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Abstract

A poor or non-existent orientation and onboarding process not only affects the organization in a monetary value but also in productivity and performance for several years. The cost for a poor or non-existent new employee orientation is $37 billion total for the United States and the United Kingdom (Vernon, 2012). Onboarding a new hire successfully will improve transition in the workplace and will lead to employee engagement.

County XYZ has grown to 700 employees. With this growth comes a change in the way that new hires complete orientation and onboarding. The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations on improvements that could be made to County XYZ’s orientation and onboarding of new hires. The findings from the study indicate numerous recommendations that will allow County XYZ to provide new hires a process that will engage, prepare, and retain employees.
Acknowledgments

I want to thank my fiancé, Alex for being patient and supportive through my educational goal.

I want to also thank my parents for instilling the value of education into me. This study would not have been possible without the constant support, encouragement, and contributions from my fiancé, parents, and family.

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Chapter I: Introduction

County XYZ is one of the fastest growing counties in Wisconsin with over 700 employees. There are a wide variety of professions at County XYZ including highway operators, certified nursing assistants, financial associates, primary services deputies, and social workers to name a few.

Within the last year, County XYZ has had an average of 100 new hires. The rapid growth has led to an increased need for hiring new staff. The current new employee orientation process for all employees regardless of employment status starts on the first day of employment. Every new employee meets with a Human Resources representative for an hour-long meeting to review a PowerPoint that covers the following topics: new hire paperwork, information technology system security, human resources policies and procedures, timesheets, employee service portal, the intranet site and benefits. After the employees leave the Human Resources office, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to train and review with the new employees their job responsibilities, expectations, departmental and organizational goals, and county policies.

There is not currently a standard process or checklist that supervisors should be following when onboarding their new hires. According to Hirsch (2017), one-third of all new hires will quit their jobs within the first six months. During this process, this is where employees decide to stay or go.

There are 26 departments within the organization that are onboarding their new hires in a different way. One department might have their new hire go through training for two weeks before fully starting into their new role, and another department might have their new hire jump right into their role without any training.
With a variety of different departments trying to serve the community, it is critical to successfully onboard and retain the best employees. Companies are finding value in having an orientation and onboarding process because if done correctly, they’re able to maintain the interest of new hires in this current market of too many jobs and not enough people (Graybill, Hudson, Carpenter, Offord, Piorun, & Shaffer, 2013). It is important to have a process that is effective and efficient for both the company and the new employee.

New employees that go through a well-executed and structured onboarding program are 58% more likely to stay with the organization for at least three years (Hirsch, 2017). If new hires experience a poorly executed and unplanned onboarding experience, it will become a reflection of their role, organization, and leadership.

**Statement of the Problem**

County XYZ is rapidly growing, and their orientation and onboarding process has been less focused on providing new hires information to transfer successfully into their new role and instead is being used as more of an activity to complete paperwork.

In a previous survey conducted with new employees at County XYZ, the new employees indicated that they did not find the new employee orientation beneficial to the transfer of learning. Since that survey, the county has not made changes to the current orientation and onboarding process. The failure to make changes to the process of onboarding new employees has been attributed to the lack of knowledge and understanding of best practices for a widely diverse, in terms of the type of workers and the services provided, governmental organization, to follow for successfully onboarding new employees.
Purpose of the Study

The study was intended to analyze the orientation and onboarding processes used by other regional counties in both Wisconsin and Minnesota to determine best practices. To guide the research the following question was used:

*What are the new employee onboarding processes similarly being used by other county governments within the same general geographic region as County XYZ?*

To assist in identifying the most effective onboarding practices (aka best practices) the following sub-questions were also utilized:

- **Sub-Question 1:** How similar, in terms of number of total employees, number of new employees, and types of services provided, are other regional counties to County XYZ?
- **Sub-Question 2:** How effective do other regional counties perceive their new employee onboarding processes to be?
- **Sub-Question 3:** Within the group of regional counties what, if any, are the unique or uncommon onboarding processes being used?

The expectation of the study was that the data collected could be used to identify best practices and create recommendations on developing a process that would improve the new employee orientation for new hires at County XYZ.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The study was intended to examine the new employee onboarding and orientation process at Counties throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota in order to determine best practices to implement at County XYZ. This chapter will review factors in regard to new employee orientation and onboarding. The chapter includes an overview of the importance of onboarding and new employee orientation in the workplace, best practices, and the first year timeline of the onboarding process.

Onboarding Process

Onboarding is focused on what the organization does for the employee, not the actions of the new hires. The onboarding process is one of the first interactions a new employee has with their new company. There are several benefits to the employee such as: being able to receive the tangible and intangible resources to carry into their new role, calming nerves of new employees, and being able to create relationships within the organization (Klein, Polin, & Sutton, 2015). There is an increasing amount of importance put onto an onboarding process. An increasing amount of organizations are seeing this as a transition tool. Onboarding a new hire can be either a very fruitful and strategic process that ends up with a productive employee or a costly and ineffective process (Snell, 2006). “Companies that don’t support a comprehensive introduction phase for new employees not only risk losing productivity generated by the employee but also losing their interest in the company” (Snell, 2006, p. 32). The sooner that this process is completed, the sooner the new employee can be more productive in their new role and have a positive impact on the organization. The onboarding process should reinforce the organizational culture. For example, Hard Rock Cafe’s employee handbook reflects their culture and is modeled after a comic book. Their training and onboarding process is filled with humor and
graphics (Wanberg, 2012). It is also an opportunity for the new employee to be shown that the organization is a People Process Culture and “walks the talk”. Onboarding into a new role is critical for organizations and the new employee. When you bring a new employee into a position, you spend a lot of time and money on that person. Onboarding successfully will improve transition in the workplace and will lead to employee engagement in the workplace (Graybill et al., 2013). If your organization doesn’t currently have an onboarding program, and you’d like to implement one, be prepared for the time it’ll take to create one. You’ll first need to make sure that your employees are in alignment and are willing to accept the change. This will be something that will need to be owned by all employees (Graybill et al., 2013).

**Turnover.** Turnover in the workplace is a large problem for many organizations today, and it can be very costly for the employer. It can be even more costly in the senior level roles. The more an individual can relate with a group’s values, the more they will support the organization by staying with them (Van Dick et al., 2004). According to Kopoulus (2017), “Research shows that new hires are more likely to leave companies within the first 18 months of their employment” (p. 2). The financial incentives to onboard and develop a new employee orientation and onboarding process will help retain employees in the organization longer than the 18 months that was indicated. Turnover is a problem with hourly workers, especially during the onboarding phase. It is typical for 50% of hourly workers to resign within the first 120 days of employment. Onboarding has been linked to decreasing the amount of turnover in an organization (Krauss, 2010).

**Socialization.** Socialization is critical in the new workplace and has been connected to valuable outcomes for the new employee such as role clarity, job satisfaction, productivity, and effectiveness in a role (Wanberg, 2012). Socialization is used interchangeably with the word
onboarding. Socialization refers to the process of “encouraging newcomers to express their unique perspectives and strengths on the job from the very beginning and inviting them to frame their work as a platform for doing what they do best” (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013. p. 24) (refer to Table 1).

**The four keys to effective onboarding.** There are four keys to effective onboarding, and they are painting the picture, mapping relationships, sharing your leadership point of view, and setting people up to win. Painting the picture refers to being able to explain the mission and core values of the new department. As well as the expectations to be followed with their new position (Healthcare Executive, 2011). Mapping relationships happen when the managers are able to share information regarding reporting structures in the workplace. Knowing who to go to for questions is critical for the employee to be able to obtain the information needed to complete their jobs (Healthcare Executive, 2011). Sharing your leadership point of view will be knowing what the new employee can expect from the team and manager, as well as what they will get in return from the team. This helps immensely because they will know what they will be dealing with on a daily basis (Health Care Executive, 2011). Setting the employee up to win is important for the employee. It not only benefits the employee but the manager as well. This will create more trust, support, and direction within the organization (Health Care Executive, 2011).
**Table 1**

*Activities to Improve Onboarding New Hires*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Set the stage for the new employees and make sure that the existing staff knows of their arrival (Montesano, 2007). It is important to welcome new employees appropriately with different activities such as lunch early on their first day because this will help facilitate relationships (Wanberg, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split up responsibilities</td>
<td>Have different team members cover various topics of their onboarding. IT, HR policies, departmental policies, logins etc (Montesano, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddy/Mentor</td>
<td>Having a hands-on guide to help the new employee will help build confidence in the role. There can be four different suggested guides: Human Resources, coworkers, supervisors, and mentors (Wanberg, 2012). Support from co-workers is valuable to the efficiency of new employee orientation because they can guide them to meet expectations and goals (Bauer, 2010). It is important to have a buddy navigate the new building with the employee to figure out where the mail room, parking, copier etc are (Snell, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Rapport</td>
<td>“New employees at BambooHR are taken out to lunch on their first day. We cared enough to hire them, we want them to know we care enough to build rapport” (Maurer, n.d. paragraph 7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The four c’s of onboarding.** There are four levels of onboarding that are touched in the process. The first level is compliance. This is the base of the onboarding. Compliance covers the organization’s legal and policy related regulations (Bauer, 2010). Clarification is there to make sure the employees know the roles and expectations that come with their new position.
(Bauer, 2010). This is important to highlight because the onboarding process is there so the employees can’t say “I didn’t know that” after. The culture of the organization is an important topic to cover, especially because you want to make sure that it will be a fit for you. This would be the time where you cover the norms that would be countered (Bauer, 2010). Connection refers to the relationships that are being made within the first months. Whether it is the person that is mentoring them or their manager. It is important for a new employee to establish this kind of connection early on (Bauer, 2010).

**Benefits of onboarding.** The benefits of an effective Onboarding process are as follows: an increase in employee productivity, which leads to less training in the long term, an increase in referrals from peers of employees, increased motivation, and creating trust and belief within the organizational goals and mission. Retention rates are increased by 25% and productivity by 11% when there is an employee onboarding program (Kopoulus, 2017). Managers quickly putting together an onboarding plan will not make that a successful process for new hires, but making an effort to engage the employee with interactions over time will benefit the employee. An effective onboarding program will be able to provide tools and support necessary to the employee to succeed and provide clarification to the employers as to who is not a cultural fit to the organization (Graybill et al., 2013).

**Best practices for onboarding.** The best practices that organizations are moving towards are socialization, providing mentorship to the employee prior to their start, and a standardized communication process that the employee can consistently follow (Wanberg 2012). Technology is making its way towards onboarding, this is due to the upcoming millennials joining the workforce. A lot of the paperwork and tasks done during the onboarding piece can now be done online before their start date (Graybill et al., 2013). Companies have also started
implementing “smart onboarding”. “Smart onboarding enhances the user experience and simplifies filling out forms, collaborating on projects, conducting background checks, and managing document integration (Kopoulas, 2017, p. 12).

**Onboarding timeline.** According to Montesano (2007), there isn’t a formal one-size fits all timeline that works for all employers, but the sooner the new employees go through an effective onboarding process, the sooner, they can be productive members of the organization. This also provides them a base to grow from within the company. Before the first day even starts, it is appropriate to have the supervisor call the new employee to answer any last minute questions. Typically this would happen on the day before the new hire starts (Wallace, 2009). According to Snell (2006), “The perfect first day for a new hire would include paperwork having already been filled out, their workspace would be set up and stocked with supplies, co-workers would welcome their new team member, and a “buddy” would be assigned to the new employee to help them navigate the new environment” (p. 33). It is crucial on the first day for the new employee to be well-prepared because that is the first impression they have of their new workplace and co-workers. A poor orientation/onboarding process is a reflection on the organization. They should have their computer and office set up for them before their start, and be able to set up their accounts on the first day. With the rapid growth of organizations, they forget to make sure the new employees should be able to jump right in on the first day. The first day will need to be prepared for the employee; this will help with their transition into this new role. The day should look like meeting with the supervisor, reviewing the job responsibilities and expectation, and then an overview of the first three months of the role (Commongood Careers, n.d.). According to Maurer (n.d.), on the first day, there will be two main objectives, making sure their responsibilities and roles are clear to them. This is not only helpful to the new
employee but to the staff as well. The first week should go into more depth than the first day. Instead of reviewing their job responsibilities more, you would introduce them to the organization. This would include reviewing the goals, mission statement, culture, and core values (Montesano, 2007). The first month to the end of their career there should be used for continuous learning. Things to be involved with that are feedback from supervisors and peers, and reviewing Human Resources Policies and Procedures (Commongood Careers, n.d.). Communication throughout the first year is critical to the employer and employee since there is a significant amount of information to be provided. You as the employer must be able to make the new hire aware of what kind of communication will be expected. The onboarding program must also align with the goals and mission of your organization (Graybill et al., 2013).

Executive onboarding versus hourly onboarding. Though many organizations have one general onboarding process, you should be shaping your onboarding process around the type of position of the new employee. Onboarding of higher level and executives should have an individualized process (Wanberg, 2012). Although you may not think of it, this is true for internal movement of executives and supervisors as well. They will need to go through their individual onboarding process (Wanberg, 2012). The process for onboarding executives is a quicker process since their position is more visible (Bauer, 2010). According to Bauer (2009), “depending on the organization, a single failed executive-level manager can be as high as $2.7 million” (p. 24). Hourly onboarding differs among the executive onboarding. The reasons being why are time, stakeholders, and content of the onboarding. It will take 3 months until the employee is able to be fully functional. The content covers more basic information of the organization and required paperwork (Bauer, 2009).
Onboarding Versus Orientation

Though the words are used interchangeably, they don’t mean the same thing. Orientation is known as the process where an employee is being introduced to the organization through learning about the history, mission statement, core values, and KSA’s (Acevedo & Yancey, 2012). Orientation is known as a specific type of onboarding and ranges from hours to days (Wanberg, 2012). There is evidence stating that the longer the orientation process, the more productive and engaged an employee will be in their new role (Vernon, 2012). New employee orientation is often a one-time event that is used for administrative tasks and paperwork to be completed. This was something that started in the early 2000s (Graybill et al., 2013). Whereas onboarding is known to be a process or journey. This is typically a process that happens early in the new hire process (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011). This can start as early as when the new employee has accepted the position. “Regardless of if this new employee is considered an internal or external hire, it is the process of acquiring, accommodating, assimilating, and accelerating new team members to the organization” (Graybill et al., 2013). Vernon states that the onboarding is typically a 90-day process of orientating new employees. The difference comes with the information that is being provided. Onboarding covers the behaviors and foundation for the success of the employee within the organization (2012).

New Employee Orientation

Organizations all have different new employee orientation and onboarding processes, but some organizations are shaping both of those processes based on the type of employee and their position (Klein, Polinn, & Sutton, 2015). The cost estimated per new hire is about $30,000-$50,000. The first month for new hires is the most crucial to the organization. A poor new employee orientation can impact an organization’s productivity and performance for several
years. “The best programs have all employees taking responsibility, quickly setting up the new hire for years of productive contribution quickly” (Cirilo & Kleiner, 2003; Hayton, 2003, Klein, & Weaver, 2000). The cost to not successfully bringing in a new employee will cost upwards of three times the employee’s annual salary (Commongood Careers, 2012).

Best practices of new employee orientation. There are several different ways that companies can orientate their employees, but depending on the industry, there will be a best practice to follow. “The essence of identifying best practices is transferring knowledge from those who know how to do something well to those who are keen to learn more” (Graybill et al., 2013). A new trend that is starting to pick up is socialization prior to the start date of the employee by using new technology. Companies are encouraging the use of Facebook or LinkedIn to facilitate and maintain the network of their employees (Graybill et al., 2013). In addition to this new trend of using new technology, organization is moving towards an online orientation. During the shorter orientations, organizations will rely on computer-based information to guide new employees through the necessary process (Bauer, 2010).

Benefits to a new hire orientation. The cost for a poor or non-existent new employee orientation is $37 billion total for the United States and United Kingdom (Vernon, 2012). Organizations that participate in a new employee orientation for their employees are helping provide pre-determined expectations to meet, facilitating relationships and communication among employees and supervisors. New hire orientation programs have been known as one of the most impactful parts of entering a new position, even if this position was an internal move (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011).

Barriers. The barriers to creating an onboarding process specific to all new employees largely are due to the timing of onboarding programs and activities (Wallace, 2009). It is also
due to the lack of knowledge that depending on the position, you should have a specialized onboarding process for them (Bauer, 2009).
Chapter III: Methodology

This study was intended to analyze the best practices of orientation and onboarding throughout different Counties in Wisconsin and Minnesota with the intention to provide recommendations to Company XYZ to improve their New Employee Orientation and Onboarding process.

It is important to create a new employee orientation and onboarding process that is based on best practices because new employees will remain at a company an average of 3 years longer if they have gone through a structured orientation program according to Bauer (2010). The first months of a new employee’s time at an organization is likely the most important. Throughout the United States and the United Kingdom, a poor process has cost a total of $37 billion dollars (Vernon, 2012). A poor or non-existent process not only affects the organization in a monetary value but also in productivity and performance for several years.

Subject Selection and Description

In order to determine if we could implement any practices from other Counties, we surveyed Counties that had the similar amount of employees as Company XYZ or more. This would allow Company XYZ to take in ideas for future improvements as they grow. A list of counties to survey was determined by suggestions from Human Resource colleagues as well as by contacts known in surrounding Counties.

Instrumentation

Permission to use Terri Brooks’ 15 question questionnaire was obtained (Appendix A). The survey is shown in Appendix B and included questions that were multiple choice question, close-ended, and open-ended. The subjective questions were rated on a Likert scale. The survey included questions that would help identify best practices in the area that County XYZ is looking
to improve or are lacking structure in. The expectations, delivery, and management aspects were also covered in the survey. Once those questions were asked, the survey goes further into detail about socialization opportunities, management participation, activities in the onboarding program, and metrics to measure the effectiveness of the onboarding program.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection process happened over a 2-week process. The questionnaire was administered to a Human Resources representative at counties within Wisconsin and Minnesota. This survey was administered through Qualtrics. Each participant was e-mailed separately with the body of the e-mail explaining the importance of participating in this survey as well as a notification that this survey was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. There was a link that led the participant to the survey. The first page included the consent form that explained in detail the following: the description, risks and benefits, time and commitment, confidentiality, and right to withdraw. During the data collection process, the researcher was the only one to administer, distribute, and review the survey as well as interact with the participants of the survey.

**Data Analysis**

After the two week period, the data that was collected and returned as a summarized report of the respondents’ answers. This data was compared and analyzed against one another through qualitative data and utilizing the Likert scale to make recommendations for determining best practices to implement at County XYZ.

The data was also compared against one another to determine any common trends on the same questions. The most common trends were compared against the current process of the
County XYZ and based off of the ability to add that trend, we were able to make a recommendation of implementation to the onboarding and orientation process.
Chapter IV: Results

The study was intended to analyze the orientation and onboarding processes used by other, similar in size, regional counties in both Wisconsin and Minnesota to determine best practices. To guide the research the following question was used:

*What are the new employee onboarding processes similarly being used by other county governments within the same general geographic region as County XYZ?*

A human resources professional in the counties selected to participate in this study were asked to complete a 15-question multi-part survey.

Demographic Results

The intent of the study was to identify the onboarding practices of county governments of regional counties similar in size, based on number of employees, to County XYZ. County XYZ has approximately 700 employees working at 5 different locations. The surveyed group included 14 counties within Minnesota and Wisconsin. The number of employees at the surveyed counties ranged between 300 employees to 4100 employees. County XYZ has approximately 700 employees, and the distribution of employees ranged from 1 location to as many as 12, with 5 locations being the median.

The first survey question asked the respondents to identify their county by the method they used for orienting and onboarding new employees (refer to Table 2). The majority of the respondents (68.75%) indicated that their counties use some combination of structured onboarding and/or orientation. Only two counties (16.66%) used only OJT (on-the-job training) with new employees, and they were directed to not complete the remaining survey questions.
Table 2

Methods Used by Counties for Onboarding New Employees (n=16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method used</th>
<th>Number of counties</th>
<th>% of counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the job training only</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstructured orientation program</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured orientation program with no onboarding program</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured orientation program with structured onboarding</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents that selected the option of Other were asked to clarify their response. One stated that they used a structured onboarding program with unstructured orientation, one stated that mentoring was also used as part of their orientation/onboarding program, and the third stated that their HR department provided a structured orientation/onboarding for all new employees but that additional onboarding by departments was unstructured and varied.

Results of Survey Orientation and Onboarding Questions

The second survey question was a multi-part question that asked respondents to estimate the total number of hours of orientation and onboarding new management employees received and new non-management employees received; and to identify over what period of time the orientation/onboarding occurred (refer to table 3). Regarding the orientation and onboarding of new management employees the number of hours ranged from 1 to an estimated 30 with the mean number of hours being 7.45 based on the responses of 12 counties. The time spent with the orientation and onboarding of new non-management employees also ranged from 1 to an estimated 30 hours but the mean number of hours was only 6.14.
Table 3 summarizes the time period, in days or weeks, over which the new employee onboarding and/or orientation occurred.

Table 3

*Period of Time in Days and Weeks Over Which County Orientation and Onboarding of New Employees Occurred (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of orientation/onboarding programs</th>
<th>Number of counties</th>
<th>% of counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 work day</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 work days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 work days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 work weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents that selected the option of Other were asked to clarify their response. One stated that they provide 2.5 hours of orientation within the first week of employment and then additional trainings one month later. Another stated that orientation/onboarding for some positions took one week while other positions could take up to six months. Another indicated the entire orientation/onboarding occurred over a period of one month, while the fourth noted that all employees received one day of orientation/onboarding from HR but orientation provided by individual departments could vary from 0 to 2 days.

The third survey question asked respondents how soon new hires are expected to attend the new employee orientation (refer to table 4). Regarding the time period in which the employee is expected to attend the new employee orientation, 50% answered within the first week of the job, 8.33% answered before starting their job, and 16.67% answered within their first month.
Table 4 summarizes the how soon a new employee is expected to attend new employee orientation.

Table 4

*Period of Time an Employee is Expected to Attend New Employee Orientation (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance period of new employee orientation</th>
<th>Number of counties</th>
<th>% of counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At their convenience</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before starting their job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the first week of starting their job</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the first month of starting their job</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the first quarter</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents that selected the option of Other were asked to clarify their response. Two respondents answered that new hires will attend on their first day of employment, the third did not answer.

The fourth survey question was a multi-part question that asked respondents how their onboarding program was delivered (refer to table 5). The second part of the question asked if it was an instructor led classroom, where was it located. 66.66% of respondents answered instructor led classroom. 16.66% of respondents answered that new employees learn one-on-one with other staff.

The second part of the question asked that if they chose instructor led classroom to answer where it was offered. 100% of respondents answered that orientation is conducted at one central location. Table 5 summarizes how the orientation was delivered.
Table 5

Method of How Orientation is Delivered (n=12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation delivery method</th>
<th>Number of counties</th>
<th>% of counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor led classroom</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video conference or teleconference</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia (DVD, CD, e-learning)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one with another employee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning by doing (e.g. case study, scavenger hunt, interactive activities, contests)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Story Telling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal activities (e.g. workbook)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fifth survey question asked respondents who participates in their orientation (refer to table 6). This was a multi-select option which allowed participants to select all that applied. 100% of respondents answered that HR is involved in the orientation.

Table 6 summarizes orientation participants.
**Table 6**

*Participation of Staff at Surveyed Counties (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation participants</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>% of total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR representative</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Manager/Specialist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management Staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Management Staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents that selected the option of Other were asked to clarify their response. The one respondent that answered other answered that it varies by position and department.

The sixth survey question asked respondents what topics are included in their new employee onboarding programs (refer to table 7). Counties surveyed were asked to select all options that applied. A majority of counties answered that their orientation includes new hire packets at 91.66% and benefits information at 83.33%.

Table 7 summarizes the activities and topics included in the orientation.
Table 7

Orientation Activities and Topics (n=12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities and Topics</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>% of total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New hire packets</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Procedures</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission, vision, core values, and culture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company history</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company policies and procedures</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory elements</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative items (business cards, name tag, cell phone, badges etc.)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work expectations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-worker introductions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job descriptions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical training (computer, phone system, etc.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents that selected the option of Other were asked to clarify their response. One respondent answered technical and job specific training is offered at department orientation. A second respondent answered that individual departments would include additional topics.
The seventh survey question asked if there were any pre-onboarding activities that took place. 9.91% of respondents answered yes. The sub-question asked to specify what kind of activities took place if they answered yes. Answers included mailing out a welcome letter or e-mail, a phone call from the supervisor, mailing out benefit information, and an e-learning link on the county’s system.

The eighth question of the survey asked what, if anything, the county did that they felt made their orientation/onboarding program unique in some way. Only four counties responded to this question. One respondent stated that most of the new employees’ paperwork is done online. Another respondent answered that there is a slide of each department head with a summary of their responsibilities. A third respondent answered that they completed their program in three phases: Human Resources, broad County overview, and departmental.

The ninth question of the survey asked respondents to identify what type of socialization opportunities were provided as part of the county’s orientation/onboarding program (refer to table 9). Only 6 counties responded to this question. One respondent answered that they assign each new employee a mentor. A second respondent answered e-learning on a time keeping system as well as reviewing HIPAA policiess. Six of the responses answered mailing out a welcome letter or a welcome call to the new hire. Another respondent answered mailing out benefit information. The last respondent answered mailing out benefit information.

Question ten asked the respondents how often their senior management participates in their new employee onboarding program (refer to table 8). There were 9 respondents, with three not answering. 41.66% of respondents answered 100%. 25% answered with <25%.
Table 8

*Senior Management Participation in New Employee Orientation (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Management Participation</th>
<th>Number of counties</th>
<th>% of counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were given an opportunity to comment below this question. We got four responses. One respondent said that they would like more participation from senior management. A second respondent answered that their County Manager made a video to welcome all employees. A third respondent answered that senior management only attends if they want a refresher course or are a new manager. The fourth respondent answered that this occurs at the department level between the department director and the new hire.

The eleventh survey question was a multi-part question which asked of how many that have attended their company’s new employee orientation/onboarding program have found it beneficial. There were only five responses to this question. Of the five that responded 80% of respondents answered 80%. 20% answered 75% beneficial.
Table 9

*How Beneficial Orientation is to Employee (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived orientation benefits to employee</th>
<th>Number of counties</th>
<th>% of counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those that answered were asked why they believed their orientation was the rating that they selected and three respondents answered that they conduct a survey asking for feedback on the orientation. Another respondent answered that they believe it is 100% beneficial because every employee is required to attend. The fifth respondent answered that they are a long term employee that covers every topic required at length and leaves employees with no questions after orientation.

The twelfth survey question asked counties to rate the perceived effectiveness of their current orientation/onboarding program (refer to table 10). Table 10 shows that of the eight counties participating in the survey 41.66% considered their programs to be effective or very effective.
Table 10

Perceived Effectiveness of Current Orientation/onboarding Programs (n=12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of program effectiveness</th>
<th>Number of counties</th>
<th>% of counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat effective</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very ineffective</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question thirteen was a multi-part question that asked about measuring effectiveness in the onboarding program as well as metrics in other areas such as job or learning retention, employee satisfaction or engagement, quicker time-to-productivity, and less mistakes. Only four respondents answered. Three respondents answered that they keep metrics on effectiveness of the employee orientation through survey and evaluation data. The fourth respondent answered that they don’t have anything in place to measure effectiveness but would expect to hear from the supervisor if there was an issue or concern.

A sub question that was asked was if the county of the respondent measured satisfaction or engagement. There were 11 respondents. Six respondents answered yes, and five respondents answered no. All respondents that answered yes said that they evaluate this through engagement surveys.

Another sub question asked if quicker time-to-productivity is measured. There were 11 respondents and 100% of respondents answered no. The last sub question asked if the county
measures if the employee is making less mistakes. We had ten respondents answer. Nine of the respondents answered no, and one answered yes. The one respondent that answered yes did not explain further.

The fourteenth question of the survey asked if the county would do anything differently with their onboarding program. Six respondents answered this question. Respondents answered with things such as having a streamlined HRIS system that allows enrollment into fringe benefits and onboarding forms, including interactive or engaging activities and having pre-scheduled days available each week or month to have orientation.

Seven counties responded to the final survey question which asked them to identify their biggest barrier to successfully integrating new employees into the organization. Four of the respondents (57%) indicated that the availability of time to implement orientation and onboarding programs was their biggest barrier. Other responses included lack of staffing, lack of a clear integration initiative or plan, and organizational culture.
Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

The purpose of this study was to evaluate participating counties in Wisconsin and Minnesota’s new employee orientation and onboarding processes and answer the following question was used to guide the research.

*What are the new employee onboarding processes similarly being used by other county governments within the same general geographic region as County XYZ?*

To assist in identifying the most effective onboarding practices (aka best practices) the following sub-questions were also utilized:

- **Sub-Question 1:** How similar, in terms of number of total employees, number of new employees, and types of services provided, are other regional counties to County XYZ?
- **Sub-Question 2:** How effective do other regional counties perceive their new employee onboarding processes to be?
- **Sub-Question 3:** Within the group of regional counties what, if any, are the unique or uncommon onboarding processes being used?

**Discussion**

The intent of the first sub-question was to establish similarities or differences between County XYZ and the regional counties participating in the survey. County XYZ has approximately 700 employees working in five different buildings/locations. Half (50%) of the surveyed counties had fewer employees than County XYZ, with the smallest number of employees being reported as 300. Four counties (25%) had more employees than County XYZ, with two counties indicating they had 2,000 or more employees. The remaining four counties, of the original 16 counties responding to the survey, reported numbers between 650 and 750, and
where considered by the researcher as being comparable to County XYZ. A review of county web pages indicated that all responding counties provided the same services as County XYZ, except two larger counties also provided medical centers and fire safety, which County XYZ does not.

By comparison, five counties used the same structured orientation-onboarding approach as County XYZ, with eight counties spending more hours in orienting and onboarding employees than County XYZ, and four counties spending fewer hours, suggesting County XYZ should give further consideration to increase the time for orientation and onboarding of new hires.

As previously noted County XYZ uses an instructor-led delivery method for orienting and onboarding new employees and does not utilize supervisors, trainers, and managers. Eight of the counties participating in the study (66.66%) also utilize instructor-led training as the primary delivery method.

The orientation and onboarding of new employees in County XYZ begins before an employee starts work, and will continue over a period of one day. Most of the participating counties (58.33%) start their orientation and onboarding programs within the first week of employment, one county begins their orientation before the first day, and two counties wait until after the employee has complete at least one month of employment before onboarding their new employees. A quarter of the counties (25%) complete their new employee orientation-onboarding program in less than one day, two counties use two or more days, in the remaining counties orientation and onboarding will take more than a week to complete.

County XYZ is similar to the other counties. Common themes are the length of the orientation and onboarding program and at what point the new employee starts orientation. For County XYZ, it is done at the day one mark for all employees.
The intent of the second sub-question was to gain a perspective on how effective other counties believed their approach to orientating and onboarding new employees is. Only five of the participating counties indicated that they believed their approach was effective or very effective. Four of the twelve counties participating in the study, however, did not provide a response to this question so it can be assumed that they did not consider their current approach to be effective.

The intent of the third sub-question was to identify unique or uncommon orientation and/or onboarding processes being used by the participating counties. Several respondents indicated that most of their new hire paperwork was conducted online versus paper. County XYZ currently has all of the new hire forms mailed to the new hire and turned in on the first day. Another county familiarizes new employees with informational slides on department heads at orientation. There is also a three-part phase to the orientation-onboarding that is completed by another respondent which includes Human Resources, broad county overview, and departmental. The Human Resources piece goes into detail on policies, procedures, and HR forms. Broad county overview will touch on the mission, culture, and values of the organization. Departmental will go into detail about your department’s mission, learning more about the services your department provides for the county and public, as well as any training specific to your role. This is unique to other counties because this allows a better understanding of the organization and the position to the new hire.

Conclusions

The findings from this study appear to be fairly consistent with the information collected from the literature review. Socialization and pre-hire seemed to be a consistent theme both in the literature review and the study. Having a buddy/mentor to guide you along the orientation and
onboarding is a key piece in ensuring new hires become comfortable in their new role. Support from co-workers is valuable to the efficiency of the orientation and onboarding because they can guide them to meet expectations and goals. Pre-hire is also another common theme that was mentioned. 36.36% of respondents answered that there is pre-hire forms and information that goes out to the new hire before their date of hire. The literature review states that completing any HR forms before the first day will allow the first day to be all about learning more about their new role and company.

Overall, half of the surveyed counties (50%) indicated that their processes need to be updated in some manner, suggesting that both the same concerns of limited effectiveness experienced by County XYZ and an uncertainty of best way to make improvements are shared. 

Limitations

There are several acknowledged limitations to the design of this study. There first being the assumption made by the researcher and the HR group of County XYZ that the number of people employed by a county was a representative characteristic of both the ‘size’ of the county and the similarity of the processes used and the problems faced by all counties of the same size. Another limitation was the method of selecting study participants which resulted from the assumption that all counties of a certain size had developed a well-structured onboarding and orientation process. The results of these two assumptions was a small sample size that greatly limited the generalizability of the study’s findings.

Additionally, throughout the different counties that were surveyed, there may have been a variety of different methods of delivery for the orientation and onboarding processes not addressed by the survey tool, and the results of the data might have changed depending on who from the organization filled out the survey.
Finally, the data collection was collected in an online survey. This could have led to a limitation for quality information. If this study were to be recreated, another option to conduct the research could be to collect the information through a phone or in-person interview with fewer people. In that scenario, you would be able to ask clarifying question on the information that was provided to you. This was conducted as an online survey due to time constraints as well as the intention to get as many participants as possible.

**Recommendations**

This study attempted to identify the similarity in new employee onboarding processes being used by other county governments within the same general geographic region as County XYZ, with the intent of making recommendation for improving County XYZ’s current approach. There were many best practices identified by the literature review however, in the public sector some of these practices are not practical to consider due to the cost, time to implement, and bandwidth of the staff.

Based on the findings of the survey data a reasonable recommendation would be that onboarding start before the first day of employment for the new hire. This could include receiving all of their new hire paperwork electronically immediately following accepting the verbal offer. This will eliminate the first day orientation that has a heavy focus on paperwork, and allow the employee to spend time getting to orientate themselves with their new role, department, and county.

The results of the survey also indicated that in only 27.27% of the representative counties that senior management staff/other staff are involved in the orientation of new employees, where as the literature suggests involvement by groups other than just HR is a best practice. This study suggests expanded involvement by management and other groups within County XYZ should be
viewed as a key recommendation as the current orientation process only involves one Human Resources staff member.

A significant number of survey respondents indicated that socialization was an important aspect of their onboarding. The findings in the literature review also indicated that socialization is critical in the onboarding of new employees into the workplace. This study thus suggests as a recommendation that County XYZ consider various ways for the socialization of its new hires.

Finally, this study was very limited in its scope and the exploration of different orientation and onboarding practices, and thus recommends that County XYZ consider 1) expanding the size of the study to query all counties on their approach to orientation and onboarding, and/or 2) conduct additional research to study specific onboarding practices such as socialization.
References


Cripisin, G. & Mehler, M, (2011) The candidate experience: What they say it is; what it really is; and, what it can be. *A CareerXroads & Friends Monograph, 1*-34.

Four keys to effective onboarding. (2011). *Healthcare Executive, 26*(6), 44.


Appendix A: Terri Brooks’ Consent

From: Brooks, Terri
Sent: Monday, February 12, 2018 12:49 PM
To: Ashley Xiong
Subject: RE: Connect with Terri Brooks

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hi Ashley,

Exciting that you are almost done! I remember how good that felt. Congrats!

You are free to use the questionnaire I put together. I would be willing to participate in your survey if you would like since I am involved in the orientation/onboarding we do at ABC County.

Kindly,

Terri Brooks
Appendix B: Onboarding Questionnaire

County Name?
Number of employees?
Number of Locations?

1. Please describe how your organization orientates and onboards new employees (include definitions)
   _____ On-the-job training only (no further questions are necessary if this is checked)
   _____ Unstructured orientation program (proceed to question 2)
   _____ Structured orientation program, no onboarding program (proceed to question 2)
   _____ Structured orientation and onboarding program (proceed to question 2)
   _____ Other:
       ___________________________________________________________

2. How many total hours of new employee orientation and onboarding do you provide?
   _______ Management _______ Non-management

   Over what time period is the orientation conducted?
   _____ < 1 day _____ < 1-2 days _____ < 3-5 days _____ < 1-2 weeks
   _____ other

   What timeframe is established to complete the entire onboarding process?
   _____ Within a Month _____ Within a Quarter _____ Within 6 Months _____ Within a Year

3. Once an employee is hired, how soon are they expected to attend the new employee onboarding program?
   _____ At their convenience
   _____ Before starting their job
   _____ Within the first week of starting their job
   _____ Within the first month of starting their job
   _____ Within the first quarter
   _____ Other:
       ___________________________________________________________

4. How is the onboarding program delivered?
   _____ Instructor led classroom
   Where? _____ one central location _____ regional location _____ job location
   _____ Video conference or teleconference
   _____ Multimedia (DVD, CD, e-learning)
5. Who participates in the onboarding program (check all that apply)?
   ____ Supervisor
   ____ HR Representative
   ____ Training Manager/Specialist
   ____ Senior Management staff: __________________________
   ____ Other Management staff: __________________________
   ____ Co-workers: __________________________
   ____ Self-directed
   ____ Other: __________________________

6. What topics and activities are included in your new employee onboarding program
   ____ New hire packets
   ____ HR Procedures
   ____ Mission, vision, core values, culture
   ____ Company History
   ____ Company Policies and Procedures
   ____ Organizational structure
   ____ Regulatory elements
   ____ Administrative items (business cards, name tag, cell phone, badges etc.)
   ____ Work expectations
   ____ Benefits
   ____ Management Skills
   ____ Co-worker introductions
   ____ Job descriptions
   ____ Tour
   ____ Customer Service
   ____ Technical training (computer, phone system, etc.)
   ____ Other:

7. Are there any pre-onboarding activities on place?
   ____ No
   ____ Yes, please
   explain: ________________________________________________

8. Please describe anything you do differently than other onboarding programs that you are aware of.
9. What type of socialization opportunities do you include as a part of the onboarding process (e.g. networking opportunities, mentor, buddy, collaborative first assignments, and company group meals)?

10. How often does senior management participate in your new employee onboarding program?

   ________100% ________75% ________50% ________25% ________<25%

   Comments:

11. What percentage of employee who have participated in your company’s new employee orientation/onboarding program would say it was beneficial?

   ________100% ________75% ________50% ________25% ________<25%

   Why do you think this?

12. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very effective and 5 being very ineffective), how would you rate your current new employee onboarding program?

   Very Effective Effective Somewhat effective Ineffective Very Ineffective
   1  2  3  4  5

   Why?

13. What type of metrics, if any, do you have in place to measure the effectiveness of the onboarding program?

   Do you measure any of the following and if so, how?
   a. Job or learning retention ____No ____Yes, how?
   b. Employee satisfaction or engagement ____No ____Yes, how?
   c. Quicker time-to-productivity ____No ____Yes, how?
   d. Less mistakes ____No ____Yes, how?

14. What would you do differently with your onboarding program?

15. In your opinion what is your biggest barrier to successfully integrating newcomers into your organization to become productive team members?