

Executive Summary

Question

“What are emerging and proven techniques to ensure orientation to a company from a cultural and tactical perspective? What are the best-in-class tools to support this orientation?”

Introduction

According to a 2017 study of 588 global executives, only 29% of executives felt that their company properly onboarded for culture.¹ More disappointingly the same study found that 69% of new leaders felt that they had a poor grasp on how the organization works. The need to create best in class orientations is clear. New employees must go from onboarding to integration with the company quickly and seamlessly. With the rise of digital platforms and an increasingly global and remote workforce, traditional orientation practices may not make as much sense as they once did. This report will include best practices for digital onboarding techniques, orientation best practices, and case studies around new and exciting innovations in orientation.

Orientation Best Practices

Even in online formats, new employee onboarding often looks a lot like the traditional teacher-centered classroom. This can often lead to disengaged or unexcited new hires. In order to combat this there are several techniques that can be used. One method is to encourage other employees to tell their own stories either in person or via video.² This allows new hires to see what it's like for employees to work there and how they too can fit in to the overall broader mission. Another is by shortening instruction times to around 15-20 minutes. The new hire should be listening to or watching the training content for no longer 20 minutes without interacting or taking a break. This leads to the next orientation best practice: encouraging learner participation. Learners need to be allowed time and space to share their own story (possibly utilizing digital tools). They must be given time to goal set and integrate their unique perspective into their new workplace. The final orientation issue is co-worker readiness.³ Managers and peers need to be ready to onboard and train new hires, just as much as the trainers themselves. Peer support is often the most telling indicator of success, and cultural understanding.

Digital Onboarding Best Practices

In order to reach an exceedingly global and remote workforce, onboarding has gone digital (mostly). Below are several best-in-class practices from digital onboarding.

Gamification - The idea of gamification (or gamifying one's onboarding experience) has become increasingly indispensable to acclimating new employees to the culture of a new organization. Using games and online gaming tools to make orientation a fun experience can eliminate the tediousness of informational briefings and actually increase retention of new hires.⁴ Research shows that gamification also increases engagement. This was seen at EVault Inc. (a San Francisco data storage/recovery firm) which began using gamification as a way to keep employees engaged while also contributing to proven increases in knowledge retention as well.⁵

Learning Centers & E-Learning - Learning Centers are an excellent way to engage new employees in training and development, but can be very impractical for remote employees who have limited access to resources. E-Learning can supplement physically going to a learning center, which can cut costs for the firm while also maintaining engagement for the employee.

Research shows that e-learning is just as effective as learning via a traditional classroom (while controlling for same conditions for both traditional classroom and e-learning).⁶

Mobile Learning Platforms - Mobile learning is a “bite-sized” way for employees to learn on-the-go. It is recommended that small, manageable learning modules and/or short videos are presented to employees via online platforms that are easily accessible to keep learner/employee engaged. It is important not to overload the employee with information not appropriate for mobile platforms since knowledge retention, and engagement, will suffer equally.⁶ One example of success in the mobile learning space can be seen in the Vodafone example. Vodafone teamed up with Fuse Universal Ltd. to create a phone application that would eliminate barriers to learning for their employees. They found that having “easy access has meant increased access”⁷ to the Vodafone/Fuse learning platform. This new platform has had a tremendous impact on engagement at Vodafone in the span of eight months, increasing “views per day” from approximately 1,500 to 10,000.⁷

Case Studies

The following case studies are rooted in the best practices above.

Samsung - In culture orientation trainings, Samsung uses a virtual reality program called *VR 360*. It is a virtual reality platform that allows employees to be immersed in Korean culture without having to travel all the way to headquarters in Seoul, South Korea (Appendix 1). This approach to onboarding is effective, both in cost reduction and engagement/learning experience.⁸ It allows employees to not only understand the international culture of the full business, but some of the underlying values by which the company operates. Through this model, Samsung delivers an unforgettable onboarding/orientation experience to new employees.

Sprint - Interactivity is the cornerstone to Sprint's completely revamped employee onboarding program. The new program, called “Welcome to Sprint”, is an interactive software program which offers features that accommodate both employees who wish to learn using traditional methods (structured, linear learning) and employees who wish to learn at their own pace. The software program is user-driven, customizable both for the employee and to individual business units, and can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Welcome to Sprint also increases manager engagement by sending an email to the manager on the first day, first week and every 30 days thereafter. The email informs the manager about the new employees' progress, providing a summary of the training, both where they excelled, and where they may have had some difficulties.⁹

Conclusion

There are many ways to increase engagement and retention (both employee and knowledge retention) during new employee onboarding/orientation. It is vital that each organization develops its own unique digital methods for orientation, but it is also important to keep the experience simple. Employees want to feel at home in their new place of work no matter where they sit. A strong and effective orientation program can do just that.

References

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Appendices

Appendix A



Thanks to VR 360 videos, new hires can visit the Samsung Innovation Museum in Korea without ever leaving their seats.

Additional Readings

- Busch, E., Nash, J., & Bell, B. S. (2011). Remote work: An examination of current trends and emerging issues. Ithaca, NY: Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies, Cornell University
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