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# EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE ONBOARDING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTED BY A RETAIL CHAIN: A CASE STUDY

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**Purpose:** Onboarding is the process of introducing a new employee to a company, including familiarising them with the team, procedures, and the organization's values and culture. To ensure this process runs smoothly and effectively, it is essential to develop an appropriate onboarding program. This article aims to evaluate and propose improvements to the onboarding program implemented by a retail network operating in the food and industrial sector.
**Design/methodology/approach**: A case study method was employed to identify key areas needing improvement and to implement solutions that support the adaptation of new employees. The study is based on a literature review and a survey conducted among 71 newly hired employees. Principal components analysis was utilised for statistical analysis.
**Findings:** As a result of the analysis conducted, five key components supporting new employees were identified. The onboarding program had a positive impact on employee motivation and engagement, facilitating their integration through mentorship. Additionally, it enabled the precise determination of career paths. However, the program's weak points were practical training and understanding of organisational culture, which require long-term support.
**Research limitations/implications**: The limitation of this study is its focus on a single retail network. The non-random sample selection does not allow for the generalization of the results to the entire population. It is recommended that future research be conducted across other competitive enterprises to deepen the understanding of current trends and challenges in the onboarding process.
**Practical implications:** The study results provide practical recommendations and serve as a valuable source of knowledge for managers at various levels, including human resources managers and employees responsible for onboarding new hires and implementing onboarding programs. The findings can help refine and adapt onboarding programs to changing work conditions and the needs of both the company and its employees.
**Originality/value:** The conducted research enabled a critical evaluation of the onboarding program and the development of recommendations to enhance it. Implementing these recommendations aims to strengthen team collaboration, increase work efficiency, and develop employee competencies. Furthermore, it should lead to increased motivation, better career path planning, and a deeper understanding of organizational culture.
**Keywords:** onboarding program, human resources, factor analysis.
**Category of the paper:** research paper, case study.

## 1. Introduction

Onboarding, as a key element of human resource management, plays a crucial role in integrating newly hired employees into an organization. Over the past two decades, significant changes in the work environment have underscored the need to consider multiple factors when implementing onboarding. Modern enterprises operating in a rapidly changing environment must adapt their strategies to meet evolving customer expectations while simultaneously developing their employees.

Ensuring appropriate working conditions, opportunities for professional development, and access to training is crucial for maintaining high levels of employee motivation and engagement. In this context, a carefully designed onboarding program plays a significant role. Such a program not only facilitates the adaptation of new employees within the company but also builds their sense of belonging and understanding of the organization's processes, values, and culture. As a result, employees achieve full efficiency more quickly and can plan their long-term careers within the company.

The aim of the article is to evaluate and propose improvements to the onboarding program implemented by a retail chain operating in Poland's food and industrial sectors. The study employs a case study method, which enables the identification of key areas requiring improvement and the implementation of solutions that support the adaptation of new employees.

As a result of the merger of two retail networks operating in the same industry, the organization gained valuable, experienced employees. The aim of the companies' merger was not only to increase market share but also to strengthen human capital. The new employees have significantly contributed to improving operational efficiency and introducing innovative solutions. Thanks to their specialized knowledge and skills, the company has increased its competitiveness.

The study is both theoretical and empirical. As part of the literature review, specific objectives were achieved, including:

- presenting the definition of onboarding,
- demonstrating the impact of the onboarding program on the motivation and engagement of new employees,
- discussing the role of a mentor in integrating new members into the team,
- indicating how onboarding contributes to the development of employee competencies and the shaping of organizational culture.

In the empirical section, the results of a survey involving 71 newly hired employees are presented. The aim of the study was to identify factors affecting the effectiveness of the onboarding program within a retail network and to propose improvements. Principal component analysis was used for statistical analysis.

The results of the study can be used to optimize the onboarding program to more effectively respond to the dynamically changing work conditions and the needs of both the organization and its employees. Such analyses are crucial for HR departments and managers, as they help understand the impact of onboarding processes on the performance of newly hired employees. This allows for the enhancement of onboarding strategies that increase operational efficiency and optimize the utilization of employee potential.

One limitation of the study is its focus on employees of a single retail chain. Although the deliberately selected sample provided significant and valuable insights for the analyzed company, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population. This study serves as a foundation for further analyses. In the future, it would be worthwhile to conduct research in other competitive enterprises to better understand current trends and challenges in the onboarding process.

## 2. Literature review – the essence of onboarding

Onboarding does not have a single, universal definition in the literature. It is analyzed from sociological, psychological, management, and quality perspectives. From a sociological standpoint, onboarding plays a crucial role in organizational socialization, affecting employee satisfaction, integration with organizational culture, and retention (Bowers et al., 2023; Khandekar, Mehtha, 2024). Proactive actions, such as asking questions and building relationships, accelerate the adaptation process (Revell et al., 2024). Improper socialization can lead to feelings of isolation and difficulties with adaptation (Ashforth et al., 2007). According to Harris and colleagues (2022), socialization experiences are particularly important in times of increasing job mobility, influencing employees' decisions to stay with or leave an organization.

From a psychological perspective, particular attention is given to the concept of psychological safety, which is defined as the ability to freely express thoughts, ask questions, and raise issues without fear of negative consequences (Hartley, 2024). Psychological safety is crucial for employee collaboration and development (Hartley, 2024). New team members often experience stress as they try to find their footing in a new work environment. It is essential that they receive support from supervisors and colleagues (Phillips et al., 2015). A lack of acceptance can lead to isolation and hinder integration (Phillips et al., 2015). New employees should feel supported and accepted.

From the perspectives of management science and quality, onboarding is much more than just the formalities of starting a new job. It is a comprehensive process aimed at acquainting new employees with the company's organizational culture, values, and goals (Cable, Parsons, 2001). This process involves building relationships and understanding the organization's mission and strategy. Its goal is to facilitate the employee's smooth integration into their new

responsibilities and to provide key information about the position. Difficulties in adaptation can lead to resignation (Peniuk, 2024), which is why it is crucial for the process to be well-organized and to consider the needs of both parties. Modern companies use artificial intelligence to develop onboarding programs that engage employees and increase retention (Brown, 2024). Modern onboarding tools, such as e-learning platforms, mobile applications, and virtual assistants, play a crucial role in stabilising the workforce by increasing employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall organisational efficiency (Dovhan et al., 2025).

### 2.1. The impact of onboarding on employee motivation and engagement

Onboarding significantly influences new employees' motivation and engagement, especially during the initial period of employment. Strong connections between motivation and engagement are crucial for work efficiency (Pradhan, Jena, 2019). Motivated employees achieve better results, which is essential for the company's development (Voloshchenko, Nikolaeva, 2024). It influences their willingness to continue working (Tutar et al., 2026).

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a key role in professional engagement (Yuan et al., 2024), while low engagement leads to staff turnover. A comprehensive approach to designing onboarding programs can help avoid negative consequences such as low satisfaction, higher costs, and low productivity, which may result in employee departure (Bauer et al., 2007). The modern work environment requires managers to make greater use of motivational techniques and create an atmosphere conducive to active engagement (Yarbrough, Salazar, 2025). Onboarding through social media and microlearning (presenting content in short-form) permanently increases employee productivity by clearly defining their roles and strengthening their sense of belonging in an environment conducive to building trust (Tutar et al., 2026).

### 2.2. The role of a mentor in integrating new employees into the team

Mentoring facilitates the integration of new employees by fostering their professional development through the sharing of knowledge and experience from more seasoned mentors. Mentors with their experience, they can act as a source of information and support (Ragins, Kram, 2007). A mentor's support influences productivity, retention, and the company's culture of trust (Süveges, Kurucz, 2024).

Mentors facilitate relationship building and enhance a sense of belonging within a company (Higgins, Kram, 2001). A contemporary mentor can combine this role with that of a leader. A mentor-leader plays a key role in employees' personal and professional development by combining coaching skills with empathy and mindfulness, thereby contributing to the flexibility, creativity, and maturity of the workforce (Triantari, 2024). Employees who feel like an integral part of the team demonstrate higher engagement and greater job satisfaction (Van Vianen, De Pater, 2012). Regular meetings and constructive feedback contribute to skill development, which in turn increases efficiency and confidence in performing professional duties (Clutterbuck, 2004). Research conducted by Allen and colleagues (2004) indicates that

participants in mentoring programs exhibit higher organizational commitment and a lower tendency to leave the company. Mentoring positively influences the sustainable psychological contract and proactive behaviours of new employees (Yang et al., 2024). There are also ideas to use artificial intelligence as a substitute for expert mentoring (Tan et al., 2025). However, this requires appropriate research.

### 2.3. The impact of onboarding on employee competencies and organizational culture

A carefully designed onboarding program accelerates new hires' skill acquisition. Effective development requires creating conditions conducive to knowledge sharing and fostering an organizational culture that supports growth (Cheikh- Ammar et al., 2024).

Organisational culture plays an important role in the employee recruitment process, as it affects employees' performance and satisfaction (LaGree, Olsen, 2026).

Programs that incorporate organizational culture help new employees understand the company's values and norms (Cable, Parsons, 2001). To help employees better understand and embrace the organisational culture during onboarding, it is important to build relationships with colleagues, managers, and leadership (LaGree, Olsen, 2026). Additionally, integrating with the team and having opportunities to demonstrate initiative and independence strengthen their connection to the organisation's culture.

Research conducted by Harvard Business Review (2018) shows that employees participating in programs focused on organizational culture are more engaged and loyal. Examples from Google and Microsoft indicate that a comprehensive approach to cultural integration allows new employees to quickly adapt to the work environment (Stein, Christiansen, 2010).

## 3. Research methodology

To provide practical guidance for managers and employees involved in implementing and improving onboarding programs, a survey study was conducted. The aim of the study was to analyse the impact of the onboarding program on new employees' motivation and engagement, and to assess how mentor collaboration can accelerate their integration into the team.

Additionally, the study aimed to examine how the program influences the development of employees' competencies and their understanding of organizational culture.

To evaluate the onboarding program, a developed survey questionnaire was used. The survey employed a 5-point Likert scale. A purposive sampling method was conducted, resulting in 71 employees completing the survey after the program, which lasted four months.

The survey consisted of 10 questions and a demographic section. Detailed survey questions are presented in Table 2.

### 3.1. Description of the study group

Seventy-one newly hired employees participated in the study, of which 79% were women and 21% were men (Table 1). Analysing the positions held, the largest group consisted of salespeople and store employees (66.2%), responsible for customer service and direct sales. The second largest group comprised store managers, assistant managers, and department managers, collectively accounting for 21.1%.

Together, these two groups made up 87.3% of all positions. Specialists and office workers accounted for 8.5%, while regional and operational managers accounted for 4.2%. In terms of age, the largest group was employees aged 41-50, accounting for 56.3% of the team, indicating an experienced workforce. Employees aged 31-40 accounted for 23.9% of the team, while those aged 51-60 made up 12.7%. The younger generation (ages 21-30) accounted for 5.6% of the team, and individuals aged 60+ accounted for 1.5%. Employees aged 50 or younger accounted for 80.3% of the team. Regarding professional experience, the largest group was those with more than 10 years of experience, accounting for 49.3%, indicating that nearly half of the respondents have significant professional experience. Respondents with 6-10 years of experience accounted for 25.4%.

**Table 1.**
*Characteristics of the study group*

| **Position** | **Quantity** | **%** | **Tenure** | **Quantity** | **%** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Salespeople and store employees | 47 | 66,2 | 0-2 years | 4 | 5,6 |
| Store managers and assistant store managers, as well as department managers | 15 | 21,1 | 3-5 years | 14 | 19,7 |
| Specialists and office workers | 6 | 8,5 | 6-10 years | 18 | 25,4 |
| Regional managers | 3 | 4,2 | Over 10 years | 35 | 49,3 |
| **Age** | **Quantity** | **%** | **Gender** | **Quantity** | **%** |
| 21-30 years old | 4 | 5,6 | Women | 56 | 79 |
| 31-40 years old | 17 | 23,9 | Men | 15 | 21 |
| 41-50 years old | 40 | 56,3 | | | |
| 51-60 years old | 9 | 12,7 | | | |
| over 60 years of age | 1 | 1,5 | | | |

Source: own study.

Combined with individuals possessing over 10 years of experience, these two groups constitute 74.6% of all survey participants. Individuals with 3-5 years of work experience accounted for 19.7% of respondents. The smallest group consisted of those with the shortest work experience, ranging from 0 to 2 years (5.6%). In summary, the majority of respondents have at least 3 years of professional experience, with the largest group having over 10 years.

### 3.2. Description of the onboarding program in the studied enterprise

In the analysed company, the HR department, in collaboration with managers and mentors, developed a comprehensive onboarding program for new employees. The structure of the program was carefully planned, and its implementation was tailored to the company's needs.

The program consisted of six stages:

- Stage I involved an informational meeting during which new employees received detailed information about the company and were assigned to mentors.
- Stage II consisted of familiarizing the team and assigning duties to the new employees.
- Stage III included theoretical training, conducted both in-person and online, regarding the company's products and processes.
- Stage IV comprised practical sessions where employees performed their duties under the supervision of experienced colleagues.
- Stage V contained feedback sessions, allowing for ongoing monitoring of progress and adapting the onboarding process to individual needs; employees also participated in integration meetings.
- Stage VI involved monitoring progress and evaluating the program's outcomes for further improvement.

It was assumed that the onboarding program should enable new employees to integrate quickly and effectively. Therefore, employees from various departments were engaged to assist in the process.

### 3.3. Presentation of research results

Principal component analysis was used for the statistical analyses. The rationale for using factor analysis was based on the results of Bartlett's test of sphericity, which showed statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, which was 0.533. These results indicate that the data are suitable for factor analysis. Additionally, the chi-square statistic was 116.084 with 45 degrees of freedom, further confirming the validity of the conducted analysis.

The application of principal component analysis enabled the identification of factors with the greatest impact on data variability. The total explained variance was 74.307%, indicating that the first five factors account for over 74% of the total variability. Ultimately, five components were obtained, ordered from most to least significant (Table 2).

Based on the analysis, several key conclusions can be drawn about new employees' onboarding experiences. Five components of the onboarding program have been identified as significantly impacting various aspects of this process.

Component 1: work efficiency and trust. One of the beneficial elements of the program was the enhancement of trust and goodwill among employees, as evidenced by a high score (0.808). This result fosters better communication and collaboration. The program had a moderate impact

on understanding and acceptance of organizational culture (0.526). This indicates that fully grasping the organizational culture requires time and commitment from new employees, highlighting the need for long-term support in this area.

**Table 2.**
*Results of the principal component analysis*

| Position | Component | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Practical training in training stores had an impact on work efficiency | -.827 | .215 | .169 | -.066 | .119 |
| 2. The onboarding program strengthened mutual trust and kindness | .808 | -.340 | -.157 | .148 | .045 |
| 3. The onboarding program positively influenced the understanding and acceptance of the organizational culture | .526 | -.348 | -.048 | -.346 | .162 |
| 4. The onboarding program allowed for a clear definition of the career path | .372 | .676 | .215 | -.107 | .111 |
| 5. The onboarding program unleashed employee motivation and engagement | .290 | .576 | .486 | .002 | -.295 |
| 6. The onboarding program facilitated cooperation with a mentor | -.123 | -.551 | .551 | .211 | -.179 |
| 7. Participation in training allowed for the improvement of competencies | -.114 | -.509 | .478 | .351 | .302 |
| 8. Developed incentives encouraged staying within the organization | .185 | -.135 | .679 | -.448 | -.277 |
| 9. The onboarding program helped integrate with the new organization and colleagues | .271 | .356 | .134 | .779 | -.005 |
| 10. The onboarding program allowed for understanding the organization's values and mission | .103 | .193 | .309 | -.142 | .831 |

Source: developed based on the results of analyses.

On the other hand, practical training in training stores negatively affected work efficiency (-0.827). This may suggest that the current training format was not sufficiently effective. The training sessions were too theoretical, lacked interactivity, and lacked practical exercises. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce a more individualized approach, engage experienced employees as trainers, and utilize modern educational technologies.

Component 2: Career path and motivation. The onboarding program has enabled the precise definition of career paths, as evidenced by an effectiveness indicator of 0.676. Additionally, this program has influenced employee motivation and engagement, achieving a value of 0.576. Both of these elements are crucial for employees' professional development and their job satisfaction. An appropriate level of motivation and engagement translates into better work performance, greater loyalty to the company, and reduced employee turnover.

Component 3: Retention in the organization. The program encouraged retention within the organizations, as evidenced by a high effectiveness rate of 0.679. Most participants were satisfied with the program's outcomes. Additionally, the program facilitated new employee integration through mentor collaboration, as reflected in a 0.551 rate.

Component 4: Integration and training. The program contributed to effective integration with the new organizations and colleagues, as evidenced by an indicator level of 0.779. Effective integration can lead to increased job satisfaction and reduced employee turnover.

Additionally, it fosters employee relationships and promotes effective collaboration. According to the respondents, participating in the training enhanced skills, as reflected in an indicator of 0.351. However, it is recommended to continuously improve qualifications and acquire new skills, which should positively impact employee development.

Component 5: Organizational values. The program enabled employees to become familiar with the organizations's values and mission (0.831). This can help build a strong team and foster collaboration among employees.

In summary, the study results highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach to implementing an onboarding program. Building trust, supporting professional development, and fostering a sense of belonging to the team are key. It is also crucial to tailor practical training to employees' individual needs. This will help them better understand the organisational culture and increase work efficiency.

## 4. Conclusions and suggestions for improving the onboarding program

The analysis identified five key components that support new employees in adapting to a new work environment, thereby enhancing their efficiency and job satisfaction. Factor analysis confirmed that a carefully designed onboarding program positively impacts employee motivation and engagement. Motivated employees integrate more effectively into the team, which increases their loyalty to the organizations and their willingness to remain with the company long-term.

Ensuring long-term support is crucial for achieving a full understanding and acceptance of the organizational culture. The onboarding program offers numerous benefits; however, it needs enhancement, particularly in training, to better support the professional development of new employees. Additionally, the results indicate the necessity for a more balanced approach that considers both skill development and a deeper understanding of organizational values. As part of improving the program, actions have been proposed in six areas:

**Regular performance evaluation**. This will allow identification of areas needing improvement and adjustment of the program to better support new employees. To increase efficiency, focus should be placed on enhancing the motivational system. Career development planning through the establishment of clear career paths should foster a positive attitude and engagement at work.

Regular feedback from mentors and managers. Regularly providing feedback helps build trust and open communication within the team, leading to better collaboration and increased efficiency. It allows for identifying areas needing improvement and strengthening strong points.

**Increasing the number of practical training courses, and workshops and integration with organizational culture**. To effectively develop employees' competencies, it is crucial to increase the number of practical training sessions and workshops focused on enhancing adaptive skills, collaboration, and effective problem-solving. New employees should actively utilise modern e-learning platforms and interactive training modules to acquire knowledge flexibly. Creating a positive workplace atmosphere is essential for effective teamwork. Promoting a culture of open communication, where employees feel comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences, is equally important.

**HR strategy update**. Updating the strategy by analysing data on new employees' absenteeism, engagement, and productivity enables a better understanding of their needs and expectations. This type of analysis enables precise identification of areas for improvement and the implementation of specific actions to enhance team satisfaction and efficiency.

**Competitive benchmarking**. Analysing onboarding programs used by competing companies enables the implementation of proven, effective solutions. This enables an organization not only to enhance the effectiveness of its own program but also to better adapt it to the dynamically changing market needs and the growing expectations of new employees.

In summary, implementing the proposed recommendations should strengthen team collaboration, increase work efficiency, and support the development of employees' skills. Additionally, it can boost motivation levels, facilitate career path planning, and better align with the organizational culture.

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