

Employee Onboarding in the New Normal

The war for talent starts here



Onboarding in the new normal

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic we've seen a huge transformation in how many employees work. Many organisations are still debating the best ways to work, whether that be on location, hybrid, or fully remote. Due to this transformation in working processes many organisations' onboarding practices are rapidly becoming out of date. We need to rethink our current onboarding practices, not simply because the information within pre-packaged onboarding kits is now likely to be out of date but because what employees expect from their onboarding experience has also shifted.

‘Today’s new hires expect onboarding experiences that allow for a much greater degree of flexibility, customisation and personalisation. Similarly, many new hires expect hiring, onboarding, and learning and development to be interconnected to generate new learning and career opportunities.’⁽³⁾

Organisations that continue to roll out generic onboarding programs that:

- Lack the big picture of how a career can be developed
- Don’t provide spaces where knowledge can be easily shared across teams
- Are not personalised
- Don’t fit into a new hybrid or remote world
- risk poor performance, low staff morale and retention issues.

In this guide we'll consider, how you can onboard your new starters so that these issues are addressed and help you ensure each new employee starts feeling connected, understands their role and knows how to succeed as they continue their career with you.

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Breaking down silos to onboard and manage talent

Breaking down silos to onboard and manage talent

“Top performing organisations understand that learning and performance management must be tightly interwoven, but the myriad of systems that organisations rely on to support these critical learning and development functions are often disparate and difficult to integrate”

Mark Ash, CEO of Totara



Build Better

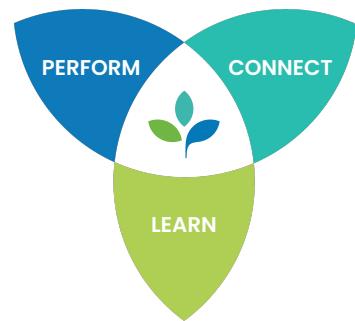
Every new employee wants to be part of a thriving organisation and be successful within their new role. However, becoming a success will depend on multiple factors, and how an individual is onboarded will heavily contribute to how well a new starter does in their role. One of the barriers to success for a new starter might be the fact that the differing areas of an employee's onboarding experience are owned by siloed departments who communicate infrequently.

Having siloed departments each take ownership of an area within an individuals' onboarding experience might leave no one with the bigger picture as to whether or not a new employee has everything they need to be a success in their new role.

A common onboarding experience is likely to involve the following three areas.

- Learning
- Performance
- Connection

How these different areas are managed as a complete onboarding experience could mean the difference between whether a new starter feels like they're able to be a success within an organisation or not.





Learning

When anyone joins a new organisation there's always a huge amount to learn. A big part of onboarding is ensuring your people are developing through both formal and informal learning opportunities. Most organisations will utilise a learning management system (LMS) to manage their learning outcomes. It's likely this will be managed by the learning and development department.



Performance

Performance management will typically attempt to manage and improve employee performance in line with an organisation's objectives. It also aims to hold people accountable for their area of work and is linked to compensation and career progression. Performance management activities are typically owned by HR and an employee's manager.





Connection

Another potentially overlooked part of the onboarding experience is making sure a new employee feels connected to their team and organisation. In a hybrid world, a new employee may not meet any of their colleagues in person for a long time after they start work. If they work for an international organisation then there's a good chance that employees may never meet their colleagues in person. During the onboarding process after the initial introductions have been made then new starters might be left to themselves to create and establish new connections across the organisation.

If people are no longer meeting in person, then building these connections will be forged mostly through the use of technology. Chat-based tools or video conferencing software could be the main way new people connect to others. These collaborative tools will likely be owned by IT rather than Managers, the L&D team or HR. As a result, there's a risk that this area of onboarding will be weaker than it needs to be.





'In most organizations, human resources, learning, engagement and performance teams work in isolation. While this isn't always a problem, it does increase the likelihood of crossed wires, conflicting information, confused communications, duplication of effort and missed opportunities' (4)

| Area of onboarding experience | Tool | Owner |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Learning | Learning Management System (LMS) | Learning and development department |
| Performance Management | Performance Management System | Manager/HR |
| Social connection | Video conferencing tool Chat-based tool | IT department |

When building out an effective onboarding experience there's a risk that you can start to adopt a range of tools and systems to help create a better experience for your employees. The problem is that if all these systems have different owners they may not be working in tandem to help support one specific goal. E.g. Onboarding a new employee well. In the next section we'll look at how your tools can be integrated to build out a better onboarding experience in the new normal.



Learning

Learning management software (LMS)

Owner: L&D



Performance

Performance management software

Owner: HR / Managers



Connections

Chat tools / video conferencing software

Owner: IT department

Onboarding through Learning, Performance, Personalisation and Connection

Learning

Onboarding through formal training

As soon as a candidate has accepted a job they can start the process of learning all about their new role and your organisation.

Through Totara, you can quickly set up courses with a range of interactive activity types to ensure all new starters are trained on essential information. Mandatory compliance training such as health and safety and IT security courses can also be set up via courses in Totara.

You can also build out an onboarding program that brings together sets of courses and competencies that already exist in your site and structure them into a logical order. Different sets or individual courses can be revealed depending on prior learning, to create a personalised, adaptive learning journey for each user. If you need your new team members to take a set of courses then you could group them together within a program in Totara. For example, all your new sales team could take a program of learning focused on the information they need to become top sales people at your organisation.

You'll also be able to set up certifications that allow learners to recertify on topics like health and safety each year. You can even set up automated notifications reminding users and Managers that training needs to be completed by a set date.

Onboarding doesn't stop at formal courses

An easy mistake to make when onboarding new starters is to think that once you've set up your formalised onboarding courses that the job is complete. However, most candidates would expect a lot more than this from their new place of work when they first start with you. In order to keep, motivate and develop talent you'll need to move beyond formal learning to create a more rounded onboarding experience.

Learning

Moving beyond formal learning

‘The step beyond formal learning is an essential one for L&D teams to make if their solutions are to contribute value to organisational, team, and individual performance improvement. Studies find that much of the performance of workers is driven by learning by doing or learning from peers or supervisors in the workplace.’⁽⁵⁾

Learning by doing

Imagine this scenario; day one of a new job. A new starter is excited by the prospect of hitting the ground running in their new place of work. Before Covid-19, this may have involved going to an office and meeting their team as well as other colleagues across their organisation. However, with a shift to remote working, a new person’s first day could be quite an isolated one if not thought through.

A poorer onboarding experience might involve a new starter taking their formal learning courses and passing short assessments to prove they understand what’s expected from them in their new role. After a day or a week of going through this set of formalised onboarding they’ll be expected to get to work!

However, by this point a new starter may not have yet developed many relationships in the organisation and as soon as they start their first set of tasks, it’ll quickly become apparent that there’s lots of information they need that wasn’t included in their formalised onboarding. So how can new starters succeed in those vital first few days and weeks?

Learning

Create knowledge sharing networks

New starters need spaces where they can connect with their peers to ask questions and allow knowledge and resources to be shared. Sharing knowledge effectively is just as important, if not more important than having formal training courses and events set up. Our educational tools need to help our teams easily share the specialised knowledge that sits within each department and that accurately reflects how a task can be completed at that specific time.

This wasn't in my induction course?

Another problem that is likely to occur if you only have formalised training set up for your new starters is that work might not be as it is described in formalised onboarding courses.

Jennings describes this issue as the difference between work as described or imagined, vs work as performed or done.

‘Work-as-imagined describes what should happen under normal working conditions. Work-as-done, on the other hand describes what actually happens, how work unfolds over time in complex contexts.’⁽⁶⁾

In a changing work landscape, it's important to realise that how a task is completed will be forever in flux, meaning that the perfectly scripted scenario as described in a piece of onboarding training will likely differ from the reality of completing a task. It's only by allowing workers to share their tacit knowledge effectively that we can support new starters as they learn by doing in the here and now.

Learning

Connecting onboarding to continuous learning and career development

It's also vital to think about how your initial onboarding training links up to a clear career path for your new starters. If the only real training employees get is right at the start of their journey with you, it's likely that they'll quickly become disengaged with work and move on to somewhere where they can see the potential for progress in their career. Showcasing a new starter's career path with you from the initial phases of their onboarding will allow an individual to visualise how it is that they will succeed with you for many years to come

'At the moment, few workplaces explore the connection between onboarding, continuous learning and organisational development.' ⁽⁷⁾



Performance

When a new employee joins your organisation they'll be doing so at a certain stage in their career. Whether someone joins as a senior manager or as an apprentice there's always space to see how they can develop their career with you and this needs to be clearly explained as soon as they're onboarded.

Through Totara's performance management functionality, you can map out an individual's skillset and set clear goals so that they can see what it is they're aiming for, but also where they're going and how this is connected to any training that they will need to take to get there.

Develop new skills

Through Totara you can map out a set of competencies or skills that your new starters will need to be able to perform their roles. In Totara competencies are set up through competency frameworks in Totara Perform. The great news is that you can assign your competencies by audience, position, organisation or even directly to an individual. And users can even assign competencies to themselves. That means that every new starter can have a highly personalised competency framework set up for them when they start their new role with you.

Set clear goals

When you start any new role, it's helpful to have clear, achievable goals. This is one of the critical first steps in ensuring a new starter succeeds in their role.

Through Totara Perform you can create both company and personal goals in hierarchical goal frameworks. Goals can be combined with performance activities to help users and managers to monitor their performance and progression.

Personalisation

Personalising the onboarding experience

Not all your new starters will need to have the same onboarding experience. Your new people will have different roles and responsibilities and their onboarding experience will need to match their exact needs in your organisation. With Totara you can also use dynamic audiences to really personalise the onboarding experience for each new employee. For example, you can build a dashboard that displays information only to a certain group of new starters in the system. You can also make use of blocks on users' dashboard such as the [current learning block](#) to highlight the specific training an individual needs to complete



Connections

Connecting onboarding to continuous learning and career development

Most of us can't succeed in isolation. It is only through connecting with our peers and networks that we'll be able to succeed in our occupations. As an employee starts a new role, they're likely to be isolated and unable to perform tasks as well as they could once they start making those vital first connections.

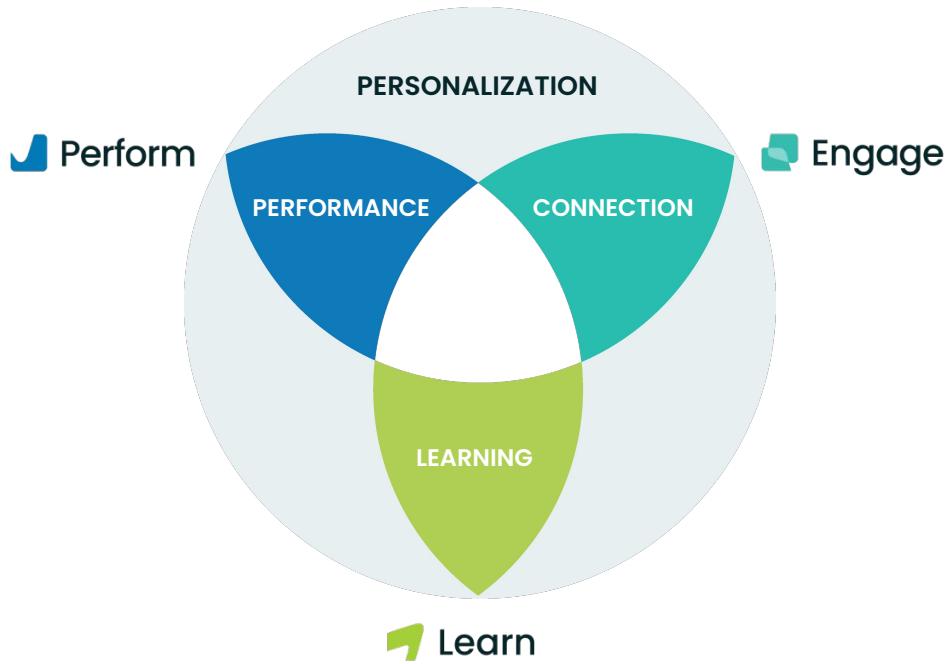
[Totara Engage](#), the adaptable learning experience platform (LXP), can help to fill the gap left by the shift from physical office spaces. By creating digital workspaces, teams can work together to problem solve and learn.

Workspaces are powerful, digital areas where social and continuous learning can flourish and informal brainstorming sessions can happen exactly when a colleague requires support. The workspace can contain all the resources that will help to support an individual in the first few weeks at the organisation. You can include resources like a company organisational chart showing who's who, point to company policies and provide links to all the useful tools an individual is likely to use during their time at your organisation.

As well as orientating your new team members, an onboarding workspace can help to introduce new team members to the rest of the organisation. New starters can join the space and introduce themselves to explain their role to the rest of the organisation. If you include team leads in the onboarding workspace then they'll be able to welcome new people and ensure they understand all the different areas of your business. They'll be able to start connecting with their peers straight away and know where to go when they have questions about completing a task.

Integrating learning, performance, personalisation and connection

Rather than trying to achieve all of these different areas of the employee onboarding experience on different independent tools you can integrate your technology ecosystem so that all of these things happen in tandem through the Totara Talent Experience Platform. By integrating your technology, you'll be able to report on how a new starter is doing in all of the different areas of their onboarding experience rather than only seeing part of the picture.



The importance of psychological safety



First day anxiety

‘Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.’

Being the new person at work can be quite an anxiety inducing time for anyone. New employees won't know many people in their new place of work and they'll lack much of the institutional knowledge, such as how things actually get done, or where information is kept. One of the most important elements of a great onboarding experience is to develop a sense of psychological safety. This will be important in the onboarding experience, but also throughout an employee's time with your organisation. If an individual fears making mistakes or asking questions then it's likely they won't develop, nor will they stay in your organisation for the long term.



Creating an atmosphere of psychological safety



Buddy up

Having a trusted person to turn to when you start a new role can make a huge difference in the life of a new starter. You can set up private collaborative spaces on Totara Engage known as workspaces which would be an ideal place to have 1:1 conversations with a mentor or coach.

Within a workspace, experienced members of staff or subject matter experts can be paired with more junior members or new starters working within the same profession. New starters can ask questions to their mentor and mentors can share resources in a private workspace that can help to support the development of staff members, and build valuable working relationships.

Adding a buddy or mentor system to your onboarding experience will help to create that sense of safety and ensure your new starters feel that they can take risks in their new roles.

Creating an atmosphere of psychological safety



Create frequent check-ins

As part of your new starter induction programme, you can incorporate frequent semi-formal check-ins.

Check-in conversations offer an alternative to the pressure and infrequency of the annual appraisal, and are focused on performance and/or development.

They are a great opportunity to discuss a team member's ongoing performance, goals and aspirations, and for managers to identify opportunities for development. They provide business insight, and foster support and connection between managers and their staff. They are also an early warning system; allowing issues to be identified early and corrective action taken, as well as identifying and cultivating high performers.

Conclusion

Building an onboarding or induction program in a new world of work will require careful reflection and planning. Traditional approaches of asking new starters to watch a PowerPoint deck or click through hours of digital learning that lack a true reflection of a new starter's actual work will disappoint and disengage your new talent and have the opposite effect of what you intended.

Onboarding programs need to ensure that your new people feel welcomed, psychologically safe to ask questions and know who they can speak to when they attempt to start completing their first set of tasks. They also need to see the big picture of how their career will be developed in the longer term at your organisation.

Integrating your technologies to build a complete talent experience for your new people will mean that rather than starting feeling frustrated, individuals will start on a personalised onboarding experience that will continue to be nurtured as they grow their career with you.



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About Totara

Totara builds employee engagement, learning, and performance management technologies that enable large multinational corporations, government entities, and mid-market companies to deliver enterprise-level talent and workforce experiences.

Totara's Talent Experience Platform unifies a transformational learning management system (LMS), a user-centric learning experience platform (LXP), and a comprehensive performance management system under a single and highly adaptable architecture. Totara's flexible architecture gives organizations the freedom to innovate, the freedom to choose, and unlocks critical resources for reinvestment into where it really counts.

[Get a demo](#)

to find out how Totara's TXP will help you unite learning, employee engagement and performance management in a single platform.

 Perform

 Engage

 Learn



Thank you

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(it's free!)

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