



Strengthening the pipeline: A leadership communication and organizational culture model to engage, retain and advance early-career women

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and organizational culture model to engage, retain and advance early-career women**

Structured Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the organizational entry phase of the socialization process as an opportunity for organizations to communicate culture through leadership empowerment behaviors to retain and advance young talent, particularly young women.

Design/Methodology/Approach: In-depth interviews with 31 early-career women explored their journeys from recruitment through their first year of full-time employment, highlighting the significance of cultural fit, organizational culture, socialization processes and leadership empowerment behaviors.

Findings: Organizational socialization and culture conveyed via leadership empowerment behaviors are undoubtedly intertwined, working in tandem to effectively acclimate young women, helping them understand the meaningfulness of their work, and ultimately supporting their visions and paths to future leadership and successful tenure at their organizations.

Originality: This study was inspired by organizational leaders’ desires to engage young workers and effectively acclimate them to the workplace. It is the first study of its kind to effectively combine multiple theoretical perspectives of organizational life–socialization, culture and leadership empowerment–to address strategies for improved employee acclimation.

Practical Implications: This study offers a practical phase model that outlines strategies organizations should implement at four distinct time periods within the first year of a newcomer’s employment.

Keywords: organizational culture, organizational socialization, leadership empowerment, leadership communication, career development, onboarding, female leadership, early-career, young workers, Gen Z

Article classification: Research paper

Introduction

Young workers continue to be more detached from the organizations that employ them, leaving leaders at odds with how to implement purposeful strategies to retain and engage this early-career cohort (Harter, 2024). Organizational culture is often cited as the reason why young workers leave organizations (Nawrat, 2022). Strategies implemented during the entry phase of organizational socialization could be key to engaging and retaining young workers—especially women—ultimately advancing them to leadership positions. However, socialization and culture perspectives are often kept separate in academic research; few studies have focused on how newcomers learn about and internalize cultural norms and values (Bauer, 1998). At the same time, more recent research emphasizes a clear relationship between organizational socialization and organizational culture (Kramer & Dailey, 2019; Taormina, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the organizational entry phase of the socialization process as an opportunity for organizations and their leaders to communicate a culture that supports, retains and advances younger workers, especially young women.

Organizational Culture

Culture is an abstract concept that represents the beliefs, behaviors, and values shared by a group of people (Rousseau, 1990). It permeates organizational life and is a powerful social force that guides but also restricts behavior (Schein, 2010). The nature of organizational culture suggests that it is also inherently communicative, that is, culture is manifested through communication among organizational members. In an attempt to offer an exhaustive, yet exclusive, assessment of how organizational culture impacts performance, Ginevičius and Vaitkūnaite (2006) identified 12 dimensions of culture including cooperation, learning, strategic direction, and communication, among others. It is clear that organizational culture is present in relatively all touchpoints between an organization and its members. Organizational culture influences an organization's ability to recruit and retain top talent and contributes to

employees’ overall job satisfaction and wellbeing, or lack thereof (Bellou, 2010; van Vianen, 2000).

Organizational Socialization and Culture as Interconnected Experiences

Organizational socialization is a process that occurs over time during which an individual gains the skills and expertise necessary to function as a contributing member of an organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). During this process, an employee will cross organizational boundaries by moving from an outsider to an integrated insider (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2002). Adjusting from outsider to insider occurs through learning about the organization, learning how, when and where to interact with other organizational members, and understanding organizational structures, workflows, and job roles (Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Chao *et al.*, 1994; Ostroff & Kozlowsky, 1992). These areas and levels of learning during socialization offer an abundance of opportunities for organizations to communicate a distinct organizational culture, which helps to align employee and organization values and makes new employees aware of the heightened purpose and value of their work (McMillan-Capehart, 2005; Taormina, 2009). Messages concerning organizational culture, both informal and formal, are imparted on newcomers during socialization through their interactions with team members and leaders (Kramer & Miller, 2014). Therefore, organizational socialization and culture should be considered simultaneously and as interconnected experiences (Kramer & Dailey, 2019).

Socialization content areas as opportunities for culture communication

Because this research seeks to understand how organizational culture can be communicated during socialization, it is necessary to know the ways in which socialization occurs. Taormina’s (2009) conceptualization of socialization domains revealed four distinct areas including: (1) training, the process through which functional job skills are obtained; (2) understanding, fully comprehending and applying knowledge related to organizational roles,

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people, and culture; (3) coworker support, receiving emotional and moral sustenance through social workplace relations; and (4) future prospects, anticipation of a personally and professionally rewarding career within the given organization. Training and coworkers significantly influence employees' knowledge and acceptance of organizational culture (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999). Employee's perceptions of career growth within their current place of employment has been found to positively influence a meaningful connection between employees and their organization's culture (Autry and Daugherty, 2003). Finally, a culture that supports the development of proactivity and self-leadership among its employees positively influences the socialization process, ultimately increasing organizational commitment (Cranmer *et al.*, 2019).

Organizational Culture and Socialization's Impact on The Early Career Phase and Young Women

The phase of organizational entry is "one of the most crucial times in one's organizational life" (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003, pp. 779). During this phase, experiences related to personal growth, professional opportunities and access to professional networks and relationships shape one's career expectations and affect future career aspirations (Kowtha, 2013). Additionally, young people acclimate to professional life and their organizations differently than experienced workers. Experienced workers have a variety of professional experiences and a wider professional network to reflect on when making sense of organizational life (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2012; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Younger workers, often members of Generation Z, want to learn how to engage in meaningful work that contributes to the mission and vision of their organization, and they want frequent and personal interactions with their managers and other workplace peers to learn about career growth opportunities (Chillakuri, 2020). This research suggests that early-

career employees experiencing organizational entry for the first time have unique needs from their organizations and should be treated as such.

Early-career women, specifically, have unique experiences and needs during the organizational entry phase, as they experience a variety of transitions simultaneously and respond to these experiences differently than young men (Kowtha, 2013), which could help or hinder their long-term career advancement. Recent research also revealed that young women grapple with their professional identities during the organizational entry phase, which often prevents them from voicing concerns or speaking up, unless someone more senior in the organization is actively advocating for them (LaGree & Olsen, 2022), or the culture of the organization is supportive and inclusive, and allows access to those in power (Meng & Neill, 2021; Place, 2012). Aspects of organizational culture that influence women’s abilities to advance include a workplace ideology that is accepting of work-life integration (Aldoory *et al.*, 2008; Burke, 2006; Rutherford, 2001), and professional development and mentorship opportunities that are equally afforded to women (Bellou, 2010; Rowley *et al.*, 2016). Considering past research on content areas of socialization, combined with early-career women’s perspectives, our first research question was:

Research Question 1: How do early-career women experience organizational culture during the four socialization content areas (training, understanding, coworker support, and future prospects)?

Connecting Leadership Empowerment to Organizational Culture and Socialization

Without intentional and consistent leadership communication that reinforces an organization’s culture, meaning can be quickly lost, ultimately resulting in disengagement. The organizational entry phase presents an opportunity for leaders and middle managers to convey organizational culture (Konczak *et al.*, 2000; Meng & Neill, 2021; Meng & Neill, 2023). Leaders that proactively and strategically facilitate the socialization of its members see

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it pay off in the form of employees' knowledge and acceptance of organizational culture (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999) increased job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Bauer *et al.*, 2007), increased trust and loyalty (Lapointe *et al.*, 2014), and a decrease in employee turnover (Allen, 2006). Leaders and mid-level managers are at the forefront of shaping organizational culture by cultivating shared meaning among their employees through consistent communication that aligns with the organization's mission, vision and long-term strategic direction (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). Leaders shape an organization's environment by including employees in decision-making and encouraging open dialogue (Johansson *et al.*, 2014) and by connecting employees' job functions with the organization's purpose, helping facilitate a supportive culture (Yue *et al.*, 2020).

To develop a deeper understanding of specific communication and behaviors that leaders should exhibit to effectively support and socialize young workers, we turn to the leadership empowerment literature (Konczak *et al.*, 2000). When employees feel empowered, they have a clear understanding of the meaning of their work, they are confident in their knowledge to do their work well, they are internally motivated, and they understand how they impact organizational outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995). Empowerment cannot be realized if leadership empowerment behaviors aren't present (Boudrias *et al.*, 2009). For example, Krishnan (2012) found that leaders who motivated their teams to achieve at higher levels positively influenced employee empowerment, subsequently increasing their wellbeing. With this leadership empowerment framework in mind, the following research question was posed:

Research Question 2: How, if at all, do early-career women in their first year of employment at an organization experience empowerment behaviors among its leaders?

Methodology

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Qualitative inquiry was used to develop an understanding of early career women’s lived experiences at their organizations, beginning with the recruitment and hiring phase through the first year of employment. Interviews allowed the researchers to connect meaning to the professional experiences of young women, which provided important context and relevant explanations pertaining to the industry’s organizational culture, socialization process, and leadership empowerment behaviors and trends. After IRB approval was obtained (proposal number 9907), early-career women in their initial five years of full-time employment in media communication roles were recruited through email and LinkedIn messaging to participate in the study. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in order to ensure participants with relevant experiences were reached (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participants

The participants represented diverse sectors within the media industry, spanning from account management and creative roles to strategy. A total of 31 individuals were interviewed, comprising twenty-five Caucasians, four Latinas/Hispanics, and two African-Americans. Geographically, participants lived and worked across various U.S. locations, including major metropolitan areas such as New York and Los Angeles, as well as cities like Denver, Kansas City, and St. Louis. All participants graduated from university programs in strategic communications, public relations, advertising, marketing, or journalism within the past five years preceding the study. They were employed in their respective fields across a spectrum of organizational types, encompassing agencies, corporations, government entities, and nonprofits. Employment settings ranged from freelance roles and small agencies (2-10 employees) to large corporations with over 10,000 employees.

Interview Procedure and Data Analysis

The study employed a semi-structured format, allowing for consistency across key topics while giving participants the flexibility to share unique perspectives. The interview protocol

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included 13 open-ended questions that invited participants to reflect on their early professional experiences, specifically looking at the major phases of socialization—recruitment and hiring, onboarding, role adjustment, and early leadership experiences. The protocol included prompts related to leadership empowerment behaviors, workplace culture, and mentorship. Sample questions included: “As a newcomer, how did you make sense of your role and the expectations others had of you?” and “Describe how you learned about the organizational culture as a new employee.” Follow-up questions were used to probe for depth and examples. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, depending on participant availability, as all were full-time professionals. Each interview was conducted by one of the two principal investigators; one researcher completed 15 interviews and the other 16, for a total of 31 interviews.

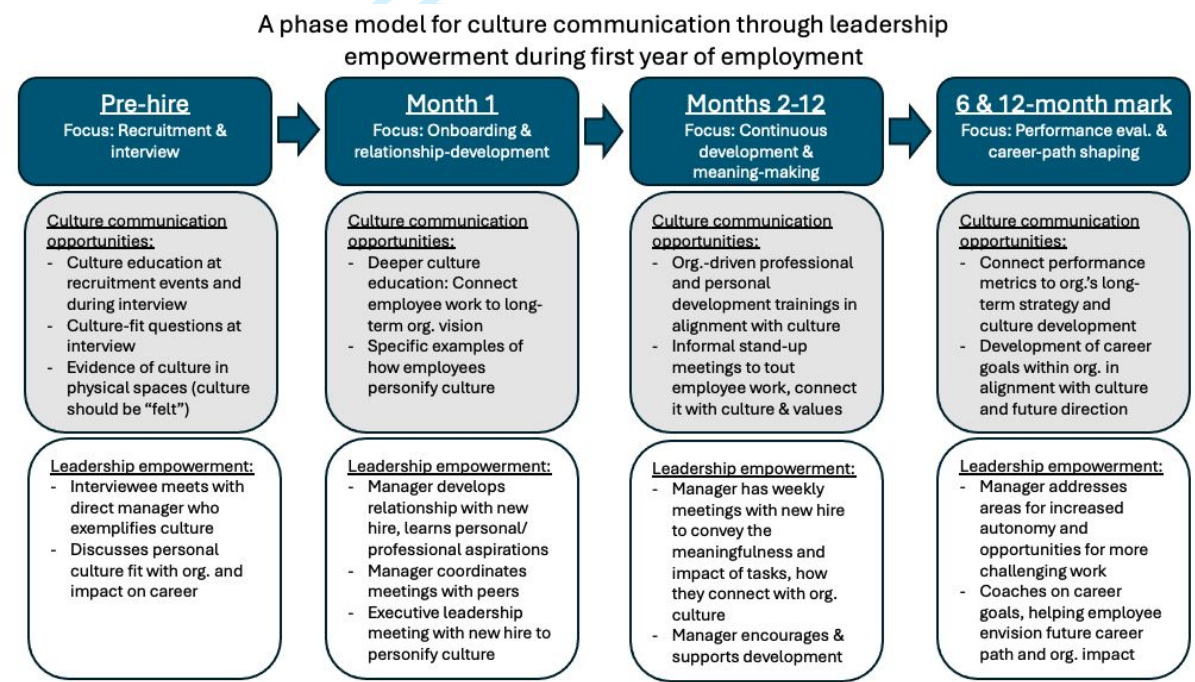
To ensure consistency in data handling, participant interviews were recorded using Zoom software, transcribed via GoTranscript.com, and imported into NVivo for qualitative analysis. Guided by Glaser and Strauss’s (2017) constant comparative method, the two researchers conducted all coding. Each independently reviewed transcripts to develop preliminary codes, then collaborated to create and refine a shared codebook. After reaching consensus, both researchers recoded the full dataset using the finalized codebook to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation. Codes were then grouped into themes based on patterns and prevalence across participants. Intercoder reliability was robust, with a Cohen’s unweighted kappa coefficient of .86 (Lavrakas, 2008). The researchers reviewed all themes alongside individual interview notes and analytic memos, enhancing the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Findings

This research focuses on the organizational entry phase of the socialization process as an opportunity for organizations and their leaders to communicate culture and, if done

effectively, allowing organizations to develop the next generation of young women leaders. Research questions guided interviews with 31 early-career women and how they experienced culture and leadership empowerment behaviors from their managers during this crucial socialization process spanning the course of 12 months. The original intention was to speak to the research questions about the socialization content areas (RQ 1) and leadership empowerment behaviors (RQ 2) individually; however, we found that culture and leadership are intertwined throughout the socialization process. Therefore, this study’s findings are presented through a Phase Model for Culture Communication (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



A Phase Model for Culture Communication through Leadership Empowerment During First Year of Employment

Data and analysis of the 31 interviews offered evidence for effective communication and leadership empowerment strategies to acclimate and support young women during different phases of their first year of employment at an organization.

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Phase I: Recruitment & Interview (Pre-hire)

Opportunities for successful culture communication actually start *before* the individual is hired. During the recruitment process, a company's values and cultural position should be authentically conveyed to potential hires via representatives at recruitment fairs, in job postings, and on LinkedIn. This provides prospective employees the opportunity to do their own cultural fit assessment to see if the organization is a good match for their values and motivations (Tholen, 2024). Internship programs were also credited with effectively showcasing the culture within a company or organization. One participant credited "internship coordinators" with providing her with an overall positive initial learning experience about the company because of their organization skills and useful onboarding. Another young woman described feeling a positive culture fit during her internship experience because she was partnered with a senior account manager, only four or five years older than her, who served as a mentor: "We related a lot because our age gap was not that big." Both of these participants were hired full-time at the place where they interned, demonstrating how internship programs can be an important first step in recruiting potential employees, as well as a first opportunity in communicating organizational culture to those potential employees.

Key in the pre-hire phase is the interview, a pivotal opportunity for organizations to communicate their culture to interviewees. This culture education includes culture-fit questions (verbal communication) as well as evidence of culture in physical spaces (nonverbal communication). One participant described how the agency where she interviewed described their organizational culture early in the interview, which she credits with giving her an immediate and concise sense of what it would be like working within its walls:

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[At the agency] it's like one of the first things you learn when you walk in the door, and even in your interview process, it's like, 'We're named a best place to work and here's why.' They made it clear like, 'We need to make sure you're also a culture fit as well.' It felt authentic when they would say those things because it was part of my interview process.

The participant elaborated about the same interview experience, describing how the physical space influenced her knowledge of the culture and helped her to envision herself as a team member:

[The agency] is very outspoken about their culture. They love it. People always joke it's the Kool Aid. You instantly feel it...you walk in and you feel it's buzzing, it's modern, it's got really high-quality tech that you just get this cultural feeling and they do a lot to foster it.

Another participant credited her interview during the pre-hire phase as the beginning of culture acclimation:

Culture-wise, it's like you learn about the culture from the minute you interview. It's very welcoming and it's friendly. There's a lot of talk about...imposter syndrome in the beginning. When you get there, it can feel like 'Why did they hire me? I can't do this.' [The agency] is all about debunking that...helping you feel like you are involved and can make an impact right away.

By prioritizing cultural fit through interview strategies and internship programs, leaders ensured that new hires are aligned with organizations' values and environment. Effective communication during interviews, both verbal and nonverbal, helped to reinforce this alignment. Organizations that foster an inclusive culture and communicate this during the recruitment process help attract candidates, and this communication also empowers new hires to feel valued and contribute meaningfully to the company, even before they are hired.

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Phase 2: Onboarding & Relationship Development (Month 1)

Once hired, new professionals are often acclimated to an organization through a focused onboarding process. Interviews revealed that those participants *without* a structured onboarding experience had a shorter tenure at their organization due to lack of understanding of professional growth opportunities, lack of mentorship and lack of clear role parameters. Onboarding can be viewed as an organizational socialization strategy that is incredibly important in shaping career expectations (Kowtha, 2013), and it is heavily influenced by relationship-development with organizational peers and leaders (LaGree & Olsen, 2022). Consistent with existing research, this study's participants described relationship-development during the onboarding process as a major avenue to learn about the organizational culture. Building relationships with coworkers, managers, and even executive leadership made the early-career women feel supported, and the emphasis on team integration helped the women understand team dynamics and how their individual work contributed to overall success:

When I got to [the agency], the onboarding to me that was most influential and educational was explaining to me and letting me meet the other people at the agency and who does what. If I need something done, if I need someone to do copywriting or I need a website updated, I need to know who to go to. That, to me, is the best onboarding that a company can do to an employee.

Another participant elaborated on how she felt the culture from the very beginning, and how it permeated the onboarding experience through personalization and observation of others:

They really welcome us, and they tell you from the very beginning that it's your company now. They make it very personal. It's all about you having an impact and not you coming and being intimidated... We actually watch someone in their role that we're going into, to learn about the role and just take it in and see what the role is

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like. You get to meet the team members and eat the food and do all that kind of stuff, get your computer. The second week we actually have a full week of training led by other people in my role, and people that we partner with. They'll come in, introduce themselves... We need to know everyone and build familiar faces with the company.

Leadership often sets the tone of the culture that trickles down to other employees who personify and exemplify the culture. One participant mentioned this as she was describing the organizational culture she experienced during her time as an intern before starting full-time at the same organization:

I would say the CEO, [name redacted], is one of the best people I've ever met and he knows every single person. As an intern, he would walk by me and be like, 'Hi Lauren.' He is the culture, he is what [the organization] is.

Another participant described her organization similarly, demonstrating how an organization's employees can personify the culture while also building relationships and trust with its new professionals:

Going in shadowing before I started, I got a good taste of the culture. I love the culture...it's an open door policy, no one has doors. Our CEO doesn't even have a door in his office. I mean, he might, but it's always open. It's just very friendly, fun... that's the first thing I fell in love with was the culture and that's why I'm still here is because of the culture. I don't stay for the work. I stay for the people and the culture.

Further, participants in this study consistently described structured onboarding processes as having a positive impact on their organizational socialization experience by helping them to understand their roles and responsibilities. Various onboarding timeframes within the first month were described, from a "two-day orientation" to a "three-day onboarding with all the departments to get your feet on the ground" to "basically five weeks of onboarding before you really even touch anything." Regardless of the timeframe, participants who credited

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3 having a positive onboarding experience described specific examples of how the experience
4 developed a deeper culture education for the organization. In addition to connecting to other
5 employees, participants grew in their knowledge of the organization's long-term vision for
6 success. One participant said there was a "massive focus on understanding the culture, getting
7 to know the people, getting to know the processes before they just throw you in." Another
8 participant described how the variety of enrichment segments during onboarding allowed her
9 to have a leg up as she began client work:

19 You learn about the departments and how they work together and all that good stuff...

21 We had one-on-ones with all the departments and cross departments, and then we had
22 panels of people within our department that we could ask and pick their brains, any
23 types of questions.

28 Leadership empowerment behaviors during this second phase, the first month of
29 employment, were incredibly impactful on this study's participants. We know that intentional
30 relationship development within the organization can position early-career women for
31 success (LaGree & Olsen, 2022), and this study's participants related these emerging
32 relationships to a sense of compassion and professional fulfillment. One woman spoke about
33 how those in leadership positions made sure that the new employees were learning and
34 growing by coordinating meetings with new hires:

44 It's one of the best places I think I could have worked as a young creative. It's crazy
45 because I think the creative team has a total of 5 people and all of them have been
46 there for at least 10 years. People loved it so much, they actually stayed and they
47 were really great because they liked working there. [The leadership is] really great
48 about fostering the young talent that came in and making sure that you were learning
49 and growing, and it was probably one of the most formative experiences in my career.

58 *Phase 3: Continuous Development and Meaning-Making (Months 2-12)*

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The study’s findings showed that months two to 12 in the first year of professional employment were incredibly important for continuous development and meaning-making. Once participants experienced the first month of onboarding and relationship development, it was clear that strategic culture communication through continued training and professional development led to deeper connections to work culture and values. The first area of this continuing development participants described was specific to skills training and personal-professional development; one woman credited a training put on by her workplace as helping her understand her value by writing a vision for herself, articulating where she saw her professional path going over the next year. Before this exercise, she described being so focused on comparing herself to others that she wasn’t focusing on what she was doing well. Another participant described a women’s leadership conference put on by her organization and how it helped her understand how her personal value can have a positive influence on the women around her:

The whole theme [of the professional development conference] is how you can help put other women forward and help build them up. That’s exactly what they’ve done for me. Everything that they’ve done, whether it’s helped me with the foundational skills of my role or just helping me navigate bigger career conversations. They’ve been instrumental in my time at [organization].

An additional commonality among the early-career women who reported a positive organizational culture as a result of continuous development was the presence of consistent, informal workplace gatherings as opportunities to connect with others and sustain culture:

Every Tuesday morning, the entire agency crowds in this little tiny space, and they would just talk about work, just exciting things going on, culture, things going on. Every single week they’re talking about this. [The agency] also was the type of place that every chance they could, they’re giving you a piece of swag or it’s like, ‘We’re

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celebrating this thing. Here's a t-shirt to commemorate.' They would bring in food.

Overall, the [agency] culture is big.

Regarding leadership empowerment behaviors during this phase, participants with positive experiences reported that their managers had frequent one-on-ones to help them understand the meaningfulness of their work and how it impacts the organization. These conversations underscored a sense of self-efficacy among participants, helping them to become more embedded within and committed to their organizations. Understanding the meaningfulness of their work also helped participants build momentum, becoming proactive about their own skill development and new ways to accomplish organizational goals.

Phase 4: Performance Evaluation and Career-Path Shaping (6 and 12-month mark)

Taormina (2009) describes a stage of the organizational socialization process as future prospects, where early-career employees are aware of and anticipate a personally and professionally rewarding career moving forward. This important phase describes receiving feedback on professional growth and envisioning a future career path; it is a method of developing career goals within an organization that are in alignment with the culture. It is important to note that this performance evaluation and career-path shaping is critical for young women regardless of the organization they are working for, so that they maintain a forward-moving career trajectory wherever they work. This study's participants describe powerful experiences during this phase where the organization and their managers invested time and effort in performance evaluations, providing the young women with personalized feedback on their development as well as guidance as they move forward in their careers:

"I felt like somebody was invested in me because I knew what I was reaching for, I had a say in what my goals were, and they even checked in on you too like, 'What motivates you? Is it money? Is it a position? Where do you see yourself? Do you want to move up? Do you not want to move up?'"

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This participant also credited transparency as a key part of her evaluation process, and how that gave her confidence in her goals and the organization’s culture supporting her to get to the next level:

It’s super transparent. I have monthly one-on-ones where I get to talk about those things and share those wins or those struggles. We meet annually. We do peer reviews at the same time each fall to constantly get feedback and hold yourself accountable and your peers accountable. And all of that feedback and those questions revolve around our values, which are candor, happiness, innovation, and accountability. You can see how those values tie into what they want for you as an employee. For me, it just made me feel so much more confident since working here. It just made me feel more motivated because I felt like there’s an achievable goal for me to move up to that next level here. Somebody knows that’s my goal, they want to get there. They want to see things to help make it an easier case for them to promote me.

The study’s participants described regular reviews as a structured approach to assessment, helping them to understand where they stand, providing clarity and feedback, which helped them with career development and goal setting. Additionally, participants noted that supervisors helped them to connect their own performance to their organization’s long-term strategy and development culture. They credited a consistent, transparent approach to evaluation as constructive and useful for goal alignment with the organization as well as personal accountability:

My boss...is literally amazing. He was immediately like, ‘Okay, here’s what we’re going to do as a team. Here’s the goals. What do you want to do to help that goal?’ Immediately set goals for me and was like, ‘Here’s where I see this program this year, next year, the year after and we’re going to contribute to this in X, Y, Z way,’ and

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totally let me run with it, totally let me do what I thought was best and was supportive of me all the way through.

Another participant described this same type of performance evaluation and how leadership challenged her to be open and communicate about being challenged:

They're really focused on, 'These are your clear goals you're working towards.' I have a clear person to report to. If I'm not meeting expectations, or if I'm not understanding my role, I have the openness to talk to someone about it. I also can say, 'I feel stuck or unhappy,' or, 'I'm doing the same things. Like, 'I want to push, I want to have a push goal or stress goal.' I think mentorship there is really important, having someone who's involved in your daily work life who can see how you're performing.

The study's participants emphasized that ongoing performance evaluations not only helped their immediate professional development but also proved pivotal in shaping their long-term career goals. Leadership empowerment was pivotal during these evaluations as leaders who actively invested in their employees' growth created a sense of purpose and motivation in their employees. Participants credited understanding how their individual contributions aligned with organizational goals as being the impetus for a clear path for advancement, enabling the young women to set ambitious goals and feel confident in their ability to achieve them.

Discussion

Given that organizational leaders are challenged more now than ever before to engage and retain younger workers, the purpose of this study was to examine the organizational entry phase of the socialization process as an opportunity for organizations and their leaders to communicate a culture that supports, retains and advances younger workers, especially young women. Following Taormina's (2009) four socialization areas throughout the first year of employment: training, understanding, coworker support, and future prospects, as well as

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leadership empowerment literature (Boudrias *et al.*, 2009; Krishnan, 2012), data from in-depth interviews revealed that the communication of organizational culture and leadership empowerment behaviors are intertwined, working together to effectively socialize young women. When they are effectively socialized, they appreciate and value their organization’s culture, find meaning in their work, are more invested and engaged in their work, and have a clear vision for career advancement within their current place of employment.

Effective socialization among younger workers benefits organizations in the following ways: Younger workers are more productive and creative because they are bought into the organization’s long-term vision and view their work as substantially contributing to strategic goals; organizations can effectively retain top talent and train younger workers as future leaders.

To break this down further, we offer a Phase Model for Culture Communication (see Figure 1) that underscores a variety of content areas in the socialization process; these four areas do not occur separately but are intertwined and often overlapping. For example, training provided the participants with opportunities to develop professional relationships and receive support from coworkers. Understanding and applying organizational knowledge began the first day of employment and was referenced throughout the first year. Participants experienced leadership empowerment throughout the first year, which is why the Phase Model for Culture Communication (see Figure 1) is proposed: To showcase the power of leadership empowerment behaviors exemplified by organizational leaders, working hand-in-hand with organizational culture communication to strategically socialize young women (and younger workers overall) during their first year of employment.

This study’s original Phase Model for Culture Communication is a clear and impactful tool for organizations across industries to learn how to support new professionals in their first year. The four phases of the model bring together the four most important areas of

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development over time: (1) the first two phases show the importance of *culture acclimation*, (2) and the third and fourth phases are critical for establishing what the *early-career professional's trajectory* will look like as they attach meaning to their work and create a path to promotion and leadership.

Recommended actions in the Model are informed by qualitative data and decades of literature in organizational socialization and leadership empowerment. Recommended actions are as follows: **Phase 1** occurs during pre-employment where we recommend that an organization's culture is exemplified in all recruitment materials and discussed during informational and formal interviews. The key here is that culture should be "felt" and experienced, especially during in-person and on-location interviews. From a leadership perspective, organizational culture should be exemplified by interviewees' direct manager where an authentic conversation addresses culture-fit and career impact.

Phase 2 focuses on onboarding and relationship-development and occurs during the first month of employment where culture education goes deeper, meaning that there is a clear connection to the newcomer's work and the organization's long-term vision. During this phase, executive-level leaders have the opportunity to make an impactful first impression by meeting with newcomers to personify organizational culture; newcomers' direct managers should learn about their personal and professional aspirations and discuss how they can be supportive mentors.

Phase 3 focuses on continuous development and meaning-making and occurs during months two through 12 of newcomers' employment. Culture communication should be emphasized during organization-driven professional and personal development trainings, as well as informal "stand-up" meetings where employees are recognized for their work and the work is connected to the organization's culture and values. During this phase, it is recommended that newcomers' managers have brief weekly 1:1 meetings to convey the

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meaningfulness of newcomers’ work in light of strategic goals and organizational values.

Newcomers’ managers should also convey the importance of professional development and continuous learning.

Phase 4 occurs during the six and 12-month milestones of newcomers’ first year of employment and focuses on performance evaluations and career-path shaping. These are important evaluation meetings where newcomers have the opportunity to connect their performance metrics to the organization’s long-term strategy and culture development. Leaders have strategic conversations with newcomers to address areas for increased autonomy, suggestions for more challenging work and coaches newcomers on career goals to help them envision a future career path.

This study’s findings support past research on younger workers and the socialization process by emphasizing the critical importance of the organizational entry phase to help new workers shape their long-term career journeys and acclimate to organizational culture (Chillakuri, 2020; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Kowtha, 2013). Integrating socialization activities with organizational culture communication opportunities and leadership empowerment behaviors was also an effective approach. Leaders and managers are uniquely positioned as exemplars of an organization’s culture (Autry & Daugherty, 2003; Kramer & Miller, 2014; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017) and are in a unique position to create meaning around young workers’ roles, helping them become more engaged and committed to their organizations long-term (Konczak *et al.*, 2000; Krishnan, 2012; Yue *et al.*, 2020).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study’s findings are incredibly important for organizations to understand, it is recognized that the investigation was informed by a sample size of 31, which limits generalizability. The participant pool was made up of predominantly Caucasian women, with only six of the women identifying as minority ethnicity. Further research should include a

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more diverse pool of participants to reflect the increasingly diverse makeup of professional employment. A more diverse group would also better illustrate how ethnicity influences women's socialization experiences. In addition, because participants largely described positive organizational and leadership experiences, future studies should intentionally focus on a broader range of perspectives, to include negative or challenging experiences. This would help capture a more balanced understanding of the early-career experience. Because this qualitative study was exploratory in nature, it does not allow for causal conclusions. Without an experimental design, we cannot say with certainty that the leadership behaviors or socialization practices described directly led to the outcomes participants discussed. Future quantitative or mixed-methods studies could build on these insights to further test and clarify these relationships.

To further extend the inquiry into organizational culture, leadership empowerment and its impact on leadership issues, additional interviews representative of the next generation should be conducted in order to better understand early-career experiences beyond the first year. The crucial mid-level management stage should be analyzed to understand who is achieving the first promotion and who is not, as well as the barriers and challenges faced during this pivotal phase in which young professionals become managers for the first time. Future research could also examine how individual factors such as personality traits, as well as differences across gender and racial or ethnic identities, shape employees' experience with socialization and leadership empowerment behaviors.

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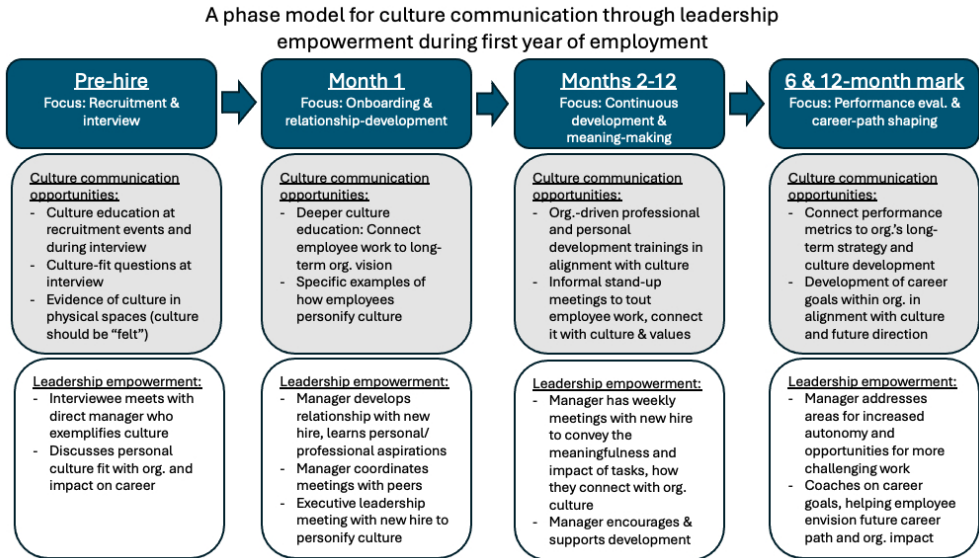
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A phase model for culture communication through leadership empowerment during the first year of employment

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Response to reviewers

We appreciate your thorough suggestions and the opportunity to provide a more robust version of this paper. The following revisions have been made:

1. All parenthetical citations have been revised according to the recommendations
2. The paper has been copy-edited and specific grammatical errors outlined in the review have been revised
3. Substantial content revisions have been made in red text. These include: A more robust Discussion that includes a thorough explanation of the Model with specific recommended actions explained; More details about the interviews and sample questions have been added; The coding technique is explained; Limitations/Directions for Future Research has been expanded to include reviewer's recommendations.