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[EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING]

In most companies, getting the new employees hands-on, is a critical driver of profitability. In many cases it leads to loss in productivity and opportunity costs. This document is an attempt to discuss effective approach to the organizational accountability to onboarding, but not specifically from Knowledge Labs point of view.

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Overview:

If you want your employees to integrate quickly into your team (primarily), your group, and on a broader perspective into your organization, you need to keep in touch with them on a regular basis. It means actively checking on them to find out how they are doing. Asking your employees to get on with their jobs without appropriate training, or support is a mistake that many managers commit even in some of the finest organization; a typical **sink or swim** kind of approach. In many organizations, although they have effective training programs, interactive exercises and games in place for employee onboarding, they insist on sending their new hires through data-dumps (links to Web/network resources), and marathon form-filling sessions.

This document talks about the business challenges, points to be considered for building a process, and steps, for a successful onboarding.

The Business Challenge:

The most significant problem arising out of poor employee onboarding process is employee turnover. It, in effect, puts in a lot of burden on your recruiters and trainers, affecting the overall profitability of the organization. Therefore, a good investment in employee onboarding is an investment, which would help organizations in employee retention, morale, and high productivity.

Some of the common challenges organizations face are:

- Creating effective onboarding process to minimize employee turnover
 - Use of creative training techniques and interactive exercises
 - Keeping the employees connected to their new job, new company
 - Orientation before the beginning of a specific project/assignment
- Streamlining the process, and the costs attached to it
- How to get new hires up-to-speed sooner
- Integrating the process with the existing systems
- Simplifying the process to a point, so that the HR and the Hiring Managers use it often

Common Problems:

From an employee perspective, what is their emotional take-away from the orientation is the key. However, owing to lack of discernment, in many cases the orientation program evokes the following emotions:

- Confusion
- Frustration
- Annoyance
- Insecurity
- Disappointment
- Regret

Note: The next section talks about emotional take-away the orientation should evoke.

Guidelines for Onboarding Success:

When you talk about effective onboarding, every communication, every choice, every action could lead to a consequence; as every action would carry an implicit message. It is; therefore, important that the new hire orientation talks about the company's culture first, then about the group, and then (more importantly) about the specific team s/he's going to work with. The HR team and the Hiring Manager thus have to play a major role in successful onboarding. The primary focus of the new hire orientation should therefore be not on organizational rules and regulations, or the benefits the organization offers, but it should be about sending a strong message that says "you matter us the most". A message that says "welcome to the team", "we are happy to have you here", "your job is so important", and "you could really make the difference", would help you get their buy-in quickly.

Differences that make a Difference:

To make your onboarding successful, providing measured doses of the most essential information, in smaller digestible chunks, would get you the desired results. This approach would create a very different experience for your new hires, it would leave them with a different feeling, different perception of their employer; as an organization, and about the team they are going to work with.

Design (or redesign) your orientation program in such a manner that the new hires feel:

- Welcome
- At ease
- Important
- Valued
- Proud

If you orientation has such elements, which would such emotions from your employees, at the end of the day, they would feel extremely confident, and would be excited to take on their new role and responsibilities.

The Role of Technology:

Only common sense would tell us the important of Technology during new hire orientation. Some of the key areas where you could use technology are:

Automation: Introduce automation in such a manner that it eliminates fair amount of paperwork. Create *Intranet* sites specific to onboarding, sites that have the most updated information about onboarding forms, and a checklist to manage the associated tasks. Encourage employees to write their own blogs; a candid reflection of their thought about the organization, their group, and their team. Provide links to such blogs to the new hires, they could really feel motivated. This could work wonderfully well in large organizations that have several groups, and sub-groups.

Integration of Data Sources: In every organization, within the first 1-6 months, employees are always thinking if they made the right choice. Orchestration technologies would allow you to include workflows, electronic acceptance of policies (leaves, expenses, provisioning, verifications etc.), dashboards, and chat rooms to extend the onboarding experience beyond the 1st day. On your *Intranet* site you could provide personalized tours, so that the new hires see only the information relevant to their role/job.

Collaborative Learning Experience: For a completely different new-hire experience, many organizations integrate Learning and Performance Management into the onboarding workflow to show new employees what training options are open to them; and/or understand their periodical goals (quarterly, half-yearly, annual etc.).

Most of the prominent organizations including the mid-size and large enterprises leverage both Data Integration and Collaborative Learning options to improve the new-hire experience and retention, lower costs, ensure compliance and streamline the process for everyone. Especially for organizations that have heavy seasonal hiring, automated onboarding eases the burden on HR Services, Back office Call Centers, and service Helpdesks.

To summarize, the role of technology in the success of onboarding, we could follow the steps below:

- Identify ways to acclimatize the new hires to your corporate culture, policies, organizational benefits and more...
 - Have a pre-boarding session, where all forms and related tasks could be completed prior to Day 1; to facilitate quicker new-hire productivity.
 - Introduce personalized, searchable knowledgebase, allowing employees to know more, or ask questions about policies, pay etc.
 - Introduce chat/message boards with hiring managers/mentors, links to videos from top management (VPs, CEOs etc.).
 - Collaboration with Learning/Performance management systems.
- Automate process workflows and management for key stakeholders
 - Auto notifications through Electronic Forms to HR, Managers to reduce administrative time and costs.
 - Easy-to-use dashboard that provide status updates on required information
- System integration
 - Allow access to forms filled-in by the new hires, provide additional forms (if any) so that the employees could review/edit/add the required information.
 - Integrate facilities and infrastructure related forms
- Ensure that information related to compliance with policies, laws, and regulation is readily available for reference.

Note: As far as we are concerned, I think we have the technology aspects covered. What we need, perhaps, is a better way (or strategy) to implement.

Using the Intranet

Effective use of the organizational Intranet, SharePoint sites is good way of keeping your employees informed about the what's happening around at the group, as well as organizational level. Timely updates of such sites is the key to the success of such initiatives. Regular updates like:

- Messages from the CEO, group heads
- Mentoring programs
- Performance review status/follow-ups
- Self-paced learning modules

- Important alerts

should be quickly available. Many a times it is observed that although this, and other information about policies and benefits etc. is available on the Intranet, locating specific pages becomes a painful effort.

Learning and Development

Effective learning and development programs, would help your employees to keep pace with changing times and technology. It would equip them with skills and knowledge that could help them achieve their personal and professional goals. Onboarding process could consist a series of such trainings or on-the-job activities, conducted at timely intervals. These activities could be broken down as follows:

- Manager-facilitated (led) training
- ILT, or eLearning
- Self study
- Manager training
- **Job shadowing**

Note: Job shadowing is an activity where employees observe veteran employees and managers doing their jobs. This could help employees in learning and practicing their skills in the actual context of performing the job. This experiential training could also supplements classroom sessions as pre-work to follow-on training. You could also monitor completion of these activities in any LMS.

Management Responsibility

Employee retention is THE biggest challenge of employee onboarding process. In some organizations the onus for employee retention is put on to their HR departments, in some it is attributed more to luck than judgment, and in some cases no one in particular is handed the responsibility or the authority to make it happen. Although everyone talks about employee retention seriously, realizes its importance, is eager to put an effective process in place, over time the seriousness is diluted, and people start spending their energies into minimizing the employee turnover.

Besides a promising career (and a bright future in turn), other factors that could lead to high employee engagement, or their decision to stay or leave the organization, are emotional ones. Employees want recognition, a pat on the back (at the right time), they want their efforts to be appreciated, a chance to

show their creativity. They want to feel that their 'personal' growth is also taken care of. They are a tricky lot though, and you cannot keep them happy 100% at any time, they are going to feel that their job is too demanding, feel the work pressures, they are going to be unhappy about something or the other, they are going to be bitchy; it's part of the package.

The most important factor; therefore, is to have 'good managers'. Managers perhaps play a bigger role than anybody else within the organization. And, if you wish to have an effective onboarding process in place then the most important aspect is to create and nurture a healthy 'manager and employee' relationship. It is important that as managers, rather than giving our employees what they want (recognition, promotions, money etc.), we give them what we feel is "right" for them; based only on their performance, attitude, and aptitude.

To nurture this relationship, organizations have training programs in place. What needs to be monitored though, is whether your employees are using such trainings for their personal and professional growth within the organization, or they are taking these trainings to get some credit score, which in turn could mean more money. Or, they are simply taking these trainings because they are mandatory. Employees would do it willingly, only if they feel they "belong" to the organization.

For every employee, irrespective of organizations (or business verticals) across the Globe, the most important element that could bind them to an organization, is the promise of a bright and secure future. Organizations do offer career roadmaps to their employees. However, employees would continue to work with the same enthusiasm and zeal only if they feel their management is committed to the promise. What the management is doing to inculcate this sense of belonging in their employees, is a question that we need to ask ourselves.

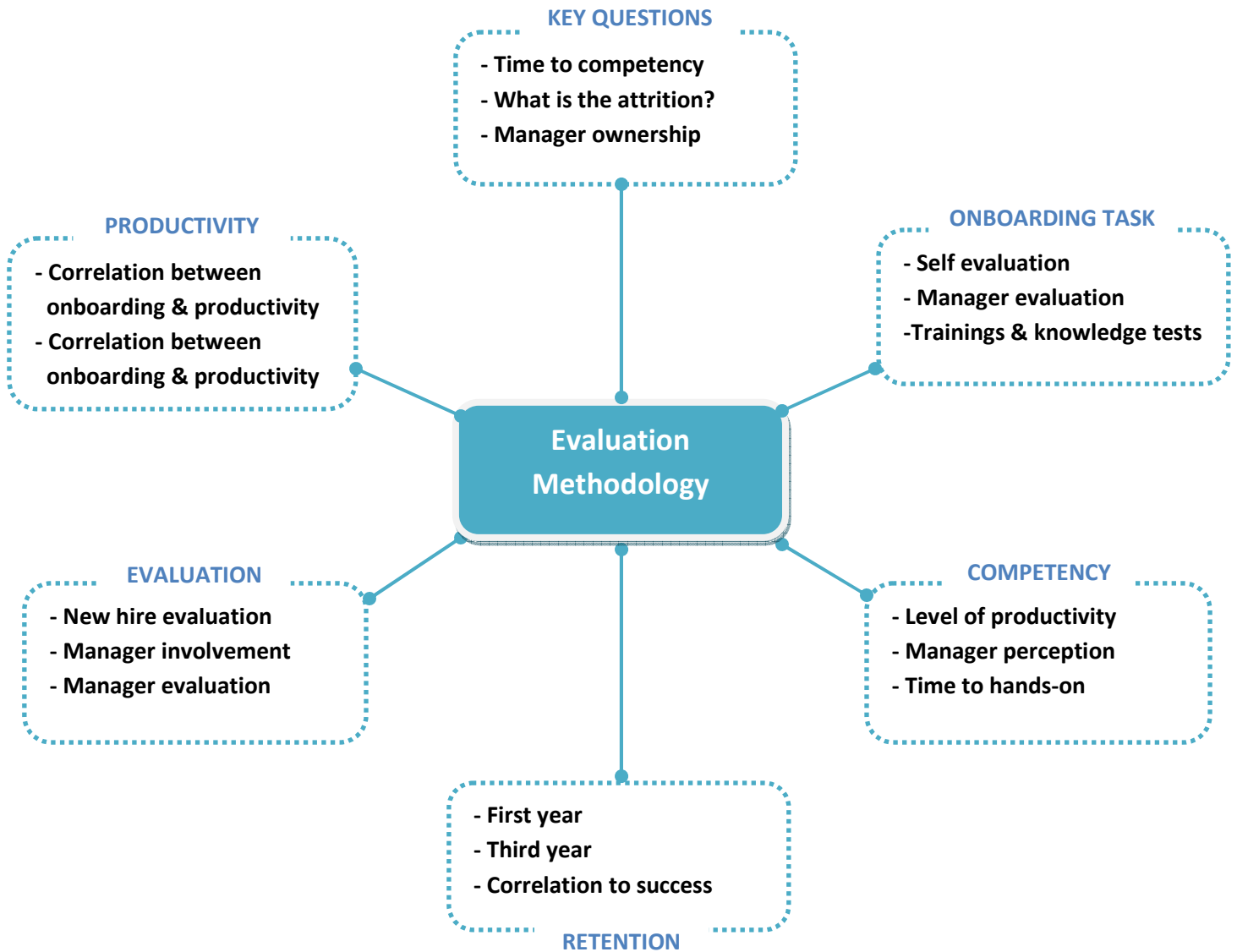
Manager Ownership

Once an employee joins the organization, his/her initial hand holding is done by his/her hiring manager. The success of the onboarding process; therefore, should be the responsibility and ownership of the hiring managers. This would allow the managers to develop a deeper relationship with the new hires. This relationship has to extend beyond just keeping in touch with them in terms of their needs, their job, their performance... the relationship has to put the employees at ease, and they should feel comfortable and confident about discharging their duties responsibly.

This is very critical if you want to achieve greater employee productivity and retention. So, long as managers are able to do the 'right' things for their employees, they would have their trust; create a sense of belonging along the way... A win win situation for everyone, at every level within the organization.

Evaluation Methodology

How we evaluate our onboarding process is also critical for its success. Therefore, it is important that we carefully determine the goals and measures for evaluating the system. It could be conceptualized as follows:



Summary

Effective implementation of onboarding initiative is becoming more mainstream as employers break through common myths. IF the process is good, it would:

- Achieve widespread usage by even the most diverse groups across an organization, or industry.
- Facilitate even more effective face-to-face interactions, or orientation programs.
- Be extremely important even when the economy is not doing good.

If we are able to achieve the best-in-class onboarding mechanism, for our group (or organization) we could achieve dramatic hard-dollar return on investment ; especially since we hire quite a large number across the organization. More importantly, given the wide variety of priorities and needs, such onboarding would “fit all sizes.” 😊