

POWER OF STORIES IN SHAPING NEWCOMERS' ACTIONS

It is well-known that organizational newcomers are exposed to stories about other organizational members as they assimilate to their new role. Stories convey information about organizational values that promote or discourage certain behaviors. Newcomers may hear stories about high-level individuals, such as founders and executives, and about lower-level individuals, such as maintenance staff. However, we know little about how these stories impact newcomer behavior. Research that appeared last year in the *Academy of Management Journal* addressed this issue. The authors found that stories where high-level individuals upheld organizational values made organizational values

Key Takeaways:

- Stories are a powerful influence on newcomer behavior
- Value-upholding stories about lower-level individuals generate desirable newcomer behavior such as helping and reinforce organizational values
- Value-upholding stories about high-level individuals result in more deviant behavior
- Value-violating stories about high-level individuals reduce newcomer helping

salient to newcomers, but were less effective in influencing desired newcomer behaviors than similar stories about lower-level individuals. Furthermore, the authors found that stories about lower-level individuals violating organizational values resulted in more deviance behavior among newcomers than those about high-level individuals.

Stories about lower-level individuals are more influential because newcomers are likely to perceive that they are more similar to lower-level individuals than high-level individuals.

Using data on 632 newcomers within a large, Asian technology firm, the authors conducted a field experiment and found that stories about low-level individuals are a powerful tool for making organizational values both salient and enduring for newcomers. These findings stem from the results of the experiment, as well as analysis of the story content that was described in the experiment.

The authors suggest that future research is needed to explore the source and subject of stories that might add more detail to these findings.

Martin, S. R. (2016). Stories about values and valuable stories: A field experiment of the power of narratives to shape newcomers' actions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 1707-1724.

