D I S S E R T A T I O N D E F E N S E

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An Achievement Goal Framework for Understanding the Learning-Performance Tension in Short-term Jobs

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Drawing from achievement goal and socialization literatures, I develop and test a theoretical model to explain how both learning and performance occur in short-term jobs in which workers lack experience yet have substantial responsibility. Goal orientations are hypothesized to motivate self-regulation activities (e.g., feedback seeking, learning strategies) which in turn affect worker learning and performance. Organizational factors, including supervisor goal orientations and socialization tactics, also lead to self-regulation activities that affect learning and performance. The model is tested in a longitudinal study of 475 MBA interns from 10 schools. As predicted, worker and supervisor goal orientations, and socialization tactics, explain unique variance in worker learning and performance. These effects were at least partially mediated by worker self-regulation activities. Workers with learning and performance goals who had learning-oriented supervisors, and who experienced socialization tactics, had the most positive learning and performance outcomes. This study contributes to achievement goal research by showing two kinds of learning goal orientations (one focused on skills, another on employer knowledge) predicted different kinds of activities and learning outcomes, and by showing both learning and performance goal orientations are adaptive for short-term workers. This study adds to research on proactive socialization by demonstrating worker goal orientations are an important antecedent to newcomer learning and performance. It also fills a gap in the newcomer socialization literature by focusing on short-term workers who lack prior experience yet have substantial responsibilities. Short-term workers and their employers can benefit from this study's findings by aligning individual and supervisor goal orientations, and organizational socialization practices, with specific learning and performance outcomes.