ENTRY SOCIALISATION STRATEGIES AT A SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTION IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract: This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of employee entry socialization options that the organization avails to its new entrants. These options include but are not limited to both formal and informal orientation programmes done individually or collectively premised on fixed time schedules. The study also sought to investigate the effectiveness of the bulk and infrequent people processing strategies obtaining at the institution. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The selected institution has a compliment of 400 teaching staff of which 230 are probationers. Forty employees were quota sampled according to faculty from a total of 230 probationers , whilst 5 heads of departments (HODs), were purposively sampled from a total of 18.The study found out that employees do not take formal orientation workshops seriously as evidenced by sporadic attendances and that such workshops are often mistimed. It was also concluded that the human resource department does not have full control of the socialization of new entrants and that induction programmes are done when they are long overdue; leaving new entrants to benefit much from informal orientation. It was again established that no evaluations were made for the formal induction programmes, and also that no follow -ups are made even by the HODs, who themselves have no policy framework to refer to. It is recommended that orientation workshops be done timeously, and that heads of departments be trained on how to do induction. The university, through its human resources department is also encouraged to come up with an induction policy guideline.

Key words: probationer, induction, orientation, socialization, new entrants

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Since first impressions form lasting marks in new employees' minds, they need to be very favorable. Taking months before new comers are "processed, in bulky" as is prevailing at the selected institution is not only insensitive, but is also tantamount to complacency. Though the new comers are left to HODs to induct, lack of partnership between departments and the human resource division manifesting itself through the absence of a university -wide induction policy guideline to standardize experiences leaves the whole exercise at the mercy of chance. And yet, one's first day at work compares very well with their first day experiences at school. The new comer is bound to be: a little nervous, but hopefully enthusiastic; keen to impress, but not

wanting to attract too much attention; anxious to learn quickly, but not wanting to be deluged with names, facts and figures; hoping to fit in, but not look too 'new' and inexperienced, (Price, 2007).As such, the reception from the employer counts very much in giving the new joiner a safe landing .An organization's induction programme -being a formal attempt to welcome ,receive and introduce the new entrant- is but to ensure that the new employee is at ease.

Compton et al (2009), believes that induction (also known as orientation or socialization) may be regarded as the final phase of recruitment and selection, but also as the first phase of learning and development.   Greer (1995), as cited by Mlindazwe (2009), believes that an induction programme (also known as on boarding in the USA) provides the first real work contact within the company and the first opportunity for new employees to develop an understanding of the company's norms, values and culture. It is therefore vivid that induction is closely linked to human resource process management.

Crucial as it is, induction cannot be the sole duty of one individual or area, but rather it involves a range of institution-wide and local level activities. These activities if properly aligned, provides a structure to ensure all new employees can effectively assimilate into their roles and become independently productive as quickly as possible,[The Learning and Development Unit, Human Resources ,Victoria University(2009)].Most universities have a blue print of their induction policies .A case closer home is that of Rhodes University(South Africa) ,whose induction blueprint aims at facilitating the transition of new employees into the working environment and enable them to respond effectively to new responsibilities , Rhodes University(undated). It is unfortunate to note that, although the selected institution has some guidelines for quality assurance, there is no policy to guide induction.

Despite the fact that induction is one of the most crucial interventions an organization can offer employees, most organizations still fail to offer induction to their employees, [Fottler et al , (2000) as cited in,Mlindazwe,(2009)] . Kleynhans et al. (2006) insist that organizations neglect it because nobody really knows who is responsible for the induction programme, or because the responsible person does not have the time or the ability to run the programme. According to Carrell et al. *(*2006), as cited in Mlindazwe(2009), many organizations fail to provide induction because they do not regard anxiety and stress due to insecurity and unfulfilled expectations as the primary reason of labor turnover among new employees. The process of induction is seen as unnecessary. Thompson (2002) registers his concern about an organization's failure to induct particularly part- time staff despite their use on a regular basis.

  The global peak body for Human Resource practitioners, the Society for Human Resource Management, posit that new employees decide within the first thirty days whether they feel welcome in their organization, and as many as one in twenty five people leave their job just because of a poor or non-existent induction program, while 4% of new employees leave their

new jobs after a disastrous first day,(Jones (2008) as cited in, The Learning and Development Unit, Human Resources ,Victoria University,(2009) . The same Unit, citing Wagner and Harter (2006), refers to a research published by the Gallup Organization, a global research-based consultancy, which has shown that engaged employees are more productive employees. The Gallup's research findings suggest that engaged employees are more profitable, more customer-focused, safer, and more likely to withstand temptations to leave, (The Learning and Development Unit, Human Resources, Victoria University, 2009).

Despite these obvious benefits, the bulk processing of new employees due to time constraints caused by a fully packed university calendar at the selected institution leads to a mistiming of the formal induction process. Most new entrants would have either navigated their way all by themselves through informal means or would have received shoddy (if at all anything would have been done) induction from their HODs, who themselves have no guidelines to follow. Since departments have no programmes to stick to, the whole process, crucial as it is, is left to the vagaries of chance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Compton et al (2009) define socialization as a process by which new employees acquire the cultural competencies that may well assist in making them successful organizational members. They regard socialization as being synonymous with induction and orientation which are the final phase of recruitment and selection but also the first phase of learning and development.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) perceive organizational socialization as the process by which people 'learn the ropes' of a particular organizational role. It can range from a quick trial and error method to a long process of education and apprenticeship. They regard socialization as entailing the learning of a cultural perspective that can be brought to bear on both commonplace and unusual matters going on in the workplace. For them, it "provides the individual with an ordered view of the work life that runs ahead and guides experience, orders and shapes personal relationships in the work setting, and provides the ground rules under which everyday conduct is to be managed", Van Maanen and Schein (1979).

Van Maanen (1978) looks at three pertinent assumptions critical to the idea of employee socialization. First, and perhaps of most importance, is the notion that people in a state of transition are more or less in an anxiety-producing situation. They are motivated to reduce this anxiety by learning the functional and social requirements of their new role as quickly as possible. The second assumption he proffers is that colleagues, superiors, subordinates, clients, and other work associates can and most often do support, guide, hinder, confuse, or push the individual who is learning a new role. Indeed, they can help him interpret (or misinterpret) the events he experiences so that he can take appropriate (or inappropriate) action in his altered

situation. His third assumption is that the stability and productivity of any organization depend in large measure on the way newcomers to various organizational positions come to carry out their tasks. 'When positions pass from generation to generation of incumbents smoothly, the continuity of the organization's mission is maintained, the predictability of the organization's performance is left intact, and, in the short run at least, the survival of the organization is assured', Van Maanen (1978).

Reasons for Induction

Since induction is regarded as being synonymous with socialization, (Compton et al, 2009), a brief analysis of the benefits of induction could be necessary. The Australian Veterinary Association Practice Management (AVAPM) staff orientation guide of (2006-9) gives the following legal reasons for induction:

❖ Legal responsibility for ensuring a safe work environment exists and that employees should know requisite safety procedures

❖ Legal responsibilities for ensuring all employees are aware of the performance standards required. This is essential so that, 'newcomers know what these performance criteria are, and feel that they are making a valued contribution, as well as ensuring that their colleagues have the same perception', (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson 2006).

❖ Legal responsibilities for ensuring all employees are aware of company policies regarding sexual harassment and anti discrimination policies:

The other reasons are that transition from school or university is made easier for employees with limited work experience and that employees adapt to the job and work environment more quickly, thus reducing disruption and restoring productivity, (Compton et al 2009). Butler (2008), Wells (2005) and Wesson and Gogus (2005) cited in Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter (2012) maintain that new employees are most vulnerable during the first few weeks of employment and poor induction significantly raises the risk of turnover. Therefore, it is paramount that institutions have   mechanisms in place to capitalize on early optimism and imprint the employer's brand of how the organization functions (Derven, 2008). The indirect costs of early departure of a newly hired executive, (Wells, 2005) or labour turnover, (Derven, 2008; Friedman, 2006) could be reduced by a good induction programme, (Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter, 2012)

Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter (2012), insist that induction programmes not only benefit organizations, they also offer significant benefits to employees. Derven (2008) agrees that induction reinforces a new employee's decision to join the organization and fosters a feeling of

belonging. Wanous & Reichers, (2000) as cited by Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter (2012) ,posit that a well-organized induction programme will aid staff in dealing with anxiety by providing them with coping strategies like goal setting and planning during one of the most stressful times in their organizational life.

Socialization Models

Socialisation can be conceptualized as a process made up of three stages: prearrival, encounter, and metamorphosis, Robbins et al ,(2010).The first stage encompasses all the learning that occurs before a new member joins the organization ;with the second stage according the new employee a chance to confront the possible dichotomy between expectations –about the job, the co-workers, the 'boss', and the organization in general-and reality, Robbins et al (2010).The last stage involves the new employee changing and adjusting to the job ,work group, and organization. The more management relies on socialization programmes that are formal, collective ,fixed ,serial and emphasize divestiture, the greater the likelihood that newcomers' differences and perspectives will be stripped away and replaced by standardized and predictable behaviors,(Robbins et al 2010).They proceed interestingly though ,to note that careful selection by management of newcomers' socialization experiences can-at extreme-create conformists who maintain traditions and customs, or inventive and creative individuals who consider no organizational practice sacred

Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) tactics model is also key in our quest to understand socialization within organizations. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) posit that Van Maanen and Schein (1979) proposed that different combinations of these tactics cumulatively result in different newcomer role orientations, ranging from a custodial orientation through innovation to the content or remit of the role. The six tactics as cited by Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006), each of which is bipolar, are:

(1) Collective – individual (whether newcomers are socialized in groups or individually).
(2) Formal vs informal (whether or not newcomers are segregated from insiders
during socialization).
(3) Sequential vs random (whether or not newcomers are told explicitly about the
Sequencing of planned socialization events).
(4) Fixed vs variable (whether or not there is an explicit, fixed timetable for
completing the various socialization stages).
(5) Serial vs disjunctive (whether or not previous job incumbents are available as
role models for newcomers).
(6) Investiture vs divestiture (whether or not newcomers receive positive social support from insiders).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of employee entry socialization options that the organization avails to its new entrants. These options include the two modes of formal and informal orientation programmes done to individuals or to groups. The formal, but 'bulk processing' of personnel at the institution is not only mistimed, but lack ownership since it is run by a unit of the human resource department and another teaching unit. To further complicate the issue, there is not even a formal policy to guide and enforce induction by departmental heads, who often shun the process, giving new employees a 'rough landing'. Of interest again, are cases of lecturers failing to meet tenure requirements after their three- year probationary period -could this be attributed to poor orientation?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research intends to:

- ❖ explore the effectiveness of entry socialization options practiced at the university
- ❖ unravel new employees perceptions regarding their orientation
- ❖ encourage human resource departments to come up with an induction blueprint for the institution
- ❖ suggest ways through which orientation programmes could be made effective.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopted a case study design .Case study research was chosen because it aims to generate an intensive examination of a single case, Ryman and Bell (2007).They believe that although many researchers emphasize that they are interested in the detail of a single case, they do sometimes claim a degree of theoretical generalizability on the basis of it.

Methodology

To measure the effectiveness of entry socialization options practiced at the university and unravel new employees' perceptions regarding their orientation, the researcher used questionnaires administered to both probationary employees and human resource assistants. Structured interviews were used on HODs and on the Deputy Registrar (human resources) to find ways through which orientation programmes could be made more effective.

Sample

The selected institution has a staff compliment of 400 teaching staff of which 230 are probationers. Forty (40) employees were quota sampled by faculty from a total of 230

probationers(less than 3 years in service), whilst 5 HODs were purposively sampled from a total of 18.Three (3) human resource assistants were randomly sampled from a total of six.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The major themes and research findings relevant to this study are discussed below.

The Designation-Sex Profile of Respondents

The research drew respondents from both sexes. Table 1 below summarizes the designation-sex profile of respondents:

Table 1 showing the designation-sex profile of respondents

Designation	Male	Female
Deputy registrar(HRM)	1	0
Human Resource Assistants	2	1
Heads of Departments	4	1
Lecturers on probation	30	10
Total	37	12

The sample for the research comprised 21.9% of the total population. Males were the modal sex, suggestive of some glass ceiling syndrome.

Role of the HR Department

The deputy registrar- human resources and his assistants, indicated that their individual orientation of employees cover the very basic organizational information, with finer details left for the line managers. Also covered are issues to do with their duties and their job title .Booklets covering their terms and conditions of service are later sent by mail. While the institution has a booklet on terms and conditions of service, there is no induction guideline as yet. Each HOD therefore falters and flounders along the way leaving joiners at the deep end. Price (2007), believes that raw recruits would be left anxious and vulnerable, forced to make sense of new surroundings and learn correct procedures the hard day. He proceeds insisting that many managers would regard this approach with favor: after all, this was how they learned to cope and get to grips with the business. If the new recruits decide to soldier on, 'there is a considerable risk of them becoming disillusioned', or developing bad habits,(Price 2007).

The researcher also established that the institution provides a fixed socialization process whereby new recruits are given exact knowledge of the time it will take them to complete a given step. The time of transition is standardized, Van Manaaen (1978).Probationary period for recruits ends after three years of joining; at which time the recruits should have met the following:

- satisfactory teaching
- satisfactory research, and
- satisfactory university service

It is the duty of the HR department to notify probationers in time to be ready for tenure considerations. Sixty percent, (60%) of the HODs interviewed admitted that the HR department often delays to notify probationers about the expiration of their probationary period. However, human resource assistants attributed this to understaffing. About ninety eight percent, (98%) of probationers and all human resource assistants assented to the fact that, failure by probationers to meet tenure requirements could be attributed to other variables other than poor orientation.

Formal Socialization

Van Maanen (1978) maintain that while formal processes work on preparing a person to occupy a particular status in the organization, informal processes, on the other hand, prepare a person to perform a specific role in that organization. From this standpoint, he insists that formal socialization processes are often only the "first round" of socialization. At the selected institution, formal induction programmes are done collectively, at least twice a year. Eighty percent (80%), of the respondents admitted that they received formal induction two months or more after their arrival at the institution. Schuler (1987), however opines that if orientation is done earlier, the more effective it becomes; and that for large organizations orientation programmes could be done every week. Such delays, as experienced at the institution, could risk employees getting inaccurate information about the institution and that would not be in the best interests of both the employee and the institution. Their induction programme normally consists of a three-day workshop in which both teaching and non-teaching staff are addressed for a day, after which the teaching staff have to remain for the remaining days. However, Penzer (1973) cited in Hendricks and Louw- Potgieter (2012), recommends that induction groups should be heterogeneous in job function but homogeneous in job level. They proceed to maintain that combining individuals of high and low job authority levels makes both groups uncomfortable. Respondents (60% of probationers and all human resource assistants) admitted that pertinent issues are addressed during the workshop. The history of the institution, its organograms, strategic plans, handling of examinations, conditions of service, and how to teach large classes are amongst the issues discussed during the workshop. Though the new lecturers considered the programme to be relevant, 90% of them concurred that the programme would be mistimed. Ideally, these programmes should take place after the first day of work and before the end of the first week, with activities spread over two to three hours each morning, [Penzer(1973) as cited in Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter(2012)]. D'Aurizio (2007), cited by the same authors, also insist that the length of an induction programme should vary between one and two weeks. An employee's first day impressions are enduring impressions. It is essential to make the new staff

member welcome from the onset as positive socialization, or lack of, substantially impacts on a person's attitude to their work and in turn the organization , (The Learning and Development Unit, Human Resources ,Victoria University 2009). Attendances also become compromised since the workshops are penciled during busy periods of a semester. Respondents concurred with the fact that,it has also been observed that while morning sessions are well attended, afternoon ones are scantly attended. The programme is often heavily congested, further compromising its effectiveness. No evaluation forms have been   administered to participants to gauge the workshop's effectiveness. Gerber et al. (1998) posit   that evaluation of an induction programme and follow-up on the induction process is necessary to check whether the new employee is coping. This goes a long way in assisting joiners in the integration process. Lack of crucial participant feedback further puts the whole exercise into disarray.

Individual Socialization

This socialization is presumed to be done by HODs, even though all HODs interviewed concurred that there is no blueprint to guide them and even standardize experiences .Eighty percent(80%) of HODs interviewed admitted to always refer to their ordinance on academic staff grading ,tenure and promotions for information .All HODs admitted that they use their offices for the induction ,with each session not lasting more than half an hour ,after which the new employee is taken on a familiarization tour of the department's infrastructure and personnel ,before he is dumped into some office –to see the HOD's face during some meeting or in the corridors,   or unless something pressing crops up. Of the forty probationers, 90% of them concurred that they received a great deal of information on how to play the game from their informal networks in the departments. This confirms Derven,(2008)'s assertion as cited in Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter(2012) , that employee integration could be fostered by means of a social network tool which enables new employees to meet and interact with other employees with similar interests or jobs . New employees could, thus, create their personal profiles by means of this tool and communicate information regarding their professional and personal lives to other co-workers with the intention of further social interaction [HR-focus(2007)cited by Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter(2012)] .

Random vs Serial Socialization

Robbins et al (2010), regard serial socialization as characterized by the use of role models who train and encourage the newcomer, through programs like mentoring for instance. They insist that in random socialization, role models are deliberately withheld-new entrants are left on their own to figure things out. All HODs agreed to the suggestion that they will ultimately leave the recruits in the hands of a subject coordinator.   About ninety five percent (95%) of the probationers admitted that their coordinators and the other members of the workgroup had to assist the recruits metamorphosize   largely through informal means. Sixty five (60%) of probationers maintained that they benefited much from the informal forms of socialization and also that they infrequently visited the HOD's office for guidance. Van Manaaen (1978) however

observes that outcomes in these one-on-one efforts depend on the affective relationships that may or may not develop between the apprentice and his 'master'. He proceeds to say that in cases of high affect, the process works well and the new member internalizes the values of the particular role he is eventually to play quickly and fully. However, when there are few affective bonds, the socialization process may break down and the transition may not take place, Van Manaaen (1978). However, there is no guarantee, though, that the direction provided by the informal approach will push the recruit in the right direction so far as those in authority are concerned, (Van Manaaen 1978).

CONCLUSION

From the weight of evidence gathered, it can be concluded that the human resource department does not have full control of the socialization of new entrants and that induction programmes are done when they are long overdue; meaning to say that new entrants often find themselves at the deep end, left to benefit much from informal orientation. It was also established that no evaluations are made for the formal induction programme, and also that no follow –ups are made even by the HODs, who themselves have no guidelines to follow. The researcher can safely conclude that though the induction process is far from being perfect, failure by probationers to meet tenure requirements could not be attributed to poor orientation since informal slogans like , 'Publish or else you perish!', have embedded themselves strongly in the institution 's culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above conclusions, the following recommendations could be made:

- ❖ the HR department should have full control of employee socialization, and work towards, producing a handbook that can be used by employees if they need additional information after orientation is over,
- ❖ an induction policy to guide management on how to do orientation should be crafted as a matter of urgency,
- ❖ HODs should also undergo basic training on how to do induction,
- ❖ given the size of the institution and its prevailing rate of growth, orientation programmes should be carried out more frequently-at least four times a year,
- ❖ since employees are an important source of feedback ,questionnaires or interviews could be done with random samples of new entrants,
- ❖ further research could be done to further probe into the implications of poor orientation,
- ❖ further research could also be done to further probe tenured employees' experiences during their own socialization.

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