

## **Onboarding Practices in the Bhutanese Civil Service Agencies**

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### **Abstract**

Onboarding is the process of integrating a new hire to an organization and its culture, as well as providing them with the resources and knowledge necessary to contribute effectively to the team (Maurer 2020). The objective of this research paper was to find out the adequacy and effectiveness of existing onboarding practices in the Bhutanese civil service from the perspectives of newly recruited civil servants. It is based on the conceptual framework of onboarding developed by Tayla Bauer (2010) that comprises of compliance, clarification, culture and connection. The data was collected from a sample size of 210 civil servants who joined the civil service in 2021 and 2022 respectively. The analysed data revealed that only 53.10% of the respondents felt adjusted in their new jobs upon completion of their onboarding programmes. This could be due to a number of factors associated with inadequate resources to implement onboarding programmes in agencies, lack of clarity on the duration of the programmes and poor planning. Among all the key components of the onboarding, the connection component is ranked lower than others which calls for more attention in terms of fostering fraternity bonds and creating the sense of belongingness with the new employees. One of the ways to

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improve the onboarding process could be through institutionalization of proper mentorship for all the new employees which is not comprehensively implemented across the civil service agencies.

## **Introduction**

Onboarding is a purposeful process that aids new hires in acquiring necessary information, competence, attitude, and behaviour to become productive member of an organization. It is a continuous process of preparing employees for their jobs in their early careers.

Despite making a huge investment in human resources, 64% of new executives hired from outside the company fail in their first year and the average chief executive officers last less than four years (Snell & Taleo, 2006). Furthermore, according to Baur (2010), half of all senior hires from outside fail within 18 months of starting a new job, and half of all hourly workers quit within the first 120 days. Jacob (2014) states that due to a variety of circumstances, high turnover can be expensive for businesses. Employees who have had a bad onboarding experience are more likely to leave the organization after a short length of time (Kumar, 2017).

There are two central purposes for developing onboarding programmes. Firstly, onboarding programmes help new employees understand their specific roles in the job and the company. By knowing what to expect and what is expected of them, employees feel more comfortable in their positions and will be more productive in a shorter amount of time. Additionally, onboarding programmes are designed to create a better fit within the organizations by aligning company culture

with those of newly hired employees (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Stein and Christiansen (2010) infer that onboarding quickens the socialization process and helps in identifying employees who are a bad fit for the organization.

In Bhutan, the Royal Civil Service Commission is in charge of hiring, developing, and training civil servants besides carrying out other related personnel functions (Civil Service Act of Bhutan 2010). The term “onboarding” was not commonly used in the civil service agencies in the past in Bhutan although it started gaining momentum among some corporate bodies for the socialization of their new employees. Although, the term ‘onboarding’ was not used widely in the civil agencies, socialization of new employees manifested in various forms like orientation, attachment, induction, coaching and mentoring. Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations (BCSR, 2018) stressed the need to provide a good orientation programme for the newly recruited employees in the organizations. It also emphasized the need to assign mentors for the new employees for a period of one year for proper induction into the civil service. It further pointed out the need to integrate and assimilate new employees as team players in the organizations. However, in the recent past, one of the main reasons for the high turnover of newly recruited civil servants was attributed to the lack of proper onboarding practices in the civil service mainly in the form of coaching, mentoring, and guidance at the early stage of civil servants’ career (The Bhutanese, 2022). For the first time, BCSR (2023) emphasizes on the word ‘onboarding’ and directs that a new employee shall undergo an onboarding which the agency shall conduct (section 4.3.8.6). Some agencies are still unable to fully understand the importance of good onboarding practices,

which results in many unfortunate and unprecedented situations, such as a lack of trust among the employees, dissatisfied employees, a fragmented organization, low employer brand and an increased level of stress and anxiety among new employees, which affects teamwork and results in high employee turnover.

## **Literature Review**

According to Maure (2019), the process of integrating a new employee into a company's culture and providing them with the tools and information they need to become a productive member of the team is known as new employee onboarding. Employee socialization, or the move from organizational stranger to integrated member, is aided by the onboarding process. Employees learn the goals, duties, and legal implications of their roles within the organization's larger structure during onboarding (Meyer, 2016). Employees who attend the orientation process carefully reach full productivity, two months earlier than those employees who do not attend the orientation process carefully according to Ganzel (1998).

According to Fyock (2009), new employee engagement is determined by how they are managed at the job during the first 30-90 days of employment. Effective onboarding does not end on the first day of work for a new employee. The next 90 days will see some of the most crucial aspects of the onboarding process. Despite the employer's best efforts, major problems may arise after the first 90 days have passed. An employee may be unsatisfied with his or her new position or hate the new city; he or she may find it difficult to fit into the new organization (Krasman, 2015). Onboarding new hires at a company should

be a planned process that lasts at least a year and for guaranteeing good retention (Maure, 2019).

The new employees need to adjust to the organization in six key areas: performance proficiency, people, politics, language, organizational values, and vision, history, and language (Dai & Meuse, 2007). According to Sapling (a human resources website that specializes in onboarding new employees), the greatest staff onboarding practices are found at Netflix, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google (Dewar, 2022). One of the Sapling's slogans is, "Sapling supports any employee with a pleasant onboarding experience." Furthermore, one of the main goals of this website is to familiarize new hires with the company, its culture, and team before they start their actual jobs (Sapling, 2020).

Netflix establishes a connection with newcomers before the first day of the onboarding programme, allowing employees to enter the stage of understanding what to do without instruction as soon as possible. "A courageous adventure" is the name of this stage. The distinguishing feature of the Netflix programme is its early start, which indicates that Netflix is attempting to form relationships with its new staff. Netflix's onboarding method begins before the new employee ever arrives. Similar to Netflix, new Googlers go through a two-week in-person training session, as well as an orientation programme that covers "organizational structure, key technologies, and programming techniques". Furthermore, every Googler is paired with a mentor who is a company success story and has completed a course on typical new employee requirements according to (Mulholland, 2020).

## **Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework is based on the key dimensions of onboarding developed by Tayla Bauer (2010) comprising of 4Cs: (i) compliance, (ii) clarification, (iii) culture, and (iv) connection (4Cs).

### **Compliance**

The first level of onboarding is compliance which involves acquainting the new employees on the essential rules and regulations, legal and policy-related matters and important provisions of relevant laws that apply to working in a new organisation. For instance, LinkedIn provides helpful documents about what a new hire can expect on the first day. Similarly, Disney has created textbooks to enhance the materials of its orientation workshops (Collins & Porras, 2005). Providing such information details ahead of time will not only help in alleviating first-day anxieties among new hires but will also facilitate in creating an environment of belongingness in the organization (Dowling, 2016).

### **Clarification**

It is important that employees are well-informed about their new jobs and the expectations that come with them. While many things can be clarified through written documents, it is also equally important to note that employees come with many expectations which are not always written down. Such expectations can be addressed only through proper management of psychological contract which deals with informal aspects of the employee-employer relationship. If

done correctly, the onboarding process should result in effective management of psychological contract (Kumar, 2017). A good communication system in the organization is critical for mutual exchange of expectations between the employer and employee. According to Battenham (2016), Google has developed NEHEN, or “Noogler Engineers Helping Engineering Nooglers,” a specialized email list to address the ongoing problem of newbies being hesitant to ask “dumb questions”. During the first ten months of a given employment cycle, the list is heavily utilized. New hires are given the opportunity to ask “newbie” questions on Nooglers (NEHEN). The list saw an average of about 1,000 posts per month in the first ten months (Chen, 2020).

### Culture

The third stage of the onboarding process entails informing employees about formal and informal organizational rules, norms, traditions and values which form the foundation of the organization’s culture. When newcomers are “processed” to embrace the identity of an organization, they are required to hide their own identities, at least while at work. However, repressing one’s personality and distinct perspectives may not be the best for the organization or the individual employee in the long run, because denying one’s identity is distressing and psychologically draining (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013). New employee must comprehend the organization’s core values and culture. As a result, new hires are better able to relate to the organization’s larger goals and feel more at home inside the larger business. In addition, organization culture explains “unspoken habits of thought and action,” social standards, and

unambiguous performance expectations (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

### Connection

Connection is associated with the creation of sense of belongingness with the organization. Several connection strategies are used in the onboarding processes. Some of the most important components of connection are buddies and mentors (Baur, 2013). Mentoring is a process in which a senior employee (the mentor) provides professional and psychosocial support to a junior employee (Gill, Chuang, & Thomas, 2018). Many companies have a structured or informal mentoring or buddy system in place to help new employees get started. Buddies might be chosen by department managers or HR professionals, or they can be volunteers (Fyock, 2009).

## **Methodology**

### **Methods**

This study is exploratory research. It is based on the conceptual framework of onboarding developed by Tayla Bauer (2010) and adopted a quantitative research method.

#### *Population and Sampling*

The population for this study included two batches of new employees who were appointed in the civil service agencies of Bhutan with effect from January 1, 2021, and 2022. It included 292 technical graduates rendering services in the field of medical, engineering, information technology, forestry, agriculture and other related areas besides other 90 graduates

who joined various government agencies upon completion of their course in post graduate diploma in public administration (PGDPA), 63 graduates who completed their post graduate diploma in financial management, and 20 graduates who completed their post graduate diploma in national law (PGDNL) at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM). A sample size of 209 respondents was determined by using Taro Yamane formula although data was collected from 210 respondents.

#### *Data Collection*

A semi-structured questionnaire was created based on a thorough literature study on the onboarding to collect primary data from the respondents. A five-point Likert scale was utilized to investigate the onboarding practices of new civil servants working in different agencies. The questionnaire contained demographic profile of the respondents along with questions on overall onboarding practices and 4Cs of onboarding i.e., connection, compliance, culture, and clarifications. The questionnaire was pilot tested before sending it out all to the respondents. It was circulated to the respondents via email and electronic messages and followed up subsequently.

#### *Data Analysis*

SPSS 22 and a Microsoft excel sheet were used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics like the mean were utilized to understand the onboarding experiences of the new civil servants.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Demographic Profile**

Table 1 depicts the demographic profile of the respondents. More males (67.9%) participated in the research than females (44.20%). A total of 210 respondents took part in the survey of this study.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Information of the Respondents*

Variables	Category	n=210 (%)
Gender	Males	67.90
	Females	44.20
Occupation	Technical	48.09
	Non-Technical	51.90
Year of joining the service	2021	44.28
	2022	55.71

### *General onboarding experiences*

To understand the general onboarding experiences of the civil servants, the respondents were asked to give their views on a set of areas. Responses are presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2**

*Response To General Onboarding Experiences*

	Percentage				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Onboarding programmes are planned well	30	11.40	27.10	22.90	8.60
There is clarity on the duration of employee	15.70	53.10	24	15.70	7.10

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onboarding in the agencies					
Agencies had adequate resources to implement onboarding	10.50	28.10	31.40	20.50	9.50
Respondents were able to adjust to their new jobs after induction	15	38.10	24	15.70	7.10

Respondents were asked whether their onboarding programmes was planned well or not. Majority of the respondents either disagreed (22.9% disagreed + 8.6% strongly disagreed) or decided to remain neutral (27.1%) while 41.4% of the respondents agreed (11.4% agreed and 30% strongly agreed) that their onboarding was planned well. This shows that onboarding programmes in the civil service agencies are not planned well. This finding is not consistent with the good practices of onboarding as reported by Wlosinska & Dillner (2013) which highlighted that six out of seven Swedish companies operating in the Japanese market had received planned onboarding for their employees.

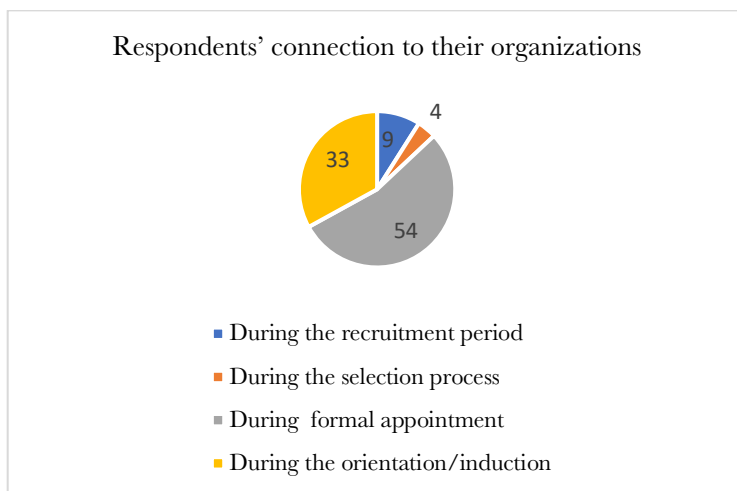
While majority (53.1%) of the respondents agreed that their agencies had clearly outlined the duration of their onboarding, however, 21.8% of the respondents expressed that there was a lack of clarity on the duration of their onboarding programmes across the agencies while 24% remained neutral. In terms of the adequacy of the resources, only 38.10% agreed that their agencies had adequate resources for their onboarding which is a matter of concern. It is also disheartening that only 53.10% of the new employees reported that they were able to adjust to

their new jobs after their onboarding programmes which means that there are significant rooms for improvement across the agencies. It is also time to find out as to why some agencies are able to do it well while others are not.

Baur (2018) asserted that the employees begin their connection with the respective agencies even before they actually join them. In the context of the civil service agencies in Bhutan, majority (54%) of the respondents reported that they got connected with their agencies only upon their formal appointments, 33% indicated that their first connection was during the orientation/induction programme, 9% during their recruitment period and 4% during the selection time as depicted in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3**

*Respondents' Connection with Their Organizations*

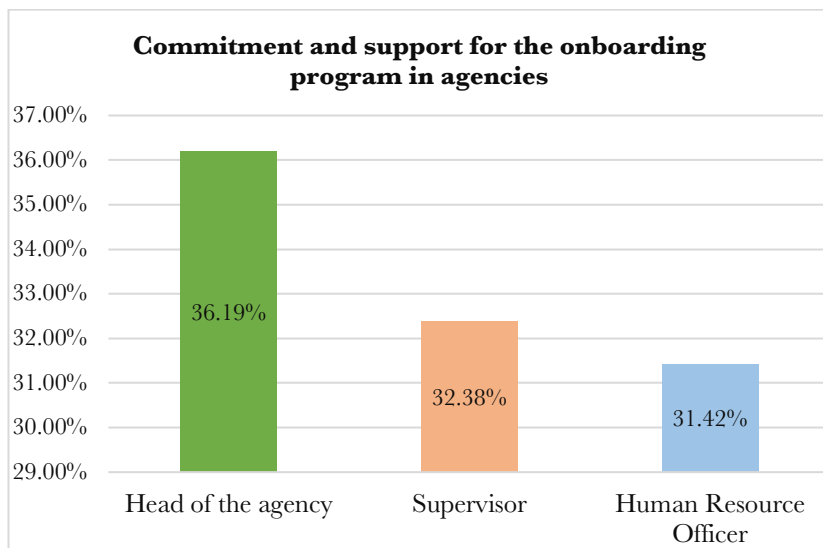


Generally, success of any onboarding programme will greatly depend upon commitment and support of the head of the

agency, immediate supervisor and human resource officer especially in the context of any civil service agency in Bhutan. Therefore, respondents were asked to assess the level of commitment of their heads of agencies, immediate supervisors and human resource officers for the onboarding programmes in their respective agencies. According to the findings from the study, it is found that heads of agencies provide slightly higher commitment and support (36.19%) to the onboarding programmes as compared to the immediate supervisors (32.38%) and human resource officers (31.42%) as shown in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4**

*Commitment and Support for the Onboarding Programmes in Agencies*



From the above findings on the general onboarding experiences, we can conclude that there is commitment of the heads of agencies, supervisors and human resource for the onboarding of new employees. However, the fact that only 53% of the respondents felt adjusted in their new jobs after their induction programme shows that there are rooms for improvement in the existing onboarding programmes in the civil service agencies. Such areas of improvement, as highlighted above, included proper planning of onboarding programmes since only 41.4% agreed that their onboarding was planned well; developing clarity on the duration of the programme; and provision of adequate of resources.

### **Dimensions of Onboarding**

Results and discussions are further presented under the 4Cs of onboarding as provided by Tayla Bauer (2010): (i) compliance, (ii) clarification, (iii) culture, and (iv) connection.

#### *Compliance*

The respondents were asked whether they were able to comply effectively with the requirements of their jobs after their onboarding programmes eg. ability to meet the office protocols, and comply with the rules and regulations of the agencies, health and safety requirements, ethical conduct, values of civil servants, etc. The findings are presented in the table below.

**Table 3**

*Compliance Requirements of the Job After the Onboarding Programme*

Year	Scale	%	% of minimum agreement and disagreement
2021	Strongly agree	27.69	67.78
	Agree	40.09	
	Neutral	15.3	4.42
	Disagree	3.88	
	Strongly disagree	0.54	
2022	Strongly agree	27.11	70.36
	Agree	43.26	
	Neutral	13.62	3.51
	Disagree	2.39	
	Strongly disagree	1.12	

According to the data, 67.78% of the 2021 batch of new employees and 70.36% of the batch of 2022 employees agreed (agreed + strongly agreed) that they had the capacity and confidence to comply with their respective job requirements. Further, most of the respondents also reported that their agencies do acquaint the new employees on their job requirements as shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**

*Responses On the Compliance Requirements of the Jobs*

My organization ensures that newly recruited employees are fully acquainted on relevant policies related to the jobs, rules and regulations, standard operating procedures, confidential requirements, office protocols, and safety requirements	Year of joining the service	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
	2021	117	3.31	1.021	0.094
	2022	93	3.55	1.006	0.104

As seen from the above, while majority of the new employees were able to meet the basic compliance requirements of their jobs after the onboarding programme, it is still a concern as to why the remaining employees were not able to do so.

#### *Clarification*

The study on Air Force company grade officers (CGOs) in the United States revealed that job satisfaction was more strongly related to clarifications of the job. In light of this, it is critical to recognize the need to provide clarity about the expectations, obligations, and tasks of a new hire (Bowers, 2019).

Respondents were asked to give their views in terms of how clear they were about their roles, organization values, mission, vision, annual plans and other related aspects of their jobs upon completion of their onboarding programmes. Findings are shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**

*Responses On Clarification Component of the Job*

Year	Scale	%	% of minimum agreement and disagreement
2021	Strongly agree	32.26	75.43
	Agree	43.16	
	Neutral	17.95	
	Disagree	5.28	6.68
	Strongly disagree	1.40	
2022	Strongly agree	34.97	76.47
	Agree	44.1	
	Neutral	14.61	
	Disagree	5.34	6.32
	Strongly disagree	0.98	

The findings show that majority of the respondents i.e., 75.43% (2021 batch of new employees) and 76.47% (2022 batch of new employees) were clear about their roles, organizational values, missions, vision, annual plans and other related aspects of the jobs. Most of the participants also reported that they had technology-based platforms in their organizations like chatbots and emails to seek clarifications on their works as shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6**

*Availability of Technology-Based Platforms In the Organizations*

My organization has technology-based platform(s) such as chatbots and email through which I can seek for information and clarification.	Year of joining the service	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
	2021	117	3.84	1.082	0.100
	2022	93	3.98	1.073	0.111

**Culture**

Respondents were asked to give their views in terms of their level of awareness on the culture, traditions, and norms of their agencies. According to the findings as displayed in Table 7, 70.25% of those employees appointed in 2022 and 67.95% of those appointed in 2021 agreed and strongly agreed that they were aware of the culture, traditions, and norms of their agencies. This shows that majority of the respondents are oriented well with the cultural aspects of their organizations.

**Table 7**

*Culture Component of the Onboarding*

Year	Scale	%	% of minimum agreement and disagreement
2021	Strongly agree	30.91	67.95
	Agree	37.04	
	Neutral	19.37	
	Disagree	9.04	11.84
	Strongly disagree	2.80	
2022	Strongly agree	27.65	70.25
	Agree	45.09	
	Neutral	19.89	
	Disagree	7.35	9.86
	Strongly disagree	2.51	

*Connection*

According to numerous theories such as those advanced by Watkins (2013), Bauer (2010), and Stein & Christiansen (2010), social integration is one of the key components of an effective onboarding programme. According to Boxall & Purcell (2016), a company's human capital advantage comes from both talented individuals and social capital advantage which happens when people successfully integrate their abilities towards cooperative efforts. The table below shows the views of the respondents regarding the connection component of the onboarding.

**Table 8**

*Response On Connection Component of Onboarding*

Year	Scale	%	% of minimum agreement and disagreement
2021	Strongly agree	30.91	66.23
	Agree	35.33	
	Neutral	20.8	
	Disagree	8.46	13.05
	Strongly disagree	4.59	
2022	Strongly agree	30.68	67.20
	Agree	39.08	
	Neutral	20.61	
	Disagree	8.42	12.18
	Strongly disagree	3.76	

As seen from the table above, majority of the respondents among 2021 and 2022 batches of new employees agreed that they were connected well to their agencies after the onboarding programmes. However, there is still room for improvement given the fact that more than 30% of the respondents (both the new employees of 2021 and 2022) did not agree that they are connected well to their agencies or remained neutral. This could be perhaps due to inadequacy of the mentorship in the agencies as expressed by some respondents. Effective onboarding programme make use of a varieties of connecting techniques. Mentoring is one of the most essential components of connection. The mentoring concept was deemed valuable based on the feedback of all survey participants. Ideally, an identified and experienced colleague who can mentor throughout the initial period of onboarding is considered important according to the research carried out by Karhunen (2017). In the context of the civil service agencies in Bhutan,

61.40% of the new civil servants reported that they were assigned with official mentors while only 41.5% of the respondents agreed that their mentors had relevant expertise and experience. In addition, only 35.9% agreed that their mentors had a specific plan of actions towards transitioning them into their respective organizations.

## **Conclusion**

While majority of the new employees (53.10%) expressed that they were able to adjust to their jobs after the onboarding process, there are others who are indirectly hinting that their onboarding programmes were not effective. The fact that only 41.4% of the new employees indicated that their onboarding was planned well cautions us on the need to improve it further. Lack of proper planning can lead to ad hoc programmes, shortage of resources and facilities to the new employees which are still observed in some of the civil service organizations. However, many of the problems associated with lack of planning as prevalent in the past are expected to be addressed now through the enforcement of new provisions of the BCSR (2023) which provides better guidelines on the onboarding process.

Among the four dimensions of the onboarding as measured in terms of the 4CS, the connection component is ranked lower than others which calls for more attention in terms of fostering better fraternity bonds and the sense of belongingness with the new employees. One of the ways to improve this process could be through ensuring proper mentorship for all the new employees which is not comprehensively implemented across the civil service agencies. On the whole, a good onboarding programme can prove effective instrument to attract and retain

employees by upholding and enhancing employee value propositions which has become critical at this age of talent hunting and retention.

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