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Assessment of effectiveness of onboarding process of foreigners in Poland

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Abstract

This study examines the onboarding of foreign employees in Poland, by focusing on three important factors which are interactivity, proactivity, and community. Using a survey and conducting interviews, an assessment was done to find out how well companies integrate their newcomers. The results of this research show that while proactivity (training and role clarity) is well-executed, community (social integration) remains a challenge, especially for women. Longer onboarding durations improve job preparedness. The research highlights the need for stronger socialization efforts to enhance inclusion and retention. Organizations should invest more into refining their onboarding strategies to create a more supportive and engaging work environment for foreign employees.

Keywords: Onboarding; organizational socialization; foreign employees; interactivity; proactivity; community

Introduction

As a race, we are continuously evolving and growing. Companies and industries are growing at exponential rates. Millions of employees are being hired every day. As industries continue to grow, so should many important factors such as quality of work, business culture, unity and empathy for one another with an end goal of improving factors such as employee retention and satisfaction. Ever since the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic subdued, there has been a surge in the number of foreigners in Poland in the education field and consequently, the job market. With an influx of individuals joining the workforce, it is important to make sure they are well-trained and adjusted to the company that they have joined. That is where onboarding plays a major role. It is a crucial factor for anyone joining a new company as this is a period of transition from one role to another or one company to another or even after an individual has completed their studies and is moving into the job market for the first time, as it can be quite stressful and often demanding (5, p.18). This is due to the fact that every company has a different set of policies and principles that are constantly evolving, and their functioning can be quite different too.

This study is aimed at investigating and understanding the effectiveness of onboarding of foreigners in Poland. The sole purpose of an effective onboarding process is to help these new employees build a solid foundation within the company and this can be done in a multitude of

ways such as providing concrete training, building relationships and alignment of personal goals with that of the company's. The faster a new employee feels comfortable in their new work environment and is ready for their job, the faster they will be able to contribute to the success of the company's mission and vision. A well-structured onboarding process aims to ease the transition of the employees through methods of incorporating them into their organization and helping them get a well-versed understanding of the functioning of the respective company they work for. In addition to this, a good onboarding system also helps boost retention of employees within the company, which is proving to be rather difficult in the latest trends with almost 3 different generations currently out in the job market. Each of these generations have their own set of principles, behaviours, habits, skills and work ethics. It is indeed a tedious task to manage the differences of these generations. Therefore, an effective process which takes into account these differences is much needed. In addition, the effectiveness of the recruitment process can be further improved by the calculated and systematic use of onboarding. This is quite an interesting topic to delve into as there is a lack of research in this area of the business industry when it comes to foreigners in Poland.

1. Concept and importance of onboarding

Onboarding or in other words, organization socialization is a concept that was not as popular but is slowly gaining popularity. While there are deficits in certain areas of the whole process through proper study and a well-structured approach, positive results can be obtained. It is a mechanism through which employees gain all the necessary skills, knowledge, culture and behaviours displayed at their organization to ultimately become effective members. Organisations that lack a well-structured approach and system have to face significant issues such as high employee turnover rates, negative company culture, low efficiency of the workers and cooperative abilities. When a company is more active and effective in onboarding new employees, they enjoy a growth revenue rate as great as 2.5 times and are 1.9 times better than the companies that are less active and effective in terms of onboarding new employees (8, p.2). In addition to this, companies that demonstrated proficiency in 22 key HR areas experienced revenue growth that was up to 3.5 times higher and profit margins that were 2.1 times higher than those of less capable companies as per an investigation conducted by Strack et al (6, p.7). Companies have yet to realize and understand the significance of how human beings are their biggest asset and need to be protected. This can be clearly revealed in the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Crook et al. which showed that human capital resources are significantly

proportionate to firm performance (4). Research has put forward that factors such as role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance are important to consider when a newcomer is hired (3, p.4). In addition to all the above-mentioned factors, employees need to acclimatize themselves to the working conditions of their company and get a grip on the workings of the organization. If executed poorly, companies can face dire consequences. Just like with everything that exists in nature, the perfect onboarding system does not exist as each individual varies from one another and in a perfect sense would require their own personalized onboarding system. Considering the fact that there exists a lot of factors and variables involved within the process, it is highly complicated to achieve a perfect result, but through implementation of various methods, it is possible to improve on the current situation.

2. Techniques used in onboarding

The concept of onboarding did not start out as it is currently spoken about, rather it was mostly spoken about as socialization within the workplace. Despite there being a fair amount of research in this field, we have yet to find a suitable solution to tackle the issue. We need to constantly keep in mind of the innumerable variables such as people involved, position of job, type of industry, size of industry, values possessed and expressed by the company and many more that exist and influence this equation. A study in 1979 was conducted by Van Maanen and Schein which was named as the Model of Socialization Tactics (1). This study focused on linking specific socialization variables and the resulting behavioural responses. Van Maanen and Schein brought into picture 6 bipolar tactics that could be used by companies and organizations to structure and categorise the various socialization experiences of newcomers. The 6 bipolar tactics were collective vs individual, formal vs informal, sequential vs random, fixed vs variable, serial vs disjunctive and investiture vs divestiture. Later in 1986, Gareth R. Jones drew inspiration from Van Maanen and Schein's study and suggested that the 6 bipolar tactics formed a particular structure which he referred to as institutionalized socialization. Jones added that the 6 tactics provided information that reduced the uncertainty and anxiety amongst early work experiences and that they also support newcomers to passively accept pre-established roles within an organization. On the contrary, these 6 tactics also encourage these new comers to challenge these pre-established roles and construct their own approaches to their roles. Jones later referred to it as "individualised socialization"

Later in 1987, with support from the URT or in other words the Uncertainty Reduction Theory it was observed that newcomers have to face and deal with high levels of uncertainty

when they are first introduced to an organization (2) They are encouraged to reduce this uncertainty so that they work in a more calculated, clear and manageable environment. This can be done in array of methods. One being, passing and sharing of information via communication channels and interacting socially with superiors and peers. Once this level of uncertainty drops to a certain percentage, the newcomers attain higher level of satisfaction with their jobs and as a result are more likely to stay within the company. Since then, the Uncertainty Reduction Theory has played a major role in a newcomer's organizational socialization and has been the foundation stone for many further studies.

3. Conceptual model to assess onboarding

The concept of onboarding or organizational socialization is one that is varied throughout the world as there are multiple factors that are to be taken into account. Factors such as culture, experience, age, gender and most importantly budget of the employer. A study was conducted by K. Wąsek, P. Zbierowski in 2022 (7) which aimed to get a deeper understanding of the how the whole onboarding process could be improved. They interviewed seasoned HR professionals and gained insight on the process. The *fruit* of this study was the pillars of onboarding, a proposed research tool that could help assess the 3 pillars which were interactivity, proactivity and finally community. The ultimate goal of this tool was to seamlessly integrate these pillars into the onboarding process by means of comprehensive feedback mechanisms, program tailoring and the inculcation of various interactive tools.

From the proposed concept of pillars, The proposed concept of the three pillars have been described in detail below:

1. Interactivity - It focuses on aspects concerned with feedback that is given and taken, tools to help an employee perform their respective duties, sources for training, and relationships during the onboarding process. When we focus on this conceptual pillar, we will be able to notice an increase in factors such as ability to freely express ideas, advice and even exchanging of feedback etc. all which ultimately prevent the employee from feeling lost or confused when joining the new company/organization.
2. Proactivity - It focuses on aspects that concern the proactive actions and measures that are to be taken by the employer which will ultimately lead to the full effectiveness of the employee in their respective professional environments. By focusing on the proactivity pillar, we will see a positive impact on employee's ability to work efficiently and perform their tasks confidently.

3. Community - It focuses on issues concerning ability to blend with fellow coworkers and support provided for the new employees during their implementation period, the roles of supervisors and support personnel with regards to training or communicating with the new hires, and the frequency of communication between involved parties and new employees. When community becomes the point of focus, we see a positive influence on the new hire within a community by gaining trust, building rapport and fostering valuable relations within the organization.

The knowledge of these pillars will guide us to collectively contribute to a comprehensive and effective onboarding experience, with a goal of ensuring that new employees are well-equipped, engaged, and connected within the organizational culture from the outset.

4. Methodology

The first step for the creation of this paper was in creating a comprehensive survey. The survey consisted of multiple sets of questions. First being, general questions which were aimed to get a rudimentary idea of the people we were surveying with questions such as “For long did the onboarding last?”, “How difficult was it to adapt to the company?”, “Were you getting adequate amount of rest during the onboarding period?” etc. Secondly, we had interactivity which was aimed to understand the feedback mechanism within the various organizations of the participants with the help of questions such as, “How often were you asked to provide feedback?”, “How often were your opinions and ideas taken into consideration?” etc. Third, we had proactivity which was aimed to understand factors concerning clarity of the job role and providing the newcomers with all necessary information with regards to their position with questions such as, “How aware are you of your role and responsibilities in the workplace?”, “When assigned with a task, how confident are you to deal with it?”, “How engaging was the onboarding process?” etc. Finally, we had community which was aimed at understanding how the newcomers were being socially integrated and how supportive and inviting of an environment they were placed in with questions such as, “If faced with an obstacle, how open/comfortable do you feel in asking your colleagues for help?”, “At what point did you feel incorporated into the society/team of where you work?”, “How often does your company organize parties/social gatherings and how often are you willing to participate in these events?”, “If you were provided with a *buddy* during the onboarding process, how supportive were they?” etc. A large majority of the questions that were asked, required the responders to rate the particular criteria in the ordinal scale between 1 to 5. The rest of the questions gave them the

option to briefly describe their experiences with a short sentence. In order to gain valuable information for assessing the rating of each of the pillars, the answer to the question from a given pillar was compared with the rating of the entire pillar. We used the following formula:-

$$OPA_{ia} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^n x_{ja}}{n}$$

Where:

OPA_i – Overall Pillar Assessment of pillar i by person a

j – a number of a given analytical question

n – number of questions assigned to a given pillar

x_j – assessment of question j by person a

Once the survey questions were finalized and made open to the public, it was forwarded to the foreigners currently working in Poland. In addition to this, couple of interviews were also conducted face to face with individuals to gain a preconceived notion and understanding of their own individual experiences with the onboarding practices and trends being followed in their company. A total of 31 responses were collected from the survey by respondents coming from various parts of the world, with ages ranging from 20 to 38 and varying years of experience in the Polish job market. At the end of the survey and interviews, feedback was asked for and provided by all respondents regarding factors that could improve the process on a whole. After the survey was closed, all the results and data was collected on MS Excel and assessed by different factors. A combination of various statistical methods was used to assess the data collected. Firstly, the ratings of various factors were compared by using their averages. Factors such as general rating of each of the pillars, overall rating of the process etc. Secondly, the t-test was used to calculate how statistically significant the various factors were when compared to one another. With the help of the t-test, we compared significance of factors such as the general rating of the community pillar between male and female respondents, duration of onboarding with respect to the each of the pillars and duration of onboarding with respect to engagement. The aggregate values for each of the pillars was obtained by taking the ratings of all the participants for each of the questions they answered with regards to the concerning pillars and divided it by the total number of participants.

5. Findings and result

After interviewing a few of the respondents, the general opinion was mostly positive with feedback such as, “We wished for more role specific training rather than general training”.

Upon further assessment of the data collected, the average general rating of the onboarding process as a whole was ~3.71 (1 – bad, 5 – excellent). This rating gives us a clear image that despite decades of research in the field of organizational socialization, we still have far to go in terms of optimizing and improving the process. Companies have a lot *on their plate* to study and improve upon the current trends.

When the pillars were assessed, all attention was pointed towards the community pillar and its rating. While all the other pillars were rated reasonably well, the community pillar showed some form of inconsistency when compared to the other pillars. Another striking revelation was the difference in the rating of the community pillar between male and female respondents. The average rating of male respondents was ~3.90 and that for female respondents was ~3.47. These ratings put into perspective how unincorporated foreign women feel within an organization. Some of the other criterion that were taken into account was duration of onboarding, methods of onboarding, duration of onboarding with respect to engagement etc.

Table 1. General assessment of the 3 pillars of onboarding

<i>Variable</i>	General	Male	Female
Interactivity	~ 4.13	~ 4.18	~ 4.08
Proactivity	~ 4.23	~ 4.22	~ 4.16
Community	~ 3.70	~ 3.90	~ 3.47

Source: Own calculations.

(1 – bad, 5 – excellent)

When the pillars were individually assessed, it was observed that among the 3 pillars, the proactivity pillar was rated the highest while the community pillar ended up with the lowest rating. What can be taken from table 1. is that most companies in Poland are focused on training their newcomers to be proactive within the work place. Factors such as completion of work before the deadline, confidence in dealing with work related tasks, awareness of job role and its responsibilities etc. fall into the pillar of proactivity.

Table 2. Assessment of the three pillars of onboarding with respect to general rating

Variable	Assessment of onboarding process N = 31
0. Intercept	-0.726 (-0.559)
1. Interactivity	-0.094 (-0.411)
2. Proactivity	1.021 (3.17)***
3. Community	-0.141596 (0.543475)
r-sq	0.354
F-statistics	5.123

Source: Own calculations.

*statistically significant at a 10% level (1-tailed)

**statistically significant at a 5% level (1-tailed)

***statistically significant at a 1% level (1-tailed)

The table 2. puts into perspective the heavy influence that the proactivity pillar has on the whole onboarding process. Proactivity being statistically significant at the 1% level is well highlighted in the table above.

Furthermore, when the duration of onboarding was compared with each of the pillars of onboarding, the results put into perspective the fact that when it concerns the proactivity pillar, those who were onboarded for < 1 month rated the process low as compared to those who were onboarded for ≥ 1 month. This goes to show that when it comes to factors concerning job role and its responsibilities, being trained for longer has a positive impact on the rating of the onboarding process.

Table 3. Assessment of the pillars with respect to duration of onboarding.

Variable	< 1 month	≥1 month	t-test
1. Interactivity	~ 4.14	~ 4.11	(0.441)
2. Proactivity	~ 3.91	~ 4.34	(0.016)***
3. Community	~ 3.94	~ 3.73	(0.113)

Source: Own calculations.

*statistically significant at a 10% level (1-tailed)

**statistically significant at a 5% level (1-tailed)

***statistically significant at a 1% level (1-tailed)

Conclusions

This study was aimed to help develop an in-depth understanding of the onboarding process for foreign employees working in Poland. Through the methods of surveying and interviewing the various participants involved and with the help of the 3 pillars of onboarding (interactivity, proactivity and community) the research was conducted to assess the onboarding process. The findings showed that while companies in Poland are generally doing a good job of onboarding foreigners especially when it comes to the proactivity aspect, there are several areas that need to be investigated more deeply such as the community aspect and social integration of foreigners into their workplace and environment. The data that was collected and assessed highlighted that women in particular felt less incorporated into the company when compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, the duration of the onboarding process with respect to proactivity was found to have a significant impact, with those onboarded for a month or more rating the process more positively as compared to those onboarded for less than a month. This highlights the significance of providing a comprehensive onboarding experience that extends beyond the initial few weeks.

To improve upon the current situation, companies should focus on enhancing the community and social integration aspects which will ensure that the new hires feel welcomed and supported by the colleagues and work environment. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for exchanging feedback and ongoing training to improve the overall onboarding experience.

While no perfect and ideal onboarding system exists, companies should recognize the fact that every individual is unique in their own way. With the help of the 3 pillars of onboarding, companies can improve upon their existing methods through research and should strive to

implement more tailored onboarding practices which can work in favour of the company and the foreign employees to smoothly transition into their new roles and contribute to the success of the organization.

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