

# Facilitating Newcomers' Work Engagement: The Role of Organizational Socialization and Psychological Capital

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**Abstract:** Employee well-being has received considerable attention over the past decades. Little has been done to examine the linkage between organizational socialization and work engagement, one of the most important indicators of well-being at work. Drawing upon the conservation of resources (COR) theory, we propose and test relationships between organizational socialization, employee psychological capital, work engagement, and leader psychological capital. Using data from 268 newcomers nested within 36 teams, the results show that (1) organizational socialization is positively related to work engagement; (2) employee psychological capital mediates the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement; (3) leader psychological capital moderates the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement and the relationship between employee psychological capital and work engagement. We discuss the limitations of the study and the implications for future research on organizational socialization and employee well-being.

**Keywords:** Organizational socialization; employee psychological capital; leader psychological capital; work engagement

## 1 Introduction

The issue of employee well-being has increasingly attracted scholars and professionals' attention [1,2]. It is already acknowledged that employee well-being may increase their task performance, creativity, and health [3–5]. Given the importance of employee well-being, it is important to know the antecedents of different types of employee well-being. One important type of employee well-being is work engagement. This is especially true for newcomers. Newcomers who have recently joined an organization are the organization's valuable resource [6]. Unlike some other senior workers, newcomers are usually faced with uncertainty during the first year of organizational entry and need to be a good fit with the organization [7]. Maintaining their work engagement is critical as newcomers who experience low work engagement are at risk of poor well-being at work and may be more likely to make errors and even leave their jobs [8]. In addition, turnover can be seen as having adverse and costly outcomes for organizations [9]. Thus, newcomer work engagement is with a critical human resource function that has implications for the career success of individuals and the effectiveness of the organization.

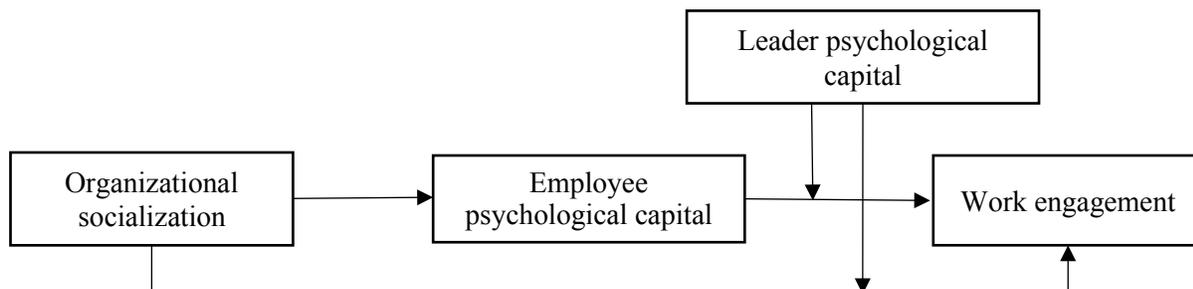
However, some limitations in the previous on newcomers' work engagement should be noted. First, it has been suggested that one of the primary potential drivers of job satisfaction among newcomers is adequate organizational socialization [10]. However, our understanding of how organizational socialization affects work engagement is somewhat limited. Recent meta-analytic reviews of the antecedents of work engagement do not even include organizational socialization [11], and few socialization studies have examined relationships with work engagement directly. Secondly, the primary



approaches to organizational socialization revolve around person-organization fit theory [12] and reducing uncertainty theory [13] and are not likely to be as effective for developing newcomers' work engagement. Thirdly, the mechanisms and processes by which organizational socialization influences newcomers' work engagement have not been adequately addressed. Last, it is unclear whether organizational socialization is equally important for newcomers under team leaders with different levels of psychological resources. As such, identifying the factors that account for individual differences in the organizational socialization to work engagement relationship is an important issue both for organizational research and for well-being literature. Thus, through a two-source data collection effort, the current research addresses these issues.

This research makes several contributions to the literature. First, this paper contributes to the work engagement literature by investigating the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement. Secondly, we extend the organizational socialization literature by using the conservation of resources (COR) theory to explain the links between organizational socialization, and work engagement. COR theory suggests that where there are job resources and personal resources provided from an organization and team leader, then newcomers will reciprocate and respond with positive work attitudes through increased resources that can lead to enhanced work engagement [14]. Third, we suggest the psychological capital provides an alternative pathway to newcomer work engagement. Last, we further argue that the linkage between organizational socialization, employee psychological capital and work engagement is moderated by leader psychological capital.

In sum, we expect organizational socialization to relate positively to newcomers' work engagement directly and via their psychological capital; we also examine the role of leader psychological capital as a moderator. Fig. 1. displays our theoretical model.



**Figure 1:** Theoretical framework linking organizational socialization, psychological capital and work engagement

## 2 Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1 Organizational Socialization and Work Engagement

According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory, people tend to invest resources in order to protect against resource loss, recover from losses, and gain resources [14,15]. The basic tenet of COR theory is that people are motivated to protect their current resources and acquire new resources. Resources are anything people value. Over the past decades, COR theory has gradually taken a place as one of the most commonly cited theories in the well-being literature [16]. However, these have typically focused on literature outside of organizational socialization. There is still a lot that is unknown about how newcomers conceptualize resources and the processes by which newcomers conserve and acquire resources. We argue that organizational socialization as a key job resource boosts newcomers' positive outcome such as high work engagement.

Organizational socialization refers to the "introductory events and activities by which individuals come to know and make sense out of their newfound work experiences" [17]. When individuals enter to a

new organization, they strive to develop the skills and abilities to meet the expectations and reduce feelings of uncertainty. Existing research highlighted the importance of organization socialization to help newcomers adapt to new organizational roles [18]. Work engagement is a motivational state of work-related well-being that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption [19]. People who are engaged in their work have high levels of energy, feeling full enthusiasm about the work, and fully immersed in the activity [20]. According to the COR theory, job resources (e.g., autonomy, social relationships, and feedback) and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism) initiate a motivational process that leads to work engagement [21].

In this study, we argue that organizational socialization plays a key role in newcomers' work engagement. According to the COR theory, newcomers often experience low work engagement as they don't have the personal, energetic, and cognitive resources to successfully transition into new roles and advance in their careers [22]. Organizational socialization provides a basis for specifying the content or knowledge that newcomers strive to learn [23]. According to Chao et al. [24], there are six socialization dimensions: performance proficiency, politics, language, people, organizational goals/values, and history. These are necessarily the most job resources that are best able to be allocated to maximize newcomers' fit with their environment. This required knowledge, skills, and abilities can help newcomers to cope with culture shock, frustrations, and obstacles, thus leading to increased coping, perceptions of organizational honesty, reduced uncertainty and anxiety [25]. Because work engagement requires for the simultaneous investment of cognitive, emotional and physical energies in the work roles [26], the acquisition and accumulation of better coping and adaptability should be a pivotal drive that initiates and maintains newcomers' work engagement. In contrast, if newcomers can't learn about the organization, work group, and job, they are susceptible to losing even more resources, leading to increased energy depletion and further diminishment of work engagement. Empirical studies about organizational socialization have shown that conflict with their coworkers is negatively related to newcomers' information seeking, and task-related outcomes [27]. In a similar vein, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1). Organizational socialization is positively related to newcomers' work engagement.*

## **2.2 Mediating Role of Employee Psychological Capital**

Psychological capital is a positive psychological state of development characterized by self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Self-efficacy refers to having enough confidence to deal with challenging tasks. Hope refers to persevering on goals that are based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals). Resilience refers to bouncing back from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, and failure. Optimism refers to making a positive attribution that good rather than bad things will happen to them [28]. Psychological capital is state-like rather than trait-like and has been well accepted in the field of occupational health psychology. Thus, researchers have conducted targeted intervention research efforts to develop psychological capital in the workplace [29].

The COR theory not only proposes a positive relationship between job resources and work engagement but also between personal resources and work engagement. Job resources and personal resources are the main drivers of work engagement, and they interact in a positive, self-reinforcing way with each other [30]. Following the COR theory, we propose that employee psychological capital can explain the association between organizational socialization and work engagement. This idea is consistent with Luthans et al. [31], who considered employee psychological capital as a key mediating variable, which explains how work-related attitudes are influenced by contextual variables such as job resources. We propose that not only organizational socialization, but also psychological capital will influence work engagement, since they are both key elements in motivational processes. Through the process of organizational socialization, newcomers learn the social tasks and skills involved in the job, the group's culture, the profession's technical language, the rules or principles, and the organization's traditions and rituals [23]. These job resources help newcomers manage their personal resources, such as psychological capital. For example, when newcomers have more job resources, they become more optimistic and confident in their work [32]. When newcomers communicate effectively with co-workers and get

feedback from their supervisors, their confidence and hopes are higher [33]. Newcomers who experience enough self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience are more likely to invest energies in their work activity and become more engaged in their work roles. Previous research showed that psychological capital explains significant variance in work engagement [34,35]. From the above we drew the following study hypothesis:

*Hypothesis2 (H2). Employees' psychological capital mediates the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement.*

### **2.3 The Moderating Role of Leader Psychological Capital**

Within the COR theory framework, leader psychological capital is viewed as a potential means for acquiring resources [36]. Consistent with other theories that have been advanced to explain leader positivity's role in the organizational socialization process [37], COR theory hypothesizes that leader psychological capital strengthened the positive impacts of job resources and personal resources associated with work engagement. Previous research has investigated the effect of leader positivity on follower psychological capital and job performance [38]. Viewing leader psychological capital as a contextual factor, we speculate that, leader psychological influence the impacts of organizational socialization and employee psychological capital on work engagement.

As Zohar et al. [39] explain, leaders' own behaviors and group interactions may shape the work teams' climate. Building on this logic, it is reasonable to expect that leader psychological capital will enhance the positive relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement and the relationship between employee psychological capital and work engagement. We contend that leader psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience) act as a contextual moderator will provides an ideal environment for newcomers' resources acquisition and investment during the process of organizational socialization. When team leaders have a high psychological capital, they could be the mentor and facilitator concerned with newcomer training and understanding. They create a supportive and innovative climate that is essential for newcomers to be fully socialized into an organization, newcomers will be motivated to expand and integrate more personal resources into their work roles, thus strengthening the impacts of organizational socialization and employee psychological capital on work engagement. While leaders who have a low psychological capital (i.e., pessimist) might place more stress on newcomers to conserve personal resources, they are unwilling to communicate with and give feedback to newcomers and have less tolerance towards to newcomers' failures. Under such leadership, newcomers may experiences lower morale and perceive that an organization's expectations are difficult to achieve, they may invest less personal resources into work roles because of leaders' negative evaluations, thus weakening the positive impacts of organizational socialization and employee psychological capital on work engagement. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis3 (H3). Leader's psychological capital positively moderates the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement.*

*Hypothesis4 (H4). Leader's psychological capital positively moderates the relationship between employees' psychological capital and work engagement.*

## **3 Method**

### **3.1 Participants and Procedures**

The proposed theoretical framework was tested using data collected from companies in China. Data were collected from team leaders and newcomers. To avoid common method variance problems, information was collected from two sources. Leaders filled out a survey that included a self-assessment of their psychological capital. Newcomers were asked to complete a self-assessment of their organizational socialization, psychological capital, and work engagement. We had a final usable sample with complete matched leader-member information for 268 employees and 36 team leaders. The average age of employees was 28 years, with a tenure of less than one year.

### 3.2 Measures

Because the original measurements were in English, all survey scales employed the back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin [40].

Organizational socialization was assessed with Chao et al.'s [24] scale. The newcomers were required to rate the items on a 5-point Likert scale rating from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A sample item is: "I have learned how to successfully perform my job in an efficient manner". The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.89.

Leader psychological capital and employee psychological capital were measured in the psychological capital questionnaire of Luthans et al. [41]. In this research, team leaders and newcomers reported their individual psychological capital. Scale items included the following: "I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job". The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the team leader is 0.90, which it was 0.90 for newcomer psychological capital.

Work engagement was measured with a three-dimensional scale developed by Schaufeli et al. [42]. The instrument consists of three subscales: vigor, dedication and absorption. Here is an example: "I am enthusiastic about my job". The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.93.

## 4 Results

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are shown in Tab. 1. In order to test the construct validity of the model variables (organizational socialization, employee psychological capital, work engagement, leader psychological capital), confirmatory factor analysis was employed to verify the discriminative validity of the four constructs in the study. Results revealed that a four-factor model was well-fitted ( $\chi^2 = 178.37$ ;  $df = 84$ ;  $GFI = 0.91$ ,  $TLI = 0.92$ ,  $CFI = 0.94$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.07$ ), providing evidence of the distinctiveness of the constructs of organizational socialization, employee psychological capital, work engagement, and leader psychological capital.

**Table 1:** Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. organizational socialization	268	3.49	0.36			
2. employee psychological capital	268	3.58	0.40	0.62**		
3. work engagement	268	3.39	0.62	0.47**	0.62**	
4. leader psychological capital	36	4.04	0.42	0.10	0.11	0.09

*Notes:* *M* = means, *SD* = standard deviations; *N* = 268 for variables 1-3; *N* = 36 for variable 4; two-tailed tests. \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 2:** Comparison of measurement models

Models	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>
Four-factor model	178.37	84	0.91	0.92	0.94	0.07
Three-factor model	284.94	87	0.85	0.84	0.87	0.10
Two-factor model	322.70	89	0.83	0.82	0.85	0.11
One-factor model	703.67	90	0.68	0.53	0.60	0.17

*Notes:* One-factor model, all items were loaded on one factor. Two-factor model, organizational socialization, employee psychological capital and work engagement were loaded on one factor. Three-factor model, employee psychological capital and work engagement were loaded on one factor. Four-factor model, organizational socialization, employee psychological capital, work engagement and leader psychological capital.

We first examined whether significant between-team variance existed in work engagement. We followed the procedure recommended by Raudenbush et al. [43] and conducted a null HLM analysis. The results revealed an 11% in newcomers' work engagement. This result provided a basis for examining individual-level and team-level predictors of work engagement.

Hypothesis 1 posits the organizational socialization is positively related to newcomers' work engagement. Tab. 3 presents the HLM results; the results revealed that organizational socialization significantly predicts newcomers' work engagement ( $\gamma = 0.78, p < 0.001$ ; Model 1).

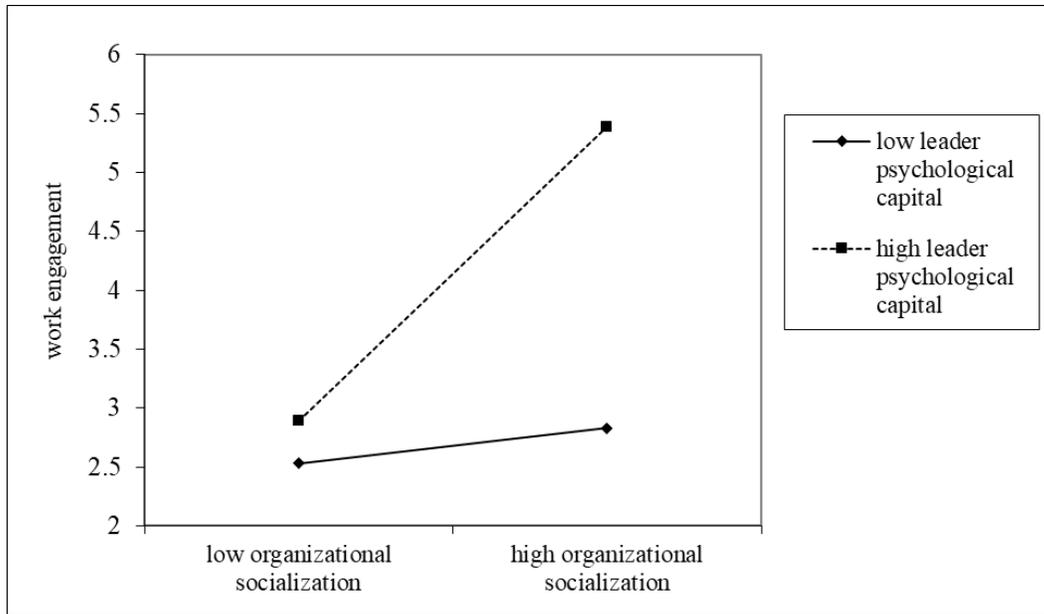
Hypothesis 2 posits that employee psychological capital mediates the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement. Tab. 3 presents the results. Organizational socialization is positively related to employee psychological capital ( $\gamma = 0.68, p < 0.001$ ; Model 5) and employee psychological capital is positively related to work engagement ( $\gamma = 0.82, p < 0.001$ ; Model 2). The effects of organizational socialization on work engagement becomes non-significant while controlling for employee psychological capital ( $\gamma = 0.21, p > 0.05$ ; Model 2). According to the procedure for mediation testing suggested by Baron et al. [44], H2 received support.

**Table 3:** Hierarchical linear modeling results

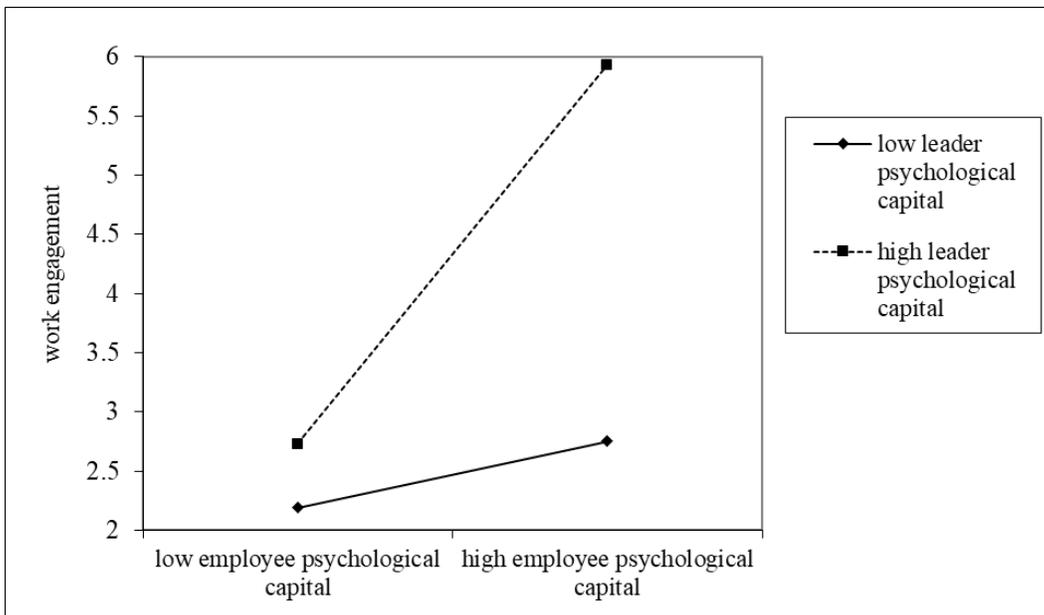
Models	Work engagement				Employee psychological capital
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	3.39***	3.39***	3.41***	3.40***	3.58***
Independent variable					
OS	0.78***	0.21	0.70***		0.68***
Mediator					
EPC		0.82***		0.94***	
Moderator					
LPC			0.73	0.93	
Cross-level interaction					
OS * LPC			0.55*		
EPC*LPC				0.66**	

**Notes:** OS represents organizational socialization, EPC represents employee psychological capital, LPC represents leader psychological capital, WE represents work engagement.  $N_{individual} = 268, N_{team} = 36$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001, *p < 0.05$ ; two-tailed tests.

Hypothesis 3 posits that leader psychological capital moderates the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement. As shown in Model 3, there was a significant interaction between organizational socialization and leader psychological capital ( $\gamma = 0.55, p < 0.05$ ). Hypothesis 4 posits that leader psychological capital moderates the relationship between employee psychological capital and work engagement. As shown in model 4, there was a significant interaction between employee psychological capital and leader psychological capital ( $\gamma = 0.66, p < 0.01$ ). Following by Aiken et al. [45], we further plotted the significant interacting effects in Figs. 2 and 3. As shown in Figs. 2 and 3, leader psychological capital moderated the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement and the relationship between employee psychological capital and work engagement.



**Figure 2:** Leader psychological capital as a moderator between organizational socialization and work engagement



**Figure 3:** Leader psychological capital as a moderator between employee psychological capital and work engagement

## 5 Discussion

In today's society, newcomers are vital for the future of organizations [46]. This groups' work engagement is different from senior workers, which leads to great pressure and challenges for many organizations. Organizational socialization might be a good prescription for such stresses. Based on the COR theory, we have explored the relationship between organizational socialization, employee psychological capital, work engagement, and leader psychological capital. We conclude the following. First, organizational socialization has a significant positive influence on newcomers' work engagement. Second, employee

psychological capital plays a mediating role between organizational socialization and work engagement. Third, leader psychological capital moderates the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement and the relationship between employee psychological capital and work engagement.

### ***5.1 Theoretical Implications***

A major implication proposed by the present study is that organizational socialization influences newcomers' work engagement. Although prior research has investigated the relationships of organizational socialization and newcomer work related outcomes [47], there have been relatively few investigations linking organizational socialization to newcomer well-being. Adding to the existing research on organizational socialization, our findings contribute to the organizational socialization and work engagement literature by demonstrating that organizational socialization acts as an important job resource enhances newcomers' work engagement. One of the critiques of organizational socialization raises a concern about the utility of socialization with respect to finance-related outcomes [48]. However, at this stage in the development of employee well-being, empirical analysis is needed to assess whether organizational socialization adds value to work engagement [49]. This is one of the few studies to examine the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement. This study supports that organizational socialization is a potentially valuable positive job resource that may lead to increased employee well-being. The findings also provide empirical support for Karatepe' [51] augment that a key component in developing work engagement can be found in training.

Another primary contribution of the present study delineates how organizational socialization is related to newcomers' work engagement. We propose that organizational socialization may enhance work engagement by employee psychological capital. In support of this argument, we found statistically significant indirect relationships through employee psychological capital between organizational socialization and work engagement. These results provide support for the COR theory, suggesting that organizational socialization enables newcomers to gain more personal resources [52]. More specifically, in our study, we found that organizational socialization not only influences work engagement but also tends to enhance newcomers' self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. As such, this study presents an initial empirical test the potential mediating process through which organizational socialization may influence newcomers' work engagement.

This study also fills the gap between organizational socialization, leadership, and newcomer outcomes. Previous studies on the association of organizational socialization and job performance have emphasized exploring the effects of leadership [53,54]. This study found moderating effects of leader psychological capital between organizational socialization and work engagement and between employee psychological capital and work engagement. Thus, our findings complement the work of Saks et al. [52] by revealing that leader psychological capital plays an important moderating role in the influence of organizational socialization and employee psychological capital on work engagement. Adding to the existing research on work engagement, this study extended the few studies that establish an empirical framework linking organizational socialization, leader positivity, and newcomer well-being. While the study by Luthans, Norman [55] found that flexibly-focused leadership behaviors were positively related to training, understanding, coworker support, and future prospects socialization domains, this study confirms that leader psychological capital as an innovator and facilitator influenced newcomers' desirable outcomes.

### ***5.2 Practical Implications***

The observation that the positive relationship between organizational socialization, psychological capital and work engagement has practical implications. First, our findings provide evidence that organizational socialization can be an important resource to positively impact newcomers' work engagement. Senior management should acknowledge the importance of facilitating job resources through socializing newcomers like company-specific language, the rules or principles, organization's myths, customs, and rituals. Second, this study showed that employee psychological capital plays an explanatory role in the relationship between organizational socialization and work engagement. Organizations that aim

to optimize newcomers' work engagement should focus on their psychological aspects and resources. Organizations should help newcomers to adopt a hopeful, positive, and optimistic attitudes toward challenging goals. Third, the results of the current study implied the importance of selecting and developing leaders' psychological capital in organizations. If organizations wish to enhance newcomers' work engagement, high psychological capital should be one of the required capabilities in selecting team leaders.

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Although HLM, multiple sources of designs were implemented, our research still has some limitations. First, data were collected from two sources to avoid common method bias (CMV) problems. Because of practical constraints, we were unable to eliminate CMV. However, with self-assessments, it is always possible that newcomers will overreport their psychological capital and work engagement under the influence of social desirability bias. Future researchers should try to conduct study including variables that measured by other ratings from customers, and co-workers. Second, we cannot warrant causality in our study since organizational socialization, employee psychological capital, and work engagement were not temporally separated. Future research should try to design a longitudinal research to replicate our results. The last limitation of this study is that the participants were from one area in China. As a result, there may have some concerns regarding the generalizability of the findings. Future research can generalize our findings to other areas, with further examination of different cultural contexts and other industry teams.

### 6 Conclusions

To conclude, this study advances the knowledge of the relationships among organizational socialization, employee psychological capital, work engagement, and leader psychological capital, in the realm of occupational health psychology. Our investigation yielded encouraging results suggesting that organizational socialization is integral to newcomers' well-being.

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