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NEW EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING PROGRAMS AND PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT: AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIALIZATION TACTICS

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The primary goals of new employee onboarding programs are to increase performance levels and create higher levels of fit within both the job and the organization. Employee fit has been shown to increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment while reducing turnover rates. As the United States recovers from the economic recession, higher performing employees are placing a greater emphasis on job satisfaction, and employers are seeking innovative techniques for increasing fit. Onboarding programs have emerged as one of the leading measures for driving employee fit, but there is a lack of research to support its effectiveness. This paper seeks to examine the effectiveness of onboarding programs at creating person-organization fit through organizational socialization tactics. By analyzing theoretical background and empirical research, I will evaluate the effectiveness of onboarding at driving cultural assimilation and reducing turnover rates.

DRIVING COMMITMENT

New employee orientation programs, or “Onboarding” programs, have recently captured the spotlight among employers across the United States. Onboarding programs are designed to help newly hired employees learn about the business including daily functions and job responsibilities, as well as the business’ culture and values. There are two central purposes for developing onboarding programs. First, onboarding programs help new employees understand their specific roles in the job and in the company. By knowing what to expect and what is expected of them, employees feel more comfortable in their positions and will be more productive in a shorter amount of time. Additionally, onboarding programs are designed to create better fit within the organization by aligning company culture with those of the newly hired employees. This process known as organizational socialization facilitates a greater commitment to the company by influencing a better person-organization fit among new hires (Cable & Parsons, 2001). It is important to note here that for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on person-organization fit, rather than person-job fit. While person-job fit is equally important to productivity and ultimately turnover, this paper will only focus on the person-organization fit obtained through socialization in the onboarding process.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

A Recovering Economy

Research has shown that employee fit within an organization has an impact on turnover rates. For the purposes of this paper, only statistics for voluntary employee turnover will be used for analysis, although it is important to note that involuntary turnover such as layoffs due to changing economic conditions are typically included in total turnover rates. Research has also shown that a large portion of employee turnover occurs within the first year of employment. Table 1 demonstrates the average turnover rates from 2009-2011 as recorded by the SHRM Human Capital Benchmarking Database (Jacobs, 2012).

TABLE 1
All-Industry Average Turnover Rates for 2009-2011 by Type

Year	Average Annual Turnover	Average Voluntary Turnover	Average Involuntary Turnover
2009	14%	8%	7%
2010	15%	13%	9%
2011	13%	9%	6%

Source: SHRM Human Capital Benchmarking Database (2010-2011, 2011-2012 & 2012-2013)

High turnover can be costly for employers due to a number of factors. For example, recruiting, hiring and onboarding costs can be rather high. Also, when employees leave the organization, other workers need to compensate for the decreased personnel resulting in lower productivity rates among remaining workers. Further, remaining workers often need to take time out of their schedules to interview, train, and assist new hires, taking away from normal daily productivity. This can often lead to a decrease in customer satisfaction due to the lack of adequate personnel available to assist with customer service. Finally, when employees leave the company, the company loses valuable historical knowledge about the business as well as productivity from the vacant position (Jacobs, 2012).

Recent developments in economic conditions also play a major role in determining the significance of onboarding. For example, according to a recent research report from the SHRM 2012 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement study, job satisfaction rates have begun to trend downward from 2009-2012. Rates significantly increased from 2008-2009 due to the economic recession; however, as economic conditions improve, job satisfaction rates have been steadily decreasing towards pre-recession levels (Jacobs, 2012).

Since job satisfaction and turnover rates move in opposite directions, a downward trend in job satisfaction would result in an upward trend in voluntary turnover rates. As the economy slowly recovers from the 2008 economic recession, the employment market is projected to improve conditions for job seekers. As a result of these recent trends, voluntary turnover is projected to increase as higher performing employees seek to find better organizational fit within a more hospitable employment market. Therefore, HR professionals will need to focus on retaining top performers through employee fit (Jacobs, 2012).

The purpose of this paper is to research the effectiveness of onboarding programs at creating better employee fit to ultimately reduce voluntary turnover rates within organizations. As a result of these trends, I will seek to answer the question: Are higher-intensity onboarding programs more effective than lower-intensity onboarding programs at creating better employee fit?

OVERVIEW OF THE ONBOARDING PROCESS

Onboarding programs are designed to drive faster time to productivity and reduce the various shock factors among new hires, reduce turnover rates and in turn, turnover costs, and drive assimilation of the organizational culture and values. Organizational socialization is key in the assimilation process because it helps companies retain top performing talent and eliminate those that are not fit for the organization. Typically, new hires will either assimilate to the culture and values of the organization or leave. Onboarding speeds up the process and helps to eliminate those workers that are misfit in the company within an earlier time frame. Stein and Christiansen (2010) explain the core elements of an Onboarding program (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Pre-Boarding

This element takes place primarily in the recruitment and selection stage but also includes all of the administrative tasks leading up to day one at the company. An example of an important element in this stage could include a welcome or greeting from the CEO of the company. This small gesture helps new hires feel more important and welcomed within the organization when they receive a greeting from senior leadership (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Organizational Socialization

As discussed above, socialization is an important driver of person-organization fit. It goes deeper than the daily job functions and KSAs needed to complete the necessary tasks of the job. Socialization engages new employees on a different level and helps foster higher job satisfaction rates. According to Stein and Christiansen (2010), there are four key components of organizational socialization that need to be addressed in some way in effective onboarding programs. These components speak to the primary needs of new hires when entering a new organization (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Culture. It is important for new hires to understand the fundamental culture and values of the organization. This helps new employees connect with the broader purpose of the organization and gives them a better sense of fit within the company as a whole. This component also outlines clear performance expectations, social norms, and “unspoken habits of thought and behavior” (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Network Development This element provides new hires with a network of resources and allows them to interact both with other new hires and with their coworkers and teammates. It is important for new hires to get to know the people that they will be working with to help them feel a sense of acceptance and to learn about the different values, norms, and processes that they will encounter on a daily basis. Further, networking gives new hires resources to help them with issues or questions that they may have or develop along the way and throughout their careers (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Career Development. This element shows new hires a clear career path within the organization. New hires typically value career development and often look for opportunities to grow in their careers within their new company. If an organization shows new hires the potential opportunities for career growth early on, they will likely feel more committed and motivated to work hard in the organization (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Strategy. Finally, this element illustrates the significance of the new hire’s individual role within the larger scope of the company. This helps show new hires how they can personally contribute to the overall goals and objectives of the company and helps them see the significance of their daily job functions. This provides new hires with a sense of purpose and fit within the organization and shows them that their role, no matter how small, is important to the company’s success (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Follow Up

The final element in onboarding programs is continuous follow up with the new hire. This can last throughout the entire first year at the organization. Follow-up helps keep the new hire engaged and provides them with a resource for clarifying misunderstandings and answering questions that arise as the new hire navigates his or her first year at the company. This element also allows the company to obtain important feedback from the new hires on their overall experience and satisfaction. This can lead

to opportunities for the company to make improvements to both the onboarding process and other procedures within the organization (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Assimilation

Assimilation takes place when new hires are able to adopt the core culture of the company and accept the common standards and norms of the organization. There are a number of important elements that are included in a company's culture that need to be articulated to new hires through onboarding and socialization (Pellet, 2009). These factors make up the general culture of an organization and must be clearly communicated to employees in order to ensure that expectations are consistent with reality. In theory, as a result, new hires will either assimilate to the culture or leave the company (Pellet, 2009). For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the socialization aspect of Onboarding programs and use socialization techniques as the basis for my research.

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

There are a number of key theories that are put into practice when analyzing the potential effects of onboarding on person-organization fit. As a result of the major gap in empirical research regarding these potential outcomes, there is a heavy reliance on theories and mental models to analyze onboarding development. Organizational culture and commitment theories illustrate the importance of aligning a new hire's culture with that of the company to foster a greater commitment.

Maslow's Hierarchy

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is one of the most widely used models in Human Resources and behavioral analysis. In turn, the hierarchy of needs translates to each of the major components of a high-intensity onboarding program. This analysis demonstrates how each socialization element, when executed properly, caters to each level of need and can bring an employee to fulfillment through self-actualization.

Physiological Needs. Physiological needs refer to basic human survival needs such as food, water, and shelter. In regards to HR Management, these needs are achieved through the selection process. For example, when a new employee is hired, he or she will receive a pay check and be able to obtain the essential physiological needs for survival. Therefore, an employee enters the onboarding process with this first level already fulfilled (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Safety and Security Needs. Safety and Security needs refer to human needs of order and stability. Effective onboarding programs offer safety and security needs through structure and organization. For example, onboarding programs that follow a structured agenda and execute formal, organized events and activities will help fulfill new employees' needs for safety and security. Onboarding programs that are more unstructured and informal do not guide employees and set the proper limits to ensure that this level is fulfilled (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Needs for Belonging. Needs for Belonging refers to the human need for interaction with and acceptance by others. These needs are realized in onboarding through various opportunities for social interaction with fellow new hires and co-workers, typically those who have the most in common. When new employees have an opportunity to interact with peers, they will feel more comfortable and accepted in their new setting. By gaining the acceptance of co-workers early on in their time with the company, new hires are more likely to have a stronger connection to the company and feelings of anxiety and fear regarding social acceptance are eased (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Needs for belonging are also realized through networking opportunities with various workers throughout the company. Not only does this help new employees gain context and valuable resources,

but it also allows them to experience acceptance at an organizational level as opposed to just within their specific department or silo (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Self-Esteem Needs. Self-esteem needs refer to humans' need to feel good about themselves. This includes self-respect, achievements, status and importance. Onboarding fulfills a person's self-esteem needs by outlining how each individual employee fits into the larger organization as a whole. Effective onboarding programs demonstrate to new hires why their individual role is important and how they contribute towards the strategic goals and objectives of the organization (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Self-Actualization. Self-actualization is the highest level of fulfillment that a person can reach. It includes the need for realizing one's full potential and continuously seeking personal growth. Effective onboarding processes include elements that help new hires see opportunities for potential career growth within the company. If a new hire can see a path for career development within the organization, he or she will be less likely to leave the company and seek other career opportunities. Showing new employees how they can grow with the company will help them reach self-actualization within their work environment (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Organizational Culture

Social Norms. Social Norms are behavioral expectations that are typically enforced by other members of a group. Social norms can include peripheral, relevant, and pivotal norms depending on the severity of consequences. In general, individuals comply with social norms if they are dominated by a self-concept external motivation, identify with the group, or internalize the behavior (Scholl, 2003).

Social Values. Social values refer to private or internal values as well as public or espouse values. Private values are important because individuals feel a sense of guilt when they act against private values. In a more social, organizational setting, public values refer to the shared social values that individuals adopt from the group. Individuals will act in ways that are consistent with communal values in order to gain acceptance and support from the group, even though they may not hold those social values personally (Scholl, 2003).

Social Identities. Social Identities refer to an individual's identity with a particular group. An individual will behave according to the group norms and values, and make their identities known to others. Role expectations and status fall within a person's social identity (Scholl, 2003).

Shared Mental Models and Cognitive Schema. Shared mental models and organizational social cognition refer to how individuals "think about other people in social situations" (Sims Jr. & Lorenzi, 1992). Specifically, organizational social cognition refers to the "study of human information processing (both conscious and unconscious) as it influences, and is influenced by, the complex social and structural phenomena within the modern organization... [or] how people think about people, situations, and people in situations" (Sims Jr. & Lorenzi, 1992). Cognitive schema focuses on the way in which people think and behave. There are different ways in which people process information, make decisions, and behave in certain situations. Cognitive schema, or social learning theory examines this notion (Gibson, 2004; Scholl, 2002b). In regards to human resource development and the onboarding process, cognitive schema demonstrates how new hires will behave in their specific role according to expectations, how they will approach tasks and problems, and how they perceive themselves in regards to their own values and KSAs.

Additionally, cognitive schema helps new hires develop a sense of consensual schema with their peers through the socialization process. This helps align their way of thinking with others in their peer group as well as with the company as a whole. Furthermore, cognitive schema speaks to a new hire's decision-making factors. For example, according to cognitive theory, a person has either a flexible or rigid schema. This means that a new hire is either set in his or her ways, or is willing to change and adapt. Therefore, if a new hire has a flexible schema, he or she is more likely to assimilate to the culture of the organization.

In contrast, if a new hire has a rigid schema, he or she is more likely to leave the organization if his or her values do not align with those of the company (Gibson, 2004; Scholl, 2002b).

Organizational Commitment

A commitment based strategy within an organization can be built through an investment-based approach, a reciprocity approach, by limiting alternatives, or by developing a social identity. Developing a social identity through onboarding programs can help an organization build a commitment based strategy as opposed to a control strategy. Helping employees develop a social identity can be achieved when the employees identify with the company mission, build individual success within the larger organizational goals, find security through a visible career path, receive skill validation from peers and leaders, and feel a sense that the organization has trust in their judgment and abilities (Scholl, 2008). Companies typically facilitate these perceptions through innovative group social activities (O'Malley, 2000).

Self-Concept – External

The self-concept external theory of motivation refers to motivation based on three external validation factors. First, individuals motivated by self-concept external seek acceptance from members of their workgroup. Individuals with a self-concept external motivation seek feelings of worth, or perceptions by members of the group that his or her role in the team is important to the overall functioning of the organization, and is therefore respected by members of the workgroup. Finally, individuals with a self-concept external motivation seek status within their workgroups. For example, these individuals seek to be perceived by members of the group as the best at their particular role and to be perceived as an indispensable and irreplaceable member of the team (Scholl, 2002a).

In relation to new employee socialization, the self-concept external theory of motivation plays a primary role in predicting newcomer information seeking. In theory, newcomers to an organization will seek information from peers and supervisors, as well as through observations to help them adapt to their new environment. Individuals that are motivated by self-concept external are more likely to take a more in depth approach to newcomer information seeking, in order to gain acceptance, worth, and status from their workgroup in a faster time period.

This concept was assessed in a longitudinal study conducted by Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison (1993) that examined the effects of information seeking on facilitating the socialization process. The results of the study demonstrated that newcomers sought technical information and performance feedback to facilitate task mastery, referent information and performance feedback to facilitate role clarity, and normative information to facilitate social integration. Morrison (1993) speculated that personality traits are correlated to the frequency of newcomer information seeking measures (Morrison, 1993).

THE ONBOARDING SCALE AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The 6 Dimensions of Socialization Tactics

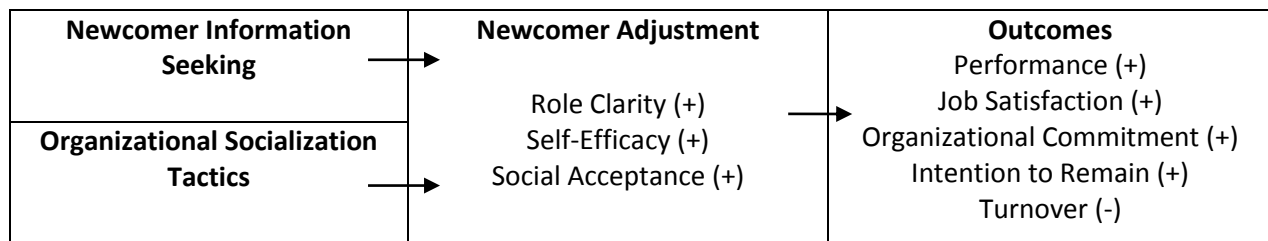
An organization's approach to socialization can be broken down into six dimensions developed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979). The six dimensions refer to methods that an organization can employ to deliver the socialization content to newcomers in order to facilitate newcomer adjustment. Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) six dimensions of socialization tactics refer to the structure of the onboarding program and include collective-individual, formal-informal, sequential-random, fixed-variable, serial-disjunctive, and investiture-divestiture approaches (VanMaanen & Schein, 1979).

In order to simplify these six approaches to socialization, Jones (1986) categorized the six approaches into three factors based on similar characteristics. The three factors included context, content, and social aspects (Jones, 1986). Subsequently, researchers categorized the six dimensions into two clear tactical

approaches: institutionalized and individualized. Institutionalized tactics include the collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture approaches. On the other end, individualized tactics include the individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture approaches (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

Bauer et al (2007) expanded on these three factors by hypothesizing that newcomer adjustment is based on role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance. Bauer et al (2007) found that in addition to the use of socialization tactics, these measures are also achieved through newcomer information seeking. Together, newcomer information seeking and the six dimensions of socialization tactics yield the desired outcomes of socialization, which typically include increased performance and productivity, higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and lower turnover rates (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, & Truxillo, 2007).

FIGURE 1
Antecedents and Outcomes of Newcomer Adjustment during Organizational Socialization



Source: Bauer et al (2007)

Collective/Individual. The collective approach to socialization refers to group learning. New hires go through the socialization process with peers in a group setting and bond through shared experience. In the individual approach, newcomers gain experience within the organization separate from their peer groups. Each individual's experience is different and unique (Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). While the collective approach fosters a consistent message to all newcomers, the individual approach opens the door to unique experiences and messages that come from a variety of sources. Research suggests that by using social learning methods, the collective approach to socialization provides a common message regarding the different aspects of the role and the organization, which ultimately leads to shared values and reduced uncertainty (Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007).

Formal/Informal. The formal approach refers to socialization that takes place separate from the job setting. Newcomers participate in a program that is separate from the actual job and current employees, and learn about role expectations and the organization through segregated activities. The informal approach refers to on-the-job training that does not typically include any clearly defined socialization activities (Bauer et al., 2007; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). Similar to the collective approach, the formal approach to socialization is thought to facilitate a more consistent message to newcomers, as well as reduce uncertainty and foster shared values (Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007).

Sequential/Random. The sequential approach to socialization provides newcomers with specific information regarding the sequence of activities during the socialization process. The sequential approach gives new hires the order in which they will experience different learning programs and participate in activities, as opposed to the random approach, where the order of events is unknown (Allen, 2006; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). The sequential approach is thought to reduce newcomer anxiety associated with new environment adjustment by establishing a routine and facilitating a sense of personal control (Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007).

Fixed/Variable. A fixed approach to socialization gives newcomers a specific timetable of when socialization events will take place and when each stage of the process will start and finish. In contrast, the variable approach operates with an unknown timeline of events (Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). The fixed approach is similar to the sequential approach in that it develops a sense of control in new hires (Allen, 2006).

Serial/Disjunctive. The serial approach provides newcomers with a role model or mentor that will help guide the new hire through the socialization process. The disjunctive approach leaves new hires to navigate their way without the help of an experienced peer (Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). Serial tactics have been shown to help new hires make better sense of the new organization by helping them build relationships with experienced members of the group and by providing them with a valuable resource within the company. Furthermore, by building these relationships, newcomers tend to gain more confidence and competence in their roles (Allen, 2006).

Investiture/Divestiture. Similar to serial tactics, the investiture approach provides new hires with positive feedback from more experienced peers. In contrast, a divestiture approach provides a newcomer with negative feedback until he or she can fully adapt to the group (Bauer et al., 2007; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). Providing newcomers with positive feedback and support through the investiture approach will help them to develop a key sense of confidence and competence in their new positions. In contrast, providing little support and giving negative feedback through the divestiture approach may discourage new hires (Allen, 2006).

Hypothesis 1. The collective, formal, serial, and investiture approaches to socialization will have the highest correlation with increased organizational commitment.

The Onboarding Scale

For the purposes of this paper, I have developed a scale to measure onboarding programs based on Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) six dimensions of socialization tactics and the subsequent research that followed. Similar to the continuum referenced by Cable and Parsons (2001) of institutionalized to individualized socialization tactics, I have developed a scale that ranges from "high-intensity" onboarding to "low-intensity" onboarding.

For the purposes of this paper, a high-intensity program incorporates more of the institutionalized methods, where the highest-intensity program uses all of the institutionalized approaches to socialization through a variety of activities and events. At the other end of the scale, a low-intensity program uses more of the individualized approaches, where the lowest-intensity program covers the minimum basic information and leaves the socialization process to newcomer information seeking methods.

Hypothesis 2. Higher-intensity onboarding programs that incorporate all six institutionalized approaches to socialization create better person-organization fit than lower-intensity onboarding programs that incorporate all six individualized approaches to socialization.

CASE STUDY – GOOGLE

In order to illustrate a high-intensity onboarding program, Johnson and Seges' (2010) case study on newcomer socialization at Google exhibits a model for the highest-intensity program based on the guidelines previously described. The onboarding process at Google for incoming software engineers, or "Nooglers," incorporates all of the institutionalized tactics through a number of different activities over the course of the Nooglers' first three months at Google and beyond (Johnson & Seges, 2010).

Nooglers at Google participate in a collective, formal program that incorporates social learning that is separate from the actual job setting. Nooglers are given check-lists that provide a timeline and description of the different events and experiences that they will encounter throughout their first four weeks at

Google. This exemplifies the sequential and fixed tactics. Nooglers also experience serial and investiture methods through a formal mentoring program, the Noogler support community, the NEHEN (Noogler Engineers Helping Engineering Nooglers) Society, and voluntary knowledge-sharing events called Tech Talks. In addition to these tactics, Nooglers also experience a large amount of training through both off-the-job simulations, and on-the-job introductory projects (Johnson & Seges, 2010).

Person-Environment Fit

There is a prevalent amount of evidence that shows that a person's fit within his or her environment is directly related to turnover. Person-environment (P-E) fit refers to the three key fit factors that an employee will encounter at an organization. Person-supervisor (P-S) fit refers to the relationship between an employee and his or her direct supervisor. This is typically measured through similar personality traits. Person-job (P-J) fit refers to the relationship between the employee and his or her specific role and job responsibilities within the organization. This is typically measured by KSAs, prior experience, and education level. Person-organization (P-O) fit refers to the relationship between an employee and the organization as a whole. This is commonly measured through shared culture and social acceptance (Tak, 2011).

Jinkook Tak (2011) examined turnover behavior in relation to these three elements of person-environment fit among new employees in a longitudinal study across a number of different industries. Tak (2011) collected data through two online surveys. The first survey gathered data from 901 respondents whose current employer was their first and who had been with their respective organizations for less than six months. The second survey was distributed six months after the first survey to the 901 employees that responded to the first survey. Out of the 901 original respondents, only 297 individuals (33%) responded to the second survey. The two surveys measured the employees' perceptions of how well they fit with their jobs, organizations, and supervisors, as well as their intentions to leave their organizations and whether or not they actually left. Tak controlled for demographic information and job-related variables (Tak, 2011).

The results of the study found that of the 297 employees who responded to the second survey, 80 respondents had left their organizations. There was a significant correlation between perceptions of person-job fit and intention to leave the organization. There was also a significant correlation between perceptions of person-organization fit and actual turnover. Person-Supervisor fit had a correlation with both turnover intention and turnover behavior. Therefore, P-J fit has a direct effect on turnover attitudes while P-O fit has a direct effect on turnover behavior. This is a logical conclusion because if a person does not fit with his or her job, but fits with the organization, he or she could potentially transfer internally to a different job within the organization that better fits his or her KSAs and experience level. In turn, if an employee does not fit with the organization, he or she would likely seek employment at a different organization where there is a better cultural alignment (Tak, 2011).

Hypothesis 3. Higher-intensity onboarding programs that incorporate the six institutionalized approaches to socialization reduce turnover.

ANALYSIS

Person-Organization Fit

Cable and Parsons (2001) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the effectiveness of the six socialization tactics at creating person-organization fit. It was predicted that each of the institutionalized socialization tactics such as collective and formal (context), sequential and fixed (content), and serial and investiture (social aspects), would be positively related to perceptions of person-organization fit among

new employees. Data was collected in three waves over a two year period across a number of different organizations (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

The first wave distributed a survey to 1,000 graduating students from a large southeastern university. The survey was distributed to students as they were leaving an orientation at the career office, prior to their interviewing for jobs. Of the 1,000 surveys distributed, a total of 461 students (46%) returned the completed survey. The first wave survey measured personal values, prior work experience, and demographic information (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

The second wave of data collection sent another survey to 420 of the 461 first wave respondents who had permanent addresses on file with the university alumni office six months after graduation. In order to increase response rates, if the respondents did not return the second survey within one month, a reminder message and duplicate second wave survey was sent to those individuals. Of the 420 surveys sent, 129 individuals (31%) responded to the second wave survey. In addition to pre-hire information such as the number of job offers the individuals received, the second wave survey examined “their organizational tenure, the socialization tactics that they experienced since joining their organization, their perceptions of their organizations’ values, and their subjective P-O fit perceptions” (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

The third wave of data was collected one year after the second wave through a final survey sent to the 129 respondents to the second wave survey. The same tactics were employed to raise response rates as in the second wave, where participants were mailed a reminder letter and copy of the survey if they did not respond within one month. Of the 129 surveys mailed, 101 individuals (78%) responded to the third wave survey. This survey measured whether or not the respondents were still at the same organization and reassessed their personal values (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

The results of the study found that sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics were all positively related to newcomer perceptions of person-organization fit. Collective and formal approaches did not prove to have a greater impact on perceptions of person-organization fit than programs that used individual or informal approaches. Therefore, the content and social aspects of onboarding had a greater effect on person-organization fit than the context aspects (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

In a similar, prior study, Allen and Meyer (1990) conducted a longitudinal analysis of the effects of socialization tactics on newcomer commitment and role orientation. Data was collected from recent undergraduate business program and MBA graduates after their first six months and twelve months of employment (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Upon graduation, students provided information about jobs that they had accepted and when they would start. After six months, 207 surveys were mailed to the students and 170 surveys (82%) were returned. In order to ensure the most accurate results regarding socialization, Allen and Meyer (1990) used 132 surveys out of the 170 returned because these individuals were not previously associated with their employers, for example through a family business or through pre-graduation employment. Six months later at the twelve month mark, a second wave of surveys were sent to the 132 individuals and received 105 survey responses. The two surveys measured socialization tactics, role orientation measures, and organizational commitment levels (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

The results of the study demonstrated that all six dimensions of institutionalized socialization tactics significantly correlated with organizational commitment after six months. The investiture approach proved to have the strongest correlation with organizational commitment after six months, and proved to be the only approach that significantly correlated with commitment after twelve months. Since all six institutional tactics correlated with commitment after the first six months, and only one approach correlated after twelve months, it is possible that either the other approaches were no longer in place after twelve months, or the newcomers’ anxiety or stress associated with entering a new environment had already been alleviated at the twelve month point (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Therefore, there is evidence that the six institutional approaches to socialization have a significant correlation to the desired outcomes of person-organization fit, with investiture, serial, fixed, and sequential tactics having the strongest correlation.

Turnover

David G. Allen (2006) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the effects of organizational socialization tactics on newcomer embeddedness and turnover rates. It was hypothesized that each of the six institutionalized socialization tactics were positively related to organizational embeddedness and negatively related to turnover (Allen, 2006). A negative relationship refers to outcomes that move in opposite directions. For example, a negative relationship would show that increasing organizational embeddedness results in decreasing turnover rates.

The sample included 259 employees at a large financial services organization who had been employed at the organization for less than twelve months. The organization reported that there was no standardized socialization program, and all newcomer onboarding approaches were left to the discretion of the managers at each individual location across the country. Therefore, the sample of employees within the organization experienced different socialization approaches based on their locations. Employees completed an online survey that also recorded their names and employee identification numbers separately to be compared to turnover research at a later date. Two hundred thirty two completed surveys were received (Allen, 2006).

One year after the survey data was obtained, turnover data was collected from the organization. After omitting ten employees who had been involuntarily terminated by the organization, the final sample included 222 employees. Of this final sample, 55 employees (24.8%) left the organization voluntarily (Allen, 2006).

The results of the study indicated that all six institutionalized socialization tactics are positively related to on-the-job embeddedness, which was significantly negatively related to turnover. Collective, fixed, and investiture approaches were the most significantly positively related to on-the-job embeddedness. Also, investiture and serial tactics were significantly negatively related to turnover. Therefore, evidence suggests that the social aspects of the socialization process have the most positive effect on reducing turnover in organizations.

FINDINGS

Research shows that the six institutionalized approaches to organizational socialization are positively related to person-organization fit, and negatively related to turnover. Hypothesis 1 is partially supported because, while evidence shows that serial and investiture tactics are significantly correlated with organizational commitment, Cable and Parsons' (2001) research did not show that there was any correlation between collective and formal tactics and person-organization fit. In addition, Allen and Meyer's (1990) research demonstrated that while all six institutionalized dimensions of socialization were correlated with person-organization fit after six months, only the investiture approach was correlated with P-O fit after twelve months (Allen, 2006; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Cable & Parsons, 2001).

Similarly, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported because Allen and Meyer's (1990) research showed a correlation between all six institutionalized dimensions of socialization and person-organization fit after six months; however, Cable and Parsons (2001) showed that only the serial, investiture, sequential, and fixed tactics were correlated with person-organization fit (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Hypothesis 3 was supported because Allen's (2006) findings show that all six institutionalized approaches to socialization are negatively related to turnover. Therefore, incorporating these six tactics effectively reduces turnover rates (Allen, 2006).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Needs Assessment

As in any effective training program, it is important to conduct a needs assessment to determine the central areas that are in need of focus and development. This could include modifications to an existing onboarding program or developing a new onboarding program from scratch. When completing the needs assessment, it is important to consider the following:

- Internal needs for development
- External benchmarking
- Opportunities for improvement
- Organizational validation and buy-in

These four considerations will assist in determining the proper elements necessary to get the most out of an onboarding program. Since not all companies are the same, not all onboarding programs will fit at all companies. Therefore, it is important to determine which elements will work best according to the unique features of each individual company (Stein & Christiansen, 2010). Furthermore, conducting a needs assessment allows an organization to address specific needs and concerns in its approach to onboarding.

Case Study – US Libraries

Recent research predicts that 60%-70% of librarians will retire within the next ten years. As a result, libraries across the United States are faced with the task of replacing more than half of its workforce. One of the most prevalent problems associated with this task is the libraries' failure to attract younger generation librarians, and the even bigger problem of their inability to retain the ones that they can attract. In an attempt to solve this problem, libraries across the United States are turning to onboarding programs to help retain young librarians. In order to develop the most effective program possible, the library system needed to conduct a needs assessment to determine why younger librarians are leaving the field (Chapman, 2009).

The results of the needs assessment showed that there was a generational gap between the older veteran librarians and the new younger librarians. This fostered a disconnect in ideology, values, and role expectations. The younger generation library staff felt isolated from the current workforce because there was a strong divestiture approach employed by the veteran staff towards the new staff. The older generation librarians provided negative feedback to the younger generation librarians until they could adapt to the current culture. However, due to the generational gap, newcomers were not adapting or assimilating to the expected culture, getting frustrated, and leaving the field (Chapman, 2009).

In order to remedy these findings, the libraries determined that serial and investiture tactics would work best for newcomers to help them create better connections with the older generation library staff. Direct supervisors will act as mediators between the two generations and facilitate positive social interactions to help newcomers feel more welcome in the environment. Additionally, a mentor program will be set up so new hires are assigned to a veteran member of the staff who acts as a connection between the newcomer and the older group of employees. The libraries also determined that the collective and formal approaches would work best at introducing new hires to the company, job, expectations, and culture prior to entering the job setting (Chapman, 2009).

Recommended Best Practices

In general, there are a number of important considerations that must be taken into account when developing an effective onboarding program. First, there is a time element associated with learning. For

example, it is important to consider a phased out approach to onboarding so that employees are not receiving a multitude of information in a short amount of time. Too much information at once creates a disconnect with the employee and leads to early burn out and a lack of knowledge retention (Sims, 2011).

Another important consideration is overselling the company. While onboarding is meant to engage the employee and create a higher level of commitment to the company, it is still important to be honest and realistic about expectations and job functions. If the onboarding process oversells the company, the new hire will be disappointed and disconnected once he or she experiences what the daily functions and company is really like. Therefore, it is important to outline the realistic elements of the company and job early on to ensure that there are no surprises when the new hire dives into his or her daily job functions (Sims, 2011).

Furthermore, it is also important to provide employees with a context for the information that is given to them through onboarding. If employees do not have the proper context, it is harder for them to absorb and fully understand the information that is given to them in the onboarding process. Even though they have the information needed, without context, they may not understand how to apply the information properly (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Finally, it is important to have buy-in at all levels of the organization when developing an effective onboarding program. In order to get the most return on onboarding development, it is essential to have full commitment to the process from the CEO and senior leadership team, to direct line supervisors, to peers and co-workers. This ensures that new hires receive a consistent message and feel a sense of acceptance and fit throughout the entire organization (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

DISCUSSION

Limitations and Opportunities for Further Research

One of the key limitations of the research involved a lack of detail regarding some of the specific elements or events involved in the onboarding programs that were evaluated. While all of the research studies examined the structural aspects of onboarding programs, none went into detail about how those approaches were translated into activities. On the other hand, this could also be considered a key strength of the research because in focusing on the structural design of the program as opposed to the specific events, the results of the research can be better generalized across different organizations, industries, and job classifications. Regardless, future research could examine the most effective onboarding program activities in particular organizations or groups.

Furthermore, the research did not examine the effectiveness of using a needs assessment to determine any gaps that could be filled or remedied through onboarding. As in any training and development program, a needs assessment is a key factor in determining which approaches will work best and which aspects need the most improvement. None of the studies that examined onboarding programs researched the effectiveness of conducting a needs assessment. This could be a highly effective tool in tailoring an onboarding program according to the most prevalent needs of the organization or the program that is currently in place.

Finally, another opportunity for further research involves the role of newcomer information seeking. While there is a small amount of research that examines newcomer information seeking, none of the studies that researched onboarding practices looked at information seeking at an in depth level in their assessments. Further research could examine the role that newcomer proactivity plays both with higher-intensity onboarding programs in place and with lower-intensity onboarding programs in place.

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