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2011

Running up the Curve: Adult Learning Styles and Employee Onboarding

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Running up the Curve: Adult Learning Styles and Employee Onboarding

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership at
St. Catherine University
St. Paul, Minnesota

Date

May 11, 2011

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the people that inspired me or otherwise helped me survive the MAOL program and learn enough to write this paper. First and foremost, I want to thank my partner, Sarah Henderson, for editing my papers and giving tough feedback on content when it was necessary. A huge thank you goes to Martha Hardesty for being my advisor and helping me through this process, and to Sheila Callander and Diane Nettifee for providing valuable feedback on the content of my thesis. To the many others - classmates, friends, neighbors, teachers, co-workers, and family – that listened to me and provided words of wisdom and encouragement, thank you.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to increase the effectiveness of technical employee onboarding by understanding the role learning style training could play in onboarding. The research included a review of available literature on adult learning styles, including a specific review of the adult learning styles of technical students, as well as a survey and face-to-face interviews with training and development (T&D) personnel. Both the web survey and interview results showed that despite interest and recognition of the role of learning styles in education, the training community is for a variety of reasons not ready to update onboarding curricula with learning style information. In fact, provision of onboarding support to new employees is still new enough that barely half the survey respondents reported onboarding activity beyond orientation training. The use of learning styles to improve onboarding and other training is regarded as important but not yet on the radar for implementation.

Chapter 1:   Introduction

Have you ever had a co-worker, friend, or relative flounder in the work world? They may change jobs quickly and sometimes involuntarily, struggle to advance, or seem lost trying to perform their jobs. The inside stories from those who struggle often have common themes such as "they changed the job after I started and it wasn't what I expected," or "they said they would train me but I was left to figure it out." A common comment from manager peers has been "They are adults; I expect them to come to me when they have trouble understanding." When that comment was shared with a friend who was yet again between jobs, the friend nodded slowly and said, "I've heard that before."

Without a solid start in a new career or position it's easy for employees to get lost and lack a full understanding of the requirements for their position and the expectations for their performance. When tossed in the pool to sink or swim in a new company or a new job, some employees sink. This leads to a fundamental question – why? More importantly why do we as managers let them sink when the cost of recruitment and the risk to our business goals are both high? For a salaried employee the cost of replacement can be as high as 150% of his or her annual salary (Corporate Executive Board, 2006). From a Kantian ethical perspective (Borowski, 1998; Johnson, 2009) we fail our part of our relationship with our employee (Rousseau, 1990; Edwards and Karau, 2007) by failing to respect and help our employee, and by doing so put the employee's livelihood and our business goals at risk. Why do we as managers let it be so hard, and take so long, to on-board new people? My personal experience provided an important contribution to understanding these crucial questions.

As a manager in the process of staffing a newly formed engineering group, I gradually

realized that each employee learned differently. Everyone had the same onboarding plan, which in hindsight was very minimal, but the results were quite different. One engineer learned well by reading everything about the company and products but struggled with execution of project details. Another engineer had good intuitive sense about the mechanics of the design but struggled with reading and understanding standard procedures for activities that had not yet been performed. Yet another jumped into attending meetings, met individually with colleagues, and fit reading procedures into the small holes in the day. With a sample of only a handful of people I had different combinations of detail orientation, big picture orientation, learning through reading, learning through talking to others, and learning through hands-on experience. From that observation I theorized that a one-size-fits-all approach to employee development might result in a wide range of responses as employees climb the learning curve because the methodology used to train people may not work optimally with each employee's style of learning.

Unfortunately the first engineer hired went through similar training but never seemed to understand the mechanics of the job, floundered, was moved to another group, and was ultimately let go. By then I was on to something via the painful lessons of coaching employees through the onboarding experience - my employees all seemed to learn the same material differently or in one case not at all. I was left to wonder why the first engineer floundered, and what I, as his manager, could have done to give him a better start. Was my employee's failure to thrive due solely to poor organizational fit, had I spent enough time with him, or was there something more to the story? This experience prompted me to think about adult learning and later about the onboarding process. The purpose of my research was to learn whether information on adult learning styles could improve the onboarding of technical employees.

The observation of differences among my employees' learning styles caused me to reflect

on my own method of learning, and on my experience with onboarding. The act of writing the proposal for this thesis illuminated my chronic struggle from grade school through graduate study for the first few weeks of each term. Facts slowly presented in a curriculum that builds competency seemed disjointed or out of place. Near the end of the term the light bulb would switch on, the facts began to fit together into a completed puzzle, and suddenly the entire subject made sense as though I'd been studying it for years. I've had to learn to hold my breath, continue to work, and wait for that magic moment.

In my experience as a new employee I found that the best onboarding most closely mimicked how I learn. In the best experience, my manager met with me daily for the first few weeks. Before I started with the company I was given an onboarding plan that provided a global, intentional, time-bound experience of reading, interviewing co-workers, observation of production activities, and review of training videos. The worst onboarding experience threw me into the pool with no plan at all and I nearly quit my job out of frustration. In the worst experience, my manager took me to my cube, wrote the project name on the white board, and disappeared without introducing me to anyone. There was no training, no over sight, no follow up. The difference in how quickly I climbed the learning curve between the best and the worst experience was about a year.

If an onboarding approach that matched my learning style could make such a dramatic improvement in how quickly I climbed the learning curve, what might happen in an organization that deliberately tried to develop a comprehensive and effective onboarding plan for each new employee and match it to their learning style? Speculating from my own experience and the research I just conducted, I would say the result would be an organization whose new hires truly could hit the ground running and make positive contributions to their project within weeks. If

the average new employee were able to be fully functional 11% faster, and their output was 20% greater because they were more engaged (Corporate Executive Board, 2006), the improvement would go right to the company's financial bottom line.

Rapid contribution to company goals is in and of itself a supportable goal and would demonstrate a return on the company's investment in an onboarding program. However, I would argue that there also is an important ethical reason to help one's employees up the learning curve, and it is reflected in the relationship we have with one another as manager and employee. The intent of my research was to learn whether and how adult learning style theory could be used to speed the onboarding of technical employees and improve the result, benefiting both the employee and the business.

Chapter 2: Analysis of Conceptual Context

This research was based on the theory that adults have different preferred ways of learning, and the supposition that the employee onboarding process would be improved by the use of training methods that are compatible with those ways of learning. Each topic was reported as an overview in keeping with the intent of my research question. An especially important aspect in the success of employee onboarding was the role that leaders have in the development of their employees. Recognition of the importance of employee engagement and the role of the new employee's manager was an outcome of answering the research question. It is a tie that binds these sections together and will be discussed throughout this section.

Onboarding

Onboarding is the very beginning of the employee life cycle, from the hire date through the first few months of employment. Specifically it is "the process of acquiring, accommodating, assimilating, and accelerating" (Bradt and Vonnegut, 2009, p. 3) one's new employees. Success at onboarding a new employee is a relationship between talent, which is assessed during recruitment, and support after hiring (Friedman, 2006, p. 25). The employee onboarding process is the crucial introduction to the company, its culture, its way of operating, and managerial expectations for the role. It is a time of focused learning in an on-the-job setting.

The two reasons companies most often cite for initiating onboarding programs are a desire to retain new hires and get them engaged with the company (Corporate Executive Board, 2006, p. 2). In addition to improving performance by up to 11%, effective onboarding can also lower new hire turnover, and increase an employee's willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty by as much as 20% (Corporate Executive Board, 2006, p. 1, 10).

Those of us in the work force enter into an employment relationship with our organizations at the time we accept an offer, at which time we begin a process called the employee life cycle. Using a similar description as that of Bradt and Vonnegut's onboarding process, John Reh condenses the employee life cycle to four stages: hire, inspire, admire, and retire (HIAR) (Reh, 2006). Hire the most talented people you can find. Make them feel welcome and "inspire them to perform to their capabilities" (Reh, 2006, p.2). Stay engaged with your employees, and provide positive feedback (admire). Finally, make your company the place where they want to work, even retire from (Reh, 2006).

Managers plan for their new employees' orientation and training, and plan their assignments. At a previous company, my peers and I used our own individually developed plans to bring people onboard and provide their first assignments without considering whether the approach would be successful for all employees. Until several engineers needed to be hired at once, it would have been difficult to discern the range of response to a single onboarding approach.

Hiring several engineers at once and sending them through the same onboarding plan might be akin to hiring several FBI recruits at once and sending them through field officer training (Massoni, 2009). In 2002 the South San Francisco Police Department (SSFPD), provider of training for the FBI recruits, recognized a serious issue with recruitment, training and retention. At the end of field officer training, which represented a significant investment in recruitment and training, the retention rate was only 50%. The Chief of Police, having recently been to a learning styles seminar, theorized that modifying their training curriculum to include learning styles might improve retention (Massoni, 2009).

The training program was reviewed and it came to light that the field training officers

(FTO) had been covering their material in a manner that made sense to them, and had not taken into account the learning styles of their recruits. Since each FTO was essentially teaching to their own learning styles, the curriculum in total was confusing (Massoni, 2009). The SSFPD embarked on a completely different approach to training. The FTOs each learned how they learn best and met to share their experiences with their own learning styles. The recruits were then given training to discover their own learning styles and receive strategies on how to use their learning styles more effectively. The FTOs were told what learning style each of their recruits had, and could more effectively tailor training to their classrooms (Massoni, 2009).

Once the learning style concepts had transformed the curriculum, the SSFPD went further to recognize and acknowledge differences in culture, particularly between generations. As a result of these changes, the SSFPD reported a higher recruit retention rate and greater satisfaction with the training program both from the recruits and the FTOs (Massoni, 2009). Massoni's decision to use learning styles during onboarding lowered turnover, improved job satisfaction, and in effect created a more engaged workforce (Corporate Executive Board, 2006; BlessingWhite, 2011).

Learning Styles

A receptive corporate culture, supportive of employee development, is essential to the implementation of learning style concepts in the onboarding process. A crucial question is whether business leadership will be supportive. It is not enough to establish that training sensitive to learning styles is the right thing to do; the question most often asked with any new initiative is what is the value proposition for the expenditure? There are published findings that attempt to answer that very question by addressing training's role in employee engagement

and the positive effect employee engagement has on company financial performance. Learning and development opportunities, and the quality of those opportunities, have been found to be key factors in employee engagement (BlessingWhite, 2011; Towers Watson, 2009; Paradise, 2008; Corporate Executive Board, 2006). A 2007 employee engagement survey sponsored by the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) found that regarding engagement the "quality of workplace learning opportunities ranked first among respondents from all organizations" (Paradise, 2008).

A learning style is the way each individual prefers to process and learn information (Kolb, 2005). There are many learning style inventories and assessments available for use, some are more highly regarded than others and have varying degrees of validation of their usefulness. This thesis discusses a few of the styles that may be most useful in the onboarding of new technical employees. From my perspective as a technical manager, the criteria I used to choose a learning style was that the learning style had to be practical, easily understood, and focused on sensory input of data (listening, reading, speaking, participating) and not the effect of the environment (too hot, too cold, too bright, too dark).

Kolb Learning Style Inventory

The seminal research most often cited for experiential learning theory is that of David A. Kolb. Kolb's learning style inventory was created to serve two purposes, the first as a method of reflection for students, and the second as a research tool (Kolb, 2005). The thought leaders whose research formed the basis for Kolb's theories were Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and John Dewey (Kolb, 1984). Lewin provided an experiential learning model called the Action Research and Laboratory Training method (Kolb, 1984, p. 21) that is based on hands-on experience from which the subject subsequently reflects and gathers knowledge. The knowledge allows

the subject to form a theory that can be tested in a new situation (Kolb, 1984). Dewey's model also showed thought progression from an experience to observation and reflection about the experience to judgment about the experience. The model is enhanced by acknowledging that learning transforms the resulting feelings and desires into purposeful action (Kolb, 1984, p.22). Jean Piaget developed a model of learning and cognitive development (Kolb, 1984, p. 23), which looked at the development of children's cognitive ability, identifying four major stages: sensory-motor, representational, concrete operations, and formal operations. The common thought process between the three models is the interaction of the individual with the environment (Kolb, 1984, p.23).

Kolb came to the conclusion that "learning is by its very nature a tension- and conflict-filled process" (Kolb, 1984, p.30). The learning process (Figure 1) requires the abilities of concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE) (Kolb, 1984, p.30). In layman's terms one might say that learners must be able to open to experience something, observe the experience and mull it over, come to some theory about the experience, and implement the theory the next time the experience happens. Put even more simply, to use the old axiom, "we learn from our mistakes."

Figure 1 Kolb Learning Styles Inventory

From his early research, Kolb created the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory (KLSI), which built on the learning distinctions of CE, RO, AC, and AE (Kolb, 1984). The KLSI categories are diverging (CE & RO dominant), assimilating (AC & RO dominant), converging (AC & AE dominant), and accommodating (CE & AE dominant) (Kolb 2005). Divergers are good at brainstorming, like to look at situations from a variety of perspectives, and are good with people (Kolb, 2005). Convergers are good with numbers and technical tasks; they are more interested in things than people (Kolb, 2005). Assimilators can take a lot of information, digest it, and generate a logical format; they are more interested in ideas than people (Kolb, 2005). Accommodators get their information from talking to people and are more suited to action-oriented positions (Kolb, 2005).

Instructors can use learning style information to provide more diversity in their training materials in order to reach out to a greater number of students. For example, someone who favors concrete experience (CE) would benefit from field studies or laboratory work (Hawk and Shah, 2007). Someone who favors abstract conceptualization would benefit from handouts and assigned readings (Hawk and Shah, 2007). Those who prefer reflective observation would benefit from keeping a journal or being part of a brain storming exercise (Hawk and Shah, 2007). And lastly an active experimenter might prefer case studies or lecture examples (Hawk and Shah, 2007).

Myers-Briggs

One of the older and commonly used inventories is the Myers-Briggs type indicator

(MBTI). The MBTI categorizes personality type by four sets of opposites, introverted (I)/ extroverted (E), sensing (S)/intuitive (N), thinking (T)/feeling (F), and judging (J)/perceiving (P) (Salter, 2006). Extroverts tend to be active learners, engaged with the world around them. Introverts tend to be reflective, preferring ideas and the world within them. Those who are perceiving types tend to be creative, spontaneous, multitaskers; whereas judging types tend to use facts and data preferentially and prefer order, and to only work on one project at a time (Salter, 2006). Sensing people tend to like precise directions, whereas intuitive people are creative. Thinking types tend to value individual achievement and seek facts; feeling types tend to make judgments based on values or ethics, and prefer group achievement (Salter, 2006). Figure 2 is an illustration of the MBTI matrix, with my results shaded. Both ENFP and INFP are reported, as I am a borderline E/I.

Figure 2 Myers-Briggs Type Inventory

	Sensing, S		Intuitive, N		
Introverted, I	ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ	Judging, J
	ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP	Perceiving,
Extroverted, E	ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP	
	ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ	Judging, J
	Thinking, T	Feeling, F		Thinking, T	

VARK

The VARK inventory (Fleming, 1992) is not a complete learning style inventory rather it is a tool used to promote student reflection into his or her personal learning style (Fleming, 1992). The inventory (Figure 3) categorizes students by their orientation toward visual (V), aural (A), reading and writing (R), and kinesthetic learning (K). Visual learners have a preference for charts, graphs, and diagrams. Aural learners have a preference for talking, listening, and group discussion. Reading and writing learners prefer books, handouts, and reading. Kinesthetic learners do best when they are able to see a demonstration, work through real life examples, or listen to a guest lecturer (Hawk and Shah, 2007).

The inventory is unique in that participants answer questions in a multiple choice format, but select all that apply (Rogers, 2009). This strategy acknowledges that we all use multiple learning styles to some degree (Fleming, 1992). The questions are made up of real life scenarios with selections that are reflective of auditory, visual, read/write, or kinesthetic preferences (Fleming, 1992). Of the more commonly used learning style inventories, the VARK inventory is the most simplistic (Rogers, 2009) and is technically not a learning style (http://vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=faq, 12-15-2010) because it focuses on sensory input preference (Fleming, 1992) and not the full spectrum of preferences such as the Dunn and Dunn Learning Style Model (Honigsfeld and Dunn, 2006). The VARK inventory is not intended to diagnose each student so that the teacher has to provide individualized lectures to each learning modality. Once the student takes the inventory and has an assessment of his or her own learning style, the student is given suggestions on how to take advantage of their dominant learning styles (Fleming, 1995). Training and sensitivity to the various ways of learning allows the teacher to provide a multi-modal approach to delivering course content (Fleming, 1992). I took the online VARK inventory; the results are shown in figure 3.

Figure 3 Example Results of VARK Inventory

The VARK Questionnaire Results
•   Your scores were:
•   Visual: 14
•   Aural: 13
•   Read/Write: 11
•   Kinesthetic: 11
You have a multimodal (VARK) learning preference.

Technical employees and learning styles

My research was focused on the onboarding of professional technical employees. These employees are typically found in manufacturing industries such as automotive, medical device, solid state, and industrial chemicals. The occupational categories of technical employees in these industries are typically engineers, scientists, and technicians. I concentrated on technical employees for one simple reason. The technical employee base is the one I have greatest access to and is the one with which I am most familiar. I have held technical positions my whole career.

Kolb's KLSI, Fleming's VARK, and the MBTI were discussed earlier in this section as good representatives of learning styles. Those assessments also provide the elements of the Index of Learning Styles by Richard Felder and Linda Silverman. In 1988 Richard Felder and Linda Silverman wrote what they thought would be a solid paper on the learning styles of engineering students. However, as Felder writes in the author's 2002 preface to the 1988 paper, they had no idea it would become so widely cited and sought after for the next two decades (Felder and Silverman, 1988). Felder and Silverman took what was known about both the Kolb and the Myers-Briggs learning styles and applied it to the world of engineering education. The categories used for the engineering learning style model are perception (sensory, intuitive), input (visual, auditory), organization (inductive, deductive), processing (active, reflective), and understanding (sequential, global) (Felder and Silverman, 1988). The perception category origin is the sensing and intuitive types from the MBTI. The processing category origin is the active experimenter and reflective observer from the KLSI. Felder and Silverman compared the typical classroom-teaching model to the learning style model held by engineering students and provided simple teaching techniques that would reach out to each category in the learning style model (Felder and
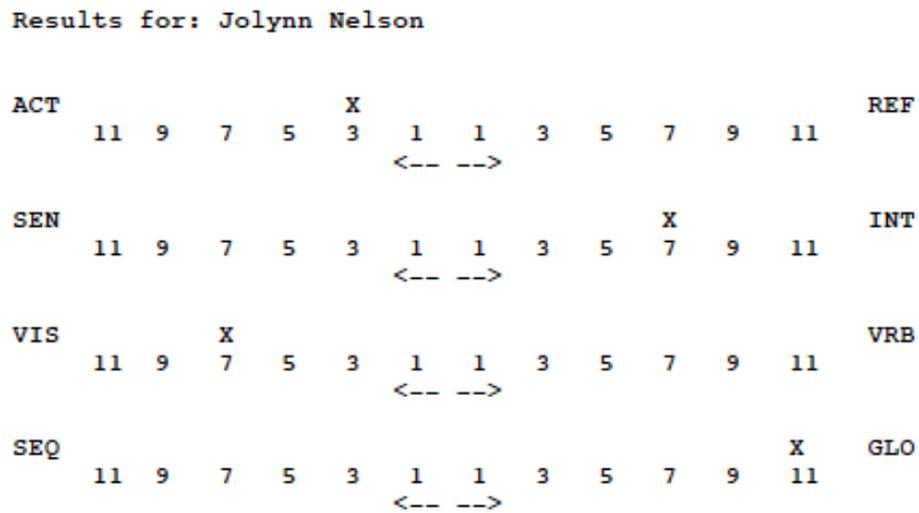
Silverman, 1988).

Active learners will remember information best if they have the opportunity to interact with it via discussion or laboratory work. Reflective learners need time to mull over the information. As in the VARK inventory, Visual learners prefer to see the information and Verbal learners like to hear and discuss the information (Rosati, 1998; Hawk and Shah, 2007). Of particular interest was the characterization of students by their method of understanding, sequential and global (Felder and Silverman, 1988). Sequential learners do best in an environment in which the subject is taught in increments that build to the final product at the end of the term. They have little trouble working with partial information on a topic (Felder and Silverman, 1988; Rosati, 1998). In contrast, the global learner needs to see an overview of the whole subject or be introduced to concepts that are in advance of where the course is at the time. The global learner may struggle and be frustrated until nearly the end of the course when all the pieces finally fit together and the material finally makes sense (Felder and Silverman, 1988; Rosati, 1998). Since most classroom curricula are presented sequentially students with a global learning style are at risk of giving up and dropping out, which is unfortunate as Felder believes that many of the best engineers have a global learning style (Felder and Silverman, 1988). Global learners are the ones that can take disparate information and tie it together with higher-level system oriented thinking to create something new (Felder and Silverman, 1988).

Figure 4, shown below, is a report of my results for the online ILS, provided as an example of the output of the inventory. As you can see from figure 4, my result as an intuitive personality from the MBTI results correlates to a moderate preference for intuition in the ILS. My moderate preference for visual learning from the ILS does not track as well with the balanced preference reported in the VARK inventory. Learning that I was a global learner

was an important personal discovery, as it matched my lifelong academic experience. I would recommend the ILS for anyone to take as a learning style assessment. The final assessment of global versus sequential learning is unique to the ILS and essential knowledge for how people learn. It can make a difference in how academic work is approached. I will expand on that a bit later.

Figure 4 Results for Felder Index of Learning Styles (ILS)

```
Results for: Jolynn Nelson


ACT                         X                                   REF
       11   9   7   5   3   1   1   3   5   7   9   11
                           <-- -->

SEN                                             X               INT
       11   9   7   5   3   1   1   3   5   7   9   11
                           <-- -->

VIS                 X                                           VRB
       11   9   7   5   3   1   1   3   5   7   9   11
                           <-- -->

SEQ                                                 X      GLO
       11   9   7   5   3   1   1   3   5   7   9   11
                           <-- -->
```

- If your score on a scale is 1-3, you are fairly well balanced on the two dimensions of that scale.
- If your score on a scale is 5-7, you have a moderate preference for one dimension of the scale and will learn more easily in a teaching environment which favors that dimension.
- If your score on a scale is 9-11, you have a very strong preference for one dimension of the scale. You may have real difficulty learning in an environment which does not support that preference.

Peter Rosati of the University of Western Ontario did a study using the ILS to compare over 800 freshman and senior engineering students looking for differences between gender, academic year, and psychological type (Rosati, 1998). The ILS profile of the students was that the majority were "active, sensing, visual and sequential" (Rosati, 1998, p. 30). Over 600 of the

students also completed the MBTI. Sensing and intuitive students correlated well between the

MBTI and the ILS (Rosati, 1998). Perceiving and extroverted students tended to be more active

in their orientation. The majority of the sequential learners were also sensing and judging types

(Rosati, 1998, p. 31). Rosati recommended engineering curricula be improved by adding "more

sensing, visual and global components" to reach the students more effectively, and to incorporate

elements into their courses to reach the E_P students who are at risk of not making it through

their first year (Rosati, 1998, p. 31, 32).

Not all educators agreed that attention to learning styles would improve learning

outcomes. Harold Pashler, Mark McDaniel, Doug Rohrer, and Robert Bjork jointly reviewed

literature published to support learning style theories and came to the conclusion that either

the data gathered came from poorly designed studies or the data simply did not exist (Pashler,

et al, 2008). Therefore their conclusion was it was not financially responsible for educational

institutions to implement learning styles until statistically relevant research is performed on the

efficacy of learning styles in education.

Professors Ross Azevedo and Mesut Akdere conducted a study (Azevedo and Akdere,

2010) to learn whether student awareness of their own learning style coupled with in class

exercises tailored to specific learning styles would improve the outcome of the students.

Azevedo and Akdere used the Kolb learning style inventory both as a diagnostic tool and as an

educational tool. Two introductory human resource classes were used as the experimental and

control groups. Both the experimental and control classes were assessed with the Kolb LSI, but

the experimental class was given instruction in what their learning style meant to them. The

experimental class content was designed to provide learning style specific exercises (concrete

experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation). Both

the control group and the experimental group were reassessed at the end of the term, and their KLSI scores and academic results were compared. The difference between KLSI scores before and after the class, and the correlation between learning style and KLSI for the course were not significant for either the control or experimental group. However, the mean and variance of the grades earned between the control and experimental group were significant. The mean point total of the control group was statistically higher, and the variance of the experimental group was statistically greater. Put simply, the experimental group had poorer performance than the control group. The authors acknowledged there might be a variety of extenuating circumstances, including the question of whether the KLSI is appropriate to use as an educational tool (Azevedo and Akdere, 2010). The authors recommended further study to determine whether the students experienced "overload" or "too much information" and their attention may have been diverted from doing what was best for them (Azevedo and Akdere, 2010).

My own story may provide some insight into the experience of using learning styles. I relied on MBTI test results from previous testing, and used the free, online assessments provided by Fleming (LSI) and Felder (ILS) to gather a profile of my learning style. The results are presented as the illustrations for those learning styles in this section. The MBTI result (taken four times over a period of 20 years) has consistently reported that my personality is an E/INFP, the balance between the "E" and "I" being highly dependent on personal energy and circumstances (Figure 2). The VARK assessment said I was a multimodal learner, which meant I have no strong preference between visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic learning (Figure 3). It is not uncommon for adults to be multimodal learners (http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page_content/multimodality.htm, 3-27-2011), approximately one third of inventory respondents are in that category. The ILS said I was balanced between active and reflective, had a moderate

preference for visual and intuitive learning, and have a very strong preference for global learning (Figure 4). It all made sense with my personal experience, so at the beginning of the spring 2011 term I reviewed what I was already doing and tried to implement some changes in an attempt to use what I'd learned.

I recognized coping skills learned as an upper-graduate and graduate student that fit with these test results. Over the years it had become important for me to read the preface and introduction to textbooks to understand the intended learning outcomes, and get a global overview of the topic. It has been important for me to develop a relationship with the professor so I can ask questions and get a verbal understanding of the material; as a result I've preferred smaller colleges. I've also sought out experiential training (labs, classroom exercises), and worked extra problems in math courses. All those coping skills addressed the needs I had as a multimodal learner that needed a global perspective. Over the years I'd managed to adapt but now that I had fresh insight, would it help?

The answer to whether it helped to know my learning style(s) is a qualified yes. It still took two thirds of the course to get a good grasp of the topic, but I had a better start by spending more time on key concepts that required a global understanding. The classroom and teamwork exercises were even more appreciated than before because I understood more clearly why they would help me. It was empowering to understand why I preferred, or in some cases needed, information presented a specific format. It shortened the time it took to self-diagnose difficulties learning the material and find alternatives if they existed. However I did experience a sense of overload with too much information regarding what I may need for my learning style(s), and some confusion about what might be the best approach. Knowing my learning style did not improve my performance, but it did improve my understanding of the difficulties and

frustrations. Perhaps with more experience I could learn to use it to my advantage. I can only guess that the students in Azevedo and Akdere's experimental class may have been experiencing something similar.

The Role of Leadership and Employee Engagement

Once the decision is made to hire an individual, the employer and employee enter into a relationship throughout the employee life cycle, which spans the time from the decision to hire through termination (Reh, 2006). To understand the ethical considerations of employee onboarding, it is important to review the two types of contract that are pertinent to this relationship, the social contract and the psychological contract.

The social contract is defined "as the set of norms, assumptions, and beliefs that society conceives as fair and appropriate for parties involved in employment relationships" (Edwards and Karau, 2007, p.2). The social contract influences the expectations of the psychological contract. With each generation comes an evolving understanding of what is fair and appropriate treatment in the unwritten social contract. One quickly finds legislative evidence of this in the evolution of the Fair Standards Labor Act established in 1938 and the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity laws, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In the psychological contract, employees and employers enter into a relationship holding a set of unwritten beliefs about what they each owe the other. It has to do with an "individual's beliefs regarding reciprocal obligations" (Rousseau, 1990, p.390). For example, I work hard therefore I expect my company to reward me with a higher salary or a perk such as attending a conference. I am rewarded therefore I give my company loyalty (Edwards and Karau, 2007; Rousseau, 1990, 2000). If I work hard and demonstrate loyalty I will earn job security. These

beliefs are common and relational in nature. As an employer I also have a set of unwritten

beliefs of what my employees owe me and I them. I expect them to be honest, work hard, and

come to me when they have problems that need my attention. In return, I am expected to provide

them development opportunities, remove obstacles for them, and facilitate their success in

the organization (Rousseau 1990, 2000). How I choose to perform at meeting the unwritten

expectations of the employer-employee psychological contract speaks to the ethics of leadership.

> *"Leadership is a relationship. Leadership is a relationship between those*
>
> *who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow."*
>
> **Kouzes and Posner, 2002, p.20**

Ethical decisions are made within a framework that guides the decision maker (Johnson,

2009). To develop a meaningful framework from which to analyze the ethical concerns raised

by the expectations of the employer-employee relationship I turned to Immanuel Kant, The

Leadership Challenge (2002) by Kouzes and Posner, and the theories of servant leadership as

defined by Robert Greenleaf.

Paul Borowski looked at the manager-employee relationship by comparing Dilbert's

business principles and Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. It is more than a little

incongruous but it makes for a clear-cut comparison. Many people are familiar with Scott

Adam's fictional character, Dilbert, who lives in a heartless corporate world where employees

are exploited and managed by morons. In a world governed by Dilbert business principles, the

manager-employee relationship is always adversarial and the manager is always incompetent at

best. In contrast, a very real CEO, Aaron Feuerstein, kept his employees on the payroll for a few

months while he rebuilt his plant, Malden Mills, after a fire. Feuerstein's philosophy was "happy

employees make productive employees" (Borowski, 1998, p. 1624), and it makes a fine example

of the Kantian belief that "every human person has an inherent worth from the very fact they are rational creatures" (Borowski, 1998, p. 1627). A Dilbertesque exploitation of employees, treating them as a means to an end, is the antithesis of Kant's belief. If we follow the ethics of Kant, then we come to the employer-employee relationship as beings of equal worth.

St Catherine University's Master of Arts program in Organizational Leadership begins with the course Ethics and Leadership. The main text for the course is The Leadership Challenge (2002) by Kouzes and Posner wherein we are introduced to the five practices of leadership: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. When my onboarding plan was compatible with my learning style it enabled me to be effective and contribute much more quickly than in any other new job. As evidenced by my recent experience, a clear onboarding plan with a sequence of training activities with due dates could provide for employee development and ensure new employees will know their performance expectations (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). To give the new employee a roadmap such as an onboarding plan could allow him or her to become competent in the new job more quickly and increase their confidence. Attention to the development needs of one's employees expresses the practice of enabling others to act (Kouzes and Posner 2002). Providing positive feedback and attention to a new employee's early success with attaining training goals is also a way of practicing encourage the heart (Kouzes and Posner 2002).

Servant leadership is the idea that true leadership emerges from the "deep desire to help others" (Spears, 2004, p.8). Greenleaf rejected the traditional idea of hierarchical organizational structure in favor of a structure that holds the leader as the "first among equals" (Greenleaf, 2004, p. 11) Larry Spears, CEO and President of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership distilled the writings of Robert Greenleaf down to ten characteristics for servant

leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2004, p.9). In the book Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership, Craig E. Johnson summarized servant leadership with four related concepts: stewardship, obligation, partnership, and elevating purpose. Onboarding is a time when employees are expected to grow rapidly in competence within the company. To focus on employee success through onboarding shows awareness and supports a commitment to the growth of people, each of which is an element of servant leadership.

Johnson includes a list by Max DePree, former CEO of Herman Miller, of the obligations "leaders owe their followers and institutions" (Johnson, p.177). DePree's list includes assets, a legacy, clear institutional values, future leadership, healthy institutional culture, covenants, maturity, rationality, space, momentum, effectiveness, and civility and values. Provision of a rational environment that "allows followers to reach their full potential" (Johnson, p.177) also addresses some of the unwritten expectations of the employer-employee relationship (Edwards and Karau, 2007; Rousseau, 1990, 2000).

The more quickly an employee is able to run up the learning curve the more quickly he or she is able to contribute to their projects and feel engaged with the company. Employee engagement, as defined in the BlessingWhite 2011 employee engagement report is the intersection of "maximum job satisfaction and maximum job contribution." Another very similar definition states that it encompasses three dimensions: rational (understanding roles and responsibilities), emotional (passion for work), and motivational (discretionary effort – going above and beyond) (Towers Watson, 2009, p. 1). The BlessingWhite 2011 employee engagement report cited sources that linked employee engagement to return on investment; specifically

Hewitt Associates stated that "*High engagement firms had a total shareholder return that was 19% higher than average in 2009. In low-engagement organizations, total shareholder return was actually 44% below average.*" The report also cited the Wharton Business School's analysis of the Best Companies to Work for in America stating, "*high levels of employee satisfaction generate superior long-horizon returns*" (BlessingWhite, 2011, p. 7). Unfortunately, barely one third of employees are highly engaged in their company's success (BlessingWhite, 2011; Paradise, 2007). Top reasons for engaging employees are improved customer satisfaction, higher productivity, better financial performance, improved teamwork and morale, and the ability to align employees with the overall corporate strategy (Paradise, 2008).

The ability to use one's talents, and opportunities for career development, are top factors of job satisfaction (BlessingWhite, 2011, p 24; Paradise, 2008), both of which are highly influenced by the new employee's manager. Employee engagement is positively affected by having a relationship with the manager, but it is even more affected by trust in senior management (BlessingWhite, 2011).

> **"Success in leadership, success in business, and success in life has been, is now, and will continue to be a function of how well people work and play together."**
>
> **Kouzes and Posner, 2002, p.21**

Chapter 3: Methodology

My research question asked how adult learning style theory could be used to improve the onboarding experience of professional technical employees, and the point of view was the employer-employee relationship from the employer's perspective.

For the purpose of this research, an adult learner was defined as someone who has attained the age of majority at twenty-one. Additionally, technical employees were defined as those with science or engineering degrees that work in industries such as, for example, medical device, semiconductor, defense, pharmaceuticals, and equipment manufacturing.

To answer this question required researching available literature on adult learning styles, onboarding, and the learning styles of technical employees as my research question was found in the intersection of these topics. That required surveying each body of literature to become conversant in them, and then searching for those papers that cross-reference each topic. For example, I looked for references to the use of adult learning style methodologies during the onboarding process of technical employees. A discussion of each topic is provided in Chapter 2, Analysis of Conceptual Context.

In addition to literature research I conducted an Internet survey of a broader audience of TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT professionals in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area to establish a regional baseline of onboarding practice. Conducting a short Internet survey allowed me to assess the regional adoption of formal onboarding programs, the use of learning style concepts, and what model of learning style T&D professionals preferred.

Access to local T&D professionals was accomplished by surveying the 700-member Twin Cities chapter of the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD). The ASTD

executive committee accepted my request for survey access to local ASTD membership. Using the ASTD Twin Cities chapter as a sample frame (Fowler, 2002) provided a wider range of industries from which to get responses. What was missing from this sampling approach was the ability to reach Twin Cities metropolitan area T&D professionals who have chosen not to join ASTD. This gap in participation had an unknown effect on the range of industry representation in the survey. Actual survey participation was approximately 4% of a total membership of approximately 700.

The survey was conducted online via Survey Monkey, a web-based survey tool, and was 14 questions in length. The request for survey participation was made first in the form of a short news article explaining the purpose of the research, and assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. It was later published in the February e-newsletter. A statement was made stating that by agreeing to fill out the survey the participant was providing implied consent. The survey data was analyzed and is reported in this thesis as evidence of the current state of employee onboarding in the Twin-Cities metropolitan area. In the survey memo I requested that interested parties contact me should they wish to be interviewed as part of my research, but had no response.

To gain a firsthand perspective regarding the current use of learning style theory and onboarding I interviewed five T&D professionals across different companies within the Minneapolis and St. Paul Minnesota metropolitan area, which is in excess of the two to four individuals specified in the thesis proposal. Survey participation was weaker than expected therefore I chose to interview an additional person. Conducting live interviews allowed me to target specific companies that hire scientists and engineers as a large percentage of their workforce and develop a relationship with each T&D professional. This relationship, and the

assurance of confidentiality, allowed me to ask questions into, for example, how onboarding is handled at their company, whether learning style tools are used, whether there is support within the prevailing company culture for training technical employees.

Interviewee selection was a sampling of convenience that allowed me to target professional contacts that work in the technical industry. Each interview was conducted with myself as the interviewer. I arranged to meet each interviewee at a mutually agreed upon locations such as private worksite offices. We agreed upon the date and time, and all the interviews were conducted between mid-January 2011 and mid-February 2011.

The intended outcome of my research was to identify potential enhancements to the onboarding process that would increase the chance of success for new employees and potentially shorten the learning curve. The expectation was that if new employees have greater success during the onboarding process, the business unit would benefit from improved employee retention. The employee would benefit from a customized approach to training that leverages how they learn best. The manager would benefit from having tools at his or her disposal to use to enhance the effectiveness of the onboarding process.

Validity

Intensive, long-term involvement:

I have worked in a technical role for over 32 years, and have been a manager for over four years. I bring experience with onboarding employees and a close relationship with peers that do the same.

Rich data:

I collected interview data from five participants, and survey data from the

ASTD. My long involvement in the industry and experience in management allowed me to craft my interview and survey questions carefully. I digitally recorded each interview to allow for precision in quoting interview participants.

Respondent validation:

I reviewed any comments planned for the thesis with the interview participants to ensure there have been no misunderstandings during the interview process.

Intervention:

There was minimal intervention due to my long association with the industries from which I pulled interview participants.

Searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases:

There was some possibility I would bring bias to the study due to my own struggles with my learning style. To counter that I looked specifically for papers that provided information was counter to my theory. I remained conscious of interview participants that provided information that ran counter to my expectations and did not dismiss them. Rather, I pursued their line of thought with result my own perceptions were changed. My survey and interview questions were reviewed beforehand to reduce any bias that may be built into the questions.

Triangulation:

I collected information from three sources, research, interviews, and surveys to triangulate the information and avoid the bias that can come from collecting information from a single source.

Quasi-statistics:

My interview and survey questions were reviewed beforehand to preclude any bias in the questioning. Also, I have statistics training from my engineering career that leads me to rigor in statistical analysis. The survey participation was low enough that I was unable to provide statistical power to the analysis. Therefore the results are discussed in terms of general trends and percentages.

Comparison:

There was opportunity to build comparison into the questioning used in the survey and for the interviews. Unfortunately review of the ASTD website did not produce existing research available to verify the responses to some of the survey questions.

Lastly, since I am a graduate student and acknowledge I am not a professional I involved as many people as practical to ensure to the best of my ability that the results were accurate and meaningful.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Results and Discussion

Learning style theories and assessments exist within the realm of education, training, and curriculum development. To scope my research question I presumed two predominant ways of using learning style theories in employee development: direct employee education regarding their learning style(s), and curriculum design using learning styles concepts. The web-based survey and interview questions had one over-arching goal, to identify whether and how learning style concepts were being used as part of employee onboarding. If learning style theories were to be incorporated into onboarding curricula, it was important to understand what support structure exists for the process of onboarding within the surveyed companies. The decision to focus survey and interview questions on onboarding presence and practice was based on the presumption that the presence of an onboarding program would provide the curricula to which learning style concepts may be added. Use of the strategy of direct education would come out during face-to-face interviews and would be indicated by answers to the learning style section of the online survey.

Together, the survey and interview questions were designed with roughly three categories of questions. The first category collected demographic data used to more closely examine the response to the survey questions by looking for trends or relationships between groups of respondents and topics. The second category assessed whether, and how, the respondent's company provided onboarding support for new employees. The third category more specifically inquired about learning style usage and whether the concepts were part of curriculum development for various training audiences.

The Twin Cities chapter of the American Society for Training and Development was surveyed to gather data for this paper. Additionally, the survey was sent to several T&D

professionals in the Twin Cities business community, who may or may not have been members of ASTD. In total twenty-nine people responded for an approximate response rate of 4% from the Twin Cities ASTD membership base of approximately 700. There was insufficient power in the sample size to do a rigorous statistical analysis; therefore the results will be discussed more generally by looking at relationships and population proportions.

Overall the results were consistent between the web-based survey and the interviews. The material will be presented starting with an analysis of the demographics of the survey, an analysis of the onboarding results, and an analysis of the learning styles results. See Appendix D for tabulated survey response data.

Demographics

The demographic questions solicited answers to the respondent's position within the company, the industry, and company size as measured by employee base. Managers and individual contributors were evenly split at 31% of the overall respondents, with consultants next at 17%. The interviewees covered the range of employee position from individual contributor to senior management.

Chart #1 Respondent position within the company

A variety of industries were represented including construction, education, government, manufacturing, distribution, information, finance, food, hospitality, transportation, and healthcare. However, the majority of the responses were somewhat equally split between healthcare (25%), manufacturing/medical device manufacturing (25%), and education (25%). The thesis question focused upon onboarding technical employees, therefore the interviewees were all chosen from the manufacturing industry, which included medical device manufacturing.

Chart #2 Represented Industries

Demographically the respondent's companies can be broken into thirds by employee base. Approximately one third of the respondents worked for companies with an employee base of up to 500, another third of respondents worked for companies with between 500 and 5,000 employees, and another third of respondents worked for companies with an employee base in excess of 10,000. There were no respondents reporting from companies of between 5,000 and 10,000 employees. The companies represented by the interviewees were largely in the greater than 10,000 employee category.

Chart #3 Company employee base

Onboarding

The focus of the onboarding section was to gauge industry adoption of onboarding activities that would provide support for the use of learning styles concepts, and corroborate the results of literature search as described in the Conceptual Context. The onboarding section of the survey asked whether the respondent's company had a T&D function, what type of onboarding support was provided, what type of training was provided by job function, and the respondent's opinion of whether onboarding had a positive impact on the employee learning curve. From these questions I hoped to learn whether a respondent's company had a commitment to training via a formal T&D function, how T&D departments were structured within their organizations, whether that affected the probability of onboarding activities at each company, and what if any onboarding activities were performed. Additionally, questions for the interviewees focused on experience with onboarding and the value of it.

Of the survey respondents, 86% reported their company had a T&D function. After normalizing the responses for company size by reporting results as a population proportion (Table #1), there appeared to be little correlation to company size whether the T&D function existed as its own department or was part of Human Resources. The exception was companies under 100 employees. The interviewees represented four different companies. Of those companies, three have separate T&D functions that reside within the HR department.

Table #1 Training and Development organizational alignment

Training and Development	1-100	100-500	500-1,000	1,000-5,000	Greater than 10,000
Part of larger group (n=15)		43%	67%	67%	60%
Separate group (n=10)	33%	57%	33%	17%	30%

Fragmented (n= 2)				17%	10%
No T&D (n=2)	67%				

In aggregate, the definition of onboarding as provided by the interviewees generally followed the definition as described in the methodology section. Onboarding starts at some point between identification of the need for a new hire through when the employee is fully functioning within the organization. The duration can be as short as 60 days to as long as two years for a role in Medical Device Sales. It is considered a welcoming process that is incredibly important to the retention of the employee. The manager (or their delegate) is considered the most important part of the onboarding process.

Two of the four companies represented by the interviewees had formal onboarding programs, one of which was quite new and still in the roll-out phase to the rest of the division. In both cases there were three distinct phases to onboarding. The first was the pre-work required to bring the new hire into the company and make them feel welcomed. The second was the first few weeks on the job during which the employee is grounded in company policies, procedures, and basic performance requirements. The third phase, of approximately two months, was assimilation into the company, including its culture, values, and expectations and how they fit in the organization. An important outcome was to get the employee engaged in the success of the company making them feel like they belong. It was also clear that onboarding varied by whether the employee was direct or indirect labor. Direct labor had assessments and supervisory accountability not found in the onboarding of indirect labor.

Approximately 82% of respondent's companies provided orientation training to new employees. This appeared to be a correlated response so the data was evaluated to see how many respondents worked at companies with a T&D function that also provided onboarding

support for new employees. Fully 84% of companies with a T&D function, whether separate

or combined with Human Resources (HR), had some form of onboarding activity for new

employees. When these numbers were further broken down by type of onboarding activity (see

Table #1) and where T&D resided organizationally, a higher percentage of companies provided

orientation training to new employees when T&D was part of HR. Given the small sample size

this could be an artificial association. Approximately half the respondent's companies provided

onboarding support such as regular meetings with the new employee's manager, or a formal

onboarding program, beyond orientation training. See Table #2.

Table #2 Onboarding activities

Training and Development Function	Company provided orientation training.	The manager meets with each new employee	Onboarding program
Part of a larger group (n=15)	93%	47%	53%
A separate group (n=10)	50%	40%	60%

Survey respondents were next asked a more specific question with the potential for

multiple answers to assess what type of training was provided to new employees as part of

onboarding support. The questions asked whether there is a formal required training period of at

least several weeks duration, whether the manager gives each new employee a formal training

plan and monitors the due dates, and whether the manager arranges on-the-job training under the

guidance of a recognized trainer. Approximately 76% of all respondents indicated their company

provided at least one of those onboarding training opportunities to new employees. Of that

group, six respondents (21%) indicated their company provided all three training opportunities

when onboarding new employees.

Nearly 93% of respondents believe that onboarding activities have a positive impact on

an employee's learning curve. One respondent commented that new employees who have been through the formal onboarding program are "*more proactive with questions, ideas and potential solutions*" and "*they consider themselves "regular" employees sooner.*" There is a concern regarding how well onboarding is done however, as the one negative respondent commented, *"Usually, this is so minimal it leaves a negative impression."* From this observation one might deduce that onboarding should be done well or not at all, as it could back fire with the new employee. There were two items from my research that provide insight into this observation. The BlessingWhite 2011 report clearly stated that a poorly done engagement initiative could backfire. Talk without action will result in lower engagement. The same can be true for onboarding. If a short orientation session is considered onboarding, particularly if there is no employee follow up or other metric to monitor the success of onboarding, then it might easily be seen as a waste of time. The other insight came from the survey. Training professionals that were most likely to be dissatisfied with their onboarding program also reported there were no measures of success. If success is not measured than there is a strong probability the onboarding activity is not meeting the needs of the new employees. The minimum threshold of being done well may be as simple as providing relevant information during onboarding and following up with the process by talking to the new employee.

As discussed in the preceding section on leadership, improving employee retention has benefit to the bottom line. One respondent specifically remarked on the benefits of their onboarding program by stating, "*The first few days of a new hire's experience at a new company creates a very lasting impression. Especially in sales - having an onboarding program has greatly impacted their ability to becoming productive sooner - and [they are] staying with the company longer.*"

Monitoring employee success with onboarding is the challenge. Over 29% of respondents

had no company oversight of the success of onboarding. Of the respondents whose companies

monitored employee success, the reported methods fell into the general categories of formal

performance monitoring (testing, probation), review of retention rates, management monitoring

the new employee, and audits (monitoring training checklists, databases). Table #3 is a summary

of the categorized responses, and the rate of response by category.

Table #3 Measures of onboarding success

Monitoring success of onboarding		
No monitor	6	29%
Formal performance monitoring	5	24%
Retention rates	4	19%
Manager monitoring employee	4	19%
Audit participation	4	19%

Clearly respondents believe that more could be done regarding onboarding (Chart #4).

While 48% of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with their onboarding process,

approximately 44% of survey respondents ranged from neutral to very dissatisfied with their

company's onboarding process. Those who were dissatisfied or neutral came from a variety

of industries and company size. The only observation taken from the data was the dissatisfied

respondents tended to remark their company did not measure the success of their onboarding

activities.

Chart #4 Respondent Satisfaction

It is easy to assume that more onboarding is always the right answer. When asked whether

there could be a time when less on boarding is valuable, the interviewees were split in their

answers. Three were very adamant that there would be no value in reducing onboarding, that one

could "*hardly equip someone too well*" to perform their job. However two interviewees gave insightful answers that can be beneficial to the design of any onboarding curriculum, particularly in light of diverse learning styles.

The first interviewee stated their company critically looked at their onboarding curriculum and adopted a "just in time" strategy, borrowed from manufacturing, to intentionally move training elements out of the onboarding phase and into a phase of employee training that would allow the new employee to learn the activity hands on just as it was needed. They also reorganized the onboarding and training curriculum to mimic how the employee would interface with the product and customers. That company's experience was that the information presented in lecture format during onboarding was not retained and that moving it to a later stage in employee training allowed for greater retention. An example of a just in time approach to medical device sales training was presented during the interview. The previous sales training approach was to provide instruction into how to fill out incident reports during onboarding, but actual practice meant there could be months between onboarding and the first reportable incident. The incident report training was made flexible so as to coincide with the first incident. This allowed the employee to fill out their first set of paperwork at the same time they were being trained, which in the long term led to fewer compliance issues with the paperwork.

The second interviewee observed that adding an onboarding program was a goal for the company, but the highly technical engineers and operators hired at their company may get impatient with all the onboarding activities and had demonstrated a desire to "*just get out there and do the job*."

Learning Styles

The previous section summarizing onboarding responses established that a healthy

percentage of the respondent's companies (82%) had some onboarding activity that might be modified by incorporating learning style concepts. The focus of the learning styles section of the survey was to determine if the respondents believed adults had preferred ways to learn, whether learning style concepts and tools were being used in curriculum development or to educate employees, and who was perceived to be responsible for the success of onboarding. It is informative to have some insight into who is perceived responsible for employee onboarding success, whether it is an individual such as the manager, the new employee, or whether it is a shared responsibility. The last question, which asked what the respondent's most successful strategy was in bringing new employees onboard, was intended as informational in the hope something novel would be expressed.

The result of the survey indicates over 96% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that adults have preferred ways of learning new information. This was another important understanding necessary to determine whether it will be possible to use learning style concepts during employee onboarding.

The next step was to establish what learning style tools are already in use (Chart #5). One of the more common learning styles mentioned in literature, the Myer's-Briggs Type Indicator had the largest response for a learning style method at 28%. Because the Felder Index of Learning Styles is specific to technical students, it was disappointing to discover it was not being used with adult technical learners. There were a handful of other assessment tools mentioned in the survey, none of which are learning style assessments. DISC™ (2), Insight, EQi (2), and Situational Leadership were all specifically referenced.

The DISC™ profile refers to Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness and is an individual profile of behavior that is useful for team interaction (http://

www.discprofile.com/whatisdisc.htm). Insight is a critical thinking assessment. The EQ-I is the emotional quotient inventory. Situational leadership is a tool to help managers and supervisors more appropriately coach employees who would normally exhibit a range of needs from high to low employee competence and high to low employee motivation. The above, briefly described, assessment tools are not among those commonly referred to as learning style assessments.

Chart #5 Learning Style Usage

However, over 57% of respondents said not applicable for the use of any of the learning style methods. Interviews with T&D professionals explained why a discrepancy would exist between the understanding of learning styles and the use of them. Interviewees stated that formal onboarding programs were a relatively new embarkation by HR and T&D functions, and that while it is recognized that learning style concepts are important the T&D organizations were not ready to implement them. As one interviewee said very clearly, "it's like flying before we are walking." Implementing learning styles in onboarding or training is something to aspire to.

As previously stated, there is general agreement that adults have different learning styles and have a variety of preferred ways to learn new information. The T&D professionals interviewed for this thesis each tried to use a variety of techniques to deliver information when possible, including handouts, videos, lecture, and demonstration when possible. When asked if there is value in recognizing learning styles in onboarding, the answer was a definite "yes." However, organizationally it was perceived to be a tough sell to ask managers to go through learning style training. As one T&D professional stated, it was their job to put these concepts in the curriculum and make the delivery of training that accommodates a variety of learning styles invisible. In this professional's opinion, managers should not have to be trained to accommodate different learning styles; rather the diversity training already delivered in the company could and should be delivering that message already. Most interviewees favored a blended approach that buried several information delivery methods in a single curriculum. However, one person thought it might take more work than that and would require assessing each employee and designing curriculum to be delivered in multiple formats. This is an area for more research.

Curriculum design was a consistent theme among the interviewees. One interviewee stated that training adults is different than training children because children memorize facts very well but adults do not. Therefore hands on experience and simulators were an important part of the way the interviewee's company delivered training.

What is of some concern is the large number of respondents who said they did not make use of multiple formats to deliver new information to technical employees and operators (Chart #6). Upon review of the raw survey data, this was also true for the subset of respondents who work in the manufacturing industry. Respondents from the education industry were most likely to make extensive use of multiple formats to deliver information to technical employees.

Chart #6 Use of Multiple Information Delivery Formats

When asked who bore the responsibility for the success of onboarding, approximately 86% of respondents believed it was the joint responsibility of the manager and new employee. Interviewees were clear that the hiring manager has a very important role in the success of onboarding. The manager sets up the activities and requirements. If the onboarding activities are structured more formally, they will inherently cover a variety of ways to learn. If the onboarding checklist contains procedures to read, people to meet, a buddy to help with questions the first few days, hands on product experience, and a manufacturing line tour then learning style diversity will be (mostly) covered.

The research question focused upon onboarding technical employees, but when asked one interviewee gave the clearest answer of why it shouldn't matter whether the new employee was technical. The training plan still needs to be there. The employee still needs to be networked.

They still need to be assimilated into the company, and learn the culture and company expectations. The technical employee will have a range of preferred learning styles just like the other employees so it isn't necessary to onboard them differently.

The largest concern expressed by interviewees and in some survey comments was how to show the value proposition to senior management to get funding to use learning style concepts to improve onboarding and training curricula. It is perceived to be difficult to point directly from learning styles to an outcome that affects the company's revenue. However, as was pointed out in the Conceptual Context, Chapter 2, the BlessingWhite 2011 report has reported findings that point to employee engagement as a significant factor in the productivity and earnings per share. A very important reason that affects the use of learning style concepts in onboarding is that of competing budget priorities. What priority should be placed on learning styles and onboarding when, as one interviewee stated, there are needs for manager training, training to improve technical skills, and team competency training?

The last question of the survey was meant to be a question of discovery, to see what companies thought were their most successful strategies to bring new employees into the company. There were no surprises. The most frequent responses were categorized as recruiting, planning/onboarding, mentoring, and management support. These items cover all the important aspects of onboarding from the hiring decision until the employee is fully functioning in the workplace.

Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The intent of this research was to learn how learning style theory might be used to improve the onboarding of technical employees. A web-based survey, literature search, and interviews were the methods used to gather research data. The survey and interview questions were designed to gather demographic, onboarding, and learning style information from Twin City area training and development professionals. The survey and interview results did not turn out as I had anticipated, based on literature search alone. I had expected to find more onboarding support, and more use of learning styles in training. It also surprised me that the T&D group disagreed, in general, whether to train managers and employees in the use of learning styles.

What I found was the success of how new employees adapt to their new company is dependent on the relationship they have with their manager, and how skilled the manager is with bringing new people on board. The importance of adult learning style theory in onboarding and training curriculum development is not argued but how to implement it is definitely up for argument. There were two distinctly different responses from local T&D professionals. One interviewee stated it was their job to use learning style concepts in curriculum development and make it invisible to the manager or the trainee. The other thought each employee would need to be assessed and potentially multiple methods to deliver the same training content may need to be developed. Four of the five agreed that using multiple modes of information delivery during training would be the most efficient way to reach the greatest number of adult students, with the fifth believing multiple classroom approaches would need to be developed.

The high proportion of respondents (82%) that have some activities related to onboarding, and the high proportion of companies with a T&D group, would indicate that the structure exists

locally to support the introduction of learning style concepts within onboarding curricula. The take away message is that there is onboarding activity reported by over 80% of respondents surveyed, and there is enough activity in place indicating support for onboarding to presume that learning style concepts could be used in the existing curricula to enhance the onboarding experience of employees if there were to be a priority placed on implementation.

My experience would indicate it is not 100% effective to rely on web resources for self-education in the use of learning styles, if for no other reason than reading information on the Internet neglects other facets of learning. In the end, it is largely personal responsibility to obtain one's education, but that outcome is also strongly affected by the classroom experience. This is analogous to the work setting. It is still largely the employee's personal responsibility to do the best job possible, and seek help to do so, but success is strongly affected by their manager.

Recommendations

Those who state that learning styles have not been researched thoroughly enough to make claims of efficacy have a point, particularly when they remind of the human capacity to learn and the "variety and range of what can be learned" (Pashler 2008). However, that was not the intent of my research. The intent was to learn whether the onboarding experience could be more effective through the use of learning styles. Experiential evidence exists that the use of learning style theory in the development of training can be effective in improving employee retention (Massoni 2009). Massoni noted improvement in recruit retention after providing learning style education to the field officer trainers and the students. The relationship of the hiring manager to new employee is analogous; therefore I would recommend that there be exploration of the benefit of providing learning style education and tools to the hiring manager and new employee

as a way of improving and potentially accelerating the onboarding experience.

Disagreement regarding the most effective method of using learning styles would indicate more research needs to be done to discern whether multi-modal or tailored approaches to training would be the most effective. More research could be done to closely link the activities of onboarding with training effectiveness and subsequent return on investment. To improve the possibility of industry adoption of learning styles in training development, the criteria for effectiveness should be evaluated from both the learning outcome and cost perspectives. I would recommend studying the full employee lifecycle as well as the onboarding phase of it to see if there are phases of learning or learning activities that would preferentially benefit from incorporation of learning styles.

Conclusions

Training and Development professionals agree that use of learning styles would have value in training curriculum development, and as onboarding support for new hires. Once the onboarding infrastructure is sufficiently mature in an organization, and the return on investment case is more widely recognized in industry, it will be more feasible to add learning styles to it and improve its ability to reach a wider audience of employees. Until then, success in onboarding will still largely be up to the skills of the individual hiring manager and his or her facility at bringing new employees into the company.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Web based survey questions

1) Please provide your position title within your company.

      Individual contributor   Director

      Supervisor   Senior/Executive management

      Manager   Consultant

2) Which industry category describes your company?

Agriculture	Information	Government
Automotive	Finance	Food
Utilities	Education	Real Estate
Construction	Healthcare	Public Service
Manufacturing	Arts and	Other (include
Retail	Entertainment	text box)

3) How large is your company's employee base?

      1-100   1000-5000

      100-500   5000-10000

      500-1000   Greater than 10000

4) Does your company have a Training and Development organization?

      Yes, it is a separate function.

      Yes, it is part of a larger group such as Human Resources

      No

      Other (include text box)

Onboarding is defined as those training and orientation activities that are necessary to bring a new employee into the company. The onboarding period starts from the hiring decision and may last as long as the employee's first six months.

5) Please refer to the above definition of onboarding. Which of the following onboarding activities are performed to aid the orientation of a new employee to your company? Please check all that apply.

      There are no specific onboarding activities.

      The company provides orientation training.

      The manager holds regular meetings with each new employee individually to monitor their employee's progress assimilating into the new company.

      The company has an onboarding program administered through a department such as HR or Training and Development.

      Other (Insert text box)

6) Please refer to the above definition of onboarding. Which of the following onboarding activities does your company provide to train a new employee to perform their new job?

There is a formal, required training period of at least several weeks duration.

The manager gives each new employee a formal, self-administered training plan and monitors the due dates for each item.

The manager arranges on-the-job training, i.e. performance of hands-on training activities under the guidance of a certified or recognized Trainer.

No specific job-related training is provided.

Other (include text box)

7) In your experience, to what extent do onboarding activities impact an employee's learning curve.

Positive impact

Neutral

Negative impact

Don't know

Please comment on your experience. (Insert text box)

8) How does your company monitor its success with onboarding new employees?
(insert text box)

9) Are you satisfied with your company's onboarding process?

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral

Mildly dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

Don't know

Please comment on your experience. (Insert text box)

10) Please indicate your response to the following statement: It is my experience that adults have preferred ways of learning new information (for example: watching, reading, listening, and doing).

Strongly agree	Disagree
Agree	Strongly disagree
Neutral	Don't know

The ways adults prefer to learn have been categorized and defined under the broad topic of Learning Styles.

11) Does your company use the tools and assessments available for learning styles to improve employee training and development? The following is a list of common learning styles used in education and training. Please select all that apply.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator	Dunn and Dunn
Kolb Learning Styles Inventory	Gregorc Mind Styles™
Felder Index of Learning Styles	Other (insert text box)
VARK	Not applicable

12) Does your company capitalize on learning style knowledge in curriculum development, providing information in multiple formats? For example use of lecture/presentation, group activities, hands-on practice, and handouts to deliver course content to the employee audience.

Please rank the following list.

	Use of Learning Style Information			
	Extensive	Some	Little	None
Company Orientation training				
Management/leadership training				
Technical training*				
Operator training**				
Job related non-technical training				

*engineering, computer, math or science based

**manufacturing operators/product builders

13) What do you believe is the formula for new employee success? Is it -

       100% new employee effort.

       50:50 new employee and manager working together.

       100% manager effort.

       More complicated than the above. Please comment. (Insert text box)

14) What do you believe is the most successful strategy your company uses to bring new employees into the company? (Insert text box)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interviewee:

Position within the Company:

Date:

1. What is your experience with onboarding? Particularly with technical employees.

   a. How do you define it?

2. Rather than assume onboarding is the right answer for new employee success, do you think there is value in providing less onboarding support?

3. Do you see any value in using learning style theory to support onboarding new employees?

   a. If no, why?

   b. If yes, why? How would you use it?

4. What do you see as having the largest effect on learning outcome?

5. How have your personal onboarding experiences affected your career?

6. What unexpected learning did you have?

7. What questions do you have for me?

8. What questions should I have asked you that I did not?

Appendix C: Sample Consent Forms

Information and Consent Form (Survey Version)

Title of Research

Running up the Curve: Adult Learning Styles and Employee Onboarding

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the use of adult learning styles during onboarding. This study is being conducted by Jolynn Nelson, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Martha Hardesty, a faculty member in the MAOL Program.   You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are a member of the American Society of Training Development and/or have been a Training and Development professional. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to evaluate the current state of the use of formal onboarding plans and adult learning style methodologies in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Approximately 70 people are expected to participate in this research in the form of an online survey.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate in the online survey, it will be preceded by an attached cover letter that will cover the topics to be surveyed. The survey will take 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:
The survey has minimal risk; it may be halted at any time.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented. No information will be released to a third party.

I will keep the research results in my home office, and only my advisor and I will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by December 31, 2011. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Voluntary nature of the study:
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University or the American Society of Training and Development in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop the survey at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and questions:
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Jolynn Nelson, at 612-819-4130. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, (Martha Hardesty, 651-690-6189), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact the faculty advisor.

Please print a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Participation in the online survey indicates consent to participate. Please know that you may withdraw from the survey at any time.

Information and Consent Form (Interview Version)

Title of Research

Running up the Curve: Adult Learning Styles and Employee Onboarding

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the use of adult learning styles during onboarding. This study is being conducted by Jolynn Nelson, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Martha Hardesty, a faculty member in the MAOL Program.   You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are a member of the American Society of Training Development and/or are a Training and Development professional. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to evaluate the current state of the use of formal onboarding plans and adult learning style methodologies in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Approximately 5 people are expected to participate in this research in the form of face-to-face interviews.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate in the interview, you will be asked to answer questions from a list of topics provided you beforehand. This interview will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes in a single session.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:
The interview has minimal risks. We may discuss emotionally sensitive topics, and you may stop the conversation at any time.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented. No information will be released to a third party.

I will keep the research results in my home office, and only my advisor and I will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by December 31, 2011. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. Any audio tape recordings will be kept in my home office, no one will have access to them besides me. The recordings will be erased one year after the end of this research.

Voluntary nature of the study:
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University or the American Society of Training and Development in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and questions:
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Jolynn Nelson, at 612-819-4130. You

may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, (Martha Hardesty, 651-690-6189), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact the faculty advisor.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the interview at any time.

_____

I consent to participate in the study and I agree to be audio recorded.

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

To: Survey Participants

From: Jolynn Nelson

January XX, 2011

I appreciate the opportunity to request your participation in a short survey that is part of the research work I am doing for my thesis at the St. Catherine University.

The purpose of this research is to increase the effectiveness of technical employee onboarding by understanding the role learning style training could play in onboarding. An essential part of my research is a survey of Training and Development professionals such as yourselves. The intent of this research is to provide recommendations to training and development professionals for enhancements to the process of onboarding technical employees through inclusion of adult learning style methods. The goal is an improved understanding of learning style diversity that leaders can use to speed their employees up the learning curve.

Any information obtained in connection with this survey will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented. No information will be released to a third party. I will keep the research results in my home office, and only my advisor and I will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by December 31, 2011. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw from the survey at any time. Participation in the survey will indicate your consent.

Thank you for your time and participation in this research study. If any of you are interested in participating in face-to-face interviews as part of this research, please feel free to contact me off line at 612-819-4130, or jolynnnelson@stkate.edu.

Appendix D: Data

Demographic data
Question #1
 Onboarding and Learning Styles

Please provide your position title within your company.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Individual contributor	31.0%	9
Supervisor	3.4%	1
Manager	31.0%	9
Director	10.3%	3
Senior/Executive management	6.9%	2
Consultant	17.2%	5
answered question		29
skipped question		0

Question #2

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Which industry category describes your company?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agriculture	0.0%	0
Automotive	0.0%	0
Utilities	0.0%	0
Construction	4.2%	1
Manufacturing	20.8%	5
Retail	0.0%	0
Information	4.2%	1
Finance	4.2%	1
Education	25.0%	6
Healthcare	25.0%	6
Arts and Entertainment	0.0%	0
Government	12.5%	3
Food	4.2%	1
Real Estate	0.0%	0
Public Service	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		5
answered question		24
skipped question		5

Number	Response Date	Other (please specify)	Categories
1	Jan 27, 2011 3:52 PM	Transportation	
2	Jan 28, 2011 9:02 PM	Medical device	(add to manufacturing)
3	Feb 8, 2011 6:09 AM	Hospitality	
4	Feb 10, 2011 2:52 PM	Distribution	
5	Feb 10, 2011 6:55 PM	Wholesale distribution	

Question #3

Onboarding and Learning Styles

How large is your company's employee base?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1-100	10.3%	3
100-500	24.1%	7
500-1,000	10.3%	3
1,000-5,000	20.7%	6
5,000-10,000	0.0%	0
Greater than 10,000	34.5%	10
answered question		29
skipped question		0

Onboarding Data

Onboarding Question #4

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Does your company have a Training and Development organization?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, it is a separate function.	37.0%	10
Yes, it is part of a larger group such as Human Resources	55.6%	15
No	7.4%	2
Other (please specify)	3	3
answered question	27	27
skipped question	2	2

Number	Other (please specify) Categories
1	Fragmented function across the agency
2	No formal organization, but does have multiple training professionals at the different business centers within the
3	There is an internal training function. I am involved in customer training which is separate from the internal training function.

Onboarding Question #5

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Please refer to the above definition of onboarding. Which of the following onboarding activities are performed to aid the orientation of a new employee to your company? Please check all that apply.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
There are no specific onboarding activities.	11.1%	3
The company provides orientation training.	81.5%	22
The manager holds regular meetings with each new employee individually to monitor their employee's progress assimilating into the new company.	44.4%	12
The company has an onboarding program administered through a department such as HR or Training and Development.	51.9%	14
Other (please specify)		3
answered question		27
skipped question		2

Number	Response Date	Other (please specify)	Categories
1	Jan 27, 2011 5:39 PM	We have some departments that have very formal and lengthy onboarding programs. These are mostly for new graduates and are linked to large departments such as Sales and Service.	
2	Jan 31, 2011 2:50 PM	Although we set manager expectations around their role in onboarding, we do not track/monitor compliance to those expectations	
3	Feb 10, 2011 6:57 PM	We are currently developing an onboarding program. Some pieces are ready to go and some are not ready yet.	

Onboarding Question #6

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Please refer to the above definition of onboarding. Which of the following onboarding activities does your company provide to train a new employee to perform their new job?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
There is a formal, required training period of at least several weeks duration.	52.2%	12
The manager gives each new employee a formal, self-administered training plan and monitors the due dates for each item.	30.4%	7
The manager arranges on-the-job training, i.e. performance of hands-on training activities under the guidance of a certified or recognized Trainer.	56.5%	13
No specific job-related training is provided.	21.7%	5
Other (please specify)		7
answered question		23
skipped question		6

Number	Response Date	Other (please specify)	Categories
1	Jan 26, 2011 8:25 PM	Manufacturing people follow a well defined & controlled onboarding process but the process isn't standardized for other people.	
2	Jan 26, 2011 8:52 PM	This is dependent on the role. More technical positions, i.e, product builders, lab scientists, quality technicians have internal certification requirements in order to perform their jobs. Training requirements are established for mid-level professionals (engineering, quality, clinical, etc) to meet regulatory & compliance requirements and to prepare employees for specific protocols and tasks. Senior professionals are provided with leadership and management courses. All employees have core training requirements that are not necessarily related to specific role performance.	

6

3	Jan 30, 2011 3:52 PM	Optional training is provided
4	Jan 31, 2011 2:50 PM	Although we set manager expectations around their role in onboarding, we do not track/monitor compliance to those expectations.
5	Feb 3, 2011 8:45 PM	The formality of job-specific training varies by department and by the new employee's role
6	Feb 10, 2011 6:57 PM	There is formal training for the majority of our employees but only in certain departments such as customer service, inbound and outbound, purchasing, etc.
7	Feb 15, 2011 4:14 PM	There is a formal 1 week onboarding program for new hires in Sales. There is self-paced on-demand training available - the hiring manager decides how much to assign. There is currently a program under development for training all new hires throughout the company which will mirror much of the sales onboarding program.

Onboarding Question #7

Onboarding and Learning Styles

In your experience, to what extent do onboarding activities impact an employee's learning curve.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Positive impact	92.6%	25
Neutral	0.0%	0
Negative impact	3.7%	1
Don't know	3.7%	1
Please comment on your experience.		6
answered question		27
skipped question		2

Number	Response Date	Please comment on your experience.	Categories
1	Jan 26, 2011 8:52 PM	Onboarding orientation and role specific training are key to accelerate the learning curve and ultimate performance of employees. The more thoughtful and structured the training/onboarding, the higher the learning curve.	
2	Jan 27, 2011 3:28 PM	Self taught.	
3	Jan 27, 2011 5:39 PM	We are a medical device company and would not be in business if we didn't do this. As a manager, I can attest that proper onboarding is essential. Usually, this is so minimal it leaves a negative	
4	Jan 28, 2011 2:39 PM	impression.	
5	Feb 3, 2011 8:45 PM	Our employees who have participated in a formal onboarding process are more proactive with questions, ideas and potential solutions. They also consider themselves "regular" employees sooner than new-hires who haven't participated in a formal onboarding process.	
6	Feb 15, 2011 4:14 PM	The first few days of a new hires experience at a new company creates a very lasting impression. Especially in sales - having an onboarding program has greatly impacted their ability to becoming productive sooner - and staying with the company longer.	

Onboarding Question #8

Onboarding and Learning Styles

How does your company monitor its success with onboarding new employees?	
Answer Options	Response Count
	21
answered question	21
skipped question	8

Number	Response Date	Response Text	Categories
1	Jan 26, 2011 8:25 PM	Many objective tests are in place to monitor success and corrective action SOP's are followed when issues are	
2	Jan 26, 2011 8:52 PM	Managers monitor new employees for the first 6 months through the onboarding system. Manager's report to their senior managers periodically during the first 6 months. Human resources monitors' onboarding participation and retention rates	
3	Jan 27, 2011 3:18 PM	We don't monitor it.	
4	Jan 27, 2011 3:20 PM	Interview supervisors and survey new employees.	
5	Jan 27, 2011 3:53 PM	If they pass probation.	
6	Jan 27, 2011 4:15 PM	Audit checklist of orientation activity completion	
7	Jan 27, 2011 4:35 PM	it doesn't	
8	Jan 27, 2011 5:39 PM	We have formal training checklists for the first day, first 30 days and then one that is maintained going forward. They are kept in a compliant database and subject to inspection by accrediting agencies. Our company has mock audits periodically where	
9	Jan 27, 2011 6:48 PM	Does not at this time.	
10	Jan 30, 2011 3:52 PM	Not specific--just general supervisor appraisal	
11	Jan 31, 2011 2:50 PM	We do not monitor this, partially because we have not defined what success looks like (i.e. not clear what we would measure).	
12	Jan 31, 2011 10:34 PM	Retention of new associates in the first 24 months of their employment	

13	Feb 1, 2011 6:28 PM	Regular check-ins, feedback from trainers and ojt mentors, performance on job duties
14	Feb 3, 2011 8:24 PM	Performance Testing
15	Feb 3, 2011 8:40 PM	Managers are responsible for all onboarding.
16	Feb 3, 2011 8:45 PM	Inconsistent monitoring between departments. Some don't monitor; some use skills testing and mentor/manager
17	Feb 4, 2011 5:55 PM	We could definitely do better at this. We provide tools to hiring managers, work through the HR Generalists to ensure hiring managers are aware of the tools. For the training that is led by L&D, we conduct Level 1 and Level 2 evaluations and get feedback from hiring managers on the performance of the new
18	Feb 6, 2011 6:29 PM	I don't know - I don't think we do. Anecdotally?
19	Feb 8, 2011 6:11 AM	bi-annual HR audits, retention statistics, and exit interviews
20	Feb 10, 2011 2:55 PM	Employee surveys consistently administered which include demographics of tenure (less than 6 months is one category). Also includes training feedback, culture feedback, etc. We also monitor turnover rates and patterns.
21	Feb 15, 2011 4:14 PM	Data in sales force.

Onboarding Question #9

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Are you satisfied with your company's onboarding process?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very satisfied	11.1%	3
Somewhat satisfied	37.0%	10
Neutral	18.5%	5
Mildly dissatisfied	22.2%	6
Very dissatisfied	3.7%	1
Don't know	7.4%	2
Please comment on your experience		4
answered question		27
skipped question		2

Number	Response Date	Please comment on your experience	Categories
1	Jan 26, 2011 8:52 PM	Our onboarding activities address company and department orientation and provide a framework for managers to determine role specific training and help the new employee build relationships and understand their expectations. Systems to deliver job specific training are inconsistent between departments and role specific training could be better defined and planned in most areas. Although we track specific training requirements, there is no system to track all job related training and the employee's	
2	Jan 27, 2011 4:15 PM	We are in the process of improving the program to add in greater simulation training	
3	Feb 3, 2011 8:45 PM	I'd like to see it more formalized, tracked in the employee performance documentation and most of all, applied consistently across the	
4	Feb 15, 2011 4:14 PM	There is always room for improvement. Far too often I think people try to cram in far too much information into too short of time – it's physically impossible for people to remember all of the data we throw at them. This is getting better - we are now using more on-demand - recorded presentations to spread the amount of information presented over time.	

Learning Styles Question #10

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Please indicate your response to the following statement: It is my experience that adults have preferred ways of learning new information (for example: watching, reading, listening, and doing).

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	48.1%	13
Agree	48.1%	13
Neutral	3.7%	1
Disagree	0.0%	0
Strongly disagree	0.0%	0
Don't know	0.0%	0
answered question		27
skipped question		2

Learning Style Question #11

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Does your company use the tools and assessments available for learning styles to improve employee training and development? The following is a list of common learning styles used in education and training. Please select all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator	28.6%	6
Kolb Learning Styles Inventory	4.8%	1
Felder Index of Learning Styles	0.0%	0
VARK	4.8%	1
Dunn and Dunn	0.0%	0
Gregorc Mind StylesTM	9.5%	2
Not applicable	57.1%	12
Other (please specify)		8
answered question		21
skipped question		8

Number	Response Date	Other (please specify)	Categories
1	Jan 26, 2011 9:04 PM	Very limited use of Myers-Briggs. No valid assessment tools are used consistently.	
2	Jan 27, 2011 3:55 PM	DiSC	
3	Jan 31, 2011 2:55 PM	While we use some of these and others, we do not use them related to "learning" styles	
4	Feb 3, 2011 8:25 PM	Insights	
5	Feb 3, 2011 8:42 PM	Situational Leadership	
6	Feb 10, 2011 4:04 PM	EQ-i, Communication Styles	
7	Feb 10, 2011 6:58 PM	eQi	
8	Feb 15, 2011 4:18 PM	We use DiSC which looks very similar to Gregorc Mind Styles	

Learning Style Question #12

Onboarding and Learning Styles

Does your company capitalize on learning style knowledge in curriculum development, providing training information in multiple formats? For example use of lecture/presentation, group activities, hands-on practice, and handouts to deliver course content to the employee audience. Please rate the following list of training activities and your use of varied information formats.

Answer Options	Extensive	Some	Little	None	Response Count
Company Orientation training	3	11	5	7	26
Management/leadership training	5	12	2	7	26
Technical training (engineering, computer, math or science)	5	4	4	11	24
Operator training (manufacturing operators/product builders)	5	6	2	11	24
Job related non-technical training	1	11	5	8	25
answered question					26
skipped question					3

Learning Styles Question #13
Onboarding and Learning Styles

What do you believe is the formula for new employee success? Is it -

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
100% new employee effort.	9.5%	2
50:50 new employee and manager working together.	85.7%	18
100% manager effort.	4.8%	1
More complicated than the above. Please comment.		10
answered question		21
skipped question		8

Number	Response Date	More complicated than the above. Please comment.	Categories
1	Jan 26, 2011 9:04 PM	There must be good systems in place to support the training of employee and employee learning and human and other resources available to support the manager and the employee as they learn their jobs and expectations and become acclimated to	
2	Jan 27, 2011 3:21 PM	100% manager effort and 100% new employee effort. Each person has to give one hundred percent for it to truly be successful.	
3	Jan 27, 2011 3:22 PM	75% manager and 25% employee	
4	Jan 27, 2011 3:31 PM	In a perfect world it's 50-50....	
5	Jan 27, 2011 4:25 PM	Depends on the level of employment. Hiring SME's are expected to know their job with little involvement from managers.	
6	Jan 28, 2011 2:39 PM	Proper identification of what the employee is supposed to do, followed by constructive and professional feedback by management.	
7	Jan 31, 2011 2:55 PM	While I selected 50/50, I think the question is oversimplified. What is success? How is it measured? There is more to it that the managers and employee alone.	
8	Feb 3, 2011 8:52 PM	I strongly believe in the employee-mentor-manager dynamic. It works very well for our department. It provides the employee with a resource who is closer to the finer details of the job than the manager and helps to develop a more "big picture" concept for our mentors (which enhances their problem solving and decisioning	
9	Feb 10, 2011 4:04 PM	Hiring well. Complete partnership and engagement between all the key players: leaders of the organization, manager, HR, new employee	

| 10 | Feb 15, 2011 4:18 PM | 60 Manager 40 Employee |

Learning Style Question #14

Onboarding and Learning Styles

What do you believe is the most successful strategy your company uses to bring new employees into the company?	
Answer Options	Response Count
	20
answered question	20
skipped question	9

Number	Response Date	Response Text	Categories
1	Jan 26, 2011 8:28 PM	Next level up mentoring	
2	Jan 26, 2011 9:04 PM	We have a good onboarding structure for the new employee and the manager to work in partnership. They system is dependent on the manager's skills and commitment to develop the new employee once they arrive and are delegated work. Some managers fully orchestrate the onboarding process using the system and for others the system provides a minimal foundation for a new employee and the employee may "sink or swim" as they We're kind of floundering right	
3	Jan 27, 2011 3:21 PM	now.	
		Full-time mentoring for several	
4	Jan 27, 2011 3:22 PM	weeks.	
5	Jan 27, 2011 4:25 PM	Finding and recruiting based on recommendations from existing staff.	
		Formalized job training requirements and a system to ensure everything happens as	
6	Jan 27, 2011 5:52 PM	specified.	
7	Jan 27, 2011 6:50 PM	Individual manager attention, but it could be far better.	
		Testing for use of the English	
8	Jan 28, 2011 2:39 PM	language.	
9	Jan 30, 2011 3:55 PM	DK	
10	Jan 31, 2011 2:55 PM	Where it is used, I believe creating a "buddy system" is an excellent way ot improve the onboarding experience. I also I believe having a structured plan that includes meeting with peers, customers, etc. is critical.	

11	Jan 31, 2011 10:36 PM	Selling the culture.
12	Feb 1, 2011 6:30 PM	Having a plan for how to handle it - even if it's not perfect, at least it's a plan
13	Feb 3, 2011 8:25 PM	Get them producing
14	Feb 3, 2011 8:42 PM	Company positions are varied. Manager's monitoring new employees with HR input is adequate.
15	Feb 3, 2011 8:52 PM	Provide basic company information via Orientation to set the stage. Team the employee with a mentor for the first 4-6 months. Use a formal on-boarding process to identify the training and resources the employee needs to be successful. FOLLOW UP, FOLLOW UP,
16	Feb 4, 2011 5:57 PM	Are you looking for a recruiting strategy? If so, I would say referrals from employees.
17	Feb 8, 2011 6:16 AM	Providing information on the company and its' culture, management support for them to succeed in their position, job responsibility, and level of expected performance needed to be
18	Feb 10, 2011 4:04 PM	Hiring exceedingly well.
19	Feb 10, 2011 6:58 PM	Extensive hiring process
20	Feb 15, 2011 4:18 PM	Building relationship with them on day one. So they always have someone to reach out too.