

Induction Practices and Procedures of New Employees in the Department of Educational Foundations at Great Zimbabwe University: Any Missing Links?

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Abstract— This qualitative research examined induction practices and procedures of new employees in the department of Educational Foundations at Great Zimbabwe University to see if there are any missing links. The research obtained information through participant observation of practices and procedures being employed. The findings were that the university employs appropriate level of induction and uses the induction to ensure attendance. The department provides clear expectations of performance, is a reputable source of information and advice and adds local relevant items to the induction. The department ensures quick settling and addresses basics despite the absence of a checklist. In this department, one size does not fit all since practices are tailor made to the situation obtaining. The research concluded the new entrants to the Department of Educational Foundations of Great Zimbabwe University receive appropriate, structured and supportive induction commensurate with their roles and responsibilities though induction checklist is not being used. The research recommends that such good practices be documented so that other departments can benefit from these good practices.

Index Terms— Practices, procedures, checklist, induction and new employees

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In one way or another, there is a time an employee has to start a new job. This can be one's very first job or simply a change from one employment environment to another. This process of commencing a new job can be a daunting process since this involves meeting new people, new place, new environment and new organisational culture. Shetland (2013) argues that starting a new job is a demanding and stressful experience for many who have done this. This is because, apart from the obvious challenge of tackling new tasks, there is the need to become accustomed to a new organisation, a new working environment, new colleagues and possibly a new living area (Australian National University (ANU), 2015). Over and above the new people, new organisation and new practices, one also has the new systems and culture to understand and obviously a new job to perform (ANU, 2015). ANU (2015) goes further and argues that the transition to a new workplace is made easier and more effective for both the individual and the institution being served if there is a

comprehensive induction process in place, which systematically introduces and welcomes the new staff member

Manuscript received February 03, 2015.

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to the new workplace environment.

Universities are large and complex organisation such that they need to have in place a reputable system that they employ to induct new members. According to ANU (2015), even if a new staff member has come from another university, all workplaces are different, and roles across universities differ greatly. This on its own means that all new staff members need and rightly deserve to be introduced to their new job, their workplace and the University, in a structured and supportive manner. RAN.ONE (2015) rightly point out that an induction process is absolutely vital for new hires. This is because they see good induction training ensuring new hires are settled in quickly and happily to a productive role.

Why induction?

Shetland (2015) argues for the holding of induction in the work place, by emphasising the fact that induction has benefits for all involved in the process. Some of the more immediate ones are that employees who settle quickly into their new job will become productive and efficient at an early stage. Induction is also beneficial as the inducted individual in turn experiences feelings of worth and satisfaction. According to ANU (2015), good induction processes contribute to: staff retention, reduced costs associated with staff turnover, job satisfaction and productivity. University of West London (2015) is also of the opinion that designing a successful induction programme can be demanding. This demanding task is ultimately rewarding. Induction provides most of the information that the new employee needs, without being overpowering. It can make the difference between an effective and engaged employee and a disenchanted and potential leaver (University of West London, 2015). These same views are echoed by Shetland, (2013) who point out that the implementation of good induction practice by managers will among other things:

- Enable new employees to settle into their new position quickly
- Enable new employees to become productive and efficient members of staff within a short period of time;
- Provide an overview of the organisation and enable the new employee to see where they fit in to the big picture;
- Ensure that new entrants are highly motivated and that this motivation is reinforced;
- Assist in reducing staff turnover, lateness,

- absenteeism and poor performance generally;
- Assist in developing a management style where the emphasis is on leadership, openness and honesty;
- Ensure that new employees operate in a safe working environment;
- Reduce costs associated with repeated recruitment, training and staff turnover;
- Enable new employees to understand the corporate culture and the overall framework in which services are delivered and that an environment exists where staff feel able to contribute their opinions (Shetland, 2013, p. 3).

The importance of induction was further emphasised by the University of West London (2015). This University observed that a good induction programme:

- Helps the individual understand their role, the department they work in and the university as a whole
- Familiarises them with the physical environment, the culture and the university's procedures and policies
- Makes sure new entrants understand their legal responsibilities (University of West London, 2015, p. 2).

All these are benefits that accrue to organisations and individuals that participate in induction exercises. Induction creates a cordial working environment, promotes honesty, reduces poor performance of tasks assigned and instils corporate culture in employees. The spirit of worthiness is also enhanced. Against this background, this research then went on to find out the induction practices and procedures for new employees in the Department of Educational Foundations of Great Zimbabwe Open University.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

Are there any missing links in induction practices and procedures for new employees in the Department of Educational Foundations of Great Zimbabwe Open University?

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study was to examine induction practices and procedures for new employees in the Department of Educational Foundations of Great Zimbabwe Open University.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research was situated in the qualitative research paradigm. Data was collected through participant observation method. The aim was to gain a close and intimate familiarity

with the line managers, chairpersons of departments and other designated officers in order to gain an insight into induction practices and procedures being used through an intensive involvement. Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p.79). Observations enable the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing a "written photograph" of the situation under study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). According to Kawulich (2005) participant observation is the process enabling a researcher to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities. Benard (1994) adds to this debate by indicating that participant observation requires a certain amount of deception and impression management as was the case in this study. Kawulich (2005) then went on to say participant observation, for many years, has been a hallmark of both anthropological and sociological studies. It is only in recent years that the field of education has seen an increase in the number of qualitative studies. This increase has seen the inclusion of participant observation as a way to collect information as was the case in this study.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Appropriate level of induction

The university under study has policies in place that ensures that new employees receive the appropriate level of induction that their posts require. This is done by the line manager. Since this research was in the academic realm, this was done by the departmental chair. What may appear missing is the use of a physical checklist that all managers use as part of the university policy. In this regard, managers will ensure that they have addressed critical areas of the induction. They will also in one way or another have time to evaluate if the new employee is receptive to suggestions for improvement and implements the suggested areas.

Ensuring attendance

The University under study ensures that new employees attend on the day when they are expected since they have in place a person for this purpose. In another way, induction is used to ensure attendance on a corporate induction day.

Providing clear expectations of performance

One thing of note in the programme under study is providing clear expectations of performance for the employee under induction. The line manager was clear on what his expectations are and was also able to articulate the same to the employee under induction. According to the University of West London (2015), particular attention should be given during induction to clearly lay out what expectations of performance you have for the new employee from day one.

They support their argument by pointing out that many organisations like universities neglect clear expectations for performance at the start of an individual's employment. This is against what is obtaining in the corporate world where there is compelling evidence that people who work with clear expectations, perform better and are much more fulfilled in their work (University of West London (2015).

Source of information and advice

The line manager responsible for induction is also one who provides information and advice for the new employee. He/She is a source of information and advice on matters of ethics, institutional practices and procedures. This is good for the university considering that all employees require induction. This was confirmed by the University of West London (2015) who pointed out that the character of the induction will vary, but all staff need some form of programme, whether they are in academic, technical, professional or support roles, senior or junior appointments, full or part-time, permanent or on a short-term contract, new to the organisation or an internal appointment.

Adding local relevant items

The officer responsible for induction at the University under study added value to the process of induction through ensuring local relevant items were tackled during induction. The University of West London (2015) gives useful hints on this process by arguing that the most effective induction is the induction carried out locally with managers and colleagues. Local induction is a key factor in helping staff fit into the University and to perform to their best. According to the University of West London (2015), a well-planned and executed induction should:

- make new members of staff feel welcome
- provide an introduction to the University
- give an insight into other people's jobs
- provide essential background information to assist new members of staff with their own work
- clarify job expectations and initial objectives (University of West London, 2015, p. 5).

This programme under study that had some local flavour clarifies job expectations, provided essential background information and made the new member of staff feel welcome.

Ensuring quick settling

The induction under study had all the ingredients of ensuring that inducted member of staff quickly settles in his role. This practice of ensuring quick settling was seen by other researchers as useful in organisations. For instance, University of West London (2015) observed that an induction period is meant to ensure that new members of staff settle into their roles as quickly and effectively as possible. Gurmit (2010) in a study of induction practices in an online programme, found out that online mentoring increased the

motivation and acceptance rate of early career and less experienced researchers, especially from low- and middle-income countries. This brings the mentoring dimension to induction. The two worked synergistically together in the programme under study.

The issue of quick settling appears to be important for new employees. This idea is supported by Shetland (2013) who posits that it is important to introduce the new employee to their new workplace and colleagues at the earliest opportunity available. In this regard, an introductory talk will be appropriate at this time. Such introductory talk should be combined with general information. There must also be exchange of necessary documentation that both the line manager and new employ consider relevant to the induction process. This talk should be brief. This is because the employee is unlikely to be receptive to detailed information at this time. It therefore follows that time must be set aside for this process.

Absence of a checklist

In the induction programme under study, there appeared to be absence of checklist. Absence of a checklist might lead to the new employee being overwhelmed by information that is provided. University of London (2015) bemoans such practices and point out that one of the difficulties many new starters face is that they quickly become overwhelmed with information. They supported this stance by adding that there is so much they need to learn. In such a situation, it can be difficult to decide where to start. What is needed under such circumstances is that when the new starter joins an organisation like a university, there is need to use a checklist to help the line manager responsible for induction design a local induction programme that does not overwhelm the employee with information. The line manager can also work to ensure that a copy of the completed checklist is sent to Staff Development Section for recording and inclusion in the employee's personal file. Shetland (2013:5) also had this to say about checklists:

The induction checklist is a way of ensuring that information is imparted to new employees when they are likely to be most receptive. It avoids overloading employees with information during the first weeks while ensuring that all areas are covered (Shetland, 2013:5).

Of course it has to be seen that this was not an induction training programme under study. If it was an induction programme then the expectations are that an induction training programme needs to cover three areas:

- General training relating to the company, including values as well as vision, structure and history, etc.
- Mandatory training relating to health and safety and other essential or legally required areas.
- Job training relating to the role that the new hire will be performing (RAN.ONE, 2015, p. 3).

In such a situation, one checklist will not suffice since presenters on company history, company values, safety and

health procedures, communication procedures and legal requirements are from different departments and from different expertise.

One size does not fit all principle

The University department under study appears to be using the one size *does not* fit all principle. What was observed in the case of the induction programme under study is that, a tailored programme was put in place. This appears to be a noble idea since a tailor-made programme is more likely to succeed. According to the University of West London (2015), although a centralised induction event has its place, the main focus of the induction should be local, and it should be custom-made for the individual. This assertion appears to support the one size does not fit all principle that was employed in the induction programme under study since it was tailor-made for the individual who participated. On tailor-making programmes to the requirements of individual employees, Shetland (2013) points out that induction programmes must be tailored to the individual's needs. It is necessary to plan carefully and prepare induction programmes with consideration to specific areas appropriate to the individual who is being inducted.

Addressing basics

The induction programme under study appeared to address some basics that many of the seasons employees just take for granted. Issues of the protocol order of the university, the reporting structure, the health facilities, the canteen, the library, the internet connections, the office space and other basics were addressed by this programme under study.

VI. CONCLUSIONS REACHED

This research concluded that Great Zimbabwe University's Department of Educational Foundations values induction of employees and employs competent people to undertake this task. The university employs appropriate level of induction and uses the induction to ensure attendance. The department provides clear expectations of performance and is a reputable source of information and advice as it adds local relevant items to the induction. The department ensures that new staff settles quickly and addresses basics despite the absence of a checklist. In this department, one size does not fit all since practices are tailor made to the situation obtaining and are meant to suit the needs of the new employ.

This study on induction practices and procedures for new employees in the Department of Educational Foundations of Great Zimbabwe Open University has confirmed what other researches uncovered before. RAN.ONE (2015) points out that research has shown that an effective induction is critical to both early productivity and long term employee retention. Thus, the new member of staff in this study who had been longing to get to know his colleagues quickly and become part

of the team was able to be productive thereby attaining this mission since time was provided for this process.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study offers the following recommendations

- Chairpersons of departments and other designated officers should take a leaf from the induction programme in this study
- Funds allowing, more line managers can receive relevant formal training necessary to assist in the induction process.
- A checklist should be issued by the Staff Development Department for use by all the immediate designated officers or line managers for each new employee
- Chairpersons of departments and other designated officers must ensure effective monitoring of the induction process to ensure that the inducted issues are put into practice.
- Should there be any challenges encountered by new employees during and after the induction process, such issues must be addressed promptly as was the case in this study.

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