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Can You All See My Screen?

An analysis of virtual onboarding due to the COVID-19 pandemic on Summer Interns and Recently Graduated New Hires

by

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Abstract

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This research was conducted to examine the relationship between Generation Z Recently Graduated New Hires (RGNHs), Summer Interns (SIs) and their onboarding in order to determine organizational connectedness during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research examined a sample population of RGNHs and SIs to determine if they could be attached to an organization's mission and vision through a virtual onboarding scenario. Attachment to mission and vision in the literature review was determined to be the main factor connecting new hires to an organization, leading to a lower attrition rate and increased productivity. However, the research examined in the literature review was not specifically conducted on the Generation Z workforce, nor were these studies concerning virtual onboarding. They also did not take the COVID-19 pandemic into consideration. After determining whether new hires within this sample population were connected to company mission and vision, the research ascertained how this sense of connectedness was created. Finally, the research examined whether connection to mission and vision would lead to a feeling of willingness to return for Generation Z new hires. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis methodology, prominent themes from the literature review such as mentorship, autonomy, sufficient meeting time with managers/direct supervisors and with the new hire cohort, were analyzed to determine what new hires within this sample population need in order to feel connected to an organization at large. This research attempted to take into consideration the differences between industries, divisions and functions in determining what is necessary for the specific nuances in onboarding scenarios. Due to limited literature review on industry specific onboarding scenarios, these specific nuances were only found for Engineering and Academia. The research found that that connectedness to mission and vision has a moderate correlation with willingness to return for RGNHs and SIs. Connectedness to mission and vision is made up of connectedness to teams and others within the cohort. Mentorship and increased understanding also lead to connectedness to the organization and willingness to return for the Generation Z new hire. This research constructed that there is an urgent need for future research on virtual onboarding for various populations of new hires to improve organizational connectedness and willingness to return.

Key words: Onboarding, Pandemic Onboarding, Virtual Onboarding, Organizational Connectedness, Generation Z, Willingness to Return, Teams, New Hires, Mentorship, Mission and Vision, Employee Orientation

Contents

Introduction

The research in this thesis was conducted in order to accomplish two things: first to examine if connectedness has a correlation with willingness to return for Generation Z Recently Graduated New Hires (RGNHs) and Summer Interns (SIs), and second to see what drives organizational connectedness for this new hire population. In this thesis I will share the findings of both a qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis of Generation Z RGNHs and SIs. The qualitative analysis was done through informational interviews with the sample population, followed by coding the transcripts from the interviews with a qualitative analysis software to find prominent and overlapping themes. The quantitative analysis took the prominent themes from the informational interviews as well as from the literature review and expanded them to a larger sample population via survey. These results were then extrapolated into key findings with a correlation analysis. The methodology of this research was informed by the literature review on organizational socialization theory and utilized qualitative theory building concepts to create a process of gathering information from participants. This research was conducted at the University of Michigan, Stephen M. Ross School of Business as part of the undergraduate honors thesis capstone requirement.

Why This Research Was Conducted

This research was conducted in order to determine what companies should include in their virtual onboarding processes in order to create a face-to-face level of engagement. Onboarding is a new hire's first introduction to an organization and companies should make sure that the new hire is well-acclimated in order to boost morale, encourage increased levels of productivity, and to reduce the learning curve (Armstrong, 2020). Onboarding can help to foster

an environment of teamwork and collaboration. For new hires, especially those who do not have work experience, onboarding is important because it teaches them how to navigate within a certain company culture. With the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual onboarding practices have been implemented but not studied to determine what is effective and what is not. Generation Z is an upcoming generation in the current workforce but research on this demographic has not been conducted either. Therefore, this research was conducted in order to highlight areas of future research for this group.

Justification of Research

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in the United States in February 2020, many companies have shifted to a work from home (WFH) business model to keep employees safe. "Before the pandemic, top programs typically required substantial face-to-face interactions, providing those new to work with opportunities to shadow senior employees, build confidence to advance into management roles and learn the ropes. In this context, learning the ropes refers to "understanding the organization's structure and one's ability to navigate through it, work with others, and execute assigned work" (Alexander, Management and Operations). Since the introduction of widespread remote work, this reliance on in-person interaction has severely limited growth opportunities for entry-level hires, leading to companies to halt more than half of their training opportunities and rescind 28% of job offers" (Laker, Matejko, Godley, Adewale, 2021). However, new hires are eager to begin to work full time and students would still like to have virtual work experience through internships. For companies who still recruited new hires and interns amidst this pandemic, they have had to shift their onboarding efforts to be accessible online. While certain pieces of the onboarding process were already virtual, prior to the

pandemic, such as training modules and payroll information, these virtual viewings still took place in the office. New hires are expected to be onboarded for their positions virtually from their own homes, blurring the lines between work and home.

Many new hires and interns who were onboarded virtually during the pandemic have never met their teams, supervisors or managers in person. A lack of in person experiences leads to a diminished understanding of unique group social codes, office culture, and a sense of workplace competency that those onboarded in person would have otherwise. As a result of this it is imperative that new hires onboarded virtually have a comprehensive experience that mimics the experiences of in-person onboarding, to mitigate some of the challenges that come from working in a team, in person or otherwise.

With the recent nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the quick turnaround of needing to move towards a virtual format, there is not much research on virtual onboarding. The best practices that have been adopted in person may not translate into a virtual format. Several top organizations have begun to determine best practices of what moving towards a smooth virtual onboarding process would look like, however there is limited research completed to determine whether these tactics are effective connecting the new hires to the organization and their work. There is also no research on best Generation Z onboarding tactics, which is the primary generation being onboarded into organizations for the first time, and what they require to feel connected and report back positive experiences in a digital environment.

Literature Review

Socialization Theory

      To be part of a group, cohort or organization, new members must be socialized to enter into the new organization. Socialization is the process where individuals implicitly learn what is accepted and what is not accepted within a society or in the case of this research, an organization. Socialization research was initially conducted on children in order to analyze their 'internalization of values, that is, their taking over of the standards and behaviors of society as a means of self-regulating or guiding their own actions" (Grusec & Maayan Davidov, 2010). Examining self-regulating behaviors in group dynamics among children grounded the research in organizational socialization theories concerning adults. The most popular theory of organizational socialization that applies to management is Van Maanen and Schein's 1979 socialization tactics. This research created an organization model designed to best integrate newcomers, move individuals into other roles within the organization and to move individuals out of an organization. Van Maanen and Schein's organizational model is broken down into three dimensions: first is functional which refers to the tasks performed by members of the organization which are broken down into departmental functions (marketing, finance, etc.), second is hierarchical which is the distribution of responsibilities, and last is inclusion which refers to how close people are to central decision making (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The organizational model helped to shape the practices where newcomers are brought into organizations today, which is referred to as 'onboarding.'

What is Onboarding

Onboarding is the socialization process that initiates newcomers into the new workplace. "... The socialization of newcomers is crucial to institutional persistence, organizational solidarity and the reenactment of organizational values and culture" (Solinger, van Olffen, Roe, Hofmans, 2013). Onboarding is the first step in a new hire's journey to being integrated into an organization. In this process, new hires learn about the company, their role, their team and how to excel throughout the course of their employment. Through administrative work, meetings and social events, new hires connect with the existing organizational culture and are introduced to best practices in order to best complete their roles. "Considered the first step in cultivating employee retention, effective onboarding programs significantly affect employee engagement and employee branding, which is generally defined as how employees internalize the brand that the business showcases and align their behaviors and perspectives with it." (Davila & Ramirez-Pina, 2018) Through a successful onboarding process, newcomers should have an increased sense of clarity in work and business mission, and reduced amounts of early career stress due to ambiguity.

Employee Orientation v Employee Onboarding

Employee orientation and employee onboarding are not synonymous. Employee orientation is a singular event, usually encompassing HR policies, training videos and payroll related topics. Employee orientation is usually the first or second day of a robust onboarding program. Therefore, employee orientation is part of employee onboarding. These events are included in onboarding but should not be mistaken for being the entirety of the process. About 30% of the learning that new hires experience during the onboarding process comes from

Employee Orientation, while the remaining 70% comes from Role-Specific Onboarding (**F1**)[1] (Davila & Ramirez-Pina, 2018). During Role-Specific Onboarding, companies should employ a strategic learning and development plan which is a, "comprehensive framework for developing people through the creation of a learning culture, the encouragement of organizational learning and the formulation of organizational and learning strategies" (Armstrong, 2020). This framework will vary from organization to organization in order to best encapsulate work practices, the office culture and deliverable expectations. It is important to specifically define when onboarding takes place and the entirety of the process in order to benefit all involved stakeholders. These stakeholders are new employees, hiring managers, the overall business unit and future stakeholders who will work with the new employees (i.e., customers, other businesses, patients, clients, etc.) Onboarding does not have a set timeline or duration but can take upwards of one-year. When onboarding is extended between ninety days to one-year, there are potential gains to productivity for new hires that remain with the company post the one-year mark. "… New hires operating under a more efficient program would get a jump start on their jobs, reaching maximum productivity- what the organization would define as 100%- sometime between day ninety and the one-year mark, well before employees at the firm might currently reach maximum productivity" (Stein & Christiansen, 2010). The new hire can end the onboarding process fully integrated into the organization, doing satisfactory work, or be in a position to excel in their work depending on the length and comprehensiveness of their onboarding experience (**F2**)[2] (Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

Purpose of Onboarding for The Organization

Properly integrating newcomers into an organization has significant benefits for the employer and the organization as a whole. "Onboarding is a business driver that ensures your

company's new or new-to-role employees are the right fit" (Davila & Ramirez-Pina, 2018). When newcomers are properly onboarded, they are able to contribute to the organization faster, are more productive and have lower attrition rates. Therefore, 'it's in the employer's best interest to shorten the learning curve and swiftly boost the performance of new hires' (Rollag, et al., 2005). The purpose of shortening the learning curve is not so new hires get in and do inadequate work, but it is to compensate for younger generations (Millennials and Generation Z's) habits of changing roles or organizations quicker than past generations. "With a more transient workforce and individuals changing jobs more frequently, it is critical that new organizational members 'get up to speed' as quickly as possible so their contributions can be maximized before they leave and to help form the desired workplace commitments so that they do not leave earlier than expected" (Wanberg, 2012).

Onboarding Checklist

Effective onboarding normally follows a checklist in order to ensure that the new hire feels adequately supported during the introductory phase into the organization. Utilizing an 'inform, welcome and guide' three-part categorization system according to the *Oxford Handbook of Organizational Socialization,* organizations can integrate new hires. This checklist was created for an in-person onboarding scenario, but it can be adapted to be applicable in a virtual format.

Onboarding Checklist (Klein & Polin 2012):

Phase One: Inform

1. Inform Communication: planned effort to facilitate communication with newcomers, including provisions of one-way messages and opportunities for two-way dialogues

    a. General Q&A meeting

    b. One-on-one with senior leaders

    c. Sufficient meeting time with managers

    d. Meetings with HR representatives

2. Inform Resources: making materials or assistance available to new hires, giving the new hire the initiative to access the materials themselves

    a. Shown where things are located on the company website

    b. Given an initial development plan

    c. Given a glossary of acronyms or company buzzwords

    d. Shown where the new hire landing page is located

    e. Given names of important people within the organization or a hierarchy chart

    f. A workspace with all materials and equipment

3. Inform Training: planned efforts to facilitate the systematic acquisition of skills, behaviors and knowledge

    a. Shown a new employee video

    b. Encouraged to shadow others within the organization

    c. Given a tour of company facilities

    d. Ability to attend a company orientation program with other new hires

    e. Online orientation program

    f. Ability to attend sessions presented by fellow associates who were experts on certain tasks and procedures

Phase Two: Welcome

4. Welcome: activities that provide opportunities for new hires to meet and socialize with other organizational members and/or celebrate the arrival of the newcomer

    a. Received personalized welcomes from a senior leader within the organization

    b. Received personalized welcomes from manager/direct supervisor

    c. Received a personalized welcome kit

    d. Ability to participate in exercises to get to know fellow associates

    e. Gathering to get to know fellow associates

    f. New team member welcome celebration

    g. Invited to attend a social gathering outside of work

    h. Family was invited to attend a social event outside of work (if applicable)

    i. Joining the company was announced in an email, or on the company website or via company newsletter

    j. Recipient of gifts such as apparel with the company logo

Phase Three: Guide

5. Guide: Activities that provide a personal guide for each new hire

    a. Someone at a higher level was assigned to be a mentor for the new hire

    b. A single point of contact (often referred to as a welcome coordinator) to reach out to with specific questions

    c. A fellow associate was assigned as an 'buddy' to answer questions

Typical Onboarding Process for New Hires

The onboarding checklist can be a useful way to organize the activities that the new hire engages in, in order to be successfully integrated into an organization. Organizations can additionally employ the two-pronged Introductory Phase and Formal Introduction sectioning theory. Onboarding begins with the new hire's introduction to the company at large, which is "...the process of receiving and welcoming employees when they first join a company and giving them the basic information needed to settle down quickly and happily and start work" (Armstrong, 2020). This is also known as the 'Introductory Phase' (IP). The aim of the Introductory Phase is to reduce anxiety, accelerate the learning curve and to begin a smooth socialization process. Newcomer introduction takes place during the first week of the onboarding process. New hires need to be received by a manager or HR representative and walked through the basics of their role and organization (Armstrong, 2020). This introduction experience sets up the transition of altering preexisting attitudes and behaviors to fit the organization. The newcomer begins to understand what is organizationally appropriate through socialization tactics, which often looks like modeling the behavior of those who have already been integrated into the organization (Solinger, van Olffen, Roe, Hofmans, 2013). Following the IP, the new hires should engage in 'Formal Induction' (FI). "Formal Induction courses assemble new starters in groups so that members can be given consistent information at the same time, which might not be forthcoming if reliance is placed on the team leader (Armstrong, 2020)." Within the first week of new hires entering an organization, FI should take place. FI should consist of information

about the organization, performance management processes and information about future evaluations, policies on DEI or equal opportunity, and pension arrangements.

Onboarding Interns

Interns are not typical full-time hires; they are often with an organization for a time period between several weeks upwards to a full year. Internships are ways for individuals with little to no work experience, like undergraduate students, to gain real life work experience. Internships can be thought of as trial runs for both the intern and the organization, to see if the pairing is a good fit for all involved. While internships are not full-time working scenarios, interns still require onboarding practices in order to become quickly acclimated to the environment and to be able to contribute in a meaningful way through their work/projects.

Intern Onboarding Checklist (Pasternak, 2018)

1. Welcome

2. Formal introductions and office tour

3. An introduction to the organization history, including the mission/vision and company values

4. An introduction to organizational structure

5. How their position/work fits within the department

6. Company culture and how interns fit into the company culture

7. Expectations

8. Code of Conduct

9. Procedures

10. Overview of Position

11. Meeting with Supervisor (consistent meeting schedule and forms of communication)

12. System overview

13. Mentorship (assigned a mentor and a 'buddy')

Meetings with peers, manager/direct supervisors and a mentor/buddy are crucial for RGNH and SIs because, "based on social learning theory, research on onboarding and newcomer socialization suggests that behavior may be explained by peer modeling" (Liu & Bamberger, 2014). Interns more than any group of new hires, learn through watching behavior and work expectations modeled by their cohort and those that they respect such as managers and mentors. Providing a sense of autonomy towards the middle and end of the internship will allow for increased understanding of how to perform their work but allowing for full ownership of a project too soon can induce stress and detach individuals from others within their cohort or within their teams.

Onboarding for Various Divisions, Functions and Industries

General onboarding has the same components as described above. However, different divisions within an organization, different industries and professions all have altered onboarding processes due to the nuances and challenges of what each role and environment entails. The intent of this section is to examine and acknowledge the differences in different industries, functions and roles to properly connect new hires to an organization. The research defined in Sample and Procedure examines the differences between different professions and organizational functions.

Academia

The onboarding framework for academia is also rooted in organizational socialization tactics. Therefore, integrating newcomers into an organization has elements of formal introductory programs, mentor pairings and social events. Academia, in the context of this research, will apply to those working in the pursuit of education at all levels, research or working with students within institutions of higher learning. Onboarding for those in higher education falls under the domain of anticipatory socialization which is the tactic of retraining individuals in order to grant them access to enter into the group (Anticipatory, 2021). There is the stigma that higher education is more focused around completing research rather than teaching or integrating new colleagues. This can lead to the revolving door effect in which new colleagues exit the organization quickly because they feel unsupported (Trowler & Knight, 1999). New research due to the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizes the importance of mentorship in academia for new faculty members. "Programs should also consider formally assigning a mentor for each area (preboarding, orientation, and onboarding) to help better guide their new faculty during a time when forming new relationships to a new environment are compromised. Failure to explicitly identify these three mentors for new faculty can lead everyone to assume that someone else is doing it, which can result in a lack of intentional support and guidance for the new faculty member." (Bhakta & Medina, 2020). The individual in charge of creating new connections for the new hire is dependent upon the role within academia or education the newcomer falls into. New or Assistant Professors should look towards the Department Chair to make those connections and new educators should look to school principals and all other educational faculty members should look towards their direct manager/supervisor (Bhakta & Medina, 2020).

Intentional mentorship pairing can help to mimic some of the informal matching that can happen in, in-person onboarding scenarios.

Engineering

Engineering roles fall into various categories: industrial, biomedical, environmental, marine and more. This section will generalize the various categories of engineering roles into 'engineering' in order to be succinct. A popular tactic in engineering programs are rotational onboarding programs. Rotational onboarding programs in engineering are when "new engineering graduates spend time rotating through different departments within a company to gain knowledge of the departments and get acclimated to the company business" (Babajide, 2019). These programs are becoming more popular in the United States and this format can be applied to internships with shorter rotations or to full time roles. Rotational programs are learning based rather than project based in order for the new hire to find the best fit for themselves within the organization, especially if they have multiple interests. Engineering roles are based on passing scientific skill, knowledge or code from experienced engineers or experts to new engineers. Engineering onboarding, especially for Software Engineers, can be based in Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is the examination of, "information passed from expert to newcomer, the techniques used during onboarding sessions and the value of this information to the newcomer." (Yates, 2019)

Finance & Accounting

There is currently no research done on the specific nuances to finance and accounting onboarding practices. However, in the sample Recently Graduated New Hire (RGNH) and Summer Intern (SI) population that was examined in this study, this group often participates in

coursework and examination sessions during the onboarding practice. The onboarding process for this demographic of new hires works to integrate newcomers as well as teach newcomers about specific financial and accounting models as well. Future research needs to study the purpose and effect of course work and examinations in Finance and Accounting onboarding practices in determining if this methodology is beneficial as well as its impact on stress and anxiety for this target population.

Marketing & Public Relations

There is no current research on the specific nuances in onboarding for Marketing and Public Relations RGNH and SIs. Marketing and Public Relations each have separate subfunctions (Social Media Marketing, Sports Management, etc.) but both industries have been condensed into Marketing and Public Relations in order to be succinct in this study. Future research needs to examine what Marketing and Public Relations RGNHs and SIs need in onboarding to have increased understanding in their work and feel more connected that is specific to their function.

Consulting

There is no current research on the specific nuances in onboarding for Consulting RGNHs and SIs. Consulting has separate subfunctions (Healthcare, Technology, etc.) however all sub-functions have been condensed into Consulting in order to be succinct in this study. Future research needs to examine what Consulting RGNHs and SIs need in onboarding to have increased understanding in their work and feel more connected that is specific to their subfunction.

General Human Resources

There is no current research on the specific nuances in onboarding for Human Resources RGNHs and SIs. Human Resource Management does vary dependent upon which industry or function the individual is supporting. Future research needs to examine what Human Resources RGNHs and SIs need in onboarding to have increased understanding in their work and feel more connected that is specific to their function.

Onboarding for Generation Z New Hires

The group of participants examined in this study were part of Generation Z. Generation Z is the demographic cohort that comes after the Millennials. There is not consensus among researchers on the exact starting and ending date of this generation, but they are thought to be more comfortable with the internet as they grew up with access to the web browsing and social media (Strauss & Howe, 1991). There is an inter-organizational disconnect within organizations as many newcomers are Generation Z and those already integrated into the organization are Generation X. Current research on generational differences exists for academia but can be applied in the context of onboarding as onboarding is a learning process, which "has a great impact on the teaching-learning environment within current university structures as the students (the new Generation Z learners) are more equipped to with technology, than typical Generation X (lecturers), which increase complexity of education processes involving instruction, guidance, and supervision." (Cilliers, 2017). According to the limited research surrounding Generation Z's onboarding expectations, this generation requires parts of the onboarding process to be digital, to onboard simultaneously as they work and to have an understanding of how their work aligns with their personal values (Chillakuri, 2020).

Mentoring

Mentorship is an integral part of a face-to-face onboarding process. Often Mentors and Coaches are conflated within organizations, however "mentors help employees navigate the organization, whereas coaches help with specific functional training" (Alexander, Management and Operations). Mentorship is a relationship in which one individual passes down lessons learned, best practices and advice to someone else. Within a mentoring relationship in an organization, there is often a ranking difference between the mentor and the mentee. There are two main types of mentoring that appear within organizations, 'technical mentoring' which could look like managerial efficiency or hierarchical authority relations/structures and 'alternative mentoring' which could look like critical democratic orientation (Mullen, 2004). Technical mentoring can create unequal and biased power dynamics that belittle the mentee. Therefore, mentors should strive for alternative mentoring where the mentor and mentee learn from each other which is a relationship based on collaboration. Organizational mentorship pairings can also look like a formally assigned mentor, a 'buddy' that is a year above the position of the new hire.

Virtual Onboarding

Virtual onboarding is the practice of integrating new team members into organizations or into teams virtually through videoconferencing technology. Elements of onboarding, such as filling out legal documents have been virtual prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the entirety of the onboarding process has been transitioned into a virtual format. Parts of the onboarding experience is connecting newcomers to their team and forming relationships. There are difficulties in onboarding through a virtual format with connecting the newcomer to other individuals already integrated into the organization such as their team members, managers and

other new hires. "In spite of this new reality, collocated teams experience difficulties in adapting their established processes and practices for a newly virtual working environment, greatly impeding their performance, productivity and morale" (Hemphill, 2011). Therefore, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on creating and maintaining relationships, such as "virtual networking activities to meet new hires" and "keeping cameras on is also part of virtually integrating new hires into the culture" or "instant messaging channels such as slack in order to create an open flow of communication." (Judd, 2021).

Creating relationships virtually creates the need for an increased number of online interactions, resulting in increased time spent on digital communication platforms. The increased usage of digital communication platforms can cause a phenomenon known as 'zoom fatigue.' Zoom is a popular video conferencing and meeting platform that became highly popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an easy platform to host small meetings, large team meetings or mass presentations. Other digital platforms such as WebEx and Microsoft Teams function in the same way as Zoom. 'Zoom fatigue' or 'virtual fatigue' is the "tiredness, anxiety, or worry resulting from overusing virtual video conferencing platforms" that occurs because "technology can disrupt our normal intricate human communication methods that have been finely tuned over centuries to help humans survive" (Wiederhold, 2020). Many users of virtual video conferencing technologies may adopt behaviors such as coming to meetings with cameras off or wanting to reduce the amount of time they spend on such platforms leading to lower attendance at virtual social events. Organizations must walk a fine line between providing adequate opportunities and events for new hires to meet and bond and not burning them out overusing these platforms.

Connectedness and Engagement for Virtual Teams

        Limited research has been done on virtual engagement, and the research that exists applies to working in virtual teams, not onboarding virtual team members. These findings have been placed in the context of virtual onboarding for the purposes of this research. "When a person is asked how it feels to work virtually, an answer such as 'isolated' is more common than 'meaningful' … working for home … 'challenging' to 'refreshing' usually reveals how the team is structured as to their work-life balance" (Rabotin, 2017). Engagement for virtual teams is significantly more difficult than it is for collocated, or in-person teams that are closely geographically located. It is difficult to replicate the same depth of relationships virtually that are created in-person. "Reduced opportunities for informal interaction impact the team's work and social relationships… during onboarding everyday informal activities that new employees normally experience with collocated employees… occur much less often, if ever" (Begel &Hemphill, 2019). These informal activities like water-cooler conversations, invitations to happy hours or eating lunch together help to create a picture of company culture and help newcomers assess belongingness.

        In order for virtual Summer Interns (SIs) and Recently Graduated New Hires (RGNH) to feel connected during the onboarding process, the environment should mimic in-person activities as much as possible. "Make sure that when you are having virtual team meetings or one-to-ones, everyone has their video on… for new hires it's particularly important that they can see the people that they are working with – and that you can see them too" (Bedfordshire). SIs and RGNHs also want to feel connected to more than just their manager and team – they want to feel connected to the organization at large. "One way to make virtual onboarding a positive experience for interns … is it not put all of your eggs in one basket … integrate people from the

Diversity & Inclusion team, Corporate Social Responsibility team and culture team …"

(Proficio, 2020). These virtual connections can come in the form of meet and greets, virtual

events, speaker series or other events an organization is able to replicate virtually.

Research Sample and Procedure

Qualitative Theory Building

In addition to the research examined in literature review, general qualitative theory building was

examined in order to build out the methodology of this research. General qualitative theory

building in and of itself consists of eight separate parts (Tuttle, 2002):

1. The units of the theory

2. The laws of interaction that state the relationship and effects on other units

3. The boundaries of the theory

4. The systems states of the theory which is how it interacts with outside forces

5. Logical and true propositions

6. Empirical indicator which operationalized points in order for them to be measured

7. Hypotheses testing specific research questions

8. Research testing

The bounds of theory that I will be working under for this research is

Organizational Socialization Theory. Organizational socialization examined six socialization

tactics (performance proficiency, politics, language, people, organization goals/values and

history) examined against working respondents in different phases in their work lives (recently

changed job, changed status in the organization or staying in their roles) (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly,

Wolf, Klein, Gardner, 1994). Quantitative theory building can often be based on the scientific method and utilizing strict numerical based analyses. The line between quantitative and qualitative methods can be closely linked, "the closed-ended and highly structured questionnaire constitutes a [QUANT] element and the open-minded minimally structured interview a [QUAL] element" (Morgan, 2016). However, the combination methodologies to conduct a research methodology for a specific topic can determine if the process is more quantitative or qualitative in nature. Utilizing interview questions to create numeric based surveys as was done in this research results in an overall qualitative analysis.

Issues can arise in qualitative theory building with allowing for more creative licensing in the questions asked in interviews or survey building which could lead to potentially unjustified findings. In creating the methodology and procedure defined below, Tuttle's eight parts for theory building were used in conjunction with an interpretative research approach under the Gioia methodology. The Gioia methodology was developed for organizational studies in guiding my informational interview process to avoid the misstep of unjustified findings and correlations. Gioia methodology says that in interviewing participants the researcher should "pay extraordinary attention to the initial interview protocol, to make sure that it is focused on the research question(s), that it is thorough, and doesn't contain leading-the-witness questions." (Gioia, Corley, Hamilton, 2012). The next step in the Gioia methodology is to build out and create data to support or disprove the initial hypotheses created by the researcher. "When all the first-order codes and second order themes and dimensions have been assembled, I then have the basis for building a data structure." (Gehman, Glaser, Eisenhardt, Gioia, Langley, Corley, 2017). This progression is important because it shows the movement from raw data points, or raw

quotes from interviews to how they connect with other raw data points to create big picture

themes from which greater understanding about a group, a system or a process can be

extrapolated. The Gioia methodology is also not a qualitative methodology in which the

researcher lends themselves to confirmation bias, as changing your assumptions or your research

question is an integral part of the research process. In another way to safeguard confirmation bias

is in utilizing both qualitative and quantitative studies. Due this research being a new arena of

organizational socialization theory, both qualitative and quantitative analysis was utilized to

reduce confirmation bias as well as to see what fits best for this type of research.

The methodology used included the following:

1. Qualitative Analysis through Informational Interviews
2. Quantitative Analysis of subsequent survey data

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to answer the research question and to address the hypotheses

outlined below:

Research Question and Hypotheses:

Q1: Is connectedness to mission and vision in onboarding the driving factor for willingness to

return in the Gen Z SIs and RGNH cohorts?

H1: SIs and RGNHs who participate in 100% virtual onboarding programs, due to the COVID-

19 pandemic, feel detached from the organization mission and vision.

H2: A reduced amount of in-person connection results in SIs and RGNH feeling unengaged with their teams and the organization.

The study adopted a research design from interpretative research theory through conducting voluntary virtual interviews with participants via zoom. For participants to qualify to participate in this research, they had to meet two qualifications: first, they had to be a recent graduate (December-May 2020) from a higher education program (undergraduate college, masters or PhD) or a Summer/Fall 2020 Intern, and second, they had to have their onboarding process disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were able to opt into the interviews through a Calendly invitation, where they were able to choose the date and time that works best for them in February 2021 for a 45-minute zoom interview. The majority of participants were Bachelors of Business Administration (BBA) students or recent graduates from undergraduate programming at the University of Michigan, with additional participants from other schools or programs.

A criterion of interpretative research is that the participants should have firsthand knowledge into what is being studied in order to meaningfully participate and for the researcher to be able to sparse out unfit candidates. As an introduction, participants were told the purpose of the interview as well as what would be done with their personal identifying information:

Meeting with Zoe Evans for an Informational Interview about experiences as an intern or as a recently graduated full time hire that has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This interview will be conducted and recorded on Zoom and recorded for transcription purposes only. This interview will also produce a transcript and all personal identifying information (name,

company name or other personal identifying information) will be redacted. This research will only be used for purposes of the thesis. By agreeing to participate in this study you are agreeing to the way the data will be used as written above. Please let me know if you have any clarifying questions.

Over the course of the interview portion of the study, there were 38 participants, with 10 being male and 28 being female. There was a mix of work experience amongst the group as well, with some having had previous experience interning or working before the COVID-19 pandemic and some having this experience as their first internship. There was also a wide variety of job functions and industry representation amongst the participants: finance, media, engineering, marketing, academia, human resources and consulting. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with participant permission for note-taking purposes. Participants were read the same disclaimer about data usage and protection prior to starting their interview.

The interviewees were all asked the same series of questions with follow-ups when applicable:

2. Did you work full time or were you an intern during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. What division of the organization were you working in or interning in?

4. Are you familiar with the term onboarding?

    1. Blanket definition said to all participants regardless of if they were familiar with the term or not "Onboarding is the process of integrating a newcomer into an organization"

5. Can you walk me through from the emails you received right after you signed your offer, right up until you began to work on your first project, what that process was like for you?

6. How long do you think the onboarding process/introductory phase lasted?

7. Did you have a manager/supervisor? If so, can you tell me more about that relationship?

    1. How often did you meet with your manager/supervisor? How did you feel about the frequency with which you all met?

8. How many times did you meet with your team?

    1. Can you tell me more about your relationship with your team?

9. Were you assigned a mentor? If yes, can you tell me more about the relationship with your mentor?

    1. How often did you meet with your mentor and how did you feel about the frequency with which you met with them?

    2. Were you paired with a mentor by your program or organization or did you find your mentor yourself?

    3. In general, do you prefer a mentor that is similar to you (in terms of social identity or general interests) or a mentor that is different than you are?

10. Were you the recipient of any gifts during the time of your onboarding process or throughout your internship?

11. Did you attend any intern/new hire social events or social events in relation to your team?

    1. If you did attend, did you enjoy them?

    2. If you did not enjoy them, why not?

    3. If you did not attend the social events, why did you opt out?

12. Did you have the opportunity to network?

      1. How did you feel about the networking that you did?

      2. If you did not have the opportunity to network, how did that make you feel?

13. One of the purposes of onboarding is to connect the new hire to the mission and vision of the organization. You do not need to say the mission or the vision, but could you say the mission or vision of the organization you worked with without having the look it up?

      1. If they believe that they are able to say it or able to think through some tenants of the mission/vision: what activities or conversations lead you to understanding the mission or vision?

      2. If they are not able to think through what the mission or vision is, explore this further. Why?

14. Could you see others at the organization such as your team members, your manager/supervisor, or even other new hires/interns living out the mission or the vision the way that they completed their work?

15. What activities made you feel connected to the bigger picture?

      1. If unsure about what I mean by 'the bigger picture' ask them to define that for themselves

16. What activities made you feel alone?

17. Did you experience virtual fatigue?

      1. If yes, how did you manage this stress?

18. What do you think, if anything, was missing that would have been present in an in-person onboarding scenario?

19. What do you think, if anything, was present during your virtual onboarding scenario that you could not have had in person?

20. Were you given the opportunity to give or receive feedback? Can you tell me more about the feedback you received?

    1. At what points did you receive or give feedback?

    2. If you were given feedback, what did you think of the feedback you were given – was it constructive or unconstructive?

    3. If you were able to provide feedback, who did you provide it to and do you think it was applied or could be applied in the future?

21. If you were an intern, would you return to this organization? Why or why not?

22. If you are a recently graduated new hire, could you see yourself staying with this organization for the foreseeable future?

    1. If the participant questions what the 'foreseeable future' means, ask them to define it for themselves.

23. Is there anything additional that you would like to tell me about your onboarding process, your internship or your first few months working full time?

Informational Interview Disclaimers

1. Interns are not given the full exposure to HR practices and traditional full time onboarding experiences; therefore, the entirety of the internship is taken into consideration when talking about onboarding practices.

2. Participants may not have other onboarding experiences to compare their onboarding experience during the COVID-19 pandemic to gauge what is or is not a sufficient process for onboarding.

3. Different departments and organizations have different expectations of job understanding prior to starting work or projects, so some organizations have incorporated teachings, exams and classes into their onboarding processes that would be unnecessary for other divisions.

4. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when asked the question "would you return to this organization" or "can you foresee yourself staying with this organization for the foreseeable future" some participants noted that they would, but not due to connectedness or enjoying their role/ the organization but out of fear to less prospects and a tiger job market.

Qualitative Software Analysis

NVivo, a software for analyzing, organizing and managing qualitative data was utilized. This software codes for the relevant factors in the data in order to create deeper and more relevant insights. The notes from the 38 interview sessions with participants were uploaded into the software database and each file was coded against a set of 33 'nodes.' Nodes are connection points in the data that categorize the information in the transcript notes into relevancy points,
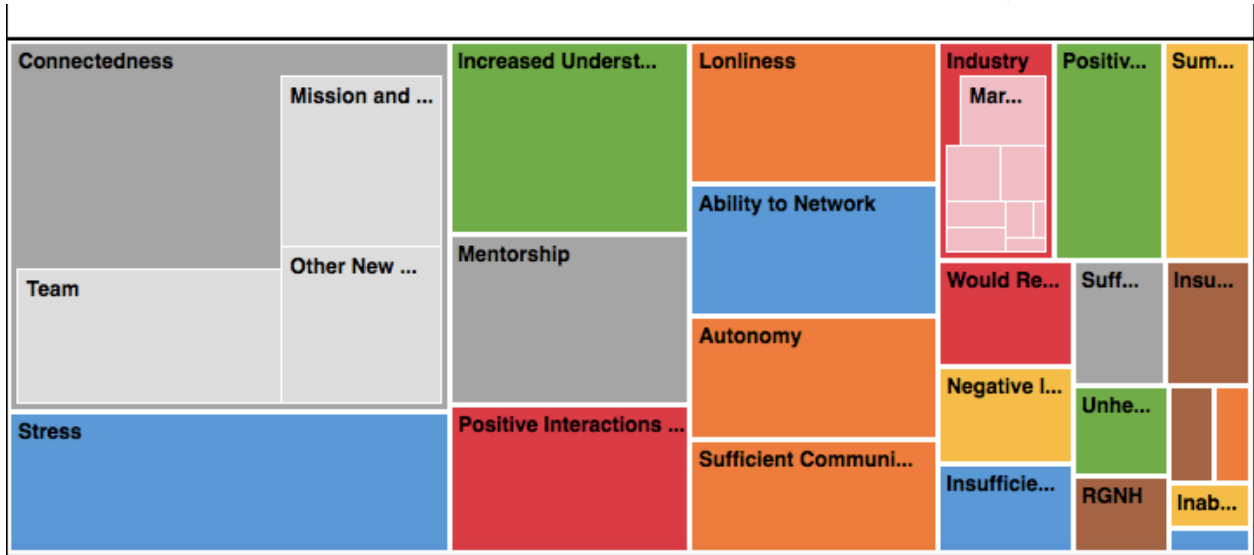
they can also be viewed as themes in the data. Relevancy points are the quotes and words that are coded into particular nodes on selected files. The relevancy points determine the percentage that each theme makes up in the data.

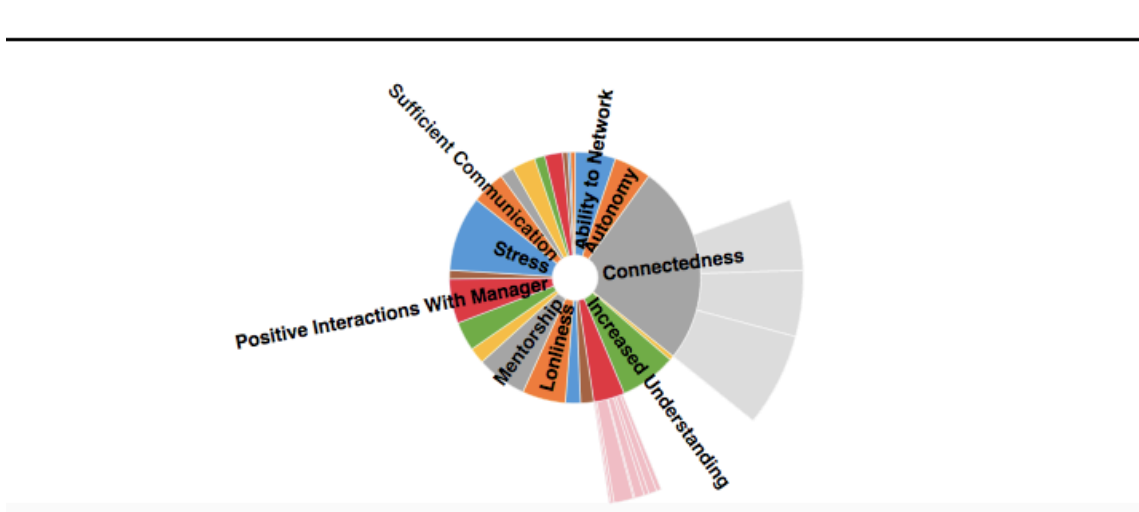Treemap of aggregated and direct coded references across the 33 nodes for the 38 transcripts

Sunburst chart – a visual representation of the 33 nodes and their percentage of coverage

Nodes and Notable Findings

There were 33 nodes coded against the 38 transcript notes. These nodes where chosen for both categorization purposes and to draw connections on themes from the interview questions. Some of the nodes were also chosen to test research question that mission and vision was the driving factor leading to willingness to return in onboarding and the hypotheses surrounding engagement and working in teams. Some of these nodes were 'Connectedness,' 'Mentorship' and the nodes that determined desire or willingness to return in the future.

Nodes were also chosen in order to organize the transcripts by both cohort and industry/division. These nodes were: Summer Intern, Recently Graduated New Hires (RGNH), and Industry which was divided into the sub-nodes of Academia, Consulting, Engineering, Finance, Health Care, Marketing, Media and Supply Chain. These nodes were to categorize the two groups within the larger sample population. Of the total number of panelists, 30 were Summer or Fall Interns and 8 were RGNH. References points refer to the number of sentences or words that are coded into a certain file. Coverage refers to the percentage of the transcript that falls under that certain node.

3 references coded, 5.84% coverage
Reference 1: 2.81% coverage
The company did not set up intern wide events where you could talk to one another
Did have throughout training, they had projects where you got to work with interns from different departments, but felt like she didn't get to know them because of the different time zones
Reference 2: 2.22% coverage
The nature of working on a project that wasn't a group project made her feel lonely
She had to own up to her work on her own, and while she could get advice from the other interns but it didn't matter at the end of the day
Reference 3: 0.81% coverage
Isolating to not know what other people are doing and the direction of her day

References coded and coverage for a node on a participant transcript

The other nodes were coded to find connecting themes within the singular file itself and the other files within the data set. Each of the nodes created were based off of trends from the interview questions and existing themes in literature review. Each of the trends within the nodes are subjective to researcher interpretation and encompass more than just the usage of the word in the transcript. Some coded references encompass entire participant statements or allude to the theme within the node (ex: statements about Zoom fatigue were coded into the node 'Stress' because the participant noted that Zoom fatigue led to stress). The nodes are not mutually exclusive, some references fall into multiple nodes. The reference point of 'crafting my own project in order to meet an expectation my manager had set' would fall into the nodes of both 'Increased Understanding' as it led to an increase in understanding of work expectations and 'Autonomy' as the participant had the ability to craft their own solution.

Additional Nodes:

1. Ability to Network

2. Autonomy

3. Inability to Network

4. Increased Understanding

5. Insufficient Communication

6. Insufficient Onboarding Time

7. Loneliness

8. Mentorship

9. Negative Interactions with Manager

10. Positive Feedback

11. Positive Interactions with Manager

12. Stress

13. Sufficient Communication

14. Sufficient Onboarding Time

15. Unhelpful or No Feedback

16. Would Not Return (Connected)

17. Would Not Return (Unconnected)

18. Would Return (Connected)

19. Would Return (Unconnected)

Ability to Network

The node 'Ability to Network' encompasses the participant's ability to network during their onboarding process, their internship or the first few months of their full-time role. This node encompasses any time the SI or the RGNH was able to network in a formal or informal way through setting up calls or chats themselves, round tables or conversations with higher ups at the organization or connecting with their peers. Across the 38 transcripts the most references to 'Ability to Network' were 5 references and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 46 direct and aggregated references and 23 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Ability to Network' was X%.

Autonomy

The node 'Autonomy' is referenced is for times when the participant was able to have and exert control over their own working hours, how they managed themselves or their work and their ability to craft their own solutions. Across the 38 transcripts the most references of 'Autonomy' were 3 references, and the least was no reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has X direct and aggregated references and 42 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Ability to Network' was 3.5%. According to literature review on Gen Z work expectations, part of autonomy is the ability to manage one's own schedule during onboarding, and potentially having the ability to work and onboard simultaneously. However, within this sample population being onboarded and working simultaneously is not one of the elements that Generation Z finds would be useful during their onboarding experience

Connectedness

Across all 38 transcripts, the node "Connectedness" specifically coding for Team, Connection to Other New Hires and Interns and Mission and Vision was aggregated the most across nodes of importance for those interviewed about their experiences in virtual onboarding scenarios with 83 total codes. The node "Connectedness for Mission and Vision" was coded into the node team, meaning that RGNH and SIs could see the Mission and Vision clearly when it was exemplified through the work of the full-time hires around them rather than told to the new hires orally. Therefore, interacting with team members should be at the forefront of onboarding efforts for virtual RGNH and SIs, emphasizing community building over autonomy, in contradiction to literature review, which states that Generation Z new hires are more focused on

autonomy and finding out how their work connects to the bigger picture. Participants with this node have a higher correlation towards the node 'Would Return (Connected).'

Inability to Network

The node 'Inability to Network' is in reference is for times when the participant was unable to network with individuals across the organization such as full-time hires, other members of their cohort or other interns. Networking is an important part of connecting with other full-time members and other new hires within the cohort. Across the 38 transcripts the most references of 'Inability to Network' was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 5 direct and aggregated references and 5 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Ability to Network' was 8.74%.

Increased Understanding

Increased understanding was coded against 38 transcripts with 67 references. Increased Understanding refers to RGNH and SIs having an increased understanding their work- and work-related expectations, understanding of how their work affects others on their team or the organization and how their work aligns with their personal values. This was repeated across the transcripts, with high overlap with the 'Connectedness' node. This demonstrates that when RGNH and SIs feel connected to their organization, their work and their team they feel committed to their work and have a higher desire to return to the organization.

2 references coded, 8.17% coverage
Reference 1: 1.45% coverage
He liked seeing his knowledge advance over the summer He was able to gain the confidence to speak up
Reference 2: 6.73% coverage
Everyone who worked there seemed like they enjoyed working there and the work place culture said a lot about the high regards to working there He felt like he knew what the company was during COVID times He felt comfortable with them and the work they were doing Feels like they are invested in him and want to grow with him which is big for him because he doesn't know if he wants to stay in this division It would be easy for him to make transitions to other divisions

A sample of references codes from a participant transcript with the highest level of coverage
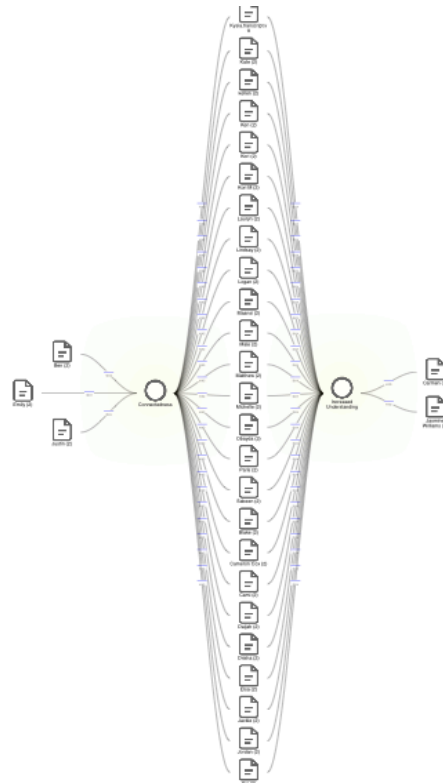
Comparison diagram between 'Increased Understanding' and 'Connectedness.' This Comparison Diagram demonstrates that respondents with transcripts that demonstrate understanding of work expectations and how their work connects to the bigger picture also reported feeling connected to the organization as a whole. Additional Comparison Diagrams are included for other notable nodes and in the Tables and Figures.

Insufficient Communication

'Insufficient Communication' was coded against 38 transcripts with 15 references. The

node 'Insufficient Communication' refers to SIs and RGNHs having poor communication with

mentors, supervisors, hiring leaders or others within the cohort. This node had 15 direct and

aggregated references and 12 coding references. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Insufficient Communication' was 42.03%. The percentage for 'Insufficient Communication' was so high because only 11 transcripts had references of participants noting a lack of communication with their managers/direct supervisors or teams, but the number of references within the individual transcript was high.

Insufficient Onboarding Time

The node 'Insufficient Onboarding Time' encompasses the participants feeling that the length of their onboarding process was not sufficient for their level of comfort and understanding. This node encompasses any time the SI or the RGNH expressed in the interview that they felt the length of their onboarding process was not significant or that they began to work on their project or full-time assignments before they felt they were ready. Across the 38 transcripts, only 10 had codes or references to 'Insufficient Communication.' The most references to 'Insufficient Onboarding Time' were 4 references and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 17 direct and aggregated references and 10 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Ability to Network' was 34.73%. This percentage was high due to the low number of transcripts with the theme 'Insufficient Onboarding Time.'

Loneliness

The node 'Loneliness' encompasses the participants feeling alone during their onboarding process. This node is in reference to RGNHs and SIs feeling that they did not have significant

support by their supervisor or mentor or feeling isolated due to the virtual nature of their program. Across the 38 transcripts, 30 had codes or references to 'Loneliness.' The most references to 'Loneliness' were 5 references, and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 49 direct and aggregated references and 30 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Loneliness was 4.10%.

Mentorship

The node 'Mentorship' encompasses the participants having a mentorship relationship during their onboarding experience. This node is in reference to RGNHs and SIs feeling that they did have significant support by their mentor and that their mentor was an integral part of their onboarding experience. As referenced in literature review, a mentor can help a new hire navigate the cultural landscape of a new organization. Across the 38 transcripts, 31 had codes or references to 'Mentorship.' The most references to 'Mentorship' were 5 references, and the least was 1 reference. Across a single transcript, 'Mentorship' had the most coverage with several transcripts having 20% of the content related to the support and relationship cultivated with a mentor. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 57 direct and aggregated references and 31 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Mentorship' was 9.7%.
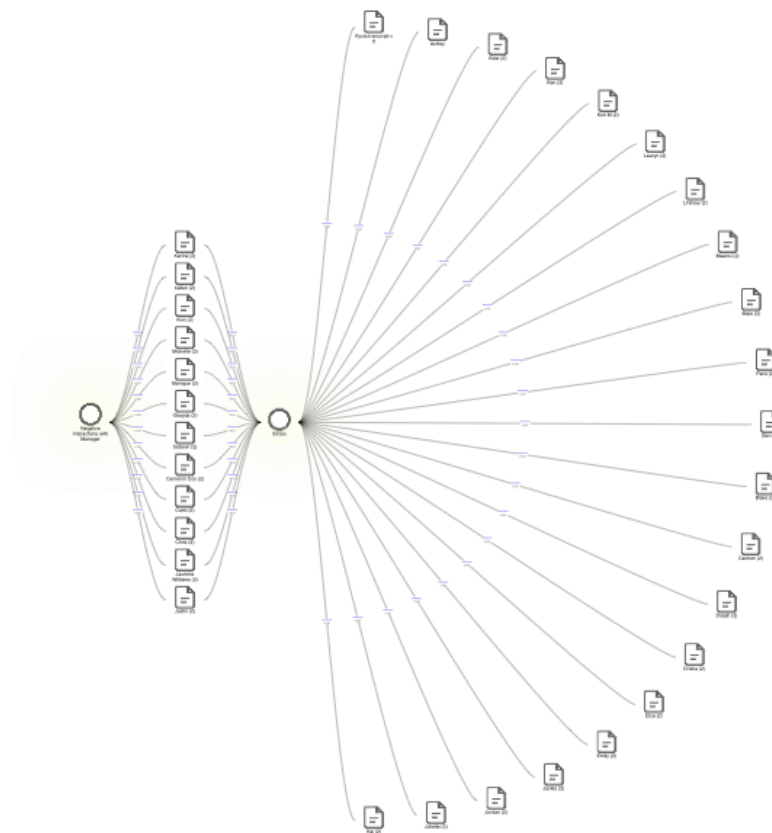
Negative Interactions with Manager

The node 'Negative Interactions with Manager' encompasses the new hires having either no relationship with their manager/direct supervisor or a negative relationship with their

manager/supervisor. This could be in the form of low or no support, unclear work expectations or conflict in their working relationship. In literature review, having support by your mentor is an important aspect of the onboarding checklist, as it helps to connect the new hire to the organization. Across the 38 transcripts, 12 had codes or references to 'Negative Relationship with Manager.' The most references to 'Mentorship' were 3 references, and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 18 direct and aggregated references and 12 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Negative Interactions with Manager' was 63.6%. The percentage for this node was so high because the number of transcripts coded with this reference are low, but the number of references on per transcript for this node were high. This means that when new hires had a negative interaction or no interaction with their manager/direct supervisor, it greatly affected their working experience.
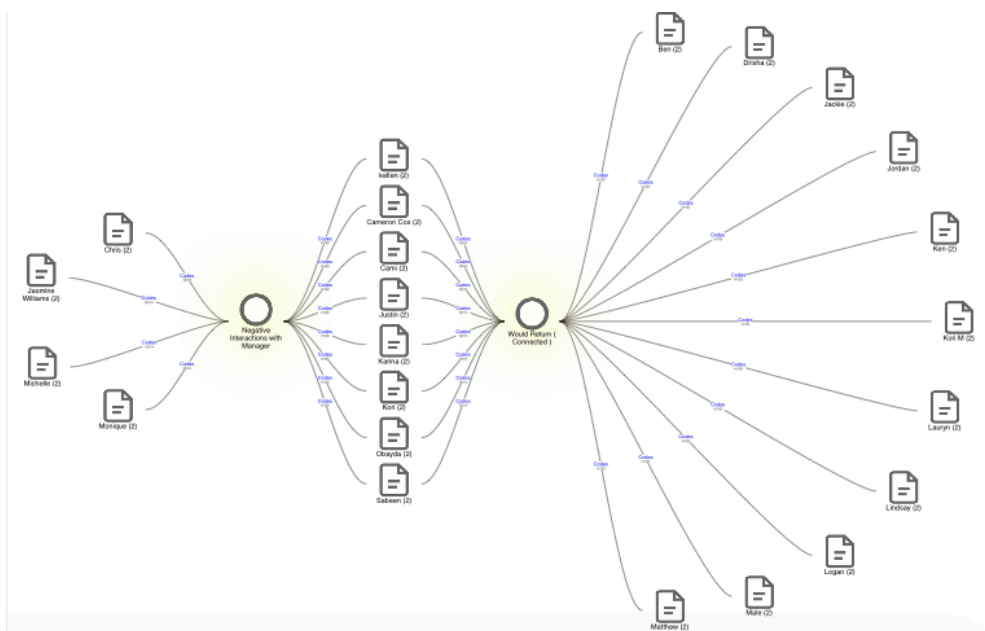
Comparison Diagram for 'Would Return (Connected)' 'Negative Experience with Manager'

When RGNHs and SIs have negative interactions or relationships with their managers/direct supervisors, it is not well connected to the node 'Would Return (Connected)' but does have high overlap with the node 'Stress.' All transcripts with the references with of 'Negative Interactions with Manager' are also coded for 'Stress.' This finding informs the assumption that having a positive relationship with a manager/direct supervisor that encompasses support and feedback leads to a new hire feeling connected and thus having a desire to return or stay with an organization. However, having a poor relationship with their manager leads to stress.

Comparison Diagram between the nodes 'Stress and 'Negative Interactions with Manager.'

Positive Feedback

The node 'Positive Feedback encompasses the RGNHs and SIs receiving feedback that was constructive, timely and helped them improve in their work. This node takes into account the ability for the new hire to give and receive constructive feedback. In literature review, Gen Z new hires expect to have immediate feedback as they work, rather than just at mid-year or mid-program reviews. Across the 38 transcripts, 24 had codes or references to 'Positive Feedback.' The most references to 'Positive Feedback were 5 references, and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 50 direct and aggregated references and 25 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Positive Interactions with Manager' was 7.1%.

Positive Interactions with Manager

The node 'Positive Interactions with Manager' encompasses the new hires having a positive and supportive relationship with their manager/direct supervisor. This node takes into account when the participant noted that they felt their manager well explained work expectations, set up goals for growth or potentially developed a mentorship-like relationship. In literature review, the manager and new hire relationship is an integral part of the onboarding experience. Across the 38 transcripts, 12 had codes or references to 'Positive Interactions with Manager.' The most references to 'Positive Interactions with Manager' were 5 references, and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 50 direct and aggregated references and 25 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed

'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Positive Interactions with Manager' was 7.1%.

When RGNHs and SIs have positive interactions or relationships with their managers/direct supervisors, it is connected to the node 'Would Return (Connected),' but there is not the same overlapping connection with the node 'Negative Interactions with Manager.'
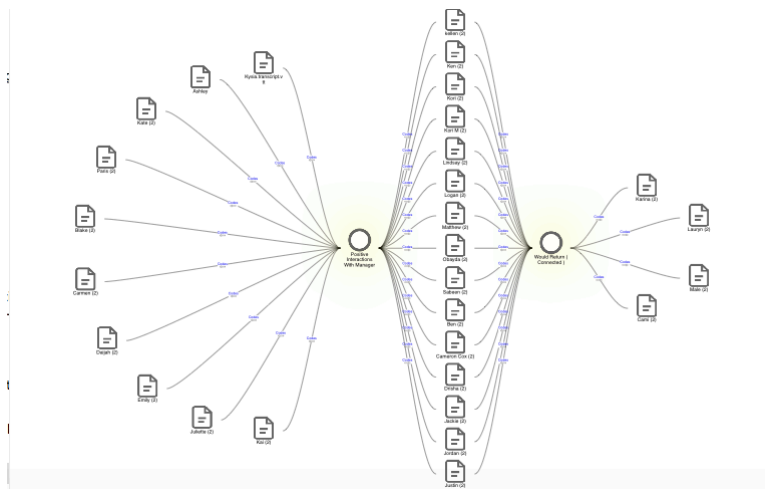
Comparison diagram for 'Positive Interactions with Manager' and 'Would Return (Connected)'

Stress

The node 'Stress' encompasses RGNHs or SIs noting situations of stress or anxiety. This node takes into account Zoom fatigue, which was referenced in literature review as a feeling of anxiety or tiredness induced from excess videoconferencing or screen time. Across the 38 transcripts, 12 had codes or references to 'Positive Interactions with Manager.' The most references to 'Positive Interactions with Manager' were 5 references, and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 85 direct and aggregated references and 33 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a percentage of each filed

'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Stress was 5.8%. The node 'Stress' has high connection to the node 'Loneliness' meaning that for participants stress may have led to feelings of loneliness or loneliness may have be a contributing factor in the stress new hires felt.
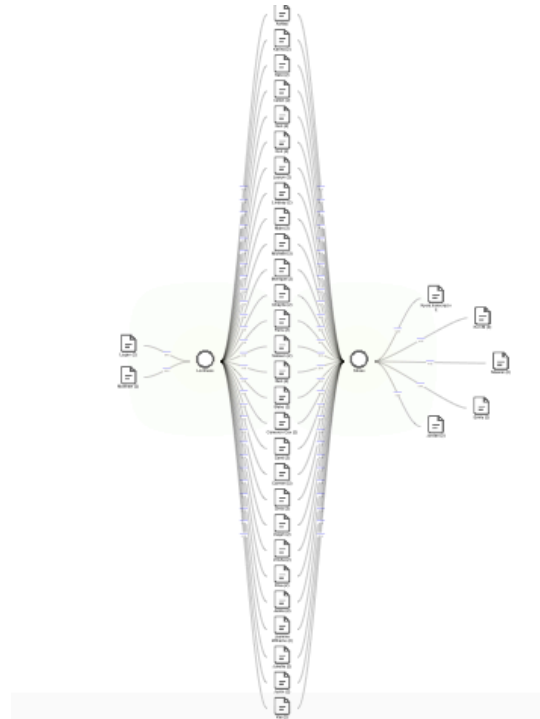
Comparison Diagram between the nodes 'Stress' and 'Loneliness.' This Comparison Diagram demonstrates the high connection between respondents with high coverage of being in both stressful and isolating experiences during their onboarding process.

Sufficient Communication

The node 'Sufficient Communication' encompasses RGNHs or SIs noting that they felt the levels of communication experienced during their onboarding experience was sufficient for increased understanding and comfort. This node takes into account conversations with managers, mentors, program coordinators, their cohort and anyone else they noted as being integral to their onboarding experience. Across the 38 transcripts, 12 had codes or references to 'Sufficient Communication.' The most references to 'Positive Interactions with Manager' were 5 references,

and the least was 1 reference. Across all 38 transcripts the Treemap has 85 direct and aggregated

references and 33 direct and aggregated codes. For each individual transcript there is a

percentage of each filed 'coverage' that encompasses how much of each transcript was dedicated

to the particular node. The average percentage of coverage for 'Positive Interactions with

Manager' was 5.8%. The node 'Stress' has high connection to the node 'Loneliness' meaning

that for participants stress may have led to feelings of loneliness or loneliness may have be a

contributing factor in the stress new hires felt.

Return Nodes

The nodes 'Would Not Return (Connected),' 'Would Not Return (Unconnected),'

'Would Return (Connected)' and 'Would Return (Unconnected)' refers to the respondent

wanting to return to the organization and also feeling either connected or unconnected to the

organization as a whole. This sense of connection was defined as feeling connected to the

mission or vision, their team dynamic or the work that they completed. The coding of this node

was upon the researcher's discretion and not all codes may reflect the respondents own internal

view of the reason they are or are not returning.

Quantitative Analysis

The second part of the research was a survey to provide quantifiable data points. The

questions asked in the survey were built off of reoccurring themes that occurred in the

informational interviews/NVivo analysis such as connectedness, mentorship, social connection,

desire or ability to return as well as a space for respondents to write how their onboarding

process made them feel.

Participants were screened out to determine eligibility before gaining access to the survey

questions. Those who were eligible had to be Interns in Summer/Fall 2020 or had to start their

first full time job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents who selected that they had kept their existing job, became unemployed, retired, recently graduated and did not start working, were never employed or an intern or other were redirected to exist the survey. 82 respondents accessed the survey, but only 46 respondents were eligible. 35 out of the 46 respondents were Summer/Fall interns in 2020 and 11 had started their first full time role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey questions:

1. How long was your onboarding/new hire orientation process?

    a. 1-2 days

    b. 3-4 days

    c. One week

    d. Two weeks

    e. A month +

    f. There was no onboarding/new hire orientation process

2. How long do you believe to be sufficient for an onboarding process?

    a. 1-2 days

    b. 3-4 days

    c. One week

    d. Two weeks

    e. A month +

    f. I do not want an orientation/new hire orientation process

3. Do you want to work simultaneously while being onboarded?

    a. Definitely yes

b. Probably yes

c. Might or might not

d. Probably not

e. Definitely not

4. How do you feel about the length of your onboarding process?

    a. Too short

    b. Just right

    c. Too long

    d. There was no onboarding process

5. Check off all that the onboarding process consisted of:

    a. Meeting your manager/direct supervisor

    b. Meeting your team (if applicable)

    c. Meeting your cohort/other new hires or other interns

    d. An introduction to the mission/vision of the organization

    e. Speaker Series with higher ups at the organization

    f. Opportunities to network

    g. New hire or intern social events

    h. Social events with your team

    i. The opportunity to give feedback

    j. The opportunity to receive feedback

    k. A stronger understanding of work expectations and project understanding

    l. The ability to attend meetings to gain a better understanding of the organization as

        a whole

    m. Assigned a mentor

    n. Meetings with your mentor

6. Do you want to be assigned a mentor when you enter into an organization?

    a. Yes

    b. No, I would like to choose my own mentor

    c. No, I would not like a mentor

7. If you would like a mentor, check off all that you would like:

    a. A mentor within your division

    b. A mentor outside of your division

    c. A mentor similar in age to you

    d. A mentor not similar in age to you

    e. A mentor with a similar background to you (race/ethnicity, gender, similar upbringing, etc.)

    f. A mentor with a different background than you

8. If you would like an assigned mentor, would you like:

    a. The organization to randomly assign you

    b. The organization to make an informed pairing decision with your wants in mind

    c. I would not like an assigned mentor, I want to find a mentor myself

    d. I would not like a mentor at all

9. How much would/does a mentor help you feel comfortable integrating into a new organization?

    a. A great deal

    b. A lot

c. A moderate amount

d. A little

e. Not at all

10. Were you the recipient of gifts before, during or after your internship/onboarding

process?

a. Yes

b. No

11. Who important is receiving gifts from an organization you are working with to you?

a. Extremely important

b. Very important

c. Moderately important

d. Slightly important

e. Not at all important

12. Were there new hire or intern social events?

a. Yes

b. No

c. I am not sure

13. If there were new hire or intern social events, did you attend them?

a. Yes

b. No

c. There were no social events/I don't know if there were social events

14. Did you find the intern social events to be a useful way to connect with others?

a. Extremely useful

b. Very useful

c. Moderately useful

d. Slightly useful

e. Not useful at all

f. There were no social events

15. On average how frequently did you meet with your supervisor?

a. Daily

b. Multiple times per week

c. Once per week

d. Once every two weeks

e. Sporadically

f. Never

16. Did you feel that the amount of time with your supervisor was sufficient for helping you

understand your work?

a. Yes

b. No

c. I did not meet with a supervisor

17. Were you told the mission/vision of your organization during the onboarding process?

a. Yes

b. No

c. I do not remember

18. If you were told the mission/vision, do you feel connected to it?

a. Yes

b. No

19. Can you see yourself staying with or returning to this organization in the foreseeable future?

    a. Yes

    b. No

20. How valued did you feel as a member of the organization or team during your internship or during the first few months of working?

    a. Extremely valued

    b. Valued

    c. Neither valued or unvalued

    d. Slightly undervalued

    e. Extremely undervalued

21. How did the onboarding process make you feel?

    a. Short answer response

22. What did you think could be added or taken away from the onboarding process?

    a. Short answer response

23. What do you expect to have in your next onboarding process?

    a. Short answer response

24. Any additional thoughts or information about your onboarding experience that you would like to share?

    a. Short answer response

25. Gender Identification

    a. Male

     b. Female

     c. Gender non-binary/third-gender

     d. Prefer not to say

Disclaimers for Survey Analysis

1. 73% of respondents were Female, 24% were Male and about 3% were Third Gender/Non-binary, therefore the survey results and the conclusions based upon the survey results are skewed and are not fully representative of a typical RGNH or SI cohort.

2. The number of respondents in this study is lower than other studies of Generation Z or of RGNH or SIs.

3. Some of the participants in the survey were interview participants in the NVivo portion of the analysis.

4. It is unknown if the RGNH or the SIs have worked or interned prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore it is unknown if their evaluation of the virtual onboarding process is skewed due to having knowledge of what a 'typical' onboarding process looks like.

5. It is unknown the amount of time participants spent filling out the survey, rushed results can also skew the overall data analysis.

Notable Survey Results and Analysis

Length of Participant Virtual Onboarding Process

1-2 days	23.53%
3-4 days	8.82%
One week	26.47%
Two weeks	20.59%
A month +	8.82%
There was no onboarding/new hire process	11.76%

Evaluation of Length on Virtual Onboarding Process

Too short	47.06%
Just right	41.81%
Too long	5.88%
There was no onboarding process	5.88%

How long do you believe to be sufficient for an onboarding process?

1-2 days	11.76%
3-4 days	8.82%
One week	35.29%
Two weeks	23.53%
A month +	20.59%
I do not want an onboarding/new hire orientation process	0%

Respondents experienced virtual onboarding processes that lasted for an average of 1-2 days (which is akin to an employee orientation) or processes of one week or two weeks. When asked to evaluate the length of the process they experienced, almost half of respondents felt their process was too short, with about 40% feeling that their length of onboarding was just right. About 35% of participants felt that a week-long onboarding process would be sufficient for onboarding, with 23% of respondents who would prefer a two-week process and almost 21% choosing a month or longer for onboarding. Only 11.76% of respondents would choose a 1-2 day long process in comparison to the over 23% that had a 1-2 day long onboarding process.

Therefore, it can be inferred that 1-2 days may not be sufficient for a virtual new employee onboarding process for Generation Z RGNH and SIs.

According to literature review Generation Z new hires want more autonomy over their work and would prefer to begin to work simultaneously while being onboarded, however 50% of respondents said "probably not" in response to the question 'do you want to work simultaneously while being onboarded' with less than 20% of respondents choosing the options " definitely yes," "probably yes," " might or might not," and " definitely not." Therefore, it can be inferred that Generation Z RGNH and SIs may not want to work and onboard at the same time, contrary to the discoveries made about this group in literature review.

Check off all that your onboarding process consisted of:

Meeting your manager/direct supervisor	12.08%
Meeting your team (if applicable)	9.66%
Meeting your cohort/other new hires or other interns	10.63%
An introduction to the mission/vision of the organization	12.56%
Speaker Series with higher ups at the organization	7.73%
Opportunities to network	3.86%
New hire or intern social events	3.38%
Social events with your team	2.9%

The opportunity to give feedback	4.83%
A stronger understanding of work and project expectations	9.81%
The ability to attend meetings to gain a better understanding of the organization as a whole	7.25%
Assigned a mentor	6.76%
Meetings with your mentor	5.8%
The opportunity to receive feedback	3.38%

Would you like to be assigned a mentor when you enter into an organization?

Yes	79.41%
No, I would like to choose my own mentor	17.65%
No, I would not like a mentor	2.94%

How much would/does a mentor help you feel comfortable integrating into a new organization?

A great deal	38.24%
A lot	35.29%
A moderate amount	26.47%
A little	0%
Not at all	0%

Participants were asked to check off all that their virtual onboarding process consisted of and the highest percentage of respondents at about 12% were introduced to the mission and vision of their organization and met with their managers or direct supervisors. Only 6.79% of respondents were assigned a formal mentor during their virtual onboarding process, but 79.41% stated that they would like to be assigned a mentor. There is a disconnect between the desires of

Generation Z RGNH's and SI's on the topic of mentorship. When asked if a mentor would help ease their transition into a new organization, no respondents noted that the presence of a mentor would not help their transition. Therefore, it can be inferred that a mentor may be a beneficial asset to Generation Z RGNH and SI's in their virtual onboarding processes.

The type of mentor assigned to respondents does affect their level of comfort and connection with this individual. According to survey results, respondents prefer organizations make informed mentorship pairing decisions with the respondents' desires in a mentor in mind. This is not an exhaustive list of qualities to create meaningful pairings, but this list can help to generate meaningful connections for new hires to better integrate into a new organization, role, or industry.

If you would like a mentor, check off all that you would like:

A mentor within your division	30.77%
A mentor outside of your vision	10.99%
A mentor similar in age to you	17.58%
A mentor not similar in age to you	13.19%
A mentor with a similar background to you (race/ethnicity, gender, similar upbringing, etc.)	19.78%
A mentor with a different background than you	7.69%

If you would like an assigned mentor, would you like:

The organization to randomly assign you	2.94%
The organization to make an informed pairing decision with your wants in mind	91.18%
I would not like an assigned mentor, I want to find a mentor myself	5.88%
I would not like a mentor at all	0%

Did you find the intern or new hire social events a useful way to connect to others:

Extremely useful	2.94%
Very useful	8.82%
Moderately useful	14.71%
Slightly useful	20.59%
Not at all useful	0%
There were no social events	52.94%

The majority of respondents, over 50%, noted that there were no social events for SIs or

RGNH, about 10% finding high levels of usage out of the events that did occur. Therefore, it can

be concluded that the format of the events or the frequency of the events may be prohibiting

RGNH and SIs from connecting with one another.

Were you told the mission/vision of your organization during the onboarding process?

Yes	82.35%
No	14.71%
I don't remember	2.94%

If you were told the mission/vision, do you feel connected to it in any way?

Yes	72.73%
No	27.27%

How valued did you feel as a member of the organization?

Extremely valued	20.59%
Valued	67.65%
Neither valued or unvalued	5.88%
Slightly undervalued	2.94%
Extremely undervalued	2.94%

On average, how frequently did you meet with your supervisor, manager, director or whoever you directly reported to?

Daily	29.41%
Multiple times per week	32.25%
Once per week	26.47%
Once every two weeks	5.88%
Sporadically	2.94%
Never	2.94%

Did you feel that the amount of time you spent with your supervisor was sufficient for helping you understand your work?

Yes	*88.24%*
No	*8.82%*
I did not meet with a supervisor	*2.94%*

Were you the recipient of gifts before, during or after your internship or full time onboarding experience?

Yes	55.88%
No	44.12%

How important is receiving gifts from an organization you are working with to you?

Extremely important	5.88%
Very important	8.82%
Moderately important	26.47%
Slightly important	32.35%
Not at all important	26.47%

A majority of respondents were told the mission/vision of the organization during their

onboarding process. About 10% less of respondents felt connected to the mission or vision than

were told the mission or vision. Over 50% of respondents were the recipient of onboarding gifts but when asked if gifts were important to them in their onboarding experience over 50% of respondents fell in the range of moderately to not at all important. Almost 90% of respondents felt that the amount of time that they met with their supervisor helped them gain a better understanding of their work. Increased understanding of work, from the NVivo study connected to wanting to return/stay at an organization and feeling connected. About 68% of respondents felt valued from their organization during their onboarding process, their internships or the first few months of working. A feeling of value can lead to positive views of an organization, the work and a willingness to return. It can be inferred that mission and vision, meeting with supervisor leading to increased understanding and feeling valued may play a role in potential retention rates, however this is not a complete corollary study.

In a correlation table on excel, 'Would/Would Not Return' was listed as the dependent variable with the independent variables being:

1. Connection to mission/vision
2. Length of onboarding
3. Feeling valued
4. Meeting time with supervisor
5. Attending social events
6. Receiving gifts

Excel Correlation Table

Correlation Table			
Dependent Variable	**Independent Variable**		
Would/ Would Not Return	Connected to Mission + Vision	0.577	moderate correlation
	Length of Onboarding	0.041	no relationship
	Feeling Valued	0.0781	no relationship
	Meeting Time with Supervisor	0.202	no correlation
	Attending Social Events	0.04	no relationship
	Receiving Gifts	0.398	no correlation

Across the different notable dimensions from the virtual onboarding process (the dependent variables), the theme with a moderate correlation was connection to mission and vision with a 5.77 correlation. This trend shows that there may be a moderate connection of feeling connected to the mission and vision for Generation Z RGNH's and SIs and their decision to return to an organization or stay with an organization for the foreseeable future.

Overall Key Findings and Conclusion

In both qualitative analysis and quantitative survey analysis the following findings were of significance in addressing the research question and hypotheses:

Q: Is connectedness to mission and vision in onboarding the driving factor for willingness to return in the Gen Z SIs and RGNH cohorts?

H1: SIs and RGNHs who participate in 100% virtual onboarding programs, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, feel detached from the organization mission and vision.

H2: A reduced amount of in-person connection results in SIs and RGNH feeling unengaged with their teams and the organization

In response to the research question, it was noted through the research that connectedness to mission and vision in onboarding is a factor that drives willingness to return for Gen Z RGNHs and SIs, however it is not the only factor under the umbrella term 'Connectedness.' RGNHs and SIs must also feel connected to their teams and other individuals in their cohorts, which leads to increased understanding of how they and their work connects to the bigger picture and how they can find natural alignment with the mission and vision of the organization.

In response to Hypothesis 1 (H1), SIs and RGNHs who participated in completely virtual onboarding programs did not feel detached to the company mission and vision as was presumed. According to the excel correlation study, this sample population had a moderate correlation between the mission and vision and willingness to return. In the qualitative analysis, 'Connectedness' had high numbers of transcript overlap with 'Increased Understanding' and 'Would Return (Connected)' meaning that in this sample population, the cohorts not only understood the mission and vision but felt that it was an integral part of their working identity within the organization and could see its impact even in a virtual format.

In response to Hypothesis 2 (H2), it is indeterminate if a reduced amount of RGHHs and SIs felt disconnected from their teams and their cohort due to the small sample size. Within this population, the SIs and RGNHs did not note feeling disengaged with their teams and cohorts due to the overlap in qualitative analysis, however the participants did note increased levels of stress due to zoom fatigue, which could lead to difficulty engaging with full time hires. The research methodology was not focused on comparing levels of engagement of virtual and in-person onboarding scenarios therefore H2 is unable to be either confirmed or denied.

Future research on onboarding processes for RGNHs and SIs with a larger sample population that is better representative of the current workforce will be an imperative addition to the field of organization socialization tactics due to the influx of Gen Z new hires into the workplace and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the modern workplace. Due to the recent nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects on organizational structure and the future of virtual teams are uncertain. Future research into the specific nuances of division and industry specific onboarding practices will also be an integral addition to the research currently done on best onboarding practices. Finally, research into the effects of zoom fatigue and how it will affect virtual team building, connectedness and productivity will also be an integral addition to onboarding research in order to develop best practices for organizations in the future.

Figures and Tables

Figure 1 (F1)[1]

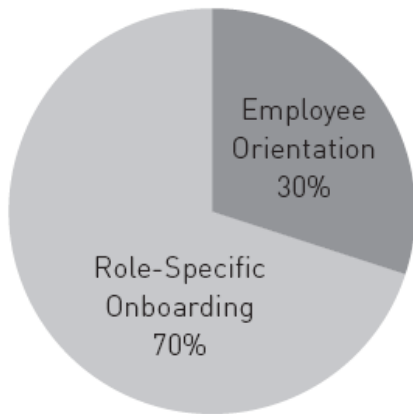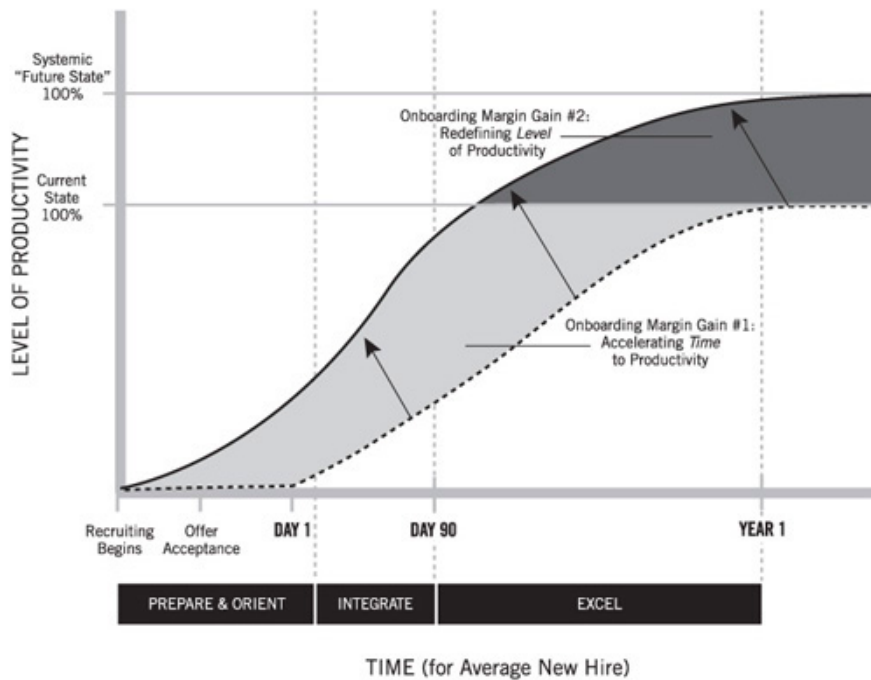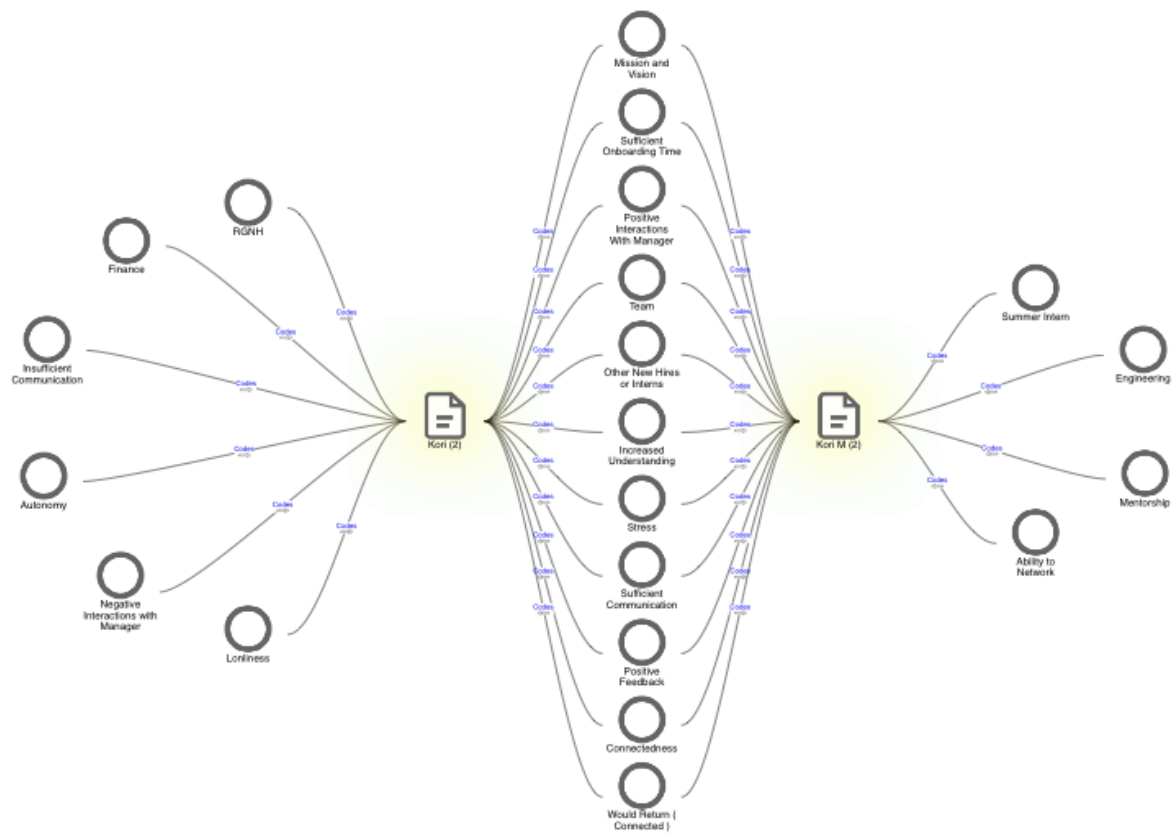Figure 1-1. Relationship Between Employee Orientation and Role-Specific Onboarding

Employee Orientation 30%

Role-Specific Onboarding 70%

Figure 2 (F2) 2

Systemic "Future State" 100%

Current State 100%

LEVEL OF PRODUCTIVITY

Onboarding Margin Gain #2: Redefining *Level* of Productivity

Onboarding Margin Gain #1: Accelerating *Time* to Productivity

Recruiting Begins | Offer Acceptance | **DAY 1** | **DAY 90** | **YEAR 1**

PREPARE & ORIENT | INTEGRATE | EXCEL

TIME (for Average New Hire)

Comparison diagram of a RGNH and SI where the main points of overlapping connection are increased understanding and mentorship, which lead to both groups having feeling connected to the organization as the basis for them returning or seeing themselves there for the foreseeable future.

Word cloud of the top 15 words repeated across 38 transcripts, redacting stop/filler words
This map correlates to the concept that Generation Z new hires prefer to find work that is people and relationship building centric with work connecting to the overall bigger picture at the forefront rather than mission and vision.

Breakdown of Connectedness in NVivo Analysis


Across 38 Transcripts :
1. 58 direct coded nodes for Team Connectedness
2. 44 direct coded nodes for Mission & Vision Connectedness
3. 41 direct coded nodes for Other New Hires or Intern Connectedness

Connectedness to Teams leads to Connectedness to the Mission and Vision through seeing others in the organization living out the Mission & Vision through the way they complete their work. Finally, connectedness to Other New Hires/Interns is important for community building within the cohort. This theme was the only theme against the prominent themes in the Qualtrics survey that produced a moderate correlation against the independent variable of 'Would/Would Not Return.'
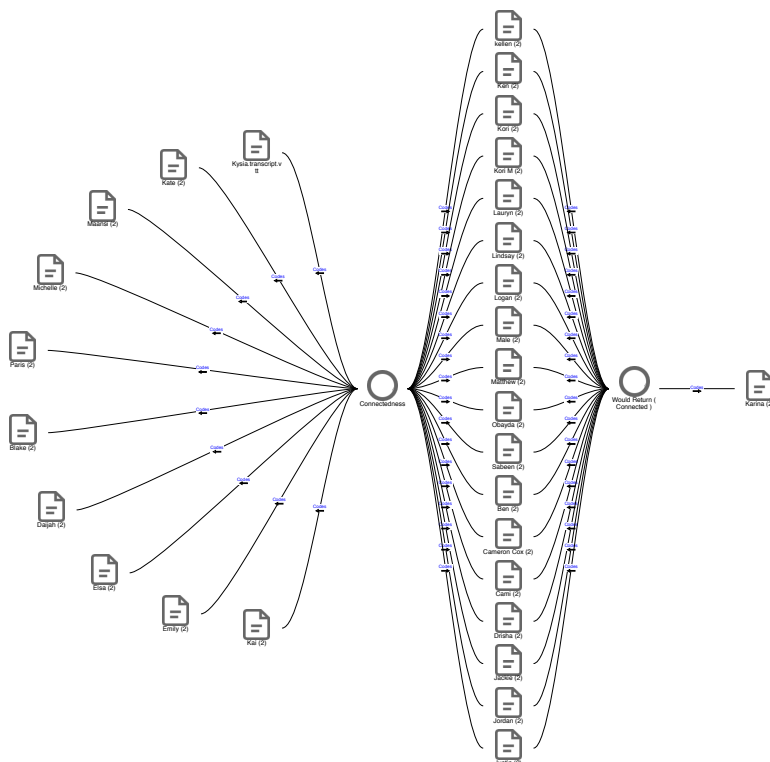

Comparison diagram comparing the nodes 'Connected' which encompasses 'Teams,' 'Other New Hires and Interns' and 'Mission and Vision' to 'Would Return (Connected). Those who were onboarded and felt connected to their team, did report that they would be interested in either returning to their organization or staying for the foreseeable future.

Increased Understanding connected to Would Return (Connected)
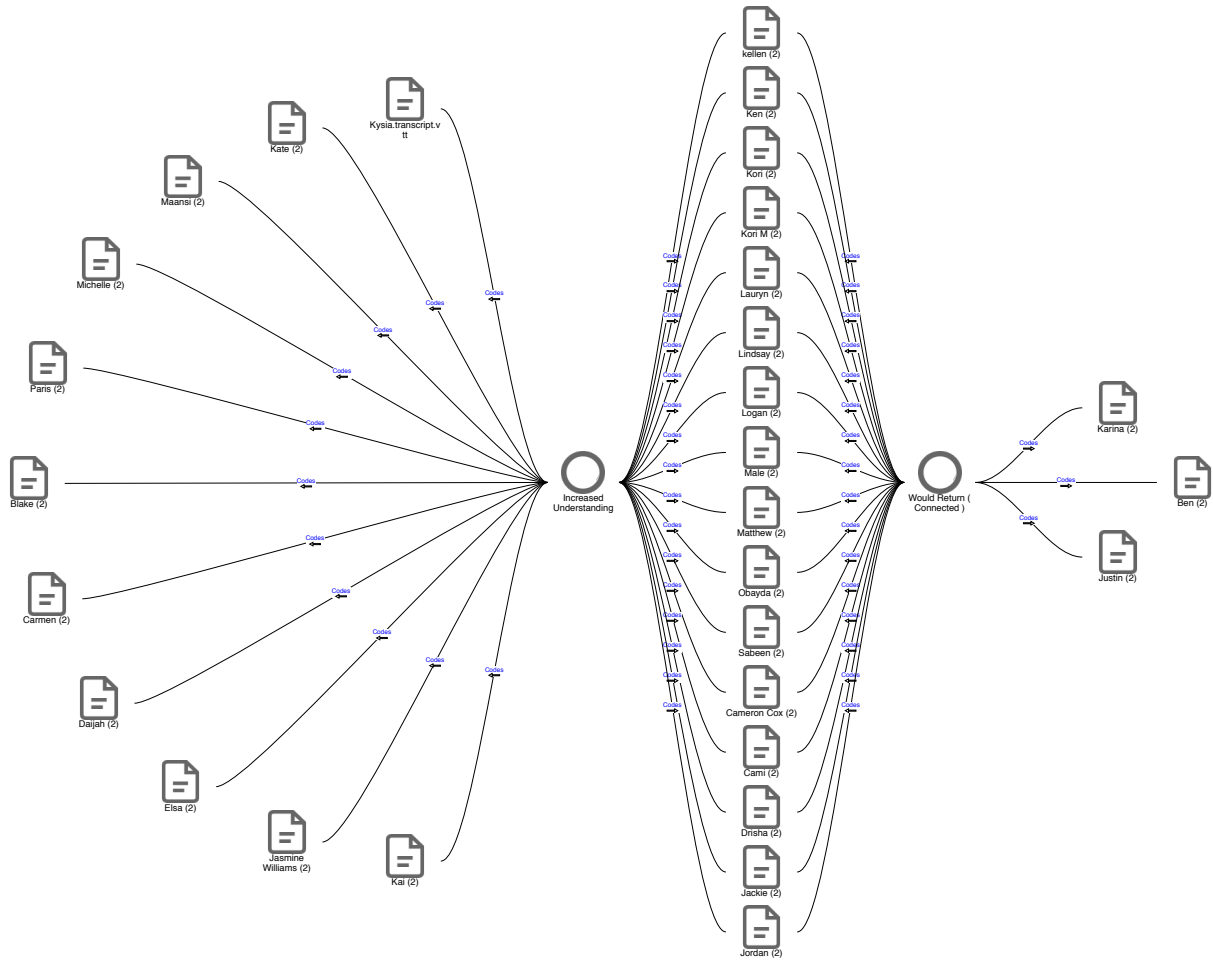
Comparison diagram comparing the node ''Increased Understanding' to 'Would Return (Connected). Those who were onboarded and felt connected to their team, did report that they would be interested in either returning to their organization or staying for the foreseeable future.

Mentorship connected to Increased Understanding
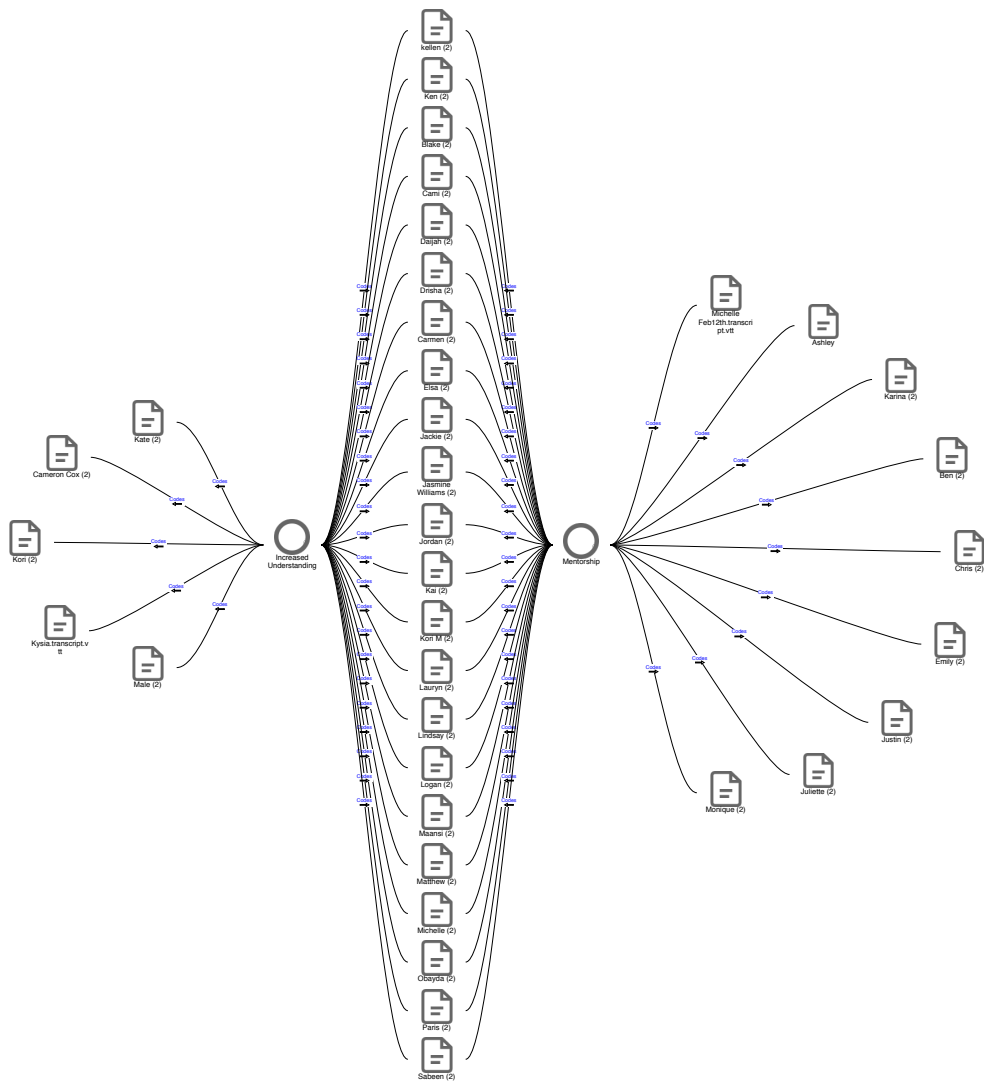
Connection between the nodes 'Increased Understanding' and 'Mentorship.' Across 38 transcripts, 22 transcripts had overlapping themes of mentorship leading to increased understanding. 'Increased Understanding' and 'Mentorship' are both connected to 'Would Return (Connected)' leading to an assumed relationship between mentorship leading to an increased understanding of work responsibilities, how work connects to the bigger picture and willingness to return or stay on for the foreseeable future.

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