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TITLE:

Which onboarding practices do HR-employees and newcomers view as important, and how do onboarding practices contribute to workplace socialisation?

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Abstract

The purpose of this master's thesis was to explore onboarding and workplace socialisation in Norwegian organisations. Further, the study aims to research how onboarding can affect the workplace socialisation for the newcomer. The research question is "*Which onboarding practices do HR-employees and newcomers view as important, and how do onboarding practices contribute to workplace socialisation?*" To answer the question, this study uses a qualitative research design with 6 Norwegian-based companies, which formed six individual cases. The chosen method for data collection was through semi-structured in-depth interviews with one HR-employee and one newcomer in each case. These interviews were transcribed and analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

The results from the thematic analysis were highlighted in the findings and analysis chapter. Furthermore, the results were grouped together into main findings in the discussion chapter and concluded in the conclusion. Four main categories of findings were 1) onboarding, 2) workplace socialisation, 3) sample differences, and 4) employer branding. The research showed that some of the most important onboarding practices for HR-employees and newcomers were the use of mentors, social gatherings, digitalised tools for learning, initial courses, and graduate programs. Many of the respondents also mentioned that the onboarding process should already start in the recruitment process, rather than in the preboarding phase. This helps the newcomer to become more familiar with the organisation's values and culture, allowing him/her to get an initial insight into their new workplace as early as possible. The majority of the respondents thought of workplace socialisation as a vital part of the onboarding process. Furthermore, multiple of the onboarding practices used by the organisations in this sample indicated a positive effect on workplace socialisation. The use of social mentors and inviting the newcomer to social gatherings during their preboarding is something the respondents mentioned as a great contribution to their workplace socialisation.

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Foreword

This master's thesis marks the ending of two years on the master program Service Leadership in International Business at the University of Stavanger. Our thesis focuses on onboarding and the impact the construct has on workplace socialisation. This topic is relevant for workplaces operating in any branch that wants to improve and embrace employee satisfaction.

We want to thank all the respondents that contributed to our study and wish them and their companies all the best. A special thanks to our supervisor Tone Therese Linge, for supporting and mentoring us. This project would not have been possible without your involvement and all the great advice you provided. We also want to offer our gratitude to The Norwegian School of Hotel Management at the University of Stavanger for facilitating us to write this thesis to the best of our ability.

Introduction

The most important asset in any organisation is people. For any organisation to be successful it is important for the organisation to have the right people for the right roles. Today, there is a substantial competition to not only attract highly skilled individuals, but also to retain their key employees. This is because today's workforce is more prone than ever before to change jobs multiple times during their work-life. This has further led to an increase in interest on how to retain employees. Organisations spend a large number of resources in HR-management and leadership to increase the chance of their key employees staying with the organisation (Mitchel et al., 2001). To avoid employee turnover, attract new talent and increase job satisfaction, there are multiple helpful tools, and one of these tools can be onboarding. The aim of this master's thesis is to examine how onboarding practices in Norwegian workplaces are related to workplace socialisation (Bauer et al., 2007).

In line with the current trend of employees switching workplaces, onboarding has come into the spotlight. Since the 2000s there has been an increase in research on the subject, and there has been clear indications that onboarding not only helps advocate the new employee, but it can also increase job satisfaction. In addition to this, good onboarding practices will help the newcomer to perform better in their new job (Bauer, 2010). Although companies spend a large number of resources into making their onboarding-practices sufficient, there is evidence that there is a disconnect between what the company states that they are offering and what the newcomer is actually experiencing (Klein et al., 2015). This indicates that more research is needed, to further allow the onboarding practices to be improved.

Topic

In this master's thesis, there will be a qualitative case study to research the onboarding practices which are used in successful workplaces in Norway. The different

companies` onboarding practices will be compared to the socialisation in the workplace. The data from the research will be analysed and discussed with the chosen theory and models. There is also an opportunity to compare how the different workplaces do their individual onboarding practices and investigate if there are similarities and/or differences within industries and companies. This research aims to reveal how onboarding is executed in six chosen Norwegian organisations, and the practices will be analysed in light of current theory and literature on the two constructs. It will also research the relation between onboarding practices and socialisation in the workplace.

Gaining insight in how onboarding practices are utilised, can help other organisations to develop and plan their own onboarding practices. In addition to this, this research can contribute to future research as an indication of what onboarding practices are used in work-life in Norway. As mentioned earlier, there is a race to acquire and retain employees in today's business-market. This master`s thesis might give some insight into how onboarding can increase job satisfaction, avoid employee turnover, and how it can socialise newcomers into their new organisation. It will also be interesting to investigate whether there are any findings of well-planned onboarding practices that can increase the likelihood of the newcomer being integrated into the organisation, and if it is beneficial for the socialisation of the newcomer.

Another point of interest this master`s thesis touches upon is if there are disconnections between what the company communicates that they are offering in terms of onboarding practices, and what the newcomer actually experiences. Klein et al., (2015) found in their research that this might be true, and that the newcomer do not always experience all intended aspects of an onboarding program. In recent years, a new generation has entered the workplace, generation Z. This new cohort have recently joined today's workforce, and they may have different values compared to previous new cohorts. In addition to this, managers will face challenges with this new generation, as generation Z are less prepared for the

realities of the workplace compared to previous generations (Scroth, 2019). This aspect will be further discussed and investigated in this master`s thesis, and it may give some initial indication if this new cohort values onboarding differently, have different expectations and how they socialise in the workplace.

As mentioned earlier, there has been an increase in research and focus on the construct of onboarding, but there is not a great amount of previous research on the relation between onboarding and socialisation in the workplace. Although, there is not conducted a lot of research on the relation between the two constructs, there are some studies on the subject. Our master`s thesis will include some inspiration from a quantitative study on the subject, conducted by Klein et al., (2015). This master`s thesis will be a qualitative study which is conducted on Norwegian businesses, rather than international companies. Furthermore, there will be conducted a study on which onboarding practices are used by Norwegian businesses and if it indicates a relation to socialisation in the workplace.

Research question

Which onboarding practices do HR-employees and newcomers view as important, and how do onboarding practices contribute to workplace socialisation?

Literature Review

In this chapter, the current literature of onboarding and socialisation will be brought to light. To better understand the constructs in the research, previous research will be analysed. This master's thesis rests on the foundation of previous literature. The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of previous studies and theories about onboarding, socialisation, organisational culture, and the current generational change. In addition to this, theory related to the construct of offboarding has been added after conducting the interviews, due to a respondent mentioning this as something important.

Onboarding

Onboarding can be defined as formal or informal practices to facilitate the new employee's adjustment to the organisation (Klein et al., 2015). Klein et al. (2015) further explains that onboarding can also be described as the organisation's way of expediting the socialisation of a new employee. This process can be interpreted as the learning and adjustment process for an individual to assume an organisational role that fits both the individual and the organisation (Klein et al., 2015). Onboarding can be divided into two separate processes, informal onboarding, and formal onboarding. Informal onboarding relates to when an organisation's onboarding process happens without a formal, structured, and detailed plan to onboard a new employee (Bauer, 2010). On the other side, there is formal onboarding which refers "to a written set of coordinated policies and procedures that assist an employee in adjusting to his or her new job in terms of both tasks and socialization." (Bauer, 2010, p. 2).

Another definition of onboarding is the collective experience between the new employee and the leader in the new employee's first year at his/her new organisation (Stein & Christiansen, 2010). The authors explain how they see onboarding as the process which decides the new employees' behaviour, productivity, decision-making and potential at their new organisation. They explain how onboarding can help the organisation retain more of their employees, and how systematic onboarding programs have multiple benefits. Some of the benefits presented are that it could help the company to become more cost-effective, and that it could lead to improvement of the newly hired's personal contribution to the company (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Today there is a big competition for organisations to retain their key employees, as employees often change workplaces. Top-level executives and HR departments spend a large number of resources to keep their key employees, and onboarding is an important part to keep

these key employees (Mitchel et al., 2001). Short-term benefits from a successful onboarding plan are better initial adjustment for the new employee. Another short-term benefit of a successful onboarding strategy is self-efficacy and self-confidence for the new employee. This will further lead to the new employee feeling more confident in performing well at his/her job. When the new employee is more confident in his/her ability to achieve at their work, she/he is more motivated and will eventually be more successful than his/her less confident counterparts. This means that a good onboarding strategy can lead to better self-efficacy and better performance from its new employee (Bauer, 2010). Another lever for successful onboarding is how the new employee has gained sufficient role clarity. If the new employee does not have sufficient role clarity the organisation's performance will suffer. The third lever for successful onboarding is social integration. If a new employee fails to receive sufficient social integration in the new workplace, their performance may suffer. Better role clarity and social integration are short-term benefits from a successful onboarding practice (Bauer, 2010). The newcomer's integration into the workplace can also be influenced by the newcomer's personality traits. Bourdage et al. (2015) found evidence in their study of the fact that a newcomer is more likely to be integrated into the workplace if he/she scores high on agreeableness (Bourdage, et al., 2015). Bauer and Erdogan (2011) describe onboarding as the process of where a new employee goes from being an organisational outsider to an organisational insider.

There are also long-term benefits from a successful onboarding plan. A successful onboarding of a new employee often leads to better job satisfaction and organisational commitment. This means that good onboarding practices can lead to a better chance for the organisation to retain their key employees. In addition to this, similar to short-term benefits, a good onboarding practice will help the organisation and the new employee to perform better in their new job (Bauer, 2010).

Four C's of onboarding

According to Bauer (2010) there are four C's, which refers to building blocks of a successful onboarding process. The four C's are compliance, clarification, culture, and Connection, and how an organisation leverages these four components decides which onboarding strategy the organisation uses. *Compliance* is the lowest level, and it relates to how the organisation teaches the new employee basic legal and policy related rules about the workplace. The second component is *Clarification*, which is to be certain that the new employee understands their new job-role and other related expectations of them. *Culture* refers to how the new employee is provided with a sense of organisational norms, both informal and formal. The last component *Connection*, is the highest level and it refers to how the new employee creates vital interpersonal connections and information networks within his/her new organisation (Bauer, 2010, p. 2)

Bauer (2010) further explains an organisation's onboarding strategy on a three-level onboarding strategy, which is based on how the four C's are included. Level 1, called passive onboarding, and often only includes compliance and some role clarification. Almost all levels of onboarding have compliance as part of their formal onboarding plan, but level 1 onboarding does not cover the last two C's; culture and connection. In a passive onboarding strategy, there has been little to no effort from the organisation - including HR staff - to integrate the last two C's and to maximise the chance for onboarding success (Bauer, 2010).

High importance onboarding is level two and is an onboarding strategy which has been more strategically planned to maximise the success of the onboarding strategies. The first two C's, compliance, and clarification, are covered by the organisation's formal onboarding plan. In addition to this, they have included mechanisms to cover culture and connection. In this level, it is clear to see that the organisation and the HR staff has put effort to try and maximise the success of their onboarding practices, but the process has not yet been

established across the organisation in a systematic way. About 50% of organisations and firms are at this level of onboarding strategy (Bauer, 2010).

The last onboarding strategy, and the strategy which has the best chance for success is level 3, proactive onboarding strategy. Proactive strategy is a strategy which includes all the four C's, compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. The organisation has made systemic mechanisms to include all the four C's in any onboarding of any new employee, which is done through a systematic human resource management approach. Only about 20% of organisations and firms reach this level of onboarding strategy (Bauer, 2010).

Four components for successful onboarding

In a paper to research the connection between onboarding and employee satisfaction, Alice Snell (2006) found that “the early stages of onboarding are crucial to establishing a lasting bond between employees and the company” (Snell, 2006, p. 32). Snell found that onboarding can directly help the organisation's bottom-line. This is because new employees can be described as a liability before they learn how to do their job efficiently. This means that the faster new employees learn to use their skills and experience to contribute to the organisation, the quicker they can stop being a liability. In addition to the new employee possible contributing to the organisation faster, a streamlined onboarding process can help with reducing the time HR employees have to spend in the onboarding process, improving the speed and accuracy of data collection, reducing shipping and printing for onboarding forms, and more effective employee/manager communication (Snell, 2006, p. 33). In addition to this, there are other areas where onboarding can help, but these are areas which are difficult to quantify direct benefits. These benefits can be reduced time to contribution, improving the new employee's performance and productivity, strong bonds between colleagues, enhanced job satisfaction, higher loyalty, and enhanced employer brand (Snell, 2006, p. 33).

Many organisations have today become aware of the many benefits of onboarding. The problem is that too many companies are aware of the need to improve their onboarding processes, but not focusing enough on them to actually improve them (Snell, 2006).

Snell (2006) presents us with four critical components for designing and managing a successful onboarding process. The first component is *process analysis*, where the roles and onboarding process is defined. The second component, *implementation*, includes the configuration of technology connected to the onboarding. The third component presented is *integration*, which includes integration of new hire information and external systems. The fourth and last component is *reporting*. This component “should be designed to push key metrics and analytics for monitoring the process and driving continuous improvement” (Snell, 2006, p. 3).

Socialisation

Socialisation can be defined as the process where an individual is confined to a narrow range of behaviours which is accessible in a certain group (Child, 1954). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) describes organisational socialisation as the process where a newcomer is taught the organisational norms of a particular role within the organisation. “In its most general sense, organisational socialisation is then the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organisational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 3). Socialisation in the workplace is about how employees learn the group norms and how they create relationships within an organisation. Good socialisation in the workplace results in people staying longer in the organisations, in contrast to leaving for another organisation. (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011).

In a meta-analysis conducted by Saks et al. (2007) they researched different socialisation tactics and newcomer adjustment. In this study they researched Van Maanen and Schein`s (1979) six tactics, and Jones` (1986) condensed research-article on these six. In the

research there was evidence that formal and structured tactics can increase the newcomer's role clarity. In addition to this, institutionalising socialisation tactics negatively affected role conflict and uncertainty (Saks et al., 2007). Another Meta-analysis conducted by Bauer et al. (2007), they set out to research newcomer adjustment and found comparable results. Their research results implied that formal socialisation tactics can affect the role clarity in a positive direction. The strongest indicator of newcomer adjustment came from Miller and Jablin's (1991) research on information seeking, during organisational entry. *Information seeking* refers to how the newcomer is getting information about how they will be functioning successfully in their new role (Miller & Jablin, 1991).

In Bauer's et al. (2007) meta-analysis they found correlations between both Jones's (1989) three organisational socialisation tactics and Miller and Jablin's (1991) newcomer information seeking model. These two theories further increased the likelihood of the newcomer's role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance. Furthermore, this affected the new employee's performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, intentions to remain and turnover. This means that institutionalised and formal organisational socialisation tactics and practices can help the organisation's overall performance (Bauer et al., 2007).

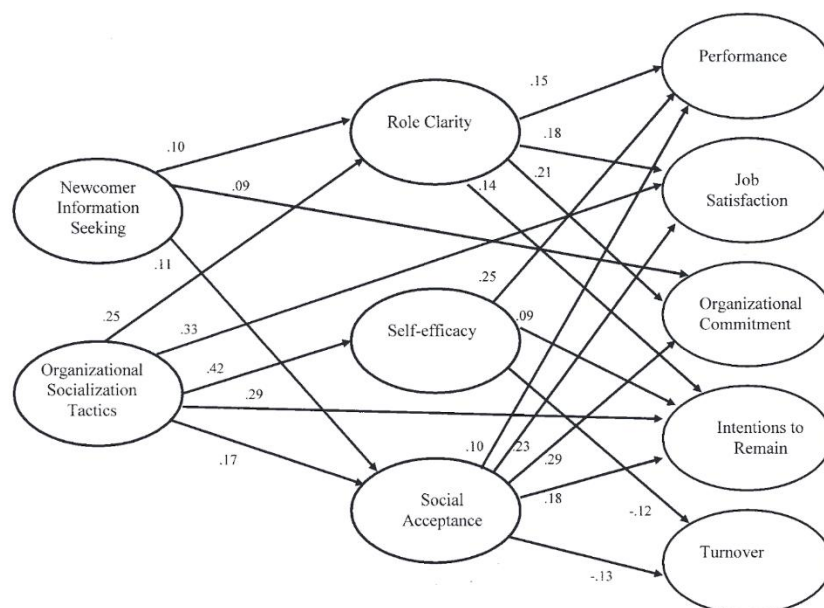


Figure 1: “Standardized parameter estimates from the final socialization process model.” (Bauer et al., 2007, p. 713).

Even though there has been a significant amount of research on organisational socialisation, Cooper-Thomas and Andersen (2006) identified three main issues about current research on organisational socialisation. These issues were: “The lack of theory; the lack of agreement on what constitutes successful OS; and the relatively minor role of the organisation in recent OS research.” (Cooper-Thomas & Andersen, 2006, p. 498). Cooper-Thomas and Andersen conducted a summary literature on organisational socialisation. In this paper they focused on the organisational role, which they found to be one of the research issues at the time. They sought out to discover some practical implications for organisational Human resource management. Further, to influence newcomers' role performance, they found that informing colleagues about their skills, personal history and prior experience in an informal way can affect role performance positively. This also has the ability to increase the chance of extra-role performance. Cooper-Thomas and Andersen also proposes that all organisations should strive and work towards a culture which supports extra-role performance (Cooper-Thomas & Andersen, 2006). Extra-role performance are certain behaviours an employee does, that are outside of his/her original organisational role. If an organisation has one or multiple employees with extra-role performance the organisation's overall performance will increase (Bateman & Organ, 1983). Cooper-Thomas and Andersen (2006) also indicates that extra-role performance can positively impact the cohesion in the workplace, which further can affect the organisational socialisation positively.

In the paper, Cooper-Thomas and Andersen recommended organisations to both include informal and formal ways to achieve better organisational socialisation of the newcomer. Formal ways of organisational socialisation may include inclusion and socialisation in the formal topic in the organisation`s organisational socialisation

program/plan. Informal ways of organisational socialisation can be work shadowing, informal mentoring, and role models (Cooper-Thomas & Andersen, 2006).

As seen, the informal ways often include the help from other employees within the organisation. Louis et al. (1983) indicates in their study that employees and colleagues are the biggest contributor to better organisational socialisation for the newcomer. When a newcomer enters their new organisation, they are faced with learning a new organisational culture. Louis et al. argues that the most effective way to guide the newcomer through this challenge is with the help of colleagues (Louis et al., 1983).

Another interesting finding is that an organisation can be more successful with their organisational socialisation if they recruit and select new employees based on certain criteria. An organisation can for instance recruit and select new employees with certain personality traits. Hiring newcomers with similar personality traits to the organisation's current workforce may help the social transition for the newcomer. To supplement this, the organisation can reinforce relevant cognitions and behaviours which stem from the newcomer's individual differences. Examples of this can include providing the newcomer with positive performance experiences, which increase self-efficacy and outlining specific proactive strategies the newcomers can use to facilitate their own organisational socialisation. Although this can lead to the newcomer having to display behaviour which may not be natural to them, it can allow the newcomer to be aware of the relevant individual differences of behaviour (Cooper-Thomas & Andersen, 2006).

Three tactics for organisational socialisation

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) described six tactics to ensure better organisational socialisation for the new employee: collective–individual, formal–informal, investiture–divestiture, serial–dis-junctive, sequential–random and fixed–variable. Gareth Jones (1986),

through a longitudinal research design, further condensed these six into three tactics: contextual, content, and social tactics.

Contextual tactics regards the formal training program for the newcomer, in which the newcomer learns about the organisation`s norms, expectations and organisational practices. In this tactic the newly hired employee learns the necessary work-skills to perform in his/her new role (Kowtha, 2018). Formal tactics can lead to the newcomer in an easier way is able to understand the organisation`s status quo and get a better understanding of their role (Jones, 1986). On the other hand, there are informal tactics where the newcomer is left to figure out these organisational behaviours and skills by informal organisational insiders. An informal process would be categorised as an individualised or low contextual tactic (Kowtha, 2018). An individualised practice can lead to a “unique set of learning experiences that allows heterogeneity in their responses” (Jones, 1986, p. 264).

Social tactics relate to the aspect of welcoming a new employee. Different ways of social tactics can be mentorship and social support (Kowtha, 2018). Formal socialisation tactics such as mentoring may increase the degree of which the newcomer learns the common organisational norms, values, and attitudes. In contrast to this, the informal socialisation tactics, such as individualised learning and group work, can lead to the newcomer responding differently from the rest of the organisation, and it can further lead to more innovative responses (Jones, 1986).

Content tactics relate to how the organisation structures the new employees` socialisation. Content tactics “clearly lay out the sequence and timetable of training and rotational assignments” (Kowtha, 2018, p. 89). With formal content tactics the newcomer learns what they need in order to be an organisational insider. Informal/Individualised tactics, however, means that the newcomer is left with little information about the sequence and

timetable of their training, and when they would be accepted as an organisational insider. This can lead to uncertainty for the new employee (Kowtha, 2018).

To reduce role uncertainty and to ease the newcomer's organisational entry, the organisation needs to institutionalise these three tactics. A highly valued tactic to ease the newcomer's entry into his/her new role is through social support and mentoring. If the organisational socialisation tactics are institutionalised the benefits can be better organisational commitment, better role innovation and less employee turn-over (Kowtha, 2018). On the other hand, Hughes et al. (2022) argues that if an employer that does not want social support receives it, it could increase the level of stress for them.

Onboarding and Socialisation

Klein et al. (2015) argues that some researchers view Onboarding and socialisation as equal terms. Bauer and Erdogan (2011) see onboarding and socialisation in the workplace as one construct. In their research they define organisational socialisation and onboarding as the process which a newcomer goes through, from being "an organisational outsider to an organisational insider" (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011, p. 51). However, in Klein's et al., (2015) research, the authors viewed the two as separate constructs. They described Onboarding as an organisational effort to facilitate socialisation, and the term socialisation is explained as something that occurs within the individual person. They also present onboarding as a process that happens when the employee joins the organisation. On the other hand, socialisation is a process that is continuously ongoing in both the present organisation, but also throughout one's career (Klein et al., 2015, p. 264).

Organisational culture

As mentioned, a major part of socialisation in the workplace regards the newcomer adjusting to organisational norms and the organisational culture. Pettigrew (1979) suggested

in his study that organisational culture consists of different cognitive systems, which explains how the people in an organisation are thinking, reasoning, and making decisions.

Furthermore, Organisational culture can be quite different in different places of the world, and Gert Hofstede (1980) introduced four dimensions which can explain the differences. These four dimensions were individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and masculinity. With these dimensions Hofstede could explain why some countries' culture can vary so much from each other (Wallace et al., 1999).

One of the key aspects for good workplace socialisation for the newcomer is understanding the different dimensions which create the organisational culture. Two of Bauer's (2010) four C's of onboarding regards culture and connection. This means that understanding what makes an organisation's culture different from others can help maximise the onboarding of a newcomer. The organisational norms can vary with Hofstede's dimensions, an example of this is how the norms would be different in an organisation with higher power distance. Power distance indicates how the organisational hierarchy is structured, and in some organisations the hierarchical structure can be very high (Hofstede, 1980). Understanding which organisational culture is in one's respective organisation will make one more able to teach the newcomer about which norms are prevalent in their new organisation (Pettigrew 1979).

Generational Change

Millennials equals a substantial portion of the workforce in today's workplace, and millennials are described as young, educated, assertive and ongoing. However, today there is a new cohort entering the workplace. Generation Z surpasses millennials with over a third of the population, and they have now just started to enter the workplace. Every cohort and generation are different, and they have different expectations and requirements of how their workplace and work life should be. As generation Z enters the workplace it is important to

understand which values and mindset they have about the workplace. When understanding this new cohort, it is then possible to strategize on how to accommodate them (Chillakuri, 2020). In 1974, 60% of teens had a job, On the other hand, today only 34% of teens have a job. This means that this new cohort has a lack of prior work experience before entering the workplace. As generation Z have different expectations and values than their predecessors, and a lack of work experience it will be important for organisations to accommodate for this (Scroth, 2019).

Chillakuri (2020) did a qualitative study, interviewing focus groups to research generalised descriptions and assumptions about generation Z. In this research article, he found six main categories, describing generation Z's workplace expectations and attitude. The first category is *meaningful work*, and it relates to the new generation Z employees' urge for their work to feel meaningful and exciting. Generation Z employees tend to intercept their job as boring, repetitive, and mundane, and this may impact their efficiency and performance at work. To avoid this, the managers have a responsibility to help the new employees and make them understand that their work is important for the success of the organisation. In addition to this, Generation Z needs to have a clear understanding of the organisation's strategic goals, values and vision, and a well-planned onboarding practice can help facilitate this to the new generation Z employees (Chillakuri, 2020).

The second category is *performance management*. Generations Z appreciates instant and frequent feedback, as they are described as an impatient cohort. In the study, Chillakuri found that 66% of the respondents preferred instant real-time feedback, preferably in person. Generation Z finds meaningful and frequent conversations with the manager valuable and considers instant feedback on their performance essential to their learning. Meaning that the organisation needs to organise a good system for instant feedback to the generation Z employees (Chillakuri, 2020).

Generation Z values a good *work-life balance*. This cohort is concerned about their salary, benefits, and job security, but they are also vocal about their work-life balance and a flexible workplace (Chillakuri, 2020).

In today's business world, digitalisation has made it easier for employees to connect from across the world, but this has created a need for more *personal connection*. The participants in Chillakuri's study responded that they value personal connection with the managers and other team members (Chillakuri, 2020). Gupta (2018) suggests from his research that because of the non-personal characteristics in today's digital workplace, organisations should focus on creating more interpersonal connections in the workplace.

The fifth category is understanding the bigger picture. Often in the first stages of onboarding a new employee, they are assigned small, redundant, and low-value tasks. These tasks are often experienced as pointless tasks by the more tech savvy generation Z employees, as they often should be automated to reduce human error. Generation Z are very ambitious compared to other cohorts, and they rarely settle for the status quo. They enjoy challenging themselves with challenging work tasks, as they are self-confident, self-directed, and reliant (Chillakuri, 2020).

Learning and development is the sixth and final category Chillakuri (2020) found in his study. "Generation Z is high on self-learning and prefers self-directed and independent learning, leveraging technology" (Chillakuri, 2020, p. 1289). This cohort is always eager to learn new ways to improve both their soft skills and their technological skills. This means that this group is often interested in hands-on learning experiences to hone their skills, and to contribute more at the workplace. Furthermore, he found that the respondents were motivated by learning new skills, and therefore it is necessary for the employer to always allow these new generation Z employees the opportunity to do so (Chillakuri, 2020).

Offboarding

As employee turn-over is higher than ever before, another important process is offboarding. Offboarding is when an employee decides to leave his/her job, and during the notice period, the company has a set program/process to off-board the leaving employee. For some companies this process only includes a perfunctory exit-interview, conversation on how to hand off his/her assignments, and a pro forma description of postemployment benefits and resources. In some companies, the leaving employee could face an impatient and rude manager, and in some cases, they may even be treated as a traitor for leaving (Dachner & Makarius, 2021, p. 91). This attitude from the managers and a weak offboarding process can leave the employee frustrated and disappointed with their prior company. This can further lead to the employee talking about the company in a bad manner, and severely decrease the chance of the employee returning (Dachner & Makarius, 2021). Furthermore, in their article, Dachner and Makarius (2021) writes that if an offboarding program is performed well, the departing employee can become the company's loyal alumni.

Companies today spend a lot of time and money on their recruitment of new employees and retaining these employees. However, they do not spend enough time focusing on the offboarding of their departing employees. A well-managed offboarding program can lead to their departing employees becoming loyal alumni, in addition to; future customers, suppliers, returning employees, mentors to current workers and ambassadors for the organisation (Dachner & Makarius, 2021). In a well-managed offboarding program the company should "prepare for employees' departures well in advance, recognize people's contributions when they leave, conduct thoughtful exit interviews, provide support for the transition (tailoring it to individuals' needs), and create formal programs to keep alumni connected to the organization" (Dachner & Makarius, 2021, p. 90).

Method

In this chapter, the research design applied in this study will be explained. The thesis` research design, data collection, sample, data analysis method and the research`s reliability and validity will be presented. Furthermore, challenges and limitations of the chosen research design will be discussed.

Research Design

According to Vogt et al. (2012) the design of the research is important and should have a relation to the research question and theory. They argue that one of the quite challenging aspects of conducting research is to relate the research question to the design. However, the authors explain that there are few occasions where the method is conclusive for the reason behind the research, and that there are several approaches that could be suitable (Vogt et al., 2012).

A qualitative research design has been selected and is the preferred approach for this master`s thesis. Qualitative research aims to investigate and understand social aspects of issues. The data collected from research of this kind consist of non-numerical data as images or text, rather than numerical data (Flick, 2014, p. 542). Flick (2014) describes a significant increase in interest for qualitative research, and he argues that this is caused by “a development that has become known as the pluralization of life worlds” (Flick, 2014, p.11). Meaning that the study of social relations is of great importance and relevance to the research design (Flick, 2014, p.11). The selection of a qualitative design is based on the social characteristic and the aim of this study.

According to Flick (2014), there are several basic designs in qualitative studies, and one of these is case studies. This type of design is to be considered an approach to reconstruct or to give a precise description of cases, and it is possible to use organisations, persons, or social communities as a subject for the analysis (Flick, 2014, p.121). The research in this

master's thesis will be using a case study methodology. The reason for this is because it allows for better research into some points this thesis aims to research. In this paper, there are six cases, where each case represents a company. One benefit from having this research being a case study, is that it can be simpler to discover any discrepancies between the perceived differences on the onboarding program by the newcomer and the HR-employees. Furthermore, this allows for a wider picture of the onboarding practices and workplace socialisation at each company/case (Flick, 2014).

Inspiration from earlier research

The research methodology in this master`s thesis is partially inspired by earlier research conducted by Klein et al. (2015). In their research they set out to find if organisations used “best practice” onboarding programs to facilitate the newcomer. Similarly, to Klein et al. (2015), this study includes samples consisting of both employees working within HR and organisational newcomers. However, while Klein et al. applies a quantitative approach using surveys, this master`s thesis applies a qualitative approach consisting of in-depth interviews (Klein et al., 2015).

Even though the sampling of Klein et al.`s study is similar to the sample in this thesis, a qualitative research methodology can produce different findings. Further, Klein et al. (2015) conducted this research in another part of the world, their findings may not be applicable in Norwegian businesses. In addition to this a qualitative take on this research methodology can explore more points of views and can lead to more unique findings.

Sample

In a qualitative study the sample is usually more strategically picked, compared to a quantitative research design, where the sample tends to be random. As this master's thesis` research design is qualitative, the chosen sampling technique will be purposive sampling. A

purposive sample is when the researcher does not choose respondents randomly, but strategically picks respondents or cases. The reason for purposive or selective sampling is to target respondents who are most relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2012).

In this master`s thesis in-depth interviews will be the method of research, and the respondents will be one HR-employee and one newcomer from six different Norwegian based companies. These companies will form cases for us to analyse in the results. There are multiple reasons for picking one HR-employee and one newcomer from each company/case as the sample. The first reason is to get more perspectives and opinions on onboarding and workplace socialisation. The second reason is to test Klein et al. (2015) finding that there may be a difference in which aspects the newcomer experiences in an onboarding program, and the organisation`s intended aspects. Third, this sample allows for greater research around both how the HR-employees` work to maximise their onboarding practice and how the newcomer values their experienced onboarding. The fourth reason for choosing this sample is to better understand which onboarding practices are important for both the HR-employee and the newcomer.

The sampling for which companies and organisations to include in our research is also a purposive sample. The chosen companies (cases) for our master`s thesis will be from two different categories. The first category is highly ranked workplaces in Norway. Three of the workplaces in the study are listed in a ranking by Great Place To Work. Great Places To Work has published their ranking of best places to work for eighteen years in Norway and has been cooperating with Forbes magazine for over 30 years. Over ten thousand organisations in over sixty different countries use Great Places To Work`s rankings to gain new insights to improve employee satisfaction (GreatPlaceToWork.no, 2022).

The second category of companies will be companies which are not on this list. This second sample is regular companies, which are based in Norway. The companies in this

sample will be picked strategically to match the industry from which the Great place to Work sample is in. This will allow for better comparisons between the two categories of samples. Furthermore, this will allow for research into if there is any difference between “highly ranked” companies and other companies.

Recruiting Respondents

To recruit companies and respondents for the research in this master`s thesis, Emails were sent out, first to different companies which are listed on Great Place to Work`s ranking for best workplaces in Norway (GreatPlaceToWork.no, 2022). After some companies from this ranking were willing to participate in the research, companies outside of the list were approached. As mentioned earlier, companies in similar fields as the participating companies from the list were approached. This was done to make a fairer comparison between the two sample categories.

When approaching the different companies, often it was HR-employees who answered the Email, saying if they were willing/able to participate. Who the participating newcomer would be was picked by the HR-employee. After the participants agreed to participate in the research an information and consent form was sent, for the respondents to sign before the interviews (Appendix B).

Achieved Sample

The original plan for the method in the master`s thesis was to conduct a total of sixteen in-depth interviews from eight different companies. Four of the companies were supposed to come from the Great Place to Work ranking, and four other companies based in Norway (GreatPlaceToWork.no, 2022). The achieved sample in this research was six companies, and twelve respondents in total. Almost all companies on the Great Place to Work list were contacted but most organisations were too busy to participate. Therefore, only three

companies from this list were able to participate in the research. Instead of choosing more companies outside of the list, it was more important to the authors to keep the same number of participants from both sample categories. This means that the achieved sample for this master`s thesis was three companies from the Great Place to Work list and three other companies. In total there were twelve participants, one HR-employee and one newcomer from each company.

As the research is anonymous in this thesis, the names of the respondents will remain confidential. To separate the respondents from each other without using their names, different companies have received different letters, for example Company A, B or C. As there were two respondents per company, the HR-employee at the company is 1, and the newcomer is 2. This means that the HR-employee from company A is referred to as “A1”, and the newcomer at company A is referred to as “A2”. This remains the same for all HR-employees and newcomers at each company.

Table 1: Profile for Great Place to Work sample

Company	Respondent	Cultural background
A	A1 (HR-employee)	Norwegian
A	A2 (Newcomer)	Norwegian
C	C1 (HR-employee)	Norwegian
C	C2 (Newcomer)	Norwegian
E	E1 (HR-employee)	Norwegian
E	E2 (Newcomer)	Norwegian

Table 2: Profile for other companies

Company	Respondent	Cultural Background
B	B1 (HR-employee)	Norwegian
B	B2 (Newcomer)	Norwegian
D	D1 (HR-employee)	Norwegian
D	D2 (Newcomer)	Norwegian
F	F1 (HR-employee)	Norwegian
F	F2 (Newcomer)	Norwegian

Data Collection

The chosen data collection method for this master`s thesis is in-depth interviews. The reason for choosing a qualitative research interview is to better understand the world from the subject's point of view. There are multiple different forms of interviewing, there is journalistic interviewing, therapeutic interviewing, and research interviewing. Although there are differences between the different forms of interview, it can be hard to split them, as they often intersect with each other. A research interview can sometimes come close to a journalistic interview, and a journalistic interview can suddenly imitate a research interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The research interview “is based on the conversation of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4).

To conduct the interviews, a semi-structured interview-guide has been constructed. A Semi-structured interview-guide “will include an outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 156). As this master`s thesis has two separate samples, HR-employees, and newly hired employees, two separate interview-guides have been made. The interview-guide serves as a help to cover all topics, but the interview will flow like a conversation and follow-up questions may vary from interview to interview.

The interview guide for the HR-employees (Appendix B) is slightly different from the interview-guide for the newly hired (Appendix C). The interview guides are made to explore the research question: *Which onboarding practices do HR-employees and newcomers view as important, and how do onboarding practices contribute to workplace socialisation?* In addition to exploring the research question, this research will also explore how/if the onboarding practices are perceived differently from the HR-employees and the newly hired and individualised differences in onboarding. In the interview-guide for the HR-employee the interview-guide covers an introduction, recruitment process, organisational values, hiring of new employees, onboarding, socialisation, perceived importance of onboarding and individualising of onboarding (Appendix B).

The interview-guide for the newly hired includes questions relating to the newcomer`s experience with the organisation`s onboarding. The topic which will be covered in the interview with the newcomer will be their recruitment experience, their onboarding experience, and their experience around socialisation in the workplace (Appendix C).

Prior to conducting the research for this master`s thesis, an application to Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) was sent to get permission to treat the respondent`s personal data. This application was sent the 27.01.2023, and after minor adjustment it was approved the 23.02.2023 (Sikt.no, 2023). The application which was sent to NSD contained information about the Master`s thesis` topic, how the data collection would be collected, a copy of the interview-guides and which personal data which will be treated during the research.

In addition to this, ahead of conducting the interviews, two test interviews were conducted. These test interviews helped the authors to see which questions may generate the most reflected answers and helped to prepare the flow of the interviews. Furthermore, these test-interviews allowed the authors to test some standard follow-up questions (Brinkmann &

Kvale, 2015, p. 156). These test interviews were conducted by both authors in this master's thesis, and the respondents were acquaintances.

The first real interview and the start of the data collection was the 10th of March 2023. The last interview and the end of the data collection was on the 31st of March.

Conducting the interviews

As mentioned above, the interviews will be conducted with a semi-structured interview-guide. This means that the interview-guide will only be used as a guide to make sure all topics are covered during the interview. Although the interviews were only semi-structured, the first part regarding information about the interviews, anonymity and treatment of personal data was always mentioned at the start of each interview. In addition to the first part, open-ended questions will be asked, where the respondents are free to elaborate on their answers. The different topics will often start with the interviewer asking an introductory question like “Can you describe how you approach the situation when you hire a new employee?” (Appendix B). After the respondent responds to these introductory questions, different follow-up questions, probing questions and specifying questions will be asked. Asking all these different types of interview questions can lead to greater exploration of knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

One common limitation and problem of interviews is the problem of power asymmetry and biases from the interviewer. One fall-pit of research in interviews is if the interviewer asks questions in a manner that leads the respondent to a certain answer. This often stems from the interviewer having a bias in which he/she thinks is the right answer or how he/she wants the respondent to answer (Neuman, 2014). During an interview there is a power asymmetry, as an interview is not an open, everyday conversation between equal partners. The interviewer is the one who decides which topics to talk about, which point to follow up on, and when the interview is over. This indicates that the interviewer has more power over

the conversation, creating asymmetrical power (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 37). For this Master's thesis it is important to understand the power asymmetry and to hide any possible biases, to get the most accurate and interesting results from the research.

The interviews will be conducted in Norwegian as all respondents in the interviews feel the most comfortable with this. This has led to the interview guides being written in Norwegian. Furthermore, it might create limitations when analysing the results from the research, as translation can create deviation from what the object truly meant about what he/she said (Flick, 2014).

Ethics

When using in-depth interviews for the research method and treating personal information, there are some ethical issues to be considered. As mentioned earlier, when conducting a research interview there is an asymmetrical power distribution in the favour of the interviewer. This causes an ethical dilemma, because the interviewer has power, he/she can use against the respondent. In addition to this, an in-depth interview's goal is to come closer to the object's personal lives, values, and thoughts. This can create an ethical dilemma, where the interviewer knows some personal information, the respondent does not want to reveal to anyone. An example relevant to the research in this master's thesis could be that the respondent revealed dissatisfaction about an employee, which they would not want the employer to know about. In this case it is the interviewer's responsibility to protect this information (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

To protect the respondents in this master's thesis there has been taken multiple precautionary measures to ensure their safety. First, as mentioned earlier, an application was sent to NSD (Sikt.no, 2023) to get approval to treat personal data. Secondly, the respondents had the option of deciding if they wanted to participate or not. In addition to this, they also had the opportunity to pull out of the research or interview at any time during the process.

Third, all the information gathered from the interview and all personal data will be anonymised in the master`s thesis. This makes sure that the respondents do not get recognised from what they said during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis can be defined as “the interpretation and classification of linguistic (or visual) material with the following aims: to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning making in the material and what is represented in it” (Flick, 2014, p. 370). In this master`s thesis there are several components applied to conduct a thorough analysis of the data collected. Firstly, all the interviews conducted in this paper have been recorded and saved on an encrypted memory stick. This approach is chosen to keep the data secure and to protect the anonymity of the respondents. It is also worth mentioning that all the data is deleted from the memory stick when the thesis is graded. To prepare the data for the analysis it is important to have the data organised (Flick, 2014). As mentioned, all the conducted interviews were recorded with the approval of the respondent. The recordings were transcribed, organised, and later analysed by the authors.

Coding

According to Flick (2014) coding is a primary method in qualitative research. The term coding can be interpreted differently. However, in this case the meaning is to organise and structure the interviews that are recorded. This makes it more convenient to search for statements that are similar to another in the same, or a different interview (Flick, 2014).

Firstly, to code the interviews, they were transcribed. This was done to make it simpler to read and analyse the findings. Secondly, the authors separately read the transcribed interviews to get an initial impression of the information gathered from each interview. In this step, the different findings were colour-coded to look for similarities and differences between

interviews. The colour-codes represented different thematics from the interview guide, for instance, recruitment, onboarding, and workplace socialisation. As the interviews were analysed separately by the authors, the third step was to discuss the different findings and impressions of the interviews.

Thematic Analysis

The analysis of the data is conducted by using a thematic analysis. Flick (2014) compares this form to narrative, discourse, and grounded theory analysis. He further explains that this form of analysing is done by identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes in data. In this master's thesis the authors have analysed with the purpose of identifying expected findings, unique findings and comparable findings or patterns. The research question and other questions asked in the introduction part of the paper is the basis for the analysis (Flick 2014).

Reliability and validity

According to Neuman (2014) perfect virtual reliability and validity is not possible to accomplish. However, it should be something every researcher should seek to fulfil. He further explains that every social researcher wants measures that are reliable and valid to make their findings more credible, truthful, and believable (Neuman, 2014, p. 141).

Neuman (2014) explains reliability as how consistent or dependable the findings are. He states, "It suggests that repeated, stable outcomes are the same under identical or similar conditions" (Neuman, 2014, p. 141). Meaning that the measures are consistent rather than inconsistent or unstable. Further, it is hard to gain perfect reliability. However, there are different methods to improve the reliability of the measures. Four methods suggested for improvement can be to "clearly conceptualise constructs, use a precise level of measurement, use multiple indicators and use pilot-tests" (Neuman, 2014, p. 141). In this study, there have

been used theories to further understand and conceptualise constructs from the research question. For instance, theory connected to onboarding. As mentioned, the study does not include numerical measures, and therefore the multiple indicators of the study is rather explaining findings thoroughly. The authors also conducted pilot-tests by interviewing two persons prior to the real interviews. Another method used by the authors is inter-rater reliability. A strong inter-rater reliability occurs when two or more people are researching the same phenomena, and the results are similar (Landis & Koch, 2012). To ensure better interrater reliability, both authors coded the interview separately, and compared the results after. If the results were similar, it indicated that the interrater reliability of the coding was strong.

The analysis produced similar results when the two authors individually analysed the transcription of the interviews. This indicates a strong interrater reliability, as opposed to if the results were quite different (Landis & Koch, 2012).

In this master's thesis, the respondents were associated with Norwegian companies, and it is not sure that similar research would have the same findings if it were conducted in another place in the world. This can weaken the reliability and should be considered when reading.

Measures to maintain anonymity

During the findings, analysis, and discussion, measures have been taken to keep the anonymity of the respondents. Certain parts of what the respondents said during the interviews are directly personal and may be recognisable to themselves and/or by others. To ensure anonymity, some parts of the interviews have been anonymised when they are quoted. This means that the findings will not include everything the respondents say, especially the most personal parts.

In addition to this, the authors choose to anonymise the letters of the organisation and the numbers of the respondent in the most recognisable quotes. This means that in some parts of the results and analysis chapter there will be anonymised quotes and respondents. The sample consisted of nine women and three men, but this has also been anonymised to maintain the anonymity of the respondents.

Limitations

Even though the research methodology is comprehensive, and it takes inspiration from previous research by Klein et al. (2015), it does have some limitations. In the recruiting of respondents for the research design in this Master`s thesis, there are some limitations which could impact the reliability of the thesis. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the HR-employee is the one who selects the newcomer that participates in the research. This could mean that the HR-employee can strategically pick an employee which they know enjoyed their onboarding program. It could mean that it can create a bias towards the more positive side of the onboarding practices at the respective organisations.

Other limitations with the sample are the fact that most respondents were women, and that all respondents were Norwegian. This means that the study lacks points of view, meanings, and thoughts from other perspectives, and can further lead to the research being biased in one direction. In addition to this, this could also mean the study has lower transferability to other parts of the world. Transferability refers to how generalisable findings in a study are, and if the research is generalised, it can be transferred to other samples and population. Qualitative studies are often not generalisable to other samples and populations (Flick, 2014). The fact that the study is conducted on Norwegian-based businesses and all respondents were Norwegian the transferability to other countries is uncertain. Although this can be seen as a limitation for the master`s thesis, the aim of the study is to focus on

Norwegian-based organisations. To make the thesis more transferable, the same research methodology can be expanded into other areas of the world.

Most of the interviews were conducted in person, however, a few of the interviews were conducted online. Few of the achieved samples for this thesis were in different parts of the country, and therefore not every interview was conducted through the online meeting app, Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams is a program which allows for meetings, calls, chats, and multiple other functions (Microsoft.com, 2023). Having meetings online can change the dynamic of the interview, and this can create some inconsistencies between the online interviews and the in-person interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Findings and analysis

In this chapter the findings and analysis from the conducted research methodology will be presented. Firstly, the findings regarding onboarding will be presented. Followed by findings related to onboarding, workplace socialisation, sample differences and some unexpected findings. At the end of the chapter there will be a summary of the findings.

Onboarding

One of the main themes/topics in the interview-guide regards which onboarding practices are used and perceived as important by the respondents. As this thesis research which onboarding practices are recognised as important by both HR-employee and newcomer, there were multiple questions related to this. This subchapter in the results and analysis will cover the respondents' perception of onboarding, which onboarding practices are utilised, the perceived importance of onboarding, individual differences, and the perceived differences on the company's onboarding program.

The respondent's perception of onboarding

The first question in the onboarding section of the interviews is asked to allow the respondents to elaborate their own interpretation and their understanding of the term onboarding. Furthermore, it is for the interviewers to understand how much the respondent knows about onboarding, and to gain knowledge about the sides of the construct that are of importance to them. All the respondents answered this question. However, there were some different interpretations of the term. For instance, two of the respondents from two different cases distinguished the term preboarding from onboarding. Preboarding was explained by them as the time between the signing of the contract and the first day at work. Furthermore, most of the answers to the question “How do you interpret the term onboarding?” (Appendix B; Appendix C) reflected that the respondents had similar interpretations of this process. The onboarding process was explained in most cases, as the process where you are being included in the organisation. One of the respondents answered, “To me, onboarding is to integrate them into the work culture and everyday life” (Respondent D1, 2023). As mentioned, some of the respondents separated the preboarding from onboarding, while others included the time after signing the contract as part of, or the start of their onboarding. When asked about when their onboarding process starts, C1 answered:

I think that the onboarding process starts when the candidate signs the contract, or actually during the recruitment process. For instance, we talk about how it is like to be an employee in company C, so I would say that the onboarding process starts early here (Respondent C1, 2023).

Although the respondents had different interpretations of onboarding, there were similarities to their answers, and all of them had meanings and thoughts about the concept.

They agreed on the fact that onboarding is a process and that one of the key constructs is the inclusion of a newly hired person.

Onboarding practices utilised

Recruitment Process. In the recruitment process part of the interviews, the HR-employees were asked about the core values of the company and how they use them in the recruitment process. One of the questions that were asked by the authors was “How do you use/show the core values of the company as part of the recruitment process?” (Appendix B). This question was asked to shed light on their relationship to the core values, and an indication to the importance of the company’s values. Furthermore, it gave an indication on how the HR-employees work to convey these values to their candidates and newcomers. Most of the HR-employees mentioned that they always start job-interviews by telling the candidate about their company and their values. This confirms what C1 mentioned about the onboarding process already starting during the recruitment period. Several of the HR-employees mentioned the culture of sharing as one of their core values, and one of the respondents explains this value with:

It is a lot about being a team player, to play on a team with each other, help each other to succeed, share professional content, share experiences-either negative or positive.

This way is often how you learn from your mistakes. That is what the sharing culture is about (Respondent A1, 2023).

The newcomer from the same case confirmed that the culture of sharing was highly appreciated by the respondents, indicating that the company has communicated their values well, and specifically the importance of their culture of sharing. The Newcomer was asked “Did you feel that you gained any insights in what values this company stands for?”, and their response was:

Yes, this is the reason behind my transition to this company. The culture of sharing, to help each other to improve, to be a team. I value this myself, and it is the reason for why I wanted to change companies. (Respondent A2, 2023).

In the A-case there seems to be a match between the newcomers' values, and the organisation's core values. As presented, the newcomer states that the reason behind the decision of transferring to the organisation was their core values. This indicates that the A-organisation has communicated their values well and used them to recruit people. Furthermore, the respondents were asked if they had any tests or cases in regard to the recruitment process. In this sample, none of the newcomers had tests in their recruitment phase. However, some of them had a case to prepare for the second interview. One of the respondents did not feel comfortable with having a case in the interview process and stated, "I thought that the case was tricky because it was not in my field" (Respondent C2, 2023). Another respondent felt the opposite when they got a case regarding real life situations, preparing them for what they can meet in the company. "I got some questions around a case, and these were down to earth questions... This made me lower my shoulders, which were high from before" (Anonymised respondent, 2023). The same respondent also mentioned that some of the person's job tasks were not clarified in the recruitment process and pointed out the short length of the interviews and recruitment period as the main reason for this.

Preboarding. Some of the respondents clearly distinguished between the preboarding and onboarding processes. One of the HR-employees emphasised the importance of preboarding already when they were asked about the construct of onboarding:

Preboarding is really important to us. Here, we try to close the gap between the signing of the contract and start-up. For instance, we recruit graduates one year before

they start here. They tend to receive other offers when the period before the start-up is so long, and if our preboarding is executed poorly, they could accept another offer (Respondent B1, 2023).

Another HR-respondent said that they are currently working with another department to “create a landing site with an overview over the organisation, for the people that are in this process with us, and people starting” (Respondent E1, 2023). The HR-employee in company C describes the importance of including the leaders and the other employees in the preboarding phase. He/she stated:

For me, it is to bridge the feeling of not comprehending anything, outsidersness and awkwardness, and make this feeling as short as possible, with standardised programs and making sure that the leaders and employees are ready to welcome the new employee (Respondent C1, 2023).

He/she also said that the feeling of being new is often something that is forgotten, and therefore it is important to remind the colleagues who have been working in the company for some time of this feeling. Other respondents included the preboarding as a part of the onboarding, without specifically naming it preboarding/using the term preboarding. For instance, a newcomer said that their onboarding process started when they signed the contract. “After I signed the contract, I got invited for lunch and team building activities. Even though I was not supposed to start for another three months, I felt as a part of the team” (Respondent D2). There were also other respondents who had similar experiences with being invited to happenings before their start date.

Onboarding. As many of the respondents distinguished between preboarding, which regards everything that happens before the newcomers' start-up date. When analysing the

utilised onboarding practices, this means what happened on the first day and after that. When interviewing the different cases, it seemed that most of the organisation had an initial part of the onboarding which contained a lot of information and activities. An example of this is case A, where the HR-employee said:

We put our new employees through a three-day course in a common location. All newcomers arrive at this location and participate in a three-day course where they learn about the company, its processes, billing, what they do, and they also get a presentation from all their different business-fields (Respondent A1, 2023).

Even though not every company in this thesis' sample had a fully structured three-day course at a separate location, all cases had their own version of this. B2 describes his/her first week as "We had an intensive first week with a lot of social and professional events and arrangements" (Respondent B2, 2023) and "The first day we got a lot of information about the company, billing etc." (Respondent B2, 2023). Another example of this is how F2 described his/her first days after arrival:

The first day we received all the equipment, such as the PC etc. and we got a lot of information. This is basically what the first few days were about, in addition to some tests and practical cases, which were similar to what we would practise in real-life work situations (Respondent F2, 2023).

Although most of the organisations in the sample had the first part of the onboarding process to give the newcomer all necessary information. There was one newcomer respondent who mentioned they still have not received all necessary information about the workplace. The respondent said: "I actually have no clue what to do if a fire occurred in this building. I

think I should have received information about this a long time ago” (Anonymous respondent, 2023).

Other onboarding practices which were common with the cases in the sample was the use of mentors in the onboarding of their new employees. A1 said, when asked about how they assign mentors to newcomers “Yes, we have that too. We had it before, then we took it away for a few years, and now we started the mentorship practice back up again” (Respondent A1, 2023). Some of the organisations which participated in the study also practised the use of two mentors, one social mentor and one professional mentor. One example of this is C1,

We also have a mentor-practice, where we have split the mentors into one social mentor, who will be the newcomer’s mentor for organisational norms, lunch and do’s and don’ts in our office environment. In addition to this we also have a professional mentor, who can be a sparring partner for professional or role-specific tasks (Respondent C1, 2023).

Another major part of onboarding regards the specific role training. When asked about this, the respondents answered in a few diverse ways. As mentioned above, mentorships were a common practice, and a lot of organisations used this tool to train the newcomer in role-specific tasks. Although mentorship was a common answer, there were some other practices the respondents mentioned. Some of the organisations in our sample mentioned relevant case-training for its newcomers. When asked about his/her role training, E2 said “The first month we had three cases we worked on ... These were cases which were very relevant to which role we have in the company” (Respondent E2, 2023). In case B, the HR-employee mentions something similar to this: “We look for relevant cases and courses to the eventual project they may participate in in the future” (Respondent B1, 2023).

Some of the cases also brought up their different E-learning platforms the newcomers can use. When asked about role-training C1 brought up “We also have the *New in C* website, where the newcomer can visit to learn more about the organisation.

Another interesting part about how the different organisations practice onboarding is how long their onboarding-program lasts. During most of the interviews, the question about how long they think someone is new in the organisation and how long their onboarding program lasts, was asked. During the interviews, a vast variety of answers occurred. In organisation C, C1 said:

We operate with the newcomer is new in the organisation for a year and a half. The onboarding-program lasts for approximately one year, where there are the most activities during the newcomers first period. We are trying to hammer it home to the company that the newcomer is new for much longer than we think (Respondent C1, 2023).

The other organisations in this research mostly said that their onboarding program lasts for 6 months to a year. D1 said, when asked about the length of their onboarding:

Our onboarding program lasts for six months, where it is most intense the first month or two. Then I also try to have a chat with them after their first three months, to discuss if some changes need to be done, additionally, they have a chat with their closest leader. The mentorship program usually lasts for the first month (Respondent D1, 2023).

A last part of the onboarding process mentioned by a few of the respondents was researching for possible improvements in their onboarding process. Respondent C1

mentioned “We have a newcomer survey which they send out to the newcomers at the end of our onboarding process. This survey is anonymous” (Respondent C1, 2023). Other respondents mentioned something similar when asked about how they have worked to improve their onboarding process.

Perceived differences of the onboarding program

One of the points of interest in this master`s thesis was to research if there would be any difference between what the HR-employees state they practise in the onboarding program and what the newcomers experience. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, when interviewing two respondents from each company, one HR-employee and one newcomer, allows the authors to compare their experiences. During the interviews, the HR-employees were asked which practices they use in their onboarding-process, and the newcomers were asked about their experienced onboarding process. This allows for an analysis between the newcomer and the HR-employee from the same organisation, to see if the answers are similar.

In this thesis` sample it seemed that a lot of the organisation`s onboarding practices had been experienced by the newcomer. This means that what the HR-employee said the organisation does in regard to onboarding practices, were also mentioned by the newcomer. An example of this is organisation D. In this case the HR-employee said when asked about what time their onboarding of a new employee starts:

Officially, the onboarding starts the day they sign the contract. This is something a lot of the new employees appreciate. In addition to this, we invite the newcomer to all events and teambuilding, even before they start their new job. This way they can join the social aspect and get to know their new colleagues even before they come to the office their first day (Respondent D1, 2023)

The newcomer answered in a similar fashion, saying that “It started the moment I signed the contract. After I signed, I was invited to teambuilding and lunch... even though I did not start my job for three months, I already felt like a part of the team” (Respondent D2, 2023). For most of the cases the newcomer had experienced whatever onboarding practise the organisation utilises. Although most were similar, there were some discrepancies in perceived onboarding process.

In one of the cases the HR-employee said that they invite their newcomers to any social event, teambuilding, and other events they may have hosted or attended. When asking the newcomer from this same organisation, although the person was overall happy with their experienced onboarding, the respondent said, “They also had a teambuilding event around the time I started, which I was not invited to ” (Respondent B2, 2023). Even though this may be coincidental, it indicates that there may be some discrepancies between the intended onboarding process and the perceived onboarding process in this case.

In another case there were some other discrepancies. In organisation E, the newcomer was overall unsure about onboarding-process and said, “I have no grasp over what is a part of the onboarding process and what is not, it is all a bit unclear to me” (Respondent E2, 2023). In addition to this there also seems to be some misunderstanding of how long the onboarding-process is at this specific company. In the interview with the HR-employee the respondent stated that “We say the newcomer is in the onboarding process approximately for one year” (respondent E1, 2023) and the newcomer said, “The onboarding process lasts until I have been here for six months” (respondent E2, 2023).

In one of the cases the organisation just implemented a new and revised onboarding-process. This means that this case had some discrepancies between what onboarding practises the newcomer experienced and what the HR-employee says their onboarding practices were. Some of these discrepancies were with the company`s mentor program, where they say they

have split the mentors into one mentor in charge of the social onboarding, and one mentor in charge of the professional part. This is something the newcomer in this organisation did not experience, as they only had one mentor, which oversaw the newcomer's professional onboarding. This can be explained by the change of onboarding processes which occurred after the interviewed newcomer started his/her onboarding process.

Individual differences in onboarding practices

Role specific differences. One part of the interview guide was about individualised onboarding processes. As every person is different, as an organisation it can be quite complex with multiple different roles, and different roles have different levels of responsibility, this was something which was researched in this master's thesis (Mitchel et al., 2001). During the interviews, most of the respondents said that their onboarding processes are the same, even though the newcomers' roles are different. Although most HR-employees said it is mostly the same onboarding process, when asked about the onboarding differences for different roles, C1 said:

It will be somewhat different for a newcomer in a leadership role. The HR team will be working closer with the leader because the new leader needs to be trained in HR processes such as handling of sick leave, recruitment, and other HR systems.

Therefore, the onboarding will be slightly different for a newcomer in a leadership role (Respondent C1, 2023).

This means that for some of the cases in this sample, onboarding would look slightly different, depending on the level of the responsibility of the newcomer. Another HR-employee in a different case said, "it may be slightly different, depending on whether the newcomer is a senior or a junior" (Respondent D1, 2023). This indicates that prior work-

experience can also dictate slight differences on how the organisation approaches onboarding of newcomers.

Graduates' differences. As mentioned, even though most of the cases mention that there are little differences in the onboarding of different specific roles. Most cases said there is a difference for newly graduated employees. In this research' sample four out of six organisations said that they have their own graduate/trainee programs for newly graduated newcomers. One example of this is case A “the graduates have a program which continues for the first three years of their work-life” (Respondent A1). A different respondent said this when asked about individualised onboarding of graduates:

We also have a program which is dedicated to our youngest newcomer, who does not have a large network from before they enter the work life. ... in this program we make it easier for graduates to build a network in their work-field. (Respondent B1, 2023).

In addition to this B1 also said “there is only so much we can do as an organisation, the graduates have to take responsibility for their own onboarding experience” (Respondent B1, 2023) which means that the newcomers also must make an effort to succeed. In organisation E they use mentors as a part of their onboarding “Some have a technical mentor, and some have a social mentor, which is responsible for the social integration of the newcomer. Some of the newcomers have one technical and one social” (Respondent E1, 2023). When asked about what decides who receive technical, social or both mentors, E1 said:

One of our new senior hires was allocated a personal technical mentor, but we have also just hired a new junior hire. This person is younger and has less work experience

and we then decided that this person will have both, one technical mentor and one social mentor (Respondent E1, 2023).

Similar to case E, case F utilises a similar approach to newcomers which have recently graduated. F1 said “for the newly graduated hires, we assign them a mentor to help with the adjustment to the work-life” (Respondent F1, 2023).

Although most of the cases in this research said they are handling the onboarding differently including newcomers that recently graduated, not all do the same. The HR-employee from organisation C said, “Even though it is obviously different when being new to the work-life, ... this is not something we have accounted for and built into our onboarding process” (Respondent C1, 2023).

Perceived importance of onboarding

All the HR-employees were asked about the perceived importance of onboarding for a newcomer, and the majority mentioned that it is important. The question was “How important do you think the onboarding process is to a newcomer?” (Appendix B). One of the employees had this answer for the question:

Very important. First of all, it is how you get trained for your role, how effective you become in your role and how early you become effective in your role. In addition to this, it is also about well-being and that they stay in our company for a while (Respondent F1, 2023).

Another HR-employee describes the onboarding process as “Alfa omega” (Respondent E1, 2023) for newly hired people. Respondent D1 expressed the importance of the process when the interviewers asked about the definition of the construct:

I think that onboarding is really important, and it is something that we have focused on lately. We had an incident last year, where we did not manage the onboarding process properly. The result was that the employee quit their job shortly after their start (Respondent D1).

Even though the newcomers were not asked about their perceived importance of onboarding, there were findings of the matter from these interviews as well. For instance, one said “I think onboarding is super important, it was actually one of the most annoying things about one of my previous workplaces” (Respondent A1, 2023). A different newcomer said this “It is not only better for the company, but also the general social life when an employee is satisfied with coming to work” (Respondent D2, 2023). As mentioned, most of the participants believed that onboarding is an important process for an employee, and in addition to D1, another respondent mentioned that someone resigned their job shortly after the start of their onboarding process. This respondent thought that the standardised onboarding process did not fit this person, and without adjustments towards the individual, this could be the reason for this person quitting.

Socialisation

Socialisation is another major part of this master’s thesis, and the interview-guide contained multiple questions regarding this construct. In this subchapter the respondent’s perception of socialisation in the workplace, the organisation's practices to help the newcomer’s workplace socialisation and the newcomer’s experienced workplace socialisation will be presented.

The respondent’s perception of socialisation in the workplace

Similar to the question of the definition of onboarding, the respondents were asked about their interpretation of socialisation in the workplace. More specifically, what comes to

mind when they hear the sentence. All the respondents, both HR-employees and newcomers mentioned the informal aspect of socialisation in work situations. One employee working with HR answered with “I interpret this as getting to know your colleagues and feel secure about your surroundings” (Respondent A1, 2023). Another HR-respondent mentioned both the professional and the informal arenas as rooms for socialisation. Everything from meetings to the informal talk by the coffee machine is considered socialisation in the workplace. She/he states, “Just to move around in the landscape is socialisation” (Respondent C1, 2023). On the other hand, one of the newly hired respondent’s interpretations was:

The interpersonal without work as the subject. One thing is to talk to someone about a professional question. It is social, but not socialisation. I think that it is more about having fun with team building and to build stronger connections. That is my definition of socialisation (Respondent D2, 2023).

This indicates that separating the formal and informal socialisation at the workplace is important for this respondent. Other participants in the study mention the informal aspect of socialisation as the definition of the construct. For instance, B2 describes the construct as “Among other things, to find time for a fifteen-minute coffee-talk. This is something that we have done several times before” (Respondent B2, 2023). Similarly, respondent F1 mentioned coffee-talk as a tool of socialisation, stating:

Sometimes, we have pizza, coffee, and cake at staff meetings. By introducing this, we try to make the meetings more appealing, and make them more like a social gathering rather than a normal staff meeting. They should be fun, not only informative (Respondent F1,2023).

A term brought up by respondent B1 was connection building. When asked about socialisation in the workplace, their response was “For me, it is about connection building. It is all about creating secureness for our people, and this place should be enjoyable. Enjoyable in general, not only professionally” (Respondent B1, 2023). Furthermore, the respondent explained that there are a lot of international people in their company, and that they have specific social arrangements aimed at them.

Workplace socialisation

One aspect of the research question in this master’s thesis regards *how do onboarding practices contribute to workplace socialisation*. To research this, many of the questions in the interviews regarded socialisation in the workplace, both from the HR-employee’s point of view and the newcomer’s point of view. HR-employees were often asked how they focus on the socialisation of the employee during the onboarding, and how centred socialisation is in their onboarding process (Appendix B). The newcomers were asked about how they experienced their own socialisation into their new workplace, and how they have adjusted to the culture and norms of the organisation (Appendix C).

Workplace socialisation’s part of the onboarding-practices. Most of the HR-employees answered that workplace socialisation plays a significant role in their onboarding process. Respondent A1 said:

“I interpret socialisation in the workplace as getting to know your colleagues and to become safe, and become secure in the surroundings you are in. As well as feeling included in the work environment. Socialisation is to the highest degree a part of our onboarding program.” (Respondent A1, 2023)

Some of the onboarding practices that were used to help the socialisation of the newcomer were for instance, the use of a social mentor, inviting the newcomer to

events/teambuilding before they start their new job and social onboarding programs. Three of the companies in the sample for this research split their mentors into one social and one professional mentor. When asked about if workplace socialisation is an important part of their onboarding process, C1 answered:

Absolutely, it is very important. That is one of the reasons we have split the mentor's and made one a social mentor. This is to clarify the importance of helping the newcomer to build a network with co-workers in the same organisation, but also externally. It is important to get the newcomer quickly accommodated to cooperate with others within the organisation, both formally and informally (Respondent C1, 2023).

Having a social mentor in addition to a professional mentor is something the newcomers appreciated. When D1 was asked about how they were integrated into the workplace, he/she said, "My mentor was very helpful in showing me the norms and routines in the office" (Respondent D1, 2023). The respondents said that the social mentor oversaw inviting the newcomer to lunch, show him/her the routines of the workplace, introduce the newcomer to some of their colleagues and team and be an introduction to their workplace culture.

Another onboarding practises the companies used to accelerate the newcomers' socialisation into the workplace was inviting them to events before their start-up. Some of the HR-employees mentioned that this is a part of their preboarding process. They mentioned that they often invite them out for a lunch, event, or teambuilding ahead of their first day. This is done to accelerate their socialisation in the workplace, and when they arrive the first day, they already know some of their colleagues. B1 mentioned that:

I was invited to a professional and social night the company hosted a couple of months before I started. In addition to this, I was also invited to another event they hosted way before I started here. During these events I got a taste of what the culture is like (Respondent B2, 2023).

Another practice most of the organisations in the sample mention is the use of different corporate teams in different sports and other activities. These are teams and activities which are available to all the employees in the different companies. In some of the companies in this sample this “organisation” is who hosts and plans different events where the employees can participate.

The newcomer’s socialisation. During the interviews with the newcomers in this thesis’ sample, they were asked about how they have been integrated into the workplace culture, how they have been socialised with their colleagues and how they have experienced the workplace socialisation process. All the respondents said that they have integrated into the workplace well and that their workplace socialisation has been nice. An example of what the respondents said when asked about how they feel they have been integrated into the workplace is respondent C2, who stated:

Very good. People here are very open, friendly, and welcoming. I have also been aware to approach many of the people who work here, because even though I am the new one, I cannot expect everyone to come to me (Respondent C2, 2023).

And when the same respondent was asked about how long it took before he/she felt a part of the team, C2 said: “It did not take very long. There was a party one month after I started, which acted as a bit of an icebreaker” (Respondent C2, 2023). Most of the newcomer respondents in this sample said they have been integrated into the organisation.

One interesting finding was about the organisational culture at the different companies. One of the questions that were asked was about how their current workplace's culture is compared to any previous workplace culture they may have had experienced. Since one part of the sample is newcomers, it can be interesting to research how their current place compares to their last job. When asking this question most of the respondents said the culture was different even though it was in the same industry. Respondent C2 said: "The work environment is very different. ... It was more social, and most of the colleagues were friends outside of work as well. Although this was nice, I prefer to keep colleagues as colleagues, as this is simpler" (Respondent C2, 2023). Another respondent said something similar.

Respondent E2 said:

People are in general a little older in this organisation compared to my last one. Either way we have a good tone at the office, but we do not really do anything together in our spare time. ... Even though I like my colleagues and the social aspect at the office I wish we would do more social stuff together in our team, despite our differences (Respondents E2, 2023).

Sample differences and similarities

Another aspect this study is investigating is if there are any differences between the two samples. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, this thesis has two different samples, one sample from the Great Place to work list of best workplaces in Norway and companies which are not on this list. Similarities and differences between these two sample-categories will be highlighted in this subchapter.

Sample Similarities

The Great Place to Work sample was company A, C and E. During the interview, the authors had in mind which company was on the Great places to work list, and which company

was not. The included companies were asked about their ranking on the list, and they were all aware they were part of this evaluation. The HR-employees from these companies all answered that their ranking was important to them, and they valued it highly. A1 said, when asked about their ranking:

It is something which we are proud of, and we use it actively in recruiting also. When the ranking is announced we always make sure to celebrate it. ... We also use the feedback from Great Place to Work's survey-scores to see possible improvement areas. Culture and employee-satisfaction is a strategic focus from our top executives (Respondent A1, 2023).

The other companies from the list had similar responses. They were proud to be in the ranking, and C1 said "It is something we always make a priority to celebrate, when we make the ranking and get certified" (Respondent C1, 2023). Respondent E1 had a similar tone and stated: "We are very proud of it" (Respondent E1, 2023) when asked about the ranking.

Even though all the companies which were on the ranking were proud of it and valued it highly, their onboarding processes were quite similar to the other companies. As mentioned earlier, most of the organisations in this sample had a mentorship program included in their onboarding. This could partially be because the companies from the two samples were mostly in the same industry. A was in the same industry as B, in addition to D and E also being in the same industry. From this research there are many similarities within industries. An example of this is that both case A and B have graduate programs that have a longer duration and are quite intense.

Although, most of the differences were to be found on the industry-difference, there was one interesting finding between the two samples. During the interviews, questions were asked about the organisation's core values, in addition to how these values were used

externally. From the Great Place to Work sample, all the companies mentioned that they actively use their values and practise employer branding to attract the best employees.

Respondent A1 said “Our values are usually marketed in our job advertisements”

(Respondent A1, 2023). Respondent C1 and D1 said something similar.

On the other hand, the other sample of companies which was not on the ranking, said the opposite. Case B, D and F all said they wanted to be more “lowkey” and “down to earth.” An example of this is D1, who said “We try to be more down to earth” (Respondent D1, 2023) when asked about how they share their values and other things that make them an attractive workplace. Respondent B1 said: “We also value being trustworthy, a little down to earth and lowkey” (Respondent B1, 2023). It seems from this thesis’ sample that the Great Place to Work ranked companies are more aware of employer branding and marketing their values and achievement externally.

Sample Differences

During the interviews it was hard to find differences between the two samples. As mentioned earlier, this can partially be because the companies were in similar industries, and there seem to be some industry standards when it comes to onboarding. Even though it was hard to find differences, there were a few respondents, which were not 100% satisfied. One newcomer, who was a newcomer at a company on the Great Place to Work ranking, showed some discontent with parts of his/her onboarding.

Other than this there did not seem to be much difference between the onboarding/socialisation processes between the two samples, however, there were some industry differences. As company A and B were in the same industry, there are some differences between these two and company C. Case C does not have a separate graduate program and C1 said: “We do not have that many graduates who start working in our organisation” (Respondent C1, 2023). This is quite different from case A and B, which hires

hundreds of graduates. Another difference is case F, where they do not have mentors for all employees, but only for some roles. F1 said: “if it is a new hire in an executive position, we may look for a possible suitable mentor for the newcomer” (Respondent F1, 2023). This is different for most of the other cases in this research, as most other companies say they often assign the newcomer a mentor. The probable reason for this difference can be caused by them operating in a different industry than all other cases or because they do not focus on this aspect of onboarding.

Unexpected findings

During the interviews, a few interesting and unexpected findings were discovered. Being conducted through a semi-structured interview-guide, the questions in the interviews were open and the respondent had the opportunity to answer in multiple matters. Although the interview had some topics, some of the respondents gave answers that did not match the planned topics, and this led to some unexpected findings. Two of these findings were offboarding and matching values between the organisation and the newcomer.

Offboarding

One interesting and unexpected finding was offboarding. Offboarding was originally not a part of the interview-guide but was mentioned by two of the informants themselves during the interviews. Respondent B1 said: “I think maybe the most important phases are offboarding and preboarding, maybe even more important than onboarding” (Respondent B1, 2023). When asked why he/she thought offboarding is important, B1 said:

If one has a good offboarding practice and wishes the employee good luck on its next endeavours, it is a bigger chance for them to return. This means that if we manage the offboarding phase well, even though you may be disappointed when the employee leaves, it makes it a bigger chance for the employee to return at a later stage. In

addition to this, offboarding can increase the chance of the leaving employee is talking about how good this company is. This is marketing which is extremely valuable.

(Response B1, 2023).

The other organisation which mentioned offboarding, and its importance was case D.

When asked about their offboarding process, D1 said:

I usually schedule a meeting with the leaving employee a month before they quit, to chat about both practical stuff and what happens with insurance etc. But also, a feedback interview about what they think we could have done differently. It is a pretty long list with questions about how we can improve and prohibit that more people leave (Respondent D1, 2023).

When asked about why he/she thought offboarding was important, D1 stated: “I also think it is very good employer branding... In addition, people often return, or they communicate positively about the company to others” (Respondent D1, 2023). Another interesting thing D1 said was: “Either they leave thinking this was a crappy place or that I was appreciated until the day I left” (Respondent D1, 2023). B1 mentioned something similar to this but added “... When you realise the grass is not greener on the other side, it feels okay to return” (Respondent B1, 2023).

Matching values

One of the topics in the interview-guide was about the organisations and the newcomer’s values when it comes to work and the workplace. This was one of the first questions of the interviews, and it received some interesting answers. One of the interesting things to investigate was if the newcomers' values would match with the organisation’s values. When asked about which values the newcomers valued, they had similar answers. The

most common values were strong communication, a culture of sharing and respect.

Respondent F2 said: “I value that the workplace has a high ceiling height, nice colleagues and a good environment” (Respondent F2, 2023).

During the interviews, the respondents were also asked about how they think their values match with the organisation’s values. All the newcomers answered that their values match their company well. An example of this was:

A big reason for applying for a job at C was because their values coincide with mine. The organisation’s values such as trustworthiness and respect for each other are values I value as well. I think that having similar values to your organisation is good (Respondent C2, 2023).

Another interesting finding was that three of the newcomers mention a similar value which is important to them. These three newcomers all mention that it is important to them that the organisation does something to help the environment, the world and work towards sustainability. B2 mentions that one of his/her values is “It is important to me the company’s values. For example, I can see what the company does for the local environment” (Respondent B2, 2023). Another respondent mentioned that it is important that “... the company has good values as its core is important to me. What we deliver to the customer is something that makes the world a better place” (Respondent D2, 2023). Respondent F2 also mentions something similar: “It is also important that the company stands for something and that they help contribute to the world” (Respondent F2, 2023).

Wrong candidates

One of the respondents mentioned another part of the recruitment process, regarding recruiting and employer branding. Respondent B1 explained that when the company is

recruiting and they interview a candidate which they realise is not the right fit, it is important to keep in mind the employer branding.

When you realise a candidate is not the one you are looking for, it is these people you want to sell the company the most to. You want this person to be disappointed they did not get the job, because they wished they would get it (Respondent B1, 2023).

This is something the respondent said at the end of the interview when the authors asked about if the respondent had anything else to add or any questions for the interviewers. Respondent B1 further said:

It is important to be aware of your reputation at all times. ... When this person leaves the interviews, he/she is more likely to talk positively about the company to others. This can further lead to others applying to work here, and they may be the right fit. The opposite of this is if you realise the candidate is the wrong one and you proceed to conduct a half-hearted and rushed interview. This can leave the candidate feeling disappointed, which can lead to this person talking negatively about the company (Respondent B1, 2023).

Although respondent B1 was the only person mentioning this, it does not mean that other respondents share the same opinions. However, an explanation of the lack of responses regarding this, could be caused by the fact that the interviewers did not include questions related to the topic.

Summary of findings

Throughout the research and interviews there are indications of similar thoughts related to onboarding and workplace socialisation among the respondents. The main findings from the research in this thesis is presented in figure 2.

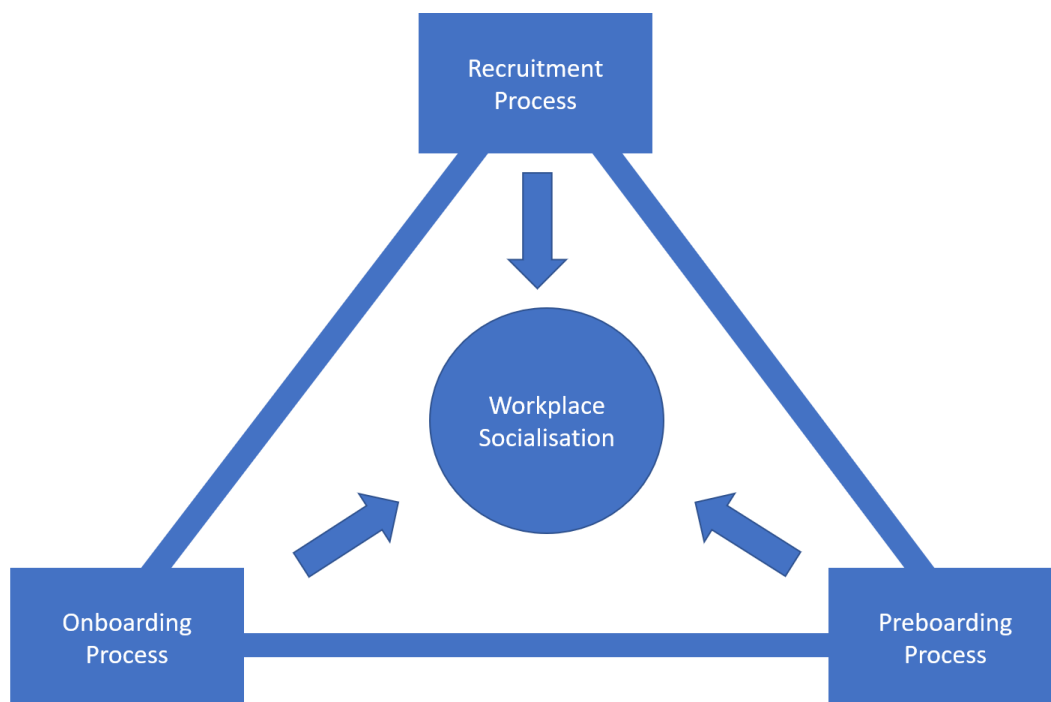


Figure 2: Summary of findings

After analysing what the participants highlighted as important in an onboarding process, the process was split into three parts, consisting of the recruitment process, preboarding process and onboarding process. During the interviews, multiple respondents mentioned the recruitment process as the first stage in an onboarding process. In the recruitment process the employer must facilitate the candidate and inform the candidate about all necessary information about his/her potential new role, their organisation and more. Several of the respondents mentioned this part of the onboarding as important for the newcomer. Furthermore, many of the respondents divided the onboarding process into two further parts, preboarding and onboarding. Preboarding is what the company executes before

the newcomer start-up date to facilitate them and welcome them into their new organisation. Practices which are used here are welcome-emails, invitation to events/lunch/teambuilding or preboarding apps or programs. The onboarding process is something the respondents described as what happens after the newcomer arrives their first day at the workplace. The most mentioned onboarding practices used in this sample were mentorships, courses, cases about the organisation and other relevant information. Additionally, the companies in this research also arranged a lot of different social plans/events as one of their onboarding practices.

As presented in figure 2, the recruitment, preboarding and onboarding process can affect the newcomer's workplace socialisation. The newcomers in this sample said that they appreciated practices which happened during all three of these processes. This indicates that it is important to have well-planned practices in all processes, and it can further lead to increased and more effective workplace socialisation for the newcomer.

Discussion

In this chapter, the research findings will be examined in light of theory presented in the literature review. Firstly, the focus will be on findings related to onboarding, followed by workplace socialisation, sample differences, and employer branding practices.

Onboarding

In this part there will be a discussion of the onboarding practices and processes that are used in the different companies in the samples. These utilised practices will be discussed with the chosen theory in this master's thesis as a basis. In the literature review chapter Bauer's (2010) four C's of onboarding and Snell's (2006) four components of successful onboarding are the main onboarding theories.

As mentioned in the introduction of this master's thesis, workers today tend to change work multiple times during their life. This means that it is important to have measures that

retain employee satisfaction and employee turnover low for the organisations. According to previous research, a good onboarding process can result in higher job satisfaction, organisational commitment, intentions to remain and turnover (Bauer et al., 2007). The participants in this study presented onboarding as a crucial part in job satisfaction and role clarity. Respondent F1 mentioned during the interviews that onboarding helped the newcomer in role training and performance, in addition to the newcomer's job satisfaction and intention to stay in the company. Respondent D1 mentioned an incident, where an employee quit their job shortly after their start. Furthermore, the incident was believed to be caused by the lack of a sufficient onboarding process. In line with theory, this indicates that a good onboarding process is important for job satisfaction and can help reduce employee turnover (Bauer et al., 2007).

Onboarding practices

To define what a good onboarding process includes, Bauer's (2010) four C's of onboarding is used in this thesis. Bauer's four C's are Compliance, Clarification, culture, and connection. The last two C's of onboarding, culture, and connection, will be discussed in the following subchapter, *Workplace Socialisation as a part of the onboarding process*.

The compliance C regards giving the newcomer the legal and policy rules at the workplace (Bauer, 2010). In this research's sample, the companies use onboarding practices such as online and physical courses to fulfil the first C. Respondent A1 said that their company has a three-day initial onboarding, where they teach/inform the newcomer about the necessary compliance information. Although most of the companies in this sample cover the compliance part of onboarding, one of the newcomers mentioned that they had not received information/training regarding workplace safety. This indicates that one of the companies in this sample did not completely cover the compliance part, at least not in this case (Bauer, 2010). Some of the companies also mentioned that this part of the onboarding started during

the recruitment process and the preboarding phase. Indicating that the onboarding process can start during the recruitment process.

The second C, clarification, is ensuring that the newcomer understands what their new job-role and what other expectations they have (Bauer, 2010). The onboarding practises the respondents mentioned were work-related courses/cases and professional mentors. Several of the HR-employee respondents said that they provide their newcomers different courses and cases the newcomers must complete. In addition to this, most of the representatives from the companies mentioned the use of a professional mentor. This mentor often had a similar role as the newcomer, however, sometimes in a different location. An example of this is how C2 mentioned she/he had a mentor that had a similar job-role and had their office in a different city in Norway.

Bauer's (2010) *compliance* can be compared to Snell's first two components, process analysis and implementation. These two components regard how the role and onboarding process is defined, and which technology is connected to the onboarding (Snell, 2006). Although some of the companies in the research mentioned the use of different online platforms and apps, not all companies used this. Respondent C1 mentioned that they have a new app which assists the company in onboarding of new employees. An example of a case who had a lack of technological tools during the onboarding was company B. Respondent B2 said "We actually got a lot of the information in paper-form. We got physical papers with all the necessary information" (Respondent B2, 2023). This same respondent also mentioned that they did not have an online learning platform or anything similar to this. This indicates that this case does not use a substantial amount of technology during the onboarding, which Snell (2006) mentions as a vital component.

Snell's third component, integration, includes the integration of the newcomer information and external systems. This means how the newcomer is integrated into the

organisation's system, protocols, and the customers (Snell, 2006). Many of the respondents mentioned that during their preboarding phase this process already started. Respondent C1 said that the preboarding was not only about the social aspect, but it was also to integrate them into the systems, to make sure they are ready when they arrive. On the other hand, this is not something the respondents mentioned frequently. The reason behind this could be because the HR-employees had not thought about this, or that the interviewers did not specifically ask it. As several of the newcomer respondents worked close with the customers, this is something that needs to be in focus. This is important because having the newcomer integrated into the organisation's systems can increase their job performance (Snell, 2006).

Some of the respondents mention that at the end of the newcomer's onboarding process they arrange a meeting with them to listen to their experiences and opinions. Respondent C1 mentioned that they send out a survey to the newcomer at the end of their onboarding. This is something Snell (2006) mentions as the last component of successful onboarding. The component is called *Reporting* and regards how the organisation analyses their completed onboarding processes to drive continuous improvements. As presented above, this is something a few of the respondents mentioned, however, not everyone. Respondent D2 mentioned this as a part of their offboarding, where they asked the departing employee what they could have done differently in their various stages. This part is something which will be crucial for improving their onboarding process (Snell, 2006).

Workplace Socialisation as a part of the onboarding process

The last two C's of Bauer's (2010) four C's of successful onboarding regard *culture* and *connection*. Bauer's *culture* refers to how the newcomer is provided with a sense of the formal and informal organisational norms (Bauer, 2010). Several of the respondents brought up a practice to accelerate the newcomer's workplace socialisation when they talked about their preboarding practices. Two of the HR-employees, C1 and B1, said that their organisation

had newly added an onboarding tool to help newcomers get familiar with the organisation, the culture, and norms. These were digital tools to help with parts of the onboarding process, such as online e-courses, relevant information about the organisation and the workplace. Pettigrew (1979) stated that the organisational culture is made up of three different cognitive systems, thinking, reasoning and decision-making. Although this tool can help with the newcomers' understanding of the organisational culture, a digital device may not be able to display the complete picture of the organisation's culture and norms to the newcomer. Meaning that it may be most beneficial to have online tools, in addition to other onboarding practices, such as mentoring, that also help the newcomer in learning the culture and norms of the workplace (Jones, 1986).

Another practice three of the companies in this research sample mentioned, is the use of social mentors. Kowtha (2018) explains that mentorship practices can help with how the newcomer learns the organisational norms, values, and attitudes. The respondents mentioned the same in this study, for instance D2 said that his/her mentor helped with understanding the norms and routines of the workplace. Although mentorship can be a good practice to teach the newcomer's the organisational culture, the success may vary from person to person. When assigning a mentor to a newcomer, one could argue that the success of this rests on two people. The mentor would have to be willing to teach the newcomer, and it would also be important that this mentor does indeed understand the organisational norms himself/herself. It would also depend on the newcomer being able/willing to learn from his/her mentor (Bourdage et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2022)

In the preboarding phase of the onboarding, multiple respondents mentioned that the newcomers were invited to events, lunches and or teambuilding before their start-up date. Respondent D2 mentioned that he/she got invited for lunch ahead of starting at his/her new job. The same respondent also said that he/she already felt as a part of the team. This can be

interpreted as an onboarding practice to cover Bauer's (2010) last C, which is *Connection*.

This C relates to how the newcomer creates interpersonal connections at the workplace and an information network within the organisation. Some of the respondents mentioned networking and a culture of sharing as their values in a workplace. An example of this is how both A1 and A2 mentioned similar values and stated the importance of networking in an onboarding process. Respondent B1 also brought up another practice, where the graduates have their own program to create networks within the industry, both internally and externally.

Although some of the organisations brought up onboarding practices which could fulfil Bauer's (2010) last C, it is still uncertain if it had effect on the newcomers. As with any practice, it is not only planning and saying it should be done, it is also about implementation. As mentioned in the findings, there were few discrepancies between what the HR-employees said they do and what the newcomers experienced. On the other hand, some of the onboarding-practices the HR-employees mentioned are newly added or soon-to-be added practices. This could mean that they are not institutionalised yet (Kowtha, 2018). Kowtha (2018) also said that some of the benefits of onboarding and organisational socialisation can come if the tactics/practices are institutionalised.

Onboarding process

In addition to presenting her four C's of onboarding, Bauer (2010) presents three levels of onboarding. The three levels of onboarding strategy are based on how many of the four C's an organisation has in their onboarding process. Level 1, which is called passive onboarding includes the first two C's, *compliance*, and *clarification* (Bauer, 2010). As mentioned, most of the organisations have these onboarding practices covered. Some of the practices covering compliance and clarification are three-day initial onboarding and courses, where the newcomer is informed with all necessary information about the company and workplace. In the discussion around which practices were used to cover compliance, it

seemed that one of the companies had missed this part. As found in the findings, one respondent mentioned she/he had not been informed of the safety and fire routines at the workplace. Indicating that this company does not have a level 1 onboarding process formalised within the organisation (Kowtha, 2018). Even though this company may have failed to cover the clarification part, this same company fulfils the requirements for some of the other two levels, and will be discussed later (Bauer, 2010).

The second level of onboarding includes the *culture c*, which regards how the newcomer is integrated into the culture in the workplace (Bauer, 2010). As mentioned earlier in the discussion, most of the companies in this thesis' sample have onboarding practices to facilitate and accelerate the newcomer's integration into the organisational culture. Two of the companies brought up digital tools to help accelerate the newcomer's integration, however, the success of this can vary. A digital tool can be excessively impersonal to explain such a complex and personal construct, for instance, organisational culture (Snell, 2006). Something the respondents also mentioned was the use of social mentors. This is a more personal approach to integrate the newcomer and may be more effective. Although a digital tool may not be as effective for this purpose, combining a personal approach with a digital one may be more effective (Bauer, 2010). Integrating the newcomer into the workplace culture is something the respondents also highlighted as important in their definition of onboarding. An example of this is D1 who said: "To me, onboarding is to integrate them into the work culture and everyday life" (Respondent D1, 2023).

When an organisation has included onboarding practices to cover Bauer's last *c*, *connection*, the company has a level 3 onboarding. According to Bauer's research only 20% of organisations have this level of onboarding (Bauer, 2010). There are indications that a few of the organisations in this sample can be in the third level. As mentioned, case C, D and E has a social mentor to help the newcomer's socialisation. This onboarding practice can be

highly beneficial for the newcomer in terms of receiving connection with someone at the workplace. Additionally, these three companies also mentioned they invite the newcomers actively to teambuilding and lunches and do seem to have practices in place to reach level three onboarding (Bauer, 2010).

As only 20% of organisations reach level three onboarding, it may seem unrealistic that three of the companies in this study reach this level (Bauer, 2010). This can be due to one of this thesis' two samples are from the Great Place to Work ranking, and the other companies are other attractive workplaces. It can be possible that the companies in this sample are out of the ordinary, and have invested more effort into their onboarding process, compared to other companies. As Snell (2006) mentions, many companies do not focus enough on their onboarding in order to improve their process, however, the companies in this sample seem to have done so.

Individual differences

There were findings of individual differences in the onboarding processes when analysing what the respondents said in the interviews. Although the respondents did not mention a lot of difference in the onboarding process depending on different roles, some of them mentioned that there could be a small difference. Respondent C1 mentioned that leadership roles will have an onboarding with more information about their HR-systems etc. Another individual difference in the onboarding process were with graduates, and how three of the companies in this case have a separate graduate program.

These graduate programs are separate and extended onboarding programs to help facilitate the younger newcomers. Most of today's graduates are younger and lack prior work-life experience. This means that most graduates today will either be young millennials or generation Z. Millennials are known for being educated, assertive and ongoing, and have less work experience compared to older generations. Similarly, to millennials the generation Z

cohort are highly educated, and have even less work experience (Chillakuri, 2020). A separate graduate program can therefore help the graduates to adjust to work-life and may offer great benefits for the young graduates. Respondent B1 also brought up a separate program that included a separate networking event for all their hired graduates. This goes back to Snell's third component for successful onboarding. This component relates to integrating the newcomer into internal and external information systems (Snell, 2006). Graduates may not have a large network in their industry, as they are new in the work life, and therefore a networking event may help with this (Chillakuri, 2020).

Although a separate onboarding process for graduates could be considered an intelligent approach, one cannot categorise everyone in the same category. As mentioned, a lot of young millennials and generation Z do not have a lot of work experience, however, this does not include everyone (Chillakuri, 2020). If a graduate has a lot of prior work experience, a graduate program may not fit this newcomer. In this case an extended onboarding program, such as a graduate program could be the wrong approach. As mentioned in the literature review, and mentioned by some respondents, a poorly planned onboarding process can lead to lower job performance and an increased employee turn-over (Bauer et al., 2007).

Perceived differences on the onboarding program

According to Klein et al. (2015), there is evidence of a mismatch between the onboarding experience of the newcomer and what the organisation states they are offering. The findings in this study show incidents where this is confirmed, and incidents of the opposite. As mentioned, the majority of the newcomer respondents mentioned a similar experience to what their HR-employee said. Most of the respondents described their experience with the onboarding program in a positive manner and listed several positive occurrences. The fact that there were a lot of similarities between what the HR-employees say their practices are, and what the newcomers actually experienced during the onboarding can

mean two things. Firstly, it could mean that the findings of Klein et al. (2015) study does not apply for the companies in this sample. On the other hand, it could also mean that there is a level of biasness from the respondents. As mentioned in the limitations subchapter, it is possible that the HR-employee selected a newcomer they knew were satisfied with their onboarding process. This could mean that the newcomer respondents in this sample are not representative to all other employees in the companies (Neuman, 2014).

Even though there were several similarities, there were some perceived differences found during the interviews. One of the respondents mentioned that they did not get invited to a social gathering around their starting date. Inviting their newcomer to social events is something the HR-employee from the same company brought up as something they always practise. Although this incident might be coincidental, there could be some discrepancies between the intended onboarding process and the perceived onboarding process in this case. Another example of this is company D, where the newcomer and HR-employee had different views on the length and scope of their onboarding process. Respondent E2 mentioned something similar, where he/she did not understand what is onboarding and what is not at the company (Klein et al., 2015). This does indicate that Klein et al, (2015) finding have some merit in this research as well.

Workplace socialisation

As presented in the literature review, workplace socialisation can have great benefits for an organisation. If there is a high amount of socialisation, the employee will have a longer career in the organisation, and not leave in favour for other companies (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). In the findings of this study many of the respondents valued socialisation in the workplace and described it as an important part of onboarding. There might be several reasons behind their perceived importance of socialisation. For instance, respondent A1 mentioned safety and to feel secure in your surroundings as the definition of socialising in the

workplace. Indicating that their company has a formal structured tactic for socialising the newcomer. Similar to A1, many of the respondents mentioned social activities arranged by the workplace as a tool of socialisation for the employees. Different social activities are something that can be seen as a social tactic and can be a crucial factor for workplace socialisation for the newcomer (Jones, 1986).

Process of socialisation

Comparing the findings to the Meta-analysis conducted by Bauer et al. (2007), is quite interesting. In Bauer's (2007) meta-analysis there were findings showing that both newcomer information seeking, and organisational socialisation tactics increased performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, intentions to remain and turnover for the newcomer. The level of information seeking can vary from person to person. Information seeking does often mean that the newcomer will have to be social, ask his/her colleagues and search for information about the organisation (Bauer, 2007). This means that information seeking often will require that the newcomer is extroverted to a certain degree. However, assuming that a new person is interested to learn about their new workplace and role, it is something which may be present in most cases (Bourdage, et al., 2015).

Firstly, there were many findings of formal socialisation tactics amongst the different companies interviewed. For instance, companies C, D and E had a social mentor and a professional mentor. Respondent D1 stated "We have divided the mentorship arrangement in a social mentor that will be the newcomer's guide for norms, lunch, do's and don'ts in our environment and a professional mentor that the newcomer can spar professionally with" (Respondent D1,2023). As mentioned by Jones (1986), formal mentorship may increase the degree of which the newcomer learns the common organisational formal norms, values, and attitudes. An example of this is respondent D1 who mentioned the social norm with seeing the need for action themselves. He/she said that "my mentor showed me that if we are the first

person to arrive, we empty the coffee machine” (Respondent D1, 2023). This incident indicates that it can be beneficial for the newcomer to have a social mentor for adapting to the unwritten rules (Pettigrew 1979). On the contrary, the newcomer may not have been aware of the social norm of emptying the coffee machine if they did not have a mentor, and in the worst case could have caused frustration among their colleagues. Although a social mentor can be beneficial for many newcomers, there could be possible downsides, depending on the personality of the newcomer. In a situation where the newly hired person has a more introverted personality, it might be more intruding to have a social mentor showing you how things work. Furthermore, if the newcomer does not seek social support, it could increase their level of stress (Hughes et al., 2022).

Another present organisational tactic found in this study, is the social gatherings. In every case the respondents have attended a form of social happening that was initiated by the company. Some of the examples mentioned, varied from trips to other countries to meeting for dinner after work. Klein et al. (2015) describes socialisation as a process that lasts through the whole lifetime of an employee, both in the current workplace and their career. The findings indicate that the importance of socialisation does not only include the newcomers, however, the whole organisation in general. Although these gatherings were not only for the newcomers, it could be a great tool to include the newly hired in the organisational culture. Furthermore, Louis et al. (1983) describes the colleagues as the biggest contributor for the organisational socialisation. This means that it is essential for the colleagues to get to know each other, leading to the aspect of social happenings (Louis et al., 1983). In addition to having informal ways of integrating the newcomers in the work culture, most of the companies had more formal introductions to give the newly-hired an indication of what to expect. According to Jones (1986) having formal tactics is important to integrate the newcomer.

Matching values

All the respondents of the study answered that their values matched their organisation's values. This could be a result of mentoring or other formal tactics that can increase the learning outcome of organisational values (Jones, 1986). However, the newly hired respondents were asked if they felt like their values matched the company values when they applied for the job, and they all answered yes. This could indicate that there were biases in the interviews or that the organisational values were slightly similar to the respondents' already existing values. On the other hand, it can be a match, and the sole reason for why they applied for the job in the first place. An example of this was from respondent A2, who said that the reason for changing company was the matching values between themselves and the company.

Another interesting finding in the study was the difference between the social life outside the work in the companies with younger employees compared to the companies with larger age differences. Respondents C2 and E2 used to work with younger people before and described it as a more social environment. However, respondent C2 said “Although this was nice, I prefer to keep colleagues as colleagues, as this is simpler” (Respondent C2, 2023), referring to their friendship with previous colleagues. This indicates that colleagues with more similar age also have more similar values in their private life, and therefore building stronger bonds also outside the work can be easier. It could also be due to where they are in life and how open they are for socialising with their colleagues (Bourdage et al., 2015). Furthermore, if an organisation can institutionalise social tactics, it can reduce the employee turn-over (Kowtha, 2018), and in one of the findings there was an indication of a lack of social tactics. One of the respondents talked about a colleague quitting their job shortly after beginning. The respondent highlighted the lack of an individualised onboarding process was the main reason and said that the person did not socialise properly. Comparing this incident with Gareth Jones (1986) social tactics for socialisation, it indicates that the company did not institutionalise

these. Firstly, the individual could possibly not have been followed up and trained for their role, leading to them feeling uncertain and the lack of socialisation could mean that it is harder for the individual to ask other people professional questions. Another reason behind this could be the lack of a formal individualised training program. The respondent mentioned that this was their perception of the situation. On the other hand, the reason for the individual could be something else. However, the pattern and connection to contextual tactics, social tactics and content tactics seem to be present (Jones, 1986).

Sample differences

In this subchapter the sample differences and similarities will be discussed. In the findings, there seemed to be a few differences between industries, in addition to some similarities. When comparing the Great Place to Work sample and other companies the findings also pointed out one difference which will be discussed.

Industry differences

The findings showed that there are several similarities between the cases in this thesis's sample. The reason for this can be because the companies who chose to participate in this research know they have a satisfying onboarding process. Although there were a lot of similarities, there were a few differences in the findings. As some of the cases were in the same industry, some industry differences were apparent. As mentioned, company A and B were in the same industry, and this can be the reason for them having a separate graduate program compared to company C. Some industries will hire more young graduates than others, and the industry will have to adapt their onboarding process accordingly. When hiring young graduates, they are, for instance, more prone to the need for more *personal connection* (Chillakuri, 2020). To facilitate this, the company might have to change their onboarding program. In this instance, company A and B, which hires a lot of graduates, have implemented a separate graduate program.

Another difference found between the cases was that three of the companies used a social mentor for onboarding their newcomers. In addition to this, company F mentioned they do not always assign a mentor to their newcomers. Respondent F1 said that they rarely assign mentors for their newcomer, however, that they have done it for some instances. All other companies which participated in this research seemed to use a form of mentorship, except company F. This could be explained by them operating in a separate industry compared to the rest of the sample, and that this is not an industry standard for them. It could also mean that the company has not spent a lot of effort maximising their onboarding process or they do not see the positive effects, for instance, the increased chance for the newcomer to learn the organisation norms, values, and attitudes (Jones, 1986).

Great Place to Work

One of the interesting things to research in this master's thesis is what differences and similarities there are between the Great Place to Work sample and the other companies' sample. As discussed in the onboarding subchapter in the discussion, there were multiple companies which had similar and good onboarding processes. Many of the companies in this research had a lot of the same onboarding practices, and this can mean that there are few differences between the two samples. When looking at Bauer's (2010) levels of onboarding, it was discussed that some of the companies have onboarding practices to possibly reach level three. Level 3 onboarding is an onboarding process which has formal practices to include Bauer's last C, *connection*. As discussed earlier three companies arguably reached this level, and these were company C, D and E. Company D was not from the Great Place To Work ranking, indicating that this ranking does not necessarily mean that they have a better onboarding process (Bauer, 2010).

Although there were a lot of similarities between the two samples, there was one finding of differences. When asking the HR-respondents from the companies which were on

the ranking about it, they all were aware and proud of being part of the ranking. Respondent A1 said that they always arrange a party when they receive their Great Places To Work numbers. The other HR-employee respondents from these companies said something similar. They mentioned that they used their values and ranking actively in recruitment and other external areas. On the other hand, the HR-employee respondents from the other companies all mentioned that they are a bit more down to earth and do not advertise their qualities and values externally. An example of this is Respondent D1 who said, “We try to be more down to earth” (Respondent D1, 2023). This could be coincidence because it is a small sample with only six different organisations, but it can also be something which the companies on the rankings do differently. This could mean that the companies from the Great Place to Work ranking are more focused on employer branding and want to show who they are. This could also be the reason they are interested in being on the list.

Employer Branding

In this subchapter some findings regarding different employer branding tactics will be discussed. As mentioned earlier, the Great Places to Work sample may be more focused on employer branding, however, additionally some other findings were found. Some of the respondents mentioned offboarding and “selling” the company to the wrong candidate.

Offboarding

Offboarding was a construct which was not originally in the interview-guide, meaning that the respondents brought this up on their own initiative. Respondent B1 mentioned that a well-executed offboarding process may lead to positive mentions and word of mouth from the leaving employee. This is in line with the theory, where Dachner and Makarius (2021) says if the offboarding program is performed well, the departing employee can be the company’s loyal alumni.

Respondents B1 and D1 mentioned that if the offboarding is perceived as suitable for the departing employee, it can increase the chance for this employee to return to the organisation. Offboarding is something that is important today, as employees are more prone to change workplaces multiple times during their work career (Mitchel et al., 2001). As the respondents mention in this research, a good offboarding can have many benefits, like increased chance of returning and word of mouth. Dachner and Makarius (2021) brings up similar benefits, adding that the departing employee can become future customers, suppliers, and mentors for current workers.

Wrong candidates

Another finding in this master's thesis is collected from Respondent B1, who said that if they receive a candidate that they know is not suitable for the position for an interview, they focus on impressing the candidate with their organisation. He/she meant that a wrong candidate is an opportunity rather than something negative. As a lot of the respondents mentioned during the interviews, they hire someone they think fits in the organisation and its work environment. Jones (1986) said that one of the main factors for good socialisation relies on values, and if the candidate has different values from the company, this candidate may be the wrong one.

Respondent B1 emphasised whenever they get a candidate which does not fit their organisation, they try to sell the organisation to this person. The reason for this is the fact that the candidate may talk about the company in a negative manner, if the interviewers rush through the interview because they realise this is the wrong candidate. Instead of this, if this candidate is treated with respect and leaves the interview wanting the job, they are more likely to tell about the positive experiences with this company. This can further lead someone else applying for his job, and this person may be a better fit for the organisation (Respondent B1, 2023).

This means treating the wrong candidate in a respectful manner can lead to positive employer branding. Although this practice can benefit the company, it could be difficult to implement, as one's interest in entertaining and spending time recruiting the wrong candidate may be seen as a waste of time. Similar to offboarding, which is also difficult to do well in practice, this can lead to better employer branding, returning employees and lead to other suitable candidates applying (Dachner and Makarius, 2021).

Conclusion

In the conclusion chapter, the research question of this master's thesis "*Which onboarding practices do HR-employees and newcomers view as important, and how do onboarding practices contribute to workplace socialisation?*" will be answered. This chapter includes the thesis' research purpose, main findings, theoretical and managerial implications, in addition to limitations and suggestions for future research.

Research purpose

The aim of the research in this master's thesis was to answer the research question "*Which onboarding practices do HR-employees and newcomers view as important, and how do onboarding practices contribute to workplace socialisation?*" During this master's thesis three main steps were used to answer the research question. The first step included reviewing current literature on the relevant constructs. This literature review consisted of theory on onboarding, socialisation, generational change, workplace culture and offboarding. The second step of this research was conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews, as this research uses a qualitative research method. The chosen sample in this study were one HR-employee and one newcomer from six different companies, which formed six different cases in this research. During the last part of this thesis, the interviews were transcribed, and they were analysed with a thematic analysis method. The findings were then analysed and discussed in light of the theory presented in the literature review.

Main findings

The research conducted in this study resulted in four main categories of findings, with eleven subcategories. The first main category of findings from the discussion chapter relates to the sample's onboarding. This main category has further five subcategories which are 1) onboarding practices, 2) workplace socialisation as a part of the onboarding process, 3) onboarding process, 4) individual differences, and 5) perceived differences on the onboarding program. Concerning the onboarding practices used in this thesis' sample, the respondents from the different companies mentioned a lot of the same practices. They often mentioned the use of social and professional mentors, a three-day informational program, digital tools, and social lunches and other types of events. One interesting finding was that most of the respondents said they started their onboarding practices already during the recruitment period, before having a preboarding process and an onboarding process after their start-up date. The respondents also brought up that a large part of their onboarding regarded the workplace socialisation for the newcomer. The most prevalent onboarding practices for the companies in this research were allocating the newcomer a social mentor and inviting the newcomer early to teambuilding, events, and social lunches. This is something the newcomers in this sample appreciated. It was especially three companies in the research sample that had a lot of onboarding practices to maximise the socialisation of the newcomer. To discuss the onboarding processes for the different cases in this thesis' Bauer's (2010) three levels of onboarding were used. In the research sample there was evidence that all the companies have onboarding practices which covered at least level 2 onboarding process. As mentioned, there were specifically three companies which had onboarding practices to fulfil the *connection C* of Bauer's (2010), and they could possibly be located at a level three onboarding process. Further, the fourth subcategory, regarding the individualised onboarding process for different individuals, the findings showed that it was usually the same for everyone. Although there

was a lack of individualised onboarding, some of the companies had separate graduate and onboarding programs for newly graduated newcomers. The respondent's justified this with the fact that the newly graduates often have less work experience and need more adjustment to their work life. The last subcategory of onboarding is if there are any perceived differences on the onboarding program between what the HR-employees stated and what the newcomer actually experiences. Although there were some slight perceived differences it seemed that most of the onboarding practises the HR-employees said they utilised, the newcomers experienced.

The second main category of findings concerned the workplace socialisation for the newcomer. This main category of findings includes two subcategories; 1) process of socialisation, and 2) matching values. For the process of socialisations, the majority of the newcomer respondents mentioned that they felt they were integrated into the organisational culture at an early stage. This could be because the companies mentioned multiple onboarding practices to facilitate the process of workplace socialisation for the newcomer. Further, it could mean that these chosen onboarding practices could have led to their newcomers having a better workplace socialisation. Although these practices may have worked, there could be other factors that had an impact on their workplace socialisation. The second subcategory of findings regarded the matching values between the newcomer and the organisation. It is a good match between the newcomer respondents' and the organisation's values, however, there was one interesting finding. There was a variation of how the newcomer respondents valued the type of relationships they had with their colleagues. Some of the respondents wanted to keep their interaction with their colleagues strictly at the office, while others wanted an increased contact with their colleagues outside of working hours as well. The reason for this difference seems to stem from their previous workplaces and which stages they are in life.

The third main category concerns sample differences in the thesis' sample. In this category there are two subcategories, 1) industry differences and 2) Great Place to Work Ranking. The sample in this study contains a few different industries, and the research reveals that there are some industry differences and standards. A minority of the cases in this sample hire a lot of graduates, and they have separate onboarding programs for graduates. Another finding showed that all companies except one, used mentorship as an onboarding practice. This company who did not utilise this practice were in a different industry than all the others in the sample. This could indicate that this is not common in their industry. In this thesis the samples were from two different groups, companies which are ranked on the Great Place to Work rankings and companies that were not present in the list. There was a small difference between the onboarding from these two samples, however, one interesting finding came to light. It seemed that the companies which are listed on the ranking emphasised employer branding more than the other sample, and this could be the main difference between the two samples.

The last main category of the findings regarded employee branding tactics used by the companies. The fourth category included two subcategories; 1) offboarding and 2) wrong candidates. Some of the respondents mentioned the construct of offboarding as an important process in their organisation. They described offboarding as the process which happens during the notice period of a leaving employee. A well performed offboarding process includes amongst other things an exit interview and a warm thank you and good luck greeting before they leave. The benefits of this construct, mentioned by the respondents were employer branding and possibility for the departing employee to return. Another finding was how one respondent mentioned how he/she treats wrong candidates during a recruitment process. This respondent said they try to "sell" this person instead of rushing through the interview when they know the candidate does not match them. The reasoning behind this is to ensure that the

person who is not getting the job, leaves with a good impression of the organisation.

Furthermore, this increases the chances of this candidate spreading positive word about the organisation, and this can benefit the organisation's employer branding.

Main contribution of this thesis

Managerial implications

This study's managerial implications is based on the fact that several of the businesses are on the list of Great Places To Work, and that the companies are attractive workplaces in Norway. This signifies that the organisations have implemented successful onboarding practices that have increased the work environments and created engagement among the employees. Therefore, implementing similar onboarding practices can be highly beneficial for organisations. Furthermore, the findings from the thesis indicates that the respondents' organisations are following best practice onboarding theory. Many respondents emphasised the socialisation experienced in their workplace, and that they felt included in the company. Although this may be coincidental, it serves as a strong indication that the organisations in this study have based their onboarding practices on a theoretical framework. By adopting similar onboarding practices, organisations can use these findings to foster employee engagement, provide a better onboarding experience in general and reduce turnover among employees. In addition to having motivated, effective, and satisfied employees, following similar approaches to onboarding could also attract talented individuals to the organisation.

Theoretical implications

The study followed a qualitative research method, focusing on theoretical implications regarding onboarding and workplace socialisation. This further expands on the already existing theoretical framework about the constructs and the impact onboarding has on workplace socialisation. The research also expands Bauer's (2010) theories on what an onboarding process should include. This thesis' research suggests the inclusion of a specific

timeline with the start of the onboarding process in the recruitment period. Furthermore, the research challenged Klein's (2015) finding on newcomers perceiving their onboarding differently than the organisation's intended onboarding process. The results in this study showed many similarities between the organisation's claimed onboarding process and what the newcomer actually experienced.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Broader representation of gender and culture diversity

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the majority in the sample in the study consist of women. Although this does not necessarily impact the findings, future research on a more equal divided sample of gender is recommended to include this potential factor. The cultural aspect of the sample is also a consideration recommended for future research. This study is conducted in Norway and all the respondents are Norwegians. Reflecting on this, the research might not be representative in other parts of the world, and the research could have yielded other findings if conducted in another country or with respondents from other places outside Norway.

Reducing biases

Although every respondent was anonymous and informed about this before the interviews, there could have been some biases. There is a possibility that some of the respondents, especially the newcomer, had experiences that they did not mention or wanted to share. The HR-employee and the newcomer respondents were from the same companies, and it is possible that they had in mind that their colleague could have identified them. For further research it is suggested to reach out to respondents from similar companies individually, rather than them knowing who the other participant in the study is.

Further investigation of the construct of offboarding

Another suggestion for further research based on the finding of the term offboarding. This was something brought up by respondents in the interviews and was not included in the interview-guide. Although Offboarding is not a new term, further research about the concept can be interesting. This could involve investigation of for instance, offboarding's impact on organisational reputation and employees returning to the organisation. In addition to this, it can be interesting to explore best practices for offboarding and if a successful process could strengthen the employee's satisfaction and the succession of the company.

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Appendix A: Information letter to participants

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

A case-study on how companies in Norway practise onboarding of new employees, and how it relates to socialising in the workplace.

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å se på hvordan åtte norske bedrifter driver deres onboarding og hvordan denne kobles opp mot sosialisering på arbeidsplassen. I dette skrevet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Forskningsspørsmål: Hvilken effekt har onboarding på sosialisering i arbeidsplassen?

Dette er en masteroppgave for masterstudiet i Service Leadership in International Business ved Norsk Hotellhøgskole. Vi skal ved hjelp av en kvalitativ undersøkelse se hvordan utvalgte Norske bedrifter utfører deres onboarding av nye ansatte. Videre skal vi se om en god onboarding-prosess kan være med å påvirke sosialisering på arbeidsplassen.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Stavanger er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Vi har kontaktet flere bedrifter om å få undersøke hvordan deres bedrift utfører onboarding. Videre har vi forespurt om å ha dybdeintervju både med en HR-ansatt og en nyansatt (ansatt inne 6 måneder siden) hos hver av bedriftene. Det er bedriften som velger hvem som bli informant i dybdeintervjuene.

Vi har mottatt kontaktopplysninger fra din bedrift, i dette tilfellet har vi fått tilsendt din E-mail adresse for å kontakte deg.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Metoden for datainnsamling i denne studien vil være via dybdeintervju. Hvis du velger å delta i dette spørsmålet vil være med på et personlig intervju som vil vare mellom ca. 30-45 minutter. Intervjuet vil omhandle deres rekrutteringsopplevelse, onboarding og sosialisering på arbeidsplassen. Du vil være helt anonym i oppgaven. Det vil bli tatt lydopptak av intervjuet, som vil bli beskyttet på en kryptert minnepinne og med koblingsnøkkel.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er kun behandlingsansvarlig institusjon, Anders Bergman (Student), Ludvig Galtung Christensen (student) og Tone Therese Linge (Veileder) som vil ha tilgang.
- Ettersom det vil bli tatt lydopptak av intervjuene skal disse sikres på en kryptert minnepinne. Lydopptak og transkribering vil bli adskilt fra personopplysninger og en koblingsnøkkel må brukes for å knytte disse sammen.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes når oppgaven blir godkjent i september 2023. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger slettes.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra *Universitetet i Stavanger* har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- *Universitetet i Stavanger* ved Tone Therese Linge: Tone.linge@uis.no
- Vårt personvernombud: personvernombud@uis.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen som er gjort av personverntjenestene fra Sikt, kan du ta kontakt via:

- Epost: personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon: 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

Tone Therese Linge
(Forsker/veileder)

Anders Bergman & Ludvig Galtung Christensen
(Studenter)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet [*sett inn tittel*], og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

å delta i *intervju*

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix B: Interview-guide for HR-employees

Interview-guide for HR-Ansatt

Introduksjon

- “Har du blitt tilsendt og fått lest relevant informasjonsskriv om intervjuet?”
- Forteller et kort sammendrag av informasjonsskriv og hva oppgaven handler om.
- Utdyp om at alt blir anonymisert, samt. at informant kan avbryte intervjuet når som helst.
- “Som informert om vil vi benytte båndopptaker og intervjuet vil bli transkribert til tekst, er dette fortsatt ok for deg?”
- Fortelle informant om hvilke kategorier intervjuet omhandler, og om hvordan intervjuet blir utført.
- “Har du noen spørsmål før vi begynner?”

Rekrutteringsprosess og organisasjonsverdier

- Hvilke kjerneverdier har dere generelt i organisasjonen?
- Hvordan foregår HR-arbeidet for å styrke disse verdiene?
- Hva er det som gjør dere til en attraktiv arbeidsplass?
- Hvilke andre metoder bruker dere for å fremstille deres organisasjon som en attraktiv arbeidsplass?
 - For eksempel: Goder og belønninger, interne muligheter eller unike læringsopplevelser?
- Hvordan bruker/viser dere kjerneverdiene deres som en del av rekrutteringsprosessen?
 - På hvilken måte da? Gi eksempler.

Ansettelse

- Hva legger dere vekt på når dere velger en kandidat?
 - Hvis to kandidater har like kvalifikasjoner, hva ser dere på når dere tilslutt velger en kandidat?
 - Hvilke egenskaper/personlighetstrekk legger dere størst vekt på?

Onboarding

- Hvordan tolker du begrepet onboarding?
- Når pleier onboarding-prosessen å starte for en nyansatt?
 - Første dag på jobb, eller dager/uker i forveien?
- Kan du beskrive hvordan dere går frem når en ny-ansatt begynner på jobb?
 - Hvem er det som tar imot den nyansatte, er det lederen, HR-ansatt eller kollega?
 - Er alt utstyr klart for den nyansatte?
- Har dere noen kurs om sikkerhet og organisasjonen den nyansatte skal fullføre?
- Hvordan praktiserer dere opplæring for den nyansatte i sin nye rolle?

- Hvordan har dere jobbet med å effektivisere onboarding-prosessen deres? Gi eksempler
 - Var den veldig annerledes for noen år siden?
 - Evt. hvordan er den annerledes i dag?
- Hvor lenge varer onboarding-prosessen for en nyansatt hos dere?

Opplevd viktighet av Onboarding

- Hvor viktig tror dere onboarding-prosessen er for en nyansatt?
- Hvilke fordeler tror dere at en god onboarding-prosess gir organisasjonen?

Sosialisering

- Hvordan tolker du begrepet sosialisering på arbeidsplassen?
- Hvor stor del av onboarding-strategien deres handler om sosialisering på arbeidsplassen?
 - Hvordan da?
- Har dere spesifikke metoder for å integrere den nyansatte inn i arbeidskulturen?
 - Eksempler: Mentor-ordning, team-building aktiviteter eller andre typer sosiale anledninger for å ønske nyansatt velkommen.

Individuell/differensiert onboarding

- Er onboarding-prosessen annerledes fra gang til gang, eller fra person til person?
 - Eventuelt: Hvilke omstendigheter gjør at dere endre prosessen?
- Har dere samme onboarding-prosesser til forskjellige stillinger?
 - lederstilling? ny stilling?
 - Hvordan da?
- Praktiserer dere forskjellige onboarding-prosesser for nyansatte i forskjellige aldersgrupper?
 - Hvordan da?

Avslutning

- Har du noen andre ting du vil legge til?
 - Noen spørsmål?
- “Tusen takk for at du var med i studien”.

Appendix C: Interview-guide newly hired employee

Interview-guide for Nylig ansatt

Introduksjon

- “Har du blitt tilsendt og fått lest relevant informasjonsskriv om intervjuet?”
- Fortell et kort sammendrag av informasjonsskriv og hva oppgaven handler om.
- Utdyp om at alt blir anonymisert, samt. at informant kan avbryte intervjuet når som helst.
- “Som informert om vil vi benytte båndopptaker og intervjuet vil bli transkribert til tekst, er dette fortsatt ok for deg?”
- Fortelle informant om hvilke kategorier intervjuet omhandler, og om hvordan intervjuet blir utført.
- “Har du noen spørsmål før vi begynner?”

Rekrutterings-opplevelse

- Hvilke verdier har du når det kommer til arbeid og arbeidsplassen?
- Hva gjorde at du søkte på denne stillingen hos firma x?
 - Opplevde du at verdiene dine passet sammen med firma x?
 - Hva annet var attraktivt med akkurat denne stillingen eller organisasjonen?
- Hvordan opplevde du rekrutteringsprosessen du gikk gjennom?
 - Beskriv gjerne hvordan prosessen var?
 - Var det noe spesielt du husker?

- Gikk du gjennom noen tester/case-er eller lignende under ansettelsesprosessen.

Onboarding

- Hvordan tolker du begrepet onboarding?
- Når opplevde du at onboarding-prosessen startet?
 - Første dag på jobb eller uker/dager i forveien?
- Hvem mottok deg første dag på jobb? (stillingstittel)
- Husker du hvordan du opplevde onboarding-opplevelsen din? Gi eksempler
 - hva skjedde da du begynte på jobben/i din onboarding-prosess?
- Hvordan ble du lært opp til den nye rollen din? Gi eksempler/historier
- I hvilken grad opplevde du at du fikk alt du trengte under onboarding-prosessen din?
- I hvilken grad opplevde du at du manglet noe under onboarding-prosessen din? Kan du utdype dette?
- Hvordan opplevde du kontakten med dine nye kolleger i den første tiden på din nye jobb? Kan du utdype?
 - Kan du fortelle om noen eksempler/erfaringer som du opplevde i forbindelse med dette?

Sosialisering

- Hvordan tolker du begrepet sosialisering på arbeidsplassen?
- I hvilken grad føler du at du er integrert inn i arbeidsplassen, de ansatte og arbeidskulturen?
 - På hvilken måte føle du deg integrert/ikke integrert?
 - Hvor lang tid tok det før du følte deg som en del av gjengen?
- Hvordan opplever du arbeidskollegaene dine i denne jobben sammenlignet med arbeidskolleger i tidligere jobber?

- I hvilken grad opplever du at det er forskjellige normer, vaner eller kommunikasjon på denne arbeidsplassen sammenlignet med dine tidligere arbeidsplasser? Kan du utdype?
- Har du et skapt et godt vennskap til en eller flere av dine kollegaer?

Avslutning

- Har du noen andre ting du vil legge til?
 - Noen spørsmål?
- “Tusen takk for at du var med i studien”.