

The Onboarding Experience

Keeping up with Onboarding

Over the last few years, companies' demand for a systematic onboarding process has snowballed. Onboarding has become the primary initiative for many HR leaders as they work to improve HR functions. Using technology is a clear way to improve a streamlined, systematic process. This white paper will help you navigate the available onboarding solutions, and find the right fit.

“Onboarding” vs. “Orientation”

Many organizations have tried to create onboarding experiences for their new hires, but these experiences have found mixed results. The biggest challenge is that organizations use the term “onboarding” synonymously with “orientation”. So what’s the difference? The two words have very separate definitions and knowing the difference could determine whether your organization creates a successful onboarding process or not.

Onboarding plays a key role as a program that should exist between the recruitment and selection process and performance management programs in an organization. Onboarding is the bridge between the résumé screening, interviewing, and selection of a job candidate and the annual review measuring how that employee is doing in her/his job. When it comes to documentation, it’s critical to get the key documentation quickly and painlessly. An online hub where new hires can find materials as they need them, once they’ve settled into their new job, is a great way to keep them engaged and informed.

Orientation, on the other hand, is the event that usually takes place on or near day one and provides an information dump of the organization and a plethora of paperwork to complete.

The following ideas may help to explain how orientation and onboarding differ:

Orientation	Onboarding
New employee orientation is an event	Onboarding is a process that begins upon acceptance of the job and typically lasts through the first 90 to 180 days
Orientation is more a one-way flow of information to the new employee.	Onboarding allows information to flow through several different channels from the organization to the new employee and from the new employee to the organization
Orientation is a one-size-fits-all program with most or all positions expected to attend	The onboarding experience is customized by a new employee’s role in a particular function or department of the organization. Onboarding delivers organizational overview information to a diverse group of new employees with consistency, yet with context to the particular employee’s situation
The audiences for new employee orientation are typically externally hired associates of all levels	Onboarding is important for both newly hired and newly promoted employees
Orientation is usually owned and led by the human resources function	Onboarding reflects best practices when it is facilitated by Human Resources in close partnership with key stakeholders, the hiring manager, and the new employee’s ownership and active engagement
Orientation focuses on the logistical and the tactical	Onboarding is integrative and strategic
It is often classroom-style learning	Onboarding delivers functional and role-specific information to the individual employee in a just-in-time model. Onboarding uses a blended learning approach

Orientation provides a one-way exposure and view to the organization's culture	Onboarding's success results when the organization allows the new employees to observe and participate in the culture; it gives the new employees feedback and then helps them make adjustments based on that feedback
Employees still feel "new" after orientation	Employees are fully integrated and no longer new after a successful onboarding experience

Defining onboarding objectives is an important step in building a successful onboarding program. Clearly stating what you want to achieve with your onboarding program will not only help in selling the concept to the rest of the organization, but it will keep you on track as you create the action items, the roles and responsibilities, and the measurement (or metrics) of the process.

The following ideas may serve as a guide for the onboarding project team leader, or onboarding champion, as he or she helps the organization build a foundation for the onboarding program:

- Get clear about what business issues onboarding will address.
- What are the organization's objectives, and how can the onboarding objectives support them?
- Build measurement tools and metrics to reflect the onboarding program's objectives.
- Who is the audience?
- Increase speed to performance of new hires by x%.
- Reduce early turnover in the first year by x%.
- Increase the employee engagement level of new employees.
- Align new employees with the organizational culture.
- Preserve the culture as the organization grows.
- Reduce the "learning curve" of new employees to meet their first year objectives.
- Increase the sales volumes of new employees by x%.
- Prevent "culture shock" for new employees.
- Leverage the onboarding program to attract and retain top talent.
- Use the onboarding experience to strengthen the employment brand.
- Reaffirm new hires in their decision to join the organization by creating a seamless transition from the recruitment and selection process to the onboarding program.

An onboarding program should lay out the specific roles and responsibilities of all the participants. In providing HR advice to clients with this important process, SharedHR has found that the best practice onboarding programs use the "three-legged stool" model of onboarding. The hiring manager, the HR partner, and the new employee are all key participants in the process and have specific roles that are played out in their action items. If any one of them fails to perform his or her part of the process, one of the legs is "broken" and that onboarding experience is not as effective as it could be. And equally important is the role of technology in the onboarding process. A web-based employee onboarding system will let you standardize, streamline, track, and coordinate every step of the process, all while making your company's most recent hires feel valued, supported and socialized quickly into their new company. We have found that leveraging technology in the onboarding and orientation processes can significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your organization.