

# DISCIPLINES AND PRACTICES FOR SELECTION AND WORKPLACE ORIENTATION WITHIN AN AMERICAN COMPANY

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**Abstract:** The primary objective of this essay is to present how selection and orientation at the workplace are regulated and practiced at an American profit oriented company. Moreover, considering these practices to outline the disciplines which determine and influence them. The first part of this essay is a literature review which specifically illustrates various perspectives of selection and orientation at the workplace. Following this review, the objectives of this paper are enumerated. The next part presents the case study, the half-structured interview and the questionnaire methods used for this research. The results and the discussion parts are separated, because the results part shows how selection and orientation work in practice and then, by examining the results in some detail, the discussion part presents the disciplines which have been extrapolated. In order to support the conceived disciplines this paper also seeks to examine the most important supporting factors in the procedure of work orientation. General and professional/organizational factors of workplace orientation have been collected. Quantitative data from an empirical analysis is used for the research. Qualitative data is a part of a future dissertation. Questionnaires were completed by 80 employees at a distributor company in the United States of America.

The results clearly show that the following disciplines should be maintained through these HR processes: equal opportunity, importance of professionalism, documentary, checking, support and continuance.

**Keywords:** human resource management, selection, workplace orientation, workplace socialization, American HR practices, American HR disciplines

## Introduction

In this part of the paper the selection and the orientation process are introduced and the objectives of this study are also clearly identified.

The selection process is complex procedure which has many aspects or dimensions. There are some authors who emphasize the importance of correspondence between the applicant's competences and the position/organization. Rothwell & Kazanas (2003) specify the selection as a process of searching for and then identifying an appropriate match between the individual, the job, the work group and the organization. Jackson et. al. (2012) defines selection as a process of obtaining and using information about job applicants to determine who should be hired for long- or short-term positions. It begins with an assessment of the requirements to be met by the new hire, including the technical aspects of a job and the more difficult to quantify organizational needs.

Gareth (2004) also suggests that the selection process is about matching people to roles. Actually, the selection

process is about getting information about the applicants in order to find the right person. The steps of the selection are the following (Farkas 2007; Száraz 2004):

- checking CV-s,
- informing the applicants (every applicant receives a response: rejecting or calling for an interview)
- interviewing and using, assessment centers, tests, references all to gain as much information as possible about the applicants,
- introducing the workplace for the best applicants (opportunity for the employers and also for the applicants to get information),
- evaluating and making the decision,
- informing the applicants about the decision,
- writing the work contract.

Other authors also strongly highlight the meaning of correspondence but they stress the importance of legal requirements, too.

Catano (2009) suggests that the selection is the choice of job candidates from a previously generated applicant pool

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in a way that will meet management goals and objectives as well as current legal requirements. Gatewood et al. (2010) specifies the selection as a process of collecting and evaluating information about an individual in order to extend an offer of employment. Such employment could be either a first position for a new employee or a different position for a current employee. This selection process is performed under legal and environmental constraints and addresses the future interests of the organization and of the individual.

Other scholars emphasize that the selection should link with the strategic business plan. The stage of an organization's development (that is, whether it is just starting up, in a growth phase, merging with another company, or even in temporary decline) will indicate the numbers and types of employees it requires in both the short and longer terms (Compton et al. 2009). Actually, a vital part of the strategic business plan is the HR planning component which is where the recruitment and selection cycle begins (Marchington & Wilkingson 2005).

In my view the selection process can ultimately be summarized as the steps in identifying exactly what is needed (soft and hard competences) from the occupant of the new position and selecting the person who matches the role. During the selection the current legal requirements must be considered. The selection process has a short and a long-term goal. The short-term goal is to divide work tasks more effectively with the help of new workforce. The long term goal of the selection process is to assist the business plan with supporting and realizing the goals of HR planning.

Many literatures can be found on work and/or workplace socialization from the '70s until the present and most of the authors emphasize the importance of learning. When it comes to learning during work socialization, Feldman (1976), Fisher (1986) and Reichers (1987) differentiate four dimensions or tasks of the learning process:

- (a) task mastery: learning how to do the components of one's job, needed skills and knowledge,
- (b) learning about the organizational culture, values and goals,
- (c) understanding one's role in the organization (identity, self-image and motives)
- (d) social integration: developing relationships with co-workers, friendships.

Recent definitions from other authors also stress the goals of new employee learning. Haueter et al. (2003) and Saks et al. (2007) specify work socialization as a procedure, through which employees acquire information, knowledge on how to adapt to new jobs, roles, work groups and the culture of the organization in order to be a useful member of an organization.

Workplace socialization reviews examine the process from the side of the newly hired employee, while orientation literature studies the issue from the side of the organization. Nyambegera (2005) defines orientation as a procedure is intended to help new employees to settle into their job. Other scholars try to find practices and tools to orient and integrate the employee. Arthur (2006) suggests that open door communication and open door policy play an important role in departmental orientation. Patient and empathy especially from

the buddy or mentor (Internet1) and support and commitment from management is also critical (Westwood 2005). Lawson (2006) mentions that arranging free-time activities like going on breaks and lunches helps the orientation process.

As the literature showed, in order for the learning process to be successful, the organization, the management and the employees need to ensure some general conditions for the newcomer, like patience, open door policy, empathy, leadership/management support, free-time activities. In addition, some professional maintain is needed specifically for the task mastery, like feedback, professional support and sharing of experiences. Moreover, a proper organizational information and communication system needs to be in place and information about the organization's goals should be clearly accessible, so that the culture can become more easily known.

In order to clearly determine the HR/direct manager tasks through the newcomer's orientation, a separation in the process is needed.

My explanation for the orientation at the workplace includes two parts: a formal and an informal part. The formal part essentially contains the documentation for which there are legal and/or organizational requirements. The informal part of the orientation process has three important factors:

1. Task acquisition in practice: knowing the tasks on a daily basis and the way these should be accomplished – the ability to work independently and the realization of the added value to the organization;
2. Contact creation: getting to know the direct co-workers and managers, building connection networks at the workplace and fitting in the hierarchical system;
3. Organizational culture: getting to know the organizational habits, values, rules and goals (Kozák 2012).

The HR and/or direct manager help the newcomer directly or indirectly in tasks acquisition, contract creation and getting to know the organizational culture.

My view for the workplace orientation task is an organizational psychology's perspective: not the newcomer's socialization for the work in general or for that special position. My view is a more complex procedure, namely the orientation at the organizational level. Orientation at the workplace is a process through the newcomer – if its his/her first workplace, adapting to the work as well – gets to know, sees through and accomplishes completely his/her tasks, realizes that his/her work became value for the organization, builds network contract and finally gets to know, accepts and integrates in the organizational culture. The work socialization, the socialization for the current position and the orientation at the workplace cannot be separated; these are different sides of the same process. During adapting to the work or working in a new position, the orientation at the workplace is happened too, because the organizational norms and habits became known as well.

As the literature showed, the selection and the orientation processes are complex procedures with many tasks and assignments which are managed by the HR and/or the direct manager. Although the literature clearly defined each steps of

the processes, there are less attention how to realize them in practice.

The objectives of this study are the following:

- Present how selection and orientation tasks and assignments are carried out in practice,
- Find out the disciplines which determine and influence the tasks, and
- Discover the most important supporting conditions in the process of workplace orientation.

Also based on the literature review the following hypotheses are set up:

Hypothesis1: The steps of selection and orientation process are clear and well-organized, also legal requirement (like equal opportunity and avoiding discrimination) play an important role in the processes at the company.

Hypothesis2: General factors are important as much as professional/organizational factors in the process of workplace orientation.

## Materials and methods

The methods used in this analysis of the selection and orientation process included a case study, a half-structured interview and a questionnaire.

With the use of a case study the author had an opportunity to make observations and use the company's own documents (especially the manager's and the employee's handbook) for analysis.

The interview was conducted with the company's HR manager who was responsible for the selection and indirectly for the orientation process. The questions for the half-structured interview were collected after the literature and the company's documents review. The questions were asked about the following topics: who is responsible for selection and orientation; steps of these procedures; special attention during these processes; documents and forms; tools to support orientation; mentoring system.

The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions; each question included 10 sub-questions. Respondents evaluated each sub-questions with the help of the following scale: 1) not important, 2) somewhat important, 3) important, 4) fairly important, 5) crucial. One of the 13 questions was about the orientation process. General and professional/organizational factors of orientation process have differentiated. Patience, open door policy, empathy, free time activities and leadership/management support were general factors. Feedback, professional help and the sharing of experiences are professional factors. Information about the organization's goals and the proper organizational information and communication system were organizational factors.

Questionnaires were distributed with simple random sampling to 80 employees of a distribution company in the United States of America. Almost two-thirds (59%) of the employees were male, 50% had college or master level, all of the respondents worked full time and 41% were in managerial position. The generational distribution of employees was the

following: 28% belong to the Y generation (between 18 and 29 years old), 42% belong to the X generation (between 30 and 47 years old) and 30% were Baby Boomers (between 48 and 65 years old).

## Results

In this part of the essay, the results of the analysis for the selection and orientation at the workplace are presented. First, the details of selection are pointed out with the tool of case study and half-structured interview. Then the details of workplace orientation are illustrated with the tool of case study, half structured interview and questionnaire.

There is an American service to provide information for organizations about the current employees' and candidates' driving license (this report is the Motor Vehicle Record). If the driving license is necessary for the job, employers can check it for fee.

The interview technique that was used depended on the new position (there are no recommendations about it in the managers' handbook), but the whole interview process is documented. Before the interview the candidates should fill a form which begins with the following sentence: "we do not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or any other status protected by law or regulations. It is our intention that all qualified applicants be given equal opportunity and that selection decisions be based on job-related factors". This form asks questions about general personal details (about age: are you 18 years of age or older? possible answers: yes or no), educational background, special skills, previous workplaces (name and contact information of their previous supervisors). Applicants also should fill the Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The managers' handbook contains directions about the questions they should and should not ask during the interview. Employers should not ask the candidates' age or birth date, place of birth, address, religion, maiden name or his/her father's name, marital status, kids, account details, record (clean or not), mental or physical illness, foreign languages, free time activities, number of days in sick leave, and others.

After the interview the managers call the candidate's previous supervisors and ask them about the candidate. The manager's handbook contains a form to guide the interviewer in asking the right questions, for example, what did she/he like/dislike about previous jobs; what did she/he think of his/her previous supervisors; what were his/her wages at previous jobs; and others. All of the listed question based on work-related factors.

There are two types of employment contracts in the United States of America: at-will and just-cause. An „at-will employee can be terminated at any time and for any reason, or for no reason at all, with or without notice" (Kaiser, 2005). A "just-cause" employee means having legitimate reason to invoke formal discipline. It means a real cause or basis for dismissal as distinguished from an arbitrary whim or caprice;

that is, some cause or ground that a reasonable employer, acting in good faith in similar circumstances, would regard as a good and sufficient basis for terminating the services of an employee ('Lectric Law Library). At the company used in this study, all of the employees are hired at the will of the employer and the employment may be terminated at any time, with or without reason and with or without notice.

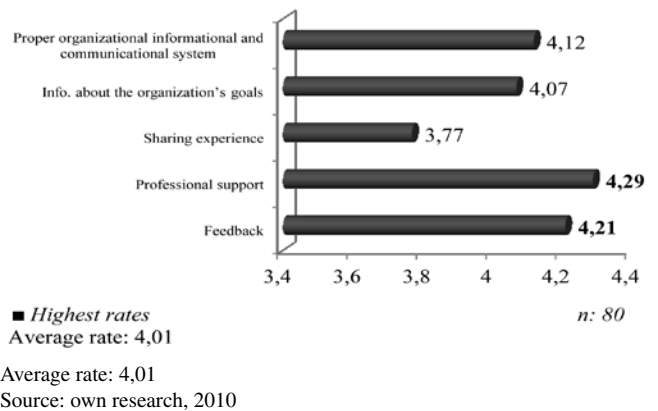
The candidate who is selected is informed by the HR manager who then presents the employee handbook, the job description and the employment agreement to the newcomer. The applicant has a few days to peruse those documents and then the HR manager presents the orientation training to him/her. This training takes 3 or 4 hours (depends on the candidate's questions) and during that time the selected candidate is informed about the organizational policies and disciplines, the company's benefits and other useful organizational rules such as performance management at the company. The selected candidate then signs the job description, the employer agreement and all of the pages of employee handbook (which includes important documents like business ethics policy, absenteeism, and others). After signing the employment agreement the newly hired employee fills in the Ethnicity/Race Self Identification Form and the Personal Information Form. At this point, the paperwork or the formal part of the orientation process is complete.

In order to understand how these tasks are performed on a daily basis and the way they should be accomplished at the company, it is essential to get to know some work conditions and specifications. The supervisor's handbook contains a checklist what should be covered on the first day: building access and alarm code (as applicable), breaks, how to order office supplies, how to use the phone system, how to use the copier, fax, printer, etc., basics of the job, how to use the computer system, where the rest rooms, emergency exits and fire-alarms are, and other matters. After the newly hired employee receives the required information the supervisor and the newcomer sign the checklist. On the first day of work the new employee is introduced to the trainer or mentor who will be responsible for the professional orientation. Furthermore, the supervisor should check with the new hire at end of first day, first week, first 30 days, etc to see how it's going. The employee then moves progressively to greater levels of independence. In the beginning the newly hired employee is observing, and then he/she is working independently but under control and finally she/he will work absolutely independently without control.

In order for the new hire to get to know the managers, it is customary for the supervisor to take the new hire to lunch on the first day or second day (but definitely during the first week. The supervisor should make sure the newcomer has a lunch buddy during the first week. Giving the new hire a quick tour of the office is also the supervisor's responsibility as well as introducing other employees they will likely work with and making sure they know who to go to with any types of questions.

During the process of workplace orientation the newcomer needs professional and general support. *Figure 1* shows the

results concerning the importance of professional/organization employment factors during the process of orientation at the workplace.

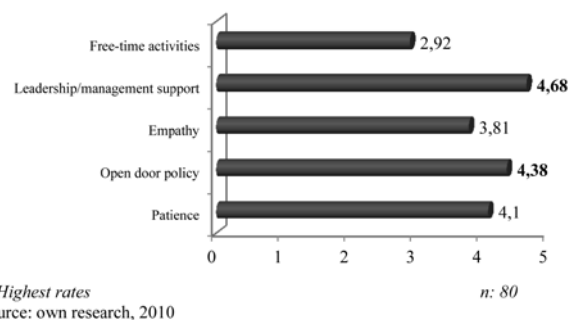


**Figure 1:** Results concerning the importance of professional/organizational factors during the process of orientation at the workplace (averages values, scale 1–5)

Professional support and feedback were evaluated as the highest professional/organizational factors. Professional support and feedback are given by the supervisor and or the mentor. These are absolutely professional factors as much as the sharing experience, which was the lowest evaluated factor. Proper organizational informational and communication systems and information about the organization's goals are dependent on the organizational culture and they become more important after the orientation.

*Figure 2* shows the results concerning the importance of general factors during the process of orientation at the workplace.

Leadership/management support and open door policy



Source: own research, 2010

Average rate: 3,98

**Figure 2:** Results concerning the importance of general factors during the process of orientation at the workplace

were evaluated as highest, while free time activities was the lowest evaluated factor. The leadership/management support is mostly depending on the supervisor's personality, while organizational culture emphasizes the open door policy. Free-time activities help to build contacts at the workplace, but good professional relationships are created at the office during work hours. Patience and empathy are also rather personal characteristics, not professional skills.

General factors were evaluated approximately same important (average rate: 3,98) as professional/organizational factors (average rate: 4,01).

## Discussion

In this part of the study the disciplines for selection and orientation at the workplace are introduced. These disciplines are listed considering the results of the research.

1. **Equal opportunity** is one of the most important principles during the process of selection. In order to find the best candidate for the position the company should ensure equal opportunity for all applicants. Equal opportunity is not only about avoiding the discrimination, but also setting up objective requirements before and during the process of hiring.
  - a. **Avoiding discrimination:** Discrimination issues are significant for all businesses because there are several legal requirements for that. It should be noted that companies should pay attention to indirect discrimination, too, when happens when the act is not discriminatory in itself, but it has the effect of discriminating against key groups.
  - b. **Setting up objective requirements:** First of all, businesses should analyze the competencies relevant to the position. The hiring manager should first determine the hard and soft skills which are required for the job; considering those competencies, the manager should refresh the job description and select CV's with the focus on matching the skills with the position. Secondly, objective requirements are important during the process of workplace orientation, too. Mentors and supervisors should have patience and empathy with the newly hired employee. They should let the newcomer clearly know what the requirements are and how much time she/he to accomplish them.
2. **The importance of professional:** Focusing on the professional issues is necessary during the hiring and workplace orientation process. The importance of professionalism through the hiring process is strongly connected to the equal opportunity discipline, but it is different for the period of workplace orientation. Considering the results of the survey newly hired employees evaluated the professional factors as more important than the organizational culture factors, therefore mentors and supervisors should primarily focus on the professional orientation.
3. **Documentation:** All of the steps of the hiring and orientation process should be documented. Proper and complete documentation ensures a protection for businesses and for newly hired employees as well. It is also useful for HR processes because it assists the personal registry at the company.
4. **Background Checking:** Background checking is a part of the selection and orientation process. Asking for the Motor Vehicle Record (if it is necessary for the position) and

calling the candidate's previous supervisors are required in the hiring process. Checking is also important in the workplace orientation process, supervisors and mentors should check the newly hired employee's work and conformity from time to time.

5. **Support:** professional support, leadership/management support and feedback are important for newly hired employees. Supervisors and HR management should consider that the younger generation usually relies on the senior staff and the older age group rather than the direct supervisor. After checking the newly hired employee's work from time to time mentors and/or supervisors should give them feedback and let them know what was correct and/or what should be changed (if it is necessary).
6. **Continuance:** This discipline means that the steps of the hiring and orientation processes are clearly defined and the steps follow each other. There are no unnecessary steps, no wasted time, and everything is well-organized. This continuance is a money saving bonus for businesses and useful for newly hired employees too since the orientation process ends sooner.

These disciplines are independent, but connected to each other. They articulate principles that recognize that, while the hiring and orientation process is a complex procedure, it works effectively and efficiently when well organized. Although these specific disciplines have been extracted from American business practice they can be adapted to other countries as well.

## Acknowledgements

The goal of this study was to present how the selection and orientation processes are regulated and practiced at an American business. This essay also examined the various components or aspects of selection and workplace orientation from the perspective of both individual and organizational needs. Finally, the author's views and analysis of these processes are defined as well.

In order to undertake this analysis, the author used a case study, a half-structured interview and a questionnaire as research methods. With the tool of case study the author had an opportunity to make observations and use the company's own documents (especially the manager's and the employee's handbook) for analysis. The interview was made with the company's HR manager who was responsible for the selection and indirectly for the orientation process. Questionnaires were distributed to 80 employees of a distribution company in the United States of America. With the tool of questionnaire the author discover the employees needs and experiences through the hiring and orientation process. The results showed that the following disciplines should be maintained through these HR processes: equal opportunity, importance of professional, documentary, checking, support and continuance. These disciplines are deduced from the American practice but can be adapted to other countries as well.

Both of hypotheses are verified:

Answer 1: The steps of selection and orientation process are clear and well-organized, also legal requirement (like equal opportunity and avoiding discrimination) play an important role in the processes at the company.

Answer 2: General factors are important as much as professional/organizational factors in the process of workplace orientation.

Empirical analysis used for the research is a part of a future PhD dissertation which aimed to find out the similarities and differences in orientation process between American and Hungarian companies.

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