

Supervision as Support Opportunity in Adaptation of New Employees during Covid-19 Emergency

 [Maija Zakrizevska-Belogrudova](#),¹ Dr. psych., Mg. sc. sal., Mg. sc. administr.; [Renāte Linuza](#),² Mg.sc. administr.,

RISEBA University of Applied Sciences, Latvia
maija.zakrizevska@riseba.lv¹; renatelinuza@gmail.com²

Abstract: The research aim is to find out whether the adaptation of new employees is affected by the rapid transition to remote work due to the Covid-19 emergency and to find out is there a need for consultative support for new employees during this time. The study included a two-part survey assessing the adaptation of new employees and the need for consultative support. The survey of new employees included 94 respondents from various industries, who worked in their workplace for less than a month to an average of one year. Respondents were from transport and logistics, marketing, advertising and public relations, education and other fields working in the office or administrative sector which is most exposed to remote work. Summarizing the results of the study, it was concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between the self-assessment of adaptation of new employees and on-site or remote work. However, there were statistically significant differences between remote work and the need for consultative support. The impact of the remote work on the adaptation process in this study appeared as a partial influencing factor. The purpose of this study is to identify the general changes that emerged during the Covid-19 emergency situation and make a basis for further research.

Keywords: supervision, new employees, adaptation, remote work, Covid-19

Introduction

Nowadays, companies need to constantly remain vigilant and flexible to adapt to various unexpected conditions, such as climate change, economic downturn and political stability in the world, which create uncertainty and threat to their operation and development. Currently, all of the processes are interrelated, and, therefore, issues in one region have impacts on countries internationally as well. This is also evidenced by the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 virus which has brought along rapid changes globally, as organisations are forced to adapt their targets, strategies, and also pursue new approaches in human resource management. New changes in the working environment have occurred along with the restrictions created by the COVID-19 with regard to communication, mobility and hygiene requirements. A large part of companies have changed to working remotely lately, and this means that the routine on-site company processes need to take place remotely. The swift transition to remote working environments causes new challenges to emerge. Employees face higher risks of experiencing lack of communication and motivation, receiving support from their colleagues or the management, and this has negative impacts on the their well-being, particularly among the new employees who have not integrated in the company environment yet.

Researchers have traditionally considered a new employee to be an individual who has worked in their position for an average of two to three years (Wang et al., 2018), (Gundry, 1993). Other authors have used the service length in the organisation or the age to define a new employee (Henderson, 1999; Thornhill et al., 2003). It is clear in this context that the term “a new employee” is a short-term or terminable phenomenon, because it is influenced by the individual’s understanding of what “new” is, and, to a large extent, it is also influenced by the length of employment of the employee in the organisation. The longer the time of employment, the less likely an employee is to be considered as a new one (Rollag, 2007). Researchers Klein and Heuser have divided the employee onboarding process into eight consecutive stages taking place from the first day and up to one year of working (Klein et al, 2008). Considering that the definition of a new employee is a biased phenomenon, the viewpoint of Klein & Heusera (2008) has been chosen as the basis of this research study, i.e., a new employee is an individual who has worked for the organisation for up to one year and who is subject to formal and informal onboarding measures within the organisation.

Theoretical knowledge suggests that adaptation is a process in which a living thing changes over time to be able to continue to exist in a particular environment (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). In corporate contexts, this process can be viewed as accommodation of the new employee to their new role and environment by integrating into the corporate processes, procedures and culture (Klein et al., 2012). Various measures are taken to make the process of socialising the new employee as swiftly as possible. This is also known as a process of learning and accommodation in which the new employees accept their role within the organisation while meeting the needs of the particular individual and the organisation (Chao, 2012). Inefficient adaptation (onboarding) of new employees not only reduces the benefits a talented and trained employee might achieve, but also increases the probability that the hard work spent on integrating the new employee will be wasted (Smart, 2012).

Research studies suggest evidence of several positive onboarding measure benefits for the organisation and the new employee, such as better clarity of the roles, efficiency, better quality of work, staying longer in the workplace, and job satisfaction (Bauer et al., 2007; Fang et al., 2011). The new employees who integrate better in the organisation have higher levels of job satisfaction and affiliation with the organisation, stay in the organisation for longer, and are more efficient at work. Those who have experienced a poorly organised process of integration, in their turn, have right the opposite feeling of lower job satisfaction, more frequent changing of jobs, higher costs for the organisation, lower levels of productiveness, and poorer performance at work (Bauer, 2010).

During the onboarding period, the new employee needs support which helps them settle in, acquire the job obligations and socialise with the other employees of the company (Ashforth, 2001; Klein et al., 2008; Klein et al., 2015). There are several support options. For instance, Ešenvalde specifies that, in a company, it can be the human resources manager who is responsible for various personnel activities and implementation of support programs (Ešenvalde, 2014). This role is often assumed by the direct supervisor of the employee or a senior specialist, also called the mentor.

One of the forms of providing support to an employee is supervision. It is a consultative form which is considered to be a resource for handling various occupational challenges, but also has a significant role in the context of the development and education of professionals. Supervision is considered to be one of the most efficient and contemporary forms of professional improvement where not only new knowledge and experience are acquired, but also solutions to certain problems are found, the client gets an opportunity to see the situation from various perspectives, thus creating new ideas and getting rid of old percepts (Mārtinsone et al., 2017). The mentioned benefits from supervision include monitoring of own professional activities, evaluation of risks and opportunities, seeing new opportunities and resources, and also widening of the perspective (Pumpiņa, 2021). Several research studies in Latvia also emphasise supervision support for prevention, and lowering the levels of, burnout amongst employees in various sectors (Zakriževska-Belogrudova, 2020). It is expected that this tendency will become increasingly significant in Latvia soon, and supervision will more frequently be used in business-related professions.

Supervision can be used to handle problems which are already now significant for those working in business environments, such as frequent change of employers, dissatisfaction in the job environment, lack of motivation, etc. One may claim every business organisation requires supervision, because it may help to achieve own financial and business development targets and excellence in customer service (Zakriževska, 2016).

The current research studies into the efficiency of remote working environment have been conducted among employees who have opted for such format of working voluntarily, but there is a lack of research data regarding the efficiency of working remotely under Covid-19 conditions, which most of companies were not ready to introduce. The first research studies already conducted into remote working experience in China suggest that problems associated with a rapid transition to remote working environments have already been identified in this context. For example, its impact is that employees experience inefficient communication, a misbalance between their job and private life, lack of socialisation, and procrastination (Wang et al., 2020). The timeliness of the topic is more frequently addressed in other research studies as well, where experts warn that the consequences of the current pandemic are far from the final outcome. The risk of health crises exists in the future as well, therefore

it is essential to have a discussion to seek ways of adapting to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic while taking care of the wellbeing of the employees (Carnevale et al., 2020).

The aim of the research study is to find out what onboarding of new employees is in the COVID-19 emergency situation, to identify the factors that influence adaptation, and to establish the need of the new employees for consultative support.

Research questions: 1. Which of the adaptation factors has the strongest impact on the self-evaluation of adaptation among new employees? 2. Are there statistically significant differences between the adaptation factors and onsite or remote working? 3. Are there statistically significant differences between the work format and the need for consultative support? 4. What levels of need for consultative support do new employees have in the adaptation period?

Methodology

Quantitative research method was selected for the study. A web-based new employee questionnaire was chosen as the basis. The participants were new employees who had started their employment during the COVID-19 emergency situation (years 2020-2021). The research study was conducted between April and May 2021.

Research participants. The participants in the New Employee Survey included 94 respondents from various occupational sectors, who had started their employment during the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the 94 participants in the survey, 80 are females and 14 are males. The percentages by the duration of working in the organisation are the following: 38% of the participants have been working for 3 to 6 months, 31% have been working for 1 to 2 months, and 13% have been working for up to one year. The percentages by working onsite or remotely are the following: more than a half (53%) work entirely remotely, one third (27%) work partially onsite and remotely, and 20% work onsite. The obtained data suggest that 80% of the survey participants have daily experience of performing their job obligations remotely.

Research survey. The questionnaire was designed using two concepts – onboarding of a new employee and need for consultative support. The questions of the survey were included in eight sections: 1. Demographic data. 2. Clarity of the job goals and obligations of new employees. 3. Communication (and awareness) within the organisation. 4. Observation of occupational boundaries. 5. Getting support within the organisation. 6. Conduct of training and evaluation thereof. 7. Self-evaluation of adaptation. 8. Evaluation of need for consultative support. The analysis of the questionnaire included a review of the correlations between the new employees' self-evaluation of adaptation and the adaptation factors. The adaptation factors were evaluated using the Likert Scale where 1 is "Disagree", 2 is "Rather disagree", 3 is "Rather agree" and 4 is "Agree". Self-evaluation of adaptation, in its turn, was expressed on a 10-point scale where 1 is "I am totally not adapted" and 10 is "I am fully adapted". A substantial component of this research is consultative support opportunities for which questions were included to find out whom new employees approach to receive support, whether they are currently in need of any additional support, and what particular support they would like to receive (specifying the areas they would like to discuss or receive information about). Multiple-choice questions were included to obtain these data.

Data processing methods. The processing and analysis of the data obtained from the survey were carried out in the PSPP statistical data processing software.

Research study restrictions. The target group of the survey was not easy to reach, therefore the sample of the survey was obtained in two ways: randomly on the Internet and based on snowball sampling or recommendations of the survey participants. One participant of the survey recommended another new employee from their friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Due to the sample of the survey, the research study data cannot be attributed to entire Latvia, but their purpose is to highlight the trends new employees are to face in the COVID-19 emergency situation and to establish the fundament for further research in individual sectors.

Results and Discussion

In order to verify the reliability of the survey scales, the results were tested using Cronbach's α (alpha) for each individual statement separately and for the overall data set. Cronbach's α (alpha) was determined for all five factor scales where multiple choices were included according to Likert scale.

Cronbach's α (alpha) shows that the adaptation factor scale data are reliable. Scales "Goals and Job Obligations" have the Cronbach's α (alpha) of 0.88 ($\alpha > 0.8$), the scale "Occupational Boundaries" have the Cronbach's α (alpha) of 0.80 ($\alpha > 0.8$), and the scale "Communication within Organisation" has the Cronbach's α (alpha) of 0.89 ($\alpha > 0.8$), which suggests very high reliability. The Cronbach's α (alpha) of 0.94 ($\alpha > 0.9$) for the scale "Support within Organisation" and that of 0.97 ($\alpha > 0.9$) for "Training" suggest outstanding reliability of the item scales.

When finding out the extent of feeling adapted in their place of work among new employees on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 stands for "I am totally not adapted" and 10 stands for "I am fully adapted", it was discovered that most of the respondents rated their adaptation as good or very good. 26% have given the rating of 8, and 21% have the rating of 7. Comparatively frequently, the participants of the survey have also given the rating of 9 or excellently adapted (15%) and 10 or outstanding (10%). Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that a considerable part of the respondents have rated their adaptation as average or even poor. Rating of 5 and below have been given by 19% of the survey participants (Figure 1).

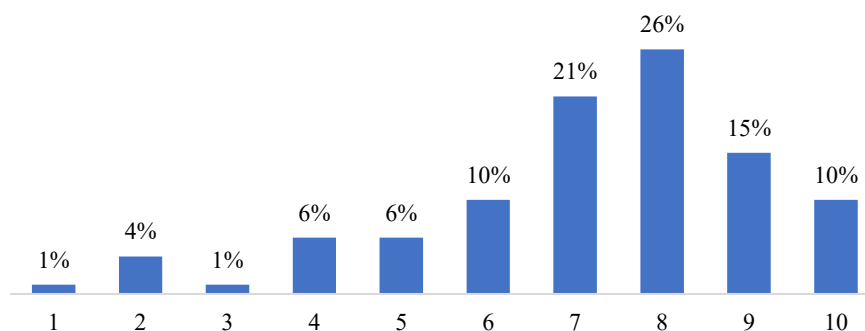


Figure 1. Percentages of Survey Participants Based on Self-evaluation of Adaptation (scale of 1 to 10, where 1 stands for "I am totally not adapted" and 10 stands for "I am fully adapted")

As the results of the survey suggest, most of the new employees currently feel that they need consultative support in the adaptation period and their career growth. 45% of the respondents agree that consultative support would be valuable currently. One third (29%) indicated not being sure about whether it is currently necessary, and 26% noted that such support is currently not required (Figure 2).

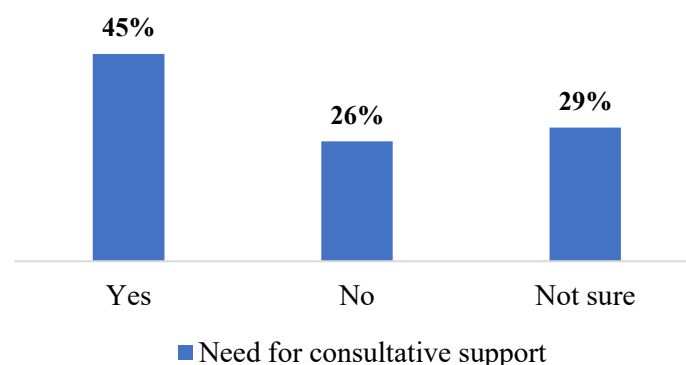


Figure 2. Percentages of Respondents Based on Need for Consultative Support

Among the respondents who acknowledged that consultative support would be useful currently and among those who are not sure about its necessity, it was also identified what support options would be the most useful. The obtained survey results suggest that the need is the highest for improvement of professional competence (61%), willingness to receive feedback regarding own occupational activity

(51%), and minimisation of stress factors (49%). It is also essential for new employees to discuss fear, concerns or mistakes associated with their occupational activity with no condemnation (44%), discuss alternative options and solutions (23%), improve communication with the colleagues, management and clients (23%), and also to receive support (21%). The mention of strengthening occupational boundaries is uncommon (19%), although a large part have specified that they find it difficult to maintain the occupational boundaries in the working environment.

The obtained results of the survey suggest that, on average, a half (51%) of the respondents rate their onboarding in the organisation as very good (values between 8 and 10). Nevertheless, many of (45%) the new employees indicate that additional consultative support would be useful in this time of change.

Linear regression

Linear regression analysis was performed to find out which dependent variables have the largest impacts on the new employees' self-evaluation of adaptation. Table 1 shows that the overall determination coefficient $R^2 = 0.74$ suggests that the five factors included in the questionnaire explain 74% of the variations in the self-evaluation of new employees among the new employees.

Table 1

Linear Regression Analysis for the New Employee Onboarding Survey

R	R value	Adjusted R value	Standard deviation
0.86	0.74	0.73	1.08

Data are statistically significant at a sig. value below 0.05. In this case, the regression sig. value is 0.00, suggesting that the data are statistically significant (Table 2).

Table 2

One-way Dispersion (ANOVA) for the Adaptation Scale

	Sum of values	df	Mean value	F	Sig. value
Regression	307.31	5	61.46	63.47	0.00

In the establishment of the adaptation factors with the highest impact on the new employees' self-evaluation of adaptation, statistically significant correlations can be seen between adaptation and clarity of the goals and job obligations (sig=0.00) and communication with the organisation (sig=0.04) (Table 3).

Table 3

Table of Coefficients

	B	Standard deviation	Beta	t	Sig. value
Goals and job obligations	0.89	0.20	0.35	4.35	0.00
Communication within the organisation	0.59	0.20	0.24	2.99	0.04
Occupational boundaries	0.38	0.25	0.10	1.54	0.12
Support within organisation	0.61	0.23	0.22	2.71	0.08
Training	0.27	0.13	0.16	2.02	0.46

The linear regression analysis leads to a conclusion that statistically significant correlation exists between the adaptation factors included in the survey and the new employees' self-evaluation of adaptation. Two factors (clarity of goals and job obligations and communication within the organisation) have the highest impact on the adaptation of employees.

One-way dispersion analysis (ANOVA)

One of the tasks set in the research study is to find out whether there are statistically significant differences between the adaptation factors and the new employee's working onsite or remotely. The sig. values in the table allow to conclude that there are no statistically significant differences between the work format and the adaptation factors, as all of the values are above 0.05 (Table 4).

Table 4

One-way Dispersion Analysis for Adaptation Factors vs. Work Format

Factor	Sig. value
Clarity of goals and job obligations	0.29
Communication within the organisation	0.82
Observation of occupational boundaries	0.30
Support within organisation	0.59
Training process	0.07

In the establishment of whether there are statistically significant differences between the new employee's working onsite or remotely and the need for consultative support, statistically significant data were obtained, as the obtained sig. value is 0.03 (Table 5).

Table 5

One-way Dispersion Analysis for Work Format vs. Need for Consultative Support

	Sum of values	df	F	Sig. value
Consultative support vs. work format	66.61	93	6.26	0.03

The highest levels of need for consultative support can be seen in the group of respondents working remotely (27%) and partially onsite and remotely (13%). Those working onsite in their workplaces, in their turn, indicate more frequently that they are not sure whether consultative support is currently necessary for them (Table 6). The data obtained from the survey confirm that there are differences between the need for consultative support and the new employee's work format.

Table 6

Percentages of Work Format vs. Consultative Support

Work format	Consultative support			Total
	Yes	No	Not sure	
I work onsite	3.2%	5.3%	11.7%	20.2%
I work partially onsite and remotely	12.8%	8.5%	5.3%	26.6%
I work only remotely	28.7%	12.8%	11.7%	53.2%
Total	44.7%	26.6%	28.7%	100%

In-depth analysis of the data leads to a conclusion that the results of the evaluation for statistically significant correlations between the adaptation factors and working onsite or remotely do not provide evidence for statistically significant data. However, the analysis of the results of the survey suggest that there are statistically significant differences between the need for consultative support and work format. In this case, the group of respondents working remotely have the highest levels of interest about consultative support in the period of adaptation.

Other research studies have looked at the influence of external and internal factors on employee satisfaction with working remotely. The research studies suggest that employees feel both positive and negative effects of working remotely, such as having more opportunities for spending time with the family and saving time that is spent on travelling to work, but, at the same time, they find it more difficult to maintain motivation, lose balance between their job and private life, and experience lack of emotional support and stress in dealing with matters related and unrelated to job simultaneously (Matli, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). In this research study, lack of support was not identified as one of the primary factors that

influence the new employee onboarding process, but the questionnaire confirms the high levels of stress among the new employees (49% noted that they would like to receive support regarding this).

Studies into employee onboarding in the COVID-19 circumstances mention that the most substantial factors which influence the onboarding of new employees are 1) clarity of roles (understanding of job obligations and requirements), 2) being sure of own ability to handle the new role, and 3) social acceptance (being part of the team) (Scott et al., 2021). As the results of this research study suggest, the identified tendencies are the same as those identified in the studies conducted by other authors, and this suggests that, in remote work environments, it is of particular importance to take care of the clarity of the new employee's roles and their communication with the colleagues in order to assure successful adaptation (onboarding) in the organisation.

Conclusions

The linear regression analysis suggests that the most substantial factors influencing the new employees' self-evaluation of adaptation include clarity of the goals and obligations and communication within the organisation (clear turnover of information, awareness of the internal processes, traditions and measures), which suggests that role clarity and awareness become particularly significant when employees work remotely.

The aim of the research study was to find out whether rapid transition to working remotely influences onboarding of new employees and the need for additional support. The results of the research study suggest that there are no statistically significant differences between the adaptation factors and working onsite or remotely. This means that no significant differences are seen between how their onboarding is rated by those working remotely, onsite, or partially remotely. However, there are statistically significant differences between the work format of the new employee and the need for consultative support.

The obtained data suggest that the highest levels of need for consultative support appear among the employees working entirely remotely (27%), with the group working partially remotely and onsite coming next (13%). Those working entirely onsite during the COVID-19 pandemic, in their turn, indicate most frequently that they are not sure about the need for such service.

Almost one half (45%) of the surveyed new employees believe that consultative support would be useful during the onboarding period and in their career growth. 29% are unsure whether such service is necessary, and almost the same percentage (26%) note that no consultative support is necessary.

When specifying what consultative support opportunities would currently be the most essential for the new employees, the three most frequent needs are improvement of occupational competences (61%), feedback regarding own occupational activity (51%), and minimisation of stress factors (49%).

Given that 49% of the new employees indicate that they would like to receive support regarding this issue, a suggestion would be having a cycle of educational lectures and a cycle of supervisions regarding the mitigation of the influences of stress factors while working from home.

The manager plays a crucial role in the onboarding of a new employee, and, therefore, managers might find the opportunities offered by supervision for the improvement of skills and the support in the new employee onboarding process particularly useful.

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