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Kane, A.; Rink, Floortje

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How Newcomers Influence Group Utilization of Their Knowledge: Integrating Versus Differentiating Strategies

Aimée A. Kane
Duquesne University

Floor Rink
University of Groningen

The present research contributes to the literature on group learning and group socialization by examining whether newcomers can actively influence the extent to which groups socially accept them and, in turn, use their unique knowledge. We propose that groups will respond more positively toward newcomers who use an integrating language-based strategy (i.e., plural pronouns) that emphasizes their new group identity than toward newcomers who use the more common differentiating language-based strategy (i.e., singular pronouns) that emphasizes their personal identity and separation from the group. This article reports 2 experiments (an interactive group study and a scenario study) that support this proposition, suggesting that group utilization of newcomer knowledge depends, in part, on the way newcomers contribute their knowledge. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: group learning, group socialization, knowledge transfer, membership change, social identity

Employees are a key source of new ideas, and the transfer of knowledge from one employee to another positively influences work group effectiveness (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Bonner & Baumann, 2012). The scientific literature on group learning has identified membership change as a key mechanism for renewing a group's knowledge resources (Argote, Gruen-

feld, & Naquin, 2001). The mere presence of a newcomer is expected to trigger group reflection on existing practices, at least to some degree (Arrow & McGrath, 1993; Choi & Thompson, 2005). But the dominant assumption is that newcomers uplift work processes particularly when they bring unique knowledge that groups can use (Bunderson, Van Der Vegt, & Sparrowe, 2014; Choi & Levine, 2004; Kane, Argote, & Levine, 2005; Rink & Ellemers, 2009).

The knowledge utilization assumption is intuitively appealing and relates to lay theories stating that “fresh blood” will enhance the origination of new ideas in groups (e.g., Sloane, 2006). However, a recent review of five decades of research on group membership change and newcomers reveals that groups rarely see their newest members as experts who possess knowledge worth utilizing (Rink, Kane, Ellemers, & Van Der Vegt, 2013). For example, a series of experiments demonstrates that groups are less receptive to constructive criticism expressed by a newcomer than to criticism expressed by a group member, even when both articulated the exact same critique (Hornsey, Grice, Jetten, Paulsen, & Callan, 2007). Moreover, organizational field studies show that work groups generally display an unwillingness to incorporate newcomers' unique task knowledge (Cini, Mo-

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Aimée A. Kane, Marketing and Management Department, Palumbo Donahue School of Business, Duquesne University; Floor Rink, Department of Organizational Behavior, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Groningen.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aimée A. Kane, Marketing and Management Department, Palumbo Donahue School of Business, Duquesne University, 600 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15228. E-mail: kanea@duq.edu

reland, & Levine, 1993; Molleman & Van der Vegt, 2007). In order for scientific literature to provide an actionable understanding of how membership change relates to group learning, further research is needed that examines when groups *are* willing to utilize unique newcomer knowledge and why.

We posit that the suboptimal use of valuable newcomer knowledge can be explained by a discrepancy between what newcomers can offer groups and the way group members regard them. Group socialization research shows that newcomers are often seen as marginal members whose attachment to the group is suspect (Cimino & Delton, 2010; Hornsey et al., 2007; Moreland, 1985). As a result, group members are primarily concerned with whether newcomers establish themselves as full group members during the socialization process. The emphasis of groups on the acceptance of newcomers as full group members suggests that group members rely strongly on social considerations in deliberating on how to respond to newcomers (Moreland & Levine, 2002). The present research, therefore, examines under which conditions groups socially accept newcomers and tests whether this acceptance reduces the likelihood that groups dismiss newcomer knowledge. In addressing this research question, we treat newcomers as *proactive* agents who are able to take social deliberations into account in how they behave toward their group.

Our research contributes to the literature in a number of important ways. First, it elucidates the relationship between knowledge utilization and newcomer acceptance and connects group learning research with group socialization research. Second, we posit that newcomers' own behavior can influence the way groups respond to them. This approach goes beyond studies that examined whether the utilization of newcomer knowledge depends on diffuse newcomer cues that may reduce concerns about group attachment, such as belonging to the same organization (Kane, 2010; Kane et al., 2005) or the same race (Ziller, Behringer, & Goodchilds, 1960). Our focus on what newcomers can do to positively influence the utilization of their knowledge also diverges from research examining whether newcomer acceptance depends on newcomers' prosocial personality traits, such as extraversion (Joardar & Matthews, 2010) or agreeableness (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg,

2003). This prior work has tended to focus on traits that are relatively fixed and, thus, beyond newcomers' control. We, on the other hand, propose that the *way* the newcomers contribute their unique knowledge affects the extent to which groups ultimately capitalize on the valuable resources embedded in their newest members.

To examine whether newcomers can behave in ways that allay group concerns about them becoming full group members, we compared the effectiveness of two subtle language-based identity strategies that newcomers can use to signal their interest in the group—an integrating pronoun strategy versus a more commonly used differentiating pronoun strategy (see Campbell & Pennebaker, 2003). We tested how newcomers' use of these identity strategies affects newcomer acceptance and knowledge utilization in a behavioral group experiment and in a scenario experiment.

Theoretical Framework

The knowledge embedded in group members is a vital resource for groups to capitalize on to improve their functioning (McGrath, 1984). This is why membership change, which provides access to new knowledge, is recognized as a key group learning mechanism (Argote et al., 2001; Argote & Kane, 2003; Lewis, Belliveau, Herndon, & Keller, 2007; Wilson, Goodman, & Cronin, 2007). However, a newcomer's knowledge will only enhance group learning when group members (a) recognize its value and (b) are willing to use it (Bunderson et al., 2014).

Research on expertise recognition in small groups (Baumann & Bonner, 2013; Littlepage, Robison, & Reddington, 1997), newcomer socialization (Choi & Levine, 2004; Moreland & Levine, 2002), and organizational learning (Argote, 2013; March, 1991) has shown that these two conditions are not easily satisfied. Innovative knowledge, for example, is critical for group viability, but groups may view it negatively because it requires them to divert scarce attention away from existing practices and learn new ways of working. Accordingly, group learning theorists (e.g., Argote & Kane, 2003; Lewis et al., 2007) have cautioned that the utilization of newcomer knowledge can be challenging.

In their seminal group socialization model, Moreland and Levine (1982) argue that newcomers are more likely to be accepted by groups when newcomers demonstrate their commitment to the group. Subsequent theory highlights that newcomers can indeed employ tactics to achieve this goal, such as seeking task feedback or actively monitoring collective task behavior (Levine & Moreland, 1999; Moreland & Levine, 2001). These tactics help overcome group skepticism toward a newcomer's task contributions and, as such, help facilitate a group's task-related needs. Given, however, that social considerations primarily tend to determine how groups respond to newcomers (Moreland & Levine, 2002), we propose that groups should respond particularly positively toward newcomers who actively signal a *social* interest in their group and show a willingness to act on behalf of the group. We thus posit that newcomers may benefit more from fulfilling a group's social, affiliative needs.

Earlier work from Hollander (1958) supports our proposition. He argues that group receptivity to disruptive, nonconformist behavior from a single group member depends on the accumulation of the group's positively disposed impressions of that particular member, termed "idiosyncrasy credits." Although newcomers tend to be marginal members (Cimino & Delton, 2010) with few positional credits, Hollander (1958) suggests that any member can amass idiosyncrasy credits through their interactions with fellow members. Through interaction, newcomers can modify initial group impressions and signal affiliation with the group.

Empirical findings from recent research provide suggestive evidence that member acceptance indeed depends, in part, on how members socially interact with their group (Hansen & Levine, 2009; Jans, Postmes, & Van Der Zee, 2011; Rink & Ellemers, 2010). This means that groups do not solely accept members on the basis of characteristics such as social similarity; groups may also socially accept members who are different, like newcomers, provided that they proactively demonstrate a willingness to belong to the group. In one study, for example, it was found that groups viewed newly appointed leaders as more effective when the leaders used a relatively directive leadership style that explicitly focused on the attainment of col-

lective group goals (Sauer, 2011). Relatedly, findings from an experiment demonstrated that groups responded more favorably to newcomers who behaved assertively and clearly indicated how their knowledge contributed to group goals (Hansen & Levine, 2009).

Not all proactive newcomers will be comfortable behaving in directive or assertive ways, however, and research suggests that such behavior is not always appreciated; newcomers who behave *too* assertively are likely to be evaluated negatively regardless of their contributions (Ames & Flynn, 2007). More generally, groups tend to be suspicious of newcomers (Cimino & Delton, 2010) and reluctant to incur the costs associated with adopting new knowledge (Argote & Kane, 2003). This raises the question of what newcomers themselves can do to help groups overcome the inclination to distrust their newest members. One way in which individuals can signal affiliation when they interact with others is through the conversational stance, or footing, that they use when referring to themselves and others (Goffman, 1981). We, therefore, examine whether the pronouns newcomers use to refer to themselves and their new group may, intentionally or unintentionally, communicate their interest in *integrating* into the collective or an interest in *differentiating* from it. Accordingly, this research aims to generate practical knowledge on what language-based strategy newcomers should use to increase their acceptance, and, in turn, the utilization of their unique knowledge.

Language-Based Identity Strategies

Small variations in the use of singular compared with plural pronouns (e.g., I vs. we) can signal large differences in a speaker's psychological state (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Chung & Pennebaker, 2007). Yet based on linguistics literature (Goffman, 1981) as well as principles derived from the social identity perspective (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005), it can also be deduced that others may perceive the use of singular compared to plural pronouns to be reflective of a speaker's interest in a collective entity. The use of singular pronouns (e.g., I, my, your) may reflect a speaker's interest in *differentiating* oneself

from the collective, but the use of plural pronouns (e.g., we, our) may reflect a speaker's interest in *integrating* into the collective and can help to establish a shared basis of identification (Goffman, 1981). To the extent this reasoning applies to how groups respond to newcomers, they may encounter less social acceptance when using singular pronouns (i.e., a differentiating strategy) rather than plural pronouns (i.e., an integrating strategy), despite the first being a potentially more natural strategy for newcomers to use. In the sections below, we describe the logic behind this reasoning.

Differentiating Pronoun Strategy

Differentiating pronouns rank among the most frequently used words in the English language. In fact, the top-five pronouns, in decreasing order of frequency, are *I*, *my*, *it*, *you*, and *me* (Campbell & Pennebaker, 2003). Although never specifically examined with reference to newcomers, it is known that singular pronouns (e.g., I, you, my, mine) are employed particularly often by marginal members in a group (i.e., minority members; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & McKimmie, 2003). Such members generally feel insecure about their group identity, and protect their self-esteem by attaching importance to personal characteristics (i.e., their personal identity; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Rink & Ellemers, 2011).

Although the use of singular pronouns may represent a natural strategy for marginal members to convey their current focal identity (i.e., their personal identity), it also signals *differentiation* from the group (Gillispie & Chrispeels, 2008). Newcomers who rely on this pronoun strategy when providing unique knowledge to the group may thus unintentionally fail to signal that they make this knowledge contribution out of an interest in belonging to and supporting the group (Jetten et al., 2003). The differentiating pronoun strategy, therefore, may undermine the social acceptance of newcomers, which, in turn, is likely to limit the willingness of groups to utilize the knowledge newcomers provide.

Integrating Pronoun Strategy

Social psychological research demonstrates that the use of first person plural pronouns (e.g., we, us, our) in relation to one's (in)group can activate and support a collective identity among group members (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hornsey, Blackwood, & O'Brien, 2005). The use of these pronouns can also create perceptions of oneness that drive pro-social behavior (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997) and unification around shared goals (Gillispie & Chrispeels, 2008). Linguistics research has corroborated these key insights, demonstrating that a "we" footing has social value because it signifies proximity to interactional partners (Goffman, 1981). It has been found, for example, that these plural pronouns are often used by group leaders who want to emphasize joint responsibilities (Bull & Fetzer, 2006) and, importantly, by members who want to (re-)affirm their group membership (Wortham, 1996).

Based on the above literature streams, it can be expected that the use of first person plural pronouns may represent an effective strategy for newcomers to actively manage their marginal group position. Newcomers who employ this strategy when providing unique knowledge signal a desire to *integrate* in the new group (cf., Burke, Kraut, & Joyce, 2010), and likely convey to their fellow group members that they make this contribution to truly support the group. The integrating pronoun strategy, therefore, may enhance the social acceptance of newcomers, which, in turn, is likely to increase the willingness of groups to utilize their unique knowledge.

To conclude, because of the importance of social considerations in how groups respond to newcomers, our central hypothesis is that groups will be less willing to utilize newcomer knowledge when a newcomer relies on the differentiating pronoun strategy than when a newcomer uses the integrating pronoun strategy. Our second hypothesis is that this relationship will be explained by greater social acceptance of newcomers who use the integrating strategy than of newcomers who use the differentiating strategy. That is, newcomer acceptance should mediate the relationship between the use of

these strategies and group willingness to utilize newcomer knowledge.

Hypothesis 1: Knowledge utilization will be higher when newcomers use an integrating pronoun strategy than when newcomers use a differentiating pronoun strategy.

Hypothesis 2: The effects of the language-based identity strategies on knowledge utilization will be mediated by newcomer acceptance.

Method

Overview

Experiment 1 was designed to provide behavioral evidence that language-based identity strategies affect groups' willingness to utilize newcomers' unique knowledge. The interactive group methodology did, however, preclude an examination of group members' social acceptance of the newcomer. Stopping the task interdependent groups to ask about the newcomer would have been reactive, creating demand effects (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). Experiment 2 was, therefore, designed with a scenario vignette methodology to examine whether group members' social acceptance of newcomers may account for the influence of the identity strategies on knowledge utilization.

Across both studies, participants were presented with a situation in which a newcomer with related work experience replaced a departing member of their group. After working with the group for a short time, the newcomer suggested the group adopt a different, better work routine using either the integrating or differentiating strategy (see the Manipulation of Language-Based Identity Strategies sections below).

Experiment 1

Method

Design and participants. This interactive group experiment employed a mixed model design with language-based newcomer identity strategy (differentiating and integrating) as a between-subjects variable and production trial as a within-subjects variable. In return for course credit, students from a private American

university ($n = 78$; age $M = 20.00$, $SD = 1.09$; 54% male; 49% sophomores, 36% juniors, and 14% seniors; 55% Caucasian, 36% Asian, and 1% African American) participated in three-person groups, which were randomly assigned to each identity strategy condition ($n = 13$ groups with 39 individuals per condition). Gender composition varied as a function of random assignment, and was not significantly associated with study variables.¹ The newcomer was always a female confederate blind to the hypotheses, who was trained to manipulate the randomly assigned identity strategy condition by delivering three lines of script (see the Manipulation of Language-Based Identity Strategies section below).² Two coders rated video recordings to check whether the confederate used the appropriate wording for the identity strategy manipulated, Cohen's $\kappa = .91$. This was the case in 92% of the groups. Because the exclusion of the two groups with a minor error in the script did not alter the conclusions drawn from our analyses, we present results based on all 26 groups.

Group task and newcomer introduction.

Participants worked in interactive, task interdependent groups producing origami paper sailboats during five 4-min production trials, three of which occurred before newcomer entry (Kane et al., 2005; Kane, 2010). Each session began with a group formation phase during which time the three members introduced themselves, created a group name, and practiced the task. The task practice was thorough, involving two segments lasting approximately 20 minutes each. The first segment focused on training participants to execute a 12-step routine for making

¹ There was, for example, no significant effect of gender on knowledge utilization, Wald $\chi^2 = 1.14$, $p = .28$, 95% CI $[-.31, .09]$.

² We recruited four confederates from the university's undergraduate acting program, who were similar in gender (female), race (Caucasian), age (20), and year in school (sophomore). After multiple training sessions that included practice groups and reviews of video recordings, the confederates felt comfortable delivering both of the language-based identity strategies and demonstrating the different, better work routine. As desired, we found no significant difference in study variables on the basis of one confederate joining the group versus another (e.g., knowledge utilization was not higher for any of the three confederates compared with a fourth, Wald $\chi^2 = 2.02$, $p = .16$, 95% CI $[-.08, .49]$; Wald $\chi^2 = .14$, $p = .71$, 95% CI $[-.28, .19]$; and Wald $\chi^2 = .70$, $p = .37$, 95% CI $[-.16, .43]$, respectively).

origami sailboats (see Figure 1). The second segment consisted of three production trials in which groups produced sailboats using a sequentially interdependent assembly line where one member was responsible for the initial steps of the 12-step routine, a second for the interim steps, and a third for the final steps (see Figure 1). These randomly assigned steps were revealed to participants just before they began working in this sequential production line.

At the end of the second segment of the task practice, we checked that the group formation procedures had been effective in creating a salient work group identity. Participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) the extent they agreed with the following (Haslam, 2004) items: (a) *Being a member of the current team is important to me*, (b) *I feel strong ties to the team*, and (c) *I see myself as a member of this team*.

Interitem reliability was satisfactory, Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$, and participant's responses were more similar within than across groups, $rwg(j) = .89$, $ICC(1) = .18$, $ICC(2) = .30$. Consequently, we created a composite scale that was aggregated to the group-level. On average, groups reported relatively strong levels of group identity, $M = 4.51$, $SD = .79$, that were significantly above the midpoint of the scale, $t(25) = 3.25$, $p = .003$. As intended, there were no significant differences in identity salience between groups in the differentiating condition, $M = 4.40$, $SD = .43$, and the integrating condition, $M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.04$, $F(1, 24) = .48$, $p = .49$, $\eta^2 = .02$. These data indicate that work groups had indeed formed a salient identity prior to newcomer entry.

After the groups had been intact for approximately 40 minutes and before the start of the fourth production trial, the experimenter explained the following: "Just like real teams in

Figure 1. Production routines taught to groups and proposed by newcomers (Experiment 1). Diagrams assume a square piece of origami paper with one dark side and one light side. The initial diagram is a dark rectangle achieved by folding the light-sided paper in half. Subsequent diagrams depict what the origami paper looks like after each fold. Dashed lines show where folds will occur, and arrows depict movement. For example, the last of the initial step diagrams shows a square that is achieved by folding in half the previous rectangular diagram. Figures for the newcomer's 8-step routine are from "Unlocking Knowledge Transfer Potential: Knowledge Demonstrability and Superordinate Social Identity," by A. A. Kane, 2010, *Organization Science*, 21, p. 658. Copyright 2010 by INFORMS. Adapted with permission.

organizations, your team will experience a change in membership.” The confederate newcomer then replaced the initial assembler. After the group produced their first sailboat, the newcomer suggested the group adopt a different, better work routine (for details on this 8-step routine, see Figure 1) using either an integrating or a differentiating strategy (see the Manipulation of Language-Based Identity Strategies sections below).³

The newcomer departed before the group started the fifth and final production trial. During this final trial, groups consisted of the two members who had been with the group since the start. In addition to performing their own assembly role, these members also had to perform the initial assembler role that the newcomer had performed. A review of video recordings suggests that participants understood the task and were engaged in producing origami paper sailboats as a group.

Manipulation of the language-based identity strategies. Newcomers suggested their group adopt a better work routine using either the integrating pronoun strategy or the differentiating pronoun strategy. The integrating [differentiating] strategy was “Oh, *we* [I] have been trained differently. *We* [You] should use *this* [my] better routine—it also meets *our* [your] specifications. Should *we* [I] go over it?”⁴

Knowledge utilization. Our behavioral measure reflected whether groups utilized the newcomer’s work routine during the fourth production trial (with the newcomer present) and the fifth production trial (after the newcomer’s departure). This repeated measures, dichotomous variable took on the following response profiles: (a) *yes/yes*, (b) *yes/no*, (c) *no/yes*, or (d) *no/no*. Two coders, who were blind to experimental condition, achieved complete interrater reliability in assessing knowledge utilization, Cohen’s $\kappa = 1.00$. Coding was straightforward because groups displayed a willingness to utilize newcomer’s unique knowledge by replacing their established work routine with the newcomer’s routine (for a comparison of the routines, see Figure 1).

Results

As hypothesized, knowledge utilization occurred more often in groups whose newcomer used the integrating than the differentiating

strategy. The majority of the groups in the integrating condition utilized the newcomer’s knowledge during Trial 4 and Trial 5, 53.8%, 95% CI [.29, .77] and 53.8%, 95%CI [.29, .77], respectively. By contrast, few of the groups in the differentiating condition utilized the newcomer’s knowledge during Trial 4 and Trial 5, 30.8%, 95% CI [.12, .58] and 15.4%, 95% CI [.04, .42], respectively.

Because knowledge utilization is a dichotomous measure collected across two trials, we employed a weighted least squares regression technique for analyzing repeated-measures categorical data (Stokes, Davis, & Koch, 2000). Correlated marginal proportions of knowledge utilization were modeled with an underlying contingency table that reflected the sampling structure and included the four response profiles. As predicted, there was a significant main effect for language-based identity strategy, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.42$, $p = .04$. When the newcomer used the integrating pronoun strategy the marginal probability of knowledge utilization was 18% higher, 95% CI [.02, .34], than when the newcomer used the differentiating pronoun strategy. The effect of trial on was not significant, Wald $\chi^2 = 0.00$, $p = .99$, indicating that the influence of the identity strategies sustained after the newcomer’s departure.

Discussion of Experiment 1

As predicted in Hypothesis 1, newcomers’ use of the integrating language-based strategy rather than the differentiating language-based strategy led to greater knowledge utilization. Subtle differences in the use of pronouns were sufficient to affect groups’ willingness to utilize newcomers’ unique knowledge, and this effect sustained after newcomers’ departure. This sug-

³ The duration before the newcomer offered the suggestion did not differ in the integrating and differentiating conditions, $M_s = 41.2$ and 44.8 seconds, $SD_s = 8.4$ and 6.3 , respectively, $F(1, 24) = 1.54$, $p = .23$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Moreover, the delivery of the newcomer’s suggestion caused a comparable amount of disruption regardless of whether it was conveyed in an integrating or a differentiating way, $M_s = 10.6$ and 11.5 seconds, $SD_s = 3.3$ and 4.3 , respectively, $F(1, 24) = .32$, $p = .58$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

⁴ We used the neutral word “this” to help the sentence come across naturally, and because the word’s meaning derives from the context in which it is placed (Wortham, 1996). As such, it is highly likely that participants interpreted “this” in the intended, integrating way.

gests that the way the newcomers contribute their unique knowledge influences whether groups ultimately capitalize on the valuable resources embedded in their newest members.

The task interdependence of this group experiment was ideal for establishing behavioral evidence that language-based identity strategies influence knowledge utilization. But, the interactive nature of the Experiment 1 precluded examination of group members' social acceptance of newcomers, which is predicted to be an important psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between identity strategies and knowledge utilization in Hypothesis 2. Experiment 2 was thus designed with a scenario vignette methodology that enabled us to conduct an examination of group members' social acceptance of newcomers as a mediator.

Experiment 2

Method

Design and participants. This scenario vignette experiment employed a between subjects design with two language-based identity strategy conditions (differentiating and integrating). Residents of the United States were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk and then directed to an experimental web site ($n = 82$). Samples drawn from Amazon Mechanical Turk provide data as reliable as those drawn from student populations, but research indicates they are older and more motivated by task engagement than by pay (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012). We paid participants a standard rate of \$.40. The data from two participants were excluded because of duplicate participation evidenced from the same worker identification number and Internet Protocol address.

The remaining 80 participants ranged in age (49% ages 24–35, 26% ages 18–23, 16% ages 36–45, and 9% ages 46–65), and 68.5% were men. Of these participants, 12 failed to correctly answer reading check questions (see Appendix). In general, however, the responses to these reading checks suggest that the task was generally well understood and easily undertaken. Although conclusions from the analyses reported below remain unchanged when including or excluding the participants who failed the reading checks, we remain consistent with our a priori

criteria and exclude them (see also Ames & Fiske, 2013; Kittur, Chi, & Suh, 2008). The 68 participants who met our inclusion criteria were randomly assigned to either the integrating condition ($n = 32$) or the differentiating condition ($n = 36$).

Group task and newcomer introduction. Participants individually responded to a scenario vignette in which they were placed in the role of group members responding to a newcomer. Participants read that they were part of a project team in DynaOrg, Inc., an organization that specializes in the development of new medical devices. Next, participants read that their work group had experienced a change in membership and the reasoning for this change was the same as in Experiment 1 (i.e., *just like real teams and organizations, your team experienced a change in membership*). The newcomer suggested that the group use a different, better work routine, and this suggestion was made using either the integrating strategy or the differentiating strategy (see the next section).

Manipulation of language-based identity strategies. Participants read that within a few days of working with their group the newcomer came up with a new idea, which he or she suggested using the integrating pronoun strategy or the differentiating pronoun strategy. In particular, the integrating [differentiating] strategy was: “We [I] have been doing things differently. We [You] should do things another way around here. We [I] have been trained differently, but *this* [my] new way will work really well for *us* [you]. It will probably really help *us* [you] to use *this* [my] better work routine. Should *we* [I] go over it?”

Newcomer acceptance. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *do not agree at all*, 7 = *agree completely*) with the following items: (a) *I will readily accept the newcomer*, (b) *I want the newcomer to become an established member of the team*, (c) *I will be pleased to have the newcomer become an established member of the team*, (d) *I think that the newcomer will become a full part of the team soon*, and (e) *I think the newcomer will integrate into the team easily*. The five items formed a reliable scale, Cronbach's alpha = .94.

Knowledge utilization. To measure knowledge utilization, participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*)

the extent to which they, as established group members, would (a) *try out the work routine the newcomer suggested*, (b) *utilize the work routine the newcomer suggested*, (c) *adopt the work routine the newcomer suggested*, and (d) *incorporate the work routine the newcomer suggested*. The four items formed a reliable scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$.

Although these measures are significantly correlated, $r = .67$, $p < .001$, a confirmatory principal components analysis with an oblimin rotation demonstrated that newcomer acceptance and knowledge utilization were represented as separate factors, eigenvalues = 6.34 and 1.31, respectively, together explaining 84.9% of variance. The five newcomer acceptance items described above have high loadings on the first factor, .73, .96, .94, .95, and .67, and low cross-loading on the second factor, $-.25$, $.14$, $.004$, $-.01$, and $-.25$. A similar pattern is observed for the four knowledge utilization items described above, which have high loadings on the second factor, $-.82$, $-.92$, $-.99$, and $-.96$ and low cross-loadings on the first factor, $.14$, $.07$, $-.08$, and $-.003$.⁵ Taken together, these high loadings and near zero cross-loadings confirm the validity of distinct measures of newcomer acceptance and knowledge utilization.

Results

Knowledge utilization. We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) on knowledge utilization with language-based identity strategies as an independent factor. Group members' willingness to utilize knowledge was greater when the newcomer had contributed it with the integrating pronoun strategy, $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.31$, than when the newcomer had contributed it with the differentiating pronoun strategy, $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.39$, $F(1, 66) = 15.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$. These results provide additional support for Hypothesis 1.

Newcomer acceptance mediation. An ANOVA on newcomer acceptance with identity strategies as an independent factor confirmed that group members were more accepting of newcomers who had used the integrating strategy, $M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.50$, than of newcomers who had used the differentiating strategy, $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.47$, $F(1, 66) = 12.96$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Hypothesis 2 predicted that new-

comer acceptance would mediate the effect of the language-based identity strategies on knowledge utilization. We follow the MacKinnon, Fairchild, and Fritz (2007) recommendation that researchers assess mediation significance with two regression analyses and use bootstrapping to calculate confidence limits around an estimate of the indirect mediation effect. In the first regression analysis of newcomer acceptance on identity strategy, the independent variable, identity strategy, significantly influenced the proposed mediator, newcomer acceptance ($B = 1.30$, $SE = .36$, $t = 3.60$, $p = .000$). In the second regression analysis of knowledge utilization on newcomer acceptance, the proposed mediator significantly influenced the dependent variable, knowledge utilization ($B = .55$, $SE = .09$, $t = 6.06$, $p = .000$). Using Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples, we calculated a bias-corrected confidence interval around the indirect effect estimate for the newcomer acceptance mediation, $B = .71$, 95% CI [.30, 1.29].⁶ The confidence interval does not include zero, further confirming the statistical significance of the mediator. Notably, the magnitude of the coefficient (.71) can be interpreted as the mean difference in knowledge utilization (on a 7-point scale) attributable to the integrating strategy compared to the differentiating strategy through newcomer acceptance (Hayes, 2009).

Finally, to assess whether newcomer acceptance completely accounted for the effect of identity strategies on knowledge utilization, we looked for the following pattern: a significant coefficient for the independent variable on the mediator, a significant coefficient for the mediator on the dependent variable, and a nonsignificant coefficient for the independent variable on the dependent variable in a regression that controlled for the mediator (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, p. 727). As shown in Figure 2, this pattern is observed in our data. Taken together, the results of these analyses demonstrate that new-

⁵ Other oblique rotations, such as promax, produce essentially the same pattern of loadings. A table of results is available from the authors on request.

⁶ The bootstrapping confidence interval was calculated in SPSS using the Preacher and Hayes (2008) INDIRECT procedure. Other bootstrapping specifications such as the percentile-based bootstrap yield nearly equivalent confidence limits. Tables available from the authors.

Figure 2. Identity strategies affect knowledge utilization indirectly through the hypothesized mediator, newcomer acceptance (Experiment 2). Differentiating strategy coded as “0” and integrating strategy coded as “1.” Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

comer acceptance completely mediated the effect of the newcomer’s identity strategy on knowledge utilization.

Experiment 2 Discussion

Our key prediction for the underlying psychological mechanism was supported (see Hypothesis 2). Group members’ social acceptance of newcomers accounted for the relationship between newcomers’ use of the language-based identity strategies on the one hand and knowledge utilization on the other hand. Newcomers’ use of collective, plural pronouns (e.g., we, us) affected the extent to which group members accepted newcomers, which, in turn, influenced their willingness to utilize newcomers’ unique knowledge. This suggests that the way newcomers speak about themselves and their groups can foster social acceptance capable of replacing group resistance with group receptivity to newcomers’ unique knowledge and ideas.

General Discussion

The current studies were designed to contribute to the literature on group learning and group socialization by answering a question that up to now has not been addressed: Can newcomers—who are generally seen as marginal members (Cimino & Delton, 2010; Hornsey et al., 2007; Moreland, 1985)—actively influence the extent to which groups socially accept them and, in turn, utilize their unique knowledge? Grounded in principles derived from the social identity perspective (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005) and the linguistics literature (e.g., Goffman, 1981), we

compared the effectiveness of an integrating pronoun strategy with the effectiveness of a differentiating pronoun strategy that newcomers tend to use by default. The results from both studies strongly supported our hypotheses that newcomers are accepted more easily and, hence, enhance the utilization of their knowledge in groups when they use collective, plural pronouns that emphasize their new group rather than singular pronouns that emphasize personal identity and separation from the group.

Theoretical Implications

Our research has several important implications for the literature on group socialization and group learning. First, the current study responds to calls for a better understanding of why groups often are not receptive to the innovative ideas of newcomers (Levine & Choi, 2011; Rink et al., 2013). Our results suggest that this lack of receptivity arises from suspicion about group attachment. Newcomers who counteracted this suspicion with an integrating language-based strategy were met by accepting group members who, in turn, were willing to utilize their unique knowledge. This finding is in line with research recognizing that within work groups, members can come to accept socially distinct others when these others display behaviors that emphasize group interests and the pursuit of common goals (Rink & Ellemers, 2010; Hornsey et al., 2005; Tyler & Blader, 2000).

Second, we also know from group learning research that social acceptance and a group’s utilization of newcomer knowledge depends, at least partly, on the existence of fixed newcomer characteristics (e.g., belonging to the same overarching group; Kane et al., 2005; Kane, 2010). Yet, our research suggests that, when developing their initial impressions of a newcomer, group members *do* have regard for the ways in which newcomers present themselves in relation to the group and, as such, fulfill the group’s affiliative needs (see Hollander, 1958). This finding implies that group members see beyond fixed newcomer characteristics, and may be less focused on the use of task-related tactics than initially assumed (Levine & Moreland, 1999; Moreland & Levine, 2001). Accordingly, groups may be less likely to exert assimilation pressure on newcomers who actively

take the group's identity into account during initial interactions.

Related to the above point, our research more generally suggests that marginalized group members, such as newcomers, *are* able to strategically improve the way they are socially perceived and treated in groups. This implies that newcomers should not be seen as passive agents who need help learning about the group's social norms and interaction patterns; they should instead be recognized as agents capable of creating social acceptance (Levine & Choi, 2011; Rink et al., 2013). This complements prior work investigating how newcomers can proactively manage their adjustment to a new group (Burke et al., 2010; Chen, 2005).

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the integrating strategy was more effective than the differentiating strategy in increasing newcomer acceptance and, as a result, knowledge utilization, it should be noted that, on average, groups exhibited moderate resistance to the newcomer's unique knowledge. This finding is consistent with existing theory (Argote & Kane, 2003; Rink et al., 2013) as well as empirical evidence from experimental studies (Hornsey et al., 2007; Kane, 2010) and field settings (Cini et al., 1993; Molleman & Van der Vegt, 2007). Although new knowledge is critical for long-term group viability, the barriers to unique newcomer knowledge are not negligible (Argote & Kane, 2003). The benefits of knowledge utilization are, for example, by no means certain. Furthermore, exploratory learning processes are disruptive and costly as they divert scarce resources away from exploiting existing knowledge (March, 1991). It remains to be investigated the extent to which the overall rate of knowledge utilization in our studies can be attributed to features of the experimental methodologies that may influence the cost of exploring new knowledge (e.g., task demands, time pressure, the timing of the newcomer's knowledge contribution). Indeed, the experimental paradigms that we used contribute to the internal validity of our findings, but they do restrict us from broadly generalizing to newcomers in contexts that differ significantly from those captured in these studies. It is therefore important that future research examines new-

comer knowledge utilization in different empirical settings.

Study 2 provides evidence for our prediction that, compared with differentiating singular pronouns, integrating plural pronouns positively influences the extent to which groups socially accept newcomers. We have argued that the latter strategy signals integration intentions and a greater willingness to belong to the group. We acknowledge, however, that it may also be profitable for future research to investigate a range of other possible responses that people may have toward the language strategies. For example, the use of integrating pronouns compared with differentiating pronouns may also trigger different initial emotional responses in group members (e.g., surprise, anger). Such responses, in conjunction with signals of group attachment, may account for the greater newcomer acceptance found in response to integrating compared with differentiating language.

Furthermore, it may be fruitful for future researchers to explore the efficacy of these strategies in groups in which there is less equality among members than was present in our studies. It is a relatively robust finding that members who are core to their group (because of their formal position, expertise, or status) tend to identify more strongly and are more motivated to act on behalf of the group (Tyler & Blader, 2002). In groups with less equality, core members may be more attentive to the language-based identity strategy that a newcomer uses than will peripheral members (Rink & Ellemers, 2015).

Likewise, newcomers can also differ in the role that they will occupy within the group, or in the reputation that they hold on group entry. Here too theory suggests that newcomers with high status may not need to utilize an integrating strategy for their ideas to be adopted, at least not to the same extent as newcomers who still have to build a reputation (Bunderson et al., 2014; Jetten, Hornsey, & Adarves-Yorno, 2006). Accordingly, the possible moderating effects of group member and newcomer characteristics offer interesting avenues for future research.

Finally, it was our aim to demonstrate that newcomers can take an active role in their own socialization. Yet it would be fruitful to examine how playing this active role influences newcomers themselves. Emphasizing an aspira-

tional group identity could, for example, be depleting, especially in a less than welcoming group. It is, therefore, important to realize that the utilization of newcomer knowledge and newcomer socialization should not solely rely on their shoulders; it is a process of mutual adjustment that relies on both group members and newcomers alike (Levine, Choi, & Moreland, 2003; Moreland & Levine, 1982).

Conclusion

This research examined how newcomers can proactively shape their social environments, replacing group resistance with receptivity. Rather than relying on the commonly used differentiating strategy (i.e., singular pronouns), newcomers can direct their behavior with the use of an integrating strategy (i.e., plural pronouns) that signals an interest in belonging to the group. This latter identity strategy motivates groups to socially accept newcomers, which, in turn, renders groups willing to utilize their knowledge. This finding can help organizations design socialization programs to increase newcomer acceptance and help work groups benefit from the knowledge their newest members have to offer.

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Appendix

Experiment 2 Reading Check Questions

Experiment 2 was designed with four reading check questions with incorrect responses serving as an exclusion criterion. This practice is recommended by researchers (Kittur, Chi, & Suh, 2008) and by Amazon Mechanical Turk in their best practices guide to ensure meaningful responses and data quality. The first two questions asked participants to identify (a) the organization (*What is the name of the organization your team is a part of?* [*IntelTech, DynaOrg, AltraOrg, BestOrg*]) and (b) its specialty (*What does your organization specialize in?* [*the sales of pharmaceutical drugs, the development of*

semiconductor chips, the development of new medical devices, the sales of computing devices]). The third and fourth questions asked participants to describe (c) the workplace situation (*What just happened in your team?* [*a leadership change, the newcomer made a suggestion, all of the above, none of the above*]) and (d) their team (*What kind of a team are you a part of?* [*a project team, a sales team, an IT support team, a consulting team*]).

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