How Should I Plan To Bring New People Up To Speed During My Projects?

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**Abstract.** The original paper addresses the challenges of managing team dynamics and personnel changes in projects, recognizing the inevitability of such changes due to turnover, project modifications, and other factors. Emphasizing the importance of anticipation, project managers are advised to assess the potential impact of losing team members, particularly those with specialized skills, and develop contingency plans.

The integration of plans for team changes into project schedules, including cost estimates, is essential. Flexibility in scheduling is highlighted to accommodate unexpected turnovers, and minimizing turnover is underscored as vital for successful project management.In the event of staff changes, guidance on swiftly integrating new team members by fostering relationships, trust, and connections with existing team members holds significance. Strategies for redistributing responsibilities and optimizing available talent when a key contributor is lost are also necessary.

The ideal scenario consists of adding team members at the project's start, although this may not always be feasible. When new individuals join the team, the prompt rebuilding of cohesive teamwork and adjustment of task assignments to prevent project difficulties or failure are emphasized.

In conclusion, some important notes include stressing the significance of retaining team members and advising project managers to incorporate budget reserves for addressing the costs of staff turnover in project risk provisions. Overall, this topic provides practical insights and strategies for project managers to navigate personnel changes and maintain project success.

**Keywords:** New Employees, Onboarding, Challenges

1. Introduction

### We’re going to delve into the challenges and nuances of onboarding individuals into project teams. The problem consists of integrating new employees into projects. The focus is on the onboarding experiences of practitioners joining project teams, which is crucial for newcomers to integrate into the organization effectively. Having new people join the project team later along the way causes some challenges that we need to prepare for.

### Two research questions guide this report: How do newcomers integrate into an ongoing project team? and how to facilitate the process of onboarding?

In this report, we will go into what are the challenges of adding new people to projects. We introduce these challenges with a short explanation of how we can face them. Later, we presented three models to help us with these difficulties and give us solutions to ease the process.

### A model of onboarding, adapted and extended from Bauer's model, is introduced. As well as an iterative model, which displays the integrative and economizing features of individuals’ experience accumulation and tacit understandings. The third model is based on a change management model named ADKAR which is an acronym for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement.

Structured methodically, this report undertakes a review of pertinent literature on onboarding and knowledge integration, providing a solid foundation for our subsequent exploration. We will delve into the introduced onboarding model and the iterative model, shedding light on their respective integrative features. Furthermore, our findings will be thoroughly discussed in relation to the posed research questions, offering valuable insights into the complexities and possibilities of the onboarding process within project teams.

1. Challenges
   1. Making Time

The challenge of time in onboarding new employees within project environments brings to the forefront the critical need to balance competing responsibilities and priorities. In the fast-paced realm of project management, where timelines are often tight and objectives are pressing, allocating sufficient time for onboarding can become a formidable challenge. The urgency to meet project deadlines may inadvertently overshadow the essential investment required in integrating new team members effectively. In such situations, organizations must recognize that the success of a project is not solely contingent on meeting immediate deadlines but also on building a cohesive and collaborative team.

Addressing the time challenge in onboarding necessitates a strategic and intentional approach to interpersonal connections. While it may seem tempting to expedite the onboarding process to save time, this approach can have detrimental long-term effects. Organizations must deliberately carve out dedicated time for meaningful interactions during onboarding, allowing new employees to familiarize themselves with their team members and the project environment. This proactive investment in relationships is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and creating a positive work culture. Team members need time to understand each other's working styles, strengths, and areas of expertise, laying the foundation for effective collaboration.

Moreover, the challenge of time in onboarding requires a paradigm shift in how organizations view and manage their resources. While project deadlines are undeniably pressing, the human element of project teams is equally, if not more, vital. Adjusting existing work commitments to accommodate the time needed for onboarding is not just a practical necessity but a strategic investment in the overall success of the project. The organizations that recognize and prioritize this investment are likely to reap the benefits of stronger team cohesion, enhanced individual satisfaction, and increased productivity in the long run.

In this context, incorporating accelerated learning methodologies becomes particularly relevant. Accelerated learning involves a highly interactive and experiential training design that engages participants in applying new knowledge immediately. Orientation program exemplifies this approach, focusing on determining which pieces of information new employees can apply immediately and which will be available in other formats and at other times. Through collaborative skill-building exercises, such as teaching human resource guidelines using visual mind-mapping and a fast-paced scavenger hunt, new employees not only acquire essential organizational information but also actively participate in the learning process. This approach aligns with the need for efficient onboarding within project timelines while ensuring that the onboarding experience remains engaging and effective.

* 1. Making Connections

The challenge of fostering connections during onboarding encompasses a multifaceted approach, emphasizing the active facilitation of new team members' integration into existing dynamics. It involves intentional efforts to nurture connections between the newcomer and other team members, extending beyond mere introductions to encompass various interactions and engagements. Establishing and sustaining effective teamwork necessitates a deliberate and conscious approach that encourages ongoing communication, collaboration, and relationship-building.

One illustrative example of addressing this challenge is embodied in the collaborative skills workshop, which strategically commences and concludes with a celebration of diversity. This workshop incorporates an innovative icebreaker that doubles as an accelerated learning activity. Participants, including the instructor, fill out forms assigning points based on gender, job title, professional experience, and whether the new employee is an assignee or a direct hire. The scoring system incentivizes teams to prioritize diversity in their composition, fostering an environment where participants actively seek out members with varied backgrounds and experiences to accumulate the highest team score.

The activities within the workshop extend to teaching participants how to effectively initiate teams. This includes guiding new teams on conducting their first information-sharing meeting using a team orientation process. The session culminates with a unique exercise where the instructor creates a colorful mind map of key points while participants listen to Baroque music, enhancing the learning experience.

Moreover, the workshop's design incorporates lunch breaks as opportunities for new employees to mingle with their managers and connect with other members of their work groups and project teams. This intentional structuring of informal settings promotes natural interactions, contributing to relationship-building beyond the formal confines of the workshop. As the collaborative-skills workshop unfolds over three days, participants not only learn essential skills for effective teamwork but also establish connections that persist, evidenced by ongoing relationships in subsequent crucial projects. This holistic approach underscores the significance of intentional efforts in fostering connections during onboarding, ultimately contributing to a positive team culture and enriching the overall onboarding experience.

* 1. Delegating Responsibilities

The challenge of delegation in onboarding necessitates a strategic approach to integrate new team members efficiently. When faced with the loss of a key contributor, it is crucial to assess which responsibilities can be swiftly transitioned to the new person. Identifying tasks that may require more time for the newcomer to handle allows for a proactive delegation plan. Additionally, determining alternative team members who can temporarily assume specific responsibilities ensures a smooth workflow and optimal utilization of available talent. Adapting plans to accommodate the strengths and development areas of the new team member contributes to effective onboarding and maintains productivity in the face of personnel changes.

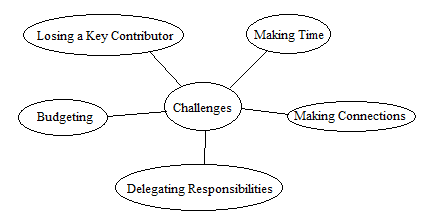
* 1. Budgeting

Effectively addressing the challenge of budgeting in onboarding requires foresight and strategic planning. When formulating onboarding plans, it is essential to incorporate a sufficient budget reserve to contend with potential costs associated with staff turnover. Staff turnover can impose unexpected financial burdens, and having a dedicated budgetary allocation for such scenarios is a proactive measure to mitigate risks. By factoring in this reserve, organizations can enhance their preparedness, ensuring that financial resources are readily available to manage transitions and maintain the continuity of onboarding initiatives in the face of unforeseen personnel changes. This approach contributes to a more resilient and adaptable onboarding strategy that aligns with the dynamic nature of workforce dynamics and organizational needs.

* 1. Losing a Key Contributor

The challenge of losing a key contributor in onboarding necessitates a proactive approach to ensure a smooth transition for the new person. It involves a comprehensive understanding of the missing team member's assignments, necessary skills, and other critical factors that contribute to project success. For team members with specialized skills, this exercise becomes particularly crucial, emphasizing the need for a contingency plan. Identifying specific points in the project where the loss of a critical contributor would be most detrimental allows for strategic planning. Developing a contingency plan outlines the necessary steps to navigate through any potential loss of key personnel, ensuring that the onboarding process remains resilient and capable of addressing unforeseen challenges.

**Figure 1.** Challenges Diagram



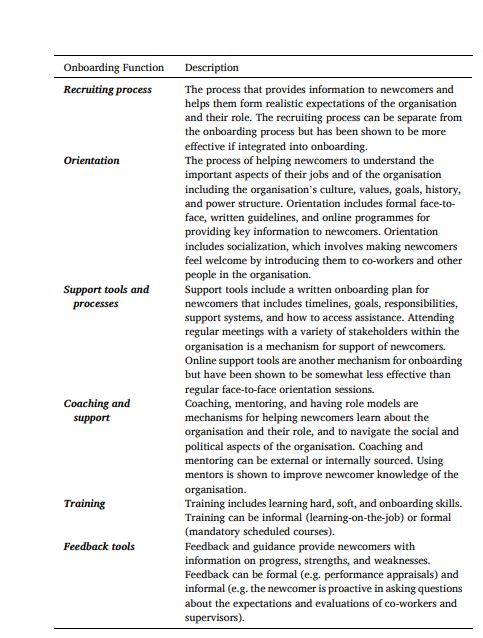
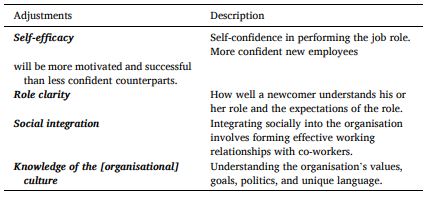
Navigating the challenges in onboarding involves addressing various aspects, including time management, fostering connections, effective delegation, and budgeting considerations. Allocating time to meet and understand new team members, ensuring strong connections within the team, delegating responsibilities thoughtfully, and incorporating budgetary reserves for staff turnover are integral components. Additionally, preparing for the possibility of losing a key contributor requires a strategic contingency plan. As we delve into the next models, it becomes evident that a nuanced understanding of these challenges is crucial for developing effective onboarding strategies. The upcoming models promise to shed light on intricate dynamics, providing insights and frameworks essential for overcoming these challenges and optimizing the onboarding process.

1. Introduced Models
   1. Bauer’s Model

Bauer's onboarding model offers guidelines for bringing people into organizations, suitable for various settings. It identifies six onboarding functions (Table 1) and introduces new employee adjustments (Table 2) as levers that organizations can target to ensure a positive onboarding experience. Bauer's model was chosen for the analysis because it is based on real-world data, is widely recognized, and hasn't been applied directly to onboarding in agile software development teams.

In the organization's recruitment process, a formal and standardized approach is employed for all staff, varying slightly based on the type of position. Long-term recruitment strategies involve hiring students and apprentices who later transition to full-time roles, reducing the onboarding effort for permanent staff. During recruitment, identifying newcomers' knowledge gaps, especially regarding agile approaches, allows tailored support. The orientation process includes comprehensive information packs, fostering socialization, and emphasizing the agile methodology. Support tools, like information radiators and communication tools, aid collaboration, while coaching and mentoring, exemplified through pair programming, ceremonies, and role modeling, contribute to effective onboarding. Training emphasizes immersion and self-study, with feedback mechanisms, such as one-to-ones, code reviews, testing, retrospectives, and sprint reviews, playing a crucial role. Overall, a holistic approach combining recruitment strategies, orientation practices, support tools, training, and feedback mechanisms ensures a robust onboarding process.

Bauer’s method focuses on onboarding new employees in the workplace, but these practices can be translated into integrating new employees into projects and bringing them up to speed.



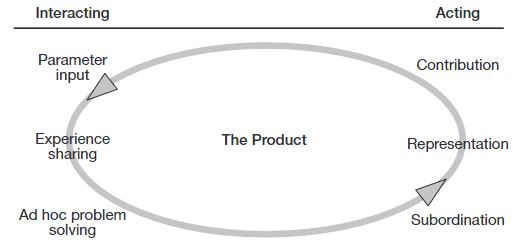
**Table 2.** Bauer's New Employee Adjustment.

**Table 1.** Bauer's Onboarding Functions.

Researchers have identified four key factors, or "levers," crucial for maximizing the success of onboarding new employees. The first lever is self-efficacy, emphasizing the importance of boosting a new employee's confidence in job performance, as this positively influences motivation and success. Role clarity, the second lever, pertains to how well new employees understand their roles and expectations, with clear expectations being vital for optimal performance. The third lever is social integration, emphasizing the significance of building relationships with colleagues and feeling socially accepted within the organization. Lastly, the fourth lever involves knowledge of and fit within the organizational culture, underscoring the importance of understanding the unique values, goals, and language of the company. Overall, these levers contribute to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduced turnover during the onboarding process.

* 1. Iterative Model

The proposed model distinguishes between instances of interacting, where individuals engage face-to-face, and instances of acting, where individuals work independently. Project meetings primarily served for routine communication of project goals and parametric input, denoted as "experience" sharing, lacking extensive discussion or knowledge exchange. However, these meetings were crucial for participants to align their efforts and occasionally address unexpected challenges through ad hoc problem-solving. The right side of the model illustrates how participants contribute individually to task achievement based on their understanding of others' roles and their representation of the collective task. This dual process forms an iterative cycle wherein interaction provides grounding for individual contributions and, reciprocally, individual actions shape the overall system. The model depicts project work as an iterative interplay between interaction and action. This object enables a dynamic interplay between individualized knowledge and explicitly articulated social knowledge, showcasing the intricate dynamics of project work. To create this method, a study was conducted. In this study, the focus was on identifying the character of project work, member interactions, and the significance of individual work, goals, and knowledge sharing. The resulting case story was compared to existing theories, refined through additional observations and discussions, and validated through feedback from project members and top managers.



**Figure 2.** The Iterative Model.

* 1. Change Management Model ADKAR

The ADKAR change management model, developed by PROSCI, serves as a comprehensive framework applicable to various scales of change within an organization, ranging from individual transitions to large-scale transformations. Comprising five key phases—awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement—the ADKAR model aligns seamlessly with project management principles. This alignment is particularly valuable for organizational changes, necessitating a dual approach that addresses both technical/logistic requirements through project or program management and human aspects through change management. Whether applied to a single person, a small group, or an entire organization, the ADKAR model proves versatile, finding practical use in scenarios such as employee onboarding.

The first phase, awareness, focuses on introducing new employees to the organization's vision, mission, values, and culture, emphasizing the importance of their role. The subsequent desire phase aims to capitalize on the initial motivation of new hires, reducing anxiety and providing clarity on potential opportunities and support. Knowledge-building follows, involving a mix of training methods tailored to address identified knowledge gaps, covering operational aspects, compliance, and organizational values. The ability phase shifts towards capacity building, requiring the application of acquired knowledge and the demonstration of capabilities in the actual job context, often facilitated by coaching and mentoring. Finally, the reinforcement phase ensures the sustainability of the onboarding process, promoting employee accountability through performance management and recognition programs.

In addition to the change management aspects, the model incorporates essential project management elements, emphasizing the importance of requirements analysis, personalized design, effective implementation, and post-implementation evaluation. Notably, the model underscores the significance of following the progressive phases systematically for stress-free and successful onboarding. Flexibility is highlighted as a key consideration, acknowledging that individuals learn and adapt at different paces, necessitating customization to suit the diverse requirements of new staff. In conclusion, irrespective of organizational size, the ADKAR model offers a structured and proactive approach to onboarding, contributing to increased employee engagement, commitment, and overall productivity.

**Table 1.** ADKAR Phases and Project Phases



1. Conclusion

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