

On-boarding: How successful is your programme?



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Resources have been invested in the (sometimes lengthy) hiring process ... ensuring the success and retention of new senior hires through proper 'on-boarding' can see a return on that investment.....

On-boarding is a process of integrating a new senior hire into their new organisation. The purpose is to allow the new senior manager become acquainted with the way the organisation operates (on a hard and soft level) and to gain the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviours to become effective, sooner.

There are a range of methods of delivery – formal meetings (group / individual), lectures, videos, printed documents, and, increasingly, computer based, on-line self service training and assimilation. Most processes will comprise a number of elements and methods. The process will also normally begin once an offer is accepted.

Such an 'On-boarding' process can have the reputation of being a 'box ticking' exercise. Unfortunately in some companies, that may be the only objective. In which case, the point has been missed and their process is not really 'on-boarding' . For others, the primary objective is to meet / comply with regulatory requirements. Again, the spirit of assimilation of the new senior hire is lost.

The Case for the Company

It is generally recognised that it can take a considerable period for a new senior manager to become productive in their new role, the more senior the role is, the longer that it is likely to take. In *'The First 90 Days'*¹ Watkins suggests the 'breakeven point' can be as far out as 6-7 months. However, with a proper, effective on-boarding process

- 'Initial settling' period is reduced
- Improves productivity of new hires with a resulting gain for the business
- Reduces level of management time
- Reduces the risk of a new Senior manager leaving
- Improves performance significantly
- Reduce / eliminate the costs of re-hiring to replace leavers
- Maintains / improves morale of other senior managers/ team members
- Enhances reputation as 'company of choice' in which to develop one's career

It is also important not just to consider such an 'on-boarding' process for an external new hires only. A manager promoted or transferred internally to a senior position can face very similar challenges. Providing on-boarding programmes for internal transfers / promotions helps, equally, to reduce failure rates and promote success.

¹ *The First 90 Days* , Harvard Business School Publishing, 60 Harvard Way, Boston, MA ISBN 1-59139-110-5. – Prof. Michael Watkins

The Case for the New Senior Hire

In some cases, new senior managers will join a company and ‘find their way’, others with less success. Even for those who do ‘find their path’ the time used is often time taken from dealing with the challenges they were specifically hired to address. For those less fortunate, it can result in frustration, reduced confidence in their decision to move roles and on occasion, ultimately lead to moving on within the first year. An effective on-boarding process can:

- Clarify company strategy – the senior hire can clearly see they are joining a winning, progressive business
- The individual’s role and responsibilities are clear –goals are more clearly set and they understand their value to the company
- Earlier “buy-in” of hearts and minds - becoming engaged and sooner
- Supports fast track assimilation and the building of critical networks
- New senior hire sees how they are developing and progressing their career
- Minimise time spent on (often necessary) form filling and administration prior to the start-date, ensuring facilities access, desk allocation, IT equipment and logon ids to the systems are established.

What a waste of time – particularly for a senior manager to be waiting to be “set-up”, properly. It is clear, and supported by research, that a well-structured comprehensive on-boarding process leads to more positive outcomes for new senior hires – such as higher job satisfaction, quicker connection with the organisation, resulting in higher levels of engagement and commitment.

Equally as important, is to create an opportunity for a new senior hire to meet their new team and significant stakeholders (other senior team and board members) . Senior managers today do not expect to stay with the one company for any length of time. This reinforces the case for a comprehensive on-boarding process, to engage new senior hires sooner and see a return on the hiring investment quicker.

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