that new employees make a positive start with an organization. Organizational onboarding processes, socialization, and orientation programs are intended to foster just that.[1] This is the focus of Chapter 8.

Starting a new job can be stressful. Newcomers often find themselves in an unfamiliar work environment surrounded by people they do not know. To be successful in a new position, the new employee must establish relationships and learn new behaviors, facts, procedures, expectations, and values. New employees can also expect surprises along the way that require further adaptation, such as not anticipating the emotional impact of greater responsibility or underestimating the difficulty of adjusting to a new work schedule. In addition to learning new things, new employees may also need to unlearn things that helped them succeed in previous settings (such as in prior jobs or in school), but would be maladaptive in their new setting.[2]

The process of adjusting to a new organization is called *organizational socialization*. Increasingly, the term "***onboarding***" is increasingly used, to signify everything from recruitment to orientation, to the effective settling in of the employee into his or her job.[3] Socialization is a complex, lengthy process. It may take new employees weeks or months to understand what is expected from them on the job and how to behave in order to be accepted by other organization members. Co-worker perceptions of the new employee are very important. For example, Keith Rollag studied these perceptions in four organizations, and found that new employees were perceived to be the 30 percent of employees with the lowest tenure in an organization.[4] That is, it isn't just the time one has been with an organization, but also its growth and employee turnover rates that affect the distribution of tenure that impacts the perceptions of employee newness. Successful socialization of new members is critical to both individuals and organizations. At stake are:

- The new employee's satisfaction, performance, and commitment to the organization
- The work group's satisfaction and performance
- Start-up costs invested in the new employee (such as recruiting, selection, training, and the time until the employee is up to full speed)
- The likelihood the employee will remain with the organization
- The costs of replacing the employee if he or she leaves

Despite the importance of socialization, some organizations do little to introduce and integrate new members, forcing them to learn on their own. As Kaye Loraine writes, "It's not uncommon in the work world for the new employee to show up for work and be greeted by, 'Oh, yeah. I forgot about you. I don't have time today to orient you. Here's a policy book. Go somewhere and read it.'"[5] Some employees may flourish under this sink-or-swim approach, but even they will likely experience anxiety and frustration during their early tenure. Fortunately, many organizations recognize the importance of successful socialization and act to facilitate a newcomer's transition.[6]

This chapter provides a discussion of organizational socialization and the nature of this complex process. We will identify two common approaches to

facilitating employee socialization—the *realistic job preview (RJP)* and *employee orientation*—and explain how they can be used to benefit both the individual and the organization. Our position is that understanding the key issues in the first part of the chapter should lead to greater success in the practical applications of socialization presented in the latter portion of the chapter.[7] Dunn and Jasinski state: "Given that as many as 50 to 60 percent of new hires leave their jobs within the first seven months of hiring, and given the increasing cost of hiring new employees, the high cost of turnover, and the need to retain knowledgeable workers, the importance of new hire orientation (NHO) becomes more evident."[8] From the standpoint of the new employee, Stephanie Sparrow emphasizes the importance of the first 100 days in a new job.[9] Susan Ivancevich and colleagues focus on the first two years that an employee is on the job.[10] Regardless of the timeframe, it is critical for both employees and employers that events of the new employee's openings months—and years – be structured and supported as much as possible.[11] Thus, whether it is called socialization, or onboarding, or some other term, the focus needs to be on much more than just the employee's first day or first few days on the job.

SOCIALIZATION: THE PROCESS OF BECOMING AN INSIDER

Organizational socialization is defined as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role.[12] The net result of this process is that someone who is considered by organization members to be an outsider is transformed into a productive and accepted insider. While this obviously applies to new hires, it can also apply to transferred and promoted employees as well. Unlike new hires, those who are transferred or promoted begin their socialization as insiders to the larger organization, with an understanding of its goals and values. But like new hires, they are outsiders to the group they will be joining and face the challenge of gaining their new colleagues' acceptance and establishing themselves in a new role.

Before we discuss the socialization process itself, it is important that we explore three fundamental concepts: organizational roles, group norms, and expectations.

Some Fundamental Concepts of Socialization

Organizational Roles. A *role* is a set of behaviors expected of individuals who hold a given position in a group.[13] Roles define how a person fits into an organization and what he or she must do to perform effectively. For example, when we encounter a receptionist, we expect that person to perform certain functions of that role, such as greeting us, providing us with information, and directing us to those in the organization we wish to see. When newcomers enter a new group, they must learn what roles they are expected to fulfill in order to fit in and perform effectively.

Edgar Schein describes three dimensions of organizational roles. These are:

1. *Inclusionary*—a social dimension (e.g., outsider, probationary status, permanent status)
2. *Functional*—a task dimension (e.g., sales, engineering, plant operations)
3. *Hierarchical*—a rank dimension (e.g., line employee, supervisor, middle manager, officer)[14]

A new role requires learning to perform in ways that fulfill the social, functional, and hierarchical dimensions of that role. For example, a patrol officer who is promoted to shift sergeant will not be completely effective until he or she knows the tasks a sergeant must do, is able to do those tasks, and is accepted by others in the sergeant's role.

Van Maanen and Schein suggest that there are boundaries along these dimensions that employees cross during their careers.[15] The socialization process becomes much more intense and presents greater challenges just before and after the employee moves across a boundary. Crossing each boundary requires learning new attitudes and behaviors and carries with it the risk of failed socialization and negative outcomes, such as dissatisfaction and turnover. Monica Danielson argues for continuous socialization, so that employees are best able to adapt and learn to handle an ever-changing work environment.[16]

Role communication and role orientation are two important issues for organizational socialization. Ideally, an individual's role would be communicated clearly and agreed upon by all concerned parties (including management, peers, and the individual). Unfortunately, roles are often not communicated clearly. Perception plays an important part in how roles are defined and communicated, and the individual, his or her coworkers, the immediate supervisor, and upper management are all likely to perceive a given role differently. Although many organizations consider a job description to be the official statement of an individual's role, job descriptions are often vague and open to interpretation.

The perceptual nature of organizational roles can lead to the following three situations:

1. ***Role overload***—when the employee perceives the role as being more than he or she can reasonably do
2. ***Role conflict***—when the employee receives mixed messages about what is expected of him or her by others, such as a boss and coworkers
3. ***Role ambiguity***—when the employee feels the role is unclear; this is often the result of assuming a newly created position

Research shows that role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity are all related to stress,[17] which in turn relates to job satisfaction, job performance, and other outcomes valued by the organization, including turnover and absenteeism.[18]

The individual's role orientation is also important to socialization. Individuals do not always conform completely to the role prescribed for them. ***Role orientation*** is the extent to which individuals are innovative in interpreting their organizational roles.[19] Role orientation exists on a continuum, with a

custodial orientation (conforming closely to established ways of doing things) at one extreme, and an innovative orientation (taking considerable initiative in redefining the role) at the other.[20] For example, a market research analyst who has an innovative orientation may include educating managers in the ethics of marketing as a part of his or her role, even though other analysts in the organization do not perform this function. It is often beneficial for employees to creatively redefine their roles (i.e., have an innovative orientation) in ways that improve their own and the organization's effectiveness. However, this creativity and innovation will often challenge some of the organization's accepted beliefs and established ways of doing things.

Van Maanen and Schein suggest that the tactics an organization uses to socialize newcomers will influence an individual's role orientation.[21] Research supports this suggestion, which we will return to in our discussion of people processing tactics later in this chapter.[22]

Group Norms. *Norms* are the rules of conduct (typically unwritten) that are established by group members to influence or control behavior within a group. Group norms are an important part of the socialization process because they indicate the behaviors that insiders agree are appropriate. Newcomers generally must learn to behave in ways that are consistent with group norms if they are to be accepted as an insider.

Groups do not develop or enforce norms for all possible behaviors and situations, but only for significant behaviors.[23] Schein suggests that organizations distinguish employee behaviors in terms of three levels of importance: *pivotal* (behaviors essential to organizational membership), *relevant* (behaviors that are desirable but not essential), and *peripheral* (unimportant behaviors).[24] Organizations are more likely to focus on pivotal and relevant behaviors during socialization and less likely to teach peripheral behaviors to the employee or pay attention to them. Similarly, Daniel Feldman observes that groups will enforce norms that facilitate group survival, express central values, make expected behaviors simpler or more predictable, or help members avoid interpersonal embarrassment.[25]

Learning a group's norms is not always easy. Norms are usually informal and unwritten—and also varied![26] Clear, positive group norms should be fostered throughout an organization, as norms can differ from group to group within the same organization.[27] Organizations can facilitate the socialization process by providing ways to help newcomers learn organization and group norms, such as in realistic job previews and orientation programs.

Expectations. Expectations are also central to organizational socialization. An ***expectation*** is a belief about the likelihood that something will occur. Expectations can encompass behaviors, feelings, policies, and attitudes. Newcomers have expectations about how they will be treated, what they will be asked to do, and how they will feel in the new organization, among other things. Expectations are important for a variety of organizational issues, including motivation and decision making. Research suggests that newcomers' expectations can affect their satisfaction, performance, commitment, and tendency to remain with an organization.[28]

Unfortunately, recruiting practices often result in recruits having inflated expectations of their jobs and organizational life.[29] Unrealistically high expectations are not likely to be met, leading recruits to be dissatisfied and increasing the chances they will leave an organization. John Wanous argued that adjusting newcomer expectations to more reasonable (lower) levels reduces turnover.[30] In general, unmet expectations (whether realistic or not) can lead to dissatisfaction, which can eventually result in individuals quitting their jobs.[31] McKay and colleagues speculate as to whether many common efforts to increase diversity via recruitment may in fact *increase* turnover from those so recruited, as they often find an organizational reality that differs markedly from what was presented to them in the recruitment process.[32] Furthermore, in a longitudinal study, Irving and Meyer report effects for *any* discrepancy between what newcomers expect and what they encounter. This is not just for expectations that are unrealistically high.[33] A newcomer may have realistic expectations about an organization's social policies (like allowing time off for family issues), but discover that the policies are different than expected (e.g., requiring that time off be earned).

Newcomers develop and test expectations throughout the socialization process. The expectations that an individual will develop depend on a number of factors and a variety of sources, including the organization and its representatives, coworkers, friends, family, the media, as well the newcomer's own personality, attitudes, values, and prior experiences.

Organizations should be aware of the impact that expectations have on the newcomer's performance and satisfaction and take steps to ensure that the information they provide leads to realistic, attainable expectations. While organizations can help adjust newcomer expectations, surprise cannot be completely eliminated from the newcomer's experience, in part because newcomers may not be aware of how they feel about certain things until they experience them.[34] For example, telling an applicant from another geographic area about the climate in your area is not the same as having the applicant actually experience it, e.g., 20 degrees Fahrenheit (-7 C) with wind chill in the winter, or 100 degrees F (38 C) with high humidity in the summer.

Content of Socialization. Organizational socialization can be viewed as a learning process in that newcomers must learn a wide variety of information and behaviors to be accepted as an organizational insider. Cynthia Fisher divides the content of socialization into five categories of learning:

1. *Preliminary learning*—including the discovery that learning will be necessary, what to learn, and whom to learn from
2. *Learning about the organization*—including its goals, values, and policies
3. *Learning to function in the work group*—including the values, norms, roles, and friendships within it
4. *Learning how to perform the job*—including the necessary skills and knowledge for a particular job
5. *Personal learning*—learning from experience with the job and organization, including self-identity, expectations, self-image, and motivation[35]

Newcomers who learn in each of these content areas should undergo attitude and behavioral changes. Similarly, Feldman proposes that socialization learning includes acquiring a set of appropriate role behaviors, developing work skills and abilities, and adjusting to the work group's norms and values.[36]

Georgia Chao and colleagues draw upon prior theory and research to propose six dimensions for organizational socialization: performance proficiency, politics, language, people, organizational goals and values, and history.[37] They developed a thirty-four-item questionnaire to measure these dimensions. Chao et al. tested the questionnaire and found support for their typology. They also conducted a longitudinal study and reported that each dimension was related to career effectiveness in a sample of engineers and managers. Jill Haueter and colleagues have developed an alternative questionnaire.[38]

Taken together, these categorization schemes make it clear that newcomers often face a difficult challenge. As we discussed in Chapter 3, learning different content areas often requires different mechanisms (recall Robert Gagné's views on this). Thus, it follows that organizations should use multiple approaches to facilitate the learning that must occur during successful socialization.

Outcomes of Socialization. Socialization researchers have suggested a wide variety of affective, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes of the socialization process.[39] Our discussion of socialization to this point has mentioned a number of possible outcomes, both positive (e.g., organizational commitment, innovation) and negative (e.g., dissatisfaction, turnover, poor performance). Other possible outcomes of socialization include role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity (discussed earlier). In general, successful socialization means that the newcomer develops (1) greater knowledge of the organization and work group; (2) attitudes that make performing, fitting into, and remaining with the organization and work group possible; and (3) behaviors that lead to personal and organizational effectiveness. Unsuccessful socialization is generally believed to result in unmet expectations, dissatisfaction, lack of commitment, and turnover.[40]

We still do not have a strong understanding of how and when specific outcomes change during the socialization process.[41] Several studies show that early socialization experiences have a lasting impact on socialization outcomes, and it appears that socialization continues over time.[42] In addition, information gained from supervisors and peers is highly valued by newcomers and has been found to have a significant effect in early socialization.[43] More research along these lines is needed, and future work should help to further clarify these processes.

So far, we have discussed what socialization is, some foundational concepts underlying it, and its content and proposed outcomes. Before discussing HRD practices that can be used to facilitate socialization, we consider a model of the socialization process, the "people processing" tactics that organizations use to socialize newcomers, and the role that newcomers play in socialization.

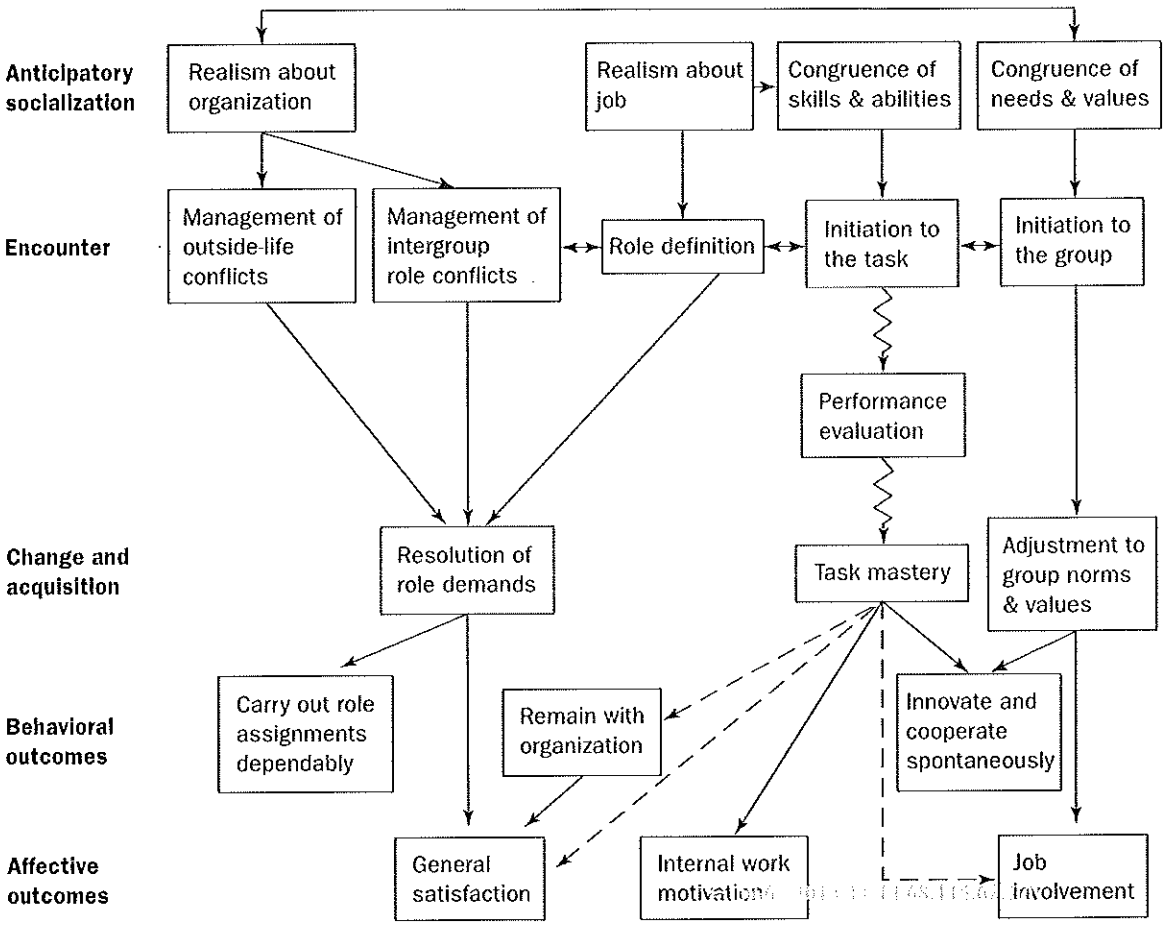
VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

Stage Models of Socialization

Many theorists who have written about organizational socialization describe the process using *stage models* that depict the steps or stages involved in the process.[44] Many stage models have been proposed.[45] Our discussion will focus on a representative three-stage model developed by Daniel Feldman, which is depicted in Figure 8-1.[46]

The first stage, ***anticipatory socialization***, begins *before* the individual joins the organization. In this stage, the person forms an impression about what membership in an organization is like. Information about organizations is available from a variety of sources, such as rumors, anecdotes, advertisements, the media, employment recruiters, and increasingly through the Internet. For example, image advertising and employer branding efforts, such as GE's "Imagination at work" or the U.S. Marine's "The Few. The Proud" campaigns, send messages about those organizations.[47] Media also play a role in helping organizations establish

FIGURE 8-1 Feldman's Model of Organizational Socialization



SOURCE: Feldman, D. C. (1981). The multiple socialization of organization members. *Academy of Management Review, 6,* 309–318. Copyright 1981 Reproduced with permission of ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT (NY) via Copyright Clearance Center.

reputations. Reports about Microsoft, for example, communicate the message that this organization is an intellectually stimulating place to work where dedicated employees put in long hours for high levels of total compensation.

These impressions influence expectations that may in turn affect an individual's behavior. For example, people's expectations when looking for jobs may attract them to one organization, reject another organization from their consideration, and affect their decision to remain at an organization where they initially choose to work. As mentioned earlier, it is important that managers provide accurate information and help correct inaccurate expectations to avoid potential negative consequences for performance, satisfaction, and tenure.

Also during the anticipatory socialization stage, individuals may be examining the extent to which their skills, abilities, needs, and values match those that they perceive the organization to require or prefer. These judgments can affect their behavior, both in terms of whether they will attempt to join the organization and how they may interact with organization members.

The ***encounter*** stage of the socialization process begins when a recruit makes a formal commitment to join an organization. A formal commitment may mean signing an employment contract or simply accepting an offer of employment or membership. At this point, an individual crosses the inclusionary boundary separating the organization from the outside environment and begins to discover what the organization is really like. During this stage, pre-employment expectations may be confirmed or rejected. This can lead to some unpleasant surprises. An employee who joins an organization because of an impression that advancement into and through the management ranks will be rapid may find promotions come slowly and are fewer in number than expected. During this stage, new employees must manage conflicts between lifestyle and work, resolve any role conflicts within a work group, define and clarify their own roles, become familiar with the dynamics of work group and job, and learn and perform the tasks required by the job.

The last stage in this process is called ***change and acquisition***. This stage occurs when new employees accept the norms and values of the group, master the tasks they must perform, and resolve any role conflicts and overloads. Employees who successfully complete this stage will likely be satisfied, internally motivated and involved in the job, perform their jobs dependably, and remain with the organization. Wendy Boswell and colleagues recently collected satisfaction data for employees at four points during their first year of employment. Their results depict a complex, yet fascinating relationship between level of socialization and satisfaction over the first year of employment.[48]

These three stages have also been labeled "getting in," "breaking in," and "settling in." As shown in Figure 8-1, it is predicted that successful movement through all three stages will lead to positive affective and behavioral outcomes.

It is important to recognize that socialization does not occur in a vacuum. The process is affected by co-workers and the dynamics within groups, as well as by on-the-job learning, career development, and life development.[49] Furthermore, it should be clear from the preceding discussion that socialization is a two-way street. Events during the socialization process change not only the newcomer, but organizational insiders as well.

Two other caveats about stage models of socialization should be mentioned. First, stage models provide a framework describing what happens to a typical or average individual. A variety of issues, including the rate of socialization and whether individuals progress through the stages in a lock-step order, have not been fully addressed.[50] Second, stage models are not the only way to view the socialization process. For example, Meryl Rice Louis developed a process model of events that might occur within the encounter stage.[51] In her view, surprises are typical, and socialization occurs as newcomers find ways to explain these events and use these explanations to predict what will happen in the future. Therefore, it is important to view such models more as suggestions rather than absolutes.

People Processing Tactics and Strategies

Even if the effort is not deliberate or part of a planned program, all organizations influence the adjustment of new members. Van Maanen calls these actions ***people processing strategies***, and suggests seven pairs of tactics organizations may use when processing or socializing newcomers.[52] For example, is socialization formal or informal? Is it done individually or in groups? Is the initial time period fixed (as in a probationary period), or is it variable? Does it seek to invest in the uniqueness of each individual, or does it seek to divest individuals of some portion of that individuality (e.g., as in a military boot camp)?

The particular tactics an organization uses are often the result of tradition rather than a conscious choice.[53] Van Maanen argues that whatever people processing strategies an organization uses, they will have a strong impact on newcomers' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. Further, Van Maanen, Schein, and others have hypothesized that various combinations of people processing tactics lead newcomers to develop a particular role orientation.[54] Several studies test these hypotheses. Gareth Jones studied MBA recipients.[55] He classified socialization tactics as either institutionalized (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture) or individualized (individual, informal, random variable, disjunctive, and divestiture). Jones predicted that fixed tactics and investiture tactics will decrease innovation. His findings support the notion that institutionalized tactics lead to a *custodial role orientation*, and that individualized tactics lead to an *innovation role orientation*. Allen and Meyer, also using MBA recipients, replicated Jones's findings.[56] In a related study, Ashford and Saks find that institutionalized tactics reduce newcomers' uncertainty and anxiety and lead to stronger attachments to a job and organization, but that individualized tactics are associated with stronger performance and reduced intentions to quit.[57] Their findings raise the possibility that there could be a trade-off between using individualized or institutionalized socialization tactics. These studies support the argument that socialization tactics impact newcomer attitudes and behavior. Further research is underway using different samples, methods, and approaches.[58]

Newcomers as Proactive Information Seekers

A third perspective on organizational socialization emerged in the 1990s. Early socialization theories tended to portray newcomers as reacting to socialization processes and events. However, this view is incomplete.[59] Newcomers often

actively seek out the information they need, both to master their environments and fill in gaps left by supervisors, coworkers, and other sources. This perspective explicitly recognizes that socialization is a two-way street, and it is not necessarily something that organizations do *to* people.

Numerous studies demonstrate that newcomers actively seek out information.[60] Information seeking also impacts socialization outcomes.[61] The dynamics of the information-seeking process are now being investigated. For example, two studies find that newcomers tend to use different information-seeking tactics and sources of information for different types of information.[62] Another study finds that newcomer proactive behavior and self-efficacy interacts with formal socialization processes (discussed in the previous section) to impact adjustment and other outcomes.[63]

A growing body of research emphasizes workplace learning as an overarching goal of HRD.[64] This has also been linked to employee socialization and orientation efforts.[65] We welcome more work in this area, as it clearly aligns well with the learning emphasis in the HRD field described in Chapter 3. That is, employee socialization should focus on the *learning processes* of new employees. It is valuable to emphasize ways in which new employees can be facilitated as active rather than passive learners in the socialization process.

Research on newcomers' proactive role in socialization has significant implications for practice. For example, if newcomers tend to seek out some information by observing others and experimenting to see what works and what doesn't, organizations should encourage them to do so. This can be done by minimizing the risks newcomers face for experimenting, by training supervisors and peers to support newcomers' attempts to gather information, and by creating orientation programs that include information-seeking activities and reinforcement for newcomers who engage in them.

What Do Newcomers Need?

So far, we have described the socialization process in terms of the key concepts involved: content, outcomes, stages, people processing strategies, and proactive information seeking. Given this knowledge, we must now ask: what do newcomers need to be successfully socialized? A good way to approach this question is to compare what insiders have to what newcomers lack. Insiders typically have a clear idea of their role in an organization, the group and organization's norms and values, the KSAOs and experience that permits them to perform their work effectively, and they have adjusted to their roles, the work group, and the organization to the point that they have chosen to remain with the organization. In addition, insiders possess three essential elements:

1. *Accurate Expectations*—insiders normally know what to expect of the situations in which they find themselves, so there are fewer surprises to confront them. Newcomers' expectations are more likely to differ from organizational reality.
2. *Knowledge Base*—when surprises do occur, insiders have the knowledge base (from history and experience in the setting) to more accurately make sense of the surprising event. Newcomers generally lack this knowledge.