

# Restructuring New Hire Orientation to Improve Organization and Personal Outcomes

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## Abstract

Orientation is an important form of socialization and early training which should seek to effectively integrate employees into the culture, mission, objectives, people, and practices of the organization. The goal should be to properly “on board” employees and to quickly get them engaged, motivated, inspired and productive. Unfortunately, new hire orientation is often a somewhat haphazard, unplanned “formality” viewed as being of limited real importance and meaning. Often the exercise is to simply inform a group of new hires about the new company and institutional practices. Employee frustration stems from the perceived lack of focus on what is critically needed from and by the new hire. Research on effective socialization and inspiration of new hires indicates a great need for opportunities to assess and appreciate their individual contribution, role, and fit with the job and the organization. It is critical to make new hires realize that they are appreciated individually, to provide them with knowledge for navigating and learning in the new company, and to give them opportunities to build relationships and networks with key people and resources throughout the organization. This conceptual paper looks at some of the problems that poor orientations can create, offers some solutions on how to improve orientation programs, and suggests potential benefits of implementing these changes.

**Keywords:** orientation, socialization, new hires, person-job fit, job roles, training, on-boarding, retention

## Introduction

Most modern organizations have battled persistent employee turnover and regularly find themselves attempting to bring newcomers on board. A full 20% to 30% of U.S. and European employees will move jobs within the next twelve months and nearly 50% of new employees in the U.S. leave their new position within 6 months (Cable, Gino, and Staats, 2013; Maurer, 2015). With an aging workforce, new employee on-boarding will no doubt remain a critical activity. New employee orientation programs are intended to familiarize newcomers with their new company, socialize them and help them fit into their new role and surroundings, and to prepare and inspire them for a successful start of their tenures in the organization (Acevedo and Yancey,

2011; Cable, et al., 2013; Klein and Weaver, 2000; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Saks and Ashforth, 1997).

Unfortunately, orientations have a very lackluster reputation for focusing on very basic and often boring procedural information and exercises designed to make new hires fit in to the new company. If done correctly, orientations can present an exciting opportunity to further sell the new hire on their new role, successfully inspire them regarding the organization's culture and mission, and make them feel a welcome individual addition and asset to an outstanding organization. A comprehensive orientation can jump start the individual's efforts to socialize and allow them to seek and define their specific role and contributions in moving the company forward (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Cable, et al., 2013; Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, and Cash, 2012).

While the content and scope of orientations can vary greatly, most orientation programs last only a day or two (or less). A traditional orientation usually includes some general discussion of necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as outlining of the organization's history, goals, values, people, policies, and language/terminology (Klein and Weaver, 2000; Wanous and Reichers, 2000). The management team and organization structure are often introduced, employee benefits are discussed generally, and payroll and tax paperwork are often completed by the new hire (Young and Lundberg, 1996). Most orientations now provide an opportunity for networking and one or more mentors might be introduced (Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003).

Orientations have traditionally been viewed by the new hire and the company as necessary evils that must be tolerated and endured. With many organizations, the new hire orientation is viewed as a necessary "breaking in" formality and is often brief and cursory in nature. Perhaps there is an uninspiring presentation on rules, pay, procedures, and vacation. Maybe there are a few introductions and a video to watch, followed by a quick tour of the facility (Young and Lundberg, 1996). Then the new employee is thrown into the workplace and asked to conform to the culture (Cable, et al., 2013). All of this happens at a critical and very salient, exciting, and memorable point in the new hire's tenure where they are starved for socialization and a new framework to define, make sense of, and embrace their new role and new environment, and especially ways that they can contribute their individual talents (Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Cable, et al., 2013; Cable and Kay, 2012). New employees without proper orientation are left to employ their own "newcomer adjustment strategies" and "adaptation approaches" as part of their early socialization and sense-making efforts (Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

Effective socialization, casually referred to as "learning the ropes," is a complicated and absolutely critical component of job success in which the new employee goes from being an outsider to being an insider and accepted and desirable part of the team. Companies are remiss to not capitalize on orientation as an opportunity to effectively socialize, acculturate, inspire, and motivate their new hires (Chapman, 2009; Wanous, 1992; Young and Lundberg, 1996). Furthermore, negative and highly confusing individual outcomes such as role ambiguity, perceived lack of person-job and person-organization fit, stress and strain, lack of regard or respect for the new organization and its leadership, and premature disengagement and turnover are very real risks if the company does not firmly embrace the opportunity to orient and aggressively deploy new employees (Acevedo and Yancey, 2011; Cable, et al., 2013; Chapman, 2009; Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Klein and Weaver, 2000).

How organizations truly view and value their new employees can over time establish a climate and ethos in the orientation process that either facilitates success or failure (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen, 1978; Zahrly and Tosi, 1989). If organizational leaders assume the new employees have a limited early usefulness to the organization and presume that the new hires don't really care about the orientation, they may allocate fewer resources and less attention to their assimilation into the organization, and the duration and quality of orientation will be minimal (Acevedo and Yancey, 2011; Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Riordan, Weatherly, Vandenberg, and Self, 2001). If, however, they presume that employees want to succeed and will greatly value and utilize the information that is presented, they may strive to create a very meaningful and impactful "experience," believing that the investment will pay off through greater socialization, familiarization, and commitment (Klein and Weaver, 2000; Mohd, Ahmad, and Tan, 2016).

Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) landmark work points out that early socialization processes such as orientation can fulfill the dual needs of creating stability, uniformity, and predictability in the institution going forward while at the same time enhancing and drawing out individual talents, temperaments, creativity, and the unique contributions of individuals toward the mission and goals of the organization. Cable, et al. (2013) revealed empirically that this dual purpose was quite important as programs that failed to provide a forum to arouse and enthuse individual investment and talent contribution were followed fairly closely by negative outcomes such as turnover. Acevedo and Yancey (2011) point out that an extensive and well-planned orientation sends the message to new hires that the organization is fully committed to the development of them individually, to giving them the right tools to perform, and to putting them in a position and environment where they can truly succeed. A sound orientation labels that company as "progressive" in the eyes of the employee from the very beginning (Klein and Weaver, 2000). Helping a new employee fit into his or her job and organization are important when considering job satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson, 2006). As Carless (2005) points out, the orientation period is a critical component of the employee's efforts to determine their fit in the organization and job environment and their overall attraction to and adoption of company mission, values, goals, and objectives. Riordan, et al. (2001) and others point out the importance of organization based self-esteem which is self-worth, perceived importance, and even self-efficacy promulgated by perceived appreciation, familiarity, and belonging within the organization. Mohd, et al., 2016 argue that beneficial organizational citizenship behavior is an outgrowth of sound orientation.

This paper attempts to shed light on the specific needs of orientation programs by identifying common impacts of good orientations and potential problematic outcomes of poor orientations. Several solutions are offered that can address these problems, and then the paper projects what benefits can accrue to the organization and the individual as a result.

### **Importance of Sound Orientation: Avoiding Pitfalls**

The content and effectiveness of orientation programs for new employees can vary greatly from one company to another, depending on such things as the company attitude toward and assumptions about new hires and orientation, overall strength and pervasiveness of the corporate culture, the availability of "experts" in the organization to cover certain topics, the budget available to pay outside instructors, the quality of presentation techniques, and the importance of lost productivity time while the employees are learning. Some companies frankly just have more exciting and inspiring purposes and stories to tell and have more creative and

engaging ways to present them! A good orientation can be an exciting time of learning and illumination for a new hire. It is a time of confirmation, reassurance, and building goodwill with and among the new members of the organization. When an orientation program is not done well, however, an organization can find that a number of problems result; some impact employees and others impact the company. A poor orientation can be an employee's first taste of disappointment with the company and can tarnish their overall feelings for the company going forward (Cable, et al., 2013; Cable and Kay, 2012; Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Mohd, et al., 2016).

### **Employee Impacts and Problems**

A key element of new hire orientation is helping the new employee fit into the job and the new organization, and to feel welcome and comfortable. The fact that the employee was asked to join the organization and indeed accepted the job is a good indicator of perceived fit, but the new employee is looking early for more confirmatory information on how they can make a beneficial personal contribution (Cable, et al., 2013; Carless, 2005; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). For there to be complete person-job fit, there must be some feeling of person-environment fit. Through discussion of core values and beliefs, interaction with veterans of the company, learning of specific past actions through stories, as well as hearing heart-felt presentations from leadership, the new employee can make judgments as to their personal compatibility within the company's ethos and culture. The orientation is a necessity for this marriage of individual to organization to occur. Without the proper orientation, the employee is left with lingering questions as to whether personal values are congruent with organizational culture.

The job itself and self-confidence in one's ability to do the job is of great importance. Bruzzese (2014) surveyed new hires who had recently attended orientations and found they desired and appreciated an information-rich orientation that dealt head-on with job-specific information. Those surveyed indicated that direct introductory discussion of the job itself and initial training (related to how to perform the job itself) was the most important and most appreciated element of orientation (76% of respondents indicated such). New hires indicated that they also desired direct discussion and training on the nature of their new environment, and the basics of navigating the company, information resources, personal contacts, etc. The new hires indicated that meeting and interacting with experienced veterans and potential resources/mentors were also important, but slightly less so. While employee handbooks are appreciated, respondents indicated that these were much less important early in the employee tenure and during orientation. Employees viewed these as important resources for later reference.

Employees who want to contribute to the organization's success and to simultaneously achieve personal goals look at orientation as the first opportunity to sample the organizational culture. Young and Lundberg (1996) indicate that new employees already have a good feel for the values, norms, goals, etc. of the company and use the orientation as an opportunity to confirm their judgments and gather more information about their new environment. Chapman (2009) argues how critical it is for the company to confirm and reinforce those good vibes that inspired the new hire to join the company in the first place. Employees are looking to confirm that the company's vision and ethos is congruent with theirs, that they are welcome and important to their new company, that they are in an environment where they feel comfortable and that they can navigate, and that they are surrounded by like-minded people with similar goals that can serve as a resource (Acevedo and Yancey, 2011; Cable and Kay, 2012; Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Mohd, et al., 2016). When orientation fails to deliver on confirming and strengthening these key

ideals, employees can feel very uncertain about their role and new environment. They can feel a sense of role ambiguity, lack confidence, and may feel lost without resources and a support system to deliver key feedback. Mohd, et al. (2016) identified a solid orientation and socialization as the first step necessary for employee empowerment and commitment to the organization, and that a poor orientation can really jeopardize positive employee investment into their new environment.

Many orientation programs fail to prepare and assimilate new hires because they focus excessively on rules and procedures. There is much more focus on limitations and what can't be done rather than viewing the new environment as an open and amenable space for empowerment and accomplishment (Cable, et al., 2013). Cooper-Thomas, et. al. (2012) speaks to how veteran employees who have been with numerous companies are able to see past these limitations and have means of "empowering and preparing" themselves for prompt success in the new environment. But younger new hires, especially those freshly out of college or technical school, desperately need the welcoming socialization, discovery, cognitive framework, and motivation that comes from orientation. Church (2014), for example, reports that many accounting firms have orientation programs that are extremely "rule-oriented" and very formal. Church notes that in spite of vast resources often assigned to orientation programs for new CPA's, many promising recruits never manage to fully assimilate into accounting firms. Many orientations fail to discuss the realities and practicalities of actually being a CPA. The first few months of transition are described as particularly difficult due to the stark contrasts between work reality and the college years and expectations built up about the work environment. While many colleges attempt to duplicate real-world business scenarios in order to prepare students for life after school, students cannot learn company-specific and job-specific tasks and responsibilities until after the employment process has begun (Holton, 1995). Unfortunately, simple and brief rule-bound orientations tend to push this horizon out even further (Chapman, 2009).

Numerous authors point out how critical the early socialization process and especially the orientation are to getting new employees "down the path" toward company commitment, motivation, high performance, and successful tenures. Orientation and early socialization are viewed as the "critical juncture" in determining if the employee's tenure is long and highly successful (good corporate citizens) versus short and problematic (Klein and Weaver, 2000; Mohd, et al., 2016; Riordan, et al., 2001). Employees feel great stress and anxiety during the early days of a job and are eager to quickly settle into their new roles (Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003). If orientation is incomplete, leaving new hires feeling limited and unprepared, early confusion and frustration can be the result. This is exacerbated further if they haven't had an opportunity to build a network of social support and information resources. This lack of preparation can then cause employees to conclude that they don't fully understand all that the job entails and a sense of role ambiguity and conflict can ensue. Often a downward spiral can result in performance deficits, heavy stress levels, resentment, absenteeism and other withdrawal behaviors, and eventually premature turnover (Ashforth and Saks, 1996).

Another area where orientation programs can create problems for employees is in their implementation process (Acevedo and Yancey, 2011; Allen and Meyer, 1990). According to Nielson (2012), many organizations create comprehensive and exhaustive orientation training programs that leave important material and assignments for later, for new hires to complete on their own when they "have more time." Many of these extensive but open-ended programs get side-tracked because new hires predictably get side-tracked and are unable to complete orientation in a timely manner. These orientation programs lack follow-up from HR staff and

management to ensure that the critical program is completed. HR staff assume that new hires will “orient themselves” when they have time. Orientation programs should be designed to shorten the time that it takes employees to become fully functional team members. Orientation should not be viewed as a necessary formality that must be checked off a list so that the new hire can “get right to work” (Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Maurer, 2015).

Finally, when employees do not experience a complete and effective orientation, they may feel limited in their ability to make good decisions and to act within their roles, which can create a sense of helplessness and a lack of empowerment. A great deal of critical work time is taken up seeking answers from colleagues. The lack of empowerment, lack of individual investment and appreciation, and the feelings of ill-preparation can lead to resentment, stress, and a belief that the company lacks confidence in the new employee (Cable and Kay, 2012; Jones, 1986; Zahrl and Tosi, 1989).

### **Company Impacts and Problems**

A most important hiring goal for many companies is to get people onboard who can make a sizable individual impact early. It is probably wishful thinking to expect that most people can make a quick and sizable impact on a new employer without substantial investment, commitment, planning, and “laying of the groundwork” by the company (Cable, et al., 2013; Chapman, 2009; Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012; Wanous and Reichers, 2000). A little preparation and planning by the company can greatly enhance the early efforts of new hires. Failing to prepare for new hires (and determining exactly how they will be plugged in to the organization) can result in much longer learning curve for new employees. This translates into a longer timeframe for new hires to become productive, which can put a strain on the veteran team members who must compensate for the new employees’ limited contribution. Lack of company preparation and planning can contribute to a lower overall return on the hiring investment, and it can impact the structure of the team and lead to negative outcomes among new hires as well as valued, veteran employees (Riordan, et al., 2001; Wanous and Reichers, 2000).

Organizations are ultimately looking for the fastest and best return on their hiring investments, and it is in their best interests to have new employees become productive faster. Oftentimes, organizations put significant resources into recruiting and hiring, but then leave early training and development to chance (Cable and Kay, 2012; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Klein and Weaver, 2000). Very general, poorly planned orientation systems contribute to these HR problems. Even if an orientation does a good job of introducing the employee to the structure and culture and policies at a high level, it often fails to deliver the specific skills and knowledge framework needed to accomplish day-to-day activities and to effectively navigate and learn within and from the organization (Fan and Wanous, 2008; Chapman, 2009).

During this period when the new employee is learning and less productive, the existing team is forced to do more to compensate if the established goals are going to be met. While most people understand that this is necessary for a time, it is reasonable for them to expect that it will not last too long. When it does begin to stretch out, frustration can set in amongst the existing team and resentment can build toward the new employee. This can have a profoundly negative impact on team chemistry and other critical team outcomes (Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Klein and Weaver, 2000; Riordan, et al., 2001).

Improperly or incompletely oriented new employees can also have a profound impact on leadership. The team problems caused by the new employees can place pressure on leadership to help improve output and repair interpersonal problems. Alternatively, the leadership might feel

pressured to compensate for unproductive newcomers, reduce expectations, delay deadlines, or otherwise minimize the consequences of sub-optimal processes and production. Leadership in the middle level of the organization may feel pressure from company management to solve their people problems and pick up the productivity. This is truly a snowball effect. New employees who perform at a subpar level because they have not been effectively oriented and trained can create big problems for management which compound as these problems flow up the ranks (Bauer and Green, 1994; Bernardin and Russell, 2007; Richardson and Kleiner, 1992).

Companies with poor or minimal orientations appear more likely to experience multiple levels and degrees of poor citizenship and employee withdrawal behavior such as higher absenteeism, lack of commitment, lack of conscientiousness and involvement, ambivalence and disinterest, and ultimately higher turnover (Cable, et al., 2013). Employees who enter a job unprepared and who experience high levels of frustration, inner conflict, and stress can lose interest and feel alienated (Wanous, 1993; Young and Lundberg, 1996). The easiest way to do this is by leaving the company while the “stakes are low” and by starting over somewhere else with a fresh slate.

As this paper has stressed, modern orientation programs don't deliver on a consistent basis. According to a survey conducted by Bamboo HR of 1,000 U.S.-based employees, 43% felt that time and money are wasted on ineffective on-boarding processes. A full 15% of respondents said that poor on-boarding is enough to make them consider leaving a job, making this early insight on the company especially important (Maurer, 2015). When an employee leaves, the company has to start the process all over again, and go through the costly recruiting, hiring, and training processes again. By the time the next new employee is up to speed and contributing to the company, it's possible that a significant amount of time has passed, not to mention the enormous waste of company resources.

### **Possible Solutions for Improving Orientation Programs and Results**

Creating an effective and cost-efficient orientation program can produce a number of positive outcomes and frankly can be implemented without great complication or difficulty. Focusing on the following improvement ideas can help to improve the orientation process and outcomes and greatly reduce some of the problems that seem commonplace. The first improvement is to focus on the notion of “pre-boarding,” or creating extensive interactions between new employees and their future teammates before actually starting the job. Second, those driving the orientation should build a strategically designed curriculum that aligns individual talents with the organizational goals and provides new hires the framework they need for navigating and contributing in the organization. Third, the orientation should enlist the guidance and support of interesting, enlightening, and credible trainers/trainers. Next, the orientation process should serve to create real excitement in an intimate and personal setting. Next, the orientation should incorporate company, departmental, and job-specific training into the process. Additionally, the orientation should try to introduce ongoing development of the new hire and foster mentoring partnerships between new hires and influential members of the organization. Further, the new hire orientation should utilize technology where appropriate. Finally, the orientation should introduce the concept of person-job and person-environment “fit” and continually emphasize and assess “fit.” Some combination of these improvements should create much different outcomes in orientations.

### **“Pre-boarding” information at home**

One possible addition to orientation occurs well before employees report to the organization for their first official day. There is often a long period of “radio silence” between the date when the hire is agreed upon and when the employee actually comes to work. “Pre-boarding” is contact between the company and the new hire where the employee gains insight into the new work environment by getting to know their new boss, colleagues, job and environment specifics, and the overall feel or culture of the work environment even before the first day of work (Dinkel, 2015; Mohd, et al., 2016; Sullivan, 2015; Yohn, 2016). Training and development tools are delivered to new hires in the period between accepting an offer and showing up for work, and they begin to work through these at home. Through these “starter kits” made up of memos, messages, online interactions, questionnaires, videos and audios, and even short manuals, employees learn a great deal of information about the company. Employees are able to get a feel for the company’s product and service lines, participate in important staff communication and orientation, learn basic processes and procedures, learn about pay and benefits information, and review basics on organizational structure and systems. Yohn (2016) and others reveal that contact with the new hire from time to time is preferable to simply waiting until traditional orientation occurs. The new hire is managed and developed much the same way as a customer would be (Yohn, 2016).

The pre-boarding process is designed to help employees become familiar with the company and its inner-workings, and also to alleviate some of the stress that would be present on that busy and confusing first day. Pre-boarding is also hoped to engender an early feeling of excitement about the job and help prevent “no shows” when the job actually begins. Pre-boarding actually delivers some of the content usually covered in orientation while at the same time giving employees a much better “state of mind” and preparedness when they actually jump into the orientation process. This “pre-boarding” requires adding new hires to the payroll earlier and trusting new hires to complete some of this work at home, but it eliminates some of the cumbersome and boring technical elements of the orientation itself. It also sets the table for a much more enjoyable and educational orientation when the employee comes on sight.

### **Strategic Alignment of Jobs**

A very important necessary improvement to orientation is to focus less on the technical aspects of “how do we get the new hires started” and focus more on “how do we best prepare and position the new hires to produce results and achieve strategic organizational goals?” Cable and colleagues (2012; 2013) have done empirical research on how traditional orientations are more company-focused in terms of how employees should fit in and conform to the structure, policies and procedures, and culture of the company. They argue that the focus should instead be squarely on the new hire, their key talents and potential contributions, and providing them an exciting opportunity for self-expression. The orientation should focus on how the new hire is critical to the strategic initiatives and goals of the company. The orientation is the first opportunity employees have to be inspired by and buy into the strategic vision and direction of the company. Employees will hopefully be able to see not just what their jobs are, but also how those jobs are critical to organizational success. To achieve this, presentations will have to use a “top down” approach to show how individual jobs contribute to department, division, and company success. But the presentations should also use a “bottom up” approach to emphasize how important front-line employee input, intelligence, and boundary spanning information are to feeding the strategic decisions and responsiveness of the company. This portion of the

orientation also likely involves some positive and productive discussions with members of upper and middle management (Cable, et al., 2013; Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012; Fan and Wanous, 2008; Jones, 1986).

This alignment focus in delivering orientation should also orient new hires on how they uniquely “fit” in the entire organization, various processes and communication flows, and key players in the organization. They should be able to envision what is required for early success. It is very important in the early socialization process for new hires to be able to build a framework or mental map of the organization and how things get done in the company. By having a solid framework or map, employees are better able to learn, understand, and assimilate all the new elements, pieces, and processes of the company that they will be encountering in the first few weeks of work (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012; Acevedo and Yancey, 2011).

### **Energetic Teachers**

A third way to greatly improve orientation is by being strategic in terms of who teaches the various components of the program. Sometimes, the problem with orientation programs is that plans are not well conceived in terms of who leads the training and what methods are used to implement the plans (Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Wallace, 2009).

Trainers need to be knowledgeable leaders in the topic, but they should also be energetic and interactive. It would be optimal if we could identify someone in the organization that has the knowledge, “buy-in,” enthusiasm, and credibility to really inspire the orientation participants. Too many individuals are outstanding in terms of content but lack the ability to deliver that content in a style and with a credibility that keeps the audience engaged, inspired, and perhaps even entertained. Content and style are both very critical, but so is the credibility that flows from someone who has “been there” and has great experiences and war stories to share. Orientation planners should recruit training leaders who are outgoing and who spark excitement, and who command the attention of the learners and compel them to actively participate. Great content that is either not heard or not remembered is ineffective content, and organizations that are looking to improve the effectiveness of orientation could start by enlisting phenomenally inspiring teachers (Chapman, 2009; Wallace, 2009).

### **Exciting and Intimate Settings**

A fourth suggestion for reinvigorating orientation goes together with the notion of energetic and exciting trainers/teachers. It appears critical for orientation leadership to utilize an exciting but intimate setting for the training. Orientation programs are often held in “non-descript,” often large, rooms that are drab and have no personality. Such settings do little to convince new employees that their organizations put any priority on this event or on them personally. The dull setting can invoke an indifferent and uninspired attitude toward the material being covered (Young and Lundberg, 1996). Coupling excited and energetic trainers with a colorful, happy, intimate setting creates an environment that should cause employees to think that things are off to a good start and a good choice of employment was made (Chen, 2010). An engaging, exciting, and fun-filled orientation creates positive first impressions and a notion of progressiveness and engagement that all have lasting impact (Yohn, 2016).

### **Multi-level Focus**

A fifth recommendation for improved orientation is to build the training into three segments, with focus on the organization, focus on the department, and focus on the job. Typical

orientation programs spend most time on covering organization-level items such as the company's mission, culture, leadership, history, policies, and formalities like benefits (Cable, et al., 2013). But there is typically insufficient discussion of the department, work groups, and the specifics of their job itself. So the orientation ignores the critical need to help the individual employee create an understanding of how things work in their department and how to navigate and perform their specific job (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012; Riordan, et al., 2001). Some of the basic organization-level subject matter can be covered as part of the "pre-boarding," with more focus at orientation on the details and nature of the department, work group, and the position itself. More time can be spent on the specific processes that are unique to their department. More time can be devoted to job-specific processes and the sharing of insight from veterans and especially successful incumbents (Chapman, 2009). We would envision an effective on-site orientation structured such that 15 to 20 percent of the time is focused on organization-wide issues such as mission, values, overall objectives, company philosophy and history, and formalities such as pay, benefits, and rules. We would see somewhere around 35 to 50 percent of the time focused on the department and/or other work groups, with emphasis on getting to know others, learning how the new employee fits in and makes special contribution, learning departmental policies and procedures, discussing key challenges and points of pride, and especially learning work processes and culture. Finally, we would envision somewhere around 35 to 50 percent of orientation focused on the specifics of the job, the real talents being brought in by the new employee, and special emphasis on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities that bring about real success on the job. Discussion with veteran incumbents and finding potential mentors can be critical in this process (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012).

### **Ongoing Development and Mentorships**

Another potential improvement to the structure of orientation is to think of it as an ongoing event, rather than a half-day or one or two-day process. The orientation itself should be geared toward arming and energizing the new employee so that they can navigate and learn daily from the work environment (Cable and Kay, 2012; Wallace, 2009; Yohn, 2016). HR professionals should be thinking of how they can be continuing the development and incremental education/training of the growing employee. The reality of equipping a new employee to be effective and efficient is that it takes perhaps months or years to get an employee to peak performance. HR should be planning additional development programs, certainly throughout the first year of tenure with the company.

The process of incremental improvement of the new hire is also enhanced through regular interaction with a mentor or several mentors who are already peak performers and are fully equipped to deal with all of the challenges and opportunities that present themselves. It also appears beneficial for new hires to have the opportunity to meet informally with influential members of the organizations, perhaps members of top management or at least middle management. Partnering new employees with mentors over a long term, perhaps for their first year or two, should improve development outcomes. Of course, this view of orientation as a patient and continuous process is quite distinct from the traditional view of orientation as an event of defined duration which is more of a formality that occurs only at the outset.

The literature on socialization warns of the stress, confusion, and information search that are inherent with starting a new job (e.g. Ashforth and Saks, 1996). Dunn (2014) compares this early job stress to that of a student attempting to navigate their first day or first week at a new school. Employees are seeking to build a framework or a type of mental map for navigating their

new environment. Hyatt Hotels, looking to reduce concerns and stress of new employees, has experimented with a plan that partners new employees with more experienced incumbents during this challenging period. The program is called “People Brand Ambassadors,” and surveys of new employees who have completed their training periods have determined that it is highly effective. Employees regularly comment that they view mentors as close friends who have a lot of the answers and who are approachable when they are needed. Hyatt developed this mentorship program after soliciting feedback from new employees and looking at the level of development, performance, and involvement of new employees. A mentor also helps the employee feel welcomed, and will work with the employee to help him or her develop into a productive asset for the company. Mentoring is also highly beneficial to the mentor as it sharpens the skills and knowledge of the mentor, and improves relations and cooperation among veterans and “rookies” (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012; Yohn, 2016).

### **Use of Technology**

Our digital and technologically-advanced work settings afford us many enhanced opportunities and methods for performing certain tasks better and faster. Very creative and progressive companies can enhance new employee orientation greatly through the use of technology. Much effective instruction today makes use of the plethora of interesting and entertaining media available, such as via YouTube. Many companies are utilizing digital resources to create virtual classrooms. In fact, pre-boarding of employees can benefit greatly through virtual distance education methods.

Mass (2014) discusses Adobe’s efforts to establish “New Employee Success,” a 100% digital orientation training program. The company implemented the program in order to deliver an exceptional, timely, and relevant orientation experience to launch new employees toward success. A fundamental piece of this was to pick a methodology that could facilitate a “multichannel” approach to learning and create personal connections. After an extensive pre-boarding and early tenure orientation, additional orientation “lessons” are delivered weekly and each lesson is designed to be timely and relevant. The sessions are two hours long, and two broadcast hosts are used to keep the energy high. New hires are given multiple opportunities throughout each lesson to engage with the hosts. This feature helps balance the needs of the individual while also accommodating the larger audiences of new hires. Using the same digital environment each week allows for the uploading of new or refreshed media to be quickly interwoven into the design. The digital method also allows company leaders to prerecord welcome videos or to host a Skype session if they are unable to attend live every week. Other key features of the digital orientation program are discussion pods for open questions, insight pods to share learning experiences, discussion boards, word clouds, screen sharing, additional videos for learning or simply for entertainment, and opinion polls.

### **Self-assessment of Fit**

Zappos takes an unusual approach at the end of their orientation program by offering new hires thousands of dollars to quit if they feel that they are not a good fit for the organization. Only one percent of trainees have taken the generous offer. Zappos has hundreds of employees but experiences extremely low turnover (Bauer and Erdogan, 2010). Many other companies have employees work for a “probationary period” where the employee and employer both are given a fair amount of time for assessing true fit.

Person-organization fit and person-job fit are critical to success. It certainly is not easy to accurately assess an individual's fit with a job or environment through the perusal of a resume or even in an interview. Many times, true fit can only be determined over time through regular interaction, but suffice it to say that much of this assessment occurs very early in the employment period (Acevedo and Yancey, 2011; Allen and Meyer, 1990). It is common for an employee to decide either that they really don't want the job or that they will have difficulty working with a manager or one or more colleagues. As Cable and colleagues (2012; 2013) point out, the early employment period is critical for the employee to assess how the new work environment empowers them for personal expression and achievement. Having a mechanism to amicably end the employment relationship provides a means to end the process before either side gets so heavily invested that it becomes very difficult to bow out of the relationship. The main point, however, is that focus is placed on the employee and how they are able to contribute to the organization and its purposes.

The eight ideas presented above are by no means radical ideas, but are rather simple improvements on existing processes that could be implemented with reasonable investment of time and expense. Most of what has been discussed requires only a different, opportunistic mindset while offering real benefits to the employee and company alike.

### **Benefits of Improved Orientation Programs**

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to achieving a dynamic and effective orientation program is the "we've-always-done-it-this-way" mentality, which inhibits new ideas and innovative changes. Orientations have traditionally been about the company and how to get the new employee "plugged in" to the existing organization. For example, the ingrained mentality that the company must use critical orientation time for going over work rules, pay and benefits, and various procedures will certainly impede the company from implementing a dynamic, informative, and inspiring orientation. Taking orientation seriously and taking a slightly different perspective on how critical the orientation is can bring about radical changes in the organization that produce tangible benefits in terms of employee recruitment, retention, performance, and especially inspiration and motivation (Cable, et. al., 2013).

### **Improved Employee Recruitment**

The cost of training employees is very high, so it is vitally important for companies to find high-quality candidates and sell them on why they should come onboard and invest their future with them. Recruitment doesn't stop once the hire has been made. A progressive company with an inspiring and highly motivational orientation program quickly assimilates the new hire and engenders buy-in and confirmation from the new employee (Klein and Weaver, 2000). Not only does this lock in and better deploy the new employees, but it also creates very positive perception among potential employees and other stakeholders in the external environment (Fan and Wanous, 2008).

It is important that the new employees are not overwhelmed with the assimilation process, that they are not lacking proper support resources, and that they do not get overly stressed with their new job tasks. If an employee feels that any of these elements are lacking, the employee might look to make a move for a company that's more stable and is perceived to do a better job in providing these elements. On the other hand, a company that has a progressive, efficient, and effective orientation can use it as a strategic recruiting tool. The company has the

opportunity to assure potential new hires that they should be able to get to a productive state faster at this place than they could with other potential employers (Mohd, et al., 2016). Reaching this level of efficiency faster and being able to qualify for bonuses and rewards faster can be used as a recruiting inducement.

### **Improved Employee Retention**

It is critical that organizations not only recruit well to get the best possible people, but they also keep these outstanding people once they are on board. An employee who is frustrated with achievement and developmental opportunities or who feels less than fully appreciated is probably less likely to fully engage and eventually may withdraw and even move on elsewhere (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012). Harris (2014) talks about the challenges faced by India-based Lupin Ltd., a pharmaceutical company, which had experienced rapid growth, but had also experienced struggles in terms of keeping quality people. The company had grown at a phenomenal clip, but had experienced a “constant churn” with its frontline executives and entry-level staff. A newly developed, more progressive orientation program served to reduce turnover by half. Likewise, Cable, et. al. (2013) studied orientation programs in India and found that traditional focus on the specifics of the company was associated with higher turnover, while progressive focus on the personal development and individual expression opportunities of the new employee was associated with much improved retention and other outcomes.

Bauer (2010) reported that new employees at Corning Glass Works who took part in a well-structured new employee orientation program were found to be 69 percent more likely to remain at a company up to three years (when compared to statistics before the new orientation). Research further indicates that when the on-boarding/orientation process is carried out correctly, the result is higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career effectiveness, and lower turnover and stress (Bauer, 2010; Cirilo and Kleiner, 2003; Riordan, et. al., 2001).

### **Other Benefits**

It could be argued that learning “the way we do things around here” (the company’s culture) is the most difficult part of a new employee’s transition into a new job, and yet it could be the most important piece in terms of getting that employee fully functional and keeping that employee long-term (Chapman, 2009; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). When orientation programs are designed in a way that employees get the critical pieces of that corporate culture, and include components that additionally allow the employee to begin to learn the departmental culture, the employee feels comfortable faster in terms of knowing how to do things and where to go for assistance (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012). When new employees have that security of success through support, it provides the foundation for them to begin taking on the responsibilities of the job in ways that reduce the load of coworkers, improving the team’s productivity, and lowering the stress of all (Klein and Weaver, 2000).

Evidence suggests that effective on-boarding and orientation can lead to such beneficial outcomes as improved productivity, better customer service, positive self-esteem, and improved employee retention rates (Acevedo and Yancey, 2011; Sullivan, 2015; Yohn, 2016). Effective onboarding can also help employees concentrate on their individual career development, which ultimately helps to achieve organizational short and long run objectives (Karim, Huda, & Khan, 2012). Managers play a significant role in this process, and need to provide meaningful discussion and reflective work experiences. Meeting with employees would also help to show concern for them, provide basis for decision making, and create loyalty (Chen, 2010).

## **Overall Analysis and Conclusion**

Orientation can create many positive outcomes for both the company and the employee, and it doesn't have to take a huge investment or effort to produce those outcomes. We believe HR professionals and senior management should view orientation as a great opportunity to shape the culture and workforce. A quick analysis from the perspectives of both the company and the employee could underscore the necessity of rethinking how we do this important task.

### **Analysis from a Company Perspective**

From a company perspective, implementation of new orientation training programs dedicated to reducing employee turnover and enhancing the employee's enthusiastic contribution and career can be a great and invaluable benefit, but costs must also be considered. One of the primary goals of any training and orientation program has to be to find more cost-effective ways to achieve outstanding results (Bharthvajan, 2014). An effective new employee orientation program that is within a realistic budget can pay off tremendously for companies, especially in a competitive recruiting environment. A good orientation must be aligned with the company culture, employee needs, and values. Even the best intended orientation methods may simply not work for some companies and their workers. For example, it may not be wise to have a 100% digital orientation process for a manufacturing company or for an older or less-educated workforce that might not respond well to digital media. For a high-tech company, a first-rate and dazzling digital orientation would seemingly be a must. For employers, well-executed orientation programs should inspire new hires, reduce employee turnover, instill company values, define responsibilities, and increase profits (Klein and Weaver, 2000; Wanous, 1993).

### **Analysis from an Employee Perspective**

From an employee perspective, it's important that the orientation program delivers in terms of the employee defining and investing in their personal role, and provides ways to enhance personal growth in a welcoming environment. The stress of a new job is usually high, and bombarding new hires with information or expecting them to learn all there is to learn about doing their job in a few days' time is a highly unrealistic expectation. Orientation programs shouldn't just let the employee know what is expected and show them how to do things (and not do things); the programs should provide guidance and direction for the employee, and should build a framework for fostering continuous, disciplined growth within the company (Fan and Wanous, 2008).

For the employee, the optimal orientation programs should create a feeling that they are highly valued individually, and will be given the necessary tools and space to flourish in their new careers. Finding the right mix that fits both the needs of the employee and the needs of the company is the key to establishing a successful employee orientation program that will allow companies to compete for and retain high-quality employees.

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