



The Case of Onboarding Process at Company X

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Abstract

Within an organisation, changes are endless. For an organisation to grow and flourish, changes are necessary and inevitable. Although the significance of change management and organisational development has been established, organisations always face resistance and challenges towards the same. Change interventions in an organization are of varied nature and can be classified as follows: strategic, techno structure, human resource management and human process interventions. The onboarding process is related to work design and refers to the procedure in which newly joined employees are given orientation about the company's culture, policies and other necessary documentation that is entailed as being part of that company. This process can be viewed from two perspectives: from the employer's point of view and the new employees' point of view. This case study attempts to analyse the benefits and shortcomings of a temporary and permanent change of the onboarding process in companies.

Keywords: Onboarding process, Organisational Change Management, Automation

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Introduction

As the saying goes, 'The only constant thing in the world is change'. This quote is more than just a mere statement. It not only gives a philosophical outlook on life but has also been helpful to study and manage the processes at the workplace, thereby proving to be useful to OD practitioners. Within an organisation, changes are endless, and this is how it must be. When we imagine a world without change, things may be less chaotic, but it certainly does sound monotonous and flat. Similarly, for an organisation to grow and flourish, changes are necessary and inevitable. Studies suggest that practitioners should be sceptical about the research about organizational change management and use their results for implementation (Barends, 2013).

Although the significance of change management and organisational development has been established, organisations always face resistance and challenges towards the same. The leadership style and the leader are also important and influential factors while dealing with change (Voet, 2015).

Change interventions in an organization are of varied nature and can be classified as follows: strategic, technostructure, human resource management and human process interventions (French & Bell, 1999). The focus of the current paper is on technostructural interventions that involve the task methods, job design, division of labour and hierarchy to name a few. The onboarding process is related to work design and refers to the procedure in which newly joined employees are given orientation about the company's culture, policies and other necessary documentation that is entailed as being part of that company. While the objective and purpose of onboarding are unitary, the means of completing the process is undertaken differently based on the company's presence or lack of resources and their understanding of the need for conducting one. This process can be viewed from two perspectives: from the employer's point of view and the new employees' point of view.

For the employer/ the recruiter, onboarding is a necessary process that must be done to ensure that the documentation and the necessary details of the individuals are recorded for future requirements that involve personal information and background.

The documentation could include the mandatory policy related information such as medical insurance and bank related details for account creation, to name a few.

However, for an employee, a new beginning is usually filled with anxieties and uncertainties about the work environment and the job responsibilities that ensure his/her entry. For this reason, companies attempt to provide a picture of the organization's beginning, the culture that is followed so that the employees can begin with a clear sense of direction, right from the start.

The purpose of onboarding is not just related to information exchange. The process is also extremely significant in determining the employees' commitment and retention rates. Individuals who have clarity in their job responsibilities will experience more positivity towards the organization indicating the positive relationship between role clarity and organizational commitment (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Studies also indicate that group integration and social support reduced stress and facilitated positive adjustment outcomes in new employees who were associated with subsequent job-satisfaction (Ashford & Black, 1996; Fisher, 1985). The above studies help derive an understanding that engaged employees are more likely to have a higher retention rate within the organization, contributed to organizational commitment.

At an automobile organization called Company X, the onboarding process was completely handled by the recruitment team. The vacancy for a post was notified by the departmental manager to the recruitment team, who in turn continued the hiring process. There are multiple functional departments in the manufacturing sector, with a maximum of two recruiters for a regional unit. The onboarding process involves the newly joined candidates to go through an initial orientation video, followed by the filling of several applications such as the EPF, Medical Insurance and others. Further, the nature of the job requires the candidates to be in the appropriate uniform and protective clothing. After ensuring that all these steps are followed, the candidates are introduced to their respective departments. This process is organised, yet, is chaotic since it was done single-handedly by the recruitment team which had a maximum of 3 employees.

Objective

Since the on-boarding process was handled solely by the recruitment team and involved a lot of manual labour, the onboarding process needed to be streamlined and made more efficient. This in turn would restructure the task of the recruiters and reduce their involvement in the entire process, thereby providing them with more time for their other responsibilities.

Problem Statement

The current onboarding process did not involve integration of the relevant departments and its members, which increased repetitive work tasks for the recruiters.

Strategies used by the Company

The current state was measured and compared to the desired state, following which certain steps were taken to bridge the gap that was analysed. This entire process was supported by the 4 D Model (Srivastva, Fry & Cooperrider, 1990), which is based on the Appreciative Inquiry Framework of Change Management. Company X uses this model for almost all change management cases.

The 4 D's stand for:

- Discover: Identify and appreciate what works
- Dream: Imagine what might be
- Design: Develop systems, structures leveraging the best of what was and what might be
- Deliver: Implement the proposed design

The first step was to address that the routine of a welcome call (introducing the new employee to the team) was necessary and must not be eradicated. The second step involved the understanding that the introduction was to be done by someone who was relevant and had enough experience in that particular department. Based on the feedback the team received from relevant stakeholders, team managers were assigned to take responsibility

for the welcome call that includes introducing the new employee to the team; this idea was implemented.

Another strategy followed was to receive sponsors from the leadership level to leverage the leaders' influence and gain easy buy-in. In other words, sponsorship acts as an influence to gain the support of the stakeholders, and subsequently the support of the employees based on their leaders. This method was suggested and implemented based on the history of the interventions due to the support from the sponsors. The entire change management process took six months.

The importance of engaging the right people who act as influential and powerful sponsors can determine the success of the appreciative inquiry model, and hence the success of the interventions (Barrett & Fry, 2005).

One active process that determines the success or failure of the model is the ability to raise fundamental queries that are concerned with the topic (Bushe, 2011).

Resistance and Challenge

The major resistance faced by the company during the handling of this issue was to convince the managers to accept additional responsibilities, such as taking the lead on the welcome call. However, X's strategy of the 4D Model and using sponsorship had its advantages which offered positive results. First, the use of a well-researched model shows that it involves a strategic approach to take control of the situation. Second, the mode of using sponsors is the art of using influential leadership to create a feeling of persuasion within the employees to accept the changes rather than perceiving it as a need to conform to the imposed rules.

While the above two methods proved to be successful within the organization, further issues might have been overlooked that define the purpose and need for onboarding processes. The solutions might have redesigned the tasks of the recruiters and the managers, but may have not completely considered a complete streamlining of the process, the reasons for which are discussed below.

The shortcomings of the model might not have been elucidated during the process. For example, the appreciative inquiry may have gained popularity given the focus on positivity, but its subjective nature cannot be ignored. For example, Oliver (2005) mentioned the possibility of decontextualized polarization where positive and negative are treated as two separate entities rather than understanding that what is positive for one might be negative for others. In the above case, this is noticed where the tasks restructured for the recruiters can be perceived in a positive light but is however not the same case for the managers. This leads us to the fundamental argument of appreciative inquiry theorists that behind every negative image lies a positive one (Bright, Powley, Fry & Barrett, 2011) while social constructionists believe that behind every positive image lies a negative one (Fineman, 2006).

Conclusion

The company's success rate at change management interventions is indicated by its reliance on the model. However, the larger picture of completely streamlining the process might have been overlooked while considering the immediate quick-fix to the issue. For example, since the process of onboarding was manual, the whole process could be considered to be automated, until the welcome call which would require a bond to be built and nurtured. Moreover, the growth of artificial intelligence could be utilized in the process to replace the recruiter's presence since the whole process is routine-based. The company's process also does not address culture initiation as part of the onboarding process. Research studies indicate that the retention rates can be determined by the percentage of engaged and disengaged employees. For these reasons, the company may have solved the issue with a temporary focus, but a broader picture of the problem would have completely eradicated future problems of redundant tasks.

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