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Hybrid onboarding

Its impact on newly hired employees

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Abstract

This thesis explores hybrid onboarding and its impact on newly hired employees. The research questions for the study were: (1) What are the consequences of hybrid onboarding for newly hired employees? and (2) How does hybrid onboarding contribute to creating realistic job expectations? The study implemented a qualitative research approach, which included semi-structured interviews that focused on studying the experiences and beliefs of participants undergoing a hybrid onboarding. In the analysis and discussion, it was concluded that social interactions and personalized experiences were key to maintaining confidence and excitement when undergoing the hybrid onboarding process. Only looking at the digital materials was perceived to be challenging for newly hired employees with no previous job experience but combining this with personalized interactions helped create a bridge for understanding the gap between onboarding and regular work experience, to then create an accurate image of the job. The study emphasizes that for a successful employee onboarding and expectation setting, it is crucial that one looks at socialization, personalized experiences, and the integration of digital and in-person elements in hybrid.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

An onboarding process is a human resource routine that should include an introduction to the job role that the newly employed will have. Furthermore, it should introduce the employee to the organization regarding its values, rules, culture, processes and goals (Cable *et al.*, 2013). The responsibility of introducing newly hired employees to the organization often falls on the human resource department or a supervisor. Every new employee is onboarded in some kind of way and more often than not it is done in an ad hoc manner. But if time and structure is put into the onboarding process it has been shown that it can have promising implications for both newly hired and companies. If an onboarding is done well it can lead to higher engagement, loyalty, productivity as well as a successful start for the newly employed where the time to contribution is faster (SHRM, n.d.).

Since the pandemic there has been a rise of using digital technology to onboard new employees which has impacted the human resource routine of onboarding (Lund *et al.*, 2021). Digitalization has become more normalized than ever and it is safe to say that the possibility of hybridity is a result of the increasing innovation of technological advances in our society. Many organizations are moving to a hybrid work arrangement whilst others are going fully digital with remote working only (Iqbal *et al.*, 2021). Digital onboarding is the process of virtually introducing new employees to companies and work roles using technologies that enable it to be performed remotely (SHRM, 2020). Onboarding new employees in a digital manner is a new format for most employers and a great deal of organizations are trying to make it work. With more people working from home, being an effect of COVID-19, it can be said that more thought needs to be put into the onboarding process than ever before. This fast rising and new format of making use of digital tools in onboarding processes will have direct implications for new job starters (Lund *et al.*, 2021).

1.2 Problematization

In the context of virtual onboarding, there are several problems regarding providing realistic information to newly higher employees and also maintaining their expectations for the role. A regular onboarding process offers opportunities to adjust the onboarding as you go and manage the new hires' expectations which can be difficult to do in a digital setting. This can create a problem when you have new employees that have different experiences of onboarding, depending if an employee has undergone an onboarding previously or not, mainly to them having a difference in opinion of the expectations from the role. According to Bauer *et al.* (2007), the onboarding process needs to be adjustable for the employees to better understand their roles, the organizational culture and to then be able to succeed in the role. Having an onboarding in this manner creates an environment where the new employee can adjust their expectations accordingly during the process (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

Because of the limited face-to-face interactions in a digital setting, there can arise a problem with connecting and informing the new employee during the onboarding. Mishra et al., (2014) argued that in a digital setting, there is a lack of adjustments to the new employee's expectations of the role because of the missing real-time conversations, and also a lack of nonverbal cues. Leading to the employees having unrealistic expectations of the new job. Mishra et al., (2014) also discuss the potential for misunderstandings because of the missing personal interactions. A problem that can arise for an organization is also that they cannot identify an individual's expectations based on their reactions. Therefore organizations need to address these challenges when going through a digital onboarding process and find methods to create a realistic environment for the new employees. They need to accomplish this while also making sure that their expectations align with the realities of the job that is provided by the organization. A way that this can work is to create videos, messages, or detailed documents, combined with clear ways of communicating for the ongoing duration of the onboarding (Mishra et al., 2014).

When understanding all the problems that may arise from a virtual onboarding, one can actively work on mitigating the pitfalls and enhancing an effective onboarding process to support new employees coming into the organization. The essay aims to investigate the impact of the hybrid onboarding process on newly hired employees' expectations. This will benefit organizations looking to know more about hybrid onboarding and how to enhance the experience in a virtual setting.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to increase the understanding of hybrid onboarding and to better understand the consequences of hybrid onboarding for newly hired employees. To accomplish the purpose of this thesis two main research questions (RQ 1&2) were constructed.

RQ 1: What are the consequences of hybrid onboarding for newly hired employees?

RQ 2: How does hybrid onboarding contribute to creating realistic job expectations?

1.4 Limitations and scope

This study takes its approach in RJP and socialization and is limited to one management consulting company operating in the city of Gothenburg in Sweden. The company makes use of hybrid onboarding where a sample of people that have undergone the processes has been interviewed as well as two HR managers of the company.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Hybridity in organizations

Defining hybridity workplaces usually means the combination between in-person work arrangement and remote work systems. This means that employees have the opportunity to work both in a physical workspace in which they show up in person as well as a digital workspace set up by the company so that the employees can work from anywhere as long as they have access to the technical necessities (Iqbal et al., 2021). Flexible work arrangements have seen an increase in popularity in scientific research because of advances in technology and in social trends. Employees are demanding more flexibility and previous research has shown increased creativity as well as an increased work-life balance amongst employees at hybrid workplaces (Hunter, 2019).

2.2 Onboarding

Being onboarded is a special time for newly hired employees. It is a process in which newly hired employees, apart from being faced with the demands of their new working role and organizational socialization, have to learn new things about their role. This includes things such as tasks, responsibilities and standards. Onboarding also includes having to establish relationships to be socially integrated in the new organization. In addition, the norms such as the values, rituals and structure of the company have to be understood (Chillakuri, 2020).

Caldwell & Peters (2018) argues that onboarding is a stressful period for newly hired employees. Most organizations often fail to meet the expectations and needs of new hires because they focus the onboarding too much on their company and its outcomes. Many onboarding processes provide the new employees with loads of information that are both impractical and hard for the participants to understand and make use of. Another common problem is that organizations provide too little information in order for the new employees to feel prepared to start working. It is a fine line for HR managers and other planners of onboarding processes to balance to get it just right. Human resource professionals have everything to gain from always improving their onboarding processes. It makes the employees feel more connected as well as invested in the companies' success while also developing a workplace environment that fosters long-term prosperity, taking into account the well-being and needs of the employees (Caldwell & Peters, 2018).

Doing onboarding digitally is coming with implications for newly hired employees as well as organizations. Many participants of digital onboarding feel that it gives rise to social disconnection in comparison to traditional on-site onboarding. New employees often start their job with excitement about their new position but to sustain that excitement is hard during digital onboarding activities. Social interaction is key to keeping people excited, and when there's little of it available, the excitement goes out of life (Sani *et al*, 2022).

According to SHRM (2020), using digital onboarding to introduce new employees to an organization requires more structure and making sure that proper technologies are set up.

Furthermore, organizations will have to face the challenge of building an interactive onboarding process that is engaging and enables connections as well as relationships to be built (SHRM, 2020). For new job starters digital onboarding will have direct implications on their working life (Lund *et al.*, 2021).

2.3 Employee expectation

A survey on newly hired employees from generation Z showed that 61% of respondents thought that their job did not live up to the expectations that they had before the onboarding. It is therefore important for organizations to meet as well as understanding the demands of newly hired employees. Furthermore, the employee experience of an organization starts as early as the day of the first interview so it is of value for the company to give a realistic view of the job right from the start. The onboarding process needs to be structured and have a starting point in understanding the expectations of the employees. The design of onboarding programs need to be personalized and consistent while also giving a positive new hire experience (Chillakuri, 2020).

According to Capitano *et al.* (2022), the recruitment period is a crucial moment for possible future employees as well as organizations to see if they are the right fit for each other. This period of pre-arrival has a high impact on the extent to which a person comprehends and accurately grasps the nature of work life in the new company. This is strongly associated with their satisfaction as a new employee. During the hiring process, a candidate's understanding of the company and their potential job role can significantly contribute to their ability to later function with their colleagues and at their job once they are hired. How a potential new employee will perform and whether they will remain committed to the organization can thus depend on this understanding. A means for pre-arrival socialization is realistic job previews, also known as RJPs. It provides truthful information and takes into account both the positive and negative job-related information to potential employees (Capitano *et al.*, 2022). According to Baur *et al.* (2014), RJP is a way to present “realistic” views and is an alternative to a method known as “seduction” which only focuses on giving positive views of a job. Using seduction as a method maximizes the attractiveness of a job, but the problem with it is the high and unrealistic expectations that the job candidates get. These outcomes of the seduction method have been shown to lead to employees having a hard time integrating into their new company or organization, which in turn leads them to have lower levels of satisfaction in their job and be more likely to leave it (Baur *et al.*, 2014). RJP research has developed to include not only formal forms of communication such as company brochures but also to include informal forms of communication such as information from friends and potential new colleagues (Capitano *et al.*, 2022).

Baur *et al.* (2014), states that an employee's success within an organization is largely dependent on how well they integrate into the company during their initial employment period. According to Capitano *et al.* (2022), in most RJP discussions the onboarding experience is often overlooked. It is argued that as the onboarding experience for an employee will be different from their regular work experience, an accurate preview of the

onboarding process can have an impact on a candidate's behavior and expectations. This is especially true when the onboarding process is complex or lengthy. A preview of the onboarding experience is therefore an important aspect to consider to meet and understand expectations early on. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that people that get a realistic job preview adjust their expectations towards companies downwards (Capitano et al., 2022). Baur et al. (2014) argues that the core of RJP is the belief of giving employees what they deserve, which is to be able to enter their new workplaces with their eyes wide open. Employees should be conscious of not only the entitlement of their job role but also be able to establish transparent and precise expectations which is crucial in order to avoid disillusionment upon joining new organizations (Baur et al., 2014).

The focus of this essay will be hybrid onboarding and its impact on newly hired employees and their experiences and expectations. The Capitano et al. (2022) article focuses more on the influence of a realistic preview of onboarding on self-selection and expectations without delving deeper into the hybrid onboarding context and its impact on setting realistic job expectations. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the unique aspect of hybrid onboarding, which provides valuable insight and fills a research gap in this specific onboarding approach. Allowing respondents to give their views on the hybrid onboarding process also sheds light on nuanced data based on their experiences undergoing the process. We want to put emphasis on social and personal interactions in a hybrid onboarding process. The thesis will contribute to further knowledge about hybrid onboarding and provides insight to organizations implementing this process. It will offer an understanding of social interactions and the challenges that may arise during a hybrid onboarding process, including balancing physical meetings, personalized experiences, and comprehending the digital elements. Focusing on the hybrid onboarding process also fills a research gap and provides practical advice for designing an effective hybrid onboarding process. This can lead to organizations improving their hybrid onboarding process and creating a better experience for newly hired employees, ultimately enhancing their performance and engagement in the job.

2.4 Socialization

According to Grusec & Hastings (2015), socialization is a field that is central in order to understand human development. The term, *socialization*, basically means the process in which individuals are assisted to become members of social groups. An important remark is the word *assist* since socialization is a two-way process where newcomers to a social group are active as well as selective regarding what they chose to accept from older members. Furthermore, new members of a social group might also try to socialize older members. Socialization is a process that can have a number of different outcomes such as the learning of rules, values, standards and roles. While there exist intended outcomes that are aimed to be achieved during the socialization, there are most often unintended outcomes as well. Examples of unintended outcomes could be low self-esteem and anger. Socialization can happen in a lot of different ways and settings. It can be seen being executed at workplaces, schools and regular homes (Grusec & Hastings, 2015).

In this thesis the focus will be on socialization at workplaces in regards to new-employee organizational socialization and the adjustment to new roles, colleagues and organizations. Organizational socialization refers to the process in which new employees in an organization goes from being outsiders to insiders in the organization setting. In practice, this relates to the degree to which newly hired employees become knowledgeable about, proficient in, and functionally aware of their new employment while also forming relationships with others inside the company and gaining awareness of the organizational culture, procedures, and personnel (Grusec & Hastings, 2015).

As previously mentioned, organizational socialization is a process rather than a “thing”. Figure 1 shows the socialization process and how it takes into account both the influence that insiders and the organization have on new hires as well as the influence that new hires have on insiders and the organization.

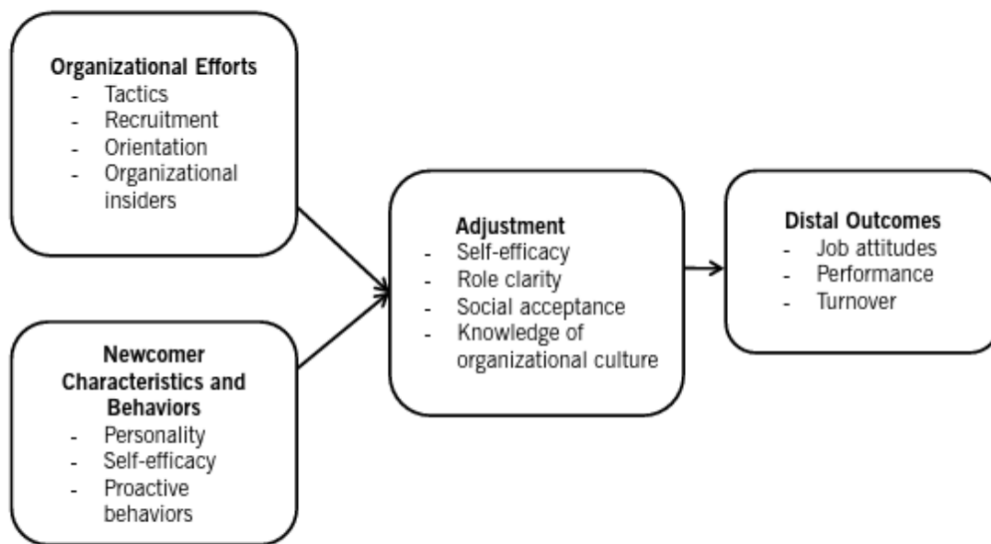


Figure 1 (Grusec & Hastings, 2015)

The process of organizational socialization involves introducing a new employee to the organization, its culture, and the expectations associated with their new role. The process can be broken down into three phases:

1. Entry phase: In this phase, the new employee seeks readily available or observable information about the organization, such as its history, products or services, organizational structure, and job responsibilities. This phase typically occurs during the recruitment and selection processes.
2. Personal phase: In this phase, the new employee seeks information that is not readily available, such as the values, beliefs, or attitudes of the organization and its employees. This phase occurs during the socialization process, once the new employee has joined the organization. The socialization process can involve formal training programs, mentoring, or on-the-job learning.

3. Exit phase: In this phase, the new employee negotiates plans for future interactions with the organization, including whether or not they will remain with the organization. This phase occurs after the new employee has completed the socialization process and has gained a better understanding of the organization's culture and expectations associated with their role.

Effective socialization during the personal phase can reduce uncertainty and stress associated with a new job, increase clarity and perceived competence around work tasks and social relationships, and impact employee retention. This can be achieved through various tactics such as orientation programs, mentoring, and socialization agents. By reducing uncertainties and facilitating learning, effective socialization can improve job satisfaction, performance, and retention rates among new employees (Grusec & Hastings, 2015).

3. Setting

The company whose hybrid onboarding process has been examined is a Swedish management consulting firm. The consultants at the company are specialized in matters such as continued growth, stability and continuous development of organizations. They offer services related to digitalization, sustainability, organization, strategy & marketing, customer knowledge and operational business management.

The company hires people that either currently are enrolled in university studies or hold an academic degree. There are approximately 30 employees working at the company. Most employees are there for a relatively short period of time since they work there during their studies. This leads to the company having a high turnover of employees which in turn led to the need to standardize the onboarding process. To do this fully in a traditional physical manner would be both a costly and time consuming activity. The answer was to digitize information in documents and video format. With that in place all new hired employees will get the same information in the exact same way, without it being a recurrent heavy activity for the company to execute.

I would say that's the most beneficial that you have it standardized, you know exactly what has been said. You're sure that you don't miss anything. [HR manager 1]

The consistency when it comes to the information that goes out to the newly hired employees is something that was appreciated by the HR-department. Both the HR manager and the respondent that designed the hybrid onboarding process expressed that one of the pros with digitizing parts of it is that every generation of newly hired employees receives the same information, in the same way. When standardizing the onboarding process in video format the human error during physical live presentations of missing to share important information is being eliminated. Furthermore, the HR manager of the firm explained that the consistency of the video onboarding also helps to create a more consistent company culture and ensure that everyone is aware of the company's policies and procedures.

It starts new consultants almost every week. So it has to be standardized and efficient. So that's why we send them the videos and they can watch it at home and we don't have to meet any persons one by one and to teach them about everything. So, I would say that maybe it isn't the best way to do it, but it's the only way to do it. If you look at how our company is built and the organization and how they work. It's more efficient for the organization, but also for the consultants. [HR manager 2]

Studying this organization creates an opportunity to gain an insight into the impact of hybrid onboarding on employees and how it affects their integration into the organization.

4. Method

4.1 Research approach

This study is based on an inductive research approach that is focusing on hybrid onboarding. The aim is to understand what effects hybrid onboarding has on newly hired employees and how it can be used as a tool to set realistic job previews.

The essay aims to study interviews instead of analyzing data quantitatively, a qualitative research study is appropriate. Because the study aims to understand hybrid onboarding from a socialization process, the essay needs to have information about the onboarding process. Since it was not a possibility to sit in on an actual onboarding process, access is needed to the different employees that have undergone the onboarding and to any related documents, videos and hubs.

The essay contains interviews with employees and different documents from the organization that is a part of the process. The study therefore got access to a hub, videos, and documents related to the onboarding process. It also got information from the respondents that have undergone the process and how they have perceived the information that the organization has shared.

4.2 The hybrid onboarding process

The process that makes up the hybrid onboarding consists of six different steps which are illustrated in figure 2. It is a two week onboarding with the first week being dedicated to the digital material provided to the newly hired by the company and the second week being dedicated to physical meetings. This thesis will mainly focus on the digital material of the onboarding such as the videos and other digital platforms and documents.

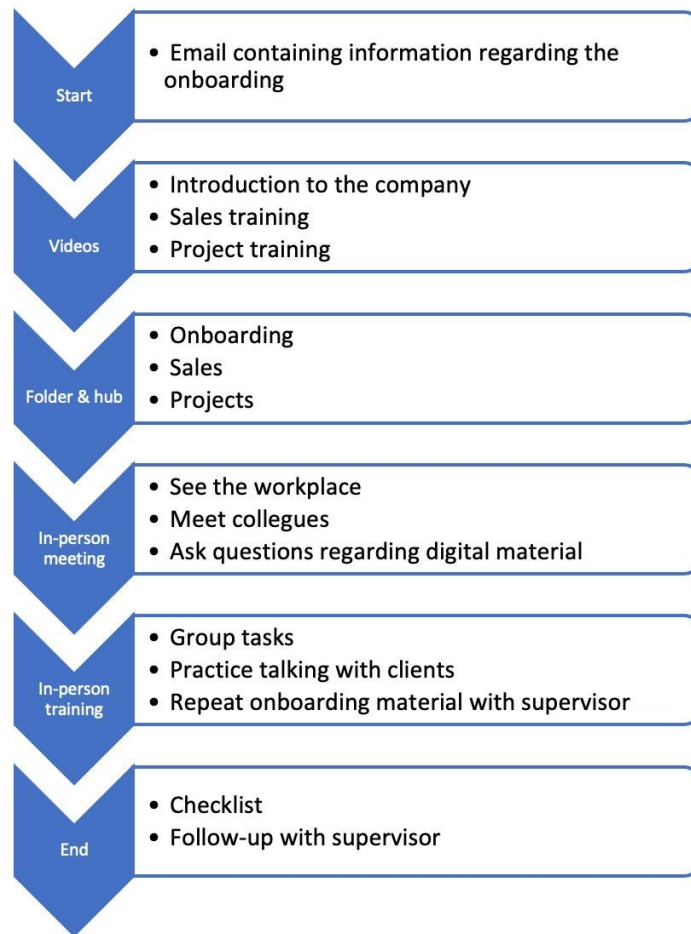


Figure 2: Hybrid onboarding process

4.3 Data sources

Primary data refers to the collection of data for the first time. This will be done through personal interviews. When an interview takes place with the respondents and they communicate, it generates a structured conversation that provides primary information directly from the source. This gives insight into a situation that, when analyzed later, can identify other relevant factors and sources of evidence for different information. The problem that occurs with interviews is that they are verbal, which leaves room for personal effects on the interview and makes it hard to recreate situations to obtain the same results. There is even a problem if the interviewer has poor or inaccurate ways of asking questions because they are subject to interpretation. In this essay, primary data will be gathered from respondents through interviews. Fifteen interviews have been conducted with employees of a Swedish management consulting firm. The aim of the communication is to provide understanding to the interviewer by asking the respondents relevant and important questions. This also means that the interviewer had to refrain from asking biased questions and create a space where honesty is possible. Furthermore, documents and other digital material were also gathered and analyzed from the company where the respondents are employed (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Secondary data refers to information that has already been collected for a purpose other than the one being implemented. This can come from both internal and external sources. Internal sources can be the organization's annual reports, sales data, or budget information. External secondary data refers to books, articles, and websites, for example. The benefits of secondary data are usually that it's less time-consuming and often more sophisticated, making it difficult to collect on one's own. The main problem associated with secondary data is that its accuracy is limited, and the results don't always coincide with the collected data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this essay, the external secondary data consists of a list of books, articles, and websites.

4.4 Sampling

The essay aims to understand how hybrid onboarding affects newly hired employees who have undergone the process. Therefore, the criteria were to examine employees with little to no work experience who have applied to work for this company. Afterward, the participants were selected based on convenience, if they were able to participate in the study. To compare the effects on newly hired employees with little to no prior related work experience, employees with more experience were also interviewed. The study aimed to examine employees with little to no experience, and based on eligibility, they would proceed to be part of the study and contribute to the essay. The technique implemented, known as snowball sampling, a type of convenience sampling, involves discussing potential interviewees during each interview, which can lead to the recruitment of new participants through referrals from those initially contacted (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

4.5 Data collection

The data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 employees of a Swedish management consulting firm that has implemented a hybrid onboarding process. The interviews were conducted between February and March 2023 in English, with each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. All the interviews were conducted through Teams, a video conference software that benefited the essay by transcribing the interviews and providing convenience for the respondents. Every respondent was provided with an introductory email explaining the purpose of the study and asking if they would participate. The study was assured to be confidential, and the respondents' answers would remain anonymous. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which means that a set of predetermined questions were asked, with the added benefit of follow-up questions and exploration of topics that emerged during the interview. The questions aimed to cover the essay's objectives and explore the participants' experiences regarding the use of the hybrid onboarding process, its impact on them as employees, and any examples they had from their experiences. During the interviews, data collection involved seeking verbal responses, observing nonverbal cues and taking any additional notes that were relevant to the essay, both during and after the interview. Since Teams transcribed the interviews in real-time, the data could be structured to identify recurring themes and patterns across the participants' responses.

4.6 Data analysis

In the data analysis part, the recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed.

The analysis process involved reading through the transcriptions multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of the data. Initially, the data was structured in an Excel document to explore similarities among respondents' experiences during the onboarding process. The Excel document helped provide structure to the different backgrounds of the respondents in order to understand how their experiences were perceived. Initially, it was perceived that age had a significant impact on the respondents' experience of the onboarding process. However, upon closer examination of the data, it was revealed that age had less of an impact, and previous work experience was more significant. Revisiting the interviews with this information helped clarify and delve deeper into the research question and gain a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' perceptions.

Later in the process, the videos that the participants had to go through were analyzed and categorized into different themes. The themes were initially structured based on the time the organization dedicated to explaining the role. This followed the organization's own themes, such as presenting the core values, the career development ladder, and the software used, among others. The time allocated to each process was also noted to understand the organization's priorities. This provided a baseline for what was important to the organization and what they expected from their employees. After this process, it was revealed that there was less emphasis on the role and more emphasis on expected employee behavior. With this insight, the themes were restructured during the analysis, focusing on how much time the organization dedicated to actions for employee role achievement and the organization's expectations regarding employee behavior. It was observed that the organization placed significant emphasis on employee behavior within the role, as noted during the dedicated onboarding time. Revisiting the documents provided during the onboarding process also revealed descriptions of the expected employee behavior.

After analyzing the digital material, the emphasis was put on analyzing the physical onboarding experience at the company. Where the newly hired consultants attend a meeting where they can meet colleagues, ask questions about the digital material, and receive a guided tour of the workplace. This process consisted of a physical training session with team members conducted by a supervisor. This process focused more on the practical approaches of the job together with the supervisor. An analysis was done of the checklist that the company sends out to the newly hired employees. This contained aspects such as the business system, sales process, projects, and administrative tasks.

4.7 Validity and Reliability

4.7.1 Validity

In order to ensure the validity of the study, various data sources such as interviews, documents, and other digital material were used to compare the information. This approach aimed to reduce bias and errors in data collection. This method is referred to as triangulation (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Conscious efforts were made to minimize biases and preconceptions that could affect the essay. Detailed notes of the research process were maintained, and continuous reflection was done to ensure that personal biases did not influence the results. The transcribed material was later shared with the participants to clarify any unclear points and ensure that their perspectives were accurately represented, helping to correct any potential misunderstandings.

4.7.2 Reliability

The essay followed predetermined instructions for each interview to ensure that consistent analysis was conducted. The analysis was performed by both researchers to allow for comparison of their findings, contributing to consistency and reliability. Detailed notes, transcripts, and analysis procedures were maintained as part of the research process. These guidelines ensured replicability by utilizing the same procedures and data. It is worth noting that it was not possible to observe the respondents during their actual onboarding process due to the time span and the absence of ongoing onboarding within the organization during the study. Therefore, the primary focus was to analyze the videos of the onboarding process shared alongside other documents related to the onboarding process.

5. Empirical findings

The analysis of interviews with new-comers showed that their attitudes and perceptions of the onboarding process differed significantly and that these differences coincided with the extent to which they had previous work experience or not. We have chosen to divide the respondents into two different groups according to this, where group 1 do not have previous work experience and group 2 have earlier work experience. In the following sections, we analyze and compare the responses of the two groups to the different stages of the onboarding process.

5.1 The start of the onboarding

When an employee has been hired by the company the onboarding starts immediately. The employee is given an email address that will be used in order to receive and send work related emails, both internally and to clients. The first message in the inbox is from the company and functions as a first step in the onboarding process. The email contains three videos that the employee is expected to watch from start to finish in a specific order. Receiving the email with the videos as an initial step of the onboarding left the respondents with different impacts. Respondents from group 1 were generally describing having high or neutral expectations and excitement towards their new work role before the start of the onboarding. Most of them also had a positive attitude towards an onboarding process that had both digital and traditional parts of it. However, after receiving the email about having to go through three videos that each are approximately one hour long their excitement towards the onboarding and their new job generally got lower.

Maybe I expected a little more. It was a mismatch between my expectations and what I got so that, that left me sort of, I felt very sort of not so valued, not so listened to and taken care of.
[Respondent 4, group 1]

The videos were initially made due to the restrictions during the covid-19 pandemic but the company found the digital onboarding to be an efficient way to onboard new employees. From human resource management there are no worries about the videos being not as seriously taken as if the information would be presented in an in-person manner. The email from the company includes no information about whether there was going to be any questionnaire or other control of the information in the videos. The company expects the newly hired junior consultants to watch the videos and take them seriously anyway.

I would say everyone is pretty hyped to start and I think they are interested in knowing more about how everything works. So I think the risk of the newly hired not watching the videos is pretty low. [HR manager 1]

The newly hired junior consultant also gets added to a digital social chat group where other newly hired as well as other future colleagues are a part of. This was appreciated by the respondents during the digital standardized part of the hybrid onboarding process. It also helped them to get answers to questions that might arise during the videos and other digital

material. Furthermore, it helped them connect and feel included in the social group at the company.

They use social media, so they use the messenger a lot, so they had a group messenger for the consulting group and there you can communicate with your colleagues and if you have any question you could ask them there. It was easy to communicate. And when it's easy to communicate, it's also easy to feel included. [Respondent 7, group 2]

5.2 Video #1 - Introduction to the company

This is the first video that the newly hired employees watch during the onboarding and it is an introduction to the consulting firm. It is approximately one hour long and made using a web camera and a screen recording of a computer screen showing a PowerPoint type of presentation. The video starts off by presenting the five values of the company in depth and the presenter gives several examples of what each value means in practice. Some examples of how the values are translated into practices and that explains how the newly hired are expected to behave are:

We always do what is expected of us and a little more.

We value open communication.

We take our own initiative and responsibility to achieve the best possible result.

We are open to new perspectives and approaches to achieve a better result.

We dare to challenge ourselves to reach a higher level.

A majority of the respondents explain that this part of the video is highly focused on shaping the behavior of the newly hired in order to fit into the company culture that they describe as highly results oriented. Furthermore, group 1 explains that the result oriented practices that the values are translated to made them a bit anxious since this is their first job and they still are unsure about the practicalities of their job role.

I was quite nervous. I think it seemed quite heavy. Like this is the rules. This is how you do it. You don't do it any other way. But then you got introduced to the company and realized it was a better environment than the videos let on. The actual job has a lighter view on these kinds of goals and these kinds of rules that were set up in the onboarding. [Respondent 15]

For group 2 it is a different story. They had expectations of results oriented values when joining a consulting firm. They knew to a higher degree what to expect from the job both role wise and what would be expected from them.

After approximately 15 minutes of going through the values the video moves on to its second part. In this section of the video the offerings of the company and its structure are presented. Furthermore, they describe the four different digital platforms that they use to store and share information within the company. The digital platforms includes:

1. A social platform for socializing with colleagues and to promote employee events happening at the company.

2. An administrative platform for time registration, registration of calls and meetings and as a tool for storage of client information.
3. A hub that holds all documents at the company.
4. A folder in three parts that functions as a quick guide to get started as a new employee.

The folder is explained by the presenter to be of great importance for the newly hired and they are expected to go through the folder on their own after watching all of the three videos.

The video continues with describing the company ladder and how a newly hired person can progress and develop. It is described that everyone starts off as a junior consultant and by completing a set of goals related to turnover and individual performance in projects there is possibility to become a consultant and senior consultant. Furthermore, the hourly salary for each step in the consultant ladder is presented with a raise of approximately 20% from junior consultant to consultant and an approximate raise of 40% from consultant to senior consultant. A junior consultant is expected to climb the consultant ladder and reach certain goals set by the management.

If the consultant does not like, fulfill the number of sales hours per week, then the business area manager would reach out to them. So we can do specific actions and then they would probably have a dialogue about that. [HR manager 2]

Respondents from group 1 expressed nervousness towards being told requirements to reach goals from a person in a video they have not yet physically met. They described this feeling probably being magnified because of the lack of personal interaction and the one way communication format a video has. Another explanation to their feelings was also described as being worse since it was their first job and the video onboarding thus far have not prepared them for their role.

I was quite nervous. There were a lot of, I think warnings like if you don't reach this goal, there would be these kinds of consequences and whatnot. All of these things. So I was quite nervous. [Respondent 6, group 1]

The consultant ladder with its salary expectations and other goal related requirements that the newly hired are supposed to accomplish is presented during 10 minutes. The video then moves on to a more hands-on part in which they show how their administrative platform works which lasts for about 15 minutes. This part is hands-on and gives a quick practical screen recording guide of some of the basic functions of the platform.

The video moves on and gives an overview of *the company folder* and all of its main content. The presenter is not going into depth since it is explained that the newly hired consultants are expected to read through the material in the folder themselves later. The company folder is described to contain a lot of information that the consultants will have to know in order to be able to start working. It is suggested that the folder should be read through carefully after watching the three videos.

After a 10 minute presentation of the content of the company folder a short presentation of the hub follows. The presenter describes how to access the hub and then explains that it contains a lot of useful information such as reference projects and sustainability and equality policies. This is also something that the newly hired are expected to read through by themselves later in the onboarding process. The video ends.

5.3 Video #2 - Sales training

The second video in the hybrid onboarding process at the company is a one hour and 20 minutes long sales training video. This second video is similarly to the first video made using a web camera and screen recording of a powerpoint presentation. The presenters are a person from the management team as well as the CEO of the consulting firm. The video is divided into six main parts. The first part of the video is a short introduction of the presenters and their explanation of why sales are an important topic for junior consultants. When starting off as a junior consultant a big part of the initial work is to call prospective customers.

Well, I guess that during the onboarding, we got the information that we would be calling people, but I think I underestimated the amount of calls and how much of your total time would be spent making phone calls. Surprised maybe that there would be such a big focus on sales as a consultant. [Respondent 13, group 2]

Even though the respondents were surprised by the time that would be spent on sales training during the onboarding they appreciated that it got addressed early on in the process so that they could be prepared for it. It was described by the respondents that this helped them set the right expectations for their initial work tasks at the company.

I like to be prepared. By setting this expectation of the role as junior consultant in the onboarding I could prepare myself to meet and talk with potential clients. [Respondent 2, group 1]

In the video, the presenter communicates and expects that the newly hired employees will take notes. Moving on, they briefly introduce their different service offerings within a number of different business areas such as digitalization and sustainability.

The second part is about prospecting. The presenter gives tips and tricks about how to go about prospecting possible customers. This is explained to be an important task for the junior consultants since the company does not want them to become telephone salesmen but rather have a high hit rate because of the research made during the prospecting. The consultants are told that they have two ways to go about the prospecting process. Firstly, they can do their own research by using Google to find potential companies that might be in need of their help. Secondly, they can use the business platform that contains a large number of former and potential customers already in a system that the consultants have access to. This part of the video lasts for about ten minutes.

The third part is about sales calls. It is during this part that the CEO takes over more of the communication and holds a 20 minute talk about what the newly hired should think about when calling potential customers. It is communicated that a number of important things for the consultants to consider when making their sales calls. Topics that are being discussed are what should be said to a potential customer, how long a call should be, how to end a call, what to do if a consultant gets asked questions and sales pitch. For the respondents in group 1 this was described as a stressful moment in the video for them because of the inability to ask questions and also lack of information that they believe they would have benefited from.

I think that they could have provided a bit more, not online information, but more practice like doing the actual work, like sitting with you and helping you with this part maybe. I didn't know how they knew everything by heart, like all of the businesses, what we offer and every description. But then they told me that they do have a prepared script that has all the information that they can talk about when having a meeting with a customer. So stuff like that could have been good to know from the beginning. [Respondent 3, group 1]

The fourth part is 20 minutes long and about how a meeting with a customer could look like. In this part of the video it is the person in the management team that again takes up most of the space. The presenter explains how a sales meeting works and what the junior consultants should think about and what their goals should be after every meeting. This is a very hands-on part of the video with an example of how a meeting could look like. It is described to be important for the consultant to collect as much information as possible about the customer in order for them to understand how the company's service offerings could benefit the customer. The focus of a meeting should not be for the consultants to present the company but rather if the potential customer is really in need of their help or not and if so how they could be helped. A meeting with a potential customer is explained to always be made two and two. A junior consultant will always be accompanied by a senior consultant which respondents in group 1 expressed relief towards since they did not feel the videos answered all the questions to make them confident in doing meetings themselves.

It felt really good hearing that we junior consultants wouldn't have to attend sales meetings alone. Knowing I would have a helping hand eased my mind. I would have never been able to hold a meeting from only watching the videos. [Respondent 14, group 1]

The fifth and final part is about how to write offers to potential customers. They begin with explaining important things to consider when writing the offer as well as presenting a case which they use to exemplify how an offer could be written. Respondents from both groups expressed appreciation towards a practical case in the video. This made it especially much easier for respondents in group 1, that have not had a similar job before, context to all of the information this far into the videos. The case lasts for approximately 25 minutes and then the video ends with some final short words about sales from the CEO.

5.4 Video #3 - Project training

The third and final video of the hybrid onboarding process at the company is a project training video that lasts for one hour. This video is just like the other two videos made in a web camera and screen recording of a powerpoint format. It is presented by the vice president of the firm who is also one of the creators of the onboarding process at the company. The video is divided into five different parts.

The video begins with a ten minute introduction to projects at the company. Examples of possible projects related to the company's service offerings are presented. It is explained that projects can be about everything from making calculations in Excel to making recommendations regarding internal process improvements.

It is described how the employees can access information about projects at the hub, which they are encouraged to learn more about project management on their own at later stages of the onboarding process. Furthermore, it is explained that every project has a project organization as shown in figure 3.

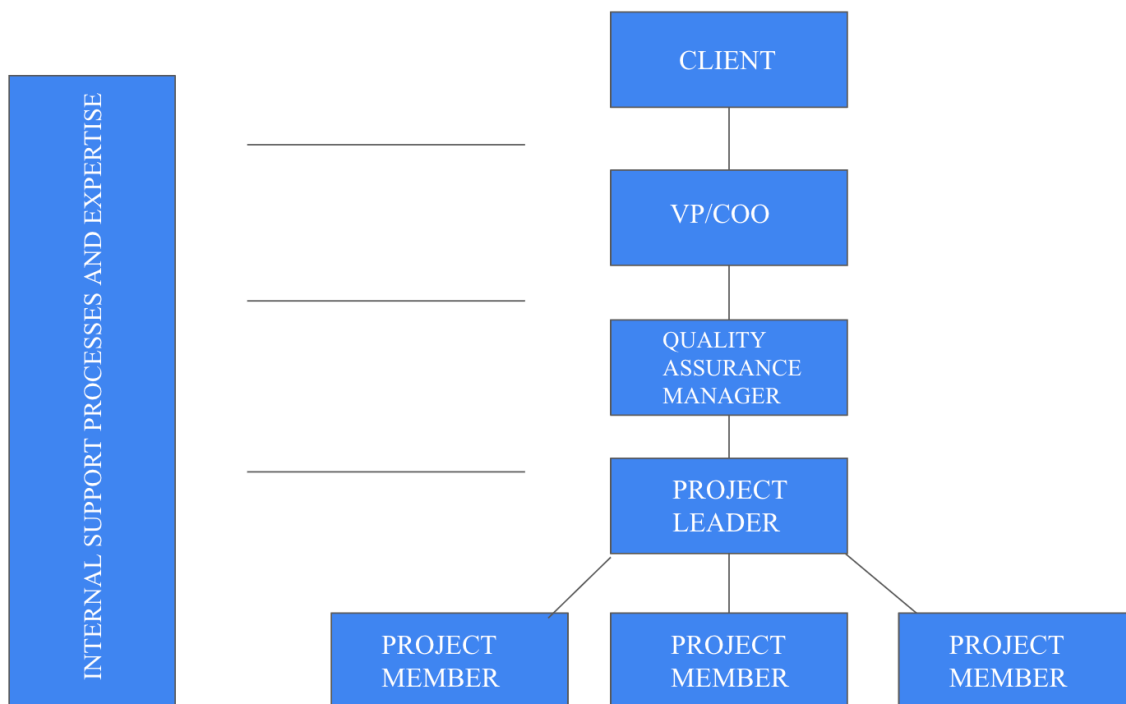


Figure 3: Project organization

A junior consultant is starting off in the project group that consists of a project leader and a couple of project members. Being a project member is where the junior consultants start their journey at the company, though it is not unusual that a junior consultant takes on the role of project leader. In that case the quality assurance manager will be more involved in the project

and be of more support. The respondents were generally interested in this part of the video since it was directly connected to their initial job role at the company.

Furthermore, they get an overview of the sales process related to projects. A sale leads to a project being conducted and then presented to the client. If the outcome of a project is a recommendation the consultants can explain how they can help their client move on by initiating a new project. The videos go on to explain the idealistic project process, where they go more into depth regarding how a project can look from start to finish. When an offer has been accepted by a client a project takes its beginning. The first step of a project is to make a pre-study which consists of both internal meetings with the project groups as well as external meetings with the client. The next step is to collect relevant data for the project to move forward. The third part is for the consultants to make a compilation of the gathered material as well as analyze it and write a report. The fourth step is to present the results and recommendations to the client. The company always offers to give the client an oral presentation but in some cases the client is satisfied with being sent the calculations or recommendations made by the project group. The final part of a project is to always make an evaluation of how the project process went. If a project member has not performed according to the standards of the company this will be a part of the evaluation and have consequences for that consultant. This was a part of the video that respondents from group 1 felt like the lack of personal interaction made the evaluation part of the project sound harsh.

I think I became more nervous just because it was like a video telling you and not a physical person. The onboarding was heavier than when I started to actually work. The actual job has a lighter view on these kinds of goals and these kinds of rules that were set up in the onboarding. [Respondent 6, group 1]

The last part is some tips and tricks regarding project execution and the importance of communication with colleagues as well as clients.

5.5 The folder and hub

When the newly hired consultants have watched the three videos the next step in the onboarding process is to read through the documents in the onboarding folder as well as going through the material in the company hub.

The folder is divided into three main parts: onboarding, project and sales. The onboarding part is shown to contain a powerpoint presentation of the company, access to the company hub, an onboarding checklist, a personnel handbook, a role description of a consultant, an email signature template, a document with the offerings of the company and two documents about the business software that they use. The project folder is shown to contain a project leader handbook, a project member handbook, a project training powerpoint and lastly a project report checklist. The last part of the company folder is the sales map which is shown to have two documents, one is about sales calls and the other is about sales presentations.

The hub functions as a digital platform in which employees can access reference projects, share project progress and read the company's policies regarding equality and sustainability.

5.6 The end of the digital onboarding process

There are differences between the two groups of respondents when it comes to how they went about watching the video material. Respondents from group 1 described taking the time to watch all of the videos thoroughly in a non-distractful location. In group 2 there were more cases of watching the videos at a faster tempo and in more distractful environments. The explanation from the respondents in group 2 as to why this may be is that because of their earlier work experience they found it simple to understand which sections of the videos that were important to put effort into.

Since I've had a similar job before it was easy to know which parts of the content you need to concentrate on and on which parts of the content you could go faster through because I've seen similar stuff before. So it went pretty fast to go through all the videos. [Respondent 13, group 2]

Furthermore, there were cases of respondents in group 2 not only going fast through the videos, but also skipping parts of them. They explained having an easier time sorting out the important things of the onboarding process in order for them to feel confident enough to start working without having to watch all the parts of every video. Reading and going through the documents at the different digital platforms gave them enough information and fulfilled their needs of the onboarding.

I started with the documents because I felt they were more important and they were quite heavy reading. And I noticed all of the information that was relevant was in the documents. The videos were quite repetitive, so no I didn't watch them that carefully. [Respondent 8, group 2]

After going through the videos and the other digital material, respondents from group 1 described that the digital material was not practical enough for them to feel comfortable executing their work tasks by just going through the videos, hub and folder. The general thought of this group was that the digital material left out a lot of necessary information in order for them to feel secure about performing in their new role.

There was more to learn that the videos left out, but they laid a good groundwork. I believe that it was good to have a supervisor to ask questions to after the videos but I guess a lot of knowledge also comes from trial and error. [Respondent 15, group 1]

5.7 In-person onboarding

When the newly hired consultants have gone through the digital material they will have their first in-person onboarding experience at the company. During this meeting they will have the

opportunity to meet colleagues and ask questions about the digital material. They will also get a guided tour of the workplace.

Like a meeting where everyone who was new met up and had time to ask their questions, and we had watched a lot of digital material before. And so that was nice when you could ask your questions and get a face on the people you had seen videos about and their roles. [Respondent 14, group 1]

In the beginning of the hybrid onboarding process the respondents with no previous work experience showed great interest in wanting to have a real person from the company to talk to instead of being sent an email with videos. It was when they got to the in-person workspace that they felt they learned their work role through trial and error. They also showed a higher appreciation than the group with previous work experience towards having a supervisor to whom they could ask questions regarding the digital material after going through it.

You could always ask afterwards if you don't understand, it was really good for me. She [the supervisor] would help me right away, or if I had any questions or concerns she had no problem repeating or explaining something to me. [Respondent 12, group 1]

Having the ability to ask questions and discuss the digital material made the newly hired junior consultants feel their confidence about the job role came back as well as the excitement towards it. The digital material was explained to be functional in the way that it introduced the company and what its doing but for the respondents to feel practically secure to start working the in-person meeting was described to be of importance.

At the end, you know you, you can watch as many videos as possible, but it will never cover everything and the specific questions that you have. The physical meeting allowed for a more personalized experience. [Respondent 7, group 2]

During the onboarding there is also an in-person training part where the newly hired consultants are meeting up at the office together with a supervisor and team members. The group will be able to put their knowledge from the previous onboarding parts into practice by calling potential clients and telling them about the company and what they can offer. They later reflect on each call in a group setting together with the supervisor. The onboarding personnel will also be able to again repeat the previous onboarding material with the supervisor as well as asking questions.

We make calls to potential clients together in a group and then you also have the chance to ask questions and to repeat the onboarding with your team leader. [HR manager 2]

Respondents from group 1 expressed appreciation towards being able to put the knowledge from the videos to test in a safe practice environment together with their supervisor and other new hires.

At the end of the hybrid onboarding process the company sends out a checklist with things that the newly hired should know in order to start working at the firm.

So basically we had a checklist in Google Docs where after you have watched all of these three videos, you should be able to look through the checklist. [HR manager 1]

The checklist includes things about the business system, the sales process, projects and other administrative things. The newly hired employees are expected to go through this list on their own and be honest to themselves regarding if they know all the statements on the checklist. If there is something they feel insecure about they should try to find the answer in the digital material they have received or ask their supervisor.

6. Analysis and discussion

Social and personal interaction is important for keeping up the confidence and excitement of participants in a hybrid onboarding process. Group 1 explained feelings of not being valued when they received the email with the instructions for watching the three videos. They felt like the lack of personal attention and interaction gave the impression that the company did not value them more than their own time. In addition, they explained that it made them feel that it was a mismatch between their expectations of the initial start of the onboarding and what they got. According to Caldwell & Peters (2018), a reason for this could be that the onboarding contains too much information that is hard for the newly hired employees to digest in such a short amount of time and because of that, their excitement lowers. Furthermore, Sani *et al* (2022) argue that the reason for a mismatch of expectations could be the lack of personal attention and interaction. It is explained that a key to keeping people excited at a new workplace is to have social interactions with other employees of the firm. This is why the in-person meetings and training that complement the digital material have been shown to the respondents to be so important to make the hybrid onboarding process work for them. At the beginning of the hybrid onboarding process, the respondents from group 1 showed great interest in wanting to have a real person from the company to talk to instead of being sent an email with videos. They also showed a higher appreciation than the group with previous work experience towards having a supervisor to whom they could ask questions regarding the digital material after going through it. In addition, they initially explained nervousness and loss of excitement about their new role since they did not believe that the videos made them feel confident enough to start working. But the later interaction with a supervisor, where they were able to have conversations about the material, made them gain back confidence and excitement. So, this is in line with the previous research by Sani *et al* (2022) and shows the importance of social interaction in a hybrid onboarding process.

A problem for many of the respondents in Group 1 was that they thought that the digital material was not practical enough for them to feel comfortable executing their work tasks by just going through the videos, hub, and folder. This could also be explained that it contained too much information that was difficult for the new employees to grasp in a short period (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). The general thought of this group was that the digital material was challenging to understand and put into context so that they could feel secure about performing as expected in line with the company values in their new role. The group of respondents who had earlier work experience thought that it was much easier to know which information in the digital material was of importance to concentrate on and put time into. In addition, in contrast to the group with no previous work experience, they thought that the digital material was enough to give them the courage to start working with confidence. It was when group 1 got to the in-person workspace that they felt they learned their work role through trial and error and could partially put the information in the videos into context. Having a hybrid onboarding where some parts are standardized through digitalization has been described as effective by HR managers. But the complemented in-person meetings and training are important for the newly hired not just for the social aspect as mentioned earlier, but also for the ability to ask individual questions and have individual conversations with a

supervisor. This allows for a personalized experience in the hybrid onboarding process which according to Chillakuri (2020) is an important aspect of an onboarding design to meet newly hired employees' demands as well as expectations.

The empirical findings have shown that video onboarding can be a tool to adjust and set realistic job expectations. Using video onboarding as an initial step to introduce new employees to a company helps them to get an understanding of their new job role as well as the expected behavior of consultants at the workplace. As the empirical findings show the respondents get a grasp of the company as well as role-related work areas such as working with sales and projects. They also get to do some practical work-related training to be prepared for both the positive and negative things that the role entails. The results show that the respondents appreciated going through a truthful practical exercise since this helped them adjust their expectations towards their initial work role at the company by getting a realistic job preview. Capitano et al. (2022) argue that an onboarding process often is different from the actual job role. Even if such prescriptions can be expected in an in-person onboarding process, they take on a different role in the context of digital onboarding, where the distinction between versions of reality becomes blurred.

An in-person training session during a hybrid onboarding could help close the gap between onboarding and the regular work experience. As Baur et al. (2014) states, the meaning behind realistic job expectations is to give employees what they deserve, which is to have transparent expectations so that disillusionment upon joining new organizations can be avoided. The respondents explained that the exercise they went through impacted their behavior and expectations towards their upcoming job role and gave them a practical and more realistic perspective on the digital material. Hence, the hybridity of onboarding could be a tool to set realistic job expectations by having digital material explaining job tasks and then complementing it with in-person, practical, and personal exercises together with a supervisor. However, for group 2 the in-person training sessions does not serve such a function since they already from the beginning understood that prescribed behaviors and expectations presented during the digital onboarding processes were not descriptions of the job reality, but rather idealistic prescriptions of the same. Since they did not take the prescribed reality seriously, the managers' efforts to downplay the high expectations during the in-person meetings only contribute to increasing their sense of unrealism, which makes them less motivated and have a greater tendency to leave. For them, to close the gap between the prescribed expectations and the regular work experience, the in-person meeting with managers, should rather enforce the realism and substance of the high expectations, not the other way around. Thus, for the two groups, the in-person interaction served different functions.

Realistic job preview is argued by Capitano et al. (2022) to be a means for pre-arrival socialization. Hybrid onboarding can be seen to be a process in which the respondents are assisted to become members of the company through the different steps of it (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). The digital parts of the hybrid onboarding that the respondents have undergone can arguably be seen as pre-arrival socialization where job expectations are set by

the company. Many of the respondents expressed nervousness during these parts since the company set high and result-oriented expectations for them. This made them shift their expectations downwards as explained by Capitano et al. (2022) often happens when people get a realistic job preview. It was explained by the respondents that the job later did not have as highly result-oriented expectations as portrayed during the initial steps of the onboarding. But one could still argue that the pre-arrival socialization of the hybrid onboarding shaped the respondent's initial expectations towards their work role. Hence, strengthen the belief of hybrid onboarding functioning as a tool for RJP.

The digital social messenger group that the respondents got to be part of further made them connect with older colleagues and have two-way communication with older colleagues as well as fellow newcomers. According to Grusec & Hastings (2015), this is a part of socialization where newly hired employees could learn the rules, values, standards, and roles of the company. The respondents expressed that this form of communication helped them gain a better connection to the company and understand their role better because of the ability to ask questions and have conversations with other members of the consulting group. Having a digital platform for communication as part of the hybrid onboarding was of help to the respondents to get realistic job expectations directly from older colleagues of the company.

7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to deepen the understanding of the digital parts hybrid onboarding processes and their implications for newly hired employees that undergo such processes. Making use of interviews with HR managers and newly hired employees as well as digital onboarding material in the form of videos and documents, we have identified several impacts that digital onboarding material has on new hires and how hybrid onboarding processes can be a tool to set realistic job expectations. The thesis contributes to previous studies in several ways.

First, it contributes to the literature on hybrid onboarding. Hybrid onboarding has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially with the rise of remote work and virtual teams. Our findings have shown several effects that a hybrid onboarding process has on new employees. For people with no previous work experience, our research has shown that it is of particular necessity for HR managers to design an onboarding where they feel valued from the start by offering personal interaction and attention. Furthermore, digital material and social groups can work well as a pre-arrival socialization tool for newly hired employees to learn more about their role and the company. With that being said, our research has shown that for newly hired employees to feel comfortable and have the confidence to start working digital material has to be complemented with in-person exercise and personal conversations with supervisors. Hybridity onboarding proved to be an effective setting for creating realistic job expectations. The interviews with respondents prove that the in-person training combined with the digital onboarding created a bridge for understanding the gap between onboarding and regular work experience, to then create an accurate image of the job.

Secondly, it contributes to the literature on RJP. Previous studies within this area have focused on RJP in recruitment processes. Our research has contributed to the field in that it gives an understanding of how it is used during onboarding processes and how it affects the expectations of newly hired employees. Furthermore, we show that hybrid onboarding can be a pre-arrival socialization tool to set realistic job expectations. What we also saw is that digital material alone would often be perceived as insufficient or challenging for the hired employees with no previous work experience. The employees that had previous work experience found it easier to figure out what was essential information and felt more prepared to start working. It is worth noting that the physical workspace and the in-person interactions with different managers within the company allowed the workers to better contextualize digital material and gain confidence. Previous research also shows that a more personalized onboarding design usually meets the demands and expectations of newly hired employees.

Thirdly, it contributes to the literature on socialization. Our research has shown how digital social groups as well as in-person meetings and training during a hybrid onboarding contribute to the ability for newly hired employees to be a part of their new social setting. Especially the digital social groups that were initiated at the beginning of the onboarding

process showed to be a tool for newcomers to meet older members of the company and in that way also get realistic job expectations.

Future research could continue to investigate how hybrid onboarding functions as a pre-arrival socialization tool to set realistic job expectations. Our research is done on one Swedish consulting firm so to further build upon this study researchers could do this at a bigger scale by including more companies and organizations from different cultures.

Overall, hybrid onboarding can have both positive and negative effects on newly hired employees, and employers need to consider the unique needs of their workforce when implementing a hybrid onboarding program.

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