

Introduction

Onboarding new employees is always a challenge. Everyone has a learning curve—a gradual progression from initial level of understanding to mastery of a new role. Succeeding in a new workplace requires that this learning process culminate with the worker producing the level of results required by the new organization. Succeeding from the perspective of the organization also requires that the process be rapid and the errors made along the way be minimized. How do you enable a new worker to rapidly integrate within your workplace with the least waste of their personal and your organizational resources?

Background Knowledge

People's performance is a function of their personal capabilities (capacity, motivation, and competencies), the task they must accomplish, and the support the setting provides them. To enable people to rapidly integrate within your organization, you first must define what task you expect them to do. Once the task is defined, you must understand the support they need to succeed at it efficiently. Next, you need to assess the degree to which you supply that support. Finally, you need to correct your deficiencies, if any, so that new employees can succeed reliably and efficiently.

The Task

The task of integration has five different but related challenges. Each new worker must:

1. learn about his/her new organization;
2. align with its purpose, vision, and core values;
3. understand his/her role;
4. perform that role effectively; and
5. work cooperatively with others.

The Support the Work Setting Should Provide

Given the task you expect new workers to perform, there is an obvious set of resources they require to succeed efficiently. The absence of these resources makes integration and the satisfying of your expectations more difficult to accomplish and froth with waste. It leaves every new worker either trying to fill the gaps on his/her own or to perform their jobs without the assistance of these critical resources.

First and foremost, the new worker needs to understand the expectations he or she must satisfy—namely, to successfully meet the five challenges listed above. This may seem obvious and therefore unworthy of statement—but *it is not*. A written statement that makes clear to new workers these five challenges should be included with the welcoming materials sent to new hires. Such an explicit statement sets the focus for their orientation efforts and confirms in their minds what it is that you hold important. They do not

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need to extract it from observations, infer it from what is said to them during their hiring process, or create it from multiple perspectives shared by people they encounter in the workplace. The remaining elements of support are described in association with the challenge each enables new workers to satisfy.

Challenge 1 - Learn About His/Her New Organization

Workers need to have a written description of their new organization.¹ It should explain what its purpose, vision, and core values are; what outputs or outcomes it must provide to its parent organization; what the key performance indicators are that measure its success and the target for achievement set for each. They should understand how the organization is structured, how it is arranged physically, where key people are located, and to whom they report. These are simple information elements that you need to properly manage the organization so they do not constitute any additional demand. Together, they might amount to a half dozen pages of materials plus perhaps a telephone directory. If your organization has a home page on the business's intranet site, the workers should be informed about this and provided access to it as well.

Challenge 2 - Align With Its Purpose, Vision, and Core Values

Alignment means each performer is pointed in the right direction. Each worker manages his/her performance in a manner that advances the organization's success and complies with its core values. The support provided workers for Challenge 1 enables them to succeed in aligning their performance to the organization's direction. Also helpful, however, is a setting where alignment by the current workforce—especially managers and supervisors—exists. To the extent that the organization's current personnel are aligned, they will demonstrate that behavior and reinforce its emergence in new workers. In contrast, to the extent people do their jobs as they see fit or work units focus on their tasks and operate without adequate coordination or communication with each other, new workers will be confused by what they see. They are also likely to encounter resistance to their efforts to be aligned.

Challenge 3 - Understand His/Her Role

Every worker needs a written job description that clearly states the function of his/her role, assigned tasks, expected outputs or outcomes, what authority and resources will be provided the employee, to whom the worker reports, and with whom he/she must coordinate work. A job description is essentially a personal work standard. It is every employee's basic guide for contributing in the workplace. Yet, many employees have none or they have some outdated, generic statement that offers little guidance.

In addition to a personal job description, new workers need access to the work process standards for those processes they implement.² If work standards do not exist, you need

¹ If the organization the new employee is entering is a subcomponent of a business, then the new hire needs similar information about the business itself. The new employee must understand both the parent entity he/she is serving as well as the host organization within which he/she is working.

² A work process standard documents the procedure a company has formally established as the correct way to execute a process.

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to produce them. They are essential to a well managed organization. Without work standards, new employees must discover by observation and conversation how you wish a process implemented. In addition, where there are no work standards, different employees will implement the same named process differently. This makes coordination among workers in the same process more difficult to achieve. It makes coordination between workers in interrelated processes almost impossible. For coordination to happen in such a setting, each worker must take the initiative in understanding how every other worker operates so he or she can define how to coordinate. This discovery and definition of individualized coordination requirements by every employee for every other employee is both wasteful and a perfect formula for repeated errors.

Challenge 4 - Perform That Role Effectively

Besides a description of the content of their work, employees need to know how their performance will be measured, what level of achievement on each measure defines success, and how they can detect where they stand on each measure. Who can perform any role effectively when they have no means for guiding their choices, detecting problems, or knowing whether the adjustments they make are working? If they must divine this from the looks and nods of their supervisors, getting to expected performance will take much more time and many more errors will be made along the way. Even where supervisors provide regular, accurate, and concrete verbal feedback, employees remain dependent on that feedback and cannot detect and correct performance problems on their own. You waste their capabilities to think and manage their own performance.

Workers also require that the organization define their roles rationally. One simple test for the rationality of a role as defined is whether most people with the skills required for the job and a reasonable desire to succeed could do the job successfully. Use the performance of current and past new hires as your reference. Look inside the jobs that have proven difficult to master at the level required by the organization. If your findings are similar to ours, you will see many jobs that are poorly designed. You will uncover that some jobs include tasks that compete with each other for time so that neither can be done on-time reliably. Others jobs may expect the person to produce outcomes but deny him or her the authority and resources needed to make that output happen as expected. Or, a job may have split reporting relationships so that the person must satisfy two different bosses, each of whom has different priorities and may not even care about what the other boss is demanding.

Finally, employees need the technical training necessary to perform their work at least for those skills you did not select them as already having. Implicit in the employment contract is the promise to train the new hire in these skills. Fail to follow through on this promise and you relegate them to trial and error methods of learning. Trial and error does lead to mastery—but the process is much longer than systematic training and generates many additional errors.

Challenge 5 - Work Cooperatively With Others

Working cooperatively is *only* possible when the people with whom you are to cooperate have the same purpose as you and can make decisions rationally in pursuing that purpose. This means that your existing workers must be aligned to the organization's purposes and make satisfying that purpose the highest priority value in their decision-making. It means that they will decide issues based on gathering and weighing information about alternatives rather than based on their personal preferences or habitual practice. Meeting the requirements for Challenge 2 should account for the alignment needs. Especially critical is the alignment of the existing workforce. Additionally, all current employees (from management down) must possess and use two sets of skills—working with others skills (see *Working With Others Training Program*) and information-based decision-making skills. The working with others skills are clarifying and confirming, which enable a worker to build an accurate picture of what another person is sharing, and constructive criticism and hitchhiking, which allow that worker to add his or her ideas in a way that builds better solutions while maintaining positive relationships. The absence of these skills hampers communication and results in misunderstanding and poor coordination. The essential information-based decision-making skills are specifying the decision's goal, generating alternatives, defining decision criteria, evaluating alternatives against criteria, and concluding which alternative to choose.

How Ready Is Your Organization to Integrate New Employees Efficiently?

Use the assessment inventory presented in Exhibit 1 to evaluate how well your organization enables new workers to succeed. The lower the score, the more likely new employees will fail. Even when new employees succeed, the lower the score, the more waste will consume their personal efforts and the organization's resources. Also, while a worker may overcome your organization's deficiencies—the extra effort they apply to integrate will not be available to do value-adding work. Since the support required from your organization is easy to supply and the benefits it generates for the organization are wide-ranging and long lasting, it is advisable to put in place any missing elements. This way, you make it likely that the average new worker succeeds and ensure that you minimize waste and maximize the value-adding contribution of every new employee.

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Exhibit 1. Inventory for Assessing a Business's Readiness to Receive New Employees

Instructions:	Yes	No
Using verifiable facts, indicate whether your organization satisfies each statement below by checking either the "Yes" or "No" box. Any item checked "No" requires correction.		
1. Written welcoming materials list the five challenges each new employee must accomplish (see page 1 for list of the five challenges).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. A written description of the organization's current purpose, vision, and core values is provided to each new employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. A written description of the outputs or outcomes the organization must deliver to the business is provided to each new employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. A written description of the organization's key performance indicators that measure the organization's success and the target for each is provided to each new employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. An organizational chart is provided to each new employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. A telephone directory listing the name, contact number, and office location of each person within the organization the employee must relate with is provided to each new employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. A written job description that satisfies each of the following requirements exists for every role a new employee will fill. <i>Requirements:</i> The description clearly states the role's function, assigned tasks, expected outputs or outcomes, authorities and resources, to whom the jobholder must report, and with whom the job incumbent must coordinate their work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The new workers is provided the work standard for each process he or she must implement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Each job has performance measures and each measure has a stated level of achievement that defines success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Most people with the required skills and reasonable desire to succeed could do the job as described successfully.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Training for skills needed to succeed in the job but not selected for when hiring is provided to new employees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Each new employee is trained in how to detect where they stand on each measure of performance for which they are accountable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Existing employees are knowledgeable of and aligned with the organization's function.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Existing employees are skilled in using information-based decision- making and apply it to make choices in their work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Existing employees use clarifying and confirming skills and hitchhiking and constructive criticism skills as they work with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>