

Proactive Resocialization Behavior of Boomerang Employees: Conceptualization, Measurement, Antecedents, and Outcomes from a Resource-Based Perspective

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Date: 2025-04-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

“Boomerang employees” has become a new trend in talent mobility in domestic and international labor markets. However, upon returning to the organization, the organizational resocialization outcomes for boomerang employees are often unsatisfactory, with employees potentially experiencing deteriorating job performance, subsequent turnover, and other issues. To identify the antecedents of differential organizational resocialization outcomes among boomerang employees, this study will conduct systematic research focusing on the proactive resocialization behaviors of boomerang employees. By exploring the conceptualization, dimensions, and measurement of proactive resocialization behaviors among boomerang employees, this study aims to identify two dimensions: general and specific proactive resocialization behaviors. Based on a resource perspective, it will identify and test the mechanisms of proactive resocialization behaviors, thereby providing guidance for organizations to optimize recruitment decisions and resocialization management strategies for boomerang employees. This study extends organizational socialization theory to the new context of “employee return,” aiming to promote the joint development of theory and practice in the fields of organizational socialization and employee mobility.

Full Text

The Connotation, Measurement, Antecedents, and Outcomes of Boomerang Employees' Proactive Resocialization Behaviors: A Resource-Based Perspective

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Abstract

“Boomerang employment” has emerged as a new trend in talent mobility across domestic and international labor markets. However, the organizational resocialization outcomes for boomerang employees after returning to their former organizations are often unsatisfactory, with many experiencing deteriorating job performance or choosing to leave again. To unravel the causes behind these divergent resocialization outcomes, this study systematically investigates boomerang employees’ proactive resocialization behaviors. By exploring the connotation, dimensions, and measurement of these behaviors, we identify two key dimensions: general proactive socialization behaviors and boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors. Grounded in a resource perspective, we examine the mechanisms through which these behaviors operate, thereby providing guidance for organizations to optimize rehiring decisions and resocialization management strategies for boomerang employees.

This research extends organizational socialization theory to the novel context of “employee return,” aiming to advance theoretical and practical development in both organizational socialization and employee mobility domains.

Keywords: organizational socialization, organizational resocialization, boomerang employee, proactive socialization behavior

Classification Code: B849:C93

1. Problem Statement

The phenomenon of employees “reconciling” with organizations after “breaking up” has become increasingly common, known as “employee return” or “boomerang employment” (Boomerang Employee; Shipp et al., 2014). Guided by the spirit of the 20th Party Congress Report— “removing institutional and policy barriers that hinder labor and talent mobility” and “implementing more active, open, and effective talent policies” —enterprises are placing growing emphasis on boomerang employees, demonstrating a new talent philosophy with significant implications for national human resource mobility. As early as 2006, a cross-industry survey by 51job revealed that an increasing number of departing employees no longer held the traditional view that “a good horse never returns to old pastures,” with 47.86% expressing willingness to return to their former companies if given the opportunity. Simultaneously, organizations are abandoning the outdated notion of “once disloyal, forever untrustworthy,” gradually recognizing the benefits of employee return, such as reduced recruitment time and costs, and bringing fresh ideas or technical innovations (Raj & Hundekar, 2013; Yang et al., 2024). These organizations now view former employees as valu-

able talent resources. For instance, companies like Alibaba, Tencent, JD.com, New Oriental, and XPeng Motors have explicitly established return policies in their recruitment systems (Yang et al., 2024) or launched programs inviting former employees back. Internationally, TravelCenters of America operates a “Boomerang Initiative” welcoming outstanding former employees who left voluntarily (Dachner & Makarius, 2021). Some organizations even treat employee mobility as a crucial pathway for enhancing human capital, such as Hema Fresh and Xibei, which adopt a “secondment-based shared employee” model (Li, 2021), or government and public institutions in China that utilize temporary assignments and secondments for cadre development (Liu & Zhao, 2024).

As boomerang employment becomes increasingly prevalent (Makarius et al., 2024), corresponding management challenges have attracted scholarly attention. This study focuses on boomerang employees as the core research object. Reviewing relevant concepts and research on the antecedents and outcomes of boomerang employee return, we find that existing literature primarily debates the pros and cons of boomerang hiring (e.g., Raveendra & Satish, 2022) and factors influencing return intentions (e.g., Akkermans et al., 2021), addressing pre-return questions such as “whether to hire boomerang employees” and “why they return or not.” However, research on the post-return process of reintegration and role assumption—namely, organizational resocialization (Organizational Resocialization; Moeller, 2024)—remains insufficient. On one hand, consensus has not been reached regarding post-return resocialization outcomes, such as job performance (Yang et al., 2024). On the other hand, limited attention has been paid to how boomerang employees leverage their agency, particularly through proactive socialization behaviors, to facilitate their resocialization process. The resocialization of boomerang employees significantly impacts both their career development and organizational talent management. Therefore, academia and practice urgently need to address questions like “why do resocialization outcomes differ among boomerang employees” and “what role do their proactive behaviors play in this process.”

Proactive socialization behaviors refer to a series of initiative actions employees take to integrate into an organization during the socialization process, manifesting differently across contexts (Wang & Kim, 2013; Zhao et al., 2023). Due to their dual identity as both “newcomers” and “veterans,” boomerang employees can adopt both general proactive socialization behaviors commonly used by new hires (defined in this study as “General Proactive Socialization Behaviors”), such as feedback seeking and information gathering, and boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors (defined as “Boomerang-Specific Proactive Resocialization Behaviors”) that leverage resources accumulated during previous tenure(s), such as relationship rebuilding with former leaders or colleagues and information verification. The resource perspective has been widely applied in proactive socialization research to explore how employees utilize resources to meet job demands (Awan & Abbas, in press; Chen et al., 2025; Grohsjean et al., in press; Zhao et al., 2024) and further accumulate resources (Bauer et al., 2021). Compared to new hires, boomerang employees’ uniqueness lies in the re-

sources accumulated during previous tenure(s). Therefore, this study explores how these resources influence boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors and how these behaviors subsequently affect resource accumulation and job performance, thereby better understanding the divergence in their resocialization outcomes.

In summary, grounded in the resource perspective of organizational socialization and focusing on boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors, this study examines their connotation and dimensions, revealing the underlying mechanisms of their antecedents and outcomes. The research aims to advance theoretical development in organizational socialization and employee mobility while providing practical guidance for boomerang hiring and employee development.

2.1 The Concept and Connotation of Boomerang Employees

This study systematically reviews boomerang employee-related concepts across three dimensions: subject, behavior, and process.

2.1.1 Subject Dimension

Existing research has identified two main actors in employee return phenomena: boomerang organizations and boomerang employees (Swider et al., 2017). The concept of boomerang organizations is well-established in academia, referring to organizations that employees leave and later return to, variously termed boomerang organizations, former organizations, ex-employers, or source enterprises (Boomerang Organization/Formal Organization/Ex-employer; Mallick & Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Shipp et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2024).

However, the definition of boomerang employees remains contested. Shipp et al. (2014) defined boomerang employees as “employees who resign from an organization but are later rehired.” Subsequently, to encompass various return scenarios (e.g., retiree rehiring, seasonal workers), Swider et al. (2017) expanded the definition to “individuals who have previously worked for an organization and returned to the same organization after a period of time.” Further refining the concept based on reasons for departure, Snyder et al. (2021) defined boomerang employees as “employees who voluntarily or involuntarily terminated employment and later chose to return,” explicitly excluding interns, seasonal workers, and employees on leave. Thus, existing research has yet to reach consensus on the boomerang employee concept, particularly regarding whether interns, seasonal workers, and working mothers on maternity leave fall within its scope—a question requiring future investigation.

2.1.2 Behavior Dimension

Existing research has cataloged behaviors of both boomerang organizations and boomerang employees. Regarding boomerang organization behavior, research primarily focuses on boomerang hiring, a phenomenon within human resource recruitment (Mallick & Mukhopadhyay, 2023). Boomerang hiring leverages former employment relationships and alumni networks to rehire former employees, enriching the organizational talent pool. This practice not only enhances person-organization fit but also helps organizations acquire firm-specific human capital, significantly improving recruitment efficiency and effectiveness (Makarius et al., 2024). Regarding boomerang employee behavior, research has examined return behavior and subsequent turnover. Both are defined as forms of job mobility: return behavior refers to boomerang employees rebuilding employment relationships with former employers after working for one or more other employers (Maier et al., 2021), while subsequent turnover refers to boomerang employees choosing to terminate employment again after returning (Arnold et al., 2020). Existing research primarily investigates the likelihood of these behaviors and their influencing factors.

2.1.3 Process Dimension

Existing research conceptualizes boomerang employees' career trajectories as a series of job transitions or interruptions (Freeney et al., 2022): “job searching → initial entry → departure → employee return → post-return retention/promotion/subsequent turnover.” As noted, research has focused on two key events in this process: employee return behavior and organizational boomerang hiring.

In summary, this study reviews boomerang employee-related concepts and key events across the subject, behavior, and process dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

These three-dimensional concepts provide guidance for clarifying research objects, stages, and behaviors. First, regarding the subject dimension, this study focuses on boomerang employees while considering the role of boomerang organizations. Given definitional controversies, we adopt Snyder et al.'s (2021) definition as our selection criterion. Compared to regular employees, interns and seasonal workers exhibit significant differences in organizational socialization: (1) in terms of employment duration, non-standardized short-term employment relationships hinder the formation of stable socialization resources; (2) regarding resource accumulation, low participation in work content and limited career development support result in insufficient organizational knowledge, professional skills, and interpersonal networks upon departure; and (3) concerning institutional protection, inadequate rights protection systems exacerbate structural barriers to resource acquisition (Chue et al., 2024). In contrast, employees returning from leave possess unique resocialization resource advantages due to role continuity and organizational system protection, facing entirely different orga-

nizational contexts. Therefore, based on theoretical rigor and generalizability considerations, this study focuses on regular employees who left and returned, temporarily excluding special groups such as interns, seasonal workers, and employees on leave. Second, regarding the behavior dimension, we shift focus from return and turnover behaviors to proactive resocialization behaviors, exploring their underlying mechanisms. Finally, regarding the process dimension, our focus aligns with research trends, moving from the “pre-return stage” to the “post-return stage.”

2.2 Antecedents and Consequences of Boomerang Employee Return

Building on the conceptual review, this study further synthesizes empirical findings on boomerang employees, including antecedents and consequences of return intention/behavior, as summarized in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper].

2.2.1 Factors Influencing Return Intention and Behavior

Existing research examines boomerang employees’ return intention/behavior from four levels: social environment, organization, project/team, and individual. The social environment encompasses employment conditions, geographic location, and social support. First, in fluid talent markets, employees tend to seek new opportunities rather than return to boomerang organizations (Breitsohl & Ruhle, 2016). Conversely, when employment prospects are unfavorable, employees are more inclined to return (Akkermans et al., 2021). Second, Breitsohl and Ruhle (2016) found that the attractiveness of the employer’s region affects return intention. Finally, social support from acquaintances and friends provides motivation for returning (Malinen et al., 2021). At the organizational level, boomerang organization prestige positively correlates with return intention (Tian et al., 2022), and proactive boomerang hiring increases return likelihood (Swider et al., 2017). At the project/team level, project compensation, duration, team cohesion, leadership changes, and exit interviews all influence return intention (Schärrer & Sender, 2021).

Extensive research has focused on individual-level antecedents, which can be categorized into factors from the original tenure and those from other organizations/departure periods. During original tenure, work experiences and departure nature affect return intention. Positive experiences—such as high job embeddedness (Maier et al., 2021), job satisfaction (Ali & Swart, 2023), and satisfactory compensation (Loan-Clarke et al., 2010)—drive return intentions, while negative experiences like psychological contract breach (Tian et al., 2022), negative work climate (Malinen et al., 2021), and involuntary demotion or ethical conflicts (Ali & Swart, 2023) diminish them. Additionally, departure nature matters; Raveendra and Satish (2022) argue that employees only consider returning after “amicable separations” (e.g., relocation due to spouse, childcare responsibilities). During tenure at other organizations, career experiences and

organizational encounters also influence return decisions. Problems experienced elsewhere—such as job shocks (Akkermans et al., 2021), unmet expectations (Shipp et al., 2014), and low job embeddedness (Maier et al., 2021)—prompt thoughts of returning.

Finally, research has identified boundary conditions. For instance, Tian et al. (2022) found that organizational identification strengthens return intention, particularly when previous work was highly collaborative. Work volition also moderates the relationship between psychological contract violation and return intention (Schärrer & Sender, 2021).

2.2.2 Post-Return Work Performance

Boomerang employee return is not an endpoint but a new beginning for both employee and organization. Consequently, research has begun examining post-return performance.

A key debate concerns whether boomerang employees achieve expected performance levels. Studies comparing boomerang employees with other types yield inconsistent conclusions. Arnold et al. (2020) focused on boomerang managers, finding their first-year performance similar to internal and external hires, but over time, both internal and external hires outperformed them. Keller et al. (2021) found boomerang employees initially outperformed new hires, while Snyder et al. (2021) found their performance comparable to employees who never left. Swider et al. (2017) identified factors influencing post-return performance, including initial tenure performance, intermediate organization experience, leadership and environmental changes, total time away, and involuntary departure.

Second, turnover intention has garnered attention. Arnold et al. (2020) noted that boomerang managers have higher subsequent turnover likelihood than internal and external hires, with reasons similar to their initial departure.

Finally, research has explored boundary conditions affecting post-return performance, including interpersonal collaboration demands and internal organizational resistance (Keller et al., 2021). Specifically, when return positions involve high internal dependency, relationship demands, and administrative coordination, boomerang employees perform better. Internal resistance is indicated by new hire numbers and manager tenure: fewer new hires and longer tenure of new managers reduce resistance, enhancing boomerang employee performance.

In summary, while extensive research has examined return antecedents, studies on post-return performance remain limited and inconsistent. This study therefore focuses on the post-return stage, applying a resource perspective on organizational resocialization to systematically investigate how different proactive resocialization behaviors affect post-return outcomes.

2.3 Boomerang Employees' Proactive Resocialization Behaviors

As organizational socialization understanding has evolved from “stage-based socialization for newcomers adapting to organizational environments” to “continuous career-long socialization adapting to intra- and inter-organizational changes,” research has begun examining proactive resocialization behaviors among special employee groups (e.g., boomerang employees, new mothers) (Ladge & Greenberg, 2015), particularly differences from newcomers or first-time employees.

Yang et al. (2024) propose that compared to newcomers, boomerang employees can integrate internal and external knowledge, update organizational mental models, and rebuild cooperative relationships with former colleagues, thereby efficiently merging old and new relationship resources. Grohsjean et al. (in press) argue that boomerang employees face lower difficulty learning organization-specific knowledge than newcomers but have more complex internal relationships, requiring both new relationship building (with new hires) and old relationship reshaping (with former colleagues). Consequently, boomerang employees may not rely solely on information gathering like newcomers but instead use organizational citizenship behaviors to build both types of relationships (Grohsjean et al., in press; Snyder et al., 2021).

Research on other employee groups also informs our understanding. For instance, reemployed newcomers differ from first-time newcomers in work experience, leading to different resocialization processes (Yang & Wang, 2022). Reemployed newcomers rely more on proactive behaviors (He & Huang, 2015) and exhibit greater behavioral variety. Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) identified unique resocialization strategies among reemployed newcomers, including specialization (focusing on skill-matched work), dedication (demonstrating competence through hard work), selfless contribution (providing information and advice), praising others, networking, team building, and resource exchange. Additionally, Yang and Wang (2022) found reemployed newcomers exhibit higher levels of taking charge behavior. Their proactive resocialization behaviors are not solely learning-oriented but also influence others to achieve better resocialization (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012). Given that boomerang employees are also reemployed newcomers, this research provides valuable insights.

In summary, boomerang employees adopt both general proactive socialization behaviors common to newcomers and unique proactive resocialization behaviors leveraging their work experience and social relationships. To comprehensively identify these behaviors, this study must consider both general and boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors.

2.3.2 Mechanisms of Boomerang Employees' Proactive Resocialization Behaviors

As research on boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors remains preliminary, and given conceptual connections to newcomers' proactive socialization behaviors, this study draws appropriately from newcomer research while noting distinctions. The overall framework is summarized in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper].

Antecedents of general proactive socialization behaviors span individual, team, and organizational levels. At the individual level, personality traits (e.g., proactive personality, extraversion, openness) are widely discussed (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Yang et al., 2019). At the team level, Reichers (1987) noted that proactive socialization behaviors are influenced by leaders, colleagues, and subordinates. At the organizational level, organizational culture and structure (Wang & Kim, 2013), organizational social image (Chen et al., 2025), and organizational socialization tactics all affect general proactive socialization behaviors. For boomerang-specific behaviors, work experience from other and former organizations (Yang et al., 2024), existing social exchange relationships (Keller et al., 2021), and boomerang hiring policies (Snyder et al., 2021) exert influence.

As manifestations of employee agency during socialization, proactive (re)socialization behaviors aim to enhance socialization effectiveness. Outcomes are typically categorized as proximal (direct results of socialization processes) and distal (indirect results influenced by other factors) (Zhao et al., 2023). Proximal outcomes at the individual level include task mastery, social integration, and role identity; at the team level, they include social exchange (Mao & Li, 2015; Yan et al., 2011). Distal outcomes include job satisfaction, organizational commitment, team cohesion, honor (Li et al., 2014), and well-being (Bauer et al., 2025). For boomerang employees, existing research has focused on work performance (Grohsjean et al., in press), psychological contracts (Schärrer & Sender, 2021), and subsequent turnover intention/behavior (Arnold et al., 2020), with inconsistent results. For example, Snyder et al. (2021) found boomerang employees' post-return performance comparable to stayers, while Arnold et al. (2020) argued their performance would be surpassed by others. Booth-LeDoux et al. (2019) found lower turnover rates among boomerang employees, whereas Arnold et al. (2020) found higher likelihoods.

Regarding boundary conditions between antecedents and proactive (re)socialization behaviors, research has focused on individual factors. For instance, Lin et al. (2018) found employee goal orientation moderates HR practices' effects on proactive behaviors. For boundaries between proactive behaviors and outcomes, research has emphasized leader traits and organizational strategies. Wang and Kim (2013) found that the positive effects of proactive socialization behaviors on performance and social integration via perceived insider status were weakened by leader traditionality.

Post-return resocialization profoundly affects boomerang employees' development and subsequent organizational contributions. However, current understanding of their proactive resocialization behaviors and mechanisms remains inadequate, particularly given inconsistent findings (Yang et al., 2024), complicating management strategy development. This paper systematically examines boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors and mechanisms to extend organizational socialization theory and provide theoretical support for managing their resocialization process.

2.4 Literature Review Summary

Boomerang employees are increasingly common in workplaces (Yang et al., 2024), and scholars have called for research examining the socialization processes of senior employees like boomerang employees and how different practices affect their resocialization outcomes (Grohsjean et al., in press). Our review reveals three key gaps:

(1) Insufficient understanding of boomerang employees' resources constrains interpretation of divergent resocialization outcomes. The resource perspective is crucial for understanding organizational (re)socialization, yet existing research inadequately recognizes boomerang employees' unique resources (e.g., existing relationship resources, intermediate organization experience) that significantly affect post-return performance. Without proper resource understanding, we cannot accurately interpret why resocialization outcomes differ. Therefore, integrating boomerang employees' characteristics with the resource perspective of organizational socialization to analyze their unique resources is essential for unraveling outcome divergence.

(2) Existing research neglects boomerang employees' agency in the resocialization process. Organizational socialization literature acknowledges that employees are not passive recipients but actively engage in proactive socialization behaviors. Boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors reflect this agency. While some studies have explored organizational factors promoting resocialization, they have overlooked employee agency. Future research must identify boomerang employees' unique resources and investigate the characteristics and roles of their proactive resocialization behaviors.

(3) Existing research provides a foundation but requires supplementation. Proactive socialization behavior research has concentrated on newcomers, describing their typical behaviors. However, studies on specialized proactive resocialization behaviors for reemployed newcomers and boomerang employees are scarce. Given the importance of proactive resocialization behaviors for outcomes, future research must draw from traditional organizational socialization theory and general proactive socialization behavior research while considering boomerang employees' unique resources to refine and supplement the content and manifestations of boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors.

3.1 Research Objectives and Framework

This study focuses on boomerang employees, employing a resource perspective of organizational socialization to deeply analyze the connotation, core dimensions, influencing factors, outcomes, and boundary conditions of their post-return proactive resocialization behaviors, thereby systematically constructing a theoretical framework. The overall framework is illustrated in Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper].

Study 1 examines the connotation, manifestations, and measurement of boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors, developing a measurement scale. **Study 2** investigates antecedents, exploring how individual, team, and organizational resources influence these behaviors through self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs. **Study 3** examines outcomes, analyzing how proactive resocialization behaviors affect proximal outcomes (role conflict, new social exchange) and distal outcomes (post-return performance, subsequent turnover intention), moderated by team and organizational contexts.

3.2 Study 1: Conceptualization, Dimensions, and Measurement

Based on our literature review, we define boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors as proactive actions taken after returning to readapt to the organization and job tasks. Using a mixed-methods approach combining thematic modeling and grounded theory, we will identify core dimensions and manifestations and develop a measurement instrument.

First, core dimensions. Through semi-structured interviews and web scraping, we will comprehensively understand actual behavioral manifestations. Boomerang employees' uniqueness stems from their dual identity as both "newcomers" and "veterans." Under the "newcomer" identity, they employ general proactive socialization behaviors common to all new hires; under the "veteran" identity, they exhibit boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors. We therefore propose two core dimensions: general proactive socialization behaviors (universal across employee types) and boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors (unique to boomerang employees, requiring their distinctive resources). This distinction reveals how boomerang employees leverage unique resources for resocialization.

Second, measurement instrument. Drawing from established newcomer proactive socialization behavior scales (e.g., Wang & Kim, 2013) and following scale development procedures (Liang & Fan, 2018), we will develop a reliable and valid measure. For general proactive socialization behaviors, preliminary items include: "Asking leaders for their opinions on my work" (feedback seeking); "Seeking information from my leader" (information seeking); "Working hard to make leaders know me" (relationship building). For boomerang-specific behaviors, preliminary interview-based items include: "Asking former

leaders/colleagues for their opinions on my current work” (feedback seeking from former colleagues/leaders); “I will find ways to pull in my former leaders/colleagues/subordinates” (relationship rebuilding with former ties).

3.3 Study 2: Antecedents of Proactive Resocialization Behaviors

Study 1 establishes the concept, dimensions, and measurement. Study 2 investigates the antecedent mechanisms. From a resource perspective, organizational (re)socialization involves resource acquisition, utilization, and accumulation, influenced by existing resources. Boomerang employees’ unique advantage lies in resources accumulated during previous tenure(s). This study explores how these resources affect proactive resocialization behaviors.

According to Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014), individual, team, and organizational sources are crucial for socialization (Zhang et al., 2018). Boomerang employees possess both internal resources from the boomerang organization and external resources from other organizations/industries during departure. These unique resources create distinct resocialization experiences. Internally, boomerang employees possess deep understanding of organizational culture, norms, and values, along with established trust networks (Keller et al., 2021), enabling rapid readaptation and reducing resocialization time and costs. Externally, they may have acquired new knowledge and skills, along with richer human capital from diverse work experiences (Makarius et al., 2024), which can be applied to the boomerang organization as valuable resources.

Based on COR theory, we examine: (1) individual resources: presocialization experience; (2) team resources: existing social exchange relationships; (3) organizational resources: organization-directed resocialization tactics. We propose these resources influence proactive resocialization behaviors through self-efficacy beliefs (confidence in performing specific behaviors) and instrumentality beliefs (perceived usefulness of behaviors for achieving goals) (Ng et al., 2021).

3.3.1 Effects of Resources on Behavioral Beliefs

First, compared to newcomers, boomerang employees possess firm-specific human capital (Snyder et al., 2021). Pre-entry knowledge and experiences are crucial variables in socialization research (Yao & Le, 2008). For boomerang employees, this manifests as presocialization experience—socialization experiences from their previous entry into the boomerang organization—constituting unique individual resources. Presocialization experience informs self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs about general proactive socialization behaviors. We therefore propose:

Hypothesis 1: Presocialization experience creates differential self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs across various general proactive socialization behaviors

among boomerang employees.

Second, exchange relationships are pervasive workplace resources, encompassing relationships with colleagues, leaders, and subordinates (Zhang et al., 2018). Boomerang employees possess interpersonal resources unavailable to newcomers. If they established robust social exchange networks during previous tenure, they can more easily leverage these resources upon return. Former leaders, colleagues, and subordinates are key information sources during socialization (Zhao et al., 2023), and strong exchange relationships enable greater information and feedback access. This leads to more positive evaluations of boomerang-specific behaviors, manifesting as higher self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs. We propose:

Hypothesis 2: Existing social exchange positively influences boomerang employees' self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs regarding boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors.

Finally, organization-directed socialization tactics affect proactive socialization behaviors (Cai et al., 2023). Upon return, organizations may provide either standard newcomer tactics or specialized resocialization tactics. Organization-directed tactics signal expectations for value alignment, prompting actions to achieve socialization goals (Chen, 2009), while also affecting opportunities to connect with other members (Yao & Le, 2008). Using identical tactics for newcomers and boomerang employees may isolate them from veterans, reducing self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs for boomerang-specific behaviors while increasing beliefs for general behaviors. Conversely, boomerang-specific tactics facilitate boomerang-specific behaviors. We propose:

Hypothesis 3: Organization-directed socialization tactics for newcomers enhance boomerang employees' self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs for general proactive socialization behaviors, while boomerang-specific tactics enhance beliefs for boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors.

3.3.2 Moderating Effects of Situational Factors

We propose that the effects of resources on proactive resocialization behaviors are moderated by job change and workplace ostracism.

First, job change refers to alterations in work content and evaluation criteria requiring employees to relearn job requirements (Hart et al., 2003). When boomerang employees experience significant job changes, previously accumulated resources become less applicable, weakening the effects of presocialization experience and existing social exchange on self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs. Conversely, when jobs remain largely unchanged, previous resources retain applicability. We propose:

Hypothesis 4: Job change weakens the effects of presocialization experience on self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs for general proactive socialization

behaviors, and weakens the effects of existing social exchange on beliefs for boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors.

Second, departure experiences may cause remaining employees to feel betrayed or resentful (Raj & Hundekar, 2013), making boomerang employees vulnerable to workplace ostracism. Defined as perceived neglect or exclusion from leaders or colleagues (Ferris et al., 2008), workplace ostracism creates negative interpersonal outcomes. Ostracism from former leaders or colleagues creates interaction barriers and negative emotional experiences, undermining psychological needs and reducing proactive behaviors (Liu et al., 2015). It also blocks information and feedback channels, hindering boomerang-specific behaviors. We propose:

Hypothesis 5: Workplace ostracism negatively affects boomerang employees' self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs for boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors.

3.3.3 Effects of Behavioral Beliefs on Proactive Resocialization Behaviors

Self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs affect proactive resocialization behaviors. Self-efficacy motivates action (Bandura, 1986). Since proactive behaviors involve social risks, individuals “need to feel confident to initiate action and resolve concerns beforehand” (Parker, 2010, p. 834). Higher self-efficacy beliefs thus lead to more proactive resocialization behaviors. Instrumentality beliefs enhance resilience when facing setbacks; if behaviors are deemed important and useful, overcoming obstacles becomes worthwhile (Li et al., 2018; Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). We propose:

Hypothesis 6: Self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs for general proactive socialization behaviors positively relate to such behaviors; self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs for boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors positively relate to those behaviors.

We further propose mediation:

Hypothesis 7: Self-efficacy and instrumentality beliefs mediate the effects of various resources on boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors.

3.4 Study 3: Outcomes of Proactive Resocialization Behaviors

Building on identified antecedents, Study 3 examines the outcomes of boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors.

According to COR theory' s resource investment principle, individuals continuously invest resources to protect against loss, recover from loss, and gain new resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). When employees invest resources through proactive behaviors, they gain new resources to aid adaptation (Deng & Yao, 2020). The resource caravans principle emphasizes environmental effects on resource

formation—environments can either cultivate or constrain resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). We propose that proactive resocialization behaviors help boomerang employees accumulate further resources, reducing inter-role conflict and developing new social exchange relationships (proximal outcomes), thereby affecting post-return performance and subsequent turnover intention (distal outcomes). These processes are moderated by team contexts (e.g., leader traditionality) and organizational contexts (e.g., organization-directed resocialization tactics).

3.4.1 Proximal Outcomes

We focus on inter-role conflict and new social exchange relationships as proximal outcomes. Inter-role conflict arises when individuals hold multiple incompatible roles (Rizzo et al., 1970). Boomerang employees' dual identity creates role conflict, a primary resocialization challenge. Proactive socialization behaviors help resolve role conflict; meta-analytic evidence shows proactive behaviors like information seeking help newcomers achieve role clarity (Bauer et al., 2007). We propose proactive resocialization behaviors reduce inter-role conflict, with general behaviors having stronger effects than boomerang-specific behaviors (which may reinforce “veteran” identity through interactions with former ties). We propose:

Hypothesis 8: Proactive resocialization behaviors reduce inter-role conflict, with general proactive socialization behaviors having stronger effects than boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors.

Regarding social exchange, newcomer research often examines leader-member exchange (LMX) and team-member exchange (TMX) as proximal outcomes (Sluss & Thompson, 2012). Boomerang employees must rebuild relationships with former leaders/colleagues and build new relationships with those hired during their absence. Relationship building behaviors facilitate social exchange (Griffin et al., 2000). However, given limited individual energy resources (Zhang et al., 2020), excessive boomerang-specific behaviors may reduce energy for general behaviors, hindering new relationship formation. We propose:

Hypothesis 9: General proactive socialization behaviors positively relate to new social exchange relationships, while boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors negatively relate to new social exchange relationships.

3.4.2 Distal Outcomes

Organizations hire boomerang employees to leverage their unique human capital for performance improvement (Swider et al., 2017), making post-return performance crucial. Additionally, boomerang employees' well-being matters, particularly given their high subsequent turnover rates (Arnold et al., 2020).

Work performance encompasses task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and counterproductive behavior. Proactive resocialization behaviors enhance perceived insider status, affecting task performance (Wang & Kim, 2013),

help internalize organizational values motivating citizenship behavior (Ge & Su, 2010), and reduce anxiety/stress, decreasing counterproductive behavior (Zhang & Liang, 2021). Arnold et al. (2020) attribute higher turnover among boomerang employees to unrealistic expectations; proactive resocialization behaviors help adjust expectations to organizational reality, reducing turnover intention. Both general and boomerang-specific behaviors should exert these effects. We propose:

Hypothesis 10: Both general and boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors enhance work performance and reduce subsequent turnover intention.

Proximal outcomes are direct socialization results, while distal outcomes represent longer-term impacts (Jiang et al., 2013). Proximal outcomes affect distal outcomes (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Zhao et al., 2023). We propose:

Hypothesis 11: Inter-role conflict negatively relates to work performance and positively relates to subsequent turnover intention; new social exchange relationships positively relate to work performance and negatively relate to subsequent turnover intention.

3.4.3 Moderating Effects of Team and Organizational Contexts

Traditionality reflects adherence to traditional cultural values, representing value orientations, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns in response to traditional Chinese cultural demands (Farh et al., 2007). High traditionality emphasizes fulfilling socially-defined role expectations and responsibilities, and high-traditional leaders may withhold work information and avoid open interaction due to hierarchical emphasis, while low-traditional leaders favor equality and openness (Spreitzer et al., 2005). According to socialization resources theory (Saks & Gruman, 2018), leaders are crucial learning objects and information sources. High-traditional leaders may respond to proactive resocialization behaviors with information withholding (Spreitzer et al., 2005), hindering resocialization, while low-traditional leaders view such behaviors positively and disclose information to facilitate resocialization. We propose:

Hypothesis 12: New leader and former leader traditionality moderate the relationships between boomerang employees' general and boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors and proximal outcomes.

Organization-directed socialization tactics also moderate relationships between proactive behaviors and outcomes (Chen & Liu, 2019). For boomerang employees, standard newcomer tactics facilitate general proactive socialization behaviors, making them more effective. Conversely, personalized boomerang-specific tactics provide conditions for boomerang-specific behaviors, making them more important. We propose:

Hypothesis 13: Organization-directed socialization tactics moderate the relationships between boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors

and proximal outcomes.

4. Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

First, this study extends traditional organizational socialization theory to the novel context of employee return. Traditional theory focuses on newcomers, potentially lacking applicability to boomerang employees. By focusing on boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors, we overcome this limitation. Additionally, shifting focus from the “pre-return” to “post-return” stage addresses the causes of divergent resocialization outcomes, broadening research horizons in employee mobility. This advances both organizational socialization and employee mobility fields.

Second, we innovatively propose the concept of boomerang employees' proactive resocialization behaviors and analyze its dimensional structure, deepening research on their resocialization. By introducing “general proactive socialization behaviors” and “boomerang-specific proactive resocialization behaviors,” we reveal both consistencies and differences with newcomers. This dimensional decomposition provides deeper insight into how different behaviors function in the resocialization process, and our measurement scale will provide a tool for future theoretical verification.

Third, we provide a systematic analytical framework for understanding boomerang proactive resocialization behaviors. By establishing the importance of these behaviors, comparing boomerang and newcomer characteristics to identify resource uniqueness, and proposing that individual, team, and organizational resources affect both behavior types and subsequent outcomes, we extend previous research on outcome divergence mechanisms. While limited studies have discussed post-return outcomes, especially performance (Arnold et al., 2020; Grohsjean et al., in press; Keller et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2024), with inconsistent results, our framework provides theoretical guidance for future research.

Practically, this study offers implications for government labor market management, organizational HR management, and employee self-development. It provides new ideas for government policies on “removing barriers to labor mobility,” aligns with the 20th Party Congress' s emphasis on employment equality, offers decision tools for implementing effective boomerang hiring policies and resocialization strategies, and provides theoretical guidance for boomerang employees to exercise agency in their career development.

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