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**INTEGRATING AN EMPLOYEE RECRUITED TO TALLINN
DEVELOPMENT CENTER WITH A REMOTE TEAM IN AN
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION**

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis/paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading. The document length is 11789 words from the introduction to the end of the conclusion.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to provide the Tallinn development center of an international organization with recommendations that can be used to improve the onboarding process of new employees in remote teams. The research problem of this thesis is the difficulty of onboarding newly hired employees to remote teams. When new employees are hired in Tallinn development center, they often need to be integrated with remote teams that are located in another location. In this thesis a qualitative study is conducted with eight employees working in remote teams. The obtained data is analyzed by thematic and content analysis methods. Results show that distance is greatly impacting social connectedness and has some impact on everyday work. To maintain and improve social connectedness, findings suggest to meet in person, have casual conversation meetings, have fun purposed meetings, have team events and have cameras enabled during online calls. Results also demonstrate that key factors for new employee successful onboarding to remote team are regular check-ins and support providing, having a mentor, supporting newcomer social integration, providing clarity about organizational structure, having a structured onboarding program and being prepared for the newcomer joining the organization. Results also reveal that participants have information required for everyday work available partially, there is reliance on others for information required in everyday work and shortage is felt in legacy projects documentation. Based on the results from this study, recommendations are provided to the organization for new employees onboarding to remote teams.

Keywords: remote teams onboarding, remote onboarding, remote teams, employee onboarding, onboarding.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 in both Finland and in the Netherlands from total employment there was 14.1% employees who worked from home most of the time (Eurostat, table LFSA_EHOMP). In 2020 in Finland there was 25% of total employment working from homes, Luxembourg 23.1% and Ireland 21.5% (Eurostat, table LFSA_EHOMP).

Assumptions arise that after the 2020 pandemic which required organizations to restructure their everyday workflows, the number of remote employees and frequency of remote work may begin to grow even further, bringing also along different onboarding challenges and demands ahead. This presents relevancy to extend investigative studies into the remote onboarding field to understand what works and what does not. All this, in order to ensure effective onboarding in organizations during digital times, help support the organizations grow and remain competitive in the market.

Remote onboarding is eminently important in the Tallinn development center of an international organization. Tallinn development center with 45 employees is one of the smaller remote offices of the organization. There are many employees in the Tallinn development center who work in remote teams on a daily basis. Based on the manager of the Tallinn development center, one of the most pressing challenges of the Tallinn development center is the successful onboarding of new employees to remote teams, so that new employees would also feel they are equally involved team members in these teams.

It is of great importance that the newly recruited employees of the Tallinn development center would be onboarded to remote teams successfully as this allows knowledge and skill sharing to take place, while also enabling employees to feel contributing and equal parts of their teams.

Ultimately, this helps the organization to maintain and potentially improve efficiency, increase performance and keep the organization continuously competitive in the market.

Considering the ambitious expansion plans of the Tallinn development center and currently many new job vacancies, the topic is especially relevant for the Tallinn development center. Much of the future new recruits need to be onboarded to remote teams.

The research problem of this thesis is the difficulty of onboarding newly hired employees to remote teams. When new employees are hired in Tallinn development center, they often need to be integrated with remote teams that are located in another location. The distance between the team members may present unique challenges to their daily work. This may require a unique angle in the organization onboarding strategy when onboarding new employees to remote teams.

The authors motivation for this topic stems from the urgency of the problem and the desire to provide the organization with new useful information which could be beneficial and applicable when onboarding new employees to remote teams.

The aim of this thesis is to provide the Tallinn development center of an international organization with recommendations that can be used to improve the onboarding process of new employees in remote teams. The thesis examines which factors are important when onboarding new employees to remote teams and help ensure successful onboarding.

To achieve the aim of this thesis, the author sets the following research questions:

1. How does distance affect everyday work and social connectedness according to the recently employed remote team members ?
2. How to maintain and improve social connectedness in remote teams?
3. What do the recently employed remote team members regard as strengths and weaknesses of the company's current onboarding process to remote teams?
4. What do the recently employed remote team members consider to be important factors in onboarding programs that help ensure effective onboarding to remote teams?

5. How do the recently employed remote team members assess the availability of information that is required for their everyday work?

In order to provide answers to these research questions a qualitative research study will be conducted. In the course of the study, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with team members working in remote teams that were recruited to the Tallinn Development Center in the last 15 months. The sample of the qualitative study will consist of eight recently hired employees.

The main body of the thesis will consist of three chapters.

In the first chapter, literature review, the author will first review the onboarding related literature and the practices recommended to onboard new employees. Secondly, it will continue literature review about remote teams and their challenges when compared to co-located teams. Finally, it reviews the literature about onboarding to remote teams.

In the second chapter, methodology, the author will explain which research methods were used in this study and explain why selected approach was chosen. Descriptive overview will be provided of the research design, study sample and selection criteria. Also, in this section brief overview is given of the organization and its relation with the Tallinn development center.

In the third chapter, results and discussion, the author will provide the study results and will answer the research questions. Based on the study outcomes recommendations will be provided that the organization can consider when onboarding newly employed to remote teams to maximise onboarding success.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Onboarding relevancy and onboarding models

Many people change their jobs every year and need to transition to new work positions in new companies. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) longitudinal study, people between ages 18 to 52 held on average 12.4 jobs. Each job change requires the employee to adjust to their new role in the new employing company. This adjustment process is called onboarding or also known as organizational socialization. Van Maanen (1978) refers to organizational socialization as a manner, how experiences of newcomers are structured for them by other people working in the organization. According to Bauer (2010) definition “Onboarding is the process of helping new hires adjust to social and performance aspects of their new jobs quickly and smoothly.”. Van Maanen (1978) also exhibits for this process a more mechanical term “people processing”.

During the first six months of employment 90% of employees have decided whether they continue to work at their current company (Aberdeen Group Inc 2006). It is even more alarming that more than 20% of newly employed decide this in the first week and around 35% decide this during the first month of employment (*Ibid.*). Bauer (2010) claims that good onboarding helps to increase in newly recruited job satisfaction and performance, while also protecting companies against unwanted employee turnover. Bauer (*Ibid.*) further adds that the leaving of a potentially good employee is the ultimate failure of onboarding.

In order to create onboarding programs for organizations, Bauer (2010) brings out as building blocks compliance (policies and applying legal framework), clarification (employee role clarity and expectations), culture (providing organizational norms) and connection (relationships and

information networks), which Bauer refers to as the four C's. Depending on the amount organizations utilise and take advantage of these blocks, determines the companies onboarding strategy in three levels: passive onboarding, high potential onboarding and proactive onboarding (Bauer 2010).

Onboarding process itself is a considerably long and continuous progression. Louis (1980) brings out that newcomer adjustment to an organization and its role happens in the first 6 to 10 months. Bauer (2010) claims onboarding duration from the pre-hire stage to a successfully onboarded employee stage to be up to 12 months.

1.1.1. Louis model and information seeking

To better understand onboarding it is important to understand how new employees in new companies feel. In the onboarding literature a cognitive approach to describe the onboarding process was proposed by Louis (1980). Louis (*Ibid.*) states that when newcomers join new organizations their experience is filled with disorientation and foreignness. Louis claims that the understanding of these entry experiences of newcomers, enables to create organizational structures that help make newcomer transitions easier (*Ibid.*). Louis explains further that a newcomer usually experiences upon entering an organization the following aspects of the whole organization entry experience (*Ibid.*):

- Change - is the level of change that newcomer goes through when comparing with his previous situation. The more difference there exists the more coping requirements it presents.
- Contrast - is the comparison by which newcomers compare the old and the new setting as their previous role and current role and by which they also give definition to the new setting.
- Surprise - surprises are experienced when the anticipated is not met with the expected.

The cumulative onboarding experience of these three aspects (change, contrast, surprise) is accompanied or followed by a sense making stage. Sense making stage consists of variety of inputs which help to translate the experiences the newcomer goes through. Translation of these experiences enables the newcomer to reach conclusions on how to act in similar future situations and also to update the internally existing views and approaches. Louis suggests that this sense making stage is strongly impacted by the interpretations and information received through

supervisors and colleagues. Sense making stage without the availability of appropriate information may not ensure successful onboarding. (Louis 1980)

Louis proposed model seems to be also aligned with the often mentioned Uncertainty Reduction Theory in the socialization context. Based on the uncertainty reduction theory, in human interactions people want to reduce uncertainty. To reduce uncertainty they need to gain information which allows to make the interactions and environments more predictable.

While the information providing can be largely supported by the organization during employee onboarding, it must be highlighted that it is equally important that newcomers would seek out information themselves. Information seeking and providing is a two-way process (Bauer 2010).

In a 1993 study researchers studied the effects of information-seeking on role clarity, task mastery, organization culture and social integration. In order to do this, they created three stage questionnaire each stage separated by a time interval. They included 240 participants and received 135 response that completed all three stages. They found that the information seeking had an overall effect on the onboarding process, but more specifically information seeking was related to task mastery, role clarify and also social integration. This was one of the earliest studies that found those relations and encouraged future research on information seeking. (Morrison 1993)

Louis (1980) model provides a glimpse into the newly recruited employee experience and also defines its stages from the cognitive perspective. The model simultaneously highlights the importance of the availability of adequate information and also the potential sources that intentionally or inevitably provide this information, thus having an effect on the employee onboarding.

1.1.2. Van Maanen model

Van Maanen (1978) proposed model is one of the most referenced onboarding models in the onboarding literature. In contrast to Louis (1980) cognitive based approach, Van Maanen (1978) model takes a more tactics focused approach. Even almost 20 years later researchers referred

back to Van Maanen proposed model as the closest testable model in terms of processes and outcomes in the literature about onboarding (Saks, Ashforth 1997).

Van Maanen (1978) brings out seven dimensions, or strategies, of which the onboarding program can consist. Choice in the organization of how each strategy is applied, determines what type of experiences the employee will have and which in turn determines the outcome of the onboarding. These seven dimensions, or strategies, according to Van Maanen are (*Ibid.*):

- Formal / Informal - refers to whether the onboarding process is taken out of the daily ongoing work (formal) or newcomer learns mainly through the social and task related networks surrounding the position (informal).
- Individual / Collective - refers to whether onboarding is carried out with the individual exclusively (individual) or together with other employees (collective) such as a group training
- Sequential / Non-Sequential - refers whether the onboarding contains stages which must be transitioned through in a specific order (sequential) or not fixed order of stages is not required (non-sequential).
- Fixed / Variable - refers whether the onboarding process provides a timeframe when a certain step is to be completed (fixed) or whether such a requirement is not required (variable)
- Tournament / Contest - refers whether in the onboarding process newcomers are classified based on their differences into specific groups (tournament) or groups are not formed and only individual performance is tracked (contest).
- Serial / Disjunctive - refers whether in the onboarding process existing employees help train the newcomer skills (serial) or whether the newcomer has to figure things out on his own (disjunctive)
- Investiture / Divestiture - refers whether during the onboarding process newcomer characteristics will be utilised (investiture) or whether specific new characteristics first need to be formed or confirmed (divestiture)

Van Maanen further illustrates that if for example, the organization desire is to have very similar employees in actions and thoughts, then a mixture of formal, serial, and divestiture strategy elements may be the best. On the other hand, if difference is preferred, then informal, disjunctive

and investiture strategy combination would make sense to apply. According to Van Maanen by applying these strategies organizations have a large portion of control in shaping the employee behaviour required in the organization. (Van Maanen 1978)

From the Van Maanen model “Tournament / Contest” strategy was later removed and the remaining six strategies remained (Van Maanen, Schein 1978).

1.1.3. Jones model

A well known organizational theory and behaviour expert, Gareth R. Jones, further built on the onboarding strategies model proposed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979 referenced in Jones 1986). Jones (1986) divided the Van Maanen and Schein (1979 referenced in Jones 1986) six proposed strategies into two main categories (Jones 1986):

- Institutionalised - collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial and investiture.
- Individual - informal, random, variable, disjunctive and divestiture.

Jones (1986) also assigned the six strategies to three levels (context, content, social aspects) based on which aspect of the onboarding the strategies targeted (see Figure 1).

	INSTITUTIONALISED	INDIVIDUAL
CONTEXT	Collective Formal	Individual Informal
CONTENT	Sequential Fixed	Random Variable
SOCIAL ASPECTS	Serial Investiture	Disjunctive Divestiture

Figure 1. Jones further development of Van Maanen and Schein (1979) model
Source: Jones (1986, 263)

The Jones (1986) classification of the onboarding strategies became a widely popular and used approach in the organization socialization literature. There are many studies in the organizational

socialization field that utilised the Jones (1986) model for further research and evaluation of different onboarding strategies (Saks, Ashforth 1997).

1.1.4. Verification of the onboarding strategies

When examining onboarding strategies and their outcomes related literature it is important to introduce to the reader that key indicators used to evaluate strategies include self-efficacy, role clarity and social acceptance.

Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo and Tucker describe self-efficacy, role clarity and social acceptance as follows (2007):

- Self-efficacy is the learning of job responsibilities and obtaining the confidence to successfully perform in the role.
- Role clarity is the understanding of job tasks with the ability to fulfil them, set task priorities and successful management of time for task fulfilment.
- Social-acceptance is to become accepted by colleagues

Different onboarding strategies were tested and indeed were seen capable of producing different onboarding results. Jones (1986) in his paper conducted a longitudinal research with graduated MBA students who had assumed job positions. Participants had to complete two questionnaires. First questionnaire was filled when they had accepted the roles but did not yet start working in the organizations and the second one had to be filled five months later when they had been already working in the organization. The results confirmed that different onboarding strategies produce different onboarding outcomes which organizations could consciously apply. The results showed amongst participants higher job satisfaction and commitment with the utilisation of institutionalized onboarding strategies. (*Ibid.*)

In a 2006 study one of the aspect that researches investigated was the onboarding strategies and newcomer proactive relationship. For this they examined 140 undergraduate students who had to complete a four month work term. They observed that the institutionalized strategies, that are more formalized and structured, bring out the proactive behaviour in newcomers. Individualized onboarding strategies were seen as less socializing, newcomers were less likely to build

relationships and less likely to seek information and feedback. They also found that a successful onboarding consists of the three following components: individual differences, new employees proactivity and onboarding strategies. (Gruman et al. 2006)

Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo and Tucker (2007) conducted a meta analysis study to investigate how institutionalized socialization tactics (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial and investiture) and information seeking, impact newcomers adjustment indicators (role clarity, self-efficacy, social acceptance). Then in turn, they investigated what effect newcomer adjustment indicators (role clarity, self-efficacy, social acceptance) have on newcomers outcomes consisting of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, intention to remain and turnover . In their study they found that (Bauer et al. 2007):

- Role clarity was found to be related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, intentions to remain.
- Self efficacy was related to job performance, intentions to remain and turnover.
- Social acceptance was related with all five outcomes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, intention to remain and turnover).

The further research and studies into the onboarding strategies helped to confirm that different strategies can have different onboarding outcomes. The possibility to orchestrate onboarding experiences by understanding the different socialization tactics and its impact on key indicators, provides organizations additional control over how to shape the employee onboarding processes and help assure the preferred outcomes.

1.1.5. Bauer research-based model

One of the most frequently referenced and one of the more recent models is the Bauer (2010) research-based onboarding model. According to Bauer (*Ibid.*) research-based model, once the employee has been selected and hired he goes through multiple adjustments. These adjustments according to Bauer are self efficacy, role clarity, social integration and knowledge of company culture. Successful onboarding is when an employee goes through these adjustments successfully. To support these employee adjustments companies human resource teams can establish several functions which need to work together seamlessly. According to Bauer these

functions are: recruiting process, orientation forums, support tools/processes, feedback tools, training, coaching and support (see Figure 2).

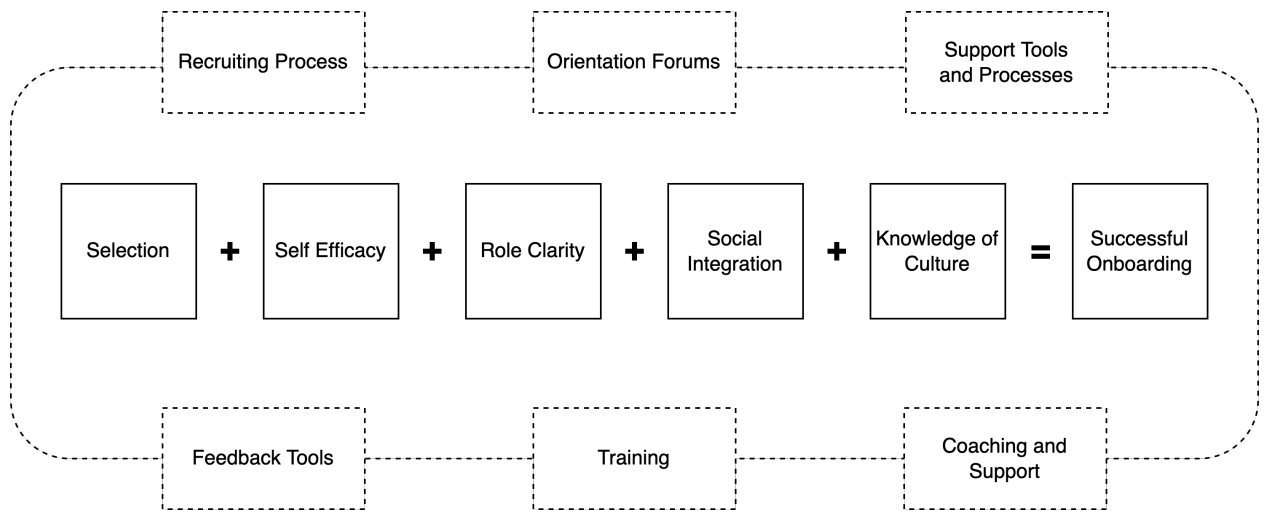


Figure 2. Bauer research based model of onboarding
Source: Bauer (2010, 8)

These supporting functions according to Bauer cover more specifically (2010):

- Recruiting process - providing realistic job previews, involving stakeholders
- Orientation forums - new employee orientation guide
- Support tools and processes - written onboarding plan, check-ins with key stakeholders, integration meetings
- Feedback tools - 360 degree feedback, performance appraisals, and newcomers self-initiated feedback seeking
- Training - to boost confidence, clarity and teach new skills, these can be hard skills, soft skills, onboarding skills
- Coaching and support - hiring manager, HR generalist, mentor

As evident from the Bauer (2010) presented model, the onboarding is a complex process consisting of several new employee adjustments (key indicators) and a wide array of functions that can support these adjustments. The right balance and mixture of these functions can promote the successful onboarding of a new employee.

1.2. Onboarding best practices

While there are various ways how to approach onboarding and how to configure the key functional parts in it, and although the final implementation specifics eventually can be determined by the organization, there exists considerable amount of research that is investigating the best practices of onboarding. For organizations these can serve as inspiration or as a starting point when designing onboarding programs.

For best onboarding practices Bauer recommends (2010):

- Establish the basics before the recruits first day at work
- First day at work should be made special for the new recruit
- Take advantage of formal orientation programs
- Ensure onboarding is inclusive
- Check that onboarding program is implemented systematically
- Monitoring of the program in time
- Usage of technology to support the process
- Utilisation of milestones occurring every 30, 60, 90 and 120 days for employee progress assessment
- Include relevant stakeholders to onboarding program plannings
- Incorporate to the program key stakeholder meetings
- Ensure full transparency with employees regarding the objectives, timelines, roles and responsibilities.

Buchan, MacDonell and Yang conducted a study in 2019 where they investigated how onboarding is handled in agile software development teams. They included to their study developers from eight small-medium enterprises (SME's). Their study results brought out the following highlights (Buchan et al. 2019):

- Mentoring and Peer support was seen as highly contributing factor for all onboarding objectives.

- Daily stand-ups (daily reviewing meeting with colleagues of team work progress) were seen as valuable to enable a place and time where newcomers could ask questions and also observe and learn how the team thinks and how its progressing.
- Several interviewees highlighted that establishing a solid product overview to understand the product value to the end user provided them with more meaning and context to their daily work.
- Organization chart which helps understand locations of people, name, role and expertise was seen as invaluable during beginning stages of onboarding.
- One interviewee expressed that the process in which onboarding expectations were explained and then the progress periodically reviewed, helped reduce uncertainty and speculation over the onboarding expectations.

Research has found that the onboarding practices can affect the onboarding outcome, but also that the more onboarding practices the organization applies may eventually be better for the overall onboarding. In a 2015 study the authors wanted to examine how different practices of onboarding were experienced by the new employees. In their study they included 10 organizations from which they gathered responses from 373 newly recruited employees. The study authors found that the more onboarding practices the newcomers experienced and took part in, the greater was also their level of socialization. (Klein et al. 2015)

While organizations may provide enough supporting materials and onboarding activities, this alone may not be enough. Klein, Polin, Leigh Sutton (2015) found that organizations tend to believe newcomers experience more onboarding activities which have been designed by the organization, than it was actually revealed from the results. Also newcomers participation in onboarding activities should not be left optional as newcomers experienced onboarding practices to be more helpful when their participation in them was required and not only encouraged (*Ibid.*). This is especially important as onboarding as a process, cannot be left to be optional which may then result in a greater employee turnover due to employees being eventually not onboarded successfully.

Klein, Polin, Leigh Sutton (2015) also highlight timing of the onboarding practices to be an important and complex subject. Sooner may not always be better than later, instead, it should rather be carefully detected when onboarding practices are actually needed by the newly recruited employee and then provided by the organization (*Ibid.*).

Another interesting onboarding practice that can be utilised when designing onboarding programs is the adoption of gaming aspect. In a 2012 case study involving a software and technology company providing employee engagement and learning online platform, worked together with a Fortune 100 company to help onboard the new hires. They applied gaming aspect in two recruitment stages - selection and new recruit onboarding. New recruits who had to be onboarded were invited to play an online game which consisted of a map with various points on it which each presented a challenge or information about the company. The game also had a scoring system which enabled players to compete with other newly recruits. 243 new hires were invited to play the game, 92% registered to play and 75% completed all the game rounds. When asked what participants liked the most in the post-joining onboarding 41% said they liked the game part. The study authors claim that gaming aspect can help to create engagement in new employees onboarding. In addition to the gaming aspect an interesting facet that was brought out in the study was that in the game program used in the new employee selection stage, the participants had to communicate with each other by exchanging messages and viewing each other profile. (Depura, Garg 2012)

1.3. Remote work aspects

Remote work has been increasingly becoming more popular in the recent years. The number of people who conduct their daily work tasks by working sometimes remotely has been growing in European Union since 2011, growing from 6.1% to a 9% at 2019 demonstrating an upwards trend (Eurostat, table LFSA_EHOMP). Similarly, although at a slower pace, since 2016 has grown the number of remote workers who work mostly from home (Eurostat, table LFSA_EHOMP).

Similar growth figures have been observed by other sources. In a 2017 study researchers wanted to investigate whether the assumption that increasingly more work is performed remotely and whether this is beneficial both for the employer and employee. To determine this they used data from United Kingdom Labour Force Survey series and from the Skills and Employment Survey series. They found that the amount of people who mainly work remotely had increased from 7.0 percent to 12.3 percent between 1981 to 2015. (Felstead et al. 2017)

1.3.1. Remote work challenges

While the remote work has its benefits, it also presents unique challenges. Felstead and Henseke found in their 2017 study that remote employees had a more positive attitude for their employer and were more satisfied with their own work. At the same time it was also observed that compared with conventional sited employees the remote employees tend to exceed their normal office working hours and finding it hard to unwind at the end of their working day. (Felstead et al. 2017)

One aspect of the remote work which cannot be neglected is the physical distance which also requires a different means of communication and presents its challenges. In regular face to face conversations there are many communication cues, such as tone of voice, voice volume, inflection, eye movement, hand gestures and facial expression to name a few. These cues help to direct the conversation. (Warkentin, Beranek 1999).

In a 2011 study, Hemphill and Begel proposed that distance and invisibility are the main contributing factors which prevent remote teams from properly functioning and successfully adopting the team processes. They conducted 95 interviews and spent 15 hours observing the employees of a software development company that operates in the United States and Canada. In their study they found that the lack of visibility and reduced amount of informal discussions greatly influenced the remote team performance and newcomers adoption to teams. For team members it was hard to know what other team members exact experiences were like, because of the lack of informal relationships where these could be experienced and translated directly. Newcomers in remote teams who were distant from the main campus and unable to see the normal pace of work experienced anxiety about lagging behind in their everyday work, while in

actuality their performance was on the same level with other newcomers. Newcomers were not able to learn what constitutes as normal and excellent work. Computer Mediated Communication tools helped to make the team experiences more humanized. (Hemphill, Begel 2011)

Warkentin and Beranek (1999) investigated whether training in virtual team communications can improve virtual team interactions. In their study they received mixed findings such as, some participants said the asynchronous nature of work introduced delays in their communications and viewed it as a negative aspect in communications, while other participants found that the asynchronous nature of communications allowed them to think their responses through which was seen as quality enhancement and allowed to reach conclusions faster. In their study they found that virtual team communications training can improve team interactions. (*Ibid.*)

1.3.2. Social connectedness

Feeling socially connected to remote team members may play a crucially important part in the efficiency of remote teams. Spain (2020) says that feeling connected to co-employees is one the main ingredients in job satisfaction. In order to achieve this she encourages employees to find the time weekly or monthly to speak with their colleagues to enable learning about their hobbies and interests. According to Spain, personal connections also lead to stronger teams, as employees that are mutually invested in each other are also willing to put in more effort which in turn leads to more productive teams overall. (*Ibid.*)

Social connectedness aspect may be the biggest concern that is felt in remote teams, this was especially demonstrated in teams transitioning from co-located work to remote work. In a 2021 study, carried out in a large and well known United States software company, the authors investigated how during the pandemic transition from stationary office work to working from over a work-from-home model has impacted the team members performance. Out of two surveys in the study, the Team Survey gathering 608 responses was created to observe the social connectedness and communication quality aspect. The results indicated that more than half felt the missing of social interactions, experienced decrease in social connectedness, reduced communication ease and the inability to properly brainstorm with other team members. As possible solutions the authors brought out that managers should encourage social interactions by

taking time at the start of meetings for small talk, instead of virtual lunches to also participate in creative online events involving crafts. They also encourage for managers to hold weekly one-on-one meetings and during meetings to ensure that all voices are heard for contribution. (Miller 2021)

It is interesting to point out that previous work experience may offer to be beneficial for teams who are communicating over computer mediated communication mediums. Alge, Klein and Wiethoff (2003) found that team members who had previous collaborative work experience did not experience in computer mediated communications differences in openness, trust and information sharing compared with face-to-face communication style teams. (*Ibid.*)

Finally, the characteristics of remote work can affect people differently, especially when the remote work is introduced following a co-located work setup. This was demonstrated in a 2021 study where the authors conducted a research to evaluate how the work from home remote model has affected the software developers of a large scale multi-national United States software company with employees from United States. For this they conducted two surveys, one at the very start of the implementation of work-from-home model and the other one month later. There was in total 3636 responses on which they performed qualitative and quantitative analysis. The authors themselves described the results as dichotomous, meaning what seemed as a benefit for ones, was a challenge for the others. Ability to focus was one such example, which was better for ones in home environment, but less for others due to proximity of family members. Study results indicated that for the majority productivity had remained the same or even improved, while others reported decreased productivity. As possible improvements for the work-from-home setup the respondents brought out hardware, internet connectivity, home office budget, ergonomic furniture, encouragement to create documentation and to highlight end work at the end of work hours to ensure healthy work-life balance. (Ford et al. 2021)

1.4. Onboarding to remote teams

With the increasing digitalisation of the world and remote work becoming a more popular and frequent form of work, companies adopting this style of work also need to be prepared to

onboard employees to remote teams instead of co-located teams. There does not exist many studies about onboarding new employees to remote teams. Rodeghero, Zimmermann, Houck and Ford (2021) whose study was about onboarding software developers in remote teams, admitted that while there is sufficient amount of information available for general onboarding or organizational socialization, there is a lack of research on how to onboard remote employees.

Britto, Cruzes, Smite and Sablis (2018) investigated remote teams onboarding specifically in software development companies due to a lack of it in the existing literature at that time. Their intent was to investigate which tools, practices and techniques companies use to onboard software developers in globally distributed teams, for this they conducted a multi-case study involving 3 companies. While there was differences in the onboarding in three of the companies, based on their findings they suggested some of the best practices to follow (Britto et al. 2018):

- Provide overview of the tools, technologies and expectations during the recruitment phase to ensure realistic job preview
- Clarity and understanding in onboarding objectives, timelines, roles and responsibilities, which can also be tracked by the mentors or onboarding buddies
- Ensure transparency of project setup and key roles across different locations to help maximise understanding
- Organise travelling to bring people together for face-to-face meetings to form relationships and ensure easier future communications over distances
- Customise the trainings based on newcomers needs

A 2021 study examined a remote onboarding process at Microsoft. In the study the software engineers were previously mainly hired to physical offices, however due to the pandemic a remote onboarding procedure had to be introduced which would enable the continuation of hiring new software engineers who then started working in remote teams. 267 new hires were surveyed in the study. Survey results demonstrated that one of the main challenges being the lack of communication, which was enhanced by not turned on cameras during the meeting. Also lack of documentation, greater barrier and effort to ask for help, and struggles with technical related matters were reported. To help new hires adjust to teams the managers held daily one-on-one conversations, introduced the newly hired immediately to the team on their first day, team

members constantly reached out to confirm if help is needed, social events were held virtually and onboarding buddies were assigned. (Rodeghero *et al.* 2021)

The importance of mentoring was demonstrated in a 2014 study where mentored employees seemed to have higher levels of productivity. Fagerholm, Guinea, München, Borenstein (2014) investigated the impact of mentoring and project characteristics and its effect on the onboarding process in open source software projects. They found that mentoring had a strong positive effect with software developers. Mentored software developers contribution was observed to be about 3 times higher when compared to the software developers group which did not have mentors. Contribution in that case was measured in software “commits” which can be compared to a finished assignment. (*Ibid.*)

While there have been conducted few studies that have tackled the onboarding aspect specifically in the remote teams context, the limited amount of studies presents a further need for additional research about the peculiarities of the onboarding process in remote teams. Bauer (2010) model is a valuable onboarding model for organizations to follow, although organizations applying remote team work need to take into account that when employees are distributed globally in remote teams, the general onboarding process may have to be adjusted. There may be challenges that present themselves more frequently and profoundly than in co-located teams, thus requiring a different mixture of the onboarding supporting functions. In the following chapters the study author will construct and carry out a study, to investigate what these challenges are and what can alleviate these according to employees themselves who work in remote teams in a Tallinn office of an international organization.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction of the Tallinn development center

The author received permission to include the Tallinn development center into the research on a condition that the organisation name nor its subsidiary company names will not be disclosed in this research study. Therefore, no reference in this study can be made to any official document that reflects the activities of the organization.

The Tallinn development center is a division of an international organization whose main products are digital and software based, offered in the gaming, finance and software industry. The organization has offices in multiple countries, such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Hungary, Greece, Croatia, United States and many more. Tallinn development center supports and belongs to the organization product development department, that is responsible for the development, quality assurance and maintenance of the company offered products. The Tallinn development center is supporting with software development the development of new products, creation of new features for existing products, improvement of the existing products, maintenance of continuous functionality and quality of existing products.

The organizations product development department setup is determined largely due to the componential nature of the products. Teams in the product development department have been formed as responsible for a specific component in the product. These teams are not location specific and teams consist of team members from multiple locations all over the world. For this reason Tallinn development center is not forming one co-located team and instead, each or smaller group of employees, belong to globally distributed remote teams that are then responsible for a specific product component. Tallinn development center employees mainly

consist of team leads, people leads, software testers, software engineers or various derivatives of the former roles.

2.2. Research purpose and sample description

The research purpose in this thesis is to provide the Tallinn development center with recommendations that can be used to improve the remote onboarding process of new employees. The thesis examines which factors are important when onboarding new employees to remote teams and help ensure successful onboarding.

To provide these recommendations to the organization the research in this thesis will answer the following research questions:

1. How does distance affect everyday work and social connectedness according to the recently employed remote team members ?
2. How to maintain and improve social connectedness in remote teams?
3. What do the recently employed remote team members regard as strengths and weaknesses of the company's current onboarding process to remote teams?
4. What do the recently employed remote team members consider to be important factors in onboarding programs that help ensure effective onboarding to remote teams?
5. How do the recently employed remote team members assess the availability of information that is required for their everyday work?

Based on the answers to the above research questions, the study author will provide recommendations to adopt in the onboarding process when onboarding employees to remote teams to ensure successful onboarding of employees to remote teams.

The sample for this study consisted of eight recently hired Tallinn development center employees. Criteria for sample required that employee was hired at least within the past fifteen months. That criteria relevancy for the sample was derived from Bauer (2010) according to whom the onboarding process lasts from 6 to 12 months. Additional sample criteria required that all recently hired employees had to work in a remote team setup. Remote team setup hereby

meant that majority of the team members that the employee worked together had to be located in another country or in multiple countries, thus meaning employee was not co-located daily with their team.

2.3. Methodological approach and data collection

In order to answer thesis research questions the author decided to collect primary data. In this study the author did not proceed to validate existing ideas, however the aim was to explore employees remote onboarding experiences and also to discover potential new ideas that are important to take into consideration when onboarding employees to remote teams. This could have been complicated to explore using a quantitative research method. Indeed, exploring can be fulfilled by both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Davies 2007, 26). Although quantitative methods are good for collecting information which can be counted, qualitative methods are more appropriate in explaining matters that are not conveniently understood by counting them (Moore 2006, 104). In this study the qualitative research interview advantage was preferred, which enables the interviewee to speak to an interviewer and thus has the ability to bring out more natural information than when purely answering to pre-planned questions (Davies 2007, 140). Interviews also allow the interviewee to set the direction and eliminate the possibility of researcher background interfering or directing the course of the interview (*Ibid.*, 140). For these reasons a qualitative research method was chosen for this study. More specifically, the author used a semi structured interview approach.

The interview guide was partially created based on some of the aspects mentioned in the onboarding and remote teams related literature, reflected also in the literature review part of this thesis. Knowing from the literature review that onboarding process takes six to 12 months (Louis 1980, Bauer 2010) one of the questions in the guide inquired about the time that the participant had worked in the company to allow understanding and confirm whether participant has completed or about to complete the onboarding process. One interview question was about the effect of distance to everyday remote team, which was based on Hemphill and Begel (2011) claiming distance being one of the main contributing factors interfering with remote teams. Three questions were included about the social connectedness aspect, which was highlighted by

Spain (2020) as being one of the key ingredients of employee job satisfaction. Social integration is also one of the key components of the Bauer (2010) employee onboarding model. One question was based on Louis (1980) study where information is considered a key factor in the onboarding process. The rest of the questions were to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the onboarding process in the company participants work at and to also explore their suggestions about the important factors companies should consider when onboarding employees to remote teams.

To collect data for the study semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants during April 2022. The average duration of each interview was 25 minutes. Shortest interview was conducted within 17 minutes and longest interview within 43 minutes. Five of the interviews were carried out at the Tallinn development center by meeting with the participant in person. Three of the interviews were carried out with a participant over a video call mediated by Skype software. All interviews were recorded on participant permission and study author confirmed that the recordings will be used only for the purpose of later ability to transcribe the interviews to be able to conduct data analysis. Transcribed interviews are available until the end of the thesis defence period from the Google Drive link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1C8lKmkgnf7sZY98vuE-L3bckf6hBwNn8?usp=sharing>.

All participants were ensured complete anonymity. The interview guide that was used during the interviews can be found as Appendix 1 of this thesis.

To analyze gathered qualitative data the interview transcripts were read and relevant parts were highlighted. Highlighted parts in transcripts were later coded. Based on the interview guide themes were created. Thematic analysis was performed and each coding from transcript was assigned a theme. Codings under a theme were then further assigned a category based on their content. Based on themes and categories a cross-case table was created and each coding was added to the cross-case table. For each coding was added a marking with interviewee number and a question number from the interview guide to enable referencing to the transcript in case needed. In the obtained cross-case table was performed content analysis to obtain information how many interviewees made a reference about a specific category. Due to the resulting size of the cross-case table it was not added to this thesis as an appendix, which would have made the

reading of the cross-case table inconvenient. Instead the cross-case table was made available for download from the Google Drive link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/10F8_uDP8Zq9AqTiKwTMB0Tvp_nzkURP-/view?usp=sharing.

During the first interview the study author understood that participants may have their own definition of onboarding. When this was noticed during the first interview, the study author briefly explained the Bauer (2010) onboarding process and duration of the process, in order to ensure same context for the word “onboarding” in the upcoming interview questions. Similar explanation was provided in the following interviews before proceeding with the onboarding specific questions.

It is important to highlight that some of the participants expressed desire to read the interview questions before conducting the interview, in order to be able to better prepare their answers. This was enabled by the study author for all participants who preferred this.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the author provides an overview of the results of a qualitative study that emerged through semi-structured interviews and thematic and content analysis. Based on results the organization is provided with recommendations the organization can consider using to improve the onboarding process of new employees to remote teams.

3.1. Results from qualitative study

The results from the study are presented in followed sub-chapters based on the themes that emerged from the analysis of the collected data.

3.1.1. Distance effect on everyday work

Distance effect to everyday work in general was not seen as problematic. Six interviewees out of eight said that distance effect to their everyday work in general is not viewed as a problem “*I wouldn't say like everyday work is much affected.*” (Interviewee7). Interviewee8 confirmed the same “*Well, workwise not very much. We are able to, we have all the resources that we need to do our work... we don't have any blockers of working remotely so we can, we can perform our work.*” (Interviewee8). Two interviewees admitted there are some effects “*Well, it's very challenging... it takes extra time.*” (Interviewee5) and distance also having an effect was noted by Interviewee1 “*It does have some effect, like now, I can't say it's completely negative.*” (Interviewee1).

Although distance was not considered problematic to everyday work, it does have its impacts. Six interviewees confirmed communication being one of the main distance affected areas. “*When we are located or co located in the same space or in the same city, in my opinion, we have some*

advantages ... a more complete communication flow” (Interviewee8). Interviewee 3 mentions exclusion from decision making *“They can discuss things between themselves, and they forget that, I'm somewhere and I need to be briefed also. I'm not, I cannot participate in the conversations, but they make decisions.”* (Interviewee3). In addition to communication in general, the distance makes harder for colleagues to read their colleagues body language which provides various cues, for example whether they are approachable: *“if the person was next to me, I could turn around just to see, if they're very concentrated, you could see the face, you can see the body language... sometimes for me, it's like okay, "Are you sure I'm not interrupting? Are you sure you have time for me?" That, like when it's person in person, I can see that right away.”* (Interviewee1) or as Interviewee5 put it *“Like you can feel, you know, you can feel that a person you cannot ask him, "Hey, how are you doing like that?" you know, it's harder to read”* (Interviewee5)

Five interviewees brought out also the social connection with their other remote team members being affected by distance *“it's hard to feel socially connected with the people that are not working in the same location.”* (Interviewee8) and Interviewee2 described a reduced emotional involvement with team members: *“you become less emotionally involved in social with people, and everything is like, you know, just professional connection.”* (Interviewee2)

Two interviewees also brought out some difficulties relating to tools and collaboration in general. Interviewee1 highlights difficulties in explaining certain things over video call: *“Like, "I'm just changing this here, here". Like "where I don't see it", then that's when I realised like, "Okay, I'm not sharing, that's not this screen, I'm sharing with others" (Interviewee1). Interviewee7 highlighted difficulties surrounding creative collaboration: “...whiteboard drawing, it's a bit hard and this collaboration slash creative tasks are bit challenging”* (Interviewee7).

Also one interviewee mentioned cultural differences having an effect *“It's probably, different nationalities, different, different work ethics maybe, different leadership styles that are, more, basically distance is not a problem”* (Interviewee3)

3.1.2. Distance effect to social connectedness

Distance having an effect specifically on social connectedness with their remote team members was confirmed by seven interviewees out of eight. Interviewee7 described it affecting a lot: *“I think, it affects a lot, in the sense that, you don't, you need more time to connect face to face or like, physical connection in terms of like working together in the same office or in the same team or in the same room.”* (Interviewee7). Interviewee8 further confirmed this: *“Yeah, that I think it affects, I think, it's hard to feel socially connected with the people that are not working in the same location.”* (Interviewee8).

Main challenges experienced on social connectedness level is the difficulty of developing social relationships and the lack of social connectedness with remote team members: *“...yeah, it's very hard, definitely hinders the, developing of good social, social connections.”* (Interviewee3). Interviewee1 explains importance and difficulties developing social interactions: *“...your teammates are the people who help you solve problems. So it's always good to have a good communication, good friendship, just like talking to each other know who they are. That here sometimes it's harder to develop”* (Interviewee1). Interviewee8 highlights the lack of social connectedness: *“...it's hard to feel socially connected with the people that are not working in the same location ... If we were in the same location, then we would be in a better social relationship with everybody I guess.”* (Interviewee8). Interviewee1 brings out also the missing afterwork social relationships *“Sometimes I miss like, "okay, let's just get out of the office, go to a bar, go somewhere and have a drink””* (Interviewee1).

The online alternatives for get together are regarded as not completely capable of substituting actual physical get togethers: *“You're still sitting in the same chair, you still have the same computer in front of you, the your headphones. I mean, the context change, because you talk about other things, or you're playing some online game or whatever, but it's still, that, physical change for me, it's not there...”* (Interviewee1). Interviewee6 describes a similar experience *“... you can have those team events, but it's still not the same as like seeing someone eye to eye, or standing next to them or, or or i dont know, getting a coffee together...”*

3.1.2. Maintaining and promoting social connectedness

In order to maintain and promote several recommendations were brought out. Most popular recommendation provided by seven interviewees was the ability to meet remote team members in person: “...sometimes we do not realise that, it really makes a difference to be, in the same room, even if it's not all the time, but sometimes of the year. I think it's really important.” (Interviewee8). Interviewee2 further described travelling and meeting in person helping to build social connectedness: “Because, meeting someone for a week, you don't even have to have like after video chats like you already know you have the image of a person. So, travel would be great.” (Interviewee2).

Another popular potential improver that was brought out was having casual hangout meetings with remote team members by five interviewees: “...we try also to have, X. X is how we call our, social meetings that are not related to work” (Interviewee8). Interviewee2 confirmed a similar approach: “So, with some remote co workers from another country, we're just having coffee calls. Even though they're remote, we just like have like, for 15 minutes or something to chat, random stuff.” (Interviewee2). In addition to meetings dedicated purely for casual chats, the importance of some casual conversation prior or briefly during work meetings was also highlighted: “And also, when we had been on retrospective, kind of Sprint's retro, that's after we have finished a particular sprint, we kind of retrospect and we do, just go over it before that, we just have some kind of small chit chats about, so we'll just pick a random topic.” (Interviewee4) and same was mentioned by Interviewee8: “And we try to have, not only work related conversation in our meetings, we try to also talk about the things that are happening in everyone's life.” (Interviewee8).

Fun purposed meetings or playing games was also suggested by five interviewees as a potential way of maintaining and improving social connectedness with remote team members: “Then the other one is sort of what we use in our team is, sort of also frequent weekly or bi weekly calls just to have fun. Where we play a game online we chat about anything and everything.” (Interviewee6)

Other ways that were brought out as ways to improve social connectedness were team events (3 interviewees), having cameras turned on during video calls (3 interviewees), having online lunches (2 interviewees), knowledge sharing sessions (2 interviewees), pair programming for developers (1 interviewee) and frequent calls (1 interviewee).

3.1.3. Strengths of organisation onboarding program

The most popular strength of the organisation onboarding program was the three day induction days. This was brought out as a strength by six interviewees: *“So, it was a good feeling that, it doesn't matter where you are, we, as company, we want to show you who, the company is what we're doing, each team that's working here, the big departments at least, like what what, what is the big divisions between the company and what everybody's doing. And it lasted, it's three days, three days. And you really get a feeling or a sense of what the company is, so it's good, because you see everybody on the screen to like from everywhere.”* (Interviewee1)

As strength the presence of a supportive manager was also brought out by three interviewees: *“And my manager was there, he also spoke about the role about expectations, he was there to give me help whenever it was needed.”* (Interviewee5). Also team members or other colleagues support was reported as a strength by three interviewees: *“I think it's that, that the people that work here really help you. And it's not something that oh, that that's something your team lead has to do or something HR has to do it. Everybody in the company feels that need or that want to help someone else. So I think for me that's the strength, like the company is doing something well to its employees, that the same employees are the ones that help the new ones.”* (Interviewee1)

Tallinn office was also brought out as a strength by three interviewees, for enabling a place where to work at, the culture that is allowing newcomers feel as fitting in and helping people to socialize: *“I think in general Tallinn office is doing a lot, like quite well, in terms of trying to make people socialise, and kind of build this feeling of belonging, belonging.”* (Interviewee2)

Other strengths brought out by newcomers were proper introduction to teams (2 interviewees), having cameras on (2 interviewees), providing a mentor to newcomer (2 interviewees), being

prepared (1 interviewee), providing feedback (1 interviewee) and providing comforting assurance (1 interviewee).

3.1.4. Weaknesses of organization onboarding program

Main weakness of the organisation onboarding program was reported by three interviewees being the lack of onboarding structure and preparedness: *“But yeah, I would say, besides those first three days, there is no structure for onboarding that seemed like a proper one. So they could invest into it more, per role.”* (Interviewee2). Interviewee3 also referred lack of preparedness and missing of a plan *“...it took probably a week until we got to my accesses and stuff. ... So people were bit unprepared that someone was joining. Basically, they didn't have a plan.”* (Interviewee3).

Role clarity was mentioned being a weakness by two interviewees *“...and the other thing that was maybe lacking is a better explanation of the role, because it quite differs from the what i experienced in other companies like what is expected from my position.”* (Interviewee2). Lack in role clarity was brought out also by Interviewee3: *“It felt like, they didn't even know in which team I were joining. Joined one team, on third day, we were in the next team.”* (Interviewee3)

As weakness was also brought out by two interviewees the hardships of receiving relevant information: *“I was the first one in my department in Tallinn at the time. So it was kind of I was alone here, in the X position. So it was kind of hard to get the, the information about the practicalities of the department. ... was kind of hard to, to get all the information by myself.”* (Interviewee8). Interviewee4 described newcomer having to chase the information himself: *“So it's more like, you have into, fight your way through or kind of pick yourself up and every information you need, you need to start looking around or start chasing, people don't get such information. So there was no proper introduction to the products, and to the development processes and to the technologies that we use sort of.”* (Interviewee4)

By one interviewee was mentioned as a weakness also the lack of support and training: *“They were very busy, the whole time, whole year. So you could ask questions, you just might not get the answer right away.”* (Interviewee3)

3.1.5. Important factors in remote onboarding

Five interviewees listed out as an important factor for onboarding being regular check-ins with newcomer and support for the newcomer “...and I think having a regular checkups with a new person is very important, to see that he and she understands the role and understands how team works, is on track. And that he or she has everything it's needed.” (Interviewee5).

Having a mentor for the newcomer was brought out by five interviewees being an important factor for successful remote onboarding: “And I would just repeat to just have someone in the team who appears about new joiners and makes, makes them to feel onboarded and, help whenever it's needed.” (Interviewee7).

Equally important was seen by five interviewees social integration support: “...help them have a processes in place to help them integrate socially. Because not everyone is going to be like extroverted reaching out to people themselves.” (Interviewee2).

Introduction to the organization structure and organization clarity was seen as an important factor for successful onboarding by four interviewees: “Everybody from each department comes in, they talk, they mentioned like, what are some, kind of common goals of the company, where it's going so you don't feel lost? You know, where everyone is going, and what they're headed to or what the aim is. ... then you go into your team and see your activities and then "ah, that's why we do this because other; this other guy from the other department said that they do this so we need to help them with this part". So it gives you bigger as vision of where you fall into. And at least for me, that I need to see the big picture that helps me...” (Interviewee1)

Structured onboarding and being prepared for the newcomer entry was seen as an important factor by three interviewees: “I think I think it should be the structure. Some kind of standard that we have, like a checklist, we have common place for knowledge sharing, we have defined process to follow. I mean, we should be, constantly making sure that this process is still current, and all the steps that we are following are still updated with all the changes that we have in, in, in the department, and also in the company as a whole. But we should have a structure, I mean, it should not be like something that we do by ourselves.” (Interviewee8). Preparedness was

illustrated by Interviewee3 as follows: “...you need to be ready that they are joining, figure out the capacity to support the developer. From the start, you have to have a plan already, who will take care of him, who will, like what he will do in the company, which team he will join, like, who will be his manager, does he know that he needs to take care of the development, do we have enough tasks, like, everything needs to be ready already.” (Interviewee3)

Additional important factors that were brought out by interviewees were providing newcomers the domain knowledge training (2 interviewees), making newcomer role responsibilities clear (2 interviewees), having location office specific events for socialization (1 interviewee), having cameras on during communications (1 interviewee) and using a hybrid model to enable some physical presence (1 interviewee).

3.1.6. Information availability

In terms of newcomers having the required information available for their everyday work, two interviewees said they have required information available and five interviewees said information is partially available. Two interviewees also brought out being reliant on team members and colleagues for everyday work information. Organisation intranet was highlighted by two interviewees containing helpful information. Lack in documentation about legacy projects was brought out by two interviewees. One interviewee brought out preference for improved overview of organisation roadmaps and targets. One interviewee highlighted outdated documentation.

3.2. Discussion and recommendations to the organization

3.2.1. Discussion

Some of the results obtained in this study may lead to ambiguous conclusions due to the reason that interviewees work in different departments and there may be different onboarding processes depending on the department. That could have potentially caused one interviewee to claim sufficient amount of support during onboarding as a strength of the company onboarding

program, while the other interviewee claiming seeing it lacking and reporting that as being the weakness of the organization onboarding program. Same can be noted about the initial organization preparedness for newcomer entry where some highlighted adequate preparedness as strength, while others noted it lacking. Remarks which highlighted the lack of possibility to travel and meet people in person as a weakness of organization onboarding program during the pandemic, were not included into strengths and weaknesses evaluation of the organization onboarding program as this falls not under organization control. The findings from this study can be beneficial for organizations who employ remote team working setup over a distance and need to onboard new employees to remote teams.

In this study was proposed five research questions.

First research question was “How does distance affect everyday work and social connectedness according to the recently employed remote team members?”

While distance itself was not seen as problematic for everyday work, there were certain impacts that distance introduces. Distance was seen as making communication more difficult and making it harder also for team members to read each other body language or cues for communication. Similar nuance was noted by Warkentin and Beranek (1999) stating that in regular face to face communication there are many cues which help direct the conversation. Distance was also reported having an impact on social connection with remote team members and also making collaboration harder on some specific tasks when compared to colocated work. Distance also meaning that some colleagues are from other countries, this introduced also the cultural difference and different work ethics.

Distance was greatly seen as impacting the social connectedness with other remote team members. It was seen as making difficult the development of social relationships with other remote team members and preventing feeling socially connected to team members, which is likely the outcome of the difficulty of social relationships development. Online social alternatives according to same were not seen as equal substitutes for in person interactions.

Second research question was “How to maintain and improve social connectedness in remote teams?”

In order to maintain and promote social connectedness within remote teams this study results brought out the following suggestions:

- Meeting with team members in person
- Meetings dedicated for casual conversations with remote team members
- Having at least some amount of casual conversations included in daily work meetings
- Having fun purposed meetings or meetings where games are played together
- Having team events with remote team members
- Having cameras on during online calls and meetings
- Having online lunches with remote team members
- To have knowledge sharing sessions
- To have frequent calls with other remote team members
- To do pair programming

Third research question of this study was “What do the recently employed remote team members regard as strengths and weaknesses of the company's current onboarding process to remote teams?”

This study results showed that the recently employed remote team members regarded as strengths of the organization onboarding program:

- Induction days (three day organisation introduction upon newcomer entry)
- Having a supportive manager
- Having available team support
- Tallinn office atmosphere and easy fit-in culture
- Being introduced to their teams upon entry to organization
- Having cameras on during meetings
- Having a mentor who can guide and provide assistance whenever needed
- Being prepared for the newcomer joining, knowing his position and role
- Providing feedback and assurance to the newcomer

This study results demonstrated that the recently employed remote team members regarded as weaknesses of the organization onboarding program:

- Lack of structure in onboarding
- Lack of preparedness about the newcomer joining
- Role unclarity (role remaining unclear for newcomer)
- Difficult access to information
- Lack of support and training

Fourth research question of this study was “What do the recently employed remote team members consider to be important factors in onboarding programs that help ensure effective onboarding to remote teams?”

This study results showed and confirmed many of the same principles laid out also in Bauer (2010) onboarding model, that according to recently employed remote team members the important factors that help ensure successful and effective onboarding to remote teams were:

- Having regular check-ins and offering support to the newcomer.
- Having a mentor for newcomer
- Helping newcomer to integrate socially by creating situations for social interactions
- Providing overview of the organization and seeing the bigger picture
- Having a structured onboarding and a general plan for newcomer joining
- Being prepared for newcomer joining the team
- Providing domain knowledge training for newcomers
- Establishing newcomer role clarity
- Having events in newcomer location office
- Having cameras turned on for remote team members visibility
- Using a hybrid work model allowing some physical presence

Fifth research question of this study was “How do the recently employed remote team members assess the availability of information that is required for their everyday work?”

This study results showed that majority of participants claimed everyday required work information being partially available to them. Results also showed that there is reliance on others for everyday work information. Also, some of the documentation was seen as outdated or lacking.

3.2.2. Recommendations to the organization

Based on the results obtained from this study, the author provides the organization with recommendations to follow when onboarding new employees into remote teams to ensure their successful onboarding.

Recommendations to the organization for successful onboarding of employees to remote teams:

- Having a mentor available for newcomer
- Enabling newcomer meeting team members in person to allow development of social connectedness
- Ensuring and encouraging newcomer to have casual conversation and fun purposed online meetings with team members
- Helping newcomer to integrate socially by creating situations and events providing a precedent for social interactions, for example team events
- Encouraging newcomer to frequently have calls with other remote team members
- Providing an overview of the organization and helping newcomer understand the overall organization structure, continue carrying out the induction days training
- Making sure the newcomer manager is ready and has the capacity for offering full support to the newcomer
- Preparing newcomer teams for the joining newcomer, introducing their role and encouraging team members to offer also their support to the newcomer
- Introducing newcomer to his team members upon entry to organization
- Having regular check-in meetings and providing performance feedback to the newcomer during the onboarding progress

- Ensuring newcomer has all necessary support needed to start performing in his role
- Having a structured onboarding program and a general plan for the newcomer upon his joining with the organization, being prepared from the first day the newcomer joins
- Providing to newcomers required domain knowledge and industry specific training if needed
- Ensuring newcomer role is clear and newcomer establishes role clarity
- Having events in newcomer location office to provide possibility to develop local social relationships
- Making sure during meetings cameras are turned on, to enable newcomers to see and meet remote team members and their other colleagues
- Considering using a hybrid work model which can enable newcomer to experience physical social relationships

Some of the limitations of this study were that some qualitative interviews were conducted in person and others online. The author noted that interviews conducted in person were having a more natural flow and thus could have potentially enabled more content to surface. Also person work history and personality traits were not considered in this study.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to provide the Tallinn development center of an international organization with recommendations that can be used to improve the onboarding process of new employees in remote teams. The thesis examined which factors are important when onboarding new employees to remote teams and help to ensure successful onboarding.

The research problem of this thesis was the difficulty of onboarding newly hired employees to remote teams. New employees that are recruited to Tallinn development center of an international organization, need to be often onboarded to remote teams, where members of the team are globally distributed in different locations and offices.

In order to achieve the aim of this thesis, the author set research questions which explored the distance effect to everyday work and social connectedness, the strengths and weaknesses of current organization onboarding program, the important factors in onboarding to remote teams and how to promote social connectedness, and the availability of information required for everyday work.

To find answers to the research questions set in this thesis, a qualitative study was conducted with employees from the Tallinn development center of an international organisation. Employees selected for this study had to be working in globally distributed remote teams on a daily basis and had to be recruited less than 15 months ago. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 employees and the obtained data was analyzed by thematic and content analysis methods.

The study results showed that distance did not affect the everyday work in remote teams, although it had its impact on communication and collaboration. Distance was seen as greatly impacting the social connectedness with other remote team members. To maintain and improve

social connectedness feeling the main findings suggested to meet in person, have casual conversation meetings, have fun purposed meetings, have team events and to have during video calls cameras on.

Results of the study also showed that the main weaknesses of the organization remote teams onboarding program were lack of onboarding structure, lack of preparedness for newcomer entry to organization, newcomer role unclarity and newcomer difficulty to obtain information. The main strengths of the organization remote teams onboarding program were the organization introductory meetings, having a supportive manager, having team support and the great atmosphere of Tallinn development center.

The study results further demonstrated that for new employees effective onboarding to remote teams, the main important factors are having regular check-ins and support providing to newcomer, having a mentor for newcomer, supporting the social integration of newcomer, providing clarity about organizational structure, having a structured onboarding and being prepared for the newcomer joining the organization.

Results also revealed that participants had required information available for everyday work partially, there is reliance on others for information required in some participants everyday work and some felt lack in legacy projects documentation.

Based on the results found from this study, the author provided recommendations to the Tallinn development center which can be considered when onboarding new employees to remote teams. With results from previous research and from this study, organizations can review and further improve their onboarding programs to maximize onboarding success also in remote teams. For future further research could be considered the topic about possibilities of transmitting remote team members body language or their availability cues between remote team members which could enable overview of team members approachability over a distance.

KOKKUVÕTE

RAHVUSVAHELISE ORGANISATSIOONI TALLINNA ARENDUSKESKUSESSE VÄRVATUD TÖÖTAJA INTEGREERIMINE KAUGMEESKONNAGA

Mick-Martin Kirsipuu

Lõputöö eesmärk oli anda rahvusvahelise organisatsiooni Tallinna arenduskeskusele soovitusi, mida saaks kasutada uute töötajate kaugmeeskondadesse värbamise protsessi täiustamiseks. Lõputöös uuriti, millised tegurid on uute töötajate kaugmeeskondadesse kaasamisel olulised ja aitavad tagada edukat liitumist.

Käesoleva lõputöö uurimisprobleemiks oli äsja värvatud töötajate kaugmeeskondadesse värbamise keerukus rahvusvahelise organisatsiooni Tallinna arenduskeskuses. Tallinna arenduskeskusesse värvatavad uued töötajad tuleb sageli integreerida kaugmeeskondadega, kus meeskonnaliikmed asuvad erinevates riikides.

Lõputöös püstitatud eesmärgi saavutamiseks püstitati viis uurimisküsimust:

- Kuidas mõjutab distants hiljuti värvatud kaugmeeskonnaliikmete hinnangul igapäevatööd ja sotsiaalset seotust?
- Kuidas hoida ja parandada sotsiaalset seotust kaugmeeskondades?
- Mida peavad hiljuti värvatud kaugmeeskonna liikmed ettevõtte praeguse kaugmeeskondadesse sisseelamisprogrammi tugevusteks ja nõrkusteks?
- Mida peavad hiljuti värvatud kaugmeeskonna liikmed olulisteks teguriteks sisseelamisprogrammides, mis aitavad tagada kaugmeeskondadesse tõhusa sisseelamise?
- Kuidas hindavad hiljuti värvatud kaugmeeskonna liikmed nende igapäevaseks tööks vajaliku info kättesaadavust?

Nendele uurimisküsimustele vastuste leidmiseks viidi läbi kvalitatiivne uuring rahvusvahelise organisatsiooni Tallinna arenduskeskuse töötajatega, kes töötavad igapäevaselt globaalselt hajutatud kaugmeeskondades. Täiendavaks tingimuseks oli, et uuringus osalejad pidid olema värvatud vähem, kui 15 kuud tagasi. Poolstruktureeritud intervjuud viidi läbi 8 osalejaga ning saadud andmeid analüüsiti teema- ja sisuanalüüsi meetoditega.

Uuringu tulemused näitasid, et distants ei mõjutanud igapäevatööd kaugmeeskondades, kuid see avaldas mõju suhtlemisele ja koostööle. Distants mõjutas suurel määral sotsiaalset seotust teiste kaugmeeskonna liikmetega. Sotsiaalse seotuse säilitamiseks ja parandamiseks tulemused soovitasid kohtuda isiklikult, pidada juhuslikke vestluskoosolekuid, pidada meelelahustusliku sisuga kohtumisi, korraldada meeskonnaüritusi ja videokõnede ajal hoida kaamerad sisse lülitatuna.

Uuringu tulemused näitasid ka, et organisatsiooni kaugmeeskondadesse sisseelamisprogrammi peamiseks nõrkadeks külgedeks olid sisseelamisprogrammis struktuuri puudumine, vähene valmisolek uue töötaja organisatsiooniga liitumiseks, uue töötaja rolli ebaselgus ja uue töötaja teabe hankimise keerukus. Organisatsiooni kaugmeeskondade sisseelamisprogrammi peamiseks tugevusteks olid organisatsiooni tutvustamine, toetava juhi olemasolu, meeskonna tugi ja Tallinna arenduskeskuse meeldiv õhkkond.

Uuringutulemused näitasid veel, et uute töötajate tõhusaks liitumiseks kaugmeeskondadega on peamiseks olulisteks teguriteks regulaarsed kohtumised ja toe pakkumine, mentori olemasolu, sotsiaalse integratsiooni toetamine, organisatsiooni struktuuri tutvustamine, struktureeritud sisseelamisprogramm ja valmisolek uue töötaja liitumiseks organisatsiooniga.

Tulemused näitasid ka seda, et osade töötajatel oli igapäevatööks vajalik informatsioon kättesaadav osaliselt, mõned töötajad olid igapäevatööks vajaliku teabe osas sõltuvuses kaastöötajatest ja mõned töötajad tundsid puudust vanemaid projekte puudutavast dokumentatsioonist.

Selles lõputöös läbiviidud uuringust selgunud tulemuste põhjal anti organisatsioonile soovitusel, mida organisatsioon saab rakendada uute töötajate edukaks sisseelamiseks kaugmeeskondadesse.

Varasemate uuringute ja selle lõputöö uuringu tulemuste alusel on organisatsioonidel võimalik uutele töötajatele loodud sisseelamisprogrammid üle vaadata ning vajadusel neid täiustada, suurendamaks uute värvatavate töötajate kaugmeeskondadesse sisseelamise edukust. Edaspidiseks uurimiseks võiks kaaluda kaugmeeskonna liikmete kehakeele või nende kättesaadavust puudutavate vihjete edastamise võimalusi kaugmeeskonna liikmete vahel, mis võimaldaks anda ülevaate meeskonnaliikmetele lähenemise valmidusest.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Qualitative study interview guide

1. How long have you been currently working in the company?
2. Do you work in a remote team setup?
3. How does distance affect your everyday work in a remote team? (Distance)
4. How does distance affect feeling socially connected with your remote team members? (Social Connectedness)
5. What do you personally perceive have been the strengths of the company onboarding program, during your onboarding to a remote team? (Strengths of current onboarding program to Remote Teams)
6. What do you personally perceive have been the weaknesses of the company onboarding program, during your onboarding to a remote team? (Weakness of current onboarding program to Remote Teams)
7. What are the important factors companies need to have in their onboarding programs, when onboarding new employees to remote teams? (Onboarding important factors in Remote Teams)
8. What do you believe helps to maintain social connectedness feeling with your remote team members? (Social Connectedness)
9. What could help to improve the social connectedness feeling with your remote team members? (Improving Social Connectedness)
10. What suggestions would you provide to companies who onboard employees to remote teams for successful onboarding?
11. Do you feel you have all the information available that you need for your everyday work? If not, please further elaborate what is missing.
12. Anything else which you would like to add additionally?

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