

## INTERACTIVITY, PROACTIVITY, COMMUNITY – THE PILLARS OF ONBOARDING. TEST TOOL PROPOSAL

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**Purpose:** The main objective of this paper is to present the pillars of onboarding programmes created on the basis of literature studies and interviews with human resource management practitioners. In addition, the presentation of a proposal for a research tool to measure the levels of implementation of the pillars' assumptions, which was developed on the basis of the author's research procedure, was taken as the specific objective of the paper.

**Design/methodology/approach:** In order to identify the pillars of onboarding, a literature review was carried out. This review was carried out using databases such as ProQuest, EBSCOhost and Google Scholar. The analysis covered a total of more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific papers. In this phase, the three pillars of onboarding were identified. As a next step, the authors decided to conduct research interviews with 23 mid- and senior-level HR professionals who carry out or coordinate onboarding programs.

**Findings:** The result of the procedure described in the point above are three pillars of onboarding, which were selected through literature studies and interviews with human resource management practitioners dealing with onboarding programs. These onboarding pillars can form the basis of a research tool that can be used to measure the level of interactivity, proactivity and community of individual onboarding programs.

**Research limitations/implications:** The limitation of the described research progress is the relatively small number of interviews with experts in the field of human resources management. The number of interviews was dictated by the availability of practitioners, as well as the willingness to participate in one of the stages of the research procedure.

**Practical implications:** The developed research tool can be used to measure the level of interactivity, proactivity and community of onboarding programs. Thanks to the comprehensive approach to the most important components of the onboarding pillars, it will be possible to determine to what extent the onboarding program used meets the basic assumptions. The created tool can be used both by scientists and managers who create onboarding programs based on the presented pillars. Additionally, said tool can also be used to improve existing implementation programs.

**Social implications:** According to the authors of the publication, the created tool will definitely help to adjust or improve implementation programs for new employees, which will definitely affect the speed of adaptation in a new workplace and will translate into faster readiness to properly fulfill professional duties.

**Originality/value:** A peculiar novelty created by the authors is the concept of a research tool for measuring the three pillars of onboarding. The results of the publication are directed to managers dealing with implementation programs and employees who are in the process of implementation.

**Keywords:** onboarding, adaptation, socialization, pillars of onboarding.

**Category of the paper:** research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Recruiting talented employees is an essential part of the success of any organisation. It becomes all the more important in a situation where competition for qualified employees is fierce (Edwards, 2009). High employee turnover rates make the deployment process a very important and significant problem for many organisations (Semenza, Harden, Koury, 2020, p. 109). Deployment therefore becomes one of the key elements of development for both employer and employees (Karambelkar, Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 5). Onboarding programmes are an increasingly appreciated tool due to the fact that employers are committing more and more resources and energy to the recruitment processes of their best employees. As a result, organisations are designing better and better onboarding programmes to ensure that newly hired employees are ready to function fully in their positions as soon as possible (Becker, Bish, 2019). As onboarding programmes are increasingly challenged, attention is being paid to redesigning legacy programmes and refocusing on the original values (Stewart, Jones, Vallas, 2021). The current state of onboarding research mainly focuses on the levels of implementation an employee can achieve after completing the programme (Bauer, 2010, p. 2). Therefore, it is reasonable to undertake a procedure to create pillars of onboarding programmes based on which effective implementation programmes can be created. The aforementioned area represents a research gap, the filling of which is one of the objectives of the described procedure. The realisation of the described assumptions will bring many benefits to those creating new onboarding programmes as well as those wishing to make changes to their existing onboarding programme.

## 2. Onboarding

The process of recruiting and selecting employees consumes a very large amount of time, capital and energy that needs to be put into activities aimed at attracting the best candidates for a vacancy. Once the recruitment and selection of candidates has been completed, it is worth preparing an onboarding process that allows the employee to be as prepared as possible to carry

out his or her job tasks and responsibilities effectively (Becker, Bish, 2019). Onboarding is a process that helps an employee enter a new work environment, through which he or she learns about his or her job responsibilities and becomes part of a team (Adler, Castro, 2019, pp. 106-120). The goal of onboarding is to introduce new employees to existing processes, policies, values and practices while fostering a positive onboarding experience (Klein, Polin, 2012, pp. 267-280). Onboarding programmes may differ in terms of formalisation, content discussed or duration (Adler, Castro, 2019, pp. 106-120) while their main purpose and objectives always boil down to familiarising the employee with the organisation, general principles, as well as job responsibilities (Skeats, 1991, p. 16). The implementation of onboarding programmes in online form, which has been and partly still takes place in many organisations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has changed the way information is communicated (Pabian, Ochwat, Kwiatkowska, 2021 pp. 6-33). It is now very common to use online forms and videos through which the new employee gets to know the organisation (Morrison, 2021, pp. 203-206). In the face of new forms of knowledge transfer about the organisation, the importance of team building, social bonding, and integration of candidates often from different backgrounds has definitely increased (Stewart, Jones, Vallas, 2021).

### **3. Pillars of onboarding**

The title pillars are essential elements in the design of any onboarding programme. They have been selected on the basis of the analysis of the literature on the subject. It should be noted that they constitute a set of desirable and correct principles, which are mentioned by authors of research studies in the scope of onboarding programmes and HR practitioners. These onboarding pillars include: the interactivity of onboarding programmes, the proactivity of the activities undertaken by onboarding programmes and the community involved in introducing a new employee to an organisation.

The first of these is interactivity. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread use of remote working, the interactivity of HR processes is becoming increasingly popular. Currently, the millennial generation is the most active in the labour market, which also puts a lot of emphasis on creating interactive solutions valued by the aforementioned generation. Similarly, J. Ferri-Red (2013) also notes, mentioning that younger generations much prefer to assimilate knowledge and information from videos, interactive sites, smartphones or other formats of an interactive nature. Furthermore, he points to the creation of interactive content as one of the tips for preparing onboarding programmes. In conclusion, the author emphasises that interactive solutions have a far greater impact on younger generations (Ferri-Red, 2013, pp. 32-33). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the coronavirus pandemic has increased the

demand for the use of interactive tools and accelerated developments in the area of modern forms of employee onboarding (HR Trends Report 2020/2021).

The second pillar of onboarding that emerged during the desk study is proactivity. The aforementioned pillar plays a key role in the smooth and comprehensive introduction of the employee to the organisation. The literature highlights in many cases the importance of a proactive attitude of managers and those conducting onboarding programmes for new hires (Jeske, Olson, 2021 p. 69). K. Dekas (2013) emphasises that managers who have a proactive approach to knowledge sharing, encourage coaching and so-called 'job shadowing' increase the chances of a successful onboarding programme (Dekas, 2013). Confirming the above thesis, the findings of A.M. Saks et al. (2011) also indicate that proactive relationship-oriented behaviour also becomes particularly important from the perspective of onboarding programmes (Saks, Gruman, Cooper-Thomas, 2011, pp. 36-46).

The third of the title pillars is the onboarding community. This aspect brings together all the people involved in the onboarding process, their competences or skills used during the implementation programmes. Bradt and Vonnegut (2009) emphasise the special role that mentors and buddies play in the onboarding process (Bradt, Vonnegut, 2009). Similarly, other authors (Bhakta, Medina, 2021; Caldwell, Peters, 2018; Karambelkar, Bhattacharya, 2017) also state the same, highlighting the fact that the assignment of a mentor during onboarding is an excellent idea to support individualised forms of implementation. Mentors are an extremely valuable and helpful source of information and support for new employees (McKimm, Jollie, Hatter, 2007). The second group of people who take an active part in carrying out onboarding programmes are the so-called 'buddies' - buddies. These individuals can be described as the official friends of the new hires. It is to the buddies that the new employees can address any questions they have about the job, its organisation and socialisation issues. The new employee's relationship with the so-called buddy is decidedly different from a mentoring relationship, as the buddy's tasks focus largely on helping the new person to so-called socialise, i.e. to get to know the new organisation also from the side of the staff who work there (Nelson, Sperl, 2004). J. Graybill et al. (2013) include mentors and buddies as essential components of any onboarding programme (Graybill, Carpenter, Offord, Bolt, Shaffer, 2013, pp. 212). It is important to emphasise that the availability of people who form the social pillar of onboarding programmes and the relationship that the employee establishes with the organisation are very positive developments that help reduce the stress that accompanies a new employee. In addition, the onboarding community helps to solve problems and difficulties that may also arise in the later stages of working for the organisation.

#### 4. Proposal for measurement tool

In the text, the Harvard referencing citation style should be used (Smith, 2017) or (Smith, Bradley, 2017). In the case of more than three authors, write the surname of the first of them and add the abbreviation “et al.” (Bradley et al., 2017).

The emergence of the pillars described led the authors to develop a proposal for a research tool to measure the assumptions of the onboarding pillars described in the previous section. The first stage in the development of the research tool was to identify relevant elements that could be categorised into the three onboarding pillars of proactivity, interactivity and community. In order to gather the relevant elements that make up the different pillars of onboarding, a literature review was conducted. This review was carried out using databases such as ProQuest, EBSCOhost and Google Scholar. The analysis covered a total of more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific papers. In this phase, the three pillars of onboarding were identified. Data was collected by systematically entering all activities representing the individual onboarding pillars into a spreadsheet. Following the literature review described above, the authors of the study decided to supplement the results with information from those involved in employee onboarding. Therefore, as a next step, the authors decided to conduct research interviews with 23 mid- and senior-level HR professionals who carry out or coordinate onboarding programmes. The number of interviews was dictated by the availability of practitioners, as well as their willingness to participate in one stage of the research proceedings. The companies the respondents represented overwhelmingly included companies from the service, manufacturing and retail sectors. Most of the experts came from large and medium-sized enterprises located in southern Poland. During the interviews, the experts were asked which activities they would categorise as particular pillars of onboarding. The interviews made it possible to collect a large amount of data on the activities that, according to the respondents, characterise the different pillars of onboarding programmes. The collected data were transferred to a spreadsheet allowing the grouping of activities and the identification of those that occurred most frequently, both in the literature and in the and expert interviews. By collating the results from the two stages of the research procedure, it was possible to compare the most frequent activities, which were assigned to the three pillars of onboarding. The activities that were repeatedly mentioned by the experts and those that were revealed during the literature review were taken into account when creating the research tool proposal. A very large number of activities from the above sources overlapped which confirmed the validity of their selection. The result of the work described above is a research tool that covers the 3 pillars of onboarding: proactivity, interactivity and community.

Under the first pillar, which is proactivity, a total of 10 statements were developed. These statements address issues related to proactive actions by the employer, leading to the full effectiveness in the professional area that a new employee should achieve. They are reproduced below to give an overview of the subject matter:

1. During onboarding, I was ensured that I was actively involved in the implementation activities.
2. During the implementation, it was presented how important my role will be in the organization.
3. The onboarding programme allowed to learn the aspects necessary to start work properly.
4. The content of the implementation programme was prepared in such a way that, once it was completed, the duties would start correctly.
5. Onboarding included active and engaging ways of implementation.
6. During the implementation process, I was given the appropriate amount of time necessary to properly assimilate the content.
7. The presenter encouraged questions.
8. The implementer made sure that the content communicated was understood.
9. The implementation schedule took into account the possibilities for absorbing new knowledge.
10. Adequate time has been provided during implementation for asking questions and clarification of ambiguities.

The second pillar of onboarding, under which a total of 11 statements were developed, is interactivity. In this area, the questions specifically address: feedback on the onboarding programme, the tools used during onboarding, the sources used during the employee's onboarding and the relationships that were built during the adaptation programme. The statements exploring the level of interactivity are presented below:

1. During onboarding, feedback was collected on the various stages of implementation.
2. Tailored the onboarding programme to my own needs and implementation preferences.
3. Interactive tools were used during the onboarding process.
4. Online evaluation surveys were conducted during implementation.
5. During onboarding, knowledge was transferred through interactive information sources.
6. Each new employee was given access to an adequate amount of information available throughout the implementation about the company and its operations.
7. During the onboarding process, a good relationship was nurtured between the implementer and the one being implemented.
8. During onboarding, progress and the degree of assimilation of information were analysed.
9. The implementer asked questions about the clarity of messages and information.

10. The implementer informed about the possibility of repeating an issue or returning to unclear and problematic issues.
11. During the implementation I felt I built a strong relationship with the implementing person.

The last of the onboarding pillars presented is the community pillar. In this case, as in the first onboarding pillar presented, a total of 10 statements were developed. The content of these statements examines, among other things: the level of support provided during the implementation programme, the number of people supporting and supervisors of the onboarding process, as well as the frequency of contact between those involved in the onboarding process and new employees. Below are the statements developed for the community pillar:

1. In the onboarding process, a mentor/mentee/buddy was assigned to guide me through the implementation process.
2. Those carrying out the implementation were well prepared for their role.
3. Those carrying out the implementation were characterised by a high degree of commitment in their duties.
4. The frequency of contact with the implementers was sufficient to get to know the organisation and its functioning.
5. During onboarding, I was given the support and assistance I needed.
6. During implementation, remote contact with those carrying out the implementation was provided.
7. The implementer, believed in me and my skills.
8. I received a lot of valuable working tips from the people involved in the implementation process.
9. New friendships were made through the onboarding process.
10. The people carrying out the implementation process even after it was completed provided assistance and good advice.

## 5. Summary

In conclusion, the pillars of onboarding identified during the literature analysis and interviews with HR practitioners could form the basis of a research tool. This tool could be used to measure the level of interactivity, proactivity and community of individual onboarding programmes. By comprehensively capturing the most important components of the repeatedly mentioned pillars, it will be possible to determine to what extent the onboarding programme in place fulfils the basic assumptions. For the survey instrument created on the basis of the statements presented above, the authors of the publication propose to use a seven-point Likert

scale, thanks to which the respondent will be able to indicate to what extent they agree with the statements forming the pillars of onboarding. The data obtained can then be analysed and the onboarding pillars can be removed if they do not fit into the whole or do not contribute to the construction of the tool. Once the procedure involved in building the tool has been followed, the sequence of questions presented can form an important part of the development of onboarding programmes. The tool created can be used by both researchers and managers who develop onboarding programmes, based on the presented pillars. Additionally, the tool mentioned, can also be used to improve existing onboarding programmes.

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