



May 2020

Acronym Usage in Groups: The Relationship of Socialization and Identification

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Recommended Citation

Carney-Nedelman, Dara K. (2020) "Acronym Usage in Groups: The Relationship of Socialization and Identification," *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol10/iss1/3>

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Acronym Usage in Groups: The Relationship of Socialization and Identification

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to express my thanks to those who have assisted me through the creation of my Undergraduate Honors Thesis and have guided me to find my passion for research. Firstly, to my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Paskewitz, for her patient guidance, constant encouragement, and bountiful knowledge of methods and group communication. I would also like to thank my advisor Dr. Wright for her direction of the honors program, and for pushing me to realize my 'self-efficacy.' I will always be indebted to my Mother who has encouraged me to think critically, and even at a moment's notice is willing to help me polish my work. Finally, to my institution for supporting undergraduate research and establishing programs to allow young scholars to develop their research interest. This research from this thesis placed in the Global Undergraduate Awards highly commended Psychology division. It was also, recognized with a silver award during the University of Tennessee's 23rd Exhibition of Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement (EURĒCA), and placed first at EURĒCA for the College of Communication and Information in 2019.

AUIGTROSAI

(Acronym Usage in Groups: The Relationship of Socialization and Identification)

Have you ever been to a country that doesn't speak your native language? You immediately feel like you cannot fully experience the culture of that country because you cannot interact with the people. Or have you ever joined a new group excited for all the possibilities your membership can bring, then on the first day realize the other group members are using unfamiliar terms? The latter experience is the impact of jargon usage in organizations, defined as "the technical terminology of characteristic idiom of a special activity or group" (Strehlow, 1983, pg. 23). Both experiences leave you feeling left out of the group. The member is privy to more information than the newcomer (Wang, Cheng, & Wang, 2016). This leaves the newcomer, feeling disconnected from the organization they just joined since they can't communicate with the other group members, who already know the jargon.

Research has concluded that when assimilated into a group, the group members contribute more. They overall have greater satisfaction (Riddle, Anders, & Martin, 2000). This assimilation can be broken down into two variables: socialization and identification of group members. Both areas have been heavily researched in the communication discipline. This paper is organized around prior research of group socialization and identification, the methods for the study, and a final discussion for review of theoretical/practical implications and limitations. This research project analyzes the relationship between knowledge of acronyms and the group member's socialization and identification.

Literature Review

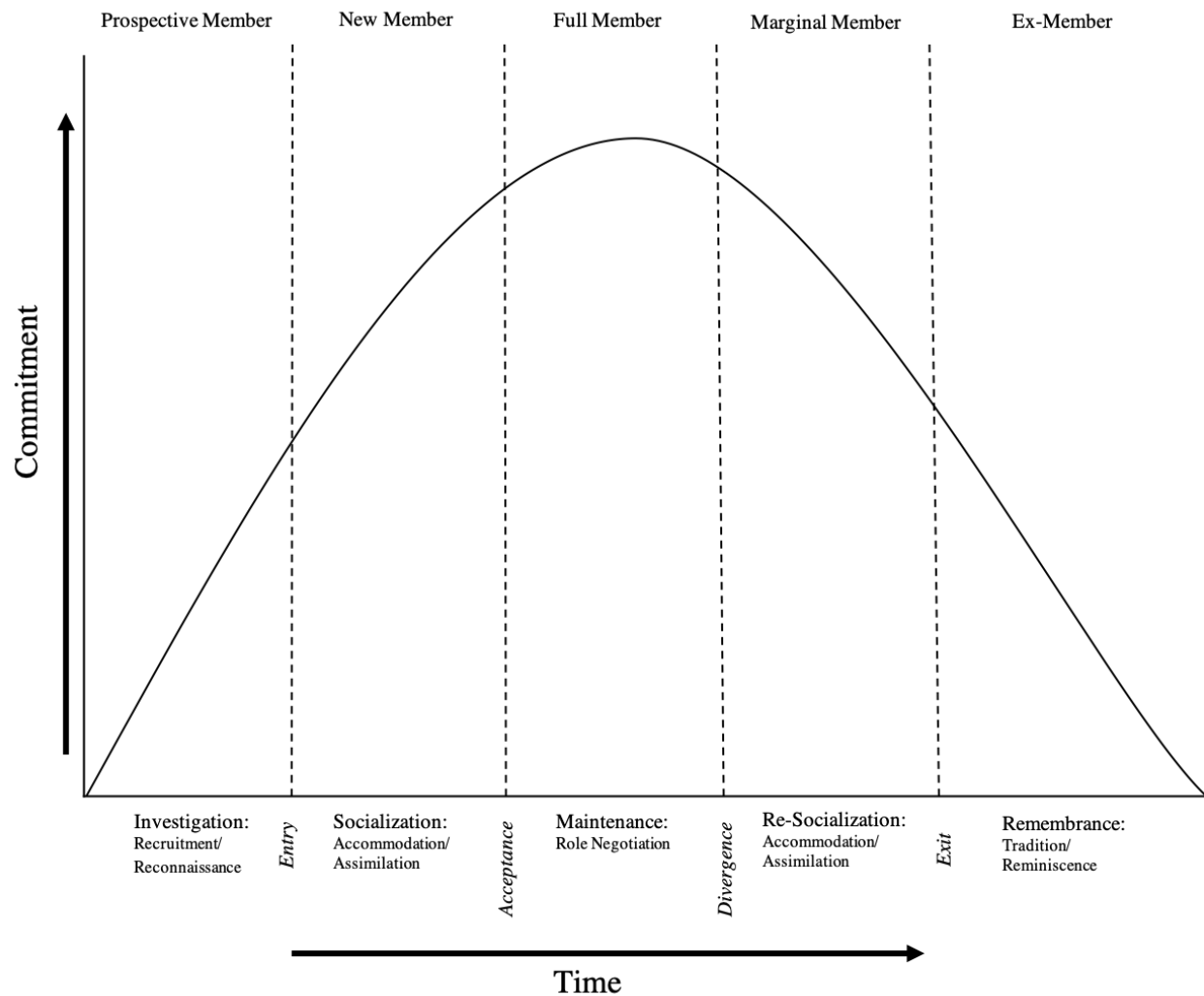
Group Socialization

Define. Socialization of group members is an important step for group communication effectiveness. Anderson, Riddle, and Martin (1999) define socialization "as a two-way process of

groups influencing individuals and vice versa, a dual perspective of the individual and the group is essential in developing a comprehensive understanding of socialization process in groups” (pg. 140). In order for newcomers of a group to gain membership in that group they must first go through the socialization process. This process helps the newcomer learn the culture of the group, so that they are able to work with and understand the other members (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Socialization leads newcomers and members to evaluate if their goals align (Levine & Moreland, 1994), and if the newcomer is fulfilling the expectations and goals of the group as a whole.

Moreland and Levine Model. The first socialization model was created by Moreland and Levine in 1982, and it evaluated the process of a newcomer going through socialization, assimilation, accommodation, and finally becoming a full member. Due to Moreland and Levine’s (1982) social psychological focus, they had a cognitive perspective approach when developing their “model of group socialization” (pg. 153). The group socialization model is displayed below as figure 1; “within each phase, evaluations produce change in commitment, which in turn lead to a role transition when a decision criterion has been reached. Once a role transition has taken place, a new phase is entered and evaluations begin anew” (Moreland & Levine, 1982, pg. 151). Moreland and Levine’s (1982) model depicts an ideal individual’s group experience through five stages of membership divided by four role transitions. For each of the stages, which can be from the perspective of the group or individual, there is a continual process of evaluation of rewards from the individual/group, this evaluation will then impact the individual/group feeling of commitment towards group goals and values, and due to the changes in commitment a role transition from the individual/group results (Moreland & Levine, 1982).

Fig. 1. A model of group socialization



The first stage of the model is investigation, which encompasses the group recruiting members and the individual does a reconnaissance of other groups to determine which group they want to join; in this phase the group and the individual “assess the potential value of forming a relationship with one another” (Moreland & Levine, 1982, pg. 152). Socialization is the second stage of the model, and the stage that will be the focus of this study. Moreland and Levine (1982) state socialization is when the “group attempts to teach the individual ‘appropriate’ behaviors, thoughts, and feelings, and evaluates how much he or she contributes to the attainment of group goals” (pg. 152). The group accommodates to the individual, and the

individual assimilates to the group by adapting and evaluating the group, as well as, having the group modify to fit the individual (Moreland & Levine, 1982).

The next stage of the model is maintenance: “the group attempts to define a specialized role for each full member that maximizes his or her contributions to the attainment of group goals and minimizes the group’s obligations to the person” (Moreland & Levine, 1982, pg. 153). The fourth stage of the model is resocialization, another version of the original socialization stage; there is a re-evaluation from the individual/group, which will either lead to modifications from both parties for re-assimilation or will lead to the individual leaving the group (Moreland & Levine, 1982). Finally, if individual leaves the group, the resulting stage is remembrance, the individual reminiscences about their time in the group; the group evaluates the individual’s commitment and determines if a tradition should be made from the individual’s time in the group (Moreland and Levine, 1982). This socialization model created a foundational understanding of the interworking’s of group transitions.

Communication Model. In 1999 Anderson et al. expanded a phase model titled Group Socialization Model: Individual Member. Whereas, Moreland and Levine focused on psychological aspects of the individual, Anderson et al. centered their work on group communication and how groups and individuals interact. This model has five phases representing “both an individual member and a group perspective, essential characteristics that explain how communication serves to shape socialization activities associated with participating in group tasks and developing intragroup relationships” (Anderson et al., 1999, pg. 144). Within this non-linear model, the authors understood that an individual can be a part of another group in a different phase. During group socialization the group may accommodate or reject the newcomer, additionally, groups may repeat phases and will handle the process at different

variations (Anderson et al., 1999; Myers & Anderson, 2008). The five phases will now be discussed more in depth.

First, the antecedent phase is a step in which the newcomer influences the group through their beliefs, attitudes, motives, motives for communication, communication traits, communication apprehension, argumentativeness, and demographics; these influencers impact the work relationship of the members and the newcomer's perception of the group (Anderson et al., 1999). Next, the anticipatory phase "describes the pre-affiliation expectations that group members form about each other" (Anderson et al., 1999, pg. 148). This process involves the group/individual determining if the expectations set for one another are being met. If expectations aren't being met, an evaluation of seeing if both parties are willing to change will occur. The next three phases are encounter, assimilation, and exit. For this research the focus will be on the encounter and assimilation phase.

The encounter phase is the initial interaction of individuals whether it be computer mediated or face to face, the phase is the first step in determining group roles and goals (Anderson et al., 1999). During this socialization phase, members are evaluating if a newcomer is able to meet their goals, newcomers are inquiring if they appreciate the goals of the group, and both are determining their roles amongst one another (Anderson et al., 1999). This phase resembles the 'ribbon cutting of a new building', and newcomers are feeling out the building during their first walk through. The fourth phase of the model is assimilation, "a process of full integration into a group culture" (Anderson et al., 1999, pg. 152). Anderson et al. (1999) explains how this process involves the newcomer understanding the group culture and identifying with the group's own identity. If both of these feeling align, the newcomer will have a sense of connection with the group. The final phase is exit, and occurs when an individual leaves a group,

the result of this exit phase leaves the group/individual reflecting on their past time involved with one another (Anderson et al., 1999). Hess (1993) deemed that a group can be perceived as successfully assimilating the out-group members based on their satisfaction, effectiveness, socialization, and personalization. The encounter and assimilation phase are at the root of socializing new members to acclimate to the group culture.

Outcomes. There are several outcomes as a result of the socialization process that are beneficial for the newcomer and the group. When newcomers enter a group, the newcomer and group itself develops and changes as a result of the new member (Anderson et al., 1999; Moreland & Levine, 2001). The more a newcomer is committed and willing to accommodate to the group's culture, the smoother the assimilation process will be for that newcomer (Kane & Rink, 2015). Gibson and Papa (2000) stated how it is "to the organization's benefit that the newcomer engage in such information-seeking and 'learn the ropes' quickly so that existing efficiency, productivity, morale and cohesion levels are not negatively affected" (pg. 71). However, it isn't only about the newcomer conforming to the group values. Burke, Kraut, and Joyce (2010) stated that "socialization to groups and organizations is a bidirectional process in which newcomers play a proactive role" (pg. 30). The group develops as a result of newcomers, therefore, both new and old members are evaluating their expectations of one another throughout the process.

Newcomers participate in different styles of evaluation through the socialization process. Moreland and Levine (2001) claim newcomers "engage in surveillance or feedback seeking, encourage mentoring by oldtimers, or collaborate with one another," (pg. 74) and that established members are more liable to help newcomers when they are most familiar to the group. Newcomers interacting through group evaluation show to the members that they are dedicated

and willing to assimilate to be a part of the organizational culture. But one must understand that assimilation is not only the duty of the newcomer. The more successful a group is the less open that group will be to accept new members, and socialization of newcomers requires commitment from both the newcomer and the full-fledged members (Moreland & Levine, 1982).

Group Identification

According to Anderson, Riddle, and Martin (1999) assimilation begins when members are immersed in the culture and have a "shared identity through symbolic interaction that builds group cohesion" (pg. 152). From this, we can conclude that the socialization and identification processes combine in order for newcomers to assimilate into the organization. This process requires the identity of one individual being immersed or merged into the identity of the group.

The foundational studies for identification are rooted in social psychology's social identity theory from Tajfel and Turner (1979). Due to the basis of the theory in psychology there are two cognitive processes at the epicenter of the theory: 'categorization' and 'enhancement of self-esteem' (Hogg & Terry, 2000). This theory explains the relationship between the individual and the group from self-perceptions of cognition and behavior (Abrams, Hogg, Hinkle, & Otten, 2005; Hogg, Abrams, Otten, & Hinkle, 2004). Cheney (1983) explained the impact the group has on the individual, by being a "motivational" source for identification, the policies of the organization influence the individual's identity, and have the potential to hold "referent power" over the individual's identity. Essentially, the social identity theory illustrates the influences and interaction of the organization on the individual's identity.

An assumption of the theory is that individuals in groups normally categorize themselves based on societal categories such as generations, gender, and ethnicity, and when in groups, they are more likely to connect with those who also fall within their own demographics (Bayazit &

Maanix, 2003). This social categorization occurs because group members identify with others based on the same classification (Hogg et al., 2004). The more obvious identity features initially outline group boundaries because it's simpler to see differences, but outwardly apparent social categories are not the only groups people pair with. Individuals will group with those who make them comfortable, which is most normally those with similar identities and therefore complementary attitudes. Abrams et al. (2005) finds that social identity is both the result and catalyst for group attitude. Individuals have a strong role of influence on group behaviors, and this is due to the dynamic experiences and attitudes each member can add to the group. Scott (2007) stated that "SIT has been useful not only for recognizing the organization as one social identification target relevant to individuals but also by illustrating the multiple identification targets (i.e., various social identities) of relevance to organizational members" (pg. 126).

However, one must remember that social identity is only a part to a whole and "must be set in the context of individual, relational, and cultural elements in groups" (Abrams et al., 2005, pg. 125). Considering this, it's beneficial to understand the impacts and factors of shared identities in groups.

Define. Identification is the concept that a member feels that their identity aligns with the group they are involved with meaning the group members' values correspond with those of the group (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Cheney (1983) claims that identification is vital, because it aids "us in making sense of our experience, in organizing our thoughts, in achieving decisions, and in anchoring the self" (pg. 342). Understanding the reasoning behind one's membership in a group is a part of the identification process, and there are multiple aspects to process this evaluation. Henry, Arrow, and Carini (1999) broke identification into variables of cognition, affection, and behavior based from Bouas and Arrow's (1996) original work. First Henry, Arrow, and Carini

(1999) state, “the cognitive source taps how social identity and social categorization- aspect of individual cognition and the self – influence group identification” (pg. 561); second, the relational connections interpersonally displayed through emotional feelings; thirdly, the behavior variable “focuses on the group-level construct of cooperative interdependence (pg. 561). In addition, contextual norms of a group share the groups’ mutuality and identity, and help to distance the outgroup (Abrams, Hogg, Hinkle, & Otten, 2005). These features help one to understand the variables of identification, and awareness that each person will have to navigate themselves.

The results of a member feeling a strong sense of identity in the group has proven to have positive outcomes on the group and member (Abrams et al., 2005; Cheney, 1983; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994) When a newcomer has a sense of identification with the group, they will be able to align with the goals of the organization more easily. This identification can develop as a result of individuals spending more time involved in an organization, which leads to the group evaluating the individual positively (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Cheney (1983) stated that during this time of organizational identification, newcomers can gain an understanding of protocol, socialization, and the administrative interworking’s of the organization.

Remember that identification aligning with a group is an intentional action of the newcomer; it is a representation of their commitment to gain and remain a member. Especially considering that Bayazit and Maanix (2003) deemed there will be a conflict of interest if individual goals are not coordinated with the organizational goals. They conducted a study on the team interactions of eighty- three MBA students, which concluded a member is more willing to continue in the group when there is: “absence of relationship conflict,” “individual member’s beliefs in the efficacy of the team, and perceived effective team task performance” (Bayazit &

Maanix, 2003, pg. 314). In the process of adjusting one's identity to match the identification of the group, the newcomer is in pursuit of reducing uncertainty (Bayazit & Maanix, 2003; Hogg et al., 2004). In this process they will become more comfortable and confident in the group.

Identification in a group leads to a member feeling more interconnected and knowledgeable about the group.

Rationale

There are more than 6,500 verbal and written languages spoken across the world. In communication studies, research on group-languages can be traced back to the 1980's from research on airplane crews and the impact the crew's communication had on the safety and effectiveness of the piloting (Vinton, 1989). There has also been extensive research on the development of children's culture and societal norms as a result of the language that they are surrounded by, defined as the language socialization paradigm (Paugh, 2005). Language plays an important role in the growth of people, because from the first day one hears a message they are being socialized to their society, and that "communication style and language...reflect relative status" (Van Swol & Kane, 2019, pg. 10). Van Swol and Kane (2019) stated that "language helps to reify status through pronoun use, polite language, and language convergence, and also creates status differences through inequality of participation" (pg. 25). Group language is a result and created from the establishment of social norms as group cultures.

Acronyms are a specialized type of language that groups use for efficiency. An acronym is defined as "a word formed from the first (or first few) letters of a series of words" (Strehlow, 1983, pg. 22). Usage of acronyms and jargon are types of communication that the general public doesn't understand. Troop (2018) stated, "People see an acronym...they want to know what it stands for" (pg. 1). This causes issues in organizations that use acronyms, since it will take time

for newcomers to learn the acronym meanings. In addition, organization's communication of symbols and messages frame the day to day of that group (Anderson, et al., 1999). Therefore, understanding the messages and communication style of the organization are crucial factors for a member to function and assimilate into the group.

Language and socialization. The assimilation that newcomers go through has many variables, and an aspect of this socialization is understanding the group's language. It's important for newcomers to interpret the group's language. By doing this they are representing to the full-fledged members they desire to become a part of the group. (Van Swol & Kane, 2019; Burt, Kraut, & Joyce, 2010). Learning acronyms is a key aspect of socialization in groups. Moreland and Levine (2001) support this belief, through their explanation that an understanding of "shared knowledge" (i.e. customs, jargon, symbols) is vital for a newcomer to be accepted into the group. When newcomers actively ask questions to learn about the group, they are heightening the group's efficiency, because they can better support the group due to their gained understanding, (Anderson et al., 1999; Gibson & Papa, 2000; Kane & Rink, 2016). This explains why understanding the group's language leading to newcomers' socialization is important for the development of the group; without these steps' groups will not form a cohesive team. Therefore, this hypothesis was analyzed:

H1: Knowledge of acronym meanings positively relates to a group member's socialization.

Language and identification. Another example of language research that has been popular in communication studies is pronoun research. Kane and Rink (2015) looked at newcomers and their use of "you" versus "we" in group discussion, and the impact on group dynamics; they concluded when newcomers merged their identity with the group's by using

plural pronouns, they were accepted more (pg. 94). The group may have been more comfortable with the newcomers because the full-fledged members were able to anticipate the newcomer's actions due to their displayed desire to identify and belong (Gibson & Papa, 2010). It is important for newcomers to identify with the group, and a way for newcomers to show this to the group members is to utilize the same group language. Van Swol and Rink (2019) stated that group language can be used by individuals to develop assimilation and unity. This is due to language aiding in understanding of societal cognition (Van Swol, Prah, Kolb, Lewis, & Carlson, 2016). Through these research findings one can understand the important role language plays for newcomer's identification in groups. Considering this, the below hypothesis was posed:

H2: Knowledge of acronym meaning positively relates to group members' identification.

Time. For assimilation, the longer amount of time a newcomer has for identification (Bayazit & Maanix, 2003) and socialization processes (Moreland & Levine, 1982), the more likely the individuals will identify the newcomer as a member. Therefore, time is a factor that must be considered for the assimilation of newcomers into groups. Moreland and Levine (1994 & 2001) stated that socialization is a process that develops over time, which will allow newcomers to influence the group and be influenced by the group. Considering this, a key concern for members entering an organization and not knowing the language is that newcomers are hesitant to fail (Anderson et al., 1999). Due to this, newcomers will not be comfortable using a specific jargon and will be dissuaded from clarifying the language. Therefore, the longer a newcomer is a part of a group and the more involved that new member is, the more likely they will socialize and identify with the group. Consequently, the following hypothesis were investigated:

H3: Length of membership in XYZ Group has a direct positive relationship to knowledge of acronym meaning.

H4: Length of membership in XYZ Group has a direct positive relationship to group member's socialization.

H5: Length of membership in XYZ Group has a direct positive relationship to group member's identification.

Methods

Sample

The study participants are from a university student group that is affiliated with an external organization. To maintain anonymity, the name has been changed to XYZ Group. For this study, participants were gathered through convenience sampling, they survey was sent out through emails, texts, and group applications. An XYZ Group letter of approval was created by the XYZ Group leadership. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary. While being a member of XYZ Group is voluntary, some students are offered scholarships which requires specific coursework. The majority of participants were offered scholarships through the XYZ Group ($n= 55$; 69%) and there were some XYZ Group members without scholarships ($n= 25$; 31%). Most of the participants were male ($n=55$; 69%), but there were several female participants ($n= 25$; 31%). The respondents ranged from 18 to 33 years old and the average age was 20 ($SD= 2.423$).

Measures

Participants that responded to the survey first shared demographic information for gender, age, semesters in XYZ group, and scholarship status. Secondly, the participants were asked to do a self-reported measure on their understanding of a set of popular acronyms. Thirdly, the participants responded to two scales, organizational identification questionnaire (OIQ) and

small group socialization scale (SGSS). All sections of the survey are attached in Appendix A.

Acronyms. In order to gauge the knowledge of acronyms, a self-reported measure was utilized, created by the researcher. The popularity/knowledge of the acronyms was determined with the help of the XYZ Group leadership. It should be noted that the usage of the acronyms did have a varying frequency in the programs, so there was an original understanding that some acronyms were more popular thus more familiar than others. Each participant stated what the acronym stood for and used it in a sentence they would utilize in XYZ Group. An example of this response is "Close of business...I'll submit that by close of business." The acronyms were chosen to represent the overall acronym understanding of the XYZ Group. By asking participants to state what the acronym stands for and use it in a sentence, it ensures they can use it in the group. The participants appeared to have a solid understanding of the 10 acronyms and the correct sentence usage of the acronyms. When an acronym was defined or used correctly it was coded with a one, and incorrect answers were coded with a zero. Therefore, the maximum number that could be reached was 20. However, the highest a participant scored was 19, and the minimum score was a 1. The mean of all 20 questions was 12.28, there was a range of 18, and $SD= 4.79$.

Organizational identification. To measure how the group members identified in the group the organizational identification questionnaire (OIQ) from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) was used. This scale measures the "perception of oneness with or belongings to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, pg. 104). The identification scale is also a self-reported questionnaire, and participants respond strongly disagree to strongly agree based on a 7-point Likert-type scale. There are six questions that the participants responded to. A sample question

is: “When someone criticizes XYZ Group, it feels like a personal insult.” These responses will be used to evaluate the members' feelings of identification in XYZ Group. The identification survey has been modified from its original form to fit this particular sample group of XYZ Group members. All six questions for the OIQ were used, the term “school” in the original survey was replaced with XYZ Group (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Additionally, OIQ was based on a 5-point likert scale, whereas, in this survey the responses were based on a 7 point-likert scale. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .87$).

Small group socialization scale. In order to measure group socialization, the small group socialization scale (SGSS) was developed by Anderson, Riddle, and Martin (1999). SGSS is a tool “that measures people’s perceptions of the communication effectiveness of group socialization that includes task and relationship dimensions” (Riddle, Anderson, & Martin, 2000, pg. 555). The SGSS is a self-reported questionnaire, that asks participants to respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. There are 14 questions, which were used to analyze how well group members are socialized and have assimilated into the organization. A sample question is: “I was clear what was expected of me in XYZ Group.” The SGSS has been modified from its original form to fit this particular sample of XYZ Group members. All fourteen questions of the scale were used, the term “group” in the survey questions was replaced with XYZ Group (Riddle, Anderson and Martin, 2000). Additionally, SGSS was based on a 5-point likert scale, whereas, in this survey the responses were based on a 7 point-likert scale. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .88$).

Content Analysis. In order to test a participant’s acronym knowledge, the participants had to fill-in their definition of an acronym and use it in a sentence. The acronyms were selected by the researcher’s knowledge of popular acronyms used in XYZ Group. The popular acronyms

list was then confirmed by XYZ Group leadership. A code book was created for the two researchers in this project, by taking examples from the responses for each of the 20 acronym questions. A coder training occurred for the two involved researchers to clarify any questions before coding took place. Through this training “1” was determined to mean the acronym was correct and used correctly in a sentence, and that “0” meant the acronym was not correct and not used correctly in a sentence. Next an inter-coder reliability test was run, by selecting 10% of the acronym responses. Two researchers completed this inter-coder reliability which resulted in 95% agreement, and a Cohen kappa of .83.

Results

First, tests were run to confirm there was not a significant difference between the two subsets of the XYZ Group. No differences were found. However, there was a vast majority of participants that were supported by scholarship, versus participants not supported by scholarship. Hypothesis one and two were analyzed using a simple linear regression. Hypothesis one was computed predicting there is a positive relationship between group member’s socialization and knowledge of acronym meaning. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 78) = 11.72$, $p < .05$, $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .12$). Participants’ predicted acronym knowledge of meaning is equal to $.06$ (Socialization) + 5.03 . As knowledge of acronym meaning increases, so does socialization. Hypothesis two was computed predicting knowledge of acronym meaning related to how identified a member feels to the group. An insignificant regression equation was found ($F(1, 78) = .063$, $p < .05$, $\text{Adj. } R^2 = -0.01$). Participants’ predicted acronym knowledge of meaning is equal to $.00$ (Identification) + 5.27 . As knowledge of acronym meaning increases, identification does not increase.

Hypothesis three, four, and five were computed using a one-way ANOVA. Hypothesis three compared length of membership in XYZ Group to knowledge of acronym meaning. There was no significant difference found ($F(8, 71) = 1.96, p < .05$). Hypothesis four compared length of membership in XYZ Group to group member's socialization. There was a significant difference found ($F(8, 71) = 2.28, p < .05$). The Games-Howell post hoc test revealed there were significant differences between 1 ($M = 5.58, sd = 0.70$) and 9 ($M = 6.75, sd = 0.15$ semesters, 3 ($M = 6.03, sd = 0.73$) and 9 semesters, 5 ($M = 5.44, sd = 0.95$) and 9 semesters, and 6 ($M = 6.14, sd = 0.10$) and 1 semesters. Hypothesis five compared length of membership in XYZ Group to group member's identification. There was no significant difference found ($F(8, 71) = 2.02, p < .05$).

Discussion

This projected explored assimilation of XYZ Group members. It revealed that aspects of socialization and knowledge of acronym meaning played the most significant impact on group members. While the group members understood the acronyms and didn't feel identified with the organization, they were still able to complete the processes of socialization to the group. This study has theoretical implications in the field, by providing insight to individuals with lengths of membership in an organization, impacts from knowledge of group language; practical implications for XYZ group and organizational importance of language/identification/socialization.

Theoretical Implications

Socialization. The hypothesizes in this study related to socialization were supported and align with the previous socialization work on group membership. Both Moreland and Levine (1982) and Anderson et. al (1999) stated groups evolve over time. The time frame that was studied focused on the socialization and identification of the members to the group, but many

other individual transitions in the group (i.e. antecedent, encounter, and exit) were also occurring. Therefore, while one can determine that having knowledge of acronym meaning and spending time in a group lead to heightened socialization, there are other factors that may contribute. This study was successful in fulfilling Levine and Moreland's (1984) request of doing more research on how groups evolve across time. Due to there being a correlation found between length of membership and socialization.

Knowledge of group language benefits the socialization process. Anderson et. al (1999) stated the better an individual understands the 'group talk' of the organization the stronger their socialization to the organization is. According to Van Swol and Kane (2019) an individual adjusting their language to fit the group means that member wants to assimilate. These conclusions about an individual's socialization were again proven through the significance of hypothesis one in this study, that knowledge of acronym meaning does have a positive relationship to socialization. Paugh (2005) explained that learning language during childhood development is an important key to societal socialization, one may draw the same comparison for group socialization. While understanding language is a key to socialization, that is not the only important aspect of socialization.

Hypothesis three stated that length of membership has a positive relationship to knowledge of acronym meaning. This hypothesis resulted in insignificant results. The insignificance of hypothesis three but significance of hypothesis one and four shows that socialization is more than solely learning the group language. The participants knew the acronyms starting from a low length of membership but did not fully feel socialized until they had been a part of the group for an extended time. They may have known the acronyms due to their familiarity with the XYZ Group external organization. Paugh (2005) explained how

learning language is a part of socialization, and that parents socialize their children to their culture through language. Since a vast number of participants had family members who had been a member of XYZ Group external organization, they may have already known the acronyms before joining the XYZ Group. But since socialization is a specific group process (Vinton, 1989) previous experience with a similar group, the XYZ Group external organization versus XYZ Group, does not expedite the process for those members who had family members in the external organization of XYZ Group. While the participants knew a large number of the acronyms and their meanings from XYZ Group external organization jargon, they had not experienced the process of socializing with the XYZ Group external organization for themselves.

Identification. Identification is how you uniquely feel about the group. The hypotheses for this study were all insignificant when the identification variable was included. This may have been due to testing two different groups as one, and the members identifying with the external organization over the XYZ Group. Additionally, the OIQ used the term ‘XYZ Group’ instead of XYZ Group subset 1 and XYZ Group subset 2 for the respective groups. Participants may feel a stronger sense of identification to their specific XYZ Group subset, versus the XYZ Group in general. Abrams, Hogg, Hinke, and Otten (2005) stated that social identity “is a self-conception as sharing a category membership with a set of other people” (pg. 117). Considering this, both XYZ Groups have two different set of members, so it’s logical that one group may feel a strong sense of identity and the other not feel the same sense of identity. However, it’s understandable that the individuals in each group would still have a strong sense of socialization, because the processes for each group are very similar.

Another consideration to make is that the participants may align their identity with the profession of XYZ Group external organization versus the training program of XYZ Group. This

conclusion can be supported by Russo's (1998) work, which used mixed methods to analyze 281 editors' experiences at their newspaper company; the study found that there was a stronger identification with the journalism profession over the news organization. Similarly, to the news organization, the XYZ Group is a means to an end, with the end goal being to join the XYZ Group external organization as a profession. Therefore, some participants may not identify with the XYZ Group itself but continue to commit to the program due to their desire to become a XYZ Group external organization member.

These participants may have chosen the XYZ Group external organization as their future profession due to their family members involvement with XYZ Group external organization. As stated above the majority of participants had some measure of familiarity with the XYZ Group external organization. This most likely played an effect on their knowledge of acronyms, and it may have an impact on their desire to join and identify in the XYZ Group. Meisenbach and Kramer (2014) found that "a third of our participants expressed a music identity as closely tied into their sense of who and what their family was and did. Thus, their identification with music was embedded within their family identity" (pg. 200). Considering most of the participants family identities may have aligned with the XYZ Group external organization, it's probable the participants felt a stronger identity with the XYZ Group external organization over the XYZ Group program. In the future when studying XYZ Group members and other programs where the individuals may have multiple connections and investments with the group being studied, it would be best to consider the 'nested identities' of those individuals (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). By considering the 'nested identities' the researcher would analyze the multiple contributing factors to an individual's identification.

Practical Implications

XYZ Group. The practical implications to this project provide lots of recommendations for XYZ Group. Hypothesis four's findings deemed that the longer a member is involved in the XYZ Group program the stronger their socialization in the organization is. This means that those who are involved in the group longer have a better understanding of what to expect and higher satisfaction during their time in XYZ Group. Therefore, an emphasis should be placed on members being involved in the program for as many semesters as possible. Additionally, there was a positive relationship between knowledge of acronym meaning and socialization, so the programs should ensure the members fully understand the XYZ Group acronyms as soon as possible. Moreland and Levine (2001) recommended having the 'oldtimers' in groups socialize the 'newcomers.' Therefore, a way to assist all new members in the XYZ Group socializing process is by establishing a mentorship system, so the assimilated members would guide the new members through the socialization process. These three recommendations related to socialization should ensure the members have a more enjoyable and fruitful experience in the program.

While all identification hypotheses were false, there is still a lot to learn about the XYZ Group participants and identification. From Russo's (1998) study we can conclude that the more the XYZ Group program is related to the participant's professions in the XYZ Group external organization the better. The members most likely do not identify with the XYZ Group itself because their identities align to the XYZ Group external organization they hope to join. But for recruiting members relating involvement in the XYZ Group to developing desired character traits may be beneficial, as Miesenbach and Kramer (2014) recommended in their study. From these concepts it must be understood the importance of identifying to an organization in order to best perform in that organization, but identification is not the sole contributor to an individual's

success in a group. There are many variables that must be understood for group communication in order to give an accurate analysis of group dynamics.

Organizational Importance. This study is relatable to other groups through its analysis of socialization, identification, and acronym knowledge. Groups can take from this study an understanding of the importance of socialization for all members, the benefits of individuals identifying with the organization, and the role acronym knowledge plays in group socialization. This study again confirmed the concept that individuals and groups evolve over time, so the longer someone is involved the more likely they are to socialize in the organization. There is also a relationship to knowledge of group language and the members socialization. However, it's possible for newcomers to understand the group talk very quickly, so it's recommended there be an introduction to the jargon used in the group to speed up the assimilation process.

There are many unknown factors impacting an individual's group interactions, and this must always be taken into consideration as a leader and peer in the group. Some of these considerations may be: previous familiarity with the organization, lack of members including newcomers, length of time involved, and members not identifying with the group. In order to best include the newcomers into the organization there must be intentional actions from the group members and leaders to guide them in their assimilation in the group. In the future, this work can be continued by researching other organizations that heavily use acronyms, such as the medical and education fields, and analyzing the newcomer's assimilation to those organizations. In addition, the understanding of how past experiences impact the individual's identity in the organization.

Limitations and Future Directions

The main limitations from this project is that it only tested the variables against one type of group. The XYZ Group has its own particular traits. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be applicable to another group. However, one can take the methods of investigating group member's acronym knowledge, socialization, identification, and length of membership and apply them. Another limitation was that a greater number of participants had only been involved in the program as an underclassman, the median number of semesters involved from the participants was three semesters. The minimum number of semesters was 1 and the maximum was nine. This is due to their being a greater number of XYZ Group members for one to four semesters, versus five to nine semesters. Additionally, a semester may have been too long to determine knowledge of acronym meaning. If tested based on smaller increments of time from the start of the program, there may have been some significant variation of acronym knowledge.

Appendix**Demographic Questions**

1. Are you a member of XYZ Group at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville? ___ Yes ___ No

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your gender?

___ Male ___ Female ___ Other ___ Prefer Not to Respond

4. What year did you start at UTK? _____

5. Are you in XYZ Group 1 or XYZ Group 2?

___ XYZ Group subset 1 ___ XYZ Group subset 2

6. How many full semesters have you been in XYZ Group?

___ 1 Semester ___ 2 Semesters ___ 3 Semesters ___ 4 Semesters ___ 5 Semesters

___ 6 Semesters ___ 7 Semesters ___ 8 Semesters ___ 9 Semesters

7. Are you on scholarship to join XYZ Group external organization upon graduation?

___ Yes ___ No

8. What prior XYZ Group external organization familiarity do you have?

(Please select all that apply)

___ self ___ parents ___ siblings ___ grandparents ___ others (please specify)

Acronym Knowledge

Below you will see 10 acronyms used in XYZ Group regularly. For each acronym you will first type what it stands for, then you will be asked to use the acronym in a sentence.

THIS IS NOT A TEST. We are interested in your experiences with XYZ Group.

9. What does COB stand for?

10. Please use COB in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.

11. What does NLT stand for?

12. Please use NLT in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
13. What does ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) stand for?
14. Please use ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
15. What does ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) stand for?
16. Please use ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
17. What does ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) stand for?
18. Please use ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
19. What does ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) stand for?
20. Please use ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
21. What does ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) stand for?
22. Please use ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
23. What does POC stand for?
24. Please use POC in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
25. What does ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) stand for?
26. Please use ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.
27. What does ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) stand for?
28. Please use ABC (anonymized for confidentiality) in a sentence you would use in XYZ Group.

Identity

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements. (Seven Point Likert

Scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree)

29. When someone criticizes XYZ Group, it feels like a personal insult.
30. I am very interested in what others think about XYZ Group.
31. When I talk about XYZ Group, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.

32. XYZ Group's successes are my successes.
33. When someone praises XYZ Group, it feels like a personal compliment.
34. If a story in the media criticized XYZ Group, I would feel embarrassed.

Socialization

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements. (Seven Point Likert Scale from strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)

35. I understand what appropriate dress for XYZ Group meetings is.
36. I understand the authority XYZ Group has for doing its work.
37. I did not see myself as an effective XYZ Group member.
38. I understand the "group talk" XYZ Group used to do its work.
39. I found someone in XYZ Group who could provide me with emotional support.
40. It was clear what was expected of me in XYZ Group.
41. I found someone in XYZ Group with whom I could talk about career plans.
42. It was not at all clear what was expected of me in XYZ Group.
43. I depend on other XYZ Group member for support in XYZ Group.
44. I found someone in XYZ Group who could help me adjust to XYZ Group.
45. I found someone in XYZ Group on whom I can depend for support.
46. I had no clear idea of what XYZ Group was to accomplish.
47. I found someone in XYZ Group with whom I could discuss personal matters.
48. There was no one in XYZ Group on whom I could depend for support.

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