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FINDING THE BIG PICTURE: A BONA FIDE GROUP APPROACH TO WORK TEAM ASSIMILATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to Carel and Ellyn Tornes.

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to use the bona fide group perspective to study organizational assimilation through the work team context. Applying this perspective served to address two limitations in the organizational assimilation literature. First, studies on organizational assimilation tend to focus on the experiences of newcomers to organizations as opposed to the experiences of more established employees. Second, studies on organizational assimilation typically do not account for the group context. The bona fide group perspective was used to address these limitations because it requires researchers to study group communication by accounting for both within group communication and intergroup communication simultaneously. The organizational assimilation literature and the bona fide group perspective suggested four research questions regarding the work team assimilation process. These research questions revolved around the importance of addressing the perspective of newcomers, established members, and the context in which the assimilation process occurs. The research questions were: In what ways does within group communication shape the work team assimilation process?; In what ways does intergroup communication shape the work team assimilation process?; How is intergroup communication facilitated during the work team assimilation process?; How does communication with members of other groups shape how employees understand their organization during the work team assimilation process?

To answer these research questions, interviews were conducted with 27 employees of an information technology division of a large organization. These participants represented different teams and positions in the organization, with some

having recently entered the organization and others having been employees for over a decade. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a modified constant comparative method consisting of data reduction, unitizing, open-coding, focused coding, and axial coding. In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted based on categories that were identified during data analysis. Data collection ended once saturation was reached in that interviews did not yield new categories.

Results from the present study addressed the four primary research questions regarding within group communication, intergroup communication, and the context in which this communication occurs. First, results identified the sources that employees communicate with in their immediate work teams during the assimilation process. Employees approached their immediate team members and supervisors frequently when they needed information. Employees received information from their team members through asking questions, observing, and receiving unsolicited information. These sources yielded information relating to tasks, teams, the organization, and individuals. Employees also received information from their team supervisors, who typically provided task, team, individual, and organizational information. Employees received information from supervisors primarily through asking questions and receiving unsolicited information. In addition, team meetings were identified as sites where newcomers were encouraged to ask questions of team members. Employees sometimes utilized team documents in addition to documents outside of IT. Employees also supplemented the information they received from immediate team members with their personal experience from working in IT and similar organizations.

Second, results identified sources of information that employees communicate with from other teams and/or organizations. Sources of information within IT included members of other teams, the human resources team, and members of management. Employees typically received task, team, and organizational information from these sources through asking questions, observing, or receiving unsolicited information. The human resources team was unique in that it handled the standard onboarding process in the organization by providing newcomers with general information on the organization (including a tour) and the newcomers' teams. Employees also received information from sources external to IT such as clients, vendors, and industry peers. These external sources typically provided task information such as how to solve a problem or providing role expectations. Employees received information from these sources through asking questions or receiving unsolicited information.

Third, results identified the ways in which communication with members of other groups is facilitated. Sometimes employees simply contacted a member of another group if they knew who they needed to contact. However, these interactions often had to be facilitated in some way. Facilitation sometimes occurred through team members arranging meetings with members of other groups. In addition, communication with members of other groups was facilitated by employees being present in points of overlap between groups (i.e., nexus). These nexus served as sites where employees communicated with members of other groups. Relevant nexus in the present study were cross-functional meetings, training workshops and conferences, and backstage sites like breakrooms. Employees gained access to additional sources of information through

these nexus. These sources typically provided task, team, and organizational information.

Fourth, results indicated the ways in which communication with members of other groups influenced how employees understood the information and technology division's culture. Some participants explained that they had an initial understanding of the information and technology division's culture that was changed over time through communication with members of other teams in the information and technology division. This initial understanding focused on employees' immediate roles in their teams. However, through communication with members of other teams, usually in nexus like cross-functional meetings, these employees adopted a new understanding that focused more on how teams are interdependent with one another or with the large, multi-divisional organization, which encompassed the information and technology division, and similar industries as a whole.

Findings from the present study resulted in some key contributions to the study of organizational assimilation. First, results provided a more complex understanding of the information seeking process. In addition, the present study addressed the context in which information seeking occurs. The physical spaces that information seeking took place in was also considered in that team meetings sometimes served as sites where questions from newcomers were encouraged. Second, results highlighted the role of intergroup communication during the assimilation process. Communication with members of other groups helped employees learn their roles and learn about their organization. In addition, members of other groups sometimes provided information or perspectives that immediate team members could not provide.

Third, the present study contributed to the bona fide group perspective by identifying the role of nexus in the organizational assimilation process. In the present study, different forms of nexus were identified such as cross-functional meetings, conferences, and breakrooms. For some participants in the present study, communication in such nexus fostered a more holistic understanding of their organization. In these instances, employees went from thinking about their role within their immediate team to thinking about how their team is interdependent with other groups whether they are within or external to the organization. Such findings suggest that communication in nexus can influence how employees perceive their degree of interdependence with other groups. On a similar note, findings from the present study stressed the importance of meetings during the assimilation process. Meetings are typically not thought of as sites relevant to learning roles, but participants described instances where attending meetings helped them learn about their roles and or about the organization as a whole. The importance of nexus suggested another way to conceptualize group assimilation by accounting for groups that employees are not members of, but still communicate with during the assimilation process.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Work teams are becoming a more salient part of organizational life (Chen, 2005; Devine, Clayton, Philips, Dunford, & Melner, 1999; Yukl, 2013). Researchers have estimated that roughly half of organizations in the United States rely on work teams to some extent (Devine, Clayton, Philips, Dunford, & Melner, 1999). Some go so far as to argue that work teams constitute organizations (Moreland & Levine, 2006). In other words, organizations can be seen as a system made up of interdependent work teams. Work teams refer to interacting groups within an organization that consist of interdependent members that have a shared purpose and consist of members that are diverse in knowledge and skills (Yukl, 2013). Work teams come in a variety of forms. For instance, cross-functional teams include members from different departments, whereas collaborative groups consist of members from different organizations (Keyton & Stallworth, 2003; Yukl, 2013). Another type of team that has received growing attention is multi-team systems, which involve multiple teams working toward a shared goal (Mathieu, Marks, & Zaccaro, 2001). Individual work teams can vary in composition based on whether the leadership is formal/informal and internal/external. For instance, work teams may have one appointed leader or leadership may be shared among team members (Moregson, DeRue, & Karam 2009).

Work teams provide a variety of benefits to organizations that utilize them such as fostering innovation among organizational members (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro, & Farh, 2010; Eisenbeiss, Knippenberg, & Boerner, 2008; Hoch, 2013). For instance, transformational leadership in teams has been found to encourage support for innovation among team members, thus encouraging the number of ideas shared among

members (Eisenbeiss, et al., 2008). Other benefits provided by work teams are fostering advice networks in an organization (Zhang & Peterson, 2011). If team leaders engage in transformational leadership, then they can increase team members' motivation to seek advice from others and also give advice to others in their team and organization, resulting in higher advice network density (Zhang & Peterson, 2011). Work teams have also been found to reduce turnover intent in that empowering leadership from team leaders increases affective commitment which in turn reduces turnover intent (Chen, et al., 2010). Cross-functional work teams in particular can benefit the organization by increasing the number of communication channels, increasing the amount of information that an organization can handle, encouraging creativity through diverse members sharing ideas with one another, improving communication between departments, and increase job satisfaction among team members (Ford & Randolph, 1992; Keller, 2001).

Organizations are becoming more reliant than they were in the past on temporary, project-based teams, which constantly requires members to join teams (Chen, 2005). One question that arises from this increased reliance on work teams is how does the assimilation process occur in the work team context? In the current economic climate, employee turnover is likely more of a reality for some organizations. In 2010, it was reported that during the span from age 18 to 44, the average American changed jobs an average of eleven times (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). During that same year, there were roughly four million workers in the U.S. categorized as new hires (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). With more individuals looking for jobs, newcomers

to work teams in organizations are more salient, thereby making work group assimilation a relevant phenomenon to study.

Group assimilation refers to a reciprocal process of influence between established group members and one or more newcomers (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Work team assimilation is important to study because much of the assimilation process experienced by newcomers takes place in the context of work teams/groups (Korte, 2009; Moreland & Levine, 2006). For instance, in a study on assimilation into organizations consisting of work teams, most of the interactions newcomers had during the assimilation process were with members of their immediate work team (Korte, 2009); newcomers rarely have a direct relationship to members of other groups (e.g., upper management) as they are learning their roles (Moreland & Levine, 2006). In addition, newcomers to teams learn the organizational culture through work teams, such as established members enforcing an organizational vision statement (Barker, 1993). Work teams can also control the information flow to and from groups in the organization such as group members acting as scouts to seek information from other groups or as ambassadors who provide group information to the managers (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992).

Studying assimilation in the context of work teams adds complexity to the assimilation process because newcomers are no longer seen as being socialized into the organization as a whole. Instead, newcomers are assimilated into groups within the organization. For instance, a newcomer to an organization may go through a general training session. However, when the newcomer is assigned to a particular work team, then that newcomer may have to go through a different training process into that work

team (DiSanza, 1995). The work team may have distinct characteristics and norms compared to the organization as a whole (Moreland & Levine, 2006). For instance, work teams may be less strict than what was communicated in a general organizational training session (DiSanza, 1995). Such differences could lead to potential conflicts between the work team and organizational members from other groups such as managers.

The work team context also adds complexity in that other groups or individuals, such as managers, can potentially influence and be influenced by the work team assimilation process. For instance, management may influence the work team assimilation process by giving established members more control over how they socialize newcomers. In turn, the way that these established members socialize newcomers may change the authority system in the organization to one of concertive control in which members of the organization begin to internalize norms and rules in a way that shifts the locus of control from management to the workers themselves (Barker, 1993). As these examples show, studying organizational assimilation through the work team context allows researchers to study assimilation through three levels: the organizational-level, the unit (or work team) level, and the individual-level (i.e., how one organizational member influences a newcomer).

One way to study work team processes like assimilation is through the bona fide group perspective, which accounts for both within group and intergroup[1] communication that occurs in and among groups such as work teams. These forms of communication can influence the team's boundaries and its interdependence with the environment. Applying the bona fide group perspective to the study of work team

[1] The term "intergroup" will refer to interactions between two different groups and/or organizations

assimilation will serve to address two limitations in the organizational assimilation literature. First, one limitation from the organizational assimilation literature is the focus on the experiences of newcomers over experiences of established employees during the assimilation process. A pattern in the organizational assimilation literature is to focus on the experiences of newcomers to organizations (Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1998; Chen, 2005; De Vos & Freese, 2011; Jones, 1986; Korte, 2009; Lapointe, Vandenberghe, & Boudrias, 2014; Meiners, 2004; Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995). This pattern is apparent in the information seeking literature, which tends to stress the information seeking behaviors of newcomers as opposed to more established employees in the organization (Miller, 1996; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 2002; Teboul, 1995). When established employees are included in such research, it is typically in the form of how these employees help newcomers learn their roles in the organization. For example, some studies on information seeking inquire about whom newcomers approach for information, which includes established employees (Morrison, 1993; Teboul, 1994). This pattern implies that established employees in organizations do not have a need to learn more about their roles or their organization. However, a few studies have addressed the experience of established employees during the assimilation process, such as Gallagher and Sias's (2009) study on the information seeking behaviors of established employees in an organization. This study provides reason to study the experiences of established employees during the assimilation process because findings revealed that established employees can still encounter uncertain situations similar to newcomers to the organization.

Accounting for the experiences of established employees can likewise account for the lack of longitudinal research in the organizational assimilation literature (Kramer & Miller, 2014). Many studies on organizational assimilation tend to collect data from newcomers at one point during their organizational tenure (Miller, 1996; Teboul, 1994; Tidwell & Sias, 2005). Those information seeking studies that are longitudinal in nature tend to account for a time-span of around six months (Morrison, 1993). While this information is useful to the literature, this pattern of data collection has resulted in an omission of how employees in an organization learn their roles throughout their tenure, including how they learn their roles and about the organization once they become established members. Accounting for assimilation over time can help to understand how the assimilation process changes for employees in addition to how their understanding of their roles and the organization changes throughout their tenure. This change over time can be assessed through panel studies or through interviews where employees recount how they learned about their roles and their organization over time.

A second limitation of the organizational assimilation literature has been the role of group context during this process. Studies on organizational assimilation rarely make distinctions among employees based on group affiliations. Instead, employees are typically identified in studies as coworkers, supervisors, managers, etc. (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995; Miller, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Sias, Kramer, & Jenkins, 1997). These studies imply that the group context does not matter in the organizational assimilation process. However, a few studies have found that employees rely on members of their immediate work team more than other employees in the organization (Korte, 2009). Clearly, studying organization assimilation through the group context has

some merits. In particular, studying the organizational assimilation process can account for unit-level influences on employees during this process.

Most studies on organizational assimilation focus on individual-level influences and less on unit-level influences (e.g., the group as a collective; Kramer & Miller, 2014). However, in group assimilation studies, there is more focus on the unit-level influence such as Moreland and Levine's model of group assimilation that accounts for how group members as a collective adapt to newcomers (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). Although they were not focusing explicitly on groups, Gibson and Papa (2000) examined unit-level influences on newcomers to a manufacturing plant in that established members of work teams put pressure on newcomers to adopt their work ethic. Even though unit-level influences have been addressed from time to time, studies do not typically examine both unit-level and individual-level influences simultaneously. A greater understanding of work team assimilation can be gained by accounting for both unit-level and individual-level influences simultaneously. For instance, finding how established team members as a collective influence a newcomer in addition to how individual team members interact with the newcomer could reveal potential conflicts if communication from one established member differs from what the others communicate collectively.

The context of work teams also allows the study of a third level, the organizational-level. The bona fide group perspective can be employed to address the limitations of the organizational assimilation literature by accounting for the various levels that can influence work team processes. This perspective accounts for unit-level of work teams in that members of work teams construct team boundaries. Individual-

level aspects of teams are accounted through concepts such as embedded teamwork, where only some members of the group interact with one another (Ellingson, 2003). In addition, the organizational-level influence is accounted for in this perspective in that groups such as work teams interact with their environment. For work teams, the organizational environment includes the organization (i.e., members of the organization from other teams) in which the team is embedded.

The bona fide group perspective addresses these limitations. This approach allows for the exploration of how the organization's underlying system of interdependent groups influences how well newcomers learn about intergroup relationships. Using a bona fide group perspective, researchers seek a holistic understanding of group processes by identifying interdependent relationships between groups and their environment.

Applying a bona fide group perspective to the study of organizational assimilation can help to find reciprocal relationships between different characteristics of the assimilation process, such as newcomer characteristics and environmental characteristics. The bona fide group perspective also seeks a holistic understanding of communication by accounting for both within group communication and intergroup communication. In addition, this perspective privileges reciprocal relationships over causal relationships in that groups are interdependent with their environments (Putnam & Stohl, 1996). Therefore, using this perspective will allow an examination of work team assimilation as a complex interaction of interdependent parts of an organization.

In summary, work teams are becoming more important to organizations than they have in the past, implying that work team assimilation requires further study.

Studying assimilation in the work team context creates a need to study the assimilation process at a variety of levels. For instance, communication within a work team involves individual-level and unit-level influences among members. Outside of the team, organizational-level influences (e.g., from managers of the organization) become more apparent. In order to examine how the work team assimilation process is shaped both by within group communication and intergroup communication at these different levels, the bona fide group perspective will be employed. Using this perspective to examine work team assimilation will address two limitations of the organizational assimilation literature. Guided by the bona fide group perspective, the present study used interview data from employees at an IT organization in order to explore how within group communication and intergroup communication shaped the work team assimilation process.

Literature Review

In order to understand the dynamics of work team assimilation, the literature on organizational and group assimilation will be reviewed. This literature review will be divided into organizational assimilation, group assimilation, the influence of the newcomer on group members, the influence of established members on the newcomer, and the socialization context.

Organizational Assimilation

A review of organizational assimilation is necessary in order to understand the work team assimilation process because organizational assimilation occurs in part through work team assimilation. Researchers have argued that organizational assimilation occurs in the context of work teams (Korte, 2009; Moreland & Levine,

2006). For instance, interactions with immediate team members may shape newcomer's perceptions of the organization (Korte, 2009). Work team assimilation occurs as part of the organizational assimilation process, which implies that work team assimilation cannot be understood fully without accounting for the organizational assimilation process in which it occurs.

Organizational assimilation refers to the process of individuals joining, participating in, and leaving organizations (Kramer, 2010). Organizational assimilation has been conceptualized as a multi-dimensional process (Myers & McPhee, 2006). This process is divided into six dimensions that represent different aspects of organizational life. The first dimension, familiarity with others, includes how employees get to know and form relationships with their coworkers. The second dimension, acculturation, includes learning the organization's culture and structure. The third dimension, recognition, involves employees receiving recognition for their work and feeling they are important to the organization. The fourth dimension, involvement, involves employees finding ways to make contributions to the organization. The fifth dimension, job competency, involves employees learning their roles and doing their job well. The last dimension, role negotiation, includes the ways that employees make compromises between their expectations and those of the organization (Gailliard, Myers, & Seibold, 2010).

A common theme in the organizational assimilation literature is to distinguish between the status of newcomers and established members (i.e., oldtimers, veterans, etc.). However, researchers disagree on how to define these statuses. Past studies have distinguished newcomers from established employees through an absolute tenure. For

instance, some researchers may assume that all newcomers in an organization are those who have been employees for two years or less. This absolute tenure has not been the same for all studies on organizational assimilation. For example, others have conceptualized newcomers as those employees who have worked for six months or less (Tidwell & Sias, 2005). Some researchers have argued that the perspective of the employees themselves needs to be taken into account when determining an employee's status (Kramer, 2011; Rollag, 2007). Recent arguments have been made for the consideration of relative tenure in research instead of absolute tenure (Rollag, 2004; Rollag, 2007). Relative tenure accounts for an employee's tenure relative to the tenure of other employees in the organization. Instead of determining status by a specific time frame, relative tenure determines an employee's status based on their percentile rank in an organization's distribution of employee tenure (Rollag, 2007). In particular, Rollag (2007) found that those employees who fall in the lowest 30^{th} percentile in terms of tenure are regarded by coworkers as newcomers. In addition, findings suggest that employees perceive their status separate from how well they understand their organization's culture (Rollag, 2004). In particular, employees are more likely to be regarded as established employees based on their relative status as opposed to how well they understand their organization's culture. Based on these findings and arguments, the present study will not distinguish newcomers and established employees based on absolute tenure.

Although a variety of assimilation models exist, the process of organizational assimilation is frequently divided into four phases: anticipatory, encounter, metamorphosis, and exit (Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2010). During the assimilation process,

newcomers can experience socialization (i.e., the organization attempting to influence the newcomer), individualization (i.e., the newcomer attempting to change the organization or their place in it), and matching (i.e., little change is required of the newcomer or organization because there is already a good fit; Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2011).

The first phase of organizational assimilation is anticipatory assimilation, which takes place before an individual enters an organization (Kramer, 2010). During this phase, individuals learn about particular roles or organizations and engage in communication with a variety of targets (e.g., parents, mass-media, peers, part-time jobs, and school) that can influence the type of job they want (i.e., role anticipatory socialization) or the organization that they want to enter (i.e., organizational anticipatory socialization; Levine & Hoffner, 2006). For instance, parents in particular can influence social reproduction (i.e., the child getting the same job that parent has) or social mobility (i.e., the child pursuing a different type of job than what the parent had; Lucas, 2011). Individuals may assess person-organization fit (i.e., the congruence between their attributes and the attributes of an organization; Judge, Cable, & Higgins, 2000).

The anticipatory phase can influence later phases of assimilation. For instance, the knowledge that individuals acquire about certain organizations can influence how quickly they are socialized by an organization. An example of this influence is organizational osmosis, where members are socialized by their parents and peers before entering an organization and thus adopt the organizational culture with little effort (Gibson & Papa, 2000). Communication is important during the anticipatory

assimilation phase because the messages that individuals receive can influence the rest of their assimilation experience (Gibson & Papa, 2000). These messages can also determine how individuals feel about current jobs that they have. For instance, hearing the colloquialism, "a real job," tends to downplay part-time work or volunteer work (Clair, 1996).

Next is the encounter stage, which takes place when a newcomer first enters an organization (Kramer, 2010). The processes socialization and individualization occur more prominently during this phase. During this phase, newcomers need to learn their roles (i.e., what they are required to do and how they need to perform these requirements; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and the culture (i.e., shared values, norms, assumptions, and behaviors; Keyton & Stallworth, 2003) of the organization. For instance, newcomers to work teams may be told to follow a strict set of rules created by established members (Barker, 1993). Organizations will generally employ a set of socialization tactics to socialize the newcomer, which in turn influences the newcomer's experience (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). For instance, newcomers to medical school may be socialized collectively (i.e., as a group) by the organization, which can influence the likelihood of these students developing friendships with others who share the same experiences (Zorn & Gregory, 2005).

Newcomers can be proactive during this phase through information seeking behaviors, where they engage in either overt or indirect tactics of gaining information to help them reduce or manage uncertainty that they experience (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Newcomers can engage in individualization through role negotiation (i.e., behaviors the newcomer engages in to change the performance of their roles in the organization;

Kramer, 2009). Role negotiation can be seen as a sensemaking process if newcomers perceive that their role can be performed in multiple ways (Kramer, 2009).

The metamorphosis phase of assimilation occurs when members feel they have a greater understanding of their roles and the culture of the organization. The processes in the encounter phase can still apply to this phase. The only difference between these two phases is that the newcomer becomes an established member, sometimes distinguished by a ritual (e.g., a new uniform or an increase in knowledge of the organization; Myers, 2005). Communication plays an important role in both of these phases because members learn and negotiate their roles through communication throughout their time in the organization (Kramer, 2009). Newcomers interact with established members (e.g., information seeking) to learn about the organization's culture as well as how they are supposed to handle certain situations.

The exit phase is the final phase in the assimilation process. In this phase, members leave the organization (Kramer, 2010). This phase can be divided in to pre-announcement (i.e., members decide whether or not they should leave and may engage in information seeking), announcement (i.e., the member makes a formal announcement of leaving), and exit (i.e., the member formally leaves, sometimes followed by a ritual, and the remaining members make sense of the member leaving; Jablin, 2001). Communication plays a role in this phase in that members may engage in various communicative behaviors to get another member to leave (Cox, 1999). Likewise, communication can influence whether or not members decide to stay in an organization. Members are less likely to leave an organization if they feel well-connected within the

organization and if they have high identification when talking to other organizational members (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Scott & Stephens, 2009).

These phases do not occur as a linear process because members can go back and forth through phases (Anderson, Riddle, & Martin, 1999). In some cases, members may need to be resocialized. For instance, in the context of work units, an employee of an organization may be transferred to a different department and have to learn the new department's norms. Another aspect of the assimilation process is that it does not occur in a vacuum. How individuals go through the assimilation process in one organization can be influenced by their assimilation experiences in other organizations or groups and vice versa (Kramer, 2011). For instance, if individuals were previously in an organization where role negotiation was discouraged, then they may not engage in role negotiation during the assimilation process in another organization. In addition, employees of one organization may share membership in a group outside of the organization, thereby making the assimilation experience less stressful because they already know some other members (Kramer, 2011). This assimilation process has generally been applied to organizations as a whole. However, in recent years more attention has been brought to the assimilation process of small groups embedded in organizations.

The literature on organizational assimilation implies that newcomers are only socialized into an entire organization. Many studies on organizational assimilation tend to strip the context away from the organizational assimilation process (Moreland & Levine, 2006). For instance, in the information seeking literature, newcomers are found to interact with coworkers, supervisors, etc. (Miller & Jablin, 1991). These

generalizations treat these individuals as members of the organization as a whole instead of members of groups within the organization. This acontextual focus in the organizational assimilation literature implies that many of these studies account for the work team assimilation process without acknowledging it (Moreland & Levine, 2006). Returning to the newcomer information seeking literature, information targets that newcomers interact with may be members of their immediate work teams, even though this distinction is never explicitly stated.

Accounting for the distinctions between organizational assimilation and work team assimilation in past research has provided a more detailed understanding of the organizational assimilation process. For instance, Korte (2009), in his study on organizational assimilation, found that the quality of relationships that newcomers form with their work team members mediates how well newcomers learn their tasks and the norms of the organization. This finding has two implications. First, it shows the importance of accounting for the work team assimilation process as a way to further understand the organizational assimilation process. Second, it provides support for how the processes of organizational assimilation and work team assimilation are related to one another. Clearly, the process of work team assimilation warrants further study. While models for work team assimilation in particular have not been developed, the literature on group assimilation can shed light on how newcomers are assimilated into work teams.

Group Socialization

Group socialization can be defined as an ongoing, reciprocal process whereby newcomers and/or established members mutually influence and adapt to one another

through communicative interaction (Anderson, et al., 1999). Both established members and newcomers can be members of other groups or have past membership with other groups which can influence the assimilation process in other groups. For instance, members of a group could be deciding how to set their budget. One member could draw upon her experience on budgeting in a former group to make a suggestion to other members.

Various models of group assimilation have been developed that have employed phases similar to those in typical organizational assimilation models (Jablin, 2001). For example the group socialization model developed by Anderson, et al. (1999) includes five phases: antecedent, anticipatory, encounter, assimilation, and exit. The antecedent phase occurs before a newcomer joins a group. This phase encompasses the beliefs, attitudes, motives, and personality that a potential member can bring to the group. For instance, during this phase, individuals may become motivated to join a group because they want to meet new people. This phase makes group assimilation models distinct from organizational assimilation models because organizational assimilation models do not typically include the antecedent phase.

The anticipatory phase, similar to the anticipatory phase in the organizational assimilation literature, is characterized by the expectations that newcomers have about the group and the expectations that established members have about the newcomer. Newcomers develop their expectations of the group by learning about the group itself or the organization in which the group is embedded. For instance, potential members might research a charity group to assess how they help others. They might form expectations of the group based on a mission statement that was posted on the group's

website. Established group members expect that the newcomer will adhere to the goals of the group (Anderson, et al., 1999). For instance, established members may employ certain socialization tactics based on the expectations that they have.

The encounter phase, similar to the encounter phase of organizational assimilation, begins when individuals join the group. In this phase, newcomers will compare the expectations they developed about the group with the reality of group membership. Conflict can emerge in this phase if the newcomers' goals for joining the group are incompatible with the goals of the group. For instance, individuals might join a group that does charity work because they want to help others directly. However, if the established members want them to do more paperwork, then there could be a conflict between established members and the newcomers. Newcomers learn their roles through communication with established members. Roles can be learned and constructed through information seeking and feedback-seeking. The socialization tactics used by established members can influence how newcomers respond to their roles within the group. For example, newcomers who are given formal instructions on how to do their job may be less motivated to make changes to their role compared to newcomers that are told to do their job however they see fit.

The assimilation phase, similar to the metamorphosis phase of organizational assimilation, occurs when newcomers become integrated into the group. Established members begin to voice acceptance of the newcomers and allow them to contribute more to the group (e.g., provide new ideas). Newcomers may begin to identify with the group if their goals align with those of the group. In addition, newcomers gain a greater understanding of the group's culture. However, newcomers may change the group's

culture through the interactions that they have with established members (Anderson, et al., 1999). For instance, a newcomer to a group may ask an established member why they start every group meeting by having members express any problems they have with the group. The established member may not have an answer and then begin thinking about how that practice emerged. After reflection, the established member may suggest they say something positive at first in order to put members in a better mood.

Finally, in the exit phase, similar to the exit phase of organizational assimilation, group members leave the group and search for other groups to join because of conflicting ideas with other members or being asked to leave the group due to misconduct. Individuals may not always go through these phases as a linear process. Instead, group members can go back and forth between phases or skip phases. For instance, an established member may be granted a new position in the group and will have to be taught this new role by the person they are replacing (Anderson, et al., 1999). Phases can be skipped if a newcomer decides to leave the group early, thus never becoming an established member of the group.

In addition to Anderson, et al.'s (1999) model, other models have been developed to explain the group assimilation process. For instance, Moreland and Levine developed a similar group assimilation model that complements Anderson, et al.'s (1999) model by focusing more on how group members move from phase to phase through the interaction of three psychological processes. Their model derives from a social exchange approach that presumes that both established group members and newcomers determine whether or not their needs/goals are being met by the other (Anderson, et al., 1999). They argue that the interaction of three psychological

processes (i.e., evaluation, commitment, and role transition) determine when members progress to another phase during group socialization. First, evaluation involves established group members and newcomers each determining the ways they can maximize how rewarding the other can be. Established members evaluate whether the newcomer can assist in attaining their goals as a group. If the newcomer cannot help in attaining these goals, then established members may take corrective measures to align the newcomer with their goals. In contrast, newcomers will evaluate whether or not the group members can meet their needs (Moreland & Levine, 2001).

The second psychological process is commitment, which is the result of evaluation. When group members are committed to an individual member, they are more willing to work toward that person's needs. Likewise, when individuals are committed to the group, they strive to meet group expectations and desire to achieve group goals. Commitment levels can change the relationship dynamics between members. For instance, if commitments levels drop between established members and newcomers, then newcomers may go from being full members to marginal members (Moreland & Levine, 2002).

The third psychological process is role transition, which is characterized by the relabeling of an individual's relationship with the group. Role transitions occur when the commitment of newcomers and established members reaches a certain level. Role transitions represent points where a member holds a new status that is recognized by both the member and established members. The four role transitions in this model are entry, acceptance, divergence, and exit. After each phase, members experience a role transition that precedes entering the next phase. In particular, the role transition of entry

precedes socialization, acceptance precedes maintenance, divergence precedes resocialization, and exit precedes remembrance (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). For instance, new firefighters in a particular department may experience the role transition of acceptance when established members invite them to join in conversations once they have proven their commitment to the station (Myers, 2005). New roles in the group bring about new expectations, repeating the cycle. Group members will generally go through this cycle in each phase of assimilation.

Moreland and Levine's assimilation model has been applied to a variety of contexts, including work group assimilation, innovation, and trust in groups (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001; Moreland & Levine, 2002; Moreland & Levine, 2006). Their model is used in these contexts to account for newcomer characteristics, group characteristics, and environmental characteristics. For instance, regarding trust in groups, various characteristics have been identified that explain how established group members come to trust a newcomer such as holding membership in a rival group making trust more difficult to establish. The reputation of the newcomer is another characteristic that influences trust in that established members are less likely to trust newcomers with poor reputations. Regarding group characteristics, the demography of the group can influence trust of newcomers if the newcomer is of a different gender, ethnicity, or age than established members. Newcomers that differ from established members may not be trusted. Environmental characteristics influence how established members trust newcomers. For instance, the more uncertainty that established members perceive, the less likely they are to trust newcomers (Moreland & Levine, 2002).

This model has also been applied to newcomer innovation in groups (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). Some forms of newcomer innovation can be regarded as individualization if newcomers suggest ways to change their roles to meet their needs. However, newcomers are not always changing their role when they share ideas with their team members. Innovation can be intentional and unintentional (e.g., a newcomer asking a question that leads to team members adopting a new strategy). Similar to trust in groups, newcomer innovation can be influenced by a variety of factors. For instance, the number of newcomers entering a group can influence the way that established members socialize newcomers. Established members may use different socialization tactics for multiple newcomers compared to one newcomer entering the group. In addition, newcomers may unintentionally change the group in that established members may question the norms of the group as they communicate those norms to the newcomer. However, newcomers may intentionally try to change the group. In these cases, established members are more inclined to accept newcomer changes if the newcomer shows higher levels of commitment. Newcomers who are more committed may also feel that the established members are more receptive to their ideas (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). Characteristics of the group can also influence intentional innovation on the part of the newcomer. For instance, if the group is successful, then established members may be less receptive to change. Group norms are another characteristic in that some group norms can discourage newcomers from speaking up and sharing their ideas that may diverge from how the established members operate (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001).

The model by Moreland and Levine is limited in that it assumes groups are autonomous and not influenced by other groups (Moreland & Levine, 2006). Their model does not account for how members of other groups or memberships with multiple groups might shape the assimilation process within the group. When environmental characteristics are taken into account in the model, they usually refer to the group climate, not characteristics of other groups. However, this limitation has been addressed by both Anderson, et al. (1999) and Kramer (2011).

Most group assimilation models focus on within group processes of group assimilation. However, Anderson, et al.'s (1999) model accounts for the role of other groups during the assimilation process. Specifically, this model accounts for memberships in other groups. As newcomers are being socialized into one group, they may simultaneously be socialized into another group (or groups). This part of the model accounts for each group member's history and how that history influences group interactions. Individuals may be at different phases of socialization in each of these groups. For instance, a newcomer may be in the encounter phase in one charity group and in the exit phase in another charity group after realizing the new charity group is a better fit. By acknowledging membership in multiple groups, this model challenges the idea that groups exist in a vacuum.

The fact that members can be in different phases of different groups implies that a group members' past experience in one group can influence how they interact in other groups. For instance, members of one group may be further along in another group and use that experience to make sense of their place in the new group. In this sense, their previous group experiences shaped their expectations of the new group.

The influence of other groups on the group assimilation process have more recently been addressed by Kramer (2011), whose model of organizational/group assimilation focuses more explicitly on how membership in other groups/organizations influences the assimilation process for newcomers. He used the characteristics of the bona fide group perspective to establish a model of assimilation into volunteer organizations. In this in this model, both the negotiation of boundaries and interdependence with the environment were included. Three levels of assimilation were identified and incorporated into a model of assimilation.

The first level in Kramer's (2011) model concerned the assimilation of individual volunteers into one organization. In a single organization, volunteers could experience five different statuses (instead of phases). These statuses are similar to the categories of phases in past group assimilation models. In the prospective member status, members decided if they wanted to join the organization and are recruited into the organization. In the new member status, volunteers are regarded as new members and experience uncertainty and engage in information seeking behavior. In the established member status, the newcomer becomes an established member and understands the culture better. In the former member status, the member may leave the organization. Lastly, in the transitory member status, individuals are in a transitory status and may not know their precise status in the organization. The use of status adds more complexity to assimilation than phase models because status can be blurred and may not be distinguishable from other statuses. Members can shift back and forth to different statuses. Group assimilation does not occur as a linear process where each status (or phase) has to be experienced in a particular order. In addition, there can be

discrepancies in the status an individual thinks they hold and the status that other group members think they hold (Kramer, 2011).

The second level of volunteer assimilation is voluntary membership in multiple groups. Similar to Anderson, et al.'s (1999) model of group assimilation, individuals can be members of multiple groups (including family and friendship groups) and have a different status in the assimilation process in each one. For instance, individuals could be full time members in a charity group they joined a year ago. They may choose to join another charity group as well; therefore, they would have an established member status in one group and a new member in the other group (Kramer, 2011). Because individuals have multiple group memberships, they typically have to manage their group memberships. In the previous example, the individuals may have to decide how much time they want to spend volunteering for each charity group.

The third level of the model is the assimilation of multiple voluntary members in multiple groups. In this level, members in one group may share membership in another group/organization. Because these members know one another outside of the group/organization, the assimilation process in the group/organization may be influenced by experiences in those other groups/organizations. In this model, within group communication and intergroup communication are accounted for in that both forms of communication are shown to intersect through the assimilation of individuals into multiple groups. For instance, in any one organization, individuals' socialization experience will be influenced by other groups/organizations in which they are members. Likewise, their assimilation experience in that one organization will influence the assimilation process in other groups/organizations (Kramer, 2011).

These group assimilation models apply to groups in general in that none of them specify a particular type of group; therefore, these group assimilation models can apply to the work team assimilation process. Moreland and Levine (2006) in particular have argued that their model of group assimilation can be used to understand work group assimilation. However, the authors suggested that the model needs to be modified to be more relevant to work teams by accounting for the fact that not all work teams are fully autonomous if managers outside of the team have control over which members get hired. However, the researchers' arguments were primarily theoretical (Moreland & Levine, 2006). Fortunately, empirical studies have been conducted about organizational assimilation in the work team context.

In addition to the development of group assimilation models, various empirical studies have been conducted that focus on group assimilation in the context of work teams. For instance, Korte (2009) studied the assimilation experiences of 30 newcomers to a manufacturing company to see how these newcomers learned the norms of the organization. The research was guided by social exchange theory in that assimilation was conceptualized as a form of social exchange where newcomers engage in exchanges (interactions) with others in order to better understand how to do their job. As newcomers learn more about their job, they become more committed and contribute more to their work group or organization. He argued that there needs to be more of a focus on the relationships and interactions among organizational members that influence the assimilation process. The study was guided by research questions inquiring how engineers learn the social norms of their organization and what factors influence that learning process.

In Korte's (2009) study, analysis of interview data yielded two primary themes. First, relationship building was an important influence of the assimilation process. Second, the work group was the primary context for newcomer assimilation. Findings showed that the quality of relationship building between newcomers and established members mediated how well newcomers learned the norms of the organization. Building relationships with established members, and observing them, helped newcomers to better learn their roles. However, established members had to make an effort to contribute to relationship development. Newcomers who developed high-quality mentoring relationships ended up having the most satisfying assimilation experience. Work groups were found to be responsible for the socialization of newcomers in that they can enable or constrain how newcomers are integrated into the work group. The researcher argued that the organizational assimilation process can be characterized by organizational members learning the norms of the work group that by extension becomes the perceived norms of the organization. One implication of this study is that relationships have importance in the assimilation process. Studies on newcomer assimilation need to account for how relationships among work team members influence the assimilation process instead of focusing on the newcomer's responsibility (Korte, 2009). This study was also significant in that it implied that work team assimilation can influence how newcomers perceive the norms of the organization as a whole; in a sense, work team assimilation can influence members' perception of the team's environment. In addition, this study provided support for the arguments made by Moreland and Levine (2006), such as organizational assimilation occurring primarily in

work teams, suggesting that studying the work team assimilation process can provide a greater understanding of the organizational assimilation process.

Work team assimilation has also been studied by Barker (1993), even though assimilation was not the primary focus of his study. He observed how concertive control developed in self-managing teams in a manufacturing company. Through ethnographic research, he found that when self-managing teams were created, members of these teams were given a vision statement from management that they were meant to adopt. This vision statement was used by team members to develop team values and act according to those values. For instance, team members would choose to work overtime in order to get a product out when they said they would. After these values were developed in the work teams, the organization expanded and brought in new workers. These newcomers began as temporary workers who could be chosen by established members of the teams to become full-time employees. Established members were placed in each of the new teams and enforced the values that they had established through tactics such as peer pressure. In order to help newcomers understand the values, established members chose to create a list of rules based off of the team values that they established. These processes created a system of concertive control where team members internalized the values of the organization and later enforced these values themselves. In these teams, newcomers did not have any say in how the team performed, and had to follow the rules or risk being fired by the established members of the teams.

These findings are significant because they illustrate how the assimilation process develops in work teams. In this organization, the work teams were given a set

of vision statements from management and told to work accordingly. The findings were also significant in that they served as an example where a work team's environment influenced the assimilation process. The subsequent process that established members established reflected their perception of what management valued (Barker, 1993); management wanted the teams to follow a set of values and the team members taught these values to newcomers in the context of work teams. The work teams functioned in line with what management wanted. This study also furthers the arguments made by Moreland and Levine (2006) in that the organizational assimilation process occurs almost exclusively through interactions in work teams. These findings stress the importance of work teams as a context in which organizational assimilation occurs. Newcomers to these teams were taught organizational norms as interpreted by established team members. Clearly, work team assimilation is an important process in organizations that requires further study.

Another study that examined organizational assimilation in the context of work teams found that group assimilation can be influenced by communication that occurs outside of the organization (Gibson & Papa, 2000). Gibson and Papa (2000) studied how newcomers are socialized into work groups in a manufacturing organization. Through observation and interviews with members of the organization, the researchers found that many of the newcomers had preexisting knowledge of the organizational culture from their friends and family members who worked for organization. The newcomers' communication with these individuals helped prepare them for the hard work that was expected of them by established group members. Established employees at the manufacturing organization adhered to a culture that stressed having a strong

work ethic and communicated this ideology to potential newcomers who were expected by friends and family to work at the manufacturing organization. Newcomers who did not adhere to this work ethic were disciplined in some manner by established members. Established group members at the organization may try to help newcomers follow the organizational culture or tell the newcomers that they are not working hard enough.

These results from Gibson and Papa (2000) imply that during work team assimilation, newcomers are directly exposed to the norms of the organization through the way that established team members communicate to them. These results also suggest how talks with organizational members outside of the work team, and the organization as a whole, can influence how established members socialize newcomers into work teams (Gibson & Papa, 2000). Similar to Barker (1993), who found that management can influence the work team assimilation process through vision statements, this study was significant in that it accounted for how communication outside of work teams (e.g., with friends and family) influences the work team assimilation process. Both of these studies moved away from the container metaphor of work teams when studying the assimilation process in that the work team assimilation process can be influenced by managers outside of the team in addition to friends and family outside of the organization.

These models and studies on group assimilation suggest three characteristics of group assimilation that need to be taken into account when studying work team assimilation. First, the newcomer has a degree of influence during the assimilation process. This influence is expressed most in Moreland and Levine's model of group assimilation in that group's need to adapt to newcomers just as much as newcomers

need to adapt to the group. Second, established group members as a collective influence the newcomer during the assimilation process. Established members can put pressure on newcomers to adapt to the norms of the team (Barker, 1993; Gibson & Papa, 2000). Taken together, work team assimilation is characterized by mutual influence between newcomers and established members (Feldman, 1994). Lastly, the organizational context, and individuals outside of the organization, can influence the work team assimilation process. Work teams do not occur in a vacuum; therefore, they can be influenced by members of other groups. For instance, management can encourage established members to develop team policies based on a vision statement (Barker, 1993). Each of these characteristics will be discussed in greater detail.

Influence of Newcomer

During the assimilation process in groups, the attitudes and behaviors of the newcomer influence the attitudes of established members and vice versa (Feldman, 1994). The assimilation process is not a one-sided process where newcomers passively process the information being communicated to them by established members. Rather, newcomers can influence the group during the assimilation process. Feldman identified a variety of ways that newcomers can influence established members and work groups as a whole, which can be divided into the presence of the newcomer, the behavior of the newcomer, and the personal characteristics of the newcomer.

Presence of the newcomer. The presence of newcomers can have a variety of positive consequences for established members and the group as a whole. For instance, when established members socialize newcomers, they may feel better about themselves when they realize they have information to share with the newcomer. Another

consequence is that newcomers provide motivation for established members if the established members feel that they need to perform better than the newcomers. In addition, newcomers can increase the knowledge of established members by asking questions that cause established members to reflect on aspects of their group or organization. The presence of newcomers can also have negative consequences for established members involved in the assimilation process. For instance, having to train newcomers can create role overload for established members in that they have to socialize newcomers in addition to their other duties. Newcomers entering a group can also make established members experience inequity, especially if they feel that the newcomer is getting too much attention (Feldman, 1994).

Other studies have also found support for the presence of newcomers influencing established members. Although their study did not focus on work groups in organizations, Gallagher and Sias (2009) found that established members experience various types of uncertainty when a newcomer enters an organization. These participants were unsure about the ability of newcomers to perform their jobs, the tasks the newcomer would do, the degree to which the newcomer would fit in, how the newcomer might change the organization, and how motivated the newcomer was. Established members reported asking direct questions, disguising conversations, and observing as ways of seeking information about newcomers. Notably, established members reported going to third parties (e.g., coworkers) and making evaluations of newcomers. For instance, some established members would evaluate the work of the newcomer as a way of reducing uncertainty. When approaching third parties, established members generally sought to find more information or others' perceptions

of the newcomer (Gallagher & Sias, 2009). As these findings illustrate, established members talk to each other when newcomers enter an organization. Even though the authors did not study information seeking behaviors of established members in the context of work groups specifically, some may have been in team settings. These findings imply that established members of work teams likely talk to one another in order to make sense of a newcomer entering the team.

The presence of the newcomer can also influence the group or organization as a whole (Feldman, 1994). Examples of positive consequences of mutual influence include providing an opportunity for making changes to the work group and increasing the morale of group members. When a newcomer enters a work group, established members may perceive the entrance of a newcomer as an opportunity to make changes to the work group, perhaps by changing the allocation of resources or changing the roles that other established members hold. In addition, the entrance of a newcomer into a group can raise the collective morale of established members if they feel that the addition of the newcomer enhances the quality of the work group (Feldman, 1994).

The presence of the newcomer can similarly have negative consequences on the group or organization such as resource allocation and conflict among established members (Feldman, 1994). Socializing newcomers can cost the group or organization resources, such as the development of training programs. In addition, established members have to take time away from their regular duties to help socialize the newcomer. Furthermore, if there are cliques in a particular group or organization, then conflict can arise if one group, or sub-group, does not like a choice made to hire a particular newcomer while the other group approves of the choice (Feldman, 1994).

Behavior of the newcomer. Newcomer behaviors can also influence established members of the group. One newcomer behavior is information seeking (Feldman, 1994; Miller & Jablin, 1991). Information seeking arises out of a drive to reduce uncertainty within an organization (Miller & Jablin, 1991). For newcomers in particular, uncertainty is generally very high, creating a desire to reduce it by gaining information from various sources. These sources, or targets, can be from within the organization (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, etc.) or outside of the organization (e.g., friends, romantic partners, etc.; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Teboul, 1995).

Miller and Jablin (1991) identified seven of these tactics that newcomers use to seek information from others. The first tactic is asking overt questions (i.e., where the newcomer asks an information source a direct question). Overt tactics are generally used when the newcomer feels comfortable with the source. The second tactic is asking indirect questions (i.e., the use of hints or referencing) which are non-interrogative and allow the newcomer to save face and avoid high social costs. The third tactic is asking a third party (i.e., asking an individual other than the primary information source). The fourth tactic is testing limits (i.e., eliciting a response from the source by putting them in a particular situation). An example of this tactic would be purposefully violating an organizational norm like coming to work late. The fifth tactic is disguising conversations (i.e., engaging in conversation with a target with the goal of eliciting information). The use of joking to gain information from another member is an example of this tactic. The sixth tactic is observing (i.e., observing how a source acts), which has less social costs than other tactics. The final tactic is surveillance (i.e., the gathering of

information over a period of time and then reflecting on that information). The use of these tactics can vary based on the situation (Miller & Jablin, 1991).

A more integrated model of information seeking was provided by Morrison (2002). This model begins with the newcomer feeling a need for information in response to an uncertain situation that can arise from factors such as unclear goals. This need for information is partially influenced by both individual factors (e.g., tolerance for uncertainty). Once there is a need for information, newcomers must decide whether or not they intend to seek information based on perceived social costs of seeking information from a variety of sources. Once newcomers intend to seek information, they decide on how they will acquire the information based on the sources, tactics to use, and when to acquire information from these sources. After newcomers engage in information seeking, two levels of outcomes can result based on immediacy. More immediate outcomes include a reduction in the uncertainty that the newcomer experienced. Later outcomes include changes in attitudes about the job and about oneself.

In addition to benefitting the newcomer by gaining needed information and influencing job attitudes, information seeking can influence group dynamics (Feldman, 1994; Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). For instance, the information seeking of a newcomer can encourage established members to find out more about their organization or work group, thereby increasing their knowledge of their organization and/or work group (Feldman, 1994). In addition, newcomer information seeking can change group dynamics if established members decide to make rules to discourage seeking information (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). For instance, in response to newcomer

information seeking about sensitive issues, established members may decide to reprimand the newcomer in order to discourage information seeking in the future (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). These contributions are significant because they present information seeking as a communicative process that can influence more than just the newcomer's uncertainty; information seeking can now be seen as a communicative process that can influence how others operate within a work team.

Newcomer characteristics. Characteristics of the newcomer can affect the amount of mutual influence during the assimilation process (Feldman, 1994). For instance, if newcomers hold a higher position in the work group or organization, then they are likely to have more influence on established members because these established members may have the expectation that these newcomers were appointed to make changes to the group or organization. In addition, the newcomer's skills can increase the degree of mutual influence. For instance, if a newcomer has previous training, then established members will not have to devote as much time to training, potentially leading to the newcomer being more accepted by the established members. In addition, if the newcomer has a diverse set of skills that established members do not possess, then the established members are more likely to learn from the newcomer (Feldman, 1994).

These findings have various implications for work team assimilation. For instance, Levine, Moreland, and Choi (2001) suggest that newcomers to teams and established members engage in a mutual adaptation. These findings provide several examples for how this adaptation occurs by showing that newcomers do not passively enter work teams without question. Instead, newcomers can change work team

dynamics by being present in a team, by being proactive through behaviors such as information seeking, or by possessing certain characteristics like holding a particular position. These findings also suggest that work teams are not static and unchanging; norms, use of resources, and team member perceptions are susceptible to change through the interactions of newcomers and established members during the work team assimilation process. However, newcomers can be influenced by the established team members as well through the process of socialization (Jablin, 2001).

Influence of the Group on the Newcomer

As a collective, the established group members can also influence the newcomer that joins a work team. One way is through the development of group norms (i.e., perceived expectations of appropriate behaviors; Graham, 2003). Group norms can evolve over time in groups. For instance, norms tend to begin as general norms (i.e., norms that reflect the values of the group) that do not have clear boundaries and may be open to interpretation by group members (Graham, 2003). These general norms may be violated by members who misinterpret them and over time become more refined as group members discuss them. These general norms then become operationalized (i.e., norms that have clear boundaries) and less ambiguous because they have an underlying set of behaviors (Graham, 2003). Norms are important during the assimilation process because they can shape how the newcomer acts (Barker, 1993; Gibson & Papa, 2000).

Norms can influence newcomers in a variety of ways during the assimilation process. For instance, norms regarding work ethic can influence how hard a newcomer works (Gibson & Papa, 2000; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1997). In a study on work groups of a democratic bank, researchers examined concertive control systems in work

teams (Papa, et al., 1997). While this study did not focus on newcomers, it provides examples of how members of work teams enforce norms. For instance, in order to normalize the physical labor that the job entails, newcomers were assigned to rural areas with little transportation available. Norms of work teams were also enforced through members criticizing one another if they did not complete their task of recovering loans. Team members followed the team norms because they identified with the organization's success and the goals of the organization's founder (Papa, et al.,, 1997). In a similar study that addressed concertive control in teams, Barker (1993) provided an example of the influence of group norms on newcomers in his study on self-managed teams at a manufacturing organization. Members of these work teams developed a set of norms over time based on the vision statement they received from management. When newcomers entered the organization after these norms were established, the norms became operationalized through established members developing written rules for the newcomers to follow. In addition, established members enforced the rules by having meetings with newcomers who violated the rules and threatening to fire them. In this instance, established members used norms in a way that prevented newcomers from having any say in the work team (Barker, 1993).

In her study on newcomers to fire stations, Myers (2005) found that group culture can influence how newcomers act in work teams. These stations had a hierarchy and culture that newcomers were expected to follow. Through semi-structured interviews of these firefighters, the author found that the organizational culture influenced the assimilation process in that newcomers had to follow strict rules. For instance, newcomers were expected to do jobs such as cleaning dishes, preparing food,

and keeping track of supplies. Established members enforced this culture by not conversing with newcomers unless they forgot one of their jobs. This culture helped newcomers feel accepted even though they did not interact with established members because this culture stressed being a family; even though newcomers were not at the same level as established members, they were all part of the same family. Established members also influenced the assimilation process by communicating acceptance to the newcomer at a particular point in time. For instance, after newcomers proved themselves by completing their tasks, established members began to invite them into conversations, signaling that the newcomer now shared an equal, or near equal status (Myers, 2005).

In addition to norms, training in work teams can influence how newcomers feel about their work team. Training in teams can have positive consequences for members such as increased cohesion. In their study on self-managed teams at a Harley-Davidson plant, Chansler, Swamidass, & Cammann (2003) found that group cohesion was positively related to training and staffing within those work teams. In this study, training involved both "hard" skills (i.e., how to do the job) and "soft" skills (i.e., how to work better with other team members). In contrast, a lack of training from team members can lead to a newcomer experiencing ambiguity. For instance, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) found that newcomers to a volunteer organization did not receive enough training in their immediate work teams. The authors described a rite of passage that newcomers experience where established members make short, uninformative introductions, which ensured that the newcomer was a marginal member (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). A lack of training left these newcomers unprepared

for how they should combine different aspects of their job. The newcomers also experienced role ambiguity and role conflict from this poor training because they did not know how to act properly (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008).

In addition to team norms and training, team receptivity (i.e., how established members of work teams/groups respond to newcomers) is another way that established members can influence the newcomer (Rink, Kane, Ellemers, & van der Vegt, 2013). One dimension of team receptivity is newcomer acceptance, which refers to the ways that established members come to accept newcomers as members of the team (Rink, et al., 2013). Upon entry into a work team, newcomers do not always become accepted immediately by established members. Instead, newcomers may experience assimilation pressure, which can discourage them from expressing themselves to team members (Rink, et al., 2013). The degree that established members accept a newcomer can influence how that newcomer behaves in the team. For instance, Chen (2005) conducted a study on how newcomers adapt to project teams and found that expectations of established team members (i.e., the shared expectations of established members regarding their confidence in how well the newcomers will perform their roles) were positively related to the newcomer's initial performance (i.e., about 42 days after they entered the project team; Chen & Klimoski, 2003). One way that established members can express these expectations is by giving newcomers challenging assignments (Chen & Klimoski, 2003). These perceptions of established members relate to the evaluation process described in Moreland and Levine's (2002) model of group assimilation in that established members have certain expectations and perceptions of the newcomer that influences the role transitions of the newcomer.

Intergroup Influences on Team Members

Newcomers can also be influenced by members of other groups. For instance, Weinholtz (1991) studied teaching in the context of attending rounds in a teaching hospital. These teams included medical students, interns, and residents. Through participant observation, the author found that nurses and other health professionals were excluded from attending rounds, and in instances where they were involved, physicians tended to dominate the attending rounds. These actions have consequences for medical students in these teams because they may assume that physicians work separately from and hold higher status than other health care workers. In addition, medical students in these teams are not taught interpersonal skills that can assist in working with other health professionals more efficiently (Weinholtz, 1991). Therefore, assimilation into one work team can hinder the newcomer's interactions in later work teams. This study is significant because it provided empirical evidence as to how the assimilation process in one team influences communication, and potentially the assimilation process, in other teams; team processes do not occur in isolation.

Authority figures from other groups can also influence newcomers in teams. For instance, Apker and Eggly (2004) studied the socialization of medical residents during morning reports (i.e., where senior residents present the cases encountered by their team during the last 24 hours to their senior physician). Even though morning reports could be regarded as a team, the senior physician may not be a member of the immediate team responsible for performing rounds in the hospital. The researchers found that the practice of the morning report functioned as a way to reinforce the biomedical perspective (i.e., privileging scientific meaning over contextual factors outside of the

realm of technical medicine) and encourage residents to develop a professional identity in line with this dominant perspective. During morning reports, the senior physician's communication reflected the traditional medical ideology of focusing on scientific interests and treating cases as acontextual. Senior physicians criticized residents whose reports did not fit the biomedical perspective and affirmed those whose presentations reflected this perspective. Senior physicians discouraged alternative ideologies (e.g., the lifeworld perspective that accounts for the social differences among physicians and patients) through the use of communication strategies such as humor and topic control. During the morning reports, physicians were socialized into thinking that the biomedical perspective should be privileged over alternative perspectives (Apker & Eggly, 2004). These results suggest that the reporting residents who begin to accept this dominant ideology will possibly change how their immediate team functions in future cases. Furthermore, these results imply that work teams are influential in the organizational assimilation process because as residents come to adopt a particular medical ideology, they will likely operate under that ideology in future interactions within the organization.

These results provide further support that the work team assimilation process is characterized by a mutual influence between newcomers and established team members. These empirical studies provide a variety of examples for how this influence can occur. In particular, established members can influence whether or not newcomers adopt team norms or particular ideologies. Studies on assimilation tend to only focus on either the influence of the newcomer on established members (Gallagher & Sias, 2009) or the influence of the established members on the newcomer (Barker, 1993; Myers,

2005). More studies need to account for both forms of influence simultaneously in order to gain a clearer understanding of the work team assimilation process. Both directions of influence are equally important. For instance, the entrance of a newcomer can change how established team members operate and interact with one another. Likewise, the established members can influence how likely a newcomer is to share their ideas with team members (Levine, Moreland, & Choi, 2001). Therefore, when studying work team assimilation, both directions of influence warrant attention. This mutual influence between newcomers and established members takes place in the form of within group communication. However, as models of group assimilation suggest, the socialization context needs to be taken into account when studying group processes.

Socialization Context

Another important characteristic of the assimilation process is the socialization context. A common aspect of socialization context studied in the organizational assimilation literature is the socialization structure (i.e., the socialization tactics used in a particular organization; Ashforth, et al., 1998; Gomez, 2009; Hart & Miller, 2005). These tactics were developed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), and are represented by six dimensions. First, organizations can have collective or individual socialization. Collective socialization is characterized by putting a group of newcomers through a similar set of experiences, such as group training. In contrast, individual socialization is characterized by providing newcomers with their own unique experiences, such as individualized training. Second, organizations can promote formal or informal socialization. Formal socialization is characterized by separating newcomers from other members of the organization while they learn their jobs. In contrast, informal

socialization does not separate the newcomer from other employees, thereby allowing the newcomer to learn their role through trial and error. Third, organizations can adopt sequential or random steps socialization. Sequential socialization is characterized by a certain sequence of steps that must be taken to reach a particular role. In contrast, random socialization does not have a known sequence of steps for a particular role. Fourth, organizations can implement fixed or variable socialization. In fixed socialization, newcomers know how long it will take, sometimes in the form of a timetable, to attain a particular position in the organization. In contrast, variable socialization is characterized by the newcomer not having a clear idea as to how long it will take to attain a position in the organization. Fifth, the socialization process can be characterized by serial or disjunctive tactics. In serial socialization, established members assist the newcomer by acting as role models. In disjunctive socialization, no such role models are available to assist newcomers. Lastly, organizations can have investiture or divestiture socialization tactics. When organizations use investiture tactics, members do not attempt to change the newcomer, but instead take advantage of the newcomer's skills. In contrast, when organizations use divestiture tactics, the newcomer's personal characteristics are stripped away during the socialization process (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The socialization tactics used in an organization serve to structure the socialization experience of newcomers. For instance, informal, individual, random, variable, and disjunctive tactics can encourage newcomers to develop innovative role orientations (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). Many studies on organizational assimilation that examine the context of the assimilation process focus

on the structure of the socialization experience (i.e., the tactics used by established members; Ashforth, et al., 1998; Gomez, 2009; Hart & Miller, 2005).

Socialization structures have been studied by Ashforth, et al. (1998). In this study, the researchers examined the relationships among organizational context, socialization structures, and the adjustment of organizational newcomers. Socialization structures were divided into two categories based on the six tactics developed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979): institutionalized socialization (i.e., the newcomers accept their roles) and individualized socialization (i.e., the newcomers are able to alter their roles). Institutional socialization is made up of the following socialization tactics: collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture (Jones, 1986). By contrast, individualized socialization is made up of the following tactics: individual, informal, random, disjunctive, variable, and disjunctive tactics (Jones, 1986). The researcher focused on institutionalized socialization and the organizational contexts that foster it. The researchers identified organizational size (i.e., the number of employees in the organization), motivating potential of the newcomer's job (i.e., the amount of intrinsic motivation perceived by newcomers), and organizational structure (i.e., mechanistic or organic) as contextual factors of the organization that could influence the socialization structure. Mechanistic organizations are characterized by formality, specialized jobs, and centralized decision-making, while organic organizations are characterized by decentralized decision-making, less formality, and low job specialization. Through their analysis of survey data from recent graduates from a business program, the researchers found a relationship between organizational context and the use of institutionalized socialization tactics. In particular, the greater the degree of mechanistic structure in the

organization, the greater the reliance on institutionalized socialization. Next, the greater the number of employees in an organization, the greater the organization relied on institutionalized socialization. Lastly, jobs perceived to have high intrinsic motivation were related to a greater reliance on institutionalized socialization.

Studies such as the one by Ashforth, et al. (1998) typically examine socialization structures as they relate to the organization as a whole; groups within the organization are not acknowledged in these studies. Nonetheless, the literature on socialization structure has implications for the process of work team assimilation. For instance, work teams may have their own socialization structures that may be similar to or different than the socialization structure of the organization. One way of showing this distinction between the organization and work team, as proposed by Hart and Miller (2005), is by treating organizational socialization structures as having institutional (or structured) socialization structures and work teams as employing individualized (or unstructured) socialization structures. In this sense, both socialization structures can occur during the assimilation process; the only difference is that one occurs at the organizational-level and the other occurs at the unit-level.

Hart and Miller (2005) studied how the socialization structure influenced the types of messages that newcomers received (i.e., message content). The authors predicted that structured and unstructured (i.e., unplanned socialization at the work-unit level) socialization contexts influence the content of messages that newcomers receive. Data were collected by distributing a survey to newly hired managers at a hotel corporation that measured socialization structure based on the socialization tactics developed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), message content, role ambiguity, and

role innovation. Results revealed that socialization structures had significant relationships with certain message content. For instance, fixed tactics were positively related to message content such as performance proficiency (i.e., knowledge about how to perform a task correctly), political (i.e., an understanding of relationships among members), and goals and values message content (i.e., knowledge of the rules and principles that guide the organization). This study was significant in that it addressed the relationship between the socialization context and the content of messages that newcomers receive (Hart & Miller, 2005). One finding related to work teams in particular in that group orientation (measured as an unstructured socialization tactic) was positively related to newcomers receiving messages related to coworker acceptance. However, only tactics that represented the unstructured socialization context were measured at the work team level.

In this study, Hart and Miller (2005) implied that socialization structures at the work team level are always unstructured, while organization-wide socialization structures are typically structured. This distinction is problematic in some ways. On one hand, the authors accepted that socialization structures occur at both the organizational-level and the work team level. On the other hand, the authors create a strict dichotomy where work team can only have an unstructured socialization context. Past research suggests that work teams can employ structured tactics such as divestiture tactics such as when work teams make sure that newcomers follow strict rules and never do anything otherwise (Barker, 1993). A more in-depth understanding of work team assimilation can come from accepting the possibility that work teams can adopt structured or unstructured socialization tactics that can in turn influence how established

members and newcomers communicate to one another. If these socialization structures can influence how members communicate during the work team assimilation process, then it would be beneficial to know how these socialization structures emerge.

Few studies examine how the socialization context emerges. However, Gomez (2009) studied how educational administrators' perception of time, or temporality, influenced the development of socialization structures (i.e., the socialization tactics developed by Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) experienced by newly hired teachers. Temporality was divided into two categories: enactments of time (i.e., how organizational members perform time) and construals of time (i.e., how organizational members interpret time). The researcher hypothesized that temporal dimensions such as scarcity, scheduling, precision, and future focus would be related to formal socialization structures (i.e., structures that are institutional in nature). Results from survey data suggested that scarcity was negatively related to formal socialization structures, while a future temporal focus had a positive relationship with formal socialization structures. Results implied that environmental factors such as allocation of resources influence the socialization structures for school teachers. In contrast, having a future focus (i.e., thinking about organizational activities in the long-term) may promote formal socialization tactics that assist newcomers in learning the norms and roles within the organization (Gomez, 2009).

Although Gomez's (2009) study focused on socialization structures at an organizational-level, the results could still apply to work teams. If work teams have their own socialization structure, then these results imply that the perceptions of established team members can influence the type of structure that emerges in the team.

These findings also imply that socialization structures are not static entities that exist apart from organizational members; instead, socialization structures are formed in part through member perceptions. However, the role of communication in developing these perceptions was not addressed in this study.

While Gomez (2009) argued that temporality shapes and is shaped by organizational communication structures, the results were presented as a linear process, with temporality influencing the socialization structures that are developed by established members. Accounting for mutual influence is important because individual perceptions (temporality) can change over time through communication. For instance, an individual's perception of time in the organization can be changed by another member employing framing (Fairhurst, 2011). If temporality influences socialization structures, then that implies the communication processes that shape the perception of time indirectly shape the socialization structures in the organization. For instance, newcomers engaging in information seeking may encourage established members to rethink how they perceive time, thereby changing the socialization structure employed by the established members. Work teams in particular are characterized by a mutual influence between established members and newcomers. The interactions that team leaders have with newcomers could potentially shape the socialization structures that are employed by the team.

In addition to socialization tactics, Feldman (1994) identified additional contextual factors that affect the degree of mutual influence experienced by established members and newcomers during organizational assimilation. One factor is how often newcomers enter the organization (i.e., how often individuals need to be socialized). If

newcomers are frequently entering the organization, then there is a greater likelihood that the socialization process will be routine for each newcomer. Another factor is the degree that established members participate in the socialization process. If established members are included in developing and implementing the socialization process, then they will be more committed to training incoming newcomers. Including established members in the development process also provides the opportunity to get new ideas and perspectives regarding how to socialize newcomers (Feldman, 1994). These findings imply that members of work teams can change the assimilation process based on the amount of newcomers entering the team. In addition, the established team members chosen to develop the assimilation process can influence how the assimilation process is carried out. This finding in particular complements the findings of Gomez (2009), who only studied the perceptions of one decision-maker in the organization. In the context of work teams, multiple established members could have a say in how the assimilation process is developed. Whether or not established team members are involved in developing the assimilation process could determine both the socialization structure of the work team and how invested established members are in the assimilation process.

A theme in the organizational assimilation literature is the examination of linear relationships involving the socialization context. For instance, organizational contexts influencing the socialization context (or structure; Ashforth, et al., 1998) or the socialization context influences the types of messages that newcomers receive (Hart & Miller, 2005). However, these studies do not account for reciprocal and/or circular relationships among these variables. For example, socialization tactics could influence how group members interact when a newcomer joins a group. These interactions could

likewise influence the choice of socialization tactics in the future. Another theme of the literature is the tendency of researchers to only focus on socialization tactics at one point in time while ignoring how these socialization structures can change over time through communication. This reciprocal relationship has implications for work team assimilation. For instance, if a work team has a specific set of socialization tactics that they employ, then those tactics could change over time based on how newcomers react to the use of these tactics. An example of this change could be two newcomers complaining to a team leader that they feel devalued from established members discouraging their innovative ideas. The team leader may make some concessions to the newcomers by allowing some innovation and thus change the socialization structure used in the future. In addition, as newcomers become more established team members, they may be given opportunities to make decisions in how the assimilation process is carried in the future. In these situations, the team members may draw on their experiences as newcomers when they work to develop the assimilation process for future newcomers.

Contextual factors such as socialization tactics have not been studied explicitly in a group context. The majority of studies on socialization tactics have focused on organizations as a whole while accounting for some aspects of work groups (Ashforth, et al., 1998; Gomez, 2009; Miller & Hart, 2005). Studying the types of tactics used, in addition to other socialization contexts, in work teams can shed light on other aspects of the assimilation process such as how members of a work team reconcile differences in the socialization tactics that they utilized compared to those used by managers in the organization.

To summarize, the literature on organizational assimilation and group assimilation in particular implies a number of characteristics relevant to the study of work teams. First, newcomers to teams experience a variety of phases, or statuses, during the assimilation process. Second, within work teams, newcomers and established members interact with one another through a process of mutual influence. Third, a variety of contextual factors, both inside and outside of the team, are relevant to the work team assimilation process such as membership in other groups and the socialization structure of the team and/or organization. Based on the assimilation literature, each of these characteristics provides an understanding of the work team assimilation process. Therefore, to study work team assimilation adequately, a perspective needs to be adopted that can account for each of these characteristics simultaneously. Based on this need, the bona fide group perspective will be used to account for both within group communication and intergroup communication relevant to work team assimilation.

Bona Fide Group Perspective

The literature on group assimilation suggests that the work team assimilation process can be influenced both by within group communication (e.g., mutual influence between newcomers and established members) and intergroup communication (e.g., influences from upper-management, socialization structures outside of the team, and experiences in other groups). One perspective that gives insight into how work team processes are shaped both by within group and intergroup communication is the bona fide group perspective. The bona fide group perspective, developed in 1990 by Putnam and Stohl, assumes that groups are embedded within an environment (i.e., a system of

groups). The bona fide group perspective states that all groups have two key characteristics (Frey, 2003). First, groups have stable, yet permeable boundaries that are socially constructed and can change over time. For example, membership in groups can change over time. Second, groups are interdependent with their relevant contexts (i.e., the environment in which a group is embedded). Contexts and group processes can influence one another. For instance, managers outside of the group may dictate what tasks group members can perform. In turn, these group members may attempt to negotiate what tasks they are assigned from management. These two characteristics are interdependent in that the environment can influence group boundary negotiation and group processes and boundary formation can likewise influence aspects of the environment (Putnam & Stohl, 1996).

The bona fide group perspective has three key assumptions for studying groups (Stohl & Putnam, 2003). First, the perspective is not limited to one type of method of data collection. Instead, any method (e.g., ethnography, interview, and survey) can be used to study groups. Second, all groups have the characteristics of a bona fide group, including groups created in an experiment because the researcher interacts with the group members. Third, the perspective does not privilege either within group communication or intergroup communication. Instead, both within group and intergroup processes need to be accounted for when studying groups (Stohl & Putnam, 2003). These assumptions make the bona fide group perspective a good choice for studying work team assimilation because (1) the perspective applies to work teams in that work teams are a group within an organization and (2) this perspective encourages researchers to study within group communication and intergroup communication

simultaneously in order to study group processes such as work team assimilation. This second point is particularly important because the work team process can be shaped both by within group communication and intergroup communication.

The bona fide group perspective was first conceptualized as a type of group (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). Bona fide group as a category of group, characterized by permeable boundaries and interdependence with the environment, was a response to researchers' reliance on functional theory and studying groups created in experimental conditions that were isolated from their environment. Functional theory focused on identifying communication practices that promoted group effectiveness and perceived groups as closed containers isolated from their environment (Poole, 1999). Putnam and Stohl argued that the environment a group is embedded in needs to be accounted for in order to adequately understand group processes such as decision-making. The researchers proposed that groups were embedded within a larger system of groups and existed in a symbiotic relationship with their environment (Putnam & Stohl, 1990).

The concept of bona fide groups was later used to address the limitations of functional theory by suggesting that task effectiveness can change over time (Stohl & Holmes, 1993). In addition, functional theory did not account for the context that influences group interaction. The authors proposed two new concepts to be incorporated into functional theory based on the characteristics of bona fide groups: historical (i.e., how a group's past influenced their options) and institutional (how the group's interdependence with their environment influenced how they carry out tasks; Stohl & Holmes, 1993).

The bona fide group *perspective* was introduced by Putnam and Stohl (1996). Bona fide groups were no longer a category of group to be studied, but instead a way to study all types of groups. This perspective treated all groups as social systems linked to their environment (i.e., context). Groups were also argued to have fluid boundaries that could alter and be altered by their environment. The researchers explained the two characteristics of bona fide groups in more detail by describing the key features of each one. Permeable boundaries have four features. First, the boundaries of groups can change through group members simultaneously being members of other groups. For instance, collaborative groups are made up of members from different groups or organizations (Keyton & Stallworth, 2003). Second, each member of a group serves implicitly as a boundary spanner or representative of the group to outside groups. For example, members of groups can serve ambassador roles in which they work to protect the group and persuade members of other groups to provide resources (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Third, membership can fluctuate in that new members can enter the group and others can leave. For instance, members of a collaborative group may change over time if organizations choose new representatives to attend each meeting (Keyton & Stallworth, 2003). Fourth, group identity can form based on the degree to which members enact loyalty and commitment to different groups. For instance, members of teams in a cooperative supermarket were found to construct group identity through interactions such as inside jokes (Oetzel & Robbins, 2003). These features were an important contribution to the bona fide group perspective because they provided further understanding as to how groups have permeable boundaries. Instead of stating that

groups have permeable boundaries, the authors stated in what ways group boundaries are permeable.

The characteristic of interdependence with the environment has four features as well. First, groups communicate with other groups. For instance, group members can serve the role of scouts in order to gather information from other groups (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Second, groups have a degree of coordinated action with other groups (i.e., groups share a degree of interdependence with other groups). For instance, teams in a multi-team system work together towards a shared goal (Mathieu, Marks, & Zacarro, 2001). Third, groups negotiate their jurisdiction and autonomy (i.e., they can negotiate their authority and interpret their goals). For instance, a member of a school board might challenge their methods for selecting a search committee by questioning the voting process in front of spectators (Tracy & Standerfer, 2003). Fourth, group members use frames to interpret their relationships with other groups. For example, a study on two groups communicating in a videoconference revealed that members of one group showed togetherness by sharing a laugh during the meeting, but they did not allow the other group to share in this moment, creating an 'us vs. them' mentality (Meier, 2003). These features were an important contribution to the bona fide group perspective because they provided further understanding as to how groups are interdependent with their environment. Instead of stating that groups are interdependent with their environment, the authors stated in what ways groups are interdependent with their environment.

In Putnam and Stohl's (1996) article, the bona fide group perspective was said to be a way to describe group processes. The authors used the example of group decision-

making as such a process, in which they stressed that group processes need to be studied at the point of intersection between within group and intergroup communication, boundary negotiation, and interdependence with the environment. Both boundary functions and interdependence functions shape and are shaped by group processes such as decision-making (Putnam & Stohl, 1996). In other words, researchers cannot focus on some forms of group communication while ignoring others. For instance, focusing on communication within the group does not account for the influence that intergroup communication has on group processes. This idea implies that groups are embedded in a dynamic system that can shape and is shaped by within group communication. Groups such as work teams are part of a system; therefore, within group communication is just as important as intergroup communication (Putnam & Stohl, 1996).

Once the bona fide group perspective was established, more empirical studies emerged that applied the perspective to a variety of groups such as work teams. One notable study of surgical teams by Lammers and Krikorian (1997) serves as an example of how the bona fide group perspective has been applied to the context of work teams. In this study, surgical teams were studied using concepts derived from the bona fide group perspective. This study extended the bona fide group perspective by identifying clusters of concepts (i.e., features) that represent the two primary characteristics of bona fide groups. For the characteristic permeable boundaries, the following concepts were identified: stability, permeability (based on temporary group members), connectivity (linkages among group members), overlapping memberships, informal groups that members are a part of, and member fluctuations (based on absences). The authors provided ways to operationalize each of these concepts, such as using network analysis

to assess connectivity among members. For context (i.e., interdependence with the environment), the following concepts were identified: multiple levels of operation (e.g., individual, group, and organizational levels), coupling (based on interdependence), task jurisdiction (i.e., functions that the group can perform), temporal control (e.g., identification of key transition periods), resource dependency, authority systems inside and outside of the group, and boundary negotiation (based on domain consensus). Identifying these features made a contribution to the bona fide group perspective by broadening what constitutes permeable group boundaries and interdependence with the environment. For instance, prior to this study, permeable boundaries were generally conceptualized in terms of group membership. The authors also took steps to develop ways to measure these features of bona fide groups, which had not been done prior to this study. For instance, the authors proposed ways to measure these concepts such as using a questionnaire to assess the types of decision-making rights that groups possess. For the study of work teams, these proposed features give suggestions for group and/or organizational characteristics that could potentially influence work team processes, such as authority systems inside and outside of the team influencing how team members interact with one another.

In their study, Lammers and Krikorian (1997) also proposed group concepts that can potentially influence a group's permeable boundaries and interdependence with the environment. These concepts include: age of group (e.g., the group's history), task duration, group pool characteristics (i.e., other groups that members may have been drawn from), and institutional history (i.e., the history of the organization in which a group is embedded). These group concepts are an important contribution to the bona

fide group perspective because they can potentially influence a group's permeable boundaries and interdependence with the environment. For instance, in surgical teams, circulating nurses are less informed than other team members, in a sense casting these members as outsiders (Lammers & Krikorian, 1997). Prior to this study, contextual characteristics of the group that were not part of permeable boundaries or interdependence with the environment were not incorporated into the perspective. The researchers sought to develop an instrument to measure these concepts, but they have not continued this line of research (Lammers & Krikorian, 1997). These concepts can also be relevant to the work team assimilation process. For instance, the institutional history of the organization can influence the work team assimilation process if established members decide to change socialization tactics that had failed in the past.

To illustrate the occurrence of these concepts in actual work teams, Lammers and Krikorian (1997) applied the bona fide group perspective to surgical teams. The researchers found instances of each of the concepts that they identified. For example, fluctuating membership appeared when a head surgeon was replaced before a particular procedure. In addition, relations among members in other contexts appeared when team members engaged in informal talk to get to know each other. For example, surgeons may discuss hobbies with one another while operating. In terms of boundaries, surgical teams were based around the roles of members in that the teams were not always made up of the same members. Instead, teams were composed of individuals who performed specific roles. The time of group duration was observed to influence team processes in that there was a time pressure during operations. The researchers also argued that the patient being operated on could be perceived as a member of the team as well, not just

an aspect of the environment. This study made a contribution to the bona fide group perspective by studying a production group instead of a decision-making group. In addition, a variety of concepts were identified that explained the nature of bona fide groups. Although not all of these concepts were operationalized in the study of surgical teams, the groundwork was laid to operationalize these concepts in the future (Lammers & Krikorian, 1997). This study is significant not only for its extension of the bona fide group perspective, but for showing how the perspective can be applied to work teams such as surgical teams. Based on the characteristics of bona fide groups, the authors provided a set of features that researchers should direct their attention to when they study work team processes.

The bona fide group perspective has gone relatively unchanged for the past few years. The main changes to the perspective have the addition of various concepts. For instance, in her study on geriatric oncology teams, Ellingson (2003) proposed the concept of embedded teamwork. This concept sheds light on the communication among dyads and triads within a particular group, additional forms of internal group communication indicating that researchers should not only focus on group communication when all members are present. Instead, the communication of some of the members outside of formal group spaces can be just as important. For example, outside of formal team meetings, members of a geriatric oncology team were found to offer important information about patients to one another such as problems with their medication and details on their support network (Ellingson, 2003). This concept has implications for the study of work teams in that teams should not only be studied in the context of formal meetings; interactions between team members outside of these formal

spaces need to be included as well. For instance, during the assimilation process, two established team members may discuss their impressions of a newcomer while they are eating lunch away from other team members.

Stohl and Putnam (2003) also provided some concepts that could be used to study bona fide groups in the future. One of these concepts was liminality, which refers to the moments of transition that groups experience over time, such as when they are between states of development (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). This concept is ideal for studying permeable group boundaries because group members are in a process of redefining the group's boundaries (Stohl & Putnam, 2003). For instance, members of work teams may experience transition if their team is being reshaped due to the organization expanding (Barker, 1993). Another concept was nexus, or the points of overlap between two or more groups. This concept is ideal for studying a group's interdependence with its environment because it can represent linkages among groups in a particular system and identify patterns of interdependence among groups (Stohl & Putnam, 2003). Nexus is particularly relevant for organizations because they are entities composed of multiple overlapping groups. Accounting for nexus allows researchers to understand how group interdependence is understood and/or negotiated through intergroup communication (Stohl & Putnam, 2003).

The bona fide group perspective has some notable strengths. First, this perspective accounts for the context in which groups are embedded. Groups are not treated as closed systems. Instead, both boundary negotiation within the group and interdependence with the environment serve to influence group processes. This perspective accounts for interactions that occur outside of formal meeting areas.

Second, this perspective is useful because it can be used to study any type of group; it is not limited to decision-making groups (Lammers & Krikorian, 1997; Stohl & Putnam, 2003). These strengths are beneficial to studying work teams because they allow for a holistic understanding of work teams by accounting for both within group communication and intergroup communication during the assimilation process.

In addition, the bona fide group perspective also has three notable weaknesses. First, the perspective is disjointed in that the concepts of bona fide groups identified in various studies have not been properly integrated. As stated earlier, new concepts have been found such as embedded teamwork (Ellingson, 2003). However, this concept has not been mentioned in current descriptions of the bona fide group perspective (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). The same can be said of many of the concepts identified by Lammers and Krikorian (1997). Second, the perspective is primarily descriptive (Kramer, 2011; Waldeck, Shepard, Teitelbaum, Farrar, & Seibold, 2002). The bona fide group perspective only describes groups based on two characteristics: permeable boundaries and interdependence with the environment. This lack of explanation keeps the bona fide group perspective from being regarded as a theory. As Berger, Roloff, and Ewoldsen (2010) explain, merely describing a phenomenon does not constitute a theory. The third limitation is that many of the concepts have not been operationalized (i.e., ways to measure and identify these concepts; Waldeck, et al., 2002). Lammers and Krikorian (1997) attempted to find ways to operationalize these concepts, but have not returned to that line of research.

The bona fide group perspective comes with a set of commitments when conducting research. First, groups cannot be studied at one particular point in time.

According to the bona fide group perspective, group dynamics can change over time. Adhering to this commitment encourages researchers to engage in longitudinal research or to interview group members in a way that accounts for the group's history. Second, researchers using the bona fide group perspective need to account for affiliations of group members outside of their group. All group interactions do not take place in one particular meeting room. Instead, interactions between group members can take place in informal locations (Ellilngson, 2003). Researchers need to account for interactions that take place outside of formal meeting areas. Third, researchers need to account for the intersection between within group communication and intergroup communication. Researchers are not employing bona fide group perspective if they only account for within group communication while ignoring intergroup communication; both forms of communication have equal importance in this perspective. The present study will adhere to these commitments in three ways. First, members of work teams will be interviewed in order to get retrospective accounts of how the assimilation process occurred over time. Second, affiliations of team members will be accounted for by inquiring about communication with members of other groups. Third, both within group communication and intergroup communication will be accounted for by inquiring into the communication that team members engage in with their team members and members of other groups.

The bona fide group perspective can be used to study assimilation in work teams. For the most part, the bona fide group perspective has been used to study the decision-making process in groups (Keyton & Stallworth, 2003). With the exception of Kramer (2011), few studies have incorporated the perspective in a study on group

assimilation. For instance, Ellingson (2003) mentioned some aspects of assimilation, but it was not her focus. As previously discussed, Kramer (2011) developed an assimilation model based on the bona fide group perspective. In line with the perspective, this model accounted for how assimilation within a group could be influenced by simultaneous membership in other groups. Similar to how Putnam and Stohl (1996) used the perspective to study decision-making in groups, the present study will explore how the assimilation process is shaped by both within group communication and intergroup communication. Most assimilation studies focus only on how either a group or organization socializes a newcomer and how that individual attempts to individualize their roles. Few studies account for how the overall environment can influence and be influenced by the assimilation process that occurs within teams as part of a larger organization. For instance, teams may socialize newcomers in a way that contradicts how the organization as a whole socializes newcomers. Similar instances have been found in the assimilation process of bank tellers, where the general training in the organization can conflict with the training in a particular branch of the bank (DiSanza, 1995). In particular, the general training taught formal rules for processing transactions, whereas the branch orientation taught shortcuts for these transactions (DiSanza, 1995).

Research Questions

The bona fide group perspective suggests a set of research questions that can be asked to examine the work team assimilation process. Based on the commitments of this perspective, questions need to address both within group communication and intergroup communication. Group assimilation is a process of mutual adaptation that includes both

the newcomer and the established members (Feldman, 1994; Moreland & Levine, 2002). Therefore, both the perspectives of the newcomer and the established members need to be examined in order to account for this reciprocal relationship. The literature on group assimilation focuses on the assimilation context and the influence of both the newcomer and the established members. However, many of these studies do not account for both of these experiences simultaneously. The present study will take a holistic approach to work team assimilation by accounting for each of these factors and how they shape the assimilation process.

First, within group communication (i.e., communication among members of the same team) in the work team can shape the work team assimilation process. In the work team assimilation process, within group communication occurs as the process of mutual influence between newcomers and established members of the team (Feldman, 1994). The literature on organizational assimilation typically does not account for this mutual influence. Instead, studies may focus exclusively on the perspective of the newcomer or on the established members of the organization. The present study will address this limitation by accounting for how the interactions of all members of work teams during the assimilation process. In addition to accounting for the interactions of all members of the work team, the levels of influence (i.e., individual and unit-level) in the team need to be addressed. For instance, newcomers may be taught norms of the work team from all established members collectively at the unit-level. However, the same newcomer may learn other norms from conversations with only one established member, which would constitute an individual-level influence. To address these issues regarding within group communication, the first research question will inquire as to how a work team's

within group communication shapes the assimilation process. Therefore, the first research question is:

RQ1: In what ways does within group communication shape the work team assimilation process?

Second, intergroup communication can shape the work team assimilation process. Fewer studies have addressed how intergroup communication influences the group assimilation process. Exceptions are Barker's (1993) study on concertive control in work teams and Gibson and Papa's (2000) study on how anticipatory socialization influences the entry stage of the assimilation process. These studies address the communication that occurs with members of other groups such as management or family members. For instance, Barker examined work team interactions with management that influenced how they socialized newcomers, such as the vision statement given to them from management. In both of these studies, communication with members of other groups encouraged acceptance of work group (and organizational) norms. For example, the culture of the work teams studied by Barker (1993) was based off of the organizational vision statement. These studies do not address potential conflicts that can emerge if there is a discrepancy between how the group wants to function and how the organization, or other entity, wants the group to function such as instances where work teams follow different rules than those expressed by management (DiSanza, 1995). In addition, less is known about how interactions with other groups influence the team assimilation process even though interdependence with the environment involves communication with other groups (Putnam & Stohl, 1996). One team's assimilation process may be used as a model for another team's assimilation

process. In addition, members of other groups may provide employees with information that their immediate team members are unable to provide. Little is known about how intergroup communication shapes the assimilation process; therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: In what ways does intergroup communication shape the work team assimilation process?

As the literature suggests, the socialization context is an important characteristic to consider during the assimilation process. This context can include the socialization structure and also characteristics of groups and organizations that shape the assimilation process. When the socialization context is accounted for in studies on the assimilation process tend to focus on the context of the organization as a whole (Ashforth, et al., 1998; Gomez, 2009). However, researchers need to account for the socialization context in organizations composed of work teams because different teams within an organization can have distinct socialization contexts that in turn shape the assimilation process. In particular, the importance of intergroup communication during the assimilation process warrants an examination of how the socialization context facilitates intergroup communication in an organization. The bona fide group perspective offers one potential characteristic of the socialization context that can facilitate intergroup communication: nexus (Stohl & Putnam, 2003). Nexus has been argued to be relevant in organizations because organizations are composed of interconnected groups (Stohl & Putnam, 2003). Nexus could be a context that influences how much access an employee has to members of other groups during the assimilation process. For instance, if members of one team have greater access to other groups in an organization, then they

may have more sources of information available to them than members of teams that are more isolated. In addition, established team members may have control over who newcomers can communicate with from other groups, similar to how group members can control the flow of information to other groups (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Nexus is just one potential team context that can facilitate intergroup communication during the assimilation process. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ3: How is intergroup communication facilitated during the work team assimilation process?

Past research has argued that employees' perception of their organization is shaped primarily by communication with members of their immediate work group (Korte, 2009; Moreland & Levine, 2006). In contrast, the bona fide group perspective suggests that intergroup communication can also influence group members (Putnam & Stohl, 1996). In addition, researchers like Barker (1993) have found support for members of other groups influencing the assimilation process for employees. These findings suggest a discrepancy regarding the role that members of other groups play in shaping employees' understanding of their organization. This discrepancy could be explained by accounting for the different dimensions of organizational assimilation (Myers & McPhee, 2006). For instance, Korte (2009) focused on how employees learned the social norms of their organization, arguing that employees perceived the norms of their work group to also be the norms of their organization as a whole. Korte (2009) was focusing on one of the six dimensions of the organizational assimilation process. Therefore, communication with members of other groups could involve information relevant to other dimensions of organizational assimilation. For instance,

within group communication can shape how employees understand the social norms of the organization, but intergroup communication could likewise shape whether or not employees feel they are making a contribution to their organization as a whole. In addition, intergroup communication could account for other aspects of a particular dimension of organization assimilation. For example, employees may develop their understanding of social norms in an organization through within group communication, but develop an understanding of their organization's structure through intergroup communication. Both social norms and structure fall under acculturation (Gailliard, Myers, & Seibold, 2010). Therefore, intergroup communication could potentially influence how employees understand their organization on certain dimensions of the organizational assimilation process. Few studies have explored how intergroup communication shapes how employees understand their organization. Therefore, the final research question posed is:

RQ4: How does communication with members of other groups shape how employees understand their organization during the work team assimilation process?

In summary, work teams are becoming a more salient part of organizational life than they were in the past. Studying organizational assimilation through the work team context provides a more complex portrayal of the assimilation process than studying the process at the organizational-level. Organizational assimilation occurs primarily in the context of groups within the organization, such as interactions with team members. Therefore, the processes of work team assimilation occur as a part of organizational assimilation. These processes overlap in terms of similar assimilation stages in

organizational and group assimilation models. Group assimilation models in particular suggest the process of how newcomers are assimilated into work teams. In particular, the work team assimilation process is characterized by within group communication in the form of mutual influence between newcomers and established members, intergroup communication involving members of groups both within and outside of the organization, and the socialization context in which the process occurs. Because both within group communication and intergroup communication are integral to the work team assimilation process, the bona fide group perspective will be employed to account for both types of interaction. This perspective allows researchers to study group processes like work team assimilation at the intersection of within group and intergroup communication. Therefore, the research questions guiding this study will inquire about how within group communication and intergroup communication shapes the work team assimilation process.

Chapter 2: Methods

To answer these research questions, a case study was conducted in order to focus on the context in which the work teams are embedded. Conducting a case study allowed an examination of how the assimilation process in multiple work teams in the same organization is similar and different. Case studies are not a method, but rather a decision of what to study (Thomas, 2010). Qualitative methods were used to gain a holistic understanding of the chosen case, an IT department of a large organization.

The methods of data collection and analysis were guided by the bona fide group perspective. Ontologically, the bona fide group perspective assumes a social constructionist position in that group boundaries and interdependence among groups are socially constructed through the communication that occurs within groups and among groups (Stohl & Putnam, 1996). Epistemologically, the bona fide group perspective assumes knowledge is gained through understanding groups by accounting for the systems in which they occur through the intersection of permeable boundaries and interdependence with the environment (Putnam & Stohl, 1996). These systems can be observed in a variety of ways (e.g., survey research, ethnography, etc.; Stohl & Putnam, 2003). This perspective seeks a holistic understanding of groups as entities embedded within a system. Groups share a reciprocal relationship with their environments in that groups can influence environments and vice versa; there are no assumptions of causal relationships (Frey, 2003). The present study was guided by these assumptions. Therefore, interviews were conducted at a single organization composed of multiple work teams. Conducting data collection at a single organization allowed the researcher

to understand the structure of the organization in which multiple work teams are embedded.

The bona fide group perspective requires researchers to understand the context (i.e., the system) in which communicative interactions occur. Therefore, a case study was conducted to better account for the environment in which work teams operate; every participant and group represented came from the same organization. Furthermore, interviews were chosen as the method of data collection because they can be utilized to understand the context of communicative interactions. For instance, interview questions can gain information regarding how and why employees approached certain individuals for help in the context of their work team and organization as a whole. In addition, interviews allow for flexibility in that questions can be tailored to employees at a specific organization. This flexibility can account for how a particular organization is structured. For instance, if an organization relies on cross-functional meetings, then questions about those meetings can be added to the interview protocol in order to understand the role of these meetings during the assimilation process. The process of data collection and analysis will be discussed in greater detail by describing the organization, participants, procedures, and analysis.

Description of Organization

The organization studied was an IT division (IT) of a large multidivisional organization (LMO) in the Midwest. LMO is an educational organization that provides educational services and serves as a research institution. LMO consists of multiple divisions, with each division being composed of multiple departments. This organization employs around 3,000 individuals. This organization requires various

technological services such as network maintenance, security, and access to various programs. To assist with these technological needs and many others, LMO developed an IT division. Although part of LMO, IT functions as its own organization and maintains autonomy in that it has its own human resources department separate from that of LMO. IT was established over a decade ago and currently has over 250 employees. The mission of IT is to provide information technology services to LMO in order to encourage an exceptional education experience to those who receive services from LMO. IT provides services to members of LMO through consultations, knowledge sharing, and the creation of partnerships. Employees of IT communicate with employees of LMO of all divisions/departments and also communicate with those who receive services from LMO.

In terms of organizational structure, IT is divided into five different departments: infrastructure and service management, security and networking, human resources, data and development, and community engagement. These five departments are broken up into four or five different work teams. Each work team has its own supervisor that leads that particular team. These team supervisors have more frequent interactions with immediate team members than department directors. Some of these work teams are broken up into smaller units. For instance, a team of nine could be broken up into units of three people each. For the purposes of this paper, the IT department will be referred to as an organization. IT has both full-time and part-time employees. Full-time employees have broader roles than part-time employees. Therefore, part-time employees in IT have standardized roles than full-time employees who can carry out their roles as they see fit.

LMO has a variety of buildings for each of its departments. IT is located in two primary buildings and then offices in a variety of other LMO buildings. Therefore, employees who are not housed in one of the two primary buildings tend to be more isolated from other teams than employees who work in one of the two primary buildings. Those isolated employees generally communicate with members of other teams less than other employees in IT.

IT does not have a strictly formal training process. Instead, the human resources team handles the general onboarding process for all members of the organization. Apart from the onboarding process, each individual team handles the training process as they see fit. Therefore, the newcomer experience can differ based on the team in which they are a member. For instance, some teams have more structure, such as providing presentations to new members to the team, while other teams have a less structured assimilation experience where new members of the team have to learn from experience and asking questions.

Participants

Participants (N = 27) consisted of full-time employees in IT. The average age of participants was 42.48. Most participants (n = 18) were men and the rest (n = 9) were women. The tenure of the participants varied greatly, with one participant having been an employee for one month and a few participants having been employees for around 15 years. Participants held various positions in IT, with some holding leadership positions. Participants represented different teams in the organization. However, a small number of teams were not represented because members of those teams did not volunteer to be interviewed.

Procedure

The researcher gained access to IT through a meeting with a member of the human resources team. In this meeting, the researcher presented an overview of the study and promised to share the results with the human resources team. This meeting led to another meeting with more members of the human resources team, where the researcher once again presented an overview of the study. Members of the human resources team allowed the study to be conducted and provided a letter of approval to be used to obtain IRB approval. The researcher then obtained IRB approval for the study and began the process of recruitment. Before data collection began, the researcher was given a tour of the main offices in IT to get a better understanding of what the organization was like.

Participant recruitment went through various phases. First, members of the human resources team arranged a meeting where the researcher explained the study to leaders of different teams in the organization. The researcher then asked the leaders to tell their team members about the study and to give them the researcher's contact information if they were interested in participating. This strategy did not yield many study participants. To address this issue, the researcher chose to have a member of the human resources team send a mass email to all full-time members of the organization telling them about the study and that they can contact the researcher to arrange a time to be interviewed if they are interested. This strategy resulted in more participants for the study. Therefore, this mass email was sent multiple times during a period of four months. Additional participants were recruited through personal contact by the researcher. In these cases, the researcher asked participants for names of employees that

might be willing to participate in the study. The researcher contacted these employees personally and asked them if they would be willing to participate in the study.

When an employee voiced interest in participating via email, the researcher scheduled a date and time for the interview to take place in addition to a location in IT that was private. Most interviews took place in a conference room at IT, but some took place in the participant's office if it was private. Interviews began with the researcher asking the participant to read and sign an IRB-approved consent form. After participants signed the form, the researcher gave an overview of the study and asked participants if they had any questions. Once participant questions were answered, the researcher began recording and commenced with the interview.

Interviews were semi-structured in that each participant was asked the same general questions. However, the researcher adapted questions and asked follow-up questions based on how each participant responded. This flexibility allowed the researcher to pursue other topics that were not considered in the early stages of the study. The initial interview questions focused on asking participants how they learned their role and about working in IT (see Appendix A). In particular, these questions addressed who participants communicated with within their work team and from other groups.

The first set of interviews served as initial interviews in that the researcher asked participants if there were any misunderstandings regarding the questions asked or if questions needed to be added. Few concerns were voiced from these participants, so their interviews were kept for the final analysis. Those concerns that were stated by participants were addressed in later interviews. For instance, one participant wanted a

question that focused on negative experiences. Therefore, a question was added to the interview protocol to address that concern.

Once these slight changes were made to the interview protocol, the researcher conducted interviews with other members of IT. Participants would be asked to describe their experience learning their roles and learning about IT as an organization. The researcher would ask probes follow-up questions based on these responses. For example, if participants mentioned that they received help from their team supervisor, then the researcher would ask them to provide an example or to elaborate more on how their supervisor helped them. If certain topics in the interview protocol were not brought up by participants, then the researcher would inquire about those topics. For instance, if participants only shared experiences about communication with members within their immediate work team, then the researcher would inquire about how members of other teams helped them learn their roles.

Follow-up interviews were conducted later during data analysis. Over time, the researcher noticed a pattern among some participants regarding a change in their understanding of how IT operates. Therefore, the researcher added questions to better address this change in understanding. These questions were added for the last set of interviews. However, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with some of the earlier participants to ask these new questions. These new interview questions addressed research question four. The researcher arranged these interviews by contacting some participants and asking if they would be interested in being interviewed again. Some participants expressed willingness, while others did not respond or did not have time to be interviewed.

Each interview was recorded by the researcher with each participant's permission. The researcher transcribed ten interview recordings including transcripts of follow-up interviews. The rest of the interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriber. This process resulted in a total of 369 typed, single-spaced pages of verbatim transcripts.

Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using a modified constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process consisted of five parts (i.e., data reduction, unitizing, open coding, focused coding, and axial coding). Data were analyzed through an iterative process that moved back and forth from an emic reading of the data to an etic application of pre-existing concepts, models, and explanations from the organizational socialization literature and the bona fide group perspective (Tracy, 2013). First, the researcher engaged in data reduction, which consisted of removing any interview responses that did not relate to work team assimilation such as talk about home life or experiences before entering IT that did not contribute to participants learning about the organization and their roles. All responses that relate to work team assimilation were retained and put in a separate document. Second, the researcher engaged in unitizing by dividing interview responses into units of complete thoughts. A complete thought can be represented by a few words or an entire paragraph. This part of the analysis overlapped with the coding process in that data were unitized as they were coded. For instance, as the coding process began for an interview transcript, the researcher would determine what constituted a complete thought, and then provide a code for that complete thought. One example of a complete thought

from the data was, “And also, in working together we were able to share information and, um, sometimes if you have a question, you just get onto, um, messaging and send somebody a – you know, your question, and you’ll get back an answer.”

Third, the researcher engaged in open coding, which involved giving each complete unit of thought a code to represent that unit. Codes are labels that summarize and reflect the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Tracy, 2013). Codes represented aspects of the assimilation process including sources that employees approached for information or assistance, content of communication, sites of communication during the assimilation process, and understandings of the organization. Codes were divided into those that related to within team communication and those that related to intergroup communication. During this coding process, codes were modified through a constant comparative analysis. Each unit of data was compared to previous codes. If the data did not fit with established codes, then previous codes were altered by creating a new definition or a new code was created. For instance, the code “asking questions at meeting” could be given to a unit of data relating to a team meeting. Another unit of data could refer to an instance where an employee asked a question at a cross-functional meeting. Because cross-functional meetings were not accounted for in the previous code, then the previous code would be changed to “asking questions at a team meeting” and the new unit of data would be given the code “asking questions at a cross-functional meeting.” In some instances, the open coding process was repeated as new codes were identified and as new insights were gained from subsequent interviews. For instance, after the first set of transcripts was coded, the researcher decided the data would be best integrated through focusing on the information seeking process. However, some of

these initial codes did not specify sources of information, even though sources did appear in these units of data. Therefore, these initial transcripts had to be recoded to account for this change in direction.

Fourth, the researcher engaged in focused coding, which involved grouping the codes from the open-coding process into related categories. During this stage, related codes were placed into categories that suggest patterns in the data (Tracy, 2013). For instance, codes such as "shadowing team members" and "informal observation" were placed under the category "observing." Once the categories have been established, the researcher gave names to each category and provided a definition for each category in order to explain what the category represents. These definitions were based on the open codes that make up the category. For instance, the category "observing" was composed of open codes related to employees receiving information from others by watching them. The definition for this category involved the type of information that employees received from watching other team members in addition to the formal and informal ways that employees can observe their team members. Categories were divided into two groups: those relating to communication with team members (research question one) and those relating to intergroup communication (research questions two and three). Once categories were developed, the researcher read through the interview transcripts again and made sure there were no cases or codes that did not fit the established categories.

Fifth, the researcher engaged in axial coding, which involved creating new categories to represent how the categories from focused coding were related to one another. Development of these categories came from memo-writing and reading over

interview transcripts during the coding process. For instance, the categories "cross-functional meetings," "workshops and conferences," and "backstage" fell under the category of nexus because they each represented points of overlap among different groups. Such categories served to answer the third and fourth research questions. For instance, research question three required the researcher to find ways to link the categories developed for intergroup communication during the assimilation process. The category "nexus" highlighted how different sites of communication, identified during focused coding, were points of overlap among groups that encouraged intergroup communication. An example of the coding process is provided in Table 1, which shows some of the codes developed during data analysis. This table shows how open codes were collapsed into categories and how these categories were grouped into "nexus" during the axial-coding process.

Table 1

Sample codes

Open-Coding	Focused-Coding	Axial-Coding
Took course from HR	Workshops/Conferences	Nexus
Attend workshops	Workshops/Conferences	
Training at LMO	Workshops/Conferences	
Hear what others do during meetings	Cross-functional meetings	Nexus
See big picture by attending meetings	Cross-functional meetings	
Get feedback from meetings with members outside of team	Cross-functional meetings	

Research question four required a separate analysis because initial codes and categories focused on the sources that employees approached for information. Therefore, the researcher engaged in data reduction to find all sections relevant to employees changing their understanding of IT. This data included the transcripts from the follow-up interviews. The same coding steps were used in research question four that were used in research questions one, two, and three. Data for research question four overlapped with the data from research questions one, two, and three. Therefore, codes were not mutually exclusive; the same unit of thought could have two different codes for answering two different research questions.

During the coding process, the researcher formulated his thoughts through memo writing, which involves writing down ideas about established codes and the relationships among those codes and categories. These memos cataloged initial thoughts about codes and categories and how they relate to one another in potential frameworks. These memos led to new questions to ask and new ways to organize and code the data (Charmaz, 2006). For instance, the researcher made notes on the importance of meetings to employees in the organization. These insights led to changes in the interview protocol in the form of new questions.

Data were collected and analyzed until saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Analysis of the last interviews did not yield new categories because responses were similar to previous study participants. In addition, most of the teams in IT had been represented by this point. Therefore, the researcher chose to stop conducting more interviews after interviewing the 27th participant.

Validation

Creswell (2007) suggests eight validation strategies when conducting qualitative research. The present study used two of these strategies. First, member-checks were conducted with some of the participants in order to ensure that the results and conclusions reflect their lived experiences. Participants were asked if they would mind reading the results section of the study. They were asked to report anything in the document that they do not agree with or felt did not represent IT. Two participants volunteered and reported via email that the results were satisfactory; they did not report any significant problems. One participant suggested minor changes such as changing the pseudonym of three participants and correcting the spelling of an information and technology term. Second, the researcher provided rich, thick description for readers (Creswell, 2007). During interviews, the researcher elicited detailed accounts of participants' experiences through probes, follow-up questions, and follow-up interviews in some instances. These detailed transcripts allowed the researcher to provide rich accounts of participants' experiences, and the context of the organization, in the results section in order to allow readers to determine the transferability of these results (Creswell, 2007).

Chapter 3: Results

Analysis of interview data resulted in various categories that characterized the work team assimilation process in IT. These categories relate to within group communication during the assimilation process, intergroup communication, how intergroup communication was facilitated, and the role that intergroup communication played in shaping employees' understanding of IT. The results from each research question will be discussed in turn.

RQ1: In What Ways Does Within Group Communication Shape the Work Team Assimilation Process?

Employees of IT learned their roles and position in the organization by receiving information from a variety of sources. These sources could be from within teams and from other groups. IT is divided into different divisions, each of which is composed of different work teams. Thus, work team in this study will refer to the team an individual is a member of within a particular division, not the division itself.

Sources of information were reported by participants to provide different types of information. The primary types of information received by employees can be divided into task, organizational, team, and individual information. First, task information refers to information relevant to carrying out particular tasks in the organization. For instance, employees may need to know about particular software or the correct way to process a ticket. As Carl, an employee in his 40's who has been with IT for over nine years, explained, he asked questions regarding, "how do I do this task, or, who do I go to to ask this, or, this email's come in; what are they talking about?" Second, organizational information refers to information regarding the organization itself. In this case, the

organization could refer to IT or LMO. As Mitchell, an employee in his 40's who has been with IT for over 9 years and holds a leadership position in IT, explained, he would tell new members to his team:

> Starting from you, as a person, here you are in the team structure and then just kind of white board that out, you know. You know, you're part of the security camera team that's part of the bigger network team that's part of a data and telecommunications team, that falls under this director, who's also over systems and applications, and then that director has all these peer directors that do all of these things. And then, they fall under the CIO, who's a vice president, who's a peer to all these other vice presidents, who work for the president of the university.

Organizational information could also include information about the future of the organization (e.g., ideas of where the organization is heading). Third, team information refers to information related to a specific team, such as team standards and expectations. For example, Elaine, an employee in her 40's who has been an employee for over nine years, explained how she asked questions about, "Why we do things and you know, what is the, I guess official you know, way of doing things. Whatever the team standards were, that kind of thing." Team information could apply to teams an employee is not a member of as well. Lastly, individual information refers to information related to specific individuals in the organization, such as asking about a specific employee in IT. For instance, Chloe, an employee in her 50's who had been with IT for under two years, reported, "I ask you know, some of the other team members that have been here longer and kind of know that. I ask a lot, 'Okay, who is that?' …And how do they relate to what we're doing." Employees received these forms of information through members of their immediate work team, supervisors, and personal experience. Each of these sources will be discussed in turn.

Team Members

Employees typically gained information from members of their immediate work team. Employees approached their team members for all four types of information (i.e., task, team, organizational, and individual). Most of these interactions with immediate team members occurred through the employee asking their team members for information when it was needed. However, some interactions were facilitated as part of the training process. For instance, team leaders or managers may assign a new employee to a member of the team to serve as a mentor to the new employee. Employees interacted with their immediate team members in the following ways: asking for information, observing, mentor relationships, and receiving unsolicited information.

Asking for information. Asking for information involved an employee directly approaching a team member for the purpose of gaining information. Employees typically asked their team members for information when it was needed, especially when they worked near their team members. Many participants mentioned times when they asked one of their team members how to do a particular task. For instance, when asked about the support he had in the team, Carl explained:

> As far as – well, other team members, asking them questions. That was the support mostly as – but, a question about how do I do this task, or, who do I go to to ask this, or, this email's come in; what are they talking about? So, any time I had a question like that, um, my peers were right there for me to answer any questions I had and, you know, take the extra time to help me learn, you know, what is supercomputing and how to manage a large Linux cluster.

As this example illustrates, employees generally felt their team members were available whenever they had a question. Although this example focuses on task information, employees also asked for other types of information, just not as frequently as task information. How employees approached their team members varied. Employees

typically approached their team members face-to-face if they were nearby. For instance, some employees worked with one or two other team members in the same office, making it easy to approach them with questions. In other instances, team members may have separate offices that are connected by the same work space, allowing employees to pose a question to multiple team members. Depending on the nature of the work space, employees approached a specific team member or simply announced that they had a question and see if anyone in the same room had an answer. In other instances, employees asked for help through a mediated channel (e.g., email). For example, some employees may send a mass email to their team members to get the information that they need from whoever chose to respond.

Asking questions was a necessary way of learning roles and about IT because teams typically had an informal training process where employees were given some general information about their role when they entered and then had to get details through asking their teammates questions. Employees typically asked whoever they worked closest to in their office. However, some employees had relationships with some team members before entering the team. In those instances, employees approached those individuals for information more frequently than others. As Phillip, an employee in his 20's who had been with IT for under two years, explained:

> I already knew one person coming in to [IT]…he was able to point me out on a couple things and assisted me in getting brought on board, and learning the area and customers and so that was a big help. I think without him it may be a little bit harder just because we didn't know anybody, but I think he definitely helped a lot.

He explained later that he would also approach this team member when he had questions. As this example illustrates, employees may approach team members more

frequently than others if they knew them before entering the organization. As this participant explained, having someone in the team that he knew prior to entering made the assimilation process easier for him.

Employees would typically be the ones to initiate questions because they generally felt their team members were supportive and open to being asked questions. In some cases, these team members sometimes told newer members that they can ask them questions at any time which helped some employees perceive their team as an open environment. Participants mentioned how they felt their team was an open environment where they could approach others for questions. For instance, Chloe described her team members as, "just immediately just chatty, you know. Come by and visit and say hello and if you ever need anything let me know and if I did have questions." These interactions made her feel supported by her team members and made her feel that she could approach her team members when she had questions.

Observing. Employees also learned their roles and about the organization by observing their immediate team members. Observation involved employees watching how their team members worked in order to learn their roles. Observation usually yielded task information because it typically involved watching others work on a particular task. However, observation could sometimes yield team and individual information as well. Observation could occur both formally and informally. First, formal observation occurred in some teams as part of the training process. In these instances, new members were assigned to observe, or asked to observe, more established members in the team. In these cases, team members knew that they were being observed by another member of the team for the purpose of learning a role. For

instance, Phillip described how he shadowed experienced team members when he entered a particular team. As he explained:

> A lot of the on-boarding process was shadowing with my colleagues to see what they did on a day-to-day basis and what I would be doing on a day-to-day basis. So, we also had – didn't have much, like, paper-based training, like, presentation paper-based training; it was mainly hands-on training, so shadowing – that was a big thing, big part of it, to see how – what the process should be when meeting with the customer, reaching out to the customer. Going on site and troubleshooting the issues.

In this instance, he was required to shadow more established members as part of his training in the team in order to learn his role.

Second, observation could be informal as well, with employees watching how their team members act without being assigned to observe them. In these cases, team members did not know that they were being observed. This informal observation is similar to how observation is typically conceptualized in the information seeking literature (i.e. as an indirect tactic; Miller & Jablin, 1991). For instance, as Brendon, an employee in his 40's who had been with IT for under two years, explained, he pays "attention to how they [his team members] answer questions. 'Cause I've noticed some – depending on your experience – is it's gonna help determine how you answer a question…I can kind of tell, based on how they answer the question of what circle I talked about earlier, what circle that they tend to gravitate from." In this example, he observed his team members without asking them so he can understand them better. In this case, he engaged in observation to learn more about his team members as opposed to a particular task. This example differed from formal observation in that he did not ask his team members if he could observe them.

An important point is that observations sometimes involved employees asking questions of those team members they observe. These instances represent an overlap between the tactic of observing and the tactic of asking direct questions. For instance, as Cameron, an employee in his 20's who had been with IT for around three years, explained:

> Probably watching my mentors is the experience that helped me best do it because if I had questions why they were doing it they could answer it, instead of them having to rely on maybe I came up with a question after we had finished and them having to rely on the communication back and forth when they may not have experienced it.

In this example, he engaged in observing his mentors in his team. However, he asked questions to better understand what he was observing, which is typically not addressed in the information seeking literature.

Mentor relationships. Sometimes employees learned from working directly with a mentor. However, not every team relied on mentors to assist new members to the team. Mentors were usually more established members who worked with a newer member to show them how to carry out particular tasks and answer any questions they may have. In teams that relied on mentor relationships, mentors were sometimes assigned to a new team member once they entered the team. As Bryan, a team supervisor in his 30's who had been with IT for over nine years, explained, "We pair [new] people with people that are either currently doing the job or have done the job in the past to coach them. To show them the ropes." Once new members were assigned to a mentor, the mentor generally shared information with the newcomer and answered any questions that the new member may have. The tactic of observation also came into

play here if a mentor has a new member observe them as they work on a particular task, as illustrated by Cameron's experience above.

Mentors were a source of information for employees in that employees could approach them with a question or observe them as they worked. Most of the information received from mentors was task information related to a particular role. For instance, mentors might share what they know about working on a particular system or software with an employee. However, mentor relationships could differ based on the role. For instance, while most mentor relationships reported had to do more with working on particular tasks, Deanna, a supervisor in her 50's who had been with IT for over nine years, mentioned how she had a mentor who helped to prepare her to assume a leadership position. While most mentor relationships were for a position that a member had already assumed, her mentor relationship revolved around preparing her for a future role. As she explained:

> He [her mentor] established some, I guess, like ground rules of expectations and if I really wanted to, um, move more into the management arena instead of being more technical, then there were things that he thought would be best to do in order to get recognition from other people that I was – I had the abilities to move more into management. And so, he told me that I had to prove myself and work at establishing, um, myself as more of a management person, as a go-to person, and then, if I could do that successfully, then I would have earned the position rather than being given the position and then trying to earn the trust of other people and the recognition.

In this example, her mentor served as a guide to achieve a particular position rather than help train for a role that has already been assumed.

Predecessors (i.e., former team members that an employee replaces) provided a form of mentorship to those who replaced them. Predecessors were formally assigned in some teams. However, mentorships from predecessors may be somewhat informal if

predecessors assume they need to assist new members taking over their former position. Some participants explained that they received necessary information from talks that they had with their predecessor in the team. If these predecessors were still members of the team, then these talks took place face-to-face. However, in some cases the predecessor left the team and communication had to take place through a mediated channel such as email. Predecessors typically provided task information such as walking new employees through various tasks and providing information regarding the status of ongoing projects. As Stephanie, an employee in her 30's who had been with IT for around six years, explained when describing her communication with her predecessors, "Yeah, I'd say, okay, I would describe the situation that come up, or maybe something I'd seen previously, and I would sit down and say, 'okay, if this situation comes up, how do you usually handle it?' And then he would kind of walk me through the steps." In this example, she contacted her predecessor to ask about task information regarding the handling of possible scenarios that she might encounter.

Some mentor relationships developed informally between new members of a team and more established members. For instance, newer members might find a mentor who has a common interest or role. In these cases, a mentor relationship develops where the newer member can gain information relevant to their role. For example, as Robert, an employee in his 40's who had been with IT for over nine years, explained when asked how mentor relationships in his team formed:

> Normally, though, [mentor relationships] just seems to occur naturally, you know, through some other interests, or a similar requirement in a job, maybe. And normally it's not taxing or involved; it's 'hey, do you have an hour to spare and come show me what you're doing with this, or walk me through it.' You know, a couple hours here and there. It's not like it's a big deal or some program you have to start, but it happens organically for the most part.

As this example illustrates, employees may initiate mentor relationships by asking their team members to show them how to perform a particular task.

Unsolicited/shared information. Unsolicited information refers to those instances where employees received needed information without having to ask another individual directly or without the intention of gaining information. Unsolicited information could come in the form of informal conversations or formal presentations as part of the training process in a particular team. Unsolicited information typically came in the form of task information, such as the steps for completing a particular task. However, some unsolicited information revolved around team information (e.g., expectations in the team) and organizational information (e.g., information about LMO). Participants described instances where team members approached others to either provide advice or share relevant knowledge. For instance, Brendon explained that,

> There was always a conversation, or being educated on how things were set up. That conversation always took place. Any time I was asked to do something or any time I was involved in a situation, there was always a 'okay, hold up. Let's sit back – let me educate you on this situation and tell you how things are set up. Let me give you some information about the customer before you go too far into it and you run into these potholes or these 'gotchas'.'

In this example, he did not ask the team member for information. Instead, a team member told him that he would provide information in order to prevent him from making mistakes in the future.

Unsolicited information was especially common when a new team member knew a member of their team prior to entering. For instance, Rachel, an employee in her 50's who had been with IT for over nine years, explained that she ended up joining a

team with a member she had met and developed a friendship with in the past. This team member helped her by sharing the information that he received from his team members when he entered. As she explained,

> Just that, uh, he was always so ready to help me – help me, or explain things, or to get me involved in a different aspect of HPC, to maybe give the background on things, probably because he's that student I was telling you about that the rest of them showed him, probably the background and all that, that he was very good about doing the same with me. He passed that on, you know, passed it forward, I guess. Passed that helpfulness on.

In this example, she had helped an individual get hired in the organization. When she joined a team he was a member of, he in turn helped her to get acquainted with her new team and position by providing unsolicited information.

Unsolicited information also occurred in a more formal capacity in situations where providing information was a part of the entry process. In these cases, more established team members may present relevant information to new members that enter the team as part of a training process. As Greg, an employee in his 30's who had been with IT for under two years, explained regarding his entry into his team:

> For me the meeting that I had with [a team member] the first day was helpful because it was, he had a very detailed, thorough presentation of who we are, who we interact with. I mean he had names of people and their specific roles and the types of people we interact with and um, his was the most helpful to me. [The supervisor] had a little, but it wasn't as, it was more conceptual than [the team member's presentation].

As part of the entry process, he was given a presentation by one of his team members in addition to his supervisor. In this case, he received unsolicited information in the form of a presentation.

Supervisors

In addition to relying on unsolicited information, employees also relied on team supervisors as sources of information. Supervisors refer to team members who held a leadership position in the team and had regular contact with team members. Supervisors provided information to new team members and also provided support for team members throughout the assimilation process. The typical information that employees received from their supervisors included: task information, organizational information, team information, and individual information. The typical channel of supervisor communication was face-to-face. However, some participants reported the use of mediated channels such as phone or email. The primary ways that supervisors helped new employees learn their roles and position in the organization was through providing unsolicited information, answering questions, and providing training resources. Each of these tactics will be discussed in turn.

Unsolicited information. Supervisors typically provided more unsolicited information to new members compared to other team members. Supervisors generally met with new team members one-on-one as part of the team's assimilation process in order to go over expectations of the job and any other information that they thought was relevant to the new member of the team. As Mitchell, who holds a leadership position in his team, explained:

> So that – that we do with just about everybody that comes on board; kind of give them that 'here's where you are,' but it's not one-dimensional. It's not like that mall map floor plan. It's, you know, institutionally, here's where you are. Technically, here's where you are. For the mission of the university, here's where you are.

In this example, the supervisor makes sure to have one-on-one meetings with new team members to discuss the new member's place in the team and IT as a whole. In these

meetings, supervisors were reported to sometimes incorporate visual elements in their presentations to new team members, such as using white boards to show the structure of the team or IT.

Unsolicited information from supervisors also came in the form of mentoring team members. As Austin, a supervisor in his 40's who had been with IT for over nine years, explained, after newcomers first enter his team, "it just becomes a regular mentorship and coaching stuff that I do for the rest of the team." In these instances, supervisors might regularly check up on new members to the team to see how they are doing and to provide relevant information such as how to develop a career path in IT. As Mitchell explained:

> So, for the past three years I've been doing a lot of career mapping, career road-mapping for my team, and I know I said it's a very small percentage, and I wish I could do so much more, but there have been a lot of one-on-one interactions with my team members to say, "this is where you are today, this is where I feel the team is heading; what are your passions and what do you want to do?"

In this example, the supervisor has one-on-one meetings with new members in his team to go over their future in the organization.

Other forms of unsolicited information came in the form of providing vision (i.e., an idea of how the organization should function in the future; Tichy & DeVanna, 1986) to new members to a team. Team supervisors mentioned how they explained to new members how they thought team members should function. These talks typically took place when new members entered the team. However, supervisors may communicate their visions to more established members as well in the form of a presentation during a team meeting. One supervisor, Bryan, mentioned how he told new

members to the team that the sub-units of the team are all connected and should not be seen as separate entities. As he explained,

> I've given two presentations in the past week about our team and I'm very clear about you know, we have this group of people that does this and this group of people that does that. And this other group of people that does this other thing. That's just the reality of the technology and services we have and the roles of the people of the team. But I'm trying to get the team to think holistically about what we do.

In this example, the supervisor gave a presentation to multiple team members, including more recent members, about how he wants them to perceive their team.

Asking questions. Similar to asking team members for information, employees also approached their team supervisor with questions regarding their role. Types of information received in these cases typically included task information and individual information. Talking directly to supervisors was rarely an issue for employees because participants stressed that their supervisors had an open door policy and described supervisors as having a willingness to help. For instance, as Scott, an employee in his 50's who had been with IT for around three years, explained, "my manager is very open-door, so just, you know, and he has a personality that is very, I'd say warm and understanding of people, so I think it's – you know, it just made it easy to come in and just be part of the group." Such policies and openness made it easier for employees to ask their team supervisors questions. Supervisors would be approached about a particular problem that the member does not know how to solve. Additionally, supervisors may be asked for information about certain individuals in or outside of the organization. As Brendon explained, he and his supervisor, "talk all the time. Of me, sometimes – honestly, a lot of the questions end up being – I wouldn't call them 'non-technical' questions, but they're more a political questions of 'who is this person? How

does this person fit into this requirement here?'" In this example, he approached his team supervisor on numerous occasions to gain information about certain individuals that he might be interacting with on the job.

Providing resources. Team supervisors are able to provide resources to team members that facilitate the assimilation process such as developmental opportunities (e.g., workshops related to the information and technology field). For instance, as Bryan, who holds a leadership position in his team, explained, "we try to get people [team members] relevant training. We try to send people to relevant conferences." He and other team supervisors try to make developmental opportunities available to their team members and make sure that their team members know about these opportunities.

Team meetings

Some teams held periodic team meetings that only included members of the same team, usually including supervisors. These meetings provided new team members with a more formal site where they could ask questions compared to talking to team members around their work space. As Stephanie explained:

> Well, when they [new members to the team] were first coming on board, as well, our senior strategist for our group made sure that we were meeting pretty regularly as a team. That way, you know, if they had any questions, they can bring them to us. There's a team of six of us, so, if anything came up we'd kind of know what was going on or be able to answer their questions.

In this example, team meetings were held in part so that new members to the team could ask any questions they had. New employees were still welcome to ask questions outside of these team meetings. The team meetings were just a way to get all members together since this particular team was more spread out than other teams in IT.

Team meetings were also a site where new team members could receive unsolicited information that helped them learn their roles and how to work in the organization. Such information included team and organizational information such as information on current projects, the strengths of other team members, and job expectations. For instance, Jessica, an employee in her 20's who had been with IT for under two years, explained how her supervisor, in a team meeting, communicated his expectations for members of the team when she explained:

> So you know, and he, our boss asked us of the team at one point like how many. Does anybody feel like they work 100 percent of the time. Are you really working 100 percent of the time and most of them settled at like 70-30 and I was like, I. I didn't tell them this in the meeting, but this was a few weeks into the job and I was like, I don't even know if I fit that much. Fill that much of the percentage with work right now. And he said, eventually you will.

In this example, she attended a team meeting in which she learned the goal that she needs to strive for regarding her contribution to the team.

Personal Experience

Due to the informal nature of training in most teams, employees sometimes had to learn their roles on their own without assistance from other members of IT. Relying on past experience typically complemented the information they gained from others during the assimilation process. Participants explained that they relied on their own abilities in the following three ways: learning from experience on the job, relying on past experience, and conducting personal research.

Learning from current experience. Participants described how they had to "learn as you go." These employees learned their roles in part through trial and error. With a reliance on informal training, new employees were typically not given all of the information that they needed to do their job when they first entered their team. As Chloe

explained, “there’s no training manual, but there’s really not or reports that come in you never know what they’re going to ask for or what they’re going to need. So it’s more of just I think learning by experience.” New employees had to learn in part by reflecting on their experiences in the organization and learning from their mistakes. Learning by trial and error was also relevant to employees who transitioned to leadership positions in IT. For instance, Deanna explained that learning her management style was a result of, “either baptism by fire, or, learning from your mistakes.” She had to learn in part from reflecting on her experiences in IT.

Relying on past experience. Employees also drew from their past work experience outside of IT. For instance, some employees held positions in other organizations that were similar to the position they had in IT. Having these past positions gave some employees an idea of what was expected of them and what their role entailed. For example, as Phillip explained:

> So, a lot of the experience I think I brought with me, and especially troubleshooting hardware and software, and interacting with customers, in customer service. [The previous organization] really helped a lot in that area and previous to that, I was basically building my own computers, working with computers, so I already had a lot of knowledge coming into [IT], so I think it was a very easy transition.

In this example, he thought his technical knowledge from working at another organization helped him have an easy transition into IT. In addition to having a similar position from a past job, some employees had experience in a similar environment. For instance, some employees did not have an IT background, but they had experience working in an educational environment. Because IT was also an educational environment, they were able to adapt to IT.

Employees also drew from their education in information and technology or other areas relevant to their job. A few participants mentioned how their education helped them understand their roles when they entered IT. For instance, as Cameron explained, "My prior experience, and just being in retail, my – the background from my degree from undergrad – helped as well with being able to read people and get what people want, what they need and understanding where they may be coming from." In this example, he drew from his experience in a previous job as well as his education in order to better perform his roles in IT.

Personal research. Employees also learned their roles through their own personal research, which involves gaining information from materials such as organizational documents as opposed to asking another employee directly. This personal research was primarily used to gain task information. Personal research is divided into research involving team/organizational documents and research involving materials outside of IT. First, some participants mentioned relying on team documents to conduct their own personal research. For instance, some teams had knowledge bases (i.e., databases of articles relevant to information and technology) that were available to all members of the team. As Jessica explained, "we [her team] have a large knowledge base of articles that we can refer to and I can go through them and basically study up on the job. And I found that very helpful. But you want to go through it anyways because so if somebody calls up you can look, know exactly where to look." Employees in some teams were also allotted time out of their work days to do personal research. This research could involve testing new software or reading articles on topics relevant to their job. Many teams did not have formal training manuals. Those teams that did have

manuals were typically those that had student workers who appreciated having formal guidelines.

Second, employees used materials outside of the IT for their personal research. Outside of the IT refers to documents or other sources that were created outside of the organization and not geared specifically for working in IT. This research usually involved employees using internet search engines (e.g., Google) to find the information that they needed. Employees may also go to web forums that are relevant to their position to see how others have handled similar issues in the past.

RQ2: In What Ways Does Intergroup Communication Shape the Work Team Assimilation Process?

The literature on information seeking tends to either focus on the information that employees receive from those in their immediate work group (Korte, 2009; Moreland & Levine, 2006) or does not distinguish sources from an employee's immediate work team and sources from other groups (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993). Results from the present study suggest that employees receive information relevant to learning their role by communicating with sources from other groups. These sources can be employees within IT or individuals outside of IT.

Sources Within Organization

Employees communicated with various employees in IT from other teams. Many participants mentioned they have a good social network, including members of different teams, that they had developed in IT that made it easier to approach members of other teams for information. Participants felt that having a social network in the organization was helpful in learning their role and working in IT because individuals in

their social network could assist them if they needed help. Typical sources of information from other groups in IT were members of other teams, the human resources team, and members of management.

Members of other teams. Participants reported that they communicated with members of other teams in IT. This inter-team communication was sometimes useful to employees in terms of learning their roles. For instance, employees received different types of information from members of other teams, including: task information about certain software/systems, organizational information, and team information. This information was received through face-to-face communication or through mediated communication channels such as email. Employees received information from members of other teams in the following ways: asking for help, observation, mentoring, and receiving unsolicited information.

Asking for help. Similar to immediate team members, employees asked members of other teams for task information regarding certain issues they experienced or for advice on how to do their job. However, in some cases employees asked members of other teams for organizational information such as inquiring about recent changes made at the organizational-level (e.g., the outcome of a reorganization in IT). In most cases, employees encountered a problem that required the assistance of someone from another team. The employee then asked a member of that other team for help. For instance, when asked how his social network in IT (including members of other teams) Brendon explained, "With this network of people, I can ask my pinpoint questions and go to a certain office, or go to a certain group of people and ask these pinpointed questions, as opposed to having to do my research ahead of time and then figuring out

how to word my question to possibly get it answered." As this example illustrates, some employees had members from other teams in mind based on the issues they faced. In this example, Brendon mentioned that knowing members of other teams helped when he had specific questions that they could answer based on their roles.

Employees communicated with members of other teams through various channels including face-to-face, phone, or email. For instance, Stephanie described her process of asking members of other teams questions. As she explained:

> By phone call or having to meet with them, like when a customer needs something, except it's not always easy just to explain it and so you would just walk up, you know, say, 'hey, can you meet me at –,' you know, 'meet me at [a building in LMO] and I will show you what's going on.' And then a lot of times it's easier to see it, and so just having those little one-off meetings, usually, or just dropping by their office. We've really changed a lot since then, but you know, some of our offices are here and there and you could go in. But, I mean, still, now a lot of – a majority of us are in [one of the main IT buildings], so it makes it easy to just walk down the hall and say, 'hey, I'm seeing this,' you know, and 'you've gotta check it,' or, 'where do I need to start,' you know, 'to get help from your team?' So, it's just that. Just the face-to-face; I would say the face-to-face and phone, mostly. Some relationships are through email.

Her account sheds light on why some channels of communication are chosen over others. For instance, face-to-face communication might be preferred based on the type of issue encountered and whether or not members of other teams are physically nearby. Employees in the main buildings of IT have opportunities to meet with members of other teams who have an office nearby. Phone and email were used in situations where it was more convenient based on physical location, such as a member of another team having an office in another building in LMO.

Although employees usually had someone in mind that they wanted to contact, some employees asked the same question to multiple employees from other teams. For example, employees might ask a question to members of other teams through email

distributions that allow them to reach a variety of employees from other groups simultaneously. Other participants reported asking various members from other teams for advice on handling a particular issue. For instance, Amy, an employee with leadership duties in her 40's who has been with IT for around six years, described a time when she asked leaders from different teams for advice on prioritizing multiple emails and phone calls when there are more pressing matters to address. As she explained, "I've been going around and talking to other leaders of other groups, you know, saying 'what are some strategies that you guys have used and have tried?' You know, and so we've gotten some suggestions." In this example, she wanted to get information from a variety of leaders regarding the problem that she was experiencing. She asked the same question to multiple leaders from other teams.

Observation. Employees observed members of other teams either formally or informally. Some employees reported having a position where they communicated with members of other teams more frequently than other employees. For instance, some positions in IT require more inter-team collaboration than other positions. Through observation, employees received task-related information, such as how to perform their roles or a future role. In some teams, more recent members formally observed members of other teams that had similar roles. For instance, as Phillip explained:

> We were also – also shadowed the two strategists. Then, I was assigned a strategist from a different team, as well as a specialist from a different team and I was able to go without them on different tickets that's outside of our area that we probably wouldn't ever go to, and then also gave a tour of the area that they were in, as well.

In these situations, part of the training process in the team involved having new members shadow members of other teams with similar roles. This example exemplifies

formal observation in that the employee was assigned to shadow a member of another team in order to learn his role.

In addition to formal observation, employees also informally observed members of other teams if their role allowed them to do so. Informal observation required initiative on the part of employees because they had to ask members of other teams if they would let them observe. For instance, Logan, an employee in his 30's who has been with IT for over nine years, mentioned how he would stay after he assisted another team by installing cables and would watch how they worked. As he explained, "If I came in and put the cable in for somebody and then just hung out and watch them, see what they did after the cable was in you know, that kind of helped me grow. Seeing that happen, so it's just kind of the steps as you went." In this example, he was not assigned to shadow members of other teams. Instead, he helped other teams by installing cable (part of his role) and then chose to stay and observe what members of other teams do once the cable is installed; he took the initiative to learn from members of other teams via observation.

Unsolicited. Employees also received unsolicited information from members of other teams. This unsolicited information came in the form of task information about job requirements or team information regarding news on the projects carried out by other teams. Members of other teams provided information to employees in one of two ways: providing information directly and sharing information indirectly through conversation.

First, few participants reported that they provided information to employees in other teams without being asked for that information. In these instances, members from

one team approached newer members from other teams to provide them with information that they believe is useful. For instance, as Elaine explained:

> Actually with the one new hire on the [other team], when the week that, his first week here, the [team] lead was out and the co-lead was also out, and so I stepped over and tried to show him around and show him just some things that would be good to know. Just for the, I spent several hours with him one day. Just to you know give him my perspective on these are things that are important to know.

In this example, she helped a newcomer from another group by providing him with information that she thought was important when working in IT. The employee from the other team did not ask her to provide this information.

A second form of unsolicited information from members of other teams was gaining information through informal conversation. Some participants explained that they gained information from members of other teams through conversation. Conversation sounds similar to indirect tactics of information seeking. However, during conversation, employees do not have a specific question they want answered. Instead, these employees talk to members of other teams informally and may inadvertently learn something relevant to their role. For instance, some participants mentioned how they talk to members of other teams and if they hear about a project that they could help with, they will ask more about that particular project. These employees have no prior knowledge of that project, but once they hear about it in conversation, they may ask for more information and even suggest collaboration based on that project. Brendon reported receiving useful information through conversations with members of other teams. As he explained, "The people who run the help desk – have conversations with those people all the time, and those conversations have been helpful because they end up having information from a customer perspective that I tend not to have that

experience." In this example, he did not have the specific goal of gaining information about customers from these conversations. Instead, the information came up in the conversations with these members of another team.

Human resources. Employees regard the human resources department as a team in IT. However, this team is directly involved in the onboarding process, so it is given its own category apart from other teams in general. The human resources team in IT has worked to standardize the onboarding process for new employees, regardless of team affiliation. Therefore, most new employees communicate with the human resources team when they first enter IT. The information that employees receive from human resources typically involves organizational information (e.g., identifying managers in the organization) and team information (e.g., who employees report to in their immediate work team). The human resources team provides information to employees in three ways: introducing new members to members of the organization, answering questions, and providing unsolicited information.

Introductions. The human resources team gives new employees tours of IT and parts of LMO as part of the onboarding process. This tour involves taking new employees around the main buildings and offices of IT and introducing them to members of the various teams in IT. As Chloe explained when asked about the tour, "I met people. I met different people. Of course I remembered half of them. But, you know, yeah, then different areas of IT. Where they were located. And we went around and met different people." This tour provides new employees with the general scope of the organization in that they are exposed to the different teams within IT. However,

some new members reported feeling overwhelmed by being introduced to so many employees of IT in a short period of time.

Answering questions. In addition to the onboarding process, members of the human resources team also provide information to employees by answering their questions about IT. Participants reported times they asked a member of human resources a question about IT. These questions were usually about processes in IT. For instance, one team leader, Mitchell, reported a time when he wanted to know about options for providing his team members with a career path. As he explained:

> So, money is not something I control and I immediately had to go and try to answer that question. "Wow, what is it that people have to do to get a raise? I really don't know." So, again, go to that [human resources team] and say, "I've got folks that come to me and they say, 'what does it take to get a raise?'," so, we worked collaboratively together to figure out the answer to that question.

Through this collaboration that emerged from his questions, he was able to find a way to provide his team members with career paths in IT.

Unsolicited information. The human resources team also provided general information of IT to new employees as part of the onboarding process. For instance, employees may be told by members of the human resources team whom they will be reporting to in their team. This information is broad in scope and supplemented the information employees receive within work teams. For example, the human resources team provided new employees with an overview of LMO. As Chloe explained:

> Initially on the first day I had a orientation with HR, IT HR. And that was great, that was just a general overview of [LMO] and where things were and you know, HR type related things. Questions if I had this is where I go for that. That was a nice overview of [LMO] itself, not necessarily our [team] or in our area.

In this example, she received general information about LMO, but little information about her particular team. However, one participant did mention a discrepancy in what

he was told by the human resources team and his immediate work team. As Greg explained:

> Then also, and I can't remember the lady's name. It wasn't, it was one of the ladies of [human resources]. But she was telling me too about kind of the vision of IT and being a new person and only here for two hours it took me a while to understand what she was telling me was the [human resources] vision as opposed to like [his team director's] vision and so that, that was, that created a little confusion, just trying to figure out the difference between the two.

In this instance, he felt that there were conflicting visions of IT between the human resources team and his own team. In situations similar to this example, new employees may be confused about the goals of the organization if they perceive an incompatibility regarding the goals that different teams communicate.

Management. Employees also received information from managers in IT. The management category includes employees of IT that hold leadership positions, but do not have regular contact with members of the teams they oversee. However, these managers have influence over how teams conduct their business. This category includes directors, vice presidents, and assistant vice presidents in IT. Managers were not a common source of information for employees, but there were instances where managers provided information to employees. For example, team leaders reported communicating with managers more frequently than other employees. This information, usually in the form of task and organizational information, was received in one of two ways: answering questions and providing unsolicited information.

Answering questions. Managers addressed questions and concerns of employees. In these instances, employees may approach managers, usually face-to-face, to ask questions regarding concerns involving a need for guidance or a transfer to a new team or position. In both cases, managers provided advice when asked. For instance,

Bryan reported a time when he desired to take over as a team leader after the position became available. When he decided he wanted the position, he asked managers for guidance in gaining this position. As he explained, "I immediately approached the assistant vice presidents and the director and said, 'I want this job. I'm the man for this job. Tell me how I can prove that uh, that I need. I need to be in this position.'" He went on to further explain that this assistant vice president provided him with advice on being a manager.

Providing unsolicited information. Managers also provided unsolicited information to employees, which usually came in the form of providing vision for the organization. Visions include those messages about where IT should be heading in the future. Employees may be exposed to these visions by attending presentations and meetings where a manager shares a vision. For instance, Bryan described a time when a new director over his division shared a vision during quarterly meetings and presentations. As he explained, "the director actually provided some sort of a strategic vision for our area. And so for the first time we had a group of people with some leadership." As this example illustrates, managers such as directors periodically provided a strategic vision of some kind to employees. In this case, the vision had to do with how different teams in the division should work together.

In addition to providing vision, managers also provided unsolicited information by communicating change to teams. Such changes include the creation of new teams, what guidelines those teams should follow, and the appointment of new team leaders. For instance, Amy described a time when she assumed a leadership position in another team. The manager of this team assisted with the transition by communicating the

change to the other members of the team. As she explained, "Basically the team was told [by the manager] I had the final say, so just little baby steps like that showing that, you know, she's assuming more leadership and you need to accept what she says, because we [management] are saying, 'yes, she has the authority to do that'." In this example, part of the process of her transition to a leadership position involved members of management explaining to team members that she would assume the role of team supervisor.

Sources Outside Organization

In addition to receiving information from employees in IT, employees also received information from individuals outside of IT. Individuals outside of the organization provided employees with task information relating to using certain software or working with clients. Participants reported three primary sources of information outside of the organization: industry peers, vendors, and clients.

Industry peers. Employees of IT reported that employees from other organizations (i.e., industry peers) provided information relevant to learning their role. These industry peers were usually employees of information and technology organizations. Participants explained that they contacted individuals in similar fields when they needed information about a particular task (e.g., information about using a particular product) or to have informal conversations about their work. Throughout their experience in IT, some employees developed relationships with individuals from other organizations. These relationships could be formed through school affiliations or from meetings at conferences. By developing these relationships, employees had additional sources of information from members of other organizations. Most of the information

employees received from industry peers had to do with technical information relating to particular tasks. However, some information includes organizational information by way of describing the work environment of other organizations. Most of these interactions took place through mediated channels such as phone or email because industry peers usually did not work in the same town. Communication with these sources occurs in two primary ways: asking direct questions and conversational.

Asking direct questions. Some employees contacted (usually through phone or email) industry peers they met in the past to ask a question about a particular task. Therefore, most of the information received from these sources was task-related. These industry peers had knowledge of certain systems or software that employees, and their immediate team members, did not possess. Although these conversations occur through mediated channels, employees have opportunities to communicate with industry peers face-to-face if they are at a conference. For instance, as Carl explained:

> It was more of people within the broader community, not so much at [LMO], but other people at other [organizations] doing the same job as me. I would learn from them, as well, usually over email or, you know, conference, or, you know, we'd have a meeting here at [LMO] and other people from around the state would come that would have their own clusters, or whatever, and they would – you know, we'd all compare ideas of how do you do this and how do you handle this? And, what if your user wants this? And, you know, how do you handle it? How do you organize your own – you know – when a problem comes in how do you decide who's supposed to handle it? So, a lot of that stuff of how to organize – how to organize our work and what software we use to do our work was – a lot of it was influenced by other people from outside of [LMO], even internationally.

In this example, he had various industry peers he could contact in various ways (e.g., email and face-to-face), to ask questions relevant to his field. In this case, he asked his industry peers questions about handling particular software.

Industry peers also includes members of other departments in LMO. Employees had peers in other departments in LMO that were not clients. Employees approached these peers through a mediated channel or face-to-face to inquire about specific problem they experienced. For instance, Mark, an employee in his 50's who has been with IT for under two years, explained that he approached peers in another department to get their perspective on a group that requested his services, but did not follow up with the request in a timely manner. As he described, he had:

> Conversations with people that were not in [IT] about that, because it's an area that [LMO] would truly benefit, but the work just doesn't get done and sort of the understanding of the situation and so I – some of the people that I work with, again, outside of [IT], know this same [group] very well and – and were able to sort of shed some light and, in some ways just sort of – you know, it had nothing to do with quality of work that I would do.

In this example, he approached members of LMO who did not work in IT. Approaching these peers about the group in question helped him gain information about why he rarely received a response from members of that group.

Conversational. Some industry peers were former colleagues from a university or another previous work organization. In these cases, employees kept in touch with these industry peers through conversation. Participants mentioned talking to these peers and learning from what these peers shared. In these situations, questions were not asked for the purpose of receiving specific information. For instance, Corey, an employee in his 40's who has been with IT for over nine years, gained more of an appreciation for IT after hearing about his former colleagues' negative experiences at other information and technology organizations. As he explained:

> When I talk to my colleagues elsewhere, it's incredibly easy to appreciate [LMO] because, you know, there's the absolute sense of, "okay," you know, there's this issue and there's that issue, but then there's the relative sense of

> "wow, I didn't really understand how unbelievably good it is here" until I compared myself to some of my peers who, by my judgment, have it unbelievably bad.

This participant had informal conversations with his former colleagues. From his conversations with these former colleagues, he determined that his experiences at IT, and LMO in general, were more positive compared to the experiences his former colleagues had at other organizations.

Clients within LMO. Clients were another source of information outside of IT. The information received from clients was typically task-related information because clients communicated their needs and expectations to employees. Clients were members of other departments in LMO that IT assisted. Most employees had to communicate with clients as part of their role. Employees' information seeking tactics with clients could be direct if employees asked clients what their expectations were or unsolicited if clients wanted to meet with employees to discuss their needs and expectations. For instance, Jessica explained that:

> [A client] I called, there were some problems and I called her and she was just like. I guess she had three or four tickets open within our system and all of a sudden people were closing them out or changing the state of them. So she was getting all these notifications that either the stated incident was closed or we closed the ticket itself. And so I called her to check on something and she's like, "you guys are driving me crazy with all these emails." And I was just like, "why are we sending her all these emails?"

In this example, she reached out to a client by calling her. Through this interaction, she learned of a problem that needed to be addressed by her team. After reporting the problem to other members of her team, one of the team leaders began to implement a solution to address the problem.

In some instances, employees reached out to clients by setting up meetings with them. For instance, Stephanie mentioned how she would meet with her clients, who were members of another department, to understand their expectations. As she explained:

> I meet, or was meeting monthly, with the [department representative], and I met early on to say, you know, what priorities does the [department] have? That way, I have an understanding of what they're working on, what they're trying to accomplish, and can we go make that happen. And, like I said, just making it a priority. That way, you know what their priorities are, so you kind of have to manage [IT's] priorities and the [department's] priorities at the same time.

In this example, she reached out to her clients early on to understand both the goals of the clients and how she could assist them in achieving those goals. In this sense, she learned about other departments in LMO in addition to their expectations. This example also illustrates that in addition to receiving task information relating to role expectations, employees could sometimes receive organizational information in the way of learning about other departments in LMO.

Vendors. On rare occasions, participants mentioned how communicating with vendors of resources (e.g., software) used by the team helped them learn to do their job. Vendors include members of other companies that provided software and other tools to IT. Communication with vendors occurred through mediated channels such as phone because vendors were not on location at the organization except for times when there were training sessions led by vendor representatives. Employees contacted these vendors to ask questions about task-related information such as a particular system or software. For instance, Chloe mentioned a time when there was:

> Just a specific tool that we wanted to learn how to use, and just had to find out the contact for that tool and gather information from the vendor, you know, user guides and those kind of things and once I realized that's what I needed to do it

> was okay. It's just, you're not, okay, does anybody else know this, where do I, you know (laughter).

In this example, she was not able to find information on the particular tool from members of her immediate work team, so she had to contact the vendor to understand how to use that tool. In this case, she was seeking task-related information.

This research question addressed the sources of information that employees approach from other groups or organizations. Sources of information within IT included members of other teams, human resources, and management. Employees relied on information from these sources in ways similar to their immediate team members such as asking questions, observing, and receiving unsolicited information. Sources of information from groups and organizations outside of IT included industry peers, clients within LMO, and vendors. Information was received from these sources through asking questions and these sources providing unsolicited information.

RQ3: How is Intergroup Communication Facilitated During the Work Team Assimilation Process?

In addition to immediate team members, employees relied on individuals from other groups for information. However, communication with these individuals was facilitated in various ways. Facilitation in this case will refer to the ways in which employees first made contact with certain members of other teams. Participants mentioned how teams in IT appeared to be isolated from one another and that it was difficult to stay informed about those teams. Thus, intergroup communication had to be facilitated in some way. Likewise, employee communication with individuals from other departments in LMO or other organizations had to be facilitated if employees did not have prior contact with those individuals. Communication with members of other

groups and/or organizations was facilitated in one of three ways: personal contact, getting assistance from a team member, and meeting these individuals in points of overlap between groups (i.e., nexus). Sites in this context refer to a physical space in which individuals communicate with one another. These sites can be seen as points of overlap between different groups, and will be referred to as nexus (Stohl & Putnam, 2003). These three modes of facilitation will be discussed in turn.

Personal Contact

Employees facilitated communication with members of other groups in IT and LMO by personally reaching out to them. Some employees knew that they had to work with members of other groups, and so they initiated contact with them. Such contact usually occurred via mediated communication channels such as phone or email. Jessica illustrated this communication when she explained:

> Different departments [in LMO] have contracts with IT for service and some of them don't. And so we have what we call a technology strategist and specialist that work within these partnership groups and so I've been trying to connect with them, just to get to know them because they are the way that we, our service system works is, you know, we get a ticket, goes into my queue. And then I have to figure out which partnership area it goes to. So I've tried to reach out to them just so I can meet them. Because I do, we do a lot of traffic back and forth.

In this example, she took initiative to reach out to different strategists in other groups in order to better perform her job. In her case, she reached out to these members of other teams via email in order to schedule one-on-one meetings with them. Based on her role, she knew who she would be working with and reached out to them on her own.

Not all employees had to facilitate communication with members of other groups they had not met before. Other employees who had been in IT for more than a few years knew members of other teams based on a past team affiliation (i.e., both

employees used to be members of the same team). IT has a history of reorganizing teams, so some employees used to work on the same team with other employees who ended up moving to a new team. When these employees needed to communicate with that new team, they contacted their former team member because they had a history with that employee. Many employees still maintained contact with their former team members, which became useful whenever they needed information from other teams. For instance, Sam, an employee in his 60's who has been with IT for over nine years, described a situation where a member of his team moved to a new team that he had to work with as part of his job. As he explained:

> The [former team member] was handling the [program] within us – we have a special team that's actually is over [the program]; she got a position, and still I have to go in. So, if I go into have to talk to them, she's often the person I'll be talking to. There's three people on the – but, a lot of the stuff we handle – that stuff we handle ourselves, but it's routed into programs so that you have to actually go and talk to and we consult with people on it.

In this example, he reported that when he has to consult with this other team about a particular program, he usually communicates with his former team member.

Assistance from Team Members

Employees were not always able to facilitate inter-group communication on their own. Instead, these employees relied on assistance from team members to facilitate communication with members of other groups. This assistance occurred both through employees asking their team members for assistance and team members providing assistance without being asked. Some employees asked their team members for assistance in finding who they needed to reach out to from another group in IT or LMO. For example, Mitchell explained how newer members of his team would ask questions like:

> Can you give me a list of people [in LMO] whose names I should know? So, if it's a technology person at the [LMO department], who do I need to call if I need to, you know, reach out? Who are these key players? These key individuals that I need to know about; that I should be aware of." Because again, it's your first day here, and you may be asked, "Hey, go do this thing for [a department in LMO]. Who do I work with?" Oh, "hey, let me get you a point of contact." We don't normally just provide that on a whim.

As this example illustrates, teams in IT do not always provide employees with a list of individuals from other groups that they will have to contact. Therefore, employees will rely on their immediate team members to assist them by asking them who they need to contact from other groups.

Employees did not always have to ask their team members to facilitate communication with other groups. Instead, team members sometimes facilitated these interactions for employees without being asked. For example, one team leader, Amy, mentioned how part of the training process in her team involves telling new employees in her team who they need to contact outside of their team and setting up meetings with the newcomer and members of these other groups. As she explained:

> As he's [the new team member] branched out and supported new things for like, "okay, here's your contact for this." Try to get it where they can meet. So sometimes he just finds out via email and then he's already learned that around here, you kind of have to take a little of your initiative sometime when you get a name, to reach out to them. So, -- and then, now, with the new person with the COGNOS, you know, we steered him toward, "okay, this is your contact for this," which – and we had our meeting on that to introduce. So, we try to do that.

In this example, new employee's team members told him who he needed to contact and also helped to facilitate a meeting for him. In this case, newer members to a team can receive information from their immediate team members regarding who they need to contact from other groups in IT and LMO.

Nexus

In addition to facilitating communication with members of other groups through personal contact and team member assistance, many participants reported various sites that helped to facilitate communication with members of other groups and organizations. These sites all served as points of overlap (i.e., nexus) between different teams in IT, departments in LMO, and other organizations. The category of nexus differs from personal contact in that through personal contact, employees knew who they needed to contact without meeting the member of the other team beforehand. In contrast, the category of nexus refers to those instances where employees did not intend to communicate with a member of another team, but ended up communicating with this member because they were each in the same nexus at the time. Examples of nexus from data analysis are cross-functional meetings, workshops and conferences, and backstage sites.

Cross-functional meetings. Inter-group communication in IT was also facilitated through employees attending cross-functional meetings with members of different groups. Cross-functional meetings were meetings that involved members of different groups or organizations, as opposed to team meetings, which only had members of one team present. Cross-functional meetings involving members of different groups in IT and LMO were a common occurrence in IT. Participating in these cross-functional meetings allowed employees to communicate with individuals from other groups. These cross-functional meetings were typically scheduled by directors or team leaders and occurred for various reasons, but they tended to revolve around collaborations based around particular projects, role expectations, or to address an issue that affects multiple groups. For instance, Chloe explained one ongoing cross-functional

meeting she participated in when she said, “Some of the different committees that I’m on or meetings that I’ve talked about, one of them is coming up with definitions for all the data fields, so that was really helpful to me cause they have different experts from the different areas come in and help define that.” In this example, she attended cross-functional meetings, composed of members of other departments in LMO, for defining data fields for a particular program. These meetings provided her with task-related information about using a program.

Cross-functional meetings were important to employees because they served as a site where they communicated with members of other groups. These sites serve as nexus where groups overlap in that members from different groups are communicating with one another in a single location. Through participation in cross-functional meetings, employees received team information, organizational information, individual information, and task related information. These meetings typically occurred face-to-face, but in some instances occurred in a mediated context such as conference calls. Employees attending cross-functional meetings learned about IT and how different teams in IT worked and the projects in which they are involved. For instance, when asked how he found out about an employee from another team knew about a particular product, Robert explained:

> In a meeting. It was just happened to be in a random meeting, where I mentioned, you know, that it would be nice to get this data from here to here, and he says, well, “why not use this product?” And, I’m like, “so you know about that product?” And he goes, “yeah, we use it a lot in the security team.” “Since when?” “Oh, well, a couple months.” Didn’t know. Would have been nice. Not that I’m angry; I’m happy to know the guy and happy to find out we have the resource and he’s working on it for me.

In this example, he made a suggestion at a cross-functional meeting and from there learned that a member of another team works on a particular product he was interested in using. Had he not attended this cross-functional meeting, he might not have had that interaction with the member of another team and thus would not have been able to use him as a resource for working on tasks involving that program.

Cross-functional meetings also served as sites where employees could communicate more effectively with members of groups. Participants reported getting to know individuals from other groups better by attending the same cross-functional meetings. Being able to meet these individuals face-to-face tended provided benefits in the future. For example, employees who meet members of other groups in meetings may get to know these individuals better and likewise receive responses from those individuals in a timelier manner compared to only communicating with them through a mediated channel. As Scott explained:

> If I were to just come here and been sat in my office and said, "here's the requirements to this program, would you write it?" You know? Going out and meeting the people and being in meetings with them makes that a whole lot easier, because if you got a question, you can just – we use IM and we use phone and in-person methods, and, you know, any of those can fall in at any time to how you want to interact with your customer, so going out and being with them and just working with them that way, just opens up to making your job a whole lot easier and getting requirements fulfilled a lot faster, I feel.

In this example, he explained that getting to know others in IT and clients was most helpful in terms of learning his roles. He believed that meetings helped to facilitate these introductions. As this example illustrates, having the opportunity to meet members of other groups, in this case clients, allowed him to ask questions pertaining to his role that he may not be able to ask had he not met with these clients in the first place.

In addition, mentor relationships with members of other teams developed from communication in cross-functional meetings. For instance, when asked how some of her mentor relationships began, Rachel explained, "Well, I think sitting in on all the meetings with them. We have lots of meetings and lots of conference calls, and we've gotten to be friends over the years from all the different events that we've planned together, the collaboration we do to advance the field at their [organizations]." In this example, she developed mentor relationships with individuals from other organizations by forming relationships with them during cross-functional meetings and other types of collaborations.

Workshops/conferences. Workshops and conferences were other nexus that facilitated communication with members of other groups. Workshops involved training opportunities either within IT or outside of IT. The content of workshops ranged from technical information related to work in information and technology as well as building interpersonal skills and leadership skills. These workshops are sometimes attended by members of the same team, but most were attended by members of different groups from IT and/or LMO. Conferences differed from workshops in that they were large events that included various activities, including workshops. Conferences allowed individuals from different organizations to share their ideas and make connections with one another. Examples of conferences common for participants were trades shows related to the information and technology field. Conferences could be held in IT or take place at other locations.

Workshops and conferences served as nexus that facilitated communication among different groups in IT and among different organizations as well. Participants

explained how they developed relationships with industry peers from other organizations at conferences. For instance, as Carl explained when describing how he developed relationships with industry peers:

> [A] guy I met here at [LMO] and he came to one of our conferences and he was from The Netherlands, and so, he did a lot of backup software, so I asked him, you know, "how'd you do this?" Or, "what was your – do you have any scripts that you've written to help me so I don't have to, you know, reinvent the wheel?" And, "oh, yeah, here." You know – give that to you, you know. [Names of related organizations], and you know, and just kind of all over. So, usually it would start – I would have a contact at some meeting, conference, and then continue that relationship on – you know, helping each other out.

As this example illustrates, he developed working relationships with industry peers through meeting them at nexus such as conferences. These nexus gave employees opportunities to communicate with individuals from other teams and organizations by allowing them, in the case of this example, to ask these individuals questions and share contact information. Once these working relationships were developed, employees used these industry peers as sources of information when they needed assistance. Nexus like workshops and conferences are important because they give employees an opportunity to communicate with individuals from other groups and build relationships with them that provides access to more sources of information.

Backstage. Communication with members of other groups was also facilitated in what can be referred to as the backstage (i.e., sites outside of formal meetings). Backstage sites in IT include breakrooms and hallways where employees might see one another and engage in conversation. Some teams in IT were located in the same building, so employees sometimes ran into members of other teams in these sites. These employees sometimes conversed with one another in these sites. These conversations sometimes provided useful information about other teams in IT or IT in general. For

instance, when asked to describe his interactions with members of other teams, Greg explained:

> Just meeting in, you know. If I see someone around the water cooler, whatever, I'd go, hey, you know, what's up with, you know the, what's up with the one card system today, you know, those types of things. Because we get, cause on a daily basis we go into the [program]. I see a lot of the issues that come through and so to learn how people deal with those and also to see what solutions they have that are forward thinking to solve those problems. It's interesting to hear.

In this example, he did not communicate with these individuals in formal sites such as meetings and workshops. Instead, he initiated conversations with members of other teams that he happened to see in a breakroom. His conversations with these employees served to get to know them and also see if they have useful information regarding programs he uses. These backstage sites were relevant for employees who worked in one of the primary buildings that IT was based. In these buildings, employees of multiple teams had offices, making it relatively easy for employees to communicate with members of other teams. However, employees in more isolated locations did not have the same opportunity because they primarily came in contact with members of their immediate work team.

Research question three addressed the ways in which employees' communication with members of other groups was facilitated. This inter-group communication was facilitated in one of three ways. First, employees could initiate inter-group communication themselves by personally reaching out to members of other groups. Second, employees received assistance from members of their immediate work team to get in contact with members of other groups. Employees sometimes had to rely on their teammates' social networks to know who to contact to reach a particular group. Third, employee communication with members of other teams was facilitated through

nexus, or points of overlap among groups and/or organizations. Nexus in IT came in the form of cross-functional meetings, workshops/conferences, and backstage sites such as hallways and breakrooms. These nexus served as sites where employees could meet and communicate with members of other groups, thus providing additional sources of information when employees needed help understanding their roles or about IT as a whole.

RQ4: How Does Communication with Members of Other Groups Shape How Employees Understand Their Organization During the Work Team Assimilation Process?

Some employees reported their understanding of IT changing during their tenure. These changes typically had to do with how the culture of IT was understood such as how IT operated as an organization. These changes in understanding generally occurred from communication with employees from other teams. The following results elaborate upon how this inter-team communication encouraged a change in employees' understanding of IT's culture by covering: employees' previous understanding of IT's culture, the source of the change understanding, and the new understanding that employees held after these communicative interactions occurred.

Previous Understanding

Some participants discussed their initial understanding of IT's culture during their first years in the organization. These participants explained that their initial understanding of IT's culture focused on their role in their immediate work team. Participants mentioned that they did not "step outside of their immediate position" and simply came to work to do their job. Based on this focus on their role, they thought less

about IT in regards to its values and structure. Bryan illustrated this understanding when he explained:

> The first two or three years that I worked here, I would say I was relatively naïve. I did my job; I only cared about my job and when it got beyond the scope of my job, I really could care less. I was fresh out of college; I didn't really have the capacity to think about much more than my tasks. And so, I consider it naïve in a good way; maybe even a little ignorant in a good way. I just – I didn't really know much more than what I had to do in front of me.

In this example, he explained how in his first years at IT, he perceived his role to be confined to the job he held in his immediate work team and never thought beyond these tasks or about IT as a whole. This focus prevented him from understanding the culture of IT as a whole.

Employees with this initial understanding based their perception of IT's culture on their role in their immediate work team; they did not have a clear understanding of how IT operated as a whole. For instance, Mitchell explained how he initially understood IT when he said:

> I mean whenever I first started at [LMO], of course I was hired at a very technical position and so my thoughts and impressions of [IT] is that it is a technically driven organization that delivers technology. That, that's really, that's what we do. If somebody needs computer networking, we provide computer networking. If someone needs a telephone on their desk, we provide a telephone on their desk.

As this example illustrates, when he first entered IT, he based his understanding of IT on his role. In this sense, he developed his understanding of how IT operates within the confines of his immediate work team. Another participant had a similar experience when he explained that his initial understanding of IT was developed in part from rumors and gossip among his team members. His understanding of IT's culture was developed from communication with his team members.

Source of Change in Understanding Culture

Some participants explained that their initial understanding of IT's culture changed due to certain communicative interactions with employees from other teams in IT. These interactions occurred in nexus among teams in IT. From data analysis, three sources of this change in understanding were identified: communication in cross-functional meetings, informal conversations with employees from other teams, and personal factors.

Communication in cross-functional meetings. Most participants who experienced a change in their understanding of IT's culture explained they experienced this change through communication with employees from other teams during a cross-functional meeting. These cross-functional meetings occurred for one of two reasons. First, some meetings were the result of collaborations among different teams in IT, such as discussing a particular project that involved multiple teams. Second, other cross-functional meetings were initiated by members of upper-management (e.g., directors or assistant vice presidents in IT). For instance, one participant mentioned participating in meetings where a director had team leaders meet to discuss issues relevant to IT and how IT can move forward. During such cross-functional meetings, members of other teams discussed topics related to how IT operates both internally and externally. Specifically, these topics revolved around interdependence with other groups in IT and/or LMO. Listening to these members of other teams encouraged employees to develop their understanding of IT's culture. The content of these cross-functional meetings that encouraged this development in understanding included: other teams in IT, how IT relates to similar industries, and how IT relates to LMO.

Other teams in IT. In some cross-functional meetings participants mentioned learning about other teams in IT. This topic included the roles that other teams have in IT and problems they encounter. For instance, as Deanna explained regarding a cross-functional meeting she attended, "We actually had to meet about this particular resource [a member of another team] and schedule out his priorities for the next six months because he's so booked with and needed so much for different projects that he had to better understand his timeline of what he needed to get done." In this cross-functional meeting, she learned more about the priorities of a team that collaborates with her team. During this cross-functional meeting, employees joked about this member of another team having too many priorities. As she explained, "It [the employee's priorities] almost became a joke when we'd say, 'well, can we schedule this person's time beyond that six months, then?'" After hearing about these priorities, she began to gain a better understanding of the other team in that her priorities and the other team's priorities were not always the same. Before this meeting, she thought little about the fact that other teams in IT may have different priorities that conflict with her own team's priorities.

How IT relates to LMO. In addition to other teams, some participants who attended cross-functional meetings mentioned learning about IT and how it relates to LMO. This topic involved learning about the goals of LMO and how they relate to IT. For instance, Amy explained how the content of the cross-functional meetings she attended sometimes focused on the future of LMO. As she explained:

> So, because I was aware of – "oh, they're wanting to do this; they really would like to see the overall direction of [LMO] go this way." Whenever we began doing shared computing with [another organization] because in order to lessen the cost – whenever they were trying to have a statewide CIO over all computing, and it just made you realize, okay, if I'm wanting a package; if I'm wanting to do something, I really need to consider more than myself. Maybe I

> should check around and see if anybody else is already using this package. We already have a license for this package, and then we can share the license, you know. Things like that; just had you think more [organization]-wide.

In this example, she explained how attending certain cross-functional meetings made her more aware of various projects in IT and how they related to the direction that LMO was taking. Understanding these projects discussed in cross-functional meetings encouraged her to think outside of her immediate role by focusing more on solving problems that affect LMO.

In other instances, the content of cross-functional meetings focused on how employees need to think about the ways in which their own work impacts LMO. For instance, Bryan explained how he attended a series of cross-functional meetings led by a director who wanted team leaders to think about how their work could benefit LMO. As he explained:

> He [the director] would sometimes help drive the conversation by posing big questions to us and forcing us to think kind of outside of our operational box...and so our conversations almost immediately evolved to be talking about the [industry LMO is part of]; talking about the different business units at [LMO] and the impact of financial planning and business analysis and how the things that we did and the things that the people on our team did translated to value for [LMO] and return on investment.

In this example, the cross-functional meetings focused on getting employees to think beyond their immediate work teams by thinking about how their work can impact LMO as a whole.

How IT relates to industry. The content of cross-functional meetings was sometimes based around the industry in which IT operates. Some participants mentioned how they attended cross-functional meetings that included discussions on how IT should work with other organizations in the information and technology field.

These discussions went beyond interacting with groups in LMO. Instead, this topic involved discussion on how IT could work with other organizations. These meeting topics encouraged some participants to change their understanding of how IT operated. For instance, Mitchell described a significant cross-functional meeting that encouraged him to develop a new understanding of IT. In this cross-functional meeting, a member of upper-level management answered a question in a way that shifted the conversation to building better relationships with industry partners. As he explained:

> And I was in a meeting with her [the manager] where she stated that. And this was very specific to our vendor relationships and our vendor partners. That we're not just looking for relationships and partnerships where we go and buy things. We truly want that value add. That, those relationships and those business partnerships that can also give back to [LMO]. So we may be handing money across the table and for goods and services. But, what we would also like to hand across the table are those relationships.

In this example, the manager, who was not a member of his team, introduced a new idea of relationship building that he explained, "was something that I never thought of before." In this cross-functional meeting, he was exposed to new ideas that made him question how he initially understood his relationships with vendors from other organizations. In particular, he began to think more about how the vendors he works with from other organizations could be perceived as partners.

Informal conversations. Informal conversations were another source of change in understanding for some participants. Informal conversations refer to communication that takes place outside formal work sites such as meetings. For instance, employees occasionally talked to other employees informally in hallways or breakrooms. Informal conversations generally occurred between two individuals instead of as a group. Informal conversation is similar to what Ellingson (2003) referred to as embedded

teamwork, which involved communication that also occurred in backstage sites like breakrooms and hallways. However, backstage conversations in the present study involve communication between members of different teams instead of team members. Informal conversations encouraged employees to change their understanding of IT's culture in one of two ways. First, employees may learn about how teams in IT are interdependent through conversations with members of other teams. Second, employees may adopt an understanding of IT's culture shared by members of other teams through informal conversations.

First, informal conversations with members of other teams helped employees gain a better understanding of how IT operated in terms of team interdependence. For instance, Amy mentioned how informal conversations in hallways helped her understand how different teams in IT worked together, usually through discussing projects. As she explained, she learned how different teams in IT fit together in part through, "Some informal conversations in the halls with people that I know who're in different areas." When describing these conversations, she said:

> Like I said we just might bump into each other walking in the hallway or [in LMO] and it's like, once somebody says, hey, I hear you're blah blah blah, and then we just start up a conversation and then from there that's whenever I did go out and do some research and then emailed her with, okay, here's some additional information, here's some other people you want to get on board.

In this example, she discusses how informal conversations about projects she is working on helps her to see how other teams in IT can help with these projects. These conversations encouraged her to develop a holistic understanding of IT in terms of how teams work interdependently on projects.

Employees did not always change their understanding of IT's culture by attributing meaning to various conversations. In some instances, employees adopted an understanding of this culture conveyed to them through informal conversation. Although such instances were seldom reported by participants, Robert explained this process in detail. He recounted a time when he met to talk with a director from another team after they had attended the same cross-functional meeting. After their conversation, he talked about his thoughts of IT, which prompted the director to reply with an explanation of how he thought IT operates. In this example, Robert was trying to understand why upper-level management went back and forth between expanding IT and shrinking IT. As he recounted:

> It was, when that [the new understanding] came to more fruition for the shared services aspect of things, when it was being built. It was like a side conversation after that. We had multiple meetings by that point of how this will flesh out kind of thing you know. And that was kind of mentioned off-handedly [by a director from another team]. Like, "well, you know, we're back into this again." And I was like curious about what that meant. "Well you know, the cycle. Back and forth." And I'm like, Oh. You know, just kind of realization.

As this example illustrates, the conversation he had with the director from another team helped him to develop his understanding of how IT operates. In this case, he adopted the director's understanding that IT goes through constant cycles between shrinking and expanding. He explained that he did not develop this understanding completely until it was shared by the director from another team.

New positions in IT. In addition to communicative interactions, some participants attributed a change in their understanding of IT to having a new position in IT. These positions were typically leadership positions that gave employees more visibility into other teams in IT. This factor relates to attending cross-functional

meetings because employees with these positions received more access to members of other teams by being invited to more cross-functional meetings. For instance, as Bryan explained:

> And then the second change was when I started expanding my role as a professional outside of just the technical stuff to being more of leadership/management level. And, that's when I started looking at the bigger picture of the holistic thinking of IT as an organization, and both seeing how much we'd grown since I started in the organization and how much was still possible to achieve.

In this example, he attributed part of his change in his understanding of how IT operated to holding a leadership position instead of the technical position he held when he first entered IT. In this case, this new position encouraged him to think more holistically about IT.

Developed Understanding of IT's Culture

Employees interpreted information from these sources in ways that encouraged them to develop their understanding of IT's culture. Some employees explained how their understanding of IT changed after receiving information from members of other teams in nexus such as cross-functional meetings. Whereas employees' previous understandings of IT's culture were based on their immediate work team and role, their new understandings focused on how IT operates as an interdependent system and how IT relates to LMO and other organizations. The progression of these understandings can be seen as going from basing IT's culture on immediate work teams to thinking about IT's culture in a holistic sense by accounting for group interdependence. From data analysis, two such understandings were identified: understanding IT as a system and how IT relates to LMO and other organizations.

IT as a system. First, some employees developed an understanding of IT's culture relating to how IT operates as an interdependent system. This understanding goes past the boundaries of an individual work team to thinking about how IT operates as an organization. Two examples represent this organization-focused understanding. First, Robert mentioned that he came to understand that IT goes through an ongoing cycle of shrinking and expanding. Cycles in this case refer to patterns that employees perceive IT undergoing. Specifically, he perceived that IT went through cycles of reorganizations that either grew by created more teams in IT or that shrank by combining teams. He described this understanding of IT as such:

> I've been here long enough. Decades go by and it does this thing where it shrinks and it expands, and it shrinks. So we shrink, and we become very tightly organized, and we have only these products. And then, and then times would be good and we'll say, "hey, we could really be more efficient if we would spread out a little or we'd be more customer oriented if we spread out a little if we took more of a personal approach to people," so we end up growing. And then we say, "Well the budgets are overrun, we'll shrink back. Let's shrink back and do only these products." And so I've been through so many stages of that now that it's kind of getting old-hat you know. Kind of back and forth, back and forth. So I've seen those changes quite a bit. It's a cycle.

This understanding, which he adopted in part from a conversation he had with a director from another team, centers on treating organization-wide change as a pattern that constantly moves back and forth from growing and shrinking. This understanding focuses on IT as an entire organization instead of his immediate work team; he understood how the structure of IT changed over time.

A second example of this understanding came from Deanna, who developed an understanding of IT's culture that focused on how teams in IT were interdependent. For instance, prior to holding this understanding, she did not focus on how other teams she worked with had priorities that conflicted with those of her own team. However, after

developing this new understanding, she became more aware that other teams have conflicting priorities that influence how they work with her own team. In her case, these conflicting priorities meant that other teams may not be able to address her team's concerns as quickly as she preferred. Regarding her new understanding, she explained:

> Sometimes, you know, the understanding of what is your priority is not always somebody else's priority and was magnified. And, because when you work on a team and you're working on a specific application, what you're working on is important to you, whereas somebody, say, in infrastructure who supports your application is also supporting multiple applications and when you don't know their agenda as to what their priorities are and sometimes you're not as sympathetic when they weren't looking at your issue immediately.

In this example, she explains how earlier in IT, she did not clearly understand the priorities other teams have. However, the new understanding she developed accepted that teams in IT do not always have the same priorities; she thought more about what other teams were experiencing and how that influenced inter-team collaboration. This new understanding gave her a clearer idea of how IT operates.

How IT relates to LMO and industry. Second, some employees developed new understandings of IT's culture focused on how IT is interdependent with LMO or related industries. These understandings accounted for how employees' work in their team benefitted LMO and/or related industries. For instance, Mitchell developed an understanding that focused on building partnerships with other departments in LMO. He explained that he initially saw his job as simply providing departments of LMO with a product. However, after attending a cross-functional meeting, he began to see the relationships his team had with these other departments as mutually beneficial partnerships. These partnerships went further than selling a product and moved into helping other departments in LMO work more effectively. As he explained:

> So what I'm finding is that [IT] is less of a service provider and more of a collaborator. They're really stepping in there and proving that not just through the ability to buy and drop technology on desks, but through the relationships and partnerships that the IT department holds. They can really lend value to what the businesses across [LMO] are trying to do. So for me that was a huge mindset change, just knowing that um, we're not just out there to put these, you know, phones on a desk. We're really out there because people want to be able to do their business better and they want our input on how to do that. They don't just want to come to us and buy stuff. They want to come to us as direct business partners and build relationships and be collaborators. And be more than just give and take, but also shared. So that's, I would say that's probably been the biggest mindset change that I've had to work with since I've started here.

As this example illustrates, his understanding of how he should work with clients changed from being a service provider to a collaborator; his job was no longer about providing technology to other departments, but rather about being a business partner and collaborator. This new understanding stressed interdependence with other departments by being a collaborator as opposed to taking part in one-sided transactions with these departments. This shift to perceiving other groups as partners can also be seen as adopting a value of IT since manager was expressing how she felt employees should act towards their clients. This understanding applied to relationships with vendors from other organizations as well.

Another participant, Darren, an employee with a leadership position in his 40's who has been with IT for around six years, illustrated this understanding when he explained how he came to adopt the understanding that his team needed to focus on helping employees in LMO. Instead of thinking solely about his immediate team, he began to think about how the work he does in his team helped develop and assist employees in LMO. As he described this understanding, he mentioned that, "If the [employees in LMO] aren't successful, then we don't have a successful [LMO]." He went on to further explain how he makes sure that policies in his team align with his

understanding of assisting employees in LMO by meeting their needs. This understanding included thinking about how work in his immediate team benefits LMO because he believed that if his team did not help employees in LMO grow, then LMO would not be successful. In this sense, this new understanding went beyond the boundaries of his immediate work team and began to include how his work team was interdependent with LMO as a whole. Helping employees in LMO can also be seen as a perceived value of IT that he adopted in his team.

Research question four addressed how employees' understanding of IT's culture developed through their communication with members of other teams in IT. Results showed the process that some employees went through when they developed their understanding of IT. First, some employees' initial understanding of IT was based around their immediate role in their team. However, these employees reported developing these understandings after communicating with members of other teams in IT. This communication usually took place in nexus such as cross-functional meetings and backstage sites where employees discussed topics relating to interdependence among teams or organizations. These communicative interactions encouraged employees to develop new understandings of IT based around team interdependence or organizational interdependence with LMO or related organizations.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to use the bona fide group perspective to study organizational assimilation through the work team context. Applying this perspective served to address two limitations in the organizational assimilation literature. First, studies on organizational assimilation tend to focus on the experiences of newcomers to organizations as opposed to the experiences of more established employees. Second, studies on organizational assimilation typically do not account for the group context. For instance, studies tend to focus on the organization as a whole and less on sub-groups within a particular organization. The bona fide group perspective was used to address these limitations because it requires researchers to study group communication by accounting for both within group communication and intergroup communication simultaneously.

The organizational assimilation literature and the bona fide group perspective suggested four research questions regarding the work team assimilation process. These research questions revolved around the importance of addressing the perspective of newcomers, established members, and the context in which the assimilation process occurs. The first research question inquired about immediate team members that employees communicated with in order to learn their roles and about their organization. The second research question inquired about the individuals from other groups and organizations that employees communicated with in order to learn their roles and about their organization. The third research question inquired about how communication with members of other groups was facilitated. The last research question inquired about the

role that intergroup communication played in employees' understanding of their organization.

To answer these research questions, interviews were conducted with 27 employees of an IT department of a large organization. These participants represented different teams and positions in the organization, with some having recently entered the organization and others having been employees for over a decade. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a modified constant comparative method consisting of data reduction, unitizing, open-coding, focused coding, and axial coding. In addition, some follow-up interviews were conducted based on categories that were identified during data analysis. Data collection ended once saturation was reached in that interviews did not yield new categories.

Results from the present study addressed the four primary research questions regarding within group communication, intergroup communication, and the context in which this communication occurs. First, results identified the sources that employees communicate with in their immediate work teams during the assimilation process. Employees approached their immediate team members and supervisors frequently when they needed information. Employees received information from their team members through asking questions, observing, and receiving unsolicited information. These sources yielded information relating to tasks, teams, the organization, and individuals. For instance, employees may shadow team members to understand how to complete a particular task. Employees also received information from their team supervisors, who typically provided task, team, individual, and organizational information. Employees received information from supervisors primarily through asking questions and receiving

unsolicited information. For instance, an employee may ask their supervisor about the role another person plays in the organization. In addition, team meetings were identified as sites where newcomers were encouraged to ask questions of team members. Employees sometimes utilized team documents in addition to documents outside of IT. Employees also supplemented the information they received from immediate team members with their personal experience from working in IT and similar organizations they worked for in the past.

Second, results identified sources of information that employees communicate with from other teams and/or organizations. Sources of information within IT included members of other teams, the human resources team, and members of management. Employees typically received task, team, and organizational information from these sources through asking questions, observing, or receiving unsolicited information. For instance, members of other teams may offer to help newcomers by sharing their perspectives on the organization. The human resources team was unique in that it handled the standard onboarding process in the organization by providing newcomers with general information on the organization (including a tour) and the newcomers' teams. Employees also received information from sources external to IT such as clients, vendors, and industry peers. These external sources typically provided task information such as how to solve a problem or providing role expectations. Employees received information from these sources through asking questions or receiving unsolicited information. For instance, an employee might email an industry peer to get an opinion on how to address a certain problem.

Third, results identified the ways in which communication with members of other groups is facilitated. Sometimes employees simply contacted a member of another group if they knew who they needed to contact. However, these interactions often had to be facilitated in some way. Facilitation sometimes occurred through team members arranging meetings with members of other groups. In addition, communication with members of other groups was facilitated by employees being present in points of overlap between groups (i.e., nexus). These nexus served as sites where employees communicated with members of other groups. Relevant nexus in the present study were cross-functional meetings, training workshops and conferences, and backstage sites like breakrooms. Employees gained access to additional sources of information through these nexus. These sources typically provided task, team, and organizational information. For instance, an employee might learn at a meeting that a member of another team has experience using a particular product and then approach that employee to ask for assistance with that product.

Fourth, results indicated the ways in which communication with members of other groups influenced how employees understood IT's culture. Some participants explained that they had an initial understanding of IT that was changed over time through communication with members of other teams in IT. This initial understanding focused on employees' immediate roles in their teams. However, through communication with members of other teams, usually in nexus like cross-functional meetings, these employees adopted a new understanding that focused more on how teams were interdependent with one another or with LMO and similar industries as a whole. For instance, one participant explained how he attended a cross-functional

meeting where a manager addressed IT's relationship with industry partners. This communication encouraged him to perceive these intergroup relationships as mutually influential partnerships as opposed to IT providing these other groups with a service. This interaction encouraged him to think more about how his team was interdependent with industry partners. These findings have a variety of implications for information seeking, work team communication, group assimilation, and the bona fide group perspective. Implications for each of these topics will be discussed.

Information Seeking

Results from the present study have implications for the study of information seeking. First, the team context has not been a focus in the information seeking literature. Most studies on information seeking break up sources of information in terms of upper-management, supervisors, and coworkers (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993). However, dividing sources in this manner does not account for the context in which communication occurs. For instance, participants in the present study reported seeking information from coworkers both within their team and from other groups. The team context is important to consider because sources of information from other groups can provide certain types of information that immediate team members cannot. For instance, members of other groups may be able to provide information about software that an employee's immediate team members know little about. In addition, some participants reported instances where members of other teams in IT provided information that developed their understanding of IT's culture. For instance, members of management may share goals of the organization of which other immediate team members were unaware. Future studies on information seeking could explore more

specifically the differences in the types of information employees receive from members of their immediate work teams and members of other groups. For instance, researchers could address how receiving information from members of other groups relates to certain outcome variables such as role negotiation and role ambiguity, similar to Hart and Miller's (2005) study on information content during the assimilation process. Such findings could highlight the benefits of intergroup communication during the assimilation process if this communication results in less role ambiguity.

Next, accounting for the team context provides more insight into how the process of information seeking occurs. Most quantitative studies of information seeking focus on who employees contact for information and at what frequency (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995; Miller, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Sias, Kramer, & Jenkins, 1997; Tidwell & Sias, 2005). However, these studies do not focus as much on what leads to these interactions. The present study addressed the various ways that employees initiated communication with members of other groups and/or organizations. Some employees were aware of who they needed to communicate with from other groups. However, other employees had to have these interactions with members of other groups facilitated in some way. For instance, some employees had to seek information from their team members regarding who they were supposed to contact from another team. In addition, many communicative interactions with members of other groups or organizations were facilitated through nexus such as cross-functional meetings and training workshops. These sites provided employees with opportunities to communicate with members of other groups and/or organizations. For instance, one participant mentioned a time when he learned that a member of another team had experience with a

product that he was interested in during a cross-functional meeting that he attended. Afterwards, he was able to get in touch with the member of the other team and ask him for assistance on using that particular product. Communication in these nexus helped to give employees access to more sources of information from other groups. This finding implies that employees who have more access to nexus in organizations likely have access to more diverse sources of information. Future research on information seeking needs to focus more on how and where information seeking occurs in order to understand how information seeking is facilitated and how employees come to access information sources. Such studies could identify different contextual factors that impede information seeking besides working in a team that is physically isolated from most teams in the organization. For instance, perceived competition with other groups may prevent newcomers from approaching members of those groups for help.

The results from the present study provide further support for the need to study how all members of an organization seek information and not just how newcomers seek information. Research in the information seeking literature tends to focus on the experience of newer members of the organization (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 2002; Teboul, 1995). Few studies have focused on the information seeking of established employees. Those studies that have covered the information seeking of established employees only focused on a particular aspect of their information seeking, such as how they seek information in response to newcomers entering the organization (Gallagher & Sias, 2009). However, the present study suggests that information seeking is relevant to more established employees in terms of learning their roles that may change over time and about their organization that also undergoes changes due to re-

organizations. Some participants mentioned they never stopped learning in IT. Employees still engaged in information seeking after their first years in IT.

As employees' roles changed and the organization changed, there was a need to engage in information seeking tactics. However, the context of information seeking for employees changed the longer they were employed in IT. For instance, more established employees in the present study typically had larger social networks than newcomers that they utilized when they needed information. In addition, more established employees gained access to more sources of information from other groups, especially for those that transitioned to leadership positions, than newcomers. Future research on information seeking needs to consider expanding the scope of participants to all employees in an organization and not just focus exclusively on newer members of the organization. Such findings would shed light on how information seeking changes for employees over time. For instance, more established employees may seek different types of information than newcomers and also rely on different sources if their network grew since they first entered the organization. More established members may receive higher quality information if they are more aware of the most knowledgeable employees in the organization.

On a related note, the results of the present study include findings on the information seeking of leaders in an organization. With the exception of Kramer & Noland (1999), leaders have generally been excluded from studies of information seeking. However, in terms of information seeking, Kramer and Noland focused on the information that new leaders needed and different factors that prevented them from receiving that information such as inadequate training. Results from the present study

suggest that employees who transition into leadership positions also engage in information seeking tactics to better understand their role and organization. However, information sources sometimes differed for leaders compared to other employees. For instance, some leaders in the study explained that they had mentors or approached other employees with similar leadership positions for information. In addition, leaders had access to more sources of information from other groups if they attended more cross-functional meetings as part of their new role.

For many participants who transferred to a leadership position, there was a process of learning to be a leader. This process involved seeking information from others regarding how to be a better leader, such as asking other leaders in IT how to better prioritize multiple questions/issues from their team members. Some types of information became more relevant for leaders in IT, such as organizational information, because the scope of their job went beyond their immediate work teams. Future research needs to address the information seeking of leaders in organizations, especially those who recently assumed a leadership position because this transition point may be a time of uncertainty for some employees. Such research could yield insights into how information seeking changes from when these employees were newcomers. For instance, an employee entering a leadership position may need to connect with employees in similar leadership positions instead of approaching former peers in the organization. In addition, leaders may not feel they have access to past sources of information if there is a perceived status difference (Kramer & Noland, 1999).

The results from the present study suggest further insights into the nature of information sources. First, the concept of third-party sources (i.e., individuals who are

not employees in the organization) has not included industry peers (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Some participants in the present study mentioned the importance of communication with industry peers in terms of learning their roles and about IT. Industry peers refer to individuals in a similar field who provides information to employees. Industry peers include individuals that employees meet at conferences and workshops in addition to colleagues from either when they attended college or a previous job in a related field. These findings highlight the role that members of other organizations have during the assimilation process.

Results suggested two ways that members of other organizations shaped the assimilation process. First, industry peers provided needed task information when immediate team members could not. For instance, employees may contact industry peers about software being used because nobody in their team understands that software. Second, industry peers provided perspectives on their organization that in turn contributed to how employees understood IT. For instance, one employee felt IT was a great place to work at after having a conversation where industry peers discussed how they were dissatisfied with their own organizations. Future research should seek to gain further understanding into the role that industry peers can play in the assimilation process. For instance, researchers could explore how employees with access to industry peers compare to those who do not during the assimilation process in terms of the quality of information they receive. Information from industry peers could be beneficial if it provides an outsider perspective from someone who is not an employee in the organization.

Second, in the information seeking literature, the concept of materials as a source of information has not included materials outside of the organization (Morrison, 1993). Instead, typical organizational materials include training manuals or organizational websites. Results from the present study highlight the use of materials outside of the organization for the purpose of gaining information relevant to a particular role. For instance, participants reported using internet search engines such as Google to find information relevant to their roles. In addition, the information seeking literature does not distinguish between materials exclusive to a specific team and materials that are available to all employees in the organization. In the present study, some participants explained that their team had knowledge bases made up of articles created by team members. Not all participants reported having such materials available in their own team. Such distinctions matter if having these documents available in an immediate work team encourages a smoother transition into a team or the organization as a whole. Future research on information seeking needs to be mindful of this distinction and not assume that the only materials that employees utilize are within the organization. Current conceptions of materials need to account for how access to new technology influences the information seeking process because employees now have access to more resources through the internet than they did in the past.

In addition to information sources, results from the present study suggest further expansion of how information seeking tactics like observation can be conceptualized. Observation is typically regarded in the information seeking literature as an indirect tactic by which employees observe others without asking them questions directly (Miller & Jablin, 1991). For example, newer employees may unobtrusively watch their

coworkers work on a particular task to see what behavior is acceptable. However, results from the present study suggest additional ways to conceptualize observation during the assimilation process. For instance, observation was not always indirect; in some cases new employees were assigned to shadow more established employees to better learn their role. In this sense, observation was more of a direct tactic in that employees knew that they were being observed in order to help the newer employee learn. Based on these results, the tactic of observation can be divided into direct and indirect observation. Direct observation refers to instances where an employee observes other employees who are aware that they are being observed. Indirect observation refers to the traditional conception of observation in the information seeking literature (Miller & Jablin, 1991).

In addition, the tactic of observation was not always distinct from other tactics in the present study. For example, some participants reported that they asked questions as they observed others work. In these instances, newcomers observing more established employees might ask them why they are working on a task a certain way. In this case, the tactic of observation includes asking direct questions for clarification. Researchers need to adjust measures of information seeking to reflect the possibility of tactics being used simultaneously because they may not be accounting for the context of certain communicative interactions. With current measures, participants might identify observing a coworker and asking that same coworker questions as separate instances when in reality, observation led to the employee asking the coworker questions.

Results from the present study also suggest a need to account for the role that mediated communication plays in the information seeking process. Information seeking

studies rarely account for the channels employees utilize to elicit information from sources (Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004 is an exception). Most studies on information seeking only inquire about who members of the organization approach and with what frequency regardless of channel (Mignerey, Kramer, & Jenkins, 1995; Miller, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Sias, Kramer, & Jenkins, 1997; Tidwell & Sias, 2005). In the present study, participants reported not just approaching sources of information face-to-face, but also through channels such as phone, email, and chat services to communicate with different sources of information. Some of these results suggested new ways to think about the nature of information seeking. For instance, one participant mentioned that she used an email distribution to ask multiple employees for help simultaneously. In this example, the employee sent out the same request for information to multiple members of the organization. Given previous strategies for measuring information seeking, channels such as these can make it more difficult to measure how frequently certain sources of information were approached by an employee. In situations similar to this example, an individual may receive questions through an email distribution, but never respond to any of these inquiries. However, if this instance was being measured in terms of information seeking frequency, then a participant could report that this individual was approached for information even this individual never read the email. Future studies need to account for such issues regarding choice of channel in seeking information by developing measures that clearly account for how sources were approached for information.

Results of the present study also highlight the importance of meetings during the information seeking process and in research on organizational assimilation in general.

Meetings have typically not been studied in the organizational assimilation literature unless they are part of a formal institutionalized socialization process as part of the on-boarding or training process. However, participants in the present study reported that meetings were sites where they received useful information from team members or members of other teams. Two types of meetings were relevant to employees of IT. First, team meetings involved members of the same teams. In some teams, these meetings served as sites where newer members could ask questions relevant to their job. These newer members could pose their questions to their team members simultaneously instead of approaching a single team member with a question. Team meetings were also sites where employees received unsolicited information from their team members such as team expectations. Team meetings represent unit-level influence during the assimilation process because team members may provide role expectations or other information to newer members as a team unit. In addition, team members could enforce norms through collective agreement with what another team member says.

Second, cross-functional meetings involved members of different teams at a single time. These cross-functional meetings served as opportunities for employees to communicate with members of other groups and learn about these groups. Cross-functional meetings can also be sites of unit-level influence during the assimilation process in instances where a single member of one team is meeting with multiple members of another team. Studying communication in meetings during the organizational assimilation process provides another context to consider when studying organizational assimilation. Future research could further address how attending meetings are beneficial during the assimilation process.

Finally, results from the present study shed light on the quality of information received by employees. A typical pattern of studies on information seeking is to focus primarily on the sources of information, frequency of seeking information (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995; Miller, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Sias, Kramer, & Jenkins, 1997; Tidwell & Sias, 2005), and sometimes the content of information (Hart & Miller, 2005). However, these studies rarely account for how employees evaluate the information they receive. For instance, a notable finding in the present study was that some employees reported changing their understanding of IT's culture after receiving information from members of other teams. For some participants, this change stemmed from one or two notable interactions that encouraged them to change how they understood IT. For these employees, not all information gathered in meetings was helpful in developing their understanding of IT. Findings from the present study suggest ways in which the quality of information received can be evaluated. For instance, not all information can be evaluated based on how well employees learn their roles. Specifically, task-related information tends to be judged based on how well it helps employee's complete a task relevant to their roles. However, organizational or team related information does not always relate to directly to task roles, and may be evaluated instead on how well it shapes employees' understanding of the organization. Future studies of information seeking that address quality need to consider how quality should be defined.

Work Team Communication

Researchers have argued that immediate work group members shape new members' perception of their organization (Korte, 2009; Moreland & Levine, 2006). These arguments appear to stem from the idea that employees communicate with

members of their immediate work group more frequently than employees from other groups in their organization (Korte, 2009). However, results from the present study suggest that communication with members of other groups can be a common occurrence for some employees. Furthermore, results from the present study challenge the argument that employees' perception of their organization is shaped primarily by members of their own team because key changes in some employee's understanding of IT's culture occurred through communication with members of other teams in IT. This communication usually occurred in the context of cross-functional meetings or other nexus that included members of other groups. Some participants reported that after a certain communicative interaction with one of these members of other teams, they broadened their understanding of IT from focusing on their immediate role in their work team to a more developed perspective about how IT operates as a whole. At times these changes were intentional, such as a director calling a meeting for different team leaders to talk about the operations of IT. However, at other times these interactions were unintentional, such as employees having informal conversations with members of other groups.

These findings can be understood through the three paradigms of organizational culture developed by Meyerson and Martin (1987). Those participants that reported a change in how they understood IT's culture appeared to first hold an integrated view of IT's culture; these individuals assumed that there were no competing understandings of IT's culture. For instance, one participant initially thought that IT's relationship with its clients was based primarily on transactions; he did not think there were competing understandings of IT's relationship with clients. However, through communication with

members of other groups, these participants were exposed to new understandings of IT's culture. In such instances, the differentiation view of culture was relevant in that these employees were exposed to alternate, sometimes contradictory understandings of IT's culture. The employees' understanding of IT's culture shifted from an integrated understanding to a differentiated standing where different groups can represent different subcultures in the organization that each have unique understandings of the organization. Exposure to these different understandings encouraged some employees to rethink and further develop their understandings of IT's culture. Therefore, intergroup communication encouraged some employees to develop their understanding of IT's culture by moving employees away from the integrated view of IT's culture to more of a differentiated view (Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

One explanation for this difference in findings in the current study is that Korte (2009) and Moreland and Levine (2006) focused more on the frequency of communication with employees and less on the content of the messages from these sources. For instance, in the present study, most participants communicated with their immediate team members more than members of other groups. However, employees' communication with members of other groups sometimes involved introducing them to new ideas and understandings of IT that they had not been exposed to before. Despite occurring with less frequency, communication with these members of other groups fostered a new understanding of IT that these employees were not able to obtain from their immediate team members. For instance, employees could frequently talk to their immediate team members and gain task-related information. Those same employees could also attend one cross-functional meeting and hear someone from another team

talk about how employees should perceive their relationships with their clients. Even though these employees had fewer interactions with the member of the other team, they could have been influenced more by what the member the other team said compared to the task information from their immediate team members. This explanation suggests that future studies need to account for the content and quality of information from different sources in addition to the frequency. Participants in the present study sometimes gained more important information from members of other teams they did not communicate with as frequently as their own immediate team members. In addition to quality of information, researchers could also explore uniqueness of information. One characteristic of these influential interactions is that these employees received unique information that they had not been exposed to before attending a particular meeting; the uniqueness of this information could have further encouraged these employees to develop their understanding of IT.

An alternative explanation for these findings is that employees in an organization may develop a general understanding of their organization through communication with their immediate team members. However, this understanding can develop over time as employees communicate with more employees from other teams. This explanation complements the findings of Korte (2009) because he did not account for changes in understanding over time. Korte's findings suggest that employees' understanding of their organization was shaped primarily by their immediate coworkers and did not change over time. However, there is the possibility that these employees' perception of their organization changes as their social network grows to include more individuals from other groups. Results from the present study provide some support for

this pattern. For instance, one participant explained how he began to better understand the cycles that IT undergoes when he started talking to a member of another group. Korte (2009) focused on how employees learned social norms. This example implies a difference in focus in that this employee learned about the structure of the organization as opposed to social norms. This difference between Korte's findings and those of the present study could mean that employees learn about social norms from their immediate team members and later come to learn about characteristics of the overall organization from members of other groups. In the present study, this understanding of the overall organization tended to occur after employees had been employed in the organization for at least two years. Future research needs to utilize longitudinal studies to better assess how employees' understanding of their organization can change over time. Such research could identify communicative interactions that serve as transition points for how employees understand their organization.

Future research on organizational assimilation needs to account for both how employees come to understand their immediate work teams and their organization as a whole. Results from the present study suggest that some employees first develop an understanding of their role in their particular work team before developing a full understanding of IT and LMO. Some studies on organizational assimilation do not account for how members understand their immediate work teams and instead focus primarily on how members feel about their organization overall (Bauer & Green, 1998; Filstad, 2011; Lapointe, Vandenberghe, & Boudrias, 2014; Madlock & Chory, 2014; Morrison, 1993). Other researchers like Korte (2009) focus more on how employees learn about their immediate work team which then influences how they perceive their

organization as a whole. These aspects of organizational assimilation need to be integrated to gain a better understanding of the organizational assimilation process. Adopting a bona fide group perspective to study this process can help to discover how employees' understanding of their team and organization are related. For instance, in the present study, some participants based their understanding of IT on how they understood their work in their immediate work team. In other instances, participants developed their understanding of IT which in turn influenced how they understood the way their immediate work teams should operate.

Studying organizational assimilation through the work team context also has implications for the role of the socialization context in the assimilation process. Past research on organizational assimilation has studied socialization context as a factor at the organizational level (Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1998; Gomez, 2009). For instance, these studies addressed contextual factors such as socialization tactics and the size of the organization. However, results from the present study challenge this assumption by accounting for the work team context. For instance, work teams had socialization contexts that differed from that of IT as a whole. IT had a standard onboarding process that all employees were required to go through when they entered the organization. However, each work team decided how members learned their roles when they entered a particular team. These different socialization contexts rarely competed with one another. Rather, they complemented one another because the standard IT onboarding provided general information about IT (including meeting other members) and providing necessary documents; this onboarding did not include teaching employees their roles. Instead, role learning took place within work teams and was influenced by

the socialization context of a given work team. Therefore, different dimensions of the assimilation process were related to different socialization contexts. In this case, general organizational information was gained from the standard onboarding that took place under the organizational-level socialization context. In contrast, role learning took place under each team's unit-level socialization context.

Socialization contexts can differ by work teams in that some may have more formal socialization processes than other teams. Stating that an organization has a single socialization context that transcends team boundaries only serves to over-simplify employees' experience during the assimilation process. Instead, researchers need to account for the socialization contexts at the organizational-level and the unit (or work team) level. These levels can have similar socialization contexts or different contexts. For instance, the organizational-level could be more formal, whereas the unit-level is more informal. Future research can benefit from finding ways to operationalize multiple socialization contexts within a given organization because findings could shed light on how differing contexts influence the assimilation process.

The socialization context of work teams appeared to have a primary influence on how team members learned their roles. For instance, when teams had little to no formal training, members had to rely on asking their team members, and sometimes members of other teams, for information relevant to their role. Results from the present study also highlight the importance of access to other employees to the socialization context. For instance, some participants appeared to have more access to members of other teams than other participants. This access was generally dictated by participants' physical location and their position in IT. Some participants were in more isolated teams based

on the location of their offices; these participants had fewer opportunities to communicate with members of other teams. In addition, participants who assumed leadership positions during their tenure reported gaining more access to members of other teams through attending cross-functional meetings. For instance, one participant mentioned how he gained more visibility into other teams when he assumed more responsibilities in IT and was invited to more cross-functional meetings. Factors like access need to be considered when studying the socialization context because access to other employees can influence how employees learn their roles and about their organization.

Results from the present study shed light on the complexities of identifying organizational-level, unit-level, and individual-level influences during the assimilation process. First, the nature of cross-functional meetings can be problematic in that members from different teams make up a single unit temporarily. However, communication in such units could involve perspectives from different teams or units in the organization. This communication could be treated as influence from a single unit or multiple units depending on the researcher's interpretation. Second, communication in a meeting could occur at the individual-level depending on the context of the interaction. For instance, a team leader may call a meeting to give a presentation to members of a team. If this leader simply gives the presentation without feedback from the team members in attendance, then this communication could fall under individual-level influence because only one person was communicating a particular message. Levels of influence need to have clearer definitions than they do now in the organizational assimilation literature (Kramer & Miller, 2014). These clearer definitions are especially

important for future researchers that plan to measure level of influence in order to avoid mistakenly counting communication during a meeting as unit-level influence when only one individual is communicating.

Group Assimilation

Results from the present study suggest an alternative way to understand the group assimilation process. Recent models of group assimilation focus primarily on individuals and the different group memberships they hold (Anderson et al., 1999; Kramer, 2011). However, the present study suggests the importance of including groups that individuals are not members of but still communicate with during the assimilation process. In the present study, employees were members of one specific team in IT. However, most of these employees communicated with individuals who were members of other groups in IT and LMO or other organizations. Communication with these members of other internal and external groups helped employees to better understand their roles, IT, and LMO (Large Multidivisional Organization). Current group assimilation models do not account for situations where an individual communicates with other groups, but is not a member of those groups. Considering these other groups is important because they constitute the environment in which a group is embedded. How employees communicate with members of these other groups can influence how they learn their roles and develop an understanding of their organization. For instance, communicating with members of other groups can help employees learn to use certain software or learn about potential collaborative projects involving other groups.

In addition, present models of group assimilation do not adequately account for points of overlap (i.e., nexus) among various groups. In models like Anderson, et al.'s

(1999) model, individuals could be seen as the nexus in that their multiple memberships constitute overlap among those groups. For instance, if an individual is both a member of a charity organization and a member of a choir, then that individual represents a point of overlap between those two groups although these models do not explicitly identify individuals as the nexus. Nexus should be more clearly accounted for in models of group assimilation, especially in the context of organizations, because it is in these points of overlap where employees communicate with members of other groups in an organization. This communication contributes to employees learning their roles in the organization and about how their organization operates. These nexus represent the context in which intergroup communication occurs.

One issue with current group assimilation models is that they do not adequately apply to an organizational context because they do not account for sub-groups within any particular group. For instance, Kramer (2011) studied a community choir and treated it as an entire group in his model. These models only account for groups outside of a primary group such as other organizations or family life. However, organizations can be seen as a system of interdependent groups. Therefore, group models of organizations need to include subgroups in the organization and how these groups interact during the assimilation process. For instance, employees in the present study learned about their roles and IT in part through intergroup communication that occurred in nexus such as cross-functional meetings. These omissions from group assimilation models suggest a need for an additional model of group assimilation.

Results from the present study suggest a new model (see Figure 1), inspired by Stohl and Putnam (2003), of group assimilation. When discussing the merits of accounting for

nexus in future studies of bona fide groups, Stohl and Putnam (2003) proposed that nexus could be visualized through the intersection among concentric circles. Although these researchers never provided such a model, the present model provides a visual representation similar to the one they theorized. Instead of focusing on how multiple group affiliations influence the assimilation process, this model focuses on how intergroup communication shapes the assimilation process. This model brings together findings from the four research questions that guided the present study by accounting for sources of information from within groups and from other groups. In addition, the model accounts for nexus, or points of overlap, among groups and the communication that occurs in these nexus. This model accounts for the various groups that employees communicate with in order to learn their roles and about their organization. Rather than focusing on the groups that one individual is a member of, this model accounts for all of the groups that an employee comes in contact with during the assimilation process. This model is not meant to be a replacement for current models of group assimilation. Instead, this model serves as an additional lens to study communication in the group assimilation process.

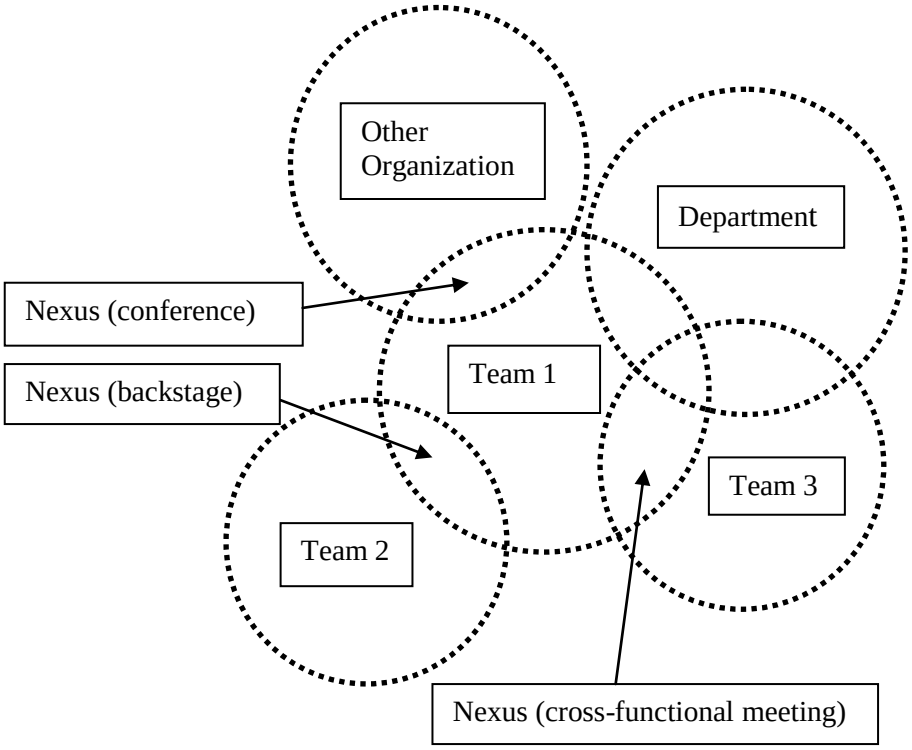


Figure 1. Model of Work Team Assimilation

In this model, circles with dashed lines represent a particular team or group. Points of overlap among groups represent nexus. These nexus represent communicative interactions that take place among members of different groups that shape the assimilation process.

This model incorporates the concept of nexus as points of overlap among groups. In the model, each circle represents a particular group. Nexus are represented by points of overlap among these circles. These points of overlap represent the context of intergroup communication that shapes the assimilation process such as cross-functional meetings and training workshops. Each nexus includes members of multiple groups. In addition, each of these nexus can be given a label to better explain the context of

intergroup communication. For instance, one nexus could be a cross-functional meeting between members of two groups while another nexus could be an informal conversation in a hallway between members of different groups. Examples of nexus identified in the present study were: cross-functional meetings, backstage (e.g., hallways and breakrooms), training workshops, and conferences. However, other types of nexus can be used in the model given the context of the organization studied.

The present model also accounts for permeable group boundaries and interdependence. The circles that represent each group have dashed lines to represent how perceived group boundaries are fluid. For instance, members of one group may believe their group is isolated. However, these individuals may start to believe their group is interdependent with other groups after certain interactions that take place in a nexus such as cross-functional meetings. In addition, this model accounts for group interdependence through the inclusion of nexus. These points of overlap show the ways that groups rely on other groups through cross-functional meetings based around collaborations. In some cases, the amount of overlap between groups in this model can indicate the degree of interdependence between groups. For instance, the nexus for a collaborative project between two groups will be larger than the nexus that represents an informal conversation in a hallway between members of different groups. However, overlap between groups does not always suggest interdependence, such as times when members of different groups attend a presentation, but do not work with or communicate with one another.

The findings from the present study clearly illustrate this group assimilation model. For instance, the model could focus on the assimilation process in a single team,

represented by the circle labeled “Team 1” in Figure 1. The findings from research question one relate to the communication that occurs among team members. In the model, those interactions take place in the parts of the “Team 1” circle where no overlap with other groups occurs. This part includes interactions with immediate team members and team supervisors. The findings from research question two relate to the intergroup communication that occurs during the assimilation process. These interactions take place in the points of overlap among different groups. These points of overlap are all labeled as nexus, as identified in the results of research question three. These nexus, or points of overlap among groups, helps to facilitate intergroup communication. Referring to the model, a cross-functional meeting can facilitate communication among a member of team one, a member of team three, and members of another department. These nexus encompass the results from research question four in that changes in understanding of IT’s culture can occur from this intergroup communication that occurs in nexus such as cross-functional meetings.

This model does not include the stages, or statuses, of group assimilation. Findings from the present study suggest a need to reconsider how stages or statuses are regarded in models of group assimilation. Past models of group assimilation rely on stages, or statuses, that group members experience when they decide to join a particular group. However, some researchers have stressed that these statuses can be ambiguous if members believe they hold a particular status, while their group members believe that they hold a different status (Kramer, 2011). In addition, different models have different criteria to determine the stage or status that a particular member holds in a group. For instance, Moreland and Levine (2002) argue that group members enter a new stage

based on the level of commitment that group members feel towards one another. Another criterion is how well members understand the group culture (Anderson et al., 1999). However, results from the present study did not suggest specific criteria for judging when members of a group enter a particular stage in the assimilation process for two reasons. First, members of IT did not reach a point where they stopped learning either about their role or IT. As Mitchell explained, "Just because of the landscape of the market that we deal with, [IT] is constantly changing as a result of that. So I'm learning new things about it every day just because it changes so much." Even though he has been an employee for over a decade, he still felt there was more to learn about IT. Such findings provide support for the argument that assimilation is an ongoing process that cannot easily be divided into distinct phases (Jablin, 2001).

In addition, employees did not only need to learn about working in their specific team, but also about working with other groups that they interact with such as other teams in IT and departments in LMO. Learning about other groups is typically not accounted for in group assimilation models. For instance, employees may feel they have a clear understanding of their team, but not of their organization as a whole. Situations like this example complicate the idea of clear statuses because employees could feel that they are established members of their team, but not of their overall organization.

Furthermore, the nature of statuses becomes problematic in situations where employees are transferred to a new group in the same organization. Transfers could occur if employees of an organization may be told to join a new group because it fits more with their skillset. At other times, the organization may undergo a re-organization that results in new teams being created with different leadership. In these instances, the

status of these transferred employees can be unclear. For example, if an employee has been with the organization for five years, then that employee would still maintain their knowledge and understanding of the organization's culture. This employee may only need information regarding their new team members. Given this employee's knowledge of the organization, the employee may be regarded as an established member of the organization. However, within the new team, the employee may be regarded as a newcomer even if the general role has not changed. Future research can explore how employees perceive themselves and one another in terms of status that results from a transition. Such findings could suggest how perceived status changes from transitions such as transfers to new teams and re-organizations resulting in the development of new teams.

The literature on group assimilation, and organizational assimilation in general, suggests that assimilation is a process of mutual influence between newcomers and established members. However, results from the present study did not provide sufficient evidence of this mutual influence among group members. Similar to previous studies on the assimilation process, the present study resulted in findings related primarily to how organizational members influence others by providing relevant information. Analysis resulted in few instances of mutual influence during the assimilation process. One such instance was described by Mitchell, who explained how a few of his team members asked him how they could get a raise. This question prompted Mitchell to ask members of the human resources team how his team members could get a raise. These interactions led to Mitchell being able to better provide his team members with career paths. In other words, the team members' initial question resulted in a change for all

members of the team. This example represents role innovation in that the team members wanted to know what they needed to do to get a raise, which resulted in the team leader being able to find additional roles or certifications that team members needed to attain the positions or pay they wanted.

The method of data collection is one of the key reasons why the mutual influence of team members was not accounted for in the present study. Interviews were used as the method of data collection; however, the limitations of the recruitment process affected the nature of the interviewing process. Interviews are more suited to assessing mutual influence during the work team assimilation process if the researcher is able to interview all members of a particular group. In that situation, the researcher could ask all group members how they felt a specific team member influenced the group. This method would be more successful than asking individual members how they felt they influenced their team because some team members, especially newcomers, may not be aware of changes that occurred since they entered the team. In the present study, recruitment was based solely on volunteers, so there were no instances where all members of a specific team were interviewed. Therefore, the researcher could not get the perspective of multiple team members regarding how specific members influenced their team. Future studies could overcome this barrier by studying one work team within an organization and interviewing all members of that work team as opposed to interviewing members of different work teams in a single organization. In addition, multiple methods of data collection could be employed to better understand mutual influence during the work team assimilation process, such as ethnography in order to observe mutual influence.

Bona Fide Group Perspective

The present study contributes to the bona fide group perspective by providing evidence regarding the nature of nexus, a concept introduced to the bona fide group perspective by Stohl and Putnam (2003), and how it relates to group boundaries and interdependence with other groups. Results suggest additional ways to identify nexus apart from those suggested by Stohl and Putnam (2003). These researchers suggested studying nexus in the form of interactions among members of different groups and isolating linkages between members of different groups. However, they did not include the physical sites in which these interactions occur. Four examples of nexus relevant to organizations were identified in the present study. First, cross-functional meetings were points of overlap among work teams in that members of different teams worked together and/or shared information with one another. Second, training workshops served as points of overlap among groups in situations where members of different groups attended the same workshop and communicated with one another. Third, conferences served as points of overlap in that members of different organizations communicated and formed relationships with one another at a single location. Fourth, informal work spaces such as break rooms and hallways served as sites where members of different groups formed relationships and shared information with one another. These sites in particular relate to what Ellingson (2003) referred to as the backstage. The present study builds on her findings by showing that the backstage can serve as nexus for different groups in an organization. In the present study, such backstage sites could be hallways in which members of different groups in IT communicated with one another.

Communication in these backstage sites also fostered a change in understanding of IT's culture for some participants.

Communication in these nexus usually included information on what other teams did in IT or about IT as a whole. For instance, nexus such as cross-functional meetings sometimes involved communication about other team's projects. Communication in these nexus helped employees learn their role or about IT by facilitating communication with members of other groups. For instance, one employee attended a cross-functional meeting where she learned that a member of another team had a busy schedule that prevented him from working on tasks that her own team was working on. This communication encouraged her to consider how her team was interdependent with the other team in that she had to consider the other team's competing priorities. She and other participants initially focused on the work that occurred within their team without considering how they might rely on other teams. However, after hearing members of other teams share the problems they encountered, employees may start to think more about how their team relies on other teams to complete different tasks. These findings suggest that communication in nexus shape how employees understand their interdependence with other teams. For some participants, more communicative interactions in nexus encouraged them to develop their understandings of their teams' relationships with other groups and IT as a whole.

Communication within these nexus served to make the interdependency of groups more apparent to some employees. For instance, some employees explained how they received information from members of other groups during cross-functional meetings. These employees interpreted this information in a way that encouraged them

to see the "bigger picture" of IT in terms of how groups in IT are interdependent. The content of this information ranged from members of other teams explaining a scheduling problem to hearing about the role that other groups play in accomplishing tasks. Before being exposed to this information, employees relied on assumptions about members of other teams or simply accepted that they did not know what other teams did in IT. Communication in these nexus made these employees more aware of other groups and how they were interdependent.

Employees thought about group interdependence in one of two ways. First, some employees focused on their immediate team without acknowledging other groups or how they are interdependent with those groups. The second way focused more on understanding the details of how an employee's immediate team is interdependent with other groups. In these instances, employees saw the bigger picture of their place in IT in relation to other groups. The latter was encouraged from communication in nexus. Communication in nexus has the capacity to encourage employees to develop a holistic understanding of their organization. In a sense, this holistic understanding could be seen as altering the perceived boundaries of a team. For instance, employees may perceive their team as more isolated, but then think more about how other teams interact with their team after attending cross-functional meetings. In this example, the team boundaries are first seen as very stable, but become more fluid after thinking about how they relate to other groups both within and outside of IT. Future research using the bona fide group perspective should explore how intergroup communication in nexus fosters understandings of group interdependence and fluid group boundaries.

Findings from the present study also extend Ellingson's (2003) concept of embedded teamwork, a concept in the bona fide group perspective, by applying it to intergroup communication. Employees did not only communicate with members of other groups during meetings. Instead, some employees communicated one-on-one with members of other groups outside of formal meetings. Communication with these members of other teams sometimes encouraged employees to develop their understandings of other groups or of IT as a whole. This communication can potentially change how employees perceive their team boundaries in situations where they begin to see how their team is interdependent with other groups in their organization. Instead of embedded teamwork, this communication could be regarded as cross-functional teamwork, which involves intergroup communication involving dyads or triads outside of formal meetings. Similar to embedded teamwork, cross-functional teamwork could involve discourse relating to changes in beliefs and attitudes, intergroup practices change, and team boundaries are renegotiated (Ellingson, 2003). Researchers using the bona fide group perspective should consider the ways that embedded teamwork can apply to intergroup communication. The context of intergroup communication may suggest other implications of embedded teamwork such as how group boundaries are renegotiated through intergroup communication. For instance, leaders from different groups may meet individually to renegotiate their respective teams' task jurisdiction in their organization.

Limitations

The present study had some limitations. First, not all teams in IT were represented in the study. Because data collection relied on volunteers to participate in

interviews, some teams were not represented if their members did not volunteer. Therefore, there could have been some experiences of employees in IT that differed from those who participated in the study. On a similar note, some participants who were contacted for follow-up interviews did not respond or were unable to participate in a follow-up interview due to busy schedules. Therefore, not every participant was represented for research questions that were added later in the study such as the fourth research question. However, this issue of representation is not a significant concern because saturation was reached during data analysis in that analysis of interview data did not yield new categories. In addition, a majority of teams in IT were represented in the present study.

Second, because a case study was conducted, findings may not be transferable to organizations outside of the IT field. The organization studied could be distinct from some organizations in that it is composed of work teams that often collaborate with other groups in some form or another. This organization may also be distinct from other organizations in that each individual team can differ in how they train new employees. IT does not have a formal training process for individual teams; it just has a standard onboarding process for all employees new to the organization. However, the findings from the present study are transferable to organizations with a context similar to IT, such as other IT divisions of large, multi-divisional organizations. The findings from the present study could also be transferable to organizations outside of the IT field if these organizations have a similar organizational structure. In particular, these findings could be relevant for organizations, or a division of an organization, that provides consultation services to an organization. Similarly, these findings can be transferable to

organizations that are composed of a variety of departments that are interdependent with one another to varying degrees. In the present study, teams in IT varied in terms of how interdependent they were with other teams/groups; some teams and departments were more isolated than others. In terms of team interdependence, some findings from the present study can be relevant to organizations that rely on cross-functional meetings. In particular, attending cross-functional meetings in other organizations could potentially encourage employees to develop their understanding of the organizational culture.

Third, theoretical contributions of the present study were limited due to the use of the bona fide group perspective. Contrary to what some sources claim (e.g., Littlejohn & Foss, 2011), the bona fide group perspective is not a theory, but instead a way to study groups. Although there are various concepts under the umbrella of the bona fide group perspective, little has been done to see how these concepts are related to one another. By using the bona fide group perspective, the present study was able to challenge some conceptions of work team assimilation (e.g., the role that members of other teams have on employee's perception of the organization). However, based on the limitations of the bona fide group perspective, relationships between concepts like nexus and permeable boundaries were not tested. Future research needs to focus more on taking steps to develop the bona fide group perspective into a theory by finding how different concepts are related. The present study did make theoretical contributions to organizational assimilation by finding results that question current arguments on work team communication that within group communication primarily shapes employees' understanding of their organization. Results suggested that intergroup communication

also plays a role in developing employees' understanding of their organization, especially in terms of the goals and structure of the organization.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to use the bona fide group perspective to understand organizational assimilation through the work team context. Findings from the present study resulted in some key contributions to the study of organizational assimilation. First, results had provided a more complex understanding of the information seeking process. For instance, sources such as industry peers were identified and the idea that information seeking tactics can overlap was put forth. In addition, the present study addressed the context in which information seeking occurs. For example, sometimes employees relied on team members to facilitate communication with potential sources of information. The physical spaces that information seeking took place in was also considered in that team meetings sometimes served as sites where questions from newcomers were encouraged. Second, results highlighted the role of intergroup communication during the assimilation process. Communication with members of other groups helped employees learn their roles and learn about their organization. In addition, members of other groups sometimes provided information or perspectives that immediate team members could not provide.

Third, the role of nexus in the organizational assimilation process was identified. In the present study, different forms of nexus were identified such as cross-functional meetings, conferences, and breakrooms. For some participants in the present study, communication in such nexus fostered a more holistic understanding of their organization. In these instances, employees went from thinking about their role within

their immediate team to thinking about how their team is interdependent with other groups whether they are within or external to the organization. Such findings suggest that communication in nexus can influence how employees perceive their degree of interdependence with other groups. On a similar note, findings from the present study stressed the importance of meetings during the assimilation process. Meetings are typically not thought of as sites relevant to learning roles, but participants described instances where attending meetings helped them learn about their roles and or about the organization as a whole. The importance of nexus suggested another way to conceptualize group assimilation by accounting for groups that employees are not members of, but still communicate with during the assimilation process.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocols

The following are the general interview protocols used for data collection. The following questions do not include follow-up questions that were asked or questions that were asked based on the participants' experiences. For instance, if a participant held a leadership position, then they would be asked additional questions about learning to be a leader.

Established Members

1. Could you describe your job title, duties, and how long you worked for the organization?
2. What is it like to work at the organization?
3. Describe to me the work team you are a member of?
    a. How long have you been a member of this team?
4. What is a work day usually like for you?
5. Describe your experience in joining this team for the first time
    a. How did you learn to do your job?
        i. What did you learn from talking to your teammates?
        ii. What did you learn from talking to your team leader?
        iii. What did you learn anything from members of the organization or clients outside of your team?
    b. How was the organization described to you when you first entered the organization?
    c. How did your team members talk to you when you joined the team?
6. How has having a social network in the organization helped you?

7. Have you learned anything of value from meetings you have attended?
8. Has your understanding of the organization changed since you first entered?
9. What has been most helpful in terms of learning about working in the organization?
    a. What has been least helpful?
10. Has anything hindered your development in the organization?
11. Have you ever experienced disappointments at the organization?
12. Would you change anything about the training process or how newcomers are brought into the organization?
13. How are current newcomers brought into your team?

Newcomers

1. Could you describe your job title, duties, and how long you worked for the organization?
2. What is it like to work at the organization?
3. Describe to me the work team you are a member of?
    a. How long have you been a member of this team?
4. What is a work day usually like for you?
5. Describe your experience in joining this team for the first time
    a. How did you learn to do your job?
        i. What did you learn from talking to your teammates?
        ii. What did you learn from talking to your team leader?
        iii. What did you learn anything from members of the organization or clients outside of your team?
    b. How was the organization described to you when you first entered the organization?
    c. How did your team members talk to you when you joined the team?
6. How has having a social network in the organization helped you?
7. Have you learned anything of value from meetings you have attended?
8. What has been most helpful in terms of learning about working in the organization?
    a. What has been least helpful?
9. Has anything hindered your development in the organization?
10. Have you ever experienced disappointments at the organization?

11. Would you change anything about the training process or how newcomers are brought into the organization?