

Discovering the Impact of Remote Onboarding on Wellbeing

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Abstract

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, organizations had to shift to remote work. This transition has led human resource practices to move to online settings among different industries. Subsequently, remote onboarding as one of the human resource practices is implemented. Remote work is the new norm; hence remote onboarding is a new reality that emerged nowadays. The literature on onboarding focused heavily on socialization. However, Remote onboarding decreases socialization and eventually affects the employees' wellbeing. Hence this study aims to better understand remote onboarding and assess the relationship between remote onboarding and employee wellbeing. A literature approach was used to identify the gaps. This study collected articles from the relevant literature that focused on onboarding, remote onboarding, and employee wellbeing from different sources. The results identified a gap in the literature where a scarce number of studies have addressed remote onboarding processes and employee wellbeing. The results support the need to develop an empirical study that first better understands remote onboarding. The second is to assess the relationship between remote onboarding and employee wellbeing in a remote job. Where the proposed method to be used in the future study is a survey approach and to develop online questionnaires to be distributed to remote workers. The originality of this research lies in the theme of human resources theories.

Keywords: remote onboarding, onboarding, wellbeing, newcomers, remote work

1. Introduction

From the early pandemic stages, companies needed to adapt to the new norm and accordingly started to make changes to the organizing function. Over time, specifically during the pandemic organizations started to acquire remote work for their employees. Remote working also influences human resources practices, where human resources practices are transferred to be managed remotely (Petrilli et al., 2022). Zacher & Rudolph (2022) advised that the relevant human resources practices that may support employee adaptivity and proactivity in times of crisis, such as the pandemic, include personnel selection, onboarding,



job design, training, and organizational socialization based on the theory of work role adjustment. Since one of these practices is remote onboarding and few studies have addressed the remote onboarding processes and their impact on wellbeing and resilience (Kuntz et al.

2016; Howard-Grenville, 2020; Spicer, 2020; Petrilli et al., 2022), This study aims to better understand the phenomena of remote onboarding. The importance of this research lies in the call of some researchers for assessing the rapid shifts that have occurred in the organizational culture during the pandemic and its impact on employees' well-being emotions and identity (Spicer, 2020). Hence this research will also assess the impact of remote onboarding on the well-being of newcomers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Onboarding

Onboarding is defined as “the process of helping new hires adjust to social and performance aspects of their new jobs quickly and smoothly” (Bauer, 2010, p. 1). Researchers proposed that onboarding is important for organizations as it presents an opportunity to realize a return on investment in the hiring processes and ensures that newcomers rapidly become engaged and productive (Becker & Bish, 2021).

Onboarding is known as the first step of the transition of the employees as they enter new work environments, become part of new teams, and take on new responsibilities (Adler and Castro, 2019). Newcomers are introduced, during the onboarding, to organizational practices, processes, policies, and values (Jeske and Olson, 2021). Onboarding helps new hires in the adjustment to the organization and subsequently positive early experiences for new hires are gained (Klein and Polin, 2012; Caldwell and Peters, 2018, Jeske and Olson, 2021).

The levels of onboarding developed by Bauer (2010) are the 4Cs model (see fig.1). Where the author suggests that onboarding includes four levels which are related primarily to the content of the onboarding but also link with the process. The first level includes Compliance at the lowest level (ex. giving the basic information about policy and legal requirements), the second level includes Clarification (of the acquired role and expectations), and the third level includes Culture (identifying formal and informal organizational culture norms and expectations), and finally, the fourth level includes Connection (ex, providing an opportunity to build the essential relationships and networks). The 4Cs model incorporates not only the necessary content for a newcomer to integrate effectively but also emphasizes organizational actions, such as facilitating connections and ensuring opportunities to develop informal knowledge about the organization (Becker and Bish, 2021). Accordingly, the need to an effective onboarding process is needed to help the employee integrate into the organization and ease the flow of the knowledge from different sources specifically informal knowledge.

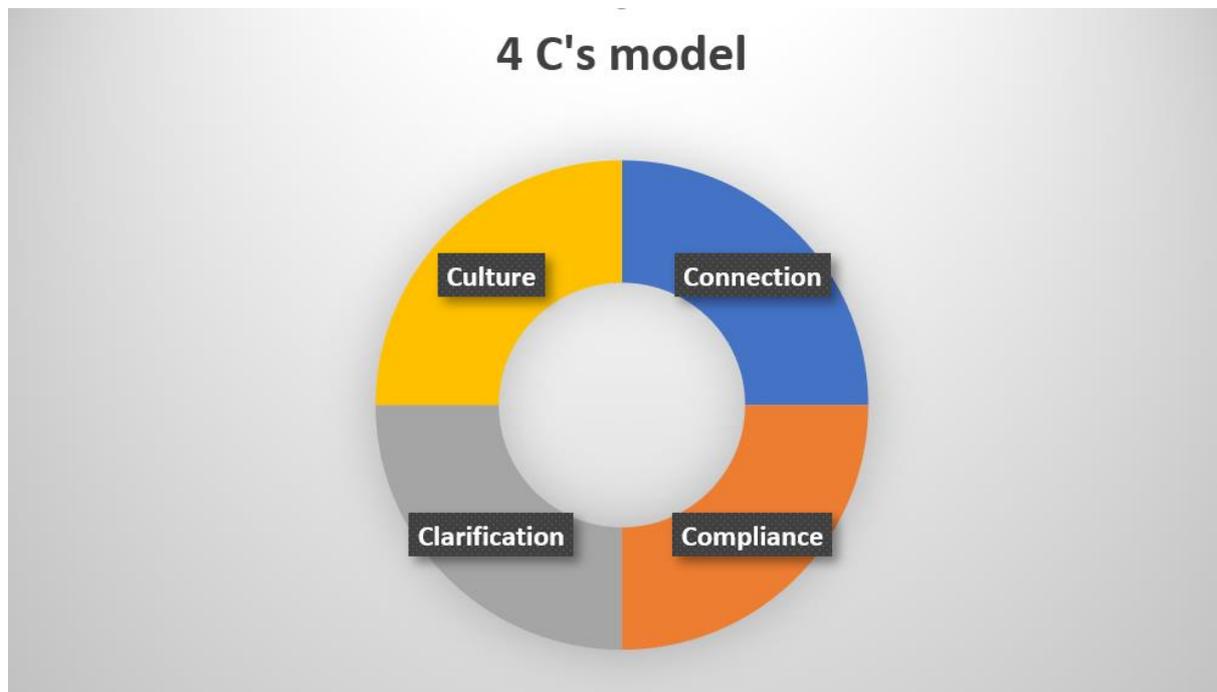


Figure 1: 4 C's model developed by Bauer (2010)

Socialisation is another important concept that is often mentioned in connection to onboarding. Where organizational socialization is the process when newcomers learn more about the social and task knowledge which would help in resolving the role uncertainty and being more involved in the organization (Kowtha, 2018; Jeske and Olson, 2021). In the onboarding process, formal activities are usually complemented by informal activities, where the newcomers are included in meetings and social activities involving the various actors within the organization. These social activities involve several stakeholders such as supervisors, team members, senior management representatives, human resource professionals, mentors, major clients, and customers (Bhakta and Medina, 2021; Stewart et al., 2021). Where in these social activities the newcomer gets introduced to all stakeholders and starts to capture the whole organizational culture, work process and organizational goals.

While the social activities mentioned earlier are normally practised inside the organization, nowadays remote onboarding moved all these activities to the online setting. Eventually, not only the change was in the setting but also in the information and communication exchange have changed (Morrison, 2021; Rodeghero et al., 2021; Jeske and Olson, 2021).

Researchers called for the need to redesign the onboarding processes to better adapt remote onboarding, with structured processes (Stewart et al., 2021). Remote onboarding influences the learning process of the newcomers, where the information retrieval is harder to acquire since the newcomers are less interactive with the rest of the existing employees

(Petrilli et al. 2022). But scarce studies have discussed remote onboarding and how it is implemented in organizations. So the first research question is raised.

RQ1: How is remote onboarding applied in organizations?

A recent study by Shufutinsky and Cox (2019) figured out that the new hires who were dissatisfied with the onboarding process within the first few months left the organization within one year. These findings apply to both onboarding and remote onboarding (Moran, 2019). Onboarding needs to be developed based on the selection processes, build commitment, consider the well-being and social connection, and identify new ways that enable particularly remote and junior hires to contribute to the goal achievement (Jeske and Olson, 2021).

2.2 Wellbeing

Workplace wellbeing is a holistic measure that enhances employee engagement (Anitha, 2014). Anitha (2014) added that well-being is the most important measure for gauging the influence that organizations have on their employees.

The phase of entering a new organization is known as a stressful period (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014), where the new employees may experience surprising or different realities than that what was expected ((Louis, 1980; Wanous, 1992; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014). In particular, this phase can be a cause of reduced well-being (Vandenberghe et al., 2011; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014). Hence it is important to study the well-being of the newcomers (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014). Newcomer well-being is described as the extent to which newcomers have regained their equilibrium and feel settled and happy in their new role (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014).

Clifton and Harter (2021) advised making socializing an important part of the onboarding of new employees. As this socializing will help the employees to know their partners and who can they rely on. Socializing is important for predicting learning and well-being (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014). Accordingly, the relationship between onboarding and wellbeing needs to be addressed.

2.3 Relationship between remote onboarding and wellbeing

The onboarding process is suggested to be effective when the occurrence of socialization is encouraged by the organizational culture between newcomers and existing employees (Van Maanen, Schein, 1979, Petrilli et al. 2022). Also, other researchers mentioned that onboarding helps in increasing socialization, where formal and informal actions during the onboarding period help new hires in better organization fit (Klein and Weaver, 2000). Since remote onboarding decreases the socialization between the new hires and the existing employees and it contradicts the previous studies that have been developed in the onboarding literature. Then it is needed to assess the remote onboarding impact on the employee



wellbeing. Jeske and Olson (2021) suggested that the link between onboarding and wellbeing will help organizations contribute to goal achievement. Jeske and Olson (2021) study is focusing on onboarding and advised reassessing the change to remote onboarding. Hence this study aims to evaluate the impact of remote onboarding on the employee's well-being.

RQ2: What is the relationship between remote onboarding and well-being?

3. Methods

Onboarding is a relatively an old topic that nowadays needs to be readdressed in the new norms, where recent studies introduce remote onboarding. Accordingly, to better understand the phenomena in the new norms we need to quantitatively address the remote onboarding process that is developed in remote jobs. In this study, we collected the relevant literature in a systematic approach using an online database like PsycInfo, ABI/Inform (Proquest), PsycArticles, Academic source complete and Business source complete and Google scholar.

Moreover, in the future of this study, the author is going to adopt a quantitative strategy as surveys help in understanding relationships and give reasoning to the relationships (Saunders et al., 2009). Where the future study will focus on developing the questionnaire and collecting the data that is needed to assess remote onboarding, wellbeing, and the relationship between them. Moreover, the questionnaire will be developed on an online instrument like Qualtrics.

In this study, remote onboarding is considered to be the independent variable, whereas wellbeing is considered to be the dependent variable. Control variables that are going to be considered in the study are organization size and organizational tenure.

The target sample of the future study is going to be newcomers that have recently joined organizations remotely. The collected data will be assessed using SPSS, where the validity of the scales will be applied. Also, Correlation and regression analysis will be used to analyse the data.

4. Findings

In this study, the author has conducted a systematic literature search and collected all the previous literature regarding remote onboarding and wellbeing concepts. Moreover, the researcher has noticed an important gap in the onboarding and wellbeing literature, that the relationship between both concepts is understudied. Given the importance of this relationship in the human resources practices area, therefore this research has focused on developing relevant literature on remote onboarding and wellbeing concepts and the relationship between them. The following table 1 shows an example of the number of research that has been retained from the search on the relationship between remote onboarding and wellbeing.

Table 1: The literature search, keywords and number of research

Database	Keywords	Number of research
ProQuest	(Remote onboarding) and (Wellbeing)	20
	(Digital onboarding) and (Wellbeing)	20
	(onboarding) and (Wellbeing)	20
Scholar	(Remote onboarding) and (Wellbeing)	55
	(Remote onboarding) and (Wellbeing)	32

After developing the literature search, several points need to be pointed out. The development of the onboarding process in a remote workplace is practically different that a physical workplace, where all the processes are held online. One of the major onboarding processes that is mentioned in Bauer (2010) model is the connection process and this process development in an online setting in a remote job is different as informal communication is no longer accessible, like in the office. Accordingly, the first research question is addressed. The findings of this study propose that the onboarding process needs to be adapted to remote work. Since the connection process that is a subprocess of the onboarding processes needs to be adapted to the remote jobs.

As for the second research question, the findings of the literature search show that remote onboarding negatively impacts employee wellbeing and that is contrary to the onboarding that occurs in the office. The differences lie in the socialization process. The findings also suggest that this area is understudied and that more research is needed to be developed to assess the impact of remote onboarding on employee wellbeing.

5. Conclusion

Even though the onboarding process is discussed in the previous research and a lot of practices have been developed to have an effective onboarding process. Still little is known about the remote onboarding and how it is implemented in remote jobs. Also, with the new norms of communication in the remote jobs, the socialization process is the most affected process among all processes. Accordingly, several gaps have been identified. Firstly, how is remote onboarding developed in remote jobs and secondly if remote onboarding impacts employee wellbeing in remote jobs. These gaps are identified in the research questions that are mentioned above. The findings show the need for adapting the onboarding processes to the remote workplace. The findings of the literature search mention the negative relationship between remote onboarding and wellbeing. Hence, this study encourages empirically assessing the remote onboarding of the remote jobs and to assess the relationship between remote onboarding and wellbeing in remote jobs. The study also recommends empowering the remote onboarding to increase the employee wellbeing. The practical contribution of this

study lies in encouraging human resources practitioners in developing the remote onboarding that helps in increasing the employee wellbeing.

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