



New employee orientation, role-related stressors and conflict at work: Consequences for work attitudes and performance of hospitality employees

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ABSTRACT

Combining role theory with theories on hindrance stressors and intragroup conflict, we develop a model of the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of new employee orientation in hospitality organizations. We test hypotheses about main and mediated effects in this model, using data from a sample of 156 recently hired hospitality interns and applying a longitudinal approach, with data collection shortly after organizational entry and several months later. Results suggest that employee orientation is negatively related to two hindrance stressors: role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity predicts a range of attitudinal outcomes and the relationship is partially mediated by relationship conflict. In addition, role ambiguity is negatively related to task performance. Role conflict predicts hospitality employees' job attitudes and this relationship is fully mediated by relationship conflict. We discuss important theoretical and practical implications of these findings for human resource management in hospitality firms.

1. Introduction

Human resource management in the hospitality industry faces a set of unique challenges. High turnover rates in the sector have traditionally been a cause for concern (Deery and Shaw, 1997, 1999). Moreover, hospitality firms often attempt to increase their human resource flexibility by relying on a substantial “peripheral” workforce (Guerrier and Lockwood, 1989), which is composed of casual, seasonal, or short-contract employees (Stamper and Van Dyne, 2001). This two-pronged predicament leads to a recurrent problem: How can new employees in hospitality firms be made operational as quickly as possible so as not to disrupt service processes and make the best use of their often limited time of employment? An obvious key to this question lies in the process of new employee orientation that usually happens in the very early stages of employment (Wanous, 1980).

Despite relatively early recognition of the importance of organizational entry for the effectiveness of hospitality employees (Young and Lundberg, 1996; Lundberg and Young, 1997) there is surprisingly little research in the hospitality management literature on the consequences of successful (or unsuccessful) new employee orientation in the hospitality industry. Moreover, there is a lack of both theoretical frameworks and systematic empirical investigation of the mediating processes

through which new employee orientation may affect attitudinal or behavioral work outcomes of hospitality employees.

In this paper, we attempt to fill this research gap by linking employee orientation to role theory (Biddle, 1986; Katz and Kahn, 1966; Teh et al., 2014), intragroup conflict (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn et al., 1999) and theory on the consequences of job stressors (Dawson et al., 2016; Fried et al., 2008; Madera et al., 2013). We suggest that deficiencies in new employee orientation may result in a lack of clarity about the tasks and responsibilities the new employee is supposed to assume (role ambiguity) as well as incompatible expectations and demands by peers and superiors towards the new employee (role conflict). We further propose that when new employees experience confusion about their role this will have important consequences for attitudinal and behavioral outcomes at work. Finally, our model suggests that this relationship is mediated by relationship conflict with other employees.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. New employee orientation, role ambiguity and role conflict

Starting a new job is an experience that can be compared to being “thrown in at the deep end” or “experiencing a reality shock”. Recent

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hires are faced with a host of new people, objects, rules, information, regulations, and objectives which they generally fail to understand from the outset (Young and Lundberg, 1996). One of their key challenges in the initial stages of their employment is “learning the ropes” of the new workplace, with the objective of transforming their initial “outsider” status towards being an “insider” in the organization (Stamper and Masterson, 2002).

In general terms, hospitality firms face the organizational dilemma of balancing differentiation and integration (Mintzberg, 1992). The specialized, differentiated contributions of organization members must be focused on organizational goals by using appropriate coordinating mechanisms. Organizations can address this coordination challenge through structural or institutional planning. Structural planning involves the creation of departments and the generation of an organizational structure with a clear hierarchy of authority (Barrows et al., 2012). Institutional planning, on the other hand, involves coordination of activities through more informal mechanisms, such as organizational culture, codes of conduct, mission and vision which have an impact on the daily activities of employees and their subordinates (Boselie et al., 2003). The distinction between structural and institutional aspects spells out the main challenge for new employee orientation. At the beginning of their organizational tenure, new employees need to rapidly gain an understanding of both aspects. On the one hand they need to learn about tasks, competencies and behaviors on the job that are expected from them and how these fit in with the organization's formal structure and hierarchy. On the other hand, they need to glean a good understanding about general organizational objectives and principles as well as the institutionalized cultural values that govern professional interactions between members of the organization.

In a similar vein, from an organizational role theory viewpoint (Biddle, 1986), organizational entry has been described as the process that allows new employees to comprehend the expectations directed at them with regard to which tasks they are to perform, how they are to behave and how they are to interact with other members of the organization. The literature on organizational socialization (Louis, 1980) suggests that relevant information about these expectations can be gleaned from a variety of both formal and informal sources. Among the formal sources are organizational induction and training workshops and/or formal documentation like handbooks and SOPs. However, research suggests that employees may derive important cues from their observation of supervisors and peers in their professional context, i.e. via the exchange with other, more experienced organizational members (Lundberg and Young, 1997). We therefore define new employee orientation as encompassing the formal and informal processes through which new employees acquire critical information about the job environment in the early stages of their tenure on the job.

When the orientation process is successful, new employees will be able to “blend in” seamlessly. When new employee orientation is insufficient or missing entirely, role theory (Rizzo et al., 1970; House and Rizzo, 1972) suggests that two different types of dysfunctionality may occur. *Role ambiguity* refers to a situation in which employees are unclear about performance expectations and/or lack information or other resources to carry out the required tasks, ultimately leading to a feeling of helplessness (Onyemah, 2008; Teh et al., 2014). *Role conflict* occurs when employees are faced with “dissonance” due to conflicting or incompatible demands from other role partners as a result of which the employee feels pulled in different directions (Onyemah, 2008; Teh et al., 2014).

Employee orientation focuses on sharing essential information about the organization's general objectives, structure, culture and processes as well as the specificities of individual jobs (Wanous and Reichers, 2000). Effective employee orientation will therefore help employees understand both specific requirements concerning their job role, as well as general requirements regarding acceptable or unacceptable role behaviors. Moreover, information about organizational processes, procedures and routines, which is a standard part of new employee orientation in

hospitality firms, will help new employees understand how their job role fits in with other jobs around them. As a result, when effective new employee orientation occurs, both role ambiguity and role conflict should be reduced. Formally stated:

Hypothesis 1. *Effective new employee orientation is negatively related to employees' perceived role ambiguity.*

Hypothesis 2. *Effective new employee orientation is negatively related to employees' perceived role conflict.*

2.2. Role ambiguity, role conflict and work outcomes

When employees experience role ambiguity they are prevented from achieving their personal goals due to a lack of direction, information, resources or any combination thereof. As a result, role ambiguity can be defined as a “hindrance” stressor (Dawson et al., 2016). As opposed to “challenge” stressors, which have the potential to be conducive to personal growth and goal achievement, “hindrance” stressors are seen by employees as obstacles that are outside of their control and cannot be overcome. As a result, hindrance stressors like role ambiguity have negative consequences for job attitudes (Beehr et al., 2000; Madera et al., 2013; Yun et al., 2007).

In this study we will focus on three attitudinal outcome variables that are particularly relevant for the hospitality industry: job affective well-being, job satisfaction and affective commitment. The hospitality industry work environment is characterized by frequent guest contact, the necessity to engage in emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and to maintain composure when faced with guests who demonstrate uncivil behavior (Walker et al., 2014). The affective well-being of hospitality employees is not only an important prerequisite for the delivery of “service with a smile” but may also be affected by what employees experience during the service encounter. With regard to job satisfaction and affective commitment, both are important predictors of turnover, which is a perennial concern in the hospitality industry context.

Employees who are faced with hindrance stressors are likely to conclude that the link between increased effort and the probability of meeting job demands is weakened or altogether broken. Supporting this line of reasoning, meta-analytic evidence (LePine et al., 2005) suggests that hindrance stressors have a direct negative effect on work performance. In addition, the unsatisfactory psychological situation resulting from a hindrance stressor like role ambiguity will contribute to employees' intention to quit their job, thereby further weakening their job performance (Fried et al., 2008; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). To summarize the preceding arguments for a negative relationship between role ambiguity and employees' work attitudes and performance, we propose:

Hypothesis 3. *Role ambiguity is negatively related to work attitudes and performance.*

Employees who perceive role conflict are under the impression that they are facing contrasting and conflicting demands from different role partners in the organization. These may be direct or indirect supervisors or peers. In a similar fashion to role ambiguity, role conflict can also be viewed as a “hindrance” stressor (Dawson et al., 2016). When the demands directed at an employee are conflicting, this implies that fulfilling the demands of one role partner will be equivalent to violating the expectations of another. Since the focal employee is not in a position to reconcile these conflicting demands, a role conflict situation will be perceived as being outside of the employee's control, with the corresponding negative consequences for job attitudes (Fried et al., 2008).

Similarly, when employees are faced with role conflict, they will come to understand that increased effort to meet the demands of one role partner will be unrelated, or potentially even inversely related, to their ability to meet another role partner's demands. Again, the effort-performance link in this case will be perceived as weak or non-existent (LePine et al., 2005). The frustration and demotivation that results from the inability to simultaneously meet conflicting job

demands should lead to a reduction in effort and, as a result, to reduced performance. Summarizing the preceding theory, we posit:

Hypothesis 4. *Role conflict is negatively related to work attitudes and performance.*

Relationship conflict as a mediator

Research on intragroup conflict has generally suggested that individual perceptions of conflict in workgroups are negatively related to a wide variety of work-related outcomes (De Dreu and Van Vianen, 2001; Spector and Jex, 1998). Based on the foundational work by Guetzkow and Gyr (1954), and extensions by Jehn (1995, 1997), two fundamental types of intragroup conflict have been distinguished. *Task conflict* concerns “disagreements among group members about the content of the tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions” (Jehn, 1995: 258). *Relationship conflict* is characterized by “interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance” (Jehn, 1995: 258).

Challenging the universally negative perspective on the consequences of interpersonal conflict, research has shown, that task conflict can actually yield positive outcomes (Amason, 1996; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Jehn and Mannix, 2001; Jehn and Chatman, 2000). The exchange of conflicting opinions and viewpoints, under the condition that such debate is not interpreted as a personal attack by group members, may actually lead to better solutions and increased performance. However, there is no such evidence for potential beneficial consequences of relationship conflict.

We suggest that both role ambiguity and role conflict should be positively associated with interpersonal conflict. When employees perceive role ambiguity, they lack information and direction in their job and are unclear about how they can contribute to the effort of their workgroup (Teh et al., 2014). As a result, the feeling of helplessness in the face of uncontrollable obstacles (Onyemah, 2008) will translate into negative attitudes towards their current job situation and will negatively affect their job performance (Fried et al., 2008; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). When employees give the impression of being disorientated and frustrated, other workgroup members will be likely to interpret their behavior as an inability and/or unwillingness to carry their part of the workload. In the high-pressure work environment of the hospitality industry where everyone's contribution is needed and stress levels are chronically high (Koc and Bozkurt, 2017; Ross, 1995; Teoh et al., 2019), the interpersonal tensions and annoyance with the focal employee that are characteristic of relationship conflict will be an almost inevitable outcome. Formally stated:

Hypothesis 5. *Role ambiguity is positively related to relationship conflict.*

By its very nature, role conflict suggests a positive association with relationship conflict. When an employee perceives role conflict, he or she is facing demands from co-workers or superiors that are inherently contradictory. As a result of this “hindrance” stressor (Dawson et al., 2016), whenever the employee tries to conform to the expectations of one role partner other role partners will come to the conclusion that the employee is unwilling and/or unable to meet their particular demands and expectations. Personal conflict, tension and annoyance between the focal employee and at least some of his or her role partners will be the outcome. Therefore, we posit:

Hypothesis 6. *Role conflict is positively related to relationship conflict.*

There are numerous theoretical reasons why relationship conflict should be negatively associated with work attitudes. Perceived relationship conflict triggers negative emotions in employees, which include apprehension, anxiety, frustration, uncertainty and wariness towards other group members (Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 2010). Lack of trust towards other group members induces communication issues, decision-making problems and a general lack of productivity in the work

group, further leading to stress, work dissatisfaction and reduced commitment towards the work group (Friedman et al., 2000; Guerra et al., 2005; Jehn et al., 1997, 1999; Tjosvold and Sun, 2002). In a similar vein, theories on the cognitive processing of conflict (Carnevale and Probst, 1998; Jehn et al., 2010; Taylor and Brown, 1988, 1994) suggest that employees who perceive less conflict will be more satisfied with their job environment.

From the perspective of work performance, perceptions of relationship conflict impose a cognitive burden on employees (Carnevale and Probst, 1998). These employees will devote resources to understanding, discussing, and possibly trying to resolve conflicts (Jehn, 1995). As a result, they will have a reduced ability to focus on solving work-related problems (Taylor and Brown, 1988) as well as less motivation and energy to devote to actual task performance. Based on the preceding theoretical rationale, we suggest:

Hypothesis 7. *Relationship conflict is negatively related to work attitudes and performance.*

In the preceding sections we posited a positive relationship between role ambiguity and relationship conflict. Moreover, we suggested that relationship conflict will have detrimental consequences for work attitudes and performance. These two theoretical arguments in combination suggest that relationship conflict acts as a mediator for the relationship between role ambiguity and the outcome variables. As relationship conflict is a more proximal predictor of job attitudes and performance than the perception of role stressors, the effect of role ambiguity on these outcomes should be partially or fully mediated by relationship conflict. Formally stated:

Hypothesis 8. *Relationship conflict mediates the negative relationship between role ambiguity and work attitudes/work performance.*

In a similar vein, we have argued for a positive relationship between role conflict and relationship conflict and we suggested that relationship conflict will have detrimental consequences for work attitudes and performance. Again, the combination of these arguments suggests a mediated relationship, linking role conflict to work attitudes and performance via the mediator of relationship conflict. Relationship conflict as a more proximal predictor of job attitudes and performance should partially or fully mediate the effect of role conflict on our outcome variables. Expressed as a formal hypothesis:

Hypothesis 9. *Relationship conflict mediates the negative relationship between role conflict and work attitudes/work performance.*

Fig. 1 summarizes the hypothesized relationships.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and procedure

Data for this study were collected via a survey sent out to an entire cohort of Bachelor's students of a major hospitality school in Europe. By the time of data collection, the students were carrying out a 6-month compulsory industry internship. This design choice had the distinct advantage of ensuring that all the respondents were in a comparable situation with regard to their professional status. Since internship starting dates are standardized for all students, all respondents had embarked on a new hospitality industry job in the very recent past and had the exact same amount of experience in their respective jobs as well as exposure to their respective employing organizations. In addition, the fact that they worked in a variety of different organizations, departments and jobs helped to ensure that there was substantial variability in the independent variable, i.e. employee orientation.

Our theoretical model implies that the relationship between employee orientation, role perceptions, conflict, and work outcomes unfolds over time. To take this longitudinal element into account, data collection was carried out in two waves, both of which took place in

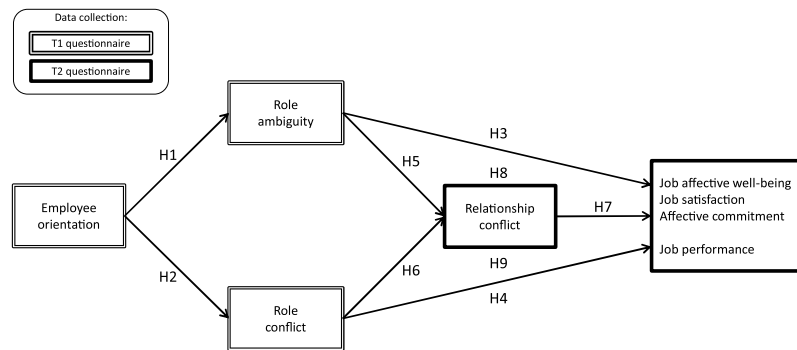


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

2019. Due to the geographic dispersion of our respondents, most of which were based in various European countries, but some of which carried out their internships in East Asia and in the Americas, we opted for an online data collection using Google Forms. The T1 questionnaire was sent out one month after the start date of the internship and included scales for orientation, role ambiguity and role conflict. By this time, the interns should have received whatever orientation was provided by the organization and should have formed initial role perceptions. The T2 questionnaire was sent three months later and included scales for task conflict, relationship conflict and the attitudinal and behavioral outcome variables. This time lag ensured that role perceptions could have translated into conflict episodes which, in turn, could have affected the interns' work attitudes and behaviors. T1 questionnaires were sent out to 827 students and 235 completed questionnaires were returned for a 28.42% response rate. T2 questionnaires were sent out to the 235 students who had completed T1 questionnaires and yielded 156 completed questionnaires for a 66.38% response rate. The final sample size was therefore $n = 156$, for an overall response rate of 18.86%.

Since English proficiency is an admissions prerequisite for all students, all of the questionnaires were prepared in the English language. Both questionnaires were pretested with a sample of five students whose demographics were very similar to those of our respondents. The purpose of the pilot test was to ensure that all items were properly understood and that the time required to complete the instrument was reasonable. While the response time was judged to be adequate by our pilot sample, we made several small adjustments to the questionnaire introduction and the format in which items and response options were presented. In order to be able to match T1 and T2 responses, we asked our respondents to indicate their unique school e-mail address at the beginning of the questionnaire. Respondents were assured that their responses would remain fully confidential and after the successful matching of the data, the e-mail addresses were removed from the final data file before data analysis started. Of the respondents in the final sample, 34% were male and 66% female. To reduce survey load we did not measure any other demographic variables, but the design of the study implies a very homogenous group of respondents with regard to their age, which ranges from 20 to 24 years. Tenure in the job as well as previous hospitality work experience could therefore be considered as constants.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Orientation

We measured new employee orientation with a 5-item scale that was specifically developed for the purpose of this study. To take into account the multiple sources from which new employees can derive orientation, the items assessed the extent to which direct supervisors, peers, and company documentation were effective in providing orientation about the job. Sample items are "My direct boss or my indirect superiors was/

were very effective in providing orientation at the beginning of my internship" and "I could rely on extensive internal company documentation (e.g. handbooks, SOPs, organization charts, videos, other materials) to facilitate my orientation at the beginning of my internship" ($\alpha = .86$).

3.2.2. Role ambiguity

Role-ambiguity was assessed with a 6-item scale recently developed by Bowling et al. (2017). Sample items are "I am not sure what is expected of me at work" and "The requirements of my job aren't always clear" ($\alpha = .92$).

3.2.3. Role conflict

Role conflict was measured with a 6-item scale developed by the same authors (Bowling et al., 2017). Sample items include "In my job, I often feel like different people are 'pulling me in different directions'" and "I have to deal with competing demands at work" ($\alpha = .80$).

3.2.4. Relationship conflict

We assessed relationship conflict with a 3-item scale by Pearson et al. (2002). Sample items are "How much anger was there among the members of the group?" and "How much personal friction was there in the group during decisions?" ($\alpha = .85$). The response options were anchored at "1 – none" and "5 – a great deal".

3.2.5. Job affective well-being

This construct was measured with 15 items from the Job Affective Well-Being Scale (JAWS) developed by Van Katwyk et al. (2000). Sample items are "My job makes me feel angry" and "My job makes me feel discouraged". Response options were anchored at "1 – never" and "5 – every day". All items were reverse-scored ($\alpha = .89$).

3.2.6. Job satisfaction

We used three items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann et al., 1979) to measure job satisfaction. A sample item is "All in all, I am very satisfied with my current job" ($\alpha = .91$).

3.2.7. Affective commitment

Affective commitment was assessed with the 5-item affective commitment scale proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990). A sample item is "I feel like 'part of the family' at this company" ($\alpha = .90$).

3.2.8. Work performance

We used the 3-item individual task performance scale developed by Griffin, Neal, & Parker (2007) to assess work performance. A sample item is "I carry out the core parts of my job well" ($\alpha = .70$).

Unless indicated otherwise, the Likert-type rating scales for all measures were anchored at "1 - strongly disagree", and "5 - strongly agree". Scale scores were computed by averaging the responses across

all items of a scale. In addition, we controlled for gender in all analyses.

4. Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations among the study variables as well as their internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas). All internal consistency reliabilities met or exceeded the customary .70 cut-off value.

To assess the discriminant validity of our various constructs we ran several confirmatory factor analyses, using LISREL. The first CFA evaluated our hypothesized 8-factor measurement model. The results demonstrated good fit ($\chi^2 = 1365.54.28$, RMSEA = .072, CFI = .95, IFI = .95, SRMR = .08). More importantly, when we compared the hypothesized 8-factor model to the CFA results of two alternative models (a 2-factor model regrouping the T1 and T2 items into two separate factors, and a 1-factor model in which all items loaded on a single factor), the 8-factor model fit the data significantly better. For the 2-factor model the relevant model comparison statistics were $\Delta\chi^2(27) = 1888.65$ ($p < .001$) and for the 1-factor model they were $\Delta\chi^2(28) = 3152.29$ ($p < .001$). We computed average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) measures for all constructs and found them to be above the conventionally recommended cut-offs. Specifically, we computed the following values for employee orientation (AVE = .59, CR = .88), role ambiguity (AVE = .66, CR = .92), role conflict (AVE = .52, CR = .86), relationship conflict (AVE = .67, CR = .86), job affective well-being (AVE = .52, CR = .91), job satisfaction (AVE = .77, CR = .91), affective commitment (AVE = .65, CR = .90) and task performance (AVE = .54, CR = .77).

We analyzed the data using a multiple regression approach. All analyses were run on SPSS Statistics version 24. Table 2 summarizes the results for the relationship between employee orientation and the outcome variables, i.e. role ambiguity and role conflict. Employee orientation was negatively related to both role ambiguity ($\beta = -.63$, $p < .001$) and role conflict ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$), thereby providing support for hypotheses H1 and H2.

Table 3 summarizes the regression analyses for the impact of role ambiguity on the various outcome variables. Role ambiguity was negatively related to all of the outcome variables, including job affective well-being ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .001$), job satisfaction ($\beta = -.36$, $p < .001$), affective commitment ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$) and task performance ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$). These results provide support for hypothesis H3.

Table 4 shows the results for the regressions involving role conflict. Role conflict was negatively related to job affective well-being ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$), job satisfaction ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$) and affective commitment ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .01$). However, the relationship with task performance was not significant ($\beta = -.06$, $p > .05$). As a result, hypothesis H4 is supported with regard to the attitudinal outcomes, but not supported with regard to work performance.

As a first step for the analysis of the hypothesized mediated relationship, we regressed relationship conflict on both role ambiguity and

Table 2

Results of regression model predicting role ambiguity and role conflict.

	DV: Role ambiguity	DV: Role conflict
Gender	-.02	-.10
Employee orientation	-.63 ***	-.34 ***

Table entries are standardized regression coefficients (betas). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

For gender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

role conflict, controlling each time for gender. The results reveal that role ambiguity was positively related to relationship conflict ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) and that role conflict was also positively related to relationship conflict ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$). These results support hypotheses H5 and H6.

The mediation analyses presented in Tables 3 and 4 reveal that relationship conflict was negatively related to job affective well-being ($\beta = -.47$, $p < .001$), job satisfaction ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$) and affective commitment ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .01$) but not to task performance ($\beta = -.05$, $p > .05$). Therefore, hypothesis H7 is supported for the attitudinal outcomes, but not supported with regard to work performance.

The complete mediation analyses in Table 3 suggest that relationship conflict acted as a partial mediator for the relationship between role ambiguity and the three attitudinal outcomes, but did not mediate the relationship with task performance. As a result, H8 is partially supported. The analyses summarized in Table 4 show that relationship conflict fully mediated the relationship between role conflict and the three attitudinal outcomes. Since role conflict was not a significant predictor of task performance, there is no mediation. These results provide partial support for hypothesis H9.

5. Discussion

In this paper we tested a model linking new employee orientation, role-related hindrance stressors and relationship conflict to a range of attitudinal and behavioral outcome variables in a hospitality context. Our results show that effective employee orientation mitigates the emergence of hindrance stressors like role ambiguity and role conflict. We also demonstrate that role ambiguity is negatively related to job attitudes and performance, with most of these relationships being partially mediated by relationship conflict. Finally, our results suggest that role conflict is negatively related to job attitudes and that this relationship is fully mediated by relationship conflict, whereas the hypothesized relationship with task performance was not supported by our data. These results have numerous theoretical and practical implications, which we will discuss below.

5.1. Implications for research

Our findings suggest two major contributions to the literature. First of all, they enhance our understanding of the consequences of employee

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	.66	.48	–								
2. Employee orientation	3.50	.96	.00	.86							
3. Role ambiguity	2.34	1.00	-.01	-.63**	.92						
4. Role conflict	2.49	.84	-.10	-.34**	.42**	.80					
5. Relationship conflict	2.28	.86	.06	-.34**	.30**	.43**	.85				
6. Job affective well-being	3.87	.77	-.01	.41**	-.41**	-.32**	-.47**	.89			
7. Job satisfaction	3.74	1.08	.05	.49**	-.36**	-.29**	-.37**	.60**	.91		
8. Affective commitment	3.13	1.11	.07	.47**	-.38**	-.22**	-.24**	.54**	.68**	.90	
9. Task performance	4.37	.55	.05	.20*	-.24**	-.07	-.04	.21**	.20*	.36**	.70

For gender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

Bold figures on the main diagonal are scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Results of regression models for role ambiguity and relationship conflict.

	DV: Job affective well-being			DV: Job satisfaction			DV: Affective commitment			DV: Task performance		
Gender	-.01	.02	.01	.05	.07	.06	.07	.09	.08	.04	.05	.04
Role ambiguity	-.41***		-.30***	-.36***		-.27***	-.38***		-.33***	-.24**		-.25**
Relationship conflict		-.47***	-.38***		-.38***	-.30***		-.25**	-.15*		-.05	.02
Mediation			partial			partial			partial			none

Table entries are standardized regression coefficients (betas). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

For gender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

Table 4

Results of regression models for role conflict and relationship conflict.

	DV: Job affective well-being			DV: Job satisfaction			DV: Affective commitment			DV: Task performance		
Gender	-.04	.02	.00	.02	.07	.05	.05	.09	.07	.05	.05	.05
Role conflict	-.33***		-.15	-.29***		-.15	-.21**		-.13	-.06		-.05
Relationship conflict		-.47***	-.40		-.38***	-.31***		-.25**	-.19*		-.05	-.03
Mediation			full			full			full			none

Table entries are standardized regression coefficients (betas). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

For gender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

orientation. Despite this being a long-standing concern of OB researchers (e.g. Wanous, 1976, 1980), most research in a hospitality context has focused on the longer-term processes of organizational socialization and on the mechanisms by which positive socialization occurs (Lam, 2003; Lo and Lam, 2002; Song et al., 2015) as opposed to the shorter-term events related to orientation and the potential negative consequences of insufficient or ineffective orientation. Moreover, the limited research that exists on new employee orientation in the hospitality industry (Lundberg and Young, 1997) relies on critical incident methodology rather than large-scale quantitative empirical investigation. Linking employee orientation to role theory constitutes an important theoretical contribution of our study, which clarifies how deficiencies in new employee orientation contribute to the emergence of negative job attitudes by way of hindrance stressors like role ambiguity and role conflict. The fact that our empirical results support the central tenets of this model strengthens the value of this contribution.

A second major contribution lies in the fact that we add a new layer to our understanding of how role ambiguity and role conflict translate into both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of employees in a hospitality context. In a general way, our results seem to suggest differential effects of these two types of hindrance stressors. We clearly show that both role ambiguity and role conflict compromise employee well-being and general employee attitudes towards the organization. In addition, for both stressors the effect is mediated by relationship conflict, with a clearer pattern of full mediation emerging from role conflict, whereas the effect of role ambiguity is only partially mediated. However, when it comes to task performance, only role ambiguity is a significant predictor, whereas role conflict does not seem to impact performance in a significant way. To shed further light on this relationship we conducted a post hoc analysis including role ambiguity and role conflict simultaneously as predictors. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 5.

The results of the post hoc analysis show that for the outcome of

Table 5

Post hoc analysis.

	DV: Job affective well-being	DV: Task performance
Gender	.00	.05
Role ambiguity	-.28 ***	-.26 **
Role conflict	-.05	.04
Relationship conflict	-.37 ***	.01

Table entries are standardized regression coefficients (betas). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

For gender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

affective well-being, both role ambiguity and role conflict (fully mediated by relationship conflict) have a significant negative effect. However, for the behavioral outcome of task performance, only role ambiguity emerges as significant. This result seems to suggest that when employees appraise their well-being in and attitudes towards an organization, they perceive both the lack of clarity with regard to their own role, as well as conflicting role demands, as hindrance stressors with negative consequences. However, when it comes to their individual performance, it is the lack of clarity about his or her own role that is dominant for the employee's ability to perform tasks successfully, whereas employees seem to be able to shield themselves and their own performance from the potential disturbance caused by role conflict. In other words, not knowing what to do clearly impacts performance, whereas the conflict of having to serve the expectations of person A versus those of person B can be resolved by the employee.

5.2. Implications for practice and recommendations

The results of this study have a number of relevant implications for managerial practice in the hospitality industry. The most obvious of these implications is that effective new employee orientation seems to pay off for hospitality firms by stimulating more positive employee attitudes as well as performance. New employee orientation is typically a process that happens in a very limited time-frame – researchers suggested “between the first day and the first week” (Wanous and Reichers, 2000: 437) – but the effects of effective employee orientation can impact work attitudes and performance over months or even years of employment. The favorable ratio between a short-term input and potentially much longer-term pay-offs should encourage hospitality organizations to invest more resources into this crucial process.

The differential results of our study also suggest that hospitality firms can make adjustments based on whether they primarily target job performance or job attitudes as outcomes. For the improvement of individual task performance, it is essential to reduce job ambiguity. This implies that immediately after organizational entry new employees should be made quickly aware of their tasks, the specific performance expectations related to their job as well as the available resources to complete their tasks.

For hospitality firms that want to put more emphasis on favorable job attitudes and smooth, conflict-free interactions between their employees, role conflict seems to be the essential variable that needs to be targeted. By clearly specifying reporting lines, carefully adjusting organizational, departmental and team objectives, and clarifying organizational processes and the individual contributions each employee has

to make to the effective functioning of these processes, role conflict can be minimized and the emergence of relationship conflict prevented.

Last but not least, the fact that in our study relationship conflict emerged as a mediator of the relationship between new employee orientation, role stressors and our focal outcomes suggests that when managerial interventions at the level of role stressors are difficult or impossible to implement, managers could also mitigate their negative impact on job attitudes and performance by attempting to reduce the levels of relationship conflict in the organization. This could be achieved by using team coaching and teambuilding activities, offering training in conflict management and conflict resolution techniques, and/or strengthening the capacity for mediation carried out either by the human resources department or supported by specialists external to the organization.

5.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Like all research, this study has a number of limitations. Since we applied a survey design, causal interpretations of our results are not warranted. We attempted to mitigate against this fundamental weakness by applying a longitudinal data collection strategy, but the fundamental challenge to survey results still stands. The measure for new employee orientation was developed specifically for the purpose of this study. Although we respected established recommendations for scale development (Hinkin, Tracey, & Enz, 1997) we did not conduct a separate assessment of convergent and discriminant validity. As such, this measure should be regarded with some caution and additional evidence for its validity and reliability may be provided by future research. An additional potential shortcoming concerns our results related to task performance. First of all, the internal consistency reliability of our measure was on the low side of the acceptable range, leading to potential attenuation of the relationships with the upstream variables in our model. Also, the measure focuses on individual elements of task performance. It is possible that performance measures oriented towards the team or the organization (Griffin et al., 2007) would have yielded a different pattern of results.

Last but not least, we collected data from hospitality students in a narrow age range, with limited work experience and employed as hospitality interns, i.e. in a “peripheral” labor arrangement. This raises potential questions regarding the external validity of our results. Older and more experienced employees may be able to navigate organizational entry processes differently or glean relevant information more effectively, thereby mitigating the negative effects due to role ambiguity and/or role conflict. Conversely, the fact that employees in our sample could have been seen as “cheap labor” and, therefore, could have been insufficiently exposed to new employee orientation does not constitute a threat to our results. In fact, we observe substantial variability in new employee orientation in our sample. This variability contributed to our findings and suggests that even short-term, peripheral employees benefit from effective orientation, which they turn into more positive attitudes and better work performance.

The limitations of our research suggest that future research may want to enlarge the scope of the outcome variables, in particular as far as employee performance is concerned. In addition to measures of individual in-role performance, measures of team or organizational performance or, alternatively, measures of extra-role performance of the organizational citizenship behavior type may be included. In addition, supervisor or peer-assessed measures of performance would provide a useful triangulation with regard to our results that are based on self-report measures of performance. Last but not least, it would be promising to include additional predictors of work attitudes and work performance, such as work-life balance, leadership, individual differences and other possible predictors in an effort to judge the relative importance of new employee orientation as an incremental predictor of work attitudes and performance above and beyond more established constructs.

We also suggest that future research enlarges the scope of the investigation beyond a population of hospitality students. For employees with more professional experience in the hospitality industry, new employee orientation may play a different role. Task-related aspects may be less relevant as employees can draw on their previous experience and repertoire of skills. However, the cultural and value-related aspects of orientation may be just as important in order to allow new employees to “blend in” seamlessly. This would also open up the possibility of investigating differential effects of task- vs. value-focused orientation in future studies.

6. Conclusion

Our research addresses a topic that features prominently in anecdotal evidence about the hospitality industry. Seen by many as a high-stress, fast-paced, and chronically understaffed job environment where the focus is on doing rather than thinking, the industry suffers from the prejudice that it has an insatiable appetite for cheap labor with limited qualification into which it invests only limited human resource management efforts. How much of this is true, and how much is folklore, is not for the authors of this paper to judge. However, the results of our study clearly demonstrate the benefits of effective new employee orientation, even (or maybe especially) for young and inexperienced employees. We hope that this will encourage human resource managers in the industry, and hospitality managers in general, to take a small step back and invest a little effort into easing new employees into their jobs. Ultimately, they may be surprised by the benefits they can reap.

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