



Master Degree in Information Management

**Exploring the Effects of Remote Onboarding  
and Management Styles on Employee  
Productivity, Job Satisfaction, and Autonomy:  
An exploratory case study at NL-ix**

**MASTER THESIS**

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# Management Summary

## English

This thesis investigates the influence of remote onboarding and management styles on employee productivity, satisfaction, and autonomy at NL-ix, leveraging an exploratory case study approach. Amidst the shift towards hybrid and remote work models, understanding the effectiveness of remote onboarding becomes crucial for maintaining employee engagement and organizational alignment. The research reveals that remote onboarding, when executed with a focus on compliance, clarification, culture, and connection, increases job satisfaction and reduces uncertainty among new hires. Management styles that balance autonomy with support, demonstrating adaptability and clear communication, further enhance the onboarding experience, promoting a quicker transition to productivity and fostering a sense of belonging within the company. The study suggests a hybrid onboarding model that integrates digital and personal interactions to address the limitations of fully remote onboarding. Recommendations include developing comprehensive onboarding programs that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of technical and non-technical roles, and managerial strategies that emphasize transparent communication and proactive support. This thesis contributes to the broader discourse on effective onboarding practices, offering insights that could guide organizations in optimizing their remote onboarding processes and management approaches to better support their workforce in a changing work environment.

## Dutch

Deze scriptie onderzoekt de invloed van remote onboarding en managementstijlen op de productiviteit, tevredenheid en autonomie van medewerkers bij NL-ix, met behulp van een verkennende case study. In het licht van de verschuiving naar hybride en remote werkmodellen wordt het begrijpen van de effectiviteit van remote onboarding cruciaal voor het behouden van medewerkersbetrokkenheid en organisatorische uitlijning. Het onderzoek onthult dat remote onboarding, wanneer uitgevoerd met een focus op duidelijkheid, cultuur en verbinding, significant de jobtevredenheid beïnvloedt en onzekerheid onder nieuwe medewerkers vermindert. Managementstijlen die autonomie balanceren met ondersteuning, die aanpasbaarheid en duidelijke communicatie demonstreren, verbeteren verder de onboarding ervaring, bevorderen een snellere overgang naar productiviteit en kweken een gevoel van verbondenheid binnen het bedrijf. De studie suggereert een hybride onboarding model dat digitale en persoonlijke interacties integreert om de beperkingen van volledig remote onboarding aan te pakken. Aanbevelingen omvatten het ontwikkelen van uitgebreide onboardingprogramma's die zijn afgestemd op de diverse behoeften van technische en niet-technische rollen, en managementstrategieën die transparante communicatie en proactieve ondersteuning benadrukken. Deze scriptie draagt bij aan de bredere discussie over effectieve onboardingpraktijken en biedt inzichten die organisaties kunnen leiden bij het optimaliseren van hun remote onboarding processen en managementbenaderingen om hun personeelsbestand beter te ondersteunen in een veranderende werkomgeving.

# Preface

## English

This master's thesis stands as a milestone not solely of my academic endeavors but as a manifestation of the profound support and love I've been fortunate to receive. At the outset, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my parents, whose unconditional love and patience have been the cornerstone of my journey. Their unwavering support and belief in me have made this journey not just possible but meaningful. Within this circle of support, I must also extend my deepest appreciation to my oldest friend and the brother I never had, Jurre. His fresh perspective and unyielding positivity have been instrumental in helping me navigate through the challenges of this thesis. Jurre's insights provided me with the clarity and motivation needed to persevere.

Additionally, I owe a great deal of thanks to Joris, whose philosophy of tackling problems by starting from the beginning and trusting in the process has been a guiding principle for me. His approach has taught me the importance of patience and faith in my abilities, qualities that have been indispensable throughout this academic journey.

I also carry with me the wisdom and guidance of my late grandmother. Her advice, though she is no longer with us, continues to guide me in times of uncertainty. Her presence is felt deeply, offering comfort and direction when I need it most.

The dedication and guidance of my thesis supervisor prof. dr. Anne-Francoise Rutkowski have been nothing short of remarkable. Her willingness to go the extra mile, especially through overtime work, has been a beacon of support. Her expertise and encouragement have been crucial in steering this research towards completion.

Furthermore, I must acknowledge the role of technology in shaping this thesis. I am grateful to be witnessing a small step in the evolution of mankind in the form of Large Language Models (LLMs), which will probably have a significant impact on the future of the world. These LLMs played a big role in my writing process, served as a reliable second opinion, offering perspectives I hadn't considered and enhancing my work with beautifully crafted English sentences. This tool made the thesis writing process not just more manageable but also more enjoyable.

## Dutch

Deze master scriptie is niet alleen een mijlpaal die tegelijkertijd een einde en een begin markeert, maar het is ook de uiting van alle steun en liefde die ik heb gekregen. Als eerste wil ik mijn ouders bedanken, wier onvoorwaardelijke liefde en geduld de hoeksteen van mijn reis zijn geweest. Hun rotsvaste steun en geloof in mij hebben deze reis niet alleen mogelijk maar ook betekenisvol gemaakt. Ook wil ik mijn diepste waardering uitspreken voor mijn oudste vriend en de broer die ik nooit had, Jurre. Zijn frisse perspectief en onsloopbare positiviteit zijn heel belangrijk geweest om alle uitdagingen van deze scriptie door te komen.

Daarnaast ben ik veel dank verschuldigd aan Joris, wiens filosofie om problemen aan te pakken

door gewoon te beginnen en te vertrouwen dat het goed komt, een simpel maar briljant inzicht bleek.

Ik draag ook de wijsheid van mijn oma mee, wiens advies doordreunt als ik het nodig heb, ondanks dat ze niet langer hier is. Zij biedt mij nog steeds troost wanneer ik het nodig heb.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Problem Indication

The hybrid working model, blending office and remote work, gained traction in the early 2000s with the advent of stable internet (Bailey & Kurland, 2002), and saw rapid acceleration due to the pandemic. Recent trends, as detailed in an article by USA Today (2023), indicate a shift from peak remote work levels during 2020, with remote workdays falling to about 25% by 2023 from over 60%, yet still significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. Experts predict a continued adaptation towards hybrid work models, with companies developing more personalized remote work policies and investing in technologies to enhance remote efficiency. In the U.S., the shift towards hybrid work has even prompted cities to repurpose office buildings into residential spaces, in response to the declining need for office space as hybrid work is becoming the norm.

A notable aspect of the hybrid working model is the unique challenges it poses for both employees and organizations during the process of integrating new recruits. The Oxford Dictionary defines onboarding as "the process of ensuring a new employee or customer becomes familiar with an organization or its products or services." This thesis delves into the first aspect of this definition, emphasizing the two-sided nature of onboarding, as a period of mutual adjustment between new hires and the organization. Thus, the onboarding process is examined as a reciprocal integration effort, analyzed from both perspectives. Specifically, this study focuses on the ways in which new employees develop the essential domain knowledge and skills to become valuable organizational contributors and how these processes have evolved with the shift towards hybrid or entirely remote working models.

This exploratory study is not only important for ensuring that employees remain in their positions but also for enhancing their performance. The costs associated with employee turnover highlight the financial implications of failing to properly onboard staff (Meyer & Bartels, 2017). The CEO of NL-ix has pointed out specific challenges the company faces in retaining talent and ensuring that employee roles are aligned with organizational objectives. These reflections bring to light the tangible impact of employee turnover on a company's bottom line and underscore the necessity of adopting a strategic approach to

remote onboarding. Such an approach aims to improve job satisfaction and thereby fostering a sense of loyalty to the organization, which is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in a market niche where very specific domain knowledge is needed to successfully compete.

Research by Sani et al. (2022) has unveiled various obstacles within the realm of remote onboarding, including diminished feelings of social connection, lowered personal well-being, and the sensation of engaging in less meaningful work. These factors contribute to the deterioration of employee relations and weakened ties between employers and employees. Complementarily, Rodeghero et al. (2021) explored the specific challenges faced by software developers at Microsoft during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings highlight the difficulties in forming strong team bonds, navigating the complexities of remote collaboration tools, and fostering social connectedness in a digital workspace. Together, these studies emphasize the critical need to refine onboarding practices, tailoring them to meet the distinctive requirements posed by remote work environments.

This thesis dives into the impact of remote onboarding on job satisfaction and uncertainty among employees in both technical and non-technical roles, probing potential differences between these groups. Additionally, it investigates how varying management strategies can influence these experiences. Ganzel (1998) mentioned that a good start at a company can help new employees reach their full potential sooner, which means companies spend less resources on hiring (turnover). Schroth (2019) added that a well-organized onboarding plan can make new hires feel less anxious and confused, helping them understand their new roles better and thereby shortening the time it takes them to become productive and improving their overall job satisfaction.

This exploratory study aims to better understand the hybrid work onboarding process and focus particularly on how it can be improved. It by finding the key factors that make remote onboarding successful, to see if there are different factors that play a role when compared to a traditional onsite onboarding. Bauer and Erdoğan (2011) pointed out that first impressions are crucial and can affect how employees feel about their company for a long time. Also, Ellis et al. (2017) warned that a bad start can lead to new hires leaving very soon, sometimes in just three months. Understanding how important onboarding is, this thesis conducts an in-depth examination of remote onboarding processes, seeking to understand their effects on job satisfaction and uncertainty, and to uncover additional factors that may influence the success of remote onboarding compared to traditional onsite methods.

## 1.2 Positioning the research

This thesis explores the remote onboarding practices at NL-ix, the Neutral Internet Exchange, a pivotal entity in the realm of internet exchanges known for blending technological innovation with strategic organizational approaches. Established in 2002 as an alternative to the Amsterdam Internet Exchange (AMS-ix), NL-ix has experienced significant growth, expanding its operations to 95 datacenters across 15 European cities in seven countries. Despite its acquisition by KPN in 2011, NL-ix has maintained its independence and competitive edge through a unique mix of peering and transit services, catering primarily to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Content Delivery Networks (CDNs).



With a modest yet rapidly expanding team, growing from 25 employees in 2019 to 49 by 2023, NL-ix underscores the critical importance of effective onboarding, especially for roles requiring specialized skills and extended learning periods. The transition to remote work, hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic, presents additional challenges in integrating new remote employees into complex roles, thereby highlighting the need for strategic onboarding practices that can retain domain-specific knowledge and foster organizational loyalty.

This research aims to dissect NL-ix's remote onboarding effectiveness for both technical and non-technical roles, with a focus on identifying strategies that can improve the integration of remote workers. Insights gained from interviews with the company's CEO reveal the intricacies of retaining talent and the alignment of employee roles with broader organizational objectives. This exploration seeks to offer actionable recommendations for optimizing NL-ix's remote onboarding process, aiming to enhance job satisfaction, reduce employee turnover, and support the company's growth and market positioning.

Furthermore, this thesis endeavors to contribute to the broader discourse on remote work and onboarding practices. The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably shifted the landscape towards remote working, underscoring the need for research that addresses how organizations can adapt to these changes effectively. By providing a detailed examination of NL-ix's approach and the subsequent formulation of recommendations, this study not only addresses specific challenges faced by NL-ix but also aims to inform future studies on remote onboarding success factors and the development of more effective onboarding practices across various sectors.

In doing so, this thesis not only seeks to aid NL-ix in refining its onboarding practices but also to lay the groundwork for further research into how remote onboarding can be leveraged as a strategic tool for achieving organizational goals and ensuring long-term success in a rapidly evolving work environment.

### 1.3 Problem statement and research questions

At the core of this exploratory study is answering a pivotal question that aims to unravel the complexities of remote onboarding within the context of NL-ix: *How significantly have remote onboarding practices implemented at NL-ix influenced job satisfaction and levels of uncertainty among employees in technical and non-technical roles? To what extent do the impacts of remote onboarding differ between these employee groups? What key factors determine the effectiveness of remote onboarding, and how have distinct management styles within NL-ix affected employee experiences and the success of these onboarding practices?* This central query aims to dissect and understand the nuances of the remote onboarding experience and its broader implications on the workforce.

To thoroughly explore this main question, the thesis will delve into four specific sub-questions, each addressing a key aspect of the remote onboarding process:

1. What are the specific effects of remote onboarding practices on job satisfaction and the level of uncertainty among employees in a technical and non-technical role at NL-ix?
2. In what ways do the experiences of remote onboarding differ between employees in a

- technical and non-technical role at NL-ix?
3. What factors are critical to the success of remote onboarding processes at NL-ix?
  4. How have different management styles within NL-ix influenced the outcomes of remote onboarding practices?

Through these questions, this thesis aims to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge in information management and also to offer practical, actionable recommendations for NL-ix that possible can help organizations that face similar problems. By analyzing the effects of remote onboarding and the factors that contribute to its success, this thesis seeks to pave the way for more effective and satisfying onboarding experiences, ultimately enhancing employee retention and productivity in a remote of hybrid work environment.

## 1.4 Research Methodology

This thesis embarks on an exploratory case study, as conceptualized by Yin ([1994](#)), to delve into the factors contributing to successful remote onboarding processes. By employing qualitative research methodologies, this study aims to uncover rich, detailed insights in a field where existing research is scarce. Yin's framework underscores the utility of qualitative approaches for exploratory case studies, particularly in their ability to generate deep understandings from complex phenomena through detailed, contextual analysis.

The research begins with a review of the existing literature, drawing upon academic studies in related fields to construct a theoretical framework. This framework serves not only to anchor the study but also to identify key themes that guide the subsequent data collection process. In alignment with Yin's recommendations, the development of interview questions is informed by this framework, with distinct sets of interview questions tailored for managers and non-managerial staff. This partition is done to illuminate the varied experiences and perspectives between these groups, given the role of a manager in the onboarding of non-managerial staff. The questions are designed to elicit expansive narratives, shedding light on how the onboarding experience influences job satisfaction and mitigates feelings of uncertainty.

Following Yin's exploratory case study methodology, the primary mode of data collection in this study is through interviews with NL-ix employees, concentrating on obtaining personal narratives about their onboarding experiences. This exploration paires the onboarding experiences of employees inducted remotely during the pandemic-induced shift to remote work with those of individuals who underwent the process on-site, either before or after this period. Through analysis of these narratives, the study aims to distill commonalities, discrepancies, and unexpected insights, while paying close attention to possible factors that could influence the effectiveness of remote onboarding practices.

In the discussion phase, this thesis integrates the empirical findings from the interviews with theoretical insights from the initial literature review and further scholarly work identified as pertinent in light of the interview data. This critical comparison and synthesis are key to contextualizing the novel insights within the broader corpus of knowledge on remote onboarding, adhering to Yin's approach of triangulating data sources to bolster the study's

credibility and depth.

The conclusions drawn in the final chapter aim to expose the practical and theoretical implications of the findings from NL-ix's case to broader remote onboarding practices and future research directions. By following Yin's structured approach to exploratory case study research, this thesis contributes valuable knowledge to the field of information management, offering nuanced perspectives on navigating the intricacies of remote onboarding in the evolving landscape of work.

## 1.5 Structure of thesis

The structure of this thesis is arranged to take the reader on a journey through the study of remote onboarding processes. It is divided into six chapters, each playing a unique role in advancing the research.

Chapter 1, titled the Introduction, establishes the groundwork for the investigation. It outlines the aims of the research and its importance, not just to the focal company, NL-ix, but also to the broader field. This chapter offers a clear guide for the chapters that follow and sets the scene for the research, detailing the context and background.

In Chapter 2, the Literature Review, a vast pool of knowledge is tapped into. This chapter dives into existing scholarly works from a variety of relevant fields, creating a solid theoretical base for the thesis. The comprehensive nature of this literature review provides a well-rounded perspective on remote onboarding and its numerous facets, forming a strong foundation for the methodological approach of the thesis.

Chapter 3, titled Methodology, explains in detail the qualitative research methods used. This chapter discusses how the interview questions were designed for different types of employees, and the techniques used for analyzing the data. It acts as a link, connecting the theoretical insights from the literature review with the actual process of gathering and analyzing data. It also ensures that the study that is done is replicable.

Chapter 4, presenting the Results, is where the findings from the interviews with NL-ix employees are revealed. This chapter is key, as it unpacks and examines the real-world experiences and insights gathered from the company. These findings are then meticulously cross-referenced with the concepts and frameworks from the literature review, possibly supplemented by recent studies to ensure a current and relevant analysis.

Chapter 5, Discussion & Conclusions, merges insights from NL-ix employee interviews with established theories, adding new perspectives where needed. This blend highlights the real-world implications for NL-ix, guiding the development of improved remote onboarding practices. The chapter concludes by summarizing key findings and offering NL-ix targeted recommendations to enhance its onboarding process. It also suggests future research directions to further explore remote onboarding, contributing to the broader knowledge and practical approaches in this vital area of information management.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

The necessity for research into remote onboarding emerges from the significant challenges many organizations encounter in effectively implementing these processes. Organizations often struggle with onboarding due to a skewed prioritization of the organization's objectives over the individual needs of new employees, as highlighted by Bauer and Erdoğan (2011) and Snell (2006). New employees enter their roles with expectations of being valued and supported, expectations that are not always met. An ineffective onboarding process can create complications for both the organization and the new hires. Stein and Christiansen (2010) highlight significant challenges in onboarding. They found that one-third of external hires leave within two years, less than a third of executives feel positive about their onboarding, and about a third of executives fail to meet expectations in the initial two years. Additionally, a similar proportion of employees with less than six months in a role are already looking for new jobs, indicating widespread dissatisfaction with current onboarding processes.

The study of remote onboarding has gained significant traction as a new research domain, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic necessitated a global pivot to remote working practices in response to lockdowns and social distancing measures, as detailed by Bartik et al. (2020). Nations worldwide implemented restrictions that curtailed physical movement and office attendance, forcing a rapid adaptation to working from home. This shift posed distinct challenges for individuals commencing new roles, ushering in remote onboarding as an essential, rather than optional, practice.

Understanding these problems can help companies build better relationships with their employees by meeting their needs and respecting their rights from the start. Since more people are working remotely now, finding ways to improve remote onboarding is important (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). This research could help make joining a new company a better experience for everyone involved.

### 2.1 The Bauer model

To frame the discussion on onboarding within this thesis, it is vital to define what onboarding entails. For the purposes of this analysis, *onboarding is understood as the process through*

which new employees are assimilated into a team or organization (Bauer et al., 2007), (Bauer & Erdoğan, 2011) & (Watkins, 2013). This process encompasses the initial phase where new employees familiarize themselves with the organizational culture and their team members. Bauer suggests that onboarding can be conducted through standard procedures, personalized approaches, or a blend of both, with the latter offering the greatest likelihood of success.

The publication by Bauer and Erdoğan (2011) has become a seminal work in the field of onboarding research, widely cited and recognized as a foundational text for studies in this area. Bauer, who has served as the Editor of the Journal of Management and held positions on the editorial boards of prestigious journals such as the Journal of Applied Psychology and Personnel Psychology, introduced the concept of the onboarding strategy level in this pivotal publication. This concept is quantified on a scale from 1 to 3, with higher levels indicating a greater likelihood of successful onboarding. Figure 2.1 delineates these three levels, outlining their characteristics and the means by which they can be measured.

Onboarding Strategy Level	Compliance	Clarification	Culture	Connection
<b>1 Passive</b>	YES	SOME	LITTLE/ NONE	LITTLE/ NONE
<b>2 High Potential</b>	YES	YES	SOME	SOME
<b>3 Proactive</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES

**Figure 2.1:** Onboarding strategy levels by Bauer and Erdoğan (2011)

The onboarding strategy level is determined by the range of topics covered during the onboarding process. A broader scope of subjects translates to a higher onboarding strategy level. These topics, also known as the 4Cs, include:

- **Compliance:** This involves educating new employees about the legal policies and regulations within the organization, such as through an employee handbook that details practices like attendance or dress code policies.
- **Clarification:** This aspect focuses on educating employees about the performance expectations of their roles, which might involve training in various systems, processes, or reporting formats used in their work.
- **Culture:** Introducing new employees to the organization's history, traditions, values, philosophy, and norms is key to integrating them into the company culture. This can be achieved through courses, workshops, or team-building exercises.
- **Connection:** At this level, employees are encouraged to form both formal and informal relationships within the organization. This might include outlining the organizational hierarchy, introducing new hires to senior leadership, or arranging for line managers and colleagues to take them out to lunch to foster personal connections.

Bauer's model endeavors to create a universal one-size-fits-all approach to onboarding, aiming to be applicable across all types of roles and organizations. However, this ambition may overlook critical nuances, such as the diversity of corporate work environments, the specific nature of roles within a company, and the individual differences among employees. Echoing the sentiment of Box and Draper (1987), All models are wrong, but some are useful, Bauer's framework, while helpful, likely does not provide a complete explanation for the success or failure of each onboarding process. An example of this is a recent research indicates that the onboarding of employees from Generation Z may involve up to six additional factors that play a critical role (Chillakuri, 2020).

Given the premise that the onboarding model can be tailored and enhanced for particular contexts, it logically follows that improvements can also be applied to remote onboarding. Research conducted by Sani et al. (2022) has identified several challenges associated with remote onboarding, including diminished social connectedness, reduced personal well-being, perceptions of less meaningful work, deteriorated employee relations, and weakened bonds between employers and employees. These findings underscore the possibility for a refined remote onboarding process. By addressing these specific issues, it is possible to mitigate the negative impacts associated with remote onboarding, enhancing the overall experience for new hires and contributing to a more cohesive and satisfied workforce.

To make remote onboarding truly effective, it is necessary to consider possible extra dimensions. The introduction of additional factors acknowledges the complex reality of integrating new hires into a workforce, especially in a remote setting. It emphasizes the importance of adapting onboarding strategies to address the unique challenges presented by remote work, including fostering a sense of community, ensuring meaningful engagement, and maintaining robust communication channels between new employees and the organization. Consequently, while Bauer's model serves as a valuable starting point, its application in the modern workplace, particularly in remote onboarding scenarios, requires a more nuanced approach that takes into account the evolving needs and preferences of the workforce.

A similar study conducted by Scott et al. (2022) involved a series of interviews with individuals who had undergone remote onboarding. One particular interview vividly illustrated the consequences of an inadequately structured onboarding process. The interviewee shared a narrative that highlighted a chain of negative outcomes stemming from this initial experience. Initially, the individual found themselves dedicating considerable time to filling the gaps left by the onboarding process. This lack of comprehensive orientation led to a pronounced ambiguity regarding goals, expectations, and operational processes within the organization.

The absence of clear direction was further compounded by unproductive feedback. Instead of guiding the new employee towards improvement and integration into their role, the feedback served to exacerbate feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy. This environment, characterized by unclear objectives and unhelpful feedback, culminated in significant uncertainty regarding the individual's job performance and suitability for their position.

This interview underscores the critical importance of a well-designed onboarding process, especially in a remote setting. The account demonstrates how insufficient onboarding can precipitate a cascade of challenges for new employees, affecting not only their immediate

integration into their roles but also their long-term engagement and satisfaction with their job. This narrative serves as a potent reminder of the need for organizations to invest in comprehensive and constructive onboarding strategies that clearly communicate expectations, provide meaningful feedback, and support new hires in navigating the complexities of their roles and the company culture, thereby ensuring a smoother transition into the workforce.

## 2.2 Effects of Onboarding Level

The intricacies of the onboarding process and its impact on employee outcomes are brought to light in the research conducted by Meyer and Bartels (2017). The empirical data reveals that the level of onboarding strategy employed by an organization is not merely a procedural formality but a foundational element that correlates with job satisfaction. As depicted in the provided figure, the onboarding level accounts for a substantial 20% variance in job satisfaction scores among the subjects of the study. This percentage is indicative of the influence that a structured and comprehensive onboarding experience has on the well-being and satisfaction of employees within their professional roles.

Additionally, the study presents insights into the association between onboarding and employee tenure, with a positive correlation suggesting that a higher onboarding level may lead to increased employee longevity within the company. While this influence is described as modest, it nonetheless underscores the potential for a well-executed onboarding program to enhance staff retention rates, thus mitigating the costs and disruptions associated with high turnover.

The data also sheds light on the relationship between onboarding and other key organizational metrics such as organizational commitment and perceived organizational support. The correlations suggest that employees who experience higher levels of onboarding are more likely to develop a stronger commitment to the organization and perceive a greater level of support from it. This perceived support, in turn, is strongly correlated with both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, reinforcing the interconnectedness of these factors.

Moreover, the study examines the concept of perceived utility, which reflects the employees' assessment of the onboarding process's effectiveness and relevance. The strong correlation between perceived utility and job satisfaction again emphasizes the critical role of employees' perceptions in their overall job experience.

These findings not only affirm the role of effective onboarding in fostering a satisfied and committed workforce but also highlight the web of relationships between onboarding and various dimensions of the employee experience. It becomes clear that organizations stand to benefit greatly from investing in robust onboarding strategies that are thoughtfully designed to address the multifaceted needs of new hires, thus enhancing their integration and satisfaction with their roles.

## 2.3 Effects of Remote Onboarding on Job Satisfaction

A study conducted by Rodeghero et al. (2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on software developers at Microsoft, sheds light on the distinctive hurdles of remote onboarding.



The paper draws attention to issues such as the struggle to forge strong team bonds, the complexity of mastering remote collaboration tools, and the challenge of establishing social connectedness in a virtual environment. The identification of these challenges underscores the necessity of enhancing onboarding protocols to address the unique demands of remote work settings.

The study by Lim and Teo (2000) delves into the dynamics of remote working, uncovering a negative relationship between organizational commitment and attitudes towards remote working. This finding suggests that individuals with a strong commitment to their organization may exhibit less favorable attitudes towards the idea of working from home. The research highlights the interplay between an employee's allegiance to their company and their perception of remote working, suggesting that deeper organizational ties might influence a preference for traditional working environments over remote settings. This insight is crucial for companies exploring remote working policies and the importance of understanding employee attitudes and organizational commitment in the successful implementation of remote work strategies.

These scholarly contributions indicate a gap in existing knowledge, highlighting a demonstrated direct impact of onboarding on job satisfaction and the indirect effects of remote onboarding on job contentment. However, there remains a lacuna in research directly linking the specific impacts of remote onboarding practices to job satisfaction. This gap presents an opportunity for further inquiry into how tailored remote onboarding strategies can directly enhance job satisfaction, suggesting a fertile area for future research to explore the nuanced dynamics of remote work integration and its effects on employee experience.

## 2.4 Effects of Remote Onboarding on Uncertainty

Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) is possible applicable in the context of remote onboarding and its impact on employee uncertainty. Developed by Berger and Calabrese (1975), URT posits that individuals have a natural inclination to minimize uncertainty in new social situations by seeking information about others and their environment. In the context of remote onboarding, new employees often experience uncertainty about various aspects of their role, organizational culture, and team dynamics. They may lack clear information about their job expectations, have limited interaction with their colleagues, and struggle to understand the organizational norms and values. These uncertainties can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and decreased job satisfaction.

Organizations can apply principles from URT to mitigate uncertainty during remote onboarding. For example, providing new hires with comprehensive information about their roles, responsibilities, and organizational culture can help reduce ambiguity and increase their sense of belonging. Regular communication and virtual socialization activities can also facilitate information exchange and help new employees build relationships with their colleagues, thus reducing uncertainty.

Two interesting studies were done that touched on the main research question of this exploratory case study, as the combine Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) with remote onboarding. The first of these studies, conducted by Pietilä (2022), aimed to enhance the



onboarding process of a specific company. Through a qualitative case study approach, the study established a model for onboarding, emphasizing the importance of URT and newcomer adjustment in improving the process. Identified improvement areas included equipment provision, information dissemination, onboarding plan effectiveness, role clarity, and social acceptance. Actionable recommendations were proposed to address these areas, focusing on refining the onboarding plan and implementing a standardized entry process for new employees. It's notable that while the results are specific to the case company, they offer possible insights for similar contexts.

The second study, conducted by Schutte (2022), explored the challenges of remote onboarding in Higher Educational Institutions in The Netherlands. Drawing from organizational socialization and newcomer adjustment theories, as well as URT, this qualitative study investigates newcomer adjustment and sensemaking in remote onboarding. Four dimensions influencing newcomer adjustment were identified: relationship building, responsibility and accountability, well-being and belonging, and information seeking. The study underscored the importance of communication in establishing connections and sensemaking during onboarding. It also highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of relationship building and the need for clear onboarding policies.

Despite the valuable insights provided, it's noted that there is currently a lack of peer-reviewed literature on this topic, indicating a potential knowledge gap in existing research.

Moreover, Cable et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of socialization tactics in remote onboarding. They argue that remote socialization, when executed effectively, can bridge the gap created by physical distance and can provide new employees with a sense of belonging and clarity.

In summary, while remote onboarding introduces new variables that may increase the uncertainty experienced by new hires, the literature provides evidence that carefully crafted remote onboarding strategies, which are cognizant of these challenges, can reduce uncertainty and foster a smoother transition into the organization.

## 2.5 Effect of Management Style on Remote Onboarding

Management styles play a significant role in shaping the onboarding experience and its outcomes. Skogstad et al. (2007) highlight the challenges associated with laissez-faire leadership, such as ambiguity in role expectations and reduced leadership clarity, which can hinder the integration of new employees. Conversely, a coaching management style, as outlined by Ladyshevsky (2010), emphasizes empowerment and accountability, fostering a proactive and self-driven attitude among employees. However, this approach requires a balance of autonomy and structured support to ensure effective personal growth and motivation.

The balance between granting autonomy and providing support is a critical consideration in remote onboarding. Autonomy encourages creativity and ownership, while support ensures clarity and facilitates learning and development. Lewin et al. (1939) discuss the benefits of democratic leadership in engaging team members and facilitating ownership, whereas too much autonomy without adequate support can lead to confusion and a lack of direction,

underscoring the importance of a balanced approach in management practices.

To date, there is a noticeable gap in the literature specifically addressing the relationship between management styles and remote onboarding practices. While existing research extensively covers areas such as the impact of leadership on remote work environments, employee engagement in remote settings, and management practices for remote teams, a focused examination of how different management styles directly influence the effectiveness of remote onboarding processes remains underexplored. This absence suggests a compelling knowledge gap within the field. The current body of literature, however, underscores the critical roles that communication, autonomy, and support play in remote work contexts—factors deeply intertwined with management approaches. These elements hint at the potential significance of management style in shaping remote onboarding experiences, highlighting an intriguing area for future research that could provide valuable insights into optimizing remote work practices and enhancing employee integration and satisfaction.

## 2.6 Remote Onboarding Effects on Productivity

The relationship between the level of onboarding and the time it takes for a new hire to become productive is an intriguing aspect of workplace integration, especially in the context of remote work. Studies, such as the one conducted by Wang et al. (2020), highlight the challenges faced by Chinese workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, including work-home interference, ineffective communication, procrastination, and loneliness. These challenges are mitigated by factors like social support, job autonomy, monitoring, and workload management, with self-discipline emerging as a crucial differentiator in effective remote working. On the other hand, research by Petrilli et al. (2022) points out that newcomers in digital contexts often struggle to access necessary information, be proactive, and receive timely feedback, which are essential for understanding their role and fit within the company. They argue that a structured digital onboarding program is vital for easing the transition to remote working cultures and enhancing socialization processes.

Drawing from these insights, it becomes clear that the depth and quality of an onboarding program significantly impact how quickly a new employee can contribute effectively to their organization. For instance, a study by Ganiel (1998) revealed that employees at Texas Instruments who underwent comprehensive onboarding reached their full potential two months earlier than those who did not. This suggests that an onboarding process that addresses the challenges of remote work, as identified by Wang et al. (2020), and incorporates structured digital onboarding elements, as recommended by Petrilli et al. (2022), can significantly shorten the time it takes for new hires to become productive. By focusing on the needs of incoming employees, providing them with the necessary support, and facilitating their integration into the company culture, organizations can not only enhance the effectiveness of their workforce but also contribute to a more sustainable and satisfying work experience for everyone involved.

## 2.7 Comparison of onsite onboarding and remote onboarding

In the realm of onboarding practices, recent literature points to significant differences between onsite and remote onboarding processes, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. A study by Sani et al. (2022) delves into the effects of digital onboarding on employee wellbeing, engagement, performance, and overall outcomes within the UK services industry. Through qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews with 28 participants, the study highlights concerns such as diminished social connectedness and personal wellbeing, the dichotomy of meaningful and meaningless work, and poor employee relations, all attributed to digital onboarding practices.

The importance of substantial human interaction during the onboarding process is emphasized, even suggesting a hybrid approach as a possible solution. The study argues for a collaborative effort between human resources and line managers to foster a welcoming culture and provide quality information necessary for supporting new employees in a digital landscape.

Similarly, research conducted by Rodeghero et al. (2021) at Microsoft examines the remote onboarding of software developers during the pandemic. Their findings, based on a survey of 267 new hires, reveal that remote onboarding presents challenges in building strong social connections with team members, as most developers never had the opportunity to meet their teammates in person.

Complementing these insights, a study by Yang et al. (2021) investigates the effects of remote work on collaboration among information workers at Microsoft. Analyzing data on various communication methods, the research found that firm-wide remote work led to more static and siloed collaboration networks, with decreased synchronous communication and increased asynchronous communication. This shift potentially makes it harder for employees to acquire and share new information across the network, impacting the onboarding experience.

Collectively, these studies illuminate the stark contrast between onsite and remote onboarding. Onsite onboarding traditionally allows for direct human interaction, immediate integration into team dynamics, and clearer communication channels. In contrast, remote onboarding, while offering flexibility, often struggles with establishing strong interpersonal connections, effective communication, and integrating new hires into the organizational culture, potentially impeding new employees' ability to become effective and well-adjusted members of their teams.

The evolving landscape of workplace onboarding, especially in the context of remote settings, has been a focal point of recent academic studies. The research by Franken et al. (2022) contributes to this growing body of knowledge by addressing the design challenges in digital onboarding. This study, set against the backdrop of the increasing prevalence of home office setups due to the COVID-19 pandemic, investigates how managers navigate the onboarding process amidst the physical separation of team members.

A master thesis by Blöndal (2021), provides an insightful, albeit limited, perspective into remote onboarding in a SaaS company during the Covid-19 pandemic. This qualitative study,

conducted at Jyväskylä University, contrasts traditional and remote onboarding processes. While it offers valuable insights, particularly in understanding the challenges of remote social connection, it is important to note that as a Master's thesis, it doesn't carry the same weight as a peer-reviewed article from a major journal. Therefore, while informative, it should be considered as a single perspective within a broader academic discourse on this subject.

Franken et al. (2022) emphasize the multifaceted nature of onboarding in digital work settings. New employees are not only required to assimilate technical knowledge pertinent to their roles but also need to forge social connections with other team members and assimilate the overarching values of the organization. This initial phase is crucial as it sets the tone for ongoing learning and shapes the overall learning climate within the organization. Data for this study was gathered through expert interviews with managers conducted via digital video call platforms, offering insights into real-world practices.

A key finding from this research is the preference among managers for a hybrid approach to onboarding, blending elements of both digital and in-person interactions. This preference underscores the recognition that while remote work offers flexibility and convenience, the human element remains crucial for effective learning and team-building. The study suggests that while managers are employing strategies to facilitate learning and team-building in remote settings, there are still untapped potentials in this area. Consequently, Franken et al. (2022) propose the development of leadership workshops focused on refining onboarding strategies to harness these potentials fully.

Incorporating these insights with earlier findings from Sani et al. (2022), Rodeghero et al. (2021), Blöndal (2021), and Yang et al. (2021) it becomes evident that while remote onboarding poses unique challenges, such as diminished social connectedness and altered communication patterns, there are opportunities for improvement. Managers and organizations can explore hybrid onboarding models that combine the benefits of digital flexibility with the irreplaceable value of human interaction. This holistic approach could address the gaps identified in remote onboarding processes, enhancing employee engagement, integration, and overall satisfaction in their new roles.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework utilized in this exploratory case study, guided by Yin (1994) foundational principles on exploratory case study research. The primary aim of this section is to detail the research procedures and techniques employed, providing a comprehensive roadmap of the study's execution. Furthermore, by presenting a clear and methodical description of the research methodology, this chapter ensures the potential for replication of the study. Replicability is crucial for the validation and expansion of research findings, allowing future researchers to build upon the work with fidelity to the original methodological approach.

The study primarily utilized semi-structured interviews, a qualitative research technique chosen for its flexibility and depth. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perceptions of both management and non-management employees regarding the onboarding process. The interviews were designed to gather detailed data on onboarding in different settings – remote and onsite – and to understand the impact of these practices on employee outcomes such as job satisfaction and uncertainty.

The methodology chapter will detail the participants involved in the study, including the selection criteria and the rationale behind choosing these specific groups. It will also discuss the materials and equipment used during the research process, highlighting how these tools facilitated data collection. The working method section will elaborate on the execution of the interviews, providing insights into how the study was conducted in practice.

Furthermore, this chapter will explain how the research questions were operationalized into interview questions, ensuring that each query directly contributed to answering the overarching research objectives. The data analysis process, which played a crucial role in interpreting the findings, will be outlined, detailing how the interview responses were examined and synthesized into coherent themes.

Lastly, ethical considerations inherent in conducting qualitative interviews will be addressed, underscoring the study's adherence to ethical research standards. Appendices will be provided for additional clarity and transparency, containing the specific interview questions used for each participant group.

## 3.1 Research Techniques

This section outlines the systematic approach employed in conducting the exploratory case study, providing a step-by-step description of the methodology. This comprehensive outline ensures that the research process is transparent and replicable.

### 3.1.1 Operationalization of Research Questions

#### Defining Key Concepts

Operationalization in this exploratory case study involved translating the abstract concepts in the research questions into measurable and observable elements. This process was critical to ensure that each aspect of the research question was systematically addressed during the interviews.

#### Research Question Breakdown

The primary research question aimed to understand the impact of remote onboarding on job satisfaction, anxiety, and uncertainty among employees. This was operationalized by formulating interview questions that directly assessed these aspects:

- **Job Satisfaction:** Participants were asked to describe their overall contentment with their job post-onboarding and any factors contributing to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction.
- **Uncertainty:** Interview questions sought to uncover any uncertainties participants had about their job responsibilities, role within the team, or the organization.

#### Measuring Impact on Different Roles

To explore whether the impact of remote onboarding differed between Technical and non-Technical roles, participants were categorized based on their job function. Questions were asked to understand the specific challenges and experiences relevant to each category.

#### Managerial Influence

The case study also aimed to examine the influence of different management styles on the outcomes of remote onboarding. This was operationalized by asking participants to describe their interactions with management during the onboarding process and how these interactions influenced their experience. By analysing multiple interviews themes and patters can be distinguished.

#### Data Analysis Techniques

To analyze the responses, qualitative data analysis techniques were used. Responses were coded, and themes related to job satisfaction, anxiety, uncertainty, and management influence were identified. Comparisons were made between the experiences of employees in Technical versus non-Technical roles to understand the role-specific impacts of remote onboarding.

## Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the operationalization, the interview guides were pilot tested with a small group of participants. Feedback was used to refine the questions for clarity and effectiveness.

The operationalization process was documented in detail, providing a clear rationale for the choice of each interview question and its relevance to the research questions.

### 3.1.2 Semi-structured Management Interviews

This research involved conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with various management professionals. The used list of questions can be found in Appendix A: Questions for semi-structured management interviews. The primary aim of these interviews was threefold: firstly, to gather insights about the onboarding process prior to the transition to remote methods; secondly, to understand the nuances of the remote onboarding process itself; and thirdly, to delve into the personal experiences and perceptions of the interviewees regarding these changes. The interviews commenced with questions that established the role, timeline, and professional trajectory of each interviewee, setting a contextual foundation for the subsequent discussion on onboarding strategies.

The exploration of onboarding strategies was informed by the onboarding strategy level framework (Bauer & Erdoğan, 2011), which categorizes the process into four levels: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. Interviewees provided insights into how the shift to remote onboarding affected these dimensions, thus altering the fundamental dynamics of their departmental onboarding processes.

Central to the interviews was an investigation into the collective impact of remote onboarding on various employee outcomes, including job satisfaction and the prevalence of uncertainty. The discussions also explored the differential effects of remote onboarding on Technical and non-Technical employees, offering a diverse perspective on the subject. The interviews further delved into the managerial styles of the interviewees, examining their evolution and adaptability in the face of the challenges posed by remote onboarding. The list of questions can be found in Appendix A: Questions for semi-structured management interviews.

### 3.1.3 Employee Interviews, Onboarded Remotely

In addition to management interviews, a series of interviews were conducted with non-management professionals who underwent remote onboarding. The list of questions can be found in Appendix B: Questions for employee interviews onboarded remotely. The objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of the remote onboarding process from the employee perspective. These interviews began by establishing the managerial context and determining whether the interviewee's role was within Technical or non-Technical functions.

The structure of these interviews was guided by the onboarding strategy level framework (Bauer & Erdoğan, 2011), which allowed for a evaluation of the onboarding process in terms of organizational rules, performance expectations, cultural integration, and networking



opportunities. The interviewees shed light on how remote onboarding influenced these aspects of their professional initiation.

A significant focus of these interviews was to assess the impact of remote onboarding on employees' job satisfaction, anxiety, and uncertainty. Comparisons were drawn between the experiences of those onboarded remotely and those onboarded onsite, particularly in terms of the timeframe for achieving productivity in their respective roles. The influence of different management styles on the remote onboarding experience was also a key area of inquiry.

### 3.1.4 Employee Interviews, Onboarded Onsite

Conversely, a set of interviews was conducted with non-management professionals who experienced onsite onboarding. The list of questions can be found in Appendix C: Questions for employee interviews onboarded onsite. The aim was to contrast these experiences with those of remote onboarding. These interviews began by establishing the context of each interviewee's role and managerial relationships, categorizing them into Technical or non-Technical functions.

Employing the onboarding strategy level framework (Bauer & Erdoğan, 2011), these interviews assessed the depth and effectiveness of onsite onboarding in educating employees about organizational rules, clarifying expectations, assimilating into the company culture, and networking. The impact of onsite onboarding on job satisfaction, anxiety, and uncertainty levels was explored, alongside comparisons with remote onboarding experiences.

The timeframe for achieving productivity in respective roles and the perceived influence of managerial styles on the onsite onboarding process were examined. This provided a comprehensive understanding of how different onboarding environments affect employee experiences and outcomes.

### 3.1.5 Interview Process

- **Scheduling and Setting:** Interviews were scheduled based on the availability of participants. All interviews were conducted in a quiet, controlled environment to ensure audio clarity and to minimize distractions. For remote interviews, the digital platform Microsoft Teams was utilized.
- **Duration:** Each interview was designed to last approximately 45-60 minutes. This duration was deemed sufficient to cover all necessary topics while respecting the time constraints of the participants.
- **Conducting Interviews:** Interviews began with a brief introduction and an explanation of the research objectives. Participants were reminded of their rights, including confidentiality. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling the interviewer to explore interesting points in depth while adhering to the key themes outlined in the interview guides.
- **Data Recording:** With the consent of the participants, all interviews were audio-recorded. This practice ensured accurate capture of information for subsequent analysis.



### 3.1.6 Post-Interview Procedures

- **Transcription:** Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using the Microsoft 365 transcription software, followed by a manual review for accuracy. Identifiable information, like personal names and company names, was removed and replaced with assigned numbers or job titles to maintain confidentiality.
- **Summarization:** Summaries of each interview were created using GPT-4, then manually reviewed and edited to ensure they accurately represented the primary points of discussion. These summaries were included in the appendices of the thesis.
- **Data Analysis:** The transcribed data was systematically analyzed to identify key themes, patterns, and insights related to the research questions. This analysis was critical in interpreting the experiences and perspectives shared by the participants. Afterwards GPT-4 was also used to do a second analysis of the data to discover previously missed key themes, patterns, and insights.

### 3.1.7 Ethical Considerations

While conducting this case study, ethical standards were upheld. This section outlines the key ethical considerations addressed throughout the study to ensure the integrity of the study and the protection of participants' rights. In Appendix E: Ethical Considerations, the following themes of the study that touch on this topic are explained.

- Informed Consent
- Confidentiality and Anonymity
- Responsible Data Use
- Potential Ethical Issues

## 3.2 Participants

### 3.2.1 Selection and Demographics

In this research, participants were carefully selected to represent a diverse range of experiences and perspectives on the onboarding process, both from a management and non-management standpoint. The participant pool consisted of professionals who had undergone either remote or onsite onboarding, as well as management personnel responsible for overseeing these processes.

For management interviews, participants were selected based on their involvement in the onboarding process within their organizations. The aim was to include a variety of industries and company sizes to ensure a broad understanding of onboarding practices. In total, interviews were conducted with 5 management professionals, with an effort to maintain a balance between those who had experience with both onsite and remote onboarding processes.

For employee interviews, two distinct groups were identified: those who were onboarded

remotely and those who underwent onsite onboarding. Within each group, efforts were made to include individuals from different departments, roles (Technical and non-Technical), and levels of experience. The group of employees onboarded remotely consisted of 4 individuals, while the onsite onboarded group comprised 11 individuals as well.

### **3.2.2 Recruitment and Sampling Methods**

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. For management professionals, initial contacts were established through social network in the company, as the thesis is written while doing an internship. Subsequent participants were often recommended by the initial interviewees, expanding the scope of the study through snowball sampling.

Employee participants were recruited using a similar approach. Initial contacts within the organization were requested to recommend employees who had recently undergone the onboarding process, either remotely or onsite. This method ensured a diverse and relevant sample of participants who could provide in-depth insights into their onboarding experiences.

### **3.2.3 Participant Confidentiality**

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, all interviews were conducted with the assurance that individual responses would be anonymized in the final thesis report. To further protect privacy, the written transcripts of the interviews had all names of employees, companies, and other identifiable information removed. These names were replaced with randomly assigned numbers ranging from 1 to 21 to maintain anonymity. Additionally, specific organizational details mentioned during the interviews were either omitted or sufficiently altered to prevent identification.

In the thesis report, only summaries of each interview transcript are included as appendices. The full transcripts, with all identifying information removed, are not published within the document but are available upon request from the researcher. This approach balances the need for transparency in the research process with the ethical obligation to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

### **3.2.4 Participant Involvement**

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and how their data would be used. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of the research objectives.

### **3.2.5 Participant Overview and Representativity Analysis**

This section provides an overview of the participants involved in the study and an analysis of their representativity with respect to the onboarding process, managerial role, technical background, and the need for domain knowledge upon starting at the company. The participants

were categorized based on four main criteria: type of onboarding (Onsite vs. Remote), role (Manager vs. Non-manager), technical background (Technical vs. Non-Technical vs. Hybrid), and the need for domain knowledge (High vs. Medium vs. Low). In the final column the encoding is shown that will be used in Chapter 4 to indentify the type of employee. The first letter of each characteristic is used and the terms Non-Manager is encoded as nM and Non-Technical as nT.

### Participant Distribution

The distribution of participants across different categories is shown in 3.1.

ID	Onboarding	Role	Type of Role	Domain Knowledge	Encoding
11	Onsite	Manager	Technical	High	OMTH
1	Onsite	Manager	Non-Technical	High	OMnTH
15	Onsite	Manager	Non-Technical	High	OMnTH
10	Onsite	Non-manager	Technical	High	OnMTH
3	Onsite	Non-manager	Technical	High	OnMTH
7	Onsite	Non-manager	Technical	Medium	OnMTM
14	Onsite	Non-manager	Hybrid	High	OnMHH
4	Onsite	Non-manager	Hybrid	Low	OnMHL
12	Onsite	Non-manager	Hybrid	Low	OnMHL
13	Onsite	Non-manager	Non-Technical	High	OnMnTH
18	Onsite	Non-manager	Non-Technical	High	OnMnTH
5	Onsite	Non-manager	Non-Technical	Medium	OnMnTM
6	Onsite	Non-manager	Non-Technical	Medium	OnMnTM
16	Onsite	Non-manager	Non-Technical	Medium	OnMnTM
9	Onsite	Non-manager	Non-Technical	Low	OnMnTL
2	Remote	Manager	Technical	High	RMTH
19	Remote	Manager	Technical	Medium	RMTM
21	Remote	Non-manager	Technical	Medium	RnMTM
20	Remote	Non-manager	Technical	Low	RnMTL
8	Remote	Non-manager	Non-Technical	High	RnMnTH
17	Remote	Non-manager	Non-Technical	Low	RnMnTL

**Table 3.1:** Distribution of Participants by Onboarding, Role, Type of Role, and Domain Knowledge Need

- **Onboarding:** Out of the 21 participants 6/21 were onboarded remotely and 15/21 has a onsite onboarding.
- **Manager:** Out of the 21 participants, 5/21 have a management role and 16/21 have a non-management role. This shows a management to non-management ratio of 1:3,2.
- **Type of role:** Out of the 21 participants, 8/21 have a technical role, 10/21 have a non-technical role, and 3/21 have a hybrid role, which is a role that has both technical and non-technical aspects.

- **Domain Knowledge Requirement:** Out of the 21 participants, 10/21 have a High level, 6/21 have a Medium level and 5/21 have a Low level.

### Analysis of Representativity

The participant distribution further enriches the understanding of the onboarding experience and its nuances:

- The need for domain knowledge is varied among participants, with a notable number requiring high domain knowledge (10 out of 21). This suggests that for many roles, understanding specific domain knowledge is crucial from the outset, which may influence the design and focus of the onboarding process.
- The distribution of domain knowledge needs across onboarding types and roles indicates that both managers and non-managers in technical and non-technical roles can have high requirements for domain knowledge. This diversity underscores the importance of tailoring onboarding processes not only to the role and technical background but also to the specific domain knowledge needs of the position.
- The variability in the need for domain knowledge across participants with different onboarding types (Onsite vs. Remote) suggests that remote onboarding programs may need to incorporate more targeted strategies to address domain knowledge acquisition, especially considering the challenges of remote learning and integration.

The inclusion of domain knowledge needs in the analysis of participant representativity provides valuable insights for organizations aiming to design effective onboarding programs. It highlights the necessity of considering domain knowledge as a critical factor in onboarding design, particularly for roles with high domain knowledge requirements, regardless of the onboarding type or technical background of the role.

## 3.3 Material and Equipment

### 3.3.1 Interview Guides

For the purpose of this research, distinct interview guides were developed for the semi-structured interviews with management and non-management professionals. These guides were used to ensure that all relevant topics related to onboarding processes were comprehensively covered. The interview guides included a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' experiences with remote and onsite onboarding. The questions were formulated based on the theoretical framework established in the literature review, particularly incorporating elements from the onboarding strategy framework by Bauer and Erdoğan (2011).

### 3.3.2 Recording Equipment

All interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile phone and a laptop, the latter serving as a backup recording device. This dual-recording approach was adopted to ensure the utmost

accuracy in data collection and to provide a reliable means of capturing the complete interview sessions. The mobile phone was primarily used for recording, while the laptop, concurrently employed for presenting the interview questions, offered an additional layer of recording security.

Following each interview, the audio quality of the recordings was enhanced using a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) complemented by various plugins. This post-processing step was done to improve the overall quality of the recordings, ensuring that the transcriptions would be as accurate and detailed as possible.

Consent for recording was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced. The recordings were used exclusively for the purposes of this research. To maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, all recordings were stored securely, with access restricted to the researcher. This careful handling of the recordings aligns with the ethical standards of the research and safeguards the sensitive information shared by the participants.

### **3.3.3 Transcription Software**

To transcribe the recorded interviews, Microsoft Office 365 transcription software was utilized. This software enabled efficient and accurate conversion of audio recordings into written text, which was essential for subsequent analysis. The transcriptions were then manually reviewed for accuracy and to ensure that all identifiable information was appropriately anonymized.

### **3.3.4 Data Storage and Security**

All digital recordings and transcripts were stored on a secure, password-protected computer to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' responses. Access to this data was restricted to the researcher and the thesis advisor.

### **3.3.5 Use of large language models**

In this study, GPT-4, a Large Language Model (LLM) developed by OpenAI, functioned as a complementary tool in this research, primarily used to boost efficiency in data processing and text composition. Its role was instrumental in managing large volumes of qualitative data and ensuring the linguistic quality of the thesis. However, the ultimate responsibility for all research content, including the integrity and accuracy of data interpretation and text production, rested with the researcher. GPT-4's contributions were integrated into the research process with a critical and discerning approach, ensuring that the final output met the standards of academic research.

Its applications were threefold:

1. Summarizing transcripts
2. Aiding in the development of interview question, by using it as a second opinion.
3. Refining texts used in the thesis.
4. Doing a second check-up on the results to see if certain patterns might be overseen.

The incorporation of LLMs such as GPT-4 marks an advancement in the realm of academic research. These tools boost the efficiency and quality of communication for researchers. By automating routine or labor-intensive tasks, LLMs enable researchers to uphold high standards of quality in their work while substantially reducing the time spent on tasks like writing academic texts. While the crafting of thesis texts is a time-consuming endeavor, it often does not directly contribute to the academic or knowledge value of the study. By minimizing the time allocated to this aspect of study, LLMs allow researchers to devote more energy to the investigative process.

This evolution mirrors historical technological advancements, akin to how the first steam engine, introduced in Tilburg in 1827, revolutionized production processes. It didn't replace the need for innovative design but rather streamlined the manufacturing of products needed to realize such designs. Similarly, LLMs transform the academic landscape by partly taking over the labor-intensive production of well-crafted texts, data analysis, and information summarization.

However, it's crucial to understand that tools like GPT-4 are designed to supplement, not substitute, the researcher's skill set. They do not eliminate the necessity for creativity, critical thinking, or a deep understanding of the research topic. Rather, they act as valuable assets that enhance a researcher's capacity to conduct comprehensive and effective studies. The adoption of LLMs in research signifies a stride in technological progress, opening doors to more efficient and precise academic work, thereby empowering researchers to achieve their objectives with enhanced efficacy and accuracy.

### 3.4 Summary

The methodology chapter describes an exploratory case study approach to investigate the nuances of remote and onsite onboarding processes. Through qualitative research methods, it operationalizes research questions into measurable elements, focusing on job satisfaction, uncertainty, and differences between Technical and non-Technical roles, alongside examining managerial influences on the onboarding experience.

Data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews with management and employees who experienced remote or onsite onboarding, aiming to capture the complex effects of remote work settings on employee outcomes. This exploratory case study detailed interview procedures from scheduling to post-interview analysis, ensuring ethical considerations and participant confidentiality were rigorously maintained.

Participants were chosen through purposive and snowball sampling to represent a broad spectrum of experiences, emphasizing the diversity of roles and onboarding methods. The chapter also highlights the use of technological tools, including Large Language Models like GPT-4, to enhance data processing and research efficiency, marrying traditional qualitative techniques with modern advancements for a comprehensive insight into the onboarding process.

# Chapter 4

## Results

This chapter delves into the findings derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with a diverse array of participants representing various roles within the organization. A total of 21 carefully selected participants were engaged to construct a representative group, considering factors such as their managerial status, the nature of their onboarding (whether onsite or remote), the technical or non-technical aspect of their roles, and their specific domain knowledge requirements categorized as high, medium, or low. These interviews gave insights into the onboarding process, aiming to understand the diverse experiences of individuals, ranging from their initial acclimatization to the onboarding journey, to their overall job satisfaction, and the challenges and opportunities encountered along the way. Additionally, the investigation sought to ascertain whether variables such as the type of onboarding, role, nature of the role itself, and the requisite domain knowledge level showed any influence on the success of the onboarding process.

The dataset obtained from these interviews offers a glimpse into the onboarding experiences of employees and also provides perspectives from management regarding the efficacy and hurdles associated with facilitating such processes in a remote work setting. By examining a spectrum of experiences, this research tried to show the intricate landscape of onboarding, providing insights that could inform future practices and policies within the organization.

Structured around prominent themes discerned from the data, this chapter systematically presents the interview findings. Each theme is explored through anonymized quotes and summarized insights from the participants, ensuring confidentiality while offering genuine perspectives on their experiences. Through this approach, the chapter tries to paint a comprehensive and detailed portrait of remote onboarding, showing both its challenges and its potential for driving innovation in the manner in which organizations embrace and integrate new hires into their teams.

### 4.1 Evolution of the Onboarding Levels

In this section the evolution of the onboarding levels will be discussed and graded on a 1 to 5 scale. At the end these results will be analyzed and interpreted.

### 4.1.1 Compliance

The compliance aspect of onboarding, as defined by Bauer and Erdoğan (2011), includes the basic legal and policy-related knowledge required for new employees to work within an organization. This section examines the evolution of compliance-focused onboarding practices within the company, using insights from various employees to trace changes over time.

#### Initial Stages (2009 - 2012)

In the early stages of the company's development, compliance in the onboarding process was notably minimal. According to Employee #3 (OnMTH), in 2009, there were no formal compliance-related onboarding activities. This lack of structured compliance onboarding extended through to 2012, with employees like Employee #9 (OnMnTL) having to navigate their roles without formal guidance, contrasting sharply with their experiences at previous employers where structured onboarding processes were in place. This period is characterized by an absence of formalized compliance procedures, such as dress codes, set working hours, or employee handbooks, as corroborated by Employees #2 (RMTH), #3 (OnMTH), #5 (OnMnTM), #6 (OnMnTM), and #7 (OnMTM).

Overall the compliance level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 1 on a scale from 1 to 5.

#### Mid-Stage Development (2013 - 2019)

By 2013, the company still showed a limited focus on formalizing compliance within its onboarding process. Employees were required to undergo a training session provided by the parent company, but other elements of compliance such as dress codes or structured working hours remained unaddressed. This lack of clarity around compliance expectations led to instances of confusion and discomfort, as described by Employee #13 (OnMnTH) in 2019, who felt overdressed on their first day due to the informal dress culture not being communicated. Employee #12 had a similar experience.

Overall the compliance level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 2 on a scale from 1 to 5.

#### Recent Developments (2020 - 2023)

From 2020 onwards, there has been a gradual recognition of the need for more structured compliance in onboarding, albeit progress remains slow. Employee #17 (RnMnTL) reported no compliance-focused onboarding activities in 2020. However, by 2022, as per Employee #14 (OnMHH), some efforts were made to formalize aspects like dress codes and personnel handbooks, and provisions for pensions and disability insurance were introduced, marking a significant shift from earlier practices. Yet, these efforts still lacked the comprehensive compliance training seen in more established companies or within the parent company. In 2021 and 2023, employees like #18 (OnMnTH) and #20 (RnMTL) highlighted that, while some compliance training from the parent company was provided, the company's specific compliance onboarding remained limited to technical setups and brief team introductions.



Overall the compliance level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 3 on a scale from 1 to 5.

## Analysis

The historical trajectory of compliance in the company's onboarding process reveals a gradual shift from minimal to slightly more structured practices. Early years showed a notable absence of compliance-related onboarding, leading to confusion among new hires about expectations and norms. Over time, there has been a slow progression towards acknowledging and implementing basic compliance structures, though these efforts remain inconsistent and incomplete when compared to standards observed in more mature organizations or the parent company.

This evolution reflects a broader organizational journey from a startup-like culture, where formal processes are often secondary to rapid growth and flexibility, to a more established entity recognizing the importance of compliance in fostering a professional and legally sound work environment. The incremental changes suggest an ongoing process of organizational maturation, where the importance of formalized compliance in onboarding is increasingly acknowledged but not yet fully realized.

### 4.1.2 Clarification

The clarification stage of onboarding, according to Bauer and Erdoğan (2011), involves ensuring new hires understand their roles, responsibilities, and how to contribute effectively within the organization. This section examines the evolution of role clarification within the company's onboarding process, drawing on employees' experiences to trace changes over time.

#### Early Efforts and Challenges (2009 - 2012)

In 2009, despite a lack of formal onboarding structures, Employee #3 (OnMTH) noted the presence of a clear task description, suggesting an initial attempt at role clarification even as employees were expected to grow into their roles organically. However, by 2012, Employee #9 (OnMnTL) highlighted the absence of clear task descriptions and expectations, indicating inconsistencies in role clarification efforts across the organization. This period showcased a foundational attempt at clarification that lacked uniformity and formal documentation.

Overall the clarification level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 2 on a scale from 1 to 5.

#### Gradual Improvements and Unique Situations (2013 - 2019)

Over the years, the approach to role clarification saw gradual improvements. By 2020, according to Employee #8 (RnMnTH), teams were assigned projects with a degree of autonomy to define their execution strategies, although this was described as a unique situation rather than a standardized practice. The lack of clear targets and explicit expectations persisted, as reported by Employee #14 (OnMHH), leading to confusion and self-imposed pressure among

new hires to quickly become productive without understanding the typical time frame for role acclimation.

Overall the clarification level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 3 on a scale from 1 to 5.

### **Recent Developments (2020 - 2023)**

Recent years have seen more structured efforts towards role clarification, albeit with significant room for improvement. By 2023, only about half of the employees had formal task descriptions as part of their contracts, as noted by Employees #17 (RnMnTL) and #9. This lack of formal role definition contributed to decreased job satisfaction, underscoring the critical importance of clear role expectations in the onboarding process. Employee #11 (OMTH), a manager, shared that responsibilities and expectations are discussed during job interviews, but formal KPIs and explicit role definitions are not consistently communicated post-hire. This approach allows for role evolution but may contribute to ambiguity regarding job performance metrics. Employee #20's (RnMTL) experience highlighted a deficiency in comprehensive education on domain knowledge and explicit job expectations, emphasizing reliance on self-guided learning. This indicates a continued struggle to balance structured role clarification with the flexibility for roles to evolve naturally.

Overall the clarification level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 3 on a scale from 1 to 5.

### **Analysis**

The historical trajectory of role clarification within the company's onboarding process reveals a slow progression from informal, inconsistent practices towards attempts at more structured role definition. Early stages showed a reliance on organic growth into roles, with minimal formal documentation or explicit expectations. Over time, there has been an acknowledgment of the need for clearer role descriptions and expectations, though implementation remains uneven across the organization.

The experiences shared by employees highlight the challenges associated with ambiguous role definitions, including decreased job satisfaction, unnecessary pressure, and reliance on self-guided learning. These insights underscore the importance of clear, documented role expectations from the outset of employment, balanced with the flexibility to adapt roles as employees grow and projects evolve.

#### **4.1.3 Culture**

The cultural integration aspect of the Bauer and Erdoğan (2011) onboarding model emphasizes the importance of assimilating new hires into the organizational culture. This section traces the evolution of cultural integration practices within the company, drawing on insights from employees across different years.

**Early Stages: Organic Integration (2009 - 2015)**

In the company's early years, cultural integration occurred naturally due to the small office size and shared lunches, as described by Employee #3 (OnMTH) in 2009. This informal approach allowed new hires to seamlessly blend into the organizational culture through daily interactions. By 2016, as noted by Employee #4 (OnMHL), the company maintained a team-oriented culture with small groups going for lunch together, indicating a shift towards more segmented interactions as the company grew.

Overall the culture level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 4 on a scale from 1 to 5.

**Growth and Challenges (2016 - 2019)**

As the company expanded, maintaining a unified company culture became more challenging. Employee #9 (OnMnTL) highlighted that whole-company lunches ceased when the team size reached 25-30 employees, marking a significant change in how cultural practices were conducted. During this period, distinct subcultures began to emerge, such as the one described by Employee #8 (RnMnTH), where a newly formed, isolated team developed its own culture, somewhat detached from the rest of the organization.

Overall the culture level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 3 on a scale from 1 to 5.

**Adapting to Remote Work (2020 - 2023)**

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant shift to remote work introduced new challenges and opportunities for cultural integration. Employee #8 appreciated the company's efforts to maintain a sense of community through online social events during the early lockdowns, although these initiatives dwindled over time. This transition period saw varied experiences among employees, with some, like Employee #17 (RnMnTL), unable to participate in online cultural activities due to technical limitations, and others, like Employee #18 (OnMnTH), missing informal opportunities for interaction that could have facilitated cultural assimilation.

Employee #19 (RMTM) pointed out that remote work made it difficult for new hires to absorb the company culture and understand unwritten norms, leading to occasional frustration. Similarly, Employee #20 (RnMTL) experienced a prolonged process of integrating into the company culture, underscoring the challenges of aligning with organizational values and navigating the work environment in the absence of structured onboarding support.

Overall the culture level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 2 on a scale from 1 to 5.

**Analysis**

The evolution of cultural integration within the company's onboarding process reflects a trajectory from an organic, informal approach to a more fragmented experience as the organization grew and adapted to remote work. Early stages benefited from close-knit interactions that naturally fostered cultural assimilation. However, as the company expanded and especially with the shift to remote work, maintaining a cohesive culture became increasingly

challenging.

The varied experiences of employees suggest that while remote work offers flexibility, it complicates the transmission of cultural norms and values to new hires. The reduction in spontaneous, personal interactions has necessitated a reevaluation of how cultural integration is facilitated within remote and hybrid work environments.

#### **4.1.4 Connection**

The "Connection" stage of the onboarding model by Bauer and Erdoğan (2011) emphasizes the importance of new hires building interpersonal relationships within the organization. This section explores the evolution of practices aimed at fostering connections among employees, from spontaneous interactions to structured initiatives, as the company navigated growth and the shift to remote work.

##### **Initial Stages: Spontaneous Connections (2009 - 2015)**

In the company's early years, opportunities for connection occurred naturally. Employee #3 (OnMTH) reminisced about forming relationships around the coffee machine in 2009, highlighting an environment where casual, spontaneous interactions facilitated bonding. By 2016, as noted by Employee #4 (OnMHL), the company had grown too large for such spontaneous meetings to suffice. Connections were formed through project work rather than through a structured process, indicating a shift towards more purpose-driven interactions.

Overall the connection level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 4 on a scale from 1 to 5.

##### **Structured Efforts and Remote Work Challenges (2016 - 2019)**

As the company continued to expand and adapt to remote work, the methods for fostering connections evolved. Employee #5 (OnMnTM) mentioned that by 2023, introductory conversations were scheduled as part of the onboarding process, representing a more structured approach to building relationships within the team. However, Employee #9 (OnMnTL) observed that despite being with the company for over a year, some new hires met their colleagues in person only once due to remote work, suggesting that virtual environments posed challenges to forming strong interpersonal connections.

Overall the connection level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 3 on a scale from 1 to 5.

##### **Adapting to a Remote Environment (2020 - 2023)**

The transition to remote work necessitated new strategies for facilitating connections among employees. Employee #11 (OMTH), a manager, described the company's cautious approach to training and cultural indoctrination, emphasizing the importance of giving employees the freedom to learn from mistakes. This approach aimed to encourage deeper engagement and connection through shared learning experiences, albeit within a more isolated working context. Employee #13 (OnMnTH) highlighted the decrease in social interactions between departments and teams following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the impact

on new employees' ability to connect with the broader company culture. The pandemic's restrictions significantly altered the landscape of interpersonal relationship-building within the organization.

Employee #17's (RnMnTL) experience in 2020 underscored the feelings of loneliness that can arise from insufficient attention to connection-building in remote settings. Conversely, Employee #21 (RnMTM) found success in forming bonds within their team through daily stand-up meetings and shared remote onboarding experiences, illustrating the potential for connection even in virtual environments. Employee #20's (RnMTL) proactive efforts to engage with colleagues and integrate into the company culture highlight the importance of individual initiative in overcoming the limitations of remote onboarding processes.

Overall the connection level in this timeframe will be assessed to be a 2 on a scale from 1 to 5.

## Analysis

The historical perspective on connection-building within the company reveals a transition from an organic, spontaneous model to one that requires more deliberate effort, especially in the context of remote work. Early stages benefited from the natural interactions afforded by a smaller office environment, but as the company grew and shifted to remote work, maintaining and fostering interpersonal relationships became more challenging.

The experiences shared by employees indicate that while structured efforts to facilitate connections have been implemented, the effectiveness of these strategies varies. The shift to remote work has necessitated innovative approaches to onboarding and relationship-building, underscoring the need for ongoing adaptation and support to ensure new hires can successfully integrate into the company culture and form meaningful connections with their colleagues.

### 4.1.5 Analysis of Onboarding Levels

This subsection delves into the nuances of onboarding experiences across different employee groups, categorized by onboarding modality (remote vs. onsite), managerial status, role type (technical vs. non-technical), and the required domain knowledge level. The analysis aims to elucidate the distinct experiences and challenges faced by these groups, providing insights into the effectiveness and areas for improvement in the company's onboarding process.

#### Remote vs. Onsite Onboarding

Employees onboarded remotely reported a notable deficiency in compliance-focused activities, with some (e.g., Employee #17) experiencing no compliance onboarding in 2020. In contrast, onsite onboarded employees, even in the early stages, had minimal but slightly more structured compliance processes. The shift to remote work introduced challenges in cultural integration and connection, with remote employees facing difficulties in absorbing company culture and forming interpersonal relationships, as highlighted by Employees #19 and #20. This suggests that remote onboarding requires enhanced structure and support to match the efficacy of onsite experiences.

### Manager vs. Non-Manager Roles

Managers, such as Employee #11, shared insights into the discussions of responsibilities and expectations during job interviews, albeit noting a lack of formal KPIs and role definitions post-hire. This contrasted with non-managers, who often reported confusion and a lack of clear task descriptions, indicating a disparity in role clarification efforts and the need for more explicit communication of job performance metrics across all roles.

### Technical vs. Non-Technical Roles

Technical roles, particularly those requiring high domain knowledge, seemed to have clearer initial task descriptions (e.g., Employee #3), suggesting an early focus on role clarification in technical positions. However, non-technical roles faced more significant challenges in this area, with reports of unclear targets and expectations. The transition to remote work exacerbated these challenges for technical roles, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive domain education and explicit job expectations for both technical and non-technical employees.

### Domain Knowledge Requirement

Employees in roles requiring high domain knowledge (e.g., Employee #3TH) initially noted the absence of formal compliance and clarification processes but had some level of task clarity. In contrast, those in roles with low domain knowledge requirements (e.g., Employee #9nTL) faced more pronounced issues in both compliance and role clarification. This disparity underscores the importance of tailoring onboarding processes to the specific needs of the role, including the level of domain knowledge required.

#### 4.1.6 Onboarding Level Through Time

Based on the data, a table is constructed that illustrates how well the onboarding determinants—compliance, clarification, culture, and connection—were met during three distinct timeframes: Initial Stages (2009 - 2012), Mid-Stage Development (2013 - 2019), and Recent Developments (2020 - 2023). The fulfillment of each determinant is rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating minimal fulfillment and 5 indicating full fulfillment.

Onboarding Determinants	2009 - 2012	2013 - 2019	2020 - 2023
Compliance	1	2	3
Clarification	2	3	3
Culture	4	3	2
Connection	4	3	2
Onboarding Level	3	2	1

**Table 4.1:** Evolution of Onboarding Determinants Over Time

Table 4.1 outlines the fulfillment of onboarding determinants across three distinct timeframes. Below is a brief analysis of each determinant:

**Compliance:** Initially, compliance was minimal and scored the lowest among the determinants. However, it was not considered of paramount importance due to the company's small scale, where the high sense of culture and connection significantly outweighed the need for structured compliance.

**Clarification:** There have been gradual improvements in role clarification, indicating a slow but positive trajectory towards better onboarding practices in this area.

**Culture and Connection:** The initial high scores in culture and connection reflect the company's strength in these areas, contributing to a higher onboarding level. However, as these scores have decreased over time, they have significantly impacted the overall onboarding level, indicating a decline in the quality of onboarding experiences. This decline suggests that the fulfilling sense of culture and connection that once compensated for the lack of compliance is diminishing, affecting the overall onboarding effectiveness.

**Onboarding Level:** The onboarding level is observed to be decreasing over time. This trend underscores the growing challenges the company faces in maintaining the quality of its onboarding process. While compliance has seen improvement, the decline in culture and connection has outweighed these gains, leading to a lower overall onboarding level.

This nuanced analysis indicates that the evolving nature of the company's onboarding process reflects a complex interplay between compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. The decreasing onboarding level highlights the need for a balanced approach that maintains the strengths of culture and connection while improving compliance and clarification to enhance the overall onboarding experience.

#### 4.1.7 Summary

The analysis reveals significant differences in onboarding experiences across various employee groups, influenced by onboarding modality, role type, managerial status, and domain knowledge requirements. These differences highlight areas for improvement in the company's onboarding process, particularly in enhancing the structure and support for remote onboarding, ensuring clear communication of expectations across all roles, and tailoring onboarding efforts to the specific needs associated with the level of domain knowledge required. Addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering a professional, inclusive, and supportive work environment for all employees.

## 4.2 General findings

### 4.2.1 Existing Onboarding Structures

A significant number of employees, specifically employees #1 (OMnTH), #2 (RMTH), #3 (OnMTH), #4 (OnMHL), #5 (OnMnTM), #7 (OnMTM), #8 (RnMnTH), #9 (OnMnTL), #11 (OMTH), #13 (OnMnTH), #15 (OMnTH), and #17 (RnMnTL), have voiced their concerns regarding the absence of a structured onboarding process. This consensus underscores a critical gap in the organizational onboarding strategy, indicating a potential area for development to enhance the initial experiences of new hires. Employee #11 (OMTH), who

also serves in a managerial capacity, acknowledges this lack of structure as a deliberate choice aimed at fostering autonomy and responsibility among new hires. This perspective, while unique, reflects an underlying intention to empower employees, albeit with mixed reception.

A notable trend among several employees, spanning various roles and onboarding methods, is the voiced concern regarding the absence of a structured onboarding process. This consensus underscores a significant gap in the organization's onboarding strategy, suggesting room for improvement to enhance new hires' initial experiences. Employee #11, a manager with a technical background, views this lack of structure as a deliberate choice to foster autonomy, though this perspective has elicited mixed reactions.

### Effects on Job Satisfaction

The link between onboarding structure and job satisfaction was a recurring theme in employee feedback. Employees #9 (OnMnTL), #10 (OnMTH), and #13 (OnMnTH) specifically noted the negative impact of the lack of structure on their job satisfaction, pointing to confusion about the company's operations and their role within it. Employee #14 (OnMHH)'s experience further illustrates the anxiety and uncertainty stemming from unclear expectations and a lack of recognition, highlighting the need for clarity and structured guidance during the onboarding phase. The connection between onboarding structure and job satisfaction emerged as a recurring theme in employee feedback. Specifically, Employees #9 (OnMnTL), #10 (OnMTH), and #13 (OnMnTH) highlighted the detrimental effects of a lack of structure on their job satisfaction, citing confusion about company operations and their roles. Additionally, Employee #14's experience underscored the uncertainty caused by unclear expectations and a lack of recognition, emphasizing the importance of clarity and structured guidance during the onboarding phase.

### 4.2.2 Domain Knowledge Acquisition

According to the collective insight gathered, it generally takes about 1.5 years for an employee to acquire all the domain knowledge necessary for the company so that one can perform their tasks independently. This viewpoint is supported by Employee #2 (RMTH) and Employee #5 (OnMnTM). Contrastingly, Employee #6 (OnMnTM), an employee in a non-technical role, believes that acquiring the necessary domain knowledge can take up to a year, suggesting that the duration can vary based on individual learning pace or specific job requirements. This variation in perception underscores the subjective nature of the onboarding experience.

Employee #9 (OnMnTL), who holds a position where domain knowledge does not play a significant role, is an exception to the general findings, illustrating how role specificity can greatly influence the onboarding timeline. Employee #10 (OnMTH) and Employee #13 (OnMnTH) provide unique perspectives based on their prior knowledge and the nature of their roles. Employee #10, despite being in a high domain knowledge-required role, needed only 2-3 months to adapt, thanks to pre-existing knowledge. Similarly, Employee #13, occupying a generic role with less emphasis on the company and market-specific knowledge, reported needing only 2 months for effective onboarding.

The experiences of Employees #16 (OnMnTM) and #18 (OnMnTH) highlight the impact of



onboarding methods (onsite vs. remote) on the time to productivity. Employee #16 noted a significant difference, requiring about a year for onsite onboarding compared to an estimated one and a half years if the onboarding had been remote. This difference was attributed to challenges such as complex products, market developments, and a lack of clear documentation and training. Employee #18 also observed a quicker adaptation in an onsite setting (2.5 months) compared to what they anticipated would have been longer in a remote setup.

Employee #17 (RnMnTL)'s experience further emphasizes the variability in onboarding time, with a half-year duration noted despite no prior role experience or technical knowledge, highlighting how role-specific requirements can alter onboarding effectiveness.

Lastly, Employee #20 (RnMTL), remarked that domain knowledge was not initially necessary for their job function, leading to a shorter path to productivity of just a few weeks. This suggests that for certain technical roles, the primary learning curve may revolve around their job skills rather than domain-specific knowledge.

These diverse experiences underline the complexity of the onboarding process, influenced by factors such as the role's nature, the individual's previous knowledge, and whether the onboarding is conducted onsite or remotely. It suggests that while there is a general timeframe for onboarding, flexibility and customization to individual needs and job requirements are key to optimizing the process for efficiency and effectiveness.

### 4.2.3 Juniors vs. Seniors

The preferences for onboarding structures between junior and senior employees show variability, with juniors desiring clearer guidelines and seniors often appreciating autonomy. Juniors expressed a desire for more structured onboarding to ease their transition and clarify expectations, while seniors appreciated the freedom to navigate their roles with less oversight.

Employee #12 (OnMHL), valuing a freer work environment, specifically sought this company's flexible structure. Junior Employee #6 (OnMnTM) wished for clearer procedures, contrasting with senior Employee #5 (OnMnTM) who favored a laissez-faire approach. Employee #10 (OnMTH), despite being senior, also expressed a need for clearer structures to enhance service quality and reduce onboarding time. Similarly, Employee #14 (OnMHH), a senior, wished for more structured guidance. Employee #17 (RnMnTL), new to their role and effectively a junior, missed having defined frameworks. Employee #18 (OnMnTH), with extensive experience, created their onboarding structure, leveraging prior familiarity with the organization. According to Employee #19 (RMTM), a manager, onboarding time varies by experience level, with seniors adapting more quickly. Employee #20 (RnMTL) noted the challenges less structured onboarding poses for juniors, underlining the importance of structured support for them.

### 4.2.4 Cost of Hiring

In discussing the costs associated with hiring a new colleague, opinions among employees vary significantly. Employee #1 (OMnTH) agrees with the statement that hiring costs can reach up to €20,000, suggesting a recognition of the comprehensive expenses involved, possibly

considering recruitment, onboarding, training, and lost productivity. Conversely, Employee #11 (OMTH) offers a different perspective, estimating the total costs at approximately €6,000, which specifically accounts for recruitment and onboarding expenses. This discrepancy highlights the complexity of accurately assessing hiring costs and suggests that factors such as role, industry, and company size may significantly influence these estimates.

### Perspectives on Improvement

The feedback on improving the onboarding process varied, yet it consistently pointed towards the need for a more structured and standardized approach. Employees #1 (OMnTH), #2 (RMTH), #4 (OnMHL), and others suggest incorporating clear documentation, setting goals, and introducing formal training sessions alongside informal interactions to create a balanced and comprehensive onboarding experience. The suggestion of a buddy system by employee #2 (RMTH) and a blend of informal and formal structures by employee #4 (OnMHL) illustrates a desire for supportive yet flexible onboarding mechanisms that cater to diverse needs and preferences.

The experiences of employees who found the current informal approach beneficial, such as employee #5 (OnMnTM), highlight the importance of managerial guidance in navigating the initial stages of employment. Conversely, employee #6 (OnMnTM), along with others, expressed a preference for more structured formats similar to those experienced in previous workplaces, indicating the value of formal training and clear expectations in facilitating a smoother transition for new hires.

Interestingly, employee #11 (OMTH)'s stance against a more standardized onboarding process reflects a managerial perspective that values autonomy over structured guidance. This viewpoint, however, contrasts with the broader employee sentiment that suggests a structured approach, including standardized components, could enhance understanding, efficiency, and job satisfaction. Employees #13 (OnMnTH) and #16 (OnMnTM) shared nuanced views, acknowledging the benefits of having some structured elements in the onboarding process while still appreciating the autonomy to explore and learn independently. Their feedback suggests a middle ground, advocating for a semi-structured approach that combines the benefits of guidance with the flexibility to adapt and learn at one's pace.

#### 4.2.5 Trends by Employee Characteristics

The analysis of employee feedback highlighted specific trends associated with four key characteristics: remote versus onsite onboarding, manager versus non-manager roles, technical versus non-technical roles, and the level of domain knowledge required. Below is a summary of these trends:

- **Remote vs. Onsite Onboarding:**
  - *Remote Onboarding:* Employees are likely to face longer adaptation times, attributed to challenges such as reduced direct interaction and access to resources.
  - *Onsite Onboarding:* Suggests quicker adaptation due to direct support and immersion in the company environment, facilitating the onboarding process.

- **Manager vs. Non-Manager:**
  - *Managers:* May perceive a lack of structured onboarding as a method to foster autonomy, indicating a preference for autonomy over structured guidance.
  - *Non-Managers:* Express a need for structured onboarding to clarify roles and expectations, highlighting the importance of guidance for this group.
- **Technical vs. Non-Technical Role:**
  - *Technical Role:* Employees emphasize the need for clarity on technical responsibilities and specific technical training, critical for productivity and satisfaction.
  - *Non-Technical Role:* The focus is on understanding company operations and culture, requiring a balanced approach to onboarding.
- **Domain Knowledge Required - Low, Medium, High:**
  - *High Domain Knowledge:* Roles requiring high domain knowledge likely need longer onboarding to achieve full competency, especially if onboarded remotely.
  - *Medium to Low Domain Knowledge:* Employees might adapt more quickly, especially with role-aligned previous experiences or effective specific learning support.

## 4.3 Effects of remote onboarding

### 4.3.1 Effects on Productivity

In the exploration of onboarding modalities, it emerged that employees who were onboarded remotely faced significant challenges in reaching full productivity compared to their onsite counterparts. Employee #1 (OMnTH) concurred with the notion that remote onboarding necessitates a longer duration to become productive, a sentiment echoed by Employee #13 (OnMnTH), who speculated that remote onboarding could potentially double the time required to reach full productivity. This perspective was indirectly supported by Employee #14 (OnMHH), who, while not explicitly stating so, emphasized the challenges associated with active learning and the difficulties in information retrieval and networking remotely. These hurdles suggest that without clear support and knowledge transfer, remote onboarding might prolong the journey to full productivity. Employee #16 (OnMnTM) provided a more quantified view, indicating that remote onboarding could extend the productivity timeline to one and a half years, in contrast to a year with onsite onboarding. Additionally, Employee #17 (RnMnTL) encountered technical knowledge gaps that hindered their progress, resulting in a two-month delay before starting substantive onboarding. Employee #20 (RnMTL) also recognized that the absence of direct, in-person interactions and the complexities of remote communication likely delayed achieving full productivity, hinting that face-to-face onboarding could expedite the adjustment phase and enhance productivity.

The interviews further highlight the critical role of informal knowledge transfer in the office setting, which becomes less accessible during remote onboarding. Employees #1 (OMnTH), #5 (OnMnTM), #6 (OnMnTM), and #7 (OnMTM) agreed on the value of informal knowledge

transfer, such as overhearing discussions or collaborating closely with colleagues, as a vital source of domain knowledge. Contrarily, Employee #11 (OMTH), a manager, attributed the difficulty in accessing information not to the onboarding process but to the attitudes of new employees, suggesting a proactive approach in seeking out necessary knowledge. Employee #12 (OnMHL)’s experience of a lack of structure and clear documentation necessitated leaning on conversations with colleagues for gradual knowledge acquisition. Employee #13 (OnMnTH) experienced challenges in acquiring specific domain knowledge, which led to prolonged discomfort due to a reluctance to seek information after an extended period with the company. Both Employee #14 (OnMHH) and #16 (OnMnTM) noted the lack of a centralized knowledge repository, requiring newcomers to actively seek out information and establish connections with colleagues. Similarly, Employee #17 (RnMnTL) and #18 (OnMnTH) highlighted the difficulties in accessing information, with Employee #18 pointing out that some documentation either does not exist or is hard to access, and a portion of company knowledge resides exclusively in the minds of certain employees. Employee #19 (RMTM) acknowledged the role of technology in facilitating remote onboarding but also pointed out the necessity for post-COVID-19 adjustments, such as more planned interactions and information exchanges to compensate for the lack of spontaneous personal communication.

Additionally, Employee #1 (OMnTH) noted that remote hiring tends to lead to more mismatches, suggesting a gap in aligning job expectations with reality in the remote onboarding process. These insights reveal the nuanced challenges of remote onboarding, especially concerning productivity and knowledge transfer. While technology serves as a crucial enabler for remote work, the absence of informal interactions and a structured approach to knowledge management can significantly hinder the onboarding experience, underscoring the need for strategic improvements to better support new hires in remote settings.

### 4.3.2 Social Effects

In assessing the social effects of remote work and onboarding, it became apparent that the shift to remote environments has significantly reduced spontaneous meetings and collaborations, a change that has not gone unnoticed among employees. Employees #1 (OMnTH), #3 (OnMTH), #6 (OnMnTM), and #16 (OnMnTM) unanimously agreed that the opportunities for casual interactions had diminished, noting that this could be particularly disheartening for those primarily working from home. Employee #16 (OnMnTM) suggested more in-office work to counteract this isolation, while Employee #17 (RnMnTL) faced challenges with technical aspects of remote meetings, hindering their ability to contribute during the initial COVID-19 lockdown. This sentiment was echoed by Employee #18 (OnMnTH), who expressed concerns over the potential for decreased communication with internal stakeholders and a resultant misalignment with project requirements due to the absence of informal interactions, potentially breeding mistrust without regular face-to-face communication.

The challenge of forging strong team connections in the absence of physical presence was highlighted, with Employees #1 (OMnTH), #3 (OnMTH), and #6 (OnMnTM) pointing out the difficulties in building relationships with remote colleagues. Employee #9 (OnMnTL) noted that while strong bonds often form within teams, inter-team relationships suffer. In contrast, Employee #11 (OMTH) posited that a positive work culture stems from successful projects,

suggesting that hard work would naturally lead to a good atmosphere, thus downplaying the necessity of physical presence. However, Employee #12 (OnMHL) recognized the struggle new hires face in assimilating into the company culture and learning communication styles, which are less readily transferred without direct interaction. Employee #13 (OnMnTH) found it challenging to connect with colleagues exclusively working from home, noting distractions and a lack of focus that prolonged tasks and fostered distrust. This perspective is supported by management, with Employee #15 (OMnTH) acknowledging the operational adjustments required by remote work, including the difficulty in maintaining company culture and effectively integrating new hires. Employee #16 (OnMnTM) further elaborated on the challenges of developing social bonds and understanding the company culture remotely, emphasizing the negative impact on personal development and integration.

Additionally, it was observed that onboarding tended to focus on cultural integration within the team rather than extending beyond it. Employees #2 (RMTH), #4 (OnMHL), and #16 (OnMnTM) observed that technical teams, often working remotely, likely form strong internal but not external team bonds. Employee #17 (RnMnTL), lacking the knowledge for social online interactions, missed out on social onboarding entirely during the mandatory remote work period. Conversely, Employee #20 (RnMTL)'s onboarding included efforts to build interpersonal relationships beyond their immediate team through company events and dinners, although the remote conditions of the pandemic prolonged the process of getting to know colleagues outside their team.

The necessity for employees to proactively develop social contacts during remote onboarding emerged as a crucial theme, with Employee #7 (OnMTM) emphasizing the potential loneliness of remote onboarding if initiatives aren't taken. Employee #16 (OnMnTM) speculated this lack of contact might be particularly true for those onboarded remotely and continuing to work from home, a sentiment personally experienced by Employee #17 (RnMnTL) who described the initial period as isolating. Employee #20 (RnMTL), also onboarded remotely, highlighted the importance of taking the initiative to integrate into the company culture and build connections, underscoring the effort required to overcome the barriers presented by remote work environments.

This examination of the social effects of remote work and onboarding reveals a complex landscape where the absence of physical presence impacts spontaneous collaboration, team bonding, and cultural integration. While remote work offers flexibility, it also introduces challenges in maintaining the informal, social fabric of the workplace, necessitating proactive measures by both employees and organizations to foster a sense of belonging and community among remote teams.

### 4.3.3 Personal Effects

The transition to remote work environments has introduced a myriad of personal effects on employees, notably around the onboarding process. This section delves into the nuanced personal impacts of remote onboarding on new employees, highlighting its influence on job satisfaction and the increased sense of uncertainty.

## Job Satisfaction

The clarity of the remote onboarding process—or lack thereof—has a profound effect on job satisfaction. Employees #2 (RMTH) and #5 (OnMnTM) agreed that an unclear remote onboarding process could lead to decreased job satisfaction, a sentiment strongly supported by Employee #17 (RnMnTL)’s experience. The lack of structure in their remote onboarding process compounded feelings of loneliness, significantly impacting their job satisfaction. This suggests that the absence of a clear and structured onboarding process in a remote setting not only affects an employee’s initial integration into the company but also has a lasting impact on their overall job satisfaction.

The findings from these employees’ experiences highlight a critical aspect of remote onboarding: the need for a comprehensive and structured approach that addresses the unique challenges presented by remote work environments. While remote onboarding offers flexibility and the convenience of working from home, it also requires organizations to put in place robust mechanisms to ensure new hires feel supported, informed, and integrated into the company culture from the outset.

## Uncertainty

A recurring theme among employees who underwent remote onboarding was the heightened sense of uncertainty they experienced. Employee #7 (OnMTM) and Employee #9 (OnMnTL) both expressed feelings of uncertainty, underscoring a common challenge faced by new hires in remote settings. This sentiment was echoed in the mixed experiences of Employee #20 (RnMTL), who initially reported lower job satisfaction and heightened uncertainty due to the lack of guidance and structured support. This uncertainty was particularly pronounced around job expectations and integration into the company culture. However, as Employee #20 became more familiar with the company and its operations, these feelings gradually diminished. This suggests that while remote onboarding can significantly impact an employee’s initial experience, adaptation over time can mitigate some of these challenges.

Employee #10 (OnMTH)’s experience further complicates the narrative, indicating that the sense of uncertainty might not stem solely from the remote nature of onboarding but could also be attributed to the lack of documentation and clear procedures. This highlights an essential aspect of remote onboarding: the critical need for well-defined documentation and procedures to guide new hires through their initial stages in the company.

Employee #17 (RnMnTL)’s experience underscores the personal challenges remote onboarding can present, including feelings of loneliness and difficulty adapting to suddenly introduced remote work applications. This high degree of initial uncertainty eventually subsided as the employee grew into their role, illustrating the adjustment period required for new hires to acclimate to remote working conditions.

In summary, the personal effects of remote onboarding on new employees, particularly the increased sense of uncertainty and its impact on job satisfaction, underscore the importance of a well-structured onboarding process. As companies continue to navigate the nuances of remote work, the insights from these employees’ experiences provide valuable lessons in developing more effective and supportive onboarding practices that can alleviate uncertainty

and enhance job satisfaction among new hires. This involves not only the provision of clear documentation and procedures but also ensuring that new employees have the support and resources needed to successfully transition into their new roles and the broader organizational culture, even from a distance.

#### 4.3.4 Trends by Employee Characteristics

The exploration of the effects of remote versus onsite onboarding, categorized by managerial status, technical versus non-technical roles, and the required amount of domain knowledge, uncovers distinct experiences and outcomes for different groups. This section delves into the productivity, social integration, and personal satisfaction impacts across these dimensions.

##### Effects on Productivity

- **Remote vs. Onsite Onboarding:** Employees onboarded remotely encounter substantial hurdles in achieving full productivity compared to their onsite counterparts, with extended durations to productivity noted. The absence of direct interactions and the complexities of remote communication significantly delay productivity milestones.
- **Managerial Status:** Although managerial status does not directly correlate with productivity levels during onboarding, it influences perceptions of onboarding effectiveness and the challenges encountered.
- **Technical vs. Non-Technical Roles:** Technical roles facing remote onboarding report significant challenges, particularly in domain-specific knowledge acquisition and overcoming technical gaps, suggesting unique difficulties in remote settings.
- **Domain Knowledge Requirement:** The necessity for high levels of domain knowledge exacerbates the challenges faced during remote onboarding, with informal knowledge transfer, crucial for productivity, less accessible in remote setups.

##### Social Effects

- **Remote vs. Onsite Onboarding:** The transition to remote work significantly curtails spontaneous interactions and collaborations, with remote employees experiencing greater difficulty in social integration and team bonding.
- **Managerial Status:** Both managers and non-managers observe reduced casual interaction opportunities in remote settings, with managers highlighting the need for operational adjustments to preserve company culture and facilitate new hire integration.
- **Technical vs. Non-Technical Roles:** Individuals in technical roles, particularly when onboarded remotely, tend to develop strong internal but weaker external team bonds, indicating role-specific social integration challenges.
- **Domain Knowledge Requirement:** While not directly impacting social effects, the required domain knowledge level interacts with other factors, influencing the ease of relationship formation and cultural integration.

## Personal Effects

- **Job Satisfaction:** The clarity and structure of the remote onboarding process significantly impact job satisfaction, with unclear processes leading to decreased satisfaction among remotely onboarded employees.
- **Uncertainty:** A heightened sense of uncertainty characterizes the remote onboarding experience, particularly affecting technical roles and those with high domain knowledge requirements, underscoring the need for clear documentation and proactive support.

In summary, the analysis reveals that remote onboarding introduces specific challenges affecting productivity, social integration, and personal satisfaction. These challenges are further nuanced by the nature of the role, managerial status, and the level of required domain knowledge, suggesting the necessity for tailored onboarding strategies to mitigate the negative impacts and ensure a successful integration of new hires.

## 4.4 Effects of remote work

### 4.4.1 Isolated Teams and Project Development

Isolated teams, or groups working distinctly apart from the main operational framework of an organization, have been observed to facilitate a unique environment for innovation and efficiency. Employee #8 (RnMnTH)’s experience exemplifies the advantages of such arrangements. By working within a geographically or functionally isolated team, this individual reported an enhanced ability to develop new products free from the usual constraints and interference that might arise within the broader organizational context. The isolation allowed for rapid, efficient progress on project work, unencumbered by the need to navigate existing hierarchies or negotiate with other departments. While Employee #8 found the isolation of their team to be beneficial, Employee #3 (OnMTH) offered a contrasting viewpoint. This individual highlighted a significant drawback of conducting projects in isolation—reduced engagement and involvement from the wider organization. From Employee #3’s perspective, the lack of integration with the rest of the organization led to decreased awareness and commitment to the project’s outcomes among employees not directly involved in the isolated team. This reduced level of involvement, they argue, could potentially undermine the broader organizational support and acceptance necessary for the successful implementation of the project.

The experiences of Employees #8 (RnMnTH) and #3 (OnMTH) underscore a critical tension in project management and organizational behavior: the balance between the benefits of isolated teams in fostering innovation and the potential risks associated with decreased organizational engagement. The greater involvement of people outside the main team, as suggested by the broader implications of these findings, could enhance engagement and commitment throughout the company. This suggests that while isolated teams can operate more efficiently in the development phase, strategies to involve a wider range of organizational members in some aspects of the project could be beneficial for building support and ensuring a smooth implementation phase.



Employee #8 (RnMnTH), perceived isolation as beneficial, possibly due to the nature of their work which demands focused, uninterrupted attention. In contrast, Employee #3 (OnMTH), viewed isolation negatively, emphasizing the importance of integration and communal work for project support across the organization. The pattern suggests that remote onboarding may predispose individuals to find value in isolation for innovative tasks, while onsite onboarding may heighten awareness of the drawbacks of reduced organizational engagement.

Employees #8 (RnMnTH) and #3 (OnMTH), who represent contrasting experiences in the thesis, also differ in their onboarding locations, with #8 being onboarded remotely and #3 onsite. This difference might contribute to their perspectives on isolation; remote onboarding could predispose individuals to see isolation as less of a barrier and more of an opportunity for focused innovation, as indicated by Employee #8's positive experience. In contrast, Employee #3, onboarded onsite, might value more the communal aspects of work and therefore perceive isolation as detrimental to wider organizational engagement.

The roles and types of roles within the organization also offer insight. Employee #8 (RnMnTH), experienced benefits from isolation that could be attributed to the nature of their work, which may demand deep, focused thought that isolation facilitates. On the other hand, Employee #3 (OnMTH), may interact more frequently with other departments or team members, highlighting the potential downsides of isolation in terms of reduced cross-departmental engagement.

The distribution of roles across technicalnT, and hybrid, coupled with varying levels of domain knowledge need, underscores the diversity within the organization. Technical roles, especially those requiring high domain knowledge (e.g., Employees #2 , #3, #10, #11), might necessitate periods of isolation for complex problem-solving. However, the data suggests that balancing this isolation with structured engagement opportunities could mitigate potential downsides, such as decreased project visibility and support across the organization.

Incorporating insights from the table, the enriched section could emphasize the nuanced impact of onboarding methods and role types on employee experiences with isolation. It might suggest that while remote onboarding and high-need domain knowledge positions can benefit from isolation due to the nature of their work, strategies to maintain organizational cohesion and support are crucial. This could involve regular updates to the broader organization about isolated teams' progress, cross-departmental meetings to share insights, or involving employees from various roles in certain stages of the project lifecycle to foster a sense of inclusion and buy-in.

#### 4.4.2 Newly Formed Teams with Autonomy

Employee #8 (RnMnTH)'s experience indicates that a newly formed team, granted a high degree of autonomy, can streamline the onboarding process. This autonomy allows new hires to engage directly with their tasks and responsibilities, potentially reducing the time required to become productive members of the team. This observation suggests that autonomy might serve as a catalyst for rapid onboarding, offering an effective strategy for integrating new hires, especially in remote work settings. Employee #11 (OMTH) attributes the success of this approach to the emulation of a "classic startup culture," where the combination of

compulsory remote work and the unique circumstances of a lockdown created an environment of cohesion and collective effort. This setup, devoid of legacy systems but guided by clear objectives, fostered a strong team culture and high job satisfaction. The necessity to work from home, according to Employee #11, inadvertently facilitated a focused and dedicated work ethic, underscoring the importance of a supportive and goal-oriented team environment in enhancing job satisfaction.

### Development of an Independent Team Culture

The experiences of Employees #21 (RnMTM) and #20 (RnMTL) further reinforce the notion that newly formed teams, operating independently and without external dependencies, can cultivate their unique culture. This culture, characterized by high job satisfaction and low uncertainty, emerges from the collective experience of starting anew within the organization, simultaneously and under shared circumstances. The lack of legacy issues and the clear direction provided to these teams appear to be crucial factors in developing a positive work environment and culture.

The insights provided by these employees highlight several important implications for organizational practices, especially in the context of remote work and team formation. First, granting autonomy to newly formed teams of new hires can accelerate the onboarding process, allowing team members to quickly become effective in their roles. Second, the conditions under which these teams are formed—such as during lockdowns with compulsory remote work—can further enhance team cohesion and culture, leading to higher job satisfaction and lower levels of uncertainty.

This analysis suggests that organizations might benefit from creating conditions that foster autonomy and a clear sense of purpose among new teams, especially in remote or hybrid work environments. Such approaches not only facilitate rapid onboarding but also contribute to a positive organizational culture and high levels of job satisfaction among new hires.

#### 4.4.3 Remote work: productivity vs. effectiveness

Employee #18 (OnMnTH) posits that remote work facilitates a heightened focus, enabling individuals to accomplish more tasks in less time. However, this increased productivity is potentially offset by a diminished effectiveness, attributed to the lack of interaction and cross-pollination among team members. The risk, as identified by this employee, lies in the development of outputs that may not fully align with team or organizational goals due to insufficient collaboration. Similarly, Employee #11 (OMTH), a manager, acknowledges that productivity benefits from the flexibility offered by remote work arrangements. Nonetheless, there is no explicit mention of how these arrangements impact the overall effectiveness of the team or organization.

Employee #14 (OnMHH) expands on this discussion by highlighting the advantages of remote work in terms of geographic flexibility and the ability to balance highly focused workdays with more collaborative ones. This employee suggests that a hybrid approach—alternating between remote work for focused tasks and in-office work for collaboration and spontaneous initiatives—can optimize both productivity and effectiveness. In contrast, Employee #17

(RnMnTL) experiences a decline in productivity due to a lack of necessary knowledge to perform tasks independently, underscoring the importance of accessible support and resources for remote workers.

Employee #20 (RnMTL) brings attention to the efficiency and effectiveness challenges posed by remote work, specifically in the context of tasks that require close collaboration, such as pair programming. The communication barriers encountered in remote settings can extend task completion times by at least 50%, illustrating the critical role of direct interaction in maintaining efficient work processes and effective learning.

#### 4.4.4 Remote onboarding into pre-existing teams

Employee #8 (RnMnTH)'s perspective sheds light on the nuanced difficulties that new hires encounter when they join an established team via remote onboarding. The core of these challenges revolves around the disparity in social and professional integration experienced by remote hires compared to their onsite counterparts. Teams with a history of working together in a physical office have established informal communication channels, shared experiences, and a sense of camaraderie that can be difficult for remotely onboarded employees to access or become a part of. This disparity can lead to feelings of isolation, hinder effective communication, and slow down the integration process for new hires. The experience highlighted by Employee #8 underscores the importance of deliberate efforts to facilitate the inclusion of remote hires into pre-existing teams. This includes fostering opportunities for informal interactions, ensuring transparent and frequent communication, and creating virtual spaces that replicate the 'water cooler' moments that naturally occur in physical office settings. These strategies can help bridge the gap between new hires and established teams, promoting a more inclusive and cohesive team environment.

#### 4.4.5 Effect of remote work on staff turnover

Employee #11 (OMTH) and Employee #21 (RnMTM) both express skepticism regarding the notion that remote work directly leads to higher staff turnover. Their views suggest that remote work, in itself, may not be a significant determinant of an employee's decision to stay with or leave an organization. This perspective is supported by the experiences within the technical operations team and the IT department, where Employee #2 (RMTH) reports low turnover rates, indicating a stable work environment despite remote work practices. Conversely, Employee #13's (OnMnTH) perception suggests a belief in the potential challenges remote work poses for technical team cohesion and retention. However, this view is not supported by direct experiences from within these technical teams, where leaders and members report stability despite the shift to remote operations.

Employee #19 (RMTM) provides a nuanced view, noting that turnover percentages differ by department. They highlight a tendency towards higher turnover in sales compared to operations, finance, or HR. Interestingly, Employee #19 contrasts their current experience with a previous company, attributing high turnover to a business model reliant on staff departures for cost management. Within their current role, they appreciate the low turnover within the technical IT team, suggesting that factors other than remote work, such as departmental culture

and business strategies, play critical roles in influencing turnover. Employee #20 (RnMTL) shares a personal account of team stability, with only one colleague leaving due to personal reasons rather than job dissatisfaction. This testimony further challenges the assumption that remote work inherently leads to increased turnover, highlighting the importance of considering individual circumstances and broader organizational contexts.

#### 4.4.6 Analysis of Isolated Teams and Project Development

The analysis of employees' experiences with isolated teams and project development reveals perspectives probably influenced by their characteristics such as onboarding location, managerial status, role type, and required domain knowledge level. The comparison between Employee #8 (RnMnTH) and Employee #3 (OnMTH) highlights how different onboarding experiences and job roles affect perceptions of work isolation and its impact on project outcomes.

##### Remote vs. Onsite Onboarding

Remote onboarding appears to predispose individuals to view isolation more favorably. Employee #8's positive experience with isolation in project development may stem from the remote onboarding process, which could foster a sense of independence and self-sufficiency early on. This contrasts with Employee #3, who was onboarded onsite and perceives isolation negatively, suggesting that physical integration into the organizational environment may heighten the value placed on collaborative work and organizational engagement.

##### Technical vs. Non-Technical Roles

Technical roles, particularly those involving high domain knowledge, may require periods of focused, isolated work for complex problem-solving, as suggested by Employee #3's experience. However, the negative view of isolation in terms of reduced organizational engagement underscores the need for balance, ensuring that technical work does not become too detached from the broader organizational context. Conversely, non-technical roles, as illustrated by Employee #8, may benefit more distinctly from isolation, allowing for undisturbed focus on innovative tasks without the need for constant technical collaboration.

### 4.5 The influence of a management style on onboarding

#### 4.5.1 The management style of the CFO

The management style of an organization's leaders can significantly impact the work environment, employee satisfaction, and overall productivity. This section explores the management style of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) within the company, as described by employees, to understand its implications on team dynamics and performance.

The CFO's management style is distinctly characterized as *laissez-faire*, with a notable pattern of frequent absences from the workplace. This approach to management is marked by a hands-off style, where employees are given considerable autonomy to make decisions and carry out their tasks without direct oversight or intervention from the manager. Employee #9

(OnMnTL) confirms this characterization, noting a complete lack of direct communication with the CFO despite being a part of the CFO's team. This absence of interaction suggests a significant level of autonomy but also raises questions about the level of support and guidance provided to the team.

Employee #17 (RnMnTL) further underscores the CFO's minimal presence and the lack of defined boundaries and expectations within the team. This approach can lead to ambiguity regarding role expectations, decision-making processes, and performance metrics.

### 4.5.2 The management style of the CTO

The Chief Technology Officer's (CTO) management style represents a significant aspect of the organizational culture, particularly in how it influences the technology team's dynamics, personal growth, and motivation. This section delves into the CTO's coaching management style, characterized by a focus on responsibility and autonomy, and explores its impact on team members.

The CTO's approach to management is predominantly coaching in nature, encouraging employees to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities. Employees #2 (RMTH), #4 (OnMHL), and #11 (OMTH) validate this management style, noting its effectiveness in fostering a sense of accountability and empowerment within the technology team. This style aligns with the broader organizational goals of innovation and self-driven development, allowing team members to explore solutions and grow within their roles independently.

Employee #20 (RnMTL) highlights the double-edged sword of a coaching management style that leans towards autonomy. In the absence of a traditional managerial hierarchy, this employee faced challenges related to personal growth and motivation, pointing out the need for a more balanced approach that includes structured support and recognition. While the autonomy granted by the CTO is appreciated for fostering trust and freedom, it also necessitates a proactive stance from employees regarding their professional development and seeking assistance.

Similarly, Employee #21 (RnMTM) appreciates the CTO's laissez-faire, coaching style, especially given their prior knowledge and preference for self-directed learning. However, they also acknowledge the infrequent direct contact with the CTO, viewing it as a sign of trust in their capabilities. This perspective underscores the importance of autonomy in the CTO's management approach, allowing employees to navigate their tasks and challenges independently.

### 4.5.3 The management of the CCO enterprise

This section examines the management style of the Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) for the Enterprise division, focusing on its democratic and directive characteristics. Insights from employees #1 (OMnTH), #5 (OnMnTM), #14 (OnMHH), and #16 (OnMnTM) provide a comprehensive overview of how this management style influences team dynamics, decision-making, and overall performance within the organization.

The CCO-Enterprise's management style is characterized by a blend of democratic and

directive elements. Employees #1 and #5 initially identify this approach, highlighting a management philosophy that values employee input while maintaining clear direction and expectations. This style facilitates a sense of ownership among team members, empowering them to contribute ideas and participate in decision-making processes.

Employee #14 elaborates on this approach, describing the CCO-Enterprise's effort to seek consensus and encourage team members to actively use their intellect to contribute to the organization's goals. This method moves away from a purely laissez-faire attitude toward a more structured, goal-oriented framework. The emphasis is on achieving specified outcomes, with the understanding that reaching these goals absolves team members from further scrutiny. This shift signifies a move towards a more cohesive and structured approach to teamwork and organizational objectives, responding to the need for greater alignment and focus. Employee #16's experience further supports this view, noting the beneficial impact of the CCO-Enterprise's directive aspect during their initial period in the company. The structured guidance provided by the CCO-Enterprise helped this employee quickly adapt and contribute to the team's efforts.

#### 4.5.4 Effects of management styles on onboarding

Several employees, including #2 (RMTH), #3 (OnMTH), #5 (OnMnTM), and #16 (OnMnTM), underscore the benefits of a supportive and directive management style during onboarding. This approach, characterized by structured guidance and clear expectations, has been appreciated for providing a sense of direction and facilitating a smoother transition into the organization. Such a management style helps new hires quickly understand their roles, responsibilities, and how they fit into the broader organizational goals, enhancing their confidence and job satisfaction from the outset.

Conversely, employees like #8 (RnMnTH), #18 (OnMnTH), and #21 (RnMTM) express a preference for an onboarding process that grants more freedom and autonomy. For teams with clear objectives and high intrinsic motivation, overly directive onboarding could be seen as counterproductive. These employees valued the opportunity to shape their onboarding experience, exploring and learning at their own pace. This autonomy was particularly effective for those with prior knowledge or experience, enabling them to leverage their background to integrate more effectively into their new roles.

However, this approach also presents challenges. Employees #9 (OnMnTL), #17 (RnMnTL), and #20 (RnMTL) highlight the drawbacks of insufficient guidance during onboarding. The absence of structured support led to feelings of aimlessness and difficulty in understanding how to begin contributing effectively. This suggests that while autonomy can be empowering, it requires a foundational level of knowledge and the availability of resources and support to be effective.

#### Managerial Perspectives

Employee #11 (OMTH), a manager, intentionally avoids a highly directive onboarding approach, favoring a model that encourages self-discovery and learning from mistakes. This philosophy aligns with the broader goal of fostering independence and problem-solving skills

among new hires. However, this strategy may not suit all individuals, particularly those who thrive under more structured guidance.

The varied employee experiences highlight the importance of balancing autonomy with support in the onboarding process. While some employees flourish with the freedom to explore and take initiative, others may find this approach overwhelming without clear guidance and support. Tailoring the onboarding experience to individual needs and preferences, possibly through initial assessments or feedback, could enhance job satisfaction and effectiveness.

#### 4.5.5 Analysis of Management Styles and Onboarding Experiences

The analysis of the management styles of the CFO, CTO, and CCO within the organization and their impact on employee onboarding experiences reveals distinct differences based on the characteristics of remote vs. onsite onboarding, managerial vs. non-managerial roles, technical vs. non-technical roles, and the amount of domain knowledge required (low, medium, high).

The laissez-faire management style of the CFO, characterized by significant autonomy and a lack of direct supervision, seemed to pose challenges for employees onboarded in both remote and onsite settings, especially those in non-managerial, non-technical roles with low domain knowledge requirements. This group experienced a lack of guidance and support, leading to potential confusion and a feeling of aimlessness. The absence of structured onboarding could hinder the integration process for employees who may benefit from clear directions and support during their initial period in the organization.

Conversely, the CTO's coaching management style, emphasizing responsibility and autonomy, appeared more effective for employees in technical roles with high domain knowledge needs, including both managers and non-managers. This approach fostered a sense of empowerment and accountability, particularly benefiting those onboarded remotely. However, the need for a balanced approach that includes structured support was also highlighted, indicating that while autonomy is valued, the availability of resources and structured guidance is crucial for personal growth and motivation.

The CCO's management style, a blend of democratic and directive approaches, was particularly noted for its effectiveness during the onboarding of employees in non-technical roles with medium to high domain knowledge needs. This style facilitated a sense of ownership and engagement among team members, empowering them to contribute ideas and participate in decision-making processes. The structured guidance provided was appreciated for helping new hires quickly understand their roles and responsibilities, aligning with broader organizational goals.

The preferences for onboarding experiences varied among employees, with some appreciating a supportive and directive approach that provided clear expectations and structured guidance, while others valued more freedom and autonomy, especially when prior knowledge or experience allowed them to navigate their roles more independently. However, the challenges of insufficient guidance during onboarding were also evident, particularly for those in non-technical roles with low domain knowledge needs, indicating that a balance between autonomy and support is crucial for effective onboarding.

In summary, the differences between groups in their responses to management styles and onboarding experiences underscore the importance of tailoring the onboarding process to individual needs and preferences. For employees in technical roles with high domain knowledge needs, a coaching style that emphasizes autonomy and responsibility can be particularly effective, especially when balanced with structured support. For those in non-technical roles with lower domain knowledge needs, a more directive approach during onboarding may be beneficial to provide clear direction and support. Tailoring the onboarding experience, possibly through initial assessments or feedback, could enhance job satisfaction, integration effectiveness, and overall performance within the organization.



# Chapter 5

## Discussion & Limitations

### 5.1 Discussion

#### 5.1.1 Evolution of the Onboarding Levels

The evolution of onboarding practices within a company, particularly through the lenses of compliance, clarification, culture, and connection, showcases a complex journey from minimalistic beginnings to increasingly structured and deliberate efforts. These changes reflect broader organizational shifts and the challenges posed by growth and the transition to remote work. Drawing on insights from Bauer and Erdoğan (2011) and other literature, we can contextualize these developments within established onboarding theories and practices.

##### **Compliance**

The progression from an almost non-existent compliance focus in the early stages to gradual attempts at formalization mirrors findings in organizational development literature. According to Saks and Gruman (2018), early-stage companies often prioritize rapid growth and operational flexibility over structured compliance, which can lead to gaps in legal and policy-related knowledge among new hires. However, as organizations mature, the need for formalized compliance mechanisms becomes more apparent, both to satisfy legal obligations and to ensure a cohesive understanding of company policies (Bauer & Erdoğan, 2011). This shift towards more structured compliance practices, albeit slowly, indicates an evolving recognition of these necessities within the company.

##### **Clarification**

Clarification, or ensuring new hires understand their roles and responsibilities, is crucial for effective onboarding. The company's journey from informal role assignments to more structured role definitions and the introduction of formal task descriptions is one seen in many organizations as they grow, as observed by Klein and Weaver (2000). The inconsistencies and slow progress in implementing clear role clarification mechanisms highlight a common challenge in balancing flexibility with the need for structure, particularly in rapidly the

growing organization.

## **Culture**

Cultural integration is a vital aspect of onboarding, facilitating new hires' assimilation into the organizational culture. The company's evolution from organic, informal cultural integration to facing challenges in maintaining a cohesive culture amid growth and remote work aligns with insights from Schein (2010), who argues that shared experiences and interactions are key to cultural transmission. The difficulties in transmitting cultural norms and fostering a sense of belonging in a remote context underscore the need for innovative approaches to cultural integration, such as virtual social events and structured cultural orientation sessions.

## **Connection**

Building connections within the organization is essential for new hires to feel integrated and supported. The transition from spontaneous, informal interactions to more structured but challenging efforts to foster connections in a remote environment reflects findings by Neeley (2015), who suggests that the physical separation in remote work can hinder the formation of interpersonal relationships. The company's attempts to adapt, through scheduled introductory conversations and online social events, highlight ongoing efforts to overcome these challenges, albeit with varying degrees of success.

## **Differential Analysis of Onboarding Experiences**

The experiences of employees reveal mixed trends in the company's onboarding process. While adherence to rules and understanding job requirements (compliance and clarification) is getting better, the sense of belonging and understanding the company culture (connection and culture) is weakening. This decline is largely due to the loss of casual, unplanned interactions, often called 'water cooler' moments, which help people feel part of the team and learn the informal aspects of company culture. These casual interactions are crucial for building connections and understanding the workplace culture beyond formal meetings and emails.

For instance, Employee #21 shared an experience about meeting a colleague in person for the first time after working together for more than a year, only because they happened to come to the office on the same day. This situation underscores how remote and hybrid work models, while beneficial in some aspects, can significantly limit opportunities for spontaneous social interactions, making it harder for new hires to fully integrate into the company's social and cultural fabric as they don't build natural relationships with coworkers who work in different teams.

The disparities observed in compliance, clarification, cultural integration, and connection efforts across different employee groups point to opportunities for further refinement and customization of onboarding practices.

## Summary

The company's onboarding evolution, from minimal compliance and clarification to developing strategies for cultural integration and connection, reflects an ongoing journey towards creating a more structured, supportive, and inclusive onboarding experience. The insights from employees, coupled with findings from organizational behavior and onboarding literature, highlight the importance of continuous improvement and adaptation in onboarding practices to meet the changing needs of the workforce and the organization.

### 5.1.2 General findings

This discussion of general findings, highlights several key insights into onboarding structures, effects on job satisfaction, domain knowledge acquisition, differences between junior and senior employees, cost of hiring, and trends by employee characteristics. These insights offer a look into the complexities of the onboarding process and its impact on employee integration and satisfaction.

#### Onboarding Structures and Job Satisfaction

The absence of a structured onboarding process has been identified as a significant gap within organizations, affecting employee satisfaction and adaptation. The literature supports this finding, suggesting that a well-designed onboarding program can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and retention. For instance, Bauer and Erdoğan (2011) highlights the importance of structured onboarding processes in improving job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions among new hires. The evidence suggests that a clear and comprehensive onboarding process helps new employees understand their role within the organization, align with its culture, and build meaningful connections with their colleagues (Allen, 2006).

#### Domain Knowledge Acquisition

The time required for employees to acquire necessary domain knowledge varies significantly, underscoring the subjective nature of the onboarding experience. This finding aligns with the work of Tannenbaum et al. (1991), who emphasize the importance of tailored onboarding processes that consider the individual needs of new hires. They argue that onboarding effectiveness can be enhanced by adjusting the process based on the employee's previous experience, role requirements, and learning pace.

The acquisition of domain knowledge has been made more difficult by the transition from onsite to remote onboarding, as spontaneous transfer of knowledge is no longer happening. This results in a longer time to productivity for new hires, this is due to the disappearance of 'water cooler' moments. New employees have fewer chances to observe their colleagues' interactions, grasp the norms of the organization, and learn of their unknown unknowns. This is supported by the findings of Comer (1991).

Interestingly, Employee #21 (RnMTM) expressed skepticism about the likelihood of team members having a significantly limited understanding of their domain for an extended period without it coming to their attention. However, this perspective was directly challenged by an

experience shared by Employee #20 (RnMTL), a member of their team, who revealed that they had remained unaware of the company's core business for over a year. This situation highlights the challenges in accurately gauging the domain knowledge of colleagues, especially in a remote work environment. Both employees, having been onboarded remotely and having spent their entire first year working from home, exemplify the complexities and potential oversights in assessing and ensuring domain knowledge in remote settings.

Another contributing factor could be the organization's level of formalization and standardization of information. The presence of multiple definitions for terms such as "product" and "service" complicates the understanding of these nuances for new hires. This challenge is exacerbated in a remote onboarding context, where spontaneous 'water cooler' moments, crucial for informal learning and clarification, are absent. As of February 2024, there appears to be no existing literature addressing this specific issue, indicating that this observation may represent a novel insight.

### **Juniors vs. Seniors Preferences**

The collective input from the interviewed employees underscores the need for a more nuanced onboarding approach than the current autonomous style. Particularly, junior employees across all departments and types of roles are in favor of a more structured onboarding experience, stressing the essential role it plays in grounding them in domain knowledge and facilitating their integration. On the other hand, senior employees are split in their preferences: non-technical seniors uniformly lean towards a structured onboarding, while technical seniors are evenly divided, with half appreciating the depth a structured approach provides and the other half preferring the autonomy of the current method and the fulfilling experience of finding thing out your own provides.

This diversified feedback mirrors findings by Jeske and Olson (2021), who suggest that while junior employees benefit from the clarity and direction of structured onboarding, senior employees may find more value in autonomy, allowing them to leverage their existing skills and knowledge immediately.

Given this, an adaptable onboarding framework is recommended, one that could include an initial assessment of a new hire's domain knowledge. Such a model would ensure that the onboarding process is tailored, offering comprehensive support for those who need it, while allowing those with sufficient domain knowledge the option to expedite their onboarding. This approach aims to balance efficiency with effectiveness, ensuring each employee receives the most relevant and supportive start to their role.

### **Cost of Hiring**

The discussion on the cost of hiring illustrates the significant investment organizations make in the onboarding process, as the number vary between €8.000 and €20.000 per new hire. The discrepancy in cost estimates among employees highlights the complexity of accurately assessing these expenses, a point echoed by Stein and Christiansen (2010), who note that the costs associated with onboarding extend beyond immediate expenses to include long-term impacts on productivity and turnover.

It appears that the estimates provided by management may not be accurate. Therefore, it is advisable to conduct a more comprehensive investigation into the costs associated with hiring and onboarding to obtain a clearer understanding of these expenses.

### 5.1.3 Effects of Remote Onboarding

The exploration into the effects of remote onboarding on employee productivity, social integration, and personal satisfaction highlights several critical findings relevant to the contemporary workplace, especially in the context of increased remote work practices. Drawing upon existing literature, these findings can be contextualized.

#### Effects on Productivity

This research underscores the complexities of achieving optimal productivity through remote onboarding, pinpointing the lack of direct, face-to-face interactions and the hurdles in transferring knowledge informally as significant obstacles for newcomers adjusting to their roles. The challenge is further compounded by the non-standardized training, non-formalized definitions, and less accessible nature of job-specific information, exacerbated by a decrease in spontaneous meetings and connections beyond immediate team members in a remote setting. This scenario often results in a pronounced learning curve for new employees.

Echoing these concerns, Gilson et al. (2014) highlight that remote employees frequently encounter communication and collaboration challenges, potentially hindering their early productivity. This thesis aligns with these findings, advocating for the implementation of structured remote onboarding initiatives designed to streamline knowledge sharing and provide explicit instructions for new hires. Moreover, Yarbrough and Salazar (2023) recommend the integration of virtual mentoring and the use of social media work groups as effective strategies to enhance socialization and improve internal communications among new employees, thereby enriching the remote onboarding experience.

#### Social Effects

The phenomena of diminished spontaneous interactions and the hurdles in cultivating profound team connections within remote environments emerge as pivotal concerns within this study. The integration of remote employees into an established team dynamic is critical for engendering a cohesive cultural ethos and facilitating efficacious collaboration. This research delineates the relative ease with which individuals can assimilate into teams composed of similarly recent hires. Conversely, it delineates the considerable challenges associated with the integration into teams possessing a protracted history of onsite collaboration. Moreover, the division of team members between remote and onsite modalities is identified as a suboptimal strategy for the cultivation of equitable connections, harboring the potential for the genesis of distinct subcultures within the remote and onsite segments of the workforce. Consequently, this study advocates for a binary approach to team configuration, endorsing either a wholly onsite or entirely remote operational model.

In the realm of remote work, the construct of social presence is amplified in significance, a notion substantiated by the seminal work of Bailey and Kurland (2002). These scholars exhort

organizations to embrace strategies conducive to the augmentation of social interactions amongst remote personnel. Proposed methodologies include the institution of virtual team-building initiatives, the regular convening of video conferences, and the creation of specialized digital forums designed to mimic the organic interchanges typifying conventional office settings.

Within the operational context of the subject company, the promotion of social presence amongst remote teams is achieved through the deployment of Daily Standup Meetings (DSMs). A rigorous investigation conducted by Stray et al. (2016) into the application and effectiveness of DSMs across a cohort of 12 agile teams spanning three distinct corporations reveals a nuanced perspective on their utility. This inquiry uncovers a generally ambivalent attitude towards DSMs among team members, with a slight inclination towards satisfaction. The elucidated advantages primarily encompass the facilitation of comprehensive awareness regarding the endeavors of fellow team members and the establishment of a forum for the articulation and resolution of challenges. The findings from Stray et al. (2016) further posit that the necessity for daily DSMs is not absolute, advocating instead for a focus on collaborative problem-solving and forward planning. The adaptation of DSMs to leverage video conferencing for geographically dispersed teams and the maintenance of participant numbers at a manageable level are highlighted as strategies to enhance their effectiveness.

In the examined company, DSMs transcend their conventional utility as a mechanism for work-related discourse, evolving into a pivotal instrument for interpersonal engagement and the maintenance of social cohesion. Employee #11's testimony underscores the perception of DSMs as predominantly social in function, underscoring their role in fostering a sense of community and well-being among remote employees.

## Personal Effects

The personal effects of remote onboarding, particularly regarding job satisfaction and uncertainty, underline the importance of clarity and support during the onboarding process. Saks and Gruman (2018) argue that a lack of engagement and clarity during onboarding can lead to decreased job satisfaction and commitment. To counteract this, they recommend that organizations provide clear expectations, regular feedback, and opportunities for new hires to ask questions and seek support. Additionally, fostering a supportive virtual environment can help alleviate feelings of isolation and uncertainty frequently experienced by remote employees.

### 5.1.4 Effects of Remote Work

The analysis of remote work effects, particularly in relation to isolated teams and project development, autonomy in newly formed teams, productivity versus effectiveness, remote onboarding into pre-existing teams, and its impact on staff turnover, provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in remote work environments.

#### Isolated Teams and Project Development

Isolated teams operating remotely can experience a unique environment conducive to innovation and efficiency, as evidenced by Employee #8's positive recount of autonomy and focused project work. However, the experiences of Employee #3 highlight a significant drawback: the

potential for decreased organizational engagement and awareness. Literature supports that while isolation can enhance focus and productivity, it may also limit the cross-pollination of ideas and reduce the sense of community within the broader organization, which is crucial for the successful implementation of projects (Galluch et al., 2015). A balanced approach, incorporating strategies to maintain connection and communication with the wider organization, can mitigate these risks and enhance the integration of isolated teams' outputs with organizational goals (Mortensen & Haas, 2018).

### **Newly Formed Teams with Autonomy**

The autonomy granted to newly formed teams, as described by Employee #8 and Employee #11, can significantly streamline the onboarding process and foster a strong team culture reminiscent of a startup environment. This mirrors findings in entrepreneurial literature, suggesting that autonomy and a clear collective purpose can expedite team cohesion and effectiveness, particularly under the constraints of remote work (Hmieleski & Ensley, 2007). The development of an independent team culture, free from legacy constraints but aligned with organizational goals, underscores the potential of autonomy in enhancing job satisfaction and reducing uncertainty among new hires (Spreitzer, 1996).

### **Remote Work: Productivity vs. Effectiveness**

This study highlights a surprising find: while working from home can make people more productive by being more focused on their tasks, it might also make them less effective at doing these tasks. This happens because team members don't talk and work together as easily as they do in an office. For example, in software development, it's harder for team members to have quick chats about the project they're working on with other developers or with stakeholders. This can diminish their effectivity as they can work longer on the wrong things before they get feedback. This issue was also noted by Gibbs et al. (2013), who found that despite the perks of remote work, like fewer distractions, the lack of face-to-face time can slow down the sharing of ideas and solving problems together.

This situation shows a challenge for companies moving to remote work. They need to find ways to help team members communicate and collaborate well, even when they're not in the same place. A hybrid approach, balancing focused remote work with in-office collaboration, may offer a pathway to optimizing both productivity and effectiveness, aligning individual tasks with broader team and organizational objectives (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

### **Remote Onboarding into Pre-existing Teams**

Remote onboarding into established teams presents unique challenges in social and professional integration, as illustrated by Employee #8. The absence of informal, face-to-face interactions can create barriers to building trust and understanding within the team. Deliberate strategies to facilitate virtual 'water cooler' moments and transparent communication are essential in bridging these gaps, ensuring that remote hires feel included and valued within the team (Neeley, 2015).



## Effect of Remote Work on Staff Turnover

The perception that remote work leads to higher staff turnover is not uniformly supported by the experiences of Employees #11 and #21. Instead, factors such as team stability, departmental culture, and individual job satisfaction play more significant roles in influencing turnover. This suggests that remote work, when well-managed and supported by a strong organizational culture, does not inherently lead to increased turnover.

## Summary

The complexities of remote work, as revealed through the experiences of employees with diverse roles and onboarding backgrounds, underscore the importance of nuanced management strategies. Balancing the benefits of isolation and autonomy with the need for organizational engagement and effective communication is crucial. Hybrid work models, clear communication channels, and fostering a strong sense of community can enhance the effectiveness of remote work, supporting both individual productivity and team cohesion. Organizations must consider these dynamics to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by remote work environments successfully.

### 5.1.5 The influence of management styles on onboarding

The influence of management style on the onboarding process and subsequent employee experiences within an organization is a critical aspect of organizational behavior and human resource management. The laissez-faire approach of the CFO, the coaching style of the CTO, and the democratic-directive blend of the CCO each offer unique dynamics in shaping team environments, employee satisfaction, and productivity.

#### Management Style and Onboarding Effectiveness

**Laissez-faire Management Style:** The CFO's laissez-faire management style can lead to challenges in the onboarding process, particularly for new hires who may benefit from more direct support and guidance to understand their roles and responsibilities. The hands-off approach may hinder the integration of new employees. This aligns with the findings of Skogstad et al. (2007), indicating that a lack of leadership clarity can result in ambiguity in role expectations and reduced job satisfaction.

**Coaching Management Style:** The CTO's coaching style, focused on encouraging autonomy and responsibility, mirrors the positive aspects of developmental leadership highlighted by Ladyshevsky (2010). This approach can foster a proactive attitude among employees, empowering them to take ownership of their learning and growth. However, as indicated by the experiences of employees like #20 and #21, without adequate structured support, this autonomy can also lead to challenges in personal growth and motivation. This suggests that while a coaching style is beneficial for fostering independence and accountability, it must be complemented by accessible support and resources, particularly for employees in roles with high domain knowledge needs.

A more demanding onboarding process can inadvertently invoke the sunk cost fallacy, po-



tentially leading to increased employee retention rates. This phenomenon, where individuals are more likely to continue with an endeavor due to the resources they've already invested (Arkes & Blumer, 1985), can make employees feel compelled to remain at a company after experiencing a rigorous onboarding, in hopes of justifying their initial efforts. While this might appear advantageous for retention, it poses ethical dilemmas, as it may bind employees to their roles not out of satisfaction or loyalty, but because of a psychological trap. Such retention strategies, exploiting cognitive biases for organizational benefit, could contribute to an unhealthy work environment, where employees' decisions to stay are influenced more by the sunk costs of their onboarding experiences rather than actual job contentment (Bazerman & Moore, 2012). Ethically, it's crucial that retention efforts foster a positive workplace, valuing employees' well-being and autonomy, rather than leveraging psychological biases to retain staff.

**Democratic-Directive Management Style:** The CCO's blend of democratic and directive management styles effectively engages team members in decision-making while providing clear direction and expectations, as supported by the research of Lewin et al. (1939) on leadership climates. This balanced approach can significantly enhance the onboarding experience by ensuring new hires feel valued and understood, facilitating a smoother transition into their roles and the organizational culture.

### **Tailoring Onboarding to Management Styles**

The varied management styles within the organization underscore the importance of tailoring onboarding processes to fit these leadership approaches and the specific needs of new hires. For roles under laissez-faire leadership, introducing structured onboarding elements can provide the necessary clarity and support for effective role integration. In contrast, under coaching or democratic-directive leadership, leveraging the strengths of these styles to foster engagement and clarify expectations can enhance the onboarding experience, promoting faster adjustment and higher satisfaction among new employees.

### **Balancing Autonomy with Support**

The analysis of employee experiences reveals a common theme: the need for a balance between autonomy and structured support. Autonomy fosters creativity, innovation, and a sense of ownership, while structured support ensures clarity, reduces uncertainty, and facilitates learning and development. This balance is crucial for effective onboarding, as it accommodates individual differences in learning styles, preferences, and the specific demands of various roles within the organization.

### **Summary**

The influence of management style on onboarding is a multifaceted issue that requires careful consideration of individual leadership approaches and their impact on new hires. Tailoring the onboarding process to align with these styles, while ensuring a balance between autonomy and support, can significantly improve the integration of new employees, enhancing their satisfaction, productivity, and long-term commitment to the organization.

### 5.1.6 Answering research question

#### **Sub Question 1: Specific Effects of Remote Onboarding Practices on Job Satisfaction and Uncertainty**

The specific effects of remote onboarding practices at NL-ix on job satisfaction and the level of uncertainty among employees are nuanced, varying between technical and non-technical roles. For technical roles, the lack of direct, face-to-face interactions and the challenges in transferring knowledge informally have been significant obstacles, potentially leading to a slower adjustment period and affecting job satisfaction negatively.

For non-technical roles, the impact seems similarly aligned in terms of job satisfaction and uncertainty, with the additional challenge of integrating into the company's culture and understanding its broader objectives, which are crucial for these roles. The absence of 'water cooler moments' and informal learning opportunities in a remote setting can exacerbate feelings of isolation and uncertainty, impacting job satisfaction. This reflects the broader literature suggesting that remote onboarding needs to compensate for the lack of physical presence through structured programs and clear communication to mitigate uncertainty and support job satisfaction.

#### **Subquestion 2: Differences in Remote Onboarding Experiences**

The experiences of remote onboarding between employees in technical and non-technical roles at NL-ix differ primarily in the specifics of the challenges faced. Technical employees might struggle more with the practical aspects of their roles, such as specific technical knowledge transfer and collaboration on projects, where immediate feedback and iterative learning are crucial. In contrast, non-technical employees might find the cultural and interpersonal aspects of onboarding more challenging, given the importance of communication and alignment with organizational goals in their roles.

These differences underscore the necessity for tailored onboarding processes that consider the unique needs and challenges of each group, emphasizing the role-specific knowledge transfer for technical roles and cultural assimilation and communication skills for non-technical roles.

#### **Subquestion 3: Critical Factors for Successful Remote Onboarding**

Critical factors for the success of remote onboarding processes at NL-ix include clear communication, structured support, and opportunities for interpersonal connection. Effective remote onboarding programs must provide comprehensive information and resources to new hires, ensuring they understand their roles, responsibilities, and the company's culture and values. Additionally, fostering a sense of belonging and connection through virtual team-building activities and informal social interactions is crucial for integrating employees into the organizational fabric, irrespective of their physical location.

The use of technology to facilitate these aspects, alongside regular feedback and check-ins by management, can significantly enhance the remote onboarding experience, aligning with best practices suggested by the literature on remote work and onboarding.

#### **Subquestion 4: Influence of Management Styles on Remote Onboarding Outcomes**

Different management styles within NL-ix have had a substantial influence on the outcomes of remote onboarding practices. A laissez-faire approach, while promoting autonomy, may

not provide the structure and support necessary for effective remote onboarding, leading to increased uncertainty among new hires. Conversely, a coaching style that emphasizes development and autonomy can be effective if accompanied by adequate support and resources, ensuring employees do not feel isolated or overwhelmed.

A democratic-directive style appears to offer a balanced approach, providing clear expectations and guidance while also valuing employee input and fostering a sense of agency and belonging. This aligns with findings on effective leadership climates, suggesting that management styles that combine direction with support and engagement can optimize the onboarding experience in remote settings.

**Main question: How significantly have remote onboarding practices implemented at NL-ix influenced job satisfaction and levels of uncertainty among employees in technical and non-technical roles? To what extent do the impacts of remote onboarding differ between these employee groups? What key factors determine the effectiveness of remote onboarding, and how have distinct management styles within NL-ix affected employee experiences and the success of these onboarding practices?**

The implementation of remote onboarding practices at NL-ix has notably influenced job satisfaction and uncertainty among employees, with distinct impacts observed between technical and non-technical roles. Key factors determining the effectiveness of these practices include clear communication, structured support, and efforts to foster interpersonal connections. Management styles within NL-ix, ranging from laissez-faire to more directive approaches, have played a crucial role in shaping these experiences, highlighting the need for leadership that balances support with autonomy. Tailoring onboarding to meet the specific needs of different roles and ensuring effective communication and support mechanisms are essential for enhancing job satisfaction and reducing uncertainty across the organization.

## 5.2 Limitations

The exploration of the evolution of onboarding practices within the organization, alongside the influence of different management styles on these processes, provides valuable insights into the dynamics of employee integration and satisfaction. However, this analysis is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged to understand the context and applicability of the findings fully.

### 5.2.1 Reliance on Employee Testimonies

The primary data source for this analysis has been the experiences and perceptions of employees within the organization. While firsthand accounts offer invaluable insights into the actual impact of management styles and onboarding practices, they are inherently subjective. Different individuals may perceive the same management approach or onboarding experience differently based on their expectations, prior experiences, personal preferences, and the specific context of their integration into the organization. Thus, the conclusions drawn may not universally apply to all employees or be entirely representative of the organization's practices.

### 5.2.2 Limited Scope of Management Styles

The analysis focused predominantly on the management styles of the CFO, CTO, and CCO, providing a detailed view of how these leadership approaches influence onboarding experiences. However, this focus inherently limits the scope of the investigation, as it does not account for the variety of other management styles that may exist within the organization, particularly in departments or teams not directly overseen by these managers. Different managers may employ diverse strategies that could significantly impact the onboarding process, suggesting that the findings may not capture the full spectrum of onboarding experiences within the company.

### 5.2.3 Evolving Onboarding Practices

The onboarding practices and management styles described in this analysis are subject to change over time. As the organization continues to grow and adapt, particularly in response to external factors such as the shift to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both onboarding practices and management approaches may evolve. Therefore, the findings presented here represent a snapshot in time and may not fully reflect future developments or changes that could alter the onboarding experience or the effectiveness of different management styles.

### 5.2.4 Lack of Quantitative Data

This analysis primarily relies on qualitative data gathered from employee experiences and perceptions. While qualitative insights are crucial for understanding the nuances of onboarding and management styles, the absence of quantitative data limits the ability to measure the impact of these factors objectively. Metrics such as employee satisfaction scores, turnover rates, and productivity measures could provide a more comprehensive view of the effectiveness of different onboarding practices and management styles.

### 5.2.5 Generalizability of Findings

The specific context of the organization, including its size, industry, and corporate culture, may influence the applicability of the findings to other settings. The experiences and challenges associated with onboarding and management styles in this particular company may not be directly transferable to organizations with different characteristics. Therefore, while the insights gained may offer valuable lessons, caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings to other contexts.

### 5.2.6 Summary

Acknowledging these limitations is essential for a balanced understanding of the analysis presented. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a broader range of management styles, including quantitative metrics, and examining the long-term impact of onboarding practices and management approaches on employee integration, satisfaction, and retention.

## 5.3 Conclusions

Firstly, the study underscores the critical importance of a structured onboarding process in enhancing employee satisfaction, integration, and retention. The transition from minimal compliance and clarification to more sophisticated strategies for cultural integration and connection reflects an organizational commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive onboarding experience.

Secondly, the differential analysis of onboarding experiences, particularly the emphasis on compliance, clarification, culture, and connection, sheds light on the nuanced challenges and opportunities presented by remote work. The findings reveal a significant shift in how employees engage with the organization and each other. This highlights the need for innovative onboarding practices that can bridge these gaps, ensuring that employees, regardless of their physical workplace, feel an integral part of the organizational community.

Furthermore, the analysis of management styles—ranging from laissez-faire to coaching and democratic-directive—reveals the profound impact leadership can have on the onboarding experience and overall employee satisfaction. This diversity in management approaches necessitates a flexible onboarding strategy that can be tailored to accommodate different leadership styles, thereby optimizing the integration process for new hires.

The study, however, is not without its limitations, which include a reliance on employee testimonies, a focus on a limited range of management styles, and the dynamic nature of onboarding practices. These limitations highlight the importance of ongoing research and adaptation in onboarding strategies to address the evolving needs of the workforce and the organization. Future research could enrich this analysis by incorporating quantitative measures of onboarding effectiveness, exploring a broader spectrum of management styles, and examining the long-term impacts of different onboarding practices on employee outcomes.

## 5.4 Recommendations for NL-ix

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the remote onboarding experience at NL-ix, aiming to enhance job satisfaction, reduce uncertainty, and ensure a smooth integration process for both IT and non-IT employees:

1. **Develop Tailored Onboarding Programs:** Customize onboarding tracks based on the specific needs of IT and non-IT employees, focusing on structured learning for domain knowledge and flexible elements for personalization.
2. **Strengthen Communication and Support:** Establish robust communication channels and a mentorship system to provide continuous guidance and support to new hires.
3. **Enhance Virtual Cultural Integration:** Organize virtual events that reflect the company's culture, helping remote employees feel connected and part of the team.
4. **Facilitate Virtual Networking and Relationship Building:** Create informal virtual interactions to mimic 'water cooler' moments and encourage cross-departmental

networking.

5. **Adapt Management Styles to Remote Onboarding:** Train managers on adapting their styles to the unique demands of remote onboarding, emphasizing clear expectations and supportive feedback.
6. **Monitor and Adjust Onboarding Processes:** Implement a feedback loop with new hires to refine and adjust the onboarding process based on their experiences.
7. **Invest in Remote Onboarding Technologies:** Utilize technology platforms that support engaging and interactive onboarding experiences.
8. **Promote a Sense of Belonging and Inclusion:** Ensure that the onboarding process fosters an inclusive environment where every employee feels valued and integrated into the company culture.
9. **Standardize and formalize domain knowledge:** Ensure that the necessary information for new hires is readily available and that there is alignment on definitions. This minimizes ambiguities, streamlining knowledge transfer processes.

## 5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The investigation into remote onboarding practices at NL-ix has unveiled significant insights into their impact on employee satisfaction and uncertainty, particularly among technical and non-technical roles. To further advance the understanding of remote onboarding and its implications for organizational success, the following research avenues are recommended:

1. **Comparative Studies Across Industries:** Future studies should explore the variability of remote onboarding impacts across different sectors. This could elucidate industry-specific onboarding challenges and effective strategies, enhancing the applicability of findings across broader contexts.
2. **Longitudinal Analysis:** Implementing longitudinal research designs would provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of remote onboarding on aspects such as employee retention, job satisfaction, and overall performance within organizations.
3. **Quantitative Measures of Success:** Incorporating quantitative metrics, including employee satisfaction scores, turnover rates, and productivity measures, would complement qualitative analyses and offer a more holistic view of onboarding effectiveness.
4. **Impact of Hybrid Work Models:** As hybrid work environments become more prevalent, examining their influence on onboarding processes could yield important insights into optimizing strategies for both remote and in-office staff.
5. **Role of Technology in Remote Onboarding:** Investigating the potential of emerging technologies (e.g., virtual reality, AI) to enhance remote onboarding experiences could be pivotal in facilitating knowledge transfer and fostering connections.
6. **Management Training for Remote Environments:** Assessing the outcomes of management training programs aimed at improving remote onboarding could shed light

on the adaptation of management styles to virtual settings and their impact on new employee integration.

7. **Diversity and Inclusion in Remote Onboarding:** Future research should focus on designing remote onboarding practices that support diversity and inclusion, ensuring equitable access to support and resources for all employees.
8. **Employee Well-being and Remote Work:** The impact of remote onboarding on employee well-being, including mental health and work-life balance, warrants further exploration to inform the development of holistic onboarding programs.

These recommendations aim to guide future research towards addressing the evolving challenges and opportunities presented by remote work and onboarding practices, contributing to the enhancement of employee engagement and organizational performance.

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# Appendici

## Appendix A: Management Interviews

### Intro questions

- What is your role?
- Do you have previous management experience?

### Onboarding strategy

- Is there information on the turnover rate of the company?
- Are you satisfied with the turnover rate of your team?
- What are the costs of hiring a new employee?
- How long does it take an employee to be fully productive?
- How long does it take an employee to be profitable for the company?
- Are you familiar with the concept of onboarding?
- Do you have certain onboarding goals for new hires on your team?
- What was onboarding like for you team members before remote onboarding?
- What has changed since the introduction of remote onboarding?
- Questions about the level of onboarding (Bauer & Erdoğan, 2011)
  1. Are new employees in your team educated on basic organization legal and policy-related rules and regulations? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, employee dress code policy, time entry instructions, or employee handbook.*)
  2. Are new employees educated about the expectations of you in your job? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, daily responsibilities, reporting standards and KPI's.*)
  3. Are new employees provided with a sense of organizational culture? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, lunch hour preferences, employee birthday celebrations, structure of the work environment.*)

4. Are new employees given the opportunity to foster interpersonal relationships with colleagues and a network inside the company? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, meet & greet with key leaders, lunch with coworkers, and introductory meetings with members of the organization across departments and teams.*)
- Was there a significant change in the way you handles one of these 4 subjects?

## Impact of remote onboarding

- Were new employees hired and subsequently remotely onboarded?
- Do you think this remote onboarding has had an impact on job satisfaction, compared to those who were onboarded onsite?
- What is the reason for this difference?
- Do you think this remote onboarding has had an impact on uncertainty, when compared to those who were onboarded onsite?
- What is the reason for this difference?
- Do you think there are other things that are influenced by remote onboarding?

## Management style

- How would you characterize your management style?
- Given the three categories: authoritative, democratic and lassaiz-faire, which one would fit you most?
- What effect has had remote onboarding had on your management style?
- What effect has had your management style on the onboarding of new employees?

## Appendix B: Non-management Interviews, Remote Onboarded

### Intro questions

- Who is your manager?
- Is your role IT or non-IT?
- When was your first day at the company?
- Did you work your first days primarily from home or primarily in the office?

### Onboarding effects

- Was there a predefined onboarding?
- What do you think that the goal was of your onboarding?
- Questions about the level of onboarding (Bauer & Erdoğan, 2011)
  1. Were you educated on basic organization legal and policy-related rules and regulations? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, employee dress code policy, time entry instructions, or employee handbook.*)
  2. Were you educated about the expectations of you in your job? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, daily responsibilities, how to write reports, or performance evaluation criteria.*)
  3. Were you provided with a sense of organizational culture? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, lunch hour preferences, employee birthday observances, or team-oriented v. independent work environment.*)
  4. Were you given the opportunity to foster interpersonal relationships and networks? (*Examples may include meet & greet with key leaders, lunch with coworkers, introductory meetings with members of the organization across departments and/or work teams.*)
- Would your onboarding have been different if it had had a different mix of working in the office and working from home?

### Impact of remote onboarding

- What was the impact of your onboarding on your job satisfaction?
- Would this be different if it had had a different mix of working in the office and working from home?
- What was the impact of remote onboarding on your uncertainty?
- Would this be different if it had had a different mix of working in the office and working from home?

- Do you think other employees who had the same mix had a comparable experience?
- Do you think other employees who had a different mix had a comparable experience?
- How long did it take for you to become productive in your role

## **Management style**

- How would you characterize the management style of your manager?
- What influence do you think that this management style had on your onboarding?
- Was the influence the management style had on you different for employees onboarded onsite?

## Appendix C: Non-management Interviews, Onsite Onboarded

### Intro questions

- Who is your manager?
- Is your role IT or non-IT?

### Onboarding effects

- What do you think that the goal was of your onboarding?
- Questions about the level of onboarding (Bauer & Erdoğan, [2011](#))
  1. Were you educated on basic organization legal and policy-related rules and regulations? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, employee dress code policy, time entry instructions, or employee handbook.*)
  2. Were you educated about the expectations of you in your job? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, daily responsibilities, how to write reports, or performance evaluation criteria.*)
  3. Were you provided with a sense of organizational culture? (*Examples may include, but are not limited to, lunch hour preferences, employee birthday observances, or team-oriented v. independent work environment.*)
  4. Were you given the opportunity to foster interpersonal relationships and networks? (*Examples may include meet & greet with key leaders, lunch with coworkers, introductory meetings with members of the organization across departments and/or work teams.*)
- To what extent was the onboarding process influenced by the switch to remote onboarding?

### Impact of remote onboarding

- What was the impact of your onboarding on your job satisfaction?
- What was the impact of your onboarding on your trait anxiety?
- What was the impact of your onboarding on your uncertainty?
- Do you think other employees who were onboarded onsite had comparable experiences?
- Do you think that employees who were onboarded remotely had a different experience?
- How long did it take for you to become productive in your role?



**Management style**

- How would you characterize the management style of your manager?
- What influence do you think that this management style had on your onboarding?
- Was the influence the management style had on you different for employees onboarded remotely?

## Appendix D: Interview summaries

### Employee 1

**Employee role:** As CCO, manager of the commercial Enterprise team and product managers. The role of CCO is shared with the manager of the commercial wholesale team.

**Type of role:** Non-technical.

**First Day at the Company:** October 2019

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

With over 15 years in leadership roles, the interviewee has observed employee tenure, noting a low turnover except for mismatches, which were more frequent during remote hiring. The employee highlighted several issues with remote working: difficulty in building strong team connections due to lack of physical presence, challenges in onboarding new employees remotely without the opportunity for in-person interaction, and the resultant slower pace at which new hires become fully operational. Additionally, the transition to remote work led to a decrease in spontaneous communication and collaboration, impacting the efficiency of team dynamics and the ability to quickly address and resolve work-related issues.

The shift from technical to customer-focused roles and the difficulty in remote onboarding are discussed, alongside the cost and process of hiring. The employee mentioned that hiring costs vary depending on the source of the new hire. Hiring through personal networks incurs no cost, while using headhunters for recruitment can lead to expenses up to €20,000 upon successful placement.

The employee described their onboarding as "fairly limited," relying on their initiative to learn about the company by speaking with many people, understanding their roles, and actively participating in company activities. They emphasized a practical approach, including sitting next to colleagues to observe operations and highlighted the importance of internal coaching for understanding the business.

The employee described their management style as democratic, emphasizing trust, team input, and individual initiative. They value clear communication of expectations, encourage team direction setting, and expect actions to follow discussions. The style fosters frequent contact, feedback, and the promotion of an environment where team members are inspired to contribute proactively, aligning with the company's goals and culture.

### Employee 2

**Employee role:** Director of Daily Operations

**Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** January 2021

**Type of Onboarding:** Remote

The interview reveals insights into the management and adaptation to remote onboarding within the company. The interviewee highlights a strong retention rate within the operations

team, with employees tending to stay with the company for long periods. This longevity is attributed to the company's culture, the opportunity for significant impact and learning, and a sense of family among the team. Challenges with retention were mainly with roles that didn't fit or were at a different life stage, not aligning with that of other coworkers.

The interviewee discussed the integration of juniors into the organization. Juniors are expected to learn the basics, to understand the operational aspects. The interviewee proposes a buddy system, pairing juniors with more experienced team members for mentorship and growth, fostering a natural progression within the team from junior to senior roles based on learning and adaptation.

The interviewee didn't provide specific details on the effects of the switch to remote onboarding on their team beyond acknowledging the general positive reception of remote work flexibility. The focus was more on the overall adaptation to remote work conditions rather than on specific impacts on the onboarding process itself. This transition was part of adapting to changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The company has embraced a model where employees can choose to work remotely or come to the office, aiming to balance personal preferences with team collaboration needs.

The interviewee described the proposed idea for an evolving webpage, used for onboarding new employees. This self-evolving page serves as a resource for newcomers to familiarize themselves with essential systems, procedures, and access requirements from day one. The person who joins the company takes ownership of updating this page with relevant information and insights gained during their onboarding experience. This approach streamlines the onboarding process.

The interviewee emphasized the importance of honesty and transparency in setting clear expectations for new hires. They believe in being straightforward about what is expected from the onset, avoiding sugarcoating to ensure new team members understand their roles and responsibilities. This approach helps in determining if an individual fits within the organization and in setting a path for their growth and integration into the team.

## Employee 3

**Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** April 2009

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee offers valuable insights into their experiences with the company's onboarding process, as it was primarily office-based, emphasizing direct interactions and discussions. Initially, the company had a small team, and roles were distinctly assigned, with each person handling a specific department. They did not have a clear understanding of their role from day one but adapted over time, appreciating the flexibility and autonomy offered in a small company environment.

The transition to remote work, highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, introduced significant changes in workplace dynamics for the interviewee. Initially preferring the office for its direct

collaboration and communication, the shift to remote work was challenging, especially in terms of building personal connections with new team members. The move to a new office location and the introduction of flexible workspaces further altered their work environment, underscoring adjustments to remote work practices and the importance of maintaining team cohesion and effective communication in a dispersed work setting.

The transition to remote work due to COVID-19 introduced challenges in building personal connections, emphasizing the difference in workplace dynamics pre-and post-pandemic. Notably, the discussion touches on the impact of prior relationships on job entry and the shift in work culture as the company expanded.

The interviewee expressed concerns about the challenges of integrating new initiatives developed in isolation, indicating a potential disconnect in company-wide adoption and enthusiasm. This disconnect stems from initiatives being developed by specific teams without broader engagement from the rest of the company, leading to a lack of personal connection and investment in the success of these initiatives by employees not directly involved in their development. This scenario suggests the need for more inclusive approaches to project development and implementation to foster a stronger sense of ownership and commitment across the entire organization.

## Employee 4

**Type of role:** non-Technical, but before had a technical role

**First Day at the Company:** October 2016

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee provides insightful perspectives on the evolution of onboarding practices within the company. The interviewee described the onboarding process as largely informal and unstructured, particularly highlighting the absence of a clear orientation for new roles, including software engineers. Initially, there was no defined onboarding strategy or clear expectations set for job roles, leading to a self-guided learning experience. Despite the company's growth from 25 to nearly 50 employees, the approach to onboarding remained ad hoc, with minimal changes to formalize the process or improve integration and knowledge transfer among new hires.

The interviewee reflects on the informal metrics of job performance and the significance of domain knowledge across different roles. The interviewee emphasized the importance of domain knowledge for successfully performing in their roles, noting it was crucial for understanding and executing job responsibilities effectively. They highlighted how domain knowledge was particularly vital in their initial role as a software engineer, aiding in problem-solving and collaboration within the operations department. Despite the shift in roles, the necessity of domain knowledge remained consistent, underscoring its value in contributing to the individual's and the team's success.

The interviewee observed a shift in company culture over time, from being quite informal and somewhat chaotic to more structured and professional as the company grew. They

noted that earlier, the company had a more amateurish vibe, with generous gestures like expensive Christmas gifts, which changed to more traditional corporate practices as the organization expanded. This evolution also led to a more open environment with less friction and better collaboration across departments, despite some residual formalities in managerial styles. Despite the shift towards a more team-oriented culture within the company, the employee notes a persistent gap in formalized onboarding practices, suggesting a need for a more structured and uniform approach to facilitate smoother transitions for new hires and enhance organizational cohesion.

## Employee 5

**Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** March 2023

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee describes their onboarding as focusing on sales but emphasizing the importance of IT knowledge for effective selling. The interview onboarding experience highlighted a blend of structured and self-guided elements. It involved meetings with key personnel to build knowledge and relationships, emphasizing the importance of physical presence at the office for learning and networking. Despite the absence of a detailed onboarding plan, a schedule of meetings facilitated initial learning and integration. The employee appreciated the management's supportive yet directive style, finding the on-site onboarding beneficial for building interpersonal connections and understanding the organizational culture.

The management style of their manager during their onboarding, was characterized as a blend of directive and democratic approaches, depending on the situation. Management set clear objectives and expectations while also being open to discussion and input, especially regarding the learning process and goals during onboarding. This flexibility and openness in leadership facilitated a more personalized and engaging onboarding experience, allowing the employee to navigate the learning curve with confidence and support. Management's supportive yet directive style facilitated the employee's integration, underscoring the value of on-site presence for relationship building and knowledge acquisition in a complex environment.

The employee did not directly link their onboarding experience to job satisfaction. However, they emphasized the importance of interpersonal connections and understanding organizational culture, which are known factors influencing job satisfaction. The detailed onboarding process, combined with management's supportive approach, likely contributed positively to their overall job satisfaction by facilitating a smoother transition and integration into the company.

The employee noted having some prior knowledge of the domain from a related industry and anticipated needing about 1.5 years to fully grasp the new role. They highlighted the complexity of the environment and the importance of technical knowledge for effective sales and advising, suggesting that lacking such knowledge could extend the learning period.

## Employee 6

**Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** October 2023

**Type of Onboarding:** Hybdrid

The interview began at the company two months before the interview took place. Despite the lack of a formal onboarding structure, they are still in the onboarding phase. They preferred a more guided onboarding process, as experienced at a previous employer, because it provided structured training and clear expectations. This approach included formal training focused on products and services, followed by assessments to ensure understanding. Such structure offered a sense of direction and clarity from the outset, contrasting with their current experience where the onboarding lacks defined steps and goals, leading to a preference for more structured guidance in the initial phase of joining a new company. The lack of structured onboarding at this company led to feelings of uncertainty and impacted their job satisfaction negatively. The absence of clear goals and expectations during their onboarding made it challenging for them to gauge their performance and understand when they were meeting job requirements. This uncertainty contrasts with their previous experience, where structured training and clear objectives helped them feel more secure and satisfied in their role.

The manager's democratic, non-micromanaging style influenced their onboarding by fostering a sense of trust and freedom. This approach allowed the employee to explore and learn independently, aligning with the manager's expectations for self-discovery and adaptation. However, the lack of structured guidance also contributed to the employee's desire for more clear-cut expectations and goals, indicating that while the management style supported autonomy, it also underscored the need for a balance with structured support during onboarding.

The interviewee described the necessity of domain knowledge in their role, emphasizing the importance of understanding the technical products offered to clients. Coming from an adjacent industry, they noted the higher level of abstraction and technical complexity in their current role, which necessitated a deeper level of domain knowledge to effectively sell the company's products. This transition highlighted the challenge of acquiring sufficient understanding of the new products without structured training, contrasting with their previous experience where formal training and assessments provided a clear pathway to gaining the required knowledge.

The employee estimates needing at least six months to understand the core business well enough to spot commercial opportunities with clients, acknowledging the constant learning curve in the IT industry. This timeline could extend to a year for them to feel fully productive and capable of linking client discussions to optimal solutions, highlighting the impact of domain knowledge acquisition on productivity.

## Employee 7

**Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** October 2010

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee has a role under the direct management of the CTO, started on October 1, 2010, at a time when the company was quite small, headcount under 10, and remote working was not a practice until the COVID-19 pandemic.

The onboarding process was informal and lacked a structured program. There was no clear onboarding trajectory; instead, the employee learned through ad hoc discussions with colleagues. At the time, remote working was not practiced, and there was minimal documentation or formal training available to new employees.

The transition to remote work introduced challenges in building social connections and navigating technical aspects of the job without in-person guidance, highlighting the importance of adaptability and the role of management style in supporting new hires.

According to the interviewee, the management style during their onboarding could be described as laissez-faire, especially regarding the CTO who was more focused on giving employees autonomy and responsibility rather than closely managing their work or onboarding process. The leads under the CTO, however, adopted a more democratic style.

**Employee 8**

**Type of role:** Non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** March 2020

**Type of Onboarding:** Remote

The interviewee started during the initial COVID-19 lockdown, leading to remote onboarding and work, thus their onboarding was quite, without a pre-established plan, leading to an ad hoc approach. They benefited from starting with two other new team members, one of whom was a colleague from a previous job. This situation fostered a collaborative team environment from the outset. The initial days focused on team integration and learning about the company through a product manager's course, which provided valuable context and understanding of the company's operations and goals.

The employee was part of a newly formed team focused on a project. This project was distinct from traditional company operations, allowing for autonomy and innovation. Despite the remote setup due to COVID-19, the team thrived, benefiting from diverse skill sets and a shared goal. Their isolated work environment shielded them from wider organizational politics, enabling a focused and collaborative approach to successfully launching the project. This experience highlighted the advantages of remote teamwork and autonomy in achieving ambitious goals.

The employee appreciated starting alongside two other team members, which facilitated a smooth team integration. Initially, there was no formal onboarding plan due to sudden remote work requirements. The employee found an early product manager course helpful for understanding the company and its operations. Over time, the employee emphasized the

importance of social events and informal interactions for building company connections, even in a remote setting.

The team was successful and productive due to their autonomy, diverse skill sets, and shared goal. They operated independently from the broader organizational politics, allowing for focused collaboration. Their remote work setup during COVID-19 facilitated unique bonding and efficiency, contributing significantly to their project's success.

The interviewee's narrative suggests that new teams, like their project team, may experience greater success and productivity due to their autonomy, focused goals, and cohesive work dynamics, unfettered by pre-existing organizational structures and politics. In contrast, onboarding into existing teams might present challenges due to established cultures, workflows, and potentially less flexibility in integrating new ideas or members, as indicated by the comparison with another colleague's less successful remote onboarding experience within an established team.

## Employee 9

**Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** Summer of 2021

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee worked initially exclusively in-office until the COVID-19 pandemic mandated remote work. There was no clear onboarding process; the employee was directly trained by colleagues without up-to-date resources or handbooks, particularly since the role was non-IT. This informal approach to onboarding contrasted with the structured environment of their previous employer, presenting initial challenges in adapting to the new workplace. Over time, social activities like weekly team lunches helped in building a sense of belonging, although the lack of formal HR policies and explicit job expectations initially made it difficult to feel settled.

Over time, informal social activities, like weekly lunches, helped build a sense of community. However, the lack of formal HR policies and clear job expectations initially hindered job satisfaction, despite enjoying the work itself. The transition to remote work introduced additional challenges, particularly in maintaining team spirit and organizational culture, emphasizing the importance of face-to-face interactions for effective teamwork and employee integration.

The transition to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant changes in workplace dynamics and employee onboarding experiences. Remote onboarding presented challenges such as creating a sense of belonging and integrating new hires into company culture without physical presence. It necessitated a reliance on digital tools and platforms for training and communication, emphasizing the importance of managerial and organizational support to navigate these challenges effectively. The shift also spotlighted the need for clear communication, structured onboarding processes, and resources to support new employees in adapting to remote work environments.



The CEO provided a detailed overview of the company's operations, focusing heavily on technical aspects. While this technical depth was somewhat excessive for the employee's non-IT role, having a general understanding of the business was still deemed necessary. The approach to sharing domain knowledge with new colleagues wasn't explicitly detailed, indicating a potential area for improvement in onboarding practices, especially for fostering a comprehensive understanding of the company's operations among new hires.

## Employee 10

**Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** April 2017

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee reveals insights into the challenges and adjustments faced during the early stages of employment and the evolution of organizational procedures over time. Initially, they were not allowed to actively participate but instead spent the first two weeks observing, particularly focusing on support processes. By the third and fourth weeks, they began to engage in work more independently.

Over time, as the organization grew and procedures became more defined, the employee's engagement with their role evolved, highlighting the importance of clear workflows and the impact of organizational structure on job satisfaction and productivity. The onboarding process had an impact their job satisfaction. Coming from a structured environment to one with less defined procedures, they experienced uncertainty about their fit within the company. This transition period was challenging, leading to doubts about whether they were in the right place. However, as the company began to grow and procedures became more defined, their sense of belonging and satisfaction with their role improved. This highlights how structured onboarding processes can influence new hires' job satisfaction by providing clarity and reducing uncertainty. It took approximately two to three months to begin feeling truly productive. This period was necessary for acclimating to the new company's culture, learning the equipment, and understanding the procedures.

The interviewee emphasizes the importance of responsibility and ownership in task management. They found the initial lack of structured procedures challenging, indicating that clear guidelines and a defined workflow are essential for maintaining quality and productivity. The interviewee suggests that having set procedures enables individuals within a team to understand their roles better, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for their tasks, which, in turn, can improve overall job satisfaction and efficiency.

## Employee 11

**Role:** CTO **Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** 2017

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee provides insights into the challenges and strategies of remote onboarding from a managerial perspective. The interviewee discusses the transition from office-based to remote work, emphasizing the organizational commitment to office presence prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewee outlines the company's low turnover rate and the significant investment in hiring and training new employees. The acquisition costs range between one to two months' worth of effort, amounting to approximately €6.000 per person for direct costs. This figure reflects the comprehensive investment in bringing a new hire up to full productivity, including recruitment efforts and the onboarding process.

The interviewee discussed that the transition to remote onboarding remained consistent with the company's practices before the pandemic, emphasizing no significant change in their approach. The interviewee highlights a structured yet flexible approach to onboarding, leveraging managerial and peer support without a formalized training program. Despite the shift to remote work, the company continued its existing onboarding procedures, including laptop pick up and peer-led training, without developing an extensive formal program like their parent company. The CTO also mentioned the importance of maintaining a distinct company culture and autonomy in the remote work setting, reflecting a pragmatic adaptation to remote onboarding while prioritizing operational effectiveness and team cohesion. The interview further explores the impact of remote work on organizational culture and employee connectivity, suggesting a pragmatic adaptation to remote interactions while maintaining a focus on autonomy, problem-solving, and team cohesion. The interviewees management style, which adapts to crisis situations and values autonomy, underscores the importance of goal-oriented teamwork and cultural integrity in the remote work era.

The interviewee described their management style as primarily coaching, with a directive approach when necessary. They adapt their style based on the context, such as adopting a more directive stance during crises while generally preferring a laissez-faire approach to encourage autonomy. The CTO emphasized not managing more than necessary and highlighted the importance of fostering a productive environment where team cohesion and autonomy are prioritized, aligning with the organization's goals and culture.

the interviewee mentioned that the time it takes for a new hire to become fully productive varies by role. For example, a network engineer might take up to six months to be fully onboarded and ready to participate in on-call duties, while a developer might also take around six months to fully integrate into their role. This timeframe allows for a gradual increase in productivity as the new hire becomes more familiar with their responsibilities and the company's operations.

## Employee 12

**Type of role:** Hybrid between technical and non-technical

**First Day at the Company:** February 2015

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee has had many different roles in the company. These transitions were marked by challenges due to managerial and organizational shifts, highlighting the fluidity between

technical, commercial, and financial domains. Starting out, they highlighted a significant lack of structure and formal training, as they were expecting a more traditional onboarding. They were surprised by the casual nature of the company, including the absence of a standard dress code and formal onboarding processes. Their first day involved informal chats with other employees rather than structured orientation, reflecting the company's informal culture. Over time, as the company underwent structural changes and corporate integration, some formalization occurred, but the onboarding process remained largely self-directed, with the employee taking initiative to learn and adapt to their role. The employee noted that this lack of formalization was the reason they joined, as helping creating these formalization is a key competence of the interviewee. The interviewee faced a significant absence of structured procedures and policies upon joining the company. Initially, there was no clear guidance on tasks such as client contact documentation, pricing strategies, or order processing, leading to inconsistencies and inefficiencies. The company's informal approach extended to requiring the employee to actively seek out necessary information and learn through trial and error. This environment, while fostering autonomy, highlighted the need for more defined processes to support new hires effectively.

The interviewee noted that remote onboarding presented challenges, particularly in building connections and understanding company culture compared to onsite experiences. The shift to remote work required new hires to be more proactive in seeking information and integrating into the team. While formal training sessions were moved online, the lack of informal, in-person learning opportunities made the onboarding process more difficult for new hires who were onboarded remotely.

## Employee 13

**Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** June 2019

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

Employee #13, a non-IT role, began at the company in June 2019, experiencing onsite onboarding before the COVID-19 pandemic. Transitioning through three managers since starting, the employee described an initial onboarding process that was short and consistent mostly of getting some info about the role from their predecessor. It took them about two months to become fully productive, primarily due to the need to adapt to their manager's management style and the expectations their manager held, which initially did not align with their own approach to work. The direct, day-to-day interaction with the manager in the same office space was crucial for navigating these initial differences and finding a successful way to collaborate. If the onboarding had been remote, the interviewee believed it would have taken twice as long to reach productivity. The absence of nuanced, face-to-face communication and immediate feedback would have likely exacerbated initial misunderstandings regarding work expectations and management style.

The interviewee highlighted that the organizational culture at their company offered significant freedom, particularly in daily choices such as meals, reflecting a lack of strict guidelines on

such matters. They observed a doubling in employee numbers over 4-5 years, suggesting rapid growth. Despite this growth, the interviewee felt that remote working during COVID-19 might have prevented potential tensions between different disciplines that could have arisen if everyone were still office-based. They noted a reduction in visible conflicts, attributing this change to the physical distance maintained due to remote work.

Despite changes in management, the essence of their role remained constant, unaffected by the company's core business operations. The interview highlighted challenges in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the company's activities and adapting to less formal dress codes and work environments, as these were not communicated beforehand. Despite these challenges, the employee emphasized the importance of personal initiative in learning and adapting to their role, highlighting a preference for a less structured onboarding approach. The discussion also touched on the impact of remote work on company culture and employee integration, suggesting a shift towards more organized onboarding for new hires but noting a potential increase in employee detachment and higher turnover rates associated with remote work practices.

## Employee 14

**Type of role:** Hybrid between technical and non-technical

**First Day at the Company:** February 2022

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interview provides insights into the remote onboarding process. The interviewee discussed the onboarding process, noting a lack of structured information and the necessity for new hires to proactively seek out knowledge and connections within the company. They highlighted the self-directed nature of onboarding. The employee shared experiences of adapting to remote onboarding, pointing out the challenges of accessing information and the importance of personal initiative in navigating the company's resources and building relationships. The discussion also touched on the differences between onsite and remote onboarding, suggesting that remote onboarding requires more deliberate planning and effort to ensure effective integration into the company.

The onboarding experience was largely self-directed, with the employee highlighting that information is often not centrally organized but rather resides with individuals. This decentralized nature of knowledge necessitates new employees to actively seek out information and establish connections with colleagues to navigate the company's processes and systems effectively. The interviewee emphasized the importance of self-initiative in learning and adapting to the company's way of operating, particularly in the context of remote onboarding where direct, face-to-face interactions are less frequent.

Despite challenges in navigating the company's information landscape and adapting to a new role, the employee appreciated the freedom and support offered, contributing to job satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment within the first few months. This narrative underscores the importance of managerial support and organizational resources in facilitating effective remote onboarding and integration into company culture.

## Employee 15

**Role:** CEO **Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** From the start of the company

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interview provides a comprehensive overview of his role, management style, and perspectives on employee onboarding and satisfaction. As a manager themselves they acknowledge the lack of a strategic, company-wide onboarding strategy, noting that while operational onboarding processes exist within departments, there's no unified approach. The transition to remote work has necessitated adjustments, particularly in maintaining informal onboarding elements, like building company culture and interpersonal relationships, which have become challenging in a remote setting. Despite these challenges, they emphasize the importance of embedding new hires into the company's fabric, even in a remote context, to ensure they understand their roles, the company's products, and its direction.

Furthermore, they highlight a significant cultural shift due to the transition to remote work, contrasting the pre-pandemic expectation of daily office attendance with the current norm where employees primarily work from home. This shift, while offering flexibility, has introduced challenges in maintaining the informal aspects of onboarding and company culture. Despite operational onboarding efforts at the departmental level, the remote environment has made it more difficult to foster a sense of belonging and to facilitate informal learning and relationship-building among new hires.

Starting from the company's inception, they outline their journey from being hands-on in both technical and commercial aspects to focusing on strategic direction and long-term vision. He discusses the challenges of adapting to remote onboarding, emphasizing the importance of maintaining company culture and employee engagement in a remote work environment. The interview also touches on the turnover rate, the cost of hiring, and the need for a strategic yet flexible approach to management to navigate the changing dynamics of the workplace effectively. The interviewee acknowledges the complexity and high cost of hiring, especially in securing the right talent. Balancing the expense of recruitment against the cost of retaining employees in mismatched roles or those unable to adapt to the company's evolving needs is highlighted as a critical management challenge.

## Employee 16

**Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** July 2023

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee described a positive first day, with a pre-arranged workstation and introductions to key department members, but noted the complexity of the company's niche required a long adaptation period. Despite a structured introduction to the company's operations, they felt a lack of comprehensive training on specific job functions and organizational culture.

The absence of formalized expectations or targets initially didn't hinder their onboarding, attributing successful adaptation to interpersonal interactions rather than formal processes.

The employee highlighted the importance of on-site presence for personal development and quicker integration, suggesting that remote onboarding might lack in fostering strong company connections and understanding of cultural nuances.

The interviewee highlighted the complexity of acquiring domain knowledge, as they need it for their commercial role, noting that even after six months, they had not fully grasped all necessary information. They believe that truly understanding the breadth of the company's operations and customer needs could take up to a year. This challenge is attributed to the intricate nature of the company's products and the ever-evolving market demands. The employee suggested that hiring individuals with prior industry experience could potentially expedite the learning curve for new hires unfamiliar with the sector.

The interviewee expressed that remote onboarding presents challenges in building strong connections within the company and fully grasping the organizational culture. They suggested that remote onboarding lacks the facilitation for new hires to immerse in the company's social and operational dynamics as compared to on-site experiences. The employee emphasized the value of being physically present in the office for personal development and quicker integration into the company's culture and operations.

Furthermore the employee observed that during their short tenure, the turnover rate within their department appeared low, with more people joining than leaving. They mentioned only one departure, which was a pre-disclosed resignation, suggesting a stable workforce in their experience.

## Employee 17

**Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** July 2023

**Type of Onboarding:** Remote

The interviewee had a remote onboarding, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to situation where they were forced to work remotely. The lack of a predefined onboarding process meant learning on the job, with significant reliance on managerial guidance. Comparing this experience to previous, more structured onboarding, the employee recognized the value of a detailed, informative process as this is harder in the long run but makes things easier in the long run.

The onboarding process initially led to feelings of isolation for the employee, which did not directly impact their long-term job satisfaction but did create uncertainty in the beginning. As communication improved and the employee became more integrated into the company's digital platforms, these feelings of isolation diminished, and the employee's satisfaction and certainty regarding their role increased.

The employee highlighted the importance of clear job expectations and the role of managerial

communication in mitigating uncertainties and fostering job satisfaction. Despite the initial challenges, including isolation and adapting to digital communication tools, the employee settled into their role within six months, attributing this adaptation partly to increased online communication and managerial support.

## Employee 18

**Type of role:** non-Technical

**First Day at the Company:** May 2023

**Type of Onboarding:** Onsite

The interviewee spoke about their first day involving discussions with the CEO and CTO about the company's services and structure. Initially hired as for a specific role evolved into a more strategic role. The employee emphasized the lack of a formal onboarding plan, attributing it to the unique and broad nature of their role.

The interviewee, transitioning to their role primarily onsite, anticipated that engaging in remote onboarding would have extended the period to reach optimal productivity. Specifically, they estimated a 2.5-month timeframe to achieve about 80% productivity onsite, suggesting that remote onboarding could have potentially lengthened this period by approximately a month. This reflection underscores the perceived challenges of remote onboarding in fostering quick acclimation and productivity within the company's context.

They proactively sought out conversations to understand organizational functions, highlighting the challenge of finding specific product and service information, which was often not well-documented. The importance of interpersonal relationships and face-to-face interactions in understanding the company's culture and the technical complexity of its products was noted. The employee also discussed the informal nature of learning about company policies and the significance of personal initiative in navigating their role and expectations within the company.

The interviewee described a significant challenge in accessing comprehensive documentation and deepening their domain knowledge upon joining the company. Despite having a broad understanding of the company's domain from previous involvement, they encountered difficulties in grasping the details and diversity of the company's products and services. This was partly because specific product and service information was not well-documented or easily accessible, often residing in the knowledge of individual employees rather than in structured documents.

## Employee 19

**Role:** IT Manager **Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** March 2020

**Type of Onboarding:** Remote

The interview offers insights into the remote onboarding experience and its success factors.

With a background in management, the interviewee discusses the turnover rates across departments. The interviewee observed that turnover rates vary by department within the company, noting that departments like sales tend to have higher turnover and shorter tenure compared to operations, finance, or HR. They expressed satisfaction with the low turnover rate within their own team, contrasting it with their experience at a previous company where a high turnover rate was normative, attributing it to a business model that relied on employees leaving before becoming costly.

The interviewee mentioned that the time required for an employee to become fully productive varies based on their experience level. More experienced employees tend to adapt and become productive faster than junior employees. This period allows new hires to acclimate to the company's expectations and workflows.

Challenges and opportunities in remote onboarding, such as adapting to company culture and fostering interpersonal relationships, especially during COVID-19. They highlighted that before the pandemic, fostering organizational culture was more straightforward, with regular in-person interactions and events facilitating a sense of community. However, the shift to remote work made it harder to maintain these cultural norms, leading to a reliance on unwritten rules that weren't explicitly communicated to new employees. This transition required adjustments in how new hires are integrated into the company's culture.

The conversation also covers the role of managerial and organizational support in the success of remote onboarding, emphasizing the need for clear communication and setting of expectations. They noted the significant role of technology in facilitating remote onboarding, but also acknowledged adjustments needed post-COVID-19, such as more planned interactions and information sharing to compensate for the lack of spontaneous, in-person communication. These changes aim to maintain organizational culture and support new hires in adapting to their roles within the company.

## Employee 20

**Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** November 2021

**Type of Onboarding:** Remote

The interviewee shares insights on their mixed onboarding experience amidst transitioning work modalities due to the pandemic. Initially receiving technical setup and a brief team introduction, the process lacked comprehensive education on domain knowledge and explicit job expectations, leaning heavily on self-guided learning. This approach presented challenges in personal growth and professional integration, highlighting the significance of managerial involvement and structured onboarding processes for new hires.

The absence of a conventional managerial structure, represented by a technical-focused manager, posed challenges in personal growth and motivation. They perceived their as technically proficient, focusing on product and technology management rather than traditional people management. This management style, characterized by autonomy, requires employees



to take initiative for their growth and seek help when needed. While appreciating the trust and freedom, the employee also expressed a desire for more structured support and recognition, highlighting the balance between autonomy and guidance in managerial roles.

Despite these hurdles, the adaptability to self-management and the provided autonomy were seen positively, emphasizing a preference for more initial guidance in navigating the company's operational landscape. The interviewee felt productive in their role within a couple of weeks, attributing this quick adaptation to their prior experience and the technical support received. However, gaining full understanding of the company's domain and integrating into its culture took significantly longer, highlighting the complexity of aligning with organizational objectives and navigating the work environment without extensive onboarding support.

## Employee 21

**Type of role:** Technical

**First Day at the Company:** September 2020

**Type of Onboarding:** Remote

In this interview the interviewee discusses various aspects of remote working and the onboarding process with the interviewee during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewee reflects on their productivity and job satisfaction during remote working compared to working at the office. They believe they were more effective working from home due to fewer distractions and a focused environment, although they acknowledge their role has evolved, affecting their perception of productivity.

The interviewee also talks about the challenges and benefits of asynchronous communication, such as chat, which they found more efficient than traditional emails or face-to-face meetings. This mode of communication allowed for flexibility in addressing tasks and questions without the immediate need for responses, fitting well with the developers' workflow.

The discussion also touches on the interviewee's interaction with their manager during their early days at the company. They mention not having frequent contact but didn't mind it, interpreting the lack of constant check-ins as a sign of trust in their abilities. The interviewee appreciated the autonomy, preferring to seek help only when absolutely necessary.

Lastly, the interviewee shares their thoughts on how being part of a new team during the pandemic might differ from joining a team with long-established members. They suggest that integrating into an existing team might have presented additional challenges in understanding workflows and dynamics but also recognizes the potential benefits of a more structured onboarding experience.

## Appendix E: Ethical Considerations

### Informed Consent

- **Clarity and Transparency:** Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided with a detailed consent form. This form clearly explained the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, how the data would be used, and their rights as participants.
- **Voluntary Participation:** It was emphasized that participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any point without any consequences.
- **Review and Removal Rights:** Participants were granted the right to review their interview transcripts and request the removal of any portion they felt uncomfortable with before the data was finalized for analysis.
- **Withdrawal Rights:** Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study entirely, at any stage, with the assurance that their data would be completely removed from the study.

### Confidentiality and Anonymity

- **Data Anonymization:** To maintain confidentiality, all identifiable information, including names of participants, other employees, and organizations, was removed from the transcripts. Names were replaced with randomly assigned numbers (between 1 and 20) to ensure anonymity.
- **Secure Data Handling:** All audio recordings and full transcripts were stored securely. Access to this data was restricted to only the researcher. Only the anatomized summaries were published as part of the appendix of this thesis.

### Responsible Data Use

- **Use of Information:** Information gathered from the interviews was used solely for the purpose of this study.
- **Data Availability:** While full interview transcripts were not included in the thesis document, they were made available upon request, ensuring that such requests were handled in line with ethical guidelines and participant consent.

### Potential Ethical Issues

- **Organizational Consent:** Prior to initiating the study, approval was obtained from the company where the study was conducted. This step was crucial to ensure the study was conducted in alignment with the company's policies and ethical considerations.
- **Mitigating Harm:** Throughout the study process, care was taken to ensure that the interviews did not cause any discomfort or harm to the participants. Questions were

designed to be non-invasive and respectful of participants' privacy.