



## HOW STRATEGIC ONBOARDING CAN TRANSFORM EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE



## Executive summary

Global executives are aware that employee experience is the key to an organization's success. However, a critical aspect that improves employee engagement – onboarding – is often overlooked. A negative onboarding experience can lead to employee dissatisfaction, disengagement, talent mismatch, higher attrition, etc.

Moreover, in times such as the current coronavirus pandemic, it is even more important to deliver an effective onboarding program that is robust and relevant. This paper looks at the key challenges that organizations face when onboarding new employees. It also highlights the solution and key steps by which companies can achieve better returns from their hiring programs.

## Introduction

Employee onboarding is one of the fundamental elements that has the potential to “make or break” the employee experience. According to a report from Digitate, employees with a negative onboarding experience are twice as likely to look for other career opportunities (1).

Onboarding is an integral event in the employee lifecycle. According to Gallup, employees with an exceptional onboarding experience are 2.6 times more likely to be extremely satisfied with their workplace (2). Thus, onboarding is a critical and opportune time to provide an exceptional experience that can have long-lasting impact on engagement, performance and retention.

According to KPMG, one of the major trends in 2020 is that the employee experience has evolved from using the right mix of digital technologies to embracing social, leadership and environmental dimensions (3). Hence, it is imperative to create a well-curated onboarding program covering all these dimensions along with an HR service delivery solution that incorporates advanced technologies like AI/ML/analytics to deliver an engaging and personalized employee experience.

## Challenges to seamless employee onboarding

There are several barriers to effective employee onboarding:

**Inadequate engagement:** Many companies are unable to engage successfully with their employees right from the start. Studies reveal that onboarding processes in several companies last for just one week or a month. Without sufficient time for employees to integrate into the company and its culture or get clarity on their role, new hires often feel confused and discouraged.

**Ineffective communication:** This is the most common obstacle to a smooth onboarding experience. Lack of communication between the company and the new hire can leave employees bewildered and dissatisfied. Poor or conflicting communication within departments during the onboarding process adds to the confusion. Companies must also be aware that a one-size-fits-all onboarding program does not work because impersonal onboarding experiences lead to lower productivity and increased attrition.

**Inconsistent and inefficient processes:** According to Sapling, a new hire has to complete an average of 54 activities in order to fully acclimatize and integrate into the new role (4). Many companies do not have the appropriate technology to automate manual onboarding tasks, which makes these processes cumbersome, tedious and inefficient for recruits as well as HR managers.

**Improper learning and development programs:** According to a survey, 42% of companies reported that learning engagement was a challenge during

onboarding (5). Improper learning and development programs during this period can lead to problems like talent mismatch and higher attrition.

In the midst of the current coronavirus pandemic, HR managers are now grappling with remote hiring practices that call for seamless and virtual onboarding. This makes all these issues even more challenging as HR now needs to keep the remote workforce engaged and connected.

## Transforming the employee onboarding experience

To deliver an exceptional employee experience, companies must adopt a holistic approach when onboarding employees. Along with a well-planned onboarding program, they must leverage technology that can address all the challenges in the employee journey. Here are some important steps by which enterprises can transform the employee experience:

**Personalize the onboarding process:** This is key to improving the new hire experience during onboarding. It is necessary to adopt a blend of technology and other initiatives that deliver tailor-made experiences. Many onboarding technologies have the ability to personalize content based on employee attributes like location, designation, etc. Additionally, pre-boarding is an area where employers can provide a unified experience through a new hire portal that enables self-service and knowledge base access. This can streamline the process by, say, replacing the deluge of emails with a one-stop platform that provides transparency and a phased approach. Implementing a buddy program can also help foster a sense of community.

### Extend onboarding and involve managers:

The program should ideally start right from the pre-boarding stage and extend at least 6 months to a year. Extended programs give the new hires enough time to integrate with the company and culture. Involving the manager right from the start will facilitate constant communication, thus making employees feel engaged and equipped to achieve their goals. According to Gallup, when managers take an active role in onboarding, employees are 3.4 times more likely to agree that their onboarding program is exceptional (2).

### Integrate learning and development with onboarding:

This can be very effective provided the program is flexible and customized from the time of joining. The learning portal should provide new hires with a curated development path and roles based on skills, educational background, interests, etc. This resolves problems like talent mismatch and helps reduce the attrition rate.

## Enterprise service management solution

ServiceNow is a cloud-based enterprise service management platform that comprises a comprehensive HR service delivery offering (6). From an onboarding perspective, this will ensure smooth employee experience. According to the ServiceNow employee experience report, around 59% of new hires find it difficult to select IT equipment like desktops and laptops before their first day (7). The workflows built in ServiceNow resolves such challenges by eliminating the silos between departments, helping them coordinate better with the employees. It makes the onboarding process clutter-free for new hires as well as enterprise departments.

Infosys Enterprise Service Management Café, part of Infosys Cobalt, taps into ServiceNow's platform to enhance value delivered to HR organizations by providing ready-to-launch solutions. These solutions help the HR team and hiring managers get real-time visibility into the onboarding process through performance analytics dashboards. In addition to this, a virtual

agent is configured to guide the new hires through common queries regarding new hire policies, organization documents, etc., enabling instant resolution and information anytime, anywhere. New hires also have access to an onboarding app that enables them to easily complete onboarding tasks, chat with the virtual agent, receive push notifications, and more, thereby mobilizing the enterprise.

Automating the onboarding process in this manner saves time for all while reducing cost and improving productivity. It further accelerates onboarding by eliminating tedious administrative work.

COVID-19 has forced many companies to continue operations with a remote workforce. Thus, **digital engagement** through videos and virtual sessions is fast becoming a priority. The above-mentioned self-service portals, virtual agents and mobile applications can greatly assist virtual onboarding programs.

## Key steps for an effective onboarding program

Infosys recommends dedicated focus on planning and strategizing to arrive at an effective onboarding program. It should encompass the following steps:

**Assess the current state:** To analyze the current state, identify all the stakeholders (new hires, HR managers, facilities, IT teams, etc.) of the onboarding program. Use design thinking principles such as discovery sessions and empathy maps to gather information and identify roadblocks in the new hire journey. Some of the common challenges that most companies face during onboarding are with respect to engagement, communication, training, and lack of technology adoption.

### Set up a clear onboarding strategy:

Based on the insights from the current state analysis, design the new onboarding framework. The onboarding strategy should revolve around enhancing the new hire experience by using the right onboarding technology coupled with other employee-centric initiatives. Investing in an enterprise technology solution can deliver immense benefits.

### Identify the right set of metrics:

Identifying the right set of HR metrics helps enterprises measure the effectiveness of their onboarding programs. The metrics can be both qualitative and quantitative. Some of the common metrics are new hire turnover rates, employee satisfaction scores, time-to-productivity, manager effectiveness, and user engagement. Advanced analytics and reporting tools can track program effectiveness.

## Benefits

- Through personalization, the employees feel more valued and engaged. According to Sapling, 87% of the companies that implemented a buddy program reported improved new hire proficiency (4)
- Onboarding programs that extend over longer periods lead to higher productivity and efficiency. According to a study, employees who undergo longer onboarding programs reach full proficiency at a pace that is 34% faster than employees with shorter programs (8)
- Active communication with managers and team members ensures that new hires are satisfied with their workplace, thereby improving employee satisfaction scores
- A robust training and development plan will ensure that new hires are well integrated into their roles, bringing down the turnover rate. According to a Gallup study, employees with a clear professional development path are 3.5 times more likely to agree that the onboarding program was exceptional (2)
- Enterprise technology ensures higher ROI and accelerated productivity for new hires. According to a ServiceNow report, 50% of employee inquiries can be resolved instantly through a self-service portal. Further, automation and self-service achieve 37% increase in productivity (7)

## Conclusion

Organizations should create and adopt a comprehensive onboarding program to deliver game-changing employee experience. To create the right onboarding program, companies must follow three important steps, namely, assessing the current state, setting up a new onboarding framework, and identifying the right set of metrics. This strategy along with a holistic approach will help companies gain various benefits like cost savings, higher productivity and a differentiated employee experience.



## References

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