VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION – A STRUCTURED LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT: The literature on Organizational Socialization and Onboarding has assumed traditional work relationships located on-site in the company. Due to the Corona pandemic, remote work has gained tremendous importance. However, we do not yet know how the lack of physical presence affects organizational socialization. The research interest is to assess papers analyzing virtual organizational socialization systematically. The method used was a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). A protocol was made. In this, the search parameters were recorded. Literature relevant to the research question was identified and evaluated. This was examined and put into context. Key Findings: virtual organizational socialization represents a research gap. The literature is scattered; we only found a small number of relevant articles from different disciplines focusing on impediments of virtual organizational socialization. Research on onboarding practices that help overcome obstacles imposed by a higher degree of virtual work is needed.

Keywords: Onboarding; Organizational socialization; SLR; Remote work; Virtual

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Remote work was already rising over the last decade, but the covid-19 pandemic was a catalyst for working from home arrangements. In Germany, for instance, in 2021, half of

all companies offered remote work for at least part of their employees (Bellmann et al., 2021). Whereas working from home before the pandemic usually wasn't daily and by choice (Delanoeije et al., 2019), due to Covid-19, working from home every day became mandatory for many knowledge workers (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The literature on organizational socialization refers to working environments with employees who work on-site in the companies (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). However, during the pandemic, new employees started a job without being physically on-site. New contacts were made predominantly or even exclusively via digital communication media. This has implications for the nature of socialization in the company. This new type of collaboration significantly limits spontaneous communication and learning opportunities (Taskin & Bridoux, 2010). To compensate for this, structured new methods of onboarding are required. In this paper, we want to investigate what is known about virtual onboarding and the organizational socialization of new employees and develop a research agenda for this new field of organizational socialization research. We, therefore, chose to conduct a structured literature review (SLR). This methodology helps overcome the issue of a scattered field by synthesizing literature from authors with different backgrounds (Kraus et al., 2020).

2 RELATED WORK

2.1. *Remote work*

Research on remote work goes back to the 1980s (Olson, 1983). Remote work refers to situations where work is carried out outside the default place of work (International Labour Organization, 2020a). Telework is a subcategory of remote work that implies using information and telecommunications technology (ICT) (Taskin & Bridoux, 2010). Telecommuting refers to telework that is introduced as a substitute for commuter travel. Working from home generally means that work takes place in the employee's home. In the context of the covid-19 pandemic, it was used to describe temporary home-based telework (International Labour Organization, 2020b). Much of the literature on remote work investigates the benefits and disadvantages of teleworking for employees and companies (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Now, the question is not about whether a company should offer remote work but rather how this can be done to be effective. In our review, we used all the above terms to get a broad picture of onboarding and organizational socialization in remote work settings.

4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach 7th – 9th July 2022

178

2.2.   *Virtual teamwork*

Just like remote work has been on the rise even before the pandemic, virtual teamwork has increased over the last decades (Mak & Kozlowski, 2019). Virtual teams are defined as teams "of (a) two or more persons who (b) collaborate interactively to achieve common goals, while (c) at least one of the team members works at a different location, organization, or at a different time so that (d) communication and coordination is predominantly based on electronic communication media" (Hertel et al., 2005, p. 71). In its origins, virtual teams were contrasted to purely face-to-face teams. By now, a continuum between wholly virtual and face-to-face teams has evolved with information and communication technology's growing availability and functionality (Mak & Kozlowski, 2019). Purely face-to-face teams hardly exist anymore since most teams use communication technology to some extent, even when co-located. The Covid-19 pandemic increased team virtuality dramatically. Very abruptly and worldwide, many team members had to work from home using information and communication technology to collaborate (Klonek et al., 2022). Research on virtual teams shows that virtuality decreases communication frequency, knowledge sharing, satisfaction, and performance. However, these adverse effects tend to dominate short-term teams and disappear over time (Ortiz de Guinea et al., 2012). Virtuality is often experienced as a barrier to coworker multiplex relationships. Asynchronous work and not seeing coworkers' availability make it more challenging to connect quickly and regularly with colleagues (Schinoff et al., 2020).

2.3.   *Onboarding and Organizational Socialization*

Although some authors use the terms onboarding and organizational socialization equally, in this paper, we understand that onboarding refers to "all formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment" (Klein & Polin, 2012, p. 268). Organizational socialization, as the broader term, describes the process by which an organizational outsider transforms into an organizational insider by learning and adapting to new jobs, roles, and the culture of their workplace (Bauer et al., 2021; van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The focus of onboarding is on the organization and its practices to help newcomers to adjust, whereas organizational socialization is a process occurring inside employees continuing over their working life, which they can influence through proactive behavior (Klein et al., 2015; Klein & Heuser, 2008; Klein & Polin, 2012).

In a Meta-Analysis, Bauer et al. (2007) investigated antecedents and outcomes of newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization. They showed that role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance mediate the linkage between newcomer information

seeking and organizational socialization tactics on the one hand and socialization outcomes such as newcomer performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intentions to remain, and turnover on the other hand. Regarding the outcomes of organizational socialization, organizations should be interested in looking at how they can support this process. One starting point for many organizations is formal orientation programs. Attending those is linked to deeper socialization concerning goals, values, history, and the development of social relationships (Klein & Weaver, 2000). Onboarding practices such as a tour of company facilities, a personalized welcome by a senior leader, or the assignment of a "buddy" positively influenced organizational socialization (Klein et al., 2015). Socialization agents help newcomers adjust through various actions such as providing information, feedback, or resources. They can be supervisors, coworkers, team members, or mentors and play an essential role in organizational socialization (Klein & Heuser, 2008). Another aspect that has been studied in the organizational socialization literature is newcomer proactivity, i.e., information and feedback-seeking, or a proactive personality (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Klein & Heuser, 2008). Proactivity in virtual environments may differ from proactivity in face-to-face settings. It might be easier to address colleagues and supervisors when seeing their availability. Still, some persons prefer to send an e-mail or ask questions in an online portal rather than address others directly. Working from home might demand even more proactive behavior on the side of the newcomers.

Bauer et al. (2021) examined which resources impacted newcomer adjustment. They found that especially personal resources such as a proactive and optimistic personality or organizational knowledge positively influenced early adjustment. In this regard, it will be valuable to investigate how prior experience with virtual teamwork and working from home, individual competencies such as virtual communication skills, and social and collaboration abilities (Cascio, 2000) improve newcomer adjustment to virtual or hybrid working arrangements.

2.4. The effect of the pandemic on organizational socialization

Many newcomers had to work from home during quarantine measures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They had to work with colleagues working remotely, or if they were onsite, physical distancing obligations limited chances to observe their coworkers and interact with them (Saks & Gruman, 2021). Using computer-based programs for socializing with newcomers so far doesn't seem to be an adequate substitution for social-based orientation sessions. These programs worked well for information-based content but negatively affected socialization and its distal outcomes, such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Rollag et al., 2005).

4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach 7th – 9th July 2022

180

As we have shown, the literature provides various insights on onboarding and organizational socialization as well as on virtual teams and remote work. The first question we want to consider in this paper, therefore, is the following:

RQ1: What is the extent and coverage of virtual onboarding and organizational socialization in work-from-home arrangements?

Having identified studies of virtual onboarding and socialization methods, the following two research questions are:

RQ2: Which methods are used in this research?

RQ3: What are the main research themes studied?

To set an agenda for research in this area, we also want to assess what recommendations for future research the authors give:

Publication medium	Journal articles indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) databases We also included articles in the conference proceedings.
Period	Published in any year (including in press), conference proceedings dating from 2018 onwards.
Languages	Writings in English
Research design	Empirical, conceptual, review
Content	Inclusion: • paper is concerned with onboarding in a virtual context • paper provides generalizable findings Exclusion: • paper is not related to at least one of the research questions • paper is not peer-reviewed (e.g. master's thesis)
Source	Scopus, web of science
Method	Boolean search in the title of the publication, abstract, and keywords

RQ4: What future research topics do the authors suggest?

Table 1. SLR protocol

3. METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review was conducted as indicated in the following protocol to achieve our objectives.

The search was carried out in the databases Scopus and Web of Science since, in the fields of social sciences, those are considered to be the most extensive sources of academic articles (Chadegani et al., 2013). We searched for the keywords "organizational socialization" OR "onboarding" OR"new hire" OR "new employee" combined with the Boolean operator AND with the keywords virtual OR telework* OR "remote work" OR telecommut* OR "work* from home" OR "information and communication technolog*" OR videoconferenc*. As shown in the paragraph on remote work, the terms "telework", "remote work", "telecommuting", and "work from home" are all used to describe the phenomenon of non-co-located working arrangements. All of these keywords were used to include all papers dealing with this subject. We also included the terms "virtual", "information and communication technology", and "videoconference" to make sure that articles that do not address remote work directly but deal with virtual collaboration or virtual teams are included. We searched for articles published in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters. We also included conference proceedings dating from 2018 onwards since articles referring to the effects of the pandemic might first appear in conference proceedings but have scarcely been found in journals so far. All steps taken in the research process were documented (Tranfield et al., 2003). Five articles could not be retrieved as the authors' affiliated universities do not subscribe to these journals. The remaining full-length articles were thoroughly studied to decide about including them in the review, applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria indicated in the protocol.
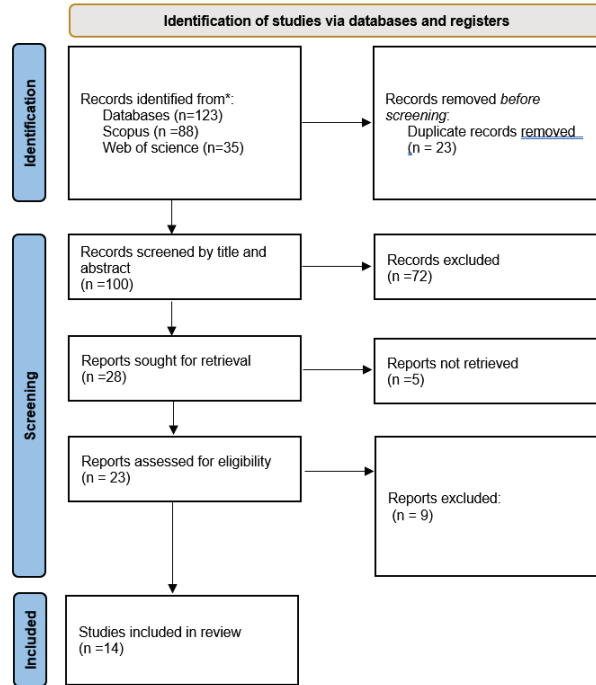
4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach 7th – 9th July 2022

182

Figure 1. Flow diagram SLR

4 FINDINGS

In this section, the results are presented. A total of 123 articles initially could be found in the interrogated databases. After duplicate removal, the titles and abstracts of 100 articles were screened. This led to 23 full texts which were read. Nine of the retrieved full texts didn't meet the eligibility criteria. Finally, 14 articles were analysed in this study.

4.1. *Bibliometric aspects of the selected articles*

As Figure 2 shows, virtual onboarding and organizational socialization were hardly discussed before the Covid-19 pandemic. The sharp increase in 2021 suggests that research on these topics is growing.
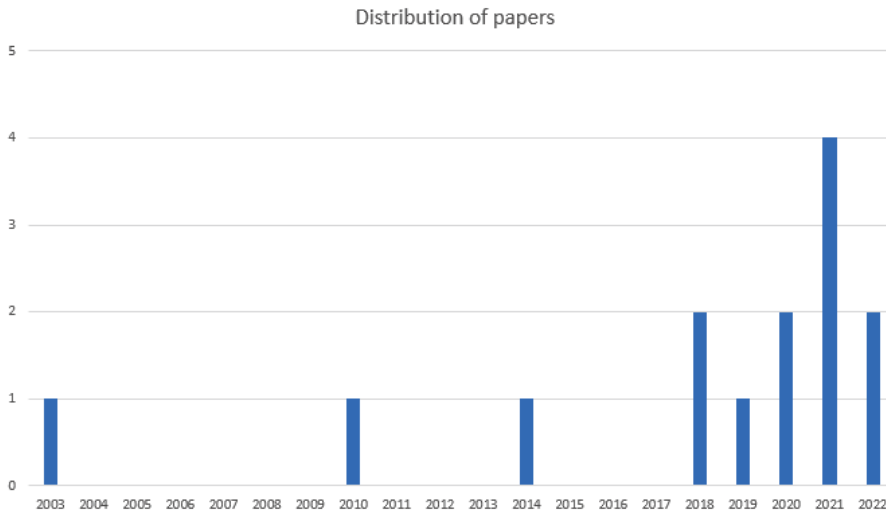
Figure 2. Distribution of papers across time

Of the 14 papers we found, four are case studies, four are qualitative studies, four are quantitative studies, and two are conceptual papers (see figure 3). This also shows that this research area is in its infancy, and researchers instead try to explore the field than test theory.
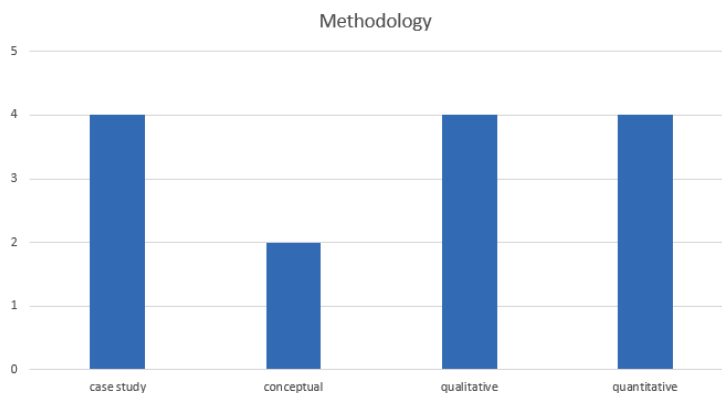

Figure 3. Methodology of the selected articles

4.2. Content of the selected articles

Both conceptual papers we found in the literature were published before the pandemic. Taskin and Bridoux (2010) theorize how different teleworking arrangements (high vs.

4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach 7th – 9th July 2022

184

low frequency, working from home vs. neighborhood work centers, social legitimacy, and constraint vs. opportunity) affect organizational socialization and thus affect knowledge transfer. Gruman and Saks (2018) propose that the degree of virtuality moderates the effect of e-socialization, by which they understand digital socialization activities such as implementing virtual socialization agents or virtual socialization practices – on human and social capital, which then determines newcomer adjustment and, in turn, leads to distal socialization outcomes. Both papers argue that organizations should include face-to-face interactions to foster organizational socialization and its distal outcomes.

Three of the qualitative studies aim to determine the effects of working from home due to the pandemic on onboarding and relation building. Carlos and Muralles (2021) report that the lack of unspoken physical clues hinders socialization and that a deep investment in relationship-building is needed. Schreier et al. (2022) analyzed that frequent communication is essential to maintaining high levels of trust. They also found that supervisors were reluctant to recruit new employees because they thought working from home would hinder establishing well-functioning relationships. This is in line with Rodghero et al. (2021), who note that new hires struggle with communication and building relationships within their teams. This is the only paper that recommends remote onboarding, such as assigning an onboarding buddy, encouraging teams to turn on their cameras, or scheduling 1:1 meetings (Rodeghero et al., 2021). Another qualitative study looked specifically at social media use during organizational socialization, which enabled and constrained employees' socialization process (Lee et al., 2019).

Three case studies provide specific examples of organizations' efforts to implement measurements to foster organizational socialization in virtual environments. This can be through the construction of a digital organizational culture handbook (Asatiani et al., 2021), the installation of yearly summits, virtual "watercooler" chats (informal meetings via video chat), daily team calls, and regional co-working days (Choudhury et al., 2020), or, actionable items such as remote meet and greets, self-learning modules or, one to one check-ins (Goodermote, 2020). A case study with staff scientists during the covid-19 pandemic shows that managerial skills, including team development in digital environments and targeted orientation resources, are needed (Murphy et al., 2021).

Of the quantitative studies, two dealt with specific virtual teams. One looked at mentoring in virtual Open Source teams, which has a positive impact (Fagerholm et al., 2014). The other study found an intervention called "Wikipedia teahouse" – a virtual meeting of senior and new editors - effective at increasing new editor retention (Morgan & Halfaker, 2018). The oldest paper dealing with remote onboarding is a study by Ahuja and Galvin

4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach 7th – 9th July 2022

185

(2003) that analyzed e-mails to investigate how newcomers in virtual groups differed in their communication. They showed that newcomers in virtual groups take a more active approach to acquire information, but they found e-mails inappropriate for inquiring about tacit and sensitive norms. Although information and communication technology nowadays offers much richer communication, the aspect that newcomers prefer to watch or listen to acquire sensitive information silently is still relevant.

A recent study from 2021 interrogated HR managers of 136 Portuguese companies about changes in their onboarding and other work and communication processes. Almost one-third of the respondents stated that induction and onboarding did undergo large significant changes due to pandemic-induced telework (Gonçalves et al., 2021).

These findings give some hints on practices that can be introduced to foster socialization in virtual environments, although research is needed to provide organizations with more generalizable results.

4.3. *Propositions for future research in the selected papers*

All authors conclude that more research is needed. It should be analyzed how knowledge-building and relationship-building work with teleworkers (Taskin & Bridoux, 2010). Besides testing the propositions outlined in their paper, Gruman, and Saks (2018) state that it should be determined which e-socialization methods are most suitable to reach the desired outcomes. It is also suggested to explore the impacts of individual and firm-specific factors such as IT literacy (Schreier et al., 2022). Rodeghero et al. (2021) propose to explore methodologies to improve virtual onboarding. They also suggest including the managers' views in the research.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION AND IDENTIFIED LIMITATIONS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Considerably more work needs to be done to identify onboarding practices that work well in virtual work arrangements. It will be especially valuable to explore in qualitative research and case studies what practices new hires, and their managers describe as helpful in a virtual or hybrid socialization process. This is a gap in the literature since the practices described in the literature were somewhat fragmented and limited to a distinct group of employees, i.e., software engineers and library personnel.

The SLR presented in this paper is limited by the small number of articles that meet the inclusion criteria, but it clearly shows the topic's significance.

6. VALUE OF THE PAPER

Our study shows that although a considerable body of literature exists in the fields of organizational socialization, virtual teams, and remote work, there is a research gap in bringing those subjects together to figure out how businesses can design their onboarding processes in a way that is suitable for a virtual or hybrid context.

Conflict of interests

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Didion, Eva: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization. *Ambrosius, Ute, Perello-Marin, Maria Rosario, and Català Pérez, Daniel:* Conceptualization; Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision.

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4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach 7th – 9th July 2022

190

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4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach 7th – 9th July 2022

191