Levelling Up: Technology and Best Practices in Regional Onboarding Processes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Onboarding employees has suddenly become trickier than ever. Due to the pandemic, making the complex process of onboarding effective and compliant in a fully remote model has somewhere presented a new series of problems to solve for HR but it was one that had to be addressed.

Today, remote onboarding has become a reality. Our survey found that 74% of regional organisations will be using it alongside in-person onboarding from now.

Many respondents' organisations are using technology for the administrative aspects of onboarding, but there is significant demand for technology which can help improve engagement of new hires.

Furthermore, the vast majority (71%) of respondents felt their onboarding process had room for improvement. There is also a clear understanding of the value onboarding can bring to an organisation, suggesting a clear desire to improve adoption of onboarding best practices.

INTRODUCTION

Getting new starters up to speed in a role has never been easy. But the value of an effective onboarding process and technology has never been more important. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies to change their hiring practices, with many making at least some use of virtual recruitment and onboarding processes – and with some employees working a year or more without ever meeting their colleagues in person.

TASC recently commissioned a survey of more than a hundred senior executives, managers, and HR professionals from the GCC, to explore the state of onboarding in the region.

The survey highlights that while regional enterprises see the value of technology in onboarding, actual adoption is slow. Moreover, most respondents still see significant room for improvement in their onboarding practices.

Methodology and Demographics

The HR Observer in collaboration with TASC surveyed **107** professionals from across the GCC. The respondents included:

C-level
8%

Head/Director
34%

Manager
39%

Consultant
11%

Junior level
5%

Other
3%
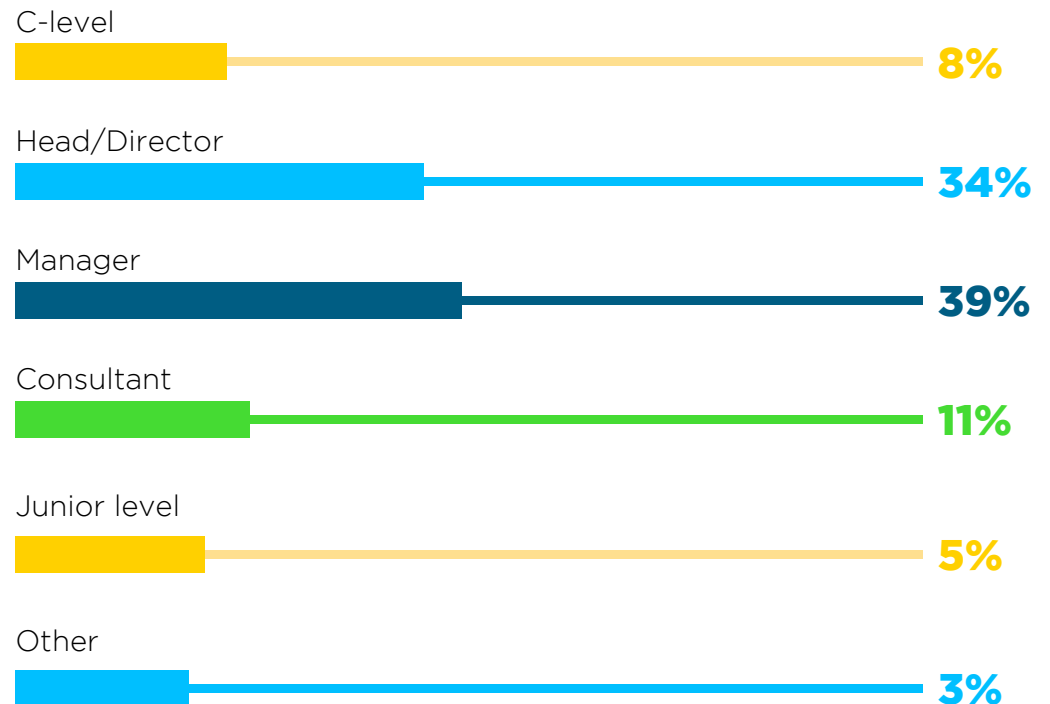
REMOTE VS IN-PERSON ONBOARDING

Did your organisation adopt remote onboarding in the last 12-18 months?

53
Yes

43
No

11
Don't know

Half of the respondents said their organisations started to use remote onboarding within the last 18 months. While almost three-quarters said their firms plan to use a mix of virtual and in-person onboarding in the near future. The significant uptake in remote onboarding in the region is unsurprising given the constraints of remote work forced upon organisations due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

> It is essential to have an effective remote onboarding programme to reduce turnover costs. If an employee is made to feel at ease from the get-go, the likelihood of them leaving is small.
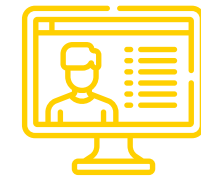
How are you planning to onboard your new hires in the next 12-18 months?

19
In-person only

9
Virtual only

79
In-person and virtual

When it comes to the adoption of technology in onboarding, the survey notes a rushed transition to remote onboarding. Almost 75% of respondents said their organisations were only using basic technology such as videoconferencing software in onboarding.

Given the move to using remote onboarding in the future, many organisations may be more willing to invest in dedicated onboarding technology. However, the survey paints a mixed picture when it comes to attitudes towards technology.

Is your organisation currently using technology for the onboarding process?

20
Yes
(advanced software)

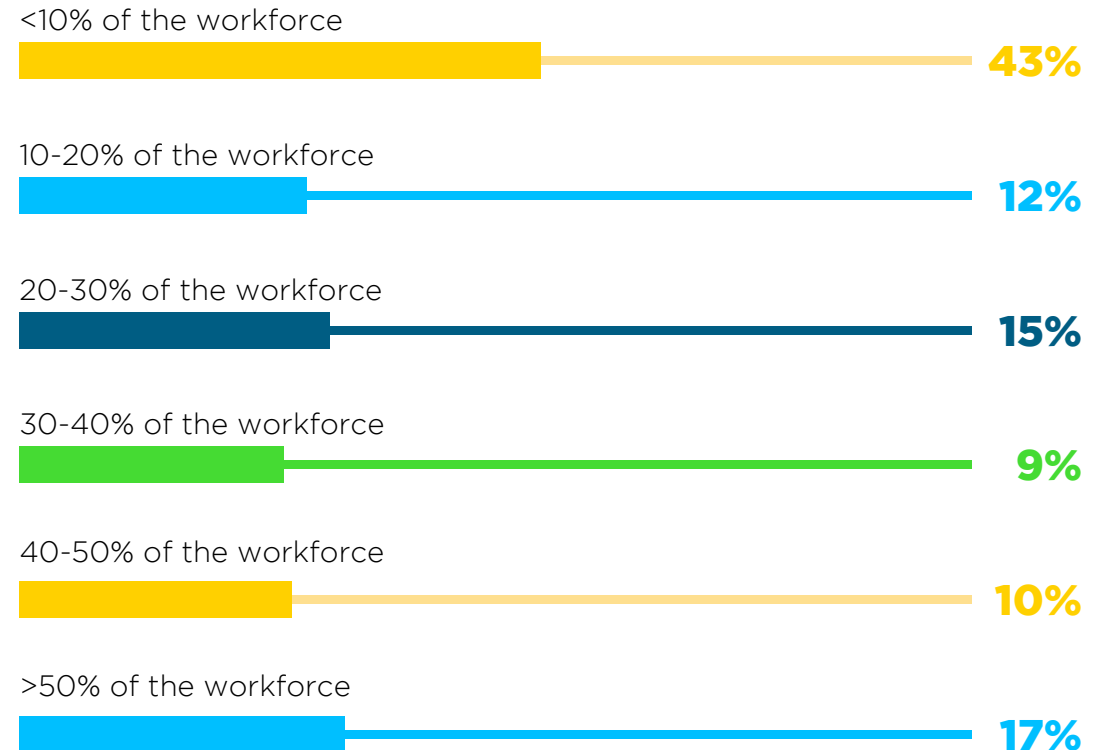**80**
No
(basic technology, e.g. MS Teams, Zoom)

7
Don't know

The results highlight that employers are definitely turning to virtual hiring and onboarding. Many organisations might also plan to continue using it post-pandemic as it speeds up the process for everyone involved by eliminating travel time. Some of the other advantages of remote onboarding include shortened hiring processes and allowing HR teams to search across a broader geography to attract more talent.

What percent of your organisation's resources are working remotely?

<10% of the workforce
43%

10-20% of the workforce
12%

20-30% of the workforce
15%

30-40% of the workforce
9%

40-50% of the workforce
10%

>50% of the workforce
17%

The results echo the divide seen elsewhere globally, with executives from organisations such as Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase pushing for staff to return to offices as soon as possible. On the other hand, many firms are formalising remote and hybrid-working patterns (Dakers & Halftermeyer, 2021).

Beyond onboarding, our survey asked how many employees were working remotely in general. 40.6% of respondents said less than 10% of staff in their organisations were working remotely. Moreover, 34% of respondents said 30% or more were working remotely.
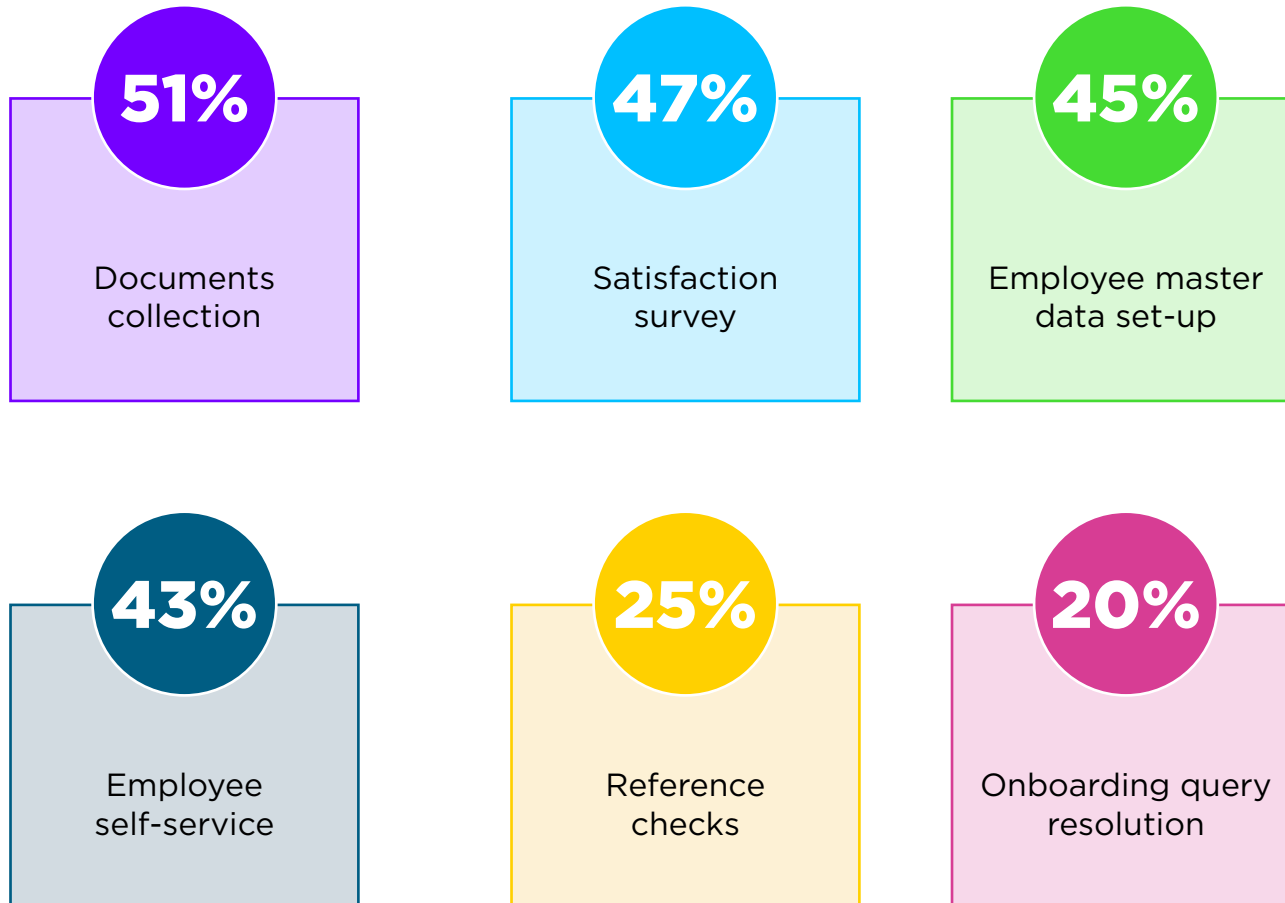
STREAMLINING ONBOARDING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Today, organisations are increasingly turning to technology to navigate the complexities of remote onboarding. For regional firms, the adoption of onboarding technology is a priority. However, according to respondents, it is also the number-one onboarding challenge. Almost 49% said that not using technology in the onboarding process was one of their top-three challenges, ahead of any other issue they face.

According to you, what are your organisation's top three challenges when it comes to onboarding?
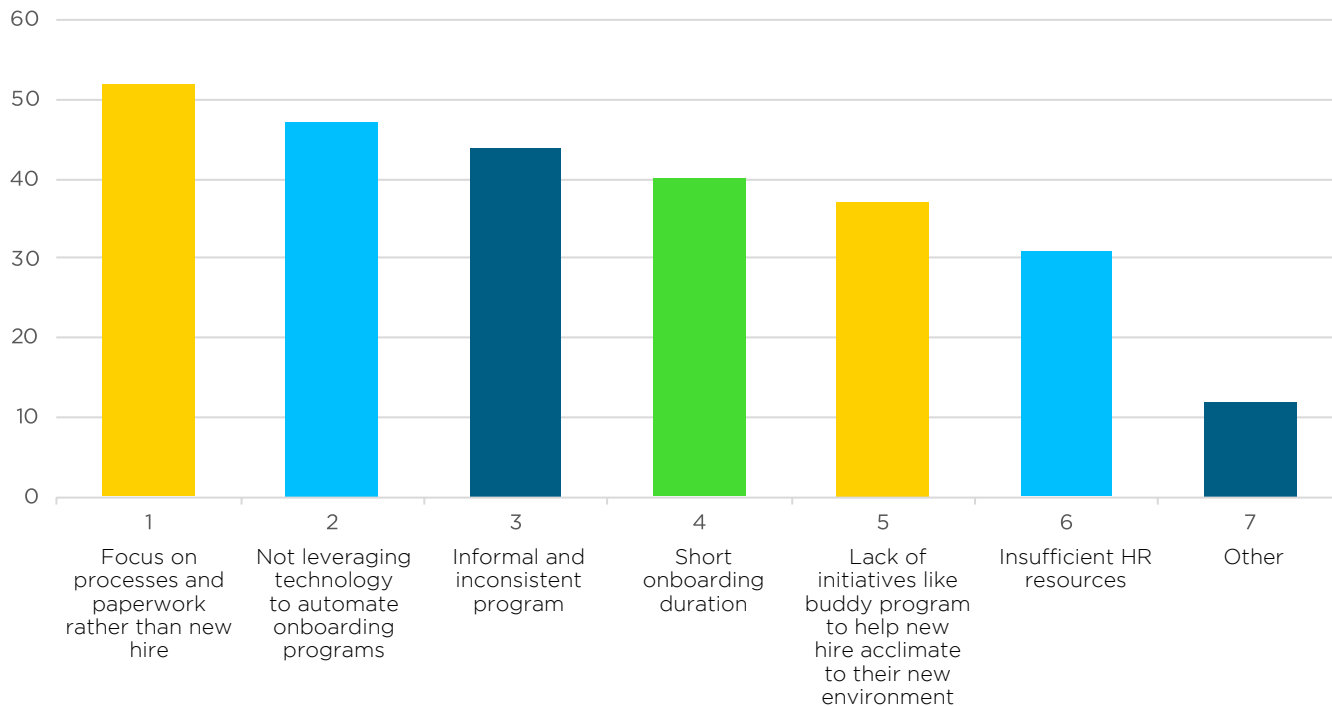
The survey found that only three-quarters of respondents use basic onboarding tools. However, more organisations have started to use technology to improve the administrative aspects of employee onboarding. More than half of the respondents highlighted that functions such as document collection, satisfaction surveys and master data setup were automated or digitised.

Chart data (approximate values):
- 1 — Focus on processes and paperwork rather than new hire: 52
- 2 — Not leveraging technology to automate onboarding programs: 47
- 3 — Informal and inconsistent program: 44
- 4 — Short onboarding duration: 40
- 5 — Lack of initiatives like buddy program to help new hire acclimate to their new environment: 37
- 6 — Insufficient HR resources: 31
- 7 — Other: 12

In your onboarding function, which of the following steps are currently digitised or automated?

51%
Documents collection

47%
Satisfaction survey

45%
Employee master data set-up

43%
Employee self-service

25%
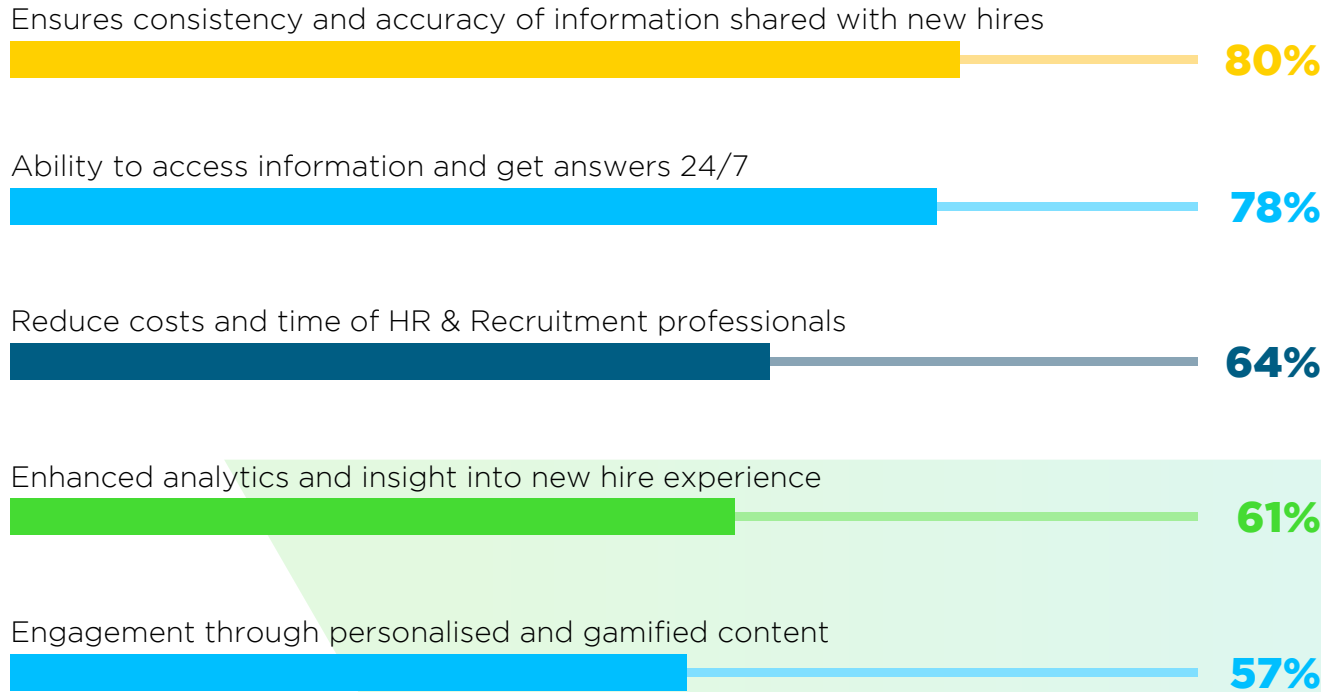Reference checks

20%
Onboarding query resolution

The respondents see significant potential in technology when it comes to onboarding. Additionally, 53% of respondents saw the potential for improving engagement through technology.

The administrative side of the process, consistency and accuracy of sharing information, and access to information for new hires are aspects that would benefit the most from technology.

How do you think technology and digital tools can help your employee onboarding process?

Ensures consistency and accuracy of information shared with new hires

80%

Ability to access information and get answers 24/7

78%

Reduce costs and time of HR & Recruitment professionals

64%

Enhanced analytics and insight into new hire experience

61%

Engagement through personalised and gamified content

57%

A technology that is gaining traction is HR chatbots that provide a single interface across all employee needs. For instance, TASC's HR WhatsApp chatbot AIDA assists with offer acceptance. So, if candidates are on the go or don't have access to mails, these integrated chatbots send proactive messages to accept or reject the extended offer. Chatbots go a long way in enhancing services, boosting productivity, and help HR teams deliver more personalised experiences for employees.

Onboarding should be interactive to keep participants engaged and connected.

Employers should strive to make virtual onboarding seamless, dynamic and informative. Doing so increases the retention of the information.

The results also suggest that many feel the currently available tech solutions may not be the most ideal. It is important to note that this is likely to change as onboarding technology evolves and improves.

What are some of the features you would like onboarding technology and tools to have?
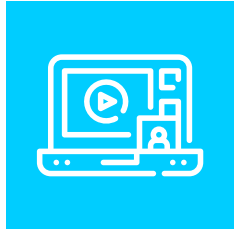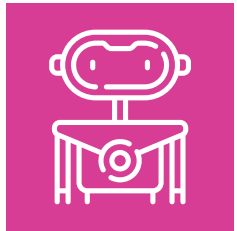
77%
Interactive videos and activities

65%
Sharing and storing of files and content to help with administration

64%
Fun, engaging and gamified approach

61%
AI implementation for deeper insights into new hire engagement

57%
Chatbot functionality to allow access to HR helpdesk

Our respondents also expressed a strong desire for features such as interactive videos and activities (selected by 73% of respondents) and a fun, engaging and gamified approach (60% of respondents). This suggests many of our respondents feel currently available tech solutions may not provide what they are looking for – but this is likely to change as onboarding technology evolves and improves.

Organisations need to assess their infrastructure and see how it can scale in various scenarios. The scale and reliability of technologies such as cloud infrastructure can make the process of remotely onboarding employees smooth.

For example, Microsoft has onboarded more than 25,000 employees since the start of the pandemic. The company directs remote hires to a tech tool called Microsoft Viva, an employee experience platform that brings together communications, learning, resources, and insights. It includes a glossary of internal company acronyms, a handy reference for new employees. The company also assigns new hires an "onboarding buddy" who act as a go-to resource for informal help and to help integrate them into the team.

Right software resources for documentation, team-based communication for tracking progress and virtual mentoring on video chat platforms help make remote onboarding better and faster. Also, since water cooler breaks are no longer a thing, companies should foster a remote work culture that gives new employees a sense of belonging through online teambuilding activities.

ONBOARDING BEST PRACTICES

The effective adoption of technology may be a big challenge, but it is only a subset of the bigger issue – adoption of onboarding best practices. When it comes to ensuring best practices are rolled out, most regional organisations say they have work to do, with 71% of respondents saying there was room for improvement in their onboarding programmes.

Do you think your organisation has an effective onboarding programme?

13
Yes, it's great

17
No, not at all

76
There's room
for improvement

1
Don't know

The second-biggest onboarding challenge for respondents was focusing on paperwork and processes, rather than the new hire themselves – this was closely followed by a lack of initiatives such as "buddy programmes" to help get new employees used to their new workplace and team. Throughout other responses, it is clear the respondents are keen to work more on the engagement aspects of onboarding but find this a struggle.

While the pandemic has almost certainly made onboarding more complex, the adoption of best practices is always very challenging, especially if HR in general, is seen as a secondary process.

Encouragingly, the respondents recognise that helping new hires feel comfortable in their roles and getting them fully engaged with the organisation is the main purpose of the onboarding processes.

"Many companies still fail at onboarding because they regard it as an orientation effort. We need to acquaint new hires with our code of conduct, show them where the washrooms are located and pencils are kept, and familiarise them with our workplace safety policies.

"That's necessary stuff. But people don't fall in love with processes and policies. Onboarding is about connecting the person to the company, to its people and to its culture and values,"

says Lisa Dakin-Bartels (2015).

What should be some of the main objectives of the onboarding process?

93%
Make new hires feel welcome, confident, and comfortable

91%
Integrate employees into company culture

76%
Clarify responsibilities of their role

72%
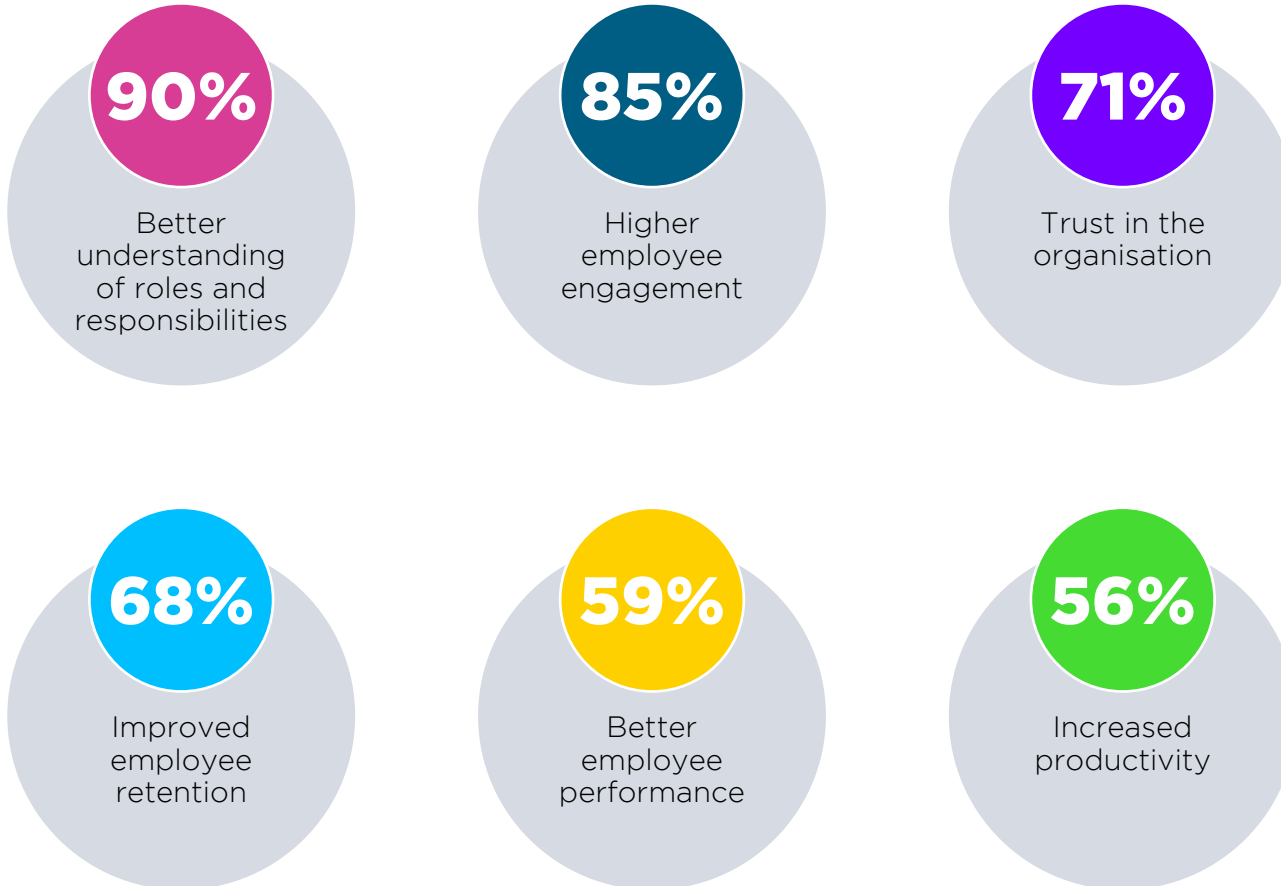Help new hires align with organisational business strategy

63%
Complete all compliance requirements

Effective communication is crucial in remote environments when new employees are physically detached from the company and the experience. It's a vital step in the hiring process that sets the tone for the rest of the organisation's employees' experiences.

What are some of the benefits of having an effective onboarding programme?

90%
Better understanding of roles and responsibilities

85%
Higher employee engagement

71%
Trust in the organisation

68%
Improved employee retention

59%
Better employee performance

56%
Increased productivity

81% of respondents agreed it was important for new hires to **connect emotionally with the organisation's brand during onboarding**. Furthermore, 88% agreed onboarding should reflect the organisation's culture.

When it comes to engaging new hires, the survey suggests that there is work to be done. For example, less than half the respondents said their organisations used a pre-boarding phase to start engagement early. In addition, just under 35% said their organisations used surveys to collect information from new hires.

As with other fundamental issues, engagement is always a challenge. But it is necessary if organisations want to ensure their onboarding processes effectively deliver on-message, knowledgeable and productive employees from their first day of work.

Conclusion

Regional HR professionals and business leaders are clear on the importance of having an effective onboarding process. But many are unsatisfied with their organisations' current approaches. These results can be viewed as encouraging, as it suggests leaders are keen to improve their onboarding methods. Technology is vital to this process of improvement. The respondents have indicated they are keen to adopt new systems and explore new ways of engaging with hires through technology. At the same time, they are cautious as to what technology can deliver.

Between the disruption from the pandemic and increasing competition to hire (and retain) the best talent, wherever they are based, the need for effective onboarding processes flexible enough to work for virtual and in-person hiring has never been more critical. Therefore, it is apparent that regional enterprises have never been more ready to adopt new technology and approaches to onboarding.

In conclusion, the survey found that one of the major challenges with remote onboarding was integrating and familiarising new hires with the company culture. Establishing a direct human connection can be quite challenging in a virtual environment, but having the right tools at your disposal can make the task easier. Due to remote onboarding, new employees may often not have access to resources usually provided to full-time employees. Therefore, employers also need to factor in accessibility and networking infrastructure when designing a remote onboarding process.

There are several challenges when it comes to remote onboarding. On the one hand, HR needs to ensure access to tools, technology, and content promptly. However, on the other hand, it is essential to teach new hires the basics about the company without overwhelming them. Therefore, it is important to keep the right balance between personalisation and consistency when it comes to remote onboarding in the long run.

About TASC Outsourcing

For more than a decade, TASC Outsourcing has been shaking up the region's staffing industry, delivering effective hiring and HR solutions to businesses of all types and sizes. Today, we're one of the Middle East's leading recruitment, staffing and HR service providers. Our comprehensive suite of services – everything from contract staffing and permanent recruitment to HR management, payroll outsourcing, and offshoring – has been designed to increase the business efficiency of our partners.

TASC Outsourcing's vision is: "To build an inspiring, innovative and global company that provides high quality people solutions delivered with unbeatable service to its customers. To do this by providing an environment for learning, growth and advancement for its employees."

With a strong focus on innovation, we have adopted workflow automation and built a unique tech stack to enhance the 'TASC experience' of our clients, associates and employees. A world-class video-conferencing tool, an engaging onboarding portal, an industry leading HR chatbot and a dedicated ESS portal are some of the tools and technologies used in the employee journey of our associates.

Learn more about TASC Outsourcing

References

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Dakin-Bartels, L, 2015. Critical Strategies for Onboarding [online]. Desire2Learn. Available from: https://www.d2l.com/en-mea/blog/welcome-aboard/

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