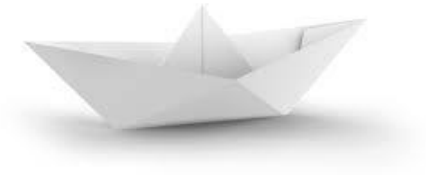
Do your early employee engagement efforts fail?



The Solution is right under your nose

"Effective Onboarding – The Most Important Tool for Early Employee Engagement"

Introduction

The process of hiring, welcoming, orienting and engaging a new employee into company culture is collectively known as on-boarding.

Have you thought of an early engagement of new employees with the company and associated benefits?

We do, however, keep its scope narrower and hence what we get is a limited output, not helping organizations meet their strategic targets. We have always chanted that human resource management is much more than a common sense; it is a full-fledged science which has capacity to offer bespoke solutions according to business needs and can come up with answers to many business questions in a very effective way. However, do we give it a due consideration? Not really! We tend to overlook available powerful tools and interventions such as effective onboarding which can always play a critical role in ensuring early employee engagement for desired employee performance.

This paper intends to explore the key strategic elements / checks which can play an instrumental role in designing and developing an effective on boarding program of a strategic nature.

Key Considerations Prior to an Action

Call it a buzz word or not, on-boarding has been accepted by a large number of successful organizations across the globe because of its undeniable benefits to the companies which has helped it gain a status of one of the most effective HR intervention for early employee engagement. This is an HR intervention which deserves and demands increasing attention from all over the world. Why? Because employees all over the world have been welcomed and on-boarded since ages. However, with the shortening of employment tenure and new generations entering into workplaces along with new set of expectations

asserting a very strong pressure on companies have led to effectively on-boarding employees on a new significance. Unfortunately, there are very few companies who give much thought to developing an effective on-boarding program having strategic nature. This oversight results into what we may call is fiasco i.e. *partially or not engaged employees, performance gaps, high turn-over, reduced employment tenures etc*.

"Strategic On boarding not only reduces costs and helps new hires improve their personal contribution to the enterprise; it also reduces regrettable attrition and help organization deliver against its strategic goals"

A lot of human resource professionals…rather…I must say most of human resource professionals know the concept of on-boarding and its benefits. However, a lot of them fail to see strategic benefits of effective on-boarding which is capable of complementing organizational effectiveness. The role of on-boarding has been confined to filling out few forms, reviewing employee handbook, setting up work stations and attending a presentation on company's policies and procedures etc. Wrong course of actions? Yes!

According to a CIPD survey, almost 80% of employers face challenges in retaining staff and most commonly used method (over 45%) to address this issue was to improve the induction process because as mentioned above early employee engagement through effective onboarding has its own benefits which can only be reaped if done well.

Consider

- A full third of external hires are no longer with the organization after two years
- Almost a third of employees employed in their current job for less than six months are already job searching.
- Less than a third of executives worldwide are positive about their onboarding experience*

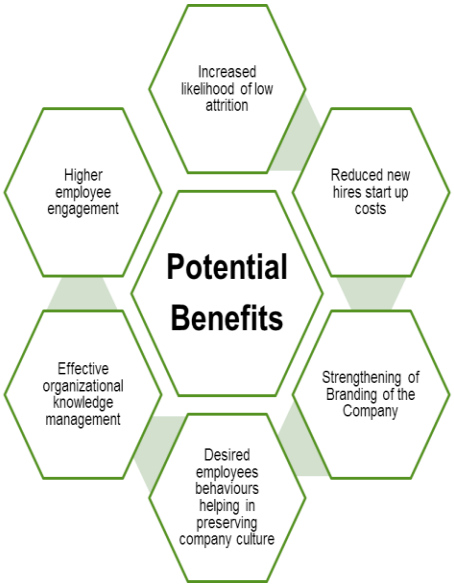
Let's See

- According to a survey, 86% of new hires make their decision to quite or stay on with the company within first six month of their employment.
- According to the same survey, 89% of the employees said that they do not have optimum level of knowledge and tools necessary to do their job to be effective in their respective roles.

(*2013 Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey)

Potential Benefits of Effective Onboarding

(A pictorial representation)



A Case in Point – A success story for a reference

Let's take *one of leading consulting firms in Pakistan as an example for inspiration. While working on HR Function Optimization which was based on following elements; HR Strategy, HR Technology, HR Service Delivery and HR Process/Policy Redesign, the company made an effective on-boarding program as part of their annual strategy plan, deployed all available resources in the best possible way to design and develop A VERY EFFECTIVE ON-BOARDING PROGRAM. Since the company is into consulting business therefore it places high value and weightage on knowledge management. While developing on-boarding program, it was kept in mind that transfer of knowledge of the company's values, mission, vision, culture as well as all functional knowledge related to the jobs will always be critical for the firm and hence one of the key indicators for success of on-boarding program will be effective transfer and retention of knowledge.

Once the program had been rolled out across the firm, a survey was run to gauge the effectiveness and impact of the newly rolled out on-boarding program and the in-house survey study revealed that new hires in comparison to old employees were able to acquire and retain knowledge, intended for a transfer through new on-boarding program by 67% percent which was a great achievement in itself and resulted into higher level of job satisfaction. The results were sort of beyond compare and amazing!
Just to mention here Knowledge management is one of the many parameters shared in above short success story.

(*The company name has not been disclosed in respect of the company's internal policies for publications)

FOUR Critical Strategic Checks

- ✓ **De-limit the Learning Canvas**
- ✓ **Learning in Collaboration**
- ✓ **Learning by Design – Guided**
- ✓ **Measure the effectiveness**

"YOU CANNOT MAKE OMLETTE WITHOUT BREAKING EGGS"

1. Delimit the learning Canvas

There is a big difference between this initial set-up and true corporate learning, which is more "relational" than transactional.

Relational On-Boarding

- Long Term Learning
- Role relevance to the org
- Job and department goals
- Job "how to"
- In-house networking
- Performance expectations
- Coaching & Support

Having the relational element is vital to strategic onboarding. This type of learning does not take place in a day, a week, or even a month. It is something that happens in small chunks, over time. The next question which may cross one's mind that then what should be the ideal length of on-boarding program. Studies suggest at least six months for effective learning saturation. And this is just a guide line. The responsibilities of new hire roles will impact the necessary length. Also keep in mind that employees are still in the process of "buying in". 90% of employees are still deciding contemplating whether they should stay at an organization throughout their first six months.

2. Learning through Collaboration

There is a great value in "show me" approach to learning instead of "tell me". According to Bersin, people retain only 10 percent of what they read, 50

Measurement of Impact

Percent of what they learn through discussion but 75 percent or more from on-the-job experiences. Adding a personalized, 1:1 approach to your extended employee onboarding program greatly improves learning retention, since this is how we, as people, naturally want to learn. Some of the benefits you can expect to see through collaborative, in-person learning are:

- Better knowledge retention
- Increased employee engagement**.**
- Ability to understand the “soft” learning of a job**.**

On-boarding program must not be designed and developed in such a way which confines interaction of new hires to a limited number of individuals instead it must be designed in such a way that they get to interact with a reasonably good number of colleagues to be able to gain specialized knowledge through experts, diversified perspectives through boundary less communication and consistent key messages in different ways from all across the firm – reinforcement at a higher level with non-monotonous elements.

The key here will be to provide new hires with network of individuals to enable them to acquire wealth of knowledge to be able to get into effectiveness phase of their performance.

3. Learning by Design – Guided

It may not only be sufficient to provide new hires with healthy network of individuals. While designing and developing on-boarding program, one must ear mark each identified exiting human resource being assigned to a new hire for knowledge transfer that what type to knowledge and skill will be transferred or exchanged, what will be the objective of such knowledge and transfer, where and how will this acquired knowledge through network will add value to new hire’s own effectiveness as a resource. This should however remain less formal without losing sight on desired productivity of the new hire.

Therefore, it becomes important to provide a structure for the extended network learning. Such learning initiatives tend to wane over time. Creating a guided workflow for the entire length of your employee onboarding program ensures that learning is continuous and productive.

Onboarding plans should be specific to job functions such as marketing or operations. Over time, one can build a library of onboarding plans so you can easily deploy them for the next crop of new hires.

4. Measure the Impact / Effectiveness

"Best in Class Companies are 30% are more likely than other organizations to extend on boarding one month for senior level executives and regular, full time employees".

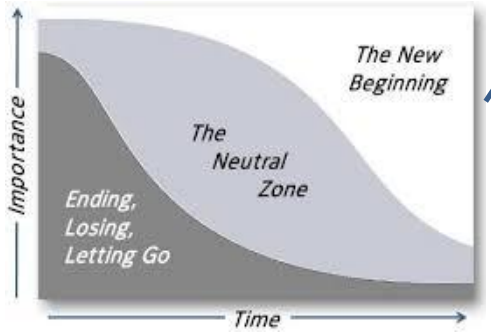
(Aberdeen Group USA)

Assuming, you deployed one of the best or bespoke on-boarding program in your company but does it make you sure that you have achieved desired results? Of course not! And here comes the role of "Measure the Effectiveness".

This is where most of the HR departments go wrong because they don't measure the effectiveness and impact of on-boarding program. If we do not measure the effectiveness how can we be sure that desired results are being met. Even if the desired results are being met, business environment within and outside your company is continuously evolving. Should not we make sure that something redundant is not being offered which has no capacity to compliment organizational effectiveness rather may drag it down. So, its wake up time for those who have not been measuring the effectiveness and impact of the on-boarding program.

Fortunately, it's all fairly easy to calculate once you focus on tracking required metrics at two levels: the program level and the employee level. To accurately measure impact, it's important to set up your metrics at the beginning of the program. At the program level, build metrics around defined business objectives.

For employees, you would want to understand the impact your extended new employee onboarding program specifically has on them. Was the learning productive? Did the employee feel anything was missing? Did they enjoy the process or feel it was a big thumbs down? It is suggested that you run survey and quizzes in a planned way and make them part of your extended program workflow, this way you will be able to pin point potential issues which need to be addressed as a priority.



Strategic On-boarding ensures to speed up the process of learning, un-learning and re-learning and subsequently reduces unproductive time for new hires with a focused approach for desired goals resulting into high level engagement

From Cost to Investment i.e. Effectiveness Phase of Employee Engagement & Performance

Gaining a temporary business edge is always achievable, but how to ensure that your organization has a sustainable growth, I believe that it is the quality of management and leadership that sets a company apart, and provides the only true blue print for lasting success. Effective on-boarding may not be a magic wand but serves like one……practical…doable….one of the best market practices….tested and tried…..and above all, churns out all desired strategic benefits provided designed, developed and executed carefully with a firm commitment not only from HR but from line management and board rooms as well.

If you do not have an effective on-boarding program, you must have one as a priority. You cannot make omelet without breaking eggs. Board rooms, line management and HR needs to develop a common understanding. Most successful organizations and their teams have benefitted from objective third party engagement at some point in time in their development and why not? They could help deliver fresh perspective without making you break too many eggs!

Author: M Ali Yaqoob

Pre-Reviews

Nitin Shankar
CEO, Middle Earth Consultants India

Ali is involved in the propagation of information In HR through blogs, articles, seminars and creation of workshops and he provides an extremely useful service to the HRM community as a whole. As a consultant and writer his writing can be considered cutting edge yet practical because he is quick to identify up and coming areas and strategic trends in HRM.

I would strongly advice the community to keep track of his writing to get the path forward in HRM. Like all the other writing the above white paper is practical, yet with deep insights based on both theory and practice.

Syed Umer Javaid
Director HR, i2c Pakistan

Ali Yaqoob seems to have grabbed a major issue that slips by most of HR professionals. It is extremely significant to understand the importance of a properly well structures onboarding program, because a lot of people do leave in the first year most of which reflect on how well they were oriented. The topics Ali write on are destined to raise a lot of eye brows because when drilled deep one would be able to discover the root cause of high turnovers by reading Ali's white paper.

Ali efforts through this white paper do point to the real cause of employee turnover in a lot of organizations and it is by further strengthening the onboarding process that an organization can retain talent and continue delivering excellence.

Ajay Sridharan
Director at Central Test, India

I am extremely happy to have read this white paper written by Ali Yaqoob whom I have known for past three years. My interaction with Ali started for a small scale activity which has now fostered into a large scale strategic nature endeavour. I have interacted with Ali on many complex projects and I believe this is his rich experience which has enabled him to write a wonderful white paper which talks about employee engagement from the day one.

Knowledge and HR issues' understanding displayed in this white paper are impeccable.

Vote of Thanks

We would like thank all experts who graciously agreed for pre-review of this white paper and shared their feedback.

We would like to make special mention of Mr. Wali Zahid, CEO Skill City for a peer-review, technical input and for many minutes out of his personal time to ensuring that this white paper illuminates desired value and impact.

We, at Clavum, strongly believe in knowledge sharing, for more articles and white papers, please keep visiting our website:

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Looking forward to receiving your feedback.

Thank you

Editor in Chief
editor@clavumconsulting.com

Integrity | Quality | Personal Reward

www.clavumconsulting.com

ali.yaqoob@clavumconsulting.com

Let's nail it together!