# EVERYBODY GET ON BOARD!

# A case study of two perspectives on onboarding process

**Baojuan Huang**

**Kristi Tootmaa**

# Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to study the two perspectives on onboarding. On one side the perspectives of managers/HR professionals who conduct onboarding, and on the other the perspectives of new employees. The study aims to discover what aspects of onboarding play a critical role.

Theory: Onboarding, or organizational socialization, is a branch of socialization theory that seeks to explain the ways in which new employees acquire the skills, knowledge and dispositions required to become effective members of a workplace environment. Therefore, the authors primarily use organizational socialization theory.

Method: This thesis depended greatly upon primary data. 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including new employees, HR professionals, and managers of an automotive engineering company in Sweden. Hence, the thesis is considered as a qualitative research.

Result: Despite that the company has an onboarding plan, it is not thoroughly carried out by managers and HR professionals. The lack of cooperation, motivation and resources to fully implement the onboarding plan, caused frustration between HR professionals and managers. Therefore, a number of new employees experienced the onboarding as insufficient. Yet, new employees valued interpersonal connections, such as having a mentor for guidance and supportive colleagues.

# Foreword

This thesis is the final outcome of our master program called Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations. We are pleased that we were able to put our theoretical knowledge into use by conducting this research. Yet, this study would have not taken place without the case company and its employees, who agreed to participate in our research. Therefore, we would like to express our gratitude towards the individuals for sharing their opinions and experiences.

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# 1. Introduction

*This chapter of the paper provides the reader with a short introduction into onboarding, followed by a short description of the case company, the purpose, and then presenting the research questions. This chapter ends with a disposition of the paper.*

## 1.1.  Background

When new individuals join and enter a company, they often find themselves in a state of unfamiliarity and uncertainty. The uncertainty may stem from their new role and how well they will carry out their job in a new position. These individuals need to absorb knowledge in terms of the technical requirements of the job to become experts and effective in their work performance. In addition, it is not less significant to learn acceptable social behaviours and attitudes that are required in an effort to become a member of a company (Katz, 1980, as cited in Saks & Gruman, 2011). Therefore, an effective new employee organizational socialization, namely, onboarding process should be in place. Onboarding process is considered as one of the most significant tasks of hiring managers or human resources (HR) professionals. The purpose of onboarding is to transform new hires from being outsiders to organizational insiders (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012, p. 97).

Not only is onboarding useful for socializing new employees, but it also plays a role in achieving the long-term success of a team or company. Newcomer's productivity, and his/her acceleration of delivering results, as well as talent retention are greatly dependent on onboarding. Effective new employee onboarding leads to increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, lower turnover, higher performance levels, career effectiveness and lowered stress. Thus, an increasing number of organizations have implemented some sort of onboarding process (Aberdeen Group, 2006). Similarly, relationships play a central role in the socialization process, particularly for new employees in order to integrate into a new organization. The newcomers are not becoming insiders of organizations by their own, but together with the help of co-workers and managers. Social capital which is obtained from relationships is essential in socialization process (Korte & Lin, 2013).

As discussed above, onboarding has many positive outcomes. However, despite that HR professionals invest many hours in recruiting, hiring and enabling, yet, unexpectedly a

considerable number of newcomers still can leave the company within a period of months. Subsequently, leaving the HR professionals to question what went wrong (Krasman, 2015). Unfortunately, many companies are unsuccessful to manage onboarding effectively, therefore the new employees fail to become fully integrated members of an organization. It could be due to employers not viewing onboarding as a strategic aspect of their employee retention (Krasman, 2015; Erdogan, 2010). One of the main possible causes of withdrawal among organizational newcomers is poor socialization (Feldman, 1988; Fisher, 1986, as cited in Allen, 2006). Consequently, organizational turnover is often highest amongst new employees (Farber, 1994).

## 1.2. Case company

The investigated case study organization is located in Sweden. The company is well-known in the automotive industry, and during the last couple of years has experienced a rapid growth. The headcount of the company is roughly 300, where the majority of them are engineers. In the last year alone the company recruited over 35 new employees and are planning to hire 50 more in 2017.

The HR manager has received some complaints from both new employees and managers when it comes to their current onboarding process. Hence, the HR manager of this engineering company is not fully aware with regards to how onboarding process is carried out and how it is experienced. The study is crucial since the company has previously experienced high turnover rate. Meanwhile, it is significant to illuminate the fact that the competition for engineers with the right competence in Sweden is fierce. Therefore, keeping new employees satisfied from the beginning and consequently maintaining them is imperative.

## 1.3. Problem formulation

One may ask: do the first days and months of a new job really matter? Bauer et al. (1998, p. 150-151) have underlined some main reasons why early socialization plays a vital role for both the newcomer's individual, as well as organizational, success.

Firstly, poor socialization can lead to employee turnover which thereafter results in financial losses for the company. An increasing number of organizations devote substantial amounts of time and expenses towards recruiting and training new employees. However, if a newcomer

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leaves soon after early training, the company not only experiences little return on its investment but the company needs to initiate the recruitment and selection process all over again, which is costly. A greater understanding of socialization may avoid this situation and facilitate organizations to maintain employees, and consequently positively affect cost savings (Bauer et al., 1998, p. 150). The second reason is connected to the first one, namely, socialization is strongly associated to behaviours and attitudes of employees which may have a long-lasting impact. These attitudes may have an influence to determine whether the employee decides to quit or stay in the organization. Thus, an effective socialization process can show in productive and committed employees (Bauer, et al., 1998, p. 150). Thirdly, one cannot undermine socialization as the primary channel in which organizational culture is transferred and maintained. New employees comprehend and adopt the organization's fundamental values and norms through an effective socialization. Therefore, this process is significant to organizations since it ensures the steadiness of these norms and values. (Bauer, et al., 1998, p. 151). Therefore, to gain a better knowledge of what factors have a greater impact on new employee socialization and how managers work around socialization is of utmost importance, in order to ensure success in new employees and in the company's long-term goals.

## 1.4. Purpose

The purpose of the current study is to explore and understand how new employees experience their onboarding process. In an effort to gain a holistic understanding of the process, the perspectives of individuals who carry out onboarding process is a necessity for this paper. Therefore, managers and HR professionals are also included in this study. Hence, the paper opens up two frontiers with regards to the socialization process of onboarding – on one side the managers and HR professionals, who conduct the onboarding and on the other side the new hires who are to be transformed to organizational insiders.

## 1.5. Research questions

The research questions of this paper are accordingly:

- How do managers and HR professionals carry out onboarding process?
- How do new employees experience different aspects of onboarding process?

## 1.6. Disposition

This paper is structured in the following way. As seen above, the authors first present a description of background by providing general understanding of onboarding, problem formulation and a short overview of the case company, and purpose with research questions. The second chapter is focused on literature review, containing previous research and theories within onboarding notion, which provides a better grasp of the matters that are dealt with within the research. Thereafter, the theoretical framework is presented and the theories that are chosen for this specific study are reasoned. Chapter four lays out the methods that are used for data collection, and discusses other relevant factors when conducting a research.

Furthermore, the empirical findings of the research are collected, categorized and presented within the main themes in which perspectives of new employees, managers and HR professionals are listed. The findings are then analysed accordingly. Lastly, the paper ends up with a conclusion of the research, limitations and additional recommendations for future studies.

# 2. Literature review

*The following chapter of the paper includes relevant literature and previous research, while offering a greater insight to the topic.*

## 2.1. Turnover and engineers

Employee turnover is commonly used to refer to the loss of an employee and consequently as a negative index of organizational effectiveness. It is a concept that is often described by scholars as a result of dissatisfaction of the employee, with possible affecting factors of the work environment, while taking into account their job, co-workers or organization. Distinguishing the antecedent settings that lead to turnover is of high importance in order to comprehend and control it (Bigliardi, et al., 2005).

When discussing turnover in engineering, it is important to keep in mind that there are some unique elements that are specific for individuals in the engineering profession. As a matter of fact, engineers form a distinct occupational grouping since engineering does not fit the classic definition of a profession, namely there exist numerous elements of professionalism within the field. Engineers are characterized as individuals who have a strong desire for growth as well as personal development in comparison to professionals of other occupations. Because there are continuous changes in economic, social and technological condition, many managers are facing a major question. Specifically, how to retain engineering employees? (ibid).

The relationship between organizational and professional commitment for engineers may be integral aspect instead of conflicting or mutually exclusive as stated by Kerr et al. (1977). Engineers high on both factors are expected to stay in their profession, and are consequently more capable of work contributions. This implies that it is especially wise for companies to encourage their engineers to be organizationally committed, as well as professionally. Therefore, companies ought to have a process in place for encouraging and planning engineer's professional development. Thus, remove all obstacles for their sound integration within the company. Hence, the concept of organizational socialization might be a vital antecedent of turnover intention among engineers (Bigliardi, et al., 2005).

## 2.2. Onboarding process

The primary difference between socialization and onboarding is that onboarding is defined as a narrower term. Onboarding involves certain practices introduced by an organization or its agents to ease newcomer's adjustment to new roles (Wanberg, 2012). The onboarding process begins when the hiring decision is made and the candidate signs the contract, which then takes the new employee through the transition process. This process is long and can last several months or even up to one year (Gilmore & Turner, 2010; Chaneski, 2015), and includes both formal and informal steps that take place before, during and after the entry of the newcomer (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004).

The onboarding process is described as a complex strategy which includes employee preparation, orientation, engagement, and follow-up (e.g. evaluation), that includes open communication regarding expectations in order to be effective (Mellinger, 2013), that aids new employees to become integrated members of their new organization. During onboarding newcomers obtain new knowledge, skills, as well as behaviour they need in order to succeed and be productive in their employment (Krasman, 2015). Organizational learning is absolutely necessary in terms of improving performance. Learning is a process, that is in most cases relational in the sense of depending on interactions between people to determine what needs improving and how to do it (Carmeli, et al., 2009). Bauer & Erdogan (2012, as cited in Wanberg, 2012) argue that although organizational socialization tactics have been one of the most deeply studied constructs in the organizational socialization literature, however, what is truly done with regards to onboarding strategy and implementation has been one of the least studied parts of socialization.

Furthermore, there is a strong connection between early experience and organizational socialization outcome (Filstad, 2004). It is significant to note that different onboarding can lead to different end result when it comes to satisfaction, commitment, turnover and performance (Bauer and Erdogan, 2010). Therefore, all organizations should strive for an effective onboarding. All in all, a successful onboarding sets a foundation for happy and engaged employees (Krasman, 2015), which greatly enhances talent retention (Vonnegut & Bradt, 2009, p. 6, Klein & Polin, 2012, p. 275). However, Klein & Polin (2012) state in their study that the academic literature has not thoroughly studied the effectiveness of different onboarding practices, as well as the extent to which organizations carefully evaluate those practices is still

ambiguous. They mean that there exists a significant lack of information about the actual onboarding activities that are being exercised in today's organizations and the extent to which those activities are meeting their anticipated goal of facilitating the organizational socialization of new employees.

## 2.3.  Principles for effective onboarding

Having an effective onboarding process is a necessity, and should be considered as a methodical and long-term strategy (Ferrazzi & Davis, 2015). Yet, many managers struggle to know how an onboarding process should be carried out (Krasman, 2015). Bauer (2010) explains that best practices for onboarding consist of applying the basic paperwork prior to the first day, making the first day on the job feel special to the new employee, organising formal orientation programs, developing a written plan for onboarding, making sure onboarding is participatory, managing the program consistently, monitoring onboarding process over time, utilizing technology to support facilitate the process, involving stakeholders, and having well-defined objectives, timelines, roles, and responsibilities (Bauer, 2010, as cited in Bauer & Erdogan, 2012, p. 99).

Krasman (2015) concluded that an effective onboarding needs to include these following four aspects:

**Strategic**. Onboarding should not be another extra step in the HR professional daily work, but it should be a strategic resource for the organization. When it is reinforced by sufficient planning and is integrated into the organization's larger business strategy, the onboarding process has the potential to function as support for organizational growth.

**Comprehensive**. Onboarding needs to be complete and carried out continuously throughout the first stages of newcomer's new employment. The more the managers invest in onboarding, the larger its return for the company.

**Consistent**. Onboarding must be consistently used to socialize every single new hire. Similarly, the level of attention needs to be maintained throughout the process, thus making certain that onboarding produces the greatest benefits to the company and its employees.

**Measured**. Onboarding needs to be monitored, evaluated, and measured frequently, with an aim towards constant improvement. By asking feedback from newcomers and establishing quantitative measurement, managers can evaluate the impact of the onboarding process and enhance its success over time.

## 2.4.   Bauer's Four Cs

Bauer (2010, 2015) has identified the Four Cs as the core aspects of onboarding, which specifically are: compliance, clarification, culture and connection.

**Compliance** signifies the basics of the job, e.g. tax forms, employment paperwork, badges, e-mail accounts, computers, and workstations that are necessary for a particular job. It also refers to teaching rules and regulations related to different policies. Organizations that have established effective compliance practices have been able to advance the routine aspects of new employee onboarding in terms of facilitating the whole process.

**Clarification** refers to the details and context of an individual's job, together with an understanding of the related expectations, work requirements, the norms for completing tasks, and how different things are defined internally and externally. The newcomers become increasingly productive, the sooner they gain a better understanding of their new job.

**Culture** refers to familiarizing with the new organizational formal and informal culture, which is unique to every single organization. Much as people have their own distinctive personalities, patterns, and expectations, so do organizations. New employees need to quickly learn and understand the overall culture of as well as the subcultures, in an effort to enhance their chances for a long-term success.

**Connection** is important for developing interpersonal relationships, support mechanisms, and information networks that newcomers need to create upon entering a new organization.

All four Cs are crucial, except some are more likely to create positive results. Organizations that successfully coordinate these four aspects of onboarding receive positive new employee outcomes, for instance, consistently increasing job satisfaction, increased productivity, and lower turnover compared to organizations that are unable to deliver across these four onboarding aspects (Bauer, 2015).

Essentially, the onboarding process calls for to be documented and repeatable. Creating unnecessary new onboarding practices every time a new employee joins the company merely puts the HR and business goals at stake, which could otherwise be potentially achieved with a well-developed onboarding process (Bauer, 2015).

## 2.5. Onboarding socialisation tactics

Allen (2006) discussed in his study that socialization tactics are for companies or organizations to facilitate new employee adjusting to the early entry experience and to reduce uncertainty and anxiety, and obtain knowledge and unwritten rules. Socialization scholars have proposed that socialization tactics can possibly have impact on turnover through three primary mechanisms: by influencing vital turnover antecedents such as met expectations, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (ibid.).

### 2.5.1. Met expectations

Gilmore & Turner (2010) state in their paper that one of the tasks of good human resource responsibilities is to carefully select new employees for their organization. Providing a clear job description that describe the duties, working conditions, and responsibilities. Clarity in job description defines what the company expects and what type of individual characteristics are needed to be effective.

Buckley, et al. (1998) state in their study that during a recruitment process the new employee creates pre-entry expectations that are found to be positively associated to employee's job satisfaction. In order to get as many qualified employees as possible, organizations usually put a lot of effort into attracting job candidates with a number of positive benefits and ignore the negative characteristics of the job. Therefore, it may cause the improper expectation for new employees (Buckley, et al. 1998). Louis (1980) states in her study that unrealistic and unmet expectation can lead to turnover. While unmet expectation may be an unavoidable process, it refers to the imbalance between new employee's expectations and the real job experience. Realistic job preview during the recruitment is one way to meet new employee's expectations in their job (Wanous, et al. 1992; Filstad, 2004). According to Miller & Jablin (1991), one of the main purposes of information-offering is to clarify newcomers' roles in the organizations, and decrease uncertainty, role ambiguity and role conflict. Buckley, et al. also (1998) state that the application of realistic job preview can offer an unprejudiced description of the new employment situation, thus lower the unrealistic job expectations and consequently increase job satisfaction.

### 2.5.2. Job satisfaction

A publication by Bauer & Erdogan (2012) discusses that feeling of acceptance by other employees, insiders (or the social dimension of social tactics) is greatly related to distal measures of socialization, in terms of job satisfaction. Louis, et al. (1983) found in their quantitative study that the helpfulness of different socialization practices as described by new employees seem to influence their feelings of subsequent job satisfaction. Namely, they found in their study that interactions with peers was available to more respondents than any other support, and was considerably correlated with job satisfaction, commitment as well as tenure intention.

Additionally, it is found that in order to increase job satisfaction, the managers need to provide a clear role description which is a significant predictor of distal socialization outcomes. Furthermore, research has revealed that new employees who comprehend organizational politics, understand the goals and values of a company and pick up the language exclusive to the organization, will have higher levels of satisfaction (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012).

### 2.5.3. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment usually refers to members' psychological conditions to the organization. Meyer and Allen (1991, p. 62) argue that organizational commitment can be extendedly connected to the "desire, need, and/or obligation to maintain membership" in an organization, and three different components are included in it. These are: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. To be specific, affective commitment links to employee's emotional need to stay in the organization, continuance commitment refers to awareness of the cost if leaving the organization, and normative commitment means that employees' feeling of responsibility to stay in the organization. When any one of the three components increase, the possibility for turnover decreases. Therefore, it is advisable to improve new employees' organizational commitment in the early stage to increase the retention rate (ibid).

How to increase organizational commitment during onboarding? Ostroff & Kozlowski (1992) found that new employees who can enhance the amount of information obtained from managers or increase their learning about their task, will be more committed and adjusted. Also, relationships play a central role during onboarding. In Morrison's (2002) study it is suggested

that newcomer's social assimilation will be supported by solid, dense friendship connections. Namely, by passing on support, identity, and acceptance, friendship networks consisting of strong and interconnected bonds will ease the development of social integration and organizational commitment.

## 2.6.   Roles and responsibilities

A collaboration, cooperation and coordination between the recruiting lead, the human resource generalist, and the hiring manager is a must in order to avoid early failures that often are not apparent early on (Bradt & Vonnegut, 2009, p. 5-6). This suggests that all parties involved in onboarding bear responsibilities. It is essential that business leaders understand the importance of effective integration of new employees. It is a major factor to ensure success of their business (Bauer, 2010). Although several stakeholders are engaged in the onboarding process, the main participants are the new employee, the hiring manager and the HR department (Snell, 2006).

Comprehending who is responsible for the onboarding process and who controls different steps in the process is imperative to onboarding's success and sustainability. One of the first things that HR managers should consider is whether their company is facilitated the greatest by informal or formal onboarding. Informal onboarding indicates the process by which a newcomer acquires knowledge about his or her new job without an explicit plan. In contrary, formal onboarding refers to written fixed and organized guidelines and procedures that help an employee in adjusting to his/her new job with regards to both responsibilities and socialization. Bauer (2010) states that the companies that follow a step-by-step guideline, a plan, are more successful in terms of conveying information of roles, norms and values amongst others. While some onboarding programs may include traditional orientation matters such as payroll signup and parking details, it ought to focus greatly on sharing information with regards to organizational structure, culture, and how things get done (Ross, et al. 2014).

Often the hiring manager is to manage every new employee's onboarding process all the way. Previous research in leader-member relationships has shown that high-quality relationships between the leader and employees help to develop the psychological safety of employees with regards to emotional closeness, which then empowers employees to engage in the process of learning (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). Therefore, managers should provide individuals with support according to the onboarding plan and place importance on it. The hiring manager should

take primary responsibility for the onboarding plan's implementation and coordination across people and functions during the recruitment (Bradt & Vonnegut, 2009, p. 7). Merely developing a formal plan will not benefit new employees nor the business (Bauer, 2010) if it is not followed through. HR manager is expected to help hiring manager throughout the process (Bradt & Vonnegut, 2009, p. 7).

Managers assign a mentor/buddy for the new employee for everyday questions and help to ease new employee's navigation in the environment. Also, mentoring facilitates interactions amongst newcomers and others in work groups. (Snell, 2006; Carter, 2015). Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) found in their study that mentors are most influential for facilitating new hires learning about organizational domain relative to other content domains.

On the first day, the manager should take the new employee on tour and introduce them to the team. A personal introduction goes a long way in terms of gaining understanding of how different departments interact with one another. In addition, the hiring manager needs to communicate expectations clearly and check-in frequently with the new employee. It is essential to keep track on the new employee's progress. Therefore, it is recommended to schedule progress meetings on the new employee's start date for the near future to discuss their progress, areas for opportunity as well as provide support (Carter, 2015). Ellis, et al. (2017) state in their study that there exist studies that have mainly focused on the new employees' experience, while putting aside the perspectives of managers during socialization which is a quite unexplored topic. They suggest that more studies should be conducted on the managers' perspective.

It is also important to highlight that it has been found that the inclusion of manager's behaviour is a crucial aspect for newcomer's socialization process. Managers' behaviours verified specificity in their relationships to accommodation. It is highly likely that early in the relationship, manager behaviours have their strongest effect on newcomer learning and adjustment, and consequently having an indirect effect on performance (Bauer & Green, 1998). In short, hiring managers are the ones that matter the most for new employees (Bauer, 2013).

An important factor of new employee organizational socialization success or failure is tightly connected to organizational insiders, such as co-workers, because socialization does not take place by itself. Research on relationships with co-workers, leaders, and mentor has revealed

that they are imperative when it comes to adjustment and socialization outcomes (Ellis, et al., 2014, p. 308). It was also confirmed in the study by Korte, et al. (2015), where they found that new hires tend to look to their colleagues for guidance but also learning how to do the work that was expected of them.

The objective of onboarding is to engage important parties and newcomers in interactions that assist them to understand each other and how they interact over time. Worked in combination with human resource management's best practices, effective onboarding will lead to faster learning, enhanced communication, and a more productive and engaged employees (Bauer, 2010).

# 3. Theory

*In this chapter, the authors are presenting the theories that are used for data analysis in this research.*

## 3.1. Organizational socialization

Onboarding, or organizational socialization, is a branch of socialization theory that seeks to explain the ways in which new employees acquire the skills, knowledge and dispositions required to become effective members of a workplace environment. It is described by scholars that organizational socialization is a joint process, including an organization that is aiming to influence and form its members, and employees who are trying to outline an adequate role for him or herself within the company (Bauer et al., 1998; Wanberg, 2012).

Most organizational socialization models outline three phases of socialization. Firstly, the anticipatory socialisation stage describes different expectations that a newcomer has with regards to the job/organization before starting work. The challenge in this stage is to develop expectations that are realistic for their future role (Solinger, et al., 2013). Secondly, the accommodation stage is the heart of socialization and includes learning, sense making, and adjustment. In other words, the new employee at this phase has arrived in the organization and he/she needs to speed up the adjustment to new role expectations and functional requirements. The primary challenge in this stage is to attain the right information on the group, job, role, and organization (Ostroff & Kowalski, 1992). During the third and final phase, the new employee is believed to acquire a set of desired behaviours, attitudes, and values expected of him/her in the new organization (Schein 2004, Weiss 1978, as cited in Solinger, et al. 2013).

As individuals either start new jobs or join new organizations across a lifelong career, the stages are re-experienced, with new lessons interpreted with the benefit of knowledge from previous socializations. In addition, employees are changing employments more often now, and join new organizations. Therefore, socialization makes a difference just as much to individuals as it does to firms. A successful organizational socialization process can lead to effective employees with positive work attitudes who remain with an organization for a longer period of time (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011, p. 51). Even though socialization takes place every time an employee either

changes roles or moves within an organization, the main focus is on socialization when an individual first joins the company (Bauer, et al., 1998).

## 3.2. "Best practice" and "best fit"

In addition, "best practice" and "best fit" theories can also be used in this paper as the theoretical fundament to discuss the case company's current onboarding plan. Boxall and Purcell (2011) distinguish the primary difference between these two strategies. Namely, "best practice" refers to universalism that ignores the context and assumes that there exists a best way to apply HR practices to the organizations. It describes that all organizations will see improvements in performance if they identify and implement "best practices" (Boxall & Purcell, 2011, 85). In contrary, "best fit" emphasizes that there is no universal fit, meaning that practices should adapt to the special context (Boxall & Purcell, 2011, 63). "Best fit" theory has many supporters and is described as an analytical model that benefits managers to recognise options and make choices in their own environments and take advantage of different circumstance (Boxall & Purcell, 2011, 71, 85). Abundance of descriptive studies on organization's activities, show that "best fit" tends to be more beneficial for them. For the reason that methods of labour management are unavoidably affected by the context, taking into account variety of economic and socio-political influences, "it shows that there are very good reasons for adaption" (Boxall & Purcell, 2011, 94).

The researchers of this study intend to analyse whether the case company's current onboarding processes benefit the most from "best practice" or "best fit".

# 4. Method

*This section gives the reader an overview of different methods that are used in this study.*

When designing a research, it is essential to make adequate choices with regards to the research methods that are used. The selection of a suitable research method is significant to the success of any research project, thus must be driven by the research question and the state of knowledge in the topic being studied (Moody, 2002).

## 4.1.     Case study

In this research, the case study is utilized as a way of describing how new engineering employees experience the socialization process of onboarding and how managers and HR professionals carry out onboarding practices. The case study is a research strategy where the central point is on understanding the dynamics present within particular settings (Eisenhardt, 1989). It considers a current phenomenon (the "case") in its real-world context particularly when the restrictions between phenomenon and context may not be entirely clear. The case study is the preferred method in comparison to other methods, especially in situations where the research question is either "how" or "why" (Yin, 2014). Case studies are a useful way to study on organizations and institutions (Hakim, 2000, p. 68).

On the other hand, case studies have been criticized because the results cannot be generalized. Bryman (2008, p.76) points out that case studies can offer an ability to have aspects understood for other cases. In addition, case studies provide a number of advantages. For instance, the data examination is often carried out within the setting of its use, specifically, within the situation in which activity occurs. Also, detailed qualitative explanation are often produced in case studies, that help to describe the complexities of existing situations that may not be attained through experimental or survey research (Zainal, 2007).

## 4.2.     Qualitative data

Often, researchers use either qualitative or quantitative research, or both. Since in this study the data collection is done via interviews to get the perspectives from both new employees and managers and HR, it means it is a qualitative study. Qualitative research is a research strategy that mainly focuses on words instead of quantification of data and analysis (Bryman, 2012, p.

380). It is proper to solve 'why' and 'how' research questions. Qualitative research allows the researcher to identify issues from participants' point of view, and understand their meanings and interpretations (Hennink, et al., 2011). It requires the researcher to perform in-depth investigation and obtain rich and detailed data on a small sized sample (Patton, 1991).

The authors have chosen a qualitative approach, for the reason that there exists a considerable amount of quantitative studies on onboarding. In addition, there exists a small number of literature that considers perspectives from both new employees, and managers/HR professionals when it comes to onboarding.

### 4.2.1. Interview

The study includes data from 25 different face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The questions were developed with literature review in mind (see Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted in person and included new employees, managers and HR professionals of an engineering company. There is a great diversity among respondents, in terms of gender, age, nationality and professional background. The sample includes both men and women, the proportion of male participants is 68%. The age of participants varies from 20's to 40's.

Every single interview was carried out in English, which for most of the participants was not their native language. The authors made use of convenience sampling, namely, the authors had access to a list of new employees that were hired in 2016. Furthermore, the researchers had an overview of managers and HR professionals through an organizational matrix, through which the researchers found contact with them.

All the new employees included in this study are by profession engineers and have been in their position for a minimum of three months and no longer than one year, in an effort to collect the most accurate observations and experiences from their onboarding process. The criteria for managers and HR professionals was that they are familiar with onboarding and regularly carry out onboarding process.

The interviewers contacted participants through e-mail where the purpose of the interview was explained. All interviews were conducted in the company in a separate meeting room, except one interview, which took place in a public café as a request from the interviewee. In addition,

the pool of participants has disregarded consultants, students and other temporary workers, and focused only on new employees with permanent full-time employment contract.

The duration of each interview was on average 50 minutes and all the interviews were recorded with permission of interviewees. It is also important to notify that the identity of the company and all the participants is anonymised.

| Knowledge bearer | Kind of knowledge | Amount |
|---|---|---|
| New employees | Have an employment of minimum three months and maximum twelve months<br>Own experience of being recruited<br>Own experience of their onboarding process | 20 |
| Managers | Experience in recruitment and operational work with new employees<br>Experience in leadership<br>Experience in onboarding process | 3 |
| HR professionals | Experience in recruitment, selection and retention.<br>Experience in onboarding process | 2 |
| Total | | 25 |

### 4.2.2. Secondary data

Hakim (2000, p. 24) explains that "secondary analysis is any re-analysis of data collected by another researcher or organization, including the analysis of datasets collected from a variety of sources to create time series or area-based datasets". Namely, besides the interview as the channel for primary data, this research also utilizes secondary data. Before the start of this study, the researchers gained access to case company's internal data. The data included the standardized onboarding checklist, different PowerPoint presentations, and the employee surveys from the previous years.

## 4.3.　　　　Data analysis

The authors first studied different concepts of onboarding and then analysed the company's current onboarding plan, which aided to develop the interview questions for both new employees and the individuals who carry out onboarding. All interviews with new employees, managers and HR professionals were recorded, transcribed word by word and thereafter coded depending on different themes, meaning that the authors utilize thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data. It helps to organise and depict the data set in detail and interpret various important factors of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results of respondents are then compared and analysed with help of the principles of organizational socialization theory and onboarding.

## 4.4.　　　　Ethical considerations

When considering qualitative study, the communication between researchers and participants can be ethically challenging for the latter, since they are personally involved in diverse stages of the study. The challenges may be faced when dealing with anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, researchers' possible impact on the participants and so on. Hence, formulating explicit ethical guiding principles is crucial (Sanjari, et al., 2014).

The researchers of this paper carry out their case study in an engineering company, where they had signed a confidentiality agreement prior the research. Therefore, any information that does not concern the research topic or may be considered as sensitive is not made disclosed. The researchers contacted all the 25 participants through e-mail, where there they presented themselves, their research and how it is conducted. The contacted individuals were encouraged to ask additional questions in case something was unclear. It was also explained that all the interviews are recorded with the permission of the interviewee and they were allowed to withdraw at any point. Moreover, in the e-mail the researchers also stated the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

## 4.5.　　　　Credibility

The credibility criteria entail establishing that the outcome of qualitative research is credible or authentic from the perspective of the partaker in the research. Since from this viewpoint, the objective of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from

the interviewee's eyes. Therefore, participants are the only ones who can legitimately make judgement on the credibility of the results (Social Research Methods, 2006). In order to hold a high credibility of the study the authors maintain objectivity throughout all the interviews without influencing the opinion of the participant nor influencing the outcomes of the interviews. It is equally important that a researcher does not let him/herself be convinced to over-interpret findings in a certain direction. "Angled reports can cause a great deal of harm, irrespective of whether they have a commercial angle or are affected by the ambitions of a certain organization" (Gustafsson, et al., 2011, p. 39).

# 5. Result

*In the following section the collected data, derived from all the interviews with the new employees, managers and HR professionals, is presented.*

The authors could identify recurring responses from interviewees and categorized them as different themes. The findings are divided into sections - new employees, managers and HR professionals. This helps the reader to clearly distinguish different perspectives. If the opinions stated did not differ then the perceptions of new employees, managers and HR professionals were gathered in one section.

The authors present the findings in a logical order by starting how information of the vacant position is shared and obtained, and finishing with revealing whether the new employees of the company are intending to continue working in the company for a long term and what are the main driving factors for it.

## 5.1.            Job advertising

**Managers/HR professionals**

Managers and HR professionals advertise vacant or available job positions both through internal and external channels. For instance, one way for managers to deliver information is during internal meetings or through so called snowball strategy by which they ask existing employees to recommend someone (e.g. organizational outsider), who would qualify for a certain position. This method is encouraged by the company, meaning that the employee who recommends someone to the right position is rewarded with a monetary bonus. Besides, HR professionals internally inform all employees by email about the vacant positions, as well as upload information about open positions on an online SharePoint, which is accessible for everyone inside the company. They also advertise the positions on the company's website and other external recruitment platforms (e.g. LinkedIn, student career fairs).

**New employees**

When considering how new employees of this engineering company received information about the position they have now, the answers were mixed, but can be categorized into three different groups. The most common way to get information about the available position is through online

advertising, specifically through LinkedIn or the company's own website. Also, since many of the new employees have some previous experience with the company, such as having a temporary contract, being a thesis student or working in another department or subsidiary, they received information internally.

(new employee) *"I did my master thesis for [company's name] as well. So, the manager basically said, "do you want to work here?" and I said "yes"."*


Lastly, the third group consists of new employees who got into contact with the company representative through someone that is already an insider of this organization. The new employees mentioned a close relative, friend, or previous manager.

(new employee) *"My uncle works here and he gave me a notification that [manager's name] is looking for people for his team, so I applied."*

(new employee) *"I was approached by people who I know here because I used to travel a lot here before."*

## 5.2.  Role clarity

**New employees**

During the hiring process, most of the new employees had job interviews, most commonly one to three. However, for some individuals there were no interviews at all since they were already well-known by their manager. During these job interviews the candidate received a short presentation of the company, and a general job description of the job. In fact, the majority of the new employees stated that the job description given to them during the job interviews was far too vague. Only 30% of the respondents said that the job description was clear or somewhat clear. Interestingly thought, the individuals who were attracted to the company by an organizational insider said more commonly that the job description was clear. Subsequently, the new employees who did not receive a clear job description wished that it had been clarified. They stated that the most important information for new employees is about their work and the responsibilities it entails. Some new employees mentioned that they did not receive a role description even after entering the company.

 (new employee) *"If you don't know what your responsibilities are then it's much easier to… then it's much harder to say, "that's not my job actually". Because you need to have some kind of limits of how much you should do, otherwise it's easy to just "okay, do that and do that", then you have 150% of the job because you didn't know if it was your or someone else's [job]"*

(new employee) *"So the role was rather vague. It wasn't that well defined and of course sometimes it has been frustrating to not know exactly what your role is."*

**Managers/HR professionals**

Indeed, the hiring managers explained that they seldom give detailed job descriptions to candidates. The managers stated that often job description is hard to be given, since it highly depends on different teams and project requirements. The managers explained that the company grows quickly and gets more and more new projects. In order to draw in more applicants, the idea of broadly designed job ads is to attract more candidates. During the job interviews, the managers decide what position or project match the candidate's set of skills.

(manager) *"We need people, we need developers, so we have gone fairly broadly with our ads, we just said software developer, or system engineer or something, so we bring in the people and then we talk to them and look at their background"*

Another manager explained that they believe broad job description is a selling point of the company. The manager reasoned that the new employees have more opportunities to do different tasks rather than focusing on one role.

(manager) *"We tried to sell that this is the workplace where you can do a lot of things, and you can work with different things and have different roles"*

## 5.3.     Pre-entry expectations

**Managers/HR professionals**

The managers follow new employees through different steps during their recruitment and are available to any possible questions that new hires may have. The managers said to always be realistic about the expectations for new employees, meaning that they do not expect new employees to be effective until after a few months. They commonly contact the new employee after signing the contract and before his/her first day of the job, where they describe what the first day will look like etc. Also, often new employees are asked to write a short introduction of themselves that will be put on an online platform, called SharePoint, and is shared with all the organizational insiders.

(manager) *"I mean I am with the candidate all the way from the interviews when we meet the first time and give a good view of [company's name], what we are doing and so on, and most*

*often I'm the one that calls them and gives them the deal and we assign them. They come here and give them the contract and info that they may require"*

**New employees**

The majority of the respondents stated that they did not have pre-entry expectations. Regardless whether the new employee had some previous job experience or not, and whether they were attracted to the company through an insider or not. Having no pre-entry expectations was especially common among new employees who were are freshly out of university.

(new employee) *"My expectations? I did not have any to be honest, because I did not have much experience"*

(new employee) *"I didn't have a lot of expectations, I guess. My experience is from doing summer work and master thesis to some degree as well. I got a pretty good idea what people are doing."*

One of the new employees implied that unclear job description was the reason for not existing pre-entry expectation.

(new employee) *"Expectations? Not really, I think. I had a rough idea what kind of position they would put me in, I would be a developer but basically, I had no idea. I didn't know what project or anything. So no, not really much expectations.''*

Although some experienced new employees stated they did not have much expectations, a few experienced ones said that there are always some kind of expectations.

(new employee) *"You always have high expectations, I had that as well, especially since I had some other good [job] opportunities."*

The few who had pre-entry expectations for the company and their employment said that the expectations were met to some extent after the entry. Some new employees reasoned that their unmet expectations were caused by the project they found themselves in, which was not what they had expected.

(new employee)*'' I was expecting to have much more interesting project to work with, it is interesting but not what I really thought it is''*

In addition, there was some disappointment with regards to the organizational language, which was said to be English during the job interviews. However, since a large number of employees are Swedish, the main language used every day is Swedish. This fact caused unmet expectations after entering the company.

## 5.4. Early interactions (welcoming lunch)

**New employee/managers/HR professionals**

On their first day of the employment the new employees are greeted by their closest manager and HR professional. The new employee is often taken on a tour around the offices and introduced to his/her new colleagues, as well as the new employee receives a designated workplace. It is also a typical practice that the managers invite their new employees out for a company paid welcoming lunch. Welcoming lunches sometimes also include managers of very high-level position in the company. In general, welcoming lunch is something that is highly appreciated by the new employees and often mentioned as something positive from their onboarding period. It is also noteworthy that new employees see lunch as a good opportunity to get to know their colleagues and manager.

(new employee)*''One thing that I really liked on the first day, I had my lunch with my immediate manager, and the chief technical officer, big guy here. I guess that is part of the Swedish system, horizontal hierarchy, that is a sort of horizontal structure here''*

Others indicated that on the first day, the new employee may feel lost and awkward. However, having a lunch together with his/her new manager and colleagues, creates sense of being taken care of. In addition, the new employees discussed that having a lunch on the first day, is a good way to get to know other people in a more relaxed setting.

(new employee) *"You're a little bit taken care of on your first day. You're not just wandering around, looking for a lunch place by yourself. I think that's a really good standard to have."*

(new employee*) "I think they do it [i.e. welcome lunch] every time also and that's a nice gesture. A good way to get to know each other"*

## 5.5. Work essential

**New employees**

Although nearly all the new employees receive their workplace, computer and batch card on the first day, some had to wait up to a couple of week weeks to get a company cell-phone and

access to the e-mailing system. The interviewees explained that the IT department is often overwhelmed due to a small number of staff in their department, which can sometimes cause delay. Also, some new employees stated that the managers should be more prepared for new employee's arrival. In general, the answers were quite mixed - some had no problems to get the work essentials while others had to wait, which caused frustration. The new employees who had their workplace, laptop etc. ready, could engage in work faster.

(new employee) *"When you have new employees you should have all the access ready and the computer ready, so you don't have to waste one week just to get everything ready. It's the same with every new employee that I have heard of - they are always waiting for stuff. "*

(new employee) *"I had to move a desk. It wasn't in place, so I had to carry it by myself and it felt a little bit like "are you coming now?"."*


**Managers/HR professionals**

Managers and HR professionals stated that work matters are usually ordered and prepared for new employees in advance, but it also has some exceptions. They stated that getting computer, cell phone, batch card etc. on time can sometimes be troublesome. As new employees discussed above, the managers and HR professionals also agreed that delays are due to low staff in certain departments, e.g. IT. This also explains why it takes time for some new employees to engage in their work.

(manager) *"Usually we have their computer up and running before lunch […] access card actually takes a little bit long time, I would prefer if they could have it done in one day, not like now like 3 days or something"*

(manager)*" I also contact IT to trigger their preparation of computer and stuff, but it is rarely ready that day."*

## 5.6. Support
### 5.6.1. Mentoring

**Managers/HR professionals**

Managers' duty is to make sure that the new employees get a mentor/buddy, regardless whether the person is new or has had a temporary working contract in the company (e.g. students who work part-time or employees who worked as consultants). According to the company's onboarding plan, the managers have to select a mentor before the new employee arrives.

Mentors are usually chosen by managers while taking into account the project where the newcomer will be working in and considering mentor's familiarity of the job and the company. The idea is to have a mentor who can work closely with the new employee, preferably in the same project.

(manager) *"Usually, or preferably, based on the project the employee will be working at, so I would say the best thing to do is to have someone [mentor] that also working in the same project and preferably in the same team"*

The HR professionals and managers also believe that it is equally important that mentors are knowledgeable not only about technical aspects of the work but also administrative aspects in order to offer sufficient support to newly hired person.

**New employees**

New employees perceived that mentoring is an important learning method. Most, but not all, new employees had an assigned mentor/buddy as a person to turn to with any questions (for instance, technical, administrative and other everyday questions). All of the new employees who had a mentor experienced it as a positive aspect of onboarding. They claimed that having a mentor helped them to ease into their work tasks.

(new employee) "*I got a mentor in the beginning and was able to work together with him, look into the issues together and got some experience from that. I think it was quite efficient for me [...] I think the mentorship is quite important because many people that start to work here come straight from the university, at least that's my experience that I have seen. And it's really important to get an introduction to the working life and to the company.*"

(new employee) *"For me it was very positive that a mentor was assigned to me immediately, that was something that not always happens in other companies, so I really liked the idea to have a mentor for newly employed"*

The new employees who did not have an assigned mentor during their onboarding, wished they had someone to turn to and help them to get familiar with their new work tasks and responsibilities.

(new employee) *"I wish I had somebody next to me, working with me closer, helping me."*

The new employees also discussed that a mentor should have enough time to spend with the new employee in order to accelerate delivering results and get maximum effect of mentoring.

Another new employee discussed the importance of timing, as well as the stage of the project when entering the company. He argued that it is not a good idea to recruit new people during a high level of workload, because the mentor's work can be disturbed and slowed down with coaching and helping duties. Therefore, some newcomers did not get enough help from a mentor and were even reluctant to ask for help from colleagues.

(new employee) *"But I think it is kind of unrealistic as well [to have a mentor]. When the team was under pressure, and had a lot of things to do [...] I was slowing them down. So, it really depends on what time, or what the stages of the project you enter. So, something always fascinates me is that some project managers, they recruit new people when it is a lot of pressure, and they think it will help but it is actually the other way around I think [...]Because you need to devote another person to teach them what's happening, so you are losing resources instead of gaining, so it works in a long term but not for a short period of time. So, in this case I mean at that time when I was employed [...] they were all, for instance working overtime because it was a lot of things to do. So, I could understand that they are under pressure and I tried not to disturb them too much."*

### 5.6.2. Colleagues
**New employees/managers/HR professionals**

Despite of work position, work experience, or overall attitude towards the company, all 25 interviewees highlighted their co-workers. The friendliness, helpfulness and competence of the employees, is something that is considered as a strength of the company. Many respondents mentioned colleagues when asked to describe something positive from their onboarding process.

(new employee) *"Everyone was very friendly. Hmm… I don't remember exactly the first day, I remember the people were friendly at least, and were very helpful"*

(new employee) *"That's the best part here. Everybody is quite helpful, no matter who is the colleagu*e"

(new employee) *"I think that's one of the things that make the company a good place to be and there's many people that know stuff and you can always ask and so on. Without those persons, I think it would be a company with all the other companies that aren't that good. It's the people not just the company."*

The new employees explained that having helpful and friendly co-workers eased their socialization process. It was also stated by some newcomers that the more they learnt who's

who on different positions the more they felt sense of being part of the company. Furthermore, a couple of new employees suggested that the company or project managers would arrange more activities for the employees, in order to advance the team spirit.

(new employee) *"I think they need to improve regarding the… how to take care of the personnel, like we need to bond in the groups much better. We don't have that much exchange between the departments and so on."*

Furthermore, the HR professionals' and managers' opinion with regards to colleagues did not differ from the new employees when it comes to how colleagues are perceived. They felt that they have a lot of great individuals working there and new employees are always supported by their colleagues.

### 5.6.3. Manager's support

**New employees**

Most of the new employees were pleased with their direct manager, they stated they have an open communication and can always turn to their manager whenever issues, questions etc. occur. On the other hand, a couple of interviewees mentioned that sometimes it is difficult to get in touch with their managers, e.g. due to their busy schedules.

In general, the interview participants seem to have good understanding of manager's responsibilities as well as boundaries. For instance, new employees understand that the project managers are unable hire more people into a project in order to lower the workload, without a permission from the headquarters. A few respondents stated that the managers do not realise how stressed their employees are at times. The new employees also discussed that the managers listen and take into consideration their opinions. One new employee explained that although he was initially put in one project, he was later moved to another, after he had talked to his manager about his real interests in his career.

**Managers**

Managers said that they try to make certain that the new employees feel welcome and comfortable during their onboarding process, as they consider to be the most important factor of onboarding.

(manager) *"The most important thing is to...is that new employees feel welcome to the company, that is the key, and [...] you show that "you are important"."*

It was also discussed that inexperienced new employees receive more attention as they may need more guidance than individuals who have previous working experience.

(manager) *"Experienced people obviously get accustomed much easier, they have been working for some time, they are aware of how routines and everything work, they don't need that much follow up"*

When asked if managers checked the workload for new employees, the managers gave positive answers and two managers stated that new employees can absolutely get help from them when needed. The managers do not put much pressure and expect the new employees to be as productive as their co-workers. They believe it is essential for new employees to focus on learning during the first few months. Another manager said if they found some new employee with high level of stress, they would take actions in an effort to decrease stress.

## 5.7. Information seeking and sharing
### 5.7.1. Personnel handbook

**New employees**

Either after signing the contract or on the first day in the company the new employee receives a personnel handbook which contains different workplace policies, rules, procedures etc. At the moment, the personnel handbook is available only in Swedish, the new employees who do not have sufficient Swedish skills rely on a quick overview in English with help of their manager, colleagues or translate it themselves online. Interestingly though, the majority of the new employees either had not read the personnel handbook or looked at it briefly. Most of the non-Swedish speaking new employees, did not perceive documents in Swedish as a problem. On the other hand, a couple of non-Swedish speaking individuals said they were disappointed to receive the personnel handbook in Swedish.

(new employee) *"I got a paper of 17 pages or something like that in Swedish, about some rules and so on, which I never read."*

**HR professionals**

The HR professionals are familiar with the fact that the personnel handbook is only in Swedish. They understand the need of translating the personnel handbook and have it in both versions, i.e. English and Swedish, in order to make it understandable for everyone.

(HR professional) "*The personnel handbook? That's in Swedish, only. [...] We have that non-disclosure agreement and that's in English. That's in English for everyone. And we also have the one for bank details in English as well. But the rest is in Swedish.*"

However, the HR professionals mean that since the personnel handbook and some other documents contain specific Swedish terminology, it is significant to translate it in a correct manner. Indicating that it is a difficult task for a HR professional, who is not trained to translate specific terminology from Swedish to English. Until the English version will be available, the HR professionals stated that managers should take the responsibility to translate and explain it to non-Swedish speaking new employees.

(HR professional) "*But it is up to the management to explain [...] we don't meet all [employees]*"

It is also noteworthy to mention that the top management of the company has arranged Swedish courses for non-Swedish speaking employees. The HR professionals explained that it not only helps them to socialize in the company but in the Swedish culture in general.

**Managers**

On the other hand, the managers appear to be more critical when it comes to documents that are available only in Swedish. Thus, managers often devote more time to non-Swedish speaking new employees to translate them the important formalities, while others said that most of the new employees have some Swedish skills, indicating that they do not need an entire translation of the personnel handbook or can rely on online translation.

(manager) "*I think it is quite embarrassing, "sorry this is only in Swedish", then I try to translate it, but as I said, it is many special terms, it is hard.*"

(manager) "*I usually go through the personnel handbook the first day with the new employee and if they only speak English. I try to point and explain, because most of them know a bit of Swedish at least and they can use Google translate.*"

### 5.7.2. Orientation course

**Managers/HR professionals**

Twice a year the top management arranges a short one or two-day orientation course. This course is available for new employees that have been hired the past 6 months. The purpose of the orientation course is to give new employees a better idea of various operations of the company. During the course, several presentations by managers of different departments take

place.  Although some managers and HR professionals believed that twice a year to be way too seldom to hold an orientation course.  Both HR professionals and managers state that that new employees should be able to participate the orientation course as early as possible. However, it requires to have an appropriate number of newly hired employees to join the course - not too few and not too many. This means that some new employees have to wait up to 6 months to participate in the orientation course.

(HR professional) "*I think it [orientation course] is quite good, but I think it is important you get it quite early but I think if you have this course you should have at least 10 persons or something, between 8 or 10. Now we have 30, maybe it is a bit too much.*"

**New employees**

The orientation course is positively received and highly valued by the new employees who have participated.  Although some people indicated that two days is too long for such course and some information is too detailed. A few said that although they had been working in the company for a few months, they still have not been invited to an orientation course. Overall, the new employees thought it was a good opportunity to meet and socialize with other new employees and get a better overview of the company and understanding of different departments' activities.

(new employee) *"I think that you get a lot of insights to how things actually work because sometimes you don't really understand the whole picture, I guess. Because even though we might think that the stuff you're working on is really broad and you have a lot of stuff that you need to keep track on and make sure that everything is moving forward. There's such a huge project, you know, that is going on, basically over your head that you don't really see, or it just happens in some way. A lot of things that I never thought about, they explained there. It really put into context like what different people are doing "*

### 5.7.3. Web based SharePoint

**HR professionals**

In order to enhance sharing information and offer convenience, the company has a web-based SharePoint. This is a platform where employees can search and ideally find information they need. The HR professionals believed that it was good and beneficial to have a SharePoint to get aware of information about different projects, documentations, presentations and so on.

**Managers**

Two of the managers did not have additional comments on the SharePoint. However, one of the managers thought that information on the SharePoint was not updated regularly. Sometimes information is passed on via emails instead of uploading it on the SharePoint for everyone to see, which means that a significant number of employees do not receive the information on time or not at all.

(manager) *"A lot of info is only passing through emails"*


**New employees**

The new employees seemed to be familiar with the SharePoint and were pleased with this platform. On the other hand, many new employees stated that it can be difficult to find information, meaning that the SharePoint needs to be more structured as well as updated often.

(new employee) *"We have something called SharePoint, where we have a lot of info, all projects. It's basically like dropbox online, so you go into the website, and then you have all the documentations nicely laid out from all the different teams"*


### 5.7.4. Feedback on onboarding

**New employees**

The participants stated that there were no surveys with regards to how onboarding has been experienced and how the new employee's progress has taken place. All of the interviewed newcomers said that neither HR professionals or their managers formally asked them to give feedback with regards to onboarding. The newcomers, who felt that the onboarding process needed improvement, stated that they wish someone had asked their feedback.

However, the new employees discussed that occasionally their manager would informally ask if everything was going well for the new employee. Since personal development discussion takes place three times per year, and if the first discussion happens to be during the onboarding process, that is when the managers tend to ask more about new employee's experience, according to the newcomers.


**HR professionals**

HR professionals rely on open-door policy where employees can drop by. One of the HR professionals stated that employees often used to come by and share their experiences, feedback, complaints etc. However, after recent re-organizing the office layout, there is a considerable decrease of employees who utilize open-door policy, since there is less privacy because the office is now shared with other individuals.

(HR professional) *"My door is always open [...] I had people in everyday, talking about how much they had, and how they felt and so on. I think that was quite a natural channel for them to go by my office if they had an issue."*

According to the company onboarding plan, the HR department is required to conduct onboarding surveys at 3 occasions during the onboarding process. The feedback should be collected from both managers and new employees, in order to discover how onboarding is conducted, experienced and what aspects need improvement. However, HR does not carry out any formal surveys. The HR professionals said that they randomly asked new employees how everything was going, which they considered to be sufficient. The HR professionals explained that since they do not have enough people in their HR department, they do not have enough resources and time to focus on surveys since they have more important tasks to work on.

**Managers**

The hiring managers are clearly not pleased with HR's very little involvement during the onboarding process and stated that they do not feel supported by the HR professionals.

(manager) *"HR, they do not follow up anything in that checklist, so that is also...why I think it is maybe not followed up that much [by managers]. I don't think the onboarding is very...is not taken seriously or it is not really in process."*

Because there are no regular new employee surveys, the managers tend to ask feedback informally or during the development discussion, to get a better idea how new employees' have experienced their first months in the company. The managers claimed that new employees are usually pleased even though they sometimes receive complaints with regards to unclear job description. When asked if they got feedback from new employees on onboarding, one of the managers said

(manager) *"I don't have specific questions about onboarding [during personal development discussion], I have general questions on how they feel about their work, 'what do you think about the team'?"*

However, they also mentioned that it is not that easy to get the negative feedback from new employees, and expressed that it would be necessary to have anonymous surveys for new employees.

## 5.8. Onboarding plan
### 5.8.1. Onboarding checklist

The company has a standardized onboarding checklist developed by the headquarters for all their subsidiaries across the world, meaning that they have followed the "best practice" approach rather than "best fit". The checklist lays out step-by-step introductions for manager, HR and mentor/buddy how to carry out onboarding. Also, every new employee is expected to follow the checklist. According to the standardized onboarding checklist, the onboarding process should take up to one year.

**Managers**

Interviewed managers believed that the current global checklist is not sufficient for the local Swedish setting. They explained that it lacks details specific for the local context (e.g. introductions for different procedures etc). The standardized checklist is according to interviewees too extensive. This has led to the fact that the managers do not act upon the onboarding checklist. Although, all interviewed managers said that they would be more motivated to follow the checklist if HR professionals also did that.

(manager) "*This is [company's name] global onboarding checklist, for me this is not enough. It is not acceptable for our site here, it covers some things, which is good, but it is definitely not sufficient*".

(manager) "*The local things you have to do here in Sweden, like how and where to get their [new employees'] phone, their computer, not much here about all the IT systems, and all of that. Then I think nobody follows this checklist, even HR don't follow upon this*".

The managers do not entirely follow the onboarding checklist rather than a general structure or guideline, as they have created their own custom-made checklist and share it with their employees.

(manager) *"I have my own checklist to follow, to fill in the blanks."*

As mentioned, the onboarding plan is considered as too long and extensive, since it takes up to one year to complete it. Therefore, the managers claimed that the current checklist is too ambitious and should cover only three to six months of new employee's employment.

(manager) *"It [onboarding checklist] is almost a year, and it is very extensive and this is only the manager's part, then you have the HR part, the buddy part and the employee part, yeah it*

*is... A bit more focused and shorter, and I think the onboarding process should be covered first quarter, six months maybe, not more than that."*

The managers displayed frustration since they aim to do their best during the onboarding but feel that they do not get enough support from the HR professionals as well as HR does not follow their tasks that are laid out according to the onboarding plan.

(manager) *"They [HR professionals] could care about the onboarding process [...] I mean they are my employees, I want them to feel welcome and know what to do and so on, so I think it is important."*

**HR professionals**

When asked HR professionals how they perceive the current onboarding plan, they claimed that the current plan is sufficient. However, they stated that the main responsibility of conducting onboarding lays on managers. HR professionals explained that since managers are the closest to the new employees, they can act quickly corresponding to new employee's needs. The HR professionals also admitted that they in fact do not follow upon the onboarding checklist, besides preparing documentations for new hire's employment.

(HR professional) *"It is also the manager who should work with the new employees, it is not we as the HR. We don't... we have a lot to do with all the employees, it is not we who work [with new employee] on daily basis."*

**New employees**

Although the new employees were positive with regards to their time in the company, when asked if they thought the onboarding process has been efficient for them, the answers varied. The most common reply was that onboarding should be carried out in a more structured manner, especially to accelerate the time to start working.

(new employee) *"No, I don't think it's [onboarding] efficient. I think it's... it should be more standardized. I feel like there could be maybe like a clear document, like the things you need to go through to start working."*

(new employee) *"It would be great if there were maybe a more structured, technical onboarding process, but maybe from technical process "do this, then register document, this is how you do that"."*

It is also worth to mention that although it takes time for new employees to fully start working in a new project, they said that they felt rather quickly that they were integrated and part of the company. Some new employees said that it took them only couple of weeks to be integrated to the company while other said it took them two to three months.

One new employee discussed that he felt quickly that he was integrated to the company, because he carried out workshops and represented the company at student fairs. However, he said that he did not feel as fully socialized yet. He reasoned that he still did not know a lot of other employees working in other departments.

## 5.9.        Satisfaction

**New employees**

Despite that many newcomers had some issues along their onboarding process, the general perception of onboarding is positive. The new employees explained that it is tied to friendly and open colleagues. Other satisfactory aspects mentioned included a good work climate, possibility to learn something new and being part of big projects.  Thus, all interviewed employees stated that in general they are satisfied in their new employment. When asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale from 1 to 10. The lowest score given was 5 and the highest 10, the average satisfaction rate is 7,6.

(new employee) "*Yes, 8.  Good tasks right now, workers, the office is good [...] good location now. It's a good environment, I think the facilities, the hardware and co-workers are quite good and we are into some projects right now.*"

(new employee) "*The climate here in the office and the colleagues and the tasks I am doing, it's always technical and difficult and you always learn a lot. So, you have a lot of good colleagues and you have a lot of fun here. But there's always potential for improvements.*"

Nevertheless, there were also new employees who felt that although they had a lot of experience the company did not take full advantage of his/her competence, which also caused lower satisfaction than on average.

(new employee) "*It's not the worst company and it's not the best company, I don't feel like I am using my full potential. They are great, a lot of good people here. Without them, this company wouldn't be that great.*"

The interviewers asked one respondent whether his onboarding had been successful and the person answered: *"Super good. [Manager's name] came to airport, he picked me up, he lifted my bags also and he dropped me to my service apartment. Then he took me to MAXI, the grocery store. He helped me to buy all the groceries I need to buy for an initial week. Then dropped me back to my service apartment, then uhm... I'm a little bit more descriptive because it was fun. Then I started cooking on the very first day, the stove wasn't working. So, then I called this bostad service apartment company here and they were on vacation because it was Saturday I think. Then I messaged [manager's name] and he appears back in 15 minutes"*

Although the interviewers asked his overall experience this is the memory that struck him the most - the way he was greeted by his manager when he arrived in Sweden. Interestingly though, the same person had claimed previously in the interview that not everything was perfect during his onboarding. However, when he was asked to specify he was unable to answer, since he had forgotten. However, he had a vivid memory of his first interaction with his manager which influenced his overall onboarding experience. It was also common among other new employees to refer back to their first day when asked about their onboarding process. They often had clear memories from that, and could describe their first day in detail.

The interviewers made some additional observations during the interviews with new employees. The new employees who were attracted to the company through an insider showed more positive attitude towards the onboarding and the company. Also, the new employees who had some previous working experience in different companies were more critical towards to the onboarding process as well as the company.

**Managers/HR professionals**
Managers' views on onboarding were quite mixed, when asked to rate the onboarding plan from 1 to 10. The scores varied from 3, the lowest, and 7, the highest. A manager, who rated with 3, stated that onboarding checklist has in general good points and offers a good guideline for managers and other parties included. However, he noted that other aspects are not sufficient and referred to the lack of communication and cooperation between departments. Also, he explained that the information preparation needed to be improved as early as possible. Another manager thought that for an effective onboarding process, there should be less steps to follow and the time expansion of onboarding should be reduced, and more importantly all parties should follow up on it.

HR professionals stated that the onboarding as a whole is good, but they also believed that onboarding plan should be simplified since many new employees have entered the company in a short period of time, which makes it difficult to thoroughly follow the onboarding checklist.

## 5.10.     Turnover intention

**New employees**

The interviewers asked new employees a hypothetical question, whether they plan to stay in the company for a long term or not. Although the respondents found it difficult to answer, the majority of the respondents said they can imagine working in the company for a long term, which they specified to be 2 or more years. A few stated that they plan to stay in the company at least 5 more years. This answer was especially common among persons who had a good onboarding experience and eased into their new job quickly.

The respondents reasoned their intent to stay for having a possibility to work in big projects and having great colleagues. In fact, almost all new employees mentioned their colleagues as the main factor for staying.

(new employee) *"Quite a few years I would say. It depends what happens, we have some projects wrapping up and some new starting up. It depends a little bit on that, what type of work I get to do. There are or there seems to be a lot of companies interested in people with our skills and with our education. I think if I wanted to leave, I could do that, it wouldn't be a very difficult to find a new employment. I think I want to keep working here, I don't think I will be afraid to not find a new job but more like "I really enjoy it here"."*

(new employee) *"Yeah, I could imagine working here for long term. It's a great company and as I said many people are friendly and so if I was located here in Gothenburg this is the company I would recommend to others."*

Furthermore, a couple of interviewed new employees stated that they did not consider the company for a longer employment because they are working with something that is not their main interest of field or they were not satisfied with their time in the company (i.e. poor onboarding process, unmet expectations).

(new employee) *"For now, I don't think I will stay here for a very long time, but I can get good experience here*"

# 6. Discussion

*In this section, the authors discuss and analyse the collected empirical findings while taking into consideration the theoretical framework and literature review.*

The empirical findings were collected through 25 interviews with new employees, managers and HR professionals. The findings were analysed, and thereafter categorized into number of themes as discussion points.

## 6.1. Unclear job description and frustration

Bauer (2010) states that recruitment and selection process is the initial step that influences efficiency of onboarding. Clarification in Bauer's Four Cs (2015) refers to the details and context of new employee's job and clarifying of the work requirements. It was revealed in the results that the managers use different channels to advertise available positions. Most of the candidates obtain information via online platforms, such as LinkedIn and the company's own website. The advertisements contain a limited information with regards to job description. Others received information about the open position through an organizational insider.

Job description essentially defines a thorough job analysis, and what he/she will really do on the job. In short, the job description offers guidance, where everybody in the organization comprehends what is expected of them (Rohr, 2016). Yet, a high percentage of new employees in this study did not receive a clear job description. Although, the interviewed managers explained that unclear job description could be perceived as something positive, since it can offer a lot of flexibilities, however, the effect was opposite. Namely, it was perceived negatively by the new employees. In addition, the experienced new employees were more critical with regards to the vague job description. On the other hand, the new employees who got information through an organizational insider said more commonly that the job description was clear or somewhat clear. It lets one to assume that the insider who attracted the candidate has an influence on how job description was perceived.

## 6.2. Non-existent pre-entry expectations

Buckley, et al. (1998) discussed that pre-entry expectations and job satisfaction are linked. However, most of the new employees in this study did not have pre-entry expectations. It is possible that unclear job description can be connected to not existing pre-entry expectations.

Moreover, it is undecided whether non-existent pre-entry expectations influenced the overall onboarding experience and job satisfaction. However, since some new employees had no previous working experience in the engineering field, it can be assumed that it contributed to non-existent pre-entry expectations.

In this study only 30% of the interviewed new employees considered the job description given to them as clear or rather clear. Bauer (2010) states that realistic job description supports the prevention of unmet expectations. Indeed, some of the new employees stated that without clear job description, they did not know exactly what their responsibilities were. Also, they gave a slightly lower satisfaction rate compared to the individuals who were pleased with their job description and role clarity.

## 6.3.       Well-structured and clear information

Miller and Jablin (1991) state that information-offering is necessary to clarify employee's role in the organizations, and decrease uncertainty, role ambiguity and role conflict. As indicated in the results, sharing information is essential to enhance onboarding process. Also, as discussed above efficient information sharing should start with clear job description. The findings indicated that it is especially important for new employees to obtain a wealth of correct information to eliminate uncertainties and confusions as much as possible, and speed up onboarding process.

Once the new employee has entered the company, the managers and HR professionals use different channels to share information. For instance, they make use of a personnel handbook, orientation courses, as well as mentoring, which is a more personal way to convey information and offer support to new employees. The new employees especially valued mentoring and orientation course. They explained that the orientation course offered a better overview of the case company's activities, as well as they found it as a good opportunity to network and learn about other employees. According to Bauer's Four C's (2015) it aids to emphasise connections between employees as well as gain a better understanding of the organizational culture. It also helps newcomers feel welcome by introducing them to co-workers and other colleagues in the company (Bauer, 2010).

The company also takes advantage of technology, such as having a common SharePoint that is easily accessible by all employees. Boxall & Purcell (2011) state that employees have to be provided with the information they need in an effort to make decisions. However, the interviewees indicated that is not simply enough to have a common online SharePoint if it is not well structured and organized. As explained by interviewed individuals, the online platform ought to include information not only with regards to administrative aspects of work and company, but also useful information and links that aid the everyday engineering work. For SharePoint to be functional, it is necessary to keep it updated at all times, as one manager concluded.

Furthermore, in a large multinational corporation, it is significant that the information provided is understandable to everyone. The interviewees stated that some documentation is available only in Swedish. These papers are also shared with non-Swedish speaking new employees, such as the personnel handbook which contains various workplace policies, procedures etc. As revealed in the interviews, the new employees who did not have sufficient Swedish skills relied on their colleagues or online translation, which created frustration in a couple of new employees. This means that information in documentations, meetings etc. should preferably be in a language that all employees comprehend. Not only are new employees negatively affected by this Swedish-English language issue but also managers. One manager discussed that he even felt embarrassment to give documents in Swedish to a non-Swedish speaking person. This contributes to a sense of not feeling supported by HR professionals, as they are responsible for preparing documentations. On the other hand, the company offers Swedish courses to non-Swedish speaking new employees, in an effort to not only socialize them better to the company but to the Swedish society.

The new employees also have a responsibility to actively seek information and make use of the documentations given to them. Many new employees stated that they had not read the company's personnel handbook or had looked at only briefly. Essentially, the personnel handbook covers different dos and don'ts at a workplace, which also refers to an organizational culture.

## 6.4.　Manager's support and interactions

The first day is considered as the most significant day on the job for new employees (Bauer, 2010). The impression the organization representatives make on that first day will greatly influence employee's perception of the company over the next following months (Krasman, 2015). Indeed, when interviewers asked new employees to highlight something positive from their onboarding process, many of them referred to early interactions with their managers and colleagues that took place on the first day. Many new employees remembered how they were warmly greeted and treated by their new manager. This is supported by Bauer & Green (1998) as they discuss how manager's behaviour has a considerable effect on new employee's accommodation and socialization process. Many new employees said that their managers are open and take into account new employee's opinions, indicating that manager acts as a general support for them. For one new employee, the first positive interactions with the manager created a strong memory, yet, the same person was unable to remember shortcomings of their onboarding. This means that the very early interactions not only influence how new employees perceive their manager but also how they experience their onboarding.

The new employees also emphasised the importance of more relaxed interactions, such as welcoming lunch. All new employees recognized it in a positive way. The new employees often said that welcoming lunch on their first day was a nice gesture by managers. In addition, it made new employees feel as they were taken care of. Furthermore, positive impression on welcoming lunch can be assumed that new employees sense uncertainty in the beginning. A lunch together with a manager and team members helps to feel inclusion. Others saw welcoming lunch as a good opportunity to get to know people in a more stress-free setting. This implies that new employees actively aim to build interpersonal relationships in order to facilitate their socialization process in a new environment. Having a social network helps to transform from being an outsider to insider faster. Bauer Four C's (2015) stated that developing interpersonal relationships is essential for a positive onboarding outcome.

## 6.5.　Work essentials

The managers and HR professionals are expected to make preparation for new employee's arrival. Compliance is the basic level of onboarding and most of organizations can reach it. New employees with all compliance and work essentials (e.g. computers, workstations, paperwork, rules, regulations) prepared feel less anxious (Bauer, 2015). In this case, work

essentials were in general prepared but expectations occurred. One new employee had to wait up to several weeks to receive a working computer or even longer time to be in the emailing list. Delay of receiving work essentials was one of the factors that impacted newcomers onboarding because it took longer time for them to engage into their new responsibilities. This shadowed new employee's onboarding experience. Some new employees directly mentioned the problem of delayed work essentials when asked about negative experiences during onboarding in this company.

## 6.6.        Colleagues are influential

Although, the manager is the primary person to carry out onboarding, yet the new employees spend most of their time with their colleagues. It is studied that employee's organizational socialization success is connected to organizational insiders, such as co-workers (Ellis, Erdogan, Bauer, 2014, p 308). All interviewed individuals agreed that the friendly, helpful and open nature of their colleagues is one of the best aspects of the company. Therefore, one may suggest that colleagues' behaviour is as important as manager's.

It can be assumed that the most natural channel exchanging information and learning is with co-workers. The colleagues in the company have a great influence on transforming the new employees from being an outsider to insider. The working environment as well as organizational culture is generated by the effort of all staff in the organization. For the reason that all the interviewed individuals (i.e. new employees, managers, HR professionals) illuminated friendliness and helpfulness of their colleagues, it may be possible that new employees take over similar attitudes.

## 6.7.        Mentors provide "safe havens"

A mentor can guide new employees concerning the organization, offer advice, guide with tasks, and provide support when needed. It is more convenient for new hires to turn to mentors when questions arise. New employees and managers/HR professionals stated that having one assigned mentor is an important aspect of onboarding in order to ease into new work quicker. According to the company's onboarding checklist, the managers are in charge of selecting a mentor for every new employee. The managers explained that they choose a mentor based on which project the newcomer starts working in. The idea is that mentor and new employee can work closely together. The new employees discussed that they often worked with their mentor

side by side and gained necessary knowledge and obtained new skills through that. It is not less significant that the managers choose a mentor wisely. The managers explained that they pick a mentor in terms of who has a good knowledge with regards to various processes in the company and technical skills to help the new employee. On the other hand, the new employees stated that in order for mentoring to be successful the mentor needs to have sufficient amount of time to spend with the new employee. In addition, some new hires suggested not to recruit new employees during the period of high workload. They explained that it decreases the efficiency of the mentor's work and increases new employee's stress as they need mentor's help. Another new employee discussed that a mentor who is busy in his/her job tasks slows down new employees speed of delivering results.

As the results displayed that not every new employee got a mentor, although the new employees who did not have a mentor stated that they wished they had somebody to turn to in case of difficulties and uncertainties. As one manager discussed that more experienced new employees need less guidance, since they supposedly already know the procedures. It may explain why some new employees did not receive a mentor. However, Krasman (2015) states that onboarding should be followed consistently to socialize every single new employee. Implying that previous working experience of a new employee should not be a factor when carrying out onboarding.

Some interviewed individuals saw even a wider picture of mentoring. Specifically, they discussed that mentoring is an essential method to introduce persons who are newly out of university to working life. All in all, the new employees talked about mentorship as something positive and said that not all other companies offer mentors. It indicates that the fact that the managers assigned mentors sets the case study company apart from other companies.

## 6.8.        Turnover intention

Interestingly, the study found that having friendly co-workers has a considerable influence on new employee's turnover intention and possibly organizational commitment. Most of the new employees discussed that they plan to continue working in the company for at least two to three more years. Many interviewed new employees highlighted their colleagues when they discussed their intent to stay in the company for a long term. One new employee said that it would not be difficult to find a new job if he wanted to, and implied that he has stayed in the

company because he enjoys the workplace. Yet, for some new employees having great co-workers is not enough, as unmet expectations or unsatisfactory onboarding plays a bigger factor for them. This was more common in experienced new employees, which means that they were probably able to compare their onboarding process to their previous experiences in other companies. Also, as one manager discussed that more experienced employees require less guidance, this may be an indication that the managers focus more on inexperienced new employees rather than experienced ones. Due to that it is possible that the experienced new employees felt lower level support which led them to be more critical towards onboarding and the company.

Moreover, engineers are characterized as individuals who have a strong desire for growth and personal development when compared to some other professionals (Bigliardi, et al., 2005). Therefore, it is not surprising that several new employees mentioned new experiences, skills, and interesting projects for reason to stay.

## 6.9. Standardized onboarding vs. local context

When looking at Krasman's (2015) theory for a successful onboarding, the onboarding process needs to be strategic, comprehensive, consistent and measured. However, during the interviews with both managers and HR professionals, it became apparent that their current process is not entirely effective, when comparing it to Krasman's (2015) theory.

The onboarding is not used strategically in the case company. The managers and HR professionals said that they do not act on the onboarding checklist consistently. The HR professionals stated that they carry out the steps that are required for new employee's employment, e.g. preparing contract, confidentiality agreement. The managers again have designed their own onboarding checklist, that is more suitable for the local context as they reasoned that the current checklist is not adequately comprehensive. They mean that for a checklist to be effective, it needs to be sufficiently detailed, while taking into account local setting. Additionally, the managers explained that an onboarding that takes up to one year is too extensive. They considered approximately three months of onboarding to be enough, which may indicate that the managers do not continue with onboarding after three months of new hire's employment. It suggests that new employees are expected to be fully socialized by that

time and familiar with their responsibilities. On the other hand again, most of the new employees stated they were integrated after a couple of months of employment.

## 6.10.        HR professionals as role models

The managers discussed that HR's support is minimal during the onboarding process, if not completely absent. However, they also argued that they would be more motivated to follow the checklist if HR professionals also did that. This indicated that HR professionals should not only be a support to managers during onboarding but also act as role models. As a matter of fact, the HR professionals admitted they do not follow the checklist either. As laid out in the standardized onboarding checklist, HR has a number of tasks to carry out. One of them is to conduct surveys three times during a one year long onboarding, however, this is something HR does not do. Therefore, onboarding is not systematically measured. This means that HR professionals do not have a full picture of how onboarding is conducted and experienced. Meaning that, HR professionals and managers are not aware of onboarding mistakes, that otherwise could be recovered.

Taking into account all the previous, it suggests that according to Krasman's (2015) theory, the onboarding process is not effective in the case company. This is also agreed by the new employees who frequently stated that the onboarding process should be better structured and standardized.

## 6.11.        Possible solutions

According to Bauer (2010) a formal step by step onboarding plan is beneficial in order to advance how onboarding is experienced by new employees. However, what happens when it is not taken into process by managers or HR professionals? As discovered in the results, onboarding that is lacking cooperation, motivation or resources, is causing frustration in different parties.

What could be the solutions to improve the current onboarding situation? Boxall & Purcell (2011) state that two strategies exist that organizations usually use. One of them is called "best fit" which emphasizes that the strategy should consider and fit the special context. The other strategy is "best practice". "Best practice" assumes that there exists one best way that can be apply to all of the organizations, while ignoring the context.

The headquarters of the case company had developed a standardized onboarding checklist for every subsidiary, meaning that they utilized "best practice" approach. However, one of the main problems of the onboarding plan, as mentioned by both managers and HR professionals, is difficult implementation of the checklist, since it was not suitable for the company's context. It implies that it is unrealistic to use one onboarding plan everywhere, because different organizations and branches have its own characteristics. Therefore, the standardized onboarding plan from the headquarters is not fully acted on. It may be suggested that improvements need to be made in order to make it fit the case company the best. Therefore, the case company may greatly benefit from the "best fit" strategy that adjusts to a specific environment.

# 7. Conclusion

*This chapter consists of the conclusion of the analysis of findings and an ending discussion of the research questions.*

The purpose of this study was to look at an onboarding process from two different perspectives. On one side the perspectives of new employees' and how they experience onboarding. On the other side the managers and HR professionals, who carry out onboarding, and how they do it.

Although the title of this study is "Everybody get on board!", the results showed that was not the case for everyone. The company has an onboarding plan; however, it was not systematically carried out neither by managers nor HR professionals. The reasons for this varied from the onboarding checklist being inadequate to the local context and lack of motivation. The individuals who carry out onboarding need to improve cooperation and support each other to fully implement the onboarding plan, which otherwise can cause frustration, as seen in this study.

Although the new employees stated that onboarding could be improved, they were generally happy with their time in the company. The new employees valued interpersonal connections, such as having a mentor for guidance, and supportive colleagues. Receiving work essentials on time was also a factor for stated satisfaction. Although many new employees experienced shortcomings of onboarding, interestingly though, the new employees had a rather high satisfaction rate, i.e. 7,6 out of 10. This illustrates that for new employee socialization, networking with their mentor, colleagues, managers are imperative.

## 7.1. Limitations and recommendations for future studies

This thesis triggers several forms of limitations, differing from the incompleteness of a case study approach, to the concern of the relatively short employment time of new employees to see longer effects of their onboarding. Another possible limitation of the study is that all the interviews were carried out in English. For most of the respondents it was not their native language, which may have created some language barrier and misunderstandings, even though the interviewees had either good or very good English skills. The authors attempted to be as

clear as possible when formulating questions and provided further clarity when needed, in order to avoid any ambiguities.

Since nearly all interviews were conducted in the company, in their meeting rooms, it may be likely that the respondents had a feeling of unease and had a concern of de-anonymity. Although, the authors assured in the beginning of the interview that all respondents are kept anonymous by them and will not be shared with anyone.

Based on the results, the authors discovered a discrepancy of the perspectives from both managers and HR professionals on different issues. The future studies can be focused on how to balance and satisfy both sides and thus improve the efficiency of onboarding process. In addition, how to improve the cooperation and interaction between managers and HR professionals, thus make both sides contribute to the onboarding.

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# 9. Appendices

## 9.1.        Appendix 1 - Interview questions (new employees)

*Leading questions*

Where are you from?

Did you have any previous job experiences prior getting this job?

How long have you worked here?

What is your job?

Where did you find information about this position?

Did the job description match your responsibilities?

What were your expectations when you started working in this company?

*Onboarding questions*

From your point of view, what information is important to know for new employees when they start working in a new company?

Did you get all this information when you started here?

What kind of information did you receive during your first days and weeks in the company?

When you think about the time when you got hired, do you feel like you got enough information and support from your closest manager? (prior, during and after entering the company)

How did your manager welcome you?

Can you name a few aspects that should be included in a good introductory to a company?

Did you have a mentor or buddy? (what did you think about it?)

Can you describe the company's values and goals?

Did you receive feedback from your manager with regards to your progress in the first months?

Has the onboarding been efficient in your opinion?

Are you satisfied with the first year in this company? (Can you rate your satisfaction from 1 to 10?)

Do you plan to stay in this company long-term or is it something you consider to be as a shortstop? Why?

## 9.2. Appendix 2 - Interview questions (HR and managers)

*Leading questions*

Where are you from?

How long have you worked in this company?

What is your job here? What is your title?

*Onboarding*

Are you familiar with the current onboarding plan when it comes to introducing new employees to the company?

What is the purpose of the onboarding process?

How long is the onboarding process?

How do you work with the onboarding checklist? (your responsibilities?)

How do you view your role in it?

Please name the most important practices of the onboarding you have right now?

How would you want the onboarding to look like?

Is it important that a new employee has a mentor?

If you could choose, what are the three most important things to have in onboarding?