

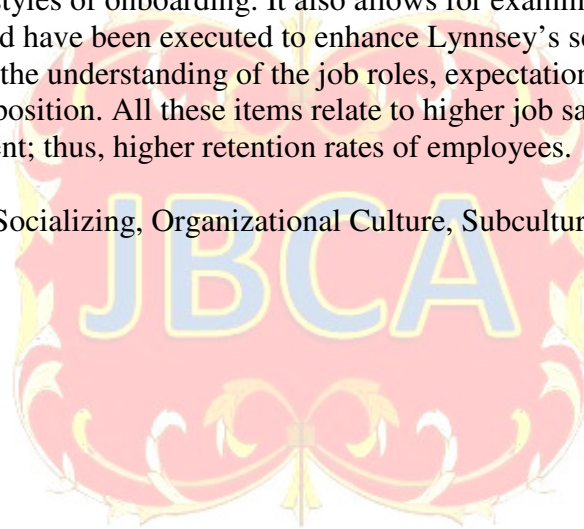
A critique of onboarding and socializing employees

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ABSTRACT

This case is based on an actual account of an experience describing the challenges Lynnsey encountered after accepting a promotion at the main headquarters of a large manufacturing organization. Lynnsey worked for this company for two years in an entry level position at a remote location of the organization. Lynnsey's new co-workers (three other females) worked in their positions for many years and evolved their higher-ranking positions via on-the-job training and expert mentorships through practical experiences. The attitudes and behaviors of the co-workers relate to the inefficiencies and dysfunctional processes of onboarding and socializing employees into an organization's culture. The various accounts allow for a comparison of two styles of onboarding. It also allows for examination of how an effective onboarding program could have been executed to enhance Lynnsey's self-confidence, social acceptance by peers, and the understanding of the job roles, expectations, responsibilities, and requirements of the new position. All these items relate to higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment; thus, higher retention rates of employees.

Keywords: Onboarding, Socializing, Organizational Culture, Subcultures, Job Satisfaction, Retention



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OBJECTIVES

The case study outlines the events of an actual experience a worker had with a large manufacturing company. The purpose of the case is to learn how companies should treat employees when exposing them to new positions within an organization. In wanting to foster an environment where employees feel accepted and valued, onboarding and socialization procedures should always be utilized to increase employee satisfaction with their organization and co-workers. This case could be used in undergraduate and graduate level human resource management and staffing and development courses. This could also be used in professional training events for onboarding programs. It allows for discussions of implications of a successful onboarding and socializing program with results such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, lower turnover, career effectiveness, understanding organizational cultures and subcultures, and retention effects.

BACKGROUND

A promotion was what Lynnsey trained for and had set as a goal since being hired into an entry level position for a large manufacturing company—a company she had always wanted to work for and planned to retire from. The company was notorious for being family oriented and the most stable, in both employability and salary wise, for the surrounding communities. In the entry position, Lynnsey worked two years in a department with a team of 15 workers. A week before starting this position, she was invited to an office tour, introduced to the team members, shown her office space, and was given work related publications to acclimate her to the jargon and department norms and values. Since this department was the starting point, or the raw materials producer of this company, the supervisor took her on a tour of the plant to explain the importance and role this department played resultant of the end-product. The co-workers were friendly and welcoming to each other. Extended family members also socialized at outings and impromptu office visits. Morning meetings were held weekly, and members communicated and collaborated on departmental decision-making. Often the team would go out for working lunch meetings to discuss upcoming projects and policies passed down from upper management. It was a great atmosphere and Lynnsey adapted easily and was extremely satisfied and committed to the job, the people, and the organization.

Excited about being offered a promotion, Lynnsey eagerly accepted. After all, the promotion was within the same organization, so the thought was that the entire organization operated under the same attitudes and values as this department as part of its overall organizational culture. Although it was a tough decision to leave such a great group of co-workers, Lynnsey felt secure, was very optimistic, and thought ultimately, retirement would be with the same organization.

After meeting with the Human Resources Department, Lynnsey was told a supervisor would contact her regarding all office details and work particulars. Human Resources had done their part in supplying Lynnsey with a large packet of information. They gave Lynnsey the contract which had the start date, time, office location, salary information, and her company email. The packet, as explained, had all the other pertinent documents with information regarding benefits, retirement plans, and contact numbers if there were any questions.

THE CHALLENGE

A week before the start date Lynnsey had not received any communication from the supervisor. She called HR to get a name of who she should contact and was told it was no longer their issue. Lynnsey was informed her information was passed along and it was the department's concern at this point. Mindful, this facility occupied two states, three counties, and thousands of workers in over 100 buildings, so finding people was difficult. However, searching on her own, Lynnsey got the name of a supervisor and a soon-to-be co-worker in the area where she was transferring into and reached out via email. There was no response.

A bit panicky and apprehensive, Monday morning (the start date), Lynnsey arrived 45 minutes early at a security station, per the contract, dressed in professional business attire with skirt and heels. Met by a guard, she explained she was there to meet the supervisor to take her to the office. The guard checked his list, stated he had no record, and asked for her identification badge. Lynnsey stated, "I don't have one."

He said, "Sorry, but I can't take anyone in without one and I surely can't take you in dressed like that!" Perplexed, Lynnsey asked, "Why?" He stated PPE (personal protection equipment) had to be worn to the building. There were catwalks, multiple flights of steps, loud machinery, and debris in the air. Thus, the reason for PPE, which included a hard-hat, eye wear, ear protection, and steel-toed or closed-toe shoes. He asked, "Weren't you told and issued these?" Flustered, Lynnsey tried to remain calm. Optimistic, she said, "Maybe the supervisor will show up with everything soon. I am early."

After an additional half an hour, no one showed. The guard called the office location: There was no answer. Lynnsey was sent home—a bit confused, upset, and deflated. This was definitely not how she pictured the first day. Later that afternoon, she received an apologetic call from the supervisor, stating he had learned what happened, and explained he was called away for a plant emergency. He asked Lynnsey to return the next morning and stated he would have everything she needed.

The supervisor met Lynnsey as promised, showed her to the office, gave her sample reports and training material from the prior analyst, gave her manuals with reports and files she would be responsible for, told her to look over everything, get adjusted, and he would check in on her later. Lynnsey did not see him the rest of that week.

The supervisor informed Lynnsey that starting time was 8:00am. She saw three other offices but no workers. She located the copy, conference, and break rooms on her own. With prior knowledge of the organization's system, Lynnsey logged onto her computer and started to learn her new job, with a hit-or-miss strategy. Around 9:15am, the first co-worker arrived. She walked past Lynnsey's door (which was open), went into her office, and shut the door. Lynnsey approached the co-worker, knocked on her door, and introduced herself. The co-worker seemed more annoyed than receptive, so Lynnsey returned to her office. She saw two other co-workers: They followed suit—walked past her door, went into their offices, and shut their doors. At lunchtime Lynnsey walked to the breakroom where she met two of the workers. There were brief introductions and some information sharing. They asked if she found everything. One worker shared, "Starting time is 8am, but we come and go when we want. The supervisor knows this and as long as the work is done on time, he's good with it." She said she had children in school, so she dropped them off, then came in. The other worker said she worked better in the evening, so she comes later and stays later. Therefore, lunches are at different times and usually in the

offices. Also, they all work independently—with doors closed, but if she needed something just knock.

Lastly, the other two co-workers warned Lynnsey of the third co-worker and stated, “Stay clear of her and let her approach you! She’s not too collegial.” Lynnsey assumed they were exaggerating. After all, Lynnsey had never experienced that type of behavior from any prior co-workers. Lynnsey’s first meeting and brief discussion with this co-worker was a happenchance opportunity at the copier when Lynnsey was copying some forms. The co-worker looked at Lynnsey and blatantly said to Lynnsey, “I don’t stand in line behind a ‘newbie’!” At that point, Lynnsey realized they were not exaggerating. Lynnsey went to her office and shut the door.

Recalling the events that had transpired, Lynnsey began to feel this position was a wrong move. After only two days—one being the entire debacle of even getting to the job, then HR’s disconcert to the situation, the supervisor’s slip-ups, and now co-workers that either did not want to work as a team or simply the curtness of the co-workers, were leaving her dissatisfied.

Lynnsey realized this was not the type of work atmosphere where she could thrive and grow as an employee, nor was it the type of culture that she desired. Unfortunately, she was not afforded to return to her prior position. Therefore, she was left with deciding as to whether to start looking outside the company and leave to find a job elsewhere, or to stick this out until something else opened within the organization—even if it meant a downward move. Yet, the distaste and reality of all these events left her questioning her original perceptions about the entire organization itself.

TEACHING NOTES

Abbreviated Abstract

This case describes the challenges Lynnsey encounters after accepting a promotion at the main headquarters of a large manufacturing organization. Lynnsey worked for this company for two years in an entry level position at a remote location of the organization. Lynnsey’s new co-workers (three other females) have worked in their positions for many years and evolved their higher-ranking positions via on-the-job training and expert mentorships through practical experiences. The attitudes and behaviors of the Human Resources Department, supervisor, and co-workers in this case, relate to the inefficiencies and dysfunctional processes of onboarding and socializing employees into an organization’s culture. The various accounts allow for a comparison of two differing styles of onboarding or socializing employees: the first with Lynnsey’s original job position and the second, with the promoted job. It also allows for examination and feedback of how an effective onboarding and socialization program could have been executed to enhance Lynnsey’s self-confidence, social acceptance by peers, and the understanding of the job roles, expectations, responsibilities, and requirements of the new position. All these items relate to higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment; thus, higher retention rates of employees.

Case Usage

This case could be used in the classroom as part of an undergraduate or graduate Human Resources Management or a Staffing and Development course. It would relate specifically to chapters discussing and/or creating onboarding or socializing procedures for employees. It also

involves discussions relating to higher job satisfaction and commitment, clarifying their role within the organization, and retention of employees.

Learning Objectives

All the topics listed below are timely and relevant issues that organizations deal with currently. Discussion of events in the case will help to identify the following HR concepts:

- 1) Onboarding and Socializing Strategies
- 2) Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Career Effectiveness
- 3) Organizational Cultures and Subcultures
- 4) Turnover and Retention

The case provides two situations within the same organization, offering a comparison of strategies on how each department onboarded the employee and reactions resultant of each. The case opens the discussion of whether an employee will be satisfied with the work environment based on their onboarding and socializing experience. Will there be a potential of higher employee satisfaction, commitment, and long-term retention, or will they choose to leave that company—low employee satisfaction and commitment with increasing turnover for the organization. It also allows for deeper discussions on how there can be multiple cultures or subcultures within an organization.

Discussion Questions

After reading and learning about onboarding and socializing employees, students should read the case and be prepared to discuss the following:

- 1) There are four steps to effective onboarding: 1) Compliance—learning and understanding company rules, regulations, and policies; 2) Clarification—understanding job expectations; 3) Culture—understanding company history, values, norms, mission; 4) Connection—developing interpersonal connections (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2017). There are multiple forms of socialization processes that may last as long as a year, depending on the organization, level of employee preparedness and job complexity (Phillips & Gully, 2019). Compare and contrast the two different departmental onboarding strategies Lynnsey experienced. Write brief notes in the chart below about each experience relevant to each of the four steps of effective onboarding. Which position's onboarding and/or socialization strategies do you feel were more effective for Lynnsey? Explain why.

Onboarding and Socializing Strategies		
Entry Level Position	Four Steps in Onboarding	Promoted Position
	Compliance	
	Clarification	
	Culture	
	Connection	

- 2) What type of message do you feel each strategy sent to Lynnsey? What are some of the related outcomes to each strategy?
- 3) There is no one type of culture that guarantees success. Different industries will have different cultures, and they may be based on the typology called the Competing Values Framework (Bauer, Erdogan, Caughlin, & Truxillo, 2019). A diagram is provided in the Appendix to explain the four quadrants (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Based on the information given of the different departments and the information within the figure below, how would you explain the overall culture of the organization? Is there a single culture or multiple subcultures? If subcultures, identify the subculture and the quadrant that relates accordingly per the diagram. Provide a rationale for your answers based on content learned from the case and chapter information about organizational cultures.

Teaching Activity One

Objective: To develop the understanding and important implications of onboarding new employees to an organization.

Preparation: Instructor may assign the case individually or break the class into small groups to enhance discussion and participation. If using small groups allow time for each group to discuss and develop findings and devise any changes to current processes or devise new processes (this will vary depending on class time). This could take two classes. Students would work together the first class to develop their plan or process. The second class would be used to allow each group to do a 5-minute presentation and then follow-up with class discussion and constructive criticism regarding pros and cons of the processes based on learned content. Students may use an existing company they know about or research a company for information about a company of their choice.

Activity: You will use accounts from the case and/or concepts from HR chapter information to create an onboarding or socializing process, or a “road map”—an overview of the effective steps of onboarding and/or socializing, for a new employee at your company. Use information learned from the case and/or chapter information, along with some external research, to answer the questions below, on how your company can enhance their onboarding and/or socializing experience:

- 1) Start Early—do not wait until the first day to assimilate the employee. What would be some of the information you would want to include to introduce the company’s culture? What are some of the documents/information you would include in this process? Refer to compliance, clarification, and culture of the four steps of effective onboarding.
- 2) Make it Exciting—be creative. What are some innovative activities you could do to make the employee excited about coming to work for your company? Refer to connection in the four steps of effective onboarding.
- 3) Include Feedback—what type of methods would you use to evaluate the employee’s onboarding experience? What would be your plan for the information learned from the evaluations? Who would you share this information with and why?

Teaching Activity Two: Role Play or Presentation

Allow students to role-play or present their groups activity to another group, through an example of a creative process they came up with in step 2 above. Instructors may assign one student (or groups of students) to be the person conducting the onboarding and/or socializing activity and one student (or groups of students) to be the new employee/s. Have them physically walk through the activities. (If time allows, students may switch roles).

Discussion after the role play:

- 1) Was the process effective in conveying the culture of the company? Give specific examples.
- 2) How did the new employee feel about the company after the exercise?
- 3) Did the person onboarding/socializing provide adequate material that answered any questions the new employee had?
- 4) Was there a rapport developed between the person onboarding/socializing and the new employee?
- 5) What did you learn from this experience? How could it be used in the future?

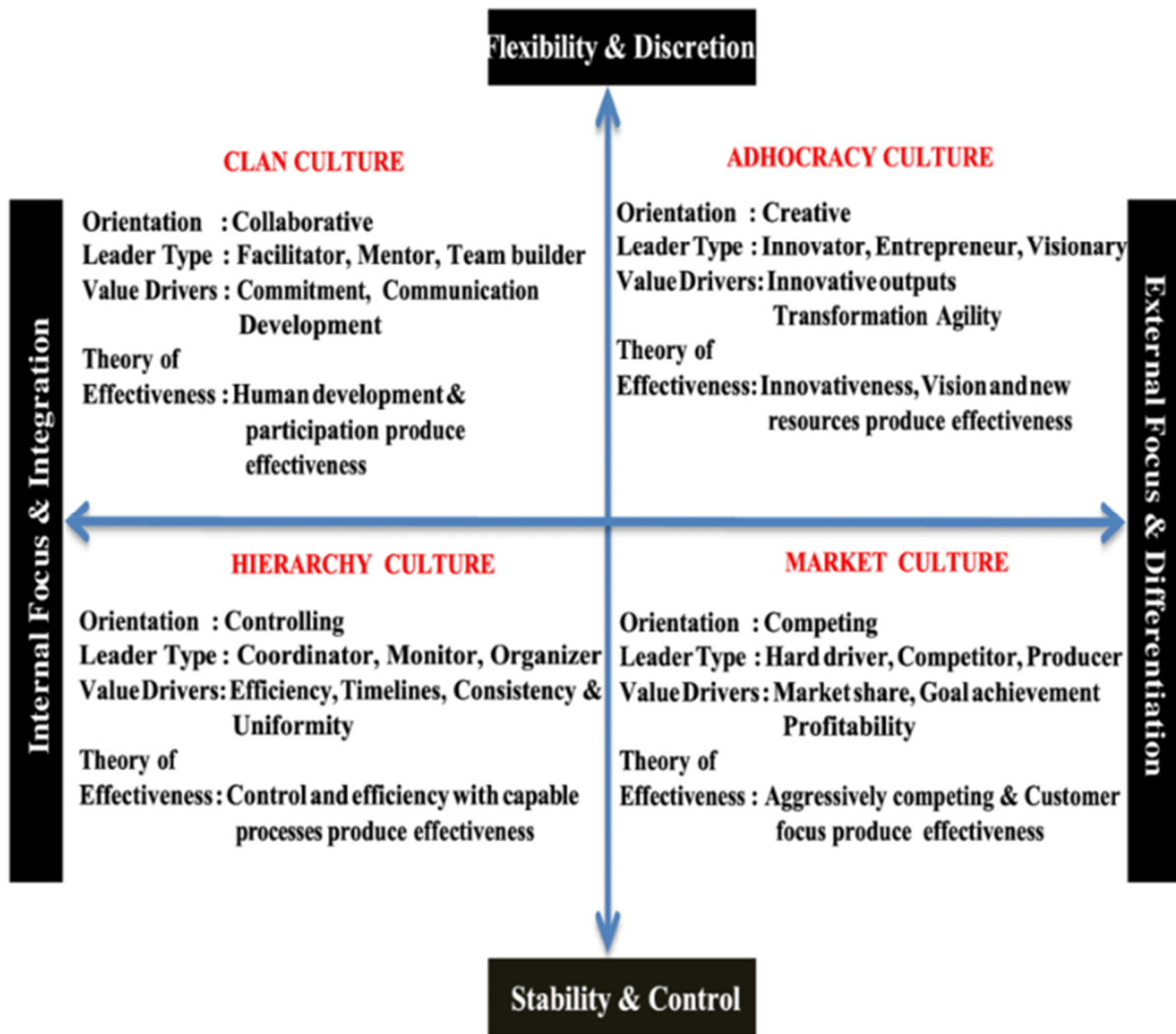


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Appendix
Competing Values Framework (CVF)



Competing Values Framework (adapted from Cameron & Quinn, 2011)