

Evaluation of the University of Limpopo Induction Programme

Lourens Johannes Erasmus Beyers and Pheagane Motsime William Nkoana

Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership, University of Limpopo, South Africa

Address for Correspondence:

Dr. LJE Beyers

Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership,

University Of Limpopo, P. O. Box 756,

Fauna Park, 0787, South Africa

Cell: 0835142099

Telephone: +27 15 2902856

Fax: 0867549664

E-mail: beyerslourens@gmail.com; lourens.beyers@ul.ac.za

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ABSTRACT Every employee at any institution should be inducted upon employment. Induction prepares new and existing employees for a new environment or workplace. It is therefore very important for an institution to design an induction programme that caters for employees' needs. This study focused on the University of Limpopo in South Africa. 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 in ensuring staff wellbeing and thus in promoting staff retention. This study examined the University of Limpopo's induction programme in order to establish whether or not the programme is efficient and effective and to assess if it meets 21st century induction standards. The study population included 50 employees, 25 academics and 25 non-academic staff. Two relevant support departments, 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. Mentors and buddies were hardly ever used and only a portion of the induction programme was covered.

There were inconsistencies in both the content and the duration of induction. Finally, while the Centre for Academic Excellence's programme 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 orientate new employees on an organization's rules, procedures, and policies. This enables new employees to become acquainted with their work environment and colleagues (Kalra & Bhatia, 2008). Induction is a vital investment. It aims to ensure that new employees settle in quickly, promoting both productivity and staff retention (Chapman, 1995). Induction is also termed orientation or socialization (Gobler, Warnich, Carrel, Elbert and Hatfield, 2006:206). According to Chapman, 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 (Chapman, 1995). A well organized, planned and effectively presented induction programme strongly influences employees' decisions to both join and remain in a company (Chapman, 1995).

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 (Banfield & Kay, 2008). 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 (Seshadri, 2008). Grobler et al. (2006:209) 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 (Grobler et al., 2006:209). According to Grobler et al. (2006:209), research has shown that impressions made during the first few days have a significant impact on performance and labour 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 (Gobler et al., 2006:209). Induction is therefore instrumental in facilitating the acculturation of an individual. However, it should however be noted that induction cannot entirely counteract the negative effects of unwise recruitment or poor selection (Grobler et al., 2006:210). Different companies structure their policies and programmes 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.

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 impacted negatively on the morale of certain staff members.

This study evaluated UL's current induction programme 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 programme.

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, effective, efficient and timely?
- Does the induction programme, if offered, meet 21st century objectives and standards?

LITERATURE REVIEW

An induction programme aims to ensure that all new employees in an organization are inducted in the relevant company policies and operational and programme requirements in

order to enable them to perform their assigned duties based on an agreed framework and standards (Ugandan Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, 2008:5). It is important to plan the induction programme well in advance so that it benefits both the employee and the company. The induction programme 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 (Ockwell, 2009)

Setting clear aims and objectives assist in focusing the programme on achieving these objectives. An induction programme 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 (The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, 2008:9). The long term objective of such a programme should be to enhance staff retention within the organization (The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, 2008:9). 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. 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 (Bizhelp24.com, 2009). Different organizations design their own forms of induction programmes, but the objectives are similar. Successful induction programmes 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 (UofG, 2008); this is a form of psychological contract. Acculturation, social beliefs and the way things are done in the new organization, and certain organizational assumptions are clearly outlined during the induction programme (UofG, 2008); this accelerates progress up the learning curve. A systematic approach to addressing employees' developmental needs will ensure that new member of staff learn their new duties and expectations (UofG, 2008). 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 (UofG, 2008).

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 programmes in the past cost companies time and money and contributed to employee turnover, accidents, and legal problems. A 21st century induction programme should be a progressive and developmental programme 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 programmes (University of Canberra, 2008). 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. For example, Fetakgomo Municipality in the Limpopo Province, pays 100% of relocation expenses although this is conditional based on termination of service (Fetakgomo Municipality, 2001:10)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design, which Creswell (2008:15) defines as an inquiry based on distinct methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem. The study employed the phenomenological research method. This enables researchers to answer their research questions as validly, objectively and accurately as possible (Burns and Grove, 2009:67). According to Yin (2006:89), 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 (Voce, 2005:194).

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population in this study was 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 part of the population. Support departments at

the University were also included for comparison with the population. 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.

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 November/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.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study do not allow for sound judgement of the standards of the induction programme provided by UL. Most of the respondents indicated that they had not been inducted either at corporate level and/or departmental level. It is therefore not possible to fully evaluate the programme 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 programmes or activities. A number were not aware of induction programmes. 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. According to Van Schalwykwyk (2005), 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 programme offered at UL. A comparison with the University of Stellenbosch induction programme suggests that many topics are not included in the UL induction process (SU, 2007:3). According to available information on corporate induction, UL's corporate induction covers less than one-tenth of the basic induction applicable at most academic institutions. 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 programmes, this programme covers just over half of the scope of many programmes (South Gloucester NHS, 2008:6). Some topics/aspects that would have made sense to include are omitted. More comprehensive induction programmes are very instrumental in job performance. The CAE only deals with academic issues, and the programme 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 programmes. 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. Many institutions did not experience this in the past. As a result, the legalities around induction, especially occupational health and safety, are not realised (South Gloucester NHS, 2008:5).

Consistency of the programme

Inconsistency is not a point for discussion since the overall programme has major shortfalls. Consistency brings about reliability and this can only be discussed if there is a reliable programme. Few employees attended the induction programme. 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 finalised 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.

Buddy systems and mentorship

Mentorship is an important and practical approach to induction. People learn better by doing, which is the basis of mentorship (Gobler et al., 2006:207). The University has a policy on mentorships, but it is not mandatory (UL, 2009:12). The findings of this study suggest that, while there is a policy, it is not fully or adequately implemented. Departments that use mentorship rely on their own interpretations of the policy.

Programme evaluation

Considering the induction model attached, UL's programme is poor. Furthermore, it is not effective and efficient. Employees indicated that they did not have confidence in the programme. They did not feel a sense of belonging to the institution. They felt that

immediately after appointment, they were neglected and that there was no sound support system to enable them to perform their duties at the highest level and to the best of their abilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations arise from the following findings of the study:

- The evaluation of the UL induction programme showed that the programme is deficient in many aspects. The scope of the programme is limited and it is not effective and efficient and therefore does not thoroughly prepare employees to perform their duties better. Only a few aspects of Human Resources Management are covered while major ones, including occupational health and safety, job specific training, labour relations, equality and disabilities are omitted. The university has to deal with people with disabilities, different cultures, races and nationalities, and the political nature of its background.
- Secondly, the programme was not consistent and reliable. It was offered to certain individuals but not to others; the scope was not consistent with each session; the programme offered to certain individuals was very short, but it was very long for others; and some employees were inducted immediately upon employment while others had to wait for an unacceptably long time. Only a few individuals were inducted, most of whom are non-academic staff. This poses significant challenges to employees joining UL. The University has a tendency to absorb new staff from its graduates. These graduates need to be thoroughly prepared for their new challenges. There are very few support mechanisms to ensure that new employees succeed. Induction is the entry point for any support system for such employees.
- Thirdly, UL employees felt strongly that the programme is not useful and/or should be improved. None of the respondents indicated that the induction programme offered is fruitful. Those who commented positively only did so in relation to one or two aspects of the programme, but complained about many other aspects. Many employees are not even aware of some of the benefits offered by the University due to poor education and a lack of information. There are a number of cases of staff (lecturers) who are sexually involved with students. Some of these cases can be blamed on poor education and training, of which induction is the core.
- Finally the attached model (see Appendix A) illustrates that UL's programme does not meet the criteria of 21st century induction programmes. It is dated, limited, lacks substance and fails to take account of the latest trends. Most of today's induction programmes use the

internet, especially for international employees before they join the university. Alternately, they are sent booklets, CDs or DVDs to inform them what to expect in their new environment. Performance management, probation, mentorship and buddy systems form the crux of induction programmes. Policies set down how these should be implemented. Unfortunately, induction is not mandatory at UL. This is completely different from institutions where new employees do not commence work until they are inducted.

Recommendations

- Revamp UL's induction programme. Since the existing programme does not meet 21st century standards, it needs to be revised in totality. The current printed only format of the induction programme is not sufficient. It should also be electronically available on the University's intranet. Furthermore, the UL induction programme 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 programme. There is no synergy between the CAE programme and the HR programme. The scope of the CAE programme suggests that it is a supplementary programme 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 task 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 programme. 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 programme at UL should be an on-going 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 programmes 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 programme. Regular reviews of the UL induction programme are necessary to meet the standards of a 21st century programme.

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 programmes would have been ideal. This is an area for further research.

CONCLUSION

It is crucial that UL implement induction programmes that benefit both the institution and its employees. The induction programme must add value to employees' wellbeing. Induction should be mandatory for all new staff members upon employment. At present, university policy suggests induction, but does not enforce it (UL, 2009:12). Skills and knowledge management training should be made mandatory and form 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 programme. This should be rectified as a matter of urgency.

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LIST OF REFEREES:

1. Prof C. Ngwakwe: University of Limpopo, Limpopo Province, South Africa
E-mail Address: collins.ngwakwe@ul.ac.za Tel: +27 015 2902835

2. Prof J. Mbuya: University of Limpopo, Limpopo Province, South Africa
E-mail Address: John.Mbuya@ul.ac.za Tel: +27 015 2902832

3. Prof N. Schutte: University of North West, North West Province, South Africa
E-mail address: Neschutte25@gmail.com Tel: +027 018 3892839