

Successful Onboarding



What you should learn from this article:

- The three factors that drive successful onboarding
- The importance of social connection
- Improving your onboarding process

INTRODUCTION

Onboarding sets the stage for an employee's thoughts and feelings about an organization. In fact, many employees decide to leave an organization within the first 6 months (Maurer, 2015), making onboarding vital for retention. In addition, employees today are more mobile than before, so onboarding has become a common occurrence (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007).

According to Bauer et al. (2007), new hires want to reduce uncertainty when starting a new role. To do so, they seek out information and the knowledge they need for the role and about the organization by engaging in organizational socialization tactics, so they can shift from "outsider" to "insider" (Bauer et al., 2007). In Bauer's et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis, three aspects: role clarity (understanding one's role and responsibilities), self-efficacy (believing in oneself to complete tasks and goals), and social acceptance (being incorporated into the social fabric of the organization) were associated with seeking information and organizational socialization. Ensuring that employees have role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance results in positive work outcomes such as increased performance, job satisfaction, commitment, and less turnover, due to a successful adjustment.

So, how can we increase role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance to ensure an effective onboarding experience and subsequent positive on-the-job behaviours?

WHAT SHOULD A MANAGER DO?

Research has found that social networks, relationships, and building relationships are vital for employees to thrive when adjusting to a new work environment. The social relationships between people provide a sense of belonging and connection, and also give employees insight into the workplace culture and resources. In fact, Bauer et al. (2007) found that social connections are associated with role clarity and self-efficacy. Researchers stated, "Facilitating interpersonal relations among workers has major effects on how well newcomers integrate into the organization. In addition ... relationships have a huge influence on what they can do (performance) and how they feel (satisfaction) toward the organization," (Korte & Lin, 2013, p. 425), demonstrating the multitude of positive effects of social connections.

HOW CAN WE FACILITATE SOCIAL CONNECTION?

An important social connection is the one between the employee and their manager. Klinghoffer, Young, and Xue (2018) found that when employees had one-on-ones with their manager, there were positive results: employees had a greater social network, higher quality meetings, and better collaboration than those who did not have a one-on-one. Other research found that manager support was associated with role clarity (Ellis, Nifadkar, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2017).

Building social connections between coworkers right away is an important contributor to an employee's later success and retention within their organization. Increasing proximity, familiarity, and similarity between individuals, as well as encouraging self-disclosure, improves the chances of people becom-

ing friends and connecting (Friedman, 2014). Organizations should plan events that highlight common interests, such as sports, or going to a museum, which give employees an opportunity to bond over their shared interest. These activities also give employees a chance to share information (self-disclosure), which leads to bonding with others. Naturally, activities also increase both the similarity and familiarity between employees. Events where employees are divided into groups, such as a trivia game with randomly assigned teams, may have more success as employees are encouraged to mingle with new people. In addition, it is important to highlight an employee's interests during introductions so that employees can bond over similar interests. To help facilitate this, you might even consider asking new hires to complete a hobbies survey to gain more insight into their background. If possible, a new employee's first project should be something collaborative, as this can help them gain connections with others (Friedman, 2014).

Having a buddy or mentor to help the new employee onboard is also an effective tactic to increase social connection (Balali, Steinmacher, Annamalai, Sarma, & Gerosa, 2018). Receiving an internal "partner" can help the new employee adapt to the culture of the organization and also better understand their role. However, according to Balali et al. (2018), when assisting newcomers, mentors may also encounter barriers that interfere with their effectiveness. When researchers interviewed both newcomers and mentors to identify issues in the onboarding process, one issue mentioned by a mentor was, "Not having a formal procedure for introducing the community," which would be imperative based on the research on friendships and social network at work. Both the mentor and mentee had difficulties knowing their responsibilities, and that the extent of the mentor's interpersonal skills affected the onboarding process. In addition, mentors specified a variety of issues with coaching new employees – such as "adjusting interaction style to different mentees' personality," or "difficulty to keep the mentees engaged," (Balali et al., 2018, p. 691). Thus, it seems that in theory, having a buddy or mentor is a good idea, but it is important to ensure a good match, and that the mentor has all the information they need to help the newcomer (e.g., how to introduce them to others, what the new hire should be doing, etc.)

ROLE CLARITY & SELF-EFFICACY

Although building social networks affects all three factors contributing to successful onboarding, below are other ways to address role clarity and self-efficacy. Some questions to ask yourself is:

Does the newcomer know what they should be doing and what is expected of them? (role clarity) (Reuteler, 2017).

- When onboarding employees, share company cultural norms with employees as soon as possible. This helps with role clarity.
- Although training is important for new employees, assign a project to employees in their first week (Gallo, 2010). This not only gives employees an idea of what they will be working on but can also make them feel valued.

Do you have a process to ensure newcomers are receiving feedback and learning new skills (self-efficacy)? (Reuteler, 2017).

- Check in with new employees about how they are doing
- Ensure employees have the proper resources from day one (Klinghoffer, Young, & Xue, 2018). This can help them develop confidence and self-efficacy in their role.

To Sum Up:

1. Facilitate a new hire's adjustment to their position and organization by reducing uncertainty through role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance.
2. Social interaction is imperative to help an employee adapt. It will help with social acceptance, role clarity and self-efficacy.
 - Provide manager one-on-ones and social support
 - Increase proximity, familiarity, similarity and opportunities for self-disclosure between coworkers
 - Plan work events where employees are encouraged to meet new people
 - Have new hires complete a hobbies survey
 - Mentorship/Buddy Program
 - Ensure that the mentor is equipped to help the newcomer
3. Make sure the newcomer knows what is expected of them, (i.e. what their role is) and that they are given learning opportunities and feedback (self-efficacy).

CONCLUSION

Onboarding employees is an important process that can determine the outcome of the new hire. Will they leave? Will they be satisfied? Engaged? Employees need role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance in order to mitigate the uncertainty associated with starting a new job. Social connections – manager support, friendships, mentorships – have huge implications for making the onboarding process successful by helping employees gain role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance (Bauer et al., 2017).

References

- Balali, S., Steinmacher, I., Annamalai, U., Sarma, A., & Gerosa, M. A. (2018). Newcomers' barriers. . . is that all? An analysis of mentors' and newcomers' barriers in oss projects. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, 27(3-6), 679-714.
- Bauer, T. N., Bodner, T., Erdogan, B., Truxillo, D. M., & Tucker, J. S. (2007). Newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization: A meta-analytic review of antecedents, outcomes, and methods. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(3), 707-721.
- Ellis, A. M., Nifadkar, S. S., Bauer, T. N., & Erdogan, B. (2017). Your new hires won't succeed unless you onboard them properly. *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, 2-4.
- Klinghoffer, D., Young, C., & Xue, L. (2018). To retain new hires, make sure you meet with them in their first week. *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, 2-4.
- Korte, R., & Lin, S. (2013). Getting on board: Organizational socialization and the contribution of social capital. *Human Relations*, 66(3), 407-428.
- Maurer, Roy. (April 16, 2015). Onboarding key to retaining, engaging talent. SHRM. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/onboarding-key-retaining-engaging-talent.aspx>.
- Reuteler, Daniela (2017). Onboarding new employees: the 3 elements that make all the difference. ScienceforWork. Retrieved from <https://scienceforwork.com/blog/onboarding-new-employees/>.