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Research Article

The immediate superior's activity in relation to onboarding

Anita Kozak, Hajnalka Csafor

Associate Professor, Eszterhazy Karoly University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Department of Economics,

H-3300 Eszterházy tér 1.Hungary Associate Professor, Dean of Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences; Head of Institute of Economics, Eszterhazy Karoly University of Applied Sciences,

Abstract: *This study is based on a questionnaire survey, the people interviewed are the employees of the Hungarian units of four international companies and they had been working in their organization for less than three years at the time of the survey. This article presents the results of this questionnaire survey which reveals the role of the immediate superiors in the onboarding process, the extent and quality of the assistance based on the surveyed employees' opinions. We also examined whether these opinions were influenced by the surveyed employees' qualifications, the mentoring system or the lack of it and the employees' work experience gained before joining the organization. Our results related to the superior's evaluation also prove that during the onboarding process it is necessary to pay more attention to the new employee's previous socializations scenes, that is, the employee's educational level, qualifications and work experience or the lack of it. In the first part of our study, we determine the superior's tasks related to onboarding, then we cover the material and the methods of the study (beside descriptive statistics we used non-parametric test). After then, we present and evaluate the results, and finally we summarize the most important findings of the article*

Keywords: *onboarding, socialization, managerial tasks, mentor*

Introduction:

Helping the new employee's onboarding based on a well-organized and efficiently working program is important both the new employee and the organization. The employee's self-confidence increases if he/she is aware that he/she will get every information and professional assistance needed for the onboarding and doing the job.

As for the organization, onboarding is essential because it helps the new employee to become productive as soon as possible. In large-company practice, the literature prescribes HR, mentoring, managerial and workgroup tasks in case of onboarding. The HR tasks are performing personnel tasks and general orientation, whereas the mentor gives, among others, the professional and organizational knowledge needed for doing the job. At the same time, the mentor also provides social psychological support.

The superior is responsible for the professional coordination of onboarding, while the members of the workgroup support the new employee's integration into the group. Thus, the related tasks, the responsibilities and scopes can be precisely defined.

However, in the practice developed so far, there are several factors which may make the separation and smooth management of these tasks difficult. Such a factor may be, for example, the fact that there is no mentoring program in every organization or work field. Also, the new employee's previous social scenes (such as the necessary qualifications and work experience or the lack of these) may also affect the process.

Literature review: the superior's tasks related to onboarding:

Earlier, onboarding has been defined as an HR task (Fekete *et al*. 1997), however, nowadays because of the broadening activities resulting from the complexity of onboarding require that the management should play a more stressed role in the process (Berard, 2013). Thus, the job-specific part of the onboarding is not managed by HR but this activity has become the immediate superior's task (Erling, 2011; Messmer, 2013). Erling (2011) distinguished three kinds of terms (short, medium and long terms) regarding the superiors' activities in relation to onboarding.

The accomplishment of short-term tasks begins with the selection of the employee's place, its preparation, ordering the working tools and the preparation of the necessary documents and that of the co-workers (Faircloth, 2014). On the first day, the immediate superior should talk to the new employee (Bradt *et al.* 2011; Matiscsákné, 2012). During this conversation, the superior should inform the employee about some major events coming up in the following weeks or months, the learning period and the performance expectations (Wanberg 2012). When giving details about the latter ones, the employee should be informed to whom he/she has to directly account and how often they should perform this duty. The new employee is also introduced to the workgroup on the first day (Brandt – Vonnegut 2009).

The medium and long-term tasks should deal with the new employee's professional coordination. This includes the appointment of the mentor and the complete supervision of the learning period (Brandt – Vonnegut, 2009; Cooper-Thomas – Burke, 2012). In case of the organizations not using the mentoring system, the immediate superior has significant tasks to help the new employees' professional activities. In case of the medium-term tasks, the competencies defined as expectations during the selection process must be reviewed and the possibly necessary training needs must also be sized up (Erling, 2011), since the assignment of professional trainings is in the managerial scope (Gyökér, 2005).

As a managerial task, it is advisable to evaluate the cooperation between the mentor and the new employee, its efficiency and success at least once before the probation ends. Beside the evaluation, the continuous feedback is also a key element. This was brought to attention by the study results of Juhász (2012) and Gergely (2014).

As for the long-term tasks, it is important for the superior to recognize the career development opportunities in case of the suitable new employees and to devise an onboarding program that lasts for years (Erling, 2011).

Thus, the immediate superior plays an important role in the onboarding of new co-workers, since the coordination of professional work is the superior's scope. If there is no mentoring program at the organization, the activities or some of the activities related to onboarding are the superior's task. As a result of this, the superior's activity (especially during the initial period) greatly affects the success of the new employees' onboarding, the duration their becoming productive co-workers and the development of their commitment toward the organization. And the organizational benefits of employee engagement is indisputable (Abué *et al*., 2014; Ellinger *et al*., 2013; Kiss, 2010; Krajcsák, 2013, 2014).

The material and the method of the study:

This study is based on questionnaire surveys, the people interviewed have at least high school degrees and they are the employees of the Hungarian units of four international companies and they had been working in their organization for less than three years at the time of the surveys.

The questionnaire used in this study consists of two parts: a data sheet about the interviewees and the organization and a professional questionnaire. The data sheet collected some important data about the company and relevant data about the interviewees in relation to the study, while the questionnaire collected the interviewees' opinions regarding their onboarding based on 13 sets of questions. One of the topics sized up the interviewees' satisfaction related to their immediate superior's activity

helping their onboarding. The questions to this topic were listed based on the study of Raabe – Beehr (2003). The interviewees evaluated on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is the lowest and 4 is the highest value.

The population of the study consists of 314 individual tests and the received data were recorded and evaluated with the SPSS 14.0 statistical program. A quarter of the interviewees (26%, 81 people) graduated high school, nearly a quarter of them (23%, 74 people) have higher education vocational qualifications and more than half of them (51%, 158 people) have higher education degrees. Those who had changed workplaces several times received a greater stress in the study. Less than one fifth of the interviewees (18%, 57 people) started their professional career at the given organization. According to the summarized replies, 147 people said that their onboarding had not been helped by assigned mentors, so we created two databases: a database for those having mentors and a database for those not having mentors.

When performing the analysis, beside descriptive statistics we used non-parametric test (n case of two groups, the Mann-Whitney test was used, in case of more groups the Kruskal-Wallistest was applied). The results of the statistical tests were regarded significant in case $p<0.05$.

The results of the study and their evaluation:

During the questionnaire survey, the interviewees rated the people who took part in their onboarding. The participants were rated according to the extent of help they provided. The rating is shown in Figure 1, which summarizes the replies of those having mentors and those not having mentors separately. The figures in the two figures represent that how many of the interviewees placed their superiors in the first, second, third or the fourth place based on their roles in the onboarding process.

Barely more than one fifth of the interviewees (22%, 36 people) having mentors thought that it was their immediate superior who had helped them the most with onboarding. 40% (65 people) placed their superiors in the second place, 23% (38 people) placed them in the third and 15% (24 people) placed them in the fourth place. At the same time, the interviewees considered their superiors' role in onboarding beside the mentor's, since 62% of the interviewees (101 people) placed their superiors in the first or second place.

44% of those interviewees not having mentors (62 people) said that their superiors had helped them the most with their onboarding, while 35% (49 people) placed their superiors in the second place, 21% (30 people) placed them in the third place. Thus, more than four fifth of the interviewees (111 people) considered their superiors the first and second most important in their onboarding. This result suggests that if there is no mentor, the immediate superior's professional assistance and support are more needed during the onboarding period. Also, the result indirectly implies that this activity might take away more time from other managerial activities than it should.

The evaluation of the superior's helping activity and personality by the interviewees is shown in Figure 2, which was made based on the average of the scores given by all interviewees.

Altogether, the interviewees were satisfied with the superior's help and personality, the only extremely low average scores were given when it came to the superior's advice on establishing connections with other co-workers. We assume that this low score was due to the ambiguous wording of the question. By asking this questions we wanted to know whether the superiors told the interviewees which of the immediate co-workers the newcomers could get the most help from, which co-workers know the various fields of work the best.

Based on the rating, we presumed that there might be a correlation between the evaluation of the superior's help and personality and the interviewees' participation in mentoring programs. The Mann-Whitney test did not show significant differences at any of the variables along the group-creating criteria.

However, if we compare the average scores of the answers given by the group to one another, it shows a slight difference, which is shown in Figure 3.

From the figure we can read that the average scores regarding the evaluation of the superior's help and personality given by the interviewees participating in a mentoring program are approximately equal to the scores given by those not having mentors. At the same time, it can also be sensed that the average scores given by those not having mentors (except for one) are slightly higher than the scores of those having mentors. This does not show any significant difference but the result is worth being noted since it supports the result of the rating test according to which if there is no mentor, the superior's assistance is more necessary.

When carrying out the tests regarding the superiors, we also wanted to find out whether there is any correlation between the evaluation of the superior's help and personality and the interviewees' educational level and whether they have work experience or not. The Kruskal-Wallis test performed on the education level answers showed significant differences in case of seven questions. The evaluation of the 12 variables based on the average scores of the groups is shown in Figure 4.

The education level average scores suggest that the interviewees with higher qualifications gave lower scores to the questions regarding the superior's helping activity and personality than those with lower qualifications. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant differences at 7 of the 12 group-generating criteria shown in the figure (checking, spent enough time with the interviewees, practical explanations, advice given on establishing connections, the way of doing the job and the proper behavior and communication skills). In our opinion, this result shows that those with higher 1ualifications can express their expectations toward their superiors in s more realistic and critical manner.

As regards the correlation between the evaluation of the superior's help and personality and the interviewees' lack of work experience, we presumed that that the those who just begin their careers expect more attention, professional assistance and feedback than those who already have some work experience. That is why we got lower scores from the more experienced interviewees.

The average scores on the superior's help and personality according to the extent of work experience are shown in Figure 5.

It can be read from the figure that the interviewees having their first workplace gave lower scores regarding the superior's help and personality in case of all criteria than the average scores of the interviewees having some work experience. The Mann-Whitney test showed significant differences at three questions (advice on the way of doing the job, practical explanations, the superior spent enough time with the interviewees). All three variables can be related to the professional assistance and the special attention. This shows that the beginners might need more professional assistance from their immediate superiors.

Acknowledgments:

The humane and at the same time efficient integration of new employees in the new workplace adds value to every employing organization, thus it is one of the fundamental interests for them. In contrast with the expenses of the assistance given to the onboarding, the fact that the new employees become efficient workforce earlier and that there is a greater chance of their loyalty and commitment will increase the organization-level success, will decrease fluctuation and will result in reducing the expenses.

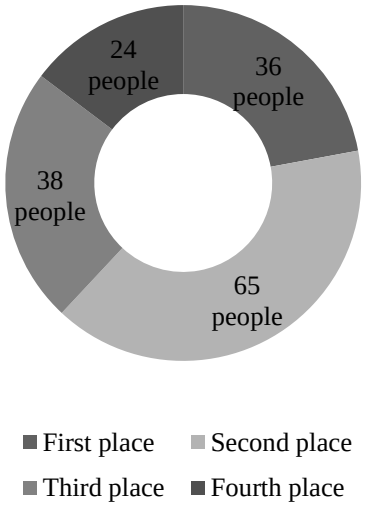
The new employees' immediate superior play an extremely important role in the onboarding process. The superiors' activities might differ depending on the fact that the mentoring system is introduced at the organization or the given work field or not. If mentors are appointed, the superiors can be exempted from giving continuous assistance, thus, they can spend more time managing the activities of the workgroup and they can spend their time performing their managerial and professional tasks.

In this case, the superior's task is primarily the professional coordination of the onboarding.

However, as our study shows, the new employees demand the immediate superior's special attention even in this case. We could not find significant differences in the evaluation of the superior's personality based on the interviewees' participation in mentoring programs. Those not having mentors might have evaluated the superior's activity more positively because of the continuous contact and assistance.

Our results related to the superior's evaluation also prove that during the onboarding process it is necessary to pay attention to the new employee's previous socializations scenes, that is, the employee's educational level, qualifications and work experience or the lack of it.

Figures



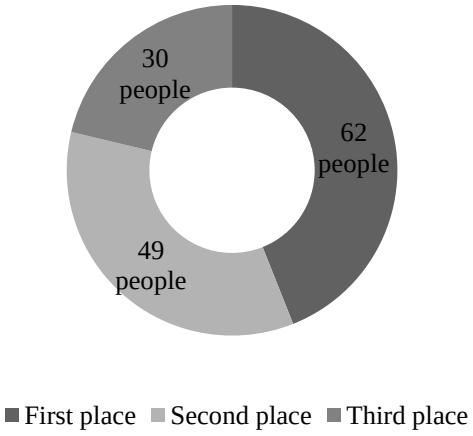


Figure 1: The evaluation of the superior's significance among the employees having and not having mentors

Source: own research N: 163 N: 141

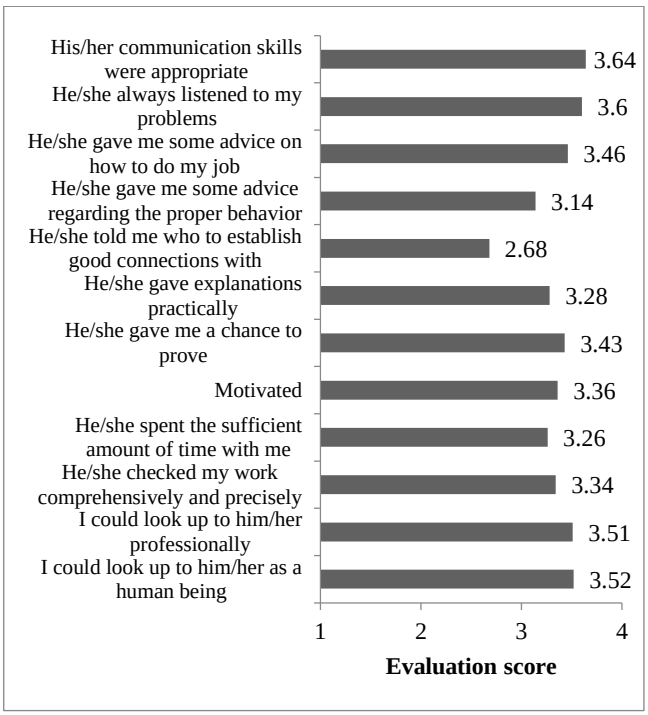


Figure 2: The evaluation of the superior's helping activity and personality among all interviewees

Source: own research N: 314

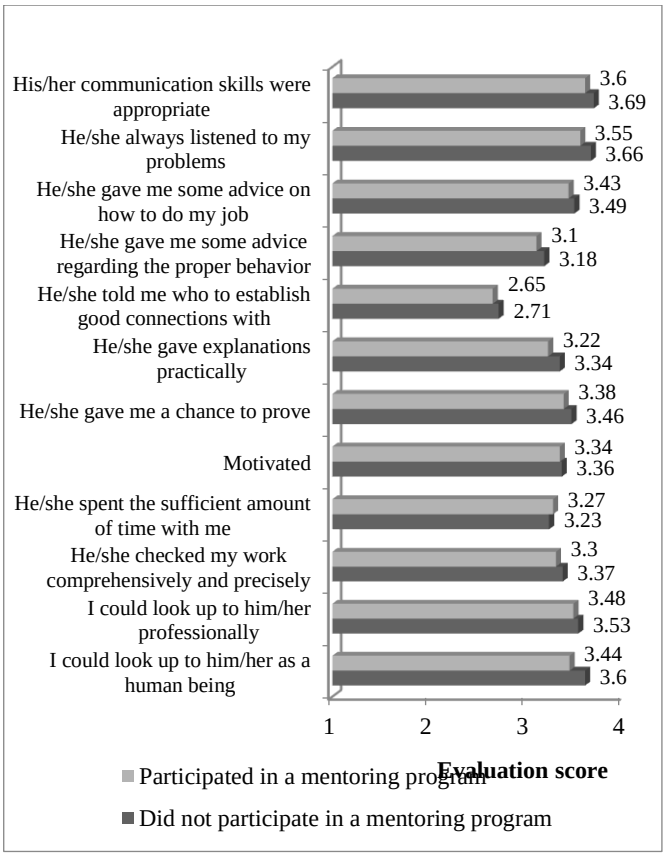


Figure 3: The evaluation of the superior's helping activity and personality based on the participation in a mentoring program

Source: own research N: 314

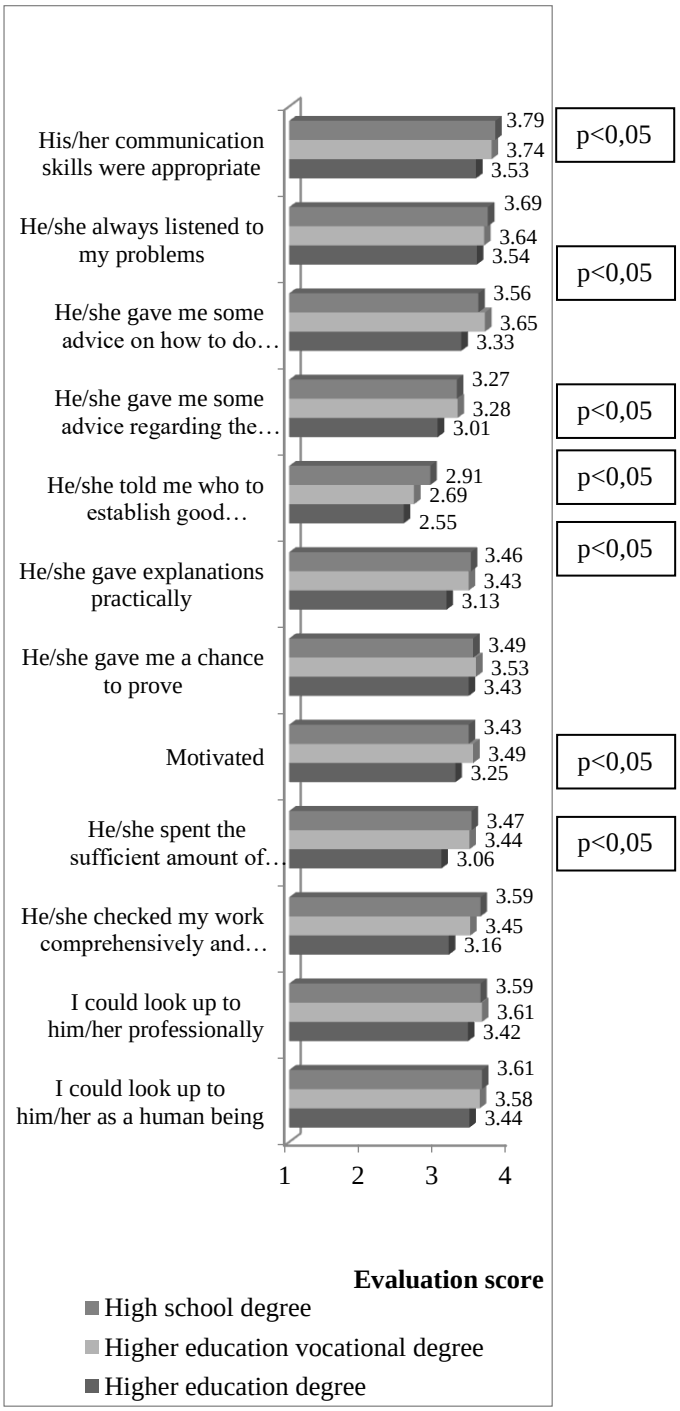


Figure 4: The evaluation of the superior's helping activity based on the interviewees' education level

Source: own research N: 314

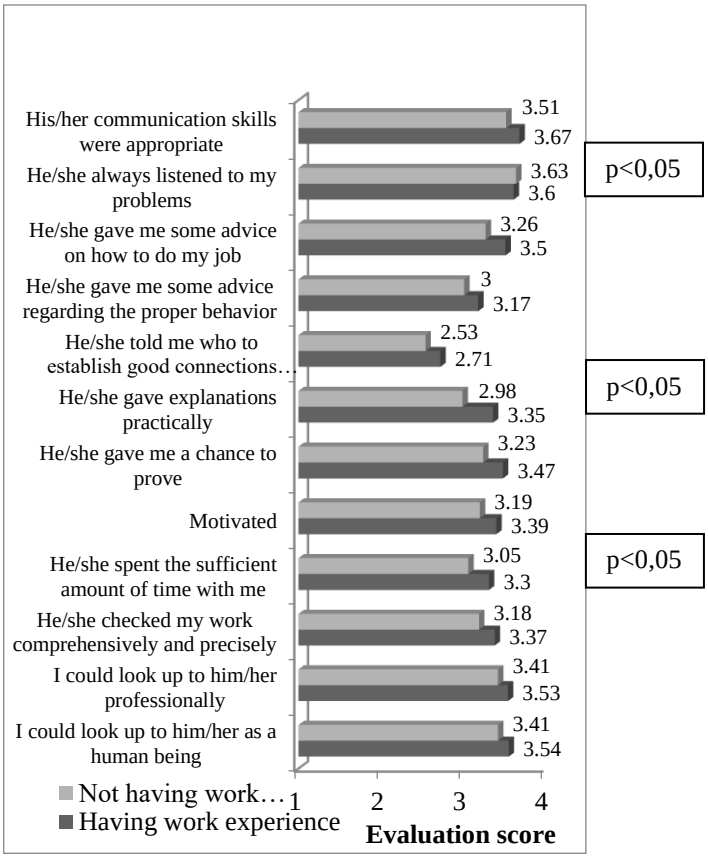


Figure 5: The evaluation of the superior's helping activity based on the interviewees' work experience

Source: own research N: 314

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