

A structured onboarding process goes a long way. Research by SHRM has shown that a structured onboarding promotes employee retention and performance¹. In this same study, it was said that the lack of a structured onboarding contributed to an employee's decision to leave within the first 6 months of joining. They went on to compile a range of approaches and mechanisms from a few organisations, which kept track of their onboarding progress and status.

In the below Q&A, we hear from senior HR professionals and their views on the importance of onboarding.

1) What does onboarding mean to you?

Onboarding means becoming familiar with, or gaining some fundamental understanding of the environment, the people and more broadly - ways of working in an organisation, with the aim of being productive and able to start contributing in the new role as soon as possible. It is more than providing knowledge or meeting different people, it is about navigating the internal landscape and helping the new hire to connect the dots.

- *Lim Mui Huang, CHRO, SNEC*

Onboarding would be the broad term for welcoming a new associate to the organisation as they embark on their new position in the company. Alternative HR terminology that is often utilised would be: induction, integration, orientation etc.. It really depends on the culture of the organization and the level of effort taken to ensure the success of his/her new hire, however one may define the process. I believe the most effective method for a company would be to focus on products, processes and people. This helps the new hire/staff understand the business and environment immediately, so that he/she will be able to adapt to his/her role and at same time, feel equipped to produce results from the company perspective. Actually, the purpose and objective of onboarding is for the mutual benefit of both company and individual.

- *Caren Tan, Senior HR Professional*

2) What are the important levers of onboarding?

Three important levers are: orientation to the immediate surroundings; meeting the supervisor and team members in the first few hours; and where to get information on how to get started (preferably intranet, handbook on company policies, forms, processes).

- *Darren Lim, HR Director, KFC*

In summary, it boils down to: people, time and engagement/support.

People - It is about getting the immediate supervisor, relevant stakeholders and colleagues to make the new hire feel welcome by providing the necessary support to ensure they have a smooth start. We stay in a job, not just because of the nature of the work or the money but colleagues can play a large role too. We get an instant feel of the culture or environment via the people within the organisation.

Time - Most of our onboarding seem to be about meetings with specific timeslots. While this is necessary, it neither should it be just be a one-off nor confined to just meetings. It is about making ourselves available and having some form of regular check-in with the new hire. I have observed that most new hires do not want to burden others i.e. take up too much of others' time especially if they feel that everyone around them are very busy. Most of these hires end up struggling alone with a steep learning curve.

Engagement/Support - New hires want to be successful in their new role and to be able to contribute as soon as they can. Apart from providing information and tools, engagement and support can foster motivation and accelerate the learning curve. I have observed inadequacy in areas of engagement and support often in environments where fire-fighting is prevalent. In such instances a listening ear, sharing experiences, or even allowing time/space for learning - often helps to the new hire overcome the challenges.

- *Lim Mui Huang, CHRO, SNEC*

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3) What are the areas that your organization has done well in onboarding? Can you share a personal experience of onboarding?

Our company has done well in assimilating the new hires with a strong getting-to-know-the-organization culture. Through the implementation of an onboarding program known as “Around GTA in 80 days”, which details the company’s vision and mission, introducing key stakeholders of the organization, business model and critical success factors of the organization.

I recall my own experience in which my superior kickstarted with a worldwide onboard message, followed by a 12 weeks schedule (with all logistics arrangements well set up) for me to meet with the key stakeholders.

- *Sharon Pock, Head of HR, APMEA, GTA*

In own experience at TBCT, the direct communication and opportunity to meet face-to-face with your manager can support a good onboarding process i.e. within the first 3-6 months. Also, assigning mandatory learning modules can help support orientation requirements. Additionally, having a 90 days outline plan driven from your immediate manager is important. In my experience, once there is good connection and the sooner both parties are comfortable, this can accelerate actions and onboarding becomes less of an issue.

- *Caren Tan, Senior HR Professional*

4) What would be the first thing you choose to revitalize the onboarding process?

Having a senior member welcome them on the first day and have a chat with the new hires.

- *Darren Lim, HR Director, KFC*

Supplying the immediate supervisor with a coaching/mentoring skill set. I believe they are key to making the onboarding a success i.e. in welcoming and engaging the new employee. Most of us are still very much focused on imparting of knowledge and tools within a structured orientation programme. However, it’s the softer aspects of checking in with the new employee, which is something I would want to promote.

- *Lim Mui Huang, CHRO, SNEC*

Based on today’s context, I would continue to make onboarding interesting, non-traditional and keep it lively. I would seek to use technology and at the same time, engage leaders so that they contribute and not strictly keep it under the HR purview or administration for actions/follow up for an organization. Managers themselves definitely need to be part of the onboarding to drive process, and integrate it with business needs. It is not so different to working on customer experience activities in the market but with your own employees.

- *Caren Tan, Senior HR Professional*

5) With globalization and operating in a “borderless world”, can online onboarding be incorporated into an organization?

Technology will definitely help in communicating the right message consistently. However, efficient and accurate communication in the onboarding process is not necessarily considered to be “best practice”. The human interaction, in some of the ways mentioned above, will ultimately be “the glue” for why a talent stays in a company.

- *Darren Lim, HR Director, KFC*

Online Onboarding is possible as we can leverage on technology to set up virtual meetings.

- *Sharon Pock, Head of HR, APMEA, GTA*

For some parts, which are more administrative in nature, yes. These can be carried out online e.g. completion of forms to enrol into employee benefits, gaining access into work systems - if it is purely for knowledge purposes. It is more efficient and should be made available whenever needed i.e. on the intranet.

Online onboarding can be made more interesting; not just looking at powerpoint presentation, electronic handbooks etc, it can be an interactive chat group for new hires, or self-enrolment into getting things ready for oneself e.g. emails sent at timely intervals to get them started on some necessary processes like signing up for access to work systems, to sign up for benefits card, etc.

However, some things still need that human touch. This is especially so in meeting the immediate supervisor. Where it is not possible to meet face-to-face, at least a first day greeting, either through a phone call, skype or even an email is equally effective. Socialisation programmes such as welcome lunch, welcome flowers, welcome souvenirs etc, introduction to colleagues, showaround, all these are still important human gestures.

- *Lim Mui Huang, CHRO, SNEC*

¹ <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/special-reports-and-expert-views/documents/onboarding-new-employees.pdf>



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