



2020

Remote Employee Onboarding Report

Contents

Executive Summary	3
The Challenges	4
Getting newcomers up to speed	4
Reducing Turnover	5
The Opportunities	6
The Three Myths of Onboarding	7
Myth #1 The best newcomers can fend for themselves	7
Myth #2 Info-dumping allows newcomers to obtain what they need	8
Myth #3 A few weeks is enough for successful onboarding	8
The Four Pillars of an Effective Onboarding Program	10
Best Practices for Successful Onboarding	
View onboarding as a journey, not an event	10
Map the employee journey	11
Involve managers	12
Less is More	12
Use a relational approach	13
Be Agile	13
Measure what matters	14
Go Online	14
Make the first day special	14
Conclusion	15

About the Author: Tugrul Turkkan is the co-founder and principal product manager of Journey. Throughout his 20-year career, Tugrul has worked with some of the world's leading organizations such as Coca Cola, GE, Nivea, Vodafone, Boston Scientific, Medtronic, and Hitachi to link their business and human capital strategies.

About Journey: Journey is a Palo-Alto based start-up that focuses on new employee onboarding, experience, and learning. With Journey, companies can create carefully timed (and micro) learning experiences to jump-start new hire productivity and improve retention. For new employees, Journey delivers precise, personalized learning moments to their mobile phones when the newcomer needs them most. To learn more, visit www.journeyapp.com.

Executive Summary

The coronavirus pandemic has forced many organizations to tell people to work from home, including new employees just starting out. With work going completely virtual, onboarding new talent has become a greater challenge, for both employers and employees. In fact, companies struggle to onboard employees even before when times are good and relatively predictable. Research suggests that 20% of employee turnover is occurring within the first 45 days of employment.

The coronavirus has pushed HR leaders to reimagine new hire onboarding. A recent research states, “Despite the fact that budgets are being slashed and refactored in real-time, 78% are investing in more onboarding¹”.

Companies face two significant challenges in onboarding. The first challenge is getting new hires up to speed in a remote work environment. Reducing the time to proficiency of new hires is a top priority in fast-paced industries. The second challenge is keeping the new employees in the company long enough to justify the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training them. 90% percent of employees make their decision to stay at a company within the first six months. Yet, new employees often feel that the attention they receive during the pre-hire stages is abandoned once they

About Research

The research data were collected from 268 interviews with new employees, hr professionals, and sales managers. We also asked 42 new employees in 14 companies to answer weekly digital assessments and keep written diaries and describe both positive and negative onboarding experiences. We analysed the resulting 1,200 pages of data, identifying activities, needs, pains and gains that newcomers said important or meaningful.

are onboard.

Research shows that structured onboarding programs improve retention, productivity, and engagement. Companies with best-in-class programs are 1.6x more likely to have a lower cost per hire and 9% less likely to retain first-year employees.

Best onboarding programs provide a fixed sequence of clearly defined and carefully timed experiences for new employees using automation and digital technologies. This report will explain why effective onboarding is so vital and how HR managers can build employee experiences and set KPIs to maximize the impact of onboarding.

The Challenges

Onboarding is the process of helping new hires learn about new jobs, roles, and adapt to the culture of the workplace quickly and smoothly. The faster new hires adjusted to their jobs, the faster they will be able to contribute to the company. Viewing onboarding as an integrating experience, and not a checklist is crucial for achieving outcomes.

The challenges of onboarding new hires are as follows.

Getting newcomers up to speed

The first challenge with new hires is getting them up to speed. When surveyed, companies perceive reducing time to proficiency as one of the top three influencers of onboarding efforts². Initially, newcomers are typically a net drain on productivity, drawing a salary, incurring training expenses, and consuming co-workers' time without providing much in return. Laszlo

Bock, the ex-VP HR of Google, highlights this challenge in his book³, “Imagine Ivan, a salesperson who earns \$60,000 per year. Ivan costs \$5,000 every month until he starts selling, and even once he’s selling it takes time until his productivity exceeds his cost. He also consumes training resources and the time of the people around him whom he’s pestering for advice.”

Consider the following chart below. Bersin by Deloitte’s study indicates that initially, most employees are a “cost” to the organization and that over time, with the right talent practices, they become more valuable⁴.



Jump-starting the productivity of new hires who have never been to your office is a challenging task. Software engineers, for instance, have a lot to learn and digest, including knowledge requirements, apps and tools to use, key contacts to work with, tribal knowl-

FIGURE 1

Cost to Value of an Employee

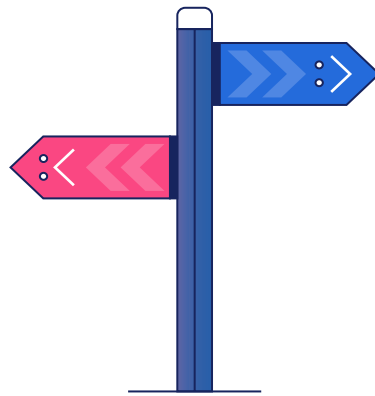


Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2013

edge, HR policies, and company culture. It is a demanding role that requires new engineers to absorb a lot of knowledge and know-how.

When you type “onboarding” in Blind, a website where professionals ask questions and share advice about companies and careers, there are more than 500 entry titles such as “Google Onboarding - confused?”, “Amazon virtual onboarding?”, “Facebook Onboarding delayed?” after the pandemic.

The learning curve is costly. The Mellon Financial Corporation discovered that companies lose between 1% and 2.5% of total revenues due to lost productivity related to getting new hires up to speed and trained⁵. It is HR and L&D functions’ critical job is to move newcomers up this curve as rapidly and effectively as possible.



Reducing Turnover

The second challenge is keeping newcomers in the company long enough to justify the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training them. The tech sector, for instance, has the highest turnover rate at 13.2% out of every single business sector, according to a turnover report from

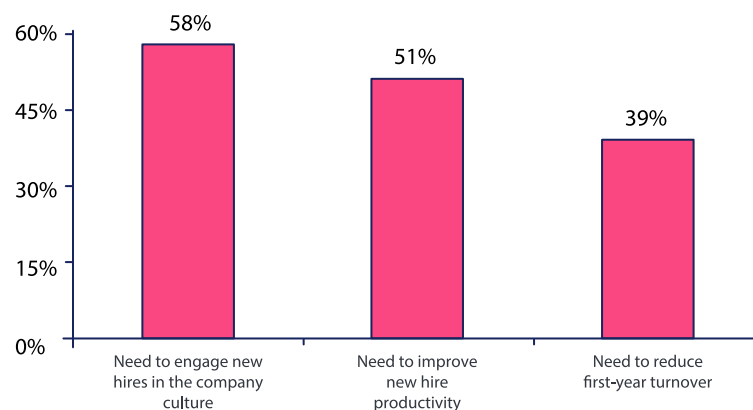
LinkedIn. Considering it takes 52 days on average to fill vacancies (Bersin), companies are spending billions to not only recruit hard-to-find new talent but to then replace that same talent when they leave in one to two years. Not to mention the impact on project timelines and your bottom line when your best software engineers suddenly put in their two weeks notice in the middle of a product launch.

Ineffective onboarding is a major reason why companies lose most of their new hires within the first 120 days. Leading onboarding expert Dr. Tauer states, “The ultimate failure of onboarding is the withdrawal of potentially good employees...

FIGURE 2

Biggest Influencers of Onboarding Efforts

■ All Companies, n=192



Source: Aberdeen Group, 2014

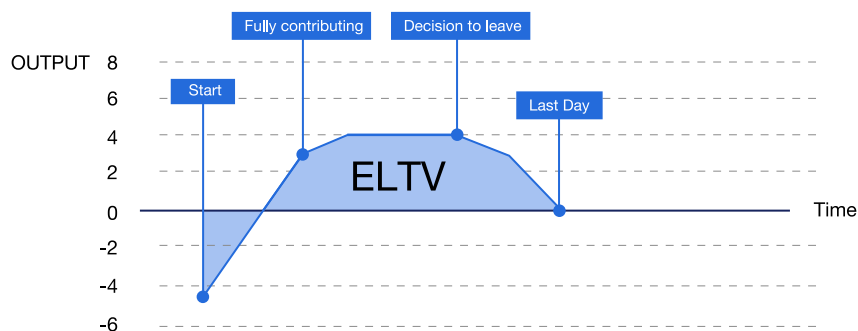
Losing employees because they are confused, feel alienated, or lack confidence indicates poor onboarding.”

After the pandemic, making remote new hires feel like they are part of the team becomes a big challenge. It can be overwhelming and isolating to start a job in a remote environment. Instead of chatting with new coworkers in the office, they’re likely working from their homes in a more isolated space. It is harder for remote team members to establish a connection

FIGURE 3

Employee Lifetime Value

Note: the numbers on the yaxis represent relative output



Source: Josebachvili, How to understand the ROI of investing in People, 2017

with the new hire. One new hire from a big five technology company noted, “When I started my job, it was only one-hour orientation, and that’s all, no check-in with my manager, no introductions

with my teammates. I know their names, but I can not recognize them if ever I meet them somewhere. Nobody opens cameras in weekly sprint meetings. I felt isolated and lonely.”

Various research indicates that good onboarding leads to good retention rates. At Corning Glass Works, new employees who attended a structured program were 69% more likely to remain at the company for up to 3 years⁶.

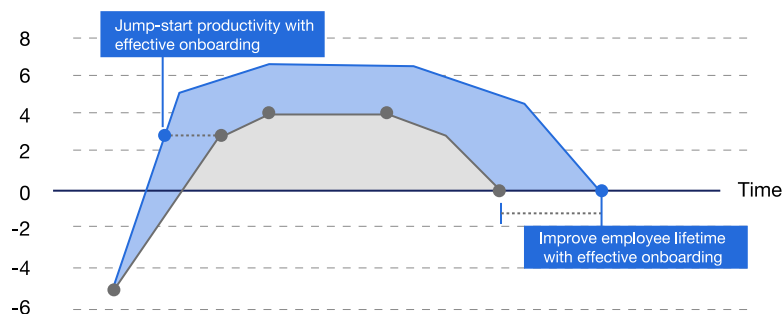
The Opportunities

An upgraded version of Bersin by Deloitte’s idea chart can be used to under-

FIGURE 4

ROI of Investing in Onboarding Program

Note: the numbers on the yaxis represent relative output



Source: Adapted from “Josebachvili, How to understand the ROI of investing in People, 2017”

stand the ROI of investing in onboarding programs⁷.

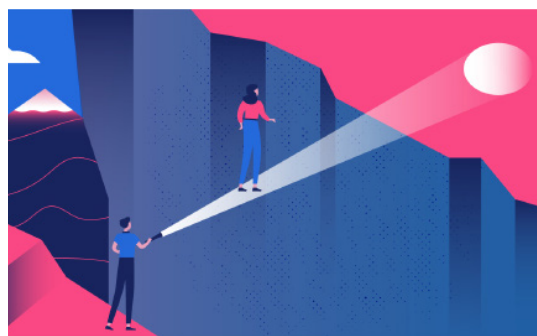
Consider the graph (see figure 3, previous page) which presents the employee lifetime value of an employee in terms of the employee lifecycle. The X-axis represents time, spanning from the start date to the day the employee leaves, and the Y-axis represents employee output. Employee Lifetime Value represents the total net value over time that an employee brings to an organization.

A new hire's output is negative at the beginning consuming resources from the recruiting, hiring team, and manager. New employees ramp up to full productivity at some point. Then employees start considering other employment options due to various reasons, including bad onboarding. Generally, after this point, productivity starts to decrease. Finally, employees leave.

The outcome of an effective onboarding program is shown in the next chart (see figure 4): reducing the time to reach full productivity and extending the lifetime of the employee.

The Three Myths of Onboarding

The pervasive belief of organizations is that newcomers have the background, skills, and cognitive ability to comprehend and internalize the vast information as needed quickly to perform well. Perception and reality are two different things.

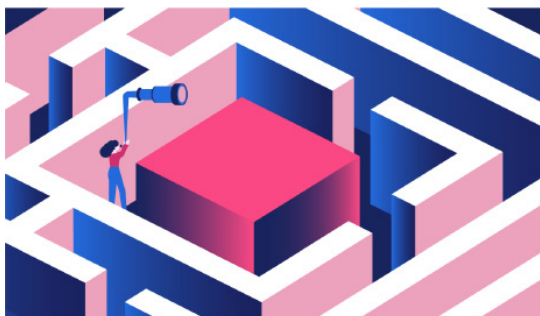


Myth #1 The best newcomers can fend for themselves

Many managers think onboarding is easy. Simply hire the right people, and they will learn what they need, find what they seek, on their own. As one manager noted, “Our leadership thinks... experienced hires damn well better be able to hit the ground running and get connected themselves⁸.”

Newcomers often feel an intense pressure to prove themselves quickly, and they fear that asking questions might reveal their ignorance, and engaging in exploratory conversations with colleagues might distract them from producing results right away⁹. Studies also show that remote workers have limited contact with managers or those higher up in the organizations. Getting adequate time and attention from supervisors is a common challenge for new remote workers. This reluctance hinders onboarding. The newcomers might end up reinventing the wheel, pursuing ideas and approaches that have already been successful at the organization (managing a typical customer challenge, for example).

To overcome that, managers should schedule frequent 1-on-1's and feedback sessions for the first 90 days and continually encourage new hires to ask questions while also reminding co-workers to expect and respond to such requests on a timely basis.



Myth #2 Info-dumping allows newcomers to obtain what they need

New hires typically spend their first days poring over manuals and other documents or browsing through scores of intranet pages. Another common approach is to send newcomers to in-class training or orientation sessions with myriad presentations and introductions to dozens of co-workers at once. At a silicon valley Fortune 500 tech company, new engineers connect with and listen to 45-minute presentations from eight to ten functions on newcomer's first day. One interviewer told, she can "hardly remember neither the information presented nor the names of the people introduced after just one week."

Relying too much on info-dumping events and sources have unintended consequences. Newcomers cannot typically prioritize the information they encounter. So they might see everything as important, exhausting themselves trying to comprehend every manual, report, and database. And those who feel overwhelmed might give up learning altogether.¹⁰

Companies should focus on the *sine qua non*-factors on an onboarding program rather than dumping way too much information into new hires' laps. One sales director noted, "An onboarding program should be based on Pareto principle. The

program should focus on the few things that make the biggest impact. I'd rather pick only the absolutely necessary things such as USPs (unique selling propositions), biggest communication failures, FAQs, where to find a piece of information, and key contacts in the company. That's it."

Repetitions are the key to internalizing content and changing habits. Filtering and focusing on three to four topics also give a chance to design spaced repetition. For example, consider a hypothetical case where a new sales rep. watches a short video on USPs on day 1, complete a quiz on day 4, role play and get feedback on day 6, receive a reminder or a nudge on day 15. The new hire will most probably be able to perform much better while selling software products. As Laszlo Bock, the ex-VP HR of Google, states in his book¹¹, "It's a better investment to deliver less content and have people retain it than it is to deliver more hours of 'learning' that is quickly forgotten."



Myth #3 A few weeks is enough for successful onboarding

The comprehensiveness of onboarding programs varies across companies. It ranges from structured and systematic (formal onboarding) to the "sink and swim" strategy (informal onboarding) in

which it is up to the newcomer to figure out what is expected. According to Aberdeen Group's research, only 32% of companies currently have a formal onboarding process in place, and most of these formal onboarding programs last a few weeks. Only 37% of companies extend their programs beyond the first month¹². Aberdeen's study indicates, "Short onboarding programs often make it harder for employees to build out the skillset and comprehension necessary to be successful in their jobs." Shorter programs can also lead to lower retention. The report indicates that companies with one-month or shorter onboarding programs are 9% less likely to retain first-year employees as compared to businesses whose employees' onboarding is a month or more.

According to Dr. Tauer, "best in class" companies provide a carefully timed and fixed sequence of activities for new employees to support their journeys in their new roles. For example, L'Oreal developed a cultural integration program called "L'Oreal Fit." The onboarding program takes two-years and has six-parts. It includes training and roundtable discussions, meeting with key insiders, on-the-job learning supported by line management, individual mentoring and HR support, site visits, and shadowing programs¹³. L'Oreal has also developed a mobile app (the Fit Culture App) that helps newcomers in the flow of work throughout their journeys. The onboarding app reaches up to 10,000 newly hired staff per year and is available in 11 languages

IBM's assimilation process is another good example. The program consists of three steps: affirming, beginning, and connecting. IBM developed clear timelines for each level.

- **Affirming** begins before a new employee's start date. It includes welcoming the new employee, preparing a workstation, and assigning a coach.
- **Beginning** occurs during the newcomer's first 30 days. During this crucial first month, strict rules are in place to guarantee the newcomer is supported well by the organization. Managers clarify roles and responsibilities, encourage the newcomer, and schedule "check-in" times to be sure that new hire is making progress.
- **Connecting** occurs during the employee's first year on the job. After two months, a coach checks in to make sure things are on track. Building a social network is a priority. Between four to six months, the focus turns to new employee's achievements and comprehending IBM's way of getting things done. A coach for each new hire is also available during the first-year journey¹⁴.

Kellogg is one of the "best in class" companies in onboarding. The company uses new hire onboarding training, new manager assimilations, employee resource groups, and a 30-60-90 day checklist. Furthermore, Kellogg launched an onboarding track record tool to analyze potential strengths and weaknesses of past onboarding activities. The tool helps the company to pinpoint areas for improvement of the onboarding program¹⁵.

As seen in these best practices, viewing onboarding as a long-term process (a journey) is essential. Aberdeen's research states, "while only 26% of organizations link onboarding and learning initiatives together, top-performing businesses link learning with onboarding most effectively."¹⁶

FIGURE 5

Three Levels of Onboarding Strategies

Onboarding Strategy Level	Compliance	Clarification	Culture	Connection
1 Passive	YES	SOME	LITTLE/ NONE	LITTLE/ NONE
2 High Potential	YES	YES	SOME	SOME
3 Proactive	YES	YES	YES	YES

Source: Bauer, Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success, 2010

The Four Pillars of an Effective Onboarding Program

Dr. Talya N. Bauer called the building blocks of successful onboarding the Four C’s:

- 1. **Compliance** is the lowest level. It is about informing employees about benefits as well as legal and policy-related rules and regulations.
- 2. **Clarification** is about role clarification. It includes ensuring that employees understand their new jobs’ expectations and goals.
- 3. **Culture** is about getting new hires up to speed on the values, norms, and guiding assumptions that define acceptable behavior in the organization -both formal and informal.
- 4. **Connection** refers to assisting employees in connecting with colleagues, and establishing—or joining—the informal work networks they need to be successful.

Concerning these pillars, companies are categorized into three groups. Studies indicate only one in five companies (best in class, Level 3) address all these four blocks effectively¹⁷. If your firm likely to view onboarding as a checklist of tasks to be completed, you are in the Level 1 onboarding stage. Studies show that most of

the employee onboarding programs were related to Level 1 - passive onboarding¹⁸. Paperwork and rules were covered, but little else is systematically addressed.

Best Practices for Successful Onboarding

View onboarding as a journey, not an event

Top-performing businesses link onboarding and learning initiatives together. Short onboarding programs often make it harder for employees to build out the skill sets and comprehension levels necessary to be successful in their jobs. “Neurological research has proved that we don’t learn well through ‘binge education’ like a course. We learn by being exposed to new skills and ideas over time, with spacing and questioning in between. Research shows that when we repeat information well, with timed intervals between, and we ask people questions (to force our brains to “retrieve” information), we actually create new learning pathways, just the same way we learn certain ‘on the job skills’ through practice, repetition, and continuous questioning about why something didn’t work.”¹⁹

New tech professionals have a lot to learn in their first days and months. The goal should be to spread short bursts of learning over time, which prevents cognitive overload and improves memory. A well-crafted onboarding program makes the learning journey a lot easier for new employees and everyone working with them. Ensure that onboarding is a journey rather than a one-off event. That is the difference between orientation and onboarding.

Map the employee journey

As stated in this report, one of the biggest problems of onboarding programs is that companies provide too much information at the beginning, but offer little guidance on the journey.



- Start by picking a specific persona (software engineer, for example). Different roles require different journeys.

Conduct interviews with a dozen new employees to quickly determine the challenges new employees are facing. Visualize a new hire's feelings, pain points, immediate needs over the course of 120 days.

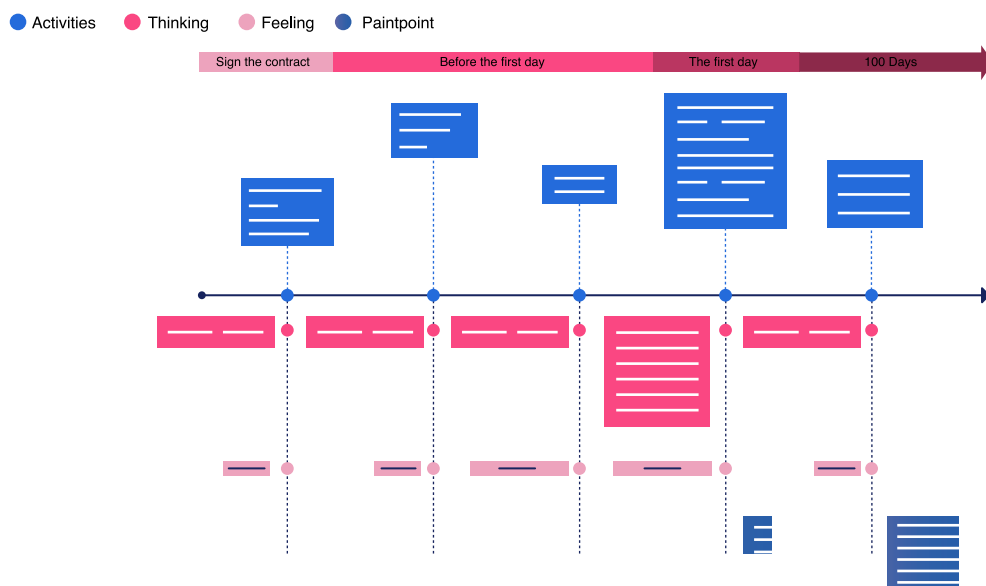
- Review the data and pick the essential insights (frustrations that are frequently addressed, for example)
- Map the journey from signing the contract to the 120 days.
- With these pain points, generate lots of ideas. Create solutions to eliminate, fix, or help solve newcomer's challenges.
- Create the onboarding journey as a series of clearly defined activities and carefully timed learning experiences.

Journey mapping is a popular design tool used to gain insight into how a user experiences a service, process, or product, intending to make informed improvements to deliver a better experience for future users. It is a visual representation of every experience the customers have with the brand. It helps to tell the story of a customer's experience with the brand from first engagement and into hopefully a long-term relationship. Best in class companies start using journey mapping to improve the onboarding experience of new employees²⁰.

Here is how you can use this technique to map the first 120 days of a new hire.

FIGURE 6

Journey Map of a New Hire



You can automate the process by using an onboarding platform like Journey.

Involve managers

“People leave managers, not companies,” noted an hr business partner. Getting adequate time and attention from supervisors was a common challenge for tech professionals. Various studies indicate the importance of line managers for successful onboarding.

For example, Google uses an electronic checklist to remind managers to discuss roles and responsibilities with new hires²¹. Rather than burdening busy managers with long documents or e-learning, Google sent a just-in-time reminder checklist. The goal is to prompt managers about the five small tasks that have proven to have the highest impact on the productivity of their new hire:

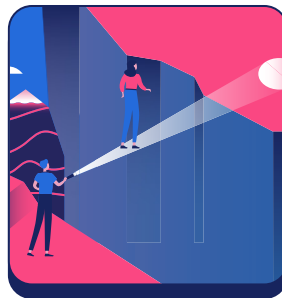
1. Have a role and responsibilities discussion.
2. Match your new hire with a peer buddy.
3. Help your new hire build a social network.
4. Set up onboarding check-ins once a month for your new hire’s first six months.
5. Encourage open dialogue

Google found that the newcomers whose managers followed this checklist became effective in their roles 25% faster than other employees.

Another crucial role of managers is giving assignments. A study showed that the challenge and success of a newcomer’s first assignment is strongly correlat-

ed with the individual’s performance and promotion²². Furthermore, the first assignment should require newcomers to build relationships with a wide variety of people to get their work done. Newcomers with stand-alone projects tended to remain isolated and failed to build relationships they needed to succeed in the long term. They also typically less connected to the social fabric of the organization, less satisfied with their progress in “fitting in” and were consequently more likely to leave.²³

Managers can design the first project so that it can’t be completed without assistance from co-workers. They can also review progress on the first assignment by asking not only “What have you accomplished?” but also, “Who have you talked to?”²⁴



Less is More

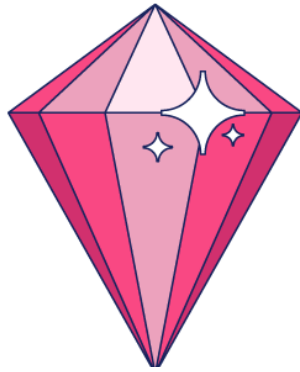
One big challenge of a new employee is feeling overwhelmed. New hires are expected to read long manuals, comprehend compliance documents, complete long e-learning, memorize the information presented in orientation program sessions with myriad presentations, know how to use various platforms, remember people’s names from rapid-fire co-worker introductions.

Experts suggest eating the elephant one piece at a time. Experts advise focusing on one or two critical things in each phase of the onboarding journey. Companies can also leave the secondary information as digital guides to be checked when needed.

The duration of the learning experience is also essential. A study by Bersin by Deloitte states that the typical employee devotes 24 minutes to training and development weekly²⁵. Learning designers need to cut down overwhelming details and fillers and deliver the core ideas and

associated information.

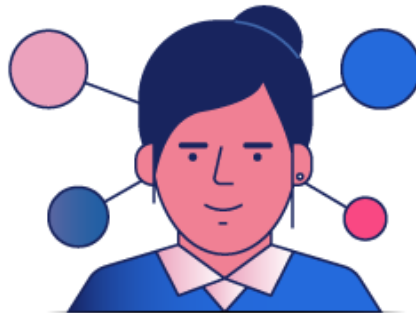
Ray Jimenes, the author of “3-Minute E-learning”, argues that 2-4 minutes is the ideal time for online learning²⁶. Connie Malamed, a learning experience design consultant, adds²⁷, “In a complex world, it’s easy to get overwhelmed by complex information as working memory (our mental workspace), has a limited capacity for processing information. If the demands placed on working memory, known as cognitive load, are too high, learners may give up in frustration or fail to comprehend. By reducing the extra mental effort required to learn new information, we can assure greater learner success.” There is an anecdote told of Chip and Dan Heath in their best-seller book, *Made to Stick*²⁸. “A successful lawyer once said, if you argue ten points, even if each point is really good, when the jurors get back to the jury room, they won’t remember any of those points.” As French writer Saint-Exupery famously said, “You have achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.” Thus, “less is more” in an onboarding program.



firm. Most of the remote new employees hardly meet any one other than their supervisors and team members. Studies indicate helping new employees to rapidly establish a broad network of relationships with co-workers and managers improve long term retention. One expert’s suggestion in the MIT Sloan Management Review is to include enough social time for the new hires to meet others during orientation days²⁹.

Be Agile

New product development methods such as design thinking and agile show companies that it is tough to achieve perfection without user experience and feedback. Launch fast, get feedback, and improve the onboarding experience. Three of four iterations are advised to strengthen an onboarding program.



Measure what matters

“If you can not measure it, you can not improve it.” Lord Calvin’s century-old famous quote highlights the importance of measuring the impact of onboarding practices. Companies must utilize rigorous and consistent methods of measurement to identify the effects of onboarding practices.

These are the most successful measures.

- Short-term retention. One Fortune 500 company sets a six-month turn-

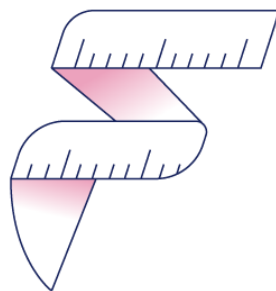
Use a relational approach

The early development of relationships with a variety of co-workers made newcomers feel more connected to the organization, which in turn drove their satisfaction and their commitment to the

over rate as a KPI for onboarding. Top performing companies measure and track six or one-year turnover rates.



- Time to proficiency. Reducing the length of time it takes for a new hire to reach full productivity according to the company's standards is a top onboarding goal of a company. The onboarding experience of a new hire is one of the reasons for employee turnover. Still, it is the first reason if the newcomer rapidly reaches to full productivity or not. It is also more difficult to quantify directly comparing to retention. Some approaches are to use the perceived time to proficiency by analyzing the data gathered through survey questionnaires, or 360-degree feedback.



- NPS. Employee feedback is by far the most predominant method for the measurement of onboarding effectiveness. NPS, one of the simplest and most effective metrics of user feedback, can be used to track the overall experience. One company measures eNPS throughout the first 120 days and analyzes the different phases through a dashboard.



Go Online

As stated throughout this report, top-performing companies use software solutions for consistency and automation in onboarding. 68% of level 3 (best-in-class) organizations have onboarding systems

that are partially or fully online³⁰. Companies use technology to deliver microlearning experiences, remind important tasks, automate basic forms, track progress, and help hr staff and supervisors monitor new employees to see when they may need additional support. For example, after mapping the first 120 days of field employees, Vodafone, a British telecom company, delivers timely microlearning to the newcomers. These daily doses of learning help newcomers to learn and practice key aspects of their job one bite at a time.

Make the first day special

The first impression lasts. The most important day on the job for a new employee is the first day. Research shows that a trajectory a new hire's success is set as early as the first two weeks³¹. Many hourly workers do not come back if the first day is disappointing.

Greeting a new employee warmly, taking her or him to lunch, leaving a personal handwritten note to his or her desk or locker, providing a functional workstation on Day 1 matter.

Conclusion

First impressions last. Onboarding is a vital part of talent management strategy in today's remote, fast-paced, high-turnover, human-centric business environment. A great onboarding program gets new hires up to speed quickly and keeps them in the company

long enough to justify the costs of recruiting, hiring, orienting, and training them. One or two days of training is not enough time for most employees to feel comfortable with their work expectations. In the age of “employee experience,” merely writing down a formal plan will not also help new employees succeed. Effective onboarding practices mentioned in this report will result in a faster learning curve for new hires and a more productive and engaged workforce.



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