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QUITTING VERSUS NOT QUITTING: THE PROCESS AND DEVELOPMENT
OF AN ASSIMILATION PROGRAM WITHIN OPPORTUNITY RESOURCES, INC.

By

AMANDA NICOLE STOVALL

B. A., University of Montana-Missoula, Missoula, MT, 2007

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Approved by:

Perry Brown, Associate Provost for Graduate Education
Graduate School

Dr. Greg Larson, Chair
Communication Studies

Dr. Bambi Douma, Co-Chair
School of Business Administration

Dr. Joel Iverson, Co-Chair
Communication Studies

Stovall, Amanda, M. A., Spring 2009

Communication Studies

Quitting Versus Not Quitting: The Process and Development of an Assimilation Program Within Opportunity Resources, Inc.

Chairperson: Greg Larson

Committee Members: Bambi Douma and Joel Iverson

To assist Opportunity Resources, Inc. (ORI) in lowering its turnover rate, an assimilation program was designed to be implemented within the organization to enhance communication difficulties and training deficiencies. Information was collected from 17 current and former employees (management and staff) of Missoula, MT's ORI. Based from the results, a Job Rotation Position (JRP) Assimilation Program was developed and tailored to ORI using Myers and Oetzel's (2003) interactive assimilation model.

Acknowledgments

There are several important individuals who helped make this project possible. I would like to first thank Greg Larson for his guidance, support, and advice. Your mentorship and commitment to my success never failed to encourage me during the course of this program. I would also like to thank my committee members, Bambi Douma and Joel Iverson, along with ORI's Director of Human Resources, Linda Pearson. Without your assistance I could have not completed this project. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Organizational Assimilation.....	7
An Employment Approach.....	7
An Organizational Approach.....	9
An Interactive Approach.....	10
How Assimilation Occurs.....	13
Six Dimensions of Interactive Assimilation.....	16
An Interactive Organizational Assimilation Approach in ORI.....	18
Justification of Research.....	20
Methodology, Protocol, and Logistics.....	22
My Story.....	22
Gaining Access.....	23
Description of Context and Participants.....	23
Data Collection Methods.....	25
Data Analysis.....	26
Results and Discussion.....	28
Research Question (RQ) 1.....	28
Research Question (RQ) 2.....	33
Research Question (RQ) 3.....	45

An Assimilation Program	52
Research Question (RQ) 4.....	52
Job Rotation.....	54
Developing and Implementing a JRP Assimilation Program.....	58
Within ORI	
A JRP Assimilation Program Effect on ORI’s Current Interactive.....	63
Assimilation Model	
Conclusion	68
Limitations and Future Directions.....	70
References	72
Appendices	
Appendix A.....	78
Appendix B.....	79
Appendix C.....	80
Appendix D.....	81

Introduction

"People get so caught up in trying to fix the person that they don't see the great diversity and benefits that the person has to bring to the rest of the world "

(Disability World, 2001).

The word "disability" often makes people think of obvious disabilities such as mobility and visual, or hearing impairments (UCP, 2008). However, disabilities can be physical or cognitive, hidden, as well as observed, and may result from various causes (UCP, 2008). To pursue my interest in organizations that work with disabled clients, I have gained access into Opportunity Resources, Inc (ORI). Ultimately, I hope to have a positive impact on these clients by placing focus on those who work closest with them, the employees of ORI. To be successful in achieving this goal, I want to discover why there is a turnover problem within ORI and what can be done that could improve the turnover rate.

Before going any further, it is important to have an understanding of ORI, who it affects, and the overall goals of the organization. ORI is a private, nonprofit organization that has provided support for individuals with disabilities for close to fifty years (ORI, 2008). This organization provides many services to people with disabilities, such as assistance with housing, transportation, recreation, and jobs (ORI). Approximately 350 individuals with a variety of disabilities are assisted each day (ORI). The services that ORI offers to these individuals helps provide opportunities to a large number of clients.

ORI is an organization that provides support to people who have disabilities. Its goal is to provide resources to clients in an effort to enhance their quality of life. ORI stands by its mission statement, "supporting persons with disabilities in enhancing their quality of life," along with its vision statement, "resources for every opportunity" (Personnel Policy Manual, p. 2). To

provide its clients with its promise of opportunity, ORI has to hire a large number of employees to carry out services to its clients. Because of ORI's high employment number, communication between management and staff, along with communication between coworkers, can be a challenge. Communication also affects the training process. It is important that ORI's employees are trained promptly and efficiently upon hire.

Turnover is an immense problem at ORI. According to Pearson (ORI Director of Human Resources, 2008), turnover occurs at all stages of employment in ORI. Based on exit interviews she has conducted with former employees, turnover occurs for a variety of reasons including school, family obligations, financial stability, and the perception that ORI is a temporary job. ORI records show that turnover is most problematic among workers who have worked with ORI for less than 6 months (Pearson). This can lead to lack of communication between management and staff because positions are held by different employees on a daily basis. As a result, it can be difficult for management to be completely informed on who is providing services at ORI for every work shift. The high turnover rate also makes it difficult to train new employees in a prompt and efficient manner because it causes continual retraining (The Point, 2005). ORI staff must train new hires and there is minimal supervision during the training process from the management level. Management leads a broad, formal training at ORI's main site, but training for a specific job role is done by staff.

To assist ORI in lowering its turnover rate, I propose that a well-designed assimilation program be implemented within the organization to address communication difficulties and training deficiencies. In order to successfully tailor an assimilation program for this specific organization a review must be conducted of ORI's current assimilation process as it pertains to new employees. Having a program specifically designed to effectively assimilate new

employees to ORI could help decrease turnover as well as retain current employees as it would provide them with an immediate and continual sense of worth to the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Implementing an assimilation program to reduce high turnover could help management and staff have a stronger communication connection because it would allow for long-term relationships. In addition, decreasing turnover would allow management to build relationships with their employees because less time would be spent on developing new relationships. Implementing an assimilation program could improve the new employee training program because less attention and energy would be focused on continual retraining. As a result, ORI would have time to focus on enhancing and updating their training program.

Along with having the opportunity to know everyone better, lowering the turnover rate could minimize the detrimental effects that high turnover has on clients and remaining employees. Retention of employees in child welfare, social service, and other human service agencies is a serious concern as these positions are more emotionally exhausting in comparison to non-human service jobs (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). Geurts, Sabine, Schaufeli, and Jonge (1998) reported that turnover rates have exceeded 60 percent each year for human service workers. Employee turnover has a serious impact on the quality, consistency, and stability of the services provided to those who use human services (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). Turnover can have harmful effects on clients and remaining employees who struggle to give and receive quality services when positions are left and then filled by inexperienced workers (Powell & York, 1992). Because ORI is a human service organization, retention has proven to be problematic (Pearson, 2008). Implementing an assimilation program within ORI could help prevent possible detrimental effects on clients and employees by retaining current employees; thus, lowering the turnover rate.

Turnover affects not only employee relationships with management, coworkers, and clients, but also costs organizations money. Some organizations will accept turnover as a “necessary evil,” but other organizations attempt to reduce turnover (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). Wasmuth and Davis (1983) found that most managers understood that turnover costs money, but few had implemented any strategies for managing turnover because they felt they had no way to determine the reason for it. According to Rumberg (2008), incorporating assimilation programs within organizations has shown to reduce turnover. Hence, implementing an assimilation program in ORI could help reduce its turnover rate while saving the organization time and money. The money saved could be used to enhance the organization in areas that are currently considered weak.

Turnover has proven to be a prevalent problem in organizations (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). Recent research has shown that it has become common for people to have a variety of different jobs over a few years instead of keeping one job over a long period of time (Wheeler, 2008). According to Wheeler, this has made the average tenure in an organization go from ten to four years. Furthermore, organizations are having difficulty keeping younger and newer employees (Wheeler). As mentioned previously, ORI’s turnover rate is high among employees who have been with the organization for less than six months (Pearson, 2008). Between October 31, 2006 to October 31, 2008, 223 ORI employees quit who had been with the organization for less than six months (Pearson). The total turnover for ORI employees who had been with the organization for six months to over five years was 76 (Pearson). These numbers are considered high as 251 employees account for ORI’s entire workforce (Pearson). In addition, the average age of an ORI employee was 42 (Pearson). According to Pearson, ORI employees who leave the organization before six months tend to be in their twenties. Pearson contributes

this to college graduation, financial stability, and the fact that younger people see ORI as a temporary job. These factors lead to ORI's difficulty in retaining younger and newer employees. ORI's problem with turnover among younger and newer employees is comparable to other organizations. Implementing an assimilation program in ORI could help reduce its turnover rate among employees within this time frame (less than six months) and age group (twenties). An effective assimilation program may also increase the number of younger and newer employees who stay with ORI. Additionally, not only could implementation of an assimilation program help retain this demographic of employees, but it could also assist in retaining employees of all time frames and age groups. An assimilation program could help decrease employees' needs to search for new employment opportunities and help increase ORI's tenure rate. Therefore, implementing an assimilation program would address the entire issue of employee turnover.

Developing and implementing an assimilation program within ORI could reduce the turnover rate. However, it is important to remain realistic and take into consideration what nonprofit organizations (such as ORI) have to compete with. A lot of times, nonprofit organizations do not have the ability or the funds to compensate their workers a livable or desired salary (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). According to Brown and Yoshioka, this can result in an employee's decision to quit their job and find employment with an organization that has the ability to pay them a desired salary. It is important to acknowledge that ORI employees may search for other job opportunities even if they are satisfied with their job position and believe in the overall mission of the organization. As a result, an organization's mission statement and desirable work environment is not always enough to retain employees. Money is sometimes the overlying factor in an employee's decision to quit an organization.

In accordance with Brown and Yoshioka's (2003) findings, Pearson (2008) addressed money as being an issue in retaining ORI employees. It is important to realize that ORI cannot always control its turnover rate when the underlying reason for an employee leaving is based on financial reasons. Thus, it is not ORI's fault when they lose an employee under circumstances that they cannot control. Other circumstances beyond ORI's control are school reasons and family obligations. Although these circumstances can be the reason for an employee's exit, there are other reasons that were previously mentioned that ORI can control. These include employees who are not financially hindered and those who perceive ORI as being a temporary job. Therefore, it is important to develop and implement an assimilation program that could assist in retaining and reducing the turnover rate among ORI employees who are not hindered by financial responsibilities and for those who see the organization as being a temporary job. As a result, an assimilation program may help ORI be seen as long-term employment.

Organizational Assimilation

Overtime, different theories and perspectives have emerged within the field of communication studies. In regards to the study of assimilation, three main approaches exist; the employee approach, the organizational approach, and the interactive approach. I will discuss how the first two approaches have ultimately become the foundation of the interactive approach, which is consistent with current communication theory.

An Employee Approach

Employees of ORI relate to the organization on a variety of levels. When exploring the depth of their organizational membership, key concepts of assimilation and socialization must be considered. According to Jablin (1982, 1987, 2001), organizational assimilation refers to the process of learning and how to function in an organizational environment. Assimilation is the process of newcomers fitting into and becoming members of an organization (Jablin, 2001). To explain the process of new employees integrating into an organization, Jablin (1982) states:

Essentially, organizational assimilation encompasses those on-going conscious and unconscious, behavioral and cognitive processes by which individuals join organizations, become integrated into the cultures of organizations, negotiate their roles in organizations, and in most cases exit these organizations and join new organizations and begin the process again as their work careers unfold (p. 31).

Scholars have long debated the definition of assimilation. An assortment of research has shown that it is up to the individual (new employee) to socialize themselves into an organization. Van Maanen & Schein (1979) indicate this by saying socialization is the process by which new employees learn about, adapt to, and eventually identify with the organization. Researchers have increasingly recognized the consequences of the socialization experiences of new employees to

the organization through productivity and performance, attitudes, organizational commitment, and turnover (Bauer, Morrison & Callister, 1998; Copper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Furthermore, socialization is important to new employees in terms of opportunities within the organization and career development (Korte, 2007). As a result, literature generally defines socialization as a process in which the individuals' (new employee) learn how to fit into the organization (Bauer, et al., 1998).

To expand on this definition of the socialization process, a series of stages were developed that new employees experienced as they learned to fit into the organization. These steps were summarized by Wanous (1992) as a four-step process. First, new employees had to confront the reality of the new job by adjusting their expectations to the reality of the job. Second, they had to achieve role clarity by learning how to negotiate the expectations and requirements of their role in the organization. Third, new members of the organization had to locate oneself in the organization by learning how their work contributes to the work of the organization. Finally, they had to access success by assessing the value of their contributions to the organization. Further research on this socialization process has proven to be problematic. It is unfair to put the responsibility solely on the new employee to learn how to fit into an organization. Placing this task exclusively on the individual ignores the organization's role in assimilating new employees to the organization. This perspective also fails to acknowledge that new employees may not be in the best position to obtain information that is helpful towards successful socialization in the organization (Korte, 2007).

Conducting an assimilation program in accordance to this approach would not be appropriate for ORI. Communication between management and staff, along with new employee training, are the issues that establish the need to implement an assimilation program. Putting

new employees in the position of socializing themselves into the organization ignores the need for increased communication and improved training programs. Turnover would continue to be an issue because there would still be a lack of communication among workers. Continual retraining would also remain a concern as no training program would be in place.

An Organizational Approach

While the employee assimilation approach focused on the individual's role in socializing themselves into an organization, other scholars have introduced a competing argument. These scholars consider it the organization's job to introduce socialization methods (Aquilera, Dencker & Yalabik, 2006). Socialization plays an important role in the institutionalization process (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Berger & Luckmann, 1967). According to Fisher (1986) and Van Maanes and Schein (1979), socialization is the process by which people learn to deal with social norms within an organization. This approach emphasizes the impact the organization has on new employees. For it is the organization's responsibility to explain and demonstrate what new employees' roles entail (Aquilera, Dencker, & Yalabik, 2006). By better understanding their roles, employees can implement systems, programs, practices, and values that correspond to organizational needs (Aquilera, Dencker & Yalabik, 2006). Therefore, the organization used a variety of method to socialize new employees.

The organizational assimilation approach seems more appropriate for ORI than the individual approach in which employees learn how to fit into an organization on their own. However, new employees would not have the opportunity to rely on their own efforts of seeking information to socialize themselves successfully into the organization (Morrison, 1993). They would be molded to fit protocol (Myers, 2005) without having the opportunity to bring anything unique to the organization. Communication between management and staff would still be a

problem if the organizational assimilation approach was utilized because it does not allow for the employees to voice their opinion. Rather it would be expected that the beliefs and values of the organization be adopted by new employees. By using the organizational assimilation approach, ORI could implement a new training program. Continual retraining may still be an issue because new employees would be expected to share beliefs and values that correlate to ORI without having the opportunity to voice their own beliefs and values; possibly resulting in employee termination. Turnover may continue to be an issue due to lack of communication between employees (new and current) and management. Continual retraining could still persist because new employees may not like the idea of being shaped to specifically fit ORI's protocol.

An Interactive Approach

Based on the employee and organizational assimilation approach, it is apparent that turnover is problematic. By combining these two approaches, an interactive assimilation approach is formed. Although turnover will continue to be an issue (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001), this approach may help influence a change within an organization that could help reduce the overall rate.

As mentioned above, according to Jablin (1982, 1987, 2001), assimilation is the process of new employees fitting into, becoming members, and exiting an organization. Van Mannen and Schein's (1979) model of socialization states that progression within the organization "is to become accepted by others as a central and working member of the particular organizational segment" (p. 222) and that new employees must demonstrate their awareness of and share organizational norms to have an immediate and continual sense of worth to the organization. Other socialization researchers claim that assimilation takes place when new employees abandon their individuality and conform to the organization's expectations (Bullis, 1999; Clair, 1999;

Turner, 1999). As a result, the organization socializes new employees to become good organizational members (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). These approaches are combined via the interactive approach, an approach in which both new employees and the organization participate in and influence the assimilation process (Myers & Oetzel). Recent research has attempted to understand how new employees are proactive in socializing themselves into an organization for their benefit as well as the organization's (Saks & Ashforth, 1996). Organizations have to engage proactive employees to help them successfully socialize (Myers & Oetzel). The interactive approach will be used to study ORI by employing Myers and Oetzel's definition of assimilation. Thus, assimilation is defined as mutual acceptance: a newcomer accepting the organization and his or her role in it and the organization accepting the newcomer.

The interactive organizational assimilation approach between the employee and the organization is consistent with current communication theory. Recent research has made it evident that organizational assimilation is not a one-way process by just the new employee or the organization (Saks & Ashford, 1996; Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Myers, 2005). Instead, research has declared organizational assimilation to be a two-way approach, or interactive process, between the new employee and the organization (Saks & Ashford, 1996; Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Myers, 2005). Therefore, this study is consistent with scholars currently looking at this communicative phenomena.

Assimilation researchers have suggested that context plays an essential role in how new employees are socialized and how they assimilate into an organization (Ashforth, Saks & Lee, 1998; Bauer, Morrison & Callister, 1998; Fisher, 1986). Therefore, assimilation is likely to vary from organization to organization (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Because of this, it is important to realize that one specific assimilation program will not work for all organizations. An

assimilation program must be developed and constructed to fit the organization that it is implemented into.

Focusing on ORI, this interactive approach between the employee and organization seems most appropriate for developing an assimilation program. Again, communication between management and staff, along with new employee training, are the issues that created the need to implement a program. By using this approach, new employees would have the opportunity to seek information on their own about their tasks, roles, and social environment (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). The organization will also inform them about their tasks, roles, and social environment (Myers & Oetzel). As a result, new employees will have the opportunity to rely on their own efforts of seeking information to decide whether they could socialize successfully into the organization, and the organization would have the opportunity to relay organizational information to the new employees (Myers, 2005). This allows new employees creative autonomy as they will not be expected to fit a particular organizational protocol (Myers). Instead there will be mutual acceptance by both the employee and the organization; the new employee will accept the organization and his or her role in it and the organization will accept the new employee (Myers & Oetzel).

Communication between ORI management and staff may be less of a problem if this approach is used because new employees would feel connected to the organization and would have the opportunity to accept the organization and their role in it. Furthermore, management and current employees may feel connected to the new employee because they would have the opportunity to accept the new employee and his or her role in it. The interactive approach will allow ORI to implement a new training program. Continual retraining would become less of an issue because employees' beliefs and values would be in parallel to ORI's (Gibson & Papa,

2000). Thus, turnover may decrease because communication between employees would improve. This could also allow for better communication between management and staff because there would be a mutual acceptance of the employees' roles by both employees and ORI. Likewise, continual retraining could be less of a concern because there would be a mutual acceptance of the employees' roles by the employees and ORI. Turnover is a problem that organizations will always face, but implementing this interactive approach may help retain employees.

How Assimilation Occurs

In order for new employees to assimilate they must become knowledgeable about their tasks, roles, and social environments through the organization's orientation and training efforts as well as through their own efforts of seeking information (Morrison, 1993). Although the process of assimilation continues throughout an individual's tenure with the organization, most information seeking by an employee is done upon entry (Van Mannen & Schein, 1979). Thus, obtaining information is the first step in adaptation and/or role negotiating within the organization (Myers, 2005)

1) Information Seeking

According to Van Maanen and Schein (1979), organizational assimilation involves acquiring knowledge about how to perform duties and how to fit into the new environment. Information seeking helps new employees obtain knowledge that can assist them in organizational tasks, role clarification, acculturation, and social integration (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wold, Klein, & Gardener, 1994; Morrison, 1993). In the process of information seeking, different tactics may be used. Regularly used tactics include overt questions, indirect questions, third parties, testing limits, disguising conversations, observing, and surveillance (Miller &

Jablin, 1991). According to research done by Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992), observation is the most commonly used information seeking tactic.

Information seeking can also begin before an individual enters the organization. Resources that may be used are job advertisements, annual reports, training brochures, job preview booklets, and websites (Jablin, 2001). Another source that is commonly used is interpersonal interactions with other applicants, interviewers, current employees, media contact, and other social ties that may be direct or indirect (Jablin, 2001). Work experience also helps individuals determine what kind of organizational culture they want to work for (Miller, 2006). For example, part-time employment in earlier years and past coworker interactions contribute to how individuals learn and choose an organizational culture they would like to work in. Therefore, information seeking is an important process for employees as it allows them to increase their knowledge regarding the tasks, roles, and social environment of the organization (Myers, 2005).

ORI employees have the opportunity to uncover this information in a variety of ways. Prospective ORI employees have the opportunity to go through a socialization process upon entry into the organization. Resources such as the ORI website can be easily accessed to inform prospective employees about the organization. Another way for potential employees to become familiar with the organization upon entry is through interpersonal interaction, a commonly used recruitment tool (Miller, 2006). Prospective employees may come into contact with current ORI employees and demonstrate interest in the organization. Social ties such as friends and family who were once ORI employees or are current ORI employees may be used to gain knowledge about the organization. Furthermore, prospective applicants may use their college experience to

decide if ORI is a good match for them. Thus, student's interests and/or their program of study may play a role in deciding whether to apply to the organization.

2) *Adaptation and Role Negotiation*

According to Jablin (2001), obtaining information allows new employees to adapt to an organization by letting them make personal changes to fit into the organization, as well as giving them the opportunity to negotiate roles (changing expectations about how a role is performed). Therefore, the interactive approach allows for adaptation. Adaptation involves compromise between the organization's expectations and the new employee's goals (Myers, 2005). By adapting, new employees conform to some of the organization's rules, regulations, and methods in attempt to achieve their personal goals (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Davey & Arnold, 2000).

To keep from fully conforming to the organization, new employees usually set limits on how much they will allow themselves to adapt to the organization and attempt to accomplish some sort of role negotiation (Myers, 2005). Miller, Jablin, Casey, Lamphear-Van Horn, and Ethington's (1996) defined role negotiation as individuals interacting with the purpose of altering the organization's requirements for how a role should be enacted and evaluated. Consequently, new employees attempt to change the organization's expectations by encouraging coworkers and management to accept new ideas about how the role should be enacted. However, role negotiation is not always plausible and can lead to negative relationships within the organization (Myers). For example, tenured employees can become irritated by new employees who do not share similar beliefs and values (Gibson & Papa, 2000). Thus, employees who do not conform to the organization's rules, regulations, and methods are usually not accepted by their coworkers (Gibson & Papa), making assimilation unlikely to happen. As a result, it seems that some organizations would not be tolerant of individual role negotiation (Myers).

Employees are expected to adapt to ORI rules, regulations, and methods. Because it is a human service occupation that assists clients with disabilities, employees must have a clear understanding of what their role entails, along with having the knowledge to successfully fulfill their job requirements. ORI encourages employees to verbalize any information they feel is important so that it is brought to the organization's attention. Although ORI has set expectations for its organization, it allows employees to make personal changes to fit into the organization by allowing verbal freedom to discuss work matters and/or ideas that might enhance clients' lives. Furthermore, knowledge can be gained from formal trainings that are implemented within the organization. Therefore, ORI employees have the opportunity to achieve their personal work goals via conformity, verbal freedom, and job training.

Although ORI employees have the opportunity to seek information and the verbal freedom to negotiate roles through personal changes, turnover is still a problem. Thus, it is clear that assimilation is more complicated than just acquiring information about an organization and then adapting and role negotiating within in (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Comparing ORI's current assimilation process to an interactive assimilation model may be beneficial in reducing the turnover rate.

Six Dimensions of Interactive Assimilation

Myers and Oetzel (2003) argue that organizational assimilation is a dual process of acceptance: "To assimilate newcomers and incumbent organizational members, exchange information and communicate acceptance to one another" (p. 351). Myers and Oetzel believe that context plays an essential role in how new employees are socialized and how they assimilate into an organization (Ashforth, Saks & Lee, 1998; Bauer, Morrison & Callister, 1998; Fisher, 1986), Myers and Oetzel (2003) interviewed individuals from the advertising, banking,

hospitality, high technology, university, nonprofit, and publishing industries. They discovered and established six dimensions of organizational assimilation. Accordingly, the organizational assimilation model proposes six processes used in assimilating individuals (new employees) in different industries at various levels in organizations.

Myers and Oetzel's (2003) suggest that these six dimensions are related to new employees accepting the organization and the organization accepting the new employees. The six dimensions are as follows:

1. *Getting to know coworkers.* New employees need to get to know coworkers and others that are associated with the organization. It was discovered that new employees' attitudes toward the organization changed as they got to know people within the organization (Chao et al., 1994). This supports other research that found assimilating into an organization involves developing and establishing relationships with other workers (Chao et al., 1994; Feldman, 1981; Fisher, 1986; Louis, 1980).
2. *Organizational acculturation.* Understanding the organizational culture can be complex. Louis (1980) states, "Between different organizations (and, to a lesser extent, between units of the same organization), there are different cultures. In different organizations, members may have substantially different orientations to one another, their roles, and the organizational mission" (p. 232). When employees develop an understanding and acceptance of the organizational culture they become acculturated. Thus, they have accepted the organization's culture (Wilkins, 1983) by acknowledging the norms and values of it and are willing to make personal changes to fit into it.
3. *Recognition.* Recognition entails an employee perceiving their value to the organization and feeling that their work is recognized by management or superiors. Another way for

employees to feel recognized is that they perceive themselves as being valuable contributors to the overall goals of the organization.

4. *Involvement.* New employees feel involved with the organization when they are active within it. For example, involvement can include volunteering for extra organizational duties and/or brainstorming ways to accomplish work more efficiently. Employees start to feel like they belong in the organization instead of feeling like the new member.
5. *Job competency.* New employees are able to sufficiently perform their designated organizational duties. According to Feldman (1981), “No matter how motivated the employee, without enough job skills, there is little chance for success” (p. 313). Myers and Oetzel (2003) agree by saying that new employees cannot assimilate into an organization unless they know how to perform their jobs.
6. *Adaptation and Role negotiation.* As mentioned previously mentioned, this is when employees adapt to the organizational structure and/or try to change the requirements or expectations about how a role is performed.

An Interactive Organizational Assimilation Approach in ORI

Incorporating Myers and Oetzel’s (2003) interactive organizational assimilation model will be beneficial in developing a successful assimilation program for ORI. The overall goals of the assimilation program are to improve communication between management and staff, to enhance new employee training techniques, and to reduce the turnover rate. To reach these goals, I will attempt to develop an assimilation program that exercises Myers and Oetzel’s (2003) dual process by seeing how its six dimensions relate to ORI’s current assimilation process. I hope to develop a program that assists newcomers in deciding to accept ORI and his or her role. If a new employee decides that they fit into the organization then I hope that the

assimilation program I develop encourages ORI to accept the newcomer. However, if a new employee chooses not to accept ORI and his or her role, then it is important to note that this assimilation program should not be used by organizational leaders to determine “who does not fit in” or to “weed out” those who do not fit in. New employees who have not assimilated to a standardized goal still may be a productive worker and a valuable member of the organization. Although job competency is a dimension of assimilation, there has been no clear link between assimilation and increased productivity (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Nevertheless, the six dimensions of assimilation may help retain new employees and establish an atmosphere that encourages acceptance and assimilation.

Justification of Research

An extensive amount of research has been done on assimilation processes within professional organizations. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of research that focuses on professional organizations that specialize in accommodating people with disabilities. Instead, many studies examine people who have a diagnosed disability rather than the organizations that assist them (UCP, 2008). Furthermore, research on employees in human service occupations, such as ORI, focus on burnout (Miller et al., 1995) and financial issues (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). As a result, ORI has focused on these areas as being the main cause of its high turnover rate. Although it has been proven that these two issues can cause turnover, it is important to uncover any underlying issues that have yet been discovered that may be contributing to this problem.

I have chosen to focus on ORI to help the organization identify trends that are causing turnover and how they can be remedied. Until now, there has been no attempt to pull empirical studies together to identify the trends that cause turnover in professional organizations that specialize in accommodating people with disabilities (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). ORI is a unique because of its nonprofit status and the services it provides. To assist it in identifying trends that can cause turnover, ORI will be compared to other professional organizations where turnover trends have been studied. Myers and Oetzel's (2003) six dimensions could help justify what areas are lacking in an organization. Focusing on how employees are assimilated into ORI in accordance to these six dimensions may help uncover problems regarding new employee assimilation. Once the problems are recognized, tailoring and implementing an assimilation program based on Myers and Oetzel's model, could help reduce turnover.

Because of the limited amount of research done on assimilation processes within ORI, it is important to assess where the organization is lacking in assimilating its new employees. Such an assessment or diagnosis will provide a greater understanding of ORI socialization by considering what assimilation processes are currently in place and what can be done to improve them. This professional paper will use Myers and Oetzel's (2003) assimilation model to study ORI's current assimilation process. Despite its history of success, the turnover rate is high and new employees need to be trained promptly and more efficiently. I will develop a plan based on the qualitative research collected via interviews and an open-ended questionnaire. These research aids will be based on Myers and Oetzel's (2003) six dimensions. Based on the results, the assimilation training program I design will be implemented through inductive research methods. Therefore, how ORI employees are socialized will provide the ground work for tailoring an appropriate assimilation program. The following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How are ORI employees socialized into the organization?

RQ2: How does ORI's assimilation process compare to Myers and Oetzel's (2003) assimilation model?

RQ3: In what ways is assimilation successful and not successful in ORI?

RQ4: How can a plan be developed in accordance to Myers and Oetzel's (2003) assimilation model to meet the needs of ORI?

Methodology, Protocol, and Logistics

My Story

Growing up I was fortunate to be surrounded by environments with a lot of diversity. Having experience with a variety of people and controversial issues has enabled me to be aware of the differences around me. An issue that has always intrigued me is people living with disabilities. The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) defines disability in an all-encompassing definition to get the largest and broadest estimate of people dealing with disabilities. The ADA defines disability as “(a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; (b) a record of such impairment; or (c) being recorded as having such an impairment” (p. 101-336). My personal experience working with disabled clients is limited; however, my mother worked with children that struggled with disabilities when I was a child. Although I personally did not work closely with these individuals, I was surrounded by their everyday issues, struggles, and achievements.

Because I am intrigued about disability issues, I want to take my passion one step further. Having a role in the lives of these people would give me the opportunity to become more educated and hopefully make a positive difference in their everyday pursuits. Although I have been surrounded by people with disabilities, it has not led to complete comprehension of what these people face. As a scholar, I hope to make a contribution to these people’s lives. I began by conducting interviews and distributed questionnaires to employees who work on a daily basis with these clients. By uncovering the main reasons behind ORI’s high turnover rate, I will be able to develop an assimilation program that promotes better employee retention. As a result, clients will be cared for by long-term employees.

Walking into ORI as a new employee, I was unsure of what to expect. I got a call from the supervisor who specializes in clients who require one-on-one attention. I was given the opportunity to work with a gentleman diagnosed with autism as well as assisting a variety of clients with physical therapy sessions. Although some clients shared similar disabilities, each person was affected by their disability differently and handled their situation in a unique manner. Clients dealt with their issues through discussion and a variety of emotions such as: silence, laughter, shouting, and crying. As I worked with these clients, I realized what a positive force I was in their everyday life. I was reinforced everyday with endless hugs, smiles, and high-fives. I soon realized that being myself around these clients was the best thing I could do because it allowed them to be treated like everyone else. Thus, the clients rely on ORI employees to not only support them when their disability requires assistance, but to also treat them as an equal member of society. Everyday ORI employees have the ability to have a positive or negative influence in the day-to-day lives of the clients they work with.

Gaining Access

I chose to focus on ORI and its employees because, as a current employee, I feel personally connected to the organization. I contacted Linda Pearson, the Human Resources Director, to discuss her thoughts on the organization's high turnover rate. Pearson was very open-minded and was interested to hear new ideas about how employee retention could be increased. I explained why I wanted to help ORI as well as the approach (interviews and questionnaires) I would take in developing an assimilation program for the organization. At one of ORI's management meetings, Linda discussed the idea and they agreed to grant me access within the organization to pursue the project.

Description of Context and Participants

Participants included both former and current employees (management and staff) of Missoula, MT's ORI. There were a total of 17 participants and they ranged in age from 18-65. The interviews consisted of 9 total participants including 3 males and 6 females. The open-ended questionnaires consisted of 8 total participants including 3 males and 5 females.

ORI is a private, nonprofit organization that has provided support for individuals with disabilities (ORI, 2008). It provides "vocational supports to a variety of individuals, some with disabilities and others who are economically disadvantaged. Any level of support may be given depending on what assistance is necessary for that individual to be successful" (Personnel Policy Manual, 2007, p. 3). As a result, ORI's goal, as stated in its mission statement, is to help: "Supporting persons with disabilities in enhancing their quality of life" (p. 2).

Along with providing support for its clients, ORI offers many services to enhance daily living. Therefore, the services ORI provides are in correlation to its overall vision: "Resources for every opportunity" (Personnel Policy Manual, 2007, p. 2). ORI provides assistance such as housing, transportation, recreation, and jobs (ORI, 2008). Each day ORI serves approximately 375 individuals with a variety of disabilities (ORI). Over 100 individuals are assisted in finding jobs and maintaining employment annually (Personnel Policy Manual). Wood Products Division and Packaging and Assembly Division alone employs approximately 150 people with disabilities (Personnel Policy Manual). ORI also assists its clients in obtaining employment outside of ORI's headquarters and offers training to approximately 70 clients (Personnel Policy Manual). In 2007, 44 individuals received residential support at ORI's 7 group homes and its apartment complex (Personnel Policy Manual). In addition, approximately 90 clients receive individual supported living services in rented apartments or their homes on a daily basis (Personnel Policy Manual). Case management services serve 666 individuals outside of Missoula County with 17

case managers in 8 offices serving counties from Havre, MT to Libby, MT (Personnel Policy Manual). Recreational activities and travel opportunities for individuals with disabilities have increased because of ORI's recreation program (Personnel Policy Manual). Clients have gone on day and overnight trips to various locations throughout the state (Personnel Policy Manual). ORI also provides transportation for adults with disabilities and seniors during week and weekend hours (Personnel Policy Manual). Finally, ORI assists clients with major life events such as getting married, buying homes, and getting drivers license (Personnel Policy Manual).

Data Collection Methods

In order to explore the issue of socialization within ORI, I conducted nine interviews with both current and past management and staff. Eight open-ended questionnaires were distributed to management and staff who were not interviewed. All research procedures were approved by University of Montana-Missoula (UM) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and ORI's human resources director for protection of human subjects. Study participants were contacted and asked if they would like to participate in a study that focuses on how and when they felt they started to fit into ORI and became a contributing member to the organization. Once they agreed to participate, a time and place was set up for an interview. Interviews were conducted on ORI property during work hours with permission from the human resources director. An explanation of the project was given along with a request for the participant's signature on an informed consent form (Appendix A) (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Each participant was asked permission to be audio-recorded. The same interview guide (Appendix B) was used for each participant. Interview length varied depending on how participants chose to answer the questions and the environment that the interview was conducted in. The average timeframe was about 28 minutes per interview. However, the interviews ranged from about 16 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes.

A pseudonym was given to each participant to protect them from identification (Lindlof & Taylor). Participants who were given the open-ended questionnaire (Appendix C) were contacted and asked if they would like to participate in the study. When they agreed a time and place was set up for them to fill out the questionnaire (Lindlof & Taylor). Just like the interviews, the open-ended questionnaires were completed on ORI property during work hours. Written instructions were provided on each questionnaire and participants were aware that the results of the study were confidential but not anonymous (Lindlof & Taylor). There was no formal debriefing for the interviews or open-ended questionnaire, but contact information for the researcher was provided (Lindlof & Taylor).

Data Analysis

The interviews and open-ended questionnaires were personally transcribed because of personal relations with the interviewees (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). When I transcribed the interviews, care was taken to maintain participants' exact word usage. In addition, the transcripts did not record pause and length between sentences or words, changes in tone of voice, or nonverbal language. Transcripts were prepared this way due to time restriction (Lindlof & Taylor) and its insignificance to the research.

To generate codes, I selected quotations for categorization, a process often referred to as "unitizing" the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This initial unitizing process is often both inductive and intuitive as one looks for "chunks of meaning" in the data (Marshall, 1981). In accordance with Lincoln and Guba, selected units or quotations had two characteristics. First, they were heuristic. Thus, I felt that certain quotations were important to use because they offered insight and/or answers to the research questions in this study. Second, the quotations that were selected to offer insight and/or answers to the research questions were the smallest piece of

information that could stand by itself. For example, there are areas in the paper where units or quotations consisted of single sentences and at other times they consisted of entire paragraphs because the quotation could not be broken up without losing the context given by the interviewees.

As quotations were selected, the initial coding scheme was refined. Codes that captured the meaning of the quotation were assigned to each unit of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I assigned codes from the tentative coding scheme described above. For example, I selected a quotation and compared it to the codes in the initial coding scheme. This reflects a version of the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, & Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If the data did not fit into any of the pre-existing schemes then new codes were created. This initial coding process and sorting generated 33 different codes. These codes were distributed into seven categories: becoming a member, getting to know coworkers, organizational acculturation, recognition, involvement, job competency, and adaptation and role negotiation (a copy of this coding scheme is attached appendix D).

Once the data was analyzed and sorted I began the process of interpretation. Axial coding was used to compare codes and categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This assisted in looking for a connection between categories to generate themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I began this process by returning to my research questions and comparing them with the data collected. The research questions were: 1) How are ORI employees socialized into the organization? 2) How does ORI's assimilation process compare to Myers and Oetzel's (2003) assimilation model? 3) In what ways is assimilation successful and not successful in ORI? 4) How can a plan be developed in accordance to Myers and Oetzel's assimilation model to meet the needs of ORI?

Results and Discussion

RQ1: How are ORI employees socialized into the organization?

Two main themes were evident after the analysis of the interviews and questionnaires. I have chosen to label them: (a) formal processes of socialization and (b) informal processes of socialization. Both these orientations differed on several dimensions. Formal processes of socialization included training (classes) and orientations done by supervisors and management at the main site (headquarters) and orientations done by the supervisors at the supported living houses. Informal processes of socialization included training conducted by fellow coworkers, individual training, and prior relationships at the main site and supported living houses. Both of these processes played role in socializing ORI employees into the organization.

1. *Formal Process of Socialization*

Upon hire, all ORI employees are required to take classes at the main site to become completely certified and qualified for their job position. Employees who hold positions at both the main site and supported living houses have to participate in the training (classes) at the main site. The required classes include: MANDT (safety issues and precautions for the employee and client), CPR, and First Aid. Employees are also required to be med certified to administer medications to clients. They are given an informational manual to study from and are expected take the test on their own time. In addition, orientations and training are typically conducted by management at the site in which an employee was hired. Therefore, those who are hired at the main site are trained at the main site and employees who are hired at a supported living house are trained at a supported living house.

Although taking classes is a part of becoming an ORI employee, participants omitted the training (classes) done at the main site as being the main reason for successfully socializing into

the organization. However, orientations done by supervisors and management at the main site and the supported living houses were noted as being most helpful for new employees. This was shown in an interview with Melissa:

The manager I worked with was really good. She showed me everything. They had a book that briefly described each client and their disability along with certain things to look out for and certain things to pick up on. That helped because ORI is always coming up with something new.

Again, training (classes) done at the main site was not talked about as being significant to employees' success. Instead it appears that orientations were most beneficial in helping employees socialize into the organization. Thus, one employee wrote, "it's the on-the-job training that's important." Therefore, learning a job position through hands-on experience was more helpful than taking classes at the main site. By being oriented to their work environment, employees had the opportunity to address questions and concerns that were specifically related to their job position along with becoming familiar with their environment and clients. An employee wrote, "getting to know clients and their needs is what helps the most."

Overall, training and the orientations are events that are planned and developed by the organization specifically to welcome and assist new employees in becoming comfortable in their new position. This relates to Miller's (2006) description of formal communication practice by having events and activities planned to assist in integrating new members into an organization.

2. Informal Processes of Socialization

Once employees complete their formal training, they are considered qualified for their job position. But because they are still new to the organization, a lot of times they still have questions and/or concerns. For that reason, old employees usually assist in further training the

new employees and are considered to be a valuable resource. Experienced employees at both sites, the main site and supported living houses, mentor new employees. However, in most cases, the new employees have to show interest in learning their position in order to get information from experienced employees. This was shown in an interview with Kelly when she talked about the importance of being proactive when learning her job position

I'm kind of obnoxious in a way that I ask a lot of questions and follow people around to try to figure it out. If I went to do something by myself and I had questions the experienced employees were always pretty close by and they would come in and assist.

Vanessa also mentioned how she took initiative to orient herself by being proactive. She said:

I had to take the initiative to follow my coworkers around, they never told me to shadow them...It is up to you to do it well. Like learning how to communicate with everybody about what needs to be done. It's not always clear so you have to be able to ask questions.

Therefore, in order to be successfully assimilated into the organization, new employees had to be proactive in learning their job position. Experienced employees were willing to assist as long as new employees initiated communication by asking questions and shadowing them.

Although old employees were considered to be a knowledgeable/valuable resource to new employees, some participants mentioned that they took initiative to orient themselves to their position without the help of their coworkers. One participant wrote, "I trained myself on the personal needs and wants for each client that I work with." Likewise, Paul mentioned that he too took the initiative in socializing himself into his position. However, he was hired for a management position which required him to be proactive in orienting himself.

Interviewer: When you first started at ORI how were you introduced to your

coworkers?

Paul: I was introduced to my new boss but it was up to me to introduce myself to my coworkers. There really wasn't really much outreach.

Interviewer: Do you think the job or role you had played a part in how you got to know your coworkers?

Paul: Yes, that played a part in it... There wasn't a lot of time to interact with coworkers because the main part of the job is that you're here to serve the clients. You never really have free time during the day because you're always on duty.

Generally, experienced employees were willing to assist new employees in learning their role as long as new employees demonstrated a willingness to learn. Thus, new employees were likely to utilize experienced employees by asking them questions and/or addressing concerns. In a few cases, however, new employees did orient themselves into their job position without a lot of assistance from an experienced employee. An employee's role within ORI (such as a managerial role) can sometimes determine how proactive they need to be to successfully socialize into the organization.

Another way that new employees were informally socialized into the organization was via a personal relationship with a ORI employee prior to their hire. Prospective ORI employees are sometimes recruited by their family and/or friends who are already in the program.

According to Jablin (2001), interpersonal interactions with future employers and/or employees before entry into an organization can help with job placement along with fitting in. In correspondence to this research, a couple of employees mentioned that their transition into ORI was an easier process due to their personal relationships within the organization. When asked

about her transition into ORI, Vanessa mentioned that having family employed there was a benefit and the main reason for seeking out a position there. She relayed the following information:

I had family that worked there and they talked about how I should apply. So I guess that was my main reason for applying...It was beneficial to have family there because my cousin worked at the same house, so it was easy to follow her around and ask questions.

In addition to Vanessa's response, another employee wrote, "When I first joined ORI I was working at North Howard (supported living house) with two of my closest friends. So the transition was easy. They also trained me."

Overall, two main themes were evident in how ORI employees were socialized into the organization. Again, they include formal processes of socialization and informal processes of socialization. Although these orientations differed on several dimensions, the two processes made it clear that both new employees and the organization participate in and influence the assimilation process (Myers & Oetzel, 2003).

Based from the analysis done on these two themes, it is evident that both formal and informal processes of socialization impact ORI employees during their transition into the organization. Both processes play a role in socializing ORI employees as they help employees begin to feel integrated into their work environment (Chao et al., 1994; Myers & Oetzel). For formal processes of socialization, planned events such as orientations done at the main site (for new main site employees) and orientations done at the supported living houses (for new supported living house employees) were most beneficial. Thus, having management and/or

supervisor communication in their specific work environment was important in the socialization process.

Informal processes of socialization had an impact on socializing new employees. These processes were unplanned (Miller, 2006) but successful in helping new ORI employees socialize into the organization. Informal processes of socialization were considered most beneficial when there was open communication between experienced employees and new employees.

Furthermore, it was helpful when communication was already established between employees due to prior relations. As a result, these two processes demonstrated the importance of communication between all ORI employees (old employees, new employees, management/managers/supervisors) and how they all play a role in the socialization process.

RQ2: How does ORI's assimilation process compare to Myers and Oetzel' (2003) assimilation model?

It was clear that both new employees and ORI participated in, and influenced, the assimilation process (Myers & Oetzel). To see the extent of how ORI's assimilation process compares to Myers and Oetzel's assimilation process, I am going to analyze the six dimensions that are related to new employees accepting the organization and the organization accepting the new employees. These dimensions include: getting to know coworkers, organizational acculturation, recognition, involvement, job competency, and role negotiation.

1. Getting to Know Coworkers

The first process of organizational assimilation was identified in the first research question. ORI coworkers get to know one another through formal processes of socialization and informal processes of socialization. It was found that the two processes made it clear that both new

employees and the organization participate in and influence the assimilation process (Myers & Oetzel) along with playing a significant role in employee socialization.

Another part of this dimension is determining whether employees' attitudes changed toward the organization as they got to know people within it (Myers & Oetzel). When employees were asked how their feelings for ORI have evolved as they developed relationships with fellow coworkers, they tended to direct their feelings toward the overall organization. In an interview with Melissa, she gave an example of how her feelings for the organization changed over time. She stated:

I really did enjoy my time there. I think my ideas changed toward ORI in a positive way. At first I wasn't sure how ORI worked, what their mission statement was, and how well their advocacy worked. But I really like how they handle their clients and how they go about doing things. I think it's a cool corporation.

Overall, attitudes were positive toward ORI and employees felt that the organization has improved over the years along with being successful in accommodating its large number of clients. Coming from a managerial perspective, Jake mentioned that he is positive about ORI's growth and current status by saying, "The numbers are great...But what I really look at is the difference we have made in people's lives...Not only the consumers we serve, but the staff people as well." Therefore, having a positive attitude toward ORI may help employees assimilate successfully into the organization. This would help with developing and establishing relationships with other workers (Chao et al., 1994; Feldman, 1981; Fisher, 1986; Louis, 1980).

2. Organizational Acculturation

Organizational acculturation involves becoming familiar with the organization's culture. All ORI employees were aware of what the organization's standards are, and therefore their

responses were similar. Susan articulated a common belief held by employees when she stated, “ORI assists individuals with disabilities in obtaining a quality of life in whatever support is necessary for an individual to be successful in whatever aspect of life they are involved in with us.” Therefore, ORI’s culture is centered on clientele achievement. Because of this, the organization’s goals, values, and standards are focused on how to best attain client quality of life.

ORI’s goals, values, and standards can change overtime to continue achieving a culture that is based on clientele achievement. Jake expressed a commonly expressed managerial view of ORI’s current goals, values, and standards. He stated:

They change. I think that in today’s world in this business just staying in business is a miracle. It’s also more difficult working with state agencies. So the goal of this organization would be being able to keep our values and goals intact and yet still deal with this system, that’s the hardest thing. Some goals, it’s really kind of simple. It’s being able to provide as much support as we possibly can and do it in a very innovated, creative way. We built programs and supports here. There’s some things we’re doing today that we may not be doing in five, ten, twenty years. And hopefully, someday there won’t be a need for a sheltered workshop like this and there won’t be a need for group homes. People will have the opportunity to have a job within the community if they want to have it, or have their own apartment or house. So it’s continually taking down barriers and leveling the playing field. It’s a constant issue, but you see the progression though.

ORI employees have an understanding of what the organization’s current goals, values, and standards are. However, it may help employees to be more educated on how ORI’s goals, values, and standards have changed overtime to maintain and improve its culture (client quality

of life). Previous research has shown that workers are more comfortable and relaxed in their work environments when they have the opportunity to learn organizational practices and norms along with what their expected role entails (Myers & Oetzel). This awareness may help ORI employees become more comfortable and relaxed in their work environments. Understanding the organization's current goals, values, and standards, along with being aware of how they have changed overtime, will help maintain and improve ORI's culture. Such an understanding among ORI employees may motivate them to develop more effective strategies and techniques thereby benefiting the organization.

3. Recognition

The third process of assimilation according to Myers and Oetzel (2003) is recognition. Recognition is when an employee feels valuable and important to the organization by being able to contribute to it in a meaningful way. Overall, ORI employees feel that they are recognized and have the ability to contribute to the organization.

A few of the employees mentioned that they had prior experience that enabled them to be successful in their current position with ORI. Hannah stated, "I have experience in physical therapy. I feel that I am able to help more because of that." Paul added that he felt that his life experience made him a valuable member to ORI. He said:

I would have to say my life experience makes me a valuable member. People with developmental disabilities are unique individuals and the more exposure you have to these people the more you are able to help them function in society.

Along with Hannah and Paul, Kelly mentioned that her college education and personal attributes made her a valuable member to ORI. Although it was not hands on, she felt her schooling

background played a large role in her success within the organization. Kelly talked about her education and personal attributes by saying:

I had the background in social work and that helped a lot. Along with that, I was compassionate, understanding, and caring towards the clients. I think you need to be competent and to be able to do your job well, but you also need to care about who you're dealing with. And I really did care about the people I was dealing with and still do.

In addition to being a valuable member to the organization, ORI employees usually felt that their work was recognized. Employees mentioned that informal recognition occurred more often than formal recognition. Informal recognition consists of casual verbal recognition from fellow coworkers and supervisors (Myers & Oetzel) at the main site and supported living houses. Formal recognition consists of planned verbal recognition and/or awards from top management (Myers & Oetzel) at the main site. To sum up the general responses, one employee said it best when they wrote, "I have been recognized many times by my peers for the work I've done, but never the ORI office."

Overall, ORI employees classify themselves as being valuable members to the organization and feel recognized by their fellow coworkers and supervisors at their specific site. Following their entry, recognition came when they were able to affect clients' lives by providing resources and daily care. Although employees did not mention being formally recognized by management, recognition by peers and supervisors at the main site and supported living houses signaled acceptance. Thus, communicating acceptance to one another through recognition can contribute to successful assimilation (Myers & Oetzel).

4. Involvement

Feeling involved or demonstrating involvement is the fourth process discovered in Myers and Oetzel's (2003) research. New employee involvement within the organization causes new employees to feel more accepted and have less role conflict. It has been found that in most organizations, new employees demonstrate involvement by volunteering for extra work duties (picking up extra work shifts) or work extra hard to improve the organization (or some aspect of the organization) through their dedication.

In ORI, employees show their active involvement in the organization by contributing to meetings. The level of involvement depends on the type of meeting. There are three different types of meetings that ORI conducts including: corporate wide staff meetings, management meetings, and staff meetings. The goal of these meetings is to establish an all encompassing channel for intraorganizational communication.

Corporate wide staff meetings take place once a month at the main site. They are lead by top management and are used to inform staff on issues, concerns, and upcoming events within the organization. This particular meeting is open to all employees, but not everyone is able to attend. Some of the reasons employees cited for not being able to attend included: being on a work shift at the main site that was not flexible with the meeting time (cannot leave a client alone), being on work shift at a supported living house (location inconvenience), and being off duty. Coming from a managerial perspective, Jake acknowledged the corporate wide staff meeting attendance. In regards to this issue, he said:

The issue isn't necessarily talking to every staff person. What is said at these corporate wide staff meetings is one of my main forms of talking about business issues. For example, if I need to let people know that we're in for a big lawsuit with the state of Montana and I need to keep the staff informed and updated on the progress, we take

minutes which are distributed corporate wide. It is up to individual staff members to read the minutes to keep in touch

In addition, the meetings are not necessarily an open forum for discussion. However, ORI top executives do try to create an open atmosphere that allows for questions and/or the contribution of ideas. Susan, an ORI manager, addressed communication between top management and staff at corporate wide staff meetings. She said, “We try to create an informal, open atmosphere that allows people to ask questions. But it can be hard for people to actually do this because of the large size of the meeting.” Although top management tries to create an open atmosphere, staff does not feel that the meetings are designed for questions and/or idea contribution. Hannah best explained this when she said, “The meetings more so just inform us of the situations that are going on within the corporation. If I had issues I probably wouldn’t bring it up to those people (top management) at the meeting. I would probably go to my supervisor first.”

It is clear from both managerial and staff perspectives that the corporate wide staff meetings are used to inform employees on issues, concerns, and upcoming events within the organization. Although these meetings can be beneficial in keeping employees updated, they are not designed for employee involvement. Corporate wide staff meetings do not assist new employees with feelings of acceptance and role conflict because there is not an open channel of communication. Thus, communication between top management and staff is unlikely. Because of this, these meetings do not play a role in integrating employees within their work environment (Chao et al., 1994; Myers & Oetzel). Although corporate wide staff meetings do not socialize new employees into the organization, they do provide some insight into the corporate culture.

Along with corporate wide staff meetings, ORI also has management meetings. These meetings are held at ORI’s main site and can vary by being held once a week, to once a month,

and to once every six months. They consist of the CEO and those who hold managerial/supervisor positions at both the main site and the supported living houses. Management meetings are more two-way because they allow and promote communication among all those present at the meeting. Thus, it is an open forum for the CEO and managers/supervisors to openly discuss any issues they find important. The overall goal of the meeting is to communicate all the information discussed to ORI as a whole. To do this, the job of each manager/supervisor is to communicate the information to their respective staff. For example, main site managers/supervisors would communicate the information discussed at the management meeting to the staff that they are assigned to. Similarly, supported living house managers/supervisors would communicate the information discussed at the management meeting to the staff that they are assigned to.

Jake, a heard ORI manager, mentioned that management meetings are more productive (in an interactive sense) than corporate wide staff meetings because of the two-way communication design. However, getting the information discussed at these meetings communicated corporate wide is a difficult task. In regards to the goal of managers/supervisor communicating the information discussed at the management meeting to their respective staff, Jake stated:

We make sure to try and the goal is for the information to flow to the staff. But communication is a tough issue because ORI is so big. That's one thing I hate about it. It does take effort on a staff person's end to find out information. It's there, at least we try to make the information available in order to communicate.

It is important to note that main site managers/supervisors as well as supported living house managers/supervisors hold staff meetings for their respective staff. These meetings are used for managers/supervisors to communicate information discussed at the management meetings to

their staff, along with discussing issues/concerns/questions that are prevalent specifically to their main site location or supported living house. However, staff meetings are usually held only once a month and the date and time does not always work with staffs' schedules. Because of this, information discussed at the managerial meetings rarely is communicated to the entire ORI staff. As a result, it is up to staff members to seek out the information that was discussed at the staff meeting.

As mentioned, staff meetings are held by both main site and supported living house managers/supervisors. Although staff members cannot not always attend staff meetings, the general consensus toward these meetings are positive. Like the management meetings, staff meetings are more two-way because they allow and promote communication among all those present at the meeting. Thus, it is an open forum for the managers/supervisors and staff members to openly discuss issues they find important. The overall goal of the meeting is to provide an update on corporate issues as well as discussing matters that are prevalent to their specific location. In an interview with Nate, he talked about two-way communication being important because it allows for clarification and idea contribution.

I think it's good being face-to-face with your manager and other coworkers.

Communication via documentation can be easy to misinterpret so face-to-face communication is pretty valuable...I have contributed ideas to the meetings. I feel that I've been able to help get some things implemented that otherwise wouldn't have.

Overall, the main goal of both management and staff meetings is for employees to contribute ideas and/or ask questions. Thus, they are designed for employee involvement. Management meetings and staff meetings assist new employees with feelings of acceptance and role conflict because there is an open channel of communication. Because of this, these meetings play a role

in integrating employees within their work environment (Chao et al., 1994; Myers & Oetzel). In this way both management and staff meetings help socialize new employees into the organization.

Another way that ORI employees show their active involvement is by volunteering for extra duties. The most commonly mentioned extra duty among interviewees was substituting for fellow coworkers. However, a couple of employees mentioned doing extra work that was not assigned to them or part of their job description. For example, Kelly talked about helping out during lunchtime at the main site. It was not part of her job description to help staff and clients during that time, but she chose to do so anyways. She said, “It’s not something I have to do, but it’s always so busy and hectic at that time (lunchtime). I would feel bad if I didn’t help. I just kind of help out where they need me.”

Therefore, ORI employees demonstrated organizational involvement through meeting contribution and volunteering for extra organizational duties. Management meetings and staff meeting are more successful in assimilating ORI employees into the organization than corporate wide staff meetings are because they allow for more open communication. Furthermore, employees demonstrate their involvement by volunteering for extra organizational work duties by substituting for one another as well as electing to take on extra work that is not included as part of their job description.

5. Job Competency

Meyers and Oetzel’s (2003) fifth process, job competency, is when new employees are able to sufficiently perform their designated organizational duties. ORI employees interviewed felt that they were able to successfully perform their roles within the organization. Some felt that their

background and past experience helped them to be successful in their current position whereas others felt that they learned their role by making mistakes.

A couple of employees mentioned that their past work experience and educational background played a role in helping them successfully perform their current ORI position. Some talked about gaining work experience from jobs outside of ORI, whereas others talked about gaining experience from their positions within ORI. Susan explained how her experience with ORI, as well as her educational background, contributed to her overall success with the organization. She said:

I think the fact that I started here as direct care helps me do my current position better because I have been there and done that. I can relate to what other workers are going through. Also, I have a degree in social work. So my social work background and the fact that I had to work myself up from the bottom has made me successful.

Another way ORI employees learned about their organizational duties was by making mistakes. According to Myers and Oetzel, this is expected and considered normal. Both top management and staff expressed the importance of being able to make mistakes, and more specifically, the importance of learning from them. Jake, a top ORI manager, explained how making mistakes is part of the process of being successful in an organization.

There's times when I felt like I've failed to get across my message or get the support needed or made the wrong decisions. It's interesting being in a position like this. You can't feel there are wrong decisions, there are just wrong choices at the time. We learn from our mistakes, or hopefully we learn from our mistakes, otherwise we wouldn't be in business.

As a staff member, Vanessa also discussed the importance of being able to make mistakes. She said “It’s nice to be part of an organization that doesn’t get down on you because you mess up once. But they do expect you to learn from the experience.”

Overall, background and past experience was beneficial and contributed to employee success within ORI. However, skills improve with practice and competency is expected to increase overtime (Feldman, 1981). ORI employees improve their skills by being allowed to make mistakes. As a result, they become more competent with their organizational duties.

6. Adaptation and Role Negotiation

The final process of assimilation in the Myers and Oetzel (2003) model is adaptation and role negotiation. This is when employees adapt to the organizational structure and/or try to change the requirements or expectations about how a position is performed. Previous research indicates that new employees perform some level of role negotiation as part of their assimilation (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Davey & Arnold, 2000).

ORI employees recognized that they were adapting to the organizational structure as well as role negotiating. Most employees believed that while conforming to ORI’s rules and regulations are an important guide, they should be paired with individual workers experience and discretion. In an interview with Nate, he did a good job of explaining the employees’ overall consensus.

I think that ORI’s rules and regulations are really realistic, so yes, I conformed. I do work outside the rules and regulations like anybody else would though. You bring your own techniques into certain situations and if it’s completely wrong you’re told. But they (ORI) do support you in how you do your job (e.g., trying new techniques (food preparation) with clients, trying new activities (outdoors) with clients, etc).

Because ORI is flexible with adaptation and role negotiation, some employees mentioned that they felt a sense of self-fulfillment. Melissa explained this by saying:

Along with getting experience, I got to solidify my goal that I wanted to work with people. I feel that empowerment is huge and that it's the best thing for self-actualization and attaining personal goals.

Overall, ORI employees mentioned that they adapted to the organization's rules and regulations along with having the opportunity to role negotiate. As previously mentioned, role negotiation can lead to negative relationships within an organization because new employees attempt to change the expectations by encouraging coworkers and management to accept new ideas for how a role should be enacted (Myers, 2005). ORI welcomes role negotiation because the employees' job is to perform their role in the best interests of their clients. Thus, if a client can benefit from an employee changing their position (as long as it is safe), ORI is accepting of the new idea. For an example, Paul said "I do my job the way I feel works best and ORI seems to be okay with it. If there's a safety issue then I'll conform to the policies."

RQ3: In what ways is assimilation successful and not successful in ORI?

Both new employees and ORI participated in and influenced the assimilation process (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). After analyzing the six dimensions that are related to new employees accepting the organization and the organization accepting new employees, it became obvious that ORI's assimilation process resembles Myers and Oetzel's assimilation model. Although the two assimilation processes are comparable, there are still areas in which ORI could improve. I will address how assimilation is both successful and unsuccessful within the organization.

In the second research question, I compared ORI's assimilation process to Myers and Oetzel's assimilation model. Overall, each dimension had a positive aspect about it which makes

ORI's assimilation process look successful in accordance with Myers and Oetzel's assimilation model. However, three dimensions, Getting to Know Coworkers, Organizational Acculturation, and Involvement, had specific areas that could be improved to make assimilation more successful within ORI. I will discuss each dimension and how it played a role in successfully assimilating ORI employees along with discussing how the dimensions, Getting to Know Coworkers, Organizational Acculturation, and Involvement, lacked in assimilating employees into the organization.

1. *Getting to Know Coworkers.* Employees were assimilated into the organization through formal and informal processes by being personally proactive and with assistance from experienced employees. These two processes demonstrated the importance of interactive communication between all ORI employees and how they all play a role in the socialization process. As a result, interactive communication plays a large role in successfully assimilating new employees into the organization. In addition, ORI employees had a positive attitude toward the organization. Having a positive outlook may help employees develop and establish relationships with other workers (Chao et al., 1994; Feldman, 1981; Fisher, 1986; Louis, 1980). This would play a role in successfully assimilating within ORI.

It was found that the interactive aspect of formal and informal processes of socialization were most beneficial in assimilating new employees. Unfortunately, ORI (management) is concerned that there is a lack of interactive communication throughout the entire organization. Because ORI has grown so much over the years, the organization has started to rely more on paper and computer communication which has resulted in less

interactive communication between all employees. Jake does a good job representing management's concern for the lack of interactive communication within ORI.

Communication is really hard. But it gets back to this day of age that we're in. The system does not support face-to-face communication. Instead, the system promotes paper or computer communication, so it gets really hard. I think that we have great bonds and great teamwork amongst different fractions, but not as a whole group because we are so spread out. Some people bring up that they don't get a lot of interaction with other staff. That's really hard. It's important for me and I need to make sure that it's important and understood by our managers to keep working on that.

This lack of interactive communication and increase in paper and internet corresponding has made communication more confusing and or/difficult. Thus, employees may not always receive the information they need to do their job successfully. Hannah mentioned that ORI seems disorganized at times and information that she and her coworker need to do their job is not always communicated to them. She stated:

I found that they're kind of disorganized. The communication is not really great. My coworker and I do not always get the information we need to do our job. For example, when my coworker was covering some appointments for someone (another employee) by driving their clients to where they needed to be, he would find out from the actual client that he needed to drive them. Nobody from ORI (management and/or staff) told him or gave him any information.

Communication between all ORI employees is important in the socialization process.

Open channels of communication have proven to be beneficial in successfully assimilating new employee as it helps them begin to feel integrated in their work environment (Chao et al., 1994; Myers & Oetzel).

2. *Organizational Acculturation.* There was a general consensus among all of the employees that they understood ORI's current goals, values, and standards. Nevertheless, it was discovered how the organization's goals, values, and standards can change overtime to continue achieving a culture that is based on clientele achievement. Making employees aware of ORI's current culture and how it has changed over the years could motivate them to find different strategies and techniques that are more effective than current practices. This could help with assimilation because new employees would have the ability to learn about ORI's past organizational strategies and current organizational strategies. Thus, employees may feel more comfortable and relaxed in their work environment because they would have a better understanding of organizational norms and what their role entails (Myers & Oetzel).
3. *Recognition.* Employees felt that they were recognized by fellow coworkers for their efforts within the organization. Employees believed that they were able to contribute and hence, were valuable organizational members. Being recognized informally by peers and supervisors at the main site and supported living houses also signaled acceptance. As a result, coworkers played a role in socializing one another by communicating acceptance through recognition (Myers & Oetzel).
4. *Involvement.* Some employees were willing to volunteer for extra organizational duties. Employees believe that management meetings and staff meetings are more beneficial than corporate wide staff meetings. Management and staff meeting were viewed

favorably by employees as they allowed for interactive communication and the opportunity to contribute ideas. Management meetings and staff meetings assist new employees with feelings of acceptance and role conflict because there is open communication. As a result, both of these meeting designs play a role in integrating employees within their work environment (Chao et al., 1994; Myers & Oetzel) which ultimately helps socialize them into ORI.

Because not all staff members are able to attend their staff meetings, the information discussed at the management meetings is not communicated to ORI staff as a whole. As a result, employees are unable to integrate within the organization and successfully socialize into ORI. Another factor that hinders communication within the organization is the lack of consistency in scheduling management meetings and staff meetings. Management meetings vary from once a month to six months and staff meetings are supposed to happen once a month; however, ORI interviews made it clear that these meetings do not happen regularly. Hannah talked about the importance of face-to-face (interactive) communication and how she was surprised by the few number (if any) of staff meetings that have been held since she has been with ORI.

I was floored when I started here and they didn't have any staff meetings. At my other job, the first thing every morning we had a staff meeting and you would find out what was going on with every client regardless of whether or not you worked with them...I know that is what T-Logs (communication via the computer) are for, but we don't necessarily get everybody's T-Logs. It would be nice to have some more face-to-face communication because then you could hear people's ideas.

Management meetings and staff meetings are more successful in assimilating employees into the organization than corporate wide staff meetings as they promote open communication. However, if employees are unable to attend these meetings or if these meetings are not held regularly, then corporate information and matters that are prevalent to their specific location do not get communicated throughout the entire organization. This lack of communication could lead to feelings of isolation among employees thereby hindering successful socialization within the organization and ultimately leading to turnover.

5. *Job Competency.* All the employees felt that they were able to successfully perform their organizational role. Some felt that their background and prior experience helped them to be successful in their current position whereas others felt that they learned their role by making mistakes. It is important to note that competency is expected to increase overtime because skills should increase with practice (Feldman, 1981). Thus, ORI employees felt that they became more competent with their organizational duties overtime.
6. *Adaptation and Role Negotiation.* While employees adapted to ORI's organizational structure, they also exercised their ability to negotiate their job position. Employees are expected to follow ORI's guidelines yet have the freedom to negotiate their organizational role as long as it is in the best interests of their client.

Overall, ORI's assimilation process is comparable to Myers and Oetzel's assimilation model because each dimension of the model had characteristics that related to ORI's assimilation process. However, three dimensions, Getting to Know Coworkers, Organizational Acculturation, and Involvement, were addressed by employees as being a concern because of

lack of interactive communication. Although these three dimensions had positive characteristics, there are areas for improvement. It has been shown that communication between all ORI employees is important in the socialization process. Implementing an assimilation program that increases communication, specifically interactive communication, could help decrease the turnover rate as it could enhance Myers and Oetzel's assimilation model's dimensions. Implementing an appropriately tailored assimilation program could improve the three dimensions of concern (Getting to Know Coworkers, Organizational Acculturation, and Involvement) along with enhancing the three dimensions that were not addressed by employees (Recognition, Job Competency, and Adaptation and Role Negotiation).

An Assimilation Program

RQ4: How can a plan be developed in accordance to Myers and Oetzel's (2003) assimilation model to meet the needs of ORI?

Based off of the research done, both new employees and ORI participated in and influenced the assimilation process. Thus, ORI's assimilation process reflects Myers and Oetzel's assertion that organizational assimilation is a dual process involving both the organization and the employee. Although ORI employees were largely positive about how they were assimilated into their organizational roles, they noted that due to the size of the organization that communication within ORI was problematic. Three dimensions in Myers and Oetzel's model, Getting to Know Coworkers, Organizational Acculturation, and Involvement, were addressed by employees as being a concern because of lack of interactive communication. Developing an assimilation program could improve interactive communication among these three dimensions along with enhancing interactive communication in the other three dimensions (Recognition, Job Competency, and Adaptation and Role Negotiation). Therefore, all six dimensions could be enhanced if interactive communication is increased. Addressing these issues could ultimately improve not only communication, but also organizational assimilation within ORI. This would provide employees with an immediate and continual sense of worth to the organization (Van Mannen & Schein, 1979).

Although communication throughout the organization as a whole has been noted as problematic, I will focus on increasing communication in one sector of ORI. Focusing on one sector may have a positive influence on the entire organization. Furthermore, it may be more attainable to enhance communication throughout the entire organization by starting small. With that said, I will develop an assimilation program that focuses on ORI's supported living houses.

The supported living houses have been defined as being their own “mini” corporation. Individual supported living houses are largely isolated from the main site, as well as other supported living houses. The managers/supervisors of the supported living houses are the main source of communication between the main site, other supported living houses, and their staff. Supported living employees do not have the same opportunities as the main site employees to get information directly passed to them. Supported living employees are often unable to attend the corporate wide staff meetings as they work outside the ORI main site. These employees rely on their manager/supervisor to pass information on to them; thus, their opportunity to personally seek organizational information is limited. Employees mentioned that they would prefer human communication over internet and paper communication. In addition, supported living house employees have limited, if any, interactive communication. By focusing specifically on enhancing communication between the different supporting living houses, interactive communication could be maximized thereby increasing the flow of information and ideas.

My decision to focus on communication in the supported living houses stems from the research findings. Employees find it most beneficial when communication is interactive between employees. Thus, both formal and informal processes of socialization are most helpful when they promote interactive communication. Unfortunately, due to organizational expansion, ORI does not utilize interactive communication like it did in the past. Overtime ORI began relying on written and electronic forms of communication. Nevertheless, employees find meetings that are two-way (equal management and staff contribution) most beneficial as they promote communication among all employees in attendance. However, ORI sometimes lacks in meeting attendance and meeting regularity. Thus, information and new ideas do not have the opportunity

to get communicated which can cause employees to not be integrated within the overall organization as well as not be successfully socialized into ORI.

Implementing a job rotation program into ORI could enhance communication among and between the different supported living houses as it could allow for the development of new personal and working relationships. This program could also contribute to increasing information and idea sharing among and between the different houses. In addition, employees would have the opportunity to develop a deeper connection with the organization. Again, it has been demonstrated that interactive communication between ORI employees is important in the socialization process. The job rotation program could assist with assimilating new employees because it may help them integrate into the environment, along with giving them a better understanding of organizational norms and what their role entails (Frase-Blunt, 2001). Therefore, successfully assimilating employees into ORI could help decrease turnover because they would feel connected to the organization.

Job Rotation

Job rotation is a formalized developmental program where an organization trains its employees through a series of rotational assignments to help them develop skills and knowledge quickly (Field & Harris, 1991; Burke, 1997). A lot of times, rotational assignments and developmental opportunities help attract individuals who are drawn by the attention of having a rotational position, along with the opportunities of promotion and leadership roles (Kuok & Bell, 2004). According to Frase-Blunt (2001), the ultimate goals of a job rotation program are to give employees a greater knowledge base about the organization and different departments; to socialize employees into the organization's business (and culture); to help employees achieve

technical skills and cross-functional skills; and to develop employees who are experienced and qualified to be positioned/staffed anywhere within the organization.

A concern for implementing a job rotation program into ORI is it hindering new employee assimilation. Because new employees are going to be rotating through each supported living house for seven months, employees may not have the opportunity to feel connected to a specific supported living house and/or develop relationships with fellow coworkers and management/supervisors. There is a fear that implementing a job rotation program would not decrease turnover because there is possibility that employees may feel isolated. This is a valid concern; however, it is important to focus on assimilation within ORI as a whole. In order to assimilate successfully, new employees need to feel that they are connected to the organization as a whole; not to just one specific department (e.g., main site, supported living house). Although ORI employees would not have the opportunity to become fully assimilated into each supported living house during the seven month job rotation period, they would have the opportunity to become assimilated into ORI as a whole. As a result, it is worth trying this program as a tradeoff because it could help employees identify and connect to ORI because they would have a deeper knowledge base about the organization; they could develop a better understanding of the organization's culture; it could help them possess cross-functional skills; and it could help them to have the experience and qualifications to be staffed anywhere within the organization (Fraser-Blunt). Therefore, successfully assimilating employees into ORI as a whole could help decrease turnover within the organization because they would feel connected to the entire organization.

Job rotation within ORI would allow employees to receive advanced training as they would have the opportunity to be placed in and learn about each of the seven supported living

houses. It would offer an experience beyond mainstream practices within human service agencies. Thus, job rotation would offer a different perspective on the following areas within the supported living houses: environmental, health and safety, analysis of current programs, and development and implementation of new programs (Sullivan, 1998).

As previously mentioned, retention of employees in child welfare, social service, and other human service agencies is a serious concern as these positions are more emotionally exhausting in comparison to non-human service jobs (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). Because ORI is a human service agency, retention has proven to be problematic (Pearson, 2008). Job rotation within the supported living houses could help prevent burnout because it would allow employees to rotate houses. They would constantly have the excitement of change and challenge of working in a new environment along with teaching and learning new skills (MacLeod & Kennedy, 1993). Employees would also learn and develop skills at each supported living house which could help with a smooth and quick transition when rotated.

Employee turnover impacts the quality, consistency and stability of human services and those who use them (Mor, Barak, Nissly, & Levin). Turnover can have harmful effects on clients and remaining employees who struggle to give and receive quality services when positions are left and then filled by inexperienced workers (Powell & York, 1992). Implementing a job rotation program within ORI's supported living houses could help increase the stability and productivity of the work atmosphere because employees would be challenged and excited about their job (Sullivan, 1998). This could be effective in reducing turnover because it may increase learning interest levels and overall excitement about an employee's position within the organization (Sullivan, 1998). As a result, implementing a job rotation

program within ORI could be beneficial in preventing detrimental effects that are caused by turnover.

Brown and Yoshioka's (2003) found that most nonprofit organizations do not have the ability or the funds to compensate their workers with a livable or desired salary. Being a nonprofit organization, Pearson (ORI Director of Human Resources, 2008) addressed money as being an issue in retaining ORI employees. It is important to be realistic and take into consideration what nonprofit organizations have to compete with. Although implementing a job rotation program within the supported living houses would not increase employee salaries, it could promote a sense of ownership to the organization because there would be an opportunity for rotation and/or growth (MacLeod & Kennedy, 1993). Therefore, implementing a job rotation program that focuses on organizational ownership may assist in retaining and reducing the turnover rate among ORI employees.

It is common in today's organizational culture to have numerous different jobs over a few years instead of keeping one job over a long period of time (Wheeler, 2008). According to Wheeler, this has led to a decrease in the average organizational tenure (from ten to four years). In addition, studies have shown that organizations are having difficulty keeping younger and newer employees (Wheeler, 2008). As previously mentioned, turnover is high among ORI employees who have been with the organization for less than six months and for those who are in the twenties (Pearson, 2008). Pearson contributes this to college graduation, financial stability, and the fact that people see ORI as a temporary job. These factors lead to the organization's difficulty in retaining employees, especially those who are young and new. It is important to note that ORI should focus on retaining employees that are attainable, such as those who see the organization as being a source for temporary employment. Implementing a job rotation program

that focuses on long-term employment within ORI could help reduce the turnover rate for employees who are within this time frame (less than six months) and age group (twenties). It may help retain this demographic of employees and also assist in retaining employees of all time frames and age groups. As a result, according to Sullivan (1998), a job rotation program could help attract new employees and increase the retention rate of current employees for the following reasons: there would be more opportunities for rotation and/or growth; it could increase employees' excitement because they would have the ability to meet different people, not become bored, and to learn about different supported living houses; ownership may take place due to overcoming a new and challenging work atmosphere; and it could possibly enhance employee commitment to stay with the organization because they could develop a sense of ownership.

Developing and Implementing a JRP Assimilation Program Within ORI

Incorporating a Job Rotation Position (JRP) Assimilation Program within ORI's supported living houses along with utilizing Myers and Oetzel's (2003) interactive assimilation model could help decrease turnover, enhance communication among employees, and improve employee training techniques. Based on the research done, I have developed a JRP Assimilation Program that exercises Myers and Oetzel's dual process by factoring in their six dimensions. The results showed that interactive communication lacked in three dimensions: Getting to Know Coworkers, Organizational Acculturation, and Involvement. The JRP Assimilation program's goal is to improve interactive communication in these three dimensions along with increasing interactive communication in the other three dimensions (Recognition, Job competency, and Adaptation and Role Negotiation); which could help decrease turnover. I will later describe how Myers and Oetzel's six dimensions can be enhanced by the JRP Assimilation Program. With that said, I recommend the following JRP Assimilation Program to be implemented into ORI.

Because ORI has seven supported living houses, I recommend that the organization incorporates a seven month JRP Assimilation Program where each house has one position that is dedicated to job rotation. ORI's turnover is prevalent among employees who have been with the organization for less than six months (Pearson, 2008). Developing a program that has a seven month job rotation commitment could frame ORI as long-term employment instead of short-term (temporary) employment. There would be seven employees who hold a job rotation position and would rotate among each other to a different supported living house each month until they have worked at all of the houses (which will occur over a seven month time period). Employees that hold this position would move between the supported living houses to explore a wider range of experiences. This approach could help employees increase their understanding of the different culture and strategies used at each supported living house. They would also have the opportunity to be proactive with learning and becoming better informed along with bringing new information, ideas, and expertise to each house. In addition, permanent staff would also have the opportunity to increase their understanding of the different culture and strategies used at each house due to information that is passed on from the rotation employee. Along with learning about different strategies and skills used at different supported living houses, permanent staff would also have the ability to teach the rotation employee about their house in order to get their information passed on to the other houses.

For job rotation to be successful in ORI there needs to be a position and time shift dedicated to rotational employees in each supported living house. It is important that the rotation position is during the same work shift in each house to make for a smooth transition. This simplifies the transition process for both the employees who are rotating and the permanent staff at each house. Thus, rotating employees would be aware of their schedule and know what is

expected of them while the permanent staff at each house would be aware of upcoming rotations and would not have to be concerned with changing their permanent staff schedules to incorporate rotation employees. Hence, there would be a rotation position open in each house during the same work shift.

I realize that getting this program started may take some time before ORI can open seven positions dedicated to job rotation within each supported living house. It would be unrealistic to immediately open up a rotation position in each of the seven houses because of money restrictions and the difficulties of instantly changing ORI's present program. Currently, each house has permanent staff and hires new employees as permanent staff for a specific house when a position needs to be filled. Incorporating a JRP program within the organization would occur over a period of time because ORI would have to wait for positions to open up in each house that have the same work shift. Slowly implementing this program as positions open up allows ORI to gradually acclimate to the change. Furthermore, it would allow the organization to test the program for success by hiring a rotation employee when a position opens up instead of hiring seven rotation employees all at once. Therefore, ORI would be able to gauge the JRP program's success in reducing turnover by gradually implementing it within the organization.

Gradually implementing a JRP assimilation program within ORI may help with organizational acclimation and the opportunity to test for success over a period of time. In addition, it would also be financially feasible for the organization to execute the program in this manner. Thus, a waiting period to hire a rotational employee until a position opens up in a supported living house would have to occur because the goal of this program is for it to be implemented without further financial obligations by ORI. By gradually implementing this program, there would be no increase in costs associated with opening extra positions and/or

paying extra employees. The organization would not have to pay for additional classes and orientations because the current formal processes of socialization would still be in place. Finally, there would be no increase in the amount of management time spent on rotation employees because the current informal processes of socialization would still be in place.

To get the JRP assimilation program started in ORI, the organization needs to hire an employee for a rotation position in a supported living house that is currently understaffed or needs to fill a permanent position. It needs to be explained to the rotation employee that the goal of the organization is to implement a JRP program that hires a rotation employee to spend one month at each supported living house over a seven month time period. However, this may not be the case in the initial stages of implementing the program because positions opening up within the supported living houses that have the same time shift may happen over a period of time. Thus, when first implementing this program a rotation employee may be at a house for less than one month or more than one month depending on what positions open up or need to be filled. As the program gets underway, ORI's goal is to eventually hire a rotation employee for each house. Once employees successfully rotate through each supported living house and fulfill their seventh month rotation period, they are eligible to apply for any permanent position within ORI. If there are no job openings within the organization when employees complete the JRP assimilation program, they would be able to keep their rotation position until a permanent position opens that interests them. When a permanent position opens up within the organization, JRP employees would be considered first for the position because of their overall organizational knowledge and skills. Furthermore, an incentive of having a JRP is the opportunity to have a voice in a permanent position and location within ORI once the seven month job rotation of the program is

finished. When JRP employees are permanently placed, ORI would hire new rotation employees to take the place of past rotation employees.

Once the JRP assimilation program is underway, permanent staff at each of the supported living houses would be in communication with their supervisor/manager and the rotation employees about the program. Thus, they would have the opportunity to converse with one another about the program's strengths and weaknesses as well as the rotation employees' ability to be proactive and communicate different ideas and skills that were learned at other supported living houses. As a result, this gives permanent staff some ownership of their house by giving them the ability to discuss the JRP program and whether it is benefiting their house. Similarly, rotation employees would be in communication with the supervisors/managers and permanent staff at each of the supported living houses. Because of this, they too would have the opportunity to discuss the JRP's program's strengths and weaknesses and whether they are able to be proactive and communicate different ideas and skills that they learned from other supported living houses (and gauge whether permanent staff is accepting of the ideas and skills that they contribute). This would result in giving rotation employees a sense of ownership for each house because they would have the ability to discuss the JRP program and its impact on each of the houses.

A JRP Assimilation Program Effect on ORI's Current Interactive Assimilation Model

The JRP assimilation program I have developed and recommended for ORI to implement within their organization based on the research done uses Myers and Oetzel's (2003) interactive assimilation model by factoring in their six dimensions. I will explain how the JRP assimilation program compares to Myers and Oetzel's model and how it will enhance each dimension of the dual process.

1. *Getting to Know Coworkers.* Rotational employees would still go through formal processes of socialization and informal processes of socialization. Formal processes of socialization include training done (classes) at the main site along with orientations done at the main site and supported living houses by their respective managers/supervisors. Informal processes of socialization include training done by fellow coworkers, individual training, and prior relationships. Both processes of socialization had an impact on new employees when interactive communication was used because they began to feel integrated into their work environment.

The JRP Assimilation program could improve interactive communication by enforcing mutual training done by both the permanent staff and the JRP employees. Having a new rotation employee at each supported living house every seven months could cause learning to happen on both ends of the spectrum. Permanent staff would teach the rotation employee about their house and the rotation employee would bring in new ideas and skills learned from working at the other houses. Instead of the new employee just being proactive in learning their position, they would also have the opportunity to teach permanent staff what they know. This could help them gain credibility and make the permanent staff more willing to be proactive in teaching them about their supported living house. As a result, the interactive approach could be enhanced because both rotation employees and permanent staff would be equally proactive in socializing new employees (new rotation employees and new permanent staff) into the supported living houses; and ultimately into the organization. In addition, attitudes toward ORI may become more positive because communication would be enhanced among the houses

which could assist in further accommodating its large number of clients (Myers & Oetzel, 2003).

I recognize that JRP employees would have to get to know new coworkers seven times because of the seven month job rotation aspect of the JRP Assimilation Program. However, this could give them the opportunity to learn and develop skills along with becoming knowledgeable about all the supported living houses (Sullivan, 1998). As a result, this could help new employees assimilate into ORI as a whole because they may gain an immediate and continual sense of worth to the organization (Van Mannen & Schein, 1979); ultimately reducing the turnover.

2. *Organizational Acculturation.* ORI employees already have an overall understanding of what the organization's goals, values, and standards are. Furthermore, workers are more comfortable and relaxed in their work environments when they have the opportunity to learn organizational practices and norms along with what their expected role entails (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Thus, a JRP Assimilation Program could increase the supported living houses employees' knowledge about organizational practices and norms because rotation employees and permanent staff would have the opportunity to be proactive in teaching and learning from one another. In addition, it was discovered how the organization's goals, values, and standards can change overtime to continue achieving a culture that is based on clientele achievement. The JRP could be instrumental in trying to achieve client achievement through the constant process of learning new values, goals, and standards from each house. Furthermore, this information would be passed on to each supported living house allowing the employees to witness any changes in the organization's values, goals, and standards overtime. This could possibly motivate

employees to find different strategies and techniques that work better than the strategies and techniques that are currently in place. This could help with assimilation because new employees would have the ability to learn about ORI's past organizational strategies and current organizational strategies. Thus, employees may feel more comfortable and relaxed in their work environment because they would have a better understanding of organizational norms and what their role entails (Myers & Oetzel). This could ultimately help reduce ORI's turnover rate.

3. *Recognition.* ORI employees feel that they are recognized by their fellow coworkers and have the ability to contribute to the organization. Recognition normally occurred when they were able to affect clients' lives by providing resources and daily care. A JRP assimilation program would have the ability to increase recognition and contribution to ORI. Rotation employees and permanent staff would both play a role in recognizing one another as well as teaching and learning from one another. This could lead to feelings of being a valuable and important member to ORI because employees would have the ability to increase their contribution to the organization (Sullivan, 1998). As a result, being recognized could increase employees' ability to affect their client's lives because they may provide better resources and daily care based on knowledge taught and learned from one another.

4. *Involvement.* ORI employees show organizational involvement through meeting contribution and volunteering for extra duties. Management meetings and staff meetings are considered to be more successful than corporate wide staff meetings because they promote interactive communication among employees. Implementing a JRP Assimilation Program within ORI could enhance communication within and between the

supported living houses. However, for the JRP Assimilation program to be successful in increasing interactive communication, it is important for staff meetings to be held regularly and that attendance be highly recommended. With that said, new ideas and skills could be communicated among and between supported living houses due to having a rotation employee. Because staff meetings allow employees to contribute ideas and/or ask questions, a JRP assimilation program could enforce the importance of communicating new ideas and/or skills. Furthermore, this program may enforce the importance interactive communication from supported living house managers, permanent staff, and rotation employees. Instead of just focusing on one house, supported living house employees would have a better idea and understanding of what is going on in the other houses. This could promote a sense of belonging and ownership to the overall organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979); which could decrease turnover.

5. *Job Competency.* Overall, ORI employees felt that they were able to successfully perform their roles within the organization. Some felt that their background and past experience helped them to be successful and competent in their current position whereas others felt that they learned their role by making mistakes. Implementing a JRP Assimilation Program within ORI could help increase job competency. Employees would have the opportunity to learn different strategies and skills used at other supported living houses while also having the chance to pass on their own strategies and skills. By communicating information within and between houses, supported living employees would have access to more information that may help them be more successful in performing their organizational roles. Thus, employees would be able to pass on information about their own background and past experiences to other houses if they feel

that the information is beneficial for other employees to know. In addition, it is apparent from the research that ORI employees felt that they learned their roles based on making mistakes. This program would allow for mistakes by recognizing that it is part of the learning process. Information that is communicated within and among the supported living houses may not always be helpful; however, it is important to learn what works and what does not by having all the information available.

6. *Adaptation and Role Negotiation.* ORI employees felt that they adapted to the organization's rules and regulations along with having the opportunity to role negotiate. The organization tends to welcome role negotiation because the employees' job is to perform their role in the best interests of the clients. Thus, if a client can benefit from an employee changing their position (as long as it is safe), ORI is accepting of the new idea. A JRP Assimilation Program would further promote adaptation and role negotiation. Employees would have the opportunity to adapt or not adapt to new ideas, strategies, and skills that are passed on to supported living houses by the rotation employee. Furthermore, based on new information learned from other houses employees may choose to role negotiate their position if it has the possibility of benefiting their clients.

Conclusion

Incorporating a JRP Assimilation Program into ORI's supported living houses along with utilizing Myers and Oetzel's (2003) interactive assimilation model could help decrease turnover. Furthermore, it could help increase interactive communication throughout the organization and improve training techniques by enhancing ORI's current assimilation program. Overall, employees were positive with how they were assimilated into their organizational roles and it was discovered that ORI's current assimilation process was similar to Myers and Oetzel's interactive assimilation model. It was continuously mentioned that interactive communication was difficult throughout the entire organization due to the large size of ORI. As a result, the JRP assimilation program's goal is to increase communication between and among the supported living houses and ultimately throughout the entire organization by enhancing the six dimensions of Myers and Oetzel's interactive assimilation model (specifically Getting to Know Coworkers, Organizational Acculturation, and Involvement).

Although interactive communication throughout the whole organization was declared as being a problem, I chose to focus on implementing the JRP Assimilation Program into just ORI's supported living houses. Focusing on improving communication in just the supported living houses was more realistic. With that said, the goal of entire organizational communication may be more attainable by working with just the houses.

The JRP Assimilation Program could prove to have an effect on not just interactive communication within and among the supported living houses, but also throughout the entire organization. Once rotation employees fulfill their seven month rotation period, they are eligible to apply for any permanent position within ORI as well as have a voice in what position and location they want within the organization. Therefore, they may seek out a position at the main

site or supported living houses. They would have the opportunity to communicate information that they learned during their seven month rotation period to different sectors of ORI. As a result, the JRP Assimilation Program may have an impact on enhancing entire organizational communication.

As previously discussed, the JRP Assimilation Program will be implemented into ORI gradually because of financial reasons. This may prove to be beneficial to ORI because making small changes over a period of time could help current workers become acclimated to the new program. ORI would also have the opportunity to analyze the program's strengths and weakness as it is implemented into the organization. The program could prove to have a lasting impact on employees and ultimately the organization. For instance, it may help attract new and younger employees along with increasing the retention rate of current employees when they see the opportunities for rotation and growth that is offered by the program. The following rationale explains why the JRP Assimilation Program may help decrease turnover. Excitement for the organization may increase because of the ability to meet and work with different people (Sullivan, 1998). Rotation employees would have the opportunity to learn about different supported living houses. Along with that, supported living house permanent staff would have the opportunity to pass their knowledge on to other houses. Therefore, the possibility of boredom would be unlikely. Furthermore, employees may develop a sense of ownership because of their opportunity to learn and teach.

On a final note, enhancing interactive communication throughout ORI may reduce the turnover rate, which could positively impact clients. Using Myers and Oetzel's (2003) interactive assimilation model, I developed and tailored the JRP Assimilation Program to ORI based on research and information I learned from the employees. The program could improve the

assimilation program that ORI currently has in place, which may decrease turnover while creating ownership towards the organization and its clients. Because the program's goal is to decrease turnover by improving the working conditions for the employees, I hope that clients will also benefit from it by having better educated and long-terms employees working with them.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study extends our knowledge on assimilation processes in professional organizations and serves as a starting point for future research in developing, tailoring, and implementing an assimilation program within an organization. I recognize certain limitations to this study and suggest that some limitations may provide opportunities for future research.

One limitation is that the study used only participants who were current or past members of ORI. It is important to realize that assimilation begins prior to entry. Patterns in assimilation might be evident in studies that test participant at all stages of assimilation. Testing (interviews and questionnaires) individuals prior to entry into an organization along with current and past employees may provide researchers with a better understanding of the continuous assimilation process. This could also assist organizations with how they develop and implement their assimilation program. Another limitation to this study was the relatively small sample size. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using prolonged engagement to ensure trustworthiness of qualitative data. Unfortunately, this study lacked in this component. Because of time limitations, I was only able to conduct a limited number of interviews. I could have stopped conducting interviews before a point of saturation was reached. There is a possibility that new themes and ideas were still emerging when interviews were ended and questionnaires were no longer distributed.

With the limitations exposed, I suggest that future research on assimilation within professional organizations of all contexts utilize Myers and Oetzel's (2003) interactive assimilation model. This model can be used as a goal for what is needed in an assimilation program to help an organization be successful. Furthermore, this interactive assimilation model could be used to compare and evaluate employees' organizational assimilation to data such as turnover rates (like this study), absenteeism, and productivity. This information could be helpful in seeing and understanding how organizational assimilation relates to organizational issues and/or outcomes. Overall, I hope that this study initiates conversation among scholars and professional organizations (management, staff, and possibly clients) about the role of assimilation processes and how assimilation programs can be developed, tailored, and implemented in different organizational settings.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

The purpose of this research is to explore how Opportunity Resources, Inc employees are socialized into the organization. I understand that this research involves my participation in an audio-taped interview approximately thirty minutes to forty-five minutes in length. I understand that this research is being conducted for a graduate level professional paper. I understand that the results of this study will be confidential. My identifiable responses to the interview questions will not be made available to anyone other than the student researcher and faculty advisor, Dr. Greg Larson. The audio-tape of my interview will be transcribed and then erased.

I understand that participation in this study is purely voluntary. The only risks I may experience are any discomfort I may feel in answering questions. I may decline to answer any questions without penalty. Also, I can withdraw from this study at any time without consequences. Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms. *In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement of compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A, Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's claims representative of Univeristy Legal Counsel. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through The University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670.*

I have been told that the researcher conducting this study is Amanda Stovall. I may ask her any questions I have right now. If I have any questions later, I may contact Amanda Stovall by phone at 406.240.4916 or via email at amanda.stovall@umontana.edu. I may also contact the faculty advisor for this professional paper, Greg Larson in 357 Liberal Arts, at 406.243-4161, or greg.larson@mso.umt.edu.

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my question have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any further questions I may have will be answered by the researchers. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix B: Interview Guide

I. Becoming a Member

1. Let us start by you telling me what sort of events took place that got you interested in ORI?
2. What are the reasons that you decided to become an employee?

II. Getting to Know Fellow Coworkers

3. How were you introduced to fellow coworkers? (what did you do to initiate a relationship with fellow coworkers, how did experienced members make you feel welcome when you were new)?
4. Did your feelings change toward ORI as you got to know people within the organization? Positive? Negative? (do you socialize with ORI employees outside of work, do you feel that you or ORI made more of an effort to help socialize you into the organization)?

III. Organizational Acculturation

5. What exactly is your role in ORI? (can you describe it in detail for me, how did you get this role)?
6. How is your role different/unique to other roles within the organization? (how do the different roles/positions make up ORI, is it imperative to have different roles/positions within ORI)?

IV. Recognition

7. What do you personally bring to ORI? Do you consider yourself a valuable member? (is your work recognized by management/superiors or coworkers, what are the overall goals of the organization, do you feel that/how are you a valuable contributor to these overall goals of the organization)?

V. Involvement

8. Do you ever fill in for a coworker by choice (for example, if they are sick)? (do you offer to do extra work, what are the reasons behind your choice)?
9. Does ORI have meetings? What do these meetings usually entail? (do you contribute ideas?)

VI. Job Competency

10. Do you feel like you are successfully able to perform your organizational duties? (what job skills do you need to perform your role/position)?
11. Did you teach yourself how to perform your duties or did ORI teach you how to perform your duties? Or both?

VII. Role Negotiation

12. Do you feel like you have conformed (molded) to some of ORI's rules, regulations, and methods? (has this helped you achieve personal goals, have you ever had an impact on how your role/job was enacted and evaluated??)
13. How will ORI help you achieve your long-term goals? (what would cause you to leave)?

Appendix D: Coding Scheme

- 1) Becoming a member
 1. School
 2. Volunteer
 3. Life
 4. Love
 5. Research
 6. Applying
 7. Work
- 2) Getting to know coworkers
 8. Supervisor
 9. Individual
 10. Feelings
 11. Outside relationships
 12. Relationships
 13. Activities
 14. Orientation
 15. Experienced members
 16. Communication
- 3) Organizational acculturation
 17. Role
 18. Role difference/unique
- 4) Recognition
 19. Contribution
 20. Valuable member
 21. Recognition
 22. Goals
- 5) Involvement
 23. Substitute
 24. Extra work
 25. Meetings
 26. Meeting contribution
 27. No show
- 6) Job competency
 28. Job skills
 29. Organizational duties
 - ORI training
 - individual training
- 7) Adaptation and Role negotiation
 30. Conform
 31. Long-term goals

32. Personal goals
33. Exit