Learning the Ropes:

A Phenomenological Exploration of Newcomer Experiences of Onboarding at a Health Services Organisation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Onboarding is a period of significant learning in which newcomers become orientated to their roles and socialised into the organisation. The rapid shift to remote work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching implications for how businesses manage their onboarding process. Newcomers are commencing roles while working separately from their colleagues. Literature on onboarding typically focuses on the delivery of co-located activities, with virtual onboarding still being a relatively new phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to explore how newcomers are experiencing onboarding at an HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study engaged with a qualitative interpretive phenomenological research design to achieve this. Six participants were purposively sampled to participate in semi-structured interviews that enabled them to share their experiences, and the data gathered was analysed thematically. Analysis of these results identified that the shift to remote and hybrid work impacted participants onboarding experiences. The participants found that the onboarding activities, while helpful, were also very intense with large amounts of information conveyed in short periods. This was exacerbated by the reduced interactions that the participants had with colleagues. As participants worked separately to colleagues, it became harder for them to build relationships, seek feedback, and clarify expectations. The results of this study have highlighted the need for further research on the impact of delivering onboarding in a remote or hybrid model. For this organisation, this study has identified areas for development, including the need to support existing staff in facilitating on-the-job learning within a virtual or hybrid model of working and the development of accessible organisational resources. As a practitioner, completing this research has led to a reconceptualisation of what constitutes good onboarding p

ractice.

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Abbreviations

GDPR	General Data Production Regulations
HR	Human Resources
HSE	Health Service Executive
HSELanD	HSE Learning and Development – eLearning Platform
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
OneDrive	OneDrive is Microsoft's cloud-based data storage system
Otter.Ai	Otter.Ai is a cloud-based transcription programme that can be linked to the Zoom video conferencing tool

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Background to the Study

This research study explores one of the most significant periods in workplace education – onboarding. In its simplest terms, onboarding can be described as helping someone "learn the ropes" when they set out in a new role. This study sought to explore how onboarding practices have been experienced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter begins by exploring the concept of onboarding and outlining the background and context of the research problem. It then identifies why this subject has been selected and what the study hopes to achieve.

Starting a new job can be a stressful experience for a newcomer. It can be overwhelming to take on large quantities of information, processes, and rules while also navigating a new working culture and building relationships with colleagues (Raub et al., 2021). Onboarding practices have been a means for organisations to ease this stress for newcomers by actively supporting them in building relationships with colleagues, learning the knowledge and skills they need for their roles, and introducing them to the organisational culture (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Korte & Lin, 2013; Rollag et al., 2005).

Onboarding practices can happen formally or informally, and approaches vary across organisations depending on their size and focus (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Chillakuri, 2020; Schroth, 2019). These activities can sometimes be referred to as 'induction' (Klein & Polin, 2012; Srimannarayana, 2016), 'new employee orientation' (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011) or 'organisational socialisation' (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Harris et al., 2020; Korte & Lin, 2013). Induction and new employee orientation are typically formal activities that introduce an individual to the organisation and occur within the first weeks of employment (Srimannarayana, 2016). By contrast, onboarding and organisational socialisation can run from several months to up to two years (Klein & Polin, 2012). These activities can happen formally, as structured training (Johnson & Senges, 2010; Sharma & Stol, 2020) or informally, through the observation of colleagues in the flow of work (Kowtha, 2018).

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, how organisations deliver and facilitate onboarding for newcomers has had to change. The shift to remote and hybrid working models has altered how organisations interact with their employees (Collings et al., 2021a). This has meant that newcomers are commencing new roles while working remotely or physically distanced from colleagues. As a result, there has been a shift in how onboarding activities are delivered, as opportunities to observe, interact and learn from colleagues are drastically reduced (Lund et al., 2021). This has created challenges, as in many cases learning within onboarding typically happens in the course of work (Kowtha, 2018). With the shift to remote working, these activities have had to shift based on what is possible within the new environment. Saks and Gruman (2021) argue that this has the potential to create "a situation in which newcomers will be left on their own" and will have "no choice but to 'sink or swim'" (p. 217-218). They argue that that how organisations onboard or "socialise" newcomers will have to change in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and that these changes may possibly be forever (p. 217).

Now, as organisations start to prepare for a return to the office, we can see that the COVID-19 pandemic has created long-term changes in the traditional structure of the workplace (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2021). The consultancy firm, McKinsey, identified in their "The Future of Work after COVID-19" report that the pandemic has accelerated a transition to hybrid and remote working for sections of the workforce (Lund et al., 2021). In Ireland the introduction of the "National Remote Work Strategy" indicates that these changes are likely to be long-term, with up to twenty percent of the public sector workforce working remotely in the future (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2021). McKinsey argue this means practices such as onboarding will require "significant rethinking to produce similar outcomes to those achieved in-person"(Lund et al., 2021, p. 38). This study explored how onboarding has been experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to identify how to improve these practices in the future.

1.2 Context

This study was carried out within a Health Services Executive (HSE) organisation that provides population-based health programmes. The organisation employs approximately four hundred staff who work across six locations around Ireland in various roles, including management and administration, clinical and non-clinical staff. COVID-19 has led to a significant transformation in how the employees of this organisation interact and operate within the workplace. While the organisation does not provide frontline care, in May 2020, some of its services were paused for several months, and some staff were then redeployed to other parts of the HSE. Staff have worked either entirely remotely or in a hybrid model since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has meant that employees have had to navigate frequently changing ways of interaction throughout this period which has had a significant impact on how onboarding practices have been managed during this period.

As part of the Health Service Executive, this organisation is guided in its approach to training by the "HSE Learning and Development Policy" (2019a), and underpinned by the "HSE People Strategy" (2019b) and "Sláintecare" (Department of Health, 2017). A core element of this policy is the adoption of a blended approach to learning using a 70:20:10 model, where learning comes from a combination of experiences – 70% through 'on-the-job' activities, 20% through exchanges with others such as coaching or shadowing, and 10% from structured training activities (Health Service Executive, 2019a). All employees also have access to HSE's eLearning platform HSELanD. In addition, this blended approach to learning is guided by Priority 3 of the HSE People Strategy (2019b), which identifies a need to develop "a culture that prioritises learning and development to ensure we have the capability and capacity at individual and team levels to confidently deliver person-centred care, problem solve and innovate" (p. 4).

The HSE provides the “HSE Induction Guidelines and Checklists” (2017) to support the process of onboarding. The HSE describes the role of induction as formally introduce the employee to their place to work and their colleagues and to provide a “clear understanding of their job, role and responsibilities and the mission and values of the wider organisation” (Health Service Executive, 2017, p.6). This document serves as a guide for managers in the practical elements of supporting newcomers. Induction is broken down into four phases, each of which is supported by a separate checklist:

- Pre-employment – to ensure the line manager prepares for the arrival of the new employee.
- Departmental – to provide appropriate information to employees relevant to their own role and department, working arrangements, departmental health and safety arrangements, security etc.
- Site Induction – to provide an overview of the various services within the site.
- Corporate Induction – introduces the wider organisation, presenting a consistent message about the values, structures, and services of the organisation, in addition to placing people’s work in the broader context of the HSE (Health Service Executive, 2017)

These checklists serve as prompts to guide the onboarding process, and all other activities are managed locally by department heads or relevant line manager line managers. These activities tend to focus on one-to-one training or the shadowing of existing staff. The Human Resources (HR) department administers Corporate Induction for all new staff. In early 2021 this corporate induction was redesigned for virtual delivery. It is composed of a series of short presentations that represent each of the disciplines within the organisation. In addition, newcomers are provided with additional support via an induction hub i-START, which can be accessed through HSELanD e-Learning platform.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation has shifted how these activities were delivered in line with revised public health guidance from the HSE via an updated series of induction checklists (Health Service Executive, 2020). In some departments, this training is delivered face-to-face in the office but physically distanced in line with public health guidelines, Whereas other departments have shifted to training new staff online. The shift in these activities has created challenges for both newcomers and existing staff, as they may not always have experience or the precedent of interacting remotely. This has required as this has required a major digital transformation, as employees transition from face-to-face interactions, to using conferencing calls and then virtual meeting technologies such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

1.3 Rationale

This study holds both personal and professional interests. My professional background is in developing and delivering onboarding programmes for several years. I understand the significance of this process for enabling newcomers to become effective in a new role. From a personal perspective, I am an employee at this organisation and have experienced how they deliver their onboarding and induction activities. This experience was the starting point for this project. I became curious about how these onboarding practices might be experienced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and what implications of this are for the future.

For me, onboarding is one of the most significant periods for learning in the workplace and represents what Gert Biesta (2010) refers to as the major functions of education – "qualification, socialisation, and subjectification" (p.6). Through onboarding, organisations can ensure that newcomers are "qualified" by helping them develop the relevant knowledge and communicating the expectations of the role. Through onboarding, newcomers can be socialised into the organisational culture, its "ways of doing and ways of being" by developing the appropriate attitudes and behaviours (p.6). Finally, through onboarding, newcomers are facilitated in building a relationship with their colleagues, enabling them to feel comfortable asking questions or in speaking up when they make a mistake – what Biesta refers to as "subjectification", the ways of being that "hint at independence" (p. 7). This perspective drove my expectations when being onboarded as a newcomer in my current role with this organisation.

My current role within this organisation is as a Section Officer, providing support to service users. When I joined the organisation in July 2019, initially as a contractor, I had no previous experience in the public sector or working in health care. This role was a departure from my previous background in learning and development within the private sector overseas I found my onboarding experience challenging as I spent my first few days reviewing documents with no computer access or understanding what was expected of me. I felt like an outsider, overwhelmed by what I had to learn and the need to adjust to a very different type of working culture. Over time, I have built my knowledge by shadowing my colleagues, listening to what they said, and seeking feedback on my performance. This enabled me to build relationships and gain a greater sense of the organisational culture.

These early experiences drove me to design and develop an onboarding programme to support new staff joining our department. This programme aims to help newcomers develop the knowledge and skills to do their roles. While also creating opportunities for them to interact with colleagues and integrate into the culture of the organisation. However, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, how we delivered onboarding activities within the department has shifted. Even though our programme was quite structured, incidental learning was an essential part of how newcomers put this knowledge into practice. For example, newcomers would learn about different types of requests during training. However, through listening to colleagues, that they developed a nuanced understanding of what these requests look like in reality.

Like many workplaces, we adjusted these practices to align with public-health guidelines, delivering virtually or physically distanced sessions. However, I saw first-hand how this impacted newcomers as the reduced interaction with colleagues meant that rather than asking questions as they arose, they would save them up and ask them at set times, cautious of bothering colleagues whom they did not know. Saks and Gruman (2021) warn that the reduced opportunities for incidental interaction can create situations where newcomers may be left behind. As the 70:20:10 model underpins the organisational approach, which emphasises learning in the course of work, I became curious about this transition would be handled across the organisation.

Through engagement with the relevant empirical and theoretical literature, I found that much of the recent research in this field is diversified. It focuses on exploring core elements of the onboarding process through the lens of different social theories. For example, Korte and Lin (2013) explore the mediating impact of relationships on socialisation and Ellis et al. (2015) examined the impact of stress on newcomers through COR theory. However, these approaches spoke only to elements of what was happening within the research context. I turned to the frameworks that have dominated traditional literature on onboarding. These have ranged from a focus on organisational tactics (Van Maanen & Schien, 1979), fostering newcomer proactive behaviours (Ashforth, 2001; Bauer et al., 2007 Morrison, 1997) to learning outcomes (Klein & Heuser, 2008). However, these models are designed to support onboarding in a traditional co-located environment. Singh et al. (2020) argue that the unprecedented situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic means that these frameworks cannot be utilised in the same way.

Engaging with the work of Harris et al. (2020) on newcomer sensemaking during onboarding, I began to consider the element of the experience. Rather than focus on testing a hypothesis or theory, I realised the study needed to take an exploratory approach that could respond to the unprecedented nature of the current situation. This led me to the research problem - to explore the impact of COVID 19 on newcomers experiences of onboarding at this HSE organisation. In addressing this research problem, this meant recognising the knowledge generated would be highly subjective and based on individual experience. Therefore, the focus of this study was to explore the broader patterns of meaning within these experiences with the intention of understanding how onboarding is happening during the COVID-19 pandemic. This drove the selection of a qualitative methodology paired with an approach of interpretive phenomenology, with data collected via semi-structured interviews and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the onboarding experiences of newcomers at this HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging with newcomers to describe their onboarding experiences during COVID-19 enabled me to explore the impact of this phenomenon. Furthermore, as remote and hybrid working becomes a permanent feature of the workplace, the data gathered throughout this process will provide insight into how onboarding practices can be restructured for the future.

Therefore, this research study aimed to gain insights into new employees' lived experience of onboarding in the context of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objectives guiding this research study were:

- To explore the participants’ experience of onboarding activities.
- To examine the meaning of these actions and their impact for the participants.
- To make recommendations for future practice of onboarding for this organisation.

1.5 Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is broken into the following sections that provide a pathway through the research process. The next chapter identifies and discusses key literature associated with the concept of onboarding, specifically, how it has been equated with organisational socialisation, how onboarding can be facilitated and its perceived impact. Knud Illeris's (2011) "Advanced Model of Workplace

Learning" has been used as a theoretical lens to structure this discussion of how onboarding happens in practice. Before exploring how the shift to remote working has impacted onboarding practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter concludes by drawing together the key elements discussed and identify the research question guiding this study.

Chapter Three sets out the methodology engaged with to explore this concept within the chosen research setting. It begins by placing the research in its philosophical context, rooting it within an epistemological standpoint of post-modern concepts of knowledge, outlining the research approach of phenomenology. Next, it describes the research participants, their selection and recruitment, and details the data collection and thematic analysis processes. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the ethical implications of the study and how quality was maintained. Chapter Four sets out the findings that emerged through the data collection and analysis processes. The implications of these findings are discussed and linked back to the relevant theoretical literature identified in Chapter Two. The final chapter concludes the dissertation, summarising the findings, discussing the study's limitations, and lays out the implications of the results and recommendations for future practice and research.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research aimed to gain insights into new employees' lived experience of onboarding in the context of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter explores the literature around this topic, framing it in the context of the research problem – to explore the onboarding experiences of newcomers at this HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter has been structured thematically to reflect the exploratory nature of this subject. It moves from a broad discussion of the key concepts under study and then moves into the finder context-specific detail that reflects the research topic's nature.

The first section explores the concept of onboarding and the critical literature associated with the topic, specifically, the relationship between the concepts of organisational socialisation and onboarding. The second section explores the key elements of onboarding, drawing on learning theory to explore how onboarding happens in practice. Knud Illeris's 'Advanced Model of Working Life' (2011) has been used as a theoretical lens to structure this discussion. The third section explores how the shift to remote work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted onboarding. The final section draws together the key elements of the review and articulates the research question guiding this study to conclude the chapter.

The literature presented in this review represents a cross-section of the field onboarding and organisational socialisation. Reference has been made to several key texts that have guided the development of the field including working by Van Maanen and Schien (1979), Bauer et al (2007), Klein and Polin (2012), and Klein and Heuser (2008). As literature on onboarding and socialisation has diversified in recent years to focus on specific elements of the onboarding or socialisation process – social capital (Korte & Lin, 2013), sensemaking (Harris et al, 2020), generational expectations of onboarding (Chillakuri, 2020) and virtual onboarding programmes (Singh et al., 2020) – it has been necessary to supplement this with reference to key articles from this field.

2.2 What is Onboarding?

Onboarding is the means by which newcomers are socialised into an organisation, acclimatised to its culture and its goals (Garavan et al., 2020). As a process, it can refer to both the formal and informal practices that organisations or their agents engage with to facilitate the adjustment of newcomers (Schroth, 2019). For organisations, onboarding provides an opportunity to 'bridge' the gap between the costs of the hiring and the employee becoming productive (Schroth, 2019). For organisations, onboarding provides an opportunity to 'bridge' the gap between the costs of the hiring process by ensuring the productivity of the employee (Snell, 2006). For newcomers, onboarding supports them in addressing the uncertainties associated with commencing a new role (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Moon, 2018) by enabling them to gain clarity on their roles and get an understanding of expectations of the organisation (Schroth, 2019). In addition, onboarding can facilitate newcomers in developing relationships with co-workers (Rollag et al., 2005), building social capital and facilitate the transition "from outsiders to insiders" (Korte & Lin, 2013, p.423).

Approaches to onboarding vary across organisations. For example, large-scale multinationals such as Google and IBM typically engage in structured training programmes that orient the newcomer to their role, their team and the organisational culture (Johnson & Senges, 2010; Sharma & Stol, 2020). In contrast, other organisations may take a more individualised approach to onboarding, with newcomers learning on the job informally from colleagues through trial and error (Kowtha, 2018; Keisling & Laning, 2016; 2012; Harris et al., 2020). Then some organisations balance a mix of the two, combining short formalised introductory programmes that centre around policies, procedures, organisational values and goals (Srimannarayana, 2016, p. 521) with individualised tactics to orientate newcomers to their roles.

As a concept, onboarding emerged from early socialisation and interactional psychology literature, particularly Van Maanen and Schien (1979). They identified a series of bi-polar tactics through which an individual would acquire “the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organisational role” (pg.1). Literature on onboarding has and continues to be equated with this concept of organisational socialisation (or socialisation). Whilst the early literature that evolved from Van Maanen and Schien’s (1979) work focused on the stages through which an employee could be socialised into their role (Wanous, 1992), subsequent research has taken a more agentic perspective that considers the experience of newcomers (Chao, 1994). This early research was criticised for its lack of conceptual structure (Batistič & Kaše, 2015), which Bauer et al. (2007) and Ashforth et al.(2008) sought to address through the development of empirically grounded models that guided organisations through the socialisation process.

This equating of onboarding with socialisation has its challenges. Klein and Polin (2012), argue that socialisation and onboarding are distinct concepts. Firstly, they note socialisation refers to the processes that support newcomers in adapting to their environment, and by contrast, onboarding can be described as the actions taken by the organisation to facilitate the process of “learning and adjustment to a new role” (p. 268). Secondly, they argue that onboarding happens when a newcomer commences in a role, but socialisation is a continual process that occurs through an employee’s time with an organisation, often repeating itself throughout their career. Finally, they posit that onboarding is a means to speed up the process of socialisation when a newcomer commences their role.

Furthermore Klein and Polin (2012) argue that these traditional socialisation tactics cannot sufficiently capture the range of activities and programmes that organisations use to onboard newcomers. For example, a newcomer may experience one organisational action as highly engaging and the other as entirely irrelevant to their role, but both may be rooted in the tactic. This builds on the arguments set out by Klein and Heuser (2008), who argue that if socialisation tactics are linked to learning outcomes, this provides a more effective means to map the employee adjustment process.

Becker and Bish (2021) build on this premise, noting that due to the conceptual roots of organisational socialisation within psychology, it is naturally focused on the experiences of the individual and how they adapt to the organisation. They argue that learning theory provides a more practical lens through which to consider the processes of onboarding and their impact. They argue that taking this position means that onboarding can be viewed as a period of adaptation and learning for newcomers. This perspective allows for a deeper consideration of what the participants bring to the experience. Specifically their capabilities and background rather than just focusing on what "information the organisation needs to impart" (p.2). This approach forms a more nuanced way to explore how onboarding happens in practice.

2.3 Onboarding in Practice

There have been numerous models developed to guide onboarding in practice. As identified by Becker and Bish (2021), these models have tended to focus on what newcomers need to know and how they need to interact. In short, the content or socialisation required to integrate a newcomer into an organisation (Chao, 1994; Van Maaenen & Schien, 1979), whilst others have focused on combining the two (Ashforth et al., 2008; Bauer et al., 2012). A challenge with many of these models is that while they prescribe the elements required for successful onboarding, they do not always consider the informal element of the onboarding process specifically, how learning may be facilitated through the development of relationships or the opportunities for incidental exchanges.

As Becker and Bish (2021) and Klein and Heuser (2008) have noted, it may be more effective to encourage the newcomers to focus on learning, not just performance. In response Klein and Heuser (2008) developed the 'Inform Welcome Guide' model, which they argue serves as a roadmap to guide organisations through the onboarding process. A key part of this approach is creating environments that "prime a learning orientation" so newcomers can utilise the resources available to them (Klein & Polin, 2012, p. 272). If we consider how onboarding can facilitate learning for newcomers in practice, we need to examine it through both the social and individual elements that facilitate learning in the workplace.

Knud Illeris (2004) argues that learning in the workplace happens at the encounter between the learning environment (workplace) and the employee's learning processes (Figure 1). Illeris's 'Advanced Model of Workplace Learning' (2011) provides a lens to explore the individual and social dimensions of learning during the onboarding process by placing the newcomer at the centre of the process. It posits workplace learning as two independent but interconnected processes through which individual engages with their cultural, social, and material environment. At the individual level is the acquisition process between content and incentive. At the social level, are the production and community elements working in collaboration with each other. At the core of the construct is the "dynamic relationship" of personal work identity, workplace practice and personal identity (Illeris, 2004, pg.432).

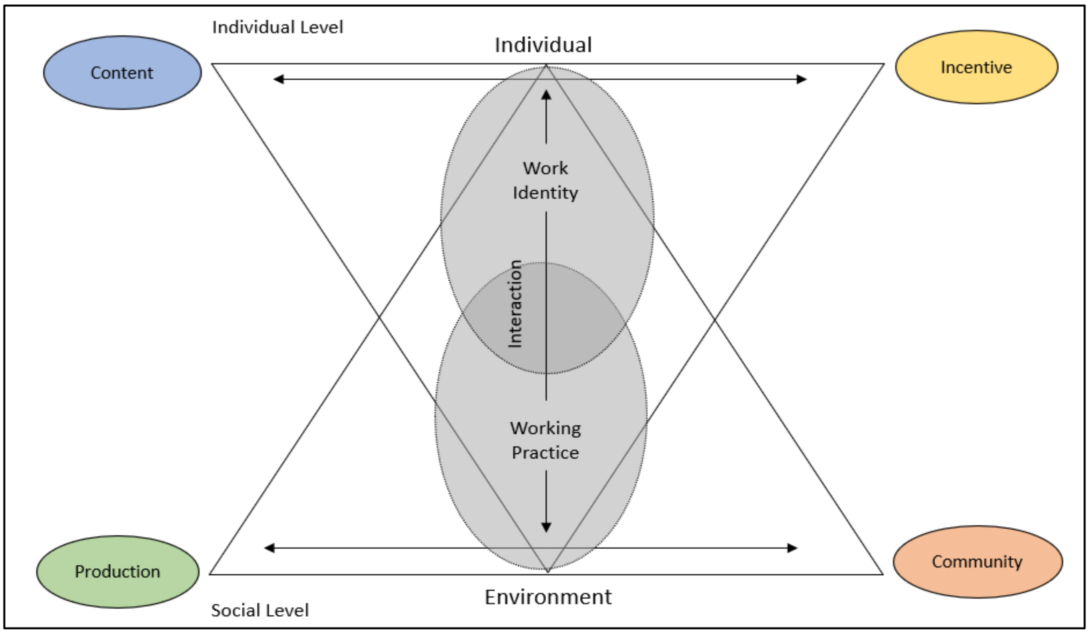
2.3.1 The Individual Level: Learning in Onboarding

At the individual level of onboarding, there is content representing what newcomers need to know, and there is incentive that represents the drive to know it and interaction, which mediates the relationship between the learner and their environment. Illeris (2011) notes that content is essential as there is "no learning without it" (p.13). It represents the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to take part in a role and the levels of consciousness and perception that go along with the workplace – its ways of "acting and reacting" (p. 14). This reflects the focus of traditional onboarding frameworks. The tacit knowledge that must be learned when joining an organisation (see Figure 2). For example, this can be seen in Bauer's 'Four C's model'(2012), which represents content through the levels

‘Compliance’ (covers organisational policies and procedures) and ‘Clarification’ (role parameters and expectations). Similarly, Klein and Heuser (2008) represent this in their ‘Inform Welcome Guide’ model, through the ‘Inform’ category, which refers to the resources, planned activities and communication that impart knowledge to participants during onboarding.

Figure 1

Knud Illeris’s (2011) *The Advanced Model of Workplace Learning*



Note: Knud Illeris’s (2011) Advanced Model of Workplace Learning, Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-advanced-model-of-workplace-learning_fig3_265153258 (Accessed, 12 August 2021)

This represents the approach for many organisations, with the focus being on delivering what Rollag et al. (2005) refer to as a "smorgasbord of information that centres on company routines, technologies and practice" (p.36). Knowledge communicated in this way characterises a type of interaction that Illeris (2011) describes as "transmission". It is typically a "more or less focused attempt to direct specific sense impressions or messages to somebody else" (p. 25). However, Illeris notes there are limits to what can be expected individuals to receive through this type of interaction. It is a common challenge in onboarding when newcomers are provided with too much critical information or too many tasks in a short time (Caldwell & Caldwell, 2016; Srimannarayana, 2016). For newcomers, this overload of information can create stress and lead to frustration, as they cannot process what is being delivered. The challenge with these frameworks is that they intend to guide the onboarding process; as Klein and Polin (2012) have noted, they do not account for how this material might be delivered.

A challenge within this process is the expectation that the newcomer will have the "background, skills and cognitive ability to filter, comprehend and internalise the information as needed to complete their initial tasks" (Rollag et al., 2005; p. 36). As participants are recruited as the most suitable for these roles, these resources should be assumed. However, as research has shown, when organisations take steps to understand what the newcomer brings to the role in terms of personal resources (background, knowledge, and personality) to support their adjustment through this period, this can reduce anxiety and stress for the participants (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Ellis et al., 2015).

Understanding newcomers' backgrounds also support organisations in guiding their learning throughout their onboarding. As Illeris (2011) notes, when we take on new information and impressions through interaction with our environment, it impacts our existing patterns of knowledge. This new information is ascribed to the same area, but it shifts the conception of our existing knowledge. In onboarding, newcomers will view the knowledge and information through their existing patterns of meaning. In understanding the backgrounds of newcomers, organisations can create environments that prepare participants to take on new material more readily. Keisling and Laning (2016) argue this is essential as it supports the newcomer in developing their "professional identity based on what they can bring to the organisation" (p.382).

Incentive drives the process of how we transform and give meaning to this knowledge (see Figure 1). Illeris (2011) argues that everything we learn is underpinned by "how we feel about these functions, how we perceive them, what we want to do with the knowledge and how committed we are to them" (p. 20). In onboarding, the expectation and experience that a newcomer brings to their roles drive the incentive dimension. As Harris (2020) notes, these experiences that newcomers bring with them can enable them to "accurately interpret and make sense of their new environment" (p.200). However, incentive also drives defensiveness in learning. As Ślebarska and Soucek (2020) note unmet expectations are a source of major strain for newcomers. However, when expectations are unclear ambiguous for newcomers, this can contribute to what Illeris (2011) describes as "psychological defence" (p.21) or resistance integrating into the organisation (Woodrow & Guest, 2020).

The incentive dimension also drives the proactive behaviours through which newcomers foster their socialisation (see Figure 2). It is the means through which newcomers can foster adjustment to their new roles, make sense of their work environment and develop an awareness of group expectations (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). As a practice, information seeking can happen actively by asking questions or engaging with organisational resources (De Vos & Freese, 2011) or more passively through observations and interactions with colleagues and managers (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Gruman & Saks, 2018). This is the most common form of information when newcomers are "co-located" and typically centres on technical or normative knowledge, in short knowledge about role tasks or information about expected behaviours and attitudes (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003, pg. 175).

The most prominent form of active information seeking is asking questions of colleagues or managers. Miller and Jablin (1991) identified that in seeking information from colleagues, questions were typically either "referent", "appraisal", or "relational" (p.98). Referent questions typically centre on role clarity and the standards of performance in a new job. In onboarding, this is communicated through training and demonstrations of performance or conversations with managers. Appraisal questions offer a means for newcomers to understand how they are performing by seeking feedback and would typically be directed to managers or supervising colleagues—finally relational questions, centre on the nature of the relationship with others. Miller and Jablin (1991) note that these usually tell the newcomer how they fit into their environment. However, relational questions can also guide newcomers on the best way to relate to others. For example, a manager at a senior level may seek guidance on how to interact when with peers when starting a new role.

Asking questions is traditionally seen as an indication of newcomer proactivity and engagement (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). However, this form of information seeking can have a social cost and undermine the newcomers' position by exposing a lack of knowledge or distract them from producing results (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; De Vos & Freese, 2011). Rollag et al. (2005) note that as a result of this, newcomers will often explore all other sources of information before they seek help. They argue this can lead to challenges as the newcomer may become frustrated when they do not find the answer, or they may reinvent the wheel by pursuing ideas that are not suitable. That the option they put forward may not be culturally, technically, or normatively appropriate. Furthermore, this reluctance to reach out to colleagues can also impact their ability to develop relationships within the organisation.

2.3.2 The Social Level: The Factors Impacting the Process of Onboarding

On the social level, there is production or the technical-organisational learning environment and community or the social-cultural learning environment (see Figure 1). The production dimension represents "how work is organised and the technology that is used" within the organisation (Illeris, 2004, pg.433). Wherever learning takes place within the organisation, it will be impacted by this dimension, specifically, the work it does (public vs private, manufacturing vs technical etc.), how the work is structured (multi-national organisation vs small local business) and the technology engaged in doing this. Illeris (2011) identifies that production manifests itself in several different ways, through the content of work, how work is structured between managers and reporting staff, the opportunity for the newcomer to draw on their background and the possibilities for engage with others. Production can also directly impact on how the newcomer experiences stress and strain in their role.

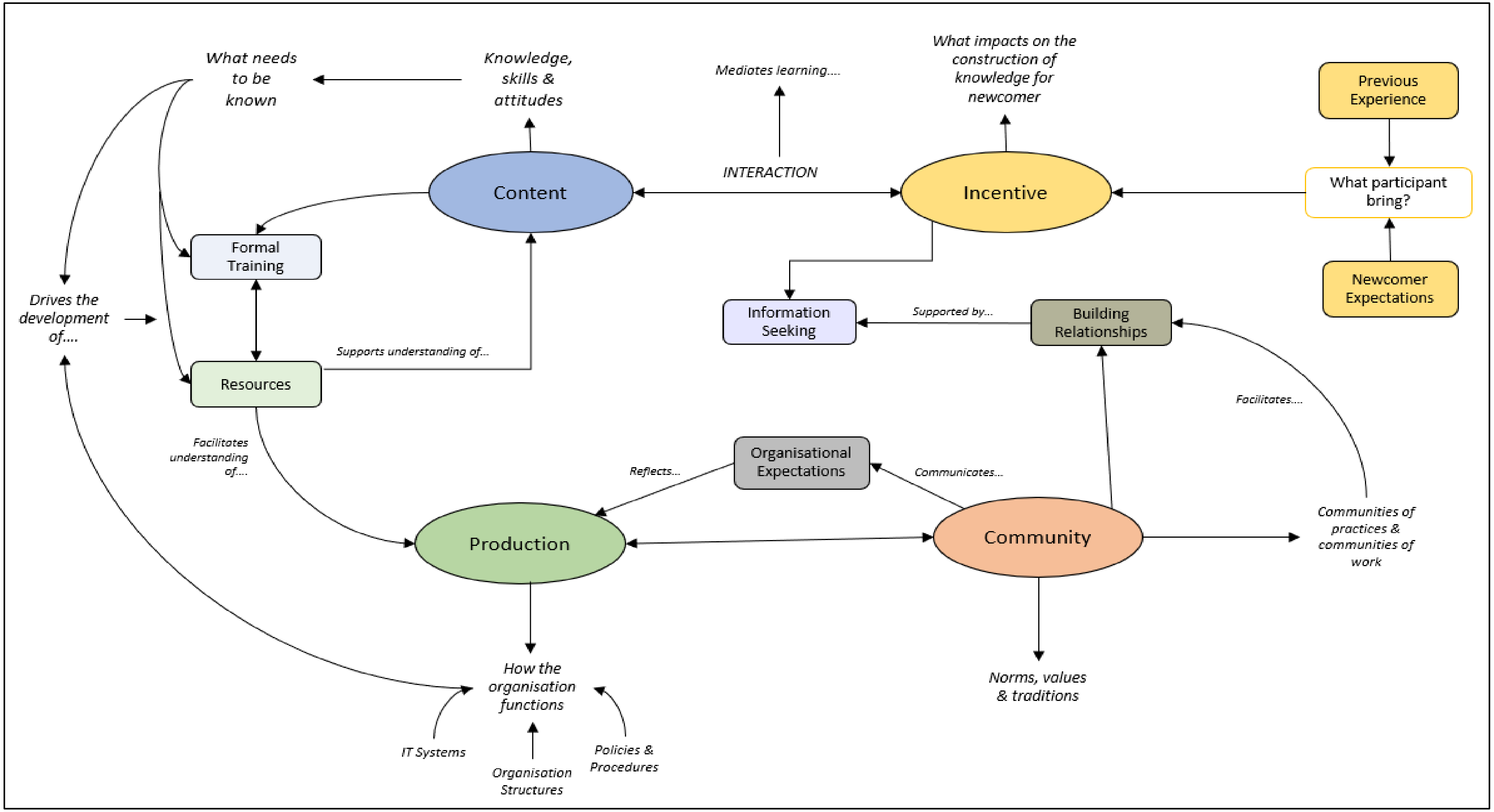
Within onboarding, production can be seen to be represented through the organisational resources available and through the onboarding activities that they engage in (See Figure 2, p.26).

Resources are essential to supporting newcomers in making sense of the organisation, reducing uncertainty, and identifying how they can contribute to the organisation. Bauer et al. (2020) note, actions as simple as providing a desk, computer and ensuring IT access can reduce initial anxiety when starting a role. By providing clear pathways to resources, it can support newcomers in learning the language of the organisation, such as core terminology and acronyms; reviewing the processes and procedures that govern tasks and more comprehensive organisational practices; and understanding the physical structure of the organisation, which is responsible for what, how do you contact them as represented through contact lists, organisational charts, and workflows. However, Klein and Heuser (2008) argue that if organisations make resources available, they must ensure that they are viewed as relevant, reliable, and “easy to access with minimal social cost or chance of negative evaluation” (p.272).

In onboarding, production can be seen in the depth and range of onboarding practices. According to Illeris (2011), the critical element of the production dimension is the opportunity for participants to experience the possibilities within the workplace. Therefore, during onboarding, organisations need to create opportunities for newcomers to experience their work tasks and thus themselves as meaningful. Core to this is creating opportunities that enable newcomers to develop their work identity by drawing on their background and previous experiences to apply knowledge within a new domain. Therefore, opportunities for newcomers not just to engage with their roles but provide opportunity to apply their own knowledge enables them to foster their work identity within this new role. This is a key element of the onboarding process, as newcomer become integrate into

Figure 2

Conceptual Map of Literature



Note: This image is a modified version of Knud Illeris's (2011) "Advanced Model of Workplace Learning" prepared by the authority. Source their new positions. For example, Johnson and Senges (2010) detailed a Google onboarding programmes for software engineers. This programme centred on ensuring that the newcomers had the requisite knowledge for their roles. Within this setting, this knowledge centred around software code, that they understood how the structure of the organisation and how they could interact within their teams.

The google programme was also designed to give newcomers a sense of the organisational culture through the development of collegial relationships. Google engaged with a situated learning approach to create communities of practice that supported newcomers in drawing on the "collective competence" of the team and the expertise of their peers (Johnson & Senges, 2010, p. 190). Illeris (2011) refers to this as the community or social-cultural learning dimension (see Figure 1). It is the means through which organisations transmit norms, values, and traditions through communities of practice and more formal communities of work that form around work tasks. It is through these communities that newcomers are integrated into organisations. It is how they seek information, engage with materials, and learn the unspoken rules of the organisations (Illeris, 2011, p.37).

In onboarding, this integration is facilitated through the quality of relationships that newcomers form in their initial period with the organisation (Rollag et al., 2005; Korte & Lin, 2013; Harris et al., 2020) (See Figure 2, p.26). Korte and Lin (2011) found that the quality of the relationships the newcomers developed directly mediated their learning. Specifically, how they learned to do their role and the rationale and context of their work through informal and formal learning (p. 39). Similarly, Bauer and Erdogan (2010) argue that relationships serve as resources that enable the newcomer to gain clarity on their roles and seek feedback on their performance. Ellis et al. (2015) expand on this argument noting that, the development of a strong social network that is key support means newcomers are "more likely to appraise demands as challenges that can be overcome" (p. 211).

Relationship building is seen as a key indicator of proactivity within onboarding frameworks and is seen as the means through which newcomers can facilitate their socialisation (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010, Klein & Heuser, 2008). Schinoff et al. (2020) note that relationships are built through opportunities for shared experience. This can happen formally (e.g., after-work events, volunteering etc.) or informally via casual chats in the lunch or room or chatting by the "water cooler". However, newcomers may need encouragement to build on these opportunities to develop relationships through introductions, positive feedback or enabling sensemaking, particularly with the unwritten organisational norms and rules (Rollag et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2020). This can be facilitated by a manager or through a "buddy". Although Rollag et al. (2005) note it must be ensured that the buddy is appropriate to facilitate this organisational entry and that the newcomer does not become overly reliant on them.

2.4 Remote Work and Virtual Onboarding

2.4.1 The rise of remote work

The rise of technology has led to shifts in how organisations operate, how employees engage through the development of virtual teams and has facilitated the growth of remote working. Remote work offers a lower-cost, environmentally sustainable approach to working and has been argued to facilitate greater opportunities for productivity and collaboration if established properly (Cascio, 2000). For organisations, remote work enables them to draw on a wider, more diverse pool of staff (Choudhury et al., 2020). For employees, remote work provides the opportunity for a greater work-life balance due to reduced commuting times. However, remote work can also present challenges.

Shifting to a remote working model means that how teams communicate, collaborate, and get work done has to change. Ahuja and Galvin (2003) note that teams can sometimes have issues adjusting to remote forms of working as the traditional methods of asking questions or communicating with each other have to change. As the opportunities for incidental interaction are reduced when working remotely, communication becomes more directed, and information is sought on a "need to know" basis (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). For example, a staff member has to pick the phone, schedule a video call, or send an email to find things out. In addition, given the asynchronicity of the virtual environment, it can be challenging to establish when a colleague is available while in an office you can walk by their desk to see if they are free. Whereas within the virtual environment, you might need to send an email to establish availability, and in some cases, there is no guarantee that the individual will respond. As a result, communication and collaboration become more directed and more formal.

For newcomers joining virtual organisations, information seeking can be more challenging, as it is not always apparent who they can ask questions to. As the opportunities for observation and incidental interaction are reduced, newcomers cannot rely on passive forms of information seeking. As a result, they have to be more strategic when seeking information. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, newcomers can be reluctant to seek out information for fear of revealing ignorance or annoying colleagues (Bauer, 2010; Rollag et al., 2005). For newcomers who are reluctant to ask questions, this can create challenges as the location or pathways to information may not be transparent as employees. This is why the all-remote organisation Gitlab argues there is a need to engage with communication that “leaves a trace” to ensure visibility, whether via email, in chat forums, or through message boards such as Slack (Choudhury et al., 2020, pg.8).

Remote work also has implications for developing and sustaining relationships in the workplace. In many ways, it is harder to communicate with colleagues virtually as the loss of verbal and non-verbal cues can make communication more intense. Furthermore, Cascio (2000) argues that there is a tendency to jump straight into business in shifting to virtual communication. As the opportunities for incidental shared experiences are reduced, there can sometimes be no reason to contact colleagues outside of queries about work. For newcomers joining organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic can experience challenges in developing relationships as colleagues have already transferred their established dynamics to a virtual environment. As the opportunities for informal shared experiences are diminished, it can be difficult for newcomers to develop relationships, and as a result, they may experience isolation (Saks & Gruman, 2021; Schinoff et al., 2020).The management consultancy McKinsey notes that this lack of consideration for the in-person connection has caused previous attempts of remote or teleworking to “stumble” (Lund et al., 2021, p.100).

Choudhury et al.(2020) and Cascio, (2000) argue that many of these challenges can be offset by an organisation with a structured plan to support employees with the transition. Unfortunately, given the rapidity of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations had to pivot to this new way of working almost immediately. Collings et al., (2021b) notes that this has led to substantive digital transformations as organisations have had to adapt to performing tasks virtually. This has created levels of ambiguity, as often overnight, both organisations and employees have had to engage with new ways of working. This has meant that many of the usual challenges of remote work have been exacerbated as employees have had to learn new ways of working on the fly. In addition, this new reliance on technology has exposed multiple skill gaps as many employees have had to relearn the soft skills necessary to effectively plan, lead and organise within a virtual workplace (Stephens et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Virtual Onboarding in the Context of Covid-19

As I have discussed in Chapter One, the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that organisations have had to shift how they facilitate onboarding for newcomers (Saks & Gruman, 2021). How organisations have responded to this challenge has varied depending on the facilities and resources they have available to transition these processes into an online environment. Although virtual or e-onboarding programmes are not a new phenomenon, organisations have used them for some time as part of blended, synchronous, and asynchronous e-learning programmes they are not necessarily widespread (Gruman & Saks, 2018). For many organisations, this has meant they have to rethink their onboarding practices to respond to the need of newcomers (Saks & Gruman, 2021; Singh et al., 2020).

Onboarding refers to the formal and informal practices that organisations engage to orient newcomers to their role, socialise them to the culture, and ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to effectively perform their role, however, as we have discussed throughout this chapter, onboarding not simply a matter of tactics to facilitate newcomer adjustment or training that imparts knowledge. Onboarding is a period of workplace learning, where environments are created to facilitate and support the newcomer in learning. The changing structure of the workplace with COVID-19 have meant that this practice has to change – specifically, the opportunities for learning through informal and incidental interactions have been diminished.

As Saks and Gruman (2021) have noted, the shift to remote work has “eliminated” the ability of newcomers to experience informal interactions both with other newcomers, with existing staff that support them in forming strong working relationships (p. 217). Korte and Lin (2013) and Rollag et al. (2005) have demonstrated that the relationships that newcomers build in their initial period facilitate their adjustment to their roles and mediate their learning. In the context of COVID-19, newcomers are losing the crucial ‘community’ dimension of learning. As the opportunity to facilitate relationships with colleagues are reduced, this impacts their passive and active information seeking behaviours. With the reduction of these interactions, newcomers lose opportunities for developing social and normative understandings of how their organisation functions (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003).

Transitioning on-the- job activities, into a virtual medium or a physically distanced interaction creates tensions for newcomers and existing staff alike. The staff delivering training lose the opportunity to get to know their colleagues in a fluid and collegial way, making it harder for them to understand the resources the newcomer brings to the role in terms of background, knowledge, skills, and personality. This approach also presents challenges as to how the delivery of this information will be managed. Shifting material from face-to-face delivery into a virtual environment requires modifying the pedagogic approach to reflect the medium (Gegenfurtner & Ebner, 2019; Henderson et al., 2017).

However, it is unlikely that many staff who deliver training to their colleagues would know how to adjust to this process. Whether delivered virtually or physically distanced, this information is likely to be passed on in short bursts. This creates challenges for newcomers in absorbing and reflecting on the knowledge, and as they apart from colleagues, they lose the opportunity to informally ask follow-up questions (Rollag et al., 2005). In addition, taking on a large amount of information in this way can also have challenges in terms of what Bergdahl (2020) refers to as 'digital balance', switching between technologies and a human presence during delivery to not overload participants.

Collings et al. (2021a) have highlighted that these changing circumstances with work have created challenges for new and existing staff alike as they are being forced to engage with digital technologies that they may not have the experience or the competency to cope with these changing work conditions. Furthermore as Martzoukou et al., (2020) note, not everyone arrives in the workplace or education with the same level of digital competency.

2.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the literature associated with the research problem. The chapter began by exploring the different elements of onboarding its benefits for organisations and newcomers. We then explored the conceptual roots of onboarding in organisational psychology (Van Maanen & Schien, 1979) and debated its relationship to the concept of organisational socialization (Ashforth et al., 2008; Bauer, 2007; Harris et al., 2020). Finally drawing on the work of Becker and Bish (2021), Klein and Polin (2012), and Klein and Heuser (2008), I identified learning theory as a more nuanced way to explore the concept of onboarding.

Recognising that onboarding as a process happens at the interaction between individuals and their environment identified Knud Illeris's (2011) 'Advanced Model of Workplace Learning' as a lens to explore this further (see Figure 1). Using the dimensions identified in Illeris's model, these were then linked back to onboarding components to explore different onboarding elements both from an organisational and individual perspective (see Figure 2). This model enabled me to explore how learning is facilitated through the various elements of the onboarding process. The final section addressed the concept of remote work and its potential impacts on onboarding practices.

Through the literature review, I have identified that much of the seminal or recent research in this field has focused on measuring the impact of specific socialisation tactics and testing models or frameworks used to guide onboarding via quantitative methodologies. Although there have been selected studies examining the experiential element of onboarding (Klein & Heuser, 2008; Klein & Polin, 2012), very few have taken an exploratory approach (Harris et al., 2020).

2.6 Research Question

The pivot to remote work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that organisations have had to shift how they manage onboarding processes. This has created a situation without precedence. Therefore, the frameworks and models traditionally used to explore this subject cannot be drawn on in the same way (Singh et al., 2020), which pointed this project towards a qualitative approach. As has been discussed throughout this chapter, very little research on onboarding has taken an exploratory approach. That led the project to experience and a phenomenological approach that would enable me to draw out how the experience of onboarding may be different in this context.as Peoples (2020) notes, a phenomenological study cannot assume something is present. This led to the element of 'what' to structure the question that would enable me to draw out these experiences.

Therefore, the question guiding this study, is:

"What are the lived onboarding experiences of newcomers at a HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the onboarding experience of newcomers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter details the methodology used across three broad sections. The first section addresses the philosophical underpinnings and methodological choices that drove the research design and subsequent approach. The second section deals with the actualisation of this research design and is explored through sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The final section details how quality was maintained throughout the study, exploring the ethical implications of the research design and the steps taken to ensure rigour and produce credible results.

3.2 Research Design

This study sought to directly respond to the research question "What are the lived onboarding experiences for newcomers at a HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic?". The aim of this study was "to gain insights into new employees' lived experience of onboarding in the context of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic" further confirms this. The research study was guided by three objectives:

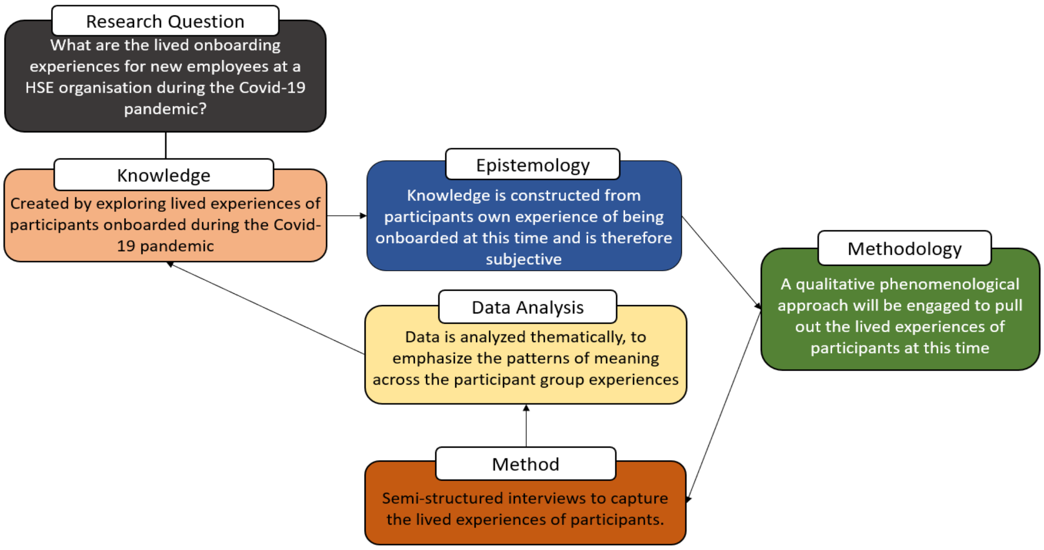
- To explore the participants' experience of onboarding activities.
- To examine the meaning of these actions and their impact for the participants.
- To make recommendations for future practice of onboarding for this organisation.

The core focus of this study is exploratory and centred on drawing out participants' experiences and the meaning they make of them. Therefore, the knowledge generated throughout the study is subjective. It is constructed from participants' experience of onboarding at this organisation at this moment in time. The subjective and personal nature of these experiences reflects a post-modern epistemology (Bevan, 2014). The participants' perception of reality mediates the experiences they share. These experiences are constructed through their consciousness and interactions as part of their onboarding experience, reflecting an ontological position of relativism (Scotland, 2012; Bryman, 2014). This epistemological positioning of subjectivism drove the selection of a qualitative methodology within the interpretive paradigm as it recognizes that there is no single viewpoint of this phenomenon and has required me, as the researcher, to grasp the "subjective meaning of social action" (Baškarada & Koronios, 2018, p. 73).

In developing the research design that guided this study, I drew on the work of Carter and Little (2007) as a framework (see Figure 3). They note that good qualitative research focuses on epistemology, methodology, and method, and it is the role of the researcher to ensure “consistency between them in order to bring the research design to life” (p. 1316). This drove the selection of the methodological approach of interpretive or hermeneutical phenomenology, as it enabled an inductive exploration of the “complex and intersubjective nature of meaning within human experience” aligning with this study's epistemological positioning (Bevan, 2014, pg.36). Interpretive phenomenology was selected as it offered a means to “eidetically” explicate the phenomenon (Finlay, 2009; pg.9). Data was collected via semi-structured interviews to draw out nuanced descriptions of participants' experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Cresswell, 2007). The data generated through these interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, with aim the of explicating the patterns of meaning that speak to this phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This research design enabled me to acknowledge my position as employee, and my use on my subjective position as an insider as “resource” for my research Braun & Clarke, 2021, pg.5).

Figure 3

Research Design Map



3.3 Methodological Approach

Interpretive phenomenology was identified as the appropriate methodological approach as it offers a means to the explore the experiences of onboarding both at group and individual levels (Cohen et al., 2018; Finlay, 2009). Furthermore it enabled a focus on the experience of the phenomena of onboarding, in the way it was experienced rather than positioning it from a theoretical standpoint (Bevan, 2014). Semi-structured interviewing was the method used to collect this data, as it enabled a focus on the richness and details that shaped these experiences for the participants (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995). Finally, the data gathered was inductively analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2020; 2006) reflexive approach to thematic analysis. This method was selected because it aligns with the "messier" flow of real-life conversations and acknowledges the impact of my subjectivity on the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2021, pg. 11).

This approach represents a departure from much of the typical research on onboarding or organisational socialisation. As discussed in Chapter Two, literature on onboarding has been dominated by tactics and frameworks focused on integrating employees. Harris et al. (2020) and Klein and Polin (2012) have noted that research on onboarding has tended to be dominated by quantitative methodology, focused on measuring specific hypotheses. Klein and Polin (2012) argue this is because research in this field is led by what organisations allow. However, this research setting is limited by the available sample size and the timing of its onboarding programmes – no two participants in this study have been onboarded simultaneously through the same activities. This would have limited a quantitative or mixed methods methodology's effectiveness due to sample size and temporality issues, which has been a challenge with previous research in this field (Batistič & Kaše, 2015; Klein & Polin, 2012).

In the early stages of the project, a mixed-methods educational design research approach was explored. However, this was deemed unsuitable given the limited time frame to collect data through different research phases. Alternate qualitative methodologies such as Case Study or Ethnography could have been engaged and would have likely generated valuable data respectively in terms of the systems and culture at play within the research context. However, the Case Study approach would have been limited by the available sample participants. Ethnography would have been challenging due to the public health restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and abbreviated period for conducting this research within the context of this Masters programme.

Furthermore, given the dramatic shifts to how workplaces operated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional frameworks, and practices for measuring onboarding cannot be used in the same way (Singh et al., 2020). As a result, it is difficult to measure the impact of this phenomenon because we do not know its impact yet. Phenomenologically framed semi-structured interviews presented an opportunity to explore how people are experiencing onboarding activities at this time. Therefore, phenomenologically framed semi-structured interviews' was selected as the appropriate approach given these time and context challenges.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was initially considered as an alternative approach. The idiographic nature of IPA would have enabled a hermeneutic exploration and unpicking of the different levels of meaning within what the participants chose to share as meaningful (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This would have enabled a focus on the thematic orientation that could be extended individual experiences into broader themes offered. This would have offered a meaningful lens through which to explore participant experience.

However, interpretive phenomenology, paired with the method of reflexive thematic analysis, was deemed more appropriate for two reasons. First, the focus of the study is to draw out participant experiences and explore how they speak to this phenomenon as a whole (Finlay, 2009). As Spiers and Riley (2019) have shown in their study with GP's, thematic analysis offers the opportunity to draw out the broader experience of participants. This enabled a focus on the patterns that emerge rather than just the intricacies of individual experience. Second, in situations such as this where the experiences of the sample population may be diverse, reflexive thematic analysis is the more appropriate method. The available sample population for this study range in age, seniority, location but most significantly in disciplines, they work in. Accordingly, their onboarding experiences would vary greatly based on the diversity of roles within the organisation. The selected approach was identified as the most appropriate it enables a dialogue between the interpretation of the patterns of meaning that emerge from the data and the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Engaging with a phenomenological approach meant I needed to acknowledge that my role as a researcher in this study was to "mediate" the experiences that participants chose to share (Cresswell, 2007, p.59). As a researcher, this has meant "locating myself" about my positionings and acknowledging the preconceptions and biases I brought to the study (Darwin Holmes, 2020). This was done firstly, through articulating my view of the phenomenon under study – onboarding practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter One addressed this by acknowledging my preconceptions of what constituted “good” onboarding practice.

Second, I had to acknowledge my perception of the participants and their view of my role within the research process. As employees of the organisation would likely see me as an “insider” who may understand certain elements of their experience. While my role as a permanent member of staff makes me an “insider” in many respects, I do not yet see myself as fully embedded in the organisational culture and thus would still consider myself an “outsider”. Finally, it was necessary to acknowledge how these positionings impacted both the research process and the research context. As Findlay (2009) notes, we cannot “transcend our assumptions” (Pg. 8). Given the selection of reflective thematic analysis, I sought to use my subjectivity as a tool to guide the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This has been addressed by critically reflecting on how my professional background and my experiences within this organisation have informed my perspectives. Specifically, how my experiences of onboarding have impacted my preconceptions of what “should” be found and how it “should” look. In addressing this, I have had to review these experiences reflexively.

3.4 Participants, Sampling & Recruitment

The research site currently employs approximately 400 people who work across six locations around Ireland. The staff population is composed of a range of different role categories - management and administration, general support staff, clinical and non-clinical staff (Health Service Executive, 2021). Since late 2019, the organisation has seen an increase in staffing. As a result, approximately 65 staff have commenced their roles between March 2020 and March 2021. These new employees who joined in a mixture of permanent and contract, full and part-time roles represented the initial population available for participation in the study.

Intending to collect rich, in-depth information on the onboarding experience, I engaged with the HR team to draw out the research sample from this cohort of staff. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that all participants had both experienced the phenomena (Cresswell, 2007) – onboarding during the COVID-19 pandemic – and could talk about it (Roulston, 2014). It was determined that participants needed to have commenced work with the organisation for the first time between March 2020 and March 2021. The date of March 2020 guaranteed that participants had commenced work after the organisation had begun to implement remote work. The cut-off date of March 2021 was to make sure that by the time interviews were completed, all participants had completed at least one month of onboarding activities and were beginning to understand their new roles.

Using the above selection criteria, HR issued invitations to the relevant sample population on my behalf. The email (Appendix A) was blind copied to participants, had a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) attached. This invitation asked participants to contact me directly in order to express their interest in the study. In addition, to further support candidates' recruitment, HR invited me to speak about the study to a group of newcomers participants at the organization's pilot corporate induction on April 22nd, 2021. I explained the purpose of the study, what it hoped to achieve and what participants could expect from the experience. After the initial recruitment email and presentation of the study, approximately eleven employees expressed an interest in participating in the interviews. This group included several employees who had previously held contract roles in the organisation and were now transitioning to permanent positions. Additional sampling criteria were applied then applied to stipulate that only participants joining the organisation for the first time would be eligible to participate in the study.

The final sample of six participants came was composed of staff who worked in two of the six locations within the organisation. All participants were female, aged between 25 and 55 approximately, holding mid-level to senior management positions. They worked across a range of different disciplines, including management, administration, clinical and specialist roles. Approximately 50% of the sample, were new to the HSE, 25% were new to healthcare as an industry.

Cresswell (2007) notes, with qualitative research, the intent is not to generalize but rather to "elucidate the particular, the specific" in this case, the experience of onboarding for the participants (p. 126). This smaller sample size was driven by the purpose of the study and the selection of phenomenology as the methodological approach (Dukes, 1984). The group selected was large enough to demonstrate a variety of experiences but sufficient to support any claims made from the "patterns of meaning" that emerged through the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, pg.11). While this sample size does limit the transferability of the study, at the same time, it increases the authenticity by drawing out rich descriptions of participant experiences of onboarding during this time (Cresswell, 2007).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Engaging with this type of research means asking participants to bring "personal experiences into a public domain" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p.62). Therefore, throughout this study, I took steps to ensure that the conduct of the research was ethical, and the participants' wellbeing accounted for. To achieve this, I worked in accordance with the National College of Ireland Ethical Guidelines. I also drew on what Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) refer to as "fields of uncertainty" – informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher – as prompts for to guide the study as it evolved:

Informed Consent: Throughout the research process, I took steps to ensure that participants understood the nature and purpose of the study, what data would be collected and how it would be used. Thus, enabling them to offer informed consent when agreeing to participate (British Educational Research Association,2018). The invitation email to participants (Appendix A) included a detailed

Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) and Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). I delivered a briefing at the corporate induction in April 2021. I also made myself available to any potential participants both before and after they consented to participate.

Confidentiality: The sample population available for this study was smaller and more identifiable, therefore precautions were taken to ensure participants privacy throughout the research process. The demographic data that has been reported in this study has been limited, to what is necessary to give an indication of the field. Where or if a participant has been quoted in the course of the study, this has been done with all identifying data removed, including names, location, department, position, or other work-related items (databases, policies, and procedures).

Data collected during the study has been appropriately managed in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). All audio recordings and transcripts were held in my secure private Otter.Ai account. Copies of the coded transcripts were saved to my personal Microsoft One Drive cloud account. Any soft-copy transcripts or notes taken during or after interviews were stored in a locked drawer until the completion of the analysis. This data was kept for the duration of the data analysis process, after which it was all deleted or destroyed using a GDPR compliant shredder.

Consequences: As semi-structured interviewing can sometimes lead participants to disclose more than they intend, steps were taken to ensure their emotional and cognitive wellbeing. This included clearly communicating the purpose of the study, the potential benefits, and the possible risks of participation over several phases. Firstly, through the recruitment of candidates via the initial invitation email (Appendix A) and the briefing I gave at the corporate induction in April 2021, I outlined one of the possible benefits of participation: an opportunity for participants to share their onboarding experiences and identify areas for development in a confidential and safe environment. Secondly, I made myself available to answer any participants' questions before and after they consented to the study. Then finally, by taking steps to ensure the participants before, during and after the interview. During the briefing session before each interview, I informed participants how long the process would take, the purpose of the study, and highlighted their right to pause and withdraw at any. Throughout the interview, I created space for participants if they needed to pause or reflect. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant for their time and took a few minutes to debrief before closing out the experience.

The Role of the Researcher: Phenomenological interviewing is a process of co-creation of knowledge between the researcher and the participant, but it is not a relationship of equal partners (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995). As an employee of the organisation with pre-existing relationships with some of the participants - some of whom held roles senior to my own - I needed to make my role as researcher in this process explicit. This meant being clear in the purpose of the study in recruiting participants. During the interview showing awareness of the power relationships by providing open communication and after the study by ensuring the participants voices were represented during the analysis of the data (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009).

3.6 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were completed over three weeks between May and early June 2021. Due to the public health restrictions in place at the time, all interviews were carried out via the video conferencing software Zoom and transcribed using Otter.Ai. Each interview was completed during business hours at a time convenient to the participant and typically lasted between 40 and 65 minutes. After each interview, I listened to the audio file and reviewed the transcript on the Otter.Ai platform. This allowed me to reflect on what was shared by participants, note my initial thoughts on a reflect log, and do some initial work to ensure the quality of the transcript.

Roulston (2014) notes semi-structured interviewing requires highly developed listening skills. With phenomenological interviewing, this becomes more pronounced as the interviewer must blend listening and narrative to gain insight and depict the rich experiences the participants share (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). To support this process, I developed an interview guide to provide a structure to ensure the interviews had a natural flow of conversation while also addressing all the relevant research topics (Roulston, 2014). This Interview Guide (Appendix D) was composed of three parts. The first was a briefing section that defined the situation under study and the purpose of the interview, key terminology, participant rights, and technical and logistical information (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008). The second addressed a series of demographic and informational questions that would inform the interview flow (e.g., is the participant working remotely, if so, for how long). Finally, the third section consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed and in-depth accounts of the participants' experiences that addressed the research question.

In developing these open-ended questions, I began by "thematising" the subject under study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p.105). First, the purpose of the research study was clarified - to gain insights into new employees' lived experience of onboarding in the context of remote and hybrid working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Next was to understand the subject under study – how onboarding happens in practice. From engagement with theoretical and empirical literature, I identified Klein and Heuser's Inform Welcome Guide model (2008) and Bauer's Four C's (2007) as valuable frameworks to identify themes for exploration. Specifically, relationship building, organisational communications, and information-seeking behaviours. This was supplemented with engagement with literature on expectations (Chillakuri, 2020)(Lieser et al., 2018) unlearning (Becker & Bish, 2021), and remote work (Cascio, 2000; Choudhury et al., 2020). Finally, understanding that this was happening within a specific context, I drew the HSE Induction Checklists (2017) to align these themes with practices within the research context.

These themes and sub-themes were then refined and developed into individual interview questions. These questions were structured to be open-ended and sufficiently broad so that the participant could fully express their views (Bevan, 2014) and then adjusted to reflect the everyday language of the organisation in order to ensure comprehension (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). A crucial part of this process was framing the first question to draw out the critical elements of the participants' experience. In this case, establishing what happened during onboarding could frame the later questions contextually (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995).

Two pilot interviews were conducted to test these questions and identify areas for refinement. The first pilot interview in April, was completed with a non- HSE employee named Jane. This pilot allowed me to see how Jane interpreted different questions and provided an insight into the type of the responses I might receive. This experience was enlightening as a novice researcher, as I got to see first-hand how participants could "meander" through different topics when responding to a question (Adams, 2015, p. 493). It also reinforced what Majid et al. (2017), have highlighted that there is simply no way of knowing what type of responses you might get to a given question, and in order to ensure that the themes were covered, I would need to pick up different strands of thoughts as they emerged. Reflecting on this experience and feedback from Jane, I refined the interview schedule further. For example, it led to the decision to restructure the introductory question to 'Can you tell me in as much detail as possible about the onboarding activities you took part in during your first weeks at the [Organisations Name]? (Roulston, 2014).

A second pilot interview was completed in early May with a colleague from the research site named Penny. This pilot provided an opportunity to review the entire interview schedule with a member of the organisation. During this interview, I was also able to test the technology – Zoom and Otter.Ai – and ensure my internet was consistent throughout the experience. Based on comments from Penny, questions about remote work and online learning were moved from section three to informational questions in section two (Appendix D). In addition, she also gave some helpful feedback about how I engaged on-screen. This led to several adjustments, such as removing items in my background to distract the candidates and placing a post-it over my incoming video feed, so I focused on the participant (Weller, 2015). After this pilot, I also identified that the Otter.Ai transcription tool did not always pick up my accent or my participants, which meant that the transcripts would require careful review with audio for quality assurance purposes.

These pilots enabled me to gain valuable experience of the interview process, strengthening my skills and highlighting the challenge of not leading participants, mainly when they wandered into unrelated topics (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014). Through this process, I identified flaws within the interview guide (Majid et al., 2017) and addressed some concerns I had about completing the interviews online specifically, specifically the need to watch for non-verbal cues (Weller, 2015).

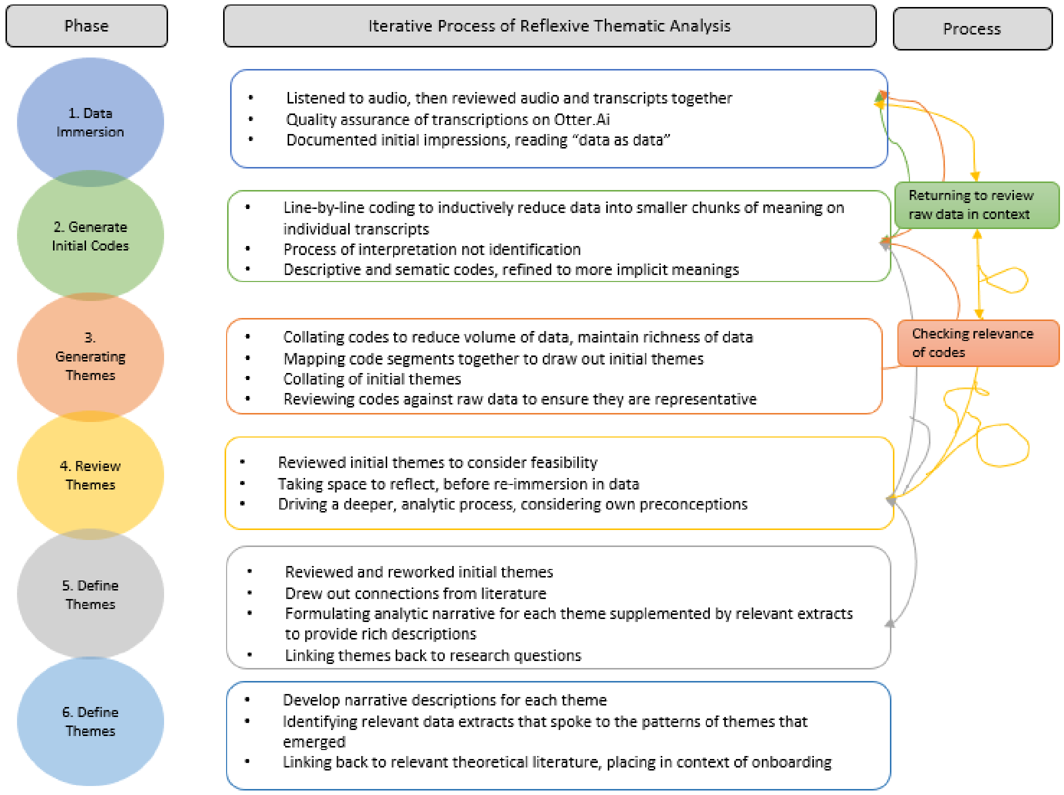
As interviews require a sense of intimacy to establish trust, I opened with a warm-up period I spent a few minutes chatting with the participants to ease with conversing online and building rapport (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995; Weller, 2015). Once the briefing section was reviewed, the demographic data was then captured, and the transcription and recording tools were switched on for the open-ended questions that made up the body of the interview. I opened each interview commenced with the nominated introductory question, and I used the responses to frame later questions contextually. For example, if a participant described working with a colleague for several weeks, I would ask questions about the activities that happened during that period and after it. This facilitated a more organic approach, exploring the interview questions in line with the participant's responses (Bevan, 2014). This approach aimed to create an environment where the participants felt heard and were encouraged to speak as freely as possible. Each interview ended by providing the participant with the opportunity to add thing they felt was relevant.

3.7 Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to inductively identify and organise the patterns of meaning that emerged from this data. This method was selected as it acknowledges as it acknowledges coding and interpretation of data as an “inherently and inescapably subjective practice” (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This analysis was done using a “bottoms up” iterative approach, with data explored through different cycles of review (See Figure 4). This analytic process enabled me as the researcher to make sense of the experiences and stories shared by the participants and identify the wider patterns of meaning that emerged and connect them back to the phenomenon under study – onboarding experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Figure 4

Iterative Process of Inductive Analysis



Note: This image has been developed by the researcher, drawing on Braun and Clarke (2012) *Thematic analysis APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol 2: Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological., 2, 57–71. https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004*

Phase One - Data Immersion: Immersing myself in the data, I first listened to each audio files then reviewed transcripts with the recording on the Otter.Ai platform. Throughout this process, I checked the transcripts for accuracy, making necessary modifications. For example, noting pauses in speech, and other non-verbal cues that gave context to the data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). During this phase, I started to note my early impressions, which helped to read "the data as data" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.60).

Phase Two - Generation of Codes: Next, I started an inductive line-by-line analysis, using open coding, making notes in the margins on printed copies of the transcripts. Depending on the content, these codes were initially succinct sematic or descriptive (e.g., working remotely vs modelling activities). After that, I reviewed the digital copies of the transcripts using Microsoft Word to label any data feature relevant to the research question, such as specific phrases or responses (e.g., information overload). Recognising that coding is a process of interpretation rather than identification this process required continuous and deep engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This process was iterative and involved repeatedly returning to the raw audio data review participants to ensure a segment fit within a code (see Figure 4). As I started to understand the shape of the data, many of these codes shifted from descriptive to more latent meanings (e.g., working remotely shifted to challenge of virtual communication, loneliness etc.).

Phase Three – Generating Initial Themes: Next, I transferred the codes into an Excel spreadsheet, which allowed me to maintain the richness of the data while also reducing the volume of material from transcripts and my notes. Exploring this data together, I started seeing the connections across the participants' experiences, and patterns emerged for me. The initial codes were mapped together to explore how they represented initial themes within the data, some of them slotting together easily while others overlapped. These initial themes were highly descriptive, reflecting the patterns related to interview questions, such as 'Organisational Actions and Resources' or 'Asking Questions'.

Phase Four – Reviewing & Developing Themes: Drawing on guidance from Braun and Clarke (2012) and Maguire & Delahunt (2017) I then began to question the feasibility of these themes. I was ensuring that they made sense, and there was sufficient data to support them. For example, initially, I identified 'Asking Questions' as a theme. However, upon further reflection and review of the data, I realised it was part of a more significant theme of participants' self-direction and information-seeking behaviours.

This process was highly challenging, as it meant acknowledging that no correct or utterly objective theme would emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Braun and Clarke (2012) likened this process to a sculptor searching for form in stone. There are endless possibilities of interpretation, but what we draw out is based on our subjective experience and preconceptions. It is the role of the researcher to immerse themselves in this data to draw out a deeper, more nuanced analysis. This meant that I had to repeatedly step back in the analytic process (see Figure 4) or take some space to reflect on the findings before immersing myself in the data again. For example, examining the raw data in the transcript and audio files, reviewing the data set, and reconsidering the identified themes.

Phase Five – Refining & Defining Themes: The final phase involved refining these identify their "essence" – what they were about (Braun & Clarke, 2006; pg. 92). This involved identifying each theme's relevant and unique features, questioning how it represented the participants' descriptions. Braun and Clarke (2012) note that themes should have a "singular focus", that they build on each other rather than overlapping while also addressing the research question directly (p. 66). For me, this meant returning to the key component of the research question – participant experience. How did the participants experience their onboarding? How did these experiences emerge as patterns across the broader data set? This involved moving the narrative description of each of the themes to link them back to the relevant literature, and this supported me in clarifying the nature of these themes. For example, an article by Rollag et al. (2005) gave context to the theme of information overload during participant onboarding activities.

Phase Six – Writing Up: Four themes emerged from this final analysis phase (see Figure 5, p. 55). I developed a detailed discussion around each of these themes. This involved drawing together the analytic narrative (how I interpreted the data) with extracts from participants. During this process, I ensured that the data extracts included illustrated the patterns of meaning that emerged from the analytic process. These findings were linked back to relevant theoretical literature and the theoretical lens guiding this study - Knud Illeris's (2011) "Advanced Model of Workplace Learning" (see Figure 1). The major findings of each of these themes are explored further in Chapter Four.

3.8 Quality & Rigour

As Carter & Little (2007) note, any discussion of quality must begin with epistemology, how we as researchers manage our relationship, our reporting methods, and what we determine as quality. The knowledge generated through this study is highly subjective based on the participants' view of the phenomenon and thus can be interpreted in many different ways. Given this approach, the quality criteria guiding this study centred on ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). This was addressed through the dimensions of confirmability, dependability, transferability, and authenticity during different phases of the study – research design, data collection, data analysis and reporting of findings.

Confirmability: Given the intersubjective nature of the knowledge generated in this study, steps were to ensure that the findings were objective and confirmable. This was addressed by acknowledging my positionality as a researcher and declaring any potential biases that might impact the findings (see pages 41 – 42). Then by clearly detailing the data collection and analysis procedures (see Figure 5).

Finally, by linking conclusions back to the relevant data through a discussion of the findings (see Chapter Five).

Dependability: In ensuring the reliability of the data collected, this was done first by establishing the study's parameters through the research question. Then by identifying the appropriate methodological approach and method through the use of phenomenologically framed semi-structured interviews. Recognising that phenomenological interviewing is a process of 'co-creation', several pilot interviews were conducted in order to identify potential flaws in the interview guide and provide an opportunity for me as the researcher to refine my skills (Majid et al., 2017; Sorrell & Redmond, 1995) (see pages 48 - 49) .

Authenticity: In ensuring internal validity or authenticity of the research findings, the differing viewpoints of the participants were represented through the provision of thick descriptions of verbatim text. These rich descriptions were then linked back to relevant theoretical and empirical literature as detailed in Chapter Four.

Transferability: The lack of triangulation of sources has been addressed by providing rich and detailed descriptions of participant experiences in Chapter Four (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). The participant group of six may not fully represent the population of the organisation, and this was dealt with by providing generalised population details on the participants (see page 43 – 44). The selection of phenomenological methodology with a smaller sample size limits the transferability outside the research setting. However, this does provide an opportunity for authenticity, as the focus was on drawing out rich 'lived experiences of participants that may still provide insight and applicability to other organisations within the HSE (Cresswell, 2018).

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the methodological choices that were made in order to respond to the research question “What are the lived onboarding experiences for newcomers at a HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic?”. As has been detailed this research design drew on a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach, focused on drawing out the patterns of meaning associated with a phenomenon. This research design is rooted in the interpretive paradigm which acknowledged that the realities are multiple and socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Given the question centres on the element of “experience”, the knowledge generated through this study reflects an epistemological positioning of subjectivism and ontological position of relativism. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews that enabled participants to share their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Then analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, which enabled the sharing eidetically of broader patterns of meaning that emerged in relation to the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2020; 2021; Spiers & Riley, 2019).

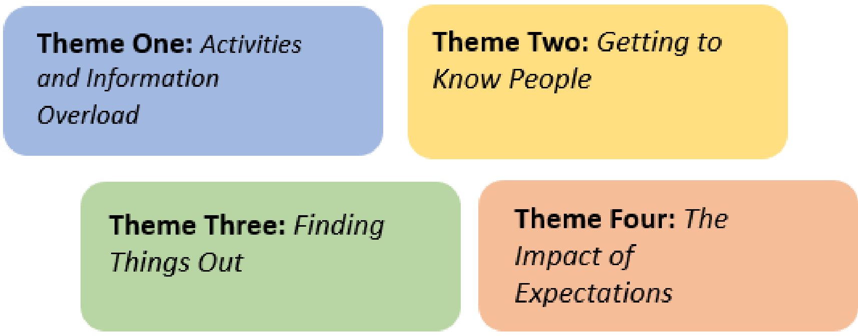
Chapter Four – Findings & Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the onboarding experiences of newcomers at this HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. As discussed in Chapter Three, this was addressed by drawing on an interpretive phenomenological approach with data collected from a purposeful sample of six participants via semi-structured interviews. The data from these interviews were then analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to inductively identify and organise the patterns of meaning that emerged from it. This chapter reports on the four themes that emerged from this analysis (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Final Themes



These themes have been explored and discussed in relation to the research question that has guided this study, "What are the lived onboarding experiences for newcomers at a HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic?" and achieve the aim "to gain insights into new employees' lived experience of onboarding in the context of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic", and the three objectives that have guided this study:

- To explore the participants' experience of onboarding activities.
- To examine the meaning of these actions and their impact for the participants.
- To make recommendations for future practice of onboarding for this organisation.

An introduction to each theme is included below:

Theme One – Activities and Information Overload: This theme centres on how organisational actions supported participants in making sense of their roles and gaining mastery over tasks. It identified that while activities were intended to support newcomers, they often overloaded them with information. The shift to remote and hybrid work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic further amplified this feeling of information overload.

Theme Two – Getting to Know People: This theme identified that the shift to remote working impacted how these participants developed relationships during onboarding. As opportunities for incidental and informal interaction were reduced due to remote work, participants lost the traditional opportunities to develop relationships with colleagues. This lead to slower development of the relational resources that are essential to facilitating learning during onboarding. In developing relationships, this was done through opportunities for shared experiences and was usually facilitated by the actions of colleagues or managers.

Theme Three – Findings things out: This theme confirmed with the opportunities for incidental exchange of information reduced participants had to be strategic in how they found things out. This was evident in how they directed questions and how they explored different organisational resources as a means to make sense of things. This challenged some participants as colleagues were not always available, and the pathways to finding things out were not clear. This led to frustration for participants and impacted the pace at which they learned.

Theme Four – The Impact of Expectations: This theme centred around the impact of expectations on participant onboarding experience, both those of the individual and the organisation. It identified that when expectations were not communicated clearly, this could create challenges. In some cases, these challenges were related to the participants' expectations for themselves, based on their previous working identities. Participants were able to address this through the transformation of their existing knowledge into a new domain.

4.2 Theme One – *Activities and Information Overload*

You're trying to learn the subject matter, and it's information overload

This theme centres on the onboarding activities and resources engaged to support the integration of newcomers. This is typically what Illeris (2011) refers to as the content dimension (see Figure 1) and is the core focus of many onboarding frameworks (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; Klein & Polin, 2008). These onboarding activities directly impacted how participants built their knowledge of how things went together in the organisation (production dimension) and facilitated introductions to key colleagues (community dimension). The main finding of this theme was that the delivery of these activities could impact participants' ability to assimilate this knowledge. Information overload is a common challenge in onboarding practices (Caldwell & Caldwell, 2016; Rollag et al., 2005). However, this theme identified that the shift to remote work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this further as this information was often delivered in short bursts. This overload of information meant that they would often need to return to items repeatedly to make sense of them. For several participants slowed their integration into their roles and impacted their confidence about their abilities.

The onboarding activities that participants engaged in typically centred on the tacit knowledge and skills that constitute the “basics of the job” (Alex). These activities varied depending on the participant's role, department and when they were onboarded. They ranged from structured “handovers” with predecessors for Alex, Casey, and Evelyn, to modelling tasks for Billie and Dara, to meetings with peers and reporting staff for Evelyn and Frankie. These activities focused on delivering content, the “biggish role stuff” (Casey) that participants needed to do their roles. These activities also enabled participants to understand their roles – reflecting key elements of the content dimension (see Figure 2).

These initial activities included team meetings, attending committees (Alex, Dara) and introductions that facilitated participants meeting their colleagues. In some cases, these participants were facilitated by colleagues "intros to the main people I'd be dealing with" (Casey). For the more senior participants in the group, one-to-one meetings were scheduled. One participant noted these meetings could take different forms "some people approached it a little bit differently somebody, some people told that told you about the program, other people launched into the issues". These interactions with colleagues reflected the community dimension – how participants would start to form relationships (see Figure 1).

These activities also ensured that the participants understood how things went together in the organisation – the production dimension, how work is structured, and technology used to carry it out (see Figure 2). For example, this included "messing around with PC logins" (Alex), accessing relevant "databases" (Evelyn) as well as being handed key organisational documents, including minutes of meetings (Frankie), reports and process documents (Dara). In addition, several of the participants also attended the corporate induction delivered by the organisation in April 2021, which was centred on providing an overview of the different departments and the organisation's functions. These activities and resources enabled participants to get the "lie of the land" (Evelyn) and get a sense of how things went together within the organisation.

The impact of these experiences was mediated by how they were delivered and who delivered them. For example, Casey had a two-week handover with her predecessor, who reviewed different scenarios of what she "could expect" in her role. She noted her predecessor had a "really good training style", and she was encouraged to "to ask plenty of questions," which she found "really helpful to get to grips with it all". Similarly, Alex had a "very organised" handover with her predecessor, who provided "really good core knowledge", noting that they would "explain how to do things" and then asked me to do them". Whilst Dara worked with a colleague who ran them through processes with a colleague with "three or four screens" opened at different times.

The activities, which directing core knowledge, and in many cases, took on the character of "transmission" in the interaction with the participants (Illeris,2011; pg.25). For example, while Alex found her onboarding activities "helpful", she noted they were also very intense as her colleague "went at 100 miles an hour". Alex remarked that they both "were absolutely exhausted after the second day". Illeris (2011) notes that when interaction takes on the character of transmission, "there are a certain number of messages that employees are expected to receive" but they may not be ready to receive them (pg. 25). In these onboarding activities, their intensity meant that participants did not always have time to reflect and integrate this knowledge. Frankie noted that "everybody is very helpful", but "they send you attachments and documents whatever, but you don't get the time to read it".

Focusing on the communication of information becomes even more challenging when paired with remote and hybrid ways of working. Traditionally with "on the job" learning, there is space to observe colleagues and learn from them as work happens. With the virtual environment, the opportunities for observation and more informal types of learning are vastly reduced (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Gruman & Saks, 2018). In addition, as every activity has a focus, there is not always time to reflect on the material being delivered and integrate it further. As Frankie noted, "we throw out all the knowledge and the (small pause) information that we have, and the person that we're doing it for isn't necessarily up to that speed, and I find that quite overwhelming".

The over-communication of information is a common issue in onboarding (Caldwell & Caldwell, 2016; Rollag et al., 2005). However, in this setting, it can be argued it is not the only factor. Collings et al. (2019a) note that the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that employees are engaging with situations for which they have no precedence. In this study, the participants are being onboarded during a pandemic, and their colleagues are delivering activities either remotely or physically distanced. Shifting material from face-to-face delivery into a virtual environment requires a level of pedagogic knowledge to transition it effectively (Gegenfurtner & Ebner, 2019; Henderson et al., 2017). Many existing staff are likely simply adjusting their approach as best they can to for online delivery within the current situation. This creates challenges with what Bergdahl (2020) refers to as "digital balance" (pg.974). When delivering online, moving at a pace between different tasks and screens can result in cognitive overload for the recipient.

This informational approach impacted the participant group in different ways. First, Rollag et al. (2005) note that information overload can impair the ability to sift through and prioritise information, as everything seems important. For example, Alex noted challenges in deciphering tasks, "oh I have to do everything now; I don't know what to do next". Second there is the challenge in integrating this knowledge. Across the participant group, it was acknowledged that they needed to review things more than once - "sometimes you can pick up a couple of points, but you might have to go back a couple of times to get the whole gist of the way things are" (Dara) – and sometimes they needed space to reflect - "there is a huge amount of information to take on" and "it takes a while to get the penny to drop" (Frankie).

Where steps were taken to assess the participant's knowledge and adjusted activities to reflect their needs, this had a positive effect. For example, Billie noted that when they came onboard, their manager spoke with them and assessed their existing knowledge, "I have been doing it for years on and off for a few different people, so I did feel confident, and that was part of what was discussed between me and my line manager". In preparing Billie for their role, she worked with a colleague who modelled "how to do" the key tasks within the workplace setting, and then Billie was asked to "demonstrate" later. Similarly, Casey noted that her manager reached out when something came up that she did not have experience with to offer her guidance on things she “might or might not know already know”.

By taking steps to understand the participants' background and experiences, their managers were able to identify the areas where they needed support with. For the participants, this meant that their experience reflected their own needs and background. Ellis et al. (2015) and Keisling and Laning (2016) have identified this as crucial to supporting the integration of new employees. This reflects the needs of the incentive, the drive to know. Understanding what the newcomer brings to the role means that onboarding activities can be adjusted to reflect their needs and existing knowledge. In Billie's case, this meant she “wasn't spoon fed” because of her knowledge base from her previous role.

Overall, the findings of this theme indicate that participants struggled with the informational approach used during onboarding. As the opportunities for informal or incidental observation were reduced, participants had to focus on gathering knowledge through these dedicated training activities and interactions with colleagues. Where steps were taken to create space for reflection or the activities (Rollag et al., 2005) or the approach was adjusted in line with the learning style or experience of the participant this made it easier for the participant to take the information on (Ellis et al., 2015; Keisling & Laning, 2016). In many cases, those delivering the training worked as they normally would, passing information onto a colleague. However, as this was happening within a tight time frame, either face-to-face or virtually, these actions were intensified with information delivered in short bursts. This created challenges, as those delivering did not always have the experience to modify this material for virtual delivery, resulting in cognitive overload (Bergdahl, 2020). This has created a situation where the sensation of information overload has been amplified.

4.3 Theme Two – Getting to Know People

Being in the room, you can make a connection.

The major finding of theme two was confirmation that the shift to remote work slowed the development of relationships during onboarding. This delay was largely due to the reduced opportunities for shared experiences as well as the more formalised nature of virtual interactions and the asynchronicity of remote work. This led to challenges for participants, as their learning was slower, and in some cases, led to incidents of loneliness and isolation. Where steps were taken to facilitate relationships or create space for less formal interaction, this had a noticeable impact on the experience for the participant.

Illeris (2011) argues that learning happens at the encounter between the learning environment and the employee's learning processes (see Figure 1). He identifies the community dimension as an essential part of this process. It is through communities of work and communities of people that organisations transmit their norms, values, and traditions. Within the literature on onboarding, relationships have been identified as a key element for integrating newcomers into their roles. Korte and Lin (2013) argue that it is the quality of relationships that newcomers build that mediate their learning. Through interaction with colleagues, newcomers build camaraderie, learn how to fit in, and gain access to a higher level of resources. This significance is reflected within onboarding frameworks, where relationships are identified as an area for facilitation by the organisation (Klein & Polin, 2012) and as an indicator of newcomer proactivity (Ashforth et al., 2008; Bauer & Erdogan, 2010).

Theme one detailed that many of the participants in this study had the opportunity to meet colleagues and peers during their initial onboarding activities. All participants spoke about how welcomed they felt when they started their roles, citing the initial meetings with colleagues during onboarding and phone calls and emails they received from staff in the wider organisation. However, while these initial interactions were overwhelmingly positive, participants noted how they did not necessarily extend beyond these initial meetings. For example, one participant noted, “I got some lovely emails day one, day three week one, week three, from people saying you're very very welcome” but she then went on to note “some of them I have had business with since, but others from that day to this, I have never spoken with”. This is the challenge with remote work; while it offers an opportunity to connect with a larger group of people (Gruman & Saks, 2018), the participants of this study found it difficult to build on these initial connections. Frankie remarked, “it's very hard doing your business over Zoom or over Teams” noting that “when you're trying to build a relationship from the get-go, it's different if you have that pre-existing relationship".

One of the biggest challenges for newcomers with the shift to remote work has been the loss of the traditional opportunities for shared informal interaction (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Lund et al., 2021; Saks & Gruman, 2021) and experiences that support the development of relationships (Schinoff et al., 2020). For example, Alex noted:

> meeting everybody online like we are talking now, you don't get to know them. You don't have the chit chats or the banter, or anything, so you never feel like, on close terms with them, it takes much longer for that.

Cascio (2000) argues that in shifting to virtual communication, there is a tendency to jump straight into business. This removes the opportunity for informal interaction and can make communication more intense. Frankie remarked that she found meeting with colleagues on Zoom “it's a strain”.

A challenge for participants was knowing when someone was available to talk outside of meetings. Schinoff et al. (2020) describe this asynchronicity as one of the major challenges of remote working. When working in an office with someone, a newcomer can walk by a colleagues desk and check if they are free. However, in a remote environment, you have to reach out to someone by phone or email to confirm their availability. Evelyn noted how she “had back-to-back meetings, and they all run over, so any space in between is gone”, so this made it even harder to gauge the availability of colleagues as they were in the same boat as her. In addition, she noted how wanting to talk about a topic further with a colleague. They would typically have just "have jumped into an office to discuss it", whereas they need to schedule a meeting.

As a newcomer meeting lots of new people, it can be challenging to do it virtually. Casey noted that meeting people virtually, "you can't pick up on body language and cues". Evelyn found, "because you're meeting them online, you don't know if they're taller they're shorter they're smaller", noting she felt "overwhelmed by this experience". It also makes it harder for the newcomer to make a good impression in this environment. Casey shared, "when you meet someone virtually rather than meeting them in person and can be kind of difficult to give off your personality and show your character" and remarked she was "always anxious did I portray myself in a good light". Meeting colleagues in this way can cause issues for relationship development as it is more difficult to build trust via this medium, especially when it is a new experience (Cascio, 2000). As existing staff have transitioned their established dynamics to a remote working environment, it is difficult for newcomers to integrate themselves without assistance from colleagues.

This created challenges for participants as it took longer to develop deeper working relationships. Frankie noted the "not having the collegiality and the fluidity, of been able to call into people in the office and speak to them" made it harder to get to know people. Dara identified that working separately from her colleagues "slowed" her learning. Alex felt it was "very challenging compared to other jobs where even the act of sitting in the canteen with other people you have conversations you ask questions you get clarity". Remarking, "when that's taken away, you're learning process is, is much longer than under normal times".

These experiences reflect the significance of the community dimension within learning as described by Illeris (see Figure 1). Relationships are a means through which a newcomer understands and becomes embedded in the “fabric “of the organisation (Ellis et al., 2015; pg. 220). One participant highlighted how the absence of these everyday informal interactions left her feeling “isolated” during their early months in her role. She noted:

> you feel like that like you have what's called that imposter syndrome, where you don't fit in and you feel like that for such a long time that you like you're walking around the office, and you feel like you've broken in, because you never, never got to know people.

Ellis et al. (2015) note are also essential resources that a newcomer can draw on when challenged or facing a crisis. In the case of this participant, the absence of collegial relationships meant they noted they were in a “heightened stress state” and “things that would normally flow okay were challenging”.

Several participants noted it was the support of colleagues or managers that enabled them to develop relationships. For example, Dara noted how her manager created space for their team to interact at the start of meetings by encouraging people to chat “what did you do for the weekend, or did you enjoy your holidays”. This helped Dara break “barriers down” for her and her colleagues to start “gelling as a team”. Billie noted how her colleagues acknowledged the challenges of remote work and themselves available to answer her questions. Casey shared how her teammates and manager reached out to provide guidance, describing them as “brilliant. She said, “I don't know how anyone worked without a supportive team, particularly at home, you know, it would be impossible. No man is an island we can't do it on our own”. These interactions reflect a core component in forming relationships – the opportunities for “shared experience” (Schinoff et al., 2020; 1396).

In some cases, it was the opportunity to meet with colleagues in person that helped participants build relationships. For example, Alex identified the significance of a face-to-face meeting with a colleague:

> being in the room, you can make this connection, and then if there is a problem, you can easily go to them and say to them, whereas when you don't have that informal chat, you feel, oh gosh, should I mention this or should I write an email or should I phone.

She described how after this meeting, their relationship shifted "you know it's like the walls have gone down and it's more personal you when you know a few details about a person personally". This reflects what Schinoff et al. (2020) argue that in building relationships in a remote or hybrid environment, there is a need for "self-disclosure" to get a sense of colleagues and establish rapport with them (pg. 1409).

In conclusion, the findings of this theme have demonstrated that the shift to remote work impacted these participants' ability to develop relationships during onboarding. This reflects Saks and Gruman (2021) argument that with the opportunities for informal shared experiences were reduced in this context, it took longer for newcomers to build relationships. As has been illustrated, communicating virtually made this challenging, as participants interactions with colleagues were often mediated by work. This had a negative impact on many of the participants, as their learning was often slower.

Cascio (2000) notes that with virtual working, organisations need to ensure that consistent efforts are made to facilitate employees in developing relationships in this environment. In this context, when efforts were made this supported the development of relationships. This was facilitated through opportunities for "shared experiences" (Schinoff et al., 2020; pg. 1396), such as informal chats at the start of meetings and collaborative projects (Dara), colleagues to offer support (Alex, Casey) or simply the opportunity to meet co-workers face-to-face (Alex). Interestingly, several participants noted how their own experiences meant they took steps to welcome newcomers – "welcome to [organisations name], I started lockdown too, it's really tough so if you have any questions".

4.4 Theme Three – Findings Things Out

You have to go searching for the answer

The major finding for theme three was confirmation that the shift to remote work impacted how participants addressed gaps in their knowledge during onboarding. Information seeking is a crucial element of Illeris's incentive dimension (see Figure 1). It is a behaviour that supports newcomers in developing their knowledge (content) and making sense of their role within the organisation (production) (see Figure 2). This theme found that as participants worked separately from colleagues, the opportunities for incidental and passive exchange of knowledge were reduced. Consequently, participants had to be more strategic in seeking information, whether through asking questions or accessing organisational resources. However, there were challenges with this as participants noted that it was not always clear who to direct questions to and resources were not always available. This process meant that participants learning was ultimately slower, which frustrated participants as they struggled to integrate this knowledge.

Onboarding is a process of learning that requires an interaction between the newcomer and the workplace. Information seeking is a key driver for newcomers to develop their knowledge and make sense of their roles. Driven by the dimension of incentive, newcomers work to integrate the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the content dimension of learning through information seeking. Information seeking enables newcomers to interact with the production dimension, make sense of how work happens and learn through practice. As a behaviour, information seeking is strengthened by the community dimension, the relationships, and communities of practice that newcomers build during their early time with an organisation. The significance of information seeking is reflected within empirical literature on onboarding and organisational socialisation (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; De Vos & Freese, 2011). Information seeking is an indicator of the newcomers' proactivity and motivation to adjust to their roles (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1997).

Onboarding literature has traditionally depicted information seeking with co-located working environments where newcomers have the opportunity to interact informally with colleagues (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010; De Vos & Freese, 2011). However, as this participant group was working separately from their colleagues, this was more challenging as opportunities for incidental exchange of information were reduced (Gruman & Saks, 2018). For example, Alex noted that she missed “having people around that I could ask questions to you know simple questions”. Whilst Billie found the experience “solitary”, noting there is “nobody in a desk opposite you to go can you help me with this”. Similarly, Dara noted:

> One of the difficulties I suppose I found was that, because staff were working from at home, and you're new, that it's a lot easier sometimes if you have somebody that's consistently there that you can go back and ask questions.

For Dara, this led to frustration. She remarked that “my own learning has maybe been a little bit lower than what I would have liked” due to this situation.

As a result of this, participants had to become more active about how they found things out. Casey noted that “you just have to bite the bullet and contact people” as “its sink or swim in the remote environment”. Ahuja & Galvin’s (2003) argue in a virtual environment information seeking has to happen on a more regulated “need to know” basis (p.169). As discussed in Theme Two, there is a tendency in virtual meetings to jump straight to business, reducing the space for clarification or explanation of material (Cascio, 2000). However, even if space is made for newcomers to ask questions, as Billie noted, there are questions sometimes that you don't want to ask, in a public setting” (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Rollag et al., 2005).

Typically, participants addressed this by seeking information directly from colleagues. However, this could be challenging as it was not always clear who was available to answer questions, how best to contact them or even if they could answer the question. As discussed in theme two, asynchronicity is a significant challenge of remote work as it is not easy to see when someone is available (Schinoff et al., 2020). As Billie noted, if they are available, “you have to wait for that response or answer to come back”. However, as the opportunities for incidental exchange of information were reduced, participants had to select the most appropriate method for asking these questions – whether via phone or email. This involved understanding the recipient’s communication style; for example, Casey noted, “if you're trying to get in touch with this person, you know don't email them pick up the phone”. Whilst there was also the challenge of how the question could be interpreted by the recipient, as Dara noted, “it is nearly almost easier to pick up the phone and say look it, you know, because sometimes when things are written down, people can misconstrue them, or they can pick things up from different angles”.

One of the major challenges for participants was determining who to ask questions. Choudhury et al. (2020) argue that one of the benefits of remote work is that newcomers tend to draw on a wider pool of people seeking information. However, knowing who to ask depends on the newcomer's relationship with that colleague (Rollag et al., 2005). As we have seen in theme two, it took longer for many participants to build relationships during onboarding. This impacted how participants information from colleagues. First, it was their level of comfort with that individual. As one participant noted, “I didn't really feel that comfortable asking questions, to be honest because I didn't know them that well”. Second, it was whether the recipient had the appropriate level of knowledge to respond. Dara shared that she would direct questions to a specific colleague as “it was easier to kind of understand where they were coming from and if I was able to ask a question, they were able to answer it”.

Who the participants deemed appropriate to ask was also driven by the type of question, whether referent, appraisal or relational (Miller & Jablin, 1991). For example, referent questions which ranged from the straightforward “where do I get what water” (Evelyn) to the more complex such as “why do we do it this way, and why can't we do it this way” (Casey), were typically directed to colleagues in the course of work. These questions tended to reflect the production dimension and were typically focused on understanding how work happened within the organisation or using technology. This included the background to situations, the rationale behind processes or to how to use tools - “I don’t know how to use Zoom…could you show me?” (Alex). As discussed in theme one, the queries were about returning to clarify previously covered material or content in some cases. Alex noted, “sometimes you're told something initially, and you do need to ask again later”.

When participants had appraisal questions, these usually centred on task feedback were typically directed to colleagues. Casey noted she would “check everything before I go off on a tangent doing things myself in case I'm not right”. As the newcomer progressed, these queries usually shifted to the manager for performance feedback - “I felt I wasn't picking stuff up quick enough” (Dara). Relational questions were typically directed to who could provide the appropriate response, which in most cases was a trusted colleague or manager. For example, a participant shared a concern on dealing with a colleague “I asked my boss what would the best way to deal with that” when wondering how to deal with a situation with another department.

In some cases, participants drew on pre-existing relationships with trusted colleagues to address more difficult questions. For example, one participant shared how they sought guidance from a colleague in the early day of their role to get a “benchmark” before speaking with people. These different questions enabled newcomers to learn and understand how the organisation was structured and the group norms and attitudes for work. However, the relationship (the community dimension) underpinned how participants directed these questions, regardless of what was being asked (Korte & Lin, 2013).

When participants were reluctant to ask questions, this was often done for fear of portraying themselves badly. For example, one participant noted, “I made the mistake that a lot of people oh if I ask a question, I’ll look stupid, oh I should know this”. This fear that asking questions may reveal a lack of knowledge or ignorance is a common challenge during onboarding (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Bauer & Erdogan, 2010). In some cases, participants were wary of annoying colleagues - “I’d say I drove the department crazy because I end up ringing them or emailing them” (Dara) and in other cases – they were called out for asking too many questions, one participant noted they thought people were “frustrated, by the amount of emails I'm sending about getting stuff done”.

Rollag et al.(2005) argue that in order to protect their reputations, newcomers “will often exploit all other information sources before requesting help” (p. 37). Within this research study, several participants noted they would actively seek out information via resources rather than ask a colleague - “sometimes I might wait a wee while and just see, maybe it's just going to happen or, you know, I'm going to find out through another means” (Evelyn). In some cases, this was because participants were cognizant that “you're taking up somebody else's time” (Billie), but in other cases it was because of availability “there was very few people around” (Alex).

The resources participants engaged with varied according to their role, and what was provided to them during onboarding. For example, Alex noted that she received a helpful handover document with all “the links, acronyms, and step by step”. Participants used press releases, databases, process documents, induction handbooks, and departmental tools such as shared inboxes when seeking information from other sources. If participants became aware of resources, they used them as a jumping-off point to build their knowledge. For example, Dara noted that when shown a database of documents, “I kind of really made myself go in and find stuff”. These resources were typically reflective of the production dimension and central to how newcomers addressed the gaps in their knowledge and enabled them to make sense of how things functioned within the organisation.

However, if there were inconsistencies in these resources or it was not clear how to access them, this led to frustration for participants. These included names missing from organisational charts or phone list to more complex issues such as access to IT, databases, or other programmes such as HSELanD or the payroll system. One participant described the lack of clarity around IT access as a "little bit frustrating" as "I just don't know what I have access to" and this led to "uncertainty," "should I have it already?". Several of the participants addressed this by making their own resources. For example, Evelyn used the organisational charts provided during the corporate induction programme, adding the names of colleagues and where she might interact with them (such as committees or projects) and personal details. Similarly, Dara, struggling with terminology, bought a small notebook to list acronyms and used it as a reference tool in her role. For both participants, these resources were essential to making sense of how things went together within the organisation – production. For Dara, it helped her learn the organisation's language, whilst for Evelyn, this resource helped get a sense of the organisation's structure and supported her in interacting with her colleagues.

Overall, the findings in this theme show that the participants of this study modified their information seeking behaviours due to the reduced opportunities for observation and incidental learning. As a result, participants had to be more directed in seeking information to address gaps in their knowledge and facilitate their learning (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Cascio, 2000; Saks & Gruman, 2021). This included being strategic about how they asked questions (by phone or email), whom they asked (typically determined availability, skill level and relationship they had built with the colleague) and when they asked (Rollag et al., 2005; Schinoff et al., 2020).

To address gaps in knowledge, several participants also drew on organisational resources to find things out. However, there were challenges with this as the pathways to information were not always clear, which meant participants might have search several resources to answer a question. In addition, the resources themselves were inconsistent or had information missing. This resulted in slower learning for many participants. It often took longer to find things out, making it harder for participants to integrate the content dimension and bring it into practice within the production dimension. However, several participants have noted that while this experience was challenging and at times demotivating, it also supported them in developing deeper levels of confidence in themselves and what they could achieve in the course of work.

4.5 Theme Four – The impact of Expectations

It's the ways of working here, I'm used to the ways of working before

This theme centred on the impact of expectations for participants experience of onboarding. This included both the organisational expectations communicated via colleagues or managers and the participants' expectations of themselves. This theme found that where participants understood the role requirements, this had a positive impact on their experience. However, if there was a disconnection between the organisational and individual expectations, this created anxiety for the participant. For participants, their expectations were driven by their previous work experiences. In some cases, part of the struggle in transition was the transformation of work identity, as participants had to let go of the reputation they held in their previous role and build it up again in a new position.

Illeris (2013) notes that newcomers must experience work as meaningful in order to drive learning. This means that the newcomer needs to understand what is expected of them on commencing a new role. The process of commencing a new role involves newcomers surrendering former parts of their work identity in order to take on the new one. For Illeris, this can be seen as represented through the dimension of identity (see Figure 2). This operates at the individual level – it underpins incentive, the experiences, and expectations a newcomer brings with them to the role – and is an essential part of the content that they take onboard in the new role (Illeris, 2011). Within organisational socialisation literature this is commonly referred to as role clarity and has been identified as a key factor in reducing uncertainty for newcomers (Bauer, et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2015; Kowtha, 2018). Role clarity supports newcomers to engage in proactive behaviours that enable them to foster their own socialisation during onboarding (Ashforth et al., 2008; Bauer et al., 2007).

Across the participant group, these organisational and performance expectations were communicated during different phases of the onboarding process – during recruitment, during training, during interaction with colleagues. Participants noted that expectations were communicated through the "recruitment process" (Casey) via the provision of "quite detailed" job descriptions (Evelyn), which enabled these participants to gain a sense of the requirements of their roles (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010). In some cases, participants expectations were linked to their previous experiences. For example, Frankie noted she expected that "in principle it was going to be fairly similar to what my previous role was", while Billie noted, "I came on board, and I had already done that". The communication of these expectations enabled these participants to gauge what to anticipate in their new roles. To recognise "the challenges that you're going to be faced into" (Evelyn). This reflects what Bauer et al. (2020) argue: prior organisational or role knowledge can support early adjustment within a new role.

In many cases, these expectations were communicated through the onboarding activities that participants took part in. For example, Casey noted that she was guided on the "plays I could expect". Evelyn identified that her predecessor guided her through current projects for her department, giving her "the lie of the land". Evelyn described these early conversations as "amazing" in helping her establish the expectations. Line managers also played a key role in communicating these expectations. For example, Billie remarked how she talked through the role parameters during early meetings with her manager. Noting that her manager took steps to understand and assess her experience and that this drove the onboarding approach - "I had a good knowledge base already from my previous role". In some cases, managers also mediated the experiences of others by supporting the participant. Casey noted that many people "who weren't aware of my background" assumed she was a "subject matter expert". Her manager supported her by sharing "things I might or might not know already" and “serving as a sounding board” when there were gaps in the expectations of others. For Casey, this enabled her to adjust to the requirements of her new role more easily and helped her build a sense of competence (Ellis et al., 2015).

For some participants, there was a disconnect between what was communicated to them during onboarding and the manager's expectations. One participant shared that her manager “had very high expectations of what I should know”, noting she found the experience “tough” as “there was no way I could know certain things even though I got a handover”. Raub et al.(2021) note that the lack of role clarity can impact the participant's performance. For the above participant, their manager's expectations caused them “a lot of stress” and impacted her work performance. The participants shared that when “put under pressure, I found my mind froze altogether”.

In some cases, expectations of performance and knowledge were not communicated sufficiently during onboarding. This led to a disconnect between what participants could do versus their expectations for themselves. For example, Dara shared, “I got upset one day, I broke down one day in the office, and it was pure frustration, I think, you know that I felt I wasn't picking stuff up quick enough”. She noted that her manager seeing her upset, reassured her “that I was probably been over critical of myself as well, you know, ehm doesn't help when you're a bit of a perfectionist”. For Dara, part of this frustration was rooted in her background as a subject matter expert in her previous role. She noted how she had been responsible for training staff and could see gaps in her onboarding:

> I have trained up staff quite a lot in my previous job and stuff, you know, ehm, but then the difficulty with that is, you're always in house so if you see people you know, you're able to go back and kind of give positive feedback and stuff.

Previous experience played a part in how participants engaged with their onboarding and their new roles. In some cases, there was an adjustment where they had to re-examine or reconfigure their existing knowledge for their new working environment. For example, Casey came to her role with extensive prior experience in her field but was new to HSE and had to a different working culture - “it wasn’t how do the job per se, it was just a gap in how much of a different environment, says, what I was used to how different processes are”. This prompted some anxiety to ensure she was “not breaking any rules”, noting she was “really really terrified of overstepping the mark”. For some participants, this process meant a questioning of their existing knowledge. Billie shared that during onboarding, she had found out “there's things that I thought were gold standard, and now I find are not”.

For some participants, the experience of onboarding and being a newcomer was in itself a major departure. Several participants had worked with their previous organisations for long periods (15 -20 years plus) and had the sensation of being a newcomer was a big adjustment. One participant noted, “I've never been in this position before, where I don't know what's happening”, noting “it's the ways of working here, I'm used to the ways of working before”. This transition from the former role into this new one meant that participants had to surrender their former work identity and associated reputation. Another participant in a senior role remarked, “I've started off with a clean slate” “nobody knows my pre-existing record”. This sensation was unexpected for her “I guess I didn't forecast it was going to be such a void and I found that a big challenge”. Illeris (2011) describes this transition as a form of transformative learning, where newcomers may surrender their existing “schemes” of knowledge, restricting them into a “new coherent understanding and experience” (pg.18). The above senior participant recognised that “you have to earn” your reputation with new colleagues, and she addressed this by offering support in her area of expertise, enabling her to demonstrate her “experience”.

This bringing of existing practice into a new domain also allows participants to make sense of their roles in a new environment (Harris et al., 2020). For example, Dara identified how on a shared project with a colleague, she was able to draw on “some of the experience I had and documentation I would have had from previous roles”. Bringing this knowledge into a new domain enabled Dara to gain a deeper understanding of “job responsibilities” and supported her in building relationships “sharing information, that the barriers break down and then you can realise who you can go and talk to about different things”. For Dara, it was experiences like this that enabled her to “see where things started fitting in, and how it fitted in and why it fitted in”, she “started making sense of” things. This replication of practice enables newcomers to reconfigure their knowledge in a new domain, using it to build relationships with their colleagues and drive improvements within their departments. This demonstrates what Harris et al (2020) have noted that the integration of employees is fluid and complex process of interactions between the “newcomer and insiders, that iteratively influence organizational practices”

This replication of practice in a new domain can also drive the incentive dimension for learning. For example, on understanding the expectations of her new role, Billie was able to identify gaps in existing knowledge. This drove a period of self-directed learning “I wanted to make sure that any question I was going to be asked I would know the answer to. I wanted to I want to become an expert in my field”. Billie noted as she had the “space to do more learning” and was “given the tools to do that”, it solidified her “decision to become an expert” in her field. For Billie, this has driven an increased level of commitment both to her role and to the organisation. She noted that “all I can say is that I, for the first time in years I can tell you honestly that I love my job”.

Overall, the findings of this theme highlight the significance of role clarity in supporting newcomers to integrate with their roles. Across the participant group, where steps were taken to clarify expectations, it supported newcomers in becoming integrated. For example, Casey had extensive prior experience in their field. As the expectations of the role were made clear, she was able to understand how to respond to different tasks. Similarly, on understanding the requirements in her role, Billie was able to identify the gaps in her knowledge and address them through a period of self-directed learning. This reflects what Harris et al. (2020) argue that newcomers can draw on previous experiences in order to “accurately interpret and make sense of their new environment” (p.200).

However, where there were gaps between expectation and reality, this caused challenges. These challenges could be a disconnect between the manager's expectations versus what is communicated during onboarding, which led to anxiety and frustration in one participant. In other cases, the participant drove these expectations, for example, with Dara, who felt that she should be taking things up quicker. This adjustment was also linked to how participants had to adjust to their new working identities. For example, several participants were transitioning from roles they held for long periods. Although they did not have the established reputation in this new role, they had to adjust to the sensation of being a newcomer, which one participant described as a “void”. It could be argued that these transitions reflect a form of transformative learning, a “decomposition” of existing schemas of knowledge, can lead to an adjustment of identity (Illeris, 2011 pg.18).

This theme has illustrated the significance of communicating expectations to newcomers. As Chillakuri (2020) notes, organisations have a responsibility to set performance standards during onboarding. However, as this theme has shown, for these participants it helped when their individual resources and backgrounds were more fully understood. For this participant group, it gives prompts further consideration for how this organisation can facilitate the informal communication of expectations whether through the development of relationships with colleagues (as we have seen in theme two) or through information seeking (as we have seen in theme three). Doing so will enable newcomers to understand expectations in the context of their capabilities and identify areas for development.

4.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to report on the findings and discuss their implications in relation to the research question "What are the lived onboarding experiences for newcomers at a HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic?". The four themes discussed reflect the "patterns of meaning" of the onboarding experiences shared by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thus, in line with the aim of the study, this discussion has provided insights into the experiences of participants who were onboarded during this period.

Theme one detailed the variety of activities that participants took part in during onboarding. These activities were delivered in line with the HSE Learning and Development policy (2019a) on a 70:20:10 model, composed of a mix of on-the-job learning, observation of colleagues and formal training. Each of the participants took part in some formalised training activity as part of their onboarding. For many of the participants these activities centred on one-to-one training with their colleagues or predecessors. This training typically covered task processes, departmental and organisational knowledge reflecting key elements of the content dimension of learning (see Figure 2). The focus of these activities varied from facilitating introductions (the community) to understanding the organisation was structured through the review of process documents, organisational charts, and IT resources (the production dimension)

While essential to supporting the integration of the newcomer into their roles, these activities could also be challenging. This was due to how these activities were delivered (whether virtually or physically distanced) and in some cases by the training style of those responsible for their delivery who was delivering them and their training style. For example, Alex noted that the 2-week handover she had with a colleague, while enormously helpful was very intense. By contrast, Casey, who also had a handover with colleague, noted she was encouraged to ask questions, which enabled her to take on the information more easily.

A common pattern that emerged through this was that while activities were intended to support newcomers, they overloaded them with the information provided in short spaces of time. This led to challenges when integrating this knowledge. Information overload is a common challenge within onboarding as organisations attempt to communicate necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Caldwell & Caldwell, 2016; Rollag et al., 2005). However, within this setting, the experience of overload seems to have been amplified. This could be attributed to the shift to remote work. Delivering virtually or in a removed capacity versus to face-to-face requires adjustment (Gegenfurtner & Ebner, 2019; Henderson et al., 2017), and it could be argued that many of the staff within this organisation do have the precedence for dealing with such a situation (Collings et al., 2021a).

The challenge of integrating this knowledge was exacerbated by the reduced opportunity for interaction with colleagues. As discussed in themes two and three, as participants communicated with colleagues virtually, it became harder to connect as the opportunities for incidental and informal shared experiences were reduced. Several participants noted how it took longer than expected to develop relationships (community). This directly impacted how they sought information when trying to make sense of the knowledge during onboarding (driven by incentive). Participants noted how they had to be strategic in seeking information based on their relationship and their colleague's perceived level of knowledge. For example, Dara shared how she directed questions to a particular colleague, who would provide more accessible answers to questions.

As detailed in theme four, these interactions impacted how participants understood their role's organisational expectations and how to turn they managed their expectations for themselves. The process of transitioning to a new role can be complex. It can mean letting go of former position and identity, for example, the participant who noted the “void” in reputation. How participants made sense of these expectations was through the opportunities for engagement with colleagues and managers. This happened through feedback, assessment of skill and guidance. These interactions supported newcomers in bridging the gap between their existing knowledge and their new role

The overriding impression from these findings is that where steps were taken to identify the participants' personal resources led to quicker adjustment levels and a more positive experience. In addition, where colleagues and managers were active in reaching out regularly to the participants, this enabled them to build relationships, develop more active approaches to information seeking, and ultimately orientate to their role faster. The next chapter will provide an overall conclusion of these findings and identify the implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

Chapter Five – Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to this research study. It begins by addressing the research question "What are the lived onboarding experiences for newcomers at a HSE organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic?" This research question has been underpinned by the research problem to explore the impact of COVID-19 on newcomers experiences of onboarding at this HSE organisation. Four underlying themes emerged thematic analysis of the data collected through the phenomenological semi-structured interviews. These themes are:

- Activities and Information Overload
- Getting to Know People
- Findings Things Out
- The Impact of Expectations

This chapter will discuss the implications of these findings and identify recommendations for future research, for policy, for practice within the organisation and for myself as researcher and trainer. The limitations of the study will be identified, and the validity of the knowledge gathered will be discussed.

5.2 Conclusion of the study

This study has identified that in considering how onboarding happens, organisations and practitioners need to account more fully for the contextual factors that impact the effectiveness of activities. This has become more significant in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as simply migrating traditional onboarding practices into a virtual or hybrid environment will not work (Singh et al., 2020). However, the challenges with onboarding during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted weaknesses in this organisations onboarding practice.

Firstly, how training activities such as modelling tasks can be transitioned for virtual delivery, this means considering both the resources that the newcomer brings with them to the role and the capabilities of those responsible for delivering the training. As discussed in Chapter Four, many participants in this study experienced frustration with the large amount of information that was delivered, which directly impacted their ability to adjust to their roles. However, where steps were taken to adjust the approach in line with the participant's experience and learning style, this had positive results.

Secondly, as newcomers have reduced interaction with colleagues, this can impact the proactive behaviours that newcomers engage as part of their role – building relationships and seeking information and clarity on their roles. The reduced interaction with colleagues impacted several participants in this study for how they learned and made sense of their roles. This has demonstrated the need for this organisation to create opportunities for staff to engage and interact more informally (Schinoff et al., 2020). In addition, the organisation could provide greater clarity on the pathways to resources (Choudhury et al., 2020) and when the resources are available that they are relevant and complete (Ellis et al., 2015). This will also support participants in understanding the expectations of their roles and facilitate them in drawing on their previous experiences to bring knowledge into a new domain.

According to Collings and McMackin (2021c), the shift to remote work in COVID-19 has forced employees to learn in the flow of work and demonstrated the validity of the 70:20:10 model. However, I would argue that this depends on the organisation having the resources and frameworks in place to facilitate this. While COVID-19 has provided opportunities to learn this way for existing staff, this is more challenging for newcomers. The sample group in this study was small but highlighted that issues with the availability of colleagues and resources could impact how newcomers adjust to their roles. Therefore, there needs to be a consideration to address these gaps for future delivery.

With the absence of supports found in traditionally co-located onboarding, there may be incidences that newcomers are being left to sink or swim (Saks & Gruman, 2021).

5.3 Study Limitations

This study has been limited in several ways – in terms of validity, sampling, and the impact of my position within the organisation. The validity of this study was limited by not seeking feedback from participants on the coded transcriptions. This would have increased the credibility of the data provided. In addition, there are also limitations in the lack of triangulation of data, although this is offset by the provision of rich descriptions of participant experiences (Treharne & Riggs, 2015).These rich descriptions were facilitated by the steps taken to create rapport with the participants before and during the interview.

Purposive sampling was the appropriate choice to select the participants of the project given the limitations of the context and the use of an interpretive phenomenological approach. However, the self-selecting nature of the sample meant that the participant group did not fully represent the population of the organisation. The sample group varied in age (between 25 and 55 approximately) and came from a wide range of disciplines including management, administration, clinical and specialist roles. However, majority of the participants were based out of a single location and held similar positions at similar levels within the organisation (from mid-level up to senior management). Several of the participants who came forward did so after my presentation during the corporate induction in April 2021. An opportunity to repeat this invitation a month later would have provided the opportunity to engage with additional participants and might have led to a more diverse sample.

This project was limited by my own role as an employee of the organisation. As I have discussed in both Chapter One and Chapter Three, while I am permanent member of staff, I am new to the public service. Many of the participants would not have been aware of my background, and consequently may have spoken in ways that would have assumed a level of knowledge on my part about their roles within the organisation. This meant that there were elements discussed in interviews that I may have missed due to this lack of insider knowledge. In turn this insider perspective, may have also gone against me, as I may have made assumptions about participants experiences based on my role within the organisation. Repeating this study again I would likely ask the questions in different ways to offset this lack of knowledge. For example, I would ask the participants to link back their experiences to their roles more deeply.

Finally, there is the limitation of the interpretive phenomenology as my approach combined with reflexive thematic analysis. As the final sample was more homogenous than expected due to the similarity of position and location, IPA would have offered a means to make use of this homogeneity. The idiographic nature of IPA would have enabled a deeper dive into the data and added a resonance to the experiences shared. This may have offered a more appropriate response to the exploratory nature of the research question.

5.4 Implications of research

This study, sought to explore the onboarding experiences of a small group of employees at a HSE organisation. While the results of this study were not intended to be generalisable, the patterns that emerged do have implications for this field of research, for policy within the HSE, for practice within the organisation and for myself both as a research and as a practitioner.

Implications for the field: This study has identified that in considering how onboarding happens, practitioners need to account more fully for the contextual factors that the impact on the effective of activities. This has become more significant in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. While onboarding frameworks provide a useful prompt in the development of onboarding programmes, these need to be reassessed in light of the changing structure of the workplace. As McKinsey (2021) have noted in their ‘Future of Workplace Post COVID’ report, onboarding practices will require a substantial reconsideration in the future. This study, while limited in size has spoken to the impact of remote work on the communication of information and the impact of informal interaction during onboarding. Future research needs to consider, how organisations can best address this gap with the resources they have available.

When thinking about this study, there are gaps and potential for further research through the area of onboarding within this organisation. This study was limited by the subjective nature of its subject and the lack triangulation of sources. Future research could take a wider perspective and consider the experiences both of the newcomer and the individual delivering the training, similar to the work completed on sensemaking by Harris et al. (2020). For example, this could be investigated using a mixed-methods Educational Design Research approach. This would enable an exploration of both the experience of delivering onboarding activies and their impacts on participants. This could be composed of a series of workshops to support managers and staff responsible for onboarding colleagues in developing their training skills, then measure the impacts of these activities across a participant group.

Implications for policy: As has been discussed in Chapter One the HSE Learning and Development Policy (2019a) advocates a blended approach to learning, which utilises a 70:20:10 approach combined with their eLearning platform HSELanD. With the introduction of National Remote Work Strategy (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2021), the HSE will need to reconsider how they can best facilitate on-the-job learning when teams are split between remote and co-located working.

This could be achieved through the development of resources to support staff in facilitating onboarding:

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This could be achieved through the development of resources to support staff in facilitating onboarding:

- A guide for HSE organisations on developing core onboarding resources that reflect their functions, their staff population and how they work. This could include templates for Induction Booklets, samples of organisational charts, template presentations.
- The development of short "Onboarding Guidelines" modules for HSELanD. This could include building onboarding programmes for specific roles, managing virtual delivery, and assessing newcomers knowledge.
- Incorporating train-the-trainer activities into the HSE Leadership and Talent Development Academy
- An expansion of the HSE Induction Checklists to reflect the hybrid and remote ways of working.

Implications for practice: Future delivery of onboarding within this organisation needs to consider how newcomers engage with their colleagues to learn their roles. Taking this into practice within this organisation means reconsidering both how activities can be adjusted for delivery in virtual environments and also how space can be created for newcomers to seek knowledge and develop relationship with colleagues. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- Developing a buddy system where a colleague is advocated to support the newcomer through their first few weeks and months of work.

- Establishing an onboarding guide for managers and staff who conduct training with the organisation that includes prompts and guidance on how to carry out different activities.
- Establishing organisational ground rules about visibility when working remotely form colleagues.

Implications for self: Commencing this study, I had preconceptions about how onboarding should be delivered based on my professional background. Completing this study has helped to challenge these assumptions. During the same period, the research interviews were being conducted, I was also onboarding several new staff onto our team. I realised on hearing interview participants' experiences of being overloaded by information that I was doing the same thing in my practice. This was confronting, as it meant I was not fully considering the impact of the current context on how participants might engage in learning. Rather, I was loading on lots of new information while they were adjusting to their new roles and engaging in an online learning environment.

This experience directly impacted my practice for the onboarding programme mentioned above. I started to make changes immediately, creating space for participants to ask questions or reflect on what was shared. I also reached out to my manager and colleagues, and we agreed we would not just get straight to work in meetings. Rather we would create some space to talk casually and share information about ourselves – what Schinoff et al. (2020) refer to as "self-disclosure". This immediately impacted our newcomers, and we noticed how they started to speak up more in meetings and ask questions more freely in front of the group.

This combination of experiences has helped me to reassess my relationship with self- evaluation. As I do not teach full-time, it is a practice that can sometimes slip and the process of completing this research and deep-diving into an area of passion has enabled me to develop my self-assessment skills further. Moving forward, I know I need to consider drawing on the research methodologies through this programme to drive improvements in my practice.

5.5 Conclusion

The study was driven by a desire to improve my professional practice in delivering onboarding and facilitating learning in the workplace. As I have discussed throughout this chapter, this study has enabled me to take a deep dive into my conception of what good onboarding practice is. This has been challenging at times as it has meant questioning elements of my practice while also balancing my role as a researcher completing this study. This process has been transformative as I have stripped away my old views, decomposed old “schemas of knowledge” (Illeris, 2011, pg. 18). My practice has changed as a result. I now view onboarding through the lens of learning theory and Illeris’s (2011) “Advanced Model of Workplace Learning”. Moving forward, knowing that I will be able to draw upon this knowledge to support both my practice and the practices of others is exciting.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Invitation Email

From:
Sent: Monday 19 April 2021 09:21
Subject: Onboarding Study

Dear Colleague,

Please see attached invitation to participate in a research study exploring your experiences of onboarding at the during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The research is being carried out by Lynn Murphy (Client Services) as part of a Masters of Arts in Educational Practice.

Please direct any queries to Lynn Lynn.Murphy@

Many thanks
Gráinne

Kind regards
Senior HR Officer
Dublin 1
D01 A3Y8

Teil/Tel: | **M:** | **Ríomhphost/Email:**

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Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Lynn Murphy, and I am currently completing a Masters of Arts, in Educational Practice, at the National College of Ireland (NCI). As part of my studies, I am undertaking a research study with the working title *An exploration of employee experience of onboarding at the* *during the Covid-19 pandemic*.

What is this research about?

The aim of this study is to explore the onboarding experiences of new staff who have joined the since March 2020. Onboarding refers to the learning activities that you took part in to get started in your new role e.g., induction, training with colleagues, meetings with supervisors etc. The study is seeking to explore these experiences in the context of remote working and the Covid-19 pandemic.

What are you being asked to do?

You are being invited to take part in a one-to-one interview, which will give you an opportunity to share your experiences of onboarding into your role remotely at the during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The interview will be held over Zoom at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will be audio recorded, to facilitate transcription at a later date. It is expected that the interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and you will be able to pause or end the interview at any stage.

How your privacy will be protected

If you choose to participate in this study, your identity will remain anonymous: personal information, names and roles will not be used in the research. An audio recording of the interview will be made, and this recording will be stored securely on an encrypted password protected device, until the data has been transcribed.

The data collected will be analysed and transcribed by the researcher alone. All transcriptions will be anonymised, with any identifying details relating to you removed and destroyed. This recording will be destroyed once the analysis of the data has been completed. In addition, a copy of the transcript can be provided to you should you wish to review it further.

In accordance with NCI policy, the anonymised data will be held on a secure server by researcher for five years from completion of study.

What are the benefits and risks of taking part in this study?

By sharing your experiences of onboarding during the Covid-19 pandemic, you will support the development of future educational initiatives being delivered by the NSS.

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without consequence.

Further information

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me via email at @student.ncirl.ie or at or by

If you have any further questions about any element of this study, you can direct queries to the academic supervisor, Dr Yvonne Emmett, NCI Learning and Teaching. She is contactable at Yvonne.emmett@ncirl.ie

Thank you in advance for taking the time to consider being involved in this study and I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Appendix C – Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Research Study Title

The working title of this study is:

An exploration of employee experience of remote onboarding at the during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the research

The aim of this study is to explore the onboarding experiences of new staff who have joined the since March 2020. Onboarding refers to the learning activities that you took part in to get started in your new role e.g., induction, training with colleagues, meetings with supervisors etc. The project is seeking to explore these experiences in the context of remote working and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Study procedures

As detailed in the Participant Information Sheet, you are being invited to take part in a one-to-one interview, which will give you an opportunity to share your experiences of onboarding into your role remotely at the during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Due to the current restrictions this interview will be held over Zoom, which the researcher will request to record (audio only).

Arrangements to protect privacy

As detailed on the Participant Information Sheet if you consent to participate in this study, your identity will remain anonymous throughout: personal information, names and roles will not be used in the research.

Right to withdraw

Participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time, without consequence.

Declaration of Consent

If you would like to participate in the study, please confirm the following, indicating Yes or No for each question

Have you read or had read to you the Participant Information Sheet	Yes/No	
Do you understand the information provided?	Yes/No	
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes/No	
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	Yes/No	
Do you agree to have your interview recorded (audio only)?	Yes/No	

Signature

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant Signature:

Name in Black Capitals:

Date:

Appendix D – Interview Schedule

Section One: Briefing Notes

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I really do appreciate it. Before we begin, I wanted to run through a couple of key points:

- Thank you for returning the consent form, and I wanted to double check if you have any questions about it.
- The interview will be recorded (audio only). This audio file will be transcribed and will be stored securely until deleted.
- The transcription will be completely anonymised personal information, names and roles will not be used in the research. In addition, references to identifying items will be removed.

Goal of study:
To explore the onboarding experiences of staff who have joined the NSS during the COVID-19 pandemic through an interview. Onboarding refers to the learning activities that you took part in to get started in your new role e.g., induction, training with colleagues, meetings with supervisors etc.

Timing:
The interview will run for approximately 60 minutes and will cover first a group of demographic questions and then a series of open questions which are focused on drawing out your lived experience of the onboarding process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before we begin, I wanted to re-emphasise that you have the right to pause or withdraw from the interview at any time.

Section Two: Demographic Questions

- When did you start at the [Organisations Name]? (Month, Year)
- Is this first role within the HSE?
- If no, how long have you worked for the HSE?
- Prior to commencing this role had you been working remotely?
- Have you been working remotely during this role? If so for how long?
- What experience have you had previously with blended or online learning? i.e., have you taken part in online lectures, webinar’s, have you completed e Learning programmes?

Section Three: Open – Ended Questions

Opening Question

1. Can you tell me in as much detail as possible about the onboarding activities you took part in during your first weeks at the [Organisations Name]?
   Prompt: Can you tell me more about that?

Onboarding Activities

2. Can you tell me about how these activities were these organised?
   Prompts:
   - How did you find these activities?
   - Can you tell me about anything you enjoyed?
   - Can you tell me about anything you found challenging?

3. How do/did these activities reflect your current role?
   Prompt: Can you tell me more about that?

4. Can you tell me about how you found things out during your onboarding?
   Prompts:
   - Did you feel comfortable asking questions?
   - How did you know who to ask?

5. Can you tell me about any resources that helped during your onboarding?
   Prompts:
   - Can you tell me more about that?
   - How did you find out about this resource?
   - Can you tell me how you found out about these resources?

6. What did you enjoy during this period?
   Prompt: Can you tell me more about that?

7. Was there anything you found challenging during this period?
   Prompt: Can you tell me more about that?

8. Can you tell me how you got to know your colleagues during this period?
   Prompt: Can you tell me more about that?

Induction Programme

9. Can you tell me how you found the induction programme?
   Prompts:
   - Did you find it relevant to your role?
   - Can you tell me about anything you enjoyed about the day?
   - Can you tell me about anything you found challenging about the day?

Ending Question

10. Do you have any other comments that you would like to share/add before we finish up the interview?