



Fostering Competency Development Through Knowledge Sharing Capabilities in Onboarding

Mustapha Cheikh-Ammar, Laval University, Canada

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9673-6607>

Marie Christine Roy, Laval University, Canada*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9825-1830>

Marie Josée Roy, Laval University, Canada

ABSTRACT

The study proposes and empirically validates a theoretical model suggesting that employee competency development during the onboarding period largely depends on the availability of knowledge sharing (KS) channels (both digital and traditional), on the KS culture experienced, and on employee satisfaction with the existing KS practices. The data for the study was collected using an online survey of a large pool of young public service employees working at various government agencies (n= 3,652 respondents). The results of a structural equation modeling analysis of the data provide support for the study's main premise. The implications of these results on the design of effective onboarding processes are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Competency Development, Knowledge Sharing, Onboarding, Personal Competency, Professional Competency

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations have long been interested in improving the skills and competencies of their human resources. Indeed, when employees develop their knowledge and abilities at work, they become better equipped to perform their job tasks and to effectively cope with the demands of their professional roles. This has consistently been found to be a key step to achieving numerous desirable organizational objectives, such as processes efficiency, customer satisfaction, employee commitment, and employee retention (Dhoopar et al., 2022; Hatch & Dyer, 2004; Shet et al., 2019; Vinarski Peretz, 2020). In this regard, knowledge sharing (KS) stands as a crucial factor that can help bolster the competencies of newly hired employees (De Vos et al., 2015; Meher et al., 2022; Niam & Lenka, 2017). Therefore, uncovering the favorable KS conditions and contexts that facilitate competency development, particularly during the employee onboarding phase, can be revealing for research and practice (Becker & Bish, 2021; Jeske & Olso, 2021).

DOI: 10.4018/IJKM.336278

*Corresponding Author

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Onboarding refers to the activities, practices, and policies implemented by organizations to help new employees develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to succeed in their jobs (Bauer et al., 2007; Klein et al., 2015). Well-designed onboarding programs can promote organizational effective commitment, work engagement (Cesario & Chambels, 2019; Meyer & Bartels, 2017), and job satisfaction (Bauer et al., 2007; Meyer & Bartels, 2017). These can also decrease employee turnover (Bauer et al., 2007; Meyer & Bartels, 2017), which is particularly high during the first six months of employment (Becker & Bish, 2021; Sani et al., 2023). Furthermore, career advancement issues, such as those related to professional growth and development, have been consistently found to be central concerns leading employees to leave their jobs (Work Institute, 2022). Since onboarding is a learning intensive process, it requires that appropriate KS capabilities be put in place (Cesário & Chambel, 2019; Jeske & Olso, 2021; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). In this study, we argue that these capabilities are closely tied to the KS channels that organizations make available to their newly hired employees during the onboarding phase, as well as to the reigning KS environment.

The relevance of knowledge sharing practices during the onboarding phase and their role in helping develop employee competency is not necessarily a new issue. However, most business practices, and particularly, those related to how knowledge is shared in contemporary organizations, are constantly changing, and as a result, onboarding practices must follow suit. Indeed, remote work is increasingly prevalent in modern organizations, and because of this, many companies have had to adapt their onboarding processes to effectively cater to the needs of off-site employees (Sani et al., 2023; Scott et al., 2022). Furthermore, employee preferences have dramatically changed in the last two decades, as digital natives, who are known to be much more technologically savvy than digital immigrants, have integrated the workforce (Vodanovich et al., 2010). Thus, it is crucial for modern organizations to provide current technological means that are aligned with the abilities and aspirations of this new generation of employees. For instance, it is well documented that Generation Z employees tend to prioritize autonomous and self-guided learning (Autry & Berge, 2011; Chillakuri, 2020; Gaidhani et al., 2019). They believe open communication and free-flowing information to be valuable resources to their personal development (Gursoy et al., 2008; Martin, 2005) and professional advancement (Chillakuri, 2020; Jeske & Olson, 2021). They also tend to favor onboarding experiences that are flexible, personalized, and customizable (Jeske & Olson, 2021). Accordingly, an effective onboarding process designed for these young employees must take these preferences into account. Therefore, in addition to traditional onboarding means that have been well-tested over the years, organizations must put in place digital channels, such as enterprise social media (ESM) and/or other information systems (IS) that are specifically designed to facilitate knowledge sharing among employees (Ziden & Joo, 2020). Evidently, the challenge becomes how to find ways to ensure that employees make use of these information systems and that they integrate them in their daily work routines. This generally depends on employees' own motivation to learn and on whether they perceive the information and knowledge available to them to be reliable and valuable (Nair et al., 2021; Veeravalli & Vijayalakshmi, 2022).

The primary aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between existing KS capabilities in a work environment and how young employees evaluate their competency level after a six-month onboarding period. To this end, the study explores a wide range of KS channels that can be used during the onboarding phase, encompassing both digital and traditional approaches, and assesses their influence on employees' perceptions of competency. It also investigates the role of the prevailing KS culture in shaping these perceptions. Finally, the study assesses the mediating role of employee satisfaction with existing KS practices on these two relationships.

The article is organized as follows. The next section develops the study's research model and hypotheses. This is followed by a section examining the methodological aspects of the study and its findings. The final section discusses these results and highlights their theoretical and practical implications.

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