

A study to identify the best e-onboarding practices for management graduates joining workforce in India

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ABSTRACT

E-onboarding is the process of acclimatizing a new entrant to the culture of organization and enabling him/her to work at full potential in a virtual environment. While onboarding has been proven to be a critical determinant of job performance, job satisfaction, employee motivation and retention; e-onboarding remains an under-explored area. This paper aims to identify, analyse and propose the best e-onboarding practices which are most impactful towards creating a successful e-onboarding experience. Semi-structured interviews and an objective questionnaire were used to capture experiences of a pool of fresh management graduates who joined as managers in various organizations in India. Further analysis was carried out on a primary dataset of 117 responses. It was found that newcomers find practices that are “required”, rather than “encouraged” to be more helpful. Also, there exists a positive correlation between the number of practices in e-onboarding program and the overall satisfaction of the newcomer. We concluded the paper by recommending best practices based on their helpfulness and the impact on newcomer’s satisfaction. This study would help Indian organizations in identifying best e-onboarding practices to design well-rounded e-onboarding programs for their management cadre. The paper attempts to study the efficacy of different onboarding practices in this novel virtual setup

Keywords

E-onboarding, induction, virtual onboarding, socialization, management graduates

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Introduction

Geographically spread virtual teams are now a reality. With the rise in alternate workforce and pick-up in trends like work from home and work-life integration, people are leveraging digital platforms to work in a virtual environment. They collaborate with one another while sitting in different corners of the world and contribute towards the output. While this virtual workplace is enabling organizations to engage best talents, be more efficient and cut costs, there are a lot of personal, structural, social, technological, and operational challenges to this transition.

For instance, in a virtual arrangement, a newcomer may get a chance to communicate with only a few members of the group. This could, in turn, form a misrepresented or even partial opinion of the organization because clear information about the customs and social expectations is not available [1]. Thus, for an organization to make a successful transition and embrace this digital workplace, it is essential that different aspects of human resource management are aligned for maximum support.

To this end, this study aims to contribute towards one of the most important yet scarcely researched topic of employee socialization in a virtual environment. Socialization during virtual onboarding does lead to the newcomer missing out on day to day informal events that take place in a collocated setup. These activities generally happen with employees working in the same office, a casual conversation during breaks, waiting for a meeting to start, other employees dropping by for a candid conversation, or going out for fun activities with the colleagues after work. This reduction in informal interactions within the team is supposed to have a degenerative effect on the formation of social relationships.

Similarly, the physical absence of distant newcomers during the onboarding program leads to challenges for the team as it is not able to connect informally and help, communicate or review the newcomers.

The lockdown during Covid-19 gave us a unique opportunity where various organizations tried different virtual ways of onboarding an employee and hence undertook various different practices. This study would look at some of the ways in which these practices were conducted and the corresponding impact of each practice in helping the newly hired management graduate get accustomed to the organizational culture and the role. The established list of practices was created by clustering activities on the basis of their fundamental utility [2].

Literature Review

A. Onboarding

Onboarding and organizational socialization are two terms used for understanding the process that an organization goes through in order to enable the full potential of a newly joined member.

As a new job starts, the newcomer not only becomes a part of the whole organization but also joins several different teams. New employees are required to learn a lot of new things as they become a part of the organization: what is the organizational structure, how are they supposed to execute their jobs, how their work impacts the organizational outputs, the everyday routine for their teams and standard practices [3]. Fisher (1986) added few more elements to this list: getting to know the sources of information, relevant

people, organizational culture, the unsaid norms of team meetings, and how to thrive in the organization [4].

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) in their seminal paper, defined organizational socialization as the course of adaptation for a newcomer to become an effective and integrated insider. They proposed six groupings of socialization strategies, generally used through the managers. There are few “shared tactics” which instruct groups of newcomers to the customs of organization, whereas the “individual tactics” allows learning autonomy to the newcomer. “Formal learning tactics”, like having training sessions, are used by organizations to impart essential job skills, whereas a set of “informal tactics” empower the new employee with an opportunity to learn while working. “Sequential tactics” make a newcomer follow certain predefined steps to enable competency building, while “random tactics” do not communicate the needed steps to a newcomer. “Fixed tactics” set newcomers on an explicit schedule during onboarding, whereas “variable tactics” imply that the newcomers are allowed to onboard at their own desired pace. “Serial tactics” are suitable when the newcomer is coming into a position that many people have occupied before (therefore can explain), whereas “disjunctive tactics” are used when newcomers build up their own jobs as they occupy them. Finally, “investiture tactics” are suitable when it is required to build on the newcomer’s previous skills; and “divestiture tactics” are applicable when the newcomer is required to learn completely new skills. These set of tactics inspire a variety of consequences, like performance, commitment to the organization, role ambiguity, conflicts, job satisfaction, and intentions of leaving the organization [5].

Meta-analyses demonstrate that “institutionalized tactics” are generally more influential than “individualized tactics”. It was shown that they cause a better positive result in case of graduate newcomers over new employees who have worked previously [6]. This is justified as newcomers with prior work experience have better established career outlines, contingent on their own skills to realize desired results [7]. On the other hand, newly joined young graduates have a higher likelihood of searching for organizational supervision [8] [9].

A lot of existing tactics have been proved to increase onboarding satisfaction. Some of these tactics include having clear phases for training, finding a reliable guide for direction [10], and undergoing formal training modules before getting started [6].

Having well-defined phases for training decreases newcomers’ hesitation about the set of tasks that they should be able to execute on their own based on their current skillset and the tasks for which they require additional training. Moreland and Levine (1982) gave a 5-stage framework of “group socialization.” The new employee and the group involve themselves in negotiation developments, known as “monitoring”; that allow a fine comparison of their outlooks with behaviours witnessed. This eventually, aid in the determination of the membership status of the new employee [11].

B. E-onboarding

E-onboarding and virtual onboarding are the terms used interchangeably in this paper and apply to the same concept of getting a newcomer on board virtually with the help of digital means. A comprehensive review of extant literature showed that although organisations have been taking bits and pieces of their onboarding program online, the possibility of conducting the entire program virtually is hitherto unexplored, especially in Indian context.

Ahuja and Carley (1999) explored the emerging concept of virtual organization in global context and defined a virtual organization as a geographically dispersed organization in which people are bound by a lasting common interest or goal, and interact and coordinate their work over information technology [12]. Communication structures and trust in virtual organizations [13] have attracted a significant part of the research so far. Jarvenpaa & Leidner (1999) suggested that when confronted with “technical/task uncertainty” during one of the early phases in the group’s life, groups high on trust were able to find solutions to the problems and resolve disputes despite being restricted in a virtual environment that relies heavily on electronic communication. The paper also discussed that teams were communicating both social and task information. [14].

Thus, we go ahead with the definition of virtual teams by Lipnack and Stamps (1997). They defined these teams as “a group working across time, space and organizational boundaries with connections reinforced by networks of communication technologies” [15].

Ahuja and Galvin (2003) had examined the relatively little-studied subject of socialization in virtual groups. They found backing for the broad claim that similar to traditional groups, a virtual team saw its newcomer asking for information which the older members of the organization had to offer, thus ensuring that the team employs this knowledge in a streamlined manner. It was interesting to note that the new employees did not deem the electronic media to be appropriate for inquiring about customs, which are more sensitive and implicit in nature. For this “normative information”, they preferred deploying the ways used in traditional groups, i.e., quietly observing the team e-mails related to such information. This was in line with the expectations as newcomers traditionally relied on interactions and observations for gaining the “normative information”. [1]

The findings from Chopra and Bhilare (2020) suggest that millennials value robust mentorship, cross-functional exposure and a well-defined career path over compensation and rewards and modern onboarding programs should be looking at providing these essentials [16] through gamification to have better socialization and learning [17]. Fagerholm, Guinea, Borenstein and Munch (2014) derived some crucial insights about mentoring for virtual teams which included providing incentive for mentoring, expecting performance to vary over time, and varying e-onboarding program based on characteristics of project (like its maturity). An e-onboarding program supported by mentor and adjusted to project culture is believed to have a

positive impact on newcomer’s performance in virtual teams [18].

While organizations had realized the significance of onboarding, they are not equipped with the investments required to implement the best of practices [19].

As “product innovation” and “innovation in technical systems” can be predicted by an extensive and sophisticated onboarding process [20], there is a need to have more and better methods and modes to socialize the newcomer to organizational norms and culture [1].

Research Methodology

Recent MBA graduates from the batch of 2020 were chosen from six management institutions across India. All the chosen institutes are listed under All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The questionnaire was sent to a total of 300 graduates, out of which 117 responded giving the response rate of 39%. At the time of data collection, all these newcomers had spent more than 2 months in their organizations. In phase I of study, semi-structured interviews were conducted among these fresh management graduates to identify the practices for their e-onboarding program. A comprehensive list of 30 activities was derived from typography presented by Klein and Heuser (2008) which was then validated through these interviews. In phase II, these 30 activities were used to design the questionnaire and collect data. The questionnaire asked these newcomers about how helpful was each practice to them in adapting to their role. This information was captured on a 5-point scale (5 meant “Extremely beneficial” and 1 meant “Not at all beneficial”). The alpha reliability of this scale was 0.93. It also gauged the overall satisfaction from the e-onboarding program on a 5-point scale (5 meant “highly satisfied” and 1 meant “Highly unsatisfied”). The survey also captured the nature of each activity, i.e. occurred formally or informally. Respondents were asked to mark ‘formal’ for mandatory and pre-planned practices which occurred for all newcomers; ‘informal’ for voluntary and encouraged practices. In case of confusion where they perceived certain practice to have elements of both, they were instructed to mark ‘formal’.

The demographic details of respondents include 82% representation from males. 46% of the respondents did not have work experience prior to this job. 23% of the respondents had joined the IT industry; 15% joined Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI); another 15% joined Manufacturing; and 14% joined consulting. Other sectors included are Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Construction, Auto, Pharmaceuticals, Entertainment, etc.

We used Pearson’s correlation coefficient technique to test the relationship between the number of practices occurred and the satisfaction from e-onboarding program. We used the same technique to test the relationship between the helpfulness of each practice and the overall satisfaction from the e-onboarding program.

Analysis and Findings

The comprehensive list of 30 practices (Table II) was derived based on the review of existent literature. The Inform-Welcome-Guide (IWG) typology was adopted from Klein and Heuser (2008). The set of practices was validated through interviews with few newcomers and hence taken for further analysis. The key findings from the paper and the analysis involved are discussed in the following four subsections.

A. Relationship between the number of activities in the e-onboarding program and the satisfaction from the experience

The first important finding from this study states that *more the number of practices in the e-onboarding program, better is the satisfaction level of newcomer*. Table I shows the Person’s correlation coefficient test report for the number of activities experienced in the program and the satisfaction from the program. It is evident that there is significant and positive correlation (0.505) between the number of practices and satisfaction.

This is similar to findings of Klein, Polin and Sutton (2015) where they established the positive relationship between the number of practices experienced to the extent of socialization in case of offline onboarding. Hence, the fact stays the same for e-onboarding as well.

Table I. CORRELATION BETWEEN NUMBER OF PRACTICES AND SATISFACTION

		Satisfaction from e-onboarding experience	Number of practices
Satisfaction from e-onboarding experience?	Pearson Correlation	1	0.505**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	117	117
Number of practices	Pearson Correlation	0.505**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	117	117

Note: **Significant correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

B. Onboarding practices occurring formally (regulated) are more helpful than the ones occurring informally (voluntary)

The study of extant literature reflects the fact that practices which are formal and hence mandated by organization, are more beneficial to the newcomer than the ones which happen in an informal (voluntary) way. This made it interesting to study the same aspect for e-onboarding experiences since there is no physical presence and hence

the environment that enables the informal practices is not readily available. Table II shows three analysis: the proportion of respondents experiencing the practice in a given mode; the mean helpfulness for each mode in a given practice; and mean helpfulness for each practice. It can be observed that the mean helpfulness for 28 out of 30

practices was more in case of mode of delivery being “occurred formally” whereas the mean helpfulness of “occurred informally” was more for only 2 practices. Hence, *practices occurring formally are more helpful than the ones occurring informally.*

Table II. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR EACH PRACTICE

Practice	Nature	Count %	Mean Helpfulness	Practice Mean (Std. dev.)
1.1 Inform-Communication				
1. I attended a Q&A session where newcomers were encouraged to ask questions from leaders.	Did not occur	16.2%	2.84	3.81 (1.02)
	Occurred formally	70.1%	4.06	
	Occurred informally	13.7%	3.69	
2. I received invitation for a virtual connect with members from senior leadership team.	Did not occur	18.8%	2.68	3.74 (1.18)
	Occurred formally	73.5%	4.01	
	Occurred informally	7.7%	3.78	
3. My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me.	Did not occur	16.2%	2.79	4.10 (1.00)
	Occurred formally	41.0%	4.50	
	Occurred informally	42.7%	4.22	
4. I had virtual connects with members from HR team.	Did not occur	10.3%	2.33	3.88 (1.02)
	Occurred formally	76.9%	4.09	
	Occurred informally	12.8%	3.87	
1.2 Inform-Resources				
5. I attended a demonstration on accessing resources from company website for associates.	Did not occur	45.3%	2.34	3.15 (1.37)
	Occurred formally	33.3%	4.18	
	Occurred informally	21.4%	3.28	
6. I received an initial developmental plan that defined opportunities for growth.	Did not occur	26.5%	2.55	3.62 (1.26)
	Occurred formally	54.7%	4.14	
	Occurred informally	18.8%	3.59	
7. I received a glossary of company buzzwords and abbreviations.	Did not occur	61.5%	2.46	3.01 (1.32)
	Occurred formally	18.8%	4.14	
	Occurred informally	19.7%	3.65	
8. I was led to a specifically designed section for associates on company website.	Did not occur	63.2%	2.38	2.92 (1.34)
	Occurred formally	25.6%	3.97	
	Occurred informally	11.1%	3.62	
9. I received a document with contact details of people relevant to me within organization.	Did not occur	26.5%	2.35	3.84 (1.32)
	Occurred formally	47.0%	4.45	
	Occurred informally	26.5%	4.23	
10. My virtual workplace was ready.	Did not occur	29.1%	3.06	3.88 (1.15)
	Occurred formally	47.0%	4.47	
	Occurred informally	23.9%	3.71	
1.3 Inform-Training				
11. I saw an introductory video for newcomers.	Did not occur	55.6%	2.35	2.92 (1.33)
	Occurred formally	35.0%	3.59	
	Occurred informally	9.4%	3.82	
12. I observed an associate for a certain number of days.	Did not occur	65.8%	2.62	3.09 (1.36)
	Occurred formally	20.5%	4.08	
	Occurred informally	13.7%	3.88	
13. I was given job specific on the job training.	Did not occur	25.6%	3.23	3.9 (1.08)
	Occurred formally	41.9%	4.31	

	Occurred informally	32.5%	3.89	
14. I had a virtual tour of facilities in organization.	Did not occur	54.7%	2.52	3.15 (1.40)
	Occurred formally	29.9%	3.91	
	Occurred informally	15.4%	3.89	
15. I attended an induction and orientation program alongside other newcomers.	Did not occur	14.5%	2.06	3.83 (1.24)
	Occurred formally	76.1%	4.24	
	Occurred informally	9.4%	3.27	

Table II. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR EACH PRACTICE (CONTD.)

Practice	Nature	Count %	Mean Helpfulness	Practice Mean (Std. dev.)
16. I finished (on-line) virtual orientation.	Did not occur	19.7%	2.13	3.78 (1.25)
	Occurred formally	68.4%	4.23	
	Occurred informally	12.0%	3.93	
17. I had sessions from associates who were specialists in their domains.	Did not occur	35.9%	2.38	3.5 (1.34)
	Occurred formally	50.4%	4.19	
	Occurred informally	13.7%	3.94	
2. Welcome				
18. A senior leader gave me a personal welcome (call, letter, e-mail, etc.).	Did not occur	32.5%	2.63	3.59 (1.33)
	Occurred formally	54.7%	4.16	
	Occurred informally	12.8%	3.60	
19. My manager gave me a personal welcome (call, letter, e-mail, etc.).	Did not occur	28.2%	2.79	3.73 (1.22)
	Occurred formally	44.4%	4.31	
	Occurred informally	27.4%	3.75	
20. I received a welcome kit.	Did not occur	78.6%	2.67	2.97 (1.39)
	Occurred formally	17.9%	4.10	
	Occurred informally	3.4%	4.00	
21. I had activities with fellow colleagues to become acquainted with them.	Did not occur	30.8%	2.72	3.68 (1.24)
	Occurred formally	38.5%	4.36	
	Occurred informally	30.8%	3.78	
22. I attended an informal gathering to get to know my colleagues.	Did not occur	45.3%	2.49	3.4 (1.40)
	Occurred formally	37.6%	4.39	
	Occurred informally	17.1%	3.65	
23. There was a celebration planned to welcome the new employee.	Did not occur	57.3%	2.70	3.22 (1.30)
	Occurred formally	28.2%	4.21	
	Occurred informally	14.5%	3.35	
24. There was a social event with fellow colleagues.	Did not occur	52.1%	2.48	3.08 (1.35)
	Occurred formally	29.9%	3.80	
	Occurred informally	17.9%	3.62	
25. A session was held for my family members.	Did not occur	81.2%	2.28	2.56 (1.34)
	Occurred formally	12.0%	3.64	
	Occurred informally	6.8%	3.88	
26. There was an announcement (on organization's website or newsletter) for my joining.	Did not occur	50.4%	2.63	3.36 (1.32)
	Occurred formally	41.0%	4.15	
	Occurred informally	8.5%	3.90	
27. I received company merchandise at my home.	Did not occur	76.9%	2.50	2.81 (1.41)
	Occurred formally	13.7%	3.88	
	Occurred informally	9.4%	3.82	
3. Guide				
28. I was allotted a mentor who was at	Did not occur	37.6%	2.48	3.56

position higher than my manager.	Occurred formally	47.9%	4.34	(1.37)
	Occurred informally	14.5%	3.82	
29. I had a SPOC (other than buddy) to address my queries.	Did not occur	22.2%	2.77	3.95 (1.13)
	Occurred formally	57.3%	4.31	
	Occurred informally	20.5%	4.21	
30. I was allotted a buddy (a friend) who was 1-2 years senior to me.	Did not occur	30.8%	3.00	3.79 (1.31)
	Occurred formally	47.0%	4.25	
	Occurred informally	22.2%	3.88	

C. Identifying the best e-onboarding practices

While the current situation did not give organizations much time to prepare for complete digitization of new-employee onboarding experience, a cumulative look at experiences from different organizations gives a good taste of what a successful e-onboarding program might entail in the future. As the primary agenda of this paper is to identify the best practices for e-onboarding from this short period of experimentation during lockdown, this section makes an endeavour to evaluate these 30 practices and come out with top 10 practices for e-onboarding.

Table II shows the mean helpfulness for each practice. The practice “My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me” was marked as the most helpful practice (mean score of 4.1) whereas the least helpful practice was “A session was held for my family members” (mean score of 2.56).

Based on this mean helpfulness score, top 10 most helpful practices are identified from the list of practices and are represented in Table III along with their corresponding

category. This list ranges from a mean score of 3.78 (I finished (on-line) virtual orientation) to 4.10 (My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me).

While Table III lists the top 10 practices based on the helpfulness of each practice independently, another important analysis in the same direction would be to identify the practices that had maximum impact on the overall satisfaction of a newcomer. This would help organizations in curating highly satisfactory e-onboarding experience.

To identify the practices that had the maximum impact on overall satisfaction value, we conducted correlation analysis to find the relationship between each practice and the overall satisfaction score (Table IV). It can be seen from Table IV that 25 out of 30 practices had significant correlation with the overall satisfaction and only 5 practices showed no significant correlation. The practice “I finished (on-line) virtual orientation” had the highest correlation value of 0.495. Based on these correlation scores, top 10 (two practices are ranked because of their same correlation value) practices which had the most positive impact on overall satisfaction from the program are listed in Table V.

TABLE III. TOP 10 MOST HELPFUL PRACTICES

Rank	Practice	Category
1	My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me.	Inform-Communication
2	I had a SPOC (other than buddy) to address my queries.	Guide
3	I was given job specific on the job training.	Inform-Training
4	My virtual workplace was ready.	Inform-Resources
5	I had virtual connects with members from HR team.	Inform-Communication
6	I received a document with contact details of people relevant to me within organization.	Inform-Resources
7	I attended an induction and orientation program alongside other newcomers.	Inform-Training
8	I attended a Q&A session where newcomers were encouraged to ask questions from leaders.	Inform-Communication
9	I was allotted a buddy (a friend) who was 1-2 years senior to me.	Guide
10	I finished (on-line) virtual orientation.	Inform-Training

The last two practices in the top 10 list are “My manager gave me a personal welcome (call, letter, e-mail, etc.)”

(correlation value 0.344) and “I had virtual connects with members from HR team” (correlation value 0.344).

C. Other important observations

There were some other important observations from the data that we analysed. These include:

1. The practice “My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me” was rated as the most helpful practice but it did not have any significant impact on the overall satisfaction from the program. So, the practice was highly beneficial in its independent existence but it was not considered while rating overall satisfaction.

2. The 5 practices: “My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me”, “I had a SPOC (other than buddy) to address my queries”, “I was given job specific on the job training”, “I received a document with contact details of people relevant to me within organization” and “I was allotted a buddy (a friend) who was 1-2 years senior to me” were rated highly for their helpfulness independently and featured in the top 10 list for helpfulness (Table III) but they were not a part of top 10 list for practices having high correlation with overall satisfaction (Table V).

TABLE IV. CORRELATION BETWEEN HELPFULNESS OF EACH PRACTICE AND OVERALL SATISFACTION

Practice	Parameter	Satisfaction from e-onboarding experience?
1.1 Inform-Communication		
1. I attended a Q&A session where newcomers were encouraged to ask questions from leaders.	Pearson Correlation	0.405
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
2. I received invitation for a virtual connect with members from senior leadership team.	Pearson Correlation	0.453
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
3. My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me.	Pearson Correlation	0.103**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.268
	N	117
4. I had virtual connects with members from HR team.	Pearson Correlation	0.344
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
1.2 Inform-Resources		
5. I attended a demonstration on accessing resources from company website for associates.	Pearson Correlation	0.148**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.112
	N	117
6. I received an initial developmental plan that defined opportunities for growth.	Pearson Correlation	0.285
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	117
7. I received a glossary of company buzzwords and abbreviations.	Pearson Correlation	0.256
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005
	N	117
8. I was led to a specifically designed section for associates on company website.	Pearson Correlation	0.197
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.033
	N	117
9. I received a document with contact details of people relevant to me within organization.	Pearson Correlation	0.259
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005
	N	117
10. My virtual workplace was ready.	Pearson Correlation	0.366
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
1.3 Inform-Training		
11. I saw an introductory video for newcomers.	Pearson Correlation	0.265
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004
	N	117
12. I observed an associate for a certain number of days.	Pearson Correlation	0.108**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.245

	N	117
13. I was given job specific on the job training.	Pearson Correlation	0.339
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
14. I had a virtual tour of facilities in organization.	Pearson Correlation	0.176**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.057
	N	117
15. I attended an induction and orientation program alongside other newcomers.	Pearson Correlation	0.433
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117

TABLE IV. CORRELATION BETWEEN HELPFULNESS OF EACH PRACTICE AND OVERALL SATISFACTION (CONTD.)

Practice	Parameter	Satisfaction from e-onboarding experience?
16. I finished (on-line) virtual orientation.	Pearson Correlation	0.495
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
17. I had sessions from associates who were specialists in their domains.	Pearson Correlation	0.300
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	117
2. Welcome		
18. A senior leader gave me a personal welcome (call, letter, e-mail, etc.).	Pearson Correlation	0.437
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
19. My manager gave me a personal welcome (call, letter, e-mail, etc.).	Pearson Correlation	0.344
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
20. I received a welcome kit.	Pearson Correlation	0.284
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	117
21. I had activities with fellow colleagues to become acquainted with them.	Pearson Correlation	0.352
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
22. I attended an informal gathering to get to know my colleagues.	Pearson Correlation	0.328
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
23. There was a celebration planned to welcome the new employee.	Pearson Correlation	0.360
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
24. There was a social event with fellow colleagues.	Pearson Correlation	0.216
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.019
	N	117
25. A session was held for my family members.	Pearson Correlation	0.126**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.177
	N	117
26. There was an announcement (on organization's website or newsletter) for my joining.	Pearson Correlation	0.382
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
27. I received company merchandise at my home.	Pearson Correlation	0.309

	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	117
3. Guide		
28. I was allotted a mentor who was at position higher than my manager.	Pearson Correlation	0.334
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
29. I had a SPOC (other than buddy) to address my queries.	Pearson Correlation	0.285
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	117
30. I was allotted a buddy (a friend) who was 1-2 years senior to me.	Pearson Correlation	0.241
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.009
	N	117
**Correlation is not significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)		

TABLE V. TOP 10 PRACTICES HAVING MAXIMUM IMPACT ON OVERALL SATISFACTION

Rank	Practice	Category
1	I finished (on-line) virtual orientation.	Inform-Training
2	I received invitation for a virtual connect with members from senior leadership team.	Inform-Communication
3	A senior leader gave me a personal welcome (call, letter, e-mail, etc.).	Welcome
4	I attended an induction and orientation program alongside other newcomers.	Inform-Training
5	I attended a Q&A session where newcomers were encouraged to ask questions from leaders.	Inform-Communication
6	There was an announcement (on organization’s website or newsletter) for my joining.	Welcome
7	My virtual workplace was ready.	Inform-Resources
8	There was a celebration planned to welcome the new employee.	Welcome
9	I had activities with fellow colleagues to become acquainted with them.	Welcome
10	My manager gave me a personal welcome (call, letter, e-mail, etc.).	Welcome
10	I had virtual connects with members from HR team.	Inform-Communication

3. Though it is now established that practices that occur formally are more helpful than the ones occurring informally, organizations that we surveyed had left a large number of activities to informal environment. As an example, the practice with the highest mean helpfulness (“My manager planned to spend some uninterrupted time with me”) occurred informally in 43% of the cases as compared to occurring formally in just 41% of cases.

4. The six practices: “I received a glossary of company buzzwords and abbreviations”, “I was led to a specifically designed section for associates on company website”, “I observed an associate for a certain number of days.”, “I had a virtual tour of facilities in organization”, “There was a celebration planned to welcome the new employee”, “I received a welcome kit” did not occur for 54-79% of organizations but were marked as highly beneficial

(3.91 to 4.21) by newcomers who experienced these formally. This opens the door for organizations to include these practices in their e-onboarding programs.

Discussions

There is a paradigm shift in the way human resource practices are valued and managed today. This shift is escalated by the Covid-19 pandemic and hence highlights the need for organizations to leverage digital solutions. This study sought to explore, and thereby add to our understanding of e-onboarding practices. Specifically, we investigated the number of practices offered, the mode of offering, the helpfulness of each practice and finally the

overall satisfaction from the e-onboarding experience. Let us look at the main conclusions from our research.

First, we identified the key e-onboarding practices from the vantage point of purpose that they serve. This was achieved by reviewing the extant research for onboarding and interviewing newcomers for the practices they were offered in their organizations. Then, we moved on to establish the conclusion that the number of practices offered in an e-onboarding program does matter. There was a significant positive correlation between the number of practices offered and the satisfaction from the program and hence suggested that it is better to have more, rather than fewer, practices in the e-onboarding program to cause better satisfaction.

Second, it is established that the mode in which each practice is conducted is also of great significance. The practices were more helpful to the newcomer when they were offered through formal channels (i.e. mandatory by the organization) than the cases in which they were offered informally (voluntary/encouraged). The two exceptions to this finding were not a part of the top 10 lists (Table III and Table V).

Third, we identified the lists of top 10 practices based on two dimensions: First was done based on helpfulness of each practice in its independent context (Table III) and the second one was done by finding the correlation between each practice and the overall satisfaction level (Table V). It was interesting to see that only 5 practices were common between the two lists. It was also interesting to see that some of the practices were highly helpful independently but did not play any major role in determining the overall satisfaction of the respondent. Lastly, we identified some practices that did not occur in most of the organizations but were identified as highly beneficial by newcomers. Hence, organizations should look at ways to bring in these practices in their e-onboarding programs in the future.

Recommendations

The findings from this study contributes to the literature on onboarding and organizational socialization. The dynamics of the workplace are changing and employees are no longer required to work from offices. Organizations are opening up to the concepts of “Work From Anywhere” and are okay with it as long as the work is getting delivered. This transformation is enabled by rapid technological advancements. Through this study, we made an endeavour to explore the emerging field of digitalization in HR practices. Specifically, we looked at the e-onboarding practices and their efficacy in the virtual set-up where newcomers would not be required to physically visit the office space.

Organizations experimented with various practices during the Covid-19 lockdown to onboard their employees virtually and only some could do it successfully because of preparedness on various fronts. This study is a step in this direction to help organizations in charting efficient e-onboarding programs for successful onboarding of a new employee. Organizations can adopt the best practices identified in the study (Table III and Table V) through the formal mode of delivery to provide better satisfaction to the newly joined management graduate. There is also a need to have a good number of activities (and not few) in the e-

onboarding program and hence focus on all areas to benefit the newcomer. There are some practices discussed in the paper which showed high level of helpfulness but were sparsely adopted in organizations. Organizations might want to take a look at these practices and try to inculcate them in their e-onboarding programs.

Conclusion

Existing literature had given considerable attention to socialization tactics, organizational outcomes associated with socialization, and how organizations facilitate newcomer’s socialization. Yet most of these studies are losing relevance in the changing dynamics of the workplace. This raises the need to study these rapid changes and realign HR practices to drive best outcomes for the organization. This study makes some initial effort in this direction, by looking at one such crucial practice of employee onboarding in virtual environment. This study derives insights about the effectiveness of a set of e-onboarding practices and their mode of offering. Future research can build on these conclusions and further recognise practices that hold high efficacy in socializing the newcomer, independently as well as in collaboration. Similarly, further studies can look at capturing the timeline to conduct these practices in order to drive the best newcomer socialization.

Limitations and Future Implications

There are several limitations to this research that needs to be recognized while interpreting the findings. The first is the duration of stay for newcomers who participated in the survey. Since the study was aimed at exploring the e-onboarding practices during the lockdown due to Covid-19, most of the respondents had only spent about 3 months in their organizations. Though it was noted that all of them were working completely virtually for the entire period and had not visited the office space physically even once. Future studies can look at capturing this experience over a longer period of time.

Secondly, our findings are more generalizable since we used an industry-agnostic approach and had respondents from multiple organizations. Yet our sample is very large or diverse to be fully generalizable in terms of providing a census of current e-onboarding practices in organizations. Hence, there is an opportunity to look at capturing a greater sample to assess the comprehensiveness of the list of practices and their prevalence and hence arrive at more generalizable results.

Further, we captured the e-onboarding experience from newcomer’s point of view and their satisfaction level. We did not focus on the organization’s point of view as a part of this study because of limited access to organizations during this lockdown. This opens up space for further studies to look at e-onboarding experiences from organization’s point of view.

Lastly, the study did not capture the time for conducting each practice during the entire e-onboarding period. Thus, future studies can aim at exploring when a particular activity should be conducted during the e-onboarding period. This becomes all the more important when the nature of work is changing and shifting to a more project-based short-termed

model. It would be interesting to find out how these different practices are conducted in a shorter period of time without losing their essence.

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