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Utilization of Digitalization in the Onboarding Process

Case study

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ABSTRACT:

Remote work has increased in recent years due to digitalization and especially the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a time when remote work became a usual way of working for many employees worldwide. Due to this rapid change in working life, companies had to rethink their operating methods, affecting human resource management functions as well. With that, the onboarding processes were changed to a remote model. After the pandemic, remote and especially hybrid work has established its place in working life.

The onboarding process is a necessary, comprehensive, and time-consuming process, which aims to make the employee part of the work community and allow the employee to perform work tasks. The term onboarding is also called organizational socialization, which describes a process where an individual becomes part of the organization by acquiring the necessary social knowledge and skills. A successful onboarding has several positive effects on the employees and from the employer's point of view.

This study aimed to discover the digital possibilities of the onboarding process after the increase in remote and hybrid work in recent years. More information was needed on the topic at the time of this research. The research was mainly conducted as a qualitative case study, where the data was collected in two stages. The data for the first stage was collected from the case company's previous research, which mainly investigated satisfaction with the company's onboarding process. In the second phase, data from the survey conducted for this study was collected from the case company to deepen the understanding of the digital possibilities of the onboarding process through satisfaction.

The research results showed that the onboarding process can be partially digitized. The research findings showed that areas of the onboarding process that are separate from time and place are suitable for digital onboarding. However, from a social point of view, digital onboarding seems inappropriate in light of this research. In summary, digitality is essential to onboarding in today's digital world. However, digital solutions only partially replace face-to-face onboarding and instead act as a certain kind of enabler that can be used to implement a modern onboarding process.

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Etätyö on lisääntynyt viime vuosina digitalisaation ja erityisesti COVID-19-pandemian myötä, jolloin etätyöstä tuli tavanomainen työskentelytapa monille työntekijöille maailmanlaajuisesti. Tämän nopean työelämän muutoksen vuoksi yrityksissä on jouduttu miettimään toimintatapoja uudelleen, mikä vaikutti myös henkilöstöjohtamisen toimintoihin. Sen myötä perehdytysprosessit muutettiin etämalliin. Pandemian jälkeen etätyö ja erityisesti hybridityö ovat vakiinnuttaneet paikkansa työelämässä.

Perehdytysprosessi on tarpeellinen, kattava ja aikaa vievä prosessi, jonka tavoitteena on saada työntekijä osaksi työyhteisöä ja mahdollistaa työntekijän työtehtävien suorittaminen. Termiä perehdytys käytetään myös organisaation sosiaalistamisessa, jota kuvataan prosessiksi, jossa yksilöstä tulee osa organisaatiota hankkimalla tarvittavat sosiaaliset tiedot ja taidot. Onnistuneella perehdyttämisellä on useita myönteisiä vaikutuksia niin työntekijän kuin työnantajankin näkökulmasta.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää perehdyttämisprosessin digitaalisia mahdollisuuksia viime vuosien etä- ja hybridityön lisääntymisen jälkeen. Aiheesta tarvittiin lisätietoa tämän tutkimuksen aikana. Tutkimus tehtiin pääosin kvalitatiivisena tapaustutkimuksena, jossa aineisto kerättiin kahdessa vaiheessa. Ensimmäisen vaiheen tiedot kerättiin tapausyhtiön aikaisemmasta tutkimuksesta, jossa selvitettiin pääasiassa tyytyväisyyttä yrityksen perehdytysprosessiin. Toisessa vaiheessa tätä tutkimusta varten tehdystä kyselystä kerättiin dataa tapausyritykseltä syventääkseen ymmärrystä perehdytysprosessin digitaalisista mahdollisuuksista tyytyväisyyden kautta.

Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että perehdytysprosessi on osittain digitoitavissa. Tuloksista kävi ilmi, että ajasta ja paikasta riippumattomat perehdytysprosessin osa-alueet soveltuvat digitaaliseen perehtymiseen. Kuitenkin sosiaalisesta näkökulmasta digitaalinen perehdytys näyttää sopimattomalta tämän tutkimuksen valossa. Yhteenvetona voidaan todeta, että nykypäivän digitaalisessa maailmassa digitaalisuus on olennainen osa perehdyttämistä. Digitaaliset ratkaisut eivät kuitenkaan täysin korvaa kasvokkain tapahtuvaa perehtymistä vaan toimivat sen sijaan tietynlaisena mahdollistajana, jonka avulla voidaan toteuttaa moderni perehdytysprosessi.

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HRM   Human Resource Management

1 Introduction

Remote work has increased in recent years due to digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic (Sutela, 2020; Kuisma & Sauri, 2021, pp. 9, 11-12). In particular, the pandemic that started in December 2019 (Terveyskirjasto, 2023) increased the prevalence of remote work (Eurofound, 2022). As a result, working from home became the norm for millions of employees in the EU and worldwide (European Commission, 2020). Although the digital revolution and remote work have been discussed for years, companies had to adapt quickly to the new situation (SD Worx, 2021). This change also meant that organizations had to rethink operating methods (Jost, Mahadevan, Pralong & Sieberer, 2020; Brower, 2020). As a result, onboarding processes have been replaced with virtual models (Maurer, 2020).

After the pandemic calmed down, the general trend in working life has been towards hybrid work (such as Leskinen, 2023; The Oxford Group, 2023; MacKenzie, 2021), and the post-pandemic period has been considered the new normal. This is not a surprise, as according to the survey conducted by Statistics Finland in March-May 2021, 90 percent of employees who worked remotely in the spring of 2021 would like to continue working remotely partly (Sutela, 2021). Work done partly remotely and partly at the workplace is called hybrid work. Its concept is still relatively new and unknown (Työterveyslaitos, 2023). This change in working life has forced organizations to rethink their operating methods, affecting HR functions (Brower, 2020).

Consequently, this has also affected the onboarding process (Maurer, 2020). However, this rapid change in working life to remote and hybrid work models may have yet to give companies time to consider which new operational methods are suitable or profitable or whether changes should be made. At the same time, digital solutions are constantly developing and increasing due to the digital era (Bearing Point, 2021).

Onboarding is an essential process, of which the goal is to make the employee become part of the work community and give the employee the necessary information to

perform at work. The process is time-consuming and may require several actions before the employee can start working. Organizational socialization is part of the onboarding process, where the individual becomes part of the organization. (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). It is stated that a positive onboarding experience affects a person's commitment to the company. (Joki 2021, p. 85; SHRM 2023).

Since remote onboarding has only grown rapidly in recent years, it is challenging to find comprehensive research information on the subject. However, there is researched information related to remote work, such as the benefits and disadvantages of remote work. It is also difficult to find studies related to hybrid work due to the topic's novelty. Still, there have already been studies, for example, on the effects of hybrid work on well-being, such as Research in Practice (Grant & Kinman, 2022), the University of Twente (De Leede & Fisher, 2022), and FlexJobs (Howington, 2023). In addition, for example, Cisco (2022) conducted a global study related to hybrid work. It seems evident that hybrid work is the future, which will also affect the direction of onboarding. Thus, getting more information about virtual onboarding and deepening the subject's understanding is important. Therefore, further studies are needed.

The study is a case study where the data is collected in two stages. The data for the first stage is collected from the case company's previous survey, which mainly investigated satisfaction with the company's onboarding process. In the second stage, data will be collected from a survey made for this study to deepen the understanding of digital onboarding opportunities through satisfaction. In both surveys, the respondents are company employees. The research is mainly carried out as qualitative research, but it also has elements of quantitative research. The research mainly focuses on that part of the onboarding process when the person has already started in the company. Therefore, the work does not take a position on the pre- or post-onboarding phases.

1.1   Aim of the study and research question

This study aims at how digitalization can be utilized in the onboarding process. The purpose is to deepen the understanding of the digital possibilities of the onboarding process and the extent to which the process can be digitized with virtual solutions. Hence, the research seeks to investigate the onboarding process functionally more systematically after the generalization of remote and hybrid work in recent years.

The research question of the research is:

How well and in which areas does digital onboarding work as part of the onboarding process from the point of view of user satisfaction?

1.2   Main Concepts

Remote work is independent of time and place and is usually done using information technology in a place other than a permanent workplace, for example, at home. On the other hand, *hybrid work* means work where part is done at a permanent workplace and part remotely. (Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Remote work results from the pandemic (Eurofound, 2022), after which hybrid work has become a new normal form of working (Leskinen, 2023).

Onboarding refers to the process in which the employee is introduced to work tasks and becomes part of the work community. (Bauer 2023, p. 1; Joki 2021, p. 85; SHRM 2023). *Remote onboarding*, in turn, refers to the onboarding that takes place virtually (GitLab, 2023). The onboarding process starts with the pre-hire and ends with the post-entry, in between including such as orientation and socialization into the organization (Bauer, 2010). This work, however, mainly deals with the phase when the employee has already started at the workplace and has familiarized with the work tasks. Therefore, the work does not take a position in the pre- and post-onboarding phases. Orientations are part

of the onboarding process (Bauer, 2010). In this work, the onboarding process includes common and task-specific orientations.

1.3 Delimitations

This study mainly examines the phase of the onboarding process, where the person has already started in the company and gets access to the company's systems. Therefore, the study does not research the pre- and post-phases of the onboarding process. In addition, the digitality of human resource management is considered to the extent that it is essential for the onboarding process.

From the empirical side, this study is limited to one company where the respondents all work in Finland. The survey concerns new employees who joined the company last year, 2022, and are still employed. Those who move to new positions within the company are not part of the study's target group because they do not fully participate in the onboarding process.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This study consists of five main chapters. The study starts with an introduction section and follows with the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework covers remote and hybrid work, as well as onboarding and digitalization in onboarding, covering the digitalization of human resource management and remote onboarding. The theoretical framework ends with a summary of the theoretical framework. The methodology chapter and the presentation of the case company follow this. Then, the work presents the findings of the study. Lastly, follows discussions and conclusions.

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter reviews the theoretical framework of the work. First, remote and hybrid work is discussed, after which the work introduces onboarding and its process. After this, the work takes an overview of the digitalization of the onboarding process by mapping the current state of the human resources management digitalization stage and goes through what remote onboarding means. Lastly, follows a summary of the theoretical framework.

2.1 New ways of working

Accelerated by digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic, working life has experienced changes, and the forms of work have changed (Kuisma & Sauri, 2021; Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Remote work has undoubtedly become familiar to most of us because of the pandemic; in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic started, many employees had to work remotely (Eurostat, 2022). Hybrid work, in turn, has established its place in working life after the pandemic subsided (Leskinen, 2023). It can be said that working life has become more diverse as remote and hybrid work has become more common (Työterveyslaitos, 2023).

2.1.1 Remote work

Remote work, or teleworking, is work outside the usual workplace, for example, from home (Työterveyslaitos, 2023). According to Tilastokeskus (2023), remote work means gainful work outside the actual workplace, which has been agreed upon with the employer. Remote work usually involves the use of information technology. Work arrangements independent of time and place are also essential for remote work. Therefore, Remote work could also be done at the workplace due to the nature of the work. (Tilastokeskus, 2023). This paper discusses remote work to the extent that it is

essential for the research. Understanding what remote work means and its advantages and disadvantages is essential.

The terms telecommute or telework can also be seen to refer to remote work. According to one source, the term telecommute dates back to the 1970s, originally developed for a different purpose. However, the term established its place in its current usage as often referred to employees who work part of the week in an alternative workplace following a traditional office schedule. Later, telework was invented, establishing its use with government remote work programs. The most recent term that has come into use is remote work, the definition of which today refers to all kinds of flexible, telework, and telecommute arrangements. The work can be done anywhere as long as technology facilitates to get the work completed is available. (Rodgers, 2020). In this work, we use the term remote work.

Although remote work had already existed before the pandemic, in 2019, only 5,4% of employees in the EU usually worked from home, according to Eurostat (2020). In 2020, the impact of the pandemic can be seen when the number increased to 12,3% (Eurostat, 2021). The digital era has also enabled increased remote work (Kuisma & Sauri, 2021, p. 12). In Finland, remote work has existed in its current form for more than 30 years (Kuisma & Sauri, 2021, p. 7), and it can be seen from the figures that the number of remote workers is above the EU's average. The remote worker figures in Finland were 14,1% in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020), and it increased to 25,1% in 2020 (Eurostat, 2021). Before the pandemic, remote work had mostly been used by high-skilled professionals and managers in knowledge- and ICT-intensive services, who do most of their work on computers. Also, education, publishing, audiovisual, podcasting activities, and real estate sectors were in the top five sectors of prevalence of remote work. (European Commission, 2020). Today, and accelerated by the pandemic, remote work has become a common and normal way of working for many in the EU and worldwide (Sutela, 2020; Kuisma & Sauri, 2021; European Commission, 2020).

After remote work became common, its advantages and disadvantages have been observed and studied. For example, the Finnish Center for Occupational Safety and Health (Työturvallisuuskeskus, 2023) has compiled a list of the advantages and disadvantages of remote work. Eurofound (2022) carried out a study about remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The advantages and disadvantages of remote and hybrid work have also received attention in papers such as Forbes. Even big companies such as Microsoft and EY have listed the advantages and disadvantages of remote work. The benefits of remote work are mainly related to work management and well-being, and the biggest concern is the lack of social contacts and the blurring of the boundaries between work and free time (such as Eurofound, 2022; Työterveyslaitos, 2023).

The advantages of remote work benefit both the employee and the company. From the employee's point of view, remote work brings personal freedom and flexibility to work arrangements, which can benefit the needs of private life, such as reconciling work and family life. Remote work can enable peace of mind at work, affecting well-being and motivation, leading to productivity and creativity. Remote work also benefits from time-practical perspectives, as time is saved from traveling. In addition, the risks of commuting accidents and the risk of the spread of infectious diseases are reduced. From the company's point of view, the benefits come in the form of space cost savings and the possibility to recruit more widely when remote work is possible. In addition, remote work brings benefits from a climate perspective by reducing the emissions caused by travel. The disadvantages are primarily related to the social side; the danger is isolation and lack of socialization. In addition, jeopardizing the development of trust, cooperation, and competence, as well as insufficient guidance, supervision, support, and feedback of management and front-line work, can be seen as disadvantages. For someone, a remote work environment can also bring disruptions. From a time management point of view, remote work can cause problems in terms of workload and issues related to joint use of time. Disadvantages of remote working can also include working when sick, not recognizing or worsening the substance abuse problem, and not recognizing the need

for early support. (Eurofound, 2022; Työterveyslaitos, 2023). The pandemic has made positive and negative effects more apparent (Eurofound, 2022).

These advantages and disadvantages can also be studied from the perspective of remote onboarding. However, since remote onboarding is a relatively new phenomenon, finding researched information on the subject is generally challenging. Especially from the point of view of digitalization, researched information is difficult to find. However, on the other hand, the benefits and disadvantages of remote work can be compared to the opportunities and challenges brought by digitalization in the onboarding process.

2.1.2 Hybrid work

Hybrid work refers to work done partly remotely and partly at the workplace, which is still unestablished so far (Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Hybrid work received much attention after the pandemic when remote work had become familiar. According to an international study by The Adecco Group, up to 74% of the office workers who responded to the survey want to work in a hybrid way (Adecco, 2023). It is also possible to read about different hybrid work rules or policies with which companies create new ways of working. Hybrid work is also called the new normal after the pandemic (Leskinen, 2023). In Finland, the increase in hybrid work was reflected in the labor force survey conducted by Statistics Finland regarding removing coronavirus restrictions and transitioning from full-time remote work to hybrid work. The research results showed, as expected, that from 2021 to 2022, the number of people working at home decreased, while at least half of those who worked at home increased. The survey's measurement method is based on the EU regulation, according to which remote work is considered working at home. (Leskinen, 2023).

According to the work health study carried out in the fall of 2021, hybrid work combines the best aspects of remote and close work from the perspective of both the employee and the organization. The research showed that resources that support well-being at

work can increase the desire to work at the workplace, while workload can drive remote work. (Hakanen, Kaltiainen & Virtanen, 2022). Several sources also indicate that hybrid work is a better form of working than complete remote work when the advantages and disadvantages of remote and close work are considered (such as Hakanen, Kaltiainen & Virtanen, 2022; Lindström & Savaspuro, 2023). Hybrid work is seen as a comprehensive cultural change in workplaces that shapes the future of work (Lindström & Savaspuro, 2023).

2.2 Onboarding

Onboarding is a necessary, comprehensive, and time-consuming process. The goal is to make the employee part of the work community and give the employee opportunities to perform work tasks. (Bauer 2023, p. 1; Joki 2021, p. 85; SHRM 2023). According to Joki (2021), onboarding refers to all those activities that help a person become a part of the organization, work community, and stakeholders as soon as possible and learn their work tasks. In Finland, the matter is also regulated in the Occupational Safety Act, according to which the employer must train and supervise the employee (Finlex, 2002).

Although the term onboarding is found to be a relatively new term, it is not a new phenomenon. From the earlier literature, onboarding can be referred to by several different terms, such as orientating, orientation, introduction, or training, which all are terms of organizational socialization. (Becker & Bish, 2021; Carlos & Muralles, 2021). Term onboarding is also referred to as organizational socialization (Bayer, 2023). Organizational socialization is a process in which an individual becomes part of an organization by acquiring the necessary social knowledge and skills. This means getting into the company's norms, procedures, and culture. (Bauer & Erdogan, 2023; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Thus, the organizational socialization process corresponds to the onboarding process's goals. According to recent literature and Carlos and Muralles (2021), it is good to understand the difference between orientation and onboarding, where orientations refer to parts of onboarding, such as a review of the employee's

responsibilities and obligations. Onboarding, on the other hand, refers to a broader whole, where the employee creates a connection with the organization right from the start, such as the work community and culture. (Carlos & Muralles 2021).

Onboarding is essential for several reasons. A good onboarding enables a person to successfully transition to work tasks and the company, which in turn can reduce the need for recruitment and thus also expensive recruitment costs. The employee feels safe, the possibility of potential mistakes and security risks decreases, and the company benefits from the new person as quickly as possible. In addition to everything, a good onboarding experience positively affects employee commitment. (Bauer 2023, p. 1; Joki 2021, p. 85). Furthermore, and as a part of the process, socialization in the organization is seen as necessary for the adaptation of the individual and the organization. Early adaptation results have lasting influence and quantifiable outcomes on the newcomer's commitment and, through this, on the organizations, such as cost effects. Neglecting socializing, in turn, has been shown to have substantially negative impacts. (Anderson & Cooper-Thomas, 2006).

Every company has its own way of onboarding a new employee, and there can be two types of processes: formal or informal. It has been shown that formal onboarding, which is planned, is more effective than informal, in which case there is no plan at all. (Bauer, 2023, p. 2). The onboarding process usually includes an onboarding plan, which should be thoroughly prepared and updated if necessary. The plan's scope is influenced by several factors, such as the new employee's background, position and duties, and length of employment. The plan is reviewed when a new employee starts and is monitored as orientation progresses. A well-thought-out plan makes onboarding easier for the mentor and the new employee (Joki 2021, s. 86-88).

According to Bauer's (2010) employee onboarding framework, the process has four distinct levels, the Four C's, which are the building blocks of successful onboarding. The four Cs are compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. Compliance refers to

teaching employees basic laws, rules, and policy regulations. All organizations must adhere to this standard in order to continue doing business. Clarification, in turn, refers to how well new employees understand their job and performance expectations, which is essential for the company's success. Connection refers to new employees feeling accepted, valued, and connected, which has been studied to affect individual and organizational results positively. Culture ensures employees understand their organization's norms, values, stories, and symbols. Onboarding is one of the most critical ways organizational culture is formed, maintained, and changed. (Bauer, 2023). Bauer has also researched an onboarding model presented below in picture 1.
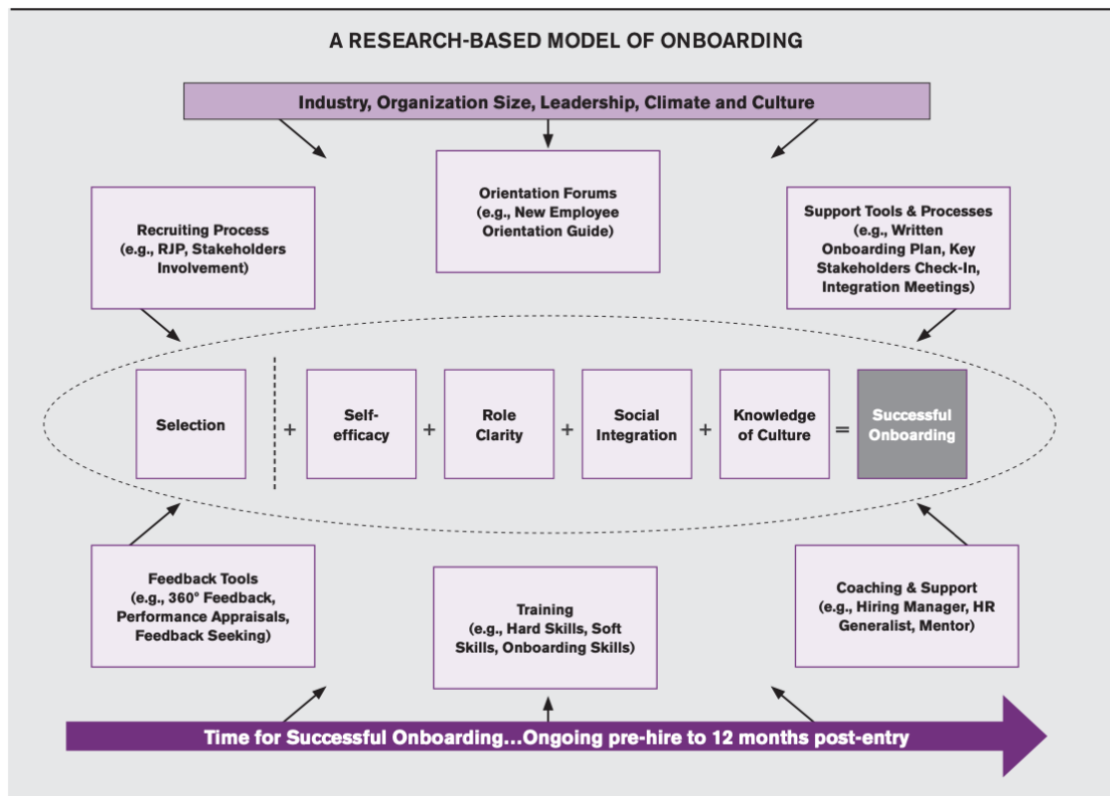
Picture 1. A research-based model of onboarding (Bauer, 2010, p. 8).

Bauer's model summarizes both a new employee's adaptation and the successful onboarding induction. The process starts with recruiting and selection, followed by orientations and training, and ending with support tools and processes, and coaching

and support. All in all, onboarding is a long process from pre-hire to post-entry. (Bauer, 2010).

According to Harpelund, onboarding is about a change process. Every orientation-related measure contributes to building either a positive or negative image of the new workplace in the new employee's mind. It is about the employee's feelings or how things are perceived. (Loikka, n.d.). A good onboarding process has several positive effects from both the individual's and the company's point of view, and therefore, the company should invest in it.

Socialization tactics refer to ways of socializing new employees to the organizational culture (Van Maanen & Schein, 1797, p. 34). Van Maanen and Schein's theory (1979) is one of the earliest and most widely used socialization models (Becker & Bish, 2021), and according to that, six dimensions reflect the structure of organizational socialization. These are collective vs. individual socialization processes, formal vs. informal socialization processes, sequential vs. random steps in the socialization process, fixed vs. variable socialization processes, serial vs. disjunctive socialization processes, and investiture vs. disinvestiture processes. Jones (1986) completed the model with additional categorizations of the tactics as institutionalized and individualized tactics and classified tactics into three groups: context, content, and social aspect. Companies can influence the adoption of the work role by choosing socialization tactics (Jones, 1986). Van Maanen's (1979) socialization tactics, revised by Jones (1986), are presented in Figure 1 below.

	Institutionalized tactics	Individualized tactics
Context	Collective Formal	Individual Informal
Content	Sequential Fixed	Random Variable
Sosial aspects	Serial Investiture	Disjunctive Disinvestiture

Figure 1. Socialization tactics (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, revised by Jones, 1986).

Institutionalized tactics encourage newcomers to accept established roles passively, and in contrast, individualized tactics encourage newcomers to examine and develop their approaches to their roles (Jones, 1986). Context refers to how socialization takes place; content refers to the step pattern of socialization, and social aspects relate to how other members of the organization influence socialization. (Ashforth, Lee & Saks, 2002).

Collective socialization refers to newcomers working in a group, while in individual socialization, newcomers work alone. In formal socialization, the newcomer is kept separate from experienced workers, and in informal socialization, learning takes place with experienced workers. In sequential socialization, socialization proceeds according to a pattern; in random socialization, there is no pattern. Fixed socialization refers to a predetermined amount of time that goes into socializing the newcomer, while in variable socialization, the time depends on the newcomer's assimilation. In serial socialization, experienced employees are used as role models; in disjunctive socialization, no role model is available. In investiture socialization, the newcomer is accepted as the person is, making use of existing skills, while in contrast, in

indisinvestiture socialization, the aim is to prune the newcomer's characteristics and shape the person. (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 37-66).

Socialization tactics and content have been studied later, and regardless of the way socialization is implemented, its ultimate purpose remains the same. Thus, socialization into the organization can also take place remotely.

2.3 Digitalization in Onboarding

Digitalization as an enabler and the spread of remote work accelerated by the pandemic (Eurofound, 2022; Sutela, 2020; Kuisma & Sauri, 2021, pp. 9, 11-12) have contributed to the human resource management functions (Brower, 2020) and with it also the digitalization of the onboarding process (Maurer, 2020). As remote work is here to stay (Sutela, 2020; Kuisma & Sauri, 2021; European Commission, 2020), it is also worth investing in the virtual onboarding processes (SHRM, 2022).

2.3.1 Digitalization of Human Resources Management

The development of digitalization and technological change that has continued in recent decades has led to a digital revolution in the world, further accelerated by the pandemic (Eurofound, 2021). Digitalization is a rapidly becoming more common phenomenon affecting human resources management, which often refers to software and information management technologies, such as HR systems, whose purpose is to make the organization's operations more efficient and reduce costs (Auvinen & Lämsä, 2020). As mentioned in 1998 by Becker and Huselid (1998), the HR system is one crucial component that can help the organization improve efficiency and gain a competitive advantage.

Although the pandemic also accelerated digitalization in HRM, it was not new. Instead, this digital age has taken HRM systems in a more employee-oriented direction. In

contrast, before tools were used to make HR's everyday life easier, nowadays, it is wanted to invest in systems where employee-centeredness is a priority. (SD Worx, 2021). There is also talk of the transition of HRM functions to digital systems that are easy to use (Iisaho, 2021). The digitalization of HRM also affects the employee experience, and in today's post-pandemic hybrid world, the employee experience is no longer limited to the work environment. Digital, social, and cultural experiences have emerged as equally important ways to meet employee needs as attractive office environments. However, even though digital tools have risen to an important position, companies should still find a balance between HR's digital solutions and a human approach. (SD Worx, 2021).

According to the study, which analyzed the current trends of HRM in a digitalizing operating environment, digitalization is already becoming an established state of being in HRM at a general level in the trends of the 2020s. However, there are emerging technological HR trends within digitalization, the most central of which are artificial intelligence, automation, mobile and cloud services, and systems that produce real-time, processed information. Still, people-oriented HRM is emphasized, the trends of which are interactivity, responsibility, well-being, and meaningfulness of work. The strategic role of HR management is emerging while managing HR routines other than digitally is declining. The study also compared the subject from the perspective of consulting companies and academic research. There are reports on the digitalization of HRM published annually by consulting companies, but there is only some academically researched information. It is also noteworthy that academically researched articles are more critical of digitalization. (Auvinen & Lämsä, 2020).

In 2021, consultant company Bearing Point researched the state of digitalization of HR functions in Finland. According to the research, organizations are at different stages of development of digitalization, also in terms of HR, and the digital opportunities to renew HR functions are constantly developing and increasing. Based on the research, investments in HR technology are indeed growing, but on the other hand, insufficient digital understanding and data skills are factors that slow down digitalization. (Bearing

Point, 2021). That is why it is good to deepen the understanding of the matter and find out to what extent the changes in HRM brought about by digitalization are functional. The study also shows that learning abilities and employee-centeredness are the keys to HR's success now and in the future. Nevertheless, the focus of the changes in HR digitalization is often on the structure, operating models, and processes of HR, as well as the identified skills needs. Hence, the effects extend to all employees, and the new technology solution is only part of the change. (Bearing Point, 2021).

SD Worx (2021), which is a globally working provider of HRM and payroll management solutions (SD Worx, 2023), has also covered digitalization in a study that investigated "The Future of Work & People 2021". According to Mattinen (2021), the results of this extensive HR research revealed that although European companies have made good progress in digitizing HR, there are significant differences between HR functions. For certain functions, digitalization may already be a long way off. Still, in processes related to commitment or teamwork, digitalization is rare. (Mattinen, 2021). The study shows that 37,7% of European companies stated that the digital maturity of their personnel management is at a high level. However, when digital maturity was studied in different areas of HR, none of the areas came close to a high level of maturity. In the survey, the field of onboarding received a score of less than 3 out of 5, and it can be concluded that there is enough to do. (SD Worx, 2021). The survey also found HR priorities, which changed between 2020 and 2021 when remote work became the new normal. The effects of the pandemic period were visible, and where in 2020 payroll was the top priority, in 2021, the top priority was to make operations more efficient. The efficiency of the administration has become, to an even greater extent, the number one priority of the moment. Also, for example, balancing work and free time increased its position in the priorities of personnel management. (SD Worx, 2021). Therefore, digital could be used more in the onboarding process, also from the point of view of efficiency, especially when remote work has taken over. Understanding which areas should be used with digital tools should also be studied more.

When we look at the transition of working life and the new normal after the pandemic and in which direction the trend is going, digital solutions are taking on an even more significant role in workplaces. This also affects HRM functions and, thus, the onboarding process. According to Matsgård's view, all HR work is paperless; for example, the onboarding process is handled using digital platforms (Iisaho, 2021).

2.3.2 Remote onboarding

Remote onboarding refers to onboarding at a distant, virtually (GitLab, 2023). The pandemic period accelerated the transition of companies to digital solutions and, at the same time, affected onboarding (Maurer, 2020). Whether the onboarding takes place virtually or not is irrelevant to the ultimate purpose of the onboarding. The implementation is just different, which affects the implementation method. (SHRM, 2023).

As earlier stated, the pandemic accelerated the transition to remote working quickly, and as a result, particular challenges were observed in remote onboarding (SD Worx, 2021; Varshney, 2023). Remote onboarding has been perceived as more challenging than face-to-face, and it requires more planning (SHRM, 2022) and more effort from both the employee and the company to form a strong relationship (Varshney, 2023). Socialization in the organization has been seen as one of the more common disadvantages of remote onboarding. However, since the topic is relatively new, it is challenging to find extensive studies. However, there are some recent thesis studies on the topic. Also, understanding the organization's culture can be perceived as a disadvantage of remote onboarding. (Such as Hurskainen, 2021; Wallenius, 2021). Among the various remote onboarding tips and guides, which are pretty well available online, the social aspects of the process have often been considered (such as Rimpiläinen, 2023; Treas, 2023). In addition, virtually implemented onboarding requires paying attention to the presence and quality of the facilitator. (Eklund, 2020). Hemphill and Begel (2023) have studied onboarding challenges in newly virtual teams, and,

according to the study, teams face social challenges during the transition to a virtual team. The study showed that those working remotely found creating social relationships with co-workers more challenging. Remote work also contributed to the fact that the new remote workers lacked awareness of performance expectations and showed their incomplete abilities to colleagues. Learning tacit information was also perceived as challenging for a new remote worker. (Hemphill & Begel, 2023). Even though the study examined the onboarding challenges of virtual teams, it can be stated that the same issues were raised in the studies related to remote onboarding.

However, virtual onboarding has positive aspects (Varshney, 2023; Työterveyslaitos, 2023), and as remote working is becoming the new norm, which enables different ways, times, and places to work, companies should develop the onboarding process according to that (SHRM, 2022; Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Remote work makes it possible to organize virtual employee onboarding simultaneously for different time zones in different parts of the world (Varshney, 2023). This possibility, in turn, can reduce the need for work trips and possible work accidents, which are seen as benefits of remote work (Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Attending the virtual onboarding process can also bring flexibility between work and private life and work flexibility, reflected in employee engagement, which affects productivity (Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Remote onboarding is successful when the basics are in order, and it considers practically the same things as if it were to take place face-to-face (Eklund, 2020).

2.4   Summary of the theoretical framework

The study's theoretical framework provides guidelines for the study's research question, which aims to determine which onboarding process areas are useful to digitize. Above all, it is known that a successful onboarding process has several positive effects, and thus, it is worth investing in it (Bauer, 2023). It is also clear that remote onboarding is possible with today's digital opportunities, which the pandemic period proved. Remote work has also been observed to have several positive effects from both the employee's and the

employer's point of view (Eurofound, 2022; Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Remote onboarding also has positive aspects (Varshney, 2023). With hybrid work and, thus, remote work being the current trend in working life (refs Leskinen, 2023; The Oxford Group, 2023; MacKenzie, 2021), the benefits can also be utilized in the onboarding process.

According to the theory, remote onboarding could be used in areas of the onboarding that the employee can do with their own time; in other words, they are not bound to time and place (SHRM, 2022; Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Remote onboarding can also be used in orientation events that would otherwise require travel (Varshney, 2023). However, it should be noted that face-to-face onboarding is needed, such as in terms of socialization into the organization (Such as Hurskainen, 2021; Wallenius, 2021). Regarding the silent transfer of information and understanding performance expectations, remote onboarding might also not be suitable (Hemphill & Begel, 2023).

3   Methodology

This chapter discusses the research approach, the data collection methods, the research samples, and the data analysis. The research's reliability and validity are also discussed. In addition, the chapter presents the case company and its onboarding process and organizational socializing as part of the onboarding process.

3.1   Research Approach

This research is mainly conducted as a qualitative study, but it also contains elements of a quantitative study. Both methods can be used in the same study to explain the same research objects but differently. In qualitative research, the aim is to comprehensively understand the quality, characteristics, and meanings of the object under investigation. (Koppa, 2021). Qualitative research is based on different materials and their analysis. Using empirical data as research data is characteristic of qualitative research. These can include, for example, texts, conversations, or interviews. (Juhila, 2021). Central to the research process is the production of material and its analysis (Günther & Hasanen, 2021). Quantitative research, on the other hand, is based on describing and interpreting the object with the help of statistics and numbers using various computational and statistical analysis methods (Koppa, 2015).

A case study is one qualitative research approach. There can be many different types of case studies, but the unifying factor in them is the study of some phenomenon and issue in the manner of qualitative research. However, quantitative methods can also be used for case studies. (Puusniekka & Saaranen-Kauppinen, 2006). A case study can examine a single or several cases and try to get as comprehensive a picture of the case or cases as possible. This means getting to know the subject from a wide range of perspectives. The case is built based on the material, often limited to the phenomenon under investigation. (Vuori, 2021).

The case study is well suited as the research approach of this research, as the purpose of the research is to analyze the digital possibilities of a case company's onboarding process. Following the nature of the case studies, the study aims to give as comprehensive a picture as possible of how the onboarding process can be utilized with digital possibilities and to what extent digitality does not produce added value (Vuori, 2021). The case is limited to one company.

3.2   Case Company

The case study company operates in the real estate industry internationally. The company offers investors, owners, and users comprehensive real estate services. The company has versatile work tasks for real estate professionals in various tasks. These can include, for example, tasks within commercial management and leasing, investment and asset management, project management, sustainable development, and technical management, as well as within valuation, research, and strategic analysis, but also, for example, in financial management, data analytics and technical innovations, and so on. In Finland, the company employs around 700 people.

Like many other companies, the onboarding process of the target company has changed in recent years because of changes in working life. These changes have been mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the increase in digital options has also accelerated the changes. The process before the pandemic, during the pandemic, and after the pandemic has been reviewed below. In addition, the work examines the socialization tactics in the company's organization, which is one of the main goals of the onboarding process.

3.2.1 The case Company's onboarding process

The company's onboarding process consists of actions before the start of work, called the pre-onboarding phase. This phase is followed by the part of the onboarding process when a person has already started in the company and the follow-up part afterward, the post-onboarding phase. The onboarding process of the target company corresponds to Bauer's onboarding model (2010). Bauer's (2010) four C's can be observed, for example, from the perspective of the company's orientation satisfaction survey.

The company's onboarding process consists of several areas, aiming to make the newcomer part of the work community and enable the work to be done. Company onboarding includes actions that take place before the person starts working. This part is called the pre-onboarding phase. When the newcomer has started at the company, socialization into the work community and orientation with the work begin. In this paper, this is addressed as the orientation phase. Onboarding also includes the time after the so-called orientation phase, the post-onboarding phase. Pre-onboarding includes, for example, an e-mail letter before the start of work and equipment orders. The orientation phase, in turn, involves social activities and guidance to work. Orientation is divided into general and task-specific orientation. Post-onboarding aims to ensure that the employee has received the necessary orientation and that the start of the work has gone well. This phase is monitored, for example, by sending a survey regarding the employee's satisfaction with the onboarding process. The general orientation includes a comprehensive introduction to the company on a general level, to the company's practices and policies, and the general systems. Task-specific orientation, in turn, includes orientation to the hired task. Onboarding is generally and, at the general level, the responsibility of the company's management and human resources administration, and at the task-specific level, the person's supervisor. Part of the company's onboarding process is globally integrated, but most of it is handled locally. In Finland, the globally integrated part includes general issues such as the company's vision and mission, values, and what kind of culture the company wants to maintain. Country-specific operating methods and practices are introduced locally.

Before the pandemic, the onboarding part was mainly held face-to-face in Finland. As a remote event, only a company introduction event for all countries was organized. It is also possible that individual parts of the orientation were available in video or another virtual format even before the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, the company had to move the onboarding to a remote format with a quick schedule. After the pandemic, the onboarding process was adapted to a hybrid model, whereby part of it is held mainly remotely and face-to-face. In the same context, the company began to use more digital solutions to support onboarding. The target group of this study is those who started in 2022, and therefore, it concerns the 2022 onboarding and its current implementation method. The general orientation was held in 2022, mainly remotely, using different platforms where materials could be stored. However, the general orientation event was organized as a hybrid, so it was possible to participate on-site. Regarding task-specific orientation, face-to-face orientation was more common than in general orientation. However, part of the task-specific orientation was also available in virtual form, depending on the tasks and the team.

The company conducts an onboarding feedback survey for new employees, as mentioned above, and it is sent virtually approximately 2-4 months after starting employment. However, the survey needs to take a more detailed stand on the onboarding implementation method or examine how well digital options are utilized in the onboarding process. Thus, due to rapid changes, the current onboarding model has yet to be examined in more detail as to whether it is currently suitable.

In 2022, 153 new people who are still employed started at the company. Therefore, onboarding has played a significant role in the company last year. This work examines the possibilities of digitalization, especially regarding general onboarding and its orientation, as task-specific orientation is mainly in the hands of superiors.

3.2.2   The case Company's organizational socializing

One of the main goals of onboarding is to socialize newcomers to the organization (Bauer, 2023, p. 1; Joki, 2021, p. 85; SHRM, 2023). Referring to Van Maanen's (1979) socialization tactics, which Jones (1986) has re-examined, the target company's current way of socializing in the organization can be observed. Based on this, the target company's method of engaging a newcomer as part of the organization is individual due to the nature of the work, as only one person is often hired for a specific task. However, part of the process is the same for each employee; thus, socializing happens in a group. If it is a question of the simultaneous hiring of several people for the same job, we can also talk about collective socialization. Again, due to the nature of the job, newcomers learn with experienced colleagues during the socialization period, in which case the socialization occurs informally. The process of socializing the target company is serial, i.e., a plan is behind it. Mainly, more experienced employees act as role models for newcomers, so socialization occurs continuously. In some situations, an entirely new role may be opened, in which case the role model is unavailable. As the last dimension, socialization in the organization takes place in an investiture manner, i.e., there is no attempt to modify the personal characteristics of newcomers, and the aim is to utilize existing skills.

3.3   Data Collection Methods

Data collection for the study was carried out in two phases. In the first stage, the study used secondary data, the case company's latest survey from 2022, Survey A, which mainly measured satisfaction with the company's onboarding process. The survey mainly consisted of quantitative questions, where satisfaction was measured on a scale of 1-5, where number one is the lowest rating and number five the highest. In the survey, it was also possible to leave open feedback, treated as qualitative data.

In the second phase of the research, a questionnaire was implemented for the research, survey B. This option was decided due to time management, as the survey allows access to a larger number of respondents, and the interviews would have taken a long time considering the number of respondents. However, the survey was conducted with open-ended answers, believed to provide more in-depth information on the researched topic than quantitative questions. The survey questions were structured to obtain the most comprehensive information on the subject and avoid possible misunderstandings. However, the survey includes a few quantitative questions measuring general satisfaction. These questions were answered on the same scale from 1 to 5 as in Survey A to make the comparison possible.

The research is, therefore, mainly qualitative, but it also contains elements of quantitative research. Both surveys were conducted in Finnish, as all respondents spoke Finnish. Thus, the answers and direct quotes have been translated from Finnish to English.

3.4   Samples

Survey A is sent to each new employee with some exceptions, such as short-term employment relationships, approximately 2-3 months after starting the employment relationship. In 2022, the survey was sent using the feedback platform and e-mail to 171 new employees who started in 2022. The message was sent only once. The survey was conducted when some respondents might have attended the onboarding remotely due to the pandemic and depending on work duties. A total of 68 responses were received. This number of respondents means a response rate of 40%. The survey consisted of the respondent's background information, including the name, the supervisor's name, and the respondent's unit. In addition, the survey asked whether the respondent had a named mentor and feedback about the mentor. Otherwise, the survey mainly asked about general satisfaction with the onboarding with different claims. The survey also

asked about face-to-face and remote onboarding fluency, which are interesting results compared to survey B.

The target group of Survey B were employees who started at the case company last year, in 2022, and whose employment relationship was active at the time of the research. The survey was sent by e-mail to a total of 153 employees. Short-term employees, such as interns, were possibly left out of the survey. The response time was about two weeks between May 3-17, 2023. A reminder message was sent about halfway through the response time, 10 May 2023. A total of 65 responses were received. This number of respondents means a response rate of 42%. The survey consisted of the respondent's background information, including the respondent's unit and office location, the general satisfaction with the onboarding, and three different areas regarding onboarding. The sub-areas were the content, the method of implementation, and the digitality of the onboarding. Figure 2 below shows the number of respondents with the recipients of the surveys.
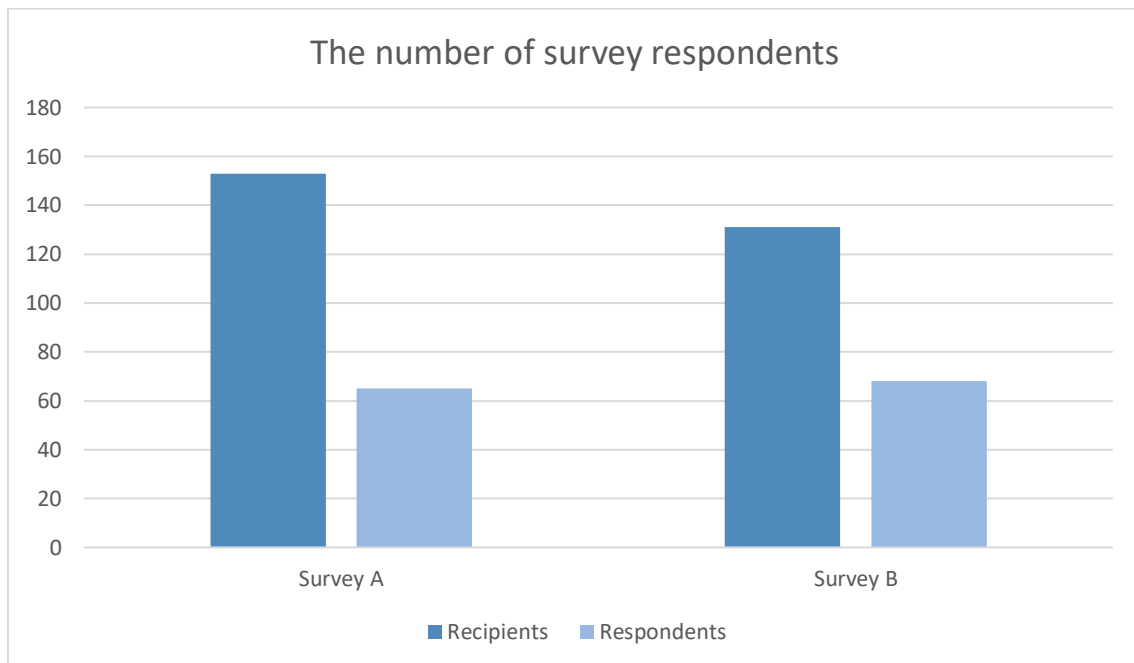

Figure 2. The number of survey respondents.

3.5   Data Analysis

Analysis is a multi-step process that usually starts with building an overall picture of the material. The most important thing is to find the things that are central to the research problem. (Günther, Hasanen & Juhila, 2021). Qualitative content analysis is used in the analysis, which aims to identify which issues, topics, and themes the material talks about (Vuori, 2021).

The material consists of surveys A and B, which are analyzed by summarizing which issues, topics, and themes emerged from it through satisfaction (Vuori, 2021). The data is therefore searched for with the help of satisfaction for issues that respondents are or are not satisfied with. The analysis is done qualitatively as the qualitative part is more important from the point of view of the research. From the secondary data, survey A, descriptive reporting of satisfaction and content analysis of the fluency of remote and face-to-face onboarding in terms of overall satisfaction is done. In addition, the results are compared with Survey B to the extent relevant. For survey B, descriptive reporting of satisfaction and content analysis is done using the survey's areas, which are general satisfaction with onboarding and three different sub-areas: onboarding content, implementation method, and digitality. In this way, a consistent analysis of the survey results can identify the problems that arise for each subject area. By combining these, the aim is to get the answer to the research question. In addition, the results are compared with the work's theoretical framework. The purpose is to identify how digitalization can be utilized in the onboarding process through satisfaction.

3.6   Reliability and Validity

Assessing the reliability of research, whose key concepts are reliability and validity, is a crucial part of scientific research. Although opinions on the appropriateness of these terms for research evaluation vary in qualitative research, validity often receives more

attention than reliability. When evaluating the reliability, the nature of the research and the research topic can affect how the participants in the research have answered, which affects the reliability. Reliability can be assessed by whether the method is reliable and consistent in which circumstance, whether the measurement results are stable at different times, and how consistent the results are with different measuring tools. On the other hand, validity aims to assess whether the research is valid, which can also be understood as credibility and persuasiveness in qualitative research. Validity assesses whether the research has been done thoroughly and whether the results obtained and the conclusions drawn are "correct", which is also influenced by the researcher's point of view. (Puusniekka & Saaranen-Kauppinen, 2006). In quantitative research building on secondary data, it was impossible to evaluate the reliability and validity of measures through statistical tests as all measures were single-item.

When considering this study, it is difficult to assess reliability, as it is challenging to say whether the answers would be valid in another study. It is possible that different results would be reached due to different contexts, time, or tools. However, it is also possible that the same issues would arise, or the same issues would arise depending also on the researcher's approach. However, when conducting this research, the questionnaire has been constructed as clearly as possible, and the answers have been interpreted as openly as possible so that possible prejudices do not affect the preparation of the results. Although, it is possible that the questions are not understood correctly or interpreted differently. There may also be interpretation errors in the answers regarding previously collected material. Considering the empirical scope, the research could also have been carried out as in-depth interviews, in which case more in-depth answers to the research question could have been obtained. However, this would not have been possible due to scheduling reasons and considering the number of survey recipients. The sample could also have been reduced, but on the other hand, it could have affected the generalizability of the results. On the other hand, it was also wanted to limit the respondents to all those who started in 2022 and whose employment relationship was still active on behalf of the case company. Regarding this study, the research material

began to repeat itself, i.e., its saturation (Puusniekka & Saaranen-Kauppinen, 2006) was reached to a sufficient extent.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the digital possibilities of the onboarding process. The study's respondents were employees who started in the case company in 2022 and had recently undergone onboarding. In addition, the employment relationship of the respondents was active at the time of the research. Thus, the respondents are valid for the research, as they have participated in the onboarding process, which was researched through satisfaction. The research is also valid insofar as it answers the research question from the perspective of a particular company. The research results could change if the topic were studied for more companies. However, the research gives valid general views on the digital possibilities of the induction process. The answers have been processed as openly as possible and documented precisely so that the results are as explicit as possible.

4 Findings

This chapter discusses the results of this study. The aim of this study was to find out how well and in which areas digital onboarding works as part of the onboarding process from the point of view of user satisfaction. First, the results of the previous survey, survey A, will be reviewed to the extent that they are relevant to the research question of this study. After this, the survey B results, which were carried out in connection with this study, will be reviewed. Finally, the results are compared with each other.

4.1 Findings from the onboarding feedback survey

Last year's 2022 onboarding feedback survey took a position on the fluency of remote and face-to-face onboarding, which are essential information for this study. Satisfaction with fluency was measured on a scale of 1-5, where number one was the lowest rating and number five was the highest. The feedback survey showed that respondents were almost equally satisfied with remote and face-to-face onboarding fluency. The answers were at a good level for both, and the satisfaction of the answers reached nearly the number four-level, 3,95/5 for remote onboarding and 3,97/5 for face-to-face onboarding. Figure 3 below reflects the level of satisfaction.
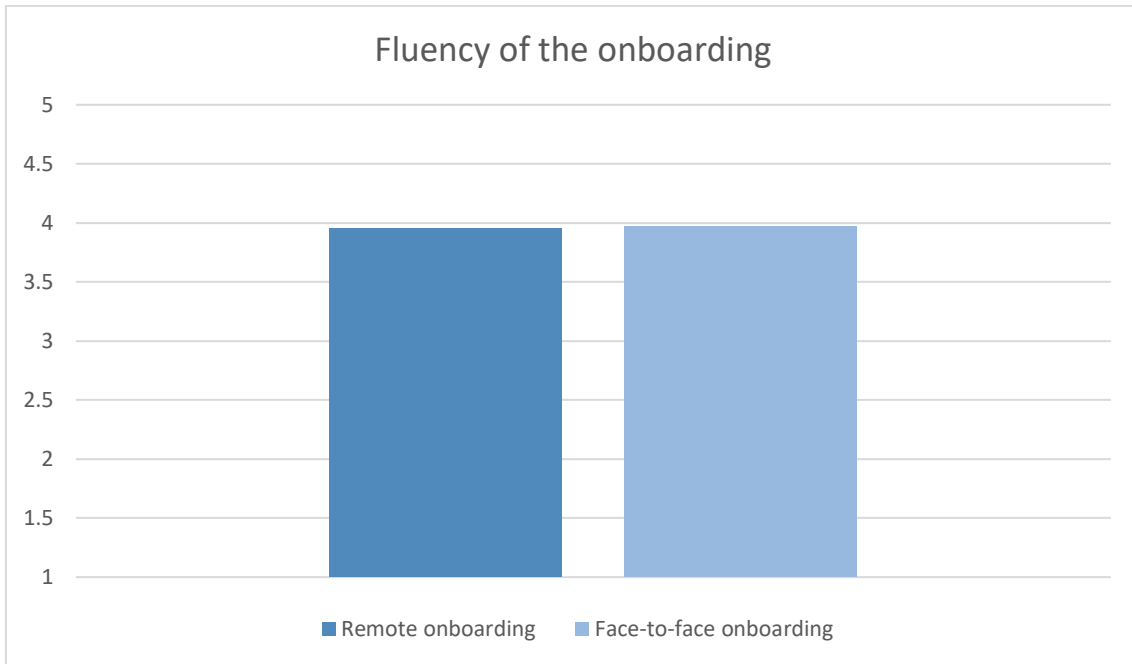
Figure 3. Fluency of the onboarding.

Regarding general satisfaction, the respondents were mostly satisfied with the fluency of the digital parts of the onboarding, and according to the satisfaction of this survey, the onboarding process can be digitized at least partly. However, it should be noted that the survey only took a position on the fluency of remote onboarding, i.e., onboarding that takes place virtually, and therefore did not take a position on, for example, which areas the respondents think are good areas to digitize. However, the general satisfaction gives guidelines for the fact that aspects of the onboarding can be digitized from the point of view of its fluidity.

Open comments also confirm that the onboarding in digital form is a good option and that some parts of the onboarding can be implemented remotely in digital form. Examples to confirm this statement are:

"The onboarding has gone well even though it has been completely remote…."

"Although the onboarding has mainly taken place remotely, I have not been left alone with problems, but have always received help. It is nice that you were also asked later how the work went."

"The onboarding has gone well despite the distance. It is nice when you have always had help from co-workers, who have helped for several hours continuously when you have had to figure out some things thoroughly. A small suggestion for improvement would be what the organization/team/supervisor expects from the employee or how best to meet those expectations. My insecurity shows a little when I am not quite sure about expectations."

On the other hand, the open comments also revealed some factors that support face-to-face onboarding or are at least against the complete remote onboarding process. An example of this is:

"…the fact that the next months at least should be almost entirely focused on working in the office and not remotely, because it allows you to get to know your colleagues properly and the threshold for asking questions is significantly lower…"

From the results, it can be concluded that remote onboarding is possible in certain parts, but for example, in terms of the social side and learning, face-to-face onboarding may be a more effective option. On the other hand, for some, independent learning may be a more suitable option, in which case the digital form of onboarding may be more effective.

4.2 The results of the survey

This chapter reviews the results of the survey conducted for this study. The survey was divided into general satisfaction and three areas: content, method of implementation,

and digitality. These were examined from the perspective of general and task-specific orientation. Each is discussed separately below.

4.2.1 General Satisfaction

At the beginning of the survey, general satisfaction with the onboarding process was investigated. Satisfaction was measured on a scale of 1-5, where number one was the lowest rating and number five was the highest. Regarding the general orientation, the average grade was 4,06. The distribution between different grades is presented in Table 1.
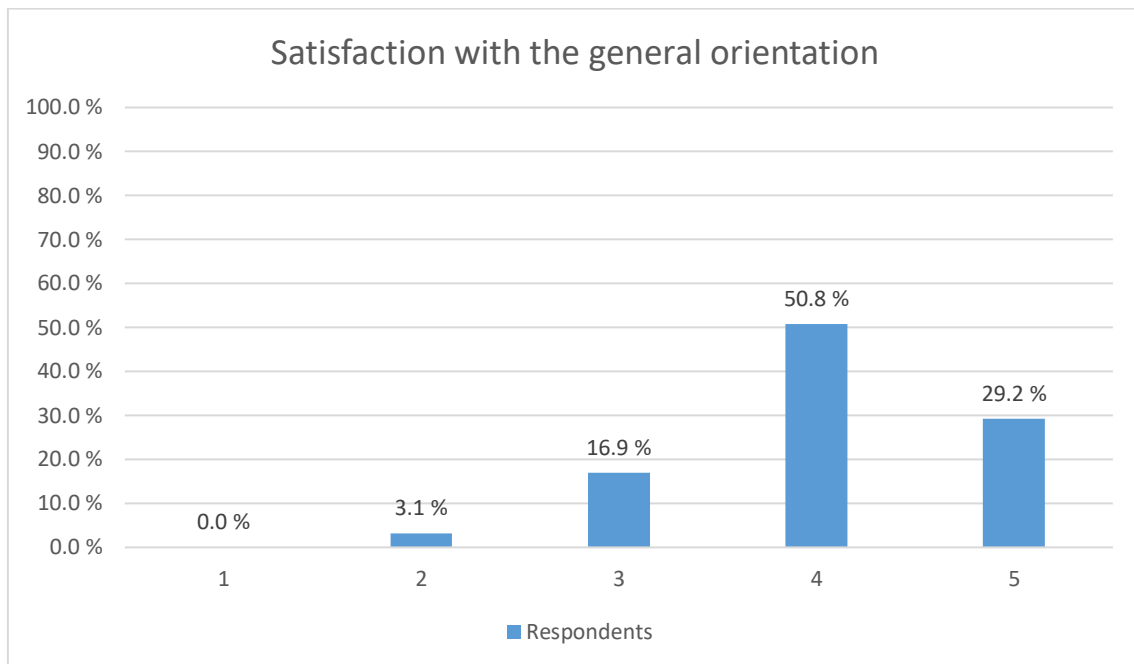

Table 1. Satisfaction with the general orientation.

The same general satisfaction was also asked regarding the task-specific orientation on the same scale. Regarding the task-specific orientation, the average grade was 3,54. The distribution between different grades is presented in Table 2.
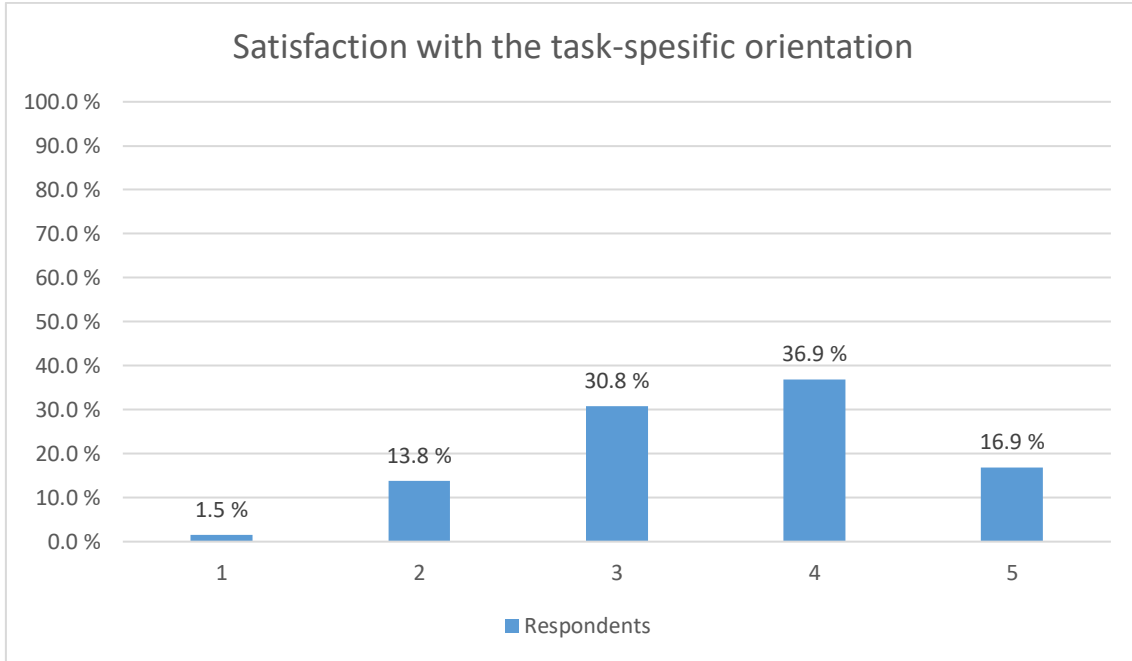
Satisfaction with the task-spesific orientation

Table 2. Satisfaction with the task-specific orientation.

At the time of the research, the general orientation included more areas that had been digitized than the task-specific orientation. It can be seen from the results that the respondents were quite satisfied with the task-specific orientation, but they were more satisfied with the general orientation. With the help of digital platforms, it is possible to put the onboarding into a clear form or entity, which can affect the orientation experience. It can be said that digital entities may have raised the overall rating of general orientation.

4.2.2 Contents

General Orientation

In the survey, deficiencies in the content of onboarding were investigated. This is to improve the understanding of potential digital content shortcomings and to deepen the understanding of more suitable content to be introduced face-to-face. The same was asked about both general and task-specific orientation.

Based on the answers, the general orientation material was mainly good and comprehensive in content. However, a few things to consider came to the fore. Some of the respondents felt that there was too much content in relation to the time and that finding the right material afterward was challenging:

"Too much matter and content for a person starting right away."

"It is not really lacking, but sometimes it is challenging to find introductory material on many different platforms..."

Some of the respondents felt that it would have been good to examine particular areas only at a later stage of the onboarding process:

"At the beginning of the employment relationship, practically all the systems and methods of operation are so new that you cannot get the most out of all the aspects included in the orientation when you are not yet able to understand the importance of the systems in practical work."

Face-to-face orientation also came up when asked about the content:

"In the general introduction, I had to watch many different videos, and if I had a question, I did not know who to ask (you cannot ask from a video). It would have been nice to go through some of the topics face to face with someone."

On the other hand, finding digital content also received positive feedback:

"There was a lot of material, and it is nice to be able to return to all points later. In the beginning, there is a lot of information."

"There is a lot of information, you cannot remember everything at once, so it is good to have the opportunity to return to it later."

Regarding general orientation and from the point of view of the content, when planning digital orientation, it is good to pay attention to the amount of material, execution schedule, and findability. However, from a content point of view, digital orientation only partially replaces face-to-face orientation.

Task-specific Orientation

The task-specific orientation content shared more opinions than the general orientation. As with the general orientation, some felt that too little time had been set aside for the orientation:

"There was too little time in the task-specific orientation together with the mentor who changed company. I did not get to try my tasks enough."

"Task-specific orientation was quickly reviewed. People were in a hurry, and things were not reviewed at the level of the whole, and there were many unclear issues that had to be asked later."

Others of the respondents felt that there was not enough content, or it was incomplete, and the lack of planning of the content was also highlighted:

"The task-specific job description is still very unclear to me, so I constantly try to think and think about whether there could be something that should have been done or noticed."

"Regarding my job description, so much learning that sometimes it is difficult to structure and process everything. Studying many systems and platforms

simultaneously is sometimes challenging, and part of the orientation may be missed because of it."

There were also shortcomings in going through policies and instructions or finding them:

"This lacked systematization and clarity. Regarding content, the orientation was mainly individual things here and there according to the busiest work task."

On the other hand, some of the respondents said that the best way to orient yourself with the content of the work is by starting the work:

"The job is one that requires learning by doing. However, basic training was sufficient."

"I think the orientation was sufficient both in quantity and quality. In the end, you get to know the actual work tasks best by doing the work overtime."

In terms of content, task-specific orientation could, in the light of this study, invest more in terms of time and material. Respondents did not mention digitalization much when asked about the content of the task-specific orientation. This point strengthens the claim that digital technology was used more in general orientation at the time of the survey. With the help of digital technology, the content of the task-specific orientation could be made more precise so that a better understanding of the schedule could also be obtained.

In summary, from a content point of view, the onboarding process can be digitized. However, the findability of the material came to the fore. The amount of material also attracted comments. On the other hand, incomplete content and material also garnered comments. The selection of entities to be digitized is influenced by the suitability of the material for each task; in other words, orientation material that is irrelevant to a task

can weaken the onboarding experience. In terms of digital onboarding, the findability of the material is an essential factor.

4.2.3 Method of Implementation

General Orientation

According to the survey, remote and hybrid methods were mainly perceived as suitable and effective ways of onboarding in terms of general orientation:

"I liked the way the orientation was implemented. I liked that I could do the orientation in peace at home and that you could also participate in the orientation session remotely."

"Worked completely remotely, in my opinion, very well. I did not have to run around the office looking for a room or a cubicle where I could have a meeting, and therefore, I could probably concentrate better."

The remote model was especially felt to bring flexibility, for example, in terms of schedules, in which case orientation could be promoted partially according to one's schedule and the place:

"The implementation method is good because you can familiarize yourself at your own pace and return to the instructions if necessary."

However, some of the respondents felt that from a social point of view, there should have been face-to-face general orientation or that remote orientation did not suit someone at all:

"Remotely, it was good to focus on things at your own pace, but then different teams and people remained distant."

"Unfortunately, most of it was handled remotely, and it would have been more comfortable as a meeting face-to-face. Presence brings interaction to education in a completely different way."

"The orientation should definitely be organized face-to-face on-site, and remote orientations should be completely abandoned."

The amount of material to be studied independently was also commented on:

"Too much to study independently. The orientation session went by quite a bit since I had been at work for so little time before that."

The implementation method of the general orientation, therefore, divided opinions. Others liked a hybrid or remote model, while others preferred a face-to-face orientation. However, based on the answers, general orientation can be digitized, but how it suits each person depends on the person. In addition, from a social point of view, there are more suitable options than digital orientation.

Task-specific Orientation

Regarding task-specific orientation, face-to-face orientation was felt more necessary than general orientation. This feeling was influenced by the fact that some felt that going through and learning things was smoother face-to-face than remotely and asking questions seemed more accessible or more natural:

"During the first month, my orientation was largely carried out at the office on site, and in my opinion, in terms of asking questions at the beginning, it was a reasonable way of orientation."

"In my opinion, task-specific orientation is best-done face-to-face at the beginning. In this way, you also become familiar with the mentor, in which case there is a lower threshold also to ask the so-called stupid questions."

"Task-specific orientation was carried out face-to-face, which is really the only right way."

Remote task-specific orientation can also be experienced as a challenge to communicate:

"The task-specific orientation was carried out remotely, but unfortunately, the communication was very difficult, and it felt like it was more of a hassle."

Although some feel that task-specific orientation only works face-to-face, on the other hand, task-specific orientation that takes place as a hybrid or even completely remote, based on research, works too for many:

"I found the task-specific orientation to be good. With the supervisor and the team, things were reviewed on-site and remotely in just the right balance."

"The orientation was functional, mostly on-site, but also partly remotely, in which case the cooperation and reachability with my instructor worked well between remote connections."

"Task-specific orientation also took place completely remotely and worked very well for me. I had been assigned a "tutor" (senior) in advance, with whom we had meetings a few times a week."

The survey also took a position on a general level, whether the employee would have wished for a different implementation method of orientation. Based on the answers, the current hybrid model was the most functional. Still, some felt that more face-to-face orientation was needed.

"In my opinion, it is best for onboarding if you agree with the orientation person whether it will be remote or on-site. I personally like it if the orientation to work tasks takes place on the spot because then going through things and asking questions is smooth. On the other hand, I think you should not be forced to do orientation at the office because the person giving the orientation or the person being oriented might want to be remote. In other words, support for flexibility."

"Face-to-face orientation would be even better, but remote orientation was just more practical even when starting in my own situation. So, everything went well, it was very flexible in terms of my schedule."

"More face-to-face onboarding, so it would have been easier to get to know new colleagues at the beginning."

In summary, remote onboarding is possible from the perspective of implementation. The factors affecting the experience of the way the orientation is implemented are social factors, as well as the way to internalize and learn things that suit the person.

4.2.4 Digitality

In addition to open comments, digitality was measured on a scale of 1-5, where number one was the lowest and number five the highest grade, in the form of four different statements. These were the utilization of digitalization, digital onboarding material, functionality of digital onboarding, and overall success in digital onboarding.

In the main, digital is perceived to be utilized well. For each statement, number 4 received the most answers. Table 3 below shows the respondents' satisfaction with the use of digitalization in the orientation process. Based on the answers, the respondents are satisfied with the use of digital technology, although it could be used even more.
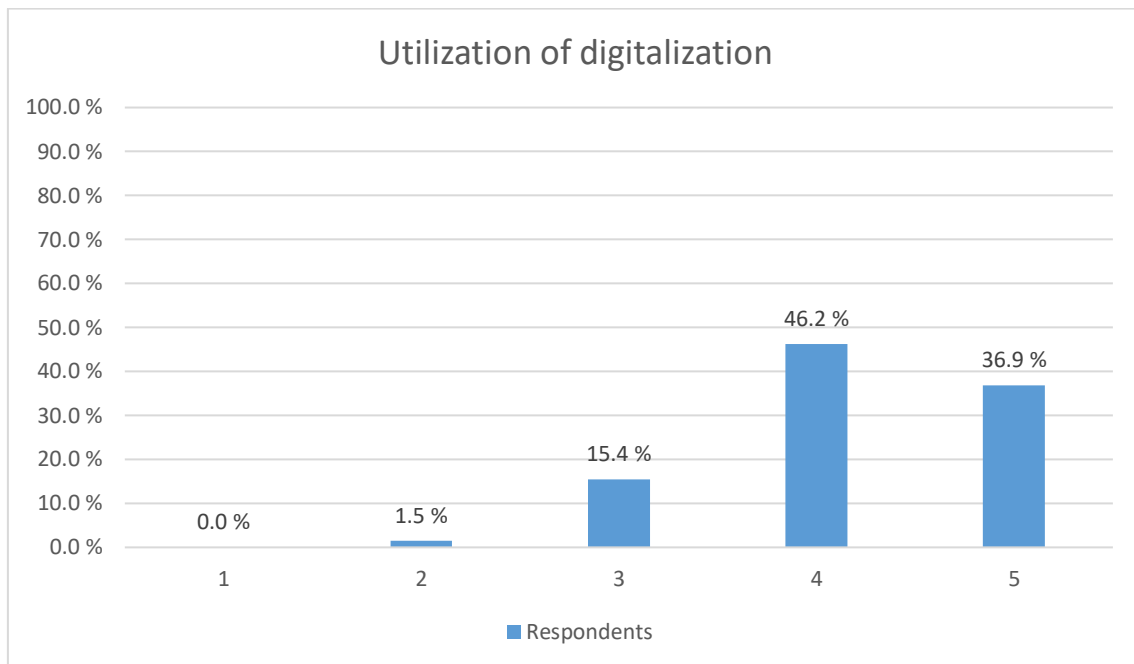

Utilization of digitalization

Table 3. Satisfaction with the task-specific orientation.

Regarding the digital onboarding material, respondent satisfaction also reached a good level. Table 4 below shows the distribution of satisfaction between different grades.
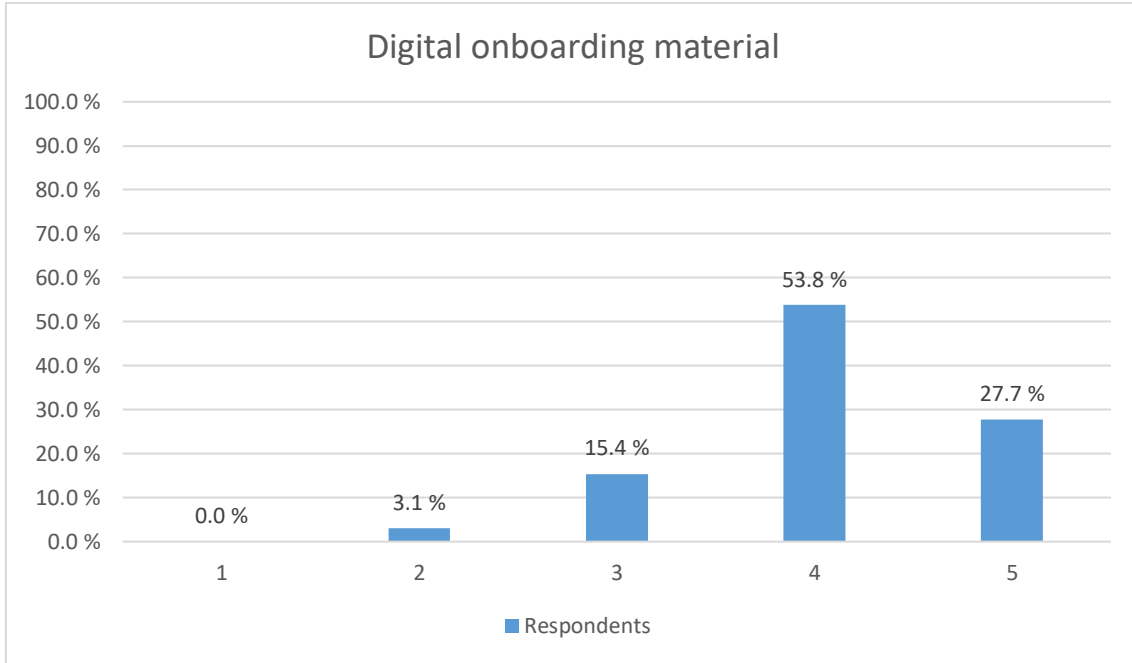
Table 4. Digital onboarding material.

Based on the answers, the applicability of digital onboarding is also at a good level. However, grade 3 reached a more significant number of responses than for the two earlier claims. Table 5 below shows the distribution for different grades.
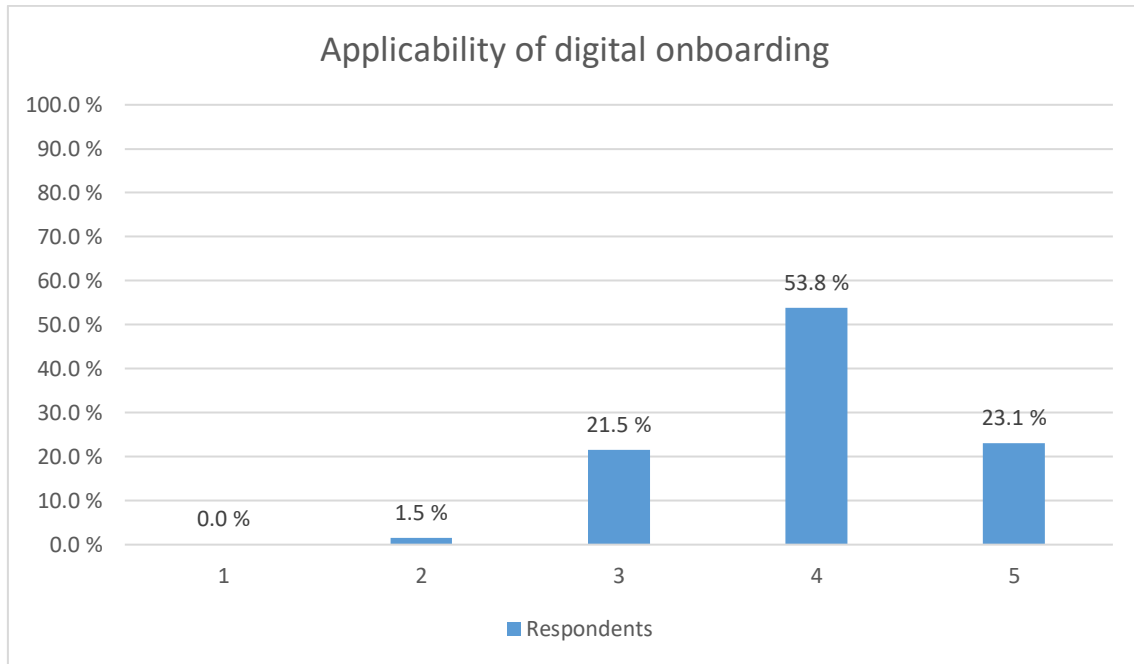
Table 5. Applicability of digital onboarding.

When the respondents were asked about their general satisfaction with the digital onboarding, the same good level of satisfaction continued. Table 6 below presents the level of satisfaction.
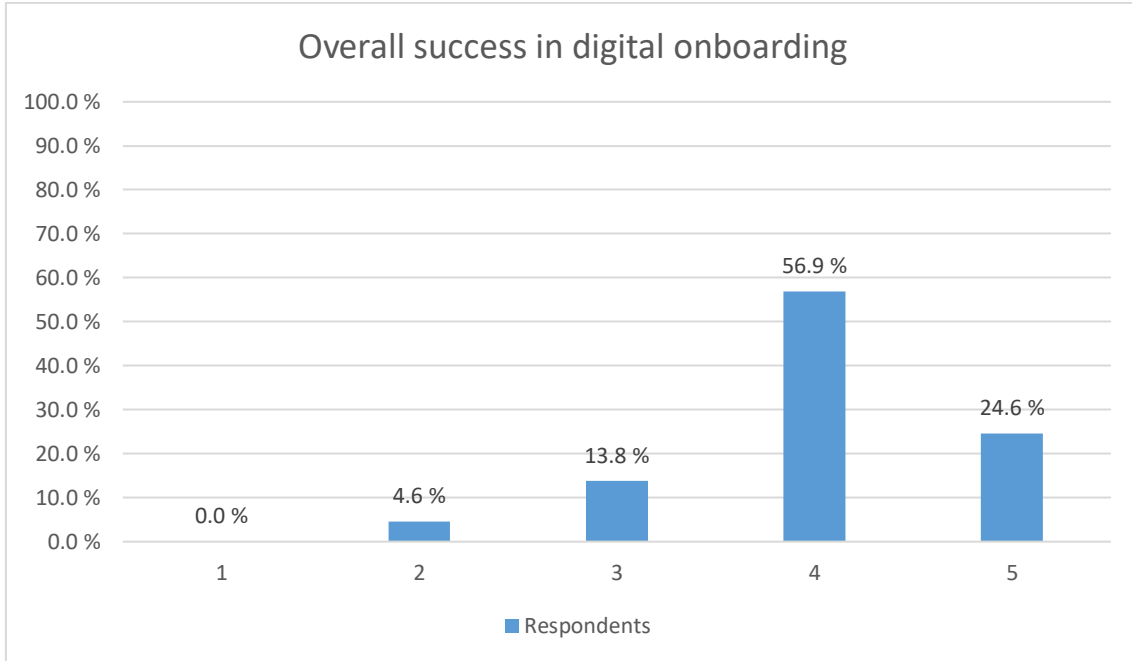
Overall success in digital onboarding

Table 6. Overall success in digital onboarding.

It can be concluded from the answers that the case company is already using digital technology in its onboarding process at a good level. However, the respondents' background information does not tell what kind of previous experiences they have with digital onboarding, so it is possible that this is the first time for many, and there is no point of comparison. This is taking into account that the research was carried out at a time when remote onboarding has just become more widely known and used mainly due to the pandemic.

In addition, it was wanted to strengthen the understanding of the functionality of the digital onboarding with an open question that took a position on the digital onboarding platform. The answers confirm that the respondents are mostly satisfied with the digital orientation platform, which is perceived as a functional, flexible, and time-saving general orientation tool:

"Very functional. Employees start at different times and this method saves time."

"Good. The platform gives flexibility to the implementation of orientation for both supervisors and employees. That method worked great for me."

"This is functional in general orientation because the same basic information is needed for different work tasks, and no additional questions usually arise in these orientations."

However, some of the respondents felt that the digital form of orientation does not completely replace face-to-face orientation. As stated earlier, face-to-face orientation is also needed:

"As a good and flexible tool. In my opinion, most of the general orientation can be done on a digital platform, but it is also good to have remote and close orientation for, e.g., questions."

"Saves time. Effective in many ways, but for a new person, meeting people face-to-face is important."

Especially regarding task-specific orientation, the need for face-to-face orientation emerged:

"In my opinion, task-specific onboarding requires more face-to-face orientation because I think dialogue is important when familiarizing with a task."

"I do not see many opportunities for it in my position. In expert work, the tasks can be varied, making it difficult to upload preparatory material to any service. In your example, a digital platform could work for teaching different systems but not necessarily for doing work tasks unless the task was regularly repeated and not many changes could be expected. In addition, if the orientation were to move to

a digital platform, getting to know new colleagues would become even more difficult."

The up-to-datedness of the digital material also attracted comments:

"Good, but you must take care of its content because the lessons can quickly become outdated."

In addition, the survey took a position on which parts of the onboarding are perceived as particularly useful or not useful to be implemented virtually in a platform. Based on the answers, the respondents were almost unanimous that general matters and system orientations are suitable areas for digitalization:

"General introductions and orientations to the company, general orientation to the programs where you can see the program's introduction on your screen."

"General sections and processes and systems orientation. You can always return to these if necessary and be found in one place."

"General things, big lines go well with the digital platform."

On the other hand, detailed task-specific matters and task-specific onboarding in general were felt to be less suitable in digital form:

"Task-specific orientation is generally less suitable for a digital platform."

"Task-specific specific things are best learned live with colleagues."

Based on the answers, digital is already being used relatively well. However, some of the respondents felt that it could be utilized even more:

"I think it is used relatively well, but something could still be added. For example, you could add a presentation of the company or a presentation of the company's teams and their functions."

"There could be more videos in which things are explained through, e.g., animations. Long PowerPoint presentations are boring to read, especially in the introductory phase, when information comes at a huge speed all the time."

"Too little. You could customize your training much more for the use of different programs and systems."

When the respondents were asked if there were content deficiencies in the onboarding, whether they could have been implemented digitally, and to what extent, however, the respondents mostly could not name any individual aspects that were missing and could have been implemented digitally or if something was exhausted, it could not be implemented digitally in the respondents' opinion. Only some individual issues emerged.

4.2.5   Summary of the results of the survey

The onboarding process can be partially digitized using a digital platform. Based on the answers, the digital platform is more effective for general than task-specific onboarding, but it can still be used for both. Regarding tasks-specific onboarding, face-to-face orientation is also more critical in this context, based on the answers. However, it is possible to support the task-specific with digitalization. Areas mainly the same for everyone or many people and mostly concern general onboarding are suitable areas to be digitized. When looking at the qualitative data, satisfaction was lower in areas that involve social factors. Thus, digital onboarding is not well suited to such aspects of onboarding where sociality is a part.

4.3   Comparison of the results from two surveys

The results of Survey A can be compared with last year's (2022) onboarding feedback survey, survey B, which also measured general satisfaction on the same scale of 1-5. It can be noticed that even though the respondents belong to the same target group, there are differences in the answers to these two different surveys. In last year's onboarding feedback survey, the average general orientation was 4,3, while the corresponding figure in this survey was 4,06. Regarding task-specific orientation, the figure was 4, and the corresponding figure in a more recent study was 3,54. For this reason, the satisfaction value decreased for both general and task-specific orientation. This may be influenced by the fact that although both surveys were answered by those who started working life in the same year, the layout of the questions and the perspective were different in the surveys. While the orientation feedback survey mainly measured satisfaction with orientation on a more general level, this study took a position on the digital nature of orientation, considering the content and implementation method. Thus, the survey could have influenced the person's answers to the overall grade. It is also possible that different people at least partially answered this survey than the onboarding feedback survey, which may somewhat affect the results. An earlier survey also took a position on the fluency of remote onboarding. The earlier onboarding feedback survey supports the results of the newer survey in general. Of course, the previous survey only took a small part in remote onboarding, but in this respect, the answers were in line with the answers of the new survey. Both surveys support digital orientation, but face-to-face orientation is also needed.

5 Discussions and Conclusion

We are at a point where remote work has become normal, accelerated by both digitalization and the pandemic (Sutela, 2020; Kuisma & Sauri, 2021, pp. 9, 11-12; European Commission, 2020). This change in working life has, in turn, affected the operating methods of companies and brought alternatives to onboarding in the form of remote onboarding, which takes place virtually (Brower, 2020; Maurer, 2020; GitLab, 2023). Remote onboarding is, however, a relatively new term, and there still needs to be more researched information on the subject. One of the main goals of onboarding is to make the new employee part of the work community. This is also called organizational socialization. (Bauer 2023; Joki 2021, p. 85; SHRM 2023; Bauer & Erdogan, 2023; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). There is researched information about socialization in the organization, but not so much about onboarding, especially remote onboarding. This study aimed to determine how well and in which areas digital onboarding works as part of the onboarding process from the point of view of user satisfaction.

The analysis showed that the onboarding process can be partially digitized. The survey B results indicated that the areas not tied to time and place but can be completed by the employee at a convenient time are suitable for digitizing areas. These can include, for example, familiarization with the company and its services in a video or other virtual format. Various system orientations were also considered suitable areas that can be digitized. The research showed that digitality could be widely utilized in the target company's onboarding process. Digital technology is already used relatively well in the general orientation process, but remote orientation could also be used more for task-specific orientation. For example, the system orientation of the task-specific orientation could also be done remotely. From a social point of view, digital onboarding is not suitable in the light of this research. The respondents felt that it is easier to get involved in the work community with face-to-face onboarding, and for some, it is easier to internalize things face-to-face. In conclusion, in today's digital world, digitality is seen as an essential part of onboarding. However, based on the answers to the survey B, digital

solutions can only partially replace face-to-face onboarding and instead serve as excellent supplemental support in the onboarding process. Digitality also works as an enabler of onboarding, and it would be worthwhile to take advantage of the benefits it enables.

5.1   The Digital Possibilities of the onboarding Process

Based on the study's findings, the onboarding process can be digitized partly. The theory also partially supports this claim. Different digital platforms can be used to support the onboarding process, which can support, for example, the creation of a plan for the process, which in turn increases the onboarding efficiency (Bauer, 2023, p. 2). Also, changing onboarding to a digital format is supported by remote work becoming the new normal form of working (Sutela, 2020; Kuisma & Sauri, 2021; European Commission, 2020). The research results showed that onboarding implemented with digital aids is considered modern. In particular, the flexibility of remote onboarding came to the fore, which, according to research, is also a benefit of remote work (Eurofound, 2022; Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Based on the answers, the various general orientation areas can be seen as flexible entities of the onboarding process. On the other hand, onboarding areas found to be suitable for general orientation could also be used for task-specific orientation, such as system training.

However, considering this study, it is not worth digitizing the onboarding process completely. The disadvantage of digital onboarding was the need for more sociality, and thus also the ability to become part of the work community. The same also applies to the studied disadvantages of remote work (Eurofound, 2022; Työterveyslaitos, 2023). Socialization into the organization is one goal of the onboarding process, which is essential both from the point of view of the individual's commitment and the company's cost effect. (Anderson & Cooper-Thomas, 2006). Thus, it is worth investing in successful onboarding (Bauer, 2023, p. 1; Joki, 2021, p. 85), and this result should be considered when planning digital onboarding. On the other hand, the task-specific orientation was

also felt to contain such sub-clauses that the respondents would prefer to familiarize themselves face-to-face. Examples of these are detailed procedures related to work tasks. Most respondents felt that the face-to-face orientation was better because asking questions is easier and more natural; free discussion naturally opens better opportunities. Matters that are essential from the point of view of work may also be better-internalized face-to-face.

The study partially confirmed the advantages and disadvantages of remote work in terms of remote onboarding that utilizes digitalization. In this regard and at the time of the research, previously researched information was challenging to find. The general trend of working life towards hybrid work also applies to the onboarding process. At the time of the research, no other researched information could be found on the factors that influence the selection of onboarding areas to be digitized, which brings some novelty value to work.

5.2 Practical Implications

Based on the research, it is possible to propose specific development proposals for the onboarding process of the case company and other companies. However, some opinions might be affected by the most suitable way for each respondent to learn and absorb things. Others may also feel that it does not matter in the way of onboarding to adopt things, but from the point of view of socialization, face-to-face onboarding is perceived as a better option.

5.2.1 General Orientation

Regarding the general orientation and based on the research results, it can be recommended that the onboarding continues according to the hybrid model so that

most of the aspects of the onboarding are in digital format. However, the research revealed some noteworthy points that can increase satisfaction with digital onboarding.

First, the content and its scope provoked some discussion, and it was partly perceived as extensive or something challenging to find. From the point of view of the content, considering the research, it can recommend content that is as diverse as possible and is organized in such a way that it is as easy as possible to find. It also emerged from the answers that some respondents needed to know which areas of general orientation should be invested in. When organizing the content, it is good to consider this increase. The second development proposal is face-to-face events. Even though the general orientation is perceived to be suitable in a digital format, from a social point of view, some get-together events also came up in the answers, where getting to know colleagues is possible. This could be an informal occasion among newcomers.

5.2.2   Task-specific Orientation

Regarding task-specific orientation, the digital aspect of the onboarding process divided slightly more opinions than in general orientation. On the other hand, the respondents felt that digitalization could be used more, while some felt that task-specific orientation should occur face-to-face.

It can be suggested to use digital opportunities more in task-specific orientation when it is the same for several people, for example, in role-specific digital orientation. Digitality could also be used as a digital platform for onboarding planning. Since personal learning also impacts how a person perceives the functionality of digital onboarding, it can be suggested to consider personal needs when a new employee starts the onboarding process. Part of the material can be such that it can be performed either face-to-face or digitally, depending on the choice. Moreover, again, if a person chooses the face-to-face format, the digital material can be returned later. Since task-specific orientation is primarily the supervisor's responsibility, close cooperation with HR and supervisor level

would be desirable. For example, on a digital platform, tasks for the supervisor could be integrated as part of the onboarding process, which can help the fluency according to the plan as the onboarding process progresses.

5.3 Limitations of the Research

Certain limitations are associated with the study, which may have also affected the study results. First, it is a single case study, so the target group of the study was a particular company and certain people in the company. Thus, it limits the generalizations of the findings, in which case the results cannot be generalized. Secondly, the research had to be done within a particular time, which brought limitations to the design and implementation of the research. Due to scheduling reasons, it was decided to conduct the research in the form of a survey rather than, for example, as in-depth interviews, which could have been used to obtain more detailed and in-depth data on the subject. This also contributed to limitations to the scope of the empirical work.

5.4 Future Research

The subject could be studied more broadly by expanding the target group to study different fields and operators in the same field but to more companies. Also, more comprehensive data related to the topic would be obtained by expanding the research to investigate the entire onboarding process from the pre-onboarding phase to the post-onboarding phase. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct a similar survey for the same company after a couple of years, for example, and compare the responses when the onboarding process has been changed based on the findings from the study. In addition, the possible new digital and working life trends could be considered.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey

BASIC INFORMATION

Employment start date (month): __/2022

Office (multiple choice):

Unit (multiple choice):

I have completed all parts of the onboarding: yes/no

CONTENTS

1. How satisfied were you with the content of your onboarding (scale 1-5)
   - regarding general orientation:
   - regarding task-specific orientation:
2. Do you feel that the general orientation lacks something in terms of content, and if so, what?
3. Do you feel that the task-specific orientation lacks something in terms of content, and if so, what?

METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

1. How did you experience the implementation of the general orientation?
2. How did you experience the implementation of your task-specific orientation? How was your task-specific orientation carried out?
3. Would you have liked your orientation to have been implemented differently, and if so, how (e.g., completely remote, more remote, or more face-to-face) and to what extent (e.g., a specific area of general or task-specific orientation)? Why so?

DIGITALIZATION

Digital onboarding (scale 1-5)

- Using digital means:

- Success in digital orientation:

- Digital orientation material:

- Applicability of digital orientation:

1. How do you feel about the digital platform as an onboarding tool in terms of general orientation?
2. How about in terms of task-specific orientation?
3. For which part or parts of onboarding do you feel that the digital platform is particularly useful?
4. For which area or areas is the digital platform not useful in terms of onboarding?
5. How do you feel that digital technology is used in onboarding, or could it be used more? In what areas?
6. If there were content deficiencies in your orientation, could they have been implemented digitally? In what areas?