On- and Offboarding
Part 1: Methodical Onboarding: As relevant as ever in the post-pandemic world of home-office

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Employers still often take for granted that new hires (especially when they come from highly paid, specialist, or managerial backgrounds) will immediately know how to integrate into a business. However, becoming 'part' of a company means more than just knowing how to do your job.

Certain individuals are indeed able to *cope* with a laissez-faire approach to onboarding. But if employers want their employees to *thrive* rather than just *cope,* then they need to develop proactive and holistic approaches to onboarding that go beyond its operational dimensions. Ultimately, promoting cultural fit *as well as* competence fit makes all the difference.

Why Does Onboarding Matter?

As [Jens Hollmann](), organisational and leadership consultant and owner/founder of [proresults.eu](), points out: "Onboarding is an important tool for corporations and is integrated into personnel development strategies. However, many companies, especially SMEs, still pay too little attention to strategic onboarding as a success factor for sustainable and long-term cooperation."

Indeed, we need only look at recent figures to see that onboarding is a pivotal element of corporate success, especially when it comes to employee retention:

According to [Glassdoor](), well-conceived and comprehensive onboarding strategies can improve the retention of new hires by over 80% and increase employee productivity by over 70%. Poor onboarding experiences, on the other hand, have been shown to [double the chances]() that employees will seek other career opportunities.

Despite being a pivotal element of corporate success, onboarding has also shown itself to be a consistent corporate pain point:

[Surveys]() have shown that close to 90% of employees would not describe their onboarding experience as especially positive; that 58% of employers admit to focusing their onboarding strategies primarily on paperwork and formal procedures; and that many limit their formal onboarding efforts to just seven days.

So, what is going on? If onboarding is such a key part of a well-functioning business, why are their strategies leaving so much to be desired from the 'onboardee's' point of view?

According to Jens, this evident gap between theory and practice can be chalked up to the *kind* of onboarding procedures that businesses employ, rather than a lack of such processes outright:

"Onboarding processes do exist, but they're often limited to the context of operational and administrative dimensions of employee integration – getting new hires access to internal networks, making sure they've signed all relevant paperwork, easing them into their day-to-day responsibilities."

What is less common, however, is the integration of new employees into the social and cultural fabric of a business and the coordinated management of expectations with regards to results, conduct, and interaction with managers.

Competence Fit and Cultural Fit

As Jens points out, "every organisation has its own unique culture, and becoming a part of this culture takes more than just a couple of weeks". This process takes time and, as we will see, can profit from the support of specialised experts.

The process of achieving cultural fit between employees and employers goes beyond just optimising the skills that employees bring to the table. It's not only about determining 'how they should do their job' (competence fit) but also about finding out 'how they should fit into their working environment' (cultural fit). Employees need to feel 'at home' when they are at work and need to see themselves as an important part of a larger whole if they are to unlock their full potential.

Many companies still suffer from too little open exchange between management and new or existing employees – something that is well illustrated by the following graphic from Corporate Rebels, the so-called 'iceberg of ignorance'.
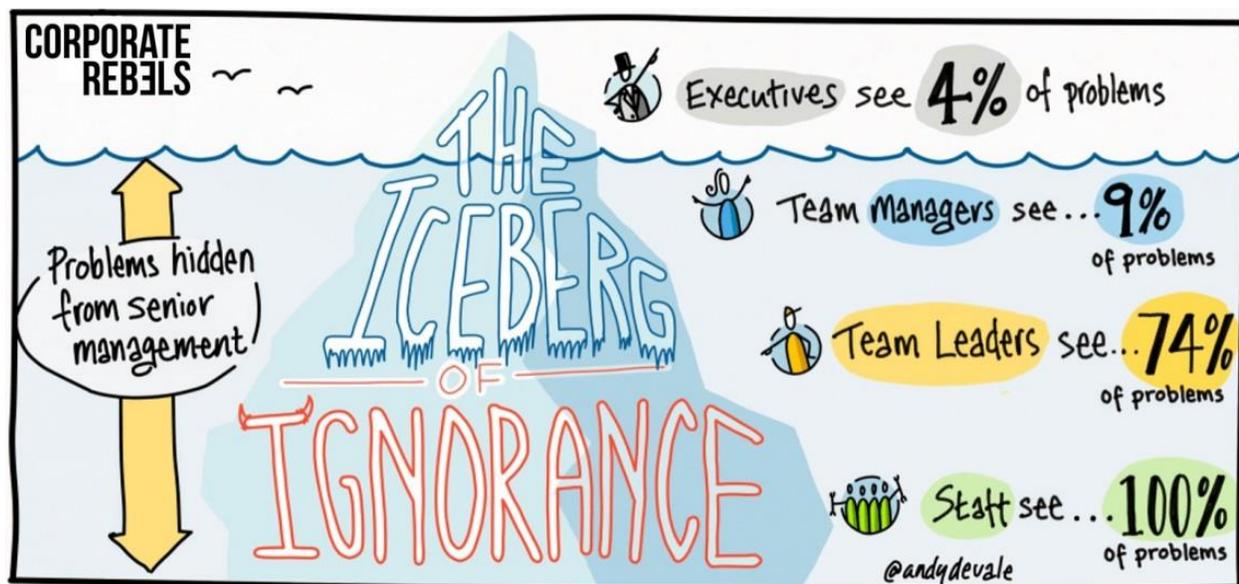
The Iceberg of Ignorance by Andy Devale at Corporate Rebels: https://corporate-rebels.com/iceberg-of-ignorance/

Anyone who has ever felt the power imbalance between superiors and employees knows only too well that communication from the bottom up can be tense or uncomfortable even for experienced staff. It is not uncommon, especially as a new employee, to feel intimidated by your supervisor, even if this is not their intention.

'I've just started the job, I don't want to start off on the wrong foot by bothering my manager with all the things I think could or should be done differently' – such concerns are not uncommon among newly hired employees.

Even experienced managers can find it difficult to establish relaxed and open lines of communication with their new employees, something that is only becoming more challenging in times of home-office.

What's needed is sustainable communication regarding the cultural fit between management and employees so that the needs and expectations of both sides can be aligned to the benefit of all those involved. This essential "communications hub" function can be handed off to competent onboarding partners.

Who does what?

A successful onboarding approach is as much about what is addressed (administrative versus cultural aspects) as it is about *who* is implementing it. The key to achieving effective and holistic onboarding processes is to have a clear picture of who is responsible for what aspects of onboarding – what areas are HR's purview, and what areas would benefit from external expertise?

"Some businesses might be tempted to think: 'we'd prefer to handle all of this ourselves – they're our co-workers after all, and we don't need external parties interfering in our affairs'", says Jens.

But this is a mistake. Administrative onboarding, is and always has been the internal responsibility of a business, so keeping this dimension of onboarding under the auspices of HR departments is not so much a problem. Promoting a sense of cultural and social 'belonging' in both new and existing hires, on the other hand, requires assets and perspectives that can be difficult to source from within a business – it requires neutral multi-dimensional assessment and input.

In this sense, good onboarding relies on a neutral authority that can overcome operational blindness, identify problems, and recommend improvements that are difficult to identify from within a company.

Seeking external guidance is a valuable way of injecting objective mediation into a process that sorely needs it. Corporate culture is anything but static, it constantly evolves. As Jens points, this is especially important "when it comes to the onboarding of business leaders and high-level experts who will play an essential role in the shaping of the corporate culture in the future."

External Onboarding Coaches – Guides to Sustainable Corporate Culture

As Jens emphasizes, "every company has a specific ethos that underpins everything from its long-term goals to the values that it hopes its employees will uphold when doing their work. This ethos and the way it is enshrined in a workforce requires careful exploration and analysis."

External onboarding coaches like Jens lend a hand with this exploration and analysis, applying tailored solutions to help integrate coachees (new hires) on behalf clients (employers):

They assess a company's underlying culture, examining how coworkers and management interact with one another, and investigating what elements are fundamental and where there is room for new team members to negotiate changes.

They set benchmarks and early touchpoints with new employees to see how they are integrating with their colleagues, and whether they have encountered any issues that warrant a shift in strategy.

Finally, they facilitate the communication of all this information between employees and management, allowing them to learn from one another over time:

"Corporate leaders are often interested in knowing about these things, but they aren't getting the information and so they're often not even aware that problems exist."

By emphasizing any critical findings to management, coaches like Jens allow for leaders to gain valuable insight which they can then apply to the benefit of the business and its employees.

How do I welcome a promising cloud specialist on his first day of work? How do I empower my newly hired IoT security specialists to participate throughout my business? Should I be personally mailing my security scouts regular briefings and inviting my phishing awareness specialists to trade fairs and Christmas parties? Where is the line between being informative and being invasive? And what about the line between the personal and the professional?

All of these are integral questions that businesses need to be asking themselves on an ongoing basis if they want to create an environment that is both efficient and a pleasure to be a part of. Involving experienced coaches can be a valuable step towards reflecting on these issues as well as towards fostering a successful future with new hires. On top of this, a thorough external examination of a business' hiring culture can bring to light valuable insights regarding its culture of interaction, and the only way to improve said culture is to understand it first.

Cyberunity's KNOW YOUR TALENTS recruiting approach stresses the importance of building and maintaining relationships with potential employees well before the need for them arises. Employee-employer relationships become even more important once someone is hired in the context of onboarding and persist in importance throughout and even beyond an employment.

Failing to recognise this is a mistake that can cause even the most promising implementation of the Know Your Talents approach to falter – and unfortunately, it is still all too common.

Stay tuned for Part 2, where we will look at the even more frequently neglected topic of 'offboarding' and how to view this process as a valuable opportunity rather than an inconvenient formality.