

CAHRS Virtual Working  
Group:

Onboarding Talent in a  
Post-Pandemic World  
March 29, 2023

## Onboarding Talent in a Post-Pandemic World March 29, 2023

Onboarding programs are crucial to the new employee experience. A great onboarding experience helps new hires understand their roles, their stakeholders, and the culture and values of the company. The way companies design and deliver onboarding programs has shifted greatly during and after the pandemic. Now as more employees are returning to the office, companies are revisiting the way they design and deliver the onboarding programs. In this working group, Dr. Frank Salfi, Vice President, Global Head of Learning and Development & Global Onboarding at American Express and CAHRS Professor Brad Bell led a discussion on best practices and innovations around onboarding talent in a post-pandemic world.

### Key Takeaways:

- A consistent onboarding structure can be scaled to many markets.
- Cut redundant and hard to digest documents/emails/messages to avoid overwhelming new hires.
- Use leadership language in onboarding materials to engage new hires in the company culture.
- Convey the value proposition early and often.
- Integrate onboarding events in one hub. Improve the design of the hub periodically.
- Simplify onboarding tasks for line managers to gain their support.
- When measuring the success of the onboarding program, an onboarding satisfaction survey is very important. HR professionals may want to administer the same survey across various stages of the onboarding process to track the changes in satisfaction overtime.
- Other metrics such as engagement, performance, promotion rate, and retention rate are also informative but more challenging to link to the onboarding experience.

### Presentation: American Express Onboarding Program Evolution

At the beginning of the session, Dr. Frank Salfi outlined the evolution of onboarding at AMEX. The central objective of the onboarding program is to deliver a globally consistent experience aimed at increasing engagement and boosting the sense of belonging while streamlining the process. To achieve these objectives, AMEX has taken several steps.

The first involves centralizing the onboarding program. As a global organization, a consistent onboarding experience drives an effective, efficient, and cohesive global infrastructure.

The second is to streamline communications. AMEX found that new hires receive lengthy and redundant emails from various sources that overwhelm employees. Frank and his team set forth to condense the information shared with new hires, assign single points of contact, and support functional partners to create global partnerships. There is also a limit on how much time people can spend on onboarding. Essentially, the goal is to deliver a

15 attendees from 13  
companies:

American Express  
Bloomberg  
Boeing  
Bristol Myers Squibb  
CNH Industrial  
Colgate Palmolive  
Corning  
Estée Lauder  
General Electric  
GE Digital  
GE Power  
Trane Technologies  
Verizon

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one-of-a-kind onboarding experience in an easy to digest and timely manner.

The third procedure is automation. AMEX has an online hub for all onboarding procedures including the timeline, to-do list, reminders, and messages. The hub also provides access to relevant courses. This self-service model orchestrated all relevant stakeholders and made the onboarding logistics easier for the new hire, their manager, and HR department.

Last but not least, AMEX also uses a global onboarding survey to measure satisfaction toward the onboarding program Day 1 - 90. In addition, they are working toward measuring an expanded set of metrics, such as future engagement, performance, promotion rate, and retention rate, to demonstrate the success of the onboarding program and highlight areas for improvement.

Thanks to the consistent structure of the virtual onboarding hub, AMEX has been able to respond to increased global onboarding needs efficiently. They can also tailor the content to meet local requirements. While AMEX offers the consistent structure of the hub, there are also slack channels to facilitate grassroots conversations among colleagues.

Collaboration is vital when engaging new hires. As AMEX centralizes its onboarding programs, each regional office needs to have a partner to co-deliver the onboarding experience. These partners are part of the Onboarding Colleague Stakeholder Group. The Group holds monthly and quarterly meeting to share best practices and collaborate on new initiatives.

Looking forward, Frank believes investing in tech will enhance the experience of onboarding to better enable colleague success.

#### Other Discussions

- **Buy-in from Stakeholders:**  
Gaining support from stakeholders is important for onboarding programs. Executive support and sponsorship can accelerate the revamping of the onboarding experience. On the frontline, line managers are very busy, so the goal is to make the onboarding task as easy as possible for them. Companies have done this by providing templates and other easy-to-use resources to line managers. Further, they also present stats and testimonials to show the effectiveness of the onboarding program and gain support from managers. Regional partners are not full-time onboarding specialists nor HR professionals. So, it is important to prepare resources and toolkits for them, and to update them frequently.
- **Authorization to Use the Hub**  
Companies are increasingly providing access to certain onboarding materials during the pre-hire stage. Although employees often only have access to the full platform after their start date, pre-hires can access certain materials (e.g., training courses) using third-party (e.g., contractor) access.

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- **Right mix of Automation and Human Experience in Onboarding**  
It depends on each firm, and how much people are comfortable with dealing with technology. Usually, firms can predict common questions and automate appropriate answers. For more complex scenarios, onboarding specialists and regional partners will join the conversation.
- **Right mix of Virtual and Human Experience in Onboarding**  
CAHRS companies agree that satisfaction of virtual sessions is lower because it's harder to build connection with people online. As people are increasingly coming back into the office, companies are building back in more in-person experiences. This is particularly true for certain international markets where in-person components are highly valued.
- **Special Consideration for Operations**  
Many details need to be taken into consideration when designing the program. For example, pre-hires often prefer to access onboarding materials through mobile devices (and in some markets it may be their own source of access); however, post-hires often prefer to access materials through their company workstations so they can do so in the course of their day-to-day work.

This Summary Report was prepared by Brad Bell and Chang Cheng for participants of the "Onboarding Talent in a Post-Pandemic World" Virtual Working Group.

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