

Post-COVID-19 Workplace Models: The Culture of Belonging for New Library Employees

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The Beginning: Reflection Conversation, 2023

- Context
 - Recent undergraduate student, fully employed upon graduation
 - Reflections of her first four months as a full-time employee
- Understood the workplace model to be a hybrid-style of 3 day in-office and 2 work-from-home (WFH)
- Team members were choosing to WFH exclusively
- Problems
 - Many questions about the basics operations of her job as a new employee
 - Unsure of where she fit into the team
 - Unsure where the team work fit into overall organization
 - Wanted to feel more connected with co-workers
 - Lonely
- Solutions
 - Short message service/internal chat or emailing a team member
 - Felt stupid
 - Intimidating
 - Reached out to her supervisor
 - Requested a mentor



Post COVID-19 Workplace Model Options

- In-person, in-building five days/week
- Completely remote work-from-home
- Hybrid format - designated & scheduled in-office & WFH days & times
- Hybrid format – random in-office & WFH days & times



New Employees Require...

- Continuous support for at least the first ~12+ months of employment
(Singh, 2022)
- Thorough onboarding, process wh/ includes an orientation and training
- An understanding of the basic functions of their job
- Introduction to the organization's:
 - culture, i.e., unspoken rules, proper attire, location for breaks (Lublin, 2022)
 - structure, procedures & guidelines
 - general office operations
- An understanding of where their work fits into the overall organization
- Personnel support for their questions
(Williams, 2023)

How can library employers onboard, train, support and build a workplace community for new employees with these flexible work models?



How can libraries cultivate environments of motivated and satisfied employees?

Negative Consequences

- Without a thorough onboarding and a cultural & social inclusion process, new employees feel:
 - Unmotivated
 - Dissatisfied
 - ‘Professional abandonment’ (Zitron, 2022)
 - ‘Meaningless’ work (Sani, 2021)
 - Low creativity & psychological empowerment (Chenji & Raghavendra, 2021)
 - Lack of camaraderie (Zitron, 2022)
- Discussions during training focus on mistakes rather than what has been done correctly (Zitron, 2022)
- Poor employee relations (Sani, 2021)
- High employee turnover
- Dwindling social connectedness (Sani, 2021)



Solutions



Onboarding, Mentoring &
Building Social Connections in the Workplace

What is the Onboarding Process?

- “Process by which new employees becomes acquainted with the culture, procedures, norms, skills, knowledge and behaviors required for task performance and accomplishment of organizational objectives”
(Chenji & Raghavendra, 2021)
- Acquaints new employees to the organization’s values, norms, mission and vision (Chenji & Raghavendra, 2021)
- Basics of job processes & task training
- General orientation



Bauer's Levels of Onboarding

- **Compliance** – policies, regulations, rules, legal issues - ~100%
- **Clarification** – job responsibilities, training, and other work expectations – ~50%
- **Culture** – philosophy, mission, vision, values, history, traditions - ~50%
- **Connection** – make connections and relationships within the organization, e.g., know peers, the leadership, upper management - ~20%

Mentoring Process

“Mentorship and training are not things that happen passively; they are actions to be done deliberately, thoughtfully, and consistently, with the intention of fostering and retaining talent.” (Zitron, 2022)

- Deliberate, planned and intentional
- Formalize training with an accompanying support system
- Selection Process
 - Employee who wants to be a mentor
 - Who has the time and patience to be a mentor
- Reach out before new employee starts new job
- Admin reduces the mentor’s workload expectations for the first few months as they work with the new employee, their new mentee

(Lublin, 2022)

Mentoring Process

- Meet daily for first month ; reduce these meetings as new employees acclimate (Williams, 2023)
 - Teach basic functions of their new position
 - Convey organizational structure, mission, vision, values, culture
 - Provides a reliable point-person and daily forum for asking questions
- Meetings occur:
 - With a set schedule
 - In-person or virtually



Mentoring Process

- Follow-up with very specific feedback
 - Consistent, reliable conversations that are more than a list of what was done incorrectly
 - Address concerns quickly & take feedback seriously (Zavvy)
 - Ask open-ended questions
 - How are you feeling about assignments, workload, communication?
 - How can I help?
- Asynchronous mentorship
 - Single, shared electronic, cloud-based document (e.g., Google suite, Microsoft 365) to share everything, e.g., current work, questions, current frustrations
 - Updates are in a regular, real-time feedback loop

(Zitron, 2022)

Solutions – Support Beyond Mentoring

- Assign a daily 'roll over' or 'work buddy', who may differ daily, to be a point-person for the new employee (Lublin, 2022)
- Admin holds informal, virtual weekly 'coffee chats' for all employees
 - provide library updates
 - allow time for questions
 - create connections among employees (Expert Panel, 2021)
- Admin allow for a variety of methods for communication – allow communication to occur through a variety of mediums, e.g., email, SMS, virtual meetings. This gives everyone space and the opportunity to get involved in a way that is comfortable for them. (Expert Panel, 2021)
- Admin foster a culture of learning for the whole library staff & administration
 - Understanding of why a procedure is in place rather than adherence to rules
 - Encourages questions (Zavvy)

Building relationships early on contributes to engagement. Engaged employees are more likely to be productive, loyal, and satisfied with their work

Solutions – Cultural & Social Connectedness

- Admin should:
 - Intentionally create a sense of community in the workplace
 - Organize in-person, in-library social gatherings, e.g., catered breakfast or lunch
 - When geographically possible, create lunchtime or after-work informal gatherings
 - Small celebrations – acknowledge personal & professional milestones, promotions, weddings, etc.
 - Publicly and personally acknowledge work and thank employees, e.g. quick note via email or SM
- Play Games Together
 - Pokemon Go – gaming app
 - Work-Related ‘Trivia Game’ Together - build knowledge on your team while increasing employee engagement and morale in a fun, virtual space. You can also use this trivia game to share best practices (Forbes)
 - Taste tests
 - Board game afternoons
 - Croquet

Solutions – Support Beyond Mentoring

- Admin schedules hour long/half day online meet-ups where employees can overhear conversations
 - All team members work remotely in a single, virtual room
 - Optional use of cameras & microphones
 - Discussions arise
 - Questions are asked & answered
- Advantages
 - Learn incidental library organization knowledge
 - Experience organizational culture
 - Immediate availability of key individuals for questions



Questions?

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Learning Objectives

- **Objective #1** - Examine the challenges and solutions that technology poses for academic library leadership pertaining to the onboarding and training of new employees in a fully remote or hybrid work environment.
- **Objective #2** – Explore the new models for onboarding, training, personnel support, and workplace community building in order to thoroughly train and retain new employees.