



## Welcome!

We are happy to share this chapter excerpt from our book, “The Employee Onboarding Playbook” written by Talya Bauer, Ph.D and Amin Fard, CEO of Preppio.



This chapter titled, “The Science of Onboarding” is all about the research behind Talya Bauer’s research behind the development of the 6 C’s onboarding framework that Preppio uses.

We decided to write this book, having witnessed first-hand the challenges and frustrations of clients who want to make a positive difference in their workplaces.



## What’s in the book?

Each chapter is a step in the process of developing a best-in-class onboarding system. At the end of each chapter, a section titled “Put in in Practice” provides links to hands-on tasks, checklists, questions, and templates. These will help you to build your organization’s new onboarding process step-by-step.

*Get our monthly newsletter to receive tips, best practices, templates, and more from our experts. Best of all, get notified when The Employee Onboarding Playbook is available.*

[Sign me up](#)

## CHAPTER 4: THE SCIENCE OF ONBOARDING

*The backbone of an effective onboarding strategy.*

**In this chapter:**

- **The 6 C's of onboarding**
- **Onboarding maturity**
- **Onboarding and engagement**

*The purpose of this chapter is to give you an understanding of a powerful science-based onboarding framework created by Talya Bauer (Ph.D.), Chief Scientific Officer at Preppio. This framework will help you identify onboarding pain points and determine what you can, and should, do better. Understanding what it takes will enable you to create an onboarding process that maximizes the new employee experience to drive their success. In this chapter, Talya will share her experience that led to the creation of the 6 C's and the role of employee engagement and business maturity.*



During the 25 years that I have studied the onboarding process, I have witnessed the power and direct impact it has on the success of organizations. As part of my Ph.D. dissertation at Purdue University, I performed a study in which I surveyed college students before and after graduation, including several times after they started their post-graduate positions.

My work formed a set of predictions specific to different situations and behaviors and their relationship to important outcomes such as new employee performance, job satisfaction, and retention. This included what happened during the recruitment process, what the manager did while the new employee was onboarded, and what the new employee did during this time. After spending 12 months following new hires and studying their onboarding successes and failures, many of my predictions turned out to be true.

When onboarding goes well, individuals and organizations thrive. When it goes poorly, the adverse outcomes can be equally influential with high levels of dissatisfaction, low engagement, poor performance, and high turnover. The statistics are sobering, with half of all hourly workers leaving their new jobs within the first 120 days and half of all senior external hires failing within 18 months in a new position.

It takes to understand which tools or levers are available to the organization to help new employees thrive. As I conducted research into what worked and what did not work, I realized that the key levers could be identified and broken down into core components.

I wrote a professional practices white paper for the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM). I laid out a number of onboarding levers based on years of research, consulting, and observation of onboarding.<sup>1</sup>

In this e-book, we will work through the evolution of the 4 C's to the 5 C's and discuss the 6th C that is helping organizations to deliver world-class onboarding consistently. My goal is to put forward the scientific theory and make a practical framework to make it easier for HR professionals to implement it within their organization.

Over the last three decades that I have studied onboarding, a lot has changed. Onboarding began as orientation programs to complete paperwork and to orient new employees in their jobs. These orientations were rarely considered a source of competitive advantage. That changed as onboarding became the increasingly hot talent management topic that it is today.

My research, and that of many other scholars, has consistently shown that effective onboarding leads to faster adjustment, better job attitudes, more customer referrals, better performance, and stronger retention. But that's only the case if it is done right. As more and more organizations focused on onboarding and began considering the need to rethink their onboarding process, best practices began to be discovered and shared. That's excellent news for those interested in helping employees and organizations to create vibrant and effective workplaces together.

### Relationships matter

Relationships matter primarily because they connect us as human beings. Few would actively disagree with such a statement. However, successful relationships require intention and effort. Interestingly, many organizations assume that a new employee's need to belong and connect with colleagues will simply "work itself out" with time when it comes to onboarding. It might – but



then again, it might not. Therefore, I help organizations develop proactive and strategic onboarding approaches that cultivate a sense of connection and belonging for new employees.

The manager holds a unique key to the connection process. In research I conducted with a colleague, we found that being unable to establish meaningful connections with co-workers led new engineers to seek less information.<sup>2</sup> However, if the new engineer and their manager were able to connect, the newcomer could overcome this hurdle even in the face of conflict with co-workers. In other words, the relationship the new employee has with their manager was crucial to establishing a

<sup>1</sup> Talya Bauer, "Onboarding new employees: Maximizing success." SHRM's Effective Practice Guidelines Series.

<sup>2</sup> Sushil Nifadkar & Talya Bauer, 2016. "Breach of belongingness during socialization: Newcomer relationship conflict, information, and task-related outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Volume 101, pages 1-13.

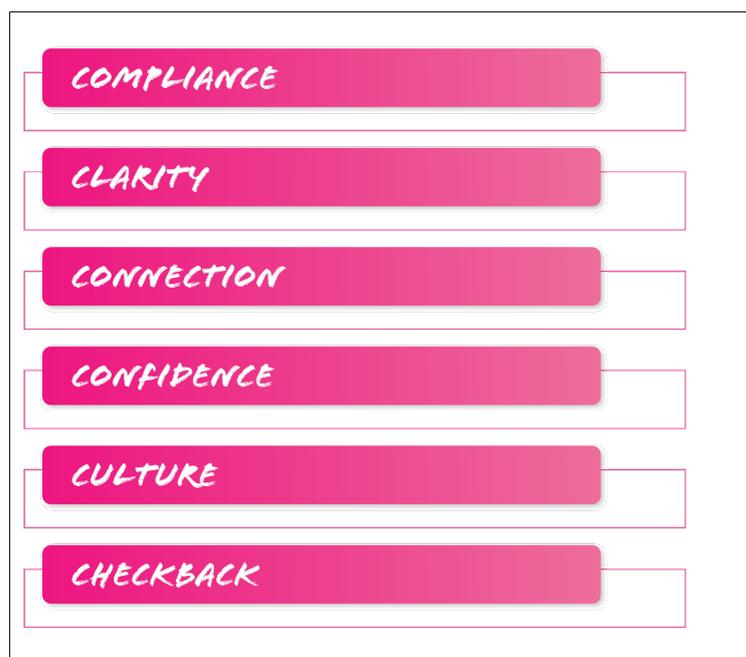
sense of belongingness in the organization, and this relationship enabled them to seek information from the supervisor freely. Hence, these employees were positioned to succeed in the organization.

It's a risky strategy to rely on new employees to "sink or swim" when it comes to connecting with their co-workers and managers. Organizations can help new employees maximize success by engaging in onboarding best practices, which I have developed and presented in this publication. These are based on research, consulting, and observations regarding new employee success that consistently show that when you invest in new employees, they invest back into their co-workers, customers, and the organization.

### The 6 C's of onboarding

I first developed the 4 C's of onboarding a decade ago based on the academic research that had been done on effective onboarding and published by the SHRM Foundation (Society for Human Resource Management). The 4 C's have since evolved into the 5 C's of Onboarding: Compliance, Clarity, Confidence, Connection, and Culture. Further to this, and to add a layer of practicality, I added a 6th C, called Checkback.

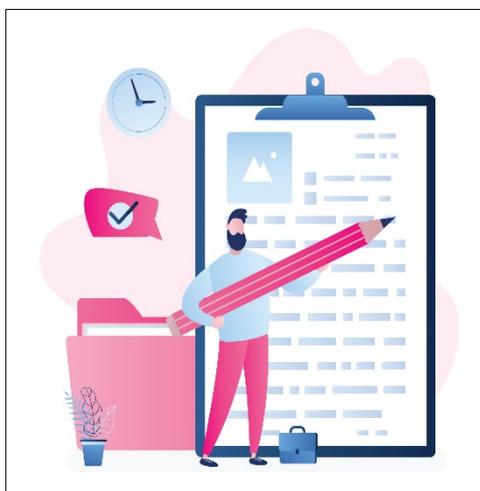
Each of the 6 C's is an essential component of onboarding that indicates an increasing level of effectiveness the higher an organization's onboarding process progresses on the scale from Compliance to Checkback.



Organizations that focus on the 6 C's demonstrate more successful onboarding and business outcomes than those that do not.



### COMPLIANCE - first the housekeeping



*Compliance* refers to the mandatory actions needed for all new employees. This includes steps such as completing paperwork, the badging process, and provisioning tasks like equipping new employees with computers and phones as well as a workspace.

Organizations, even those that claim they do not have a formal onboarding program, must be compliant at this basic level to stay in business. Due to this, many employees spend their first day on the job filling out forms. This is a missed opportunity.

Organizations spend millions of hours and billions of dollars working through the recruitment funnel to attract candidates, identify qualified candidates, assess candidates, and then finally hire them with the hope that they join the organization.

The irony is that they spend much less time thinking about ways to improve the employee experience.

### **CLARIFICATION of employee roles and expectations**

*Clarification* refers to how well new employees understand their roles and performance expectations. Of course, organizations hire new employees to do specific jobs, so clarifying what they need to be doing, how to do it, and how the organization functions in terms of rules and policies are important.



We also know that structure and clarity are essential for individual and team success, but spending time learning these basics is not the most exciting way to spend your time when you're new. It's essential to build in ways to help new employees understand what is expected of them and to make them feel equipped and supported in their decision to join your organization, and to give them confidence in their ability to do a good job. This feeds into the next C.

### **Building new employee CONFIDENCE**



*Confidence* refers to employees' feelings about doing the job well and their competence to tackle new challenges. It is a state of mind. While an organization cannot directly help new employees feel better about themselves, they can design onboarding experiences that help build up employees rather than tearing them down.

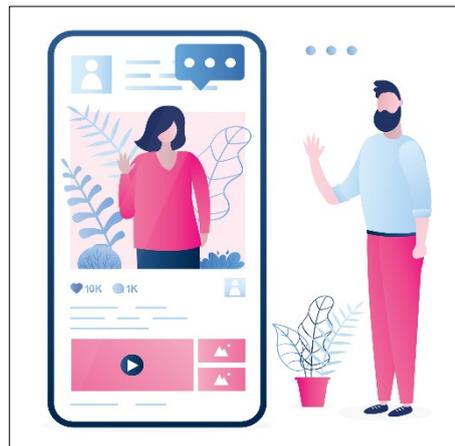
When employees feel more confident, they are more likely to feel good about those around them, as well as the choice to join your organization. Research conducted by Dan Cable<sup>3</sup> and his colleagues found that when onboarding focuses on the value of the new employee and encourages them to share themselves at work, it can immediately increase performance and retention.

<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2015/11/the-powerful-way-onboarding-can-encourage-authenticity>

## Helping employees build meaningful CONNECTIONS

*Connection* refers to how accepted and valued new employees feel. When new employees feel connected to their colleagues, they feel safe. Research has consistently shown that a sense of connection leads to various positive individual and organizational outcomes.

When new employees feel connected and secure, they ask questions and try new things. Additionally, they engage more fully with their co-workers, their role, and the organization with a greater sense of appreciation. It is a factor that helps new employees feel that they made the right decision to join the organization.



Gallup has consistently found that having a close friend at work is related to a 50% boost in job satisfaction and that those employees with a best friend at work were seven times more likely to engage with their work fully.<sup>4</sup> This starts with onboarding. If new employees feel alone and isolated on their first day, it can be challenging to recover, as researchers found at Microsoft.

## Shared CULTURE is constantly evolving

*Culture* refers to how well new employees understand the norms, values, stories, and symbols of their new organization. Onboarding is one of the key ways through which organizational culture is formed, maintained, and changed.

When I was working at Google, we focused on onboarding as a KPI in People Operations because the number of new employees at Google was forecast to double within 18 months. That turned out to be true. It was imperative that we identified what the Google culture was and how this growth would impact it. One important consideration was acknowledging the stories about how the company was founded yet respecting that its norms, missions, and goals were constantly evolving.



Onboarding is a great way to teach your people about what matters within your organization. It is also a great way to learn about how your organization can evolve for the better and learn about the contributions of new employees to the organization's future.

<sup>4</sup> <https://hbr.org/2013/07/we-all-need-friends-at-work>

## Onboarding CHECKBACKS are critical for long-term success

Checkback refers to onboarding feedback. The data you receive about the employee experience will be invaluable. As you can see throughout this book, there are considerable benefits to executing onboarding in a purposeful and playful manner. Yet, even the best onboarding plans sometimes don't turn out the way we hope. This is one reason why it is so



vital for all onboarding programs to include the sixth C of Checkback. The only way to know if your onboarding programs are working is to ask new employees.

Before the new employee begins, plan when you'll check back with them and what you'll be wanting to know from them. You should also survey managers and other stakeholders to assess what is working well, what should be repeated for future newcomers, and what needs to be adjusted to ensure a world-class onboarding experience.

The Checkback insights will help you benchmark results and find problem areas. These will support your business case to drive change in the organization and iterate and improve areas that need attention.

### Onboarding maturity and the 6 C's

There is a strong correlation between the onboarding approach a company adopts and the results achieved by employees and businesses. The more maturity a company has around onboarding, the greater chance it will invest in sound strategic onboarding practices. Onboarding maturity is a combination of the content, delivery, governance, breadth, and length of the onboarding program. The table below shows the relationship of the 6 C's to the level of company maturity.

According to an industry study by Brandon Hall in 2017,<sup>5</sup> companies with a high onboarding maturity level, which includes engaging in the 6 C's of onboarding, experienced 38% employee engagement. Compare this with companies characterized by lower maturity levels, as indicated by engaging in the 6 C's inconsistently or not at all, which experienced 50% engagement.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.brandonhall.com/blogs/new-research-reveals-impact-strategic-onboarding/>

**Employee Onboarding Strategy Level  
Incorporation of the 6 C's**



Strategy Level	Compliance	Clarification	Confidence	Connection	Culture	Checkback
<b>3. Proactive</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>2. High Potential</b>	Yes	Yes	Some	Some	Some	Some
<b>1. Passive</b>	Yes	Some	None	None	None	None

*Source: Preppio*

Source: Preppio

The Aberdeen Group found that 30% of companies were passive in their onboarding, 50% were high potential, and 20% were proactive.<sup>6</sup> Proactive organizations reported much better outcomes than passive onboarding organizations.

Definition of Maturity Class	Mean Class Performance		
	first-year employees who were retained	employees hired in the last 12 months who met first performance milestones on time	year-over-year improvement in hiring manager satisfaction
<b>Best-in-Class:</b> Top 20% of aggregate performance scores	<b>91%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Industry Average:</b> Middle 50% of aggregate performance scores	<b>70%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Laggard:</b> Bottom 30% of aggregate performance scores	<b>30%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Source: Aberdeen Group, March 2013

For example, organizations with proactive onboarding strategies retained 91% of their new employees for one year, while organizations with passive onboarding strategies only retained 30% of their new employees that long.

<sup>6</sup> Madeline Laurano, 2013. *Onboarding: A New Look at New Hires*. Aberdeen Group.

They also reported that 62% of new employees met their performance milestones, while only 17% of new employees hired by organizations with passive onboarding strategies achieved this same result. Hiring manager satisfaction was 30% higher in terms of year-over-year improvement as well.

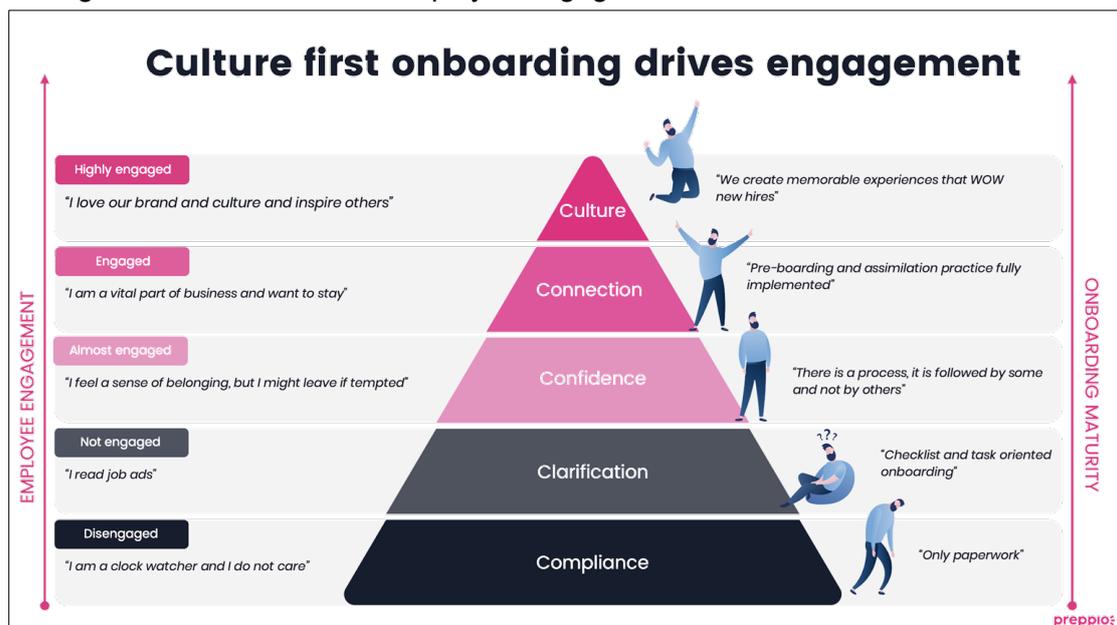
**Where does your company stand on the onboarding maturity scale? Book a no-commitment chat with our onboarding experts to find out! We'll answer all your onboarding questions.**

**Book a time**

### Engagement and the 6 C's

Acknowledging the role that 'engagement' plays in driving business results is a crucial stepping-stone to understanding the importance of onboarding. Engagement is a popular buzzword and a fixture in the world of brand marketing, as well as a common benchmark to gauge our relationship with the world around us. Its significance should not be underestimated in the context of the workplace.

As the below diagram shows - culture, connection, clarification, and the WOW factor are significant contributors to employee engagement levels.



As shown in the illustration, the 6 C's correspond to increasing levels of onboarding maturity and employee engagement with 'culture' at the pinnacle of both.

**We hope you enjoyed this chapter from "The Employee Onboarding Playbook!"**

[Click here](#) to sign up for monthly tips, resources, and templates from our onboarding experts. And we'll let you know when The Employee Onboarding Playbook launches!