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Arrive, stay and succeed

Hybrid onboarding in the new normal

Same but different

Recruiting, hiring and training up new employees are standard tasks for any company's HR department. Every manager needs to deal with them.

A lot has been written about this, and it has been discussed many times. Is there anything left to say about onboarding?

By now, we have all arrived in the "new normal" of work life in times of corona. Job interviews are held via Zoom or other virtual conferencing software, at least in the first instance. Large parts of the workforce is – and will keep – working from home, collaborating remotely, even with new colleagues.

What does that mean for a company's onboarding process? Which (digital) approaches are now accepted or even expected by new employees? What would be a smart way to combine tried and tested workflows with new ones?

There are many reasons to look at the topic in a fresh light and create a great onboarding journey for new colleagues.

But first, let's take a step back:

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How can you tell if an onboarding journey was successful?

The new employee ...

01

... doesn't quit before starting the job.

We often underestimate the pre-boarding stage – the phase from signing the contract to actually starting the job. 30% of all companies have to deal with fresh recruits calling the cooperation off before their first day of work. Given the recruitment effort and expense, retention management measures are worthwhile investments.

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02

... stays with the company beyond the trial period.

During this period, the company, the team and new employees get to know each other and evaluate the decision made for the new employment. If this second phase - the onboarding journey - turns out negatively, the risk is quite high that new employees will opt for another employer. This means a high loss for the recruiting company.

03

... is able to get working quickly (time to performance).

The wish of every company is a short and efficient training period for new employees. The prerequisite for this is not only professional competence, but also successful so-cial integration into the existing team and rapid familiarization with the process and sys-tem landscape.

04

... contributes existing competencies and own experience as soon as possible.

Every employee brings existing competencies and relevant previous experience with him or her. Identifying these and ensuring that the employee uses them successfully and thus advances the existing team is just as important as imparting new knowledge.

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05

…feels emotionally involved in the company.

A sense of community and identification with the company's vision and culture are im-portant motivators and a prerequisite for employees to contribute their full potential.

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Remember: New employees are influencers in the war for talents and will evaluate their onboarding experience online.

Each new prospective candidate will look at reviews of a potential new employer on sites like glassdoor and ask their personal contacts and networks about the company. Young applicants also share their experiences with their former university and fellow students. Many applications will not even be submitted if reviews are negative.

ⓘ

TIP

Most of the success factors described above can be defined as a KPI (key performance indicator), allowing you to track the effectiveness of your measures over the course of several years.

80% of companies with higher levels of onboarding maturity see an improvement in new employee retention.

¹ http://go.brandonhall.com/l/8262/2018-11-29/8ygj6d

Hybrid Experience:
using the best of both worlds

If you want to remain the "new employer of choice" in the future, linking digital and analogue spheres in a meaningful way opens up many opportunities. Digital is not better just because it is digital, and analogue and in-person approaches are not doomed to failure. The important thing is to leverage the advantages each approach offers and to rethink the onboarding journey in the new normal.

We would like to present ten recommended actions below.

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Interlinking both worlds

This is not limited to alternating e-learning and face-to-face training. Rather, the individual journey elements need to be intertwined. Here are four examples for making this work:
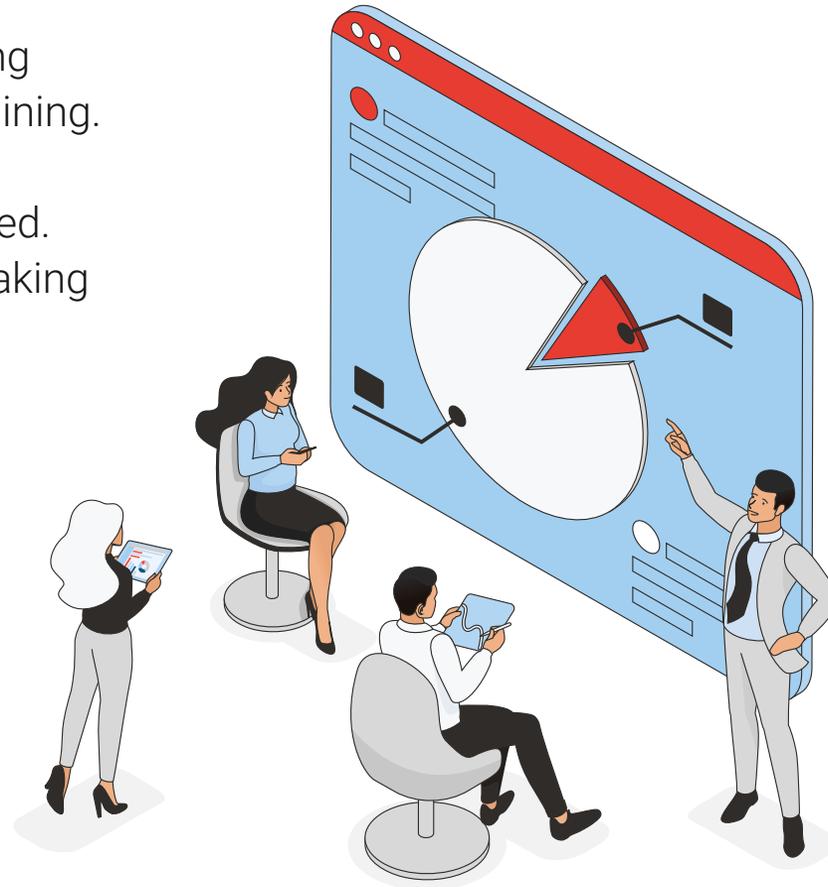
01

The trainer of the first physical workshop is already visible as a person in the preceding web-based training course. This enhances the personal connection and ensures a smooth transition. It then becomes easier to recall knowledge from the digital world in the workshop.

02

Colleagues working in sales could, for example, record a sales pitch, send it to their trainer or mentor, and get feedback from them. A chatbot can help practice customer calls. Especially if a large part of the working hours is spent in the home office, this approach helps to progress from knowledge transfer to practical skills development.
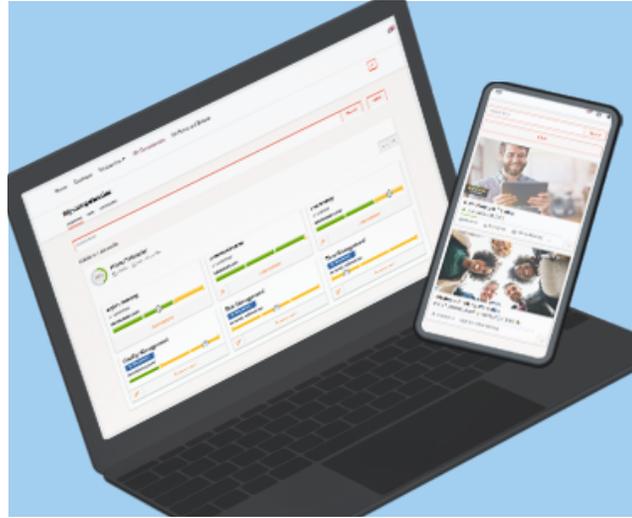
03

Use established concepts within a learning management system – for example, with an on-the-job-training module in the LMS: This makes things easier for you while also facilitating the combination of self-study, application, feedback and interaction, similar to the previous example.

04

Use gamification components: Organise a scavenger hunt across the business premises, for example by placing QR codes at specific company locations. Of course, challenges can be of a less serious nature and include tasks like "Ask the canteen cook for the Müller & Schmidt curry sauce recipe." This allows new colleagues to get a taste of the corporate culture and learn what makes their new employer tick.

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Focusing on professional competence

"Competence is the ability to act in a creative and self-organised manner in [...] complex, dynamic [...] situations." [2]

It is important for any company to have an interest in their employees not only having the relevant knowledge for their role, but also being able to apply this knowledge for both routine tasks and to solve problems. The initial training concept should incorporate this focus from the outset.

These simple questions offer some guidance:

— Which actions are required from the new colleague?

— What does he/she need to be able to perform them?

Dos:

— Integrate specific application practice or – even better – on-the-job training. Your learning management system provides a suitable digital platform to achieve that.

— Rather than merely testing knowledge, measure when and how the new employee has applied their knowledge.

— Facilitate and reward new skills being passed on – making their contribution.

Don'ts:

— The learning path doesn't end when a training module or knowledge test is completed.

— The more the better? Absolutely not. Limit training content to what's needed to enable practical application. This is known as didactic reduction.

[2] Erpenbeck J., von Rosenstiel L (2007) "Handbuch Kompetenz-messung" (Competence Measurement Handbook), 2nd edition, Stuttgart

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Learning

Learning theory, including self-directed learning

Application

Applying the learned knowledge, documenting it and having it confirmed by supervisors

Contribution

Sharing knowledge; for example, in the company's social channels or by mentoring new colleagues

To realise this concept, the consultancy firm EY introduced badges their employees earn for reaching each level. A higher level means a greater proportion of applied or shared knowledge. This is a beautiful example of how the focus shifts from knowledge sharing to acquiring professional competence.

[3] https://weiterbildungsblog.de/blog/2019/08/14/neue-lernformate-lernangebote-ey-badges/

"By extending the 'learning process' with 'application' and 'contribution', it includes the practical experience of the learner and documents the development of their skills. [...] In the company's social networks, groups and channels soon formed where results and experiences with the badge platform are shared. Thus, the exchange tends more towards living a learning method than a didactic concept."

As Jochen Robes describes in his professional development blog:[3]

Leveraging the advantages of social learning

Both in social networks and in companies, individuals gather in interest groups. This often happens without being organised or controlled by the company. However, the company should create the necessary framework conditions with its corporate and management culture as well as the technological tools and learning content.

Employees will then utilise these channels for their contribution.

Mentors can introduce new employees to these interest groups to facilitate exchange. This makes it easier for them to engage in social interaction within their interest and peer groups.

A buddy system promotes exchange and networking among new employees and enables them to reflect on their experiences together.

Setting up a team in the Microsoft Office application MS Teams and integrating this collaborative group with the onboarding learning path in their learning management system opens up further opportunities.

Other colleagues can introduce themselves virtually in this team and share files, while the newcomers can discuss their impressions of their new environment between themselves. This creates an optimal synergy effect between knowledge sharing, peer-to-peer learning, social integration[4] and knowledge transfer.

[4] Deci, Edward. L. & Ryan, Richard. M. (2000) The „What" and „Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. In: Psychological Inquiry 11(4), 227–268.

Digitising theory

If you are striving for compliant initial training and good knowledge of IT security regulations among new employees, a digital format set up for self-directed learning will prove very suitable for the topics at hand. On the agenda for the Welcome Day for new employees, they are less of a fit.

Automated reporting further allows you to verify that your employees have attended compliance training or acknowledged important policies.

Using a face-to-face approach ...

... to establish a network

After theory comes the network (and knowledge transfer):

When working through theoretical material on IT security, the content already contains links to further reading such as SharePoint files. It also introduces the IT compliance officer, who will personally answer questions on the topic and ensure that the learner can apply the new knowledge. For instance, they might simulate supplier meetings with the new employees. Most companies use the Welcome Day for new employees for this purpose. A temporary Teams group can further support this practical exercise by encouraging further discussion.

This enables new employees to establish their first contacts, laying a foundation for a network within the company. A robust network and relationships based on trust are ideal cornerstones for virtual collaboration.

... to immerse in the corporate culture

Company history is more than just facts and figures. It is a story. The story of the founder of the business and their family. The story about their first invention or patent. The story about the meaning of the three rings in the logo. Or the story about the farm house next to the ultra-modern headquarters.

Of course, emotional corporate videos and other digital media can still be used. Yet, it is important to provide any new employee with physical immersive experiences like a tour of the premises or digital scavenger hunts across the site, as well as the opportunity to speak to special personalities in the company. This helps them identify with their new environment and feel like they are part of the team.

According to the recent Deloitte Human Capital Trends Study 2020, 79% of the respondents consider a sense of belonging as a key driver for corporate success. Deloitte recommends connecting each employee's unique, complementary skills through the shared "Why" to leverage them as a strength.[5]

When many employees are working alone in their home office, loneliness[6] is often described as an inherent problem, making this common ground even more important.

ThyssenKrupp historical headquarters next to the new corporate headquarters

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[5] The Social Entreprise at work: Paradox as a path forward, Deloitte Human Capital Trends 2020

[6] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/21/opinion/work-from-home-me-loneliness.html

Activating new learners

It is possible to identify simple tasks in any learning context that new colleagues can contribute to a business topic. This might involve, for example, taking a video on their phone to share knowledge nuggets, or their own opinion or interpretation. A task could look like this: "Please outline in your video how you experience/practice our corporate values x, y, z in your new work routine."

Naturally, the activating tasks can and should be based on the technical induction.

Quizzes are another effective and entertaining option for activating learners and consolidating knowledge. A quiz app can also help form teams competing against each other. Question and answers are derived from the content of the onboarding journey. The winning team will be rewarded.

TIP

Almost all HR officers believe that a new employee's technical (91%) and social integration (94%) can be enhanced and accelerated through good onboarding.[7]
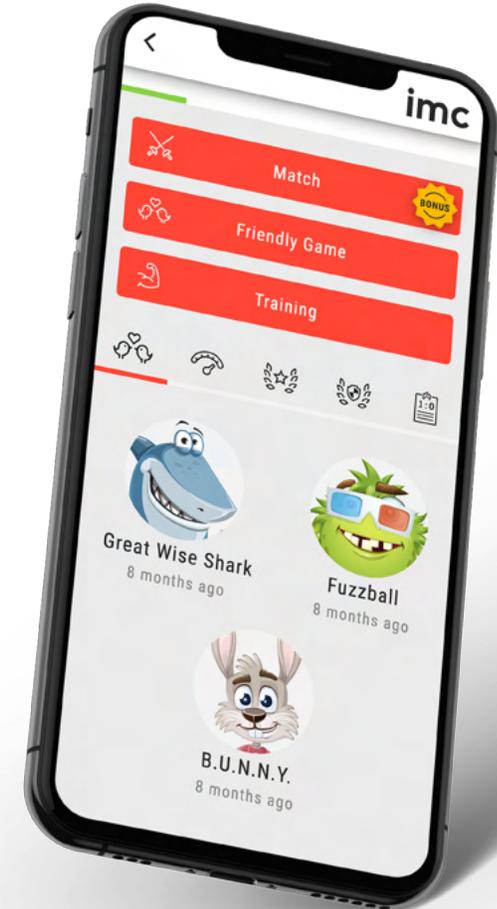
[7]Onboarding Studie 2019, Haufe (https://www.myonboarding.de/studien)

Reducing time to performance

We recommend using performance support in order to enable a new employee to start working as quickly as possible and to minimise initial training investment (see success indicators), The software helps to resolve questions about digital processes, such as "How do I request an order number for procurement?" or "How do I work in the ERP system?" Electronic performance support works like a personal virtual assistant, like a colleague sitting next to the new employee to help them.

The virtual assistant is also helpful for handling tasks that only come up sporadically ("How do you do that again?").

Performance support also includes aids like glossaries or Wikis for specialist or company-specific terms. Learning cards with knowledge nuggets are particularly useful for mobile application on the road or to quickly look something up before a client meeting.

TIP

Use performance support software to support your new colleagues throughout the process, allowing them to complete tasks right away.

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It's personal

A one-size-fits-all initial training course for all employees? The same learning path for the apprentice and the new Head of Controlling?

While one person might be out of their depth, the next person will not feel challenged and may even be bored. Instead, tailor the onboarding journey to each individual: Of course, some training elements will be relevant for everyone – videos on corporate values and history, brand presentations, compliance regulations to name a few. Beyond these basics, digital assessments can offer new colleagues feedback on the level of their current knowledge. This is particularly relevant for specialist topics. This enables them to leverage self-directed learning to close knowledge and competence gaps. In our experience, a learner-centric approach is the best strategy in most scenarios. Autonomous decisions motivate learners![8]

[8]Deci, Edward. L. & Ryan, Richard. M. (2000) The „What" and „Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. In: Psychological Inquiry 11(4), 227–268.

Conclusion

Having arrived in the new normal, many opportunities are available to us. Wherever feasible, even highly traditional companies have relocated their workplaces to the employees' home offices, the cloud and the digital world. Managers have been convinced that employees are equally able to do their job well from home.

It has been a positive surprise to us all that a digital approach is much easier to realise than assumed. That means we now really have access to different learning channels to onboard new employees, know how to use, combine and – above all – integrate them. This creates the necessary added value. With the advancement of digitalisation, direct human contact is reduced even further. We need to utilise any contact that is made carefully.

The "Why" of a company, the common goals of a diverse workforce and the shared mission and vision are becoming more important and form the common ground for a team working separately.

The shock of the pandemic for all societies and companies around the world has shown that resilience to crises is more than a meta-level word. It very specifically impacts our daily work.

A hybrid onboarding journey is but a small switch to put us on the right track towards a learning organisation best placed to handle unforeseen events.

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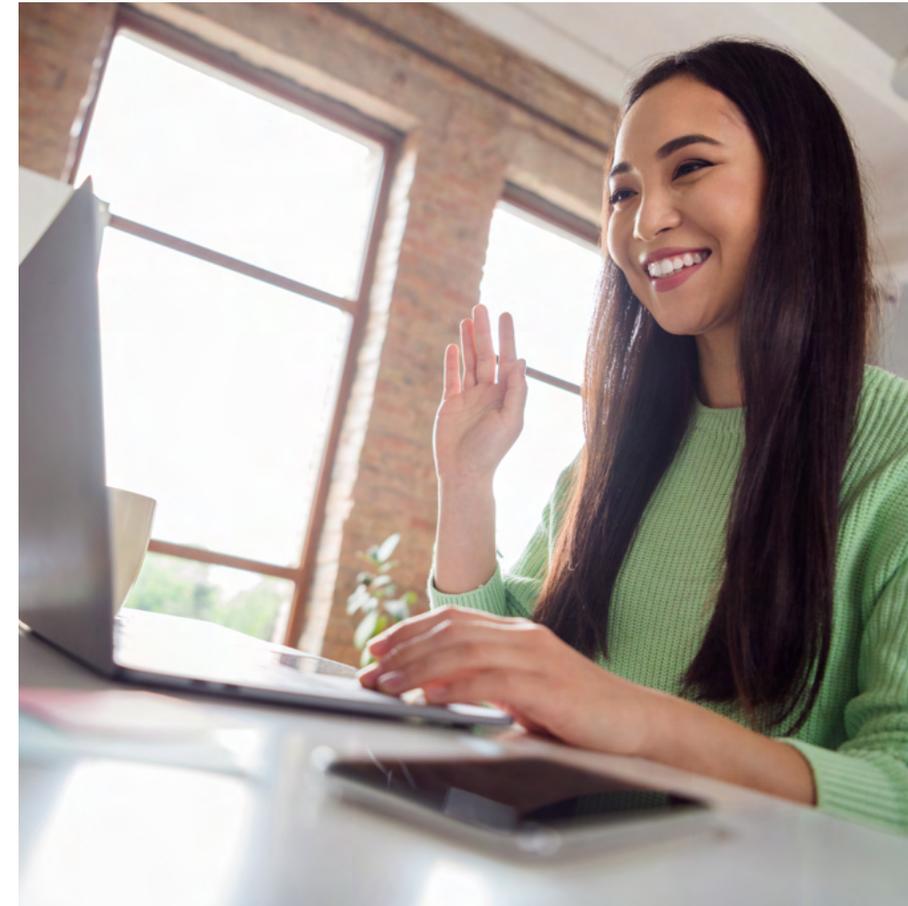
Hybrid onboarding journey

physical   digital

0

Pre-Boarding
Staying in contact, first information, welcome

1

Onboarding Invitation
By the supervisor

2

Self Assessment
What do I know?
What are my gaps?

3

Self-Directed and Guided Learning
Guided: company history, brand Self-directed: selection of specialist content based on competence profile

4

Infographic
Organisational chart

5

Web-Based Training (example)
- Product overview
- Quality management
- IT security
- GDPR in the company

6

Completing Specialist Tasks
Submit to mentor when completed

7

Virtual Assistant:
Performance support system guides through/explains new software and processes

8

Mentoring and Feedback
- Mentor support - "This is how we work"
- Technical feedback: discussion of specialist tasks

9

Learning Cards
To look up knowledge nuggets

10

Welcome Day for New Employees
- Experience the company (scavenger hunt)
- Meet important persons
- Consolidate knowledge face-to-face with experts
- Establish a network

11

Specialist Workshop
With specialist trainers (from web-based training), colleagues, interfaces for applying knowledge

12

Peer-to-Peer Coaching / Social Learning:
Exchange within the team, (continuous) feedback, contribution

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Rewrite the way we learn

About imc

imc is the leading full-service provider for learning technologies and e-learning content. We make learning better – by redefining the way we learn. Experts in technology, e-learning content and strategy work hand in hand to offer holistic and tailored e-learning solutions – worldwide. Created as a German university spin-off at Saarland University, imc has provided holistic support to more than 2,000 companies, public and educational institutions from all sectors and of all sizes in the planning and implementation of digital training strategies.

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