



**DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED IT,
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NEWCOMER ADJUSTMENT AND SENSEMAKING IN REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

*Perspectives on remote onboarding in Higher
Educational Institutions*

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Abstract

The transition to remote and hybrid work environments due to the advancements in computer mediated communication and the COVID-19 pandemic, introduced challenges in the process of onboarding new hires. This research presents a case study on the remote onboarding process of new hires of Higher Educational Institutions in The Netherlands. The existing theories in organizational socialization and newcomer adjustment, as well as a reflection of the uncertainty reduction theory in the onboarding process are used as a foundation for this study. Through a qualitative inductive analysis and semi-structured interviews this study sheds light on the challenges of newcomer adjustment and sensemaking in remote onboarding. Findings suggest four dimensions that affect newcomer adjustment and sensemaking in remote work: 1) relationship building, 2) responsibility and accountability of newcomer adjustment, 3) managing well-being and the sense of belonging and 4) information seeking. This study makes three contributions. First, the study shows that the existing frameworks on socialization are compatible in the onboarding process in remote and hybrid work environments, as long as there are opportunities of relationship building between new hires and peers. Second, communication is key for establishing connections and sensemaking in the onboarding process, as communication is used in moments of uncertainty and sense-making. Last, the approach towards relationship building is multi-dimensional, as it not only includes different ways of bonding, but also looks at the role of different stakeholders around the newcomer and the need for clear onboarding policies.

Keywords

Onboarding; remote work; newcomer adjustment; organizational socialization; sensemaking

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Introduction

Remote working and computer mediated communication (CMC) are part of today's office worker's habitat allowing people to collaborate remotely. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, office workers worked partly and, in some cases, completely from home, where physical meetings between staff members were replaced by CMC: in many western European countries, the adjustment towards remote work doubled in 2020 compared to 2019: *"12% of the employed people aged 20-64 in the EU usually work from home while this share had remained constant around 5-6% in 2019"* (Eurostat, 2021).

Communication technology such as video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams, Slack) permits knowledge users to collaborate synchronously, with a high transmission velocity and carry out their work completely remotely. Organizations were required to restructure their operations, in order to allow remote work. This was the kickstart of a major shift in how these organizations viewed traditional work habits.

This transition means new challenges and opportunities for organizations and their workers and especially for the onboarding process, as this process is necessary for relationship-building for employees, and to perform well at the new job. Mann & Adkins (2017) already argued that employee engagement is massively affected when changing to remote work, namely whether individuals are enthusiastic about, committed to, and involved in their work and workplace. According to Bakhta & Medina (2021), newcomers in remote work need to put extra effort in meeting people, and asking for help, which is not simple. They note that this puts a strain on newcomers, as they are in their own bubbles and it is difficult for them to grasp what their roles and responsibilities are. Adding to that, research of Rodhero et al., (2021) show that challenges experienced by new hires in remote onboarding include difficulties in communication and collaboration with peers and difficulties in building a strong connection with their team.

Drawing on the existing research on onboarding in general (Bauer, 2007; 2010), and organizational socialization theory by Van Maanen & Schein (1979), this study is concerned with newcomer adjustment tactics and the sensemaking process of newcomers in remote work.

Firstly, the purpose and the research questions of this thesis are presented. Following, the author reviews relevant literature on staff onboarding in general, organizational socialization, newcomer adjustment and sensemaking, which will lead up to the positioning of this thesis and the research gap the research aims to address. The method section discusses

the choice of conducting semi-structured interviews for data collection, and thematic analysis to analyse the data. The findings section will present concepts and aggregate dimensions, based on the data structure model of Corley & Gioia, (2004). The discussion will relate the findings to the presented literature on staff onboarding in remote work and will identify new aspects of newcomer adjustment that can be used for remote onboarding as well as implications for research and practices. Finally, some suggestions for future research are provided and the limitations of this study are discussed.

Purpose and Research Questions

Although research has identified (Bauer, 2010; Meyer & Bartels, 2017; Caldwell & Peters, 2018) areas of improvement within the general onboarding process, they solely focus on the onboarding process in traditional, on location, working environments. There is a salient lack of academic research looking into newcomer adjustment in dynamic and remote work environments, that make the socialization process much more complicated.

Drawing on Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) theoretical framework on organizational socialization and the use of the theoretical framework of onboarding in remote work (Bauer et al., 2005), this research aims to provide knowledge on how staff onboarding is handled during remote work and how communication is affecting this process of social integration and relationship building. This research is looking particularly into the remote onboarding process of newcomers, for whom the ultimate goal is to prepare workers to succeed in their job as quickly as possible. There are many strong foundations on how to onboard newcomers successfully in traditional working environments, however, there is a strong lack of onboarding policies in online working environments. The aim of this research is to shed light on sustained practices for staff onboarding in remote and hybrid work. Additionally, by focusing on existing and fundamental theories, this research also tries to find out if those theories fit a new world of remote onboarding.

The research questions of this research are therefore:

- *RQ 1: How does communication affect newcomer adjustment and sensemaking during remote working in higher educational institutions?*
- *RQ 2: How does remote onboarding affect relationship building between newcomers and peers?*

Literature Review

In the following section an overview is presented of the relevant academic literature on onboarding in general, followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework of organizational socialization. Then the newcomer adjustment and the Uncertainty Reduction Theory are discussed. Finally, the context of remote and hybrid working and online sensemaking is debated, which positions this study in relation to the existing relevant academic literature.

Onboarding and organizational socialization

There are two main concepts which are used interchangeably by scholars (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Bauer, Morrison & Callister, 1998; Saks & Ashfort, 1997) within the process of helping new employees adjusting to social and performance aspects of their jobs quickly and smoothly namely: *organizational socialization* (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and *onboarding* (Bauer, 2010).

Organizational socialization has a more elaborate definition: it refers to that individuals must understand and make sense of their new environments when joining an organization. This process carried out by individuals in order to obtain the attitudes, behaviours, knowledge and skills required to take part and function effectively as a member of an organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Both definitions are somewhat muddled: some scholars say organizational socialization is the foundation of onboarding (Bauer, Morrison & Callister, 1998; Saks & Ashfort, 1997), while for example, Jablin (2001) argues that onboarding is a synonym for organizational socialization, even though onboarding refers to a narrower aspect of the overall organizational socialization process. No matter the terminology, the bottom line is that the ultimate goal of both concepts is to prepare workers to succeed in their job as quickly as possible, however, for clarification: this study uses the term onboarding in both meanings, but refers to organizational socialization specifically when drawing on the theory.

General onboarding approaches

Each institute or organization has its own version of the process in which new hires learn the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that are required to fulfil the expectations and function effectively. Approaches to onboarding differ from very structural and systematic or to the “*sink or swim*” strategy (Bauer, 2010), in which new hires often

struggle with understanding their new workplace and figuring out what is expected. Looking at first step in onboarding approaches, it is important whether the onboarding is informally or formally organized. Informal onboarding refers to the process by which employees learn about their new job without an explicit organizational plan while, formal onboarding refers to a written set of harmonized policies and procedures that assist employees in adjusting to their new job in terms of both tasks and socialization (Zahrly & Tosi, 1989; Louis, 1980).

Organizations that engage in formal onboarding are, according to a study on newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization by Bauer et al., (2007), more effective than others.

Bauer (2010), introduces four distinct levels in the onboarding process which are important to look at because they form its foundation. These distinct levels can be carried out on three different onboarding strategy levels: passive; high potential and proactive.

Firstly, *compliance* focuses on teaching hires basic legal and policy-related rules and regulations. Secondly, *clarification* refers to making sure that new hires understand their new roles and all related expectations. Thirdly, *culture* is a rather broad category which refers to the formal and informal organizational norms and lastly *connection* that refers to the important interpersonal relationships and information networks that new employees must establish.

In Bauer's (2010) onboarding framework, four major short-term outcomes of onboarding, levers, both related to job roles and social environment have been identified, to maximize the onboarding process. The first lever of successful onboarding is *self-efficacy*, also called self-confidence in job performance. Secondly, a lever more focused on the task is *role clarity* – how well does the new hire understand his or her role and expectations that come with the role. *Social integration* is the third lever for successful onboarding, and is most important in this research as social integration in general onboarding processes refers to meeting and starting to work with organizational insiders. According to Bauer & Greens' (1998) research on adjustment, new employees need to feel comfortable and accepted by their peers and supervisors in order to be able to adjust. Social integration is thus undoubtedly related to successful onboarding.

While the Human Resource department and supervisors may play a significant role in contributing to the social integration, employees must also facilitate their own onboarding by building relationships actively. The fourth lever of onboarding is *knowledge of and fit within organizational culture* and refers to the organization's unique environment and culture. It is

essential for new hires to get to know this particular culture in order to successfully integrate employees (Bauer, 2010).

Organizational socialization - a theory

There is significant literature in general onboarding (Chau et al., 1994, Gruman et al., 2006; Lynch & Buckner-Hayden, 2010; Johnson, 2005; Moyson et al., 2018), but for this research the author is opting for the theory of Van Maanen en Schein (1979) as they introduced the most popular typology on organizational socialization which is nowadays still relevant. They proposed a theoretical framework consisting of six bipolar dimensions:

- 1) ***Collective*** (vs individual) socialization refers to whether new workers go through common learning experiences, designed to produce uniform responses to situations or not.
- 2) ***Formal*** (vs informal) socialization refers to whether the position is soloistic or part of a group within the organization.
- 3) ***Sequential*** (vs random) socialization refers to whether newcomers receive clear guidelines upon arrival about tasks and activities.
- 4) ***Fixed*** (vs variable) socialization refers to whether a clear, detailed time planning is available for newcomers.
- 5) ***Serial*** (vs disjunctive) socialization refers to whether senior employees are available as mentors and role models.
- 6) ***Investiture*** (vs divestiture) socialization refers to whether self-identities are accepted within the organization or not.

Van Maanen & Schein (1979) argue that “*what*” people learn about their work roles in organizations, often comes directly from “*how*” they learn it. The tactics organizations use during the socialization process of employees can relate to what messages they will retain about their role, the culture of the organization, and how they fit in. Based on Van Maanen & Schein's (1979) theoretical framework, their first assumption was that newcomers will try to reduce uncertainty during their onboarding process. Berger's (1979) Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) suggests that individuals try to reduce the uncertainty to create predictable environments, and this is done by for example, providing information via various communication channels, and also notably, social interactions with peers and superiors (Saks & Ashfort, 1997). Within the scope of this research, the URT will be outlined later.

Newcomer adjustment

In this new era where employees have become more and more mobile, the process of newcomer adjustment is an important process which can affect new employees' job performance and well-being (Bauer et al., 2007) and needs to be researched more extensively. As the purpose of this present study is to examine and extend Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) model of socialization tactics in future work environments, it is important to go further into the concept of newcomer adjustment. Socialization focuses on how individuals learn the beliefs, values, orientations, behaviours and skills in order to successfully fulfil their new role (Fisher, 1986; Van Maanen, 1976) and thus, socialization facilitates the adjustment of newcomers to organizational institutions. Newcomer adjustment according to Fisher (1981), consists of both tasks and social transitions that the newcomer carries out. Feldman (1981) adds three aspects to this definition: *resolution of role demands*, which refers to job understanding (role clarity). *Task mastery* refers to gaining confidence while learning the tasks of the new job (self-efficacy). Lastly, *adjustment to one's group* refers to feeling accepted and liked by peers (social acceptance). Drawing onto these aspects, researchers (e.g., Bauer & et al, 1998) have used role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance as main indicators of newcomer adjustment. The challenges of newcomer adjustment e.g., uncertainty about their new role, difficulties with social integration, social acceptance, can be explained in-depth by the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

The URT is a well-known theory to explain the challenges within the newcomer adjustment process. It is therefore also not surprising that Berger's (1979) URT fits Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) theoretical framework and suggests that individuals will create predictable work environments. Originally, the theory explained how strangers use communication in moments of uncertainty, when they are firstly introduced to each other. It is important for newcomers in organizations, no matter in which field, that they must learn an immense amount of information about their new workplace, the culture and what is expected of them. According to this theory, new hires are motivated to reduce their uncertainty to the furthest extent in order to make their work more predictable and eventually controllable (Saks and Ashforth, 1997). Within the process of uncertainty reduction, sensemaking and information seeking are two of the most important aspects carried out in the process.

Sensemaking, according to Louis (1980), is a potential key aspect in newcomer adjustment and is about how employees construct meaning about every-day events (Weick et al., 2005) and how these are shaped by the interactions of others (Louis, 1980). The sensemaking process cultivates best when information from organizational insiders (veteran and/or senior employees) serve as sounding boards and provide background information that is critical for newcomers. Therefore, it is no surprise that interpersonal relationships play one of the key roles in newcomer adjustment (Allen et al., 2017; Fang et al., 2017; Korte & Lin., 2012; Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016; Zhou et al., 2021). It must be outlined that sensemaking is different from seeking or receiving social support or social sharing, although it may involve the same contacts (Baranik et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2010).

Another major aspect of the URT, is the newcomers' attempt to seek and gain information, to be prepared for future behaviours from others (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Driskill and Goldstein (1986) add to this that those newcomers seek information and feedback to reduce the uncertainty. During this process, newcomers use organizational insiders as resources to ask questions and to gain information from. In the process of reducing uncertainty, Saks and Ashforth (1997a) argue that "uncertainty is reduced through the information provided via various communication channels, notably social interactions with superiors and peers" (p. 236). Additionally, Louis (1980) noted that information from organizational insiders is key input to the sensemaking and newcomer socialization process. Looking at information seeking, there are three adjustment (Miller and Jablin, 199) types which are relevant for this study: *referent information*, which refers to understanding what is needed to function effectively on the job, e.g., role clarity; *appraisal information*, which includes information on how well the newcomer is functioning in their new role (self-efficacy); and *relational information*, which related to the quality of relationships with organizational insiders (social acceptance).

Remote and hybrid work

Due to innovations in information and computer-mediated communication technologies and the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all heard of the concepts of remote work, hybrid work, teleworks, work from home and work from everywhere. Nonetheless, it is still unknown how remote work challenges newcomer adjustment in general and the two aspects of the URT, sensemaking and information seeking in particular. Prior to the global pandemic, research (Hunter, 2018) already showed that the major benefits of remote and flexible

working –the ability of continuing careers while taking care of a family or the household– outweigh the disadvantages such as the lack of face-to-face encounters. In terms of remote work, Koehne et al., (2012) claim that it means that workers need less social contact with peers in order to do their work. Studies on remote work in the last decade, show several deficiencies, such as the social and professional isolation (Charalampous et al., 2019) and blurred home-work boundaries (Tietze & Musson, 2005). Human Resources has an important role to play in ensuring the work-private life balance and that the (remote) work experience is positive for employees and organizations (Beauragard & Basile, 2016), especially in terms of the onboarding and the recruitment of new staff. Therefore, as suggested by Kniffin et al., (2021), organizations allowing remote and hybrid work, should be advised to set more particular goals and enhance role clarity for newcomers in order to reduce the uncertainty. With digitalization growing, sensemaking and information seeking in the digital world is becoming more and more complex. Sensemaking in its traditional habit, is a natural kind of human activity, in which large amounts of information about a situation or topic are collected and reflected upon to form an understanding. The question here is: how does sensemaking then makes sense in a digital world, when the onboarding period is mostly online?

According to Horrigan (2006), the online information environment has become much richer and it has become a place to explore and learn. All technologies aimed at cooperative information sharing and their success, implies their effectiveness. In terms of sensemaking in online environments, it is therefore important to look at the utility of such sites, as far as that depends on factors such as how readily users can judge the credibility of the sources and how knowledge is produced by one individual transfers to one another. According to Ahuja and Gavin (2003), one of the biggest challenges in online work is the adjustment of newcomers and their adaptation to the new organization, which results from the lack of the regular contacts with co-workers. Even though online environments have presented new ways to socialize newcomers through information and communication technologies, it is still very unknown how such technologies help or hinder the socialization and sensemaking process.

Current studies on onboarding in remote work

Since the COVID-19 pandemic only few studies have been conducted on how newcomers onboard in remote and hybrid work. For example, Rodeghero et al., (2021) researched the remote onboarding process of software developers. They surveyed over 250 new hires of Microsoft, investigating different factors of remote onboarding: challenges,

member interaction, social connection and the onboarding strategies of teams. They listed out recommendations for remote onboarding, which include amongst others, promote communication and asking for help, emphasize team building and assign an onboarding buddy. Another research by Goodermote (2020) on remote onboarding and training of new program coordinators into the medical education office demonstrated that recommendations for successful results during training are to be specific in communication, thinking a step ahead and make sure to reassure the employee. On the other hand, Carlos and Muralles (2021) focus more on the onboarding process and the relation to building relationships, in remote work. They argue that building relationships, ultimately leads to the development of trust; trust of the new hire and the organization, and trust between the new hire and other staff members. However, they also point out that these findings are not new – but rather existing concepts that have been re-organized (Carlos & Muralles, 2021).

However, despite the increase of studies on onboarding and organizational socialization in remote work in different types of organizations, few studies on onboarding in higher educational institutions have been carried out. Even more important, the connection of strong existing foundations and frameworks, e.g., Van Maanen & Schein's (1979) theoretical framework on organizational socialization and the Uncertainty Reduction Theory and the new concept of remote onboarding has received little attention.

To sum up the literature review: several theories and frameworks have been discussed: organizational socialization by Van Maanen & Schein (1979), Bauer et al's., newcomer adjustment theory and the uncertainty reduction theory by Berger (1979). Those theories and frameworks will shape the path of this study as they have an important impact on the interview guides, but also as sounding boards upon which, the results of the study might lean upon. Despite that the theories and frameworks used, can be seen as quite old and not relevant anymore in times of remote and hybrid work, these theories and frameworks are seen as strong and suitable for this study, based on their strong foundation and serve to guide this study and its design. For example, According to a review from Klein & Heuser (2008), Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) six bipolar tactics still prevail in recent socialization research. They say that Van Maanen and Schein's framework is the most frequently used typology of organizational socialization tactics, and even though it has been reconceptualized later on, this six-dimensional model stayed most prevalent and therefore the author decided to draw this study mostly upon this framework in combination with Bauer et al., (2007) concepts that

were positively related to Van Maanen en Schein's (1979) six tactics: role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance (Klein & Heuser, 2008).

Methodology

Research site

A case study was carried out in Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) based in The Netherlands. Employees of Higher Educational Institutions worked prior the COVID-19 pandemic in physical offices and onboarding of new hires took place physically. I have chosen for a case study as the aim of this research is to explore the phenomenon of onboarding more in-depth. According to Sturman (1997), a case study is the common term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon and is therefore seen as appropriate for this study. This research site for this case study was chosen in particular because there were no online onboarding policies in place, which made the choice for this research site extra suitable.

Qualitative research method

A qualitative inductive analysis has been carried out for this research, as firstly, according to Jablin and Putnam (2001), qualitative research does not focus on measuring and predicting a phenomenon, but rather aims to understand. I choose an approach of qualitative inductive study because this research aims to understand and test the current conceptual frameworks on onboarding while also expanding them, based on the new situation of remote and hybrid working. Secondly, according to Bryman (2012), inductive research is typically associated with a qualitative research approach and emphasizes the relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis lies on the generation of theories.

From the perspective of theoretical contribution, the objective of this study is to generate an explanation theory in the area of newcomer socialization and sensemaking in remote work by extending our understanding of onboarding from a distance and online information seeking.

Semi-structured interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen as research method because this method allows us to dive into the employee's individual experiences by asking specific open-ended questions, while structure and giving space for additional clarification is maintained (Newcomer, 2015). The interviews were conducted following a semi-structured interview guide with specific topics, focusing on open questions which encourage the participant to

answer openly and honestly, thus without suggesting pre-determined answers (Bryman, 2012). Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility and go into in-depth knowledge and understanding of the experiences of the participants and what they consider relevant regarding the topic.

Target population and sampling

Sampling universe

The first step of the sampling process is looking at the totality of persons that are eligible for this case study. It is important to make sure that the sample of participants is representative for this study, therefore, as suggested by Robinson (2014), a list of inclusion and exclusion criteria has been established. The following criteria were taken into consideration:

- 1) The main target group of the case study is support staff of HEI's in The Netherlands. Within this target group, I look at two niche groups:
 - a. **Newcomers:** employees that did their onboarding remotely and/or hybrid;
 - b. **Peers:** employees that have had new colleagues being onboarded remotely and/or hybrid.

No inclusion or exclusion criteria were made regarding the profession nor age group. The sample was homogenous in terms of gender, as the majority of support staff within Dutch Higher Educational institutions is female, (55% in 2019, according to Emancipation Monitor 2018-2021). For an overview of the respondents, see Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' profile

Participant	Newcomer/Peer	Age	Gender	Profession
P1	Newcomer	25-34	F	Admissions Officer
P2	Peer	35-44	F	Policy maker
P3	Peer	55-64	F	Policy maker
P4	Peer	25-34	F	Coordinator
P5	Peer	35-44	F	Coordinator
P6	Newcomer	25-34	F	Assistant
P7	Newcomer	25-34	F	Project leader

P8	Newcomer	25-34	F	Policy maker
P9	Peer	25-34	F	Coordinator
P10	Newcomer	45-54	F	Study advisor
P11	Newcomer	15-24	F	Student Desk Officer
P12	Peer	45-54	F	Policy maker

Sampling size

This research aims to identify the *how* and the *why* events happened as they did. According to Robinson (2014), these qualitative studies benefit from a sampling size of 3-16 participants. Therefore, a sample size of twelve interviews (including two pilot interviews) was perceived as appropriate.

After conducting and transcribing the first ten interviews, the data collection already showed sufficient and essential patterns and themes were visible. To strengthen the validity of the findings, the last two interviews were also conducted.

Sampling strategy and sourcing

A network sample in combination with a snowball sample has been used to recruit the twelve participants. Relevant people in the author's network that work in HEIs and met the requirements have been asked to participate in the study.

Interview guide

Prior to the interviews, a pre-made interview guide with planned topics and questions to be addressed was created. An interview guide was made for each group -the newcomers and the peers-, in order to retain a certain level of consistency. The planned order of questions can be found in appendix 1. However, as supported by Bryman (2012), questions may not follow the exact outlined way, and questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as I pick up on things said by the participant.

Two minor pilot studies have been conducted at the beginning of the data collection period, in order to further refine the interview guide and to test the clarity of the interview questions and sequence. Accordingly, some minor adjustments were made in the interview guide. The pilot interviews gave some important insight to enhance the quality of the interviews and provided input for possible follow-up questions.

Data collection

In total twelve interviews between 21 and 36 minutes have been conducted online through Microsoft Teams from the *2nd until 18th of March 2022*. Attention has been given by me to create a comfortable interview setting as stressed by Kvale (2007). Therefore, all participants were informed beforehand what the interview was about and the duration. The invitation for the online meeting included the consent form, which can be found in appendix 2. I focused on a relaxing, informal and trusting atmosphere from the beginning in order for the participant to feel comfortable. By doing individual interviews, I was able to focus solely on the individual subject, allowing for more confidentiality, and facilitating an atmosphere of trust (Brinkmann, 2014).

Data analysis

For this research, a thematic analysis and flexible coding has been used as means to analyse the empirical data in this study, based on Corley and Gioia's (2004) data structure model. This method focuses on systematically identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012).

Considering the possible difficulties to conduct a purely open approach to all emerging phenomena while being aware of existing themes in the literature (Bryman, 2012), the challenges were subject to flexible coding as described in Treadwell (2017) and therefore organized in themes that represent both the literature and newly emerging themes from the data. This involved a fluid process of constant comparison of data and themes, which ensured the flexibility and evolvement of clearer categorization (Bryman, 2012) by enabling a two-way flow between data and themes. In order to find common themes, some quantitative aspects were considered in the analysis.

The steps in the data analysis are built on a mix of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step iterative process and Corley and Gioia's (2004) data structure model.

Step 1: Data familiarization

In qualitative research, one of the most crucial points is to get familiar with the collected data, which is done by active listening to the audio recordings and transcribe the interviews. (Braun & Clarke, 2006), The audio- and video recorded interviews were therefore transcribed within 24 hours but maximum within 72 hours after taking place in order to

maximalise the reliability of the data. The transcriptions of the interviews were re-read and served as the basis of the data analysis.

Step 2: Order concepts

Corley & Gioia's (2004) data analysis approach starts with analysing the quotes that emerged from the transcriptions and turn them into first order concepts. In this first analysis I tried to stick faithfully to the informant terms and did not focus too much on making themes and categories, as supported by Gioia et al., (2012), by summarizing and shorten the (long) quotes of the participants. From the twelve interviews, over 250 first order concepts arose, as expected by Gioia et al., (2012): "*the sheer number of categories initially becomes overwhelming*" (p. 20).

Step 3: Order themes

Among those first order concepts, I started looking for differences and similarities and give those categories labels or phrasal descriptions. This ordering is part of Corley and Gioia's (2004) analysing process and eventually led to reducing the relevant categories into a more manageable number: 15 order themes were identified.

Step 4: Review themes

When reviewing the themes, I looked into the theoretical aspect of the themes: are the suggested themes allowing describing and explaining the phenomena this research is focusing on. In order to be sure that no findings were left out, extra attention was given to concepts that did not seem to be that important or that could not be referred to the existing literature.

Step 5: Defining and naming the themes in clustered dimensions

Once a workable set of themes and concepts is in place, I looked into clustering the themes into aggregate dimensions, by bundling themes that match each other. The label of "aggregate dimensions" has been taken over from Corley and Gioia's (2004) approach upon which the analysis of this research is based.

Step 6: Producing the data structure

After I had identified a full set of order concepts, order themes and aggregate dimensions, the basis for building Corley and Gioia's data structure is complete to be produced. The data structure is an efficient way for allowing me to configure the data in a sensible and visually attractive way. It also provided a graphic representation of how the data of this research has been analysed: from raw data to concepts, to themes to aggregate dimensions, and to what the relationship among the concepts and themes is.

The final coding scheme has been checked by the advisor working in the same field of research and can therefore be seen as reliable. The data structure model can be found in appendix 3.

Ethical considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, the fundamental ethical guidelines for social science, according to Bryman (2016) have been taken into consideration. Those guidelines concern integrity, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. To ensure these guidelines, this case study has been carried out within the regulations of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017) and the study follows the GDPR guidelines on data handling.

Prior the interview the participants have been informed that the interview will be video- and audio-recorded for academic purposes (participants were able to withdraw from the study) and the participants have been asked for their approval by a consent form. As an ethical practice according to Treadwell (2017), participants were assured that the video- and audio recordings will be stored only until the transcriptions have been completed. Participants have been promised prior to the interview that they may refuse to answer any questions for any reason and that there is no known harm of the studies.

Finally, to protect the participants, anonymity and confidentiality has been taken into account. As Treadwell (2017) implies, qualitative researchers usually protect the participants' anonymity by referring to them as "Respondent/Participant A". Therefore, names will be replaced by "Participant #" in the transcriptions. To further protect the privacy and personal experiences of the participants, all identifying information such as places, departments, names of colleagues have been anonymized.

Findings

Four aggregate dimensions emerged from the data analysis. Those aggregate dimensions are factors affecting the remote onboarding process and newcomer adjustment, positively and negatively. Each aggregate dimension has several sub-themes, that address the most prominent themes on how remote onboarding affects newcomer adjustment and how communication with peers influences the sensemaking and social integration of newcomers.

Table 2 shows the summary of the aggregate dimensions and correlating sub-themes. The complete data structure model on which the findings are based, can be found in appendix 3.

Table 2: Summary of the clustered dimensions and correlating sub-themes

Aggregate dimensions	Relationship Building (RB), Social Integration and Bonding	Responsibility and Accountability of Newcomer Adjustment	Managing Emotional Well-being and Sense of Belonging	Information seeking
Sub-themes	RB through online humour	Role of manager	(No) sense of community	Communication tools
	RB through online meetings	Role of team	Feeling isolated & excluded	New means and methods
	RB through physical meetings	Role of buddy	Welcome arrangements	
	RB through shared experiences	Role of newcomer	Feeling part of the team	

Next, the findings from each aggregate dimension are presented in detail illustrated by quotes of the collected data.

Relationship building, Social Integration and Bonding

The first dimension is concerned with relationship building (RB), social integration and bonding. Participants argued that within the onboarding process, relationship building, online or offline, positively impacted the onboarding and social integration process of newcomers and peers. Participants claimed that building a connection and getting to know their peers on a personal level helped them integrate into their new workplace more socially. One participant explained this as “The informal part, and being able to talk about other things, and not just about work, being able to laugh with each other, but also really being able to ask questions work related.” (P8). However, the aspects of not starting physically in the office as a newcomer, generated a feeling of limited possibilities and confusion: “It is a really

weird time to start, you know, it's kind of hard.” (P10) and “I was starting, and I remember like, at Monday morning at 9 o'clock, and I was like, okay, so what should I do now? Like, I have no idea.” (P8). Onboarding remotely forced the newcomers, and the peers, to find new ways of engagement through online tools. P2 mentioned setting up a new kind of online meeting in order to engage: “So I have been a part of these meetings where we had, like these informal [online] meetings, I think they were called even informal meetings. Two of them, actually, one would be at the beginning of the week. And that would be just as like a starting of the week kind of thing where you could discuss work, but also not work related. So it'll be about what you did the week before. But it will also be something that you're working on.” (P2).

Prior to remote and hybrid working, new employees would have had the possibility to get to know their workplace and the surroundings. P6 describes the feeling of not getting to know the workplace: “but it was kind of strange, because I didn't really know, for example, which place I was working. I know, it was a university, but I didn't know how the office looked like.” (P6).

Furthermore, remote onboarding often resulted in peers not feeling the need to connect to newcomers, mostly because of the content of their work had no overlap. P3 describes the way of looking at a newcomer:

“I think, the closer they are in connection to work, content wise, the easier it is because you have a lot more informal meetings or also formal meetings with the ones that are working closely to you but the further away, they are, and the other new team members are, content wise, I don't think I have had the need to meet them (online) because the work is not related. Maybe it could be related but it never came up since they started.” (P3).

This research identified several approaches on how newcomers and peers tried to build a relationship with each other during the onboarding period and how these aspects positively or negatively impacted the social integration. Relationship building through (online) *humour* turned out to be a successful way of relationship building amongst the participants. The need for fun, humour and possibilities to connect was increased when there was no possibility to meet physically. As a result, online humour was used in remote onboarding to integrate socially with team members. As expressed by P8: an example is the use of groups in Teams or WhatsApp and the use of GIFs (graphic interchange format):

“I think it really helped that the study desk here at the [name of department] has a chat, where like, everybody's inside the chat, and it's not like, they only talk about work stuff, but they also like make jokes or when they see an email or something or some somebody says something funny, you know, [...] A lot of GIFs are sent as well, you know, so I think it's like very informal and yeah, like you can also talk about other things and work so I think that's really helped to socially integrate. (P8).

Relationship building amongst newcomers and peers in remote work is also positively carried out in *online meetings*, but only because physical meetings were not possible. An example P1 shared: “I think that [the online informal meetings] were actually a really cool thing we did, because people would share a lot of stuff sometimes, like really personal or just really funny. (P1). However, this research also shows that the online meetings are just a compensation when lacking of physical meetings: “We've had the kind of social where we would do like, you know, kind of like a pub quiz or have like a drink with colleagues online. And it works to some extent, I guess it's better than nothing.” (P5).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *physical meetings* were hardly possible during the newcomers' onboarding periods of the participants, however, in some exceptional cases, physical meetings were organized in order to stimulate the relationship building of the newcomers and their peers. P6 describes the positive outcome of this physical meeting:

“I think I was lucky that in my second week, there was like a physical meeting in the garden of our team member, so I could meet the team. And I, for me, that was like the best thing, because then I could see them and really connect with them. So then afterwards, also, it's easier to have more like formal conversations about work, because then you know how someone is.” (P6).

Most participants of this study argue that “you only get to know things about each other when we see each other” (P9) and that the few physical meetings that were organized during remote onboarding times, were the most useful in terms of relationship building and social integration. P11 describes the first time she really felt part of her team: “We went on a walk and had to do like a treasure hunt, that sort of stuff. And it was really about team bonding on that day. And yeah, I remember that being the first point in time that I really

thought to myself, okay, well, this is my team. These are my people, and I really enjoyed it as well.” (P11).

Lastly, findings showed how *sharing experiences* contributed towards relationship building. The following quote explains: “I think we cried all so much during those online meetings because I think a lot of us felt that way [not feeling part of the team], even, the ones that were part of the sub teams.” (P7). Relationship building through shared experiences was also visible when a newcomer that started completely remotely, later on became closer to three other newcomers. P11 describes the feeling of being able to help newcomers out: “A couple of months afterwards I started, three other people started working in my team. So, we were like, the newbies group. And I do remember us meeting up quite frequently and just chatting about everything, about nonsense. So, it was really nice having that group of new people that are all a little bit insecure about their new job. But it was really nice to just share that experience with each other. (P11).

In conclusion of the first dimension, this research detected four techniques of relationship building for newcomers: through humour, online and offline meetings and shared experiences. Participants seem to be flexible when it comes to social integration and different tools for relationship building have been found e.g., the use of GIFs, different communication tools and being open about (negative) experiences in the onboarding period.

Responsibility and Accountability of Newcomer Adjustment

Another relevant principle concerning the newcomer adjustment is the role of different colleagues around the newcomer: the manager, the team, the buddy, if there is a buddy and obviously, the role of the newcomer him or herself. Participants argued that the responsibility and accountability is divided amongst all stakeholders, as P10 states: “The team has to be cohesive; the supervisor has to be proactive and have personal skills and understand where someone's coming from. And you have to go outside your comfort zone. And dare to be vulnerable sometimes”. (P10).

Participants also experienced that there were times that no one felt responsible for the newcomer, because this was not clearly communicated before the newcomer had started. “There should be someone responsible, but if no one feels responsible, the bigger the team gets, the less responsibility you feel. So, then I would, I would like to have these guidelines that someone says, okay, now you are the responsible one.” (P4)

In the following sections, this study will go deeper into the collected data related to the specific *role of manager*, *role of team*, *role of buddy* and *the role of newcomer* in terms of responsibility and accountability for the newcomer adjustment process.

Role of manager

This sub-theme concerns the role of the manager, in this case the hiring manager of the newcomer, in the process of the onboarding period. It is expected that the role of the manager in the onboarding process is visible, as expressed by P6: "I think it's really important in online working. That the manager is aware about how someone is including him or herself in the team. [...] Especially in the beginning, the team manager should say to a team like "Hey, make sure that in the first week you plan on my meeting to get to know each other." (P6). In addition, the feeling that the manager did not take responsibility and no guidelines on welcoming the newcomer, as P4 describes: "As soon as the team is bigger than several people, then you [the newcomer] don't know who to reach out to, especially when these people do similar jobs. [...] I was talking about these guidelines earlier that I would like to receive on how to make sure a newcomer would feel welcome." (P4). This resulted in blurred lines regarding the responsibility and accountability of the manager in the newcomer adjustment period.

Another aspect of the responsibility of the manager within the onboarding of a newcomer is the communication between the manager and the newcomer, which is illustrated in the following quote: I think it's the team leader's responsibility to make sure that the new colleague has all the information and all the tools to get started. And to keep in touch with a new colleague: is he doing all right? Can he or she find the way? [...] as a team leader, you have to be alert and make sure you have an open communication that the new colleague feels that there is room to ask for help." (P12).

Role of team

The role of the team within the newcomers' adjustment period was also discussed by the participants. One important point is that nonetheless, "the team need be cohesive." (P10). Several participants seemed to struggle with figuring out what the role of the team was within the onboarding process, as the onboarding plan was not in place. P4 explained that the onboarding of her new colleague felt quite far away from here: "When remote working

started, I would not say I would feel very connected. That had to do with, in my head, I don't feel responsible for the new colleagues, which I think is a bad thing that happened. But that is the truth. So if I on professional level, I don't have to work with this person, it does already feel a bit more far away from me.” (p4).

In remote setting, one participant emphasized that you rely on the person that works the most with the newcomer and makes sure the newcomer will be socially integrated: “I guess you kind of figure that the person who will be working with them closest, like most, most time would feel responsible for that. But that's not always the case. [...] Sometimes I think we assume maybe too much that someone else might do it or.. yeah, I didn't know. We could have maybe we could have done more.” (P5).

From the point of view from the newcomers that actually onboarded remotely, it is remarkable that they argue that the role of the team is not clear and well understood. This is illustrated by P6: “I felt like definitely not everyone took the time to actually know, chat for a bit and make me feel at home or helped me out.” (p6).

Role of buddy

Another important theme that emerged from looking at the onboarding process of newcomers in remote work, is the role of having a buddy. For some departments the buddy system is integrated: “We want to make sure that every new colleague has a buddy within our department.” (P12).

A buddy may also be an online guide but seems to also be the peer with who the newcomer communicates the most in the beginning, as exemplified by the following quote “I got buddied up with one of my colleagues who guided me through the first couple of days or weeks maybe. So I spoke with her quite regularly and she was kind of like my contact person within the team.” (P11). Some participants were concerned with the fact that there was no buddy system present, as illustrated by P5: “Somebody should probably be given like a mentor, or you know, or have a buddy or whatever you want to call it would be much better. Because sometimes you figure like someone else is going to do it. And none of the colleagues might reach out so and then that person might be, I don't know. Yeah. ...be really lonely, and you wouldn't even know.” (P5)

Role of newcomer

With regards to the role of the newcomer in their onboarding process, the opinions of participants were diverse. Some participants mentioned that they did not feel responsible for the newcomer, and that the initiative of onboarding belongs to the newcomers themselves. This is exemplified by the following quote: “But if I look at these [new] colleagues, it was always sort of that, that we asked them to take that initiative, and not me as a part of the bigger team, because I did not really feel responsible for them.” (P4).

On the other hand, P5 was very clear about the role of a newcomer in terms of onboarding: “I think it's a bit much to ask from someone who's new to actually be able to pinpoint that I think someone who was just starting in a new job would probably kind of just take what is offered? [...] I don't think it [social integration] is the responsibility of the person who's starting the job.” (P5)

However, some of the participants that experienced remote onboarding, felt that onboarding successfully was their own responsibility: “And I felt like, it was also maybe my own responsibility to like, kind of get out there and connect, but couldn't really do that” (P7).

To sum up the second aggregate dimension about who has the responsibility for the new hires, and who can be accounted for if the new hires’ onboarding is unsuccessful, the findings show that we can look at four different stakeholders: the manager, the team, the buddy and the newcomer itself. As conclusion, all four stakeholders have some kind of responsibility, but it is clear that this will only work if there are (written) policies on the remote onboarding process in place.

Managing Emotional Well-being and Sense of Belonging

Another theme that emerged from the collected data were factors related to emotional well-being and the sense of belonging. Experiences such as not feeling part of the community and feeling excluded and isolated were mentioned by some of the participants, due to the remote onboarding. Stress as a result of remote onboarding was actively illustrated by several participants. P1 explains “I felt like I just spent the first month, just kind of like swimming in the ocean of the institution.”, and P9 adds to that it can be quite isolating: “You tend to tend to add to your stress during the online onboarding. What's wrong with me? What's? Why can't I find it? So it's quite isolating, and a little bit makes you doubt yourself a little bit.”

It is also noteworthy that some participants did not feel welcomed, and therefore a sense of community was lacking: “But I wasn't even given like a laptop to start from the

university.” (P1) and “No, I didn't get any information about the institution, the team or the team members.” (P6). It was remarkable, that also the participants that did not onboard remotely -the peers- experienced those newcomers may had difficulties related to well-being. P4 illustrates that newcomers could feel lost when onboarding remotely: “But if they struggle, there is not a person who will see them daily, because you work from home. And I can imagine that for some people, that is a big struggle that you would feel a bit lost.” (P4).

The collected data also showed how to create and maintain the sense of community within the organization. Examples given on how participants felt *part of the team*, were quite diverse, depending on the use of informal group chats, for example: “I think the group chat is really, really helped like for community feeling while also for asking questions.” (P8).

Unlike the mentioned examples of participants that not felt welcome in their onboarding process, some other participants expressed that their community feeling was increased due to the *welcome arrangements* organized by their team leader: “My manager had a welcoming package sent to my parents place.” (P8) and “I met them at the office and brought a big bunch of flowers to welcome them.” (P12).

The findings show that in remote onboarding, managing the new hires' emotional well-being is important, in order to give them the feeling that they belong to their new team and organization. The findings also show that this aspect is handled very differently per team.

Information Seeking

The last but not least dimension that emerged from the collected data is focused on which communication tools were used by the participants and what new means and methods were discovered in this new way of working. Communication tools that were used during remote onboarding were “Microsoft Teams group channels” (P4), “group chats” (P4, P9, P10), “WhatsApp groups” (P1, P4, P11), “sharing screens” (P8). P4 elaborates on using their Teams group channel as information source for newcomers: “We've got a team channel together. What I do see is that some people reach out to each other with some general questions like, input, can someone help me out with this? I think that is a good thing. So to reach out to the entire team, it's easier than to just find that one person.” (P4).

Furthermore, participants also included new means and methods for future working, where hybrid onboarding with fixed office days or fixed daily meetings were emphasised. P7 suggests: “I think something like of a morning start like, calling in at like 9 or something 9:30 to just check in with each other like, oh, how you doing?”. On another note, participants

mentioned the lack of etiquettes in online meetings. This is exemplified in a statement made by P10, and therefore suggests a protocol for online meetings: “think there should be a sort of protocol of behaviour that people should be aware of.” (P10).

In terms of information seeking, in online working, different online communication tools are used. Looking into the future work environments, protocols and fixed daily online meetings and fixed physical meetings days are longed for.

Discussion

In this chapter, the findings from the data analysis presented in the previous chapter will be considered in relation to the current state of knowledge concerning newcomer adjustment, organizational socialization and (online) sensemaking. The discussion aims to elaborate that the empirical findings make several distinct contributions to the newcomer adjustment and socialization theory, in remote work and how the results could be used for a refined remote onboarding process in future work environments.

Generally seen, this study showed that there was a lack of onboarding policies and procedures in a remote and online setting, that caused ineffective onboarding of newcomers as suggested by Bauer et al., (2007). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) support this and refer to this as ‘sequential vs random socialization’ in their framework. It has to be said that the global COVID-19 pandemic caused this sudden transition from on location to remote working, and therefore it is not a big surprise that institutions did not have online onboarding policies in place. Even though the policies in remote onboarding were absent, this research shows that newcomers and peers slowly found their way establishing practices that helped compensating for the absence of physical interaction, as also demonstrated in the studies of Rodeghero et al., (2021); Goodermote (2020) and Carlos & Muralles (2021).

Based on Bauer’s (2010) framework, *connection* is one of the four distinct levels in the onboarding process and refers to the important interpersonal relationships and information networks that employees must establish in order to integrate successfully. The findings in this study show that participants had more difficulties with finding connections and integrating in the remote working setting and participants often raised the traditional physical offices when thinking of establishing a relationship with newcomers. However, the study also found that the use of organizational insiders (buddies) online or offline, successfully helped with the integration of the newcomer. Noteworthy to add here is that while the findings of this study on the importance of buddies is definitely seen, as in the literature suggested by Van Maanen & Schein’s (1979) fifth dimension, “*serial vs disjunctive socialization*”, which refers to whether a senior employee is available as mentor and role model and the recent study of Rodeghero et al., (2021), there is hardly any literature on the role of the manager within the (online) onboarding period. The outcomes of this research revealed that even though it is expected that the role of the manager during the onboarding of a new hire is visible, this is not always the case and that results in blurred lines regarding the responsibility and the accountability of the newcomer adjustment.

Comparing the framework of organizational socialization of Van Maanen & Schein (1979), which is focused on the pre-hybrid and remote work era and the findings of this study, it can be said that their six bipolar dimensions of socialization: collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial and investiture, can also be used as dimensions for the online organizational socialization process of newcomers, but that these existing concepts have been reconfigured and adopted to new work environments. The findings in particular show that whether a newcomer has a senior employee (buddy) available as a mentor or role model (serial), has a massive impact on the success of the remote onboarding, which was an expected outcome in this study, looking at the study of Rodeghero et al., (2021).

On a more promising path, the findings showed that participants found different forms of digital communication to reduce their uncertainty in their onboarding period. Remote working does not give the space for traditional communication for reducing uncertainty, as according to Berger (1979), and thus newcomers need to find other (digital) communication ways to build active relationships with peers.

To sum up everything that has been stated, this study, based on the findings and discussion, lead to the following two theoretical implications and at the same time, answers both research questions.

Communication is key for connecting and sensemaking

In regards to RQ1, communication definitely has a significant role in the remote onboarding process of new hires and is one of the most prominent means in the remote onboarding process this study found. Even though the studied literature is not particularly zooming into the effects of communication tools in newcomer adjustment, this study clearly revealed that communication is the key for building a sense of community and connecting, something that is of the utmost importance for new hires in the beginning of their new role, especially in remote work. Perspectives from this study are that for new hires, communication between peers and newcomers should be continuous and in a two-way nature, as stated by Feldman (1981), who suggests that the adjustment to one's group is one of the main indicators of newcomer adjustment, and that acceptance is reached through building relationships with peers, a process where communication is essential. Also, the well-known Uncertainty Reduction Theory applies to this, as new hires, when they are still strangers to the organization and their new team, use communication in moments of uncertainty (Berger, 1979) and when they need to give to meaning to first-time experiences (sensemaking).

Remote work does not give the space for traditional communication to reduce uncertainty, as according to Berger (1979), and thus newcomers need to find other digital communication ways to build active relationships with peers. As suggested by Miller & Jablin's (1999) and shown by this study, relational information seeking could be a solution here, as that is actively done by newcomers by introducing different forms of digital communication.

A multi-dimensional approach towards relationship building in remote work

This study shows that establishing relationships with peers is more challenging in remote working environments than in face-to-face settings, however, it also conceptualized a multi-dimensional approach towards relationship building in remote work. Several ways of relationship building and bonding occurred; through humour, through organizing physical meetings once in a while, and also through creating communication tools that are accessible for newcomers, such as WhatsApp groups, Teams channels and online quizzes.

In addition, the study revealed the importance of looking at the stakeholders within the remote onboarding process: the manager, the team, the buddy and the newcomer itself. Questions in response to the blurred lines of responsibility and accountability are raised after conducting this research.

Social connection and relationship building through humour is not a new aspect in the traditional organizational socialization world, but it can certainly be used more effectively in future remote onboarding. Bridging the gap between the onboarding literature linked to work environments where meeting is possible and only remote onboarding, this study suggests that the social organization framework of Van Maanen & Schein (1979) and Bauer's onboarding theory (2007), also fit to online onboarding, but that digital ways of onboarding can only replace physical onboarding activities to a certain extent.

Moving forward to RQ2, on how remote onboarding affects relationship building between newcomers and peers, the findings in this study show that participants had a harder time to connect and build a relationship with peers in the online working setting and that participants often referred back to the physical office when thinking of establishing a relationship with newcomers. However, the study also learns that the use of a buddy system online or offline, successfully helps with newcomer adjustment and integration.

A theoretical suggestion that goes into line with Bauer et al., (2007) and Van Maanen & Schein (1979) is that formal onboarding policies and protocols need to be in place for effective onboarding. The participants of this study also suggested that clear policies are

needed, especially in remote onboarding. Another thing to mention is that while the recent study of Carlos & Muralles (2021) demonstrated how relationship building affects the trust between new hires and the organization, as their manager, as their peers, this is not much shown in the outcomes of this study.

Limitations

Although it was expected that this research would point out interesting patterns and correlations between the findings, this research, as all empirical studies, it is not without its limitations. While these specific qualitative studies provide detailed information from participants and the findings of this study are valid, the samples are required to be limited in size and scope, and thus necessarily limiting the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the participants of this study solely represent female employees, and therefore the study does not represent a whole generation of higher educational institutions.

The research method, a qualitative analysis with semi-structured interviews is a proper approach as this research looks at the correlation between the collected data and the existing concepts, however, semi-structured interviews are time-consuming and require extensive resources when focusing on a larger and more representative sample.

Suggestions for future research

Though the world seems to recover from the pandemic, the hybrid and remote working will stay. The lack of research on digital onboarding and how it affects newcomer adjustment and organizational socialization remains too. One thing that came up during the data collection and analysis, is the influence of personality traits of employees, for example, being extrovert rather introvert, and how this contributed to the remote onboarding process and newcomer adjustment. As there is not enough empirical data on this aspect and therefore not enough evidence, it is hard to say to what extent personality traits have on the social integration process. Therefore it is suggested for future research to look into the big five personality traits, which include extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism, and what the connection to remote onboarding and organizational socialization is.

Additionally, looking more into the role of different stakeholders within the remote onboarding process is advised. Future research may focus more on the responsibility of the

manager, team, and buddy within the onboarding period of new hires and aim to set-up clear guidelines that fit the organizational culture of HEIs.

Conclusion

The major shift from traditional working environments to future -remote and hybrid- environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in communication technology has caused organizations to restructure their operations and especially the onboarding process of new hires. A process that is so important for the integration of the newcomer, as the main goal of onboarding is building relationships and skills training. This research focused on the onboarding process in remote work, drawing onto Van Maanen & Schein's (1979) theoretical framework of organizational socialization. The researcher's purpose was to shed light on sustained practices that can be used in remote onboarding.

Even without remote onboarding policies in place, this research shows that new hires and peers slowly found their way in establishing practices that helped compensating for the absence of physical interaction, but in no way it is perceive as a replacement.

The ideas and practices in this research are not new concepts but rather establishing concepts that have been reconfigured and adopted to new work environments. Results show that by focusing on communication and on providing relationship building opportunities, offline or online, it is to be expected that newcomers are able to adjust to and integrate smoother and thus succeed and feel a sense of belonging to their organization.

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Appendix

1. Interview guide

Group 1: Newcomers

- Tell me about the time when you got the job offer from this company? What were you feeling at that time? Were you confident about starting the job at that time?
- What has been communicated prior the start of your new job?
- Tell me about your experience on the day of your orientation? Walk me through the first day.
- What did your manager do to help you get acquainted with the team and your role?
- What role did your team play in this process? Tell me about your interactions with them that helped you to understand your surroundings?
- What helped you to feel integrated with the team? Can you think of the moment or moments where you really felt like you were part of the team?
- What communication channels have you been using from the start of your new role? Tell me a bit more about the communication channel you use the most to communicate with peers/colleagues.
- How did you learn about the rest of your team members and people in your company? Was it easy or did you feel it was tough to navigate?
- Tell me about any experiences during this time that you felt were challenging? Tell me about the time that you needed to find information, how did you do it?
- Tell me more about the emotions you feel when you think of your company and work?
- How long do you see yourself working for this organization and why?

Group 2: Peers

- Tell me about the time you got new colleagues in your team in the last 2 years. Did your team change a lot? How many new people joined your team?
- What has been communication about the start of the newcomers? How were you informed about the action plan?
- Tell me about your experience with meeting a new colleague online.
- What's most challenging with meeting new colleagues in a hybrid working situation?
- What helps you feel connected to others?

- How do you communicate with you new colleagues and on what basis? How often and through which channels?
- How well do you feel connected to your new co-workers?
- Do you feel like you have opportunities for "water-cooler" type discussions with the team to help you spur on ideas? What ideas do you have for how we could create more of them?
- Do you feel supported by the team so that you could go to anyone asking them for help?
- Do you think newcomers feel like they can come for help to you?
- Do you feel like you're a full member of the team? What makes you feel connected/disconnected?

2. Form of Consent



Form of Consent, Audio- and video recording of Interviews

The researcher Tessa Schutte, is conducting a qualitative interview study within the field of organizational communication by the IT Faculty, Gothenburg University.

On [date] I am carrying out an interview, which will be used for research on onboarding and newcomer adjustment in remote working within higher educational institutions.

Thank you for your time and for your willingness to take part in this interview. Your participation is very much appreciated. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on gusschute@student.gu.se. In order to carry out the interview, kindly consent with the interview being video- and audio recorded by agreeing to the following:

- Participation in this interview is completely voluntary;
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any moment;
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any moment;
- If you would prefer to not have the interview audio- and/or video recorded, please inform the researcher beforehand;
- The audio- and/or video recording will be used exclusively for research purposes only and will be deleted after the interview has been transcribed;
- The audio- and/or video file is subject to a high degree of confidentiality and will only be accessed by the researcher;
- The data provided will be anonymized to prevent traceability;

If you agree to the terms, you will be asked verbal agreement to the consent form upon the start of the interview.

Thank you for participating in my research. Again, it is really appreciated.

Best wishes,

Tessa Schutte

3. Data structured model

Table 2: Data structured model reproduced from Corley & Gioia, 2004

Quotes	First Order Concepts	Second Order Themes	Aggregate dimensions
<i>Like, in the beginning, I used to every Friday send, some sort of try, try and send a funny cartoon, just to test the waters of humour and see how people respond, you know, to my immediate colleagues, and so that by the time Christmas came, I felt confident enough to send everybody a mass email saying Happy Christmas, you know, with a cartoon, so and that that's yeah, so that was a slow build-up of that.</i>	Occasionally I would send a funny cartoon to my colleagues through mail to test the waters of humour.	Relationship building through humour	Relationship building, social integration and bounding
<i>what I said like the informal part, and being able to talk about other things, and just work, being able to laugh with each other, but also really being able to ask questions work related.</i>	A team means to me that there is also an informal part and to be able to laugh with each other.		
<i>We have different groups, though. I must say we have. We have a chat with the team itself, that is a bit more serious. But sometimes we have GIFs in there as well. But you do see that you form a bit of a tighter group with some other colleagues that you work more with. And in those groups, we, yeah, we will send more informal messages.</i>	We have chats that are more serious but we also have a chat where we talk informally. We sent GIFs and laugh a lot		
<i>I think we cried all so much during those meetings online because I think a lot of us felt that way, even, the ones that were part of the sub teams.</i>	My colleagues and I cried a lot during the online meetings because we felt lost.	Relationship building through shared experiences	
<i>I was like, very happy to make some contact, but it kind of fell away as soon we were working from home. One of them also had quite a solo position. So I felt like I was she's kind of in the same boat as me.</i>	I was happy to find a colleague that felt the same.		
<i>Not that I can clearly recall, while I was introduced through email that will send being sent throughout the whole faculty. And I did get some replies to that. So a couple of people invited me to have coffee with them. So I did whenever we were on campus, both on campus. And I did get sent a lot of information, like digitally, so a lot of internet pages and manuals, that sort of stuff. So I had to, to read through those myself. And my, my work buddy just introduced me to a lot of topics, but I did a lot of like self-studies, I would call it.</i>	After I was introduced through e-mail, a few colleagues invited me for a digital coffee meeting.	Relationship building through online meetings	
<i>I guess knowing a little bit about their private life or where they live, like what their day-to-day life looks like outside of work. That really helps in terms of connecting with someone and then yeah, when you do actually, we do have had in the in the past had team outings where you just, it's sometimes nice to be able to meet colleagues outside of their work context, and to go for dinner or go for drinks or something.</i>	I feel more connected to someone if I know a bit about their private life. It's nice to see colleagues outside work context (e.g., on a walk, go for a drink or dinner)	Relationship building through physical meetings	

<i>We did a lot of small talk on that day, because we went on walks through the botanical gardens and stuff and you got paired up with another colleague that you don't that you didn't really know very well at the time. So yeah, you start talking about your private life and your hobbies, that sort of stuff. So that's really when the small talk started to happen as well.</i>	Talking about personal matters make me feel more connected to my colleagues		
<i>I think the responsibility of integrating a newcomer is for both team leader and team, but I think mostly of the team. Yeah. You know, because they know each other and they know to work with has to be done. They know how the work has to be done and a newcomer like, yeah, is new, he or she doesn't know anything. So it's, I mean, of course a newcomer also needs to make an effort and needs to have an open attitude. But I think the biggest part is for the team.</i>	The responsibility for making sure that the newcomer is integrated lies at the team more than the team leader.	Role of manager	Responsibility & Accountability of newcomer adjustment
<i>No, I really think especially in the beginning, the team manager should say to a team like "Hey, make sure that in the first week you plan on my meeting to get to know each other."</i>	The team leader should have encouraged the other team member to meet up online with the newcomer		
<i>I should do that [welcoming a newcomer via e-mail/online meeting] to every person.</i>	I realize now that I should welcome every newcomer after the announcement e-mail of the team leader.	Role of team	
<i>if you would have made me a buddy, again, then I would have automatically asked this question because then it's my responsibility. So I did not do that. I should have done that.</i>	If I would have been a buddy, I would have checked with the newcomers how they are or if they needed anything.	Role of buddy	
<i>But if I look at these colleagues, it was always sort of that, that we asked them to take that initiative, and not me as a part of the bigger team, because I I did not really feel responsible for them.</i>	We always asked the newcomers to take the initiative to integrate.	Role of newcomer	
<i>We have Whatsapp group as well. Actually, two groups. We have one for work and one for fun stuff.</i>	We have an informal WhatsApp group that we use for direct lines and fun with colleagues.	Feeling part of the team	Managing Emotional Well-being and Sense of Belonging
<i>Something like a WhatsApp group, it's pretty low key. So if you just have something to share with your people, or just like a quick message</i>	The group chat is really helpful and adds to the community feeling.		
<i>So you really have like this community feeling kind of because not like of course people have their own responsibilities as well but like the main tasks, we all do</i>	The team is responsible together which supports the community feeling.		
<i>she had like a welcoming package sent to my parents' place, you know, with a water bottle of the university and a notebook and those kinds of things.</i>	I received a welcome package at home in the first week which made me feel really appreciated.	Welcome arrangements	
<i>So the first day, they started working for our faculty for my team. I met them at the office and brought a big bunch of flowers to welcome them. And well at least show them around where they would sit if they would be in the office all the time, and introduce them to some colleagues. But it was all very small</i>	As a team leader I always try to meet my new team members in real life, if the		

<i>scale, of course, but it did give them a little bit of feeling of being welcome and part of the team. And so I tried to do that as much as possible. And also, meet up online.</i>	situation allows, to make sure they feel welcomed.		<div>Information Seeking</div>
<i>I think it was strange that I didn't know their names. Like we didn't know each other. And I was just sitting there. Yeah. was it awkward, yes, a little bit maybe?</i>	lacking sense of colleagues in my team	(No) sense of community	
<i>So I didn't really meet a lot of people in the first couple of weeks, maybe even months. It only started when people started returning to the team and to work on location when I really got to know them. So there wasn't really a lot of onboarding, I would say.</i>	I did not meet people in the first couple of months.	Feeling isolated and excluded	
<i>I didn't feel directly like I was part of the team because I didn't even know anyone.</i>	I didn't feel part of the team because I didn't know anymore.		
<i>You tend to tend to add your stress. What's wrong with me? What's? Why can't I find it? So it's quite isolating, and a little bit makes you doubt yourself a little bit.</i>	When I need help during remote work, I get stressed and it feels quite isolating.	Stress	
<i>No, they didn't really organize something but I had like a lot of chats. So well, first, day but also, the first meets, I think, a lot of screen sharing, you know, so it still kind of felt like we were working together. It wasn't like I was sitting in my room all day all by myself. I was actually talking all day to my colleagues.</i>	The team did not organize a welcome meeting but they chatted me a lot.	Communication Tools	
<i>I would just send it in this big chat group I told you about. And then there will always be somebody who will reply, and sometimes I just forwarded it to the wrong person. But then I would always come back.</i>	If I needed help, I would just ask in the big group chat.		
<i>What I do see is that some people reach out to each other with some general questions like, input, can someone help me out with this? I think that is a good thing.</i>	The group teams' channel is used for newcomers with questions.	New means and methods	
<i>And I think I think something more structural to get people warmed up, again to re-awaken people's social skills, to get people back to normal, whatever that is, and whatever that's going to be from here on in.</i>	We need to re-awaken our social skills in this hybrid work environment.		
<i>I would think that for a team, to have certain days, just marked as office days already helps a lot. Because then you know, as a solo position, even though you might not have as much contact with your co-workers, that if you go to the office on Monday, they will be there, either way. And you can have your small talk and your lunch talk and everything about that. So I think these like marking these days, will really help, not just having people decide in the morning be like oh, it rains my going today. Because then you kind of get this discrepancy, you know? I know let's say like, then it doesn't really matter for the setup position person to come to work or not. And I think really like investing in like the social structure of a team, like so doing something outside of work, going for lunch together, or maybe planning something altogether outside of work. That really helps as well.</i>	Fixed office days (where the whole team/majority of team is present) with your team would benefit integrating in the team.		