REMOTE ONBOARDING EFFECTIVENESS IN INDIAN IT INDUSTRY DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Purpose: The outbreak and impact of COVID-19 has definitely caused the most drastic and rapid shift to the global workforce. The Information Technology (IT) industry was amongst early responders who adopted a remote working model. The aim of this study was to understand the effectiveness of remote onboarding experience in the IT companies. **Design/methodology/approach:** The perceived benefits of remote working such as creating valuable opportunities for cost saving and greater flexibility for staff has caused many businesses to understand it is a beneficial model of working in the future and hence adopt it. Now that remote working is here to stay, this research studied the experience of the employees who were recruited in the years 2019 and 2020 into various IT organisations. A survey was circulated to understand this effect and a total of 126 employees participated from 21 IT Companies across India. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was verified and the data was analyzed using SPSS V22. **Findings:** The results indicated that there is a significant difference in the joining experience between the two groups. The findings showed that the physical joining experience worked better as it helped in a higher employee satisfaction and hence helped learning the job faster. While the remote induction process seemed effective, the gaps pertain to lack of a structured onboarding process, knowledge transfer and supervisor interventions that are relevant for the remote working world. **Research, Practical & Social implications:** Organizations should understand the importance of making a good first impression with the new joiners. They should ensure smoother interventions that could enhance the culture immersion and knowledge transfer process. **Originality/value:** Most Indian IT companies have always allowed employees to work remotely. However, even these employees were required to be physically present for the onboarding process. Remote onboarding as a process did not exist prior to the pandemic and hence this study touches upon a lesser researched topic. The research recommendations provided in our study could help bridge the gaps and provide a better employee remote joining experience.

EFICÁCIA DA INTEGRAÇÃO REMOTA NA INDÚSTRIA INDIANA DE TI DURANTE A PANDEMIA

RESUMO
Objetivo: O surto e o impacto do COVID-19 definitivamente causaram a mudança mais drástica e rápida na força de trabalho global. O setor de Tecnologia da Informação (TI) estava entre os primeiros a responder que adotaram

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um modelo de trabalho remoto. O objetivo deste estudo foi compreender a eficácia da experiência de onboarding remoto nas empresas de TI.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: os benefícios percebidos do trabalho remoto, como a criação de oportunidades valiosas para economia de custos e maior flexibilidade para a equipe, fizeram com que muitas empresas entendessem que é um modelo benéfico de trabalho no futuro e, portanto, o adotassem. Agora que o trabalho remoto veio para ficar, esta pesquisa estudou a experiência dos funcionários que foram recrutados nos anos de 2019 e 2020 em várias organizações de TI. Uma pesquisa foi distribuída para entender esse efeito e um total de 126 funcionários participaram de 21 empresas de TI em toda a Índia. A validade e confiabilidade do questionário foram verificadas e os dados foram analisados no SPSS V22.

Resultados: Os resultados indicaram que há uma diferença significativa na experiência de união entre os dois grupos. Os resultados mostraram que a experiência de união física funcionou melhor, pois ajudou em uma maior satisfação do funcionário e, portanto, ajudou a aprender o trabalho mais rapidamente. Embora o processo de indução remota parecesse eficaz, as lacunas referem-se à falta de um processo de integração estruturado, transferência de conhecimento e intervenções do supervisor relevantes para o mundo do trabalho remoto.

Implicações de pesquisa, práticas e sociais: As organizações devem entender a importância de causar uma boa primeira impressão aos novos funcionários. Eles devem garantir intervenções mais suaves que possam melhorar a imersão cultural e o processo de transferência de conhecimento.

Originalidade/valor: a maioria das empresas indianas de TI sempre permitiu que os funcionários trabalhassem remotamente. No entanto, mesmo esses funcionários precisavam estar fisicamente presentes para o processo de integração. A integração remota como um processo não existia antes da pandemia e, portanto, este estudo aborda um tópico menos pesquisado. As recomendações de pesquisa fornecidas em nosso estudo podem ajudar a preencher as lacunas e fornecer uma melhor experiência de ingresso remoto para os funcionários.

Palavras-chave: Tecnologia da Informação, Gestão de Recursos Humanos, Onboarding, Desafios de RH, COVID-19.

EFECTIVIDAD DE LA INCORPORACIÓN REMOTA EN LA INDUSTRIA DE TI DE LA INDIA DURANTE LA PANDEMIA

RESUMEN

Propósito: El brote y el impacto de COVID-19 definitivamente han causado el cambio más drástico y rápido en la fuerza laboral global. La industria de la tecnología de la información (TI) estuvo entre los primeros en responder que adoptaron un modelo de trabajo remoto. El objetivo de este estudio fue comprender la efectividad de la experiencia de incorporación remota en las empresas de TI.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: los beneficios percibidos del trabajo remoto, como la creación de oportunidades valiosas para ahorrar costos y una mayor flexibilidad para el personal, han hecho que muchas empresas comprendan que es un modelo beneficioso de trabajo en el futuro y, por lo tanto, lo adopten. Ahora que el trabajo remoto llegó para quedarse, esta investigación estudió la experiencia de los empleados que fueron reclutados en los años 2019 y 2020 en varias organizaciones de TI. Se distribuyó una encuesta para comprender este efecto y participaron un total de 126 empleados de 21 empresas de TI en toda la India. Se verificó la validez y confiabilidad del cuestionario y se analizaron los datos con SPSS V22.

Hallazgos: Los resultados indicaron que existe una diferencia significativa en la experiencia de unión entre los dos grupos. Los hallazgos mostraron que la experiencia de unión física funcionó mejor, ya que ayudó a una mayor satisfacción de los empleados y, por lo tanto, ayudó a aprender el trabajo más rápido. Si bien el proceso de inducción remota parecía efectivo, las brechas se relacionan con la falta de un proceso de incorporación estructurado, la transferencia de conocimientos y las intervenciones de los supervisores que son relevantes para el mundo del trabajo remoto.

Implicaciones de investigación, prácticas y sociales: las organizaciones deben comprender la importancia de causar una buena primera impresión con los nuevos miembros. Deben garantizar intervenciones más fluidas que puedan mejorar la inmersión cultural y el proceso de transferencia de conocimientos.

Originalidad/valor: la mayoría de las empresas de TI indias siempre han permitido que los empleados trabajen de forma remota. Sin embargo, incluso estos empleados debían estar físicamente presentes para el proceso de incorporación. La incorporación remota como proceso no existía antes de la pandemia y, por lo tanto, este estudio toca un tema menos investigado. Las recomendaciones de investigación proporcionadas en nuestro estudio podrían ayudar a cerrar las brechas y brindar una mejor experiencia de conexión remota para los empleados.

Palabras clave: Tecnología de la Información, Gestión de Recursos Humanos, Incorporación, Desafíos de Recursos Humanos, COVID-19.

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INTRODUCTION

Onboarding a new employee is an important process that HR departments thrive hard to get right. The onboarding process not only allows the person to understand the organization but it also saves tremendous cost by reducing the cost of learning. Proper onboarding reduces the learning stress on the new joiner and helps to settle down quickly. This also helps reduce employee turnover in the organization. Replacement costs are generally 25 percent of employee's annual salary and hence reducing employee attrition directly contributes to the profitability of the organization. According to Dr. Talya Bauer (2010), the onboarding process focusses on four parameters: Compliance, Clarification, Culture and Connection. Compliance is the most basic of the four and focuses on educating the new joiner on the company policies and processes. The other three are significantly important. This is because providing clarity on the roles and responsibilities, explaining the culture and allowing employees to develop their connections will go a long way in making the new joiner successful.

The onboarding process is one where the person completes the joining formalities, understands the organization, gets to know the job and settles down to work in a "Business as Usual" (BAU). While in many western countries, Indian companies were managing remote onboarding, within India, almost all IT companies were completing the onboarding process in person. This has been a seamless process which has matured over the last few decades. Day 1 of the job is usually structured introducing new employees to the work environment and company culture. The overriding goal on onboarding will be to show new employees ``how things are done around here" and to instil a sense of pride in their new affiliation. An approach called "personal identity socialization", which involves newcomers to express their unique perspectives and strengths on the job from the beginning and inviting them to frame their platform for doing what they do best. A research by Rodeghero (2020), focuses on shaping the process around individual identity rather than how they can adapt to the organization's culture. The need for remote onboarding was pandemic induced and seemed temporary. However, it is now clear that this process could continue to be remote. A survey was conducted to understand how the organisations fare in their remote onboarding process compared to the earlier process which used to happen in office. How ready are the organisations to provide a seamless onboarding experience for their new recruits is an aspect very important to plan ahead and quick. According to Daniel (2013), with remote onboarding, there can be challenges such as difficulties in finding documentation, communication, asking for help and bonding with teammates.

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Remote working or Working from Home (WFH) arrangements have been in vogue even before the outbreak of COVID-19. In his research paper, Davison (2020) says, the pandemic however, has accelerated the absolute need for adoption of remote working to keep functioning and get the business going. IT companies were the early responders to this situation. While there were companies which encouraged WFH, the joining or onboarding process was still mostly in person. During the pandemic all the companies had to shift to a remote onboarding process. IT Companies who were early adopters to WFH may have faced less confusion by the need to work remotely. However, most of the organisations were uncertain about getting the basics right.

With long-term remote working or a hybrid model being considered as a permanent way of working by many organisations, it is important for these organisations to prioritise and address any challenges.

DATA COLLECTION

The aim was to understand the joining experience and job orientation difference between those who joined in 2019 and those who joined during the pandemic in 2020. The survey contained 12 questions. Two questions summarised the overall joining experience and the job experience based on onboarding. There were two open-ended questions to understand the improvement areas. The remaining questions helped understand the finer aspects of the onboarding experience. Except for the open-ended questions, the other questions captured ratings on Likert Scale (5 point scale). The survey targeted around 120 responses split equally between the two groups, A total of 126 responses were collected from 21 IT companies across India. The data was analysed using SPSS v22. The primary independent variable was dichotomous as the respondents had either joined before the pandemic in 2019 or during the pandemic in 2020. An Independent samples T test was performed for hypothesis testing and to compare the means between 2019 and 2020 scores with respect to the overall joining experience and job orientation in the onboarding process.

RESULTS AND MAIN FINDING

The results from the survey that was undertaken by 126 professionals employed in the IT sector across 21 organisations in India led to the finding that the overall joining experience and job orientation in remote onboarding has a significantly lesser satisfaction level when compared to the traditional onboarding that happens in office. We used the Independent

Samples T test to compare the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different. By testing the responses from the two equal groups, employees onboarded from office in 2019 and employees onboarded virtually in 2020, we found that there is a significant difference in the overall joining experience and job orientation as part of their onboarding experience. The t-value (3.431 for joining experience and 4.796 for job orientation) was significantly greater than the critical value (at degree of freedom 124, Critical value stands at 1.98) and the p-value (0.001 & 0.000) was lesser than the significance value (0.05) for both the cases, hence the alternative hypothesis H1 is accepted. The data also clearly shows that the remote onboarding process is not as effective as physical joining experience.

The significant reasons that contribute to the gaps in the remote onboarding process is the fact that the laptop/desktop delivery was delayed significantly for remote working employees. Amongst the 2020 joiners, nearly 41% of the respondents received their laptops/desktops after 1 week and 31% received after 2 weeks from joining, 20% of the respondents did not experience a welcome meeting with their managers. 37% of the respondents after induction did not feel confident about the organisation's culture, values, policies & compliances which overall constitutes to a dissatisfied joining experience. The gaps in the job orientation part of the onboarding process is mainly because 30% of the respondents were not satisfied with job specific knowledge transfer that took place. 20% of the respondents did not receive satisfactory support from their managers. As a result, more than half the respondents (58%) took 1 month or more to get productive on the job. Infact, 38% out of this group actually took 2 months or more to become productive on their jobs, after being on boarded remotely. the physical joining experience worked better as it helped in learning the job faster and created better team bonding. While the remote induction process seemed effective, the gaps pertain to lack of a structured onboarding process, collaboration and networking initiatives that are relevant for the remote working world

RECOMMENDATIONS

Remote onboarding process was not in practise before and it was forced upon by the pandemic situation. Hence, there were not many past studies conducted on this topic in Indian IT industry. From the analysis, it is clear that virtually managing employee joining formalities and knowledge transfer has its limitations. Employees who joined physically and worked in office were more satisfied with their experience compared to those who joined virtually. Based

on the responses, suggestions and discussion with human resource professionals of various IT Organizations, the following recommendations could be made with respect to remote onboarding.

Day 1 is extremely important for an employee. Designing a well-structured induction program that provides all the required information is the first step. This program should be engaging as remote programs can get monotonous beyond a point. According to Ganesan (2022), social interaction between the instructor and co-worker (new joiners) is a critical component of their participation. Johnson (2005) pointed out that more human touch points, personal and interaction with the new joiners is necessary. The induction program should help the person acclimatize with the organization, understand the policies and answer the possible questions. Choosing a competent facilitator who can create a great first impression is important.

If possible, some of the non-confidential material could be shared with the joiners in advance. This will ensure that they are brought up to speed even before they complete the joining formalities. Interactive sessions, leadership team addressing real-time, storytelling including organisation's legacy and milestones through a video are some of the best virtual onboarding practices. Induction is not a one-time event for virtual joiners. While in office employees get to see posters and digital banners, for remote workers, it is important to constantly communicate the same via email posters. It was further confirmed by Sukawat (2023) that HR competencies have a positive influence on technology adoption.

Preparedness regarding availability and distribution of laptops for remote working employees must be improved. While HR managers have confirmed that it is not practical to expect laptop distribution on day 1 (given the number of dropouts), care must be taken to ensure that the laptops distribution process is initiated on completion of joining formalities. According to Edward (2006), employees should be informed on when they will have their computers and when they can start being productive. Being productive has a significant impact on employee morale.

Onboarding involves a lot more aspects beyond joining formalities. Proper knowledge transfer, collaboration, training and support from managers form a key element to this process. The supervisors must plan ahead on delivering all these experiences for a faster yet effective onboarding experience. Taskin (2010) recommended that the managers have to create a rich social interaction amongst people working remotely. There are several collaborative tools which foster instant video/audio communication across a global workforce. Kristine (2016)

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pointed out that Organisations must invest in these tools for a smooth job specific knowledge transfer.

Employees must have the clarity on whom to reach out in case of any queries along with their contact details. Encourage team members to turn their cameras on as this has proved to improve the bonding between the supervisor and the new joiner. Encourage new joiners to ask questions, share their past experiences and make them feel comfortable. A remote buddy program will also help the new joiner to get into the comfort zone quickly. As suggested by Libby (2011), through building camaraderie among remote teams, new hires will feel more confident and supported.

Being transparent with job expectations and deliverables is something that needs to be done even when employees work from the office. However, due to lack of sufficient time to connect and interact with the employees, this important aspect is getting overlooked in remote working. Supervisors have to make time to share SMART goals and provide clarity around the expectation. Constant feedback around performance is also important especially during the early days.

CONCLUSION

IT Organisations globally are evaluating more permanent remote working arrangements as a cost saving measure. It is important that Indian IT companies fill the gaps identified in this paper and provide a great onboarding experience to the new joiners. This study is limited to IT Companies located in India. The findings could differ for companies located in other regions. We will be happy to collaborate with someone who wishes to build on this study.

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