Elle Mäkinen

# How to successfully onboard a newcomer in a hybrid workplace

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**Author:** Elle Mäkinen
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**Supervisor:** Vesa Suutari
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**ABSTRACT:**
Workplace arrangements have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the restrictions began to lift, employees were still working from home, which led to organizations implementing a new working style that combines both on-site and off-site working. There are various studies that explore the opportunities and threats related to hybrid working, but there is little research done on how this working style affects the onboarding process. Onboarding is a comprehensive process that aims to effortlessly assimilate a new hire into the organization. Successful onboarding sets a foundation for employee retention, employee well-being and increases productivity and performance. Successful onboarding has been challenged by the hybrid model. Newcomers learn various skills by having social interactions. They are able to gain knowledge and resources by observing how others act and behave in an organization. This transfer of information is somewhat prevented by the lack of face-to-face communication and social interactions that are caused by the hybrid model. Thus, this thesis explores how to succesfully onboard a newcomer in a hybrid workplace. This thesis analyzes challenges and benefits associated with hybrid onboarding and identifies effective tactics for a succesful onboarding process.

The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding on how to successfully onboard a new employee in a hybrid workplace, by identifying key challenges and opportunities during the onboarding process. Because the hybrid workplace incorporates both remote and in-person work, it is of interest to research how employers onboard new hires in terms of it meeting the needs of both in-office and remote workplace environments. The challenge being how to assimilate a new hire to the organization and its culture, when the team meets in person less often. This research was conducted through semi-structured interviews, by interviewing six employees that had been onboarded in a hybrid workplace. The data was analyzed by transcribing and categorizing it into themes. The study was further supported by a literature review, giving insight into onboarding practices, hybrid working and onboarding in a hybrid workplace.

The results of this study indicated that the main opportunities of a hybrid workplace are flexibility, enhanced work-life balance and productivity. Critical challenges associated with the hybrid model are communication, collaboration and a decrease in organizational culture. These challenges have an affect on employee well-being. To address these challenges, organizations should establish clear guidelines for on-site and off-site working. Concerning the onboarding process, these challenges affect social integration, communication and social and normative learning. To overcome these challenges and to achieve a successful onboarding process, organizations should enhance the use of supervisory support and mentors. Having training sesions on-site and using socialization tactics help alleviate challenges with social integration and communication. Moreover, customizing the onboarding process towards the needs of the newcomer assist with finding a balance in the hybrid model.

**KEYWORDS:** hybrid workplace, onboarding, newcomer, social integration, social isolation, organizational culture, communication, collaboration

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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**
COVID-19-pandemian seurauksena työpaikkojen järjestelyt muuttuivat. Rajoitusten purkaantuessa etätyöskentely jatkui edelleen, mikä johti siihen, että organisaatiot ottivat käyttöön uudenlaisen työskentelytavan, jossa yhdistyvät sekä paikan päällä työskentely että etätyöskentely. On olemassa useita tutkimuksia hybridityöskentelyyn liittyvistä mahdollisuuksisia ja uhkista, mutta vain vähän tutkimusta on tehty siitä, miten tämä työskentelytapa vaikuttaa perehdyttämiseen. Perehdyttäminen on kokonaisvaltainen prosessi, jonka tavoitteena on opettaa uusi työntekijä työpaikkansa tapoihin, työhönsä liittyviin odotuksiin ja työkavereihin. Perehdytyksen tavoitteet ovat työntekijän sitouttaminen, hyvinvointi, tuottavuuden ja tehokkuuden lisääntyminen. Onnistunut perehdyttäminen on kohdannut haasteita hybridimallin vuoksi. Uudet työntekijät oppivat taitoja sosiaalisessa vuorovaikutuksessa. Tämä tiedonsiirto on jossain määrin estynyt tai rajallisempaa etätyöskentelyssä. Toisin sanoen etätyöskentely aiheuttaa haasteita kommunikaatiolle ja sosiaaliselle vuorovaikutukselle.

Tässä tutkielmassa tutkitaan, miten uusi työntekijä voidaan onnistuneesti perehdyttää hybridimallisessa työpaikassa. Tässä tutkielmassa analysoidaan hybridityöpaikan haasteita ja mahdollisuuksia ja määritellään tehokkaita taktiikoita menestyksekkääseen perehdyttämiseen. Koska hybridimallia noudattavassa työpaikassa työskennellään etänä ja paikan päällä, kiinnostuksen kohteena on tutkia, miten työnantajat perehdyttävät uusia työntekijöitä siten, että perehdytys vastaa sekä toimisto- että etätyöympäristön tarpeisiin. Haasteena on se, miten uusi työntekijä sopeutetaan organisaatioon ja sen kulttuuriin, kun työpaikalla tavataan harvemmin henkilökohtaisesti. Tutkimus on tehty puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen avulla haastattelemalla kuutta työntekijää, jotka ovat vastikään perehdytetty hybridityöpaikassa. Aineisto analysoitiin puhtaaksikirjoittamalla ja luokittelemalla se teemoihin. Tutkimusta tuettiin tämän lisäksi kirjallisuuskatsauksella, jossa tutustuttiin hybridimalliin, perehdyttämiseen ja perehdyttämiseen hybridityömallia noudattavalla työpaikalla.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että hybridityöpaikan tärkeimmät mahdollisuudet ovat joustavuus, tuottavuus ja työn sekä yksityiselämän tasapainon parantaminen. Hybridimalliin liittyviä haasteita ovat kommunikaatio, yhteistyö ja organisaatiokulttuurin heikkeneminen. Nämä haasteet vaikuttavat työntekijöiden hyvinvointiin. Näiden haasteiden ratkaisemiseksi organisaatioiden olisi laadittava selkeät periaatteet etätyöskentelyä varten. Perehdyttämisen osalta nämä haasteet vaikuttavat sosiaaliseen integraatioon, kommunikaatioon ja sosiaaliseen sekä normatiiviseen oppimiseen. Näiden haasteiden ylipääsemiseksi ja onnistuneen perehdyttämisprosessin aikaansaamiseksi, organisaatioiden olisi lisättävä esimiestuen ja mentoreiden käyttöä. Koulutustilaisuuksien järjestäminen paikan päällä ja sosiaalistamistaktiikoiden käyttäminen auttavat lieventämään sosiaaliseen integraatioon ja kommunikaatioon liittyviä haasteita. Lisäksi perehdyttämisprosessin mukauttaminen vasta-alkajan tarpeisiin auttaa tasapainottamaan hybridityömallin haasteita.

**AVAINSANAT:** hybridimallinen työpaikka, perehdytys, tulokas, sosiaalinen integraatio, eristyneisyys, organisaatiokulttuuri, kommunikaatio, yhteistyö

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# 1 Introduction

The following chapter will introduce the background of the study. After discussing the background, the aim of the research and the research question will be established. Lastly, the process of the study will be explained by introducing the structure of the thesis.

## 1.1 Background of the study

Workplace arrangements have changed as a result of a worldwide disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the lockdown limitations were lifted, employees were given the option to return to their workplaces, which resulted in employees wanting the opportunity to continue working from home (Maddox-Daines, 2023). Besides the benefits of reduced commuting costs and an increase in work-life balance, employees also felt disengaged and isolated from the workplace as a result of the new remote work environment (Mortensen and Haas, 2021).

Nonetheless, with less geographic, physical, and organizational restrictions, these modifications implied a considerable possibility for revamping how employees work, making remote situations less of an emergency response and more of a new way of working (Ameri and Kurtzberg, 2022). Nowadays, businesses have a choice to provide employees alternatives for their unique workplace preferences (Weritz et al. 2022). Several firms have adjusted and tried out new ideas, with discussions arising about the functioning of office spaces and its contribution to the businesses overall organizational culture (Tahsiri, 2023 p. 2). Moreover, businesses have noticed how remote working has decreased their cost savings but also how it has decreased employee engagement and collaboration (Iqbal at al., 2021 p. 31). Thus, a hybrid workplace model has emerged, offering a solution for the onsite and off-site working (Maddox-Daines, 2023), with a likelihood of it being the future of work (Iqbal et al., 2021 p. 1).

Mortensen & Haas (2021) and Lenka (2021) explain hybrid workplace model to be a flexible working style in which workers can work physically from the company's office spaces, or remotely from their home offices or other workstations. There are various studies that explore the opportunities of a hybrid workplace (Stitch 2020; Bhatia et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Kane et al., 2021, Sokolic, 2022). These advantages are increased flexibility, improved work-life balance and access to a wider talent pool. On the other hand, inadequacies associated with hybrid working are challenges with communication, technology, employee engagement and collaboration (Mortensen & Haas 2021; Kane et al., 2021; Lenka, 2023). Although the latest research surrounds the opportunities and challenges of hybrid work, there is currently little research on how to successfully onboard new hires in a hybrid workplace environment.

As mentioned, hybridity also comes with its challenges. Employees may feel social isolation, technological stress, problems with work-life balance and a decrease in informal communication (Ferreira et al., 2021; Galanti et al., 2021; Tarafdar et al., 2010). In particular, these components present specific difficulties with a company's onboarding process. The onboarding process is a human resource routine that intends to foster a long-term relationship between the company and the new employee, while creating a sense of belonging and validation, in addition to providing role clarity for the newcomer (Kumar, 2017). Increased employee satisfaction, greater commitment, and higher employee retention are all connected to successful onboarding (Scott et al., 2022).

Successful onboarding is a comprehensive and well-executed process that ensures that new hires are effortlessly incorporated into an organization, allowing them to become productive, engaged, and aligned with the company's culture, values, and goals (Stein and Christiansen, 2010). Moreover, it goes beyond the paperwork, and it includes a variety of activities aimed to help new hires settle into their roles and the workplace environment. Successful onboarding sets a foundation for long-term employee happiness, retention, and performance (Davila and Pina-Ramizer, 2018).

Successful onboarding has been challenged by the hybrid workplace model. Unlike traditional onboarding, where employees are integrated to the workplace while being physically present at the office, hybrid onboarding demands balancing remote and in-office attendance. Because a significant percentage of the onboarding process now takes place virtually in a hybrid workplace, face-to-face encounters are restricted, making it more difficult to establish meaningful connections, rapport, trust and sense of belonging among new recruits (Mazzei et al., 2023). Additionally, visits to another employee's office for an impromptu question or chat, informal conversations before team meetings, or team excursions to lunch occur much less frequently in a hybrid setting during onboarding, disrupting social ties and successful onboarding (Hemphill and Begel, 2011).

According to Korte and Lin (2013), when starting a new employment, newcomers must understand the unwritten rules and norms of the company culture to be able to gain membership in the organization. How a newcomer is able to socialize in the organization often is in relation to the new hires capacity to fit in. It takes effort and skill to convey company culture, values and identity to distant workers, since culture is often transmitted through in-person interactions. Knowledge is frequently transferred from experienced team members to new hires as part of onboarding (Hemphill and Begel, 2011). The smooth transfer of information might be prevented by the absence of face-to-face informal communication. Additionally, due to the lack of direct supervision, evaluating the development and performance of new hire’s during onboarding can be seen as difficult.

Ensuring that new hires’ are successfully integrated into a new organization causes a significant challenge. Challenges concerning personal, social, structural, technological, and operational are common during the transition (Hemphill and Begel, 2011). Poorly handled onboarding can often result in employee turnover and underperformance (Caldwell & Caldwell, 2016). As a result, the onboarding process in a hybrid workplace currently requires a new analysis of how it functions in an environment where onsite and offsite working is merged.

Although the pandemic erupted a few years ago, there is already considerable amount of research on onboarding in a fully remote setting (Carlos and Muralles, 2022; Martyniuk et al., 2021), but there is limited research on onboarding in a hybrid workplace, which is why it is of interest to study the success factors of onboarding in a hybrid workplace. The importance factor even grows, since it has been said that the hybrid workplace is becoming the future of work (Iqbal et al., 2021 p. 1). Researchers have studied onboarding in fully remote workplaces and emphasized the need of it being seamless, effective and informative, to replenish what is lost due to it not being executed in the traditional in-office setting (Maurer, 2019). Although hybridity also consists of remote working and the same challenges arise in the hybrid setting as they do in fully remote settings, what is different is the dynamic nature that hybridity brings and how to both introduce remote onboarding practices and the more traditional in-office face-to-face practices. Moreover, in a hybrid work environment, employees can choose the setting in which they want to work in. This can have an effect on the onboarding process and complicated it in terms of scheduling and team dynamics. In the light of this, this thesis explores how to successfully onboard new employees in a hybrid workplace. The study will also analyze challenges and benefits of hybrid onboarding, and identify effective tactics for a successful onboarding process.

## 1.2 Research question and objectives

The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding on how to successfully onboard a new employee in a hybrid workplace, by identifying key challenges and opportunities during the process. Because the hybrid workplace incorporates both remote and in-person work, it is of interest to research how employers onboard new hires in terms of it meeting the needs of both in-office and remote workplace environments. The challenge being how to assimilate a new hire to the organization and its culture, when the team meets in person less often.

In order to achieve the main purpose of the thesis, the main research question for this study is:

***What tactics can organizations use to successfully onboard a new hire in a hybrid workplace?***

To further explore the onboarding process in a hybrid workplace, the research question will be approached with research objectives. These objectives support the aim and direction of the paper. The following objectives are set:

1. to identify what are opportunities and threats related to a hybrid workplace
2. to identify what factors, make onboarding successful in a hybrid workplace, and what tactics can be used in order to succeed
3. to discover the mishaps when onboarding new employees within a hybrid work environment.

## 1.3 Structure of the study

This thesis begins with an introduction of the study. It includes a discussion of the background of the study, as well as the aim and purpose of the research. It also outlines the main research question, following a set of objectives that support the aim of the paper. The main purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the topic and the research goals of the thesis.

The second chapter introduces the literature review. The purpose of the literature review is to introduce theories, models and practices related to onboarding. The reader will also discover the relationships between the organization, the newcomer and the social agents during the onboarding process. Additionally, this chapter will define the hybrid workplace, with a conclusion of the theory at the end by proposing a framework

for hybrid onboarding. The aim of the literature review is to deepen the reader's knowledge on onboarding and the hybrid workplace, whilst also introducing practices on what makes onboarding successful. This will provide a foundation for the research itself.

The third chapter will focus on the empirical aspect of the research. It will provide a detailed account of the research methodology, including the methods used for data collection, sample selection, and data analysis. This section will provide a thorough explanation of how the research will be carried out. The fourth chapter will provide a detailed presentation of the study's findings and the results obtained from the interviews conducted. The fifth chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the literature review and lastly, the sixth chapter will summarize the main conclusion drawn from the study and identify practical implication, limitations and future research suggestions. A list of references and appendices will also be provided after the conclusions.

# 2 Literature review

This part of the thesis aims to build a foundation for the study. It is split into three chapters. These chapters discuss onboarding, hybrid workplace and onboarding in a hybrid workplace. The first chapter will define onboarding, first by introducing organizational socialization and then moving forward to the onboarding process itself. Practices of successful onboarding will be introduced, as well as the relationship between onboarding and the organization, newcomer and social agents. When introducing the role of the newcomer, Newcomer Proactivity will be explained, since it is related to motivation and commitment when adjusting to a new role in an organization. Chapter three will describe what a hybrid workplace is and history behind the modern phenomenon. Lastly, what is known about onboarding in a hybrid workplace will be reviewed with also a summary of the literature review.

## 2.1 Onboarding

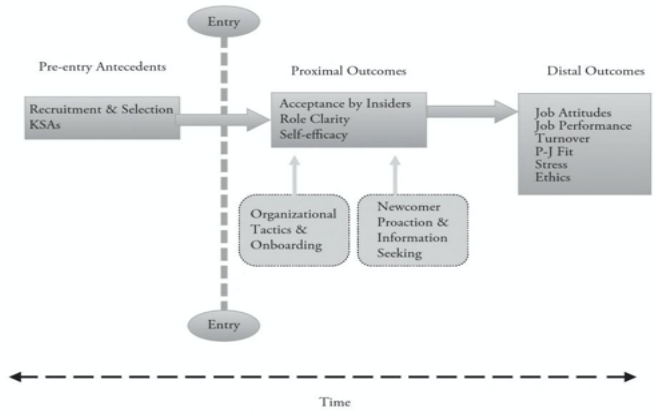
In order to gain understanding of the term onboarding, the term organizational socialization will first be introduced, since onboarding has stemed its roots from it. After accomplishing what organizational socialization means, this thesis will dive deeper into onboarding by explaining its relation to employee satisfaction, productivity, engagement, higher performance and retention.

### 2.1.1 The role of organizational socialization in onboarding

Before the term onboarding was introduced, organizational socialization was largely used to describe the process of onboarding (Chillakuri,2020). According to Ritz et al. (2023) some researchers still use the phrases onboarding and organizational socialization interchangeably, but many believe them as separate, but supportive constructs. In this study, onboarding and organizational socialization are discussed separately.

As mentioned, onboarding derives from organizational socialization, which was developed by Van Maanen and Schein in the 1970's (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). Organizational socialization further evolved into onboarding, when it started to form into a much larger concept. Organizational socialization is defined as " *the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role*" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, p. 3). It is described as a learning and adjustment process that enables the new hire to adopt an organizational position that meets the demands of both the organization and the individual (Chao, 2012). Organizational socialization is a key component in the onboarding process, because it helps the new employee to feel connected to the business and effectively create connections within it (Carlos and Muralles, 2022). The goal of socialization is to prepare the newcomer for an effective role in the organization (Ashforth, 2012 p. 161), and for them to fit into the larger social context (Taormina, 2008 p. 89).

Organizational socialization is vital for both the employee and the business. Failure to socialize new recruits has been found to display high levels of unsatisfied expectations, which is connected to poor attitudes and negative behaviors, thus concluding to greater levels of turnover (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006 p. 493). Picture 1 demonstrates a visual summary of the socialization process over time by Beuer and Erdogan (2012 p.98).




**Picture 1. Model of socialization over time based on Beuer and Erdogan (2012).**

According to Godinho et al. (2023), there are three different phases in the socialization process that are adapted from Feldman's work in the 1980's. The adapted phases are the pre-entry phase, encounter phase and metamorphosis phase. The goal of the pre-entry phase is to inform the applicant in the recruiting and selection process of onboarding about the organization and the position they are applying to. In this phase, candidates should analyze their academic background and professional experience in relation to the role they are applying to. Additionally, recruiters should avoid communicating inflated expectations and overly positive beliefs about the organization. Anderson and Thomas (1996 p. 22) express that in this stage newcomer expectations, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced by previous experiences with socializing. Employee's admission procedures begin at the encounter phase, where the newcomer learns about the organization and what skills are needed for the position (Godinho et al., 2023). Lastly, the metamorphosis phase of this process is organizational socialization. During this phase, the expected outcome should be formed, this being an emotional tie between the employee and the organization which should further convert into high levels of dedication, motivation, and contentment (Godinho et al., 2023).

### 2.1.2 The onboarding process

Since organizational socialization only explains the socialization part of onboarding, it is important to understand that the process is much more. Onboarding is a systematic process, in which the organization integrates, trains and orients new hires into the organization (Bauer, 2013). Onboarding is all about acquiring, assimilating, accommodating and accelerating new employees (Bradt and Vonnegut 2009). By using onboarding practices, organizations help new hires adjust to the social and performance aspects of their new role. During the onboarding process organizations also seek to orient new employees to their company's culture and responsibilities (Davila and Pina-Ramizer, 2018). Norms such as the company's values, structure and rituals are taught in the onboarding process demonstrating the need for new hire to commit to these values from day one (Chillakuri, 2020; Cable et al., 2013). The onboarding process is different

from each organization, differing in the methods, strategies, and styles used, which is dependent on the size of the company and the degree of the worker (Chillakuri, 2020).

One of the most significant ways an organization can increase the efficacy of their people management is by strategically using the process of onboarding (Bauer 2010 p. 1). Ashforth (2012 p. 161) expresses that from the perspective of the new hire, onboarding activities are about learning to become a functioning member, which motivates them to think positively into the future. Moreover, this kind of thinking offers incentive to persevere through the hardships of learning new ways of the role and the organization. Additionally, from the organization's point of view, the onboarding process is an investment, with the idea that in the long run the benefits of the process will outweigh the short-term expenses. For example, L'oréal supports their newcomers with a mobile app specifically used for the onboarding process (L'oréal, 2017). The onboarding app supports employees with topics such as networking and collaboration and helps employees immediately align with the company's values and culture.

Onboarding occurs both formally and informally (Bauer, 2010 p.2; Bauer et al., 2007). Informal onboarding is the process through which a new hire learns about their new position without the use of a formal plan. On the other hand, formal onboarding is defined as a written set of rules and guidelines that help an employee get acquainted with their new role in terms of tasks and sociability. Firms that participate in formal onboarding by developing a step-by-step program for new employees are more effective than those that do not teach about their organization's roles and norms (Bauer, 2010 p.2). The onboarding process begins with pre-onboarding, which consists of the recruitment and selection activities, as well as paperwork and other necessary steps made before the new hire begins their employment (Davila and Pina-Ramirez 2018). Onboarding also consists of orientation, which is the process where the new hire learns about the tasks and responsibilities that they are expected to perform. The onboarding process can last up to 12 months depending on the organization. After the 12 months of onboarding, and if done successfully, it transitions into retention (Maurer, 2019).

According to Laurano (2013), the top drivers for companies to implement an onboarding process is to achieve productivity faster, to gain better employee engagement, to obtain better employee retention and to be able to acquire better assimilation of new hires. Laurano (2013) also states that some organizations struggle to commit to an onboarding program because it can be difficult to prove its success. Onboarding centers on basic orientation activities and socializing new workers into the business, which are both demanding to measure. However, researchers have been able to establish the benefits of a successful onboarding process, which is vital to the success of the employee and the organization itself (Davila and Pina-Ramirez, 2018; Bauer, 2010; Dai and Meuse, 2013). Dai and Meuse (2013) specifically state that productivity, employee engagement and retention are key indicators for a successful onboarding process. For example, by monitoring the retention rate of new employees from a specific period, can indicate how the onboarding process is successful in achieving to keep the newcomers within the company.

Neglecting the onboarding process can lead to low employee productivity and work dissatisfaction, a lack of belonging to the organization, a lack of acceptance by colleagues, or even a desire to quit (Czopek and Kazusek, 2020). Klein and Heuser (2008) created a framework for onboarding practices that is divided into three categories: organizational tactics and practices, social agents and newcomer productivity. These three categories interact with one another and together influence how successful the onboarding process can potentially be. Klein and Hauser's (2008) framework will further be utilized in this chapter, after discussing successful onboarding, in order to explore even deeper how onboarding is reflected in organizations, team members and the newcomer itself.

### 2.1.3 Factors that make onboarding successful

The aim of onboarding is to successfully integrate a new hire into an organization. Employees who are trained correctly, have a considerably higher potential for succeeding

in their role, than an employee who has not been instructed properly (Weinstock, 2015). How organizations operate the newcomers from day one is crucial in ensuring high retention and successful performances (Maurer, 2019). Frögéli et al. (2023) state that organizations that are active in their onboarding practices have 2.5 times as great revenue growth and 1.9 times as great profit margin than the organizations that are not as active in tailoring their onboarding process. Organizations can use specific onboarding practices to impact the skillset, motivation and social skills of new employees.

Newcomers can often experience anxiety during their first week at their new job, but by assigning them proper tools, they can gain confidence in order to be successful in their new job (Maksymiuk, 2017). A way for organizations to succeed in onboarding is by using building blocks, namely the 4 C's by Bauer (2010). The 4 C's provide a framework for successful onboarding by focusing on four different elements, which are compliance, clarification, culture and connection (see Picture 2). According to Meyer (2016 p. 2) onboarding activities such as orientation can be found within the first and second elements of the 4 C's which are compliance and clarification. Activities regarding the socialization of the newcomer can be found within activities from the third and fourth elements, culture and connection.

| Onboarding Strategy Level | Compliance | Clarification | Culture | Connection |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Passive | YES | SOME | LITTLE/ NONE | LITTLE/ NONE |
| 2 High Potential | YES | YES | SOME | SOME |
| 3 Proactive | YES | YES | YES | YES |

**Picture 2 Building blocks of successful onboarding by Bauer (2010).**

According to Bauer (2010), the 4 C' are ranked by their level of success. Compliance being at the lowest level, it refers to essential legal and policy-related aspects that new employees must understand, such as organizational rules, regulations and requirements. Clarification involves the employee getting a clear understanding of their role and expectations in the new organization. For example, what specific duties are for the new employee and what is their role in the larger organizational culture. Culture involves immersing the newcomer into the organization's values, beliefs and norms, by sharing the organization's mission and vision and fostering a sense of belonging to the company's culture. Lastly, connection refers to the necessary formal and informal relationships that new employees must establish when joining a new organization. Because onboarding differs from organization to organization (Chillakuri, 2020), several different onboarding techniques are used, which can be distinguished by the extent to which the building blocks are leveraged. If organizations only apply the most basic level of onboarding, which is by using practices that only concern the element of compliance, their onboarding is on a passive level, which is seeing onboarding only as a mandatory task (Bauer, 2010; Dai and Meuse, 2007). When organizations use an onboarding strategy that focuses on compliance, clarification and briefly touches upon culture and connection, the organizations onboarding strategy is on a highly potential level of success (Bauer, 2010). Lastly, when an organization has practices and tools that address all four elements of a successful onboarding process, it follows a proactive onboarding strategy. Research was done to further investigate the 4 C's model, and it was found that when a new hire receives tools and practices from all four elements, report higher levels of organizational support, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Meyer, 2016 p. 35).

Baek and Bramwell (2016) mention that when measuring the success of an onboarding process, employers can look into how the newcomer has achieved role clarity, self-efficacy, social integration and knowledge of and fit within an organizational culture. These are indicators of newcomer adjustment (Scott et al., 2022). Self-efficacy is when an individual believes in their own skill sets and abilities to successfully finish a task (Ziden

and Joo, 2020 p. 743). Self-efficacy influences job performances and the higher the employee's sense of self-efficacy is, the more likely they are in their abilities and how well they perform their tasks (Bauer, 2010). Ziden and Joo (2020 p. 743) also argue that employees who showcase high levels of self-efficacy possess attitudes and behaviors of positivity, which aid them in obstacles and challenges. This leads to greater achievements and job satisfaction, which are most often desirable in all organizations. Role clarity refers to an individual having the knowledge needed to understand what is expected of themself and from the role that they are in, as well as what is needed to achieve the goals that are expected from them (Frögéli et al., 2023). Bauer (2010) argues that during the onboarding process, role clarity is the most consistent foretell of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The third level of successful onboarding is social integration. Employees should feel connected, trusted and valued within their working environment (Baek and Bramwell, 2016). Using practices to ensure that the new employee is socializing with coworkers is a way for the new hire to learn about the organization and to feel that they are socially accepted by their team members and supervisors (Bauer, 2010). Lastly, knowledge of and fit within an organizational culture, includes newcomers having a sense of feeling that they are a part of the organization and that they understand the culture within, such as the company's history, goals and values (Baek and Bramwell, 2016; Bauer, 2010). Employers can measure these indicators by interviewing new employees, doing employee surveys and asking for feedback.

Caldwell and Peters (2018 p. 7-9) demonstrate ten core onboarding steps to achieve a successful onboarding process. The first step is to establish a relationship online immediately after the organization has hired the new employee, to instantly create a relationship with them. The second step is to assign a mentor for each new hire, to enhance the socialization of the new employee. Third step is to have practices that focus on relationships and networking in order to assist the newcomer to create connections and gain valuable information. Step four is to prepare a booklet that has all the information that the new employee needs for a well-developed orientation. Fifth and sixth step is to have proper equipment ready for the employee and to assist them in any logistics, to ensure

that their start is as smooth as possible. This demonstrates that the organization is ready and that they have carefully thought-out the assimilation of the new employee. Step seven is having practices that clarify the responsibilities, goals and role of the new employee in their tasks and within the team. Eighth step is to build self-efficacy within the new employee, since confident employees are more likely to be innovative, productive and to add value to the organization. Ninth step encompasses the supervisor and team members being involved with the training and orientation of the new hire in order for them to explain organizational values and showcase that they are also committed to the values, goals and culture of the organization. The last step is to create an ongoing training process, where the mentor and supervisor identify resources available for the new hire to become as productive as possible.

In Caldwell and Peters (2018 p. 7-9) ten-steps the main focus is to show the new hire that they are valued and that they are the priority of the organization. The ten-steps help the new hire succeed in their new role. New employees offer talent, experience, abilities and views that hold tremendous opportunities for organization growth. Investing in successful onboarding processes help employees achieve their full potential, leading to employee-employer success (Chillakuri, 2020).

### 2.1.4 The organization’s role in the onboarding process

As mentioned, Klein and Heuser (2008) created a framework for onboarding practices that is divided into three categories: organizational tactics and practices, social agents and newcomer productivity. This framework is utilized in order to gain deeper knowledge on how each area influences the onboarding process.

The organization's role in onboarding is to create programs, practices and tools that explain the values and culture of the organization as well as share knowledge about the role (Godinho et al., 2023).

These four goals allow organizations to promote socialization and to accelerate the learning process of the new hire (Godinho et al., 2023). Organizations can help new employees develop a social identity within the organization. This can be achieved through tools that allow the new hire to identify with the company mission, to build success within the larger organizational goals, to find security through a career path and to feel that the organization trusts their abilities and judgment within the role that they are in (Pike, 2014). These senses build organizational commitment, which means the employee feels as though they belong within the company and they are dedicated to help it achieve its goals, values and mission. Tactics and models will be further introduced as a way organizations can help new employees begin their socialization process.

Socialization tactics are used to guide newcomers to become productive more quickly, to reduce their stress and anxiety and to drive the assimilation of the organization's culture and values (Pike, 2014). These models and tactics are ways organizations can structure the early experiences of their new hires (Klein and Heuser, 2008) and to introduce them to their new work environment. Us touched upon, by using different onboarding activities, new employees can achieve positive outcomes such as role clarity, self-efficacy, social integration and cultural knowledge, which are elements of a successful onboarding process (Bauer, 2010).

A way to reach these positive outcomes is by implementing an onboarding model by Klein and Heuser (2008) called the *Inform-Welcome-Guide* (IWG) framework. The IWG model suggests three categories of practices, those practices that inform, welcome and guide the new employee. The first category aims to provide new information through training, communication and resources. The goal of these practices is to help newcomers learn what is needed to successfully perform in their new role. The welcoming category is associated with practices that aim to make the newcomer feel welcomed in their new workplace and to provide guidance from other organizational members. These practices allow the newcomer to create social relationships within the workplace and to address the emotional needs of the new employee. Lastly, practices concerning the guide category, aim to give direct and proactive assistance to the newcomer in order to

make them move from being organizational outsiders to organizational insiders. These practices can be related to activities such as providing a personal guide or “buddy” to the newcomer in order to help them navigate through the process. Klein and Polin (2012), did a survey researching the importance of onboarding practices based on the IWG model, and the majority of the respondents voiced that every category of the IWG framework is extremely important in terms of newcomer’s performances, engagement and retention.

Social tactics were seen to be most influential towards how well the newcomer adjusted in the organization, with Enneking and Kleiner (2017) claiming that supervisors should encourage newcomers to play an active role in their own socialization to enhance the results of the organizations socialization tactics.

### 2.1.5 The newcomer’s role in the onboarding process

When it comes to onboarding a newcomer, the earlier the newcomer is able to assimilate into their new work environment, the faster the organization will recoup its investment in onboarding the new employee (Ziden and Joo, 2020 p.734). According to Davila and Pina-Ramirez (2018), new hires meet key individuals with whom they will engage with throughout their careers during the onboarding process. The ties that new employees form with their coworkers offer them a support system that minimizes stress and anxiety. As new hires learn more about the organization from the relationships, it allows them to gain a stronger connection with the company, thus increasing their commitment to the workplace. Gardner and Kozlowski (1993) express that the start of a new job can introduce the newcomer to a variety of uncertainties, including what is expected of them, how to engage with coworkers, and what norms and values are significant in the organization. Furthermore, as newcomers gradually gain an understanding of their work environment, they begin to learn the characteristics, events, and processes in the

same way that experienced organizational members do, and begin to gain confidence towards their new job.

Dai and Meuse (2007 p. 2) state that new hires have six key areas to which they need to adjust to when integrating into a new organization. The first area is performance proficiency, which identifies what needs to be learned and what knowledge, skills, and abilities are required to successfully perform the work task. The second area is people, which refers to developing successful work relationships with other members of the organization. Identifying individuals from whom to learn from about the company, work group, and job, assists with the role of socialization. Moreover, the third key area is politics. This describes how well new hires learn about the formal and informal work relationships and power structures in the organization. The fourth area is language, which indicates the new hires knowledge on the acronyms, slang, and jargon specific to the company as well as their grasp of the technical language used in their industry. Understanding the language used and shared by others will help to interact successfully with both clients and other members of the organization. According to Dai and Meuse (2007 p. 3) the fifth dimension for newcomers to be able to adjust to, are the organization's vision and values. This describes the comprehension of the rules and values that uphold the integrity of the organization. Lastly, the sixth and last dimension is history. Traditions, myths, and rituals are ways that an organization transmits cultural information. Newcomers can learn what kinds of behaviors are suitable or not suitable in the interactions and circumstances in the organization, by learning about the history and personal backgrounds of individual organizational members.

According to Klein and Heuser (2008 p. 292) newcomers have individual differences that have an effect on how they begin to integrate to a new organization. Self-efficiency is seen as a predictor towards the newcomers' socialization efforts. Moreover, self-efficiency has been linked to how well a newcomer begins to understand their tasks and how well a newcomer incorporates themself to the new organization. Personality traits have an effect on how proactive the newcomer is (Klein and Heuser, 2008 p. 292). Extroverted newcomers were more active in seeking knowledge and trying to establish

relationships within the organization than introverted newcomers (Klein and Heuser, 2008 p. 293).

Bauer et al. (2017 p. 995) state that the newcomers' proactive behavior can be seen as how committed they are to adjusting to their new role and organization in which they are in. Moreover, employers can perceive how invested newcomers are towards their role in how proactive they are towards their tasks and how committed they are in finding role clarity. Additionally, proactive behavior towards finding connections within the social networks of the organization is also an indication towards employers in how committed the newcomer is to fitting in with the company's other employees.

According to Crant (2000 p. 436), proactivity plays a significant role in job performance. Crant defines proactivity as "*taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it invo*lves *challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions".* People that are proactive seek knowledge and possibilities for improvement more actively, than those that wait for information and opportunity to come to them. This is extremely important when being a newcomer, because it can significantly impact the onboarding experience, creating faster integration, higher job satisfaction and greater organizational commitment (Crant, 2000 p. 438).

Newcomer proactivity includes seeking information and feedback, building relationships and positive framing (Bauer and Erdogan, 2012; Crant, 2000). Proactive newcomers have a tendency to learn more quickly. They are able to swiftly learn the information and abilities required to flourish in their positions (Ashford and Black, 1996). Moreover, proactive newcomers have a better chance of establishing a solid professional network, by initiating conversations with coworkers, mentors, and supervisors, which may lead to beneficial connections that can help them advance in their careers (Cooper-Thomas and Burke, 2012). Newcomers who are proactive in seeking answers to problems might adapt to the organization's culture and surroundings more efficiently. When presented with challenges, they are less prone to feeling frustrated and more able to come up with solutions (Ashford and Black, 1996). A proactive approach to onboarding leads to

greater work satisfaction. When newcomers are actively directing their integration and making a significant contribution, they are more likely to stay engaged. Although newcomer productivity initiates positive outcomes towards the integration of the new hire, it is inevitable that individuals possess different personality traits that can have an effect on how proactive the individual is (Klein and Heuser, 2008 p. 295). Personality, demographics, past work experiences and pre-entry knowledge all have an impact on newcomer proactivity and therefore should influence how companies structure onboarding activities for new employees.

### 2.1.6 The role of social agents in the onboarding process

Klein and Heuser (2008 p. 288) and Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006 p. 495) define social agents as individuals who help newcomers adjust to work-related practices by giving knowledge, feedback, support and connection. Supervisors, team members, and colleagues from other departments are seen as social agents.

Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) express that newcomers might find social agents more useful in sources of information and knowledge rather than what is found in the formal orientation programs. Social agents have been found to have an impact on the newcomers' learning outcomes (Klein and Heuser, 2008). Support from social agents is connected with improved psychological well-being, more favorable attitudes towards the organization, and organizationally beneficial behavioral outcomes, such as lower turnover (Hayton et al., 2012; Klein and Heuser, 2008). On the other hand, an undermining reaction from social agents will give a strong signal to the newcomer that the environment they are in is unpleasant and rejecting (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). Social agents in work environments are an element of the socialization process, they are a source of knowledge for employee satisfaction and successful performances, and a source of social support and networking (Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu, 2018). Organizations should purposefully integrate social agents into the newcomers onboarding process to maximize their organizational socialization. According to Mitchell et al. (2012)

when an individual gives another individual a valued and beneficial resource, an obligation is formed, and in return the other individual offers a beneficial resource back (Mitchell et al., 2012). For example, when coworkers work together on projects, information, resources and expertise is often shared, which can assist in meeting a deadline or providing insights regarding the task. The more exchanges of this kind, strengthens the relationship between the two parties, building trust and cooperation among team members. These social interactions can determine the newcomer's perceptions on the organization itself. Positive interactions in workplace relationships create a sense of obligation which leads to a higher sense of organizational commitment. This higher sense of commitment leads to a stronger desire to stay with the organization, minimizing turnover intentions (Harden et al., 2018). Bauer (2013) proposes the use of mentors or buddies as a way to help newcomers build relationships and connect with the organization early on. Mentors or buddies can provide informal support and help build the new employees confidence early on. Microsoft found that within the newcomers' first 90 days, 56 percent of those who met at least once with their onboarding buddy helped them to become more productive more quickly. Those who met their onboarding buddy two or three times rose to 73 percent and those who met four to eight times rose to 86 percent (Microsoft, n.d).

Team members as social agents are key sources of enabling information for newcomers and their inputs help new hires understand the culture of the organization and how practices are performed in it (Harris et al., 2020). According to Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2013) the first 90 days of employment builds a foundation for later work outcomes and how the newcomers are either supported by their team members or undermined play a significant role in their work performance. Employees who do not have supporting team members at their workplace may be more vulnerable to the harmful impacts of workplace pressures (Kim et al., 2017 p. 126). The support from coworkers can be examined through social support. Scott et al. (2014 p. 1238) state that the social support theory suggests the following: "*(1) informational support provides individuals with relevant data or knowledge that helps them to comprehend a difficult situation and therefore*

*cope in an effective manner; (2) instrumental support makes pertinent material resources available that directly help to combat the problem; (3) emotional support gives individuals an outlet for discussing their feelings and concerns with others; and (4) appraisal support is strictly a perceptual belief that one has the ability, means, or aptitude to overcome the perceived difficulty."* This theory effectively provides newcomers with informational, instrumental and emotional support, thus assisting their successful integration during the onboarding process. When team members are supportive of newcomers, the new hire is more likely to have access to important work-related information and resources. This forsters the newcomer in believing that the organization supports them and thus makes the newcomers feel more competent and assists proactive behavior (Scott et al., 2014).

In addition to team members, supervisors play a critical role as social agents. The managerial skills, support and information sharing from supervisors assist the newcomer immensely when socializing into an organization (Jeske and Olson, 2021 p. 67). Not only is managing and communicating essential, supervisors should also ask for feedback regarding the newcomer's personal needs and preferences. This ensures a customized and personal onboarding process, which can reflect positively. Additionally, when asking for feedback, it offers learning insights for the supervisor to further craft their onboarding process in a way that complements different cultural and ethnic demands (Jeske and Olson, 2021).

An important aspect to acknowledge between employers and employees, is the psychological contract. A psychological contract is an informal agreement of shared expectations, commitments and understandings between supervisors and employees, and what they expect to receive from one another (Kumar and Pandey, 2017). These are aspects such as reputation, opportunities, support, productivity and security. The psychological contract plays an important role in shaping the newcomer's perceptions on the organization and their relationships with their supervisors. According to Hansen et al. (2016), when the psychological contract is fulfilled, it generates positive outcomes, whereas

when the psychological contract experiences breach, it is immediately connected to negative outcomes, such as distrust and dissatisfaction (Hansen et al., 2016). Breach could consist of broken promises, such as when an employee's promises over exaggerated expectation towards a role and it is not met in reality. If the onboarding process is successful, a psychological contract should be formed and the employer and employee are both aware of what is expected of them (Kumar and Pandey, 2017). Successful onboarding that strengthens the psychological contract can include effective training, clear communication and support from social agents.

Now that the onboarding process has been established, the hybrid workplace will be defined in order to understand its characteristics and how it has become the new normal in many organizations around the world.

## 2.2 Hybrid workplace

In order to gain an understanding of the modern term hybrid working, it is crucial to understand the history behind remote working and what led to the modern phenomenon of hybrid working.

### 2.2.1 The history of remote working

Remote working was first used in the 1970's as a flexible work arrangement, in which an employee worked from a designated worksite away from their regular place of employment (OPM, n.d.). In 1970, IBM was the first corporation to have employees work in offices without walls and permanent workstations to increase communication (Van Meel, 2011 p. 358) and during these times researcher Jack Nilles also gained interest towards remote working in 1973. Commuting was both time-consuming and expensive, which led Nilles to observe other alternatives, such as the possibility of working from

home or from satellite offices (Van Meel, 2011 p. 359). Remote working offices have been described as the following:

1. a satellite office involves workers that are allocated to another office space that is not on the firm's premises (Kim et al., 2021)
2. a working from home office space is an environment where an employee works in the private space of their own home (Gadecki et al., 2016)
3. working on the go refers to situations where an employee works from anywhere, such as from a library or airport (Bailey and Kurkland, 2002).

During the 1980s and 1990s, interest towards remote working rose, with the development of technology (Qvortrup, 1998 p.32). Additionally, the development of WIFI opened up opportunities for remote working. However, only a small number of employees were able to benefit from remote working, since most companies and managers were not excited about the idea of it (Baruch, 2001 p. 115). Remote working was found to offer an increasing number of benefits, including cost reductions for businesses, reduced commute time, increased community stability and environmental advantages (Messenger and Gschwing, 2016). Despite the fact that these benefits were recognized, remote working took slower than expected. Working from home required technological advancements, and a decrease in commuting time was not as appealing to employees as first was thought (Messenger & Gschwing, 2016; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). Additionally, managers recognized potential problems with control and trust when working remotely. Following the aforementioned obstacles, the adoption of remote working continued to slowly grow due to the developments of information and communication technology (Messenger & Gschwing, 2016). Emails and electronic devices such as laptops and smartphones made remote working grow. Remote working also involved a combination of working on-site and remotely. Hence, it can be said that hybrid working has existed ever since remote working began.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working further developed. Opportunities for remote working were heavily influenced by factors such as, national infrastructure, management styles and resident attitudes (Bloom and Van Reenen, 2007; Noda, 2020). Though, the number of telecommuters in Europe remained consistently low. In 2009 only 7,5 % of dependant employed Europeans occasionally worked from home and this number steadily rose to 11 % in 2019 (Moens et al., 2022). According to OECD (2020), the significant difference in remote working between those who worked remotely and those who did not, implied that there were other reasons than just technical barriers to telework. Many employees who had the option to work from other workstations chose not to, due to the fact of it not being the most suitable working environment and them being afraid of being negatively judged. Prior to the pandemic, remote working was more common in professional services like consulting as well as the Information and Commuting Technology (ICT) industries. Nevertheless, remote working remained uncommon in industries such as wholesales, retail, manufacturing, and logistics. Also, industries that significantly relied on knowledge-based work were more likely to use teleworking, but those that required physical presence were less likely to do so for obvious reasons (OECD, 2020). Yet, the likelihood of remote work also depended on the employee's position and educational background. Managers, senior professionals, as well as those with a greater skill sets or educational background, were more likely to prefer working from home than less-skilled workers (OECD, 2020). According to Eurostat's (2020), the degree of autonomy, which was mostly determined by the employer's faith in their employees, also had an impact on differences in remote working. Even within the same occupation, junior professionals demonstrated significantly lower rates in remote working than their senior colleagues.

As the pandemic began to spread, employees around the world were forced to work from their homes. Working remotely became the new norm for many employees, since numerous workplaces were shut down. According to a research done by European Commission (2020), more than half of the employees who were forced to work from home,

had no prior experience with remote work. Additionally, a significant portion of employees lacked the necessary resources or equipment for remote working (Vasic, 2020 p. 64). According to a survey done by Eurofound (2020 p. 31-33), 48 % of European workers worked from home between April and July, with Finland being near to 60 % and Ireland, Austria, Italy and Sweden being close to 40 % (ILO, 2020 p.3). These workers were mostly knowledge workers and well-educated (Yang et al., 2023). Vasic (2020 p. 64) argued that during this time, many employees lacked the technical know-how that was required for remote working, others had difficulty communicating effectively with their team and organization. Nonetheless, this new way of working created situations where employees felt secluded and lonely, which led to issues with overworking and a decline in employee well-being. Researchers discovered that working remotely increased misunderstandings, workloads and disputes, due to communication only happening through digital channels, which made it more challenging to receive constructive feedback and to engage in discussions with co-workers and managers (Pulido-Martos, 2021). Nevertheless, several studies indicated that teleworking during the pandemic increased productivity, job satisfaction and helped people efficiently combine their work and home commitments (Zalat & Bolbol, 2022).

The pandemic did significantly increase the volume of remote working, by showing that numerous jobs were able to be performed remotely. In addition to the pre-pandemic teleworking industries, new industries such as education, public administration and financial services started adopting remote working (ILO, 2020 p. 3). While fully remote work settings caused personal isolation and tiredness for employees (Eurofound, 2020) both companies and employees noticed benefits related to remote working. As a result, there is a growing belief that remote working is here to stay, despite the difficulties brought on by the pandemic. According to Eurofound (2020), after the pandemic, three out of four remote workers expressed a preference for a hybrid work place that incorporates both remote working and in-person work, paving the way for hybrid working.

### 2.2.2 Defining hybrid work

Iqbal et al (2021 p.29), argue that the hybrid model can provide a solution for issues such as location, distance, cost, availability, and management. According to Mortensen & Haas (2021) and Lenka (2021), a hybrid work model is a flexible work style in which employees can choose to work from their employer's workplace or remotely, either from their homes or other workstations. This gives employees the freedom to work remotely, while still participating in their organizations' different activities. As a result, employees use technology to coordinate their workloads, build relationships, and participate in conversations with their managers and co-workers when working either on-site or off-site (Innstrand et al., 2022).

As there is no one method that works for all organizations, a hybrid working system can differ from company to company. Each business can develop their own hybrid model that suits their own requirements and preferences (McKinsey, 2021). Organizations can either require their workers to visit the office once a week or more frequently, or they can provide their workers the option of working fully remotely and visiting the office once a month. According to Lenka (2021 p.2688-2689), there are three different categories of hybrid workplace models: *Remote First, Office Occasional and Office First.* The *Remote Firs*t category, means that the leadership team and most of the staff work remotely. However, if there is an urgent requirement for physical presence, a few employees might work on-site. The office space is accessible, but only when there is a need for it. This approach allows for maximum flexibility and efficiency in the workplace. Also, it is not necessary for employees to meet each other in this approach, but there is the option for in-person communication if and when needed (Lenka, 2021 p. 2688-2689). The *Office Occasional* category, refers to both employees and leadership occasionally working from the office. Remote work is an option for employees who are unable to physically visit the office. In this approach, remote workers may believe since they work remotely, that those who are physically present in the office might receive more attention from their subordinates than they do. In order to remove this perception, manage-

ment must address this matter and take all necessary measures to eliminate this impression (Lenka, 2021 p. 2688-2689). The *Office First, Remote Allowed* category, the company operates largely on-site and occasionally remotely. The majority of staff members, including the leadership team, regularly attend work, and those who have chosen remote work are kept informed on crucial conversations. In order to prevent distant workers from feeling left out of meetings and other activities, the management must create this mode in the sense that everyone participates digitally whether or not they are physically present (Lenka, 2021 p. 2688-2689).

According to Gratton (2021), when adopting a successful hybrid working model, a business must set clear goals and pay attention to the opinions and recommendations of their staff. Thus before applying flexibility in the workplace environment, team leaders need to communicate about the objectives, goals and policies to its team. Additionally, managers should aim to identify the requirements of their staff, such as the location where each team member feels most productive or the timetables that assist them the most. Accenture (2021) found reasons to why some individuals prefer to work onsite or remotely. Employees choose to work onsite for reasons such as an easier access to technology, colleagues and team members that made collaboration easier. Moreover, routine, structure and increased visibility to managers for reasons why employees choose to work onsite. On the other hand, safety, a higher quality of life and freedom were factors that motivate employees to work remotely. It is also important to understand that hybrid working is not possible for service workers, frontline workers and factory workers, since the tasks related to these occupations are not possible to operate remotely (Hilberath et al., 2020). Sokolic (2022) mentions that research on the future working habits regularly forecast that the option to work from home will become as common as the traditional manner of working from the office.

#### 2.2.2.1 Opportunities in the hybrid workplace

There are various studies that explore the opportunities of a hybrid workplace (Stich 2020; Bhatia et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Kane et al., 2021, Sokolic, 2022). The key opportunities of a hybrid workplace, according to literature, are increased flexibility, improved work-life balance, cost savings and access to a wider talent pool. A hybrid workplace also allows the advantages that come along with working on-site, which are in-person collaboration, creativity at the workplace and social situations (Bhatia et al,. 2021). Below, the reasoning of each opportunity is explained.

*Workplace flexibility* is defined as the possibility for employees to determine when and where they choose to work in (Jeffrey Hill et al., 2008). Work schedule, work hours, and geographical flexibility are all beneficial outcomes that hybridity allows for employees (Bal & Izak, 2021; Sokolic, 2022). Additionally, it increases work-life balance, since employees are able to work in a way that suits them the best (Stich, 2020). A research done by McKinsley found that flexibility was the number-one issue raised by employees that wished for more freedom in their working patterns (Dowling et al., 2022). Many employees regard flexible working options to be a huge benefit, and offering the option of working from anywhere helps also attract and retain talent. Increased flexibility is seen to improve productivity. This is due to giving employees the freedom to select when they work, which allows them to do so when they feel the most productive (Yang et al., 2023). According to other studies, receiving autonomy leads to better work satisfaction and lower role stress (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Furthermore, having control over one's own job can boost motivation and employee engagement.

*Work-life balance* is defined as "the extent to which experiences in one role improves the quality of life in the other role" (Greenhaus et al., 2006, p. 72. Thomas (2022) define work-life balance as "being able to manage a personal life during the work day, without the hassle of having to get permission or explain activities to others". According to Srimulyani & Hermanto (2022 p. 34-35) work-life balance is determined as a type of balance

that exists in a person's life when a person does not overlook their duties and commitments at work while also not overlooking their commitments in all areas in his or her private life. Moreover, having the option for remote working brings employees benefits such as an improvement in their work-life balance as more time with family and friends and hobbies. These advantages can boost employee satisfaction and productivity. Thomas (2022) states that activities such as hobbies, exercise, culture, sleep and quality time spent with close companions are important for an individual's emotional and physical well-being. Time spent away from work enhances brain function and creativity. When an employee's emotional and physical well-being is enhanced, knowledge work is expected to increase.

*Cost saving* is the ability to save money for both businesses and employees and it is seen as a benefit of a hybrid workplace. For most employees they save time and money on commuting to the office (Moretti et al., 2020; Sokolic, 2022). Office rent and utilities are the most significant ways for cost savings in a hybrid workplace, due to a large percentage of the company's personnel working remotely. Companies that use a hybrid workplace model also profit from company logistics, transportation, and the extra utilities that come with running a business such as utility fees from fuel, electricity, WIFI and phone bills (Iqbal et al., 2021 p. 34). Another cost saving area for companies are office supplies and equipment. Companies can save money on having a larger space where employees can cooperate and have occasional meetings, rather than a personal spot for each employee (Iqbal et al., 2021 p. 34). Additionally, office supplies such as paper, printer ink and other stationery supplies are used less frequently leading to cost savings. The option for remote work has been shown to be related to employee turnover. From a company's point of view, employee turnover is rather costly. The increased work satisfaction that hybrid working allows results in employee retention and thus contributing to cost savings (Blumberga and Berga, 2022).

*Access to a wider talent pool* has been seen as an opportunity that has emerged from hybrid working (Ozimek & Stanton, 2022). According to a survey of 841 Swiss companies,

87 % of the companies are in the belief that hybrid work models are essential in attracting top talent (Berger et al., 2021). Hybrid working enables companies to recruit employees from different areas, since the workforce is not limited to one certain geographical area (Kane et al., 2021). From the same survey, 89 % of the companies with employees over 1000, believe it to be a considerable opportunity to increase their geographic reach (Berger et al., 2021). By limiting a company's workforce to one certain area, it can result in a predominately homogenous workforce with minimal diversity in ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds. Companies can now hire employees from a variety of areas creating possibilities for companies to locate employees with distinctive skill sets, thus hiring a more-diverse workforce. This additionally provides more competitive advantage and it introduces new ideas and perspectives that might assist in the company's growth (Microsoft, 2021). A hybrid workplace can especially aid underrepresented groups. Groups such as young families, elderly employees, caregivers and people who suffer with mental illnesses often face barriers with employment (IWG, 2019 p. 15). However, with flexible working options, these obstacles are reduced, allowing individuals to create a productive setting. Additionally, this helps organizations to expand the pool of individuals with specialized talents and create a more inclusive workplace.

#### 2.2.2.2 Threats in a hybrid workplace

Whilst the benefits of a hybrid workplace are appealing for numerous reasons, there are also inadequacies associated with it. These inadequacies are related to challenges with communication, technology, employee engagement and collaboration (Mortensen & Haas 2021; Kane et al., 2021; Maddox-Daines, 2023). Below, the reasoning of each challenge is explained.

*Communication* is fundamental when it comes to business. According to Mortensen and Haas (2021), a hybrid workplace does not achieve the key elements that arise when employees work together on-site. Strengths such as smoother coordination, face-to-face collaboration, informal networking and stronger company culture decrease immensely.

When working from home, communication has to be preplanned, rather than happening by chance if running to a coworker in the office premises. Iqbal et al. (2019 p. 35) express that in the traditional office environment, unplanned ideas and meetings are typical. Additionally, numerous decisions have been made in these unplanned meetings, but in the remote and hybrid workplace systems, communication is inorganic. Iqbal et al. (2019 p. 42) and Williams et al., (2015), express that communication is the instrument that aids in developing trust, and for building trust both face-to-face and non-verbal communication are required. Hybridity can lead to moments of confusion. A communication challenge is for employers to keep record of conversations that have been made onsite, and communicating the same to off-site employees (Ramana & Krishna, 2022). This can cause cases of miscommunication and misunderstandings or even for off site employees feeling excluded. For decreasing misunderstandings, clarifying communication channels will guarantee that the same information is given to all employees (Iqbal et al., 2019 p. 42). A challenge with this is that information can become over-communicated. The lack of communication can also cause feelings of isolation for employees (Flores, 2019 p. 40). The lack of unexpected face-to-face conversations within the workplace, has also led to decreased innovation and knowledge sharing (Kane et al., 2021). Gajendran & Harrison, 2007, argue that it is found that if investing more than 2,5 days per week working from home can cause workplace relationships to fall apart. Social contacts and interactions with coworkers and management are said to contribute to employees belonging to a company. Because of the option for distant work, these possibilities in communication, including feedback and support have decreased (Golden et al., 2008 p. 1414). These disadvantages can have a negative effect on employees' career development over time.

*Employee engagement* underlines the significance of the individual's effect on their engagement level and satisfaction with their firm (Harter et al., 2002 p. 269). Lenka (2021 p. 2690) argues that employee engagement suffers in a hybrid workplace model. This is due to employees not having constant interactions with one another and a sense of bonding is decreased when employees are not physically present in the workplace. Ad-

ditionally, remote work can become isolating, communication reduces, leaving employees dissatisfied and unable to dedicate themselves to work, resulting in employee disengagement. Sokolic (2022) mentions that working from home results in missed opportunities in creating relationships and social networks. This lack of visibility can have an effect on promotions and career development.

*Collaboration* is argued to be performed more effectively in person (Maddox-Daines, 2023). A lack of collaboration possibilities can have an effect on employee's well-being, which can further lead to a decrease in productivity, increased absenteeism and an even higher increase in staff turnover (Maddox-Daines, 2023). Additionally, Mortensen & Haas (2021) state that, hybridity is linked to power and hybrid workplaces have the ability to create power differentials within teams. This can lead to damaged relationships and decreased performances. According to Yang et al., (2023) Microsoft employees analyzed a 350-person team's collaboration habits and found that 10 % of employees have collaborative meetings on the weekends, since team members' schedules can now be so different from one another. Moreover, Kane et al., (2021) express that virtual settings have decreased organizational culture, due to the decrease in collaboration and team-building activities. This is due to organizational culture being fostered by employees coming together and engaging together in different activities.

*Technology* has been in more use due to the implementation of working from home. The mix of both digital and in-person work has given a new range of challenges across all levels of an organization. Organizations have needed to incorporate more tools and forms of technology as a way to communicate with their employees. Time-critical information is transferred through multiple technology channels, such as video calls, emails and other tools (Sanders et al. 2020). Employees need strong internet connectivity, effective IT security and the necessary tools to be able to work from anywhere. Cakula & Pratt (2021 p. 211) mention that the main barriers towards effective communication are related to the availability of technology as well as the devices, software and the internet

used. Additionally, challenges are also related to employee's skills, the function of remote tools and the ability to interact virtually. At times, using these information and technological communication tools are not seen as effective as face-to-face communication (Cakula & Pratt, 2021 p. 210). This is due to technology reducing non-verbal communication and eliminating non-verbal signals that are a vital part of communication. Additionally, information and technology communication can exclude those individuals who do not naturally have the know-how in using different technology tools. This is why implementing proper training towards technology in a hybrid workplace is critical (Bhatia et al., 2021. p. 9). Moreover, the different technological tools have made collaboration less efficient and has then decreased productivity levels (Sokolic, 2022). According to ILO (2020), technostress, technology addiction, and overload all contribute to exhaustion, anger, and an inability to switch off from work and rest appropriately.

## 2.3 Onboarding in a hybrid workplace

A hybrid workplace has become more common in today's world, but as mentioned onboarding in a hybrid workplace has not been researched as much as onboarding in a virtual setting (Didion et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2022; Asatiani et al., 2020). Businesses are adopting the concept of combining on-site and off-site working in order to provide employees flexibility and to enhance their work-life balance. Giving employees freedom boosts motivation and fosters a more inclusive workplace (Stitch, 2020; Bal & Izak, 2021; Sokolic, 2022).

Mazzei et al. (2023) argues that, in spite of the positives, there are challenges associated with hybrid working, especially with the onboarding process. The onboarding process can be seen as more complicated in a hybrid workplace than it is in a traditional office setting. The remote working part of the hybrid workplace can lead to difficulties in sharing company culture, missed opportunities for informal communication and social isolation. These drawbacks can especially affect the process of organizational commitment.

Furthermore, there has not been enough adequate research into the challenges associated with onboarding in a hybrid workplace (Mazzei at al., 2023). Moreover, existing literature identifies the need of improving onboarding practices such as socialization practices and the use of social agents in order to successfully execute the onboarding process.

In remote settings, employees operate and interact through technology. This has influenced the socialization process, due to communication playing an important part in the process. For example, new hires need to be able to learn the skills needed for their new role and gain valuable information from their colleagues or supervisors (Picherit-Duthler et al., 2004). Didion et al. (2023) expresses that the use of virtual teams has reduced communication frequency, knowledge exchange, satisfaction, and performance, which are all important factors when socializing into a new organization. Technology mediated communication has also affected regular and spontaneous communication with colleagues. When an individual is able to observe their colleagues' or superiors' availability, it may be easier to approach them with formal or informal conversations (Didion et al., 2023). On the other hand, remote working may necessitate even more proactive activity on the part of newcomers.

Sani et al. (2022) argue that in human resource practices, digital onboarding is not an entirely new phenomenon, since organizations around the world have used it to manage new recruits in geographically dispersed locations. Organizations are using new technology such as artificial intelligence to assist with recruiting, which might usher in a new age of work practices (Ritz et al., 2023). During the pandemic, virtual onboarding increased dramatically, and businesses that had not previously used virtual onboarding practices, were forced to implement it. Onboarding is a critical process that offers the opportunity for both the applicant and the employer to get to know one another. This can have a negative effect in terms of costs, employer reputation, employee morale, and productivity, but also with social and normative learning.

Social and normative learning happens when new hires are able to closely observe how other colleagues interact, behave, and act. If onboarding processes are done remotely through virtual platforms such as Teams, retrieving this information gets more difficult, potentially affecting performance and productivity (Jeske and Olson, 2021 p. 74; Petrilli et al., 2022). Additionally, some of the top concerns and issues related to virtual onboarding is how the use of computer-mediated communication tools can harm the quality of communication between newcomers and colleagues (Hemphill and Begel, 2011). Nonetheless, Sani et al. (2022) expresses that the main problems and issues that employees experienced when undergoing their online onboarding practices were concerns facing lack of connectedness, lack of adequate social interaction and lack of role clarity. Nowadays newcomers demand a more customized and personalized onboarding process as well as greater flexibility during it (Jeske and Olson, 2018). These expectations, as well as the growing demand for remote working, require changes in the onboarding process, which is still very generic (Jeske and Olson, 2018).

## 2.4 Summary of the literature review

This thesis aims to provide insight into how a hybrid workplace can affect the onboarding process and how organizations can implement tactics to successfully manage it. The theoretical framework provides an understanding of previous literature related to onboarding first by introducing organizational socialization and then discussing the onboarding process itself. Hybrid workplace is described and insight is given to what is already known about onboarding in a hybrid workplace.

Organizational socialization is a learning and adjustment process that helps new hires feel connected to the organization and from connections to other employees within it. It is an important part of the onboarding process, since it attempts to prepare the newcomer for a successful role and fit in the organization (Chao, 2012). There are three phases in the socialization process, which are adopted from Feldman's work from the

1980s (Godinho et al. 2023). These are: the pre-entry phase, the encounter phase and the metamorphosis phase.

Onboarding is a process that aims to integrate, train, and orient new employees into the company (Bauer, 2013). Organizations also strive to familiarize them to their company's culture, values, structure, and rituals (Chillakuri, 2020; Cable et al., 2013; Davila and Pina-Ramizer, 2018). The onboarding process can last up to 12 months which then if done successfully transitions into retention (Maurer, 2019). Neglecting the onboarding process can lead to low employee productivity, work dissatisfaction, and a lack of belonging within an organization (Czopek and Kazusek, 2020). A way for organizations to succeed in onboarding is for example by using the 4 C's by Bauer (2010). Another way to measure success of an onboarding process, is by looking into how the newcomer has achieved role clarity, self-efficacy, social integration and knowledge of and fit within an organization. Additionally, Caldwell and Peters (2018) outline ten core onboarding steps for successful onboarding. The steps include: establishing an online relationship immediately after hiring, assigning a mentor for socialization, focusing on relationships and networking, preparing a booklet for orientation, having proper equipment and logistics, clarifying responsibilities, building self-efficacy, involving supervisors and team members in training, and creating an ongoing training process. Klein and Heuser's (2008) introduce three categories that have an effect on the onboarding process. These categories are: organizational tactics, social agents, and newcomer productivity.

The organization's role in onboarding is to create programs, practices and tools that explain the values and culture of the organization as well as share knowledge about the role (Godinho et al., 2023). Bauer et al. (2017 p. 995) state that the newcomers' proactive behavior can be seen as how committed they are to adjusting to their new role. Proactive newcomers learn quickly, establish strong professional networks, and adapt to the organization's culture. Klein and Heuser (2008 p. 288) and Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006 p. 495) define social agents as individuals who help newcomers adjust

to work-related practices by giving knowledge, feedback, support and connection. Supervisors, team members, and colleagues from other departments are seen as social agents.

A hybrid work model is a flexible work environment that involves working either remotely or from the office spaces (Mortensen & Haas 2021 and Lenka 2021). Opportunities associated with a hybrid workplace are increased flexibility, improved work-life balance, cost savings and access to a wider talent pool (Stich 2020; Bhatia et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Kane et al., 2021, Sokolic, 2022). Threats that are related to the hybrid workplace are: challenges with communication, technology, employee engagement and collaboration (Mortensen & Haas 2021; Kane et al., 2021; Maddox-Daines, 2023).

Onboarding in hybrid settings is more complex than in traditional office settings. Remote working can lead to difficulties in sharing company culture, reduced informal conversations and social isolation, which then can have an impact on organizational commitment (Mazzei et al,. 2023). Remote working has significantly impacted the socialization process, due to technology influencing communication (Picherit-Duthler et al., 2004). Remote working has reduced communication frequency, knowledge exchange, job satisfaction and performance, which are crucial factors for socializing into a new organization (Didion et al., 2023). Concerns include the quality of communication between newcomers and colleagues, lack of connectedness, lack of proper social interaction, and role clarity (Sani et al., 2022). Newcomers now demand a more personalized and flexible onboarding process (Jeske and Olson, 2018).

# 3 Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to get a better understanding on how organizations can successfully onboard a new employee in a hybrid workplace setting. This chapter outlines the overall research approach, target population, sampling technique and data collection method. The research method is outlined in a transparent way to ensure the research is gathered in a reliable and credible way and that the research question will be answered.

## 3.1 Research approach

The goal of this research is to find practices and methods organizations can use to successfully onboard new employees in a hybrid workplace setting. The aim of this research is to get a better understanding on how to successfully onboard a new employee in a hybrid workplace setting, by identifying key challenges and opportunities when onboarding in a hybrid workplace.

Research is the process of gaining knowledge and developing an understanding of a phenomena. It is about gathering facts and analyzing them in order to create a bigger picture of the external or internal world. The research process is systematic by the way the goal is defined, data is managed, and findings are communicated within the established framework. Researchers can choose what to include in the research, how to conduct the research, and what kinds of inferences are likely based on the data collected by using the frameworks and recommendations (Williams, 2007).

According to Williams (2007), the three most common approaches when conducting a research are a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach or mixed methods. In order to choose the correct approach, what is needed to know is what type of data must be collected in order to answer the research question. The data collected can be numerical,

textural or both. If numerical, a quantitative research method should be chosen, if textural, a qualitative approach, and if both, the option would be mixed methods (Williams, 2007). What separates quantitative and qualitative research from one another is that quantitative research is related to statistical methods of data collection which includes measurements and figures. On the other hand, a qualitative approach is seen as a "softer" approach, since it embodies techniques such as observations, interviews and interpretive analysis (Saunders et al., 2003).

According to Harper (2011 p.2) a qualitative approach is generally used because it is best at developing broader and detailed descriptions of phenomena and processes. It is a holistic approach that involves discovery (Williams, 2007). In order to answer the research question of this thesis, a qualitative research method is chosen.

## 3.2 Data collection

Qualitative research approaches are utilized in order to address questions related to experiences, perspectives, and meanings, usually from a participant's point of view. Different techniques used in a qualitative research approach are either small-group discussions, which is used when the author wants to explore beliefs, attitudes and concepts of normative behavior. In-depth interviews are used when the author wants to understand an experience or event from a personal perspective and semi-structured interviews are used when the author wants to investigate aspects on a particular issue or key informants and background information on an institutional outlook (Hammarberg et al., 2016). The data for this study will be collected by using semi-structured interviews in order to investigate practices and strategies used to successfully onboard in a hybrid workplace. The author will prepare an interview guide that is used to follow while conducting the interviews.

According to Adams (2015) semi-structured interviews are used when the author wants to collect independent thoughts by asking probing open-ended questions, and when the

author does not want the interviewee to get influenced by the opinions of other peers. When the researcher asks questions in a “probing” manner, it may lead to discussion into topics that the researcher had not previously considered, but may be significant in understanding the broader picture and thus aid in addressing the research question and objectives (Saunders et al., 2003). Moreover, when using semi-structured interviews, the researcher conducts the interviews through a list of themes and questions that need to be covered. The order of the questions may vary depending on how the conversation proceeds. It is possible to also use additional questions in order to investigate the research question and objectives further in light of the events happening within the particular organization (Saunders et al., 2003). Additionally, due to the nature of the conversation data can be recorded either by video or audio. The recording is then transcribed into written words. During the interview, it is also noted to take into account the tone of the participant’s voice and other non-verbal cues (Saunders et al., 2003).

In this study, interviews will be held face-to-face and they will be audio-recorded after receiving permission by the interviewees. By audio-recording the author will be able to listen and concentrate to the discussion as well as the nonverbal cues of the interviewees. Audio-recordings are then transcribed into transcripts, in order to manage and organize the material. This helps the process of searching for themes, patterns, and keywords to further help with the data analysis (Saunders et al., 2003).

## 3.3 Sample selection

The sample selection chosen for a research is critical since it should be a group of participants that should be able to provide valuable insight towards the research question. Additionally, sampling determines the credibility and representativeness of the data collected. There are different types of sampling techniques, but in this study the sampling technique chosen is purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2). Purposive sampling is often used in a qualitative research method. It involves choosing participants based on

the attributes the participant possesses. When using this technique, the researcher decides what information is necessary to gather and thus, searches for participants with that knowledge or experience (Etikan et al., 2016 p. 2, 4).

The main criteria for the sampling of this study, is to interview employees that have been onboarded into a hybrid workplace for at least a year from the interview date. This is because the onboarding process can last up to 12 months and after the 12 months of onboarding, if done successfully, it transitions into retention (Maurer, 2019). The reasoning behind choosing employees for the data collection rather than employers, is because employees can give more honest reviews of the onboarding process and because they are the ones experiencing the practices and processes that the organization uses when onboarding. A criteria is to also find candidates from different fields and lines of business to gain a broader view of different onboarding practices. The interviewees' names and companies are not revealed in this thesis. However, the fields of work, employee titles, and interviewee genders are shown in the table below.

| Interviewees | Gender | Role | Industry |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interviewee 1 | Male | Software Developer Intern | Tech Industry |
| Interviewee 2 | Male | Issuer Service Officer | Banking |
| Interviewee 3 | Female | People Specialist | Automations |
| Interviewee 4 | Male | Supply Chain Specialist | Manufacturing |
| Interviewee 5 | Female | eCommerce Assistant | Retail |
| Interviewee 6 | Male | Marketing Trainee | Retail |

**Table 1. Participant information.**

A sample of six interviewees were chosen in order to research successful onboarding in a hybrid workplace. Most of the interviews were held face to face except two were held

through a Zoom call. Each interview was recorded. The interviews took about 50-90 minutes per respondent. The participants were given the option to choose whether the interviews are held either in English or in Finnish. This was to make the participants feel more comfortable with the chosen language. The occurrence of the interviews were on the following dates:

- Interviewee 1: February 11th, 2024, in person, 88 minutes
- Interviewee 2: February 28th, 2024, in person, 80 minutes
- Interviewee 3: March 3rd, 2024, in person, 82 minutes
- Interviewee 4: March 17th, 2024, in person, 53 minutes
- Interviewee 5: March 19th, 2024, on Zoom, 65 minutes
- Interviewee 6: March 21th, 2024 on Zoom, 57 minutes.

The following section will focus on the methods used for data analysis.

## 3.4 Data analysis

In this study, a thematic approach is used in order to analyze the data acquired from the semi-structured interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic approach is used for analyzing and finding themes in data. It is a method that helps to organize and give a well-provided description of the material. Analyzing the data is more than summarizing the interviews. It is also about interpreting the data and making sense of it.

The author approaches the analysis of the data through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis method. The first step is to make the data as familiar as possible. This is done by re-reading the transcripts and writing down ideas that arise from the text. The second step is to generate codes that arise from the transcripts. In the process

of coding, the author uses abductive coding, meaning that the author revisits and reviews the data as often as needed in order to generate codes and refine interpretations (Vila-Henninger et al., 2022). Abductive coding involves generating new insights and concepts and encourages flexibility allowing the author to uncover new insights of the data. The third step is to search for themes within the codes. Since the codes help to gather similar data together, potential themes are grouped from these bundles of codes. The fourth step is to review the potential themes and to check that the themes are aligned with the purpose of the study and the data. It is important to check that there is enough data to support the theme and that the themes are not overlapping one another. Step five is to name the themes. The names should give the reader an immediate sense of what the theme is about. Moreover, each theme should determine what data is wanted to capture through the theme. The final step of the analysis is writing a report of the analysis. The report should have detailed summaries of each theme with vivid examples of quotes from the transcript to support the theme itself.

## 3.5 Reliability and validity of the research

To ensure that the method chosen for the research goes well, the researcher needs to pay attention to the reliability and validity of the research (Sanders et al, 2003). Reliability refers to the consistency of the research, whilst validity refers to the accuracy. Validity and reliability play a crucial role in ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

Reliability refers to the dependability and consistency of the research method used. The idea behind reliability is that the research results should be replicable or repeatable and stable (Golafshani, 2003). For the research to be reliable, these three questions should be answered (Sanders et al., 2003; Golafshani, 2003): (1) if the research were to be done repeatedly using the same measurement tool, would the results remain the same? (2) would similar results be reached by other observers? (3) is the analysis of the data trans-

parent? To ensure reliability in a qualitative research method, examination of trustworthiness is critical (Golafshani, 2003). In this study, reliability is established by clearly documenting the research process and maintaining consistency in the data collection and data analysis. The transparency aims to enhance dependability and trustworthiness of the research conducted. Additionally, by clearly documenting the research process, other researchers can potentially replicate the study done, to discover if comparable results are produced. This contributes to the general reliability of the research.

Validity refers to whether the findings are truly accurate or not (Saunders et al., 2003). Whilst reliability assures that the data collection process is precise and carefully planned, validity ensures that the results are relevantly error-free. A way for researchers to ensure validity of their study is by pilot testing (Gani et al., 2020). By conducting a pilot test of the interview, potential issues may arise during pilot testing, and thus adjustments can be made to improve clarity and relevance for when the actual interviews are conducted in the future. Another way to ensure validity is by having an interview guide that the researcher can follow when conducting the interviews (Gani et al., 2020). Gani et al., (2020) introduce an interview guide as an protocol that consists of guidelines and questions that are prepared according to the research objectives. An interview guide helps to stay in control of the direction of the interview during the interview. In this study a pilot test and an interview guide will be conducted in order to ensure the validity of the study.

# 4 Findings

This chapter discusses key findings from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted in order to research how to successfully onboard new employees in a hybrid workplace. The following sub-chapters will present findings of the interviews in themes. The first sub-chapter explores what opportunities and threats are related to a hybrid workplace. In the following sub-chapter, factors and tactics that make onboarding successful in a hybrid workplace are discussed. Lastly, the following sub-chapter focuses on finding the mishaps that had an effect on the onboarding process.

## 4.1 Perceptions towards the hybrid workplace

As the study is based on how organizations can successfully onboard a new employee in a hybrid workplace, it is essential to understand the unique opportunities and threats related to the hybrid work environment. When understanding factors associated with the hybrid environment, it is possible to then identify specific tactics that an organization can use to successfully integrate a new hire. In light of this, in the first theme of the interview, interviewees were asked to express their thoughts and feelings related to the hybrid workplace. When asked about their thoughts on flexibility, opportunities of time savings, improved work-life balance and autonomy were mentioned in the majority of the interviewees' responses.

> *"The option for remote working has had a great impact on my work-life balance. I feel that being able to work from home works well for me and it eliminates commuting time etc., leaving much more time to do household chores and other leisure activities after work. (Interviewee 1)"*

> *"It allows more free time after working hours. I wouldn't have taken this job if it was completely on-site. I feel that being completely on-site is not modern anymore." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"For me personally it brings balance and that I am able to decide for myself where and how I work the best. It brings positive freedom." (Interviewee 5)*

When asked about productivity, a few interviewees noticed differences in work dynamics and the different types of work that are either accomplished at home versus at the office. Tasks that did not have many expectations and were straighforward in terms of the process, were more likely done remotely, versus the tasks that were more complicated and needed brainstorming which were then done at the office.

> *"In certain tasks, I am more effective when I am working from home, since the work that I am doing in the office has more to do with socializing. I get so much more information from the office than what I get from my home." (Interviewee 3)*

> *"At home I can't do the socializing work and at the office I can't really do work that needs my full attention and that is really basic in terms of the task. So, when I know that I need to do the tasks that need my full attention for a longer period of time, it's even made me think that I need to be at home to get that type of work done." (Interviewee 6)*

Interviewees also associated the possibility of being able to attend to personal tasks during breaks with higher satisfaction and productivity levels.

> *"I would argue that when I am working from home, I feel that I am somehow more refreshed when I go to the office and that is because during breaks when I'm home I can do laundry or wash the dishes, so it means that after the working day you have more time." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"If I've done everything and my mail is empty, then in the office I'm just kind of sitting around and waiting to receive another email, but when I'm home I can do useful stuff like cleaning. " (Interviewee 5)*

Some interviewees mentioned the downsides towards working from home in regards to working overtime, or not taking breaks from working.

> *"I find it easier to work overtime if I work from home, because I don't have to commute, so the commuting time often relapses to me working overtime." (Interviewee 1)*

> *"What often happens is that either my breaks are shorter when I'm working from home or that I sometimes eat at my workplace and don't take a proper lunch break, which I would do if I was at the office." (Interviewee 4)*

Some interviewees mentioned the challenge of it being difficult to maintain a clear separation between work and personal life when working remotely.

> *"Sometimes it is the fact that the conditions at home can make it difficult to start doing work." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"When working remotely, I sometimes open my laptop in the evenings or check my emails from my phone. But when I am at the office and leave after I've done my tasks for the day,I don't check my laptop or phone in the evenings. It is much easier to put a clear distinction between work and personal life." (Interviewee 4)*

Next question guided the discussion towards collaboration and communication. Each interviewee noticed challenges. Some interviewees noticed challenges in regards to not being able to read body language and missing out on informal communication. Participants felt that virtual conversations were too formal.

> *"On a day when there are meetings and lots of people in the office, I try to go there myself so I can talk to them face to face, because I feel that it is really difficult to sometimes have a conversation via phone or chat." (Interviewee 6)*

> *"Not so much with collaboration, because everything is done through Slack, but there is no small talk through digital platforms, so that I find that challenging." (Interviewee 1)*

Challenges were also associated with not being able to form a personal bond with the other recipient after a virtual conversation.

> *"I feel like on conference calls or Teams, the people I am talking to, talk in such monotone ways and I can't sense how they are feeling. So if I have a tougher discussion with someone, I feel like it just ends so abruptly after the call. If I was talking to them in a conference room, and the meeting ends, we would walk away from the conference room together, maybe have a coffee and talk about other things that would make the "tough discussion" easier in a sense." (Interviewee 5)*

> *"The majority of my team is in a different country and I have never met them in-person. I have only spoken to them virtually, so I do not personally know them. If I compare them to my team members here in Finland it is totally different because we see each other face to face three times a week and the bond is different." (Interviewee 2)*

Other challenges were associated with not finding time for collaboration, and how it has become more of an obstacle rather than a positive opportunity. Some conversations and collaborations were even postponed because of the challenge of having them virtually. This affects productivity and causes feelings of anxiety when working from home.

> *"The challenge is to find the time now from the other person and the fact that everything must go through text or a phone call. And even if I forgot to say something or ask through the call it is always so difficult to call them back again, because the original call was already challenging to get." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"A lot of challenges. At home I feel that at times I'm just sitting and staring at the wall. I should contact someone, but everyone's on the phone or in Teams and I can't just quickly shout to a colleague, "hey can you help me with this or give me an opinion". (Interviewee 3)*

> *"Sometimes I think, should I call them or should I just wait until I see them in the office because a Team's call just seems so much more work in order to just ask a simple question, because it feels so formal." (Interviewee 6)*

> *Everytime I or my team members finish a task, we have to always check and look it over, so when we all are at the office it goes so much more smoothly, I just quickly ask them if they could go and approve it. But when we are in different places I have to call them, or send a message, or wait for them to get back online, so it is much more difficult and more time consuming." (Interviewee 2)*

The conversation was then guided towards staying connected and included within their team while being remote. Majority of the interviewees felt that there were no major issues regarding it, but the participant that had a rule of being at the office three times a week felt truly connected to their team and organization. Other participants did have some feelings of social isolation.

> *"We have such a small team and we have regular meetings with the team. Of course you miss the small talk and informal chatting at the office when you are remote, but I feel that I get enough of it when I am at the office a few days of a week." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"Being at the office at least three times a week, which is mandatory in our team, but it also maintains the sense of community and connection." (Interviewee 2)*

Participants were able to share their thoughts about rules concerning the hybrid model. As mentioned, the participant that had a writted rule of being at the office three times a week, had the most positive experience with the hybrid model. Other participants had feelings of anxiety and confusion when trying to learn about the unspoken rules of hybrif working. Since unspoken rules do not have any specific requirements towards on-site and off-site working, participants felt inconsistency and confusion of what was expected of them in terms of working hours, communication and other aspects of hybrid working. Written rules eliminate this confusion and can help the newcomer in feeling more secure when working in a hybrid workplace.

> *"I enjoy hybrid working, but I do think that there are also some limits to how it works. There should be some rule, or some silent contract that you have to be at the office, because otherwise I would probably be at home too much and I don't find that good in the long run." (Interviewee 3)*

> *"I am positively surprised that our rule of having to be at the office at least three days a week is perfect. It brings structure to the week, it helps to maintain workplace relationships, and work culture, but it gives the freedom that you can also do remote work 2 days a week." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"It's really important for the team and the company to find a balance with the hybrid work environment, otherwise it can go in the wrong direction. Our team has an unspoken rule that if most people go to the office, everyone has to go there. We're usually there at least two days a week." (Interviewee 6)*

Other attributes that were mentioned by interviewees included elements of social isolation and perceived pointlessness of the constant meetings associated with remote working. Another point that emerged from an interviewee was that they sometimes chose not to go to the office, if a majority of other colleagues were going there on that day as well. This was due to the potential challenge of finding a desk for themselves, since the office has reduced their office space. These mentioned factors were expressed by individual interviewees. In the next chapter, findings will be reviewed in regards to factors that make onboarding successful in a hybrid workplace.

## 4.2 Factors and tactics that had a positive effect on the onboarding process

In the second part of the interview, the objective was to discuss the participant's perceptions of their onboarding process. The idea was to gain knowledge on the different factors and tactics that positively contributed towards the onboarding experience. Supervisory support was a factor that was pinpointed in the majority of the interviews.

> *"I received a lot of security from my supervisor in relation to the work and the external pressure and that was my biggest support during the onboarding process and till this day." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"The one who trained me welcomed me on my first day, as well as my supervisor of course. Overall, there were a lot of people in the office that day, so I don't know if it was because they knew that there was a new employee coming or why, but it was nice. It was a good opportunity to get to know them right away." (Interviewee 6)*

> *"Our supervisor works from another country, so he came to Finland for a week to get to know us. We had dinner with the team and it was really nice. It gave a good feeling that we were actually cared about. (Interviewee 2)*

A positive factor that emerged from most of the interviewees, was when the organization made an effort in trying to immediately integrate the new employee into the organization, meaning that there was minimal remote time during the first few weeks. By not having any remote days during the initial start of the onboarding process, the new hire is able to receive the resources nedded to succeed in their new role and integrate seamlessly into the organizations culture. On-site onboarding provides new hires the opportunity to observe workplace dynamics and company culture firsthand.

> *"I had a good situation straight from the start because me and my other team member started at the same time and our senior said that he can always be there if we needed him to. So we were at the office every day and it was so much easier to learn about the organization and the tasks in person during our trainee period." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"My training was done in person at the office, which I think was the best way to do it. It was an intensive 2 week period but I was happy that it was done in-person, because through Teams it can be a little overwhelming." (Interview 4)*

> *"It was good that even though it's a hybrid workplace, all the learning and getting used to happened at the office. It's important to be in the workplace at the beginning but when things start rolling you can start working more remotely." (Interviewee 1)*

> *"The whole training via Teams is not suitable for me, because the days were long, boring and it was easy to lose concentration, so it was a good solution for me to have everything in the beginning at the office as much as possible." (interviewee 4)*

Communication was seen as effective, when it was open and easily accessible.

> *"Communication has always been open in my team. We usually just go straight to the point and take care of it right away." (Interviewee 6)*

> *"I think communication has always been pretty efficient in our team. It could be that our team in Finland is so small that the communication is more intimate and efficient." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"We had an open relationship towards communication and it was always pretty easy for me to ask questions since the beginning." (Interview 1)*

Interviewees had an easier time adjusting at the beginning of their onboarding process when expectations for the role were clearly explained.

> *"Yes, I had very clear goals. First I had to learn the basics and then little by little, I was given more demanding tasks. I was constantly being instructed and nothing was unclear about my role." (Interviewee 1)*

> *"In the beginning, I sensed a chilled attitude from my supervisor and thanks to that, I feel like I learned so much faster because all the pressures was taken away." (Interviewee 2)*

During the second theme, the questions were also guided towards tactics that the organization might have used in their onboarding process. During training, it was clear that the majority of the interviewees enjoyed that it was done face-to-face and on-site. Personality traits had a big role when processes were taught. Some only enjoyed learning onsite.

> *"Based on my experience, I found it easier to learn on the spot and face to face, rather than remotely through teams. When we began to also work remotely, we had some training through teams, and I just felt that I couldn't really participate in it." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"I'm the kind of person who learns best by doing it myself or by observing it from the side, so I noticed quite a big difference between learning the process remotely or on-site. If it was done remotely, I felt like I had to ask about the process again later because I just didn't really learn that way." (Interviewee 6)*

Some of the participants enjoyed learning some processes remotely.

> *"I actually liked that when I was learning about processes that I needed to do, which did not have any exceptions, that it was done remotely, because I could just sit and listen and take notes, and I didn't have to be proactive when learning it." (Interviewee 3)*

> *"Coding can't really be taught in a sense that everyone has their own way of doing it. So, I found it easier when all the basics were learned that I could learn the other processes remotely on my own time." (Interviewee 1)*

There were some specific tactics that were used during the training period that were noticed as helpful. For example, two interviewees had the same experience when working remotely. They had Teams call with their mentor or trainer during the day and it was continously on, giving the employee an option to ask questions more freely when working remotely. Another participant thought it was helpful, when their trainer had made materials accessible for them to use when working remotely.

> *"My mentor and I kept a Teams call on if we were both working remotely, if I had any questions I needed to ask during the day." (Interviewee 6)*

> *"I thought it was so good that our senior had made teaching material of almost every possible process and if we were ever working remotely during the beginning, I could just check from the material and it really gave a sense of safety when working from home." (Interviewee 2)*

Another tactic that had a noticeable difference on the onboarding experience, was the use of mentors. Those who were assigned a mentor, felt more supported during the onboarding process.

> *"My mentor taught me the ropes of the organization by telling me about them and I also learned about it through his work." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"Yeah, my team lead was also my mentor and he was the one I could go to, to ask questions and he kind of looked after me that I was included in everything." (Interviewee 1)*

> "Our senior was also my mentor and he looked after me and taught me also all the practical stuff, since our supervisor lived in a different country so he really couldn't." (Interviewee 2)

Another tactic that was taken up for discussion was the use of feedback during the onboarding process. Again those who felt that the organization had laid an open environment for discussion and had been assigned a mentor, felt as though they were able to give and receive feedback more openly.

> *"We had regular reviewing meetings, where we went through everything like my progress and how I felt. During these meetings I was able to give feedback, and I also got feedback." (Interviewee 1)*

> *"I liked that the feedback was not so much as what was done right or wrong, we had more of a conversation where I was able to justify why I chose to do something the way I did it, so together we were able to reflect on the choices that I have made." (Interviewee 4)*

What also seemed to have an effect was the size of the team. Interviewees that were onboarded into a smaller team felt that it was easier to create relationships, learn and bond when working in a hybrid environment.

> *"I am in a smaller team and it feels like I'm getting involved in such a different way because I'm working so intensively with them." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"We mostly just work the three of us, and it is easier in the sense that if we were going to the office we can match our calendars more easily." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"I think that when there were three of us, it made learning really sufficient and easy. You got a lot of repetition on your own. If I would have started with more people, or if it was a bigger group, I don't think it would've worked so well." (Interviewee 6)*

When asked about other activites during the onboarding process, tactics such as group chats for the new hires, trainee days and kick-offs were used by organization in order to integrate the new hire succesfully.

> *"We had a trainee day with other trainees. And from day one I was attending daily and weekly meetings with the team. "(Interviewee 1)*

> *"When I started, I think three other employees started during that time as well, so the company organized a kick-off day, where everyone got to know one another. (Interviewee 4)*

> *"We had a group chat between trainees, where information was shared and stuff like afterworks were organized through that." (Interviewee 6)*

> *"We actually had an annual party quite soon after I started and I met another person who started through that and she was someone who I started to talk to and who I started to go to lunch with." (Interviewee 3)*

The interviewees were then asked if they felt proactive during the onboarding period. Each interviewee perceived themselves as proactivity during the process. Some interviewees even noticed that it was helpful that the organization tried to push the newcomer in being proactive.

> *"Even though it was sometimes uncomfortable and everytime I did it, I knew that I had to do it. I didn't have a choice but to be proactive for example if I wanted to talk to someone or ask them to lunch. Which I think is good that not everything is handed to you." (Interviewee 3)*

> *"I always asked why this process is done this way to get a deeper and broader picture of the whole operation. This way I learned more about the company and stuff that the company can't necessarily tell or teach themselves." (Interviewee 6)*

> *"It's good for the company to try to push that proactivity because it shows interest and motivation towards the company. That proactivity gives a better overview of why we do what we do and why I'm in this role doing what I do which then helps me better understand my own role and why it's important in this company. " (Interviewee 2)*

> *"There were so many things I didn't know and I would never have known if I hadn't asked about them myself." (Interviewee 1)*

Lastly, the interviewees were asked how the organization fostered a sense of connection to the company. Almost all the interviewees received some type of goods from the organization, which they all thought was a pleasant way to foster a connection. Interviewees also noticed other ways that made them feel connected to the company, which were factors such as assigning a desk from the office for the new employee and having daily team meetings and other team building activities.

> "Honestly, the way that they immediately had me start doing the work from the first *day, made me feel like I was part of the organization from day one and that I mattered as an employee." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"I remember that they said to me that it's nice that I joined the team, and I was the one that they wanted and that they saw a lot of potential in me. I immediately got the feeling that this place has a good work culture." (Interviewee 2)*

Additional notes that were presented was how enjoyable it was to be able to start working straight away, especially when it is a job that they were excited and eager about.

## 4.3 What did not work during the onboarding process

Because the aim of this study is to find out how to successfully onboard a new hire in a hybrid workplace, the third and final theme of the interviews was to find out what did not work during the onboarding process. A concern is how the hybrid environment plays a role in the process and if it has an effect on integration, job satisfaction and social relationships. The interviewees had different opinions concerning hybridity and its involvement in their job satisfaction. A common perception was that although it involves

freedom, it does create confusion and challenges during the onboarding process, especially with communication.

> *"It was a bit harder to ask questions when on a remote call. It feels like I'm interrupting the one who is trying to train me for the role and I can't read their body language. If we are speaking face-to-face and I have a question, the other can sense it." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"In some cases, if there is something I needed an answer to and I didn't get it immediately because either I or the other recipient were working remotely, I get so overwhelmed by it and it was hard to concentrate." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"It does have a slight effect on efficiency because sometimes it can be paralyzing, when I couldn't receive a straight answer straight away and there is a lot of new stuff and things to do." (Interviewee 6)*

Half of the interviewees felt loneliness and social isolation during their onboarding process. A common problem in a hybrid setting is when collagues are working remotely, whilst a new employee joins their team. The collagues are not on-site and showing the newcomers the ways of the organization. This has an effect on the integration of the new employee and has a negative effect on organizational culture.

> *"In a hybrid workplace, it is so much slower to integrate into the company, because you're only there for a couple of days of a week and during those days your whole team might not even be there. The more you spend time with your colleagues, the quicker you feel like your part of the team, the company and the community, but in a hybrid setting it's not possible in the same way."(Interviewee 3)*

> *"If everyone was at the office, I'd be there myself and socialize in different ways, but rarely ever was anyone there and to this day no one is ever there, so why would I bother to be there myself? And although my onboarding did happen on-site with my mentor, there could have been days that other team members were there as well so I could have gotten to know them better as well." (Interviewee 1)*

> *"I felt quite lonely at the office, so I wanted to be home, but I remember that in the beginning there were a lot of conflicts with communication and hybridity. For example, if there is no rule for when to be at the office or when I can work remotely, how I'm I supposed to know." (Interviewee 5)*

Those who weren't assigned a mentor, did not feel as secure and had an negative effect on their integration and onboarding experience.

> *"I wasn't assigned a mentor, I guess my whole team was kind of my mentor, so we ate together during lunch. And I guess my supervisor told me more about the company culture and values etc." (Interviewee 5)*

> *" I feel that there was no real support and no one to latch onto. There was not one person who asked about me or checked if I had any work to do. Everyone was so busy that in the beginning there was no work for me at times, of course there were little things, but sometimes there was really nothing to do. It felt like I was just forgotten." (Interviewee 3)*

Although supervisor support was a factor that many mentioned being positive during their onboarding process, some interviewees also had a difficult time in finding time with their supervisor, due to hybrid working.

> *"It's hard to find time, especially when the other person has a lot on their calendar, so it might take a long time for them to answer their messages or calls." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"Of course they have their own stuff that take up their time, so it was hard to catch them sometimes." (Interviewee 1)*

> *"I honestly hardly ever saw my supervisor, because she was so busy. That one time she gave me feedback when we randomly bumped into each other in the hallway." (Interviewee 3)*

Those who did not receive clear role expectations at the beginning of their onboarding process negatively impacted their role clarity, self-efficacy, social integration and knowledge of and fit within an organization.

> *"I kind of knew my role, but not really, so I didn't really feel confident in getting to know other colleagues from other teams, because I didn't really know what to say to them about my role." (Interviewee 3)*

> *"There was a bit of a hassle when I was on boarded and because I wasn't at the office during the first week, except for the first day, I feel like the start was a bit rough, in terms of not really knowing when I would receive my first tasks, what my tasks were going to be or who was onboarding me." (Interviewee 5)*

There were some interviewees who felt like not enough feedback was given. These participants were those that did not receive clear role expectations in the beginning and were not assigned a mentor.

> *"Well, to be honest, I would have liked a bit more feedback. I would have liked it if every month there was a general review of how things were going, what could be done differently, what is going well, how my productivity is, etc. It would also be nice to hear about development points." (Interviewee 5)*

> *"I had zero feedback, I asked for help whenever I needed, but no one was keeping track of what I did and how I did it, so I didn't get any feedback on my work. In the hybrid model everyone is just constantly everywhere, and finally when you see your co-workers, everyone is just all over the place. So when a new employee comes in, of course they feel like this. No one has the time or is keeping an eye on them." (Interviewee 3)*

In terms of what could have been done differently during the training, was to receive more information on the organization itself, for example about the product or service that the organization produced. Additionally, information about how other departments or teams worked was of interest. What also came up was how desensitizing it was to learn about the company's code of conduct, values and principles during the onboarding.

> *"We had a day when we learned everything about the company which was compulsory and it was done through teams even though we were at the office. I have to say that it was a bit boring, and maybe it made it even more boring because it was through teams, so maybe it could have been held face-to-face, so it would have been a bit more interesting." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"The most boring part was probably listening to recordings about the companies values and code of conduct, which is really important of course but it was quite tiresome." (Interviewee 1)*

Some interviewees gave their personal feedback on how the training process could be made easier for the newcomer.

> *"The fact that they explained so little about how everything relates to one another on a larger scale was non-existent. Things that were self-evident for them*

> *were self-evident and they were not taught. Of course I learned them after a while, but it took a lot of unnecessary time from the to learn by myself and my productivity was really low at the beginning." (Interviewee 1)*

> *"A company should have clear documentation about everything." (Interviewee 5)*
> *"If there is a process that is learned through Teams for example, it could be good that the call is recorded, because sometimes when learning remotely through a screen you get nervous that you miss something, and it takes so much extra from the process. But if it was recorded you could go through it again if needed." (Interviewee 3)*

The discussion was then directed to organizational commitment. As mentioned in the literature review, onboarding turns into retention when the newcomer has been at the company for over 12 months. Each individual has been working for over 12 months, but only a few individuals felt that they could see themselves working at the company for a longer time.

> *"The growth potential for the employee is great there so yes I can see myself there." (Interviewee 4)*

> *"Of course, I feel that since I spend most of the week there, the work culture that we have, especially in the team, is now very much part of everyday life. It would feel strange to be somewhere else, since there is a sense of familiarity and security there, so I feel that the integration has been very successful for me at least and currently I feel that I could have a long career there, with all of its potentials." (Interviewee 2)*

> *"Well now yes, since I feel like I've found my place in the team and the company, and I know the unwritten rules, but if a new possibility opens somewhere else I would not hesitate to take it." (Interviewee 3)*

> *"Yes for now, since I am still doing school and it works well with it, but I don't see a future there. But now of course while I am still there I am committed to the organization in a way that I want to do my best there." (Interviewee 1)*

One interviewee said that it would be best if the whole team could work on-site for a week or two when a new employee is starting, since it would help with integration and building relationships with other team members. Another participant mentioned that they did not enjoy watching online onboarding videos from home, since it felt lonely doing it during the first week when starting in the new role. Lastly, one interviewee said

that if another employee was now to join their team, the best way to onboard them would be by asking about their personal thoughts and feelings about learning and hybrid working, and base the onboarding process on that.

# 5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings of the conducted research in connection with the theoretical framework and aims to answer the research questions of the study. The research question is the following: What tactics can organizations use to successfully onboard a new hire in a hybrid workplace? This study gathered information from an employee's point of view of threats and opportunities that arise in a hybrid workplace, as well as factors and tactics that were used on them when onboarded in hybrid settings. The chapter is divided into three sub-chapters which are based on the objectives of the study.

## 5.1 Perfecting the balance in a hybrid environment

According to Mortensen & Haas (2021) and Lenka (2021), a hybrid work model is a flexible work style that combines both remote work and on-site work. As there is no one method that works for all organizations, a hybrid working system can differ from company to company. During the interviews, participants were first interviewed about their thoughts on hybrid working now that they had been onboarded for over a year and already committed to the organization.

In current literature (Dowling et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023) flexibility is one of the most highly-valued benefits that employees receive when working in a hybrid environment, since it allows the freedom to choose your own working patterns. All of the participants stated that they would not agree upon a role that does not allow hybrid working. Sokolic (2022) mentioned that future working habits regularly forecast that the option to work from home will become as common as the traditional manner of working from the office. The empirical findings based on the interviews reflect accordingly to the opportunities of hybrid working which are increased flexibility and improved work-life balance. Decrease in commuting time and having days off from the office, were seen as opportunities to recharge.

The increased flexibility was also linked to higher productivity, which is also mentioned in current literature (Yang et al., 2023). Participants noticed that some tasks were more productive to do at home and some at the office. This allowed the participants to choose the setting in which they see themselves working the best during specific tasks. Higher productivity was also seen in relation to being able to attend to personal tasks when working from home. Participants saw a huge benefit in the ability to do their laundry, or dishes during their breaks, which would leave more hours of the day for personal time after work. Although hybridity helps to achieve a greater work-life balance and it has an increase in productivity, some participants noticed that it was difficult to maintain a clear distinction between work and personal time when working remotely. Participants were checking emails after working hours and working overtime, when working from home.

One of the biggest challenges that arise in hybrid working is communication and collaboration (Mortensen and Haas, 2021; Maddox-Daines, 2023). Some interviewees noticed challenges in regards to not being able to read body language and missing out on informal communication when working remotely. Communication and collaboration was seen to be very challenging in a hybrid workplace. The participants showed difficulty in creating a deeper bond with colleagues when conversing through virtual platforms. Cakula & Pratt (p. 210, 2021 ) mention that using information and technological tools for communication is not seen as effective as face-to-face communication, due to technology reducing non-verbal communication and eliminating non-verbal signals. One participant also noticed that they have created a much deeper bond with team members working in Finland, than with team members working abroad in a different country. This was because they are only able to converse and collaborate with the others virtually, which has had an effect on their personal relationship. Lenka (2021 p. 2690) also mentions in the literature review, that employee engagement suffers in a hybrid workplace model, since a sense of bonding is decreased when employees are not physically present in the workplace.

According to the participants, collaboration has also become difficult in the hybrid environment. Virtual conversations feel more formal than conversations that are held face-to-face, which has led to some of the participants pushing these collaborations forward. Finding time for collaborations is also harder than expected which has made some of the participants feel frustrated. According to Maddox-Daines (2023) collaboration is argued to be performed more effectively in person. This is also reflected on how the participants felt about collaboration during the interviews. A lack of collaboration possibilities can have an effect on employees' well-being, which can further lead to a decrease in productivity (Maddox-Daines, 2023). Participants did have feelings of irritation and defeat in regards to collaborating and communicating through virtual platforms.

Majority of the participants did not feel any major issues with staying connected and included with their team and company now after being onboarded for a while. According to Lenka (2021 p. 2688-2689) there are three different categories that companies use in a hybrid workplace. These are Remote First, Office Occasionally and Office First. All except one participant were in a team that worked in the Office Occasionally model. This means that both employees and leadership occasionally work from the office. Remote work is an option for employees who are unable to physically visit the office. One participant worked in an office that used the model of Office First, meaning that company operates largely on-site and occasionally remotely. The majority of staff members, including the leadership team, regularly attend work, and those who have chosen remote work are kept informed on crucial conversations. This participant had a rule in their team that they had to be at the office at least three times a week, with two days of remote working. This participant did feel the most connected to their team and the most connected to the organization. This participant also mentioned that they had many activities that were held at the office. Team building activities such as breakfasts each Wednesday, coffee breaks with other teams and parties for celebrations, were held during office hours. Other participants did not have a rule for hybrid working, just unspoken rules towards office days. These participants had more feelings of anxiety and confusion surrounding the hybrid model.

According to Morretti et al. (2020) and Sokolic (2020) employees save time and money when not commuting to the office. Companies are also able to save money on not having a personal spot for each employee (Iqbal et al., 2021 p. 34). One interviewee did mention that their company did not have a personal spot for each employee, which has led them to choose not to go to the office knowing that many others will be going there on that day as well. This was due to them not wanting to waste time on trying to find a desk and seat for themselves.

Lenka (2021 p. 2690) argues that off-site work can become isolating because communication is reduced and it can therefore leave employees dissatisfied. The empirical findings based on the interviews reflect accordingly to this argument. Most participants recognized the social isolation that is associated with communication and missed informal conversations with colleagues, when working from home. Gajendran & Harrison, 2007, argue that investing more than 2.5 days per week towards remote working can cause workplace relationships to fall apart. Social contacts and interactions with coworkers and management are said to contribute to employees belonging to a company. Because of the option for distant work, these possibilities in communication, including feedback and support have decreased (Golden et al., 2008 p. 1414). A challenge with the hybrid model is that it offers both on-site and off-site work, yet neither option fully encompasses it. Meaning that if an organization works fully remotely, all of their processes, policies and communication guidelines are setup for remote working. If an organization works fully on-site all the same processes are set up for on-site work. In a hybrid model, processes exist for both on-site and off-site work, but based on the participant's answers, the guidelines and processes appear incomplete in both working styles. According to the results, this seems to have an effect on employee wellbeing as well as organizational culture, since there are many visible challenges with communication and collaboration. These findings reflect on Kane et al's., (2021) arguments that remote work has decreased organizational culture, because organizational culture is fostered by employees coming together an engaging in different activities.

Although there was a lot of frustration and challenges concerning collaboration, communication and organizational culture, all the participants felt that the flexibility increased their work-life balance so drastically that they would not work for a non-hybrid company. A key element that arose from the results was the need for the company to create some type of balance for the hybrid environment. A good example of this was the three days at the office and two days remote rule, since the participant felt that it created a good structure for the week, while also maintaining relationships, company culture and flexibility. And as mentioned by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) more than 2,5 days per week that is used for remote working causes a decrease in workplace relationships, which then has an effect on organizational culture and employee well-being.

## 5.2 Finding the right factors and tactics to use

Onboarding is a systematic process, in which the organization integrates, trains and orients a new hire into the organization (Bauer, 2013). By using different factors and tactics, organizations can help new hires adjust to the social and performance aspects of their new role. The onboarding process differs from company to company, differing in the methods, strategies, and styles used (Chillakuri, 2020). In this study, each participant came from different fields of work and industry in order to achieve a broader view of the research.

The organization's role in onboarding is to create programs, practices and tools that explain the values and culture of the organization as well as share knowledge about the role (Godinho et al., 2023). Organizations can help the new hire to build success within their new role, to find security and to feel that the organization trusts their abilities and judgment within the role that they are in (Pike, 2014). Additionally, Jensen and Olson (2018) argue that newcomers demand a more customized and personalized onboarding process. The results from the interviews agree with this argument. Since the hybrid model enhances flexibility and allows the employee to choose the environment they work best in, some employees felt comfortable with the hybrid model and some felt

disconnected and struggled to be a part of the team. Personalizing the onboarding process towards the need of the newcomer may help to find a balance in the hybrid setting and create a positive onboarding experience. Results from the study are in line with Jensen and Olson's (2018) argument, since some participants learned certain processes better online, whilst some only enjoyed learning the processes on-site.

Since this study is based towards employees working in a hybrid workplace, a major factor that emerged from the results was that when the organization made an effort to have the first weeks of the onboarding process fully on-site, the participants had a more positive onboarding experience. Social and normative learning happens when the new hire is able to closely observe how other team members and colleagues interact and behave (Jeske and Olson, 2021 p. 74; Petrilli et al., 2022). This is an important part of the onboarding process, since it affects the socialization of the new hire. The empirical findings based on the interviews reflect accordingly to this theory, since results from the study indicated that some of the participants had difficulties integrating into the company, due to their team members working off-site.

Support from social agents such as mentors is connected with improved psychological well-being, more favorable attitudes towards the organization, and lower turnover (Hayton et al., 2012; Klein and Heuser, 2008). The results align with this argument, since those participants that were assigned a mentor, felt supported during the onboarding process and were given more feedback during the process. In a hybrid workplace, employees are physically distant from one another and results from the study suggest that having a mentor helped create a sense of connection and support, which is particularly valuable for new employees navigating their way in an organization that works both on-site and off-site.

Newcomer proactivity includes information seeking, feedback seeking, relationship building and positive framing (Bauer and Erdogan, 2012; Crant, 2000). Results indicated that the participants were actively taking initiative and reaching out to others. They were also seeking a deeper understanding of the processes within the company, and asking

questions in order to learn more and create personal development. The interviewees noticed that this had a positive impact on their onboarding process and acknowledged that they gained a deeper connection to the organization and team members because of it. Didion et al., (2023) expresses that remote working may necessitate even more proactive activity on the newcomers' part. The results from the empirical study align with this statement, since a few participants acknowledged that they did not have a choice but to be proactive in the setting.

If possible, a successful approach for onboarding a newcomer is if the newcomer is onboarded into a smaller team. The results from the interviews suggest that smaller teams made it easier to create relationships and bond when working in a hybrid environment, since the team worked more closely together. It made it easier to meet with the whole team during days at the office and communication was more open. Coordinating meetings with a larger team can at times become more complex since team members have different preferences and schedules surrounding remote and on-site working.

According to the interviews, the best techniques that organizations can use to support hybrid onboarding was firstly to have a clear documentation of all processes for newcomers to use when working remotely. This assists the newcomer to adjust to working from home. Additionally, recording virtual training sessions was thought to help alleviate the stress from potentially missing important information during the learning sessions. Another helpful tactic that was mentioned was having Teams calls continuously on during the day with mentors or other team members to help with feelings of social isolation during remote days.

Lastly, the best tactic was to have as much as possible of the training on-site. Socialization tactics are used to guide newcomers to become productive more quickly, to reduce their stress and anxiety and to drive the assimilation of the organization’s culture and values (Pike, 2014). These tactics are ways organizations can structure the early experiences of their new hires and to introduce them to their new work environment (Klein and Heuser, 2008). Other tactics that organizations used to help assimilate the new hires were socialization tactics such as group chats for new hires, trainee days and kick-offs

with the team. These had a positive effect on social integration and organizational culture.

## 5.3 The mishaps and how to overcome them

Onboarding in a hybrid workplace has not been researched as much as onboarding in a virtual setting (Didion et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2022; Asatiani et al., 2020). Mazzei et al., (2023) argue that there are challenges associated with the onboarding process in a hybrid workplace. Moreover, the onboarding process becomes more complicated in a hybrid model, since the remote working part can lead to difficulties in sharing company culture, missed opportunities for informal communication and social isolation. Didion et al., (2023) expresses that the use of virtual communication has reduced communication frequency and knowledge exchange. Additionally, the use of computer-mediated communication tools harm the quality of communication between newcomers and colleagues (Hemphill and Begel, 2011). These drawbacks can especially affect the process of organizational commitment. The empirical findings based on the interviews reflect accordingly to the challenges associated with hybrid onboarding, which are communication challenges, social isolation and difficulties in sharing company culture.

Communication challenges had the biggest effect on the onboarding process. According to the participants, virtual communication platforms made it harder to ask questions and receive immediate feedback. This resulted in feeling insecure and having trouble concentrating during virtual training. Moreover, the delays in receiving answers to questions led to feelings of overwhelm and inefficient productivity. As mentioned, hybrid onboarding may leave newcomers feeling isolated due to the remote part of the working model. The empirical findings aligned with this statement by showing difficulty with integration and building a sense of community within the company. What makes it challenging is that when employees are working on-site, members of the same team or department may be present on different days of the week. This makes it highly challenging

to maintain organizational culture, since employees are the main contribution towards creating it (Kane et alk., 2021). Additionally, supervisory support was important to all participants, but some interviewees mentioned that the hybrid model made it more difficult to find time with their supervisors. According to Jeske and Olson (2021 p. 67) supervisors play a critical role in the newcomers onboarding process, since their support and knowledge assist the newcomer immensely when socialization into an organization. Since the hybrid model can be confusing to new hires if there are no clear rules surrounding it, organizations should enhance the support of the supervisor, since it is essential during the onboarding process.

Baek and Bramwell (2016) mention that role clarity, self-efficacy, social integration and knowledge of and fit within an organizational culture are critical indicators that the onboarding process is gaining desired results. The results are consistent with the literature, since there was a clear difference between those who did not receive clear role expectations at the beginning of their onboarding process, with those that did have clear role expectations. The few participants that had trouble understanding their roles felt unsure and lonely, which negatively impacted role clarity, self-efficacy and knowledge of and fit within the organization. Those that had clear role expectations were more relaxed and at ease, which increased their productivity and engagement as suggested in literature (Scott et al., 2022;  Ziden and Joo, 2020 p. 743).

Additionally, empirical findings presented that the lack of face-to-face interaction lead to feelings of loneliness and social isolation, since some participants found it challenging to socialize and build relationships with other colleagues. Sani et al., (2022) expresses that the main issue newcomers have in remote settings are lack of connectedness and lack of adequate social interaction. In a hybrid environment where employees are often physically distant from one another, socialization tactics such as team-building events, social activities and informal conversations help new employees understand the organizational values and culture that lack in virtual conversations (Picherit-Duthler et al., 2004). This was also stated by Mazzei et al., (2023) that the onboarding processes in a hybrid workplaces needs to improve the use from social agents.  Social interactions in

the organization can determine the newcomers perceptions on the organization itself. Positive interactions in workplace relationships create a sense of obligation which leads to a higher sense of organizational commitment. This higher sense of commitment leads to a stronger desire to stay with the organization, minimizing turnover intentions (Harden et al., 2018). Therefore, organizations should foster these interactions more in a hybrid workplace where they have been seen to be less frequent as suggested by the empirical findings. Additionally, according to Ziden and Joo (2020 p.734), the earlier the newcomer is able to assimilate into their new work environment, the faster the organization will recoup its investment in onboarding the new employee. Results showed that participants would have wanted to have more socialization activities with the team, since the interviewees noticed that it would have helped with social integration.

# 6 Conclusions

This chapter aims to conclude the main findings of the study. Practical implications will be presented and limitations of the study with recommendations for future research will be discussed.

In conclusion, this study aimed to investigate how to successfully onboard a new employee in a hybrid workplace setting, by identifying key challenges and opportunities within the process. This thesis aims to give insight for organizations on how an hybrid workplace might affect the onboarding process and how to overcome those challenges and create a successful onboarding process for newcomers. This study gathered information from an employees point of view of threats and opportunities that arise in a hybrid workplace, as well as factors and tactics that were used on them when onboarded in hybrid settings. This research supports existing literature, while also providing new insights into the topic. Through an extensive literature review and by thoroughly analyzing the data conducted from the semi-structured interviews, the following conclusion has been reached.

The hybrid workplace combines both off-site and on-site work. Flexibility is seen as one of the most highly valued benefits that employees receive when working in a hybrid workplace. With flexibility, employees are able to determine when and where they wish to work, which has also increased their work-life balance. This has also had a positive effect on productivity, since employees are able to choose the setting in which they see themselves working the best in. However, the hybrid model also comes with its challenges. Challenges associated with communication, collaboration and maintaining organizational culture are present in the hybrid setting. Virtual platforms are not able to offer the same benefits as what face-to-face communication offers. Virtual communication is seen as too formal making it almost impossible to read body language and other non-verbal cues. This then has an effect on creating relationships with other team members which also creates frustration when trying to collaborate. Moreover, employee well-being and organizational culture is also affected by the hybrid model, since the

workplace is affected by reduced communication and absence of workplace relations. In order to resolve the issues that are present in the hybrid model, rules and guidelines for on-site and off-site work should be acknowledged. Establishing a guideline for hybrid working, such as three days at the office and two days remotely, can create structure for the week, help maintain relationships, company culture and flexibility.

How the hybrid model has affected the onboarding process is multifaceted. Employees are able to gain a more positive experience if the initial onboarding period is done fully on-site, since social and normative learning happens when newcomers are able to observe how other team members act and behave in the working environment. Because hybridity involves both working on-site and off-site, finding time with supervisors and team members is challenging. Thus, in order to successfully onboard new employees in a hybrid workplace, organizations should ensure supervisory support and the use of mentors, since the presence of colleagues can help create a sense of connection and comfort for the newcomer. Role clarity, self-efficacy, social integration and knowledge of and fit within an organizational culture are indicators that the onboarding process has gained desired results. Employees that had trouble understanding their role within the team and organization felt more unsure and lonely, than those that did have clear role expectations. Off-site working during the first few weeks and months contributed to feelings of social isolation among newcomers. Therefore, socialization tactics were seen as highly necessary in a hybrid workplace, since it can positively impact social integration and organizational culture. To ensure that the newcomer feels supported when working remotely, organization should have clear documentations for all processes during the onboarding period Additionally, recording virtual training sessions may help alleviate stress from potentially missing out on important information during the learning sessions. Moreover, organizations can provide an opportunity for newcomers to have an ongoing virtual call with mentors or with other team members during remote days. Onboarding a newcomer into a smaller team was found to be particularly effective. Laslty, conducting training as much as possible on-site, implementing social tactics and customizing the onboarding process to foster the needs of the newcomer were seen as important when being onboarded into a hybrid workplace.

## 6.1 Managerial and practical implications

The practical implications of this study are significant for organizations that work in a hybrid model, and want to achieve a successful onboarding process. This research has identified areas where the onboarding process was successful but also failed when onboarding a newcomer into a hybrid workplace.

The onboarding process should be personalized towards the needs of the new hire. With this, the new hire would feel more secure in their learning and thus have a sense of trust towards the organization. Clear guidelines and rules surrounding on-site and off-site working may help with the challenges associated with the hybrid workplace, as wel as the onboarding process. Since newcomers gain valuable information and resources from other team members and colleagues, it would be advisable for organizations to foster more social interactions between the two. The challenge remains: if there are no written rules for hybrid working, how can employers demand their employees to be more actively at the office when a newcomer joins their team? The use of mentors and feedback is particularly important in a hybrid workplace, since the model already lacks frequent conversation and collaborative challenges. By understanding what employees are expecting and needing from their onboarding process, organizations can strategically coordinate the process and become successful while doing it. With the findings presented in this research, organizations can tailor their onboarding process and ensure employee retention, employee well-being and maintain organizational culture. Overall, as the results of this study present, newcomers can either have a positive or a negative experience when being onboarded in a hybrid workplace. Therefore, businesses should evaluate their own onboarding processes, their hybrid model and the needs of their workforce when implementing a hybrid onboarding program.

## 6.2 Limitations for future research

This research has limitations that limit the generalizability of the study, but bases a foundation for future research.

Firstly, this study was conducted on six participants, making the sample size small. This influences the study in limiting whether a particular outcome is genuinely a true finding, since some of the results are not repetitive. A small sample size may not represent different experiences and practices across different organizations. Additionally, the study was done on Finnish employees. Different countries have different cultures in terms of values, norms and expectations. This can influence how an organization approaches their onboarding process. For example, different countries have differences in the ways they communicate, their attitudes towards hierarchy and authority, work-life balance and social connections within the workplace. Since this study includes participants from the same country, the findings may not be relevant across different organizations through different nations.

Moreover, since this study was conducted on employees that had been working in the company for over 12 months, the participants could have had difficulties in recalling their onboarding experiences, limiting the findings of the results. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge other factors that can influence the employees' perceptions and experiences during the onboarding process. These are management styles, organizational structure, job designs, personality and expectations.

Suggestions for future research towards successfully onboarding a new hire into a hybrid workplace may be by gathering a wider range of participants from different industries and countries. This would enable researchers to make better conclusions towards the topic. Moreover, researching managers that work in the same industries and organizations, may give more insight into the practices and processes that are practiced in the organization. An additional suggestion for future research may be to study individuals that are currently in an ongoing onboarding process, since it could lead to broader re-

sults. On the other hand, future research could be conducted through following employees from the beginning of their onboarding process through their first year of employment. This could provide more insight towards the long-term effects of an onboarding process. Lastly, a study based on the perspectives of employees who left their organization during their first year might gather a broader view of factors that contribute to successful onboarding.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Interview guide

| Topic | Guiding questions |
|---|---|
| Warm-up | Gender, role description, starting date, industry, team site and location, previous working experience |
| Opportunities and threats related to a hybrid workplace | • How has the flexibility of a hybrid work environment impacted your work-life balance?<br>• Have you noticed any improvements in your productivity or job satisfaction since starting in a hybrid workplace? If yes, could you describe these improvements?<br>• Are there any challenges have you noticed in terms of communication or collaboration with team members while working in a hybrid workplace?<br>• Have you experienced any difficulties in getting information or resources while working remotely part of the time?<br>• How do you ensure that you feel included and connected with your team members when working remotely?<br>• Have you experienced any issues with maintaining focus or motivation while working from home? If so, how have you addressed these challenges?<br>• How do you personally feel about hybrid working? Please share your thoughts and feelings. |
| Factors and tactics used during the onboarding process | • What specific topics were covered in your training? Was your training done in-person or |

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| | through /teams/other platforms or both?<br>• Could you describe the role of any mentors or buddies you had during your onboarding process and how they assisted you?<br>• How helpful was the mentorship in understanding your role and the organization's culture?<br>• How would you describe the communication between you and your supervisor during the onboarding process? Did you have regular meetings?<br>• What was your experience with feedback during your onboarding period, and do you think there were areas where more feedback could have been beneficial?<br>• Were there any team-building activities or initiatives that stood out to you as effective or memorable?<br>• Were you able to share your feelings or thoughts about the onboarding process with other peers or not?<br>• How did you find the experience of socializing and building relationships with your team members while transitioning into a hybrid work environment?<br>• What do you think made communication effective/ineffective during your onboarding process?<br>• In what ways were you proactive during the onboarding process? meaning that you were actively seeking more information about your role, the organization or building relationships?<br>o if yes:<br>o Can you share any personal experiences or examples |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ○ Do you think being proactive during the onboarding process helped you adapt more effectively to the organization's culture or helped you learn something new about your role or the organization?<br><br>• How were your expectations and goals communicated for your role during the onboarding process<br>• Could you share your thoughts on how the organization fostered a sense of belonging and connection during your onboarding journey? |
| What worked and what did not work when onboarded into a hybrid workplace | • Were there any gaps in the training content that you identified later on?<br>• How did you find the transition to a hybrid work model during your onboarding period?<br>• Were there any challenges or advantages you experienced in adapting to a hybrid work environment?<br>• Looking back on your onboarding experience, what aspects do you feel were most successful, and which ones could be improved?<br>• Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for enhancing the onboarding process for future hires in a hybrid workplace?<br>• How well do you feel integrated and committed to the organization you now work in and its culture? Do you feel like you are part of it?<br>• Do you understand your role and what is expected of you? Do you understand your goals?<br>• Was the onboarding-process as expected and did it align with the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | recruitment process and pre-onboarding process? (Better/worse?)<br>• Do you have any other thoughts or experiences you want to mention? Good or bad. |