Exploring the dimensions of organizational assimilation: Creating and validating a measure

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Exploring the Dimensions of Organizational Assimilation: Creating and Validating a Measure

Karen Kroman Myers and John G. Oetzel

The purpose of this study was to create and validate a measure of organizational assimilation index. Organizational assimilation describes the interactive mutual acceptance of newcomers into organizational settings. Members from the advertising, banking, hospitality, university, nonprofit, and publishing industries participated in two phases of research. In the first phase, 13 interviewees suggested six dimensions of organizational assimilation: familiarity with others, organizational acculturation, recognition, involvement, job competency, and adaptation/role negotiation. The second phase involved analysis of a survey of 342 participants that appeared to validate the six dimensions. The OAI's construct validity was tested and supported through the use of three other scales. Job satisfaction and organizational identification related positively to assimilation, while propensity to leave related negatively.

KEY CONCEPTS organizational assimilation, organizational assimilation index, organizational socialization, newcomer integration

Fisher (1986) highlighted about the lack of research devoted to the processes involved in organizational entry. In recent years, however, our understanding of the processes related to organization entry has benefited from several lines of research, including processes organizations use to orient and mold recruits into productive organizational members (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardener, 1994;

Schein, 1968; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), socialization turning points (Bullis & Bach, 1989), methods of organizational orientation and training (Holton, 1996; Jones, 1986), efforts exerted by newcomers themselves through adaptation (Ashford & Taylor, 1990), behavior self-management (Saks & Ashforth, 1996), coping strategies (Teboul, 1997; Waung, 1995), early involvement (Bauer & Green, 1994), information seeking (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992), and role negotiation (Kramer & Miller, 1999; Miller, Jablin, Casey, Lamphear-Van Horn, & Ethington, 1996).

Organizational assimilation refers to "the processes by which individuals become integrated into the culture of an organization" (Jablin, 2001, p. 755). Although some scholars note that "assimilation" emphasizes individuals' giving up their individualities to fit in with their new collectives (see Bullis, 1999; Clair, 1999; Turner, 1999), we feel it is a useful aspect of newcomer entry because becoming an effective member of an organization involves not just organizational efforts to socialize new members nor, in turn, efforts of recruits to become accepted by organizational incumbents. Successful assimilation involves both organizations and newcomers.

Despite the prevalence of research on these processes, there is no measure of organizational assimilation. The stage model of organizational assimilation (Jablin, 1987, 2001) so prevalent in scholarly literature, and most notably in organizational communication textbooks, suggests that employees are assimilated in a kind of linear progression, wherein it is implicitly assumed that they continue to feel increasingly a part of the organization until they exit. To the contrary, it makes sense to presume that the extent to which one feels him or herself to be a valuable part of an organization is likely to vary over time in accordance with unmet expectations, environmental shifts, changes in responsibility, promotions, burnout, and a wide variety of experiences that constitute organizational life.

The absence of an instrument to measure the rise and fall of assimilation is perhaps one reason these linear assumptions endure. Moreover, it appears obvious that some newcomers and their organizations vary not only with the efficiency of their assimilation processes generally, but also with regard to specific dimensions of the phenomenon. For example, individuals may feel assimilated in some aspects of the organization because they are involved in their work, but may have failed to develop productive working relationships in the environment. What is needed then is an instrument to assess members' level of organizational assimilation.

Such a measure could provide information to management indicating not only whether assimilation deficiencies exist but also what specific dimensions of assimilation are most lacking. Further, the measure could enable scholars to focus on the various dimensions of assimilation, as well as the impact of antecedent phenomena. The study reported here proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, we explored dimensions of organizational assimilation to define the processes involved in transitioning from newcomer to organizational member. Stage one concluded with the development of an instrument that permits operationalization of the dimensions of organizational assimilation. The second stage consisted of efforts to validate the measure, which we call the Organizational Assimilation Index (OAI).

Dimensions of Organizational Assimilation

As previously mentioned, several studies have examined processes related to assimilation. These studies provide insight into newcomer integration. We review three exemplars that provide a framework for the creation of a measure of organizational

assimilation. We then discuss related concepts with validated measures, which we used to establish the construct validity of the new measure.

Stage models depict at least three stages of organizational assimilation (Jablin, 2001). Anticipatory socialization refers to all socialization efforts prior to organizational entry. The encounter stage begins as the newcomer enters the organization and begins to become socialized through training and orientation. Finally, the metamorphosis stage is viewed as long-term settling in, during which newcomers make the transition to become full members of the organization. However, the question of when a newcomer passes through the stages of assimilation is problematic. Jablin noted that many organizations arbitrarily designate the newcomer-member transition to end after the member has been with the organization between three and six months. This designation appears to ignore the fact that some newcomers assimilate more quickly than others and that employees might assimilate in one aspect of organizational life quicker than in other aspects (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Therefore, we looked for studies that focused on the content of assimilation.

In a multi-phase study, Chao et al. (1994) attempted to identify "what is learned during socialization" (p. 730). They found six content areas of newcomer socialization (organizational history, language, politics, people, goals and values, and performance proficiency) and examined the relationship of those factors to career outcomes. Next, they compared levels of these six dimensions for individuals who had not switched jobs, others who had not switched jobs within the same organization, and individuals who had switched organizations. The results revealed that workers who had not switched jobs and remained in their original organization were highest on five of the dimensions. The next highest group consisted of individuals who had only switched jobs, not organizations.

Bullis and Bach (1989) interviewed 28 new graduate students and asked them to describe turning points, specific messages that had long-term impact on their relationship with their new academic departments. The participants described 15 different turning point events, such as moving in, getting away, receiving formal recognition, and doubting one's self. At two weeks and eight months following their entry, the students identified turning points they had experienced and completed Cheney's (1983) Organizational Identification Questionnaire. The authors reported that instances of socializing positively affected identification, whereas instances of disappointment had a negative impact. Because many of the turning points involved communication indicating the newcomer's acceptance within the organization, Bullis and Bach's (1989) study takes us one step closer to understanding processes associated with newcomer assimilation.

Although these exemplars illustrate some of the content and processes of organizational assimilation, the researchers have not explicitly described all of the dimensions of organizational assimilation. From these studies, it appears that getting to know others in the organization and receiving recognition are relevant factors, but other dimensions and tactics may also contribute to an individual's assimilation. In the first stage of this study, we explored and identified an exhaustive list of dimensions of assimilation. This stage helped to establish content validity of the instrument. We addressed the following research question:

RQ: What are the dimensions of organizational assimilation?

In the second stage of this study, we sought to validate an instrument (the Organizational Assimilation Instrument [OAI]) for measuring organizational assimilation. The answer to the first research question provided specific items for use in operationalizing organizational assimilation. We included three scales to test for construct validity of the OAI: job satisfaction, organizational identification, and propensity to leave. *Job satisfaction* is the level of affinity one feels for a job and company (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951). To capture this attribute, Brayfield and Rothe created the Job Satisfaction Index. *Organizational identification* refers to a member's perception that the organization's values and interests are of primary concern with evaluating decision alternatives (Tompkins & Cheney, 1983). Cheney (1983) speculated that individuals with organizational identification make decisions that affect the organization on the basis of that identification and created the organizational identification questionnaire (OIQ) to assess the level of employee identification with an organization. *Propensity to leave* refers to the likelihood that an individual will sever ties with an organization (Lyons, 1971). Lyons developed an index that has questions related to one's desire to remain in an organization's employ, likelihood of his or her rejoining the organization if he or she were forced to spend time away from the organization (for example due to illness), and how long the person wishes to remain in the organization.

We predicted that job satisfaction and organizational identification would correlate positively with organizational assimilation and that propensity to leave would correlate negatively with organizational assimilation. Further, we expected the dimensions of organizational assimilation to be better predictors of the job satisfaction, organizational identification, and propensity to leave than tenure. Since tenure is often used as an indicator of assimilation, it was necessary to show that the OAI provides information over and above tenure. These expectations led to four hypotheses:

H1: The dimensions of organizational assimilation correlate positively with job satisfaction.
H2: The dimensions of organizational assimilation correlate positively with organizational identification.
H3: The dimensions of organizational assimilation correlate negatively with propensity to leave.
H4: The dimensions of organizational assimilation account for more variance in job satisfaction, organizational integration, and propensity to leave than tenure.

DETERMINING FACE AND CONTENT VALIDITY

The study unfolded in two phases. The purpose of Phase One was to answer the research question defining the dimensions of organizational assimilation. This was accomplished by asking organizational members to describe their assimilation experiences. Phase Two involved constructing and validating a questionnaire that could be used to measure organizational assimilation. The next section describes the first phase and results.

Participants

To ensure that the measure would be appropriate for assessing assimilation, regardless of industry or organizational level, members of several different types of organizations at various levels within organizations took part in the study. Seven women

and six men who represented a wide range of positions within their organizations, tenures, ages, and industries participated in interviews. The participants' positions ranged from entry-level hourly employees to higher-level executives, with tenure from half a month to 109.5 months (M=28.57, SD=34.72). The participants' ages varied from 18 to 61 years (M=37.08, SD=11.54). They included individuals from the hospitality, university, high-technology, and advertising industries. The organizations were located in two cities in the southwestern United States.

Data Collection

Interview protocol. We designed the questions in such a way as to help the interviewees think about how their status as organizational members had changed since their first day in the organization and what processes led to those changes (See Appendix A for the interview protocol.). The first two questions required participants to indicate whether they felt more a part of the organization now (at the time of the interview) than they did on their first day, and if so, to describe the changes. The respondents were then to think of a situation that may have caused them to feel that they were becoming accepted as members of the organization and communication they received during the situation (Questions 3-6). The next two questions (7-8) entailed describing people who were or were not assimilated and the communicative behavior that negatively relates to assimilation. For question #9, participants described communication from co-workers relating to assimilation. Questions #10 and #11 concerned knowledge about "fitting in." The final question related to strategies individuals reportedly used to assimilate into the organization. These questions helped to identify specific types of communicative behavior relating to the participants' assimilation into the organization for different periods during their tenure, as well as that were indicative of the success level.

Interview procedures. The participants took part individually at their respective organizations, except for one person who was interviewed over the telephone. Participation was voluntary, and the participants understood that they could refuse to answer any questions and terminate the interview at any time. Interviewees were informed that the purpose of the research was to explore how a new employee becomes a part of the organization. Participants had assurance that the interviews would not be shared with management, and, if quoted in the research results, pseudonyms would replace their actual names. We asked participants to think about how they attempted to assume membership in their organizations. Interviewees were to reflect on their experiences and tell stories that they believed illustrated their characterizations. Questions were often followed by additional questions to probe for detailed explanations. The interviewer took detailed field notes. All participants gave the interviewer permission to tape-record the sessions. Interviews continued until the point of theoretical saturation was reached (Lindlof, 1995), which indicated diminishing original insights. The interviews ranged in length from 20 to 50 minutes, and each was later transcribed for use in analysis of participants' responses.

Data Analysis

The analysis for Phase One served to answer the research question concerning the dimensions of organizational assimilation. Using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) method of constant comparison, and Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestions for coding qualitative data, we identified and categorized all processes that the participants described

or referred to in the interviews that pertained to their attempts to learn about and fit into the organization. We completed this process in several iterations. First, we read the transcriptions to obtain an overall flavor of the interviewees' responses. Next to each line or paragraph, we generated labels to reflect our initial coding. From these labels, we developed a general category scheme of the participant responses.

Second, we began to identify themes by sorting the initial scheme into concrete categories and subcategories. The categorization reflected similarity of responses (in regard to the assimilation process) and frequency of responses. At least half the participants had to identify an initial theme for it to be included. Next, we reread the transcripts and field notes and looked for frequently occurring expressions and unexpected counterintuitive material that provided atypical evidence of participant experiences. We categorized the responses according to several initial themes, such as getting to know coworkers' names, learning the organizations' standards, developing job skills, being appreciated by supervisors and coworkers, and understanding how they fit into their organizations.

Third, we reviewed these themes to determine how they fit into existing assimilation theory or how they might contribute to an understanding of the assimilation process. During this step, we used two criteria (Patton, 1990): Does the information confirm current organizational assimilation theory, and does it offer new insights into and interpretations of member assimilation? Continuing with this third step, we also thought about members' underlying purposes of the processes described and how those actions may have fulfilled an objective of assuming a role or becoming a part of the organization. As a result, we combined and renamed the initial themes into six dimensions of assimilation. Finally, we reread the responses and categorized them into one of the six themes to ensure goodness of fit. After this step, we determined that the resulting six dimensions adequately reflected the responses provided by participants.

Results

Familiarity with others included getting to know coworkers, making friends with coworkers, feeling comfortable with coworkers, feeling and expressing a general friendliness, learning how to interact with coworkers, speaking up at meetings, demonstrating a willingness to interact with coworkers, deriving emotional support from organizational members, and generally feeling a sense of community. Rodney, head waiter at a hotel restaurant, thought that his bond with the organization was stronger because of relationships he had formed with coworkers. "I've gotten to know the people who have been around for a while. If we happen to go out and grab a cocktail after work or something, you build more of a social relationship. It is kind of a commitment to the [organization] just because the people become more enduring to you."

Acculturation, or learning and accepting the culture, was the second dimension of organizational assimilation. Interviewees described aspects of learning the norms of the organization and "how things get done" within their respective organizations. Kelly, who works in an organizational development position with a technology company, talked about steps her organization takes to introduce newcomers into the organization. She said that her organization's culture is not conducive to an overly friendly assimilation process. Others orient newcomers by teaching them "what they need to watch out for, like what they need to not step into, what are the kinds of things that will get them in trouble." She also noted that newcomers who have not assimilated are more likely to break organizational norms, such as not keeping coworkers informed

about projects they are working on. Violating norms would likely cause established members to be less accepting of the newcomer resulting in less acceptance and added stress. Therefore, acculturating was critical to organizational assimilation.

We labeled the third dimension *recognition*. According to the participants, being recognized as valuable, either by superiors or coworkers, and feeling that their work was important to the organization was a significant part of feeling accepted into the organization. Jessica, a hotel manager, identified a defining moment in her assimilation when she was able to use her ability to speak Spanish to rescue her general manager. She proudly remembered, "He came to me and said, 'I need your help. I have all these ladies. They don't speak English.' I translated the meeting for him. I was excited to be able to do this for my general manager."

Some participants suggested that they can tell when someone has not assimilated into the organization because of the employee's level of *involvement* with the organization. When members are involved with the organization, they seek ways to contribute to the organization, often by volunteering to perform extra work or take on added responsibility for the sake of the organization and its members. Margaret, a university instructor, compared two students, one who was thriving in her new environment and one who was not. The thriving student had become involved in many aspects of university life. She had made friends with many others within the department and was deriving social support from her fellow students. The other student was not really sure of her long-term goals and was not involved in any way beyond attending classes. According to Margaret, "She doesn't feel any connection with the people that are in their class." Margaret concluded by speculating that the non-involved student still derives her emotional support from long-time friends in a neighboring community.

Job competency was reportedly another important aspect of becoming accepted into organizations. Assimilated employees apparently know how to do their jobs, and they do them well. As a newcomer, Sarah, an advertising sales representative, said making her first sale was a defining moment. "Oh yeah, the first sale helped a lot!" she laughed. She went on to explain how making the first sale may have helped her feel as though she was capable of performing.

The sixth dimension emerging from the interviews was *adaptation and role negotiation*. Adapting to their new organization and/or negotiating roles within it signified that the newcomer was settling into the organization. Role negotiation involves newcomers' compromising between their expectations and expectations of the company. Adaptation suggests more compromise on the part of the newcomer. When newcomers adapt, they adjust to the organization's standards and environment. As an experienced hotel manager beginning work for a new company, Curtis described the situation that caused him to negotiate his role. "Just before I joined the company, they had undergone a massive refinancing. There was a strong drive to control costs throughout the company. But, I decided I would rather spend a little more and be told I was spending too much than save the company a nickel and have the place get run down." While the company saw his position as "cost cutter," he chose instead to be "guardian of the property." His promotion later in the year may have been an indication of his successful role negotiation.

The interviewees described processes they have used or witnessed to become assimilated into organizations. Analyzing the qualitative data provided six dominant themes these individuals associated with accepting and becoming accepted into organizations. The six themes — *familiarity with others, acculturation, recognition, involvement,*

job competency, adaptation and role negotiation — are dimensions or processes associated with becoming full members in organizations. The six dimensions provided a foundation for development of a measure of organizational assimilation. The next section describes the process of creating and validating the Organizational Assimilation Index.

CONSTRUCTING A MEASURE OF ORGANIZATIONAL ASSIMILATION AND ESTABLISHING ITS CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

In Phase Two, we developed 61 items to represent the six dimensions of organizational assimilation. We then asked a sample of employees at several organizations to use them to assess their assimilation experiences.

Participants

To create a generalizable measure of assimilation for members of varied industries, we involved 342 employees in distinctly different industries: lodging, banking, advertising, publishing, hospitality, and a nonprofit service agency. There were four hotels from one company located in Arizona, California, and Washington. The bank, advertising agency, and nonprofit agency were located in a large city in the southwestern United States. The bank included two participating branches.

Since assimilation is a continual process, we encouraged all employees, not just newcomers, from the organizations to take part in the survey. The sample included 114 men and 219 women from at least six ethnic backgrounds: 153 Caucasian, 148 Hispanic, 12 Asian/Pacific Islander, 7 Native American, 4 African American, 3 other. Fifteen did not indicate their ethnicity. Ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 77 (M=32.69, SD=12.56). In respect to education, 32 had some high school, 68 were high school graduates, 159 had some college, 56 were college graduates, 10 were post-graduate, 2 classified their education as "other," and 15 declined to state their level of education. As to level within the organizations, 18 were executives, 75 were supervisors/managers, 224 were hourly employees, and 25 did not disclose. Tenure ranged from two weeks to 40 years (M=2.68 years, SD=3.81). Seventy-four percent of the participants completed the questionnaire in English, and the other 26% did so in Spanish.

Instrument

The 61-item questionnaire had nine to eleven items for each of the six dimensions noted above. Items reflected the specific content of the six themes (see Appendix B). The instrument had three additional scales: Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) Job Satisfaction Scale; Lyons's Propensity to Leave Scale (1971); and six randomly selected items from Cheney's (1983) Organizational Identification Questionnaire. Brayfield and Rothe generated evidence of content validity by having respondents rate the items along the continuum of satisfied to dissatisfied. The reliability of the index was demonstrated by an even-odd product moment coefficient of .77. The Lyons (1971) scale correlated negatively with measures of work satisfaction and correlated positively with voluntary turnover and job tension. Koberg and Hood (1991) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .83 with Lyons's Propensity to Leave Scale. Cheney provided evidence of the validity of his instrument by interviewing 178 corporate workers for purposes of exploring the process of organizational identification to create the instrument. Further, he found that 52% of the respondents who were looking for jobs elsewhere were low in organizational identification.[1] The data yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .94. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the three scales was .61, .85, and .68, respectively.[2]

We interspersed items from the scales randomly throughout the instrument. Each was accompanied by a five-point scale in a Likert format (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree) for all items. Finally, the questionnaire contained six demographic items related to the respondent's level within the organization: tenure, age, sex, education, and ethnicity.

Procedures

We pretested the questionnaire with two graduate students and two individuals with lower levels of education from the participating organizations. One was a high school graduate, and the other had only completed elementary school. We revised the questionnaire on the basis of their recommendations. Finally, because many of the participants were monolingual, Spanish-speaking, we had the questionnaire and consent form translated into Spanish by a professional translating service. A bilingual manager at one of the participating hotels validated the Spanish translation by back-translating it into English. Because many of the participants were apt to have minimal education and hold non-managerial-type positions, he recommended some changes in wording. For example, such words as "colleague" and "socialize" we replaced with "coworker" and "get together away from work."

The questionnaire was available in English or Spanish to the participants. They secured copies during company meetings. The participants understood that the purpose of the research was to examine the processes involved in people becoming a part of organizations. The employees knew that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that they had assurance that management would not see the responses from any individual participants (only summarized results for their organization). When they finished, they placed their questionnaires in large collection envelopes as a means of further ensuring their anonymity. Most participants completed the questionnaire in about 15 minutes. Six months later, the participants again completed the questionnaire under similar conditions. By asking that participants fill in blanks asking for their middle names and mothers' maiden names, we were able to ensure some level of anonymity, but still to identify 91 participants at follow-up. Those 91 surveys enabled us to estimate the test-retest reliability of the OAI.

Results

We subjected the data from Phase Two to confirmatory factor analysis to establish content validity of the *a priori* dimensions. Second, we used correlation analysis to test the four hypotheses concerning the relationships of the factors to job satisfaction, propensity to leave, organizational identification, and tenure. Support for these hypotheses provided evidence of validity for the instrument in the sense that the dimensions identified showed essentially the same relationship to the dependent variables of interest. Construct validity exists, according to Bailey (1982) when different indices (in this case dimensions) show the same relationship to other measures as one would expect on the basis of the theory in which they appear.

Factor Analysis. The AMOS version 3.61 structural equation modeling package (Arbuckle, 1997) with maximum likelihood estimation of the covariances of the items enabled us to test the empirical validity of the hypothesized model. We utilized several criteria to determine the inclusion of the items and model fit. First, items had to have a primary factor loading of .40. Second, items had to be unidimensional as demonstrated by the tests of internal consistency and parallelism (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Internal

consistency requires that the items comprising a scale have a similar statistical relationship to the primary factor. Parallelism requires that the items of a scale have a similar statistical relationship to the other factors. Since AMOS does not directly test for internal consistency or parallelism, we removed items from the model that the modification option of AMOS suggested had a path to another factor. Essentially, this procedure assured that an item only loaded on one factor. For the final model, internal consistency and parallelism were tested using the product rules of internal consistency and parallelism (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Third, the items had to have homogeneous content. Fourth, the items needed to show an acceptable level of reliability (Cronbach's alpha).

After removing items from the model in line with the first two criteria, the empirically-derived model corresponded to the six dimensions on the conceptual model, χ^2 (155, $N = 342$) = 365.92, $p < .001$, IFI = .92, CFI = .92, GFI = .90. Because the chi-square test statistic and p-value is biased by sample size and model size (see Kline, 1996; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985), the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is a more meaningful summary than chi-square alone. The expected ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom is 1, and the smaller the ratio, the better the fit. Researchers suggest that a ratio as high as 5 to 1 indicates good fit (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985), but that 3 to 1 is better (Kline, 1996). The ratio in the current instance was 2.36, which suggests an adequate fit. Further, the model fit indices were at or above the recommended .90 (Hoyle & Panter, 1995). Additionally, there were no deviations in internal consistency or parallelism for the items. The dimensions also demonstrated homogeneous item content, and estimated reliability ranged from adequate to good (recognition α = .86, familiarity α = .73, acculturation α =. 73, involvement α = .72, role negotiation α = .64, job knowledge α = .62). Estimates of re-test reliability were similar (recognition α = .85, familiarity α = .77, acculturation α =. 71, involvement α = .70, role negotiation α = .57, job knowledge α = .66). Overall, these results suggest a good set of measures for assessing people's perceptions of their organizational assimilation experiences. Table 1 displays the items and factor loadings. As an additional check for generalizability, we examined each of the factors' reliability for consistency across the sample. Reliability coefficients did not vary significantly across organizations or organizational level, nor did they vary as a function of the language of the questionnaire or sex of the respondents.

To provide evidence for the discriminant validity of the six dimensions of organizational integration, we specified a single factor solution that alternatively assumed that the items represent a single construct. This model provided a poor fit to the data, χ^2 (170, $N = 342$) = 931.28, $p < .001$, IFI = .69, CFI = .69, GFI = .73. The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was 5.47. A comparison of the fit between the two models indicated that the six-factor model exhibited a significantly better fit to the data, χ^2 (15, $N = 342$) = 565.36, $p < .001$. Thus, we were able to reject the assumption that a single factor underlies these measures.

Construct validity of the OAI. Hypotheses One-Three proposed that the dimensions of organizational assimilation would correlate positively with job satisfaction and organizational identification and negatively with propensity to leave (see Table 2 for correlation matrix). A significant, positive relationship existed between job satisfaction and all six of the dimensions of the OAI. Similarly, a significant, positive relationship between organizational identification and all six of the dimensions of the OAI emerged. Finally, a significant, negative relationship between propensity to leave and all six dimensions of the OAI surfaced. Thus, Hypotheses One, Two, and Three, in receiving support, provide further evidence of the construct validity of the OAI.

TABLE 1
Organizational Assimilation Index

Dimension	Factor Loading
Supervisor Familiarity	
I feel like I know my supervisor pretty well.	.54
My supervisor sometimes discusses problems with me.	.69
My supervisor and I talk together often.	.85
Acculturation	
I understand the standards of the company.	.68
I think I have a good idea about how this organization operates.	.64
I know the values of my organization.	.78
Recognition	
My supervisor recognizes when I do a good job.	.68
My boss listens to my ideas.	.74
I think my supervisor values my opinions.	.86
I think my superior recognizes my value to the organization.	.82
Involvement	
I talk to my coworkers about how much I like it here.	.70
I volunteer for duties that benefit the organization.	.52
I talk about how much I enjoy my work.	.70
I feel involved in the organization.	.66
Job Competency	
I often show others how to perform our work.	.61
I think I'm an expert at what I do.	.44
I have figured out efficient ways to do my work.	.54
I can do others' jobs, if I am needed.	.58
Role Negotiation	
I have offered suggestions for how to improve productivity.	.70
I have helped to change the duties of my position.	.66

TABLE 2
Correlation of Organizational Assimilation Dimensions and Job Satisfaction, Propensity to Leave, and Organizational Identification

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	JS	PL	ID	Tenure
	1.00	.53**	.46**	.30**	.37**	.48**	.33**	-.28**	.43**	.01
2		1.00	.51**	.52**	.53**	.44**	.45**	-.41**	.60**	.08
3			1.00	.41**	.25**	.30**	.24**	-.34**	.46**	.15**
4				1.00	.42**	.35**	.53**	-.63**	.61**	.01
5					1.00	.46**	.37**	-.31**	.50**	-.04
6						1.00	.34**	-.19**	.35**	.01
JS							1.00	-.68**	.62**	.04
PL								1.00	-.74**	-.03
ID									1.00	-.03
Tenure										1.00
M	2.19	1.89	1.94	2.14	1.98	3.50	1.90	1.99	2.20	2.68
SD	.78	.65	.72	.65	.57	1.22	.58	.89	.68	3.81

**$p<.01$, two-tailed.
(1) = Supervisor Familiarity, (2) = Acculturation, (3) = Recognition, (4) = Involvement, (5) = Job Competency, (6) = Role Negotiation, (JS) = Job Satisfaction, (PL) = Propensity to Leave, (ID) = Organizational Identification.

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The fourth hypothesis proposed that the dimensions of organizational assimilation account for more variance in job satisfaction, organizational identification, and propensity to leave than did tenure. Tenure did not correlate significantly with job satisfaction, organizational identification, or propensity to leave. Thus, the fourth hypothesis was supported.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to develop and validate a measure of organizational assimilation. This section discusses the findings of both phases of the study and how the research fulfills the predetermined purpose. We review the factors of organizational assimilation that emerged in the study and note implications, limitations, and future directions.

Dimensions of Organizational Assimilation

In the first phase, we identified six dimensions of organizational assimilation. Confirmatory factor analysis of the Organizational Assimilation Index provided empirical support for these six dimensions. This constituted evidence of content validity. Further, the OAI's construct validity was apparent by the positive association of each of the dimensions with job satisfaction and organizational identification and the negative association of each of the dimensions with propensity to leave. This section examines each of these dimensions.

The first factor involved familiarity with supervisors. Participants in this study depicted the process of getting to know supervisors as the first step of fitting into organizations and said that their feelings toward their organizations changed as a result of becoming acquainted with superiors. This corresponds with Jablin's (1982) description of assimilation as an interactive communicative process and coincides with prior scholarship indicating that socialization involves establishing relationships with members within the organization and Chao et al.'s (1994) findings that suggested getting to know people is an important socialization outcome.

The second factor was organizational acculturation. When members are acculturated, they have accepted the organization's culture and are willing to make personal changes in order to integrate into it (Wilkens, 1983). The development of a shared understanding by organizational members is the important difference between those who are genuinely a part of the organization and those who are not (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Jaques, 1951; Kanter, 1984; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Chao et al. (1994) reached a similar conclusion in noting that becoming familiar with organizational goals and values is such an important socialization outcome that those who perceive they are mismatched between personal values and goals and those of the organization are likely to leave.

The third factor, recognition, involves perceiving one's value to the organization and feeling recognized by superiors. In previous research, recognition has been linked to such positive outcomes as job satisfaction and commitment (Baird & Deibolt, 1976; Garland, Oyabu, & Gipson, 1989; Pincus, 1986). Receiving recognition was also strongly influential in increasing organizational identification in Bullis and Bach's (1989) examination of socialization turning points.

Involvement, the fourth factor, encompassed many aspects of being a part of organizations. Interviewees described various norms for involvement, such as volunteering for extra organizational duties, figuring out ways to accomplish work more effi-

ciently, and feeling involved in the organization. This parallels the findings of Bauer and Green (1994) who determined that early newcomer involvement caused participants to feel more acceptance and less role conflict. Early involvement also translated to higher levels of productivity.

The fifth factor, job competency, related to members' beliefs that they were able to adequately perform their designated duties. As Feldman (1981) noted, "No matter how motivated the employee, without enough job skills, there is little chance for success" (p. 313).

Finally, the results for Phase One suggested that the processes of adaptation and role negotiation would cluster to form the sixth factor. However, confirmatory factor analysis produced evidence for role negotiation only. To participants, role negotiation represented ways newcomers interact with others in the organization in an attempt to compromise on ways a role should be enacted (Miller et al., 1996). Ashforth and Saks (1996) alleged that the employee selection process does not result in a perfect fit between the organization and the recruit. Successful role negotiation requires willingness to compromise on behalf of both the organization and the newcomer (Jablin, 1987).

In sum, the OAI includes measures for six distinct and empirically verified aspects of organizational assimilation: familiarity with supervisors, organizational acculturation, recognition, involvement, job competency, and role negotiation. With the two-phase process, we demonstrated face, content, and construct validity for the OAI. Although each dimension in itself provides valuable information, the full index can more efficiently offer data to organizations about success or inadequacies of new member development programs. Over the long-term, relationships among the six dimensions might become apparent both for the benefit of industry and also contributing to future theories related to assimilation.

Implications

This study contributes to our understanding of the processes associated with organizational assimilation and creates an instrument for its measurement. The need for the index is evidenced by an assumption commonly made about assimilation: the longer members are with an organization, the more assimilated they become. Comments by some participants suggest that levels of assimilation do not always rise. Our results parallel those of Bullis and Bach (1989), who found that organizational identification levels vary throughout members' tenures. Similarly, assimilation levels may rise and fall throughout a member's tenure as a result of a variety of factors, including leadership, management policy, and relationships with coworkers. We are of the view that assessments permitted by using the OAI are a more accurate index of assimilation than tenure, and our results provide strong evidence in its support.

The OAI appears to be useful for diverse organizational types, not specific to any particular industry. Further, it is applicable to members at all levels of organizations. This sort of generalizability should enhance its value in organizational settings.

Organizational leaders may be particularly interested in three implications of this study. First, we believe the findings contribute to understanding communicative processes and outcomes that foster premature turnover. Turnover rates for new workers are at least three times as high as those for workers who have been with the organization for more than four weeks (Wanous, 1992). Organizations incur costs for publicizing job openings, interviewing, and training, with expectations that recruits will be less productive than experienced coworkers and make many mistakes before they are con-

sidered proficient in their duties. Appreciating communicative processes associated with assimilation may be beneficial toward encouraging newcomer integration. When organizations become aware of types of communication involved in assimilation, they can take action to encourage those processes. For example, front-line supervisors should be educated on the importance of early and frequent recognition and its potential impact on member assimilation and commitment. This knowledge and practices may lead to longer tenures and reduced turnover costs.

Second, the OAI may assist organizations in improving assimilation efforts. In using it to assess levels of assimilation following implementation of differing socialization tactics, they may be better able to determine which of their socialization methods are most effective in a given organization, department, or job. The result could be better quality assimilation at lower costs.

Finally, in fostering processes likely to cause higher levels of organizational assimilation, employees may demonstrate higher levels of organizational identification and job satisfaction that may encourage a more favorable culture. This, of course, can further the interests of organizations and potentially enhance their performance.

As a final word of caution, the OAI should not be used by organizational leaders to determine "who does not fit in" with the objective of terminating or "weeding out" those who do not fit. Individuals who have not assimilated to a standardized goal may still be productive and valuable assets to the organization. In fact, although our findings suggest becoming competent at performing duties is a dimension of assimilation, we cannot explicitly tie levels of assimilation to increased productivity. However, the instrument may direct organizations toward evaluating methods for inducting recruits and maintaining an atmosphere that encourages acceptance and assimilation (especially of individuals with diverse perspectives and backgrounds).

Limitations and Future Directions

We also recognize certain limitations to this study and suggest that some limitations may provide opportunities for future research. The first limitation relates to the sixth factor. Specifically, instead of adaptation and role negotiation emerging as one factor as predicted, adaptation items appeared to be related to acculturation items. In retrospect, considering the similarity in the processes of acculturation and adaptation, this may be a reasonable outcome. However, the factor that emerged defined as role negotiation contained only two items following factor analysis.

A second limitation is that while organizational assimilation is a dynamic process, this study utilized only participants who were current members of their organization. However, assimilation may begin prior to entry, and some of the effects may linger after organizational exit. Patterns in members' levels of assimilation might be evident in studies that test participants at various intervals. Repeated longitudinal testing of the OAI, and preferably including individuals who had not yet entered the organization and those who had recently exited, would provide researchers with a better understanding of the ongoing nature of the assimilation process.

Finally, we suggest that future research should utilize the OAI to evaluate members' organizational assimilation levels for comparison to other data such as turnover rates, absenteeism, and productivity. This information would be useful in determining how organizational assimilation relates to other organizational outcomes. This would

provide valuable information for theoretical, as well as practical use.

NOTES

[1] Our purpose in using the OIQ was to include items which should positively correlate with items to measure organizational integration. We acknowledge Sass and Canary's (1991) and Miller, Allen, Casey, and Johnson's (2000) concern that the OIQ may in fact measure organizational commitment or some other form of organizational unity. Although we respect this position, we do not view this as problematic for use to validate the OAI as commitment or identification should both positively correlate with the assimilation dimensions.

[2] We included four items from the Communicator Style Measure (Norton, 1978) as a test of "no correlation." We used the items from the animated sub-scale of the measure. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .45. Due to the low reliability, this scale was not used to validate the OAI.

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APPENDIX A
Interview Protocol

1. Do you feel more like a part of the company than you did on your first day here?
2. What do you think changed?
3. Do you remember any situation or particular time when you felt that you were becoming a part of the company?
4. What did others (coworkers, managers or your subordinates) say that might have helped you to feel this way?
5. Do you believe you felt differently toward the company and your fellow employees after that time?
6. How so?
7. Do you think you can tell when a new employee has assimilated into the company? What might that person or their coworkers do that might clue you into whether or not that person has become a part of (name of the company)?
8. Can you think of someone who hasn't really assimilated into the company?
9. What might that person or their coworkers do that might clue you into whether or not that person has become a part of (name of the company)?
10. How does a new employee know when they have begun to "fit in" here at (name of the company)? What might their co-workers say that indicates their acceptance?
11. What would someone who had 'fit in' do or say that would be different from someone who had not?
12. What strategies did you use to integrate into the company?

Demographics:
How long have you worked for (name of the organization)?
What is your position? How long have you been in that position?
Do you supervise other employees? How many?
Your age?
What is your ethnicity?
(Information was also recorded about the participant's sex.)

APPENDIX B

Original items for Organizational Assimilation Index

Familiarity with Others

I consider my coworkers friends.
I feel comfortable talking to my coworkers.
I must work up the courage to talk to my supervisor about a problem.
I can tell when my supervisor would prefer not to talk.
I have shared my problems at work with some of my coworkers.
I spend time away from work with some of my coworkers.
I avoid conversations with my coworkers whenever possible.
I feel like I know my supervisor pretty well.
My supervisor sometimes discusses problems with me.
My supervisor and I talk together often.
I feel like I know my coworkers pretty well.

Acculturation

I know what is expected to succeed in this organization.
I know whom I should talk to about a work-related problem.
I understand the standards of the company.
I think I know "how things happen around here."
I feel more stressed than I should at work.
I think I have a good idea about how this organization operates.
I feel very comfortable in my work environment.
I am tense in my work environment.
I can see how my work benefits our customers.
I know the values of my organization.
I usually feel stressed at the end of my shift.

Recognition

My work is appreciated by the organization.
My supervisor recognizes when I do a good job.
My coworkers tell me I do good work.
My boss listens to my ideas.
I think my supervisor values my opinions.
My supervisor does not recognize the good work I do.
I think my superior recognizes my value to the organization.
My supervisor has told me that he/she trusts my judgment.
I do not think I can perform my work as well as others.
I think the work I do would be missed if I quit.

Involvement

I talk to my coworkers about how much I like it here.
I question why we do things the way we do at this organization.
I volunteer for duties that benefit the organization.
I do not prefer to take on more job responsibility.
I talk about how much I enjoy my work.
I feel involved in the organization.

I tell others that I am only working in this job temporarily.

I would do my best work even if I were not being supervised.

I often start work early or leave work late if they need me.

I am happy to do the work I do for the organization.

Job Competency

I can do others' jobs, if I am needed.

I sometimes feel overwhelmed trying to figure out how to do my work

I often feel as though I need someone to tell me how to do my job.

I know how to work to accomplish all my duties.

I think I could train someone to do my work.

I have figured out efficient ways to do my work.

I do not feel very competent in my work.

I think I'm an expert at what I do.

I feel unsure of my work when my supervisor watches me.

I often show others how to perform our work.

Adaptation and Role Negotiation

I think I have adapted to my organization's expectations.

I question why we do things the way we do at this organization.

I feel like I have too many responsibilities for my job.

I feel I have to adapt to too many company policies.

Adapting to the organization's ways has helped me in my work.

I do not mind being asked to perform my work according to the organization's standards.

I have offered suggestions for how to improve productivity.

I have helped to change the duties of my position.

I would like to change some of the organization's standards.