

Onboard New Hires Virtually

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instructional design

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Whether it's temporary or long term, remote work has been gaining in popularity.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Global Workforce Analytics estimated that approximately 4 percent of US employees worked remotely. During the pandemic, the Pew Research Center estimates that up to 70 percent of employees are working from home.

And it is likely individuals will remain remote even after it is safe to return to the office. While the pandemic has forced many organizations to allow individuals to work outside the office, employees' desires as well as organizational productivity will be the drivers for long-term telework.

The transition to remote work no doubt has its challenges for companies and employees alike. But it can be easier for established employees because they at least already have a relationship with their employer and should understand the expectations for their role and work. What about for new hires? How do they join a new organization, learn the company values and mission, and demonstrate their skills and productivity all while working outside the office?

From virtual interviews to a virtual start date, companies have a lot to navigate. For talent development professionals, that means pairing their onboarding program with virtual learning to create a virtual onboarding program.

In this issue of TD at Work, I will:

- Discuss the value of onboarding as well as the benefits and drawbacks of virtual learning.
- Detail how to use ADDIE to develop a new virtual onboarding program.
- Explain how to redevelop an existing program.
- Outline managers' roles in virtual onboarding.
- Advise on how to gain—and retain—stakeholder buy-in for your program.

This issue will equip you with practical guidelines for designing a virtual onboarding program, including tips for activities that can make the program engaging and effective and ways to incorporate virtual components into an existing onboarding program.

The Value in Onboarding and Virtual Learning

Onboarding programs, whether in person or virtual, are valuable for two reasons. First, they help employees become productive more quickly. According to a Brandon Hall Group research brief, organizations with strong onboarding programs are known to improve productivity by more than 70 percent.

Second, onboarding is valuable for employee retention. In a Korn Ferry survey, 98 percent of responding senior leaders said that structured onboarding programs are the key to employee retention. How does onboarding make that possible? As new hires who participate in such a program become productive faster, they engage with the company while seeing how their work affects the business's bottom line. That connection makes them more likely to stay with the organization.

Regardless of whether companies are fully remote, fully in person, or a hybrid of the two, their onboarding program will play a critical role in how new hires get started. Further, whether by choice or as a byproduct of the pandemic, employers are learning how to incorporate virtual components into their recruiting strategies and other aspects of organizational culture. That includes onboarding.

Think about how to bring many different types of learning into the virtual experience.

You may be able to develop a primarily virtual onboarding program or incorporate virtual learning activities into an existing program. But as with any change, it's essential to look at the advantages and disadvantages of virtual learning so you can design a program that leverages its strengths while at the same time manages disadvantages.

Virtual learning advantages. Virtual learning offers participants flexibility in terms of where and when they consume the program content. That can be valuable for employees who work second or third shifts. Today's technology also enables you and learners to track progress—employees are able to see where they are in their onboarding journey.

For detailed content, you can prerecord the material to ensure that all participants receive consistent information. And if your company hires in high volume, you can use virtual onboarding to scale the transfer of information without sacrificing quality.

Virtual learning disadvantages. For participants to benefit, they need to understand and feel comfortable with the technology you are using with the program. Learners also must have the discipline to stay engaged with the content and not become distracted. And managers must provide employees with the support they need to participate—and not get tugged in a different direction during learning time.

Your challenge: Think about how to bring many different types of learning into the virtual experience. Variety will be a key component to learning engagement.

Choose a Design Model

When it comes to designing a virtual onboarding program or reworking an existing one, you have many instructional

design models available to choose from. For this discussion, I use ADDIE (analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate). Since it was initially developed in the 1970s at Florida State University for military training, talent development professionals have used the model for program design. That said, as you set out to work on your program, pick the model that works best for you. And remember that instructional design best practices still hold true for a virtual onboarding program.

Starting Fresh

If your company doesn't have any type of onboarding program or your current one isn't worth salvaging, it's time to create one. This is where ADDIE comes in.

Analyze

First, assess the current environment. Ideally, for this analysis, gather relevant data and information to help you understand where the company currently is and where it wants to go in the future.

Be objective. While you may have your own ideas about what needs to happen, the analysis is about gathering objective data and information. Leave any preconceived thoughts and biases aside. Otherwise, it's possible the assessment won't give you a clear picture of the problem and solution.

Keep it brief. Assessments don't have to be lengthy, resource-heavy activities. Balance the need to conduct a thorough, objective assessment with the time and resources available. Simply put, if it is too in-depth, you could run into resistance and unnecessarily waste time and resources during this phase. And that can hurt your project later.

Think of the assessment as a traditional gap analysis. If done well, the process of conducting the assessment will help you gain organizational buy-in.

Four Questions

In *Needs Assessment Basics*, Deborah Tobey and Beth McGoldrick outline a straightforward, four-question approach to conducting a learning assessment.

- 1. What are the organization's needs?** Identify what the company needs in terms of operating the

business successfully. Some survey participants will be able to answer this question quickly and without hesitation. Others—especially if the company is in the middle of a restructuring, merger, or acquisition—may have to spend more time on it.

- 2. What are the performance needs?** Once you know what the company needs to be successful, translate that into performance standards. Again, some companies may have these defined, while others may have to create them. If your company is doing any type of reskilling or upskilling, it's possible that some but not all positions will be affected.

The ADDIE Model

Analyze: Assess your organization's current environment. Reach a consensus on the project's goals and an understanding of what's currently happening. Then conduct an audience analysis.

Design: Create program objectives that align with the project goals you've identified. Then determine how you will measure outcomes.

Develop: Focus on developing the program. Identify the methods, and create content for participants and facilitators.

Implement: This is the most visible step in the process. During implementation, you roll out the program to the target audience. Sometimes organizations will include a pilot program, where a select group goes through it and offers feedback before the program officially launches. That is a great way to get feedback and buy-in.

Evaluate: In this final step, collect data and information about the program from participants, managers, and senior management. Use that to adjust content and implement future updates. Also, be sure to share how the program is meeting its goals. Additionally, anecdotal information can be useful, especially when combined with post-program data. Evaluation data and information can justify the case for budget dollars and more resources.