

**Effects of digital onboarding on Newcomer Proactivity Behaviours and its
impact on Socialisation Outcomes.**

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to firstly investigate whether digital onboarding impacts newcomer proactive behaviours. Secondly to investigate whether newcomer proactive behaviours remain positively related to socialisation outcomes despite the evolving workforce and work environment. The study aims to extend the literature on organisational socialisation through understanding the impact of digital onboarding.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper used an exploratory study, based on interviews held with new employees, comprising both digitally onboarded and face to face onboarded employees.

Findings – Based on a sample of 14 employees, the results indicated that digital onboarding has no notable effect on newcomer proactive behaviours, specifically information seeking, feedback seeking and general socialising. The study also found that newcomer proactivity remains positively related to socialisation outcomes. Specifically the findings show how information seeking, feedback seeking, and general socialising is related to role clarity, task mastery and social integration, respectively.

Research limitations/implications – It may take time for proactive behaviours to become evident, therefore, researchers are encouraged to investigate the research questions by introducing a time lag between the behaviours and cognitions.

Practical implications – The paper includes implication for organisational socialisation processes to test for newcomer proactivity during the recruitment process to ensure effective socialisation.

Originality/value – This paper identifies an opportunity for organisations to leverage digital onboarding processes as part of their socialisation tactics and confirms that the change in workforce and environment has not displace existent knowledge of effectiveness of socialisation processes.

Keywords

digital onboarding, newcomer proactive behaviours, socialisation outcomes, newcomer socialisation

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. IT has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Definitions

Word	Meaning
Digital Onboarding	Onboarding of a new employee through the use of digital information tools or applications e.g., Microsoft Teams or Zoom
Organisational Socialisation	The process of integrating a new employee into the organisation and commonly referred to as 'onboarding'
Newcomer	A new employee
Newcomer Proactivity/Proactive Behaviours	Actions exhibited by a new employee to aid them in integrating into their new roles, e.g. information or feedback seeking

The above words and meanings are used interchangeably throughout this research paper.

1 Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem

1.1 Background to the research

In today's dynamic and constantly evolving world, organisations face the imperative to adapt, transform, and augment their workforce through the recruitment of new talent (Becker & Bish, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022). The strategic objective behind recruitment is to introduce a 'fresh pair of eyes' into the existing teams, thereby enabling them to effectively respond to evolving demands and positioning the organisation for success (Becker & Bish, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022). This infusion of fresh perspectives and skills is essential for organisations seeking to remain agile and competitive in a rapidly changing landscape.

When a new employee, often referred to as a newcomer in the realm of academic research, becomes a part of a new organisation, both the individual and the organisation embark on a mutual adjustment journey (Liu et al., 2023; Rubenstein et al., 2020). From the employer's standpoint, this adjustment process is typically facilitated through what is academically termed the organisational socialisation process, and more colloquially known as the onboarding process (Becker & Bish, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; L. Zhao et al., 2022). The onboarding process plays a crucial role in smoothly integrating new employees, accomplished through a comprehensive array of practices that encompass both on-the-job training and integration programs (Becker & Bish, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; L. Zhao et al., 2022). These multifaceted processes are key in facilitating the transition of a new employee from 'outsider' to becoming an integral part of the organisation's 'insider' cohort (Becker & Bish, 2021; Dimitrova et al., 2023; Nasr et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2023; L. Zhao et al., 2022).

Through this journey, new employees gain the knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding required to thrive within the organisation. Ultimately contributing to their sense of belonging and their ability to make meaningful contributions to the company's objectives and overall success (Becker & Bish, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; L. Zhao et al., 2022).

From the viewpoint of an employee, embarking on a new job can be a daunting experience. There's notable pressure to rapidly acquire the necessary skills and

competencies to navigate the intricacies of the new role (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Rubenstein et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). This entails not only mastering job-specific tasks but also comprehending the underlying values, norms, and distinct organisational language (Lui et al., 2023; Rubenstein et al., 2020).

Extensive research efforts have been dedicated to shedding light on the concept of organisational socialisation by delving into the firsthand experiences of new employees (Becker & Bish, 2021; Dimitrova et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; L. Zhao et al., 2022). The body of research uncovered the intricacies of the newcomer's journey, providing insights into the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and the overall process of acclimating to their new professional environment (Liu et al., 2023, J. Jiang et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022).

The theoretical framework employed in this research paper draws heavily from Van Maanen and Schein's model of socialisation tactics and socialisation outcomes, recognised for its proximity to an established theory of organisational socialisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; J. Jiang et al., 2022; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Zhao et al., 2022). This theoretical foundation serves as a robust and comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals adapt and integrate into an organisation (Griffin et al., 2000; J. Jiang et al., 2022; Wiseman et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Additionally, the study leverages the well-established uncertainty reduction theory, renowned for its prevalence and widespread use in socialisation research (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Zhao et al., 2022). This theory is instrumental in explaining the intricacies of newcomer proactivity, shedding light on how individuals navigate uncertainty in an organisation.

1.2 Business rationale for the study

Ensuring the effective socialisation of new employees holds a myriad of advantages for organisation's. Firstly, it's essential to recognise that organisation's invest substantial financial resources in the process of hiring and onboarding new employees (Becker & Bish, 2021; Wiseman et al., 2022). To realise a return on this significant investment, it becomes imperative for new employees to become productive and contribute to the organisation's goals in the shortest possible time frame (Becker & Bish, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022; J. Zhou et al.,

2022). Therefore, the longer it takes for new employees to reach peak effectiveness, the greater the financial risk for the organisation. Moreover, the contemporary employment landscape is marked by a high degree of mobility, with employees frequently transitioning between organisations (Wiseman et al., 2022; J. Zhou et al., 2022). This fluidity exacerbates the risk of organisations not realising a sufficient return on their investment in each new hire. In this context, the role of effectively designed socialisation programs becomes critically important (Wiseman et al., 2022).

By facilitating a smoother and faster integration process for new employees, these programs enhance the chances of not only retaining talent but also ensuring that the organisation reaps the full benefits of its human capital investments. Consequently, well-crafted socialisation programs are pivotal in mitigating financial risks and bolstering organisational effectiveness in a dynamic and competitive employment landscape.

Historically, the onboarding process has mainly been conducted through face-to-face interactions (Gupta et al., 2022). However, the landscape of workplace communication has undergone a significant transformation with the advent of digital communication applications (Lane et al., 2023). These digital tools have revolutionised the way teams collaborate and communicate within organisations, fostering enhanced efficiency and flexibility. As Gruman and Saks (2018) astutely observed, the ongoing integration of new technologies into the workplace necessitates a continuous exploration of their effects on socialisation, particularly for newcomers. The need for scholarly attention on the role of information communication tools advancements in organisational socialisation is further supported by Gupta et al., (2022). Considering this imperative, the present research endeavors to assess the ramifications of incorporating digital technology within the onboarding process, specifically in terms of its influence on a new employee's capacity to engage in proactive behaviours. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate how these proactive behaviours, shaped by the digital onboarding experience, may subsequently impact socialisation outcomes.

The growing prevalence and reliance on digital tools within contemporary workplaces, as posited by Choudhury et al. (2021), Gupta et al. (2022), and Lund et al. (2021), render the outcomes of this research, exceptionally valuable for

businesses navigating the challenges of the digital age. The findings of this study hold the potential to provide organisations with crucial insights that can inform and reshape their onboarding processes to better align with the demands of the digital era.

Furthermore, the significance of the socialisation process is underscored by the fact that ineffective socialisation frequently emerges as a prominent factor contributing to early employee turnover (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; J. Zhou et al., 2022). When employees do not experience a successful transition into their new roles and organisational culture, it often leads to their premature departure. This phenomenon is particularly costly for employers, as it results in financial losses associated with recruitment, training, and lost productivity (J. Zhou et al., 2022; Wiseman et al., 2022). Effective socialisation programs, on the other hand, serve as a critical tool for minimising these financial losses by increasing the likelihood of employee retention and job satisfaction (Becker & Bish, 2021).

Lastly, it's essential to recognise that the adjustment process of a new employee extends beyond mere job-related aspects. It also significantly impacts their overall well-being and job performance (Liu et al., 2023). A successful adjustment not only ensures that employees are competent in their roles but also contributes to their job satisfaction, mental health, and overall job performance. As such, organisations have a vested interest in facilitating a positive adjustment experience for their employees to not only enhance their productivity but also to promote their overall well-being within the workplace.

By understanding how digital technology impacts socialisation outcomes, businesses can make informed adjustments to their onboarding strategies. These adaptations have the potential to result in more positive socialisation experiences for new employees, ultimately translating into improved job performance. In a landscape where digital tools are increasingly central to operations, the ability to harness the full potential of these tools for onboarding and socialisation is paramount. Hence, the research outcomes stand to empower organisations to remain competitive, agile, and effective in an ever-evolving digital business environment.

1.3 Theoretical need for the study

The process of transitioning from an outsider to an insider within an organisation has garnered significant attention over the years due to its profound and enduring impact on employee performance. This critical aspect of employee integration has been the subject of extensive research (Becker & Bish, 2021; Dimitrova et al., 2023; Nasr et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022), with many scholars delving into its complexities and implications.

Moreover, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about seismic shifts in the workplace landscape (Gupta et al., 2022), necessitating rapid and extensive changes in work practices, including a swift adoption of digital technologies in organisations. This, in turn, accelerated the onboarding process, pushing it towards digital platforms (Lund et al., 2021). Consequently, what was traditionally a face-to-face socialisation process found itself migrating to virtual platforms, reshaping how organisations welcome and integrate new employees into their ranks. This transformation underscores the adaptability and resilience of organisations in response to unprecedented challenges, while also emphasising the importance of continued research to understand the evolving dynamics of employee integration in the digital era.

The study's relevance is accentuated by the ongoing digital transformation and the accelerated adoption of technology, which have become defining features of the modern business landscape (Choudhury et al., 2021). This dynamic context underscores the importance of understanding how digital tools shape various aspects of organisational processes like onboarding. This research paper, by embarking on an exploration of whether the mode of onboarding (i.e. whether it's conducted virtually or face-to-face) exerts any influence on newcomer proactivity and subsequent socialisation outcomes aims to shed light on the impact of digital tools in employee socialisation.

The research and will add to the literature by including digital onboarding implications to existent literature on newcomer proactivity behaviours and socialisation outcomes. It is furthermore important to study individual differences when looking at newcomer socialisation so that we can gain a better understanding of individuals interaction with

socialisation tactics to diminish the likelihood of failure (Peltokorpi et al., 2022). The research will lastly confirm whether the evolving working place environment has impacted the relationship between newcomer proactive behaviours and positive socialisation outcomes, which has always enjoyed a positive relationship in existing literature since first confirmed by Gruman et al. (2006).

1.4 Research Problem

There is little research on the impact of new technologies on an organisation's socialisation process, newcomer proactivity behaviours or socialisation outcomes. Gruman and Saks (2018) recommend that as organisations continue to leverage new technologies, it is important that the effect on socialisation, especially on newcomers continues to be explored. Researchers have classified socialisation outcomes as either proximal or distal (Becker & Bish, 2021), with both receiving academic attention. Proximal outcomes include work group integration, task mastery, perceived fit, social integration, role clarity and political knowledge (Becker & Bish, 2021). Positive socialisation indicators include role clarity, task mastery and social integration (Gruman et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 2022). For assessment of socialisation outcomes, this paper will focus proximal outcomes and more specifically on role clarity, task mastery and social integration.

Organisational socialisation theory states two main approaches to socialisation, namely centralised and decentralised (Wiseman et al., 2022). In the centralised approach the onboarding program relies on actions from the employer, i.e., institutionalised socialisation tactics (Wiseman et al., 2022). While a decentralised program is a combination of actions from both the employer and the new employee, i.e., institutionalised and individualised socialisation tactics (Wiseman et al., 2022). As per existent theory, both the new employee and the employer are key agents in the onboarding process (Liu, et al., 2023; Rubenstein et al., 2020). This research paper takes the decentralisation approach, exploring both tactics employed by the employer and the employee.

The paper aims to firstly assess whether onboarding using communication technology applications like Microsoft Teams and Zoom, have any impact on new employees exhibiting three proactive behaviours, namely feedback seeking,

information seeking and general socialisation. Secondly, the paper aims to investigate whether the positive relationship between newcomer proactivity and positive socialisation outcomes, focusing on three aspects, namely role clarity, social integration, and task mastery, remains unchanged.

It is to be noted that both newcomer proactive behaviours and positive socialisation outcomes have several indicators. This research is limited to the following indicators for proactive behaviours:

- **Information Seeking** behaviours include asking for help and obtaining clarity on tasks (Bauer et al., 2019; J. Jiang et al., 2022).
- **Feedback Seeking** behaviours include asking for feedback on tasks performed and general feedback on performance (L. Zhou et al., 2022).
- **General socialising** is showed through attendance of social work-related events and efforts taken to build a relationship with the boss (Bauer et al., 2019; J. Jiang et al., 2022).

In respect of socialisation outcomes, the research is limited to:

- **Role clarity** reflects an employee's ability to understanding their role and responsibilities (J. Jiang et al., 2022; L. Zhou et al., 2022).
- **Task mastery** is the ability to problem solve and being happy with quality and quantity of work output (J. Jiang et al., 2022)
- **Social integration** is shown by feeling like part of the team and having friends within team (J. Jiang et al., 2022; L. Zhou et al., 2022).

1.5 Research Purpose

The aim of this research paper is to firstly explore whether the introduction and usage of digital technologies through the socialisation process, in any way impacts a new employee's proactivity and positive socialisation outcomes. Specifically, whether the usage of digital technologies increases or decreases proactivity behaviours and how this relates to positive socialisation outcomes. The intent is to contribute to the existing research by assessing whether the use of digital communication technologies by organisations during the socialisation process helps or hinders the ability of new employees to integrate into their roles. This is important due to the rising adoption of digital technologies by organisations (Choudhury, 2022; Gruman & Saks, 2018).

Secondly, the aim is to investigate whether the well-established (Gruman et al., 2006, J. Jiang et al., 2022; W. Jiang et al., 2023; L. Zhou et al., 2022) positive relationship between new employees exhibiting a range of proactive behaviours when transitioning to a new environment and positive socialisation outcomes remains unaffected, notwithstanding the changes working environments have undergone. Very few of the studies in the increasing body of research on proactive behaviours (e.g., information and feedback seeking) as indicators of successful socialisation, has been based on a full set of proactive behaviours (Zhao, et al., 2022). The exception to this, was the study conducted by Cooper-Thomas et al. (2014). The result of this, is that a lot is still unknown regarding how the specific proactive behaviours related to specific socialisation outcomes, when measured simultaneously. Zhao, et al. (2022) attempted to resolve this through their meta-analysis, however, to the researcher's knowledge no qualitative research measuring specific proactive behaviours related to specific socialisation outcomes with a focus on the type of onboarding has been done.

The paper will contribute by extending the existing literature on organisational socialisation. The paper will also contribute to the body of knowledge on how specific newcomer proactivity behaviours are related to specific socialisation outcomes, thereby extending the knowledge on both newcomer proactive behaviours and socialisation outcomes. Lastly, the research contributes to the existing research by exploring the relationship between digital onboarding, specific newcomer proactivity behaviours being investigated and the effect on specific socialisation outcomes. In the next chapter, a review of the literature is covered.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The literature review firstly covers the theoretical framework of organisational socialisation. Relying on Van Maanen and Schein's model of socialisation a review of organisational socialisation tactics is reflected including a review of the evolution of organisational socialisation approaches over time. The review then covers employee socialisation tactics focusing on newcomer proactivity as explained through uncertainty reduction theory. Thirdly, the review covers socialisation outcomes and how they are impacted by both the institutional and employee driven socialisation tactics. The review concludes with a review on how digital technologies have impacted organisational socialisation tactics.

2.2 Organisational socialisation

Organisational socialisation is defined in the seminal work of Van Maanen and Schein (1977, p.3) as the "process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organisational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, p.3). Simply put, organisational socialisation is how an employee obtains information and skills (Nasr et al., 2019; J. Jiang et al., 2022) about their job. It is also more commonly referred to as the onboarding process (Wiseman et al., 2022) in the workplace.

2.3 Organisational Socialisation Theory

The theoretical framework of Van Maanen and Schein's socialisation tactics and socialisation outcomes was considered the closest to an established theory of organisational socialisation (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Organisational socialisation theory distinguished between two primary approaches to socialisation namely, centralised, and decentralised (Wiseman et al., 2022). These approaches represented different strategies and orientations in how organisations structured their onboarding programs and supported the socialisation process. In the centralised approach, the onboarding program primarily relied on institutionalised socialisation tactics. Here, the organisation took a more prominent role in orchestrating and directing the adjustment process for newcomers (Dimitrova et al., 2023). The organisational role was pivotal, and the program typically followed established and

standardised procedures, emphasising conformity to the organisational norms, values, and expectations (Dimitrova et al., 2023). This approach placed a strong emphasis on aligning the newcomer with the organisation's culture and prescribed roles.

Conversely, the decentralised approach incorporated a blend of institutionalised and individualised socialisation tactics (Wiseman et al., 2022). This approach recognised the roles of both the employer and the employee in the socialisation process, arguably, reflecting a more balanced and flexible perspective. It acknowledged that socialisation was not solely driven by organisational directives but also involved the proactive engagement and agency of the newcomer. In a decentralised program, there was room for personalisation and adaptation, which allowed newcomers to have a more active role in shaping their own adjustment while still adhering to the organisation's overarching goals (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022).

In summary, the choice between centralised and decentralised approaches to socialisation reflected how organisation's conceptualised the balance between organisational control and individual agency in the onboarding and adjustment process for new employees.

2.4 Models and Tactics of onboarding programs

The foundational concept of onboarding as a socialisation tactic for newcomers traces its origins back to the seminal work of Van Maanen and Schein in 1979 (as cited in J. Jiang et al., 2022, p. 2). Within Van Maanen and Schein's model of socialisation, there were six dimensions represented by a pair of tactics that were conceptualised as opposing counterparts. Specifically, these tactics could be categorised as collective or individual, formal or informal, sequential or random, fixed or flexible, serial or disjunctive, and investiture or divestiture (Wiseman et al., 2022; Griffin et al., 2000; Zhao et al., 2022) as more clearly depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Socialisation Tactics

Collective vs Informal	Formal vs Informal	Sequential vs Random
Fixed vs Variable	Serial vs Disjunctive	Investiture vs Divestiture

This framework laid the groundwork for understanding how organisations introduce and integrate newcomers into their culture and workforce, providing a foundation for subsequent research and exploration into the multifaceted nature of socialisation tactics (Wiseman et al., 2022; Griffin et al., 2000; Zhao et al., 2022). By juxtaposing these opposing dimensions, researchers have been able to examine the various approaches organisation's employ to socialise new employees. Shedding light on the strategies and methods that are most effective in facilitating successful integration and adaptation.

2.5 Evolution of Organisational Socialisation Theory over time

Van Maanen and Schein's model marked the commencement of studies on organisational socialisation focused on understanding the process of socialisation within an organisation by following a newcomer's transition into the organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Griffin et al., 2000; L. Zhao et al., 2022; Wiseman et al., 2022). Their work marked the inception of studies dedicated to comprehending the intricate process of socialisation within an organisation, with a specific emphasis on tracking and understanding a newcomer's journey as they transitioned into their new professional environment (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022).

From 1988 to 2000, the measurement of newcomer adjustment predominantly revolved around the assessment of how a new employee acquired knowledge and conformed to the organisational environment (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022). This era was characterised by a predominant emphasis on tangible aspects of adjustment, such as the acquisition of job-related skills and the alignment of behaviour with organisational norms and expectations (Dimitrova et al., 2023; J. Jiang et al., 2022).

Organisational socialisation primarily revolved around explaining the strategies and tactics that organisation's should employ to facilitate the effective transition of new employees (Bauer et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2022; Dimitrova et al., 2023). During this initial phase, the focus was on devising approaches that would empower newcomers to seamlessly integrate into the organisation. A salient aspect of this early research paradigm was the pronounced emphasis on the role of social support emanating from insiders within the organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; J. Zhou et

al., 2022).

These insiders, often referred to as "organisational insiders," played a pivotal role in assisting newcomers in reducing uncertainties associated with their transition (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Rubenstein et al., 2020; J. Zhou et al., 2022). This social support mechanism entailed a multifaceted approach, including mentoring, guidance, and informational exchanges. Organisational insiders leveraged their experience and knowledge to provide newcomers with valuable insights, clarify role expectations, and serve as conduits for acclimatisation to the organisational culture.

However, there were exceptions to this trend, as evidenced by the work of Ostroff and Kozlowski in 1992 (as cited by Dimitrova et al., 2023). Their perspective introduced a noteworthy shift by framing adjustment as a psychological construct. This approach delved into the inner workings of newcomers' minds, focusing on the psychological processes and mechanisms that underpin their adaptation to the organisation, but failed to gain a lot of attention.

Overall, the research during this period primarily concentrated on the practical aspects of how newcomers adjusted to fit into the organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; J. Jiang et al., 2022). This included considerations related to job performance, knowledge acquisition, and behavioural alignment with organisational norms, with a notable exception that explored the psychological dimensions of the adjustment process (Dimitrova et al., 2023).

In the decade spanning from 2001 to 2010, research on newcomer adjustment saw significant advancement, marked by the introduction of a crucial distinction between proximal and distal indicators (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022). This differentiation helped refine our understanding of how newcomers adapt within organisations. Proximal indicators in this context referred to measures that primarily represented the processes involved in learning and fitting into the work environment.

Examples of these proximal indicators included role clarity, which pertains to a newcomer's understanding of their job responsibilities, task mastery, which reflected their competence in job-related tasks, and social integration, which gauged the degree to which they were successfully assimilated into the social fabric of the

organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022). These indicators were more immediate and were directly linked to the newcomer's adaptation process (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022).

The proximal consequence of successful socialisation processes proved highly favourable, as it engendered a comprehensive adaptation of employees to the new organisation (Wiseman et al., 2022). During this phase, employees acquired a comprehension of their assigned roles and responsibilities, along with a nuanced understanding of the expectations set forth by the employing entity (Wiseman et al., 2022). Furthermore, this immersion in effective socialisation imbued employees with a sense of belonging and acceptance within both the organisation and among their peer colleagues (Wiseman et al., 2022). It is for this reason that the researcher selected proximal indicators, namely role clarity, task mastery and social integration.

In contrast, distal indicators encompassed measures that reflected the outcomes or consequences of the adjustment process. These included factors like job satisfaction, which relates to a newcomer's contentment with their work, and turnover, which pertains to their decision to stay or leave the organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022). Distal indicators, in essence, captured the results of the adjustment process and provided insights into its overall effectiveness. This distinction between proximal and distal indicators marked a significant evolution in the conceptualisation of newcomer adjustment, allowing researchers to explore and measure different facets of the adjustment journey and its ultimate impact on individuals and organisations.

The predominant focus of research in the field of socialisation and newcomer adjustment continued to center on the process of socialisation throughout the period from 2001 to 2010. Researchers primarily viewed this process as an individual-driven change process (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022). This perspective underscored the importance of understanding how individual newcomers navigate their transition into the organisation and adapt to the new environment.

The research delved into the intricacies of how individuals personally experienced and managed the challenges and uncertainties that came with joining a new organisation. It explored the learning mechanisms, cognitive adjustments, and

behavioural shifts that individuals underwent as they sought to align themselves with the organisational culture and expectations (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Wiseman et al., 2022; Zhoa et al., 2022). This period also marked a continuation of the emphasis on the individual's role in the socialisation process, reflecting the recognition that newcomers play an active and central role in their own adjustment and integration within the organisation, embedding the concept of newcomer proactivity and the role of uncertainty reduction theory.

The decade spanning from 2011 to 2021 marked a notable evolution in the research landscape related to socialisation and newcomer adjustment. The research focus continued to center on the socialisation process, but there was a discernible shift towards acknowledging and incorporating the agency of new employees in shaping their own adjustment process (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023). This shift represented a significant departure from the earlier perspectives that primarily viewed socialisation as a predominantly organisational-driven process. Instead, it introduced a person-centric approach to understanding socialisation, recognising the active role that newcomers play in influencing and shaping their own adaptation within the organisation (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023).

Central to this progression was the emergence of a concept known as newcomer proactivity behaviours. Newcomer proactivity behaviours represented the proactive initiatives that new employees exhibited to facilitate their own socialisation processes. These behaviours reflected their proactive engagement in seeking knowledge, forging connections with colleagues, and actively participating in the social fabric of the organisation (Bauer et al., 2019; Zhoa et al., 2022). Such actions not only expedited their acclimatisation to the organisation but also contributed to the development of positive interpersonal relationships, which are fundamental to the socialisation journey. The evolution of research in this domain culminated in the exploration of the specific activities that a new employee could embrace to attain favorable socialisation outcomes (Bauer et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2022).

The seminal work by Ashford and Black, as highlighted by Zhoa et al. (2022), stood as a pioneering effort in identifying seven key proactive behaviours commonly exhibited by new employees. These proactive behaviours encompass a spectrum of actions and approaches that new employees employed to proactively engage in their

roles and socialisation processes. These behaviours have been categorised by researchers into the following distinct domains:

1. **Sensemaking:** This domain encompassed proactive behaviours related to the acquisition and processing of information needed for the newcomer to perform their tasks and integrate into the organisation. It can further be divided the following themes:
 - **Information Seeking:** This involved actively searching for and acquiring job- and organisation-related information that is crucial for effective functioning within the new role.
 - **Feedback Seeking:** This entailed the proactively obtaining performance-related feedback which demonstrated the new employee's eagerness to improve and adapt to their new responsibilities.
2. **Relationship Building:** This category revolved around proactive behaviours aimed at fostering meaningful connections and social interactions. It included:
 - **Development of Peer Relationships:** New employees in this category would proactively engage in building positive relationships with their colleagues and team members.
 - **General Socialising:** This behaviour involved active participation in social events and activities within the team or department (i.e., intradepartmental).
 - **Networking:** The building of social networks extending beyond the immediate team or department (i.e., interdepartmental).
3. **Positive Framing:** In this proactive behaviour domain, newcomers adopt a positive and constructive outlook toward their situation and role, fostering an optimistic perspective that can enhance their adjustment.
4. **Job Change Negotiation:** This category encompassed the proactive efforts exerted by newcomers to initiate adjustments to their assigned tasks or responsibilities, reflecting their agency in shaping their role to better align with their aspirations.

The identification of these seven proactive behaviours by Ashford and Black (as cited by Zhoa et al., 2022), constituted a valuable framework for understanding how newcomers actively engage in their roles and socialisation processes.

2.6 New Employee Role in Socialisation

Socialisation research had historically centered on newly hired organisational members, with the primary aim of facilitating their adjustment process by mitigating uncertainty concerning their new work environment (Bauer et al., 2019; J. Jiang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016). This emphasis on newcomers' experiences was rooted in the recognition that newcomers often grapple with heightened uncertainty during the initial phases of their tenure (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Addressing this uncertainty and enhancing newcomers' sense of certainty had been closely associated with more positive socialisation outcomes (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). This heightened focus on reducing uncertainty within organisational socialisation gave rise to the prominence of the uncertainty reduction theory.

Uncertainty reduction theory had emerged as the most prevalent and frequently employed theoretical framework for explicating the role and dynamics of organisational socialisation (Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Yin et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022). This theory posited that individuals naturally seek to minimise uncertainty in unfamiliar situations, and was extensively applied to illuminate how newcomers, through their socialisation processes, strive to reduce uncertainty and attain a more comprehensive understanding of their organisational roles, expectations, and the broader work environment (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022). In essence, the dominance of uncertainty reduction theory underscored its relevance and applicability in elucidating the multifaceted aspects of organisational socialisation and the mechanisms by which newcomers navigate the intricate landscape of uncertainty within the context of their new employment.

For newcomers, effective socialisation served as a valuable resource for managing the inherent uncertainty associated with the onboarding process (Nasr et al., 2019). The process of transitioning into a new job was often accompanied by considerable stress and anxiety for employees, primarily stemming from their limited organisational knowledge (Bauer et al., 2019; J. Zhou et al., 2022). New employees typically found themselves in a position of relative unfamiliarity with the organisational culture, processes, and expectations, which was inherently anxiety-inducing (Nasr et al., 2019; J. Zhou et al., 2022).

However, effective socialisation programs had been demonstrated to yield substantial benefits, both for the new employee and the organisation (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022). Effective socialisation programs contributed to the faster integration and adjustment of new employees, which resulted in shorter learning curves and quicker productivity. Moreover, they fostered a sense of belonging and alignment with the organisational culture, which, in turn, enhanced engagement, job satisfaction, and long-term retention (Nasr et al., 2019; J. Zhou et al. 2022; L. Zhou et al., 2022).

While there had been a discernible shift in the literature towards recognising the individuality of newcomers and their unique experiences, the predominant focus remained rooted in the concept of conformity (Dimitrova et al., 2023). This emphasis on conformity underscored the historical perspective that the adjustment process primarily involved newcomers conforming to the established norms, practices, and expectations of the organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022).

The research increasingly continued to explore how newcomers exercised their agency, made choices, and engaged in self-directed learning and adaptation strategies to navigate their integration into the organisational culture (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022). This person-centric perspective enriched the understanding of the socialisation process by highlighting the dynamic interaction between individuals and the organisation, emphasising the importance of individual motivations, preferences, and behaviours in shaping the adjustment journey.

For new employees to be successful in their new roles, they had to navigate a multifaceted landscape, encompassing various domains. These domains encompassed gaining a comprehensive understanding of their newly assigned responsibilities, acquiring proficiency in performing new tasks, and seamlessly integrating within their new team (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023; Nasr et al., 2019). The achievement of success was contingent upon a combination of factors. Firstly, the efficacy of the organisation's onboarding process, encapsulated within its organisational socialisation tactics, played a pivotal role. These tactics, designed to facilitate the newcomers' transition, provided them with essential resources, guidance, and contextual knowledge that served as foundational

elements for their success (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Nasr et al., 2019).

Secondly, there was a requirement for the active engagement of new employees in proactive behaviours, such as information and feedback seeking, emerged as a critical determinant of their success. This proactive stance allowed newcomers to proactively acquire knowledge, seek guidance, and adapt to their roles and organisational dynamics swiftly and effectively (Bauer et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2022). By taking ownership of their learning and integration processes, they fortified their position for successful integration (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Nasr et al., 2019).

The extended research trajectory sought to establish a concrete link between the actions of employees, particularly those possessing a proactive personality, and the attainment of enhanced socialisation outcomes (Bauer et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Notably, proactivity had ascended to prominence as a predominant characteristic exhibited by newcomers, holding a huge connection to all indicators of successful adjustment (Dimitrova et al., 2023). These characteristics signified an individual's propensity to take initiative, exhibit self-directedness, and proactively engage in behaviours that propel their adaptation and integration. In sum, proactivity stood as a linchpin in the newcomers' journey toward successful adjustment, bridging the organisational socialisation tactics with the proactive efforts of new employees to culminate in a harmonious and fruitful transition into their new roles.

Moreover, Bauer et al. (2019) shed light on another noteworthy aspect of proactive behaviours. Their research revealed that proactive behaviours have the potential to act as a compensatory mechanism, mitigating the adverse effects of certain leadership styles, such as servant leadership (Bauer et al., 2019). Even in situations where new employees perceive leadership styles as less supportive or facilitative, their proactive behaviours can effectively bridge the gap and facilitate their integration into the organisation (Bauer et al., 2019). In essence, the findings of Bauer et al. (2019) underscore the potency of proactive behaviours exhibited by new employees in fostering their successful integration within the organisation. Proactivity not only serves as a catalyst for positive socialisation outcomes but also demonstrates its resilience by enabling newcomers to overcome potential obstacles, such as suboptimal leadership styles, thereby enhancing their prospects for a seamless transition and integration into the organisational fabric.

In summary, the evolution of research within this realm led to the delineation of newcomer proactivity behaviours as a focal point. These behaviours encapsulate the proactive activities new employees employ, such as seeking information, fostering relationships, and engaging in social interactions, all of which are integral in shaping their socialisation experiences and outcomes within the organisation (Bauer et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2022). In essence, it heralded a more holistic and nuanced approach to socialisation, one that considered both the organisational and individual dimensions, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of how newcomers successfully acclimate and contribute to the organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023).

2.7 Positive Socialisation Outcomes

Researchers had also observed that newcomers' levels of proactivity could vary, depending on whether the socialisation process was characterised by institutionalised or individualised approaches, as indicated by the studies conducted by Gruman et al. (2006) and Cheng et al. (2022). In the main, Gruman et al.'s (2006) study underscored the pivotal role of institutionalised socialisation tactics in fostering proactive behaviours among newcomers. These tactics served as a structured and supportive framework that not only eased the transition process for newcomers but also cultivated a sense of alignment with organisational values and a strong commitment to their professional development within the organisation. This underscored the dynamic interplay between the socialisation approach adopted by the organisation, the proactivity exhibited by new employees and positive socialisation outcomes. It signified that those newcomers who actively engaged in proactive behaviours, including fostering self-belief in their abilities, and autonomously navigating the socialisation process, tended to realise more favorable socialisation outcomes.

Moreover, Gruman et al. (2006) had empirically demonstrated that institutionalised socialisation tactics, which encompassed the structured and organisationally facilitated aspects of the onboarding process, exhibited a positive association with socialisation outcomes. This suggested that organisations that employed institutionalised socialisation tactics were more likely to yield positive outcomes in

terms of newcomer socialisation experiences. The degree of proactivity exhibited by newcomers, coupled with the nature of the socialisation approach employed by the organisation, collectively influenced the ultimate socialisation outcomes experienced by new employees, shaping their successful integration.

Socialisation outcomes served as pivotal benchmarks for assessing the extent to which new employees integrated effectively within an organisation. These outcomes were vital indicators of an individual's ability to acclimate and thrive in their new role, manifesting their level of adjustment and alignment with the established norms and expectations of the organisation (L. Zhou et al., 2022; Peltokorpi et al., 2022). Extensive literature on the socialisation of new employees found that proactive behaviours lead to positive work and career outcomes for example organisation commitment and career advancement (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2021; L. Zhou et al., 2022). Zhao et al., (2022) noted that the influence of newcomer proactive behaviours on socialisation outcomes has been extensively explored in academic research. The topic garnered a lot of global attention, with scholars employing a diverse range of research designs which included cross-sectional and time-lagged approaches, to further explore the dynamics of the socialisation process (Zhao et al., 2022).

Within the realm of socialisation research, it had been discerned that the process of a newcomers' transition into an organisation could broadly be categorised into three distinct domains (L. Zhao et al., 2022). These domains collectively encapsulated the multifaceted nature of the transition experience and served as pivotal focal points for understanding the dynamics of organisational socialisation. First and foremost, the domain of "uncertainty reduction" emerged as a fundamental dimension of newcomers' transition. This domain encompasses the concerted efforts made by newcomers to mitigate and manage various forms of uncertainty that arise during their integration into the organisation. Uncertainty reduction, as delineated by L. Zhao et al. (2022), specifically targeted three key components, namely role, task, and social aspects.

In this context, "role" pertained to the clarity and comprehension of a new employee's designated position and associated responsibilities within the organisation. "Task" related to the understanding and effective execution of the job-related duties and

functions incumbent upon the newcomer. Lastly, "social aspects" encompassed the process of building relationships and acclimating to the social fabric of the organisation, which includes interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and understanding the informal dynamics of the workplace (L. Zhao et al., 2022; Peltokorpi et al., 2022). Taken together, these three domains - role, task, and social aspects - collectively constituted the central framework through which newcomers navigated the complexities of their transition into the organisation. By actively engaging in uncertainty reduction within these domains, newcomers sought to enhance their understanding and proficiency, ultimately promoting a smoother and more successful integration process (L. Zhao et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2021).

One of the integral components of these socialisation outcomes was the concept of "role clarity," a multifaceted construct that conveyed the degree to which a newly inducted member comprehended their designated role and associated responsibilities. Roles in organisations are designed in relation to other roles, hence clarity on one's role is subjective and dependent on information received from the social environment (L. Zhou et al., 2022).

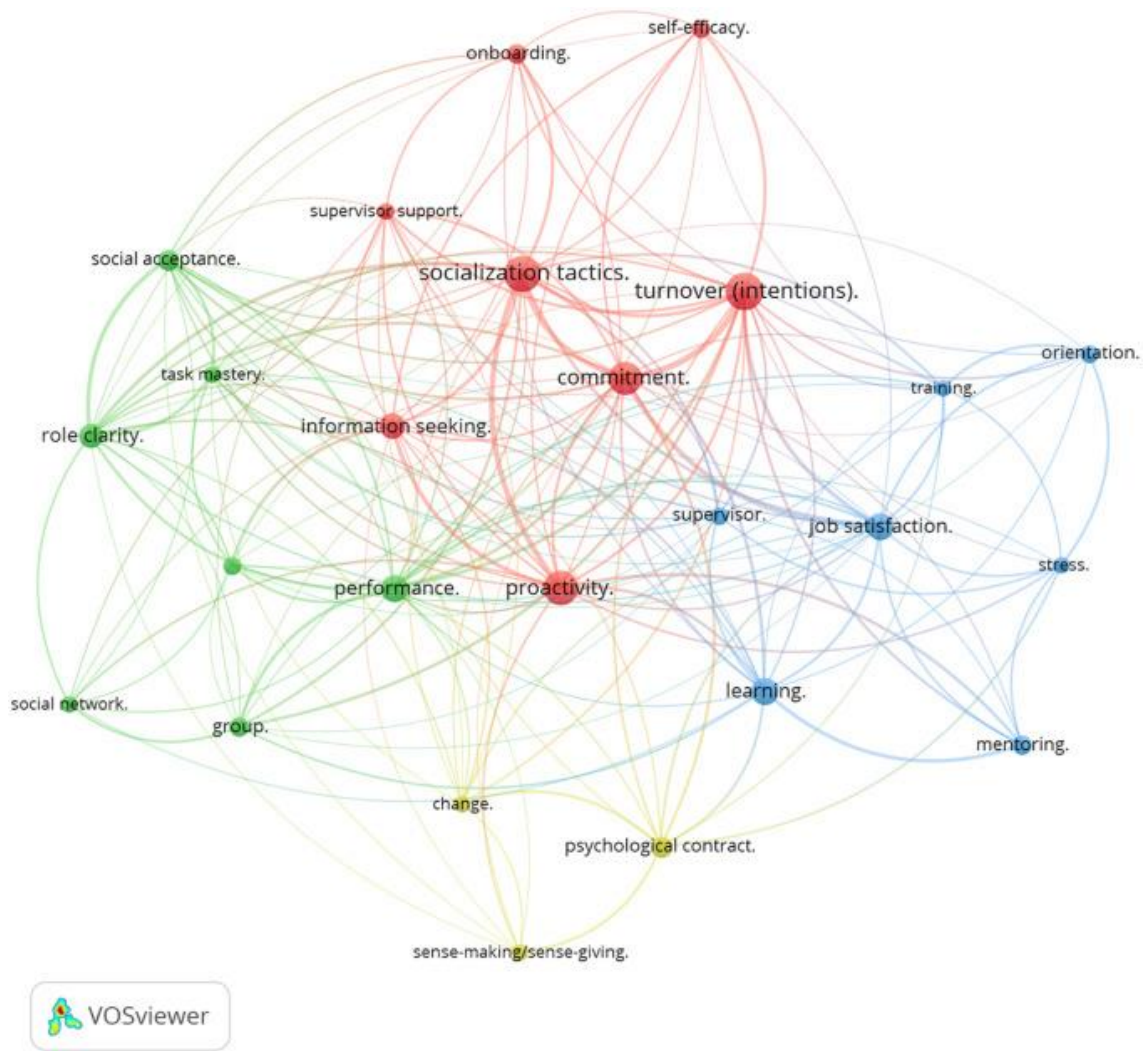
Empirical investigations in the field of organisational research yielded compelling evidence that highlighted a noteworthy association between the level of role clarity possessed by newcomers and their subsequent job performance and job satisfaction (L. Zhou et al., 2022; Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2021). Role clarity encapsulated the clarity and comprehensibility of job expectations, delineating the boundaries of one's responsibilities, tasks, and accountabilities. This factor became indispensable in determining an individual's ability to contribute effectively to the organisation's objectives and goals (L. Zhou et al., 2022; Peltokorpi et al., 2022). As such, role clarity stood as a critical criterion for evaluating the extent to which a newcomer was poised to successfully assimilate into the organisation. In effect it acted as a pivotal dimension within the broader framework of socialisation outcomes. Specifically, the research findings consistently demonstrated that individuals who possessed a heightened degree of role clarity, indicating a clear and unambiguous understanding of their roles and responsibilities exhibited superior performance outcomes. These individuals tended to effectively execute their tasks, meet job expectations, and contribute positively to the organisation, thus constituting a valuable asset to the employer (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022).

Furthermore, newcomers who enjoyed a greater sense of role clarity also tended to experience heightened levels of job satisfaction (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022) as a clear understanding of one's role and responsibilities provided a sense of direction and purpose, thereby reducing uncertainty and ambiguity. Such clarity enhanced a newcomers' confidence in their ability to fulfil their job requirements, which, in turn, fostered a more positive and contented work experience (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022).

Social integration entailed building social relationships within the organisation (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; L. Zhou et al., 2022) found that forming and maintaining relationships within one's team was important as it facilitated the processing of information. The incorporation of newcomer proactive behaviours and social interactions into the research discourse brought about a more holistic understanding of the socialisation process. It recognised that successful socialisation was contingent upon a dynamic interplay between organisational efforts and the proactive engagement of new employees, highlighting the intricate and reciprocal nature of this crucial aspect of organisational life.

Within the context of the research, individuals who demonstrated effective adjustment were those who not only acquired a clear understanding of their new roles but also seamlessly integrated themselves into the social fabric of their environment (Dimitrova et al., 2023). This encompassed not only achieving role clarity and task proficiency but also establishing a sense of belonging and acceptance within the social dynamics of their setting (Dimitrova et al., 2023).

Figure 2 represents a **keyword co-occurrence analysis** of organisational newcomer adjustment literature from 1988-2021, as done by Dimitrova et al., 2023 (permission obtained from author)



The analysis of keywords revealed that role clarity, social acceptance, and task mastery emerged as recurrent indicators for successful adjustment, as identified by Dimitrova et al. (2023).

2.8 Digital Onboarding

Gruman and Saks (2018) conducted a noteworthy study delving into the effects of onboarding newcomers through technology, a concept they aptly termed 'e-socialisation.' Their findings highlighted a fundamental distinction between e-socialisation and the conventional, face-to-face socialisation process. Their research underscored the pivotal role of the degree of virtuality in influencing socialisation outcomes. Their research suggested that the level of virtual interaction played a significant role in shaping how newcomers assimilated into their organisation.

By examining established socialisation approaches e.g., formal and informal

discussions and use of training manuals etc. alongside the novel concept of e-socialisation, Gruman and Saks (2018) enriched our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in the process of socialising newcomers within organisations. This juxtaposition of traditional and tech-driven methods offered valuable insights into the evolving landscape of employee integration and adaptation within the modern workplace. They however did not that more research was required to better understand the impact of the digital technologies (Gruman & Saks, 2018).

The surge in technology adoption led numerous companies to embrace communication applications such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. These platforms not only facilitated geographic flexibility but also played a pivotal role in enabling remote work arrangements (Choudhury, 2022; Lane et al., 2023), particularly during and post the Covid 19 pandemic. The tools have become indispensable for connecting teams across distances, facilitating seamless communication, and bridging geographical gaps. As a result, organisations have been able to adapt and thrive in the face of evolving workplace dynamics, while also reimagining how they approach the onboarding process, incorporating digital tools to accommodate the changing needs of a remote or geographically dispersed workforce.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the widespread acceptance of hybrid working models and digital technologies (Choudhury, 2022), added a unique dimension. The traditional boundaries of work and workplace have evolved, and remote work, as emphasised by Mickeler et al. (2023), has become increasingly common. As a result, employees are not only more familiar with digital technologies but may also have come to expect their integration into various aspects of their professional lives, including onboarding processes. This evolving landscape implies that new employees may arrive with preconceived expectations about the role of technology in their onboarding experience, which, in turn, can significantly impact their proactivity behaviours and overall adaptation within the organisation. Understanding these expectations and their effects becomes essential for organisation's striving to meet the needs of their modern workforce and optimise the effectiveness of their onboarding processes.

To conclude, from a review of the literature it is clear that organisational socialisation received a lot of research attention over the years due to its impact on employee's

ability to adapt to their new role and its impact on culture and organisational processes (Dimitrova et al., 2023; J. Jiang et al., 2022). Indeed, there had been remarkable progress over time in enhancing our understanding of the intricate dynamics of the newcomer adjustment process. This progress was reflected in the growth in the body of research and scholarship dedicated to organisational socialisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022). It has enabled an understanding of how an employee gained an understanding of how the organisation functioned, built social networks with co-workers, and learned the ways of work of an organisation (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Gardner et al., 2021).

In essence, organisational socialisation research has played a pivotal role in unraveling the complexities of the employee onboarding and integration process. It has contributed to our knowledge of how individuals adapt to their roles and become effective contributors within an organisational context. Moreover, it has underscored the pivotal role that socialisation plays in shaping an organisation's culture, facilitating knowledge transfer, and ultimately influencing its overall performance and success. The next chapter covers the research questions.

3 Chapter 3: Research Questions

3.1 Purpose of the Research

The primary objective of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to evaluate the potential effects of utilising communication technology applications such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom during the onboarding process on new employees' demonstration of three specific proactive behaviours: feedback seeking, information seeking, and general socialisation. Secondly, the paper endeavours to investigate the interplay between the proactive behaviour and their association with three positive socialisation outcomes, namely role clarity, social integration, and task mastery, remains unchanged. The study aims to enhance our comprehension of how the integration of digital technologies in the workplace can affect these aspects. This research is significant in light of the increasing adoption of digital technologies by organisations (Choudhury, 2022).

3.2 Research Questions

Existing research has consistently demonstrated a positive association between newcomer proactivity and socialisation outcomes (Gruman et al., 2006; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014; L. Zhao et al., 2022; J. Jiang et al., 2022). However not much is known about the impact of introducing digital tools, making this a new and is new and underexplored phenomenon (Gruman & Saks, 2018). Accordingly, the following research questions are explored in this search paper.

- **Does digital onboarding impact the following newcomer proactive behaviours, namely information seeking, feedback seeking and general socialising.**

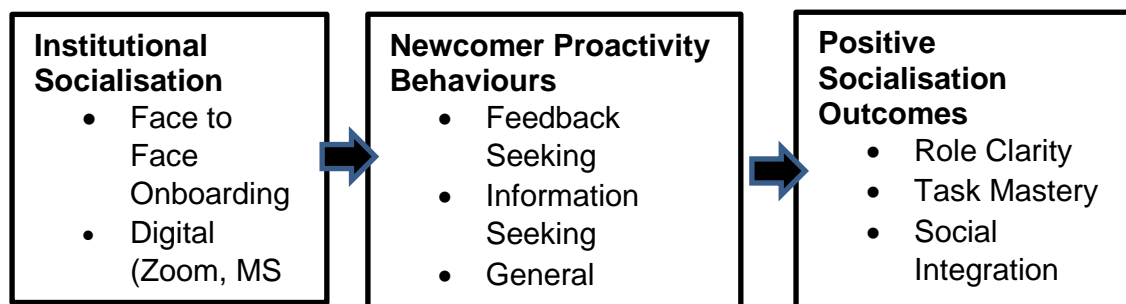
The primary goal for a new employee during socialisation is uncertainty reduction (Gupta et al., 2022; J. Jiang et al., 2022; L. Zhou et al., 2022). A new employee reduces the uncertainty, by making sense of the new environment, through asking information and feedback and through building relationships through general socialising. Proactive behaviour is characterised by the capacity to instigate actions with the aim of either creating novel circumstances or enhancing existing ones, as observed in studies by Gruman et al. (2006) and Zhoa et al. (2022). The growing

prevalence of workplace flexibility and the adoption of hybrid working arrangements, as posited by Choudhury (2022) and Gupta et al. (2022), underscores the paramount importance of newcomer proactive behaviours in socialisation (L. Zhao et al., 2022).

- **What is the relationship between the newcomer proactive behaviours and role clarity, task mastery and social integration as indicators of positive socialisation outcomes.**

Existent literature has long established that proactivity is positively linked to positive socialisation outcomes (Gruman et al., 2006). This research study sought to understand whether this relationship remains unchanged. The researcher followed prior studies which focused on task mastery, role clarity and social integration as indicators of positive socialisation outcomes (Bauer et al., 2019; J. Jiang et al., 2022 (a); W. Jiang et al, 2023; Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022).

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework



The next chapter covers the methodology.

4 Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The purpose of the research was to firstly assess whether on-boarding using communication technology applications, for example Microsoft Teams and Zoom, had any impact on new employees exhibiting the following three proactive behaviours: feedback seeking, information seeking and general socialisation. Secondly, the research aimed to determine how the impact on the behaviours relate to the following positive socialisation outcomes: task mastery, social integration, and role clarity. To answer the two research questions a qualitative research method was used. This is similar to the method chosen by several researchers, including Nifadkar and Bauer (2016) and Woodrow and Guest (2020).

In defence of the methodological choices, Saunders and Lewis's (2018) research onion was used to determine the design for the research project. The methodological choice was mono method qualitative (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) as data collection only occurred through semi-structured interviews. As per Barrett and Twycross (2018) interviews give the most direct and straightforward approach and are particularly suitable for gathering rich, detailed data about an aspect. Semi-structured interviews are also commonly used in qualitative research (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). A qualitative approach was identified as a suitable approach to gain an understanding of the impact of digital onboarding on newcomer proactiveness and how it links to socialisation outcomes.

The researcher applied the research to gather primary data from qualitative interviews. Qualitative research is distinguished by its focus on offering detailed descriptions and highlighting the importance of understanding social behaviour within its context. Inquiring about how employees carried out their initial tasks could be better articulated using words, potentially resulting in more comprehensive responses. Due to the constrained practical expertise in this domain, it was necessary to maintain the breadth of questions in order not to constrain research participants in their responses. Qualitative interviews afforded the researcher the flexibility to be adaptive, allowing for questions to be adjusted according to the responses provided by the interviewees. As a result, richer and more comprehensive answers were obtained. Lastly, qualitative interviewing enabled the collection of the

interviewee's attitudes and emotions allowing for the gathering of deep insights (Bell et al., 2022).

For this research, an exploratory research design was the most appropriate approach. This is because the research topic is emerging, and there is no existing theory on digital onboarding that can be tested (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The explorative method was also appropriate for the study as it allowed a deeper understanding of how the type of onboarding impacted newcomers and socialisation outcomes from their perspectives and in their own words. The viewpoints and experiences of participants in their natural setting contributed to a more complete knowledge of the topic under inquiry. The qualitative research approach followed by the researcher was an interpretivist epistemological position as it was aimed at understanding and interpreting the social world (Bell et al., 2022).

Interpretivism promoted the importance of understanding variations between persons and their roles as social agents. Interpretivism was excellent for this research since it aided in identifying how newcomer behaviour and socialisation outcomes are impacted by the type of socialisation process elected by the organisation (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher investigated a phenomenon in its natural setting with the goal of understanding or interpreting it in terms of the meanings that individuals ascribe to it. By employing a qualitative, exploratory study, the researcher gained new insights on the impact of digital onboarding on newcomer proactive behaviour and socialisation outcomes (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

An inductive technique to extract meaning from data was used. According to Saunders and Lewis (2018), using an inductive approach helps to gain an understanding of the value humans place on events. Since this was phenomenological research, namely where very little is known about the impact of digital onboarding, an inductive technique was accordingly appropriate. Through an inductive view of research, organisational socialisation and uncertainty reduction theory was applied, and observations were collected to generate a new theory as an outcome. Data was gathered with the aim of examining a phenomenon, uncovering themes and patterns, and constructing a conceptual framework (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The research landscape pertaining to socialisation outcomes had predominantly exhibited a static orientation, emphasising analyses at specific points in time, as elucidated by L. Zhou et al. (2022). This prevailing approach within the extant literature had often entailed the examination of socialisation outcomes at discrete moments, thereby offering a snapshot of a newcomer's adjustment and integration within the organisation. Such investigations have typically scrutinised aspects such as role clarity, task mastery, and social integration among other dimensions, capturing the newcomer's status and alignment with the organisation at distinct time points. Therefore, the researcher used a cross sectional time horizon, representing a point in time (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) in which the data was collected. The cross-sectional time horizon was an employee who was in a new role between two months (Zheng et al., 2021) and eight months in an organisation (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.2 Universe

Previous studies on organisational socialisation consistently delineated between two primary categories of new employees, namely the graduate new employer and the experienced new employee (L. Zhao et al., 2022). Graduate newcomers were less experienced in the professional realm and tended to manifest higher levels of uncertainty (L. Zhao et al., 2022). The experienced new employee being one that has previously been employed and thus had experienced a working environment which research has shown significantly impacts their adjustment (Gupta et al., 2022). The distinction emphasised the importance of recognising the differing needs and expectations of newcomers and potential differing socialisation outcomes (L. Zhao et al., 2022).

As the researcher aimed to establish whether a new factor, namely digital onboarding, moderate's newcomer proactivity, a more experienced employee based was targeted for purposes of this research. This approach was followed by several studies using sensemaking (Bauer et al., 2019; Nifadkar & Bauer 2016; Zheng et al., 2021).

The population therefore comprised new employees with prior work experience, across genders and age groups. and having been in role for at least two months. This allowed for sufficient time to have elapsed for socialisation outcomes to have manifested and still be recent enough that they could recall the process (Gruman et al., 2006; J. Jiang et al., 2022).

While newcomer proactivity is stable based on existent literature reflecting it as personality trait driven, it would be naïve not to factor in the impact of long-term negative feedback on proactivity, hence the research operated a 12-month tenure boundary to mitigate against this, similar to the approach taken by other researchers (Griffin et al., 2000; Li et al., 2022; J. Jiang et al., 2022).

4.3 Sampling

Since the study employed a qualitative approach, a non-probability sampling method was used to select the participants for the study. In addition, purposeful sampling was used to select participants. The sample was representative comprising both male and female participants, across different job levels, but excluding participants who did not have prior work experience, e.g., graduates. The sample included employees who were either on-boarded digitally or through face-to-face engagement and have been with a new employer for between two to nine months of starting their new role. Most research used a four-month period to measure institutionalised socialisation, stating that newcomers would have gained considerable experience with the socialisation process (Gruman & Saks, 2018; J. Jiang et al., 2022).

The sample size was determined by reaching theoretical saturation, which means that conducting additional interviews did not yield any new theoretical insights (Bell et al., 2022). The targeted population was heterogenous as it comprised participants onboarded both face-to-face as well as virtually. In a heterogenous population, a likely sample size of between 12 and 30 would be required (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher stopped with 14 participants for data collection having determined that saturation had been reached.

4.4 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis was individuals who were new to their role or organisation and who were onboarded either face-to-face or through digital communication tools. In all the instances where participants had been onboarded through digital communication.

4.5 Measurement

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which allowed for uniformity. This also

enabled the researcher to discover nuances unique to the participants experiences. The researcher approached individuals who started their new roles between 2 January 2023 and 30 July 2023. The interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams. The Covid 19 pandemic required researchers to adapt methodologies to enable remote data collection and recent research on the use of virtual qualitative research has indicated that data gained from video calls demonstrated substantial richness similar to those gained in face-to-face interviews (Keen et al., 2022). Obtaining the data using Microsoft teams therefore did not negatively impact the quality of the data and had the advantage of being able securely record and store the interview data. The researcher commenced the interviews by asking leading questions as per the interview guide (see Appendix A). The length of the interviews varied from 31 minutes to 20 minutes depending on the participants. Candidates were given an election on whether to have their camera's on or not. During Stage Six loadshedding most candidates elected to have the camera off to ensure connectivity effectiveness.

Prior to the interview, the researcher provided each participant with a consent form that explained the role of the researcher and the role of the participant. In addition, the researcher explained the benefits of the study. Guarantees were made regarding the rights of participants, confidentiality, prevention of harm and anonymity. If a participant consented to take part in the interview, the researcher asked the participant to sign the consent form.

4.6 Development of measurement instrument

An interview guide was used as a measuring instrument to acquire the required insights to be able to answer the research questions and meet the objectives of the study. The interview guide was used to conduct the semi-structured interviews, included open-ended question derived from the research questions. The interview guide's reliability to achieve the research aims, was measured against the research questions for comprehensiveness.

4.6.1 Newcomer Proactive Behaviours

The six elements of proactive behaviour are feedback and information seeking, relationship building with bosses, networking, general socialising, and job change negotiation (Gruman et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 2022). This research only assessed

feedback seeking, information seeking, and general socialising as follows:

- Feedback seeking refers to a new employee's asking for information on how they are performing. Feedback allows new employees to understand what more they need to learn (Gruman et al., 2006). Feedback seeking was assessed by asking questions developed to understand the extent to which respondents sought feedback and solicited critique and if so, what drove the action.
- Information seeking refers to a new employee's search for and acquiring of job and company information. This is a way to reduce uncertainty and make sense of the new situation (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Information seeking was assessed by asking questions seeking to understand whether information on tasks to be performed was sought and if so, what drove the action.
- General socialising refers to actions taken by a new employee to initiate social interaction in the work environment (Gruman et al., 2006). General socialising was assessed by asking whether social activities were attended and if so, what drove the action.
- The participants were then asked whether the way they were onboarded played any role in their adoption of the above actions.

4.6.2 Socialisation Outcomes

Socialisation outcomes comprise task mastery, role clarity, social integration, person to job and person to organisation fit, job satisfaction and organisational commitment and intent to return (Gruman et al., 2006; Peltokorpi et al., 2022). This research paper only focused on understanding social integration, task mastery and role clarity. This was explored as follows:

- Task mastery refers to a new employee's ability to learn the skills and routines need to perform their job (Gruman et al., 2006). To assess task mastery, participants were queried to determine the extent to which they had achieved competence in their assigned tasks.
- Social integration refers to a new employee's integration into his or her new work group. To gauge social integration, participants were asked questions aimed at understanding whether they felt like they were a valued part of their

new team.

- Role Clarity refers to a new employee's level of understanding of his or her job, what is expected of them and their responsibilities. This can be either through reading up on information or listening to co-workers talk about the job (Peltokorpi et al., 2022). Role clarity was assessed by asking whether the participants understood their role and responsibilities.
- The responses were then correlated with the participants responses on whether they had engaged in proactive behaviour or not in order to determine the relationship.

4.7 Demographics

The demographic characteristics included gender, and job level as previous studies have explored how demographics and individual characteristics impact adoption of proactive behaviours (L. Zhao et al., 2022). The sample comprised eleven females and four males. The organisational tenure of newcomers was between three to nine months. All, but one of the participants had their job interview using digital communication tools. All the participants had previous work experience.

4.8 Structure and content of the instrument

The interview guide included open-ended questions derived from the research questions to conduct semi-structured interviews. The interview guide's reliability to achieve the research aims, was measured against the research questions for comprehensiveness.

4.9 Data gathering process

The researcher sought ethical permission to conduct the study from the University of Pretoria before beginning data gathering. The researcher approached individuals who joined the organisation from 2 January 2023 to 31 July 2023, and requested their participation. Only one participant had joined outside of this period, namely in November 2022, but this still fell within the 12months cap. The researcher explained to each participant that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty.

The researcher explained that all data would be reported without any identifiers and

thus their identity would remain confidential. Prior to carrying out the interviews, the researcher informed the participants about the study's aim, any risks associated with participation, and the participants' roles. The researcher asked for permission to record the interview. Finally, if the participants agreed to engage in the study, the researcher asked them to sign a consent form. The interviews were conducted online using the digital communication tool, Microsoft Teams, enabling ease of recording and transcription. The data collection took place over a period of five weeks. The researcher used the transcribe functionality on Microsoft teams to transcribe the interviews and amended same where the technology incorrectly captured the statements made, e.g., 'roll' was replaced with 'role' and 'year' was replaced with 'here'. Initial and concluding greetings and clarifications pertaining to the overall study were not completely edited out by the researcher during the transcription process. Filler words, like "like" and "you know," were removed from the transcription to aid in readability, as well as repeated words for example "I'm I'm", "so so so". Sounds of hesitation, such as "um," were also omitted from the transcription, except when they were deemed beneficial for the researcher to gain insights into hesitation or uncertainty. The data was stored electronically on a password protected device.

The interviews were performed using an interview guide built based on existing theoretical information regarding onboarding, newcomer proactivity behaviours and socialisation outcomes. The interview guideline was used to guide the conversation, allowing for comparability of the interviews, and ensuring relevance to the research objective (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The interview was structured with open-ended exploratory questions on:

- participant's onboarding method and experience,
- actions taken by the participants to seek information, gather feedback and attend social events; and
- self-assessments by the participants on whether they were clear on their roles, felt happy with the quality of their work, problem solving ability and whether they felt like they were part of their new team.

The researcher did not intend covering the process prior to onboarding of the research participants, namely the interview process. However, from the first two interviews, it was clear that onboarding for them included the interview process. Each participant was keen to share their experiences before they joined their respective

organisations. This aligned with Dimitrova et al. (2023) and Gupta et al. (2022)'s finding that newcomer adjustment starts before entry into the organisation. Dimitrova et al. (2023) called this the anticipatory stage wherein new employee's form expectations about their work in their new environment. The researcher therefore included the interview process as part of the interview questions for all subsequent participants.

The subsequent questions were designed to collect general insights on the onboarding process including whether it was formal and structured or informal and unstructured. Lastly, the interviewees were asked to reflect on their socialisation process and advise whether they wanted to share anything else that the researcher had not touched on. The same interview structure was used across all interviews. Minor modifications were made to the interview framework during the interview cycles to promote a smooth interview flow, enhance participants' comprehension of the questions, and capture perspectives more effectively. During the interviews, the interviewer aimed to be neutral and only direct the discussion when the semi-structured frame so required to ensure that the topics were covered.

4.10 Analysis approach

Thematic analysis was meticulously and rigorously applied to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and to attain meaningful results in accordance with best practices (King & Brooks, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). In accordance with King and Brooks (2018), the thematic analysis strove to identify themes, recurring patterns, and distinctive aspects within the participants' perspectives. The researcher aimed to characterise specific perceptions or experiences that the researcher deemed pertinent to the research question. Thereafter the researcher organised the themes into a structure showing the relationships between them.

4.11 Data interpretation

The data was transcribed using Microsoft Teams transcription and analysed using ATLAS.TI software. This is a digitally driven analytic method which identifies similar patterns in the data, group the data using codes and then assigning themes to the codes. The data obtained in this research was analysed using the thematic analysis approach, which provided a systematic yet flexible method for evaluating qualitative

data. This form of analysis permitted the identification of recurring and distinct themes within the data set that were pertinent to addressing the research question. This approach was also data-driven since the themes were derived from the data and the actual terminology employed by the participants. These steps were not entirely sequential; instead, they occurred simultaneously and in a recursive manner as the researcher continuously revisited the analysed data and refined the coding, discovering new insights and connections (Bell et al., 2022; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The analysis of the interview data commenced while the researcher was reviewing the automated transcription as this requires listening and reviewing the transcription. Throughout this process, the researcher became well-acquainted with the interview content. This included data cleaning, which involved removing transcription errors, as well as becoming familiar with the data by reading the transcripts multiple times. The researcher firstly discovered and identify aspects or variables that met the study objectives. This was determined from the reasons provided by the participants for their behaviours, activities, and thoughts. Specific, re-occurring subjects in the documents were noted.

A more structured data review was started after transcriptions were completed. By reading the transcribed interview texts, re-listening the recorded semi-structured interviews was necessary to understand better and highlight specific categories and codes, some of which the student researcher had already made a note of during a transcribing process. Coding involved categorising the data set into different units that shared similar meanings, enabling comparisons to be made. Data was coded and categorised into topics using Atlas Ti. Each code identified was linked to a specific quote found in the transcription. Once the initial codes were captured through the detailed review across all the fourteen transcribed interviews, specific re-occurring themes were searched. Polkinghorne (2005) states that the actual transcribed data word by word is not the evidence, but rather the evidence is in the ideas and thoughts that have been explained by the interviewed people using their terms. When the researcher analysed the data and looked for the themes, especially when maturing the themes, this was considered. While the wording of certain elements might have differed between the interviewed employees, these were summarised under the same theme if the overall meaning or idea of the statement

was the same.

The researcher employed an inductive technique to extract meaning from interview transcripts. Using an inductive method, the bulk of the data collected began with specific material, progressed to wider generalisations, and lastly to the research questions. This helped to ensure that the themes were properly related to the data. In this context, a theme was regarded as a broad category comprising multiple data units that were interconnected and emphasised a concept crucial for addressing the research question. The subsequent stage of thematic analysis involved the refinement of themes and their interconnections through the reorganisation of coded data units, ensuring their alignment with the respective themes. Moreover, themes were assessed based on the supporting data and, if necessary, were either eliminated or merged into a single theme (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The thematic analysis was used in a precise, rigorous, and methodical manner to ensure trustworthiness and achieve meaningful results in line with the best practice (King & Brooks, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

4.12 Quality controls

To ensure dependability, it is essential that the research process is traceable, follows a logical sequence, and is thoroughly documented. Dependability was achieved through a meticulous examination and audit of the research process (Nowell et al., 2017). This approach prioritises the potential for replication, and as such, all aspects of the research can undergo scrutiny. This thorough audit establishes trust in the research process. Dependability was obtained through the diligent storage of records related to the development of research questions, data collection, transcripts, and analysis. These records are maintained for the purpose of review and assessment.

The study can be replicated in different contexts and different groups, for example employees with no prior work experience and thereby generalisability through transferability can be achieved (Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility hinges on the alignment of a researcher's findings with the perspectives of the study's participants. To establish credibility, the researcher's process underwent external review by a supervisor, where the interpretations and initial findings were scrutinised against the raw data. Thus, credibility was attained. Conformability involved the researcher critically examining any biases of axiological viewpoints that could have been shaped

by the participants and the setting of the research. Having successfully established dependability, transferability and credibility, conformability was achieved, collectively contributing to the rigour of the research (Nowell et al., 2017)

4.13 Limitations

The mono method was selected, prevented richer and deeper insights which could have been achieved through additional methods from being obtained (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The usage of a purposive sampling technique is highly contingent on the specific research questions that the researcher aims to address and is guided by the overarching research objectives. Consequently, it may not provide a statistically representative sample of the entire population as a whole (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Due to the limited time frame within which this research is being conducted, the relatively small size of the sample may potentially influence the validity of the data collected. The results of the interviews are inherently subjective, as they rely on the individual participants' own interpretations and conceptions. It's important to acknowledge that the participants may have held varying definitions of onboarding, which could have shaped their responses regarding their onboarding experiences. Additionally, the researcher noted during the interviews that the questions might have been phrased differently to not only identify the elements of onboarding but also to understand how these elements contribute to the integration of newcomers.

Furthermore, while the researcher inquired whether the onboarding was formal or informal, a clear distinction between what is unique to the remote work environment versus traditional onsite onboarding may not be discernible. The participants had varying lengths of organisational tenure, which could influence their recollection of the onboarding experience. Given that the interviews were semi-structured, the manner in which the interviewer framed questions may have had an impact on the responses provided by the interviewees. It was also crucial to take into account the potential for personal bias, which might have resulted in leading questions during the qualitative interviews and could have had an impact on the participants' responses. Another limitation was related to the possibility of bias in the analysis, as the author's personal interpretations of the respondents' statements could have influenced the results.

Proactive behaviours may take some time to manifest so ideally a time lag should be introduced between the behaviours and cognitions (Zhoa et al., 2022). Less experienced employees for example graduates, could yield different results, as their proactive behaviours may be more strongly linked with socialisation outcomes, therefore they were excluded from this study (Zhoa et al., 2022). Furthermore, occupational complexity increases the time new employees take to master their tasks and gain clarity on their roles (Capitano et al., 2022) therefore an extended period may yield different results.

The cross-sectional time horizon, although informative, may potentially overlook the dynamic and evolving nature of socialisation processes over time, wherein individuals' understanding of their roles, as well as their interactions within the organisational environment, may undergo fluctuations (Zhou et al., 2022). Consequently, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of socialisation outcomes necessitates an exploration that extends beyond a mere cross-sectional perspective, encompassing a longitudinal dimension to capture the evolving dynamics of newcomer adjustment, however the time period for this research paper was insufficient to do.

Lastly, the scope of the research was limited by the capacity of the researcher. Due to the complexity, depth and breadth of topics and theories linked to organisational socialisation, the researcher focused on only a small section. Namely, of the six key proactive behaviours identified by Ashford and Black (as cited by J. Zhou et al., 2022), the researcher only investigated feedback seeking, information seeking and general socialisation as newcomer proactivity behaviours. Similarly, of the eight key socialisation outcomes positively related to newcomer proactivity found by Gruman et al., (2006), the researcher only investigated role clarity, task mastery and social integration.

5 Chapter 5: Findings/Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the interview data collected after it was analysed. It begins with descriptions of the sample for contextualisation purposes and presents the suitability of the sample to validate the fit of sample-to-sample criteria. The key themes that emerged through the qualitative analysis process as related to the research questions formulated in Chapter 3 are discussed.

5.2 Sample Description

The identities of the participants have been protected by the assignment of a participant code to each participant. Company and individual names were replaced with pseudonyms were referenced in responses. The entire sample comprised fourteen participants who were either new to their role or new to their organisations. The participants were from different organisations, different departments, and different job levels to provide different perspectives. This reflects the attempt by the researcher to accomplish heterogeneity in the sample to obtain variation of data.

Twelve of the participants' companies were based in South Africa. One participant's company was based in the United Arab Emirates, and one was an international company with an office in South Africa, where the participant was based.

Figure 4: Study Participant Information

Participant Identification Code	Gender	Job Level	Onboarding Type	Tenure
P1	Female	Junior	Digital	4 months
P2	Male	Senior	Face to Face	4 months
P3	Female	Junior	Face to Face	5 months
P4	Female	Senior	Digital	4 months
P5	Female	Senior	Face to Face	9 months
P6	Female	Senior	Face to Face	6 months

P7	Female	Senior	Face to Face	3 months
P8	Female	Junior	Digital	3 months
P9	Male	Senior	Digital	2 months
P10	Female	Junior	Face to Face	3 months
P11	Male	Middle Management	Face to Face	6 months
P12	Female	Junior	Digital	4 months
P13	Male	Middle Management	Digital	2 months
P14	Female	Junior	Face to Face	4 months

5.3 Suitability of Sample

All the participants had been in their new roles for at least two months. The participants all started their roles between November 2022 and July 2023 and the average time they had been in their new roles when the interview took place was three and a half months. All the participants had prior work experience before starting in their new roles.

The onboarding processes experienced by the participants varied, with some being formal and structured, informal and unstructured or a mix of both. Just under half (i.e. 42%) of the participants were onboarded face to face and the remaining 58% were onboarded digitally. All the participants onboarded digitally used Microsoft Teams as the digital tool. Two of the participants only went into the office on the first day to collect their laptops and access cards etc but immediately went home thereafter, these were included in the digital onboarding data set.

5.4 General Observations

5.4.1 Onboarding Process

The participants described their onboarding process as follows:

<p><i>"She took me through the policies to standards. All the things that I needed to equip myself with before I even met the stakeholders." (P4)</i></p>
<p><i>"Yeah, there's a bit of a weird onboarding, right. I mean, I just had. I just I think I we had our onboarding session in in May of this year. Our formal onboarding, I you know the actual session. So, I headed like a month ago, June. Sorry, June and I was presenting at my own on boarding. So, it does make it weird." (P5).</i></p>
<p><i>"It was a mixture of both [formal and informal]. So, in like as I was going round with the PA and with the coffee chat was informal. This is the structure. This is what to expect, and then when I went back to my desk, Their IT came to sort me out. You know with access and whatnot and then after that, the guy from IT was showing me. So, this is where you find the policies." (P6)</i></p>
<p><i>"We had engagements, we spoke quite extensively around you know what I need to do, what they critical sort of business requirements are, what the areas of concern are, what we need to focus on et cetera. So, all of that did happen. Very structured and quite formal." (P11)</i></p>
<p><i>"I liked the fact that even, uh, a week or yeah, I think it was a week or even two weeks before I even started at the organisation, I was already getting pamphlets and emails to say this is how your first week is gonna look. This is the map of the office. This is who you're going to meet because that helps a lot with the anxiety, the onboarding that first week all you do is integration. So how to use the system? How to apply for leave every you know meeting the heads of department to understand how the organisation works. All of those were very helpful things to make you feel like I'm in an organisation that's organised and that again also cares about me." (P7)</i></p>
<p><i>"So before, the 5th of May, when I came on board, I had already been given material to read up on to acquaint myself so that I don't feel lost when I come on board." (P8)</i></p>
<p><i>"I had a whole four-week plan basically on what to follow, how to follow, who will buddy up with me, who will coach me, who will assist me with questions and yeah. Umm, I think it's all about structure if I can. If I can summarise everything, it's the first time I've been on boarded and it's probably due to department or management or so we before you even walk into the role, you know what is expected. You know what is the time frames and being aware of what's going on? You, you feel informed, and it makes the process so much easier." (P9)</i></p>

"I think my onboarding was quite formal because you know everything was planned out quite well and even the day after I collected my tools, I had to come to the office and meet the team." (P14)

"Umm, it was likely to be more informal if there was formal stuff, I probably didn't read it." (P10)

"More informal, very relaxed." (P3)

"Structured process in terms of getting the things that are require 1st and then later on meeting the general team." (P2)

5.4.2 Fears of new employees

The participants expressed the following concerns about being new in their environments:

"I think for me, when you move into a new area, the greatest fear is, am I going to be accepted? Because obviously you're not just moving into a vacuum, you're moving into a team where people have developed their culture, where people have actually set up boundaries of what's expected within those teams. Obviously, we don't know everything, but if you're not welcome in into the team and you face resistance, I think that's the biggest challenge that you have to deal with." (P4)

"This is who you're going to meet because that helps a lot with the anxiety, the onboarding that first week all you do is integration." (P7)

"I think it was a little bit nervous cause as a new joiner and stuff you don't wanna make mistakes. I almost wanna say, you wanna live up to the standards and stuff that you've mentioned in the interview... It's sometimes makes it also difficult because you hardly you know that nature of that person in the first few weeks or days." (P9)

"if I do ask, are they going to see me as you know, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know my job. I feel alone. I feel anxious and you know, I mean new employee, I'm learning But I'm sitting all alone at my bedroom at home, and I feel anxious. You know, as a newbs and new person, am I doing things, right?" (P12).

"And so, for me, it was when I started here, I wanted to make sure that I'm following the right way of doing things the X Company way of doing things instead of, you

know, I don't want to be seen as just some cowboy going on a, you know, a tangent of my own and doing my own thing. If I do ask, are they going to see me? As you know, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know my job.” (P12)

“I didn't know what to expect, what kind of a person he is, and all those kinds of things.” (P4)

“there's a lot of uncertainty about where you stand with people, whether or not people receive you in the way that you intend.” (P10)

“It's sometimes makes it also difficult because you hardly you know that nature of that person in the first few weeks or days.” (P9)

5.5 Research Question 1:

Does digital onboarding impact the following newcomer proactive behaviours, information seeking, feedback seeking and general socialising?

5.5.1 Information seeking

The following responses were received in respect of whether the participant sought any information when executing their first task.

“But on a daily basis, if there is a challenge or a challenging position which we need to review, it's simply dropping an email, picking up the phone to say, X what do I do here? Is there anything we can have for probably from your end, before I respond to the stakeholders, and I also have leeway to actually reach out to other team members who are not my Direct Line managers just to seek their opinion. ...lots of questions were asked and to just get clarity” (P4)

“In the first three months when I was still on probation, I spent a lot of that time, you know, just trying to learn and understand what it is exactly how things work basically... I was learning as much as I could. I was asking as many questions as I could and you know, the more I spoke to them the more I understood the business, the more I was able, the more I understood how they operate” (P6)

“It was quite easy because the guy that I report to, he uses an open-door policy, so whoever wants to talk to him at any time, you just call him and you know, yeah, you get clarity, or you ask any questions that you have. But it was a matter of just calling

<p><i>the boss straight away. And then, you know, making sure that I get proper direction This is I think it's XY and Z. Do you agree? She comes back and says yes, that's it.</i> (P10)</p>
<p><i>"So, I think you definitely need to speak up and ask if you unsure or if you unclear or if you don't know which direction to go in."</i> (P13)</p>
<p><i>"So, the first task in terms of clarity in terms of what's required and the objectives are I think it was very clear, so and then the first sort of elements that I actively do is sort of lean on my teammates generally because they have much more experience in terms of where I can get sort of like the effective data that's required."</i> (P2)</p>
<p><i>"I called my line manager and to ensure that you know if I'm understanding the ask."</i> (P1)</p>
<p><i>"And it wasn't as stressful thing. I think it was a gut reaction of let's get this done. Who do I know in the system? Umm, so I kinda just tried to go for it. Umm yeah, I almost didn't have time to think because I think the deadlines were getting tighter and tighter."</i> (P5)</p>
<p><i>"It's impossible to cover all aspects upon on boarding, so as and when I had questions, I will talk to my line manager, talk to my colleagues to say guys by the way, I still do by the way."</i> (P3)</p>
<p><i>"But it was a matter of just calling the boss straight away. And then, you know, making sure that I can proper direction."</i> (P14)</p>
<p><i>"It's generally before, so I'll effectively sort of sent before it gets sent to the stakeholder. My line manager would effectively get sight of the work."</i> (P2)</p>
<p><i>"I called him [line manager] first. I called him first because when you are new, you want to make sure that you are on par with the team. You are not just thumb sucking so to speak. So, I called him and he gives a guide."</i> (P8)</p>

5.5.2 Reasons shared as to why they engaged in information seeking behaviours.

The reasons given by the participants on why they engaged in information seeking:

"You know, calling my boss over there or over the phone, it's just something that I've that I've been doing, and it doesn't matter whether it's, you know, it's senior or junior I call people over the phone. I call I called my line manager and to ensure that you know if I'm understanding the ask. Actually, it this is something that I do a lot." (P1)

"Umm, no, it's something that I'm quite used to even in my previous roles it it's what I did. So, it was a matter of me getting, you know, of a clarity or, you know, requirement for a particular project that I need to get straight from the boss and then I execute." (P14)

"And it wasn't a stressful thing. I think it was a gut reaction of let's get this done. Who do I know in the system? Umm, so I kinda just tried to go for it. Umm yeah, I almost didn't have time to think because I think the deadlines were getting tighter and tighter." (P5)

"I called them first. I called him first because when you are new, you want to make sure that you are on par with the team. You are not just thumb sucking so to speak." (P8)

"It was quite easy because the guy that I report to, he uses an open-door policy, so whoever wants to talk to him at any time, you just call him and you know, yeah, you get clarity, or you ask any questions that you have." (P10)

"I think it's both from past experience and you know getting clarity." (P6)

"And I guess the desire to like everyone to do well and to make sure that I deliver and to make sure that you know the money that the bank spends on me is deserved and you know I come to the party for what the bank does for me so it's for it's more from that perspective but so in other words and I had a horrible onboarding experience I would still I would still personally I think I would still deliver because it's you know I'm hired to do a specific thing I get paid to do it and the right thing for me to do based on my principles is to ensure that I do what the bank pays me to do." (P10)

"To be able to deliver what the book of work and I guess the deliverables were for my role, and then those probably one of the first things that I had to do. And I mean,

I sat with my line manager on that particular one where we just went through. High level. What the key focus areas should be for me” (P11)

“it’s the nature of who I am and obviously I think it’s influenced by past experiences, past job experiences and expires, because I would say this is not a new game I am playing.” (P4)

5.5.3 Reasons why participants did not engage in information seeking

The reasons why participants did not engage in seeking information was varied from knowing what was required, attempting on own and line manager driven process that enable the information to be received without seeking.

“Umm, I think I would have gone to a colleague who possibly sitting next to me, factor me to say hey, this is what I'm dealing with. This is how I would like to approach it and is this, you know, would this be in order type of thing? I didn't need to because it's something that I'm trained in and looked at the papers.” (P12)

“And then my boss just said to me printed. I'm come over. Let's talk about it. So, I printed the first instruction I went. She took me through, you know, the business for this specific, so she started explaining to me, you know, the business, the process” (P6)

“But you fiddle around first, so you give yourself a try and you answer the instructions and then when you get stuck, you call a friend you know. Hopefully, if you're already know someone in line manager, sort of your last resort. And if I was, if they instruction required me to send it to, you know, someone I've never interacted with uh before, I would have even asked my line manager to check. It is like. Is this the standard of how we do things here? Is it the right format I would have asked for her to check it first” (P7)

5.5.4 Feedback seeking

The participants were asked whether they asked for any feedback on their first task delivered. Their responses were as follows:

‘We engage on a daily basis and obviously from those meetings, even via email, I would drop an email to say I need your guidance on this. And I think from the

responses I get; it actually formulates some form of feedback to say things are really going well or things are not going well. But these were the things that I was busy with and happy for you to just OK or give me guidance. It's to what more should I be looking at? What other things should I focus on?" (P4)

"I did ask for feedback. Umm, I generally do that because it's a way to test whether your sense is the correct one." (P5)

"All the time I am pro asking for feedback. Ohh the time and sometimes I think if a straight matter, the people that are reported because I always whenever we have a meeting and one and one I will always my starting point would always be please tell me if there's anything that you see that I need to work on that I need to cover what is it that I'm good that I'm doing. So, it's just me, I think even in my personal life, I'm like that. I would always ask So what do you think about this? But most of it I because I ask all the time and I do get feedback". (P8)

"So, I've done the report on my own, completed everything and then called the colleague for the checking session. Spent 35 minutes gone through the report, almost like the person would audit the report. know this is a process and sometimes in life you can only learn out of mistakes. So, if I've made a mistake, rather pick it up and flag it now before it's too late with me." (P9)

"Umm, you know there are always consistent engagement which are, you know often result in you know constant feedback because you know I have to meet with colleagues and most of the work that I do you know is internal work. So yeah, the feedback, getting feedback from colleagues, but actually quite seamless because they were always, you know around. So yeah, the whole feedback or the constant feedback process is what I'm wide used to in my line of work. It's something that I need to really do because uh also just my line of work, whether in this role or, you know, previous roles that I've done. Umm, even the project management process that we use is the agile one where you know there's constant feedback there." (P14)

"I think I sent my manager and in email separate email thereafter to say this was my assessment and I've instructed them to do 123 and I said you know; I'm hope that it's in line with you know what your expectation or how you would have handled the matter." (P12)

"But what I would do, I would discuss with my line manager as to what especially the initial first few weeks to say this is how I went about it, or I would even copy here to say I mean all bounce it with her before sending it through." (P3)

"Ohh yes, I always ask for feedback. It's important to get feedback. So, it was important for me to get feedback because it's something new that I'm doing." (P1)

"So, in the first so on in your first three months, you are on probation and in those first three months, anything that you send out, whether it's to the business or any simple question, you still have to copy in your line manager. So, for example, if you send out an email they should send you feedback to say ohh OK no this was right or no." (P6)

"And if I was, if they instruction required me to send it to, you know, someone I've never interacted with fur before, I would have even asked my line manager to check. It is like. Is this the standard of how we do things here? Is it the right format I would have asked for her to check it first." (P7)

"But what I would do, I would discuss with my line manager as to what especially the initial first few weeks to say this how I went about it, or I would even copy here to say I mean bounce it with her before sending it through." (P3)

"Yes, yes, yes. No, No certainly I did that." (P11)

5.5.5 Reasons shared as to why they engaged in feedback seeking behaviours.

The participants responded as follows on how they asked for feedback:

"Yeah, that's just me. That's automatically something that I would do just to ensure that I'm on the right track." (P3)

"And to me, it's something that I effectively sort of quite enjoy it because it's sort of gives me a bit more different perspective in terms of the work that I did and having extra eyes is always helpful." (P2)

"So, it was important for me to get feedback because it's something new that I'm doing." (P1)

“Umm I do that because of my past experience, and we find each and every organisation has its own way of doing things. And so for me, it was I when I started here, I wanted to make sure that I'm following the right way of doing things that [X Bank's] way of doing things instead of, you know, I don't want to be seen as just some cow cowboy going on a, you know, a tangent of my own and doing my own thing. But I just wanted to get that to say, OK, this is how I dealt with it is it is this in line with how the team normally deals with matters and also communicates with the external stakeholders?” (P12)

5.5.6 Reasons why participants did not engage in feedback seeking

Only two of the participants did not ask for feedback and the reasons given was that they did not need to.

“There was no real need for a follow up in most of the situations” (P10)

“Yeah, I was confident that. Yeah, I was. Uh, in my in my zone, you know?” (P13)

5.5.7 General Socialising

When asked whether they attend team social events, the participants responded as follows:

“We had a town hall where we had the option to go in face to face due to the size of the venue and I did opt to go into face in face to face just to ensure that I meet at the rest of the stakeholders and obviously this town hall.” (p4)

“Yes. Umm, I came to the year end, and I've been to all the town halls and umm been to a few like informal like lunches with colleagues.” (P5)

“It was. It was easy for me to say yes. And you know me. Extremely social. Extremely social, so yes, I do go. I even go to the pub es, even though all I'm drinking there is my Coke 0 but yes.” (P6)

“Do I say yes to team events? Yes, I do. Do I consciously set up team events for team? No, not necessarily. And yeah, listen, I attend, but it's not something that I'm crazy about.” (P11)

“So and I would say yes to a social event where I know that I'd be able to get some value out of it and put in value out of it. I looked forward to that more than anyone

<i>because I was like now this is my chance to meet and greet everyone, looking at everybody in their eyes, you know, and I think that also just shapes how you engage with your immediate team or all colleagues.” (P8)</i>
<i>“So, I think it's, yeah, I say yes, because at the end of the day, yeah, you need to get along. Umm, I might need your help once or twice or whenever UM. So, depending how big social activities its first work then. That's what we're saying to entertainment and socialisation and stuff after that. And but I also believe that the socialisation aspect is important because that's how we get to know the colleagues. That's how we get to know each other. UM, if we don't have those other interactions, how do I know what is your red buttons?” (P9)</i>
<i>“So I love them because you know, they make me know more about my team leagues and colleagues. So yeah, it's always a yes from my side. I love them.” (P14)</i>
<i>“I'm an extrovert, so I, you know, feed off the energy of other people. So, any social event, any face to face meeting? I'm in. I make an effort to, you know, to be there.” (P13)</i>
<i>“So, I say yes to most every social event, and not just because I like things. But yeah, so just for the team, our team has a quarterly in person breakfast. So, in my time starting, there's been one of those breakfast and not everyone attends.” (P10)</i>
<i>Coincidentally, the team had a prearranged breakfast team breakfast, so I interact, you know, as a newbie at that point, I felt I need to go and meet everybody. The great opportunity, so I went to join them for breakfast.” (P12)</i>
<i>“Yes, yes, some of them. In fact, most of them, depending on if my work allows.” (P3)</i>
<i>“I had lunch with some of the people in in my new team, uh, before this and they were taking me through, you know, some of the things that were happening in, in the thing that we're excited that I was, you know, going to be joining the team.” (P1)</i>
<i>“Uh, yes, I will say yes.” (P2)</i>

5.5.8 Reasons shared as to why they engaged in general socialising

<i>“I think it's part of role and expectation. Naturally, maybe that's come across in it. Maybe doesn't. I'm a natural introvert. Umm, so my energies really consumed by the AT and I do it and it's not that I don't enjoy it, but I understand what it does to my energy resources. So, I do see it as part of the role.” (P5)</i>
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"I just believe it's important to be, you know, some, you know, a part of a community. It doesn't have to be, you know, in the context of your work environment, even outside of your work environment, it's just important to network with other people. It's important for us, as human being, you know, to socialise with other people." (P1)

"So having to bring people into the office once in a while, I think that actually helps to build relationships and to breach that silo sitting and just having to do your work without having to engage with the people, even if I have to pick up the teams, call just to call somebody, I when I'm already I miss talking to you is different rather than for us to say, let's meet over coffee and to just engage outside of team and work as well. And obviously in those engagements, lots of questions were asked and to just get seek clarity as to what exactly the business does and how best I can support from a legal perspective, which I actually got answers to. So definitely I would say yes, we've managed to build relationships and both from a social as well is a work perspective." (P4)

"I thought I had the pressure to say yes, and I did way too many. And I yeah, yes umm because you're trying to make a good impression and the last thing you want to come off as you don't wanna integrate with people. You don't want people to get to know you, so I was actually even telling my husband that ohh, now that they're coming around, it's like they six time when they say dinner. I'm not gonna go anymore because now they know me." (P7)

"I'll say yes because it's important. As part of my work that we need work not only within our team, but the broader compliance team, the product with the product stakeholders, but also, I think it is part of my, my weakness, the compliance officer to do that." (P3)

"Yes, I'm also in in terms of professionalism because you know you get to network and you get to know more about what other colleagues are doing, which are, you know, helps out in projects that." (P14)

"And but I also believe that the socialisation aspect is important because that's how we get to know the colleagues. That's my personal opinion about at least once a quarter or twice 1/4 getting together, socialising and just having that interaction not digitally or virtually" (P9)

"So, because a lot of people are expats and because some of them are, their families are not with them yet, we actually spend a lot of time together. So, it's people inviting each other to the pub after work. Yes, they do allow drinking in the pub. So, we've

got a social committee, I think, because of the loneliness that some people might, might, might find themselves in. So, there's a social team that arranges events. I think twice a month, so we've gone for different events. We've gone for bowling, we've gone for, for tracking. We've gone to do karaoke, but it's it's something that we do a lot and the and the and the team members that have families can bring their families along.” (P6)

“Because I'm a team player and because you know I'm, you know, I, I wanna be around my team. I wanna be around the people that I wanna be around with, you know? But I wouldn't go out of my way necessarily, you know, to be in the forefront and arranging those etcetera. I wanna be there if, if, if that makes sense. You know you will not find me at every single event, but you know the ones that are meaningful for me make sense for me. You'll certainly find me.” (P11)

“So, I see that as an opportunity to sort of broaden my scope from my knowledge perspective and sort of from a social perspective, just to know who's who.” (P2)

“I'm I think, and I think that's why it's also important to go to as many of these engagements as you can because you get to interact with the head of the area or all of the, you know, other leaderships that stakeholders and colleagues.” (P13)

5.5.9 Reasons why participants did not engage in general socialising

All participants engaged in general socialising however two participants indicated that they would stop either as they felt they received no value from the interaction or had attended several and felt that the relationships had been built.

“There was one specific team engagement. It was for Mandela Day where I, for I took a conscious decision to say I'm not going. you know, I'm. I don't know if my presence there would even, you know, be not just or would be appreciated. So, I decided let me just sit and do my actual work. One I am naturally an introvert. I take time to, you know, to get to, to feel people and to be comfortable around people. I want to be able to interact with a person on a one-on-one basis before I can do a group sort of scenario. And so, for me, I feel I felt very disconnected like I'm just this is just the group of strangers, really. And I didn't see any anything that I any similarities, anything that I have in common with them except the work that we do and I think to a great extent that what that's what influenced my decision not to do the Mandela Day drive” (P12)

"I thought I had the pressure to say yes, and I did way too many. And I yeah, yes umm because you're trying to make a good impression and the last thing you want to come off as you don't wanna integrate with people. You don't want people to get to know you, so I was actually even telling my husband that ohh, now that they're coming around, it's like they six time when they say dinner. I'm not gonna go anymore because now they know me." (P7)

5.5.10 For those who exhibited proactive behaviours, did onboarding play a role

Digital Onboarding

"I would say that wouldn't have made a difference because that is, that is what you want to say individually. That depends on person to person, probably." (P9)

"So, I think it basically I would say 50/50, it will be basically is the nature of the person who I am. It is something that I'm actually learning and growing in, so that actually built it up and I think the way I was on boarded, yes, well played a role because it actually gave me confidence and in comfort that I could actually reach out to the stakeholders without any red shapes in between without being restricted to say you cannot go to this person without the line manager, you cannot do this. So having to bring people into the office once in a while, I think that actually helps to build relationships and to breach that silo sitting and just having to do your work without having to engage with the people, even if I have to pick up the teams, call just to call somebody, I when I'm already I miss talking to you is different rather than for us to say, let's meet over coffee and to just engage outside of team and work as well. It is something that I'm actually learning and growing in, so that actually built it up and I think the way I was on boarded, yes, well played a role because it actually gave me confidence and in comfort that I could actually reach out to the stakeholders." (P4)

I think even if it was face to face, I would have probably experienced the same. So, it wasn't, it wasn't. It didn't really have much of a difference. I was comfortable to reach out because as opposed to if we were at an office, I would have to reach out to the three of them, everyone has a lot to do. Number one, I think would be much harder to get hold of them when we're in the office as opposed to when we are online. We are just minutes apart in the office. You could be on a separate floor where I don't

see you for the better part of the day because you're in and out of meetings in board rooms, locked away the whole day." (P8)

"I don't think it has anything to do with how I was on boarded. I would say I can't really say that my own boarding played a role." (P1)

"Umm, I think I would have gone to a colleague who possibly sitting next to me, factor me to say hey, this is what I'm dealing with. This is how I would like to approach it and is this, you know, would this be in order type of thing? So, I would have bounced it off a colleague and not necessarily my manager and before attending to that matter in a particular way." (P12)

"You can be onboarded face to face, umm at the end of the day if you don't receive the required information or details that you might require, you need to put up your hand to say that I need another week." (P9) I think we probably at a disadvantage of when we operated from the office in that in that specific aspect you could walk up to a person's desk and you know chat or debate the problem previously. You know, now you gotta look for time in someone's diary and I find a lot of lot of people week by week they kind of just block out the diary. The social element and a relationship building element, the face to face would have had a bigger impact where you to feel like you are part of the team." (P12)

Face to Face Onboarding

"Umm, I could say it's a little bit of all of the above (in reference to whether it was onboarding, environment or personality), but I wouldn't put it on or everything on the on boarding side. I think that onboarding only goes a certain path. I think that belonging and fitting in is a cultural element of how the environment reacts to other I think I'm very much another." (P5)

"It did, and maybe, and I don't know if I'm quite objective. Yeah, but I'm. I'm that person. I prefer the office, but the whole process of doing the onboarding face to face and doing the interviews face to face even and that first day when I came through, you know, meeting the people face to face, I think that I think just it adds it I must say you learned it adds something to the experience. You know, just meeting people and seeing people face to face and talking to people just makes a difference." (P11)

"I think it helped because it made me feel more comfortable with the team in a very short space of time" (P6)

"But the way I was onboarded. Uh, I doubt, but I think I would sort of refer back to the team as well. I think that's my line manager that that played much more of a huge role, unlike the onboarding process itself. I doubt affecting that it had anything to do with the actual process itself, but so like our working relationship. I think that's that that played much more of a huge role, unlike the onboarding process itself, I think UMM, but to a certain extent I think yes. Uh, I think it was more influenced by my line manager. Sort of being there to sort of guide me. Yes, you can say to a certain extent that's part of the on boarding process, but I think he played a much more important role in it." (P2)

"Am I don't have an issue asking questions but it was if I compared to look so I met with my manager and my buddy so I l'd seen them and then there were some people that had handed over matters to me that I hadn't met and it was certainly easier to communicate with my buddy and my manager than to communicate with the person that I had not met face to face. I don't think necessarily in the way that I was onboarded. I think it's more of the individuals themselves and the personalities. I think it was more influenced by my line manager. I feel very comfortable with my manager because I had that face-to-face interaction with her." (P10)

"I think it did. The whole process actually from when I was made an offer. Then I started glazing with my lineman manager in. In my case I was based abroad with my family, so I was not even in South Africa, but she really made it seamless because when I arrived I it felt as if I already knew or and met her before." (P3)

"I think it was definitely the way I was onboarded because HR did the onboarding. So, I was interacting with everybody else, but my line manager, so I didn't even know if she knew. If what I was doing so that she could help me solve the problem, so yeah. (P7)

"I feel the way I was onboarded had an impact, you know, especially the initial stages, and I think also that the social event because we have them on that, I'm good every two months where we just get together. I go to know more about my team, but they do so yeah, the way I was onboarded helped me out a lot in making me, you know, feel that I'm part of the team." (P14)

5.5.11 Figure 5: Research Question 1: Summary in Table Form

Participant	Onboarding Type	Proactive Behaviour: Information Seeking	Proactive Behaviour: Feedback Seeking	Proactive Behaviour: General Socialising	Onboarding Impact	Onboarding: Formal or Structured
P14	Face to Face	√	√	√	Yes	Formal
P2	Face to Face	√	√	√	no	structured
P3	Face to Face	√	√	√	yes	informal
P10	Face to Face	√	X	√	No	informal
P11	Face to Face	√	√	√	Yes	Structured and formal
P5	Face to Face	√	√	√	To a certain extent	structured
P6	Face to Face	X	√	√	Yes	Both formal and informal
P7	Face to Face	X	√	√	Yes	Both structured and informal
P8	Digital	√	√	√	No	Structured
P9	Digital	X	√	√	No	Structured
P12	Digital	X	√	√	Yes	Informal
P13	Digital	X	X	√	No	Informal
P4	Digital	√	√	√	Yes and no	Structured
P1	Digital	√	√	√	No	Formal

5.6 Research Question 2:

What is the relationship between the newcomer proactive behaviours and role clarity, task mastery and social integration as indicators of positive socialisation outcomes.

5.6.1 Role Clarity: Yes

Participants who answered yes to whether they were clear on their role and responsibilities, responded as follows:

"So, there's still ongoing questions, but the gist of my work Now, I'm very confident that I understand what's expected of me." (P3)

"So, the first question in terms of clarity in terms of what's required and the objectives are I think it was very clear, so and then the first sort of elements that I actively do is sort of lean on my teammates generally because they have much more experience in terms of where I can get sort of like the effective data that's required. There are clear responsibilities, clear guidelines. Clear as stakeholder engagement in terms of the expectation of myself and the broader team. So, I would answer that was a yes." (P2)

"I think, yeah, I think I would say that I know what it's expected of me." (P1)

"Yes, I am clear of what's expected of me, and we've sort of part of the on boarding. We had to sign on and contract on PD objectives for the year, which we did our contract and where I wasn't clear, I sought clarity which was provided and on Wednesday I actually had my midyear check in with my line manager just to be sure that things were rolling out or OK and I think and he also gave me good feedback that he was happy and I was quite he was quite impressed that at least I knew where we were going, what was expected and obviously they were still room to deliver more as we progress into the year." (P4)

"Yes, I think I am. Let me say 90% or let me say 90-95% because I don't know actually 100%. But there are always new things, so yes, I know what is expected 95%, but I also, you know acknowledge the fact that I'm still going to learn new things." (P14)

"Yeah, I do. I definitely do." (P13)

"The work I'm quite comfortable." (P10)

"All that I know is what is expected of me in terms of My Portfolio or my role as an employee. I don't think I can say I know everything, but I I know what it's expected of

me, but I am still in my learning training. I do, and I have a pretty clear idea in terms of what my job entails. Now I understand, you know what is required from my direct manager or our ultimate head” (P12)

“Yes. So I know in the beginning we like we did at [X Company], we had you know we have like performance goals and clear measures of success. This is this is what is expected of you. This is how you can do the things. This is how you can get assistance where you are not clear on things I and I understand the role because it's similar to the role that I held at [x Company].” (P6)

“I know what I need to deliver, you know, and the input that I gave, I think I've implemented most of the things from a team setup perspective around who should be doing what, how et cetera and also so I was, I was almost given I don't wanna say carte blanche you know but I was allowed to set it up the way I wanted to make sure that I delivered I want to deliver on. Yeah. Yes. very clear on what is expected certainly.” (P11)

“Yes, because it was very clear in setting the goals for the probation phase and just the role and also the future just you know, general like, what do you wanna be?” (P7)

“Yes, so I think when we [had] my initial onboarding phase, the manager onboarded me was quite clear with what the uumm obstacles are, challenges and targets, all of those things.” (P9)

5.6.2 Role Clarity: No

Two participants indicated that they did not have role clarity. One participant indicated that they needed more time to figure it all out, while the other participant indicated that the nature of the role was ‘ambivalent’. It does not appear that tenure is a factor as one the participants P8 had the longest tenure of the sample and participant P5 did not have the shortest tenure. The two participants responses were as follows:

“I was told to almost embrace the ambivalent nature of my role. But what's very hard is that people have expectations. So, it's hard to have hard expectations and role responsibility, but that has to almost come to a head. So, I'm yeah, I think people and myself are trying to figure it out. So, what does good look like? I may be obsessing about things which aren't expected. No, it's the nature of the role itself.” (P5)

“So, at the moment I'm not going to say that I have it all figured out. It's an ongoing process, maybe in about 8 months' time, early to easing into early next year.” (P8)

5.6.3 Tasks Mastery

Participants who answered yes to whether they were happy with the quality of their work and ability to problem solve, responded as follows:

“Absolutely. Yes. So, I think uh, mostly yes. I do understand what's expected of me and it comes with the skill as well. Yeah, because I think most of the things that we are currently doing, they're not, they're not new.” (P4)

“Umm, only now I'm in a routine. Now I kind of know my day to day what I'm going to do. I think the first six months was we all just figuring it out and I think, yeah, is what it is. I'm happy with the quality I could it get better? Yes. I think it's. Yeah, I think it's something I have to do every day. So, I'm quite comfortable. Umm, I think it's good because it puts me in a in it. It takes me out of my comfort zone, which means that I have to network and socialise and find someone right? You find someone to help you, you find someone to talk to. Umm, so that's been really great. The fact that there's been so many opportunities to problem solve I think has even broadened my network even further, cause you don't just rely on yourself.” (P5)

“I know what I need to deliver, you know, and the input that I gave, I think I've implemented most of the things from a team setup perspective around who should be doing what, how et cetera and also so I was, I was almost given I don't wanna say carte blanche you know but I was allowed to set it up the way I wanted to make sure that I delivered I want to deliver on. But, but having said that, I think I think everyone is doing their best to try to push as hard as as hard as we can and push as good quality as we possibly can I think we do produce quality. ” (P11)

“They are having my fingers in all sorts of different pies, but gradually I'm learning to balance that out, so the workload I think I've and they're gonna see me. I've made peace with it, but I have kind of made peace with that. I mean we resolve with helping the organisation resolve its problems. That one I'm confident about that. I'm really confident about.” (P8)

“So before starting, my question was or my first few days for the training person was how long does it take for a person joining the team to be full stream? And I almost wanna say 100% quality, 100% minimum of productivity and the the answer was

<p><i>anything from three to six months. So, I said, OK, so I'll put a target for myself for two months and yeah, I'm getting off to after the first month. I got the same amount of allocations as the rest of the colleagues. So, after my first month I'm fully onboarded. I'm contributing as a full body, not a person that is still on training and things like that.” (P9)</i></p>
<p><i>“Yeah, I think right now where I am I'm actually quite comfortable with what I do. I'm happy with. You know, what is expected of me to do and I I'm able to produce work that I quite happy with and more than willing to take accountability of all for the work that I approach.” (P14)</i></p>
<p><i>“So, and my managers confirmed that she's like, I'm happy you've come in You've hit the ground running You need very little support. And maintenance. There are still some things to learn, but I'm comfortable in what I'm doing.” (P10)</i></p>
<p><i>“So, from a work that the technical side of things and the way of how the team that I'm carrying you part of operates I am I'm quite comfortable to say OK, Now I know the work I've always to some extent being very you know kind of OK technically it was just about learning the different product that I'm now dealing with.” (P12)</i></p>
<p><i>“Yes, I am comfortable.” (P3)</i></p>
<p><i>“So, I I do feel comfortable enough to sort of produce the required objectives and given the fact that there is someone to also have a second eye, I guess at the work, so that that also gives me an essence of comfort I guess.” (P2)</i></p>
<p><i>“I don't think I can say that I know everything, but I'm comfortable to know. Umm I think it's getting there. OK, I'm happy with this quality.” (P1)</i></p>
<p><i>“so, I think I have mastered problem solving” (P6)</i></p>
<p><i>“Yes, so you know, when I have a problem or somebody saying we had the same problem, let me walk you through it” (P7)</i></p>

5.6.4 Task Mastery: No

Only participant indicated that they were not comfortable with their problem-solving abilities and that this was driven by the impact of remote working.

<p><i>“I think we are at a disadvantage of when we operated from the office in that specific aspect you could walk to a person’s desk, and you know chat or debate the problem previously. You know now you gotta look for time in someone’s diary and I find that</i></p>
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a lot of people week by week they kind of just block out the diary.” (P13)

5.6.5 Socially Integrated: Yes

When asked whether they felt like part of the team, the participants responded as follows:

“Yeah, so I do feel like I'm part of the team, but I'm not sure if I belong in the team. There's a difference between fitting in and belonging and. Fitting in is you understand the environment. Therefore, you shape yourself towards the environment and you find you find your portion there, right. You find your like little space. There belonging feels like you are who you are, and you come into that environment, and you can be who you are and you feel like you. so, I do feel like I'm part of the team, but I'm not sure if I belong in the team.” (P5)

“Yes, yes, I, I now feel like I'm. I'm. I'm part of the part of the team and I guess it helps that everyone doesn't look at the UAE like home.” (P6)

“Yes. Ohh yes, I do.” (P11)

“Yes, I had a warm welcome.” (P9)

“Yes, definitely. Took me a week to start feeling that I am part of the team and I had to hit the ground running with the work, but they were there to support every step of the way.” (P14)

“Il, yeah, I feel part of the team definitely.” (P13)

“But now, with the interactions that I've had with the people that I've had, that the different campuses that I've been to, I'm, I'm getting that sense of, OK, so this is what the organisation is about. And after doing that, just OK now I I feel like, OK, now I'm a I'm part of something. I do have a place.” (P12)

“Absolutely yes.” (P3)

“I think I am, uh to a certain extent. Well, let me not say to a certain extent, I think I am because now I get leaned on a lot and when anyone new joiners. I don't know with the broader team” (P2)

“ Yes, I do feel like I'm part of the team. I feel like I am part of the team, not just within those specific individual, but the entire team.” (P1)

“Yes, yes definitely.” (P7)

“I do not entirely.” (P8)

“No, I wouldn't say that I I feel like a part of the team now. Umm, no, no, I don't. I

don't. I feel like I don't know most of them. My own, my own little team with my manager. And there's one other lady in our team and I feel part of that team, certainly we have meetings every week and my manager is quite accessible.” (P10)

5.6.6 Exhibited Proactive Behaviours

All of the participants engaged in proactive behaviours, with the majority (57%) having engaged in all three proactive behaviours investigated.

5.6.7 Reason why engaged in Proactive Behaviours

Participants responses when asked why engaged in information and feedback seeking and attendance of social events.

“I think it was a gut reaction of let's get this done”. (P5)

“So, it's just me, I think even in my personal life, I'm like that. I would always ask So what do you think about this?” (P8)

“Also, individually you can't. You can't just sit back and say, OK, now I'm waiting for this. Waiting for that in my instance I've followed up self to get my system accesses sorted out because I wanted to start getting going because I knew I had that two months that I had put on my shoulder that I've produced to myself. So yeah, I think individually it plays a huge role as well. It's up to you.” (P9)

“So, I think you definitely need to speak up and ask if you unsure or if you unclear or if you don't know which direction to go in. So, I can't be waiting for someone to come and hold my hand and walk me through.” (P13)

“Yeah, that's just me. That's automatically something that I would do just to ensure that I'm on the right track.” (P3)

“It's me it's something that I generally do.” (P2)

“You know, calling my boss over there or over the phone, it's just something that I've that I've been doing, and it doesn't matter whether it's, you know, it's senior or junior I call people over the phone.” (P1)

“it's the nature of the person I am.” (P4)

5.6.8 Figure 6: Research Question 2: Summary of findings in Table Form

Participant	Onboarding Type	Socialisation Outcome: Role Clarity	Socialisation Outcome: Task Mastery	Socialisation Outcome: Social Integration	Proactive Behaviours
P14	Face to Face	√	√	√	3 out of 3
P2	Face to Face	√	√	√	3 out of 3
P3	Face to Face	√	√	√	3 out of 3
P10	Face to Face	√	√	X	2 out of 3
P11	Face to Face	√	√	√	3 out of 3
P5	Face to Face	X	√	√	3 out of 3
P6	Face to Face	√	√	√	2 out of 3
P7	Face to Face	√	√	√	2 out of 3
P8	Digital	X	√	X	3 out of 3
P9	Digital	√	√	√	2 out of 3
P12	Digital	√	√	√	2 out of 3
P13	Digital	√	X	√	1 out of 3
P4	Digital	√	√	*	3 out of 3
P1	Digital	√	√	√	3 out of 3

*Researcher omitted to ask social integration question

6 Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

6.1 General

6.1.1 Use of digital tools

Digital tools have grown in prevalence and reliance within workplaces (Choudhury et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2022; Lane et al., 2023; Lund et al., 2021). This is confirmed by the study as evidenced by twelve of the fourteen participants having been interviewed digitally. This also aligns with the findings of Gruman and Saks (2018) that it is now commonplace for organisation's to use online recruitment and selection procedures to hire new employees. All of the participants who were interviewed digitally, expressed comfort with the digital format and previous experience using the tool. The only concern participants had with the digital format was concerns around connectivity due to loadshedding.

While the researcher did not intend to include questions relating to the interview process, having deemed this as separate from the onboarding process, from the first two interviews it became clear that participants consider the recruitment process as part of their socialisation. This aligns with the findings of Dimitrova et al. (2022) and Gupta et al. (2022) that the organisational socialisation process started even before a new employee starts.

6.1.2 Uncertainty

Many of the participants expressed anxiety and uncertainty in respect of their new working environments. This is aligned with the existent literature that attributes the uncertainty to being unsure of their roles and their lack of understanding of the behavioural norms of the new employer (Bauer et al., 2019; Gruman & Saks, 2018; Gupta et al., 2022; Nasr et al., 2019; Peltorkorpi et al., 2022; Rubenstein et al., 2020; J. Zhou et al., 2022). It also confirms the findings that transitioning into a new job is often stressful and creates anxiety for employees because of their limited knowledge of their new environment (Bauer et al., 2019; Peltorkorpi et al., 2022; J. Zhou et al., 2022).

One participant expressed a desire to show the skills and performance standards that they stated as having during the recruitment process and how these elicited

feelings of nervousness when engaging in the first task. Another concern shared by one of the participants about the fear of being perceived as not knowing what one is doing if they were to ask questions. This experience is supported by existent literature that has found that new employees have little sense of how well they will perform in their new roles (Gruman & Saks, 2018).

One participant expressed being accepted as the greatest fear because they were joining a team with established an established culture. This aligns with existent literature that new employees must learn how to behave and interact with their colleagues in order to be accepted and effective (Gruman & Saks, 2018).

6.1.3 Onboarding Processes

The existing consensus in the research is that institutionalised tactics, that is formal and structured onboarding processes is associated with more favourable socialisation outcomes for new employees (Peltorkorpi et al., 2022). Nine out of the fourteen participants indicated yes to all three socialisation outcomes. Of the nine participants only two had experienced individualised socialisation tactics (i.e. informal and unstructured onboarding process) employed by their employer. This finding therefore supports the current consensus in the literature that formal and structured onboarding processes help achieve positive socialisation outcomes (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023).

6.2 Research Question 1:

Does digital onboarding impact proactivity in respect of information seeking, feedback seeking and general socialising?

Existent research argues that a recently onboarded employee comprehends their unfamiliar surroundings by gathering information and cultivating social networks through active participation in both work-related and social engagements (Gupta et al., 2022). Based on this, the research considered new employees as participants in the socialisation process and enquired what actions they engaged in to aid their socialisation. This engagement occurs through the employee taking proactive steps to gain information, request feedback and attend social events for relationship building purposes.

6.2.1 Information seeking

Six of the eight participants that were onboarded face to face to engaged in information seeking behaviours. Three of the six participants onboarded digitally engaged in information seeking behaviours. These behaviours entailed reaching out to their line manager or colleagues to gain clarity on tasks and performance expectations and is used to reduce uncertainty (Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Zhoa et al., 2022). Many of the participants indicated that the reason they engaged in information seeking behaviour was to gain clarity on performance expectations. New employees seeking information from supervisors and co-workers in order to adapt to expectations aligns with what previous research have found (Bauer et al., 2019; J. Jiang et al., 2022). The researcher's findings similarly indicated that those participants that engaged in information seeking behaviours did so to gain clarity and ensure that their performance aligned with the expectations.

Existing research is in line with the observation that information seeking is aimed at helping a new employee become better equipped and more efficient (Bauer et al., 2019; J. Jiang et al., 2022; Mickeler et al., 2023). A strong theme in the data was that line managers were generally the first port of a call for most of the participants. This was the same for participants whether they were onboarded digitally or face to face. This aligns with the findings of Rubenstein et al., (2020), that new employees reap large gains where the supervisor provides knowledge and feedback. It also aligns with W. Jiang et al,s (2023), finding that given the authority and hierarchical position of a supervisor, it is not surprising that frequent interaction is sought.

The overarching theme on why participants engaging in information seeking behaviours was the goal to understand their new environment and performance expectations effectively reducing the uncertainty they had entering the organisation. That information seeking behaviour is used to reduce uncertainty, aligns with uncertainty reduction theory and is in line with existent literature (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Peltokorpi et al., 2022). The reason for engaging in information seeking was the same across participants that were onboarded face to face or digitally, therefore indicating that digital onboarding does not have an impact on information seeking behaviours.

The responses given as reasons for why some of the participants did not engage in information seeking were varied with no common theme apparent. One of the participants indicated that their line manager would be their last contact after all avenues have been exhausted to seek information. The reason given for this was that they had not interacted with their line manager before as their onboarding was driven by the human resources department and their manager was based outside of South Africa. This could potentially indicate that greater line manager engagement in the onboarding process may have mitigated the actions of the employee. This would align with existing literature, however the data, being one participant was insufficient to draw any conclusions.

Two of the participants that also did not engage in information seeking, did not do so as they felt that they knew what to do and did not need any more information to execution the task, or the new joiner process was such that it required the participant to sit with their line manager to complete the first few tasks. Information seeking being used as a recommended institutional socialisation tactic, is in line with existent literature that recommends that a centralised organisational socialisation approach, wherein the organisation takes a more prominent role in orchestrating and directing newcomer adjustment can yield positive socialisations outcomes (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Peltokorpi et al., 2022).

One participant that did not engage in information seeking as they wanted to first attempt the task by themselves and only when unsuccessful, did they reach out to colleagues for assistance. The remaining participant whose organisation had a hybrid way of work, indicated that if they had been in the office, they would have asked a colleague for assistance. However, since they were onboarded digitally, they had recorded the process to be followed which had occurred using a digital platform. This allowed the participant to revert the recording while they were completing the task. They indicated that this was positive as they felt that they did not bother anyone and were able to complete their work. Previous research has shown that onboarding using digital tools may negatively impact the socially orientated areas of socialisation (Gruman & Saks, 2018). There could be argument that this is true because the participant would have behaved differently, namely interacted socially had their onboarding not been digital.

6.2.2 Feedback seeking

The vast majority, twelve of the fourteen participants, engaged in feedback seeking behaviour. The reasons for engaging in this behaviour was given as way to gain clarity, for example feedback was seen as important because the participants were new and wanted to align with the standards, ways of doing things and ensuring that they were on the right track. Feedback seeking was also seen as allowing participants to gain different perspectives in terms of work and was seen as always helpful. Many of the participants spoke of requesting feedback as a normal occurrence, citing that it just what they do and have done in previous roles. This is supported by uncertainty reduction theory what posited that individuals would naturally seek to minimise uncertainty in unfamiliar situations (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Nasr et al., 2019; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Zhoa et al., 2022)

Existent literature reflected proactive behaviour has personality trait driven (Griffin et al., 2000; Li et al., 2022), aligning with the findings of this research.

Only two of the participants did not engage in feedback seeking and the reason given was that they were comfortable with their tasks and did not need to obtain feedback. Both of the two participants were quite experienced in their professions which could be an indicator of why they felt comfortable with their work. The method of onboarding proved an inclusive indicator as one participant was digitally onboarded and the other was onboarded face to face.

6.2.3 General Socialising

Social interactions are of central interest in organisational newcomer literature (Dimitrova et al., 2023), with studies showing that interpersonal relationships play a critical role in the adjustment of new employees (L. Zhou et al., 2022). Amongst the recent research, the study by L. Zhou et al, (2022) showed that relationship building plays an essential role in facilitating social integration and positive organisational attitudes. They also found that, as a predictor of job performance, relationship building is also almost as good as information and feedback seeking. This means that during the process of transferring from organisational 'outsider' to 'insider', newcomers need to actively seek opportunities for interaction with others (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022).

All of the participants engaged in general socialising by attending social events. The main theme on why the participants engaged in general socialising was given as being an expectation of their role and work requirements. One participant went so far as to state that they felt pressured to say yes to social events as they were trying to make a good impression. The secondary theme was linked to the social engagements being important for networking purposes and getting to know other colleagues.

Two of the participants indicated that having attended several social events that they had started to decline additional requests to attend. One participant indicated that this was because they felt their colleagues knew them. While conversely the second participant indicated that they felt that didn't gain value from the engagements as they often occurred in large groups which left the participant still feeling like they were not really connecting with colleagues. Introversion as a personality trait came up twice in the feedback and may be something for future research to explore.

6.2.4 Onboarding Impact

Five out of the six participants who were onboarded digitally indicated that the method of onboarding played no role in them exhibiting proactive behaviour. This is unsurprising, considering that most participants attributed their proactivity as being personality trait. Only one participant that was onboarded digitally indicated that they would have behaved differently, namely requested information from a colleague had they been onboarded face to face.

Five out of the eight participant that were onboarded face to face indicated that their behaviour was impacted by their onboarding. The reasons given included that face-to-face onboarding made them more comfortable with the team and personal preference for face to face engagements. For the two participants for whom it did not make a difference the common theme was that line manager support was driver overriding the method of onboarding.

Two indicated that it was not impacted by their onboarding and one participant indicated that to a certain extent their onboarding impacted their behaviour. Interestingly, whether the onboarding process was formal and structured or informal and unstructured did not seem to have an impact on whether the participants

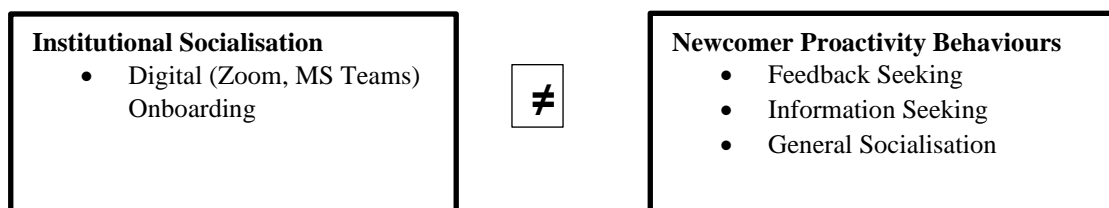
engaged in proactive behaviours. While existent literature indicates that socialisation programs that are structured and formalised yield substantial benefits for both the new employee and the employer (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023; J. Jiang et al., 2022; Zhoa et al., 2022), this does not align with the findings of this study. It further does not support the theorising of Griffin et al., (2000) that formal and structured onboarding process should make it easier for new joiners to engaged in proactive behaviours. However the findings of the study, confirms that the socialisation process is nuanced and that the institutional tactics may not always process the outcomes they aim to achieve (Nasr et al., 2019).

The findings of the study are more aligned to the findings of Wiseman et al, (2022), that decentralised, that is onboarding that relies on both the organisation and the new employee, is more impactful when socialising new employees. The findings indicate that how the new employee exercises their agency and individual motivations is of more importance. This could be because the onboarding program studied by Wiseman et al, (2022) included digital content.

Therefore, the findings in terms of research questions, does digital onboarding impact proactivity, the conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that digitally onboarding does not seem to impact proactive behaviours. This is supported by the research that attributes new employee proactivity to being personality trait driven versus being strongly influenced by how a new employee is onboarded.

My conceptual framework is therefore amended as follows:

Figure 6: Revised Conceptual Framework



6.3 Research Question 2:

What is the relationship between the newcomer proactive behaviours and role clarity, task mastery and social integration as indicators of positive socialisation outcomes?

6.3.1 Role Clarity

Role Clarity pertains to the degree to which a recent employee comprehends their position, the associated expectations, and their responsibilities. This understanding can be acquired through information seeking behaviours like reading relevant materials, by engaging in discussions with colleagues about the job (Peltokorpi et al., 2022). Researchers have found that new employees with high levels of role clarity report being more satisfied with their work and perform better (J. Jiang et al., 2022; L. Zhou et al., 2022). Increased certainty inevitably results in lower stress and a more positive sentiment towards the job (L. Zhou et al., 2022). This is because role clarity indicates successful adjustment to the newcomer themselves thus giving them a sense of certainty. This contention is supported by the findings as seen by the fact that all of the participants who responded yes to role clarity similarly expressed comfort with the quality of their work and ability to problem solve.

Many of the participants indicated that the onboarding process wherein they were made aware of performance goals and measures of success coupled with clarity provided by their line managers played a key role in them being clear about their roles. This aligns with the research findings of Nasr et al. (2019) that a new employee's role clarity is shaped by the socialisation process and interactions with direct supervisors.

Twelve out of the fourteen participants indicated that they had clarity on their roles. That information seeking is positively linked to role clarity is seen in the fact that the vast majority (85%) of the participants who engaged in information seeking behaviour indicated being clear on their roles and responsibilities. This aligns with existing research by both Peltokorpi et al, (2022) and L. Zhou et al, (2022) that employees that engaged in information seeking are likely to have greater clarity on their role and responsibilities. This finding specifically confirms that information seeking is positively related to role clarity.

Incidentally only two participants indicated not being clear on their roles and responsibilities, notwithstanding having engaged in information seeking behaviours.

6.3.2 Task Mastery

Task mastery signifies a new employee's capacity to acquire the essential skills and routines necessary for executing their job effectively, including quality of work and ability to problem solve (Gruman et al., 2006; Peltokorpi et al., 2022; Wiseman et al., 2022). This is acquired through requesting feedback on performance. Thirteen out of the fourteen participants expressed comfort with the quality of their work and ability to problem solve. Of the thirteen participants only one participant had not engaged in feedback seeking behaviour. This finding is in line with similar findings that newcomer proactivity is positive related to socialisation outcomes. More specifically the findings provide confirmation that information seeking, and task mastery are positively related. The findings confirm that seeking knowledge, defined as the act of identifying and accessing co-worker knowledge, can benefit employees in uncertain organisational environments, helping them solve problems more quickly and deliver high quality work (Mickeler, et al., 2023).

6.3.3 Social Integration

Social integration pertains to the process of a newly hired employee becoming integrated within their new work group (Nasr et al., 2019). Although all participants engaged in general socialising two of the participants indicated that they did not feel like part of their respective teams. This was mainly driven by the fact that their social interactions were held with large numbers of people present, with the participants indicating that smaller engagements would have been more impactful.

Direct supervisors and co-workers are important social agents in the socialising process (J. Jiang et al., 2022; Nasr et al., 2019) as is also shown in the participant feedback wherein ease of engaging with their bosses and team members was one of the factors that was considered when engaging in proactive behaviours. Participants indicated elements like 'open door' policies and being able 'to call right away' as key.

Research has also shown that new employees who have high quality relationships with their line managers and co-workers report higher levels of task and role master

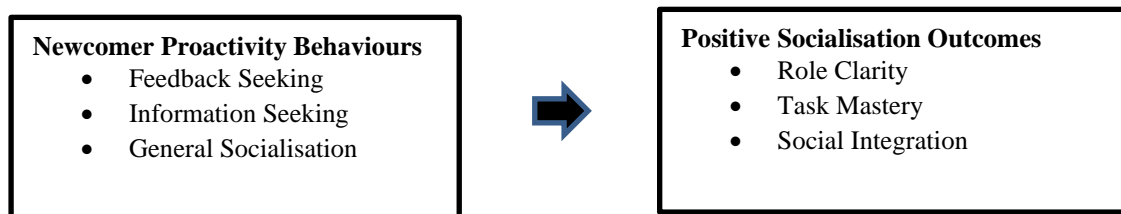
(J. Jiang et al., 2022; Nasr et al., 2019). This is evident in the data as the majority of participants who reported having engaged in all three proactive behaviours, responded yes to having role clarity and having mastered their tasks. One participant who did not engage in information or feedback seeking behaviour responded no on task mastery, further supporting the existing literature.

6.3.4 Newcomer Proactivity as related to socialisation outcomes

Ten of the participants that reported having achieved all three socialisation outcomes had also exhibited all or at least two of the proactive behaviours investigated. This outcome confirms the empirical findings of Bauer et al., (2019) that new employees who displayed proactive behaviours were more likely to achieve success in terms of integration within the organisation. This observation underscores the significant impact of proactive behaviours on newcomers' socialisation outcomes, highlighting the pivotal role of proactivity in their successful assimilation into the organisation. The findings therefore align with existing literature that had found that newcomer proactive behaviour is positively related to socialisation outcomes (Bauer et al, 2019; Gruman et al., 2006, Wiseman et al., 2022). It also confirms that information accumulated through information and feedback seeking directly impacts the new employee's role clarity and task mastery (Zhoa et al., 2022) and that building of relationships through attending of social events also improved role clarity and task mastery (Zhoa et al., 2022).

Therefore, my conceptual framework remains unchanged as follows:

Figure 7: Unrevised Conceptual Framework



7 Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 What did I study this subject and why does it matter?

There has been growing acknowledgment that socialisation is a nuanced process that involves a balance between conformity and individual adaptation, with an increasing emphasis on understanding the diverse needs and contributions of newcomers in modern organisational contexts.

The predominant focus of research on newcomers within organisations had historically revolved around the imperative for newcomers to swiftly integrate into their roles and become fully functional members of the organisation (Bauer et al., 2019; Dimitrova et al., 2023; Zhoa et al., 2022). This integration process hinged on newcomers adopting behaviours and strategies that facilitated their learning and comprehension of organisational expectations. Within the socialisation process, a new employee's capacity to proactively engage in specific behaviours plays a pivotal role in shaping their overall socialisation experience (Becker & Bish, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). These proactive behaviours encompass actions such as actively seeking feedback and information and actively forging meaningful relationships within the organisation (Becker & Bish, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022).

Engaging in such proactive behaviours not only accelerates the newcomer's acclimatisation but also facilitates a smoother transition into their role and the broader organisational culture (Becker & Bish, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). By actively seeking feedback and information, newcomers demonstrate a commitment to learning and adapting to their new environment, which can foster a sense of competence and confidence (Becker & Bish, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). Similarly, building relationships within the organisation enhances social integration, enables knowledge sharing, and can provide valuable support networks during the adjustment period.

As such, the willingness and ability of new employees to proactively engage in these behaviours not only influence their own socialisation but also contribute to the organisation's ability to effectively assimilate fresh talent and maximise their contributions to the workforce (Becker & Bish, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022).

Recognising the critical role of its workforce, organisation's must continually invest

in talent acquisition and development to harness this valuable source of competitive strength. It is also worth noting that the individuals within an organisation constitute a pivotal component of the firm's competitive advantage (Choudhury et al., 2021). In a world where technology and processes can be replicated, it is the collective talent, expertise, and innovation of the people within an organisation that often sets it apart and contributes significantly to its ability to excel in the marketplace.

This research recognises that in our increasingly tech-driven work environment, the ways in which newcomers assimilate into their roles and integrate into the organisational culture are evolving. By investigating the intersection of digital technology, proactive behaviours, and socialisation, this study sought to provide valuable insights into the changing dynamics of employee adaptation and engagement within contemporary organisations. Ultimately, this research strives to inform best practices in onboarding, enabling organisations to harness the full potential of their digital tools to facilitate seamless transitions and foster positive socialisation outcomes for new employees.

7.2 What was the research context and why does it matter?

The rise of workplace flexibility, as noted by Choudhury (2022), brought about significant change in the way organisations operated and managed their workforce. In the evolving landscape, the ability of new employees to showcase proactive behaviours has taken on heightened importance, primarily because of its strong linkage to positive socialisation outcomes (Zhoa et al., 2022). Research has underscored the crucial role that proactive behaviours play in facilitating a new employee's successful transition into a new role and organisation, acknowledging that socialisation is not solely a function of organisational initiatives but also hinges on the proactivity and engagement of new employees (Dimitrova et al., 2023).

7.3 What did we already know/not know?

Based on existent literature, it was clear that the onboarding process serves as the gateway for newcomers to familiarise themselves with the organisation's culture, practices, and expectations, while also enabling the organisation to integrate the fresh talent effectively into its existing structure. In essence, it is a dynamic interplay where both the newcomer and the organisation adapt and evolve to align with each

other's needs and objectives. This multifaceted learning curve is further complicated by the need to assimilate into the unique culture of the organisation. Socialisation is important as it has both short term and long-term effects, namely shortening newcomer adjustment and in the longer term impacting on the employee and consequently the organisations success (Gruman & Saks, 2018; Nasr et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2022; Peltokorpi et al., 2022). The onboarding process allows an organisation to ensure that new employees meet their potential, thereby ensuring that the investment made in recruiting is released (Becker & Bish, 2021; Nasr et al., 2019).

What we did not know was whether the introduction and use of digital communication tools had any impact on a new employee's ability to exhibit proactive behaviours, namely information and feedback seeking and relationship building. We also did not know whether the use of digital communication tools impacted the employee's socialisation outcomes namely, role clarity, task mastery and social integration.

7.4 What specific questions did I answer?

- Does digital onboarding firstly impact newcomer proactivity particularly in respect of (i) information seeking, (ii) feedback seeking and (iii) general socialising.
- Secondly what is the relationship of the newcomer proactive behaviours to positive socialisation outcomes related to (i) role clarity, (ii) task mastery and (iii) social integration.

7.5 How did I answer these questions-i.e. research methodology

The research questions were answered through the adoption of mono method qualitative research. An exploratory interpretivism research approach was adopted as the study was emerging. By employing a qualitative, exploratory study, the researcher gained new insights on the impact of digital onboarding on newcomer proactive behaviour and socialisation outcomes (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In extracting the data, an inductive technique was employed. Using this technique, organisational socialisation and uncertainty reduction theory was applied, and observations were collected to generate a new theory as an outcome. A non-

probability sampling method was employed on a representative sample of new employees with previous work experience. The unit of analysis were employees new to their role, onboarded either digitally or face to face. Semi- structured interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, once ethical clearance and consent was granted. An interview guide was used as measuring tool, developed based on existing research relating to newcomer proactive behaviours and socialisation outcomes. The interview data was transcribed using Microsoft Teams transcription capability and coded using the software tool, Atlas Ti. Through an iterative process the data was coded and categorised into topics and then themes. Using an inductive method, the bulk of the data collected begun with specific material, progressed to wider generalisations, and lastly to the research questions. The thematic analysis was used in a precise, rigorous, and methodical manner to ensure trustworthiness and achieve meaningful results in line with the best practice (King & Brooks, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

7.6 What did I find and how did I interpret what I found?

In respect of research question one the researcher found that all the participants engaged in either all three proactive behaviours or at least two of the behaviours. This was the case irrespective of the way (i.e digitally or face to face) they were onboarded. The majority (four out of six) of the participants who were onboarded digitally did not attribute their actions to the way they were onboarded. One participant indicated that the digital onboarding did play some role while the remaining digitally onboarded participant indicated that their proactivity in relation to information seeking was impacted by the way they were onboarded. This finding was in contrast to participants who were onboarded face to face. The majority of these participants did indicate that the way they were onboarded played a role in them being proactive, by creating comfort to engage with colleagues they had met face to face as part of the onboarding process. This was however contradictory to the reasons given by many of the participants on why they engaged in the proactive behaviours, which seemed to indicate proactivity being a personality trait as found in prior research. That personality determines how individuals navigate uncertainty and whether they take accountability for decreasing the uncertainty in their environment, has been considered in the research and has been found to be a key determinant for proactivity (Peltokorpi et al., 2022).

The researcher interpreted the data to mean that digital onboarding did not seem to impact newcomer proactivity behaviours. In line with existing literature, that proactivity is a self-driven process that is not heavily reliant on institutional socialisation tactics.

In respect of research question two, the researcher found the following:

- majority of the participants that engaged in information seeking behaviours had clarity on their roles and responsibilities;
- the majority of the participants that engaged in feedback seeking behaviours had mastered their tasks; and
- the majority of the participants that engaged in general socialising activities felt socially integrated into their new teams.

The researcher interpreted this to mean that proactive behaviours, namely information seeking, feedback seeking, and general socialising were positively related to role clarity, task mastery and social integration as socialisation outcomes.

7.7 How does this add to the scholarly debate (i.e. relevance and contributions)

This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field of organisational socialisation by incorporating an examination of the influence of new technologies on the socialisation process and impact on newcomer proactivity. In doing so, it not only reaffirms the earlier findings of Gruman et al., in 2006, which demonstrated a positive relationship between newcomer proactivity and socialisation outcomes, but also takes it a step further, by linking specific newcomer proactive behaviours to specific socialisation outcomes.

This research extends the literature on the interplay between newcomer proactivity and socialisation outcomes by establishing a more nuanced connection. It accomplishes this by delving into the specifics of newcomer proactive behaviours and their direct association with socialisation outcomes. In essence, it helps in unravelling the distinct ways in which proactive actions by newcomers impact various facets of their socialisation process, shedding light on the intricate dynamics at play within the organisational context.

7.8 What is the practical /business relevance of the study findings?

By understanding the employee perspective on digital onboarding, organisations can tailor their onboarding and socialisation practices to enhance the transition experience, foster a sense of belonging, and ultimately, facilitate the rapid integration of new talent into their ranks. The findings indicate that digital onboarding does not impact new employee proactiveness in respect of information and feedback seeking and general socialisation. It further reconfirms that assessed proactive behaviours are positively linked to role clarity, task mastery and social integration. This means that business do not need to restrict their onboarding processes only to face to face process and that digital technologies can be leveraged without negatively impacting socialisation outcomes.

Based on the study outcomes, it is recommended that organisations build into their interview process an assessment of proactive behaviours through asking questions in the interview which indicate a propensity to be proactive, for example asking how they would attempt their first task. Alternatively, development of an assessment tool that test for proactivity. Organisation's should recognise that although the type of onboarding does not make a big difference for certain proactive behaviours and socialisation outcomes, the formality of the process remains key in ensuring an effective socialisation. The study has also shown that to achieve social integration as a socialisation outcome and general socialising as a proactive behaviour are negatively impacted by virtual onboarding. Organisation's therefore need to ensure that where they are following a virtual onboarding experience, that social engagement occurs in a face-to-face environment and ideally in smaller groups to allow team members to build relationships. This aligns with similar recommendations about being intentional and proactive about setting up both formal and informal interactions (Citrin & DeRosa, 2021).

7.9 What are the suggestions for future research?

As a mono method was selected, research using mixed methods may give richer and deeper insights (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A time lag study is recommended as proactive behaviours may take some time to manifest (Zhoa et al., 2022). A study

focusing on employees with no prior work experience, for example graduates could yield different results, namely that their proactive behaviours may be more strongly linked with socialisation outcomes, therefore they were excluded from this study (Zhoa et al., 2022).

The researcher only investigated feedback seeking, information seeking and general socialisation as newcomer proactivity behaviours, research on the other newcomer proactive behaviours, for example job change negotiation, relationship building with boss, positive framing etc would add greatly to the understanding of the impact of digital onboarding. Lastly, in respect of socialisation outcomes, the researcher only investigated role clarity, task mastery and social integration, similar to the proactive behaviours, other socialisation outcomes should be explored. Occupational complexity increases the time new employees take to master their tasks and gain clarity on their roles (Capitano et al., 2022) therefore a longitudinal study may yield different results.

7.10 Conclusion

The research findings highlighted the nuanced dynamics of socialisation, wherein the interplay between proactivity levels, socialisation approaches, and socialisation outcomes are intricate. The findings conclude that digital onboarding does not impact new employee proactivity and confirms the existent research that newcomer proactivity is positively associated with socialisation outcomes. The findings also indicated that while the initiation of a new job may be fraught with stress due to limited organisational knowledge, well-designed socialisation initiatives continue to play a pivotal role in alleviating this stress, facilitating smoother transitions, and yielding advantageous outcomes for both the new employee and the organisation at large. Overarchingly, though, the differing responses from participants should not be overlooked as they do confirm that socialisation is nuanced and multi-faceted and therefore a one-size-fits-all approach should not be adopted.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Interview Guide Assessing Employee's Proactive Behaviours when starting a new role or job and assessing socialisation outcomes.

Thank you for participating in this interview. I appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and thoughts with me. I would like to explore and understand what motivates you to be proactive and what influences your social integration into the organisation. I would like to record this interview and have it transcribed. I will remove any identifying information from the transcript and no identifying information including your name will be used during analysis. Is it ok if I record the interview?

Turn on the audio recorder on phone if face to face or press record if on a digital platform

This is an interview by Yolande Myburgh with (student no: 20807776).

Take a minute to consider your first months in your role. Throughout the interview it may be useful to recount important events to help explain.

QUESTIONS

ONBOARDING

1. How were you onboarded (face to face, digitally or both)
 - a. How did you find the experience?
 - b. Was this the first time you were onboarded in this manner?
 - c. Was there a structured process?

PROACTIVE BEHAVIOURS

Influences on being proactive

2. What do you think being proactive means when starting a new job or role?
 - a. Any examples of how you have been proactive?
 - b. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
 - c. What influences your ability to be proactive in general for your learning?
 - d. Could you give an example?
 - e. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?

3. What influences your ability to intentionally seek feedback when starting a new role or job?
 - a. Any examples?
 - b. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?

- c. How would you be hindered in seeking feedback?
 - d. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
- 4. What influences your ability to intentionally seek information when starting a new job or role?
 - a. Any examples?
 - b. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
 - c. How would you be hindered in seeking information?
 - d. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
- 5. What influences your ability to develop relationships with others when starting a new job or role?
 - a. Any examples?
 - b. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
 - c. Since you joined, how many social events have you attended?
 - d. How would you be hindered in developing relationships with others?
 - e. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?

SOCIALISATION OUTCOMES

Social integration

- 6. In what ways do you feel like a part, or not, of the team?
 - a. With who particularly?
 - b. Any examples?
 - c. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
 - d. How would you be hindered in feeling like a part of the team?
 - e. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?

Role Clarity

- 7. Role Clarity refers to you level of understanding of your job, what is expected of you and your responsibilities.
 - a. What influences your ability to understand the roles and responsibilities expected of you when starting a new role or job?
 - i. Any examples?
 - b. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
 - c. How would you be hindered in gaining clarity on your role?
 - d. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?

Task Mastery

- 8. Task mastery refers to the ability to learn skills and routines to perform your job. E.g high quality work output, amount of work, ability to problem solve.

- a. What influences your ability to master (i.e the roles and tasks expected of you when starting a new role or job?
 - i. Any examples?
- b. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?
- c. How would you be hindered in mastering your role?
- d. Has the way you were onboarded played a role?

Any other comments

- 9. Is there anything else you'd like to add about the ways in which others influence your ability to show initiative as you participate in the organisation or team?