

Evaluation of the University of Limpopo's Induction Program

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KEYWORDS Employment Policies. Teaching Institution. Induction Standards. Excellence Program. New Workers

ABSTRACT This study focused on the University of Limpopo in South Africa's induction program. While the University has sound recruitment, selection, and employment policies, it faces many challenges, including staff retention. The University loses many of its knowledgeable employees to its competitors. Induction is very important step in ensuring staff wellbeing and thus in promoting staff retention. This study examined the University of Limpopo's induction program in order to establish whether or not the program is efficient and effective, and to assess if it meets the 21st century's induction standards. The study population included 50 employees, 25 academics and 25 non-academic staff members. Two relevant support departments, namely the Centre for Academic Excellence and the Human Resources Department's Training and Development Office, were also sampled. The study found that employees perceive that the University is not doing enough to induct employees. Very few employees were inducted. Furthermore, induction was not fully executed at different organizational levels. There were inconsistencies in both the content and the duration of induction. Finally, while the Centre for Academic Excellence's program was adequate to equip academics for their working environment, the same cannot be said for induction offered by the Human Resources Department.

INTRODUCTION

Induction is a short, informative training session just after recruitment, to guide or orient new employees on an organization's rules, procedures and policies. This enables new employees to become acquainted with their work environment and colleagues (Chung 2015; Sanches et al. 2013). According to Choi and Nazareth (2014), induction is a vital investment. It aims to ensure that new employees settle in quickly, promoting both productivity and staff retention. Induction is more than skills training; it involves all the basics that seasoned employees take for granted such as shift arrangements, the location of the notice board, canteen and toilets, the routine for holidays, and the dress code. While induction did not receive much attention in the past, and was more casual than formal, it has now become standard policy in most organizations. A well organized, planned and effectively presented induction program strongly influences the employees' decisions to both join and remain in a company (Eric and Chong 2015). Induction is performed

for a number of reasons, including facilitation of entry, participation and the socialization of new recruits into the new job and organization. The training primarily provides knowledge of key aspects of the employment contract, HR policies, health and safety issues, and the social organization of work (Lam et al. 2015). Induction is a follow-up action after hiring. Introductory information regarding the history of the company and its products, its organizational structure, personnel policies, and rules and regulations relating to leave, pay and perks should be provided informally or in group sessions in the HR department. Zhong et al. (2015) describe induction as the transformation of new employees from complete outsiders to participating and effective members of the organization. Since starting a new job is a stressful experience, proper induction can eliminate anxieties and uncertainties as well as address the needs of the new employee. According to Gamlath (2013), research has shown that impressions made during the first few days have a significant impact on performance and labor turnover in general. Induction bears rewards in terms of goodwill, morale and efficiency, which are more than worth the investment and effort expended to make the new employee feel at home. Induction is therefore instrumental in facilitating the acculturation of an individual. However, it should be noted that induction cannot entirely counteract the negative effects of unwise recruitment or poor selection (Denman and Higuchi 2013; Zender et al.

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2015). Different companies structure their policies and programs in different ways. In some companies, the employment policy includes a clause on induction, while others have a dedicated induction policy. The different approaches to induction highlight the level of understanding of both the importance of induction and an extent to which the benefits of the induction process are valued (Gong et al. 2015; He 2015).

Purpose of Study

Induction's main purpose is to facilitate new workers' successful entry into an organization. The purpose of this study was to determine how successful induction of new employees is at the University of Limpopo (UL). The study sample was 50 employees, 25 academic and 25 non-academic staff. Relevant support departments were also sampled. The ethical guidelines set by the University were observed during the study.

Problem Statement

The University of Limpopo has gone through a merger process, which required drastic policy changes. It seems that the merger process negatively impacted the morale of certain staff members.

This study evaluated UL's current induction program to determine whether or not it meets the criteria of a 21st century tertiary education institution. It is of vital importance for the University to have a modern and effective induction program.

Arising from the above problem, this article poses the following questions:

- ♦ Does the University offer induction to its employees?
- ♦ If UL does offer induction to its employees, is it beneficial to the employees, and is it effective, efficient and timely?
- ♦ Does the induction program, if offered, meet 21st century objectives and standards?

Literature Review

An induction program aims to ensure that all new employees in an organization are inducted in the relevant company policies, and operational and program requirements in order to enable them to perform their assigned duties based on

an agreed framework and standards (Fish 2013; Su-Yan 2013). It is important to plan the induction program well in advance so that it benefits both the employee and the company. The induction program should set clear objectives, conduct assessments to ensure that these objectives are met, be evaluated for effectiveness by staff and managers, take advantage of pre-employment enthusiasm, be readily available to new staff members from day one, cater for all areas within the organization, be consistently applied to every employee, and be regularly reviewed and updated (Chung Fun 2015; Zhong and Zhang 2015).

Setting clear aims and objectives assist in focusing the program on achieving these objectives. An induction program aims to support new staff members to understand their roles within the new organization, contribute effectively to its success, develop a positive understanding of processes and procedures, structures and standards, and develop a positive attitude to their work and the company (Chauhan 2015). The long-term objective of such a program should be to enhance staff retention within the organization. All new employees, as well as those that are promoted or demoted should be inducted. Induction should also occur when there are changes in company policies, procedures or operations (Masson 2015). Furthermore, when acquisitions, mergers or any other changes to the structure of the business occur, induction should be provided to acquaint employees with the new ways of doing things (Montague et al. 2014). Different organizations design their own forms of induction programs, but the objectives are similar. Successful induction programs offer obvious benefits, including increased employee commitment. If the new employee's initial impression is that the company is worth working for, he/she becomes more committed to his/her work (Edwards 2015). Acculturation, social beliefs and the way things are done in the new organization, and certain organizational assumptions are clearly outlined during the induction program (Edwards 2015), and this accelerates progress up the learning curve. A systematic approach to addressing employees' developmental needs will ensure that new members of staff learn their new duties and expectations. Problems that can be encountered if induction is not done effectively include poor performance, low levels of job satisfaction, absenteeism, high staff

turnover, resignations or dismissals, disciplinary and grievance cases, and accidents leading to injuries and/or prosecution (Choi and Nazareth 2014).

Continuous change and the evolution of Human Resources (HR) policies and systems in the 21st century require every aspect of HR to be continuously updated. Induction is one of the systems that require serious attention as, if ignored, both companies and employees suffer. A lack of thorough and systemic programs in the past cost companies time and money and contributed to employee turnover, accidents, and legal problems. A 21st century induction program should be a progressive and developmental program that enables new employees to adapt quickly and perform their jobs well in the new organization. Mentoring, the buddy system, performance management, and relocation issues are all features of 21st century induction programs (Ugla 2014). Being new to an area, state or country can be difficult, but if proper mechanisms are put in place to assist the new employee, the load can be eased. He/she can then adapt quickly and concentrate on the job at hand. Relocation subsidies, conditions and benefits are therefore necessary in any company.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design, which is defined as an inquiry based on distinct methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem (Edwards 2015). The study employed the phenomenological research method. This enables researchers to answer their research questions as validly, objectively and accurately as possible (Elragal and El-Gendy 2013). According to Guercini (2014), a phenomenological method involves an in-depth, systematic examination of a real-world life experience or event. The phenomenological method facilitated easy analysis and interpretation of the research data using descriptive and explorative themes. It presented an opportunity to focus intensively on the evaluation of the induction used at UL. The University has two main campuses and different satellite campuses under the main campuses. The study was conducted on the Turfloop Campus at the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership and the Health Promotion Campus, situated at Polokwane Edupark and Dalamada, respectively. Primary data was collected by means of

interviews and questionnaires (Kennedy and Avila 2013).

Population and Sample

The population in this study consisted of staff members at UL, including permanent, temporary, contract, full-time and part-time staff. Staff members at the Turfloop Campus and the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership satellite campus were included. All members of staff, both academic and non-academic, formed a part of the population. Support departments at the University were also included for comparison with the population (Edwards 2015). These departments support the core business of the university, which is training and education without providing this service themselves. Examples include, Academic Administration, Logistics, Facilities and Maintenance, the Research Administration Office, the Information Technology Centre (ITC), Library, Finance, and the Disability Unit. Two departments, the Human Resources Department's Training and Development Office and the Centre for Academic Excellence (CAE) offer induction. They were therefore included in this study for comparative purposes.

The university has an estimated 900 employees at the targeted campuses. The sample size was estimated at 50 participants. Random and convenient sampling methods were used to select the sample (Guercini 2014).

Response Rate

There was very poor response rate. While at least 90 questionnaires were distributed, just over half were returned. The reasons for this low response rate included:

- ♦ The timing of the study: The study was conducted in the months of November and December when university examinations were in progress. Most academic staff was concentrating on marking scripts, invigilation, and other examination duties. Administrative staff and management were also involved in the examinations process, processing student applications for the coming year and completing outstanding tasks by year-end.
- ♦ Willingness to participate in the study: Apart from their busy schedules and daily responsibilities, some staff members were simply not willing to participate in studies of this nature.

- ♦ Motivation and exposure: Non-academic staff members often felt left out of overall academic issues and thus seemed surprised to be approached, lacked confidence and did not wish to participate in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the respondents indicated that they had not been inducted either at the corporate level and/or departmental level. It is therefore not possible to fully evaluate the program given the low number of those who had received induction. The key findings of the study are aligned with the research questions. The sample size was sufficient for the results to be extended to the entire population. The participants were adequately spread amongst the University departments. Academic and non-academic staff members participated in almost equal ratios in this study. It was evident that most employees were not aware of many of the University's programs or activities. UL seems to confront problems in communicating with and marketing itself to employees, students and the broader community. This has resulted in negative perceptions that have less to do with the University's operations and structures than the way people perceive UL.

Importance of Induction

The general consensus was that induction is a highly important aspect of training and job performance. Employees felt strongly compromised by the fact that they were not either inducted or inadequately inducted. Some indicated that they had to learn the hard way to acclimatize at the university while others reported that they did not have a sense of belonging at the university. This reduces employees' commitment to the organization. Inducted staff members are highly motivated, quickly become more effective, and are more likely to play a positive role in the organization, pass probation, and be retained in the system.

Scope and Application of the Induction Programme

There are shortfalls in the induction program offered at UL. In terms of statutory induction at the University, it can be assumed that this is

offered by the CAE and only covers academic issues. When weighted against other programs, this program covers just over half of the scope of many programs. Some topics/aspects that would have made sense to include are omitted. More comprehensive induction programs are very instrumental in job performance. The CAE only deals with academic issues, and the program is only available to academic staff. The statutory business functions for non-academic staff are neglected. This suggests that non-academic staff members are vulnerable and are not provided with training to improve their performance. The findings suggest that very few UL departments on the Turfloop Campus offer induction at the departmental level. Furthermore, those that do offer induction do not have formal, structured programs. An interview with some of the staff at the Optometry Department revealed that refresher courses were offered informally and haphazardly. Induction is not only the process of perfecting performance, but is a legal process that has implications.

Consistency of the Program

Inconsistency is not a point for discussion since the overall program has major shortfalls. Consistency brings about reliability and this can only be discussed if there is a reliable program. Few employees attended the induction program. Some waited more than seven months to hear the outcome of their interview and almost a year to get an employment contract. The few employees that were inducted had to wait two months before induction.

The unreliability of UL's induction system can be assumed to be based on the following factors:

- ♦ Type of contract: Temporary or contract employees were inducted the same day they were employed but it took longer for permanent employees.
- ♦ Country of origin: Most foreign employees waited longer for their contracts to be finalized due to delays in the University's systems and the country's legislation.
- ♦ Prior engagements before employment: Employees who studied at UL received better service. These employees were not inducted because it was erroneously assumed that they were familiar with the UL system.

- ♦ Type of duties: High-ranking officials were given more attention than lower level employees.

CONCLUSION

It is crucial that UL implement induction programs that benefit both the institution and its employees. The induction program must add value to the employees' wellbeing. Induction should be mandatory for all new staff members upon employment. At present, university policy suggests induction, but does not enforce it. Skills and knowledge management training should be made mandatory and form a part of all UL employees' contracts. In the course of the merger, many policies were redrafted and merely adopted. There is a need to induct the entire staff component of the University at all its campuses. This study has concluded that UL has never had an effective induction program. This should be rectified as a matter of urgency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ Revamp UL's induction program. Since the existing program does not meet 21st century standards, it needs to be revised in totality. The current print-only format of the induction program is not sufficient. It should also be electronically available on the University's intranet. Furthermore, the UL induction program should be measurable and consistently evaluated. The Human Resources (HR) Department should launch initiatives that inform employees that the University is a worthwhile and exciting institution to be associated with. The haphazard and drop-in training sessions that are common in University processes are a good place to start revamping the poor image of the UL induction program. There is no synergy between the CAE program and the HR program. The scope of the CAE program suggests that it is a supplementary program, which indicates a loophole, in that the responsibilities of the HR department are not fully covered. There is also a need for statutory induction for non-academic employees.
- ♦ Departmental induction is necessary and should be fully implemented. The University should formulate a standard model with a proper and relevant checklist for induction

at this level. This would engender more respect for the tasks each employee performs. Mentors also need to be trained to be better coaches. This training should be incorporated in the overall induction guidelines for departments. Performance evaluation, probation and induction are parallel processes. Support departments like ICT should play a major role in an online induction program. Quality assurance is a statutory requirement of any university. The University's Quality Assurance Office should emphasize that departments should play a major role in induction activities. The induction program at UL should be an ongoing process for new and current employees on a wide range of management and individual worker issues. The HR and CAE departments, with the assistance of the ICT Department, need to develop online induction programs that are easily accessible to all new employees. There is a need for follow-up on inducted employees to establish the success of the induction program. Regular reviews of the UL induction program are necessary to meet the standards of a 21st century program.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study focused on one university. Financial as well as time constraints made it difficult for the investigation to be conducted on a broader scale to accommodate other universities. The study's conclusions and recommendations are therefore only applicable to the University of Limpopo. A comparative study that evaluated other universities' induction programs would have been ideal. This is an area for further research.

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Paper received for publication on October 2014
Paper accepted for publication on December 2015