
UNIT 13 ORIENTATION

Objectives

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 appreciate the importance of inducting new employees and re-orienting old employees in an organisation;
- 1 prepare an orientation checklist for supervisors and for those in charge of orientation programme;
- 1 evaluate the success of orientation in the context of organisational aims and objectives.

Structure

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Orientation Objectives
- 13.3 Why Orientation?
- 13.4 Orientation Policy
- 13.5 Orientation Contents
- 13.6 Orientation Responsibilities
- 13.7 Orientation Programme
- 13.8 Orientation Checklist
- 13.9 Orientation Evaluation
- 13.10 Summary
- 13.11 Self-Assessment Questions
- 13.12 Further Readings

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Orientation or induction is the process of introducing new employees to an organisation, to their specific jobs and departments, and in some instances, to their community. Orientation also marks the beginning of the process by which employees are integrated into the organisation. This process is primarily one of the organisation members informing the new member of the company's expectations. The orientation process communicates basic organisational philosophy, policies, rules, and procedures. Orientation programmes can be either formal or informal. Formal programmes are planned, and structured sessions are conducted at a set time. Informal programmes are unstructured in content and are typically conducted by supervisors and/or co-workers in an employee's first day at work.

A new recruit needs orientation. The orientation meeting is the official welcome from the company. It should be conducted with warmth and understanding. The first few days on the job are filled with doubts and fears. The new employee needs assurance, confidence, and a nudge in the right direction until he finds his own way.

In most organisations, some form of orientation follows selection and hiring of new employees. Orientation provides new employees with the basic information regarding working conditions, policies, procedures, pay, and benefits, and

introduces them to the management and its co-workers. Orientation does not include training in the performance of job tasks and responsibilities. That comes in the training programme. It includes those things that are done to introduce a new employee to the work environment, to fellow employees, to the work station, and to general policies and procedures that a new environment creates.

Performance appraisal relates to orientation function in that the new employees are informed of the acceptable levels of performance. Orientation function typically leads to the training and development function. For almost all jobs, some degree of training follows orientation. While orientation provides new employees with general information, training provides them with the specific knowledge and skills necessary to perform the job.

13.2 ORIENTATION OBJECTIVES

The objectives of orientation are:

1. To welcome the new employee, relieve his anxieties, and make him feel at home.
2. To develop a rapport between the company and the new employee and make him feel part of the organisation as quickly as possible.
3. To inspire the new employee with a good attitude toward the company and his job.
4. To acquaint new employees with company goals, history, management, traditions, policies, departments, divisions, products, and physical layouts.
5. To communicate to new employees what is expected of them, their responsibilities, and how they should handle themselves.
6. To present the basic information the employee wants to know: rules and regulations, benefits, payday, procedures, and general practices.
7. To encourage the new employee to have an inquiring mind, show him how to learn, and assist him toward a discipline effort in developing additional knowledge.
8. To provide basic skills, terms, and knowledge of the business world and help the new employee in human relations.

13.3 WHY ORIENTATION?

Orientation marks the beginning of socialisation, the process by which the employee is indoctrinated to the organisation's norms, values, and ways of doing things. Socialisation is a period of adjustment for new employees, in which they learn what is expected of them in terms of appropriate behaviour and acceptable performance. An ideal orientation programme gives to each new employee confidence and pride in himself and the company he works for. It makes him feel part of the company team. Orientation contributes to organisational effectiveness by facilitating the socialisation process so that new employees become integrated into the organisations as soon as possible. The sooner new employees feel comfortable in the organisation, the sooner they can be productive workers.

The ease with which employees adjust to the new job and work environment is often a function of the expectations they bring to the job. If expectations are realistic, adjustment will be relatively simple. If, however, expectations are unrealistic or unreasonable, adjustment will be more difficult. In the latter case, orientation can be instrumental in modifying employee expectations.

Most companies realise that the first impressions of new employees affect future job satisfaction, competence, and company loyalty. Organisations make investments of time and money in new employees and, therefore, want to obtain their best efforts on the job, greatest level of efficiency in the shortest period of time, as well as their loyalty and respect. An orientation programme is a critical factor in shaping the work attitude. The attitudes formed in the early days on the job tend to persist and are not easily changed. An orientation programme, therefore, must be sound, follow a carefully thought-out plan and adhere to a reasonable timetable.

The benefits of orientation are:

1. It can cut down recruitment costs.
2. It can be a motivating factor for new staff.
3. It can be used as a supplement to improve training and development functions.
4. It can have a beneficial effect on existing staff.
5. It can make a contribution to quality initiatives.

13.4 ORIENTATION POLICY

1. That the organisation is committed to full orientation for all new entrants.
2. That every new member of the organisation would have to undergo a comprehensive and appropriate orientation programme.
3. That as a part of the orientation process, each new member would have the opportunity to discuss a training plan to meet agreed needs.
4. That every entrant would be given an opportunity to discuss aspects of orientation at appraisal meeting and exit interviewing.
5. That all those involved in orientation will receive appropriate training to carry it out.
6. That a review team would be set up to monitor all aspects of the orientation policy.

13.5 ORIENTATION CONTENTS

Formal orientation rests almost entirely with personnel professionals. They are responsible for seeing that orientation programming is initiated in the first place, and that is carried out according to plan. They determine the programme content and how information will be conveyed and prepare programme materials. They also train line supervisors in the performance of their orientation responsibilities. They also schedule, conduct and evaluate formal orientation programmes. The information provided in orientation programmes typically covers things like:

1. the objectives and philosophy of the organisation;
2. company history, policies, practices;
3. company products and/or services;
4. company plans and facilities;
5. organisation structure (in general);
6. employee responsibilities to company;
7. company responsibilities to employee;
8. employee compensation benefits;

9. personnel policies;
10. work schedules;
11. training opportunities; and
12. safety measures and regulations.

Another responsibility is conducting follow-ups to the orientation programme, whether formal or informal. Like any other personnel function, orientation programmes should be evaluated to determine whether they are accomplishing their stated objectives. Orientation programmes can be evaluated by soliciting opinions from the new employees or from the employee's supervisor. Personnel records can also be used in evaluating orientation programme's effectiveness. Exit interviews are also a good source of evaluation data.

13.6 ORIENTATION RESPONSIBILITIES

The supervisor plays the most important role in orientation. He is expected to have a complete understanding of the company's policies and practices and share his enthusiasm and knowledge with his new recruits. An orientation checklist is a handy tool for the supervisor. It provides an outline of the items he should cover with the new employees and can be used as a good follow-up technique. The supervisor is expected to give the new recruit the information he needs when he first reports to work and to answer questions the employee may have. He can use the orientation checklist as a means of making sure that the employee has sufficient understanding of the policies and practices that he needs to know.

An orientation programme helps to establish teamwork between the personnel specialist and the supervisor. The personnel specialist introduces the policies and practices of the company and provides motivation toward a good performance and the supervisor capitalises on motivation by developing the employee's interest. Once this is accomplished, the supervisor can turn his major interest to the immediate training and development of his new staff member. •

13.7 ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

The orientation programme of a new employee into the company is such an important part of the management function that it merits special attention. The programme is intended to help a new employee become integrated as soon as possible functionally and socially into the company and its environment. The main responsibility for implementing and evaluating the programme lies with the concerned line and personnel managers. The contents and methods of the programme will vary in details depending upon the position and the new employee's background. A new employee should be met by the responsible line and staff manager at the beginning and end of the programme. The initial meeting is necessary with a view to:

- 1 explain the aim, objectives and plan of the induction programme;
- 1 inform the new employee where and how he may obtain assistance wherever needed;
- 1 encourage him to consult his supervisors, line managers or human resource manager if any problem arises; and
- 1 ascertain whether there are any initial problems or queries that need to be dealt with.

A meeting at the end of the programme is held so that line and staff managers can assess the progress made by the employee and decide on the future plans. The human resource department has to follow-up the programme from the beginning to the end.

An orientation programme may not succeed due to several reasons. Some of them are:

- 1 Supervisor who is entrusted with the job is not trained or is too busy.
- 1 Employee is overwhelmed with too much information in a short time.
- 1 Employee is overloaded with formalities to complete.
- 1 Employee is pushed into the job with a sketchy orientation under the mistaken belief that actual work at the work place is the best orientation.
- 1 Employee is forced to fill in the gaps between a broad orientation by the human resource department and a narrow orientation at the department level.

13.8 ORIENTATION CHECKLIST

- 1 Welcome the new employee to the organisation.
- 1 Chat with the employee to reduce tension.
- 1 Build the employee's confidence. Convince him/her of success on the job.
- 1 Make the employee feel important. Explain the importance of the job.
- 1 Provide a go-round of the entire work area (departments).
- 1 Introduce some of the officers and employees during the visits. Try to show a friendly atmosphere of the works/departments.
- 1 Explain the basic duties and responsibilities of the job.
- 1 Explain office practices, services and benefits.
- 1 Introduce the new employee to his/her immediate supervisor.
- 1 Introduce the new employee to the training department/trainers.
- 1 Make sure the employee understands whom he/she reports to during the training period.
- 1 Describe the training to the employee and its importance in career progression.
- 1 Let the new employee know how long he/she is considered to be in training and the duration and conditions of any probationary period.
- 1 Explain the job performance standards during the training period and after the training period.
- 1 Make arrangements to ensure that the new employee has frequent contact with his/her immediate superior.
- 1 Make sure the employee knows whom to contact in the event of problems.
- 1 Show the new employee that he/she is important to the organisation and its people.
- 1 Make the new employee aware of his/her career path.

The checklist is a guideline for the human resource specialist and the supervisor as to exactly what they should do. It is an outline of the company's expectations of the employee and what the employee may expect of the organisation.

13.9 ORIENTATION EVALUATION

To measure how well the orientation programme meets its objectives, you may use:

1. Testing or questionnaires to see if factual material was learned
2. The checklist
3. Evaluation forms or opinions

4. Discussions with immediate supervisors of newly oriented employees
5. Formal or informal interviews during probationary periods or at the end of a month's employment
6. Exit or terminal interviews.

A systematic orientation programme should have an evaluation and follow up. Evaluating the costs and benefits of orientation programme can follow several approaches. One is to compute the cost per new employee. This is done as follows:

Direct Costs

- Cost of trainers or orientation specialists.
- Cost of materials provided.
- Cost of space used (if applicable).

Indirect Costs

- Cost of time of supervisors, trainers/orientation specialists.
- Cost of supervision of new employees on the job.

Trainees can be asked to evaluate the benefits of orientation by administering a questionnaire. Companies can also experiment and measure orientation programme versus no programme. In all cases, it is easier to compute costs than benefits. A personnel representative or a manager can evaluate the effectiveness of the orientation by follow-up interviews with the new employees a few weeks or months after the orientation. A reorientation programme in which all employees are periodically given a refresher "introduction" should be a part of the follow-up. Reorientation is especially important if significant changes in organisational policies or structure have occurred.

Activity A

Do you have formal orientation programme for new recruits in your organisation? If so, how is it carried out in practice?

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If you are aware of any informal orientation activity in your organisation, give a brief account of the same.

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13.10 SUMMARY

Orientation is the guided adjustment of a new employee to the organisation, work environment, and job. An orientation programme is the result of a plan. Though orientation is basically meant for new employees, a company must continue to orient all its employees as change and innovation develop the need. The objectives of orientation are multifold. In carrying out such a programme, the management seeks to create a favourable attitude toward the company, its policies, and its personnel. It can instill a feeling of belonging and acceptance. It can generate enthusiasm and high morale. A general company orientation presents topics of relevance and interest to all employees. The responsibility for orientation is normally shared by the human resource department and the new employee's immediate superior. However, someone should be made responsible to take periodic inventory of what innovations have taken place and of what renewal-orientation seems to be necessary and to develop special programmes for this need. An orientation kit provides written material to supplement the verbal orientation programme. Orientation programmes range from the brief informal introduction to lengthy formal programmes. Formal and systematic follow-up of initial orientation is essential.

13.11 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What is orientation? What is an orientation kit?
2. Identify the importance of orientation and tell how you would orient a new management trainee?
3. "Induction is the guided adjustment of employee to the organisation and his work environment." Discuss.

13.12 FURTHER READINGS

Aswathappa, K., *Human Resources and Personnel Management*, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1997.

Bernardin, H. J., and Russel, J.E.A., *Human Resource Management - An Experimental Approach*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1993.

Meighan, M., *How to Design and Deliver Induction Training Programmes*, Kogan Page, London, 1995.