

INCLUSIVE ONBOARDING PROCESS AND THE SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE – A THEORETICAL OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to indicate to what extent an organization hiring new employees is able to prepare an individualized, inclusive onboarding process for a diverse workforce; to what extent is it necessary, and to what extent is it possible, so that each new employee efficiently find themselves in the new workplace, but also has the feeling that the organization wants to use their potential and talents.

Design/methodology/approach: The objectives are achieved by the analysis of existing scientific literature and research. The theoretical scope is to discuss the possibilities of introducing organizational culture efficiently during the process of onboarding and still make the process inclusive.

Findings: It was found that to make the newcomer become truly included in the organization and connected to its social life it is necessary for the organization to pay attention to all four phases and prepare practical solutions to: compliance, clarity, culture and then connection.

Practical implications: The implications for business comprise two ideas how to prepare inclusive onboarding in the organisations.

Originality/value: The paper is addressed to HR specialists (practitioners) and also to researchers to check in practice the proposed approach.

Keywords: human resources management; onboarding; inclusiveness; organizational culture.

Category of the paper: Conceptual paper.

1. Introduction

Both researchers (e.g. Bauer, 2010) and human resource management (HRM) practitioners define the onboarding process in organizations as inclusive by definition. On the other hand, in today's social reality, inclusiveness has a slightly broader meaning, because it also requires paying attention to and taking into account in practice HRM many features that differentiate people – not only those well known, researched and described, such as gender, but also the fact of the existence of increasingly older syndromes (the inevitable demographic process of aging of European societies) and those increasingly diverse in age (Sammara, Profili, Peccei, 2023),

taking into account the possible degree of physical disability or chronic disease of the employee (Innocenti, Profili, Sammarra, 2023), as well as neurodiversity (Doyle, 2021; Tomczak, 2022).

Outlining the broader background of the problem – each new employee, who may be significantly different from others, appears in an organization that also has its own specific, pre-formed organizational culture. It is worth noting that when considering the individual meaning and specificity of organizational culture, as well as the requirements for the adaptation process itself, each of these concepts may cause difficulties due to its multidimensional nature. While a lot of space has been devoted to research and the search for effective practices for the inclusion of newly hired employees (e.g. Klein, Polin, 2012), their diversity is noticed by organizations rather after hiring and onboarding into organizational life. The aim of this article is to outline a research area that seems to be important from the point of view of the effectiveness of HRM tools and processes, i.e. to indicate to what extent an organization hiring new employees is able to prepare an individualized, truly inclusive onboarding process for such a diverse workforce; To what extent is it necessary, and to what extent is it possible, so that each new employee effectively and quickly finds himself in the new workplace, but also has the feeling that the organization wants to use his or her potential and talents.

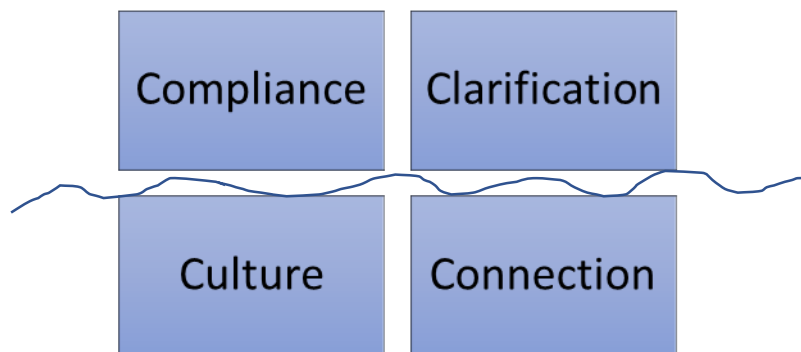
2. Onboarding and culture in organizations

2.1. What is onboarding

John Van Maanen and Edgar H. Schein begin their 1977 publication with a statement that the organizations we work at offer a person much more than just a job position. Bearing in mind our own experience and observations of the organizations around, it can be added that when we become a new participant in any organization, we are almost immediately thrown into its multidimensional, already formed social life, which means interpersonal relations, visible and hidden patterns of acceptable behavior, specific language (sometimes jargon or specific corporate slang), coalitions and oppositions to specific people, groups, power and many others. Usually, before we start to be perceived as a full-fledged, sociologically speaking - "our" - member of the organization, we participate in a previously prepared adaptation process (Feldman, 1981; Van Maanen, Schein, 1979). Its role is to provide each new employee with all possible organizational support so that they can be introduced to both dimensions of organizational life – professional and social – as quickly and effectively as possible (Król, Ludwiczynski, 2008). This means that the newcomer gradually joins both his professional role, i.e. professional duties, and the social life of the organization, i.e., m.in. efficient movement between existing social relationships and building his own.

This process is interchangeably called adaptation (Król, Ludwiczynski, 2008), *orienting/ orientation* (Klein, Heuser, 2008; Smith, 1984; Wanous, Reichers, 2000), induction (Van den Broek, 1997), socialization (Van Maanen, Schein, 1979), and since the early 2000s – onboarding (Bauer, 2010; Bradt, Vonnegut, 2009). In the literal sense, onboarding has connections with maritime topics, as it means "boarding on" (for example, a ship). This process can be perceived in a similar way in the organizational context. The basic question that both HR practitioners and researchers ask themselves is how to prepare the onboarding process so that it is as easy as possible for both parties, what it will require from the organization and what it will require from the employee. According to Bauer (2010) there are four building blocks of successful onboarding which are called the Four C's (see: Table 1). The extent to which each organization utilizes these four foundational components dictates its comprehensive onboarding strategy, resulting in most firms being categorized into one of three levels.

Table 1.
The Four C's concept



Source: adapted from Bauer, 2010.

Compliance means providing knowledge on basic regulations and legal or policy-related rules. *Clarification* is ensuring the new-comer is acquainted with all job-related expectations. *Culture* refers to providing formal and informal organisational norms. *Connection* comprises the vital interpersonal relationships and information networks that the new should participate in at first and create individually secondly. The first two levels are strongly connected to the professional aspects of the job, the two others refer mostly to social dimension. To cover all of them Klein and Polin (2012) propose 7 onboarding best-practices based on practitioner literature they analysed:

1. Perceiving onboarding as a process that requires time and planned following steps,
2. The attitude that onboarding should reinforce culture,
3. Understanding that onboarding is a team effort,
4. If possible the organisation should take advantage of technology,
5. It is necessary to give newcomers a sense of purpose,
6. Initially the organisation should provide appropriate orientation training,
7. Provide feedback channels.

The onboarding process leads to three types of effects (Table 2), which are multidimensional in nature – they can be visible immediately, in the near future and in the long term.

Table 2.

Onboarding results – taking into account the time perspective

Onboarding results		
Immediate	Short term	Long term
They refer specifically to the development of new knowledge and better and better cognition/absorption of the substantive content of socialization processes (Klein, Heuser, 2008).	Transparency of the organizational role, social inclusion, perceived alignment (Klein, Heuser, 2008).	Linking to the work performance (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, Tucker, 2007),
	Improving the performance of tasks, integration with the group, political knowledge (Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, 2003)	Job satisfaction (Bauer et al., 2007; Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, 2002; Meyer, Bartels, 2017; Myers, Oetzel, 2003).
		Organizational commitment (Bauer et al., 2007; Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, 2002; Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, 2003; Meyer, Bartels, 2017).
		Organizational identity (Myers, Oetzel, 2003), Will to stay in the organization (Bauer et al., 2007; Ellis et al., 2017), Withdrawal behaviors (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, Johnson, 2005), The will to leave the organization (Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, 2002; Gupta et al., 2018; Jones, 1986; Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, 2003; Myers, Oetzel, 2003), Staff Liquidity (Bauer et al., 2007).

Source: own study based on: Becker, Bish, 2021, p.2.

Why is it so important to plan and monitor the effectiveness of the onboarding process? First of all, it is worth understanding that each of the time perspectives has certain specific psychological and social effects for the employee. If onboarding has a negative impact on any of them, it leads primarily to a lack of commitment to the tasks performed, and consequently to leaving the job. Ellis et al. (2017) noted that in situations of improper onboarding, as many as 17% of new employees leave the organization within the first three months. This is an unfavorable situation both for the employee (it causes the need to look for another job, go through the processes of recruitment, selection and new adaptation) and for the organization (possible loss of talent with unique skills, the need to once again engage one's own material and intangible resources in the search for a new employee, with no guarantee of success in the entire new process). Generally, when onboarding process is done correctly it leads to “higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, lower turnover, higher performance levels, career effectiveness, lowered stress” (Bauer, 2012, p. 17).

2.2. The role of organizational culture

The concept of culture, including organizational culture, is considered to be one of the most ambiguous, but also subject to dynamic changes in terms of their understanding (Krzyworzeka, 2008). In the maze of definitions, it is worth paying attention to two important aspects of organizational culture. First of all – its uniqueness. The culture of organizations began to be discussed, researched and described particularly intensively in the 1980s (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2007; Alvesson, 2002), which is understandable, because more and more people worked in multinational corporations, where people from very different national cultures met and had to learn to cooperate. At that time, it was emphasized, and also today, researchers draw attention to the fact that '[t]he every organisation, like a local community, has its own culture [...] created and maintained by its participants' (Konecki, 2007, p. 9), the uniqueness of which is built by employees with the use of their own symbols. Thanks to this, they can move and act freely in it, as well as notice its unique character. As Zbiegień-Maciąg (1999) writes, the processes of creating symbols and giving them meanings are continuous. Kostera (2003) also notes that "[t]he culture is therefore that which, through symbols, enables us to see and understand the world, as well as to communicate. It offers a common language, shared associations and ideas, as well as at least partially a common evaluation of various things and phenomena" (Kostera, 2003, p. 33). Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges, on the other hand, calls the culture of organization 'a bubble of meanings' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, p. 60).

Secondly – the multidimensional nature of culture. There are many definitions of organizational culture in management sciences, which emphasize its complex nature and diversity (e.g. Schein, 1985; Sikorski, 2006; Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2000; Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner, 2002). One of the most commonly cited is the definition proposed by Edgar Schein (1985), which indicates three dimensions of organizational culture. The lowest level, and at the same time the one most deeply hidden from the human eye and consciousness, are the basic assumptions of culture. It includes all the most important problems of human existence (Marcisz, 2017; Lipińska-Grobelny, 2020), e.g. perception and understanding of the organization's environment, the importance of professional activity, "ideas about the correct ordering of formal and informal social relations" (Lipińska-Grobelny, 2020, p. 274 after Marcisz, 2017). The second dimension, a little more visible and conscious, is the norms and values in force in the organization. And the last, most visible and conscious level of culture are cultural artefacts, i.e. symbols, ways of communication, rituals, taboos, stories (Zbiegień-Maciąg, 1999, pp. 44-51; Kostera, 2003; Mikułowski-Pomorski, 1999). If we assume that each organization is (more or less) a culture that is (more or less) distinct from others, usually ambiguous, then we also assume that it has specific, unique features, i.e. assumptions, values, symbols and other artefacts observable externally as manifestations of its a complicated and rich inner life (Hatch, 2002). However, it is very difficult to interpret the manifestations of culture without knowing (and not understanding) its very core hidden in the depths (Zbiegień-Maciąg, 1999).

3. Summary: inclusive onboarding – how to make good use of diversity

In the light of the above considerations, inclusive onboarding can be understood as an active, planned and prepared action of the organization, which aims to effectively and systematically include the newly hired employee in the multidimensional social and professional life of the organization. Inclusivity implies the inclusion of employees with different competences, physical or mental requirements, and socio-demographic characteristics. It is worth bearing in mind that it includes the employee in a multidimensional organizational organism in which there are visible and invisible elements, for which in turn it may be necessary to spend a lot of time (even more than assumed at the beginning).

The aim of the article is to indicate to what extent an organization hiring new, diverse employees is able to prepare an individualized onboarding process and to what extent it is necessary for the employee to effectively learn about various dimensions of the organization, and to what extent it is possible – so that each new employee also has the feeling that the organization wants to use their capabilities and they want to get involved in its activities. The relationship between employee engagement and HRM practices is the subject of many scientific studies (e.g. Alfes et al., 2013; Saks, Gruman, 2021). Also in the context of developing DEIB culture (that means Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging). Owyong (2022) explains how to change particular HRM practices that enhance building strong DEIB culture in organisations all over the world. It is not enough to employ diverse people and give them equal chances, possibilities, expectations but it is necessary to re-think existing HRM processes (especially onboarding – as that is the subject of the article) and prepare such solutions and practices that literally include newcomers into both professional and social organizational dimensions, and lead to the sense of belonging to the work team. In this context it is worth taking a closer look at the two proposed perspectives which are aimed at constructing the onboarding process in such a way as to significantly increase the chances of a new employee reaching the last stage of Connection according to the concept of The Four Cs (which seems to be impossible without knowledge of and emerging in the organisational Culture):

- firstly, the use of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model in the onboarding process in relation to each of the most common diversity (gender, age differences, disability, chronic diseases, neurotypicality). It is a model that has been constructed to explain the phenomenon of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001), but it is also used in another organizational context – research on the impact of HRM practices on increasing employee engagement, e.g. chronically ill people (Innocenti, Profili, Sammarra, 2023) and neurodiverse workers (Tomczak, Kulikowski, 2024). The JD-R model takes into account the requirements of the workplace (i.e. physical, social and organizational aspects that generate physical or mental effort and constitute some kind of psychological or physiological cost – e.g. exhaustion) and resources, i.e. the possibility of applying

strategies to protect the employee's health from the adverse effects of the workplace requirements, stimulate personal development and act functionally in achieving professional goals (Demerouti et al., 2001).

- secondly – preparation of separate onboarding processes for people taking up work for the first time, i.e. without professional experience, and for those with experience. The separation itself is a common practice, but in the case of people changing jobs (i.e. with work experience, and especially with long-term experience), it is worth considering extending the standard onboarding process, usually planned as a process of learning and adapting of the employee, to include the stage of "unlearning" previous work practices, behaviours, and even habits (Klein, Heuser, 2008). HRM practitioners and researchers propose that unlearning precedes proper adaptation, because only then does the organization have the opportunity to make onboarding more individualized, i.e. to take into account the diversity of employees, their unique experiences, knowledge base, and needs (Becker, Bish, 2021).

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