

Induction is not a luxury, it is an investment

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Mankind in general and managers in particular have a fascination for anything macho. Don't we all love adventure and adrenalin-charged challenges? The world of corporate business is no place for the weak-kneed. Rather, we need take-charge kind of people who can hit the road running and come out victorious.

Well, that is the stuff of fairy tales. Modern organisations are complex entities with a character and personality as diverse and varying as any other animal on the planet. Strip them of their glass and steel façades, their hitech machinery and computers, they are human organisations; human organisations with as many idiosyncrasies, cultural norms, informal codes, right-wrong mores as any tribal society or a religious commune. The DNA of organisations as defined by these unique characteristics is not easy to understand; much less to get used to. It is this fact that underscores the importance of Induction.

But the effectiveness of induction depends not so much on the amount of factual information conveyed to the new comer. Companies, nowadays use technology extensively to communicate to new employees. You have wonderful multimedia presentations, online tutorials and assessments, glossy brochures and in many cases, excellent class room sessions. All these are pretty effective in educating the newcomer about the company, its products, customers, job requirements, company policies etc. So what is missing?

Employee signs a contract with a company formally on appointment terms. Unstated and implicit is an even more important agreement; a psychological contract between the employee and the organisation. This contract is both an opportunity and a pitfall for the organisation. Mutually beneficial psychological contract is of paramount importance to employee initiative and productivity. Badly understood and executed psychological contract is the starting point for all the ills of badly managed workforce.

How does this work? How do we engage a new employee at the level of heart and soul? And does it really work?

Academicians and researchers who have worked on socialization processes tell us the following: a) most newcomers to an organisation are usually tense, nervous or at best cautious; b) even the best of individuals may feel slightly vulnerable or insecure in a new place; c) they find, at a subconscious level, many things strange or different or worse incomprehensible d) they are eager to get a confirmation of their decision to join e) they are also anxious to make a personal mark in the new place; and f) new employees are most receptive to any organizational messages.

Of course, there are managers who believe that the most effective way to train new recruits is to 'throw them at the deep end' and let them fend for themselves. After all 'in their time' it was done that way. No substitute for self-learning. Makes a person a lot

more confident and self-reliant. This is the 'macho' view we saw earlier. Not entirely wrong for some people in some situations, but it is too much of a hit-or-miss affair. Selection costs a lot of money and time. We cannot afford to lose any candidate to the classic 'induction crisis' where newcomers get disillusioned easily.

In short, there are broadly two aspects to an induction. Hard facts and information; and softer, intangible messages welcoming, accepting and embracing the newcomer. The first part can be impersonal and use technology and systematic procedures. The second one requires personal touch and a deeper understanding and acceptance of human needs.

How do we do it? The following points need to be kept in mind:

- Induction process needs to involve as many people as possible - colleagues, reception staff, HR specialists, senior company officials
- Induction material should necessarily include stories of achievement and stories of struggle and triumph.
- The main job of HR specialists is to ensure that all those involved in induction are selected carefully for their understanding of the organisation and its culture as well as the need for such a personal approach to induction.
- Frontoffice staff and others likely to come in contact with the newcomer need training as rigorous as in the hospitality industry.
- HR specialists in the organisations should be able to argue convincingly and obtain necessary resource commitment from the managers for the time and effort needed.
- Induction program is not a one-shot affair. It can be two days or two weeks of formal induction but should have follow up and feedback sessions and perhaps employee events exclusively for the newcomers.
- Organisations may assign informal or formal mentors for every newcomer to get them settle down.
- Important aspect of a top manager's job is marketing the organisation even for internal stakeholders – the employees. Their personal involvement and time enhances the program manifold.

There is an organisation we know of which celebrated the tremendous personal achievement of an employee who did it against all odds. He recalled verbatim a statement made by the CEO to him in the induction dinner he attended many years ago as the main motivation for him. Therein lies the tale. What you spend in terms of time and money on induction becomes an investment. It comes back as more productive and committed employees; it pays back as savings on selection, recruitment and training costs. Productive employment in an organisation is long distance swimming; it does not pay to jump in the pool and start thrashing about.