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Research Article

Adjusting to new work teams: Testing work experience as a multidimensional resource for newcomers

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Summary The successful performance adjustment of team newcomers is an increasingly important consideration given the prevalence of job-changing and the uncertainty associated with starting work in a new team setting. Consequently, using sensemaking and uncertainty reduction theories as a conceptual basis, the present study tested work experience as a potential resource for newcomer performance adjustment in teams. Specifically, we tested work experience as a multidimensional predictor of both initial newcomer performance and the rate of performance change after team entry. We tested hypotheses using longitudinal newcomer performance data in the context of professional basketball teams. Although the traditional quantitative indicators of the length and amount of work experience were not meaningfully associated with newcomer performance adjustment, their interaction was. In addition, the qualitative indicator of newcomers' past transition experience revealed a significant, positive association with the rate of newcomer performance improvement following team entry. These results suggest that work experience is a meaningful facilitator of newcomer adjustment in teams and emphasize the dual consideration of both quantitative and qualitative work experiences. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Keywords: newcomer adjustment; work experience; socialization; job performance; teams

Although it was once common for workers to remain employed in the same organization and the same job for the duration of their careers, today's workers change jobs and organizations at a much higher rate (Hall, 2002; O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006). In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the average American worker changes jobs 11 times between the ages of 18 and 44 years (BLS, 2010). The increased frequency of job-changing is noteworthy given the uncertainty and ambiguity associated with starting work in a new environment (Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Lester, 1987; Louis, 1980).

Concomitant with the higher frequency of job-changing is the increased prevalence of teams in organizations. Devine, Clayton, Philips, Dunford, and Melner (1999) estimated that approximately half of all US organizations use some form of work team as part of their organizational structure, and this number is likely even higher today. Consequently, the proximal socialization setting for many of today's organizational newcomers is the team. Entering an interdependent team setting has important implications for both newcomers and the teams in which they work, given that newcomers' uncertainty during the adjustment process tends to reduce their job performance (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992) and consequently their teams' performance (Lewis, Belliveau, Herndon, & Keller, 2007). Thus, there is an increasing need for researchers and human resource practitioners to consider factors that can aid newcomers' performance adjustment when entering new

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teams. We define *newcomer performance adjustment* as the extent to which newcomers are able to perform core tasks at satisfactory levels shortly following team entry.

The extant socialization literature has identified a number of individual and organizational factors that facilitate newcomer adjustment to new work contexts (e.g., Jones, 1986; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Morrison, 1993; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). For example, meta-analytic evidence suggests that both newcomer information seeking and varying organizational socialization tactics are positively associated with proximal adjustment indicators such as role clarity and social integration (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007). More recent studies have identified other factors including newcomer personality traits and coworker developmental feedback as antecedents of newcomer adjustment (Harrison, Sluss, & Ashforth, 2011; Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011). An additional factor that has been widely theorized to facilitate newcomer adjustment, but rarely considered empirically, is work experience—past events experienced by individuals pertaining to the performance of a job (Quiñones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995). According to socialization theorists, work experience is a cognitive resource available to newcomers to help them adapt their performance to a new context more effectively (Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Carr, Pearson, Vest, & Boyar, 2006; Jones, 1983; Louis, 1980). To the extent that this is true, work experience represents a particularly useful factor for human resource practitioners to consider as a means of forecasting successful newcomer performance adjustment given that work experience can fairly readily be assessed in pre-hire or promotion contexts.

Despite the theoretical expectation that work experience facilitates newcomer performance adjustment, however, empirical results have been mixed, particularly with regard to the effect of work experience on job performance. Job performance is a telling indicator of newcomer adjustment because any newcomer's performance should be reflective of proximal adjustment indicators such as task mastery, role clarity, and social integration (Bauer et al., 2007). That is, it is reasonable to infer that a high performing newcomer is likewise one who has reduced prior uncertainty such that they have a more accurate understanding of the task, their specific role, and how they fit into the overall team dynamic.

A study that specifically considered the effect of work experience on newcomer job performance found that work experience was *negatively* associated with both self-rated and supervisor-rated performance (Adkins, 1995). Other studies that have considered the association between work experience and job performance more broadly with non-newcomers have reported inconsistent results. Whereas some studies have shown that work experience is positively related to job performance (McDaniel, Schmidt, & Hunter, 1988; Quiñones et al., 1995; Schmidt, Hunter, & Outerbridge, 1986), others have found negative or null associations between the two constructs (Castilla, 2005; Medoff & Abraham, 1980). One explanation that has been offered to reconcile these mixed results is the notion that irrelevant or maladaptive prior experiences may at times hinder an individual's ability to adjust to a new role and new organizational dynamics (Dokko, Wilk, & Rothbard, 2009).

It is important to note, however, that these studies of newcomers and non-newcomers alike only considered work experience in terms of time spent in a job or career (e.g., months, years). Operationalizing work experience solely in terms of time is limiting and fails to capture more qualitative indicators of experience that add depth and meaning to the work experience construct (Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Quiñones et al., 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). To test work experience as a resource for newcomer performance adjustment, we operationalized newcomer performance adjustment using two indicators: initial newcomer performance levels and the rate of performance change following team entry, with higher levels of either of these indicators suggesting successful newcomer performance adjustment. The examination of both of these indicators of newcomer performance adjustment represents a more appropriate conceptualization that few studies have been able to test (cf. Chen, 2005).

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the extant socialization literature by testing newcomer work experience as a multidimensional predictor of initial newcomer performance levels and the rate of performance change following team entry to better determine the extent to which past work experiences affect newcomers' performance adjustment. We tested our hypotheses using a sample of professional basketball team newcomers. Professional basketball teams exemplify action teams or highly interdependent teams of experts that engage in time-limited performance episodes involving adversaries, audiences, or challenging environments (Sundstrom, McIntyre,

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Halfhill, & Richards, 2000). Action teams are prevalent across industry sectors and include such teams as firefighting companies, military tactical units, surgical teams, flight crews, and sports teams (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003; Sundstrom, de Meuse, & Futrell, 1990; Sundstrom et al., 2000). For newcomers, joining action teams represents a situation in which the need for successful performance adjustment is accentuated because of high levels of interdependence and often unpredictable work environments.

Theory and Hypotheses

Sensemaking, uncertainty reduction, and newcomer performance adjustment

There is no gradual exposure and no real way to confront the situation [team or organization entry] a little at a time. Rather, the newcomer's senses are simultaneously inundated with many unfamiliar cues. It may not be clear to the newcomer just what constitutes a cue, let alone what the cues refer to, which cues require response, or how to interpret and select responses to them. (Louis, 1980, p. 230)

Uncertainty reduction theory (URT) characterizes the unfamiliar cues associated with a new work context as sources of uncertainty, which newcomers are naturally motivated to reduce (Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Lester, 1987; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Specifically, URT posits that uncertainty is a source of stress for newcomers, which motivates corrective actions to minimize the stress and promote effective behavioral adaptation (Falcione & Wilson, 1988). According to sensemaking theory, these unfamiliar cues represent "surprises" or unanticipated novelties associated with entering a new work context (Louis, 1980). These surprises signify the absence of behavior-guiding cognitive scripts—knowledge structures that specify the appropriate behaviors for specific situations (Gioia & Manz, 1985; Gioia & Poole, 1984)—and require newcomers to engage in conscious sensemaking to cognitively reconcile ambiguities and effectively reduce uncertainties (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). Accessing pre-existing cognitive scripts or forming new ones allows newcomers to behave in more automatic or "preprogrammed" ways that require less information processing and should facilitate performance adjustment (Louis, 1980).

Taken together, these theories suggest that newcomers are driven to minimize the stress of uncertainty in a new context and apply sensemaking to do so by either drawing upon pre-existing cognitive scripts or developing new cognitive scripts to facilitate adjustment. Stated differently, whereas URT describes *why* newcomers are driven to reduce uncertainty (i.e., stress reduction), sensemaking theory describes *how* newcomers reduce this uncertainty (i.e., accessing or creating cognitive scripts).

Sensemaking theory posits that both individual and contextual factors act as sources of cognitive scripts that allow newcomers to construct meaning in and more effectively adjust to a new context (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). According to Louis (1980), factors that are theorized to aid newcomers' sensemaking include assistance from insiders (i.e., coworkers; Li et al., 2011; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992), individual predispositions (e.g., proactivity; Ashford & Black, 1996; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), and newcomers' past experiences (Beyer & Hannah, 2002). A distinction that can be made concerning these factors is that whereas individual predispositions and insider assistance should facilitate the creation of *new* cognitive scripts for newcomers, work experience reflects the extent to which newcomers bring with them relevant *pre-existing* cognitive scripts. Further, although a growing body of research has tested coworker assistance and individual differences as antecedents of newcomer adjustment (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Bauer & Erdogan, 2011), there is a paucity of work that has considered work experience as an antecedent of adjustment. Given the limited and inconsistent findings noted previously concerning work experience and newcomer performance, there is a need to adequately test the theoretical proposition that work experience facilitates newcomer performance adjustment.

The value of considering work experience as an antecedent of newcomer performance adjustment lies in the expectation that newcomers will draw from their previous experiences to make sense of their new experiences

DOI: 10.1002/job

(Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Louis, 1980). This represents a deductive and efficient means of making sense of a new situation (Jones, 1983) with implications for both individual and team performance. That is, newcomers with greater work experience should have more developed and extensive sets of cognitive scripts to draw from (Gioia & Poole, 1984) to adjust their performance more quickly and effectively in a new context.

Work experience should be a particularly important cognitive resource in action teams. Because of the high levels of interdependence and the dynamic and often fast-paced nature of work in such teams (Sundstrom et al., 2000), the ability to rely on previously developed cognitive scripts to make sense of new situations and reduce uncertainty can be critical. For example, a new firefighter with relevant past work experience who unexpectedly becomes separated from his or her company could enact applicable cognitive scripts gained from past experience to quickly make critical decisions; conversely, a rookie firefighter, who would have had less opportunity to form such scripts, would be required to either engage in more time-intensive information processing (i.e., sensemaking) or make a rushed, less informed decision (Louis, 1980). In this scenario, and others like it, the more experienced newcomer would be expected to perform more favorably than the less experienced newcomer because of a greater repertoire of cognitive scripts for facilitating performance. We next introduce this study's hypotheses and explain how specific components of work experience are posited to affect newcomer performance adjustment.

Hypotheses for work experience and newcomer performance adjustment

The conceptualization of work experience we adopted for this study corresponds to Tesluk and Jacobs's (1998) multidimensional framework. These authors describe work experience in terms of three core components: quantitative, qualitative, and interaction components. In the sections that follow, we describe these components and discuss the specific indicators of each that are hypothesized to affect newcomer performance adjustment. A graphical summary of this study's hypotheses is provided in Figure 1.

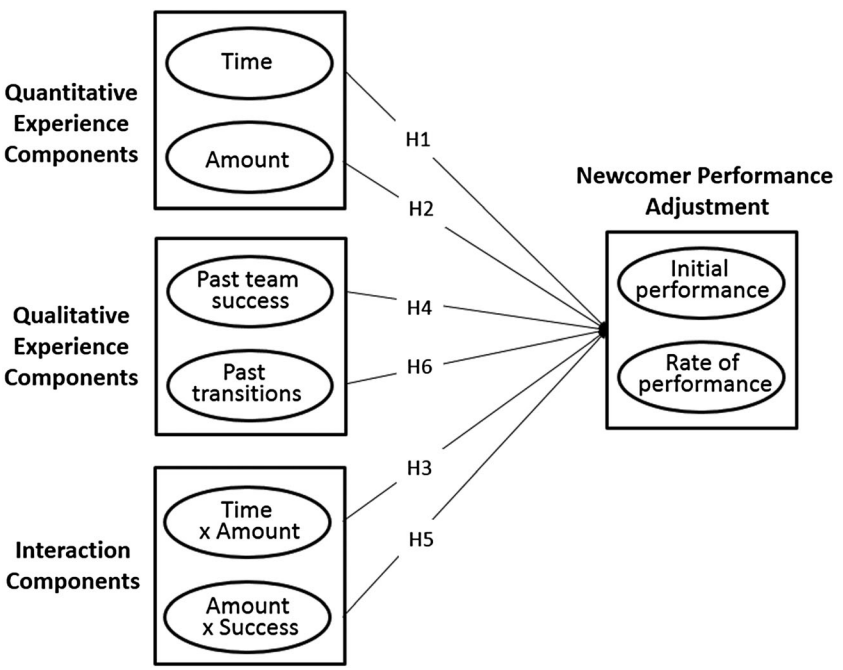

Figure 1. Model of hypothesized relationships between newcomer work experiences and the newcomer performance adjustment indicators of either (a) initial performance, or (b) the rate of performance change

DOI: 10.1002/job

Quantitative work experience

Work experience is most often conceptualized in quantitative terms (e.g., job tenure) that reflect either the *time* or *amount* of experience (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). Time indicators operationalize work experience as the length of time spent performing a job or task, whereas amount indicators operationalize work experience as the opportunity to perform or the number of times a task has been performed (Quiñones et al., 1995). For example, a soldier with 10 years of experience and zero combat missions is clearly substantively different from a soldier with 3 years of experience and two combat missions. Thus, both quantitative indicators describe meaningful components of work experience that should affect newcomer performance adjustment. Specifically, newcomers who have spent more time working or who have had greater opportunity to perform on the job should have accumulated a greater number of job-specific cognitive scripts and should thus be more capable of focusing their attention on nuanced team-specific scripts to facilitate their performance adjustment in an interdependent team setting. Consequently, newcomers with more work experience, in terms of both time and amount, should start performing at initially higher levels or, alternatively, improve their performance at faster rates than newcomers with less work experience.

We note that it is unlikely that these experience factors will reveal significant, positive associations with *both* initial newcomer performance and the rate of performance improvement simultaneously. Our reasoning for this is that more experienced newcomers who start performing at high levels will have less subsequent room for improvement because they are closer to their ceiling or maximum performance level; this naturally restricts the extent to which the rate of performance improvement can correspondingly increase. Conversely, although a newcomer may not start performing well, greater levels of work experience may be associated with faster rates of performance improvement. Hence, for all subsequent hypotheses positing associations with newcomer performance adjustment, we expect the work experience factors of interest to be positively associated with *either* initial newcomer performance or the rate of performance improvement, but not both simultaneously.

Hypothesis 1: Newcomer work experience, in terms of time, is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment.

Hypothesis 2: Newcomer work experience, in terms of amount, is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment.

The interaction between these two quantitative indicators of work experience should likewise demonstrate a meaningful impact on newcomer performance adjustment. The product of the time and amount of work experience represents the concentration of relevant experience over time. The experience of performing or contributing more over a longer time should further reinforce the relevant cognitive scripts that are necessary to facilitate performance adjustment (Gioia & Poole, 1984). We thus posit that the interaction between the time and amount of newcomer work experience will demonstrate a positive association with newcomer performance adjustment beyond the main effects of the time and amount of work experience.

Hypothesis 3: The interaction between the time and amount of experience is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment.

Qualitative work experience

Qualitative experience represents the next major component of work experience in Tesluk and Jacobs's (1998) model. Qualitative experience offers unique explanatory power beyond quantitative experience because it represents the *type*, or nature, of an individual's prior work experience (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). Although qualitative work experience can be assessed in a myriad of ways that differ on the basis of context, examples of experience type include the variety, challenge, and complexity of work (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). These contribute to the richness of an individual's work experience and can have an important impact on the quality and variety of cognitive scripts that are established as a result.

DOI: 10.1002/job

For a newcomer transitioning to a new team, the quality of the work experience gained on previous teams should have a meaningful impact on the newcomer's ability to perform successfully on the new team. For action teams in particular, in which performance episodes tend to be brief and complex (Sundstrom et al., 1990), past team success represents a qualitative experience that should help newcomers form specific scripts about successful team performance, which allow them to adjust their performance more effectively when working with a new team. For example, a newcomer in a rescue unit with the experience of multiple successful rescues in previous units would have had greater opportunity to form scripts regarding effective performance and is arguably in a better position to contribute to the new unit's success than a newcomer with little or no such work experience. Thus, we posit that the experience of being on successful teams in the past will positively affect newcomers' subsequent performance adjustment.

Hypothesis 4: Newcomer work experience, in terms of past team success, is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment.

As an extension of this, an important interaction to consider is the combined effect of past team success and the opportunity to contribute to that success on newcomer performance adjustment. This represents an example of what Tesluk and Jacobs (1998) referred to as the *density* or intensity of work experience. The work experience of newcomers who came from successful teams *and* who provided meaningful contributions to those teams should naturally have a greater influence on subsequent performance adjustment than the work experience of newcomers who came from successful teams but did not contribute as substantively to team success. The experience of contributing substantively to a more successful team reflects a higher quality experience that should translate into cognitive scripts that facilitate subsequent performance adjustment on a new team. Thus, we posit that the interaction between the amount of previous work experience and past team success will be positively associated with newcomer performance adjustment.

Hypothesis 5: The interaction between past team success and work experience amount is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment.

An additional qualitative work experience that is specifically relevant to newcomers' ability to adjust to a new team context is past transition experience (Beyer & Hannah, 2002). We defined past transition experience as experience changing or transitioning between teams within the same profession. Whereas the previously discussed types of work experience should result in job-specific or task-specific cognitive scripts (Gioia & Poole, 1984), newcomer *transition* experience should result in the formation of cognitive scripts specifically associated with team or organization entry. A person who has changed work teams before is likely to be more familiar, and thus more comfortable, with the process of newcomer adjustment. For example, past transition experience may aid workers in anticipating likely areas of uncertainty, which allow them to proactively reduce those uncertainties at earlier stages. Similarly, a worker with past transition experience would be expected to have a better understanding of how and from whom to obtain needed information to reduce uncertainties relative to a first-time or second-time newcomer. Although the job may be the same, the team and its associated roles and norms likely will not be the same. Thus, transition experience should result in the formation of cognitive scripts that allow newcomers to improve their performance more quickly than newcomers with less transition experience. It is noteworthy that we do not expect an association with *initial* performance in this case. This is because having the experience of transitioning teams would not be expected to improve a newcomer's baseline performance. Rather, past transition experience should provide newcomers with the understanding needed to facilitate the sensemaking process and thus enhance their *rate* of performance improvement following team entry.

Hypothesis 6: Newcomer number of previous job transitions is positively related to the rate of newcomer performance improvement.

DOI: 10.1002/job

Method

To test our study's hypotheses, we examined work experience and newcomer performance adjustment in a sample of newcomers on professional basketball teams in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Day, Gordon, and Fink (2012) described sport as a "living laboratory" that is uniquely suited to answering organizational questions because of the presence of unambiguous performance rules and situations, the frequency of performance episodes, and the fact that performance data are reliably documented in sports archives. The more objective nature of these performance data reduces the bias that commonly affects self and supervisor evaluations of performance (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995) and answers calls for research to consider more objective newcomer adjustment indicators (e.g., Chan & Schmitt, 2000; Chen, 2005). We obtained the data coded for this study via ESPN's online NBA statistics archive (ESPN.com, 2013) and Basketball-Reference.com (2013), a comprehensive professional basketball statistics database.

Participants

We coded data from the NBA's 30 franchises from the 2001–2002 to the 2010–2011 seasons, resulting in a pool of 296 teams (we refer to a franchise's set of players within a single season as a team). We identified a total of 540 newcomers on 254 of those teams ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.17$) with the maximum number of newcomers on any team being six. We considered newcomers to be any player who had not played any previous games for their new franchise—this included rookies who had played no previous games in the NBA. We restricted our analyses to team newcomers who played at least half of the games in their newcomer season (i.e., 41 of 82 games) and who, on average, played at least 10 minutes per game. We did this to ensure that the monthly performance estimates obtained were reliable estimates of newcomer performance. In addition, all newcomers were only allowed to appear once in the dataset. For those players who changed teams more than once from the 2001–2002 to 2010–2011 seasons, we randomly selected the season that was used as the focal season for the present analyses.

Measures

Newcomer performance

We operationalized newcomer performance using "Win Score," a weighted basketball performance composite created by Berri, Schmidt, and Brook (2006) to estimate players' contributions to team wins. Win Score is computed as follows:

$$\text{Win Score} = \text{Points} + \text{Rebounds} + \text{Steals} + \text{Blocks} \times 1/2 + \text{Assists} \times 1/2 - \text{Shot attempts} - \text{Free throw attempts} \times 1/2 - \text{Turnovers} - \text{Personal fouls} \times 1/2.$$

The values entered into this equation were newcomers' monthly per-game averages in each of the noted categories. We used monthly averages because they represent more reliable performance estimates that are not affected by game-to-game performance fluctuations. There were a maximum number of six 1-month performance periods from November to April (the duration of the regular NBA season) that were computed for each newcomer. This allowed for enough time points to more accurately analyze the trend of newcomer performance improvement. Combined across all 6 months of the regular season, monthly newcomer performance ranged from −5.00 to 18.18 with an average performance score of 3.49 ($SD = 2.80$).

DOI: 10.1002/job

Newcomer performance adjustment

We measured newcomer performance adjustment using two separate indicators: initial newcomer performance and the rate of performance improvement. We operationalized *initial newcomer performance* as newcomer performance in the month of November, the first full month of the NBA season. Initial newcomer performance ranged from −2.00 to 15.00 ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 2.32$). We operationalized newcomers' *rate of performance improvement* as the rate of performance change across the 6 months of the NBA regular season. We assessed this using latent growth curve modeling and discuss the details of this analysis in the Analyses and Results sections.

Because of its expected association with newcomer performance adjustment on a new team, we included newcomers' recent past performance (i.e., performance the preceding season) in this study's analyses as a covariate (Henry & Hulin, 1987). We also operationalized recent past performance using Win Score ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 2.83$).

Work experience—time

We operationalized work experience assessed in terms of time as the number of years of professional basketball experience prior to the year of interest; in addition to years played in the NBA, this included semi-professional experience in the NBA's developmental league as well as experience playing in professional international leagues. The number of previous years of professional experience ranged from 0 to 20 years ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 4.31$). Because tenure strongly covaries with age, and age tends to have a negative impact on physical performance because of the deterioration of the body—particularly in a professional sports context—we included age ($M = 25.89$ years, $SD = 4.68$) as a covariate in this study's analyses.

Work experience—amount

We operationalized work experience assessed in terms of amount using ESPN's "usage rate" statistic, which represents the percentage of team possessions a player "uses" per 40 minutes of playing time (ESPN.com, 2013). We calculated players' career usage rates up to the season of interest and reflect their opportunities to perform during their NBA tenure ($M = 11.79$, $SD = 10.20$).

Past team success

We operationalized past team success as the average win percentage of newcomers' previous teams up to the season of interest ($M = 0.48$, $SD = 0.10$). In addition to past team success, we coded the recent past success of newcomers' *current* teams (i.e., *current team success*; $M = 0.48$, $SD = 0.16$), operationalized as the current team's win percentage in the previous season, and included it in our analyses as a control variable given that the quality of a newcomer's current team would be expected to affect newcomer performance adjustment.

Past transition experience

We operationalized transition experience as the number of times each newcomer had transitioned to a new NBA franchise *prior to* the year of interest. For example, a newcomer entering his fourth NBA season on his fourth team would have experienced the transition process three previous times. The number of past transitions for newcomers ranged from 0 to 13 ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.91$).

Analyses

We tested hypotheses using a latent growth curve model. This is a specific type of confirmatory factor analysis (Bollen & Curran, 2006) that allows for newcomers' performance across the months of the season to be modeled. For the present sample, we modeled an intercept factor and a linear growth factor to reflect newcomer performance adjustment. Specifically, we used the intercept factor to model differences in player performance at the beginning of the season (i.e., initial performance), whereas we used the linear growth factor to model differences in the rate of

DOI: 10.1002/job

newcomer performance change across the season. We then regressed these two factors on each of the work experience variables and interactions described earlier to test this study's hypotheses.

Two issues arose with these data. First, the dataset included occurrences of more than one newcomer on the same team, and the performance of these newcomers was likely non-independent. To test this, we estimated intraclass correlation (ICC1) values for performance in each month of the season. These values revealed that, on average, 6 percent of the variance in newcomer performance ($M_{ICC[1]} = 0.06$, $SD_{ICC[1]} = 0.02$) was accounted for by team membership. We likewise note that teams in our sample are nested within franchises. Consequently, we computed ICC1 values for performance in each month of the season on the basis of franchise membership. However, on average, franchise membership accounted for only 1 percent ($M_{ICC[1]} = 0.01$, $SD_{ICC[1]} = 0.01$) of the variance in newcomer performance. This is likely a bi-product of the high degree of fluctuation in both coaches and personnel in professional basketball franchises over time. Thus, we did not account for franchise-nesting in addition to team-nesting in our analyses. To account for non-independence based on team-nesting, we estimated the growth curve model using the pseudo maximum likelihood estimation method for clustered data implemented in Mplus 6.0 (Asparouhov, 2005; Muthén & Muthén, 2010).

Second, newcomers occasionally failed to play any games for an entire month because of injury. We treated these instances as missing data rather than as zero performance because it was not the case that the players were playing and failing to contribute to team performance, but rather that they were not performing at all. We accounted for the missing data in the model by using full information maximum likelihood, which allows for the inclusion of incomplete cases, and which can be combined with pseudo maximum likelihood estimation in Mplus.

Results

Prior to testing the proposed hypotheses, we estimated a growth curve model as an unconditional model, meaning the predictor variables were excluded. This version of the model allowed for testing whether newcomer performance across the months of the season was represented well by a linear growth factor. As is typical in growth models, the loadings of the monthly performance variables on the growth factor were all fixed. All loadings of monthly performance scores on the intercept factor were fixed to 1, whereas loadings on the linear growth factor were fixed to represent linear growth (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for November performance through April performance).

The unconditional model fits the data well ($\chi^2_{[16]} = 58.90$, $p < .05$; CFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.04). The mean of the intercept factor (3.10, $p < .05$) gives the estimated mean of initial newcomer performance (i.e., performance in November), and the mean of the linear growth factor (0.15, $p < .05$) gives the estimated mean linear growth rate in newcomer performance across the season. The significant, positive value of this factor's mean suggests that newcomer performance tended to improve meaningfully over the course of the season. This is consistent with the expectation that newcomers' performance improves as they become adjusted over time to a new team context.

We then re-estimated the growth model with the two growth factors regressed simultaneously on the work experience variables of interest, including age, past performance, and current team success as covariates. This model also fit the data well ($\chi^2_{[52]} = 115.80$, $p < .05$; CFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.02).

Quantitative work experience

We reported descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among all study variables in Table 1. We reported and likewise depicted the results of all hypothesis tests in Table 2 and in Figure 2, respectively. Hypothesis 1 stated that quantitative newcomer work experience in terms of time (i.e., number of years in the league) is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment. This hypothesis was not supported, however, as newcomer work experience in terms of time was not significantly associated with either initial performance ($b = 0.01$, *ns*) or the rate of

DOI: 10.1002/job

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and variable intercorrelations.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. November performance	3.01	2.59	1.00														
2. December performance	3.30	2.76	.73*	1.00													
3. January performance	3.53	2.69	0.65*	0.73*	1.00												
4. February performance	3.62	2.87	0.62*	0.64*	0.71*	1.00											
5. March performance	3.57	2.77	0.59*	0.62*	0.67*	0.70*	1.00										
6. April performance	3.92	3.04	0.52*	0.53*	0.53*	0.56*	0.66*	1.00									
7. Experience—time	4.35	4.31	0.17*	0.17*	0.12*	0.06	0.01	−0.02	1.00								
8. Experience—amount	11.79	10.20	0.22*	0.23*	0.20*	0.14*	0.07	0.01	0.65*	1.00							
9. Time × amount	28.72	37.17	0.05	0.01	−0.02	−0.03	−0.05	0.01	0.16*	−0.16*	1.00						
10. Past team success	0.48	0.10	−0.16*	−0.11	−0.13*	−0.19*	−0.09	−0.12*	0.23*	−0.02	0.19*	1.00					
11. Team success × amount	−0.01	0.96	−0.14*	−0.06	−0.14*	−0.22*	−0.11	−0.09	0.22*	0.04	0.29*	0.76*	1.00				
12. Past transitions	1.56	1.91	0.03	0.08	0.07	0.04	−0.02	−0.07	0.67*	0.60*	0.00	0.03	0.01	1.00			
13. Past performance	3.79	2.83	0.66*	0.58*	0.54*	0.57*	0.56*	0.48*	0.23*	0.18*	0.26*	−0.12*	−0.11*	−0.10	1.00		
14. Age	25.89	4.68	0.10*	0.09*	0.04	−0.02	−0.06	−0.10*	0.87*	0.64*	0.17*	0.28*	0.29*	0.71*	0.12*	1.00	
15. Current team success	0.48	0.16	0.12*	0.09*	0.09*	0.08	0.07	0.00	0.26*	0.20*	0.05	0.07	0.10	0.19*	0.08	0.28*	1.00

Notes. $N = 540$; *$p < .05$, two-tailed.

DOI: 10.1002/job

Table 2. Results of hypothesis tests using latent growth curve models.

	Initial performance			Rate of performance		
Variable	Estimate	*SE*	*t*	Estimate	*SE*	*t*
Time (H1—not supported)	0.009	0.055	0.165	−0.007	0.014	−0.519
Amount (H2—not supported)	0.030	0.027	1.090	−0.008	0.006	−1.308
Time× amount (H3—supported)	0.004	0.002	2.010*	−0.001	0.001	−1.191
Past team success (H4—not supported)	−0.873	1.128	−0.774	0.242	0.273	0.885
Past team success× amount (H5—not supported)	−0.070	0.032	−2.202*	−0.002	0.009	−0.260
Past transition experience (H6—supported)	−0.051	0.060	−0.840	0.037	0.016	2.329*
Past performance (control)	0.563	0.052	10.894*	−0.002	0.012	−0.191
Age (control)	−0.129	0.036	−3.631*	−0.016	0.010	−0.191†
Current team success (control)	1.168	0.567	2.062*	−0.048	0.139	−0.348

Notes. $N = 540$; all estimates are unstandardized; H1, H2…H6 = Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and so forth; initial performance = intercept factor; rate of performance = linear growth factor; time× amount = the interaction between time and amount; past team success× amount = the interaction between past team success and amount.
†$p < .10$; *$p < .05$

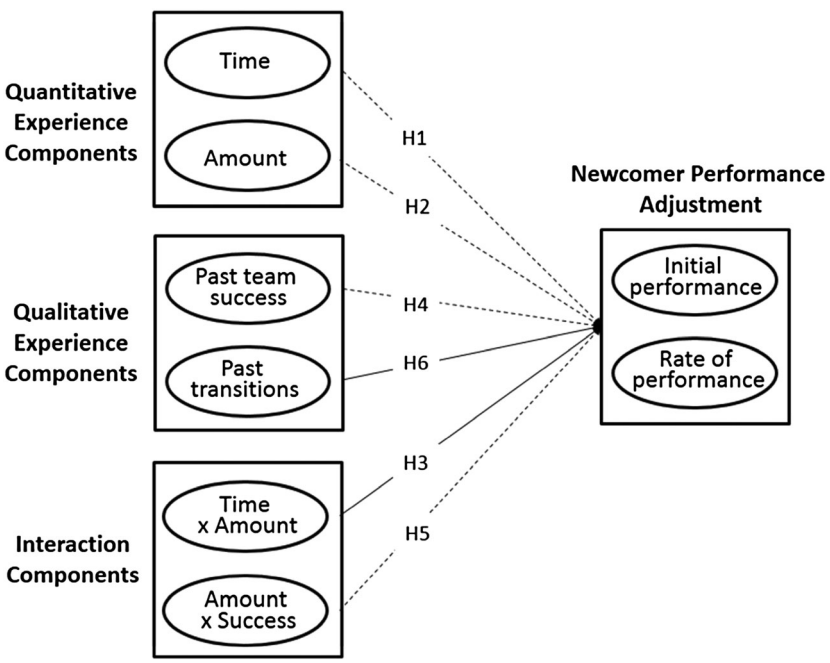

Figure 2. Empirical evidence of relationships between past newcomer work experiences and either (a) initial performance, or (b) the rate of performance change; solid lines reflect supported hypotheses, whereas dashed lines represent unsupported hypotheses

performance improvement ($b = -0.01$, *ns*). Hypothesis 2 posited that the amount of newcomer work experience is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment. This hypothesis was not supported as the amount of newcomer work experience was not meaningfully associated with initial performance ($b = 0.03$, *ns*) or the rate of performance change ($b = -0.01$, *ns*).

Hypothesis 3 posited that the interaction between the time and amount of newcomer work experience is positively related to newcomer performance adjustment. Consistent with expectations, this interaction revealed a significant, positive association with initial performance levels ($b = 0.004$, $p < .05$), although it was not significantly associated

DOI: 10.1002/job

with the subsequent rate of performance improvement ($b = -0.01$, *ns*). However, because there was a statistically significant, positive association with initial performance, these results provide support for Hypothesis 3 given that it is unlikely for a facet of work experience to be simultaneously positively related to both initial performance and the rate of performance change due to performance ceiling effects. Thus, although neither the length nor the amount of experience was significantly associated with newcomer performance adjustment, the interaction of these two variables was. This suggests that the concentration of experience over time is more meaningful than the length or amount of experience considered independently.

Qualitative work experience

Hypothesis 4 stated that past team success is positively associated with newcomer performance adjustment. However, past team success was not significantly associated with either initial performance ($b = -0.87$, *ns*) or the rate of performance improvement ($b = 0.24$, *ns*). Hypothesis 5 posited that the opportunity to contribute to past team success—the interaction between the amount of experience and past team success—is positively associated with newcomer performance adjustment. Contrary to expectations, this interaction revealed a significant, *negative* association with initial newcomer performance ($b = -0.07$, $p < .05$) and no association with the rate of performance change ($b = 0.00$, *ns*), suggesting that greater opportunities to perform on more successful teams actually inhibit newcomers' initial performance. We revisit these counter-intuitive findings in the Discussion section.

Hypothesis 6 stated that past transition experience is positively associated with the rate of performance improvement. This hypothesis was supported, as newcomer transition experience was significantly positively associated with the linear growth factor ($b = 0.04$, $p < .05$). This suggests that newcomers with greater previous transition experience improve their performance at a faster rate than newcomers with less transition experience.

Discussion

The process of changing work teams can be an onerous one that adversely affects the performance of newcomers and, by extension, newcomers' teams and organizations (Chen, 2005; Lewis et al., 2007). Consequently, using sensemaking theory and URT as a conceptual basis, this study tested work experience as a multidimensional predictor of newcomer performance adjustment in the context of highly interdependent action teams. Results revealed that quantitative and qualitative work experiences demonstrated unique associations with newcomer performance adjustment. First, although the traditional quantitative work experience indicators of the length and amount of experience were not meaningfully associated with newcomer performance adjustment on their own, their interaction revealed a significant, positive association with initial newcomer performance levels. Further, with regard to the qualitative experience indicators examined, whereas past team success and its interaction with the amount of experience revealed null and negative associations, respectively, past transition experience was significantly positively associated with newcomers' rate of performance improvement following entry to a new team. The implications of these findings are discussed next.

Theoretical and practical implications

Although extant socialization theory has been relatively clear on the issue (Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Carr et al., 2006; Louis, 1980), empirical results have been less conclusive as to the extent to which work experience is beneficial for newcomer performance adjustment. Using a more expansive—yet rarely considered—conceptualization of work experience (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998) and by testing both initial performance levels and performance change over time, this study sheds light on the nuances of this relationship.

DOI: 10.1002/job

Perhaps one reason for the inconsistent findings concerning the impact of quantitative experience indicators on newcomer performance is the failure of past studies to test the interaction between the length and amount of work experience. As was demonstrated here, although neither of these work experience indicators was meaningfully associated with performance adjustment on its own, the multiplicative combination of these work experiences was. Thus, these results suggest that the more useful means of conceptualizing quantitative work experience is to do so by testing the interaction of these indicators to represent the *concentration* of work experience over a given time. Not surprisingly, the benefits that can be accrued from work experience with the passage of time are apparently accentuated given greater opportunities to perform during that period.

Despite the existence of typologies that emphasize the importance of considering the *type* or *quality* of experience in addition to more traditional quantitative indicators (e.g., Quiñones et al., 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998), few researchers have tested these empirically. Consequently, an important contribution of this study was the simultaneous consideration of both quantitative *and* qualitative indicators of work experience. Of the qualitative indicators considered relevant in this context, past transition experience revealed a significant, positive association with the rate of performance improvement. This suggests that past transition experience helps newcomers adjust their performance more quickly after joining a new team. We theorized that the experience of negotiating the transition process on past teams would help newcomers develop cognitive scripts associated with team entry that would facilitate the adjustment process on a new team.

The other qualitative experience indicator tested was past team success. We posited that past experience playing for successful teams would equip newcomers with cognitive scripts that would enhance newcomer performance adjustment. Although the association between past team success and newcomer performance adjustment was not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that the direction of the association was opposite from the direction hypothesized. More puzzling, though, was the finding that the interaction of past team success and the amount of experience revealed a statistically significant, *negative* association with newcomers' initial performance levels. This was contrary to our expectation that greater opportunities to perform on more successful teams would allow newcomers to form cognitive scripts that facilitate performance adjustment. However, the presence of rookie newcomers in our sample may explain this counterintuitive finding. Although considering rookie newcomers as having zero or no experience in terms of time, amount, or past transitions is a realistic means of operationalizing these experiences for such newcomers, it is not necessarily appropriate to use "zero" as a means of representing past team success for rookies. Having no experience playing for a professional team—and thus zero past team success—is quite different from playing on a team that won zero games. Given this consideration, we re-estimated this study's theoretical model without rookies to see if these associations shifted in direction or statistical significance.

Removing rookies reduced the sample size from 540 to 324, but the theoretical model still revealed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2_{[52]} = 80.05$, $p < .05$; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.03). Although still not statistically significant, the model estimate for the association between past team success and initial newcomer performance shifted from negative in the original model ($b = -0.87$, *ns*) to positive ($b = 0.54$, *ns*) in the model without rookies. Further, the interaction term for past team success and experience amount moved from significance ($b = -0.07$, $p < .05$) to non-significance ($b = -0.06$, *ns*) when rookies were removed from the model. Although this latter association may be the result of reduced statistical power, the former association shifting from negative to positive in direction likely was not. It is important to note that no other results affecting hypothesis interpretations were altered—both the interaction between the length and amount of experience and past transition experience retained significant, positive associations with newcomer performance adjustment in the model with no rookies. In summary, it appears that the counterintuitive findings concerning past team success were the result of statistical artifacts in this sample and not true effects. Nevertheless, it remains the case that past team success was not meaningfully associated with newcomer performance adjustment in this context.

However, although not formally hypothesized, it is noteworthy that the quality of newcomers' *current* teams—operationalized as teams' win percentages the preceding season—revealed a significant, positive association with initial newcomer performance levels. This was included in the theoretical model as a potentially relevant covariate, but the significance of this association in the presence of all the experience indicators tested warrants further

DOI: 10.1002/job

discussion. This finding is consistent with the interactionist perspective of newcomer socialization (Jones, 1983; Reichers, 1987) that has been supported in previous studies (e.g., Chen, 2005; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Li et al., 2011) and emphasizes the fact that newcomers are not socialized in a vacuum. Whereas the primary focus of this study has been on how the experiences newcomers bring with them to a new context affect their performance adjustment, it is likewise important to acknowledge the context itself. Chen (2005) demonstrated this empirically and found that higher initial team performance levels were associated with steeper subsequent newcomer performance improvement in a sample of project team newcomers. Similarly, the present study's findings suggest that newcomers perform better initially when joining recently successful teams. This can likely be explained from the interactionist perspective as a function of joining higher quality teams where leaders and coworkers more effectively integrate newcomers and communicate newcomers' roles and responsibilities. In summary, these findings along with those regarding the examined work experience indicators suggest that both newcomer previous work experiences and the team setting itself can play an important role in helping newcomers adjust their performance to a new context.

This study's findings have practical implications for managers and human resource practitioners. For example, in the context of employee selection, these results underscore the value of considering work experience as a predictor of future performance adjustment and likewise highlight the importance of considering both quantitative and qualitative experience indicators. Although relevant qualitative work experiences often differ on the basis of the job in question, qualitative indicators such as past transition experience arguably have application across jobs and industries and can readily be quantified for selection purposes. These considerations are particularly important in interdependent team contexts. In such situations, selecting newcomers who are likely to adjust their performance more quickly should minimize the process losses that naturally occur with membership change and thus improve subsequent team performance (Lewis et al., 2007).

This study's findings likewise have relevance for employee development. For managers, these results suggest that it may be beneficial to look for opportunities not only to give employees more opportunities to perform but also to consider different types of experience that can prepare them for expanded roles or future promotions. Targeted development designed to improve workers' qualitative experience could include assigning novel or challenging work responsibilities or providing opportunities to take the lead on specific team tasks. Such experiences would be expected to equip workers with cognitive scripts that could facilitate performance adjustment in subsequent positions or roles.

Limitations and future directions

Although this study makes a number of contributions to the extant literature, there are some limitations worth noting. Our sole reliance on archival data for all of this study's examined variables is a potential limitation. Although the use of objective, archival data to operationalize newcomer performance is arguably a strength given the weaknesses of more subjective performance ratings (Murphy, 2008; Murphy, Cleveland, Skattebo, & Kinney, 2004), the exclusive use of archival data to assess qualitative newcomer work experiences in particular is a possible limitation. For example, assessing the quality of a person's past transition experience via methods such as self-report or other-report in addition to using archival data may have added richness to this study's findings. However, it is noteworthy that, as operationalized, this construct still revealed a significant association with newcomer performance adjustment that was consistent with our theoretical expectation.

Another potential limitation is the fact that the newcomers in this study did not join teams at random. Of course, this is generally the case for any newcomer who joins a new team. Rather, teams typically select newcomers (and vice versa) because they believe the newcomer will be a good fit and will either complement or supplement current team needs (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). Consequently, there is a natural restriction of range that occurs in newcomer selection—those newcomers who join new teams are those deemed by the team and/or newcomer to have the highest likelihood of success. This restricted variability due to targeted (as opposed to random) selection naturally attenuates statistical associations (Sackett & Yang, 2000). Thus, this study's findings concerning the associations between work experiences and newcomer performance adjustment likely represent conservative estimates relative

DOI: 10.1002/job

to those which would be attained if random selection had occurred. However, we note that, for practical reasons, gaining access to a field sample of teams that engaged in random employee selection is highly unlikely.

Our use of NBA teams for this study is also a potential limitation. Professional basketball teams are different in a number of respects from other types of action teams (e.g., pay, national exposure). However, although unique in some respects, we assert that NBA teams are not singular and that they represent an appropriate exemplar of action teams on the basis of the accepted definition of this type of team (Sundstrom et al., 2000). Moreover, there are a number of benefits to addressing organizational questions in what has been described as a microcosm of organizational life (Day et al., 2012; Wolfe et al., 2005). Specifically, the simplified, quasi-laboratory conditions of professional sport allowed us to test our hypotheses in a setting where our theorized effects were particularly likely to be demonstrated. Further, the examination of newcomer performance adjustment on intensively interdependent basketball teams provided a setting that only heightened the relevance of this study's research questions. In other words, if work experience facilitates newcomer performance adjustment, then it should have been demonstrated in this basic and relatively controlled setting. Accordingly, this study represents a relevant and informative basis upon which future socialization studies can build. Although the motor performance demands of professional basketball are arguably unique, the cognitive benefits of work experience, which underlie successful newcomer performance adjustment—whether or not performance is primarily motor or cognitive in nature—are unlikely to be limited to this context. However, more research is needed to determine to what extent this is the case.

Because we were unable to directly assess the presence of cognitive scripts when assessing newcomer work experience, additional research is needed to provide a more direct test of this proposed theoretical mechanism. The assessment of individual mental models may be one means of accomplishing this given that mental models are essentially a proxy for cognitive scripts. Mental models represent organized knowledge structures that help individuals explain and predict (i.e., make sense of) relevant surrounding phenomena to more effectively interact with their environment (Mathieu, Heffner, Goodwin, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 2000). One means of more directly testing this study's proposed theoretical mechanism would be to assess newcomers' mental models to determine if the mental models of more experienced newcomers are more accurate and developed than those of less experienced newcomers and to examine whether these mental models correspondingly predict newcomer performance adjustment.

An additional avenue for future research to consider is how the timing of past work experiences affects newcomer adjustment. This is particularly relevant for qualitative experiences that tend to occur at more finite points relative to quantitative experiences, which are considered more in terms of accumulation over time. As an example, receiving a leadership opportunity could represent a useful qualitative experience, but the timing of that experience could arguably affect its impact on subsequent outcomes such that the more recent the experience, the stronger its expected impact would be. Thus, future research should test the interaction between the acquisition of qualitative experiences and the timing of those experiences when predicting relevant outcomes.

Finally, given the initial performance decrements associated with newcomer uncertainty, future studies should consider factors beyond work experience that directly facilitate newcomer performance adjustment. In a team context, individual knowledge, skills, and abilities relating to teamwork (Stevens & Campion, 1999) may impact newcomer performance adjustment. Potentially relevant dispositional variables that have been considered in the broader socialization literature include the desire for control, proactive personality (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), and curiosity (Harrison et al., 2011). In addition, contextual factors such as team acceptance of newcomers or the presence of a formal mentor may likewise enhance newcomer performance adjustment.

Conclusion

This study theorized that work experience is a cognitive resource that newcomers use to reduce uncertainty and adjust their performance to new work contexts. In a sample of action team newcomers, we demonstrated that both quantitative and qualitative work experience indicators are meaningfully associated with newcomer performance

DOI: 10.1002/job

adjustment. Specifically, whereas the interaction between the length and amount of experience was positively associated with initial newcomer performance levels, past transition experience was positively associated with the rate of newcomer performance improvement. These results help clarify the apparent disconnection between theory and empirical evidence concerning the relationship between work experience and performance by highlighting the types of experience that appear to be most beneficial for newcomer adjustment. Given the frequency with which today's workers change jobs and teams, continuing to examine potential factors that might facilitate or impede newcomer performance adjustment as well as factors that influence the accumulation of relevant work experience is of clear practical importance for workers, teams, and organizations alike.

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