Evonik's Just-in-Time Tools for Managers Create Seamless Onboarding Experiences

Evonik Industries AG

Best Use of a Blended Learning Program

January 2022

Company Background

Company-at-a-Glance	Evonik Industries AG
Headquarters	Essen, Germany
Year Founded	1847 but Evonik as a brand was introduced in 2007
Revenue	€12.2 billion
Employees	33,000+
Global Scale	Present in more than 100 countries, in all regions globally. Evonik's three main regions are Germany/EMEA, the Americas and Asia Pacific.
Customers/Output, etc.	Evonik is a specialty chemical company. Its customers are the different divisions of Evonik, including Specialty Additives, Nutrition & Care, Smart Materials, Performance Materials, Technology & Infrastructure and its corporate administrative functions.
	Evonik is one of the world's leading specialty chemicals companies. The company offers specialty chemical elements/additives for many products ranging from tires, mattresses, medications to animal feed and many more. While the amounts of material contributed are usually small, those contributions are precisely what make the difference (e.g., making tires fuel-efficient, medications more effective or animal feeds healthier).
Industry	Specialty Chemicals
Stock Symbol	EVK
Website	www.evonik.com

Budget and Timeframe

Overall budget	Creation of tools and learning journey make use of currently available resources. No additional funding was necessary.
Number of (HR, Learning, Talent) employees involved with the implementation?	All resources were from the Onboarding team; 7.5 employees total.
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	7.5 employees
Timeframe to implement	Community launch and supporting tool creation: Three months, developed from April 2020 to June 2020. Learning Journey: Three months, developed from December 2020 to February 2021
Start date of the program	Community was launched in June 2020 and the Learning Journey was launched in February 2021. Broad communications were sent to managers in March 2021, introducing all tools and providing a survey to assess the current state of onboarding.

Business Conditions and Business Needs

Evonik is affected by massive change in four areas: internationalization, digitalization, sustainable efficiency and demographic and value changes. These changes have led to an organization structure change strengthening functional teams with end-to-end responsibilities with global implications. They must push ahead mastering digital ways of solving problems and driving innovation, and agile ways of working. They must do this while they maintain positive relationships with employees and as they deal with the changes brought about by the mixture of a multi-generational, global workforce and as values have changed during a pandemic.

While there is a need to have a global onboarding process and initiatives in Evonik, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown in 2020 intensified the need for a quick and sustainable solution to support Evonik's new hires who will have to be onboarded virtually and may not have the chance to get to know their team beyond the virtual context, as well as managers who need stronger skills in onboarding. The Global Onboarding team, established in October 2019 and staffed with skeletal resources in February 2020 with most of the hired staff only coming onboard in December 2020, was faced with the

challenge to come up with digital and cost-effective solutions in a short time if they are to truly support the needs of the business.

Onboarding Status in 2019-20

- In 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown, the pressing need for virtual onboarding is highlighted and must be addressed to support new employees hired while the rest of the team are in home office
- Evonik has a global onboarding framework Going Purple defined in 2018 but not yet implemented since there was no responsible team before. Needs to be revisited to ensure that the framework is still valid and addresses the business needs
- No digital platform for onboarding; Workday Onboarding planned to go-live in November 2021
- With Workday, the intention is that managers will take on more HR-related transactions. In a survey of hiring managers at Evonik (March 2021), 85% of managers agree that onboarding is critical to the success of the team, but 60% of them do not feel that they have a reliable, repeatable process. Good processes are in place for first week activities such as hospitality, meeting the team and having a safety orientation, but strong practices are lacking in skills developed later in the six-month period. The areas of weakness include cultural onboarding, political onboarding (building stakeholder alliances) and the absence of a strong Buddy program (this is not mandatory but is a best practice).
- The Workday project involves a large expenditure of capital and internal resources. Expectations are high for what Workday can deliver, but the Onboarding team needs to prepare managers to be self-sufficient prior to Workday go-live, in November 2021. There are many sophisticated tools available on the market which deliver onboarding solutions, but the team is tasked with doing as much possible without seeking additional funding for technology nor the IT-related resources to implement it.

External research has shown that most organizations only focus on week one of onboarding, which is consistent with the manager survey. It also shows that the biggest onboarding challenge is inconsistent application. (Both data points come from HCI.) Given the above-outlined challenges, a suite of tools has been created for hiring managers using existing resources offering just-in-time guidance at the important milestones and consolidating onboarding activities into a simple to use planner. This suite of tools has been produced and communicated with no additional costs to the company.

Overview

One of the primary delivery methods for digital onboarding support is through Evonik's Connections software with a community called "Going Purple — Onboarding for New Hires at Evonik," or the Going Purple Framework. This Avatar-based system (Avatars Generator) allows participants to select a learning persona that matches his or her role in onboarding. From there, it is designed to address the needs and pain points of each persona. For purposes of this application, the Line Manager avatar and the tools found within are the focus. These tools include a Learning Journey created using CrossKnowledge, a color-coded and event-based onboarding checklist in Excel which includes live links to valuable information and a library of templates to make implementation easy. The full range of avatar options are shown below.

Figure 1: Learning Personas, or Avatars, for Every Participant in Onboarding

New Hire   Line Manager   Buddy   HR   Student   Newly integrated from M&A
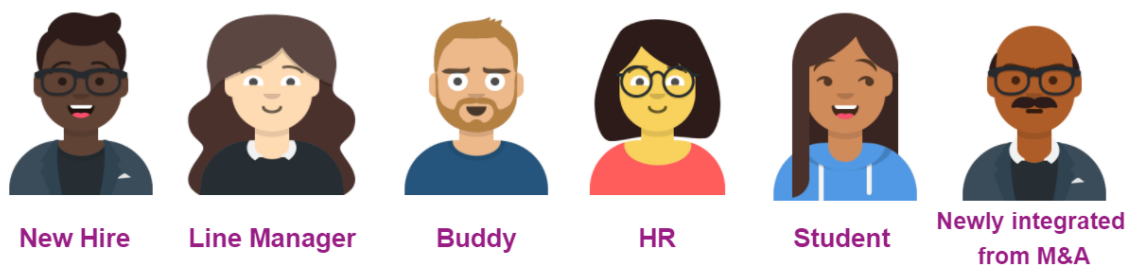
Evonik's goals were to establish a digital, sustainable, repeatable and consistent process which will be applied globally for as little cost as possible. These tools were created within expected timeframes for no additional cost. Communications about these tools are published through several channels. Work began in April 2020 with the launch of the Going Purple community in June. Prior to June testing was provided by "friends and family" of Onboarding — meaning the Onboard team and volunteers in other parts of HR. With regular outreach through multiple channels, visits to the site increased dramatically as show below.

Figure 2: Metrics Report from Going Purple Community
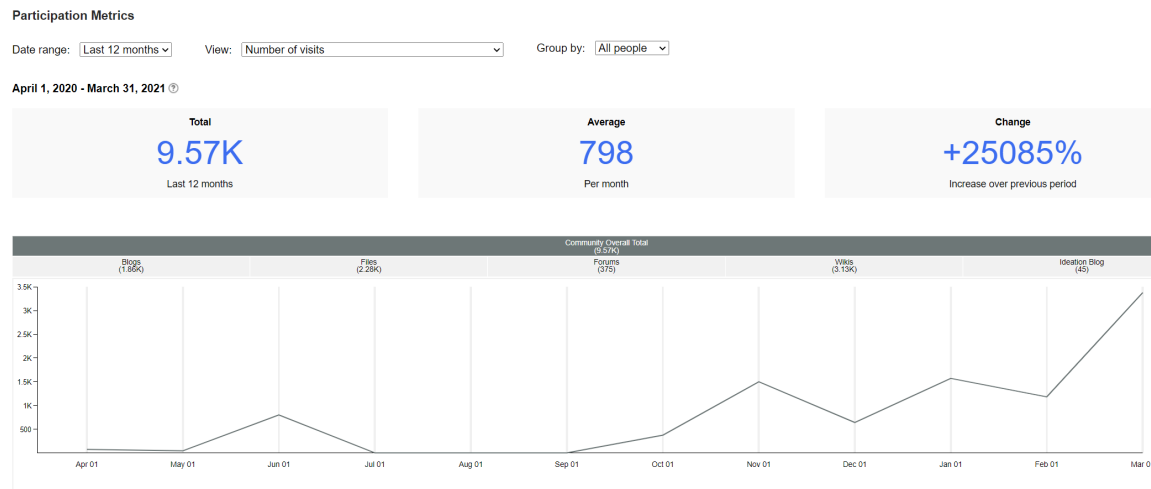
In the last quarter, the number of unique people following the community is up almost 300%. Since the launch in June 2020, approximately one-third of Evonik's manager population has visited the Line Manager page of the community and have clicked on or downloaded the checklist for managers. Most of this activity has been in the past quarter with the communication of both the community and the learning journey in the first quarter of 2021. In the past 45 days, 214 managers have registered for the Onboarding Learning Journey. From the end-of-course survey, the satisfaction score is 4.4 out of 5 and when asked how likely they would apply what they learned to their job, the course scored 4.7 out of 5.

The realignment of Evonik's HR department addresses several challenges: internationalization, digitalization, sustainable efficiency and demographic and value changes. This program touches on all these needs. The platform is global and many of Evonik's tools are translated into multiple languages, even though Evonik's recognized shared language is English. All tools are digital and agile. The needs and preferences of learners from multiple generations were taken into consideration as resources, tools and communications were developed. Lastly, they all reflect the values of Evonik.

Design of the Program

Defining onboarding as not a one-off orientation event, but rather an employee journey that spans from the signing of the contract until the first six months into Evonik provided a clear overview on how Evonik views employee engagement and the clarity on what support is provided at each milestone. The framework as well as the solutions developed were products of iterative workshops involving what at that time was onboarding project team and in consultation with line managers and global HR partners.

There are several milestones defined from day one and week one, and then monthly through the first six months. There are various onboarding initiatives/support implemented since April 2020 to support these defined milestones. Since the hiring manager is the primary contact through this process, the milestones of the new hire are also important milestones for the manager. The diagram below shows how the Onboarding team supports development through the six-month period.

Figure 3: Going Purple Timeline — Six-month Onboarding Milestones

Design

Agile and Fast Development of Onboarding Solutions (February 2020-onward)

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that ensued, the onboarding team has developed and implemented these onboarding initiatives virtually. It is, therefore, important to note that one of the success factors is the good digital access and infrastructure that Evonik has provided for the employees.

Working offsite and virtually across the globe is a challenge when designing the solutions, so the team used a mixed of agile working methods and old-style project management. Projects were worked on agreed deadline and a stand-up happens every Monday and Friday to discuss progress and support where needed. In parallel, communications and consultations to relevant stakeholders were done by each member to ensure buy-in and visibility.

Since the Onboarding team was still on the ramp-up stage in the early 2020 and most members were supporting the product development phase on a project basis, the team prioritized based on: (1) pressing business need for instance — virtual onboarding support during this crisis period; (2) low-hanging fruits — using existing Evonik digital platforms and technologies to reach as much stakeholders as possible; (3) build on best-cases and existing good practices (copy with pride philosophy) internally as well as from external benchmark; (4) ensure buy-in and support of the regions by integrating local processes into the overall global process; and (5) be bold, innovative, try and not be afraid to kill what does not work. These simple and practical strategies helped the team in coming up with fast and effective solutions despite having to work virtually for the development and implementation.

Delivery of the Program

Delivery (April 2020-onward)

Out of the new Going Purple framework the following are some of the key onboarding initiatives launched in 2020 that have since gained acceptance and support from new hires and the business.

Going Purple Online Connections Community Platform — launched June 2020 with currently 1,600+ members. This is now considered Evonik's One-Stop-Shop for Onboarding Resources and internal Facebook-style platform for new hires. Avatars were created for everyone who takes part in the onboarding process including the new hire, the line manager, the assigned Buddy, Human Resources, students and those employees who are newly integrated due to a merger or acquisition. The avatar-based approach allows users to find the right content and participate in self-directed learning.

The site is available in both English and in German since two-thirds of Evonik workforce are in Germany.

Figure 4: Going Purple Onboarding Community Home Page
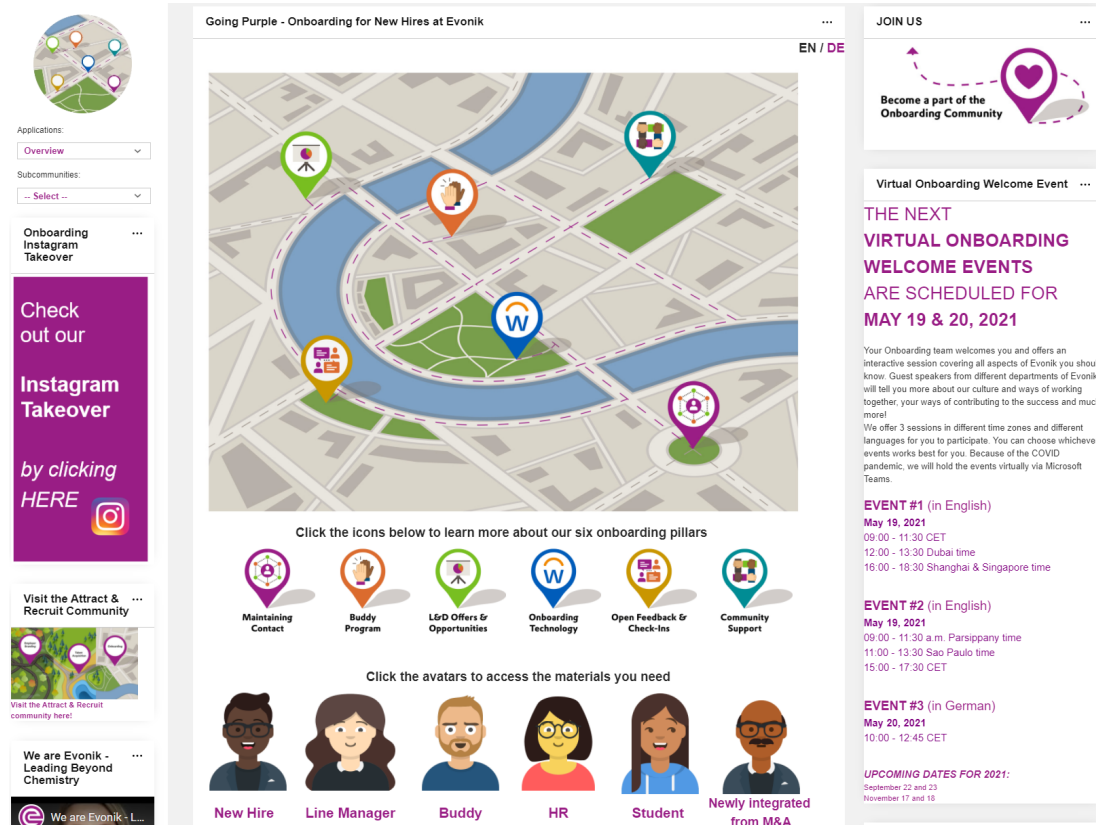
When a manager selects the "Line Manager" avatar, the following options are available:

Figure 5: Line Manager Home Page in Going Purple Onboarding Community

Under "What to do," four simple steps are offered, the most important being the Learning Journey and the Onboarding Checklist. The blended learning journey was developed using full-time employees, apprentices, interns and other Onboarding team members. Moments of truth were identified based on extensive external research and discussion within our global team and our HR partners. The training course was created using the platform CrossKnowledge. It includes a mixture of videos, tutorials and job aids and the goal was to complete the course in about an hour. A screenshot of the course can be seen below. This journey is offered in the manager and HR avatar, as HR should also be familiar with these steps.

The Onboarding Checklist and all templates offered in the Going Purple Community are offered as links throughout the course as well as at the conclusion of the course.

Figure 6: Onboarding New Hires Learning Journey for Managers and HR

The second tool offered to managers under the "Line Manager" avatar is the Onboarding checklist. The Line Manager Checklist is color-coded into the four categories of onboarding tasks necessary for a great experience including communication and hospitality, equipment, productivity and safety. It is organized into a timeline from preboarding activities, to first day, first week and first months. Important links are

included in the spreadsheet allowing managers to easily find templates which have been created for easy implementation.

Figure 7: Onboarding Checklist

A sample of the templates includes check-in questions for the manager to ask after the first week, shown below.

Figure 8: First-week Check-In Questions

Check-in questions first week

- Who have you met this week (colleagues, department contacts etc.)?
- If you had questions, who was available to answer to your questions?
- What has our team done to make you feel comfortable?
- What was the best part of your first week? What did you find most interesting?
- What was the most challenging part of your first week? How could we have made that challenge easier to manage?
- Is there anything that you think we should change to help new employees during their first week?
- Is there anything that we haven't explained fully?

Feel free to delete/ add questions according to your needs.

Two-way Communication (March 2021-onward)

In March 2021, all managers at Evonik (3,300+) received an email from the Onboarding team sharing links to Evonik's most important content and announcing a survey to solicit feedback. This survey generated an almost 40% response rate and confirmed that

onboarding is a critical part of the success. Feedback from this survey has been used to create priorities for the remainder of 2021.

Figure 9: Manager Survey Results

Value of Onboarding

Onboarding is Critical to Success of my Team

13%   1%

85%

■ Agree/Strongly Agree   ■ Neutral   ■ Disagree/Strongly Disagree
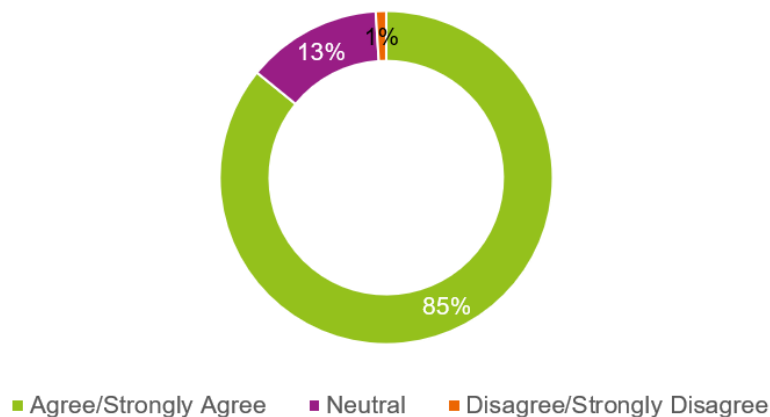
Other methods have been used to create awareness of the Onboarding Tools, including:

- Information cascade through regional Human Resources;
- Information sessions with Division leaders;
- Evonik Learning Hour — Weekly series offered in all regions, Onboarding offered a presentation about Evonik's services. This recorded session is offered in Evonik's Going Purple community;
- VLOG and Blog — New hires participated in both VLOGs and blogs sharing experiences. VLOGs were shared on the Evonik Career site and other social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter;
- LinkedIn posts about onboarding activities such as Evonik's Virtual Onboarding program; and
- Instagram Takeover by the Onboarding team.

Change Management Efforts

There were several challenges faced as the Onboarding team was created and as work began.

- **Pandemic and lockdown**: The need for virtual onboarding is heightened and must be addressed by a team new to working together and who cannot sit in the same room for planning.
  - **Action taken:** Onboarding team embraced a multitude of electronic tools to work together and with others including Microsoft tools (Teams, Whiteboard, Forms) and Mind Manager. Solutions provided were 100% digital and/or virtual.
- **Review of dated tool:** Going Purple was originally defined in 2018 but was not implemented due to the lack of a designated onboarding team.
  - **Action taken:** Prior work was reviewed for validity and updated to addresses the current business needs.
- **No comprehensive digital platform:** Workday Onboarding to go-live in November 2021.
  - **Action taken:** All tools have been consolidated into the Connections system in an avatar-based community which guides users to the tools which are most needed. This includes the learning journey created in CrossKnowledge.
- **Lack of familiarity with Connections:** Connections is used widely in Germany but not in the Americas or Asia Pacific.
  - **Action taken:** Tools have been shared in a variety of ways beyond Connections. All regions were offered a Learning Hour to learn about Onboarding. This was recorded and is available for all employees to view on our site and on the Learning Hour site. Emails were sent directly to each manager informing them of the tools and a survey was sent to capture their opinions, further drawing them into the topic. Survey results will be provided to all managers in April 2021 along with links to the sites.
- **Scope and responsibilities:** The current onboarding process focuses mainly on the first week, and the goal of the newly established Onboarding team is to create a sustainable, repeatable and consistent process which guides the new hire for six months.
  - **Action taken:** An Onboarding checklist has been provided in the Connections community and in the Learning Journey. Eventually it will be

part of Workday as well. Managers can complete all of the checklist, or they can share it with their team via Microsoft Teams to ensure that their new hire has a comprehensive onboarding process.

- **Funding:** The Workday project involves a large expenditure of capital and internal resources. Expectations are high for what Workday can deliver, but the Onboarding team needs to prepare managers to be self-sufficient prior to Workday go-live, in November 2021. There are many sophisticated tools available on the market which deliver onboarding solutions, but the team is tasked with doing as much possible without seeking additional funding for technology or the IT-related resources to implement it.
  - o **Action taken:** In a very short period of time the team was able to create digital and virtual tools incurring no additional cost.

Beyond the challenges faced by the Onboarding team and the change management process that was adopted, Evonik global HR has a change management team. This team has created a change network for various stages of implementation. The change advocate stage was postponed due to the rollout of Workday being postponed. Once the Change Advocates and Local Connectors are named, the Onboarding team will network with them to ensure they are aware of the tools available from the Onboarding team.

Figure 10: Change Network Global Process

Change network has 3 hubs, each has a specific audience and goal HR4.0 🌐

Change Network		
HR Buddies	**Change Advocates**	**Local Connectors**
Audience size		
~600 HR employees	4,800 managers	27,500 non-managing employees
Distribution of members		
Distribute amongst squads, regions and grade	Distribute amongst squads, regions and grade	Based on site locations
Target # of members		
30 from HR	100 non-HR	~20 non-HR
Key messages		

▪ New HR organization
▪ New interfaces
▪ New culture of leadership & collaboration
▪ New job roles & responsibilities
▪ New HCM
	▪ New human capital management system (Workday)
	▪ Behavioral change
	▪ Improvements to manager tasks
	   ▪ Performance management
	   ▪ Talent management
	   ▪ Recruiting
	   ▪ Position management
		Push information to non-managers
		▪ New human capital management system (Workday)
		▪ Sneak peek of system & interface
		▪ Benefits of self-service model
		▪ Behavior change
		▪ Go-live readiness

13 | Internal | April 8, 2020 | HR Buddies Kickoff

EVONIK
Leading Beyond Chemistry

Measurable Benefits

Quantitative Outcome

In 2020, Evonik successfully onboarded around 1,500 new hires and 860 M&A integrated employees. Since the launch of the platform Going Purple Online Connections Community in June 2020: membership is currently at 1,620 and around 10,000 visits to the site since launch.

Figure 11: Going Purple Site Impressions Metrics
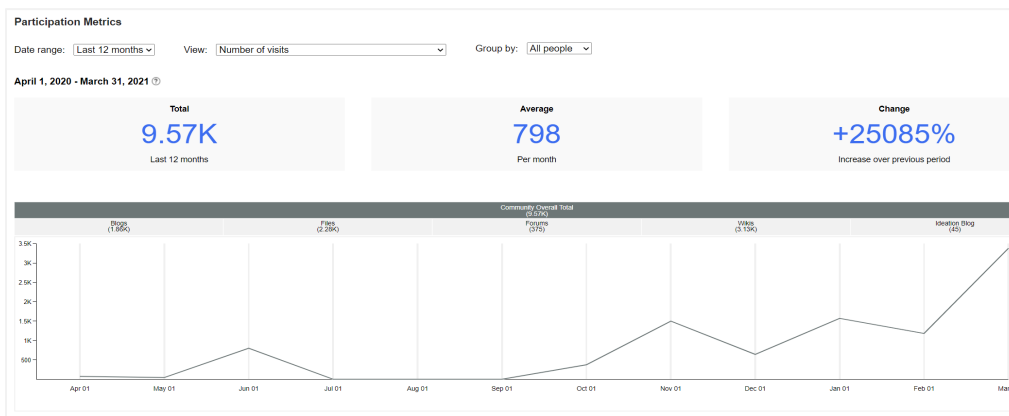
Figure 12: Manager Survey, Current Process

A survey was sent to all Evonik managers (3,300+) with a 39% response rage. In the survey, 85% of managers indicated that onboarding was critical to success. In a question about the manager's current onboarding process (multiple responses allowed), 60% of managers did NOT select the choice "I have a system that works well." (See Figure 12) Over time, the number of managers indicating that they have a system that works well should grow.
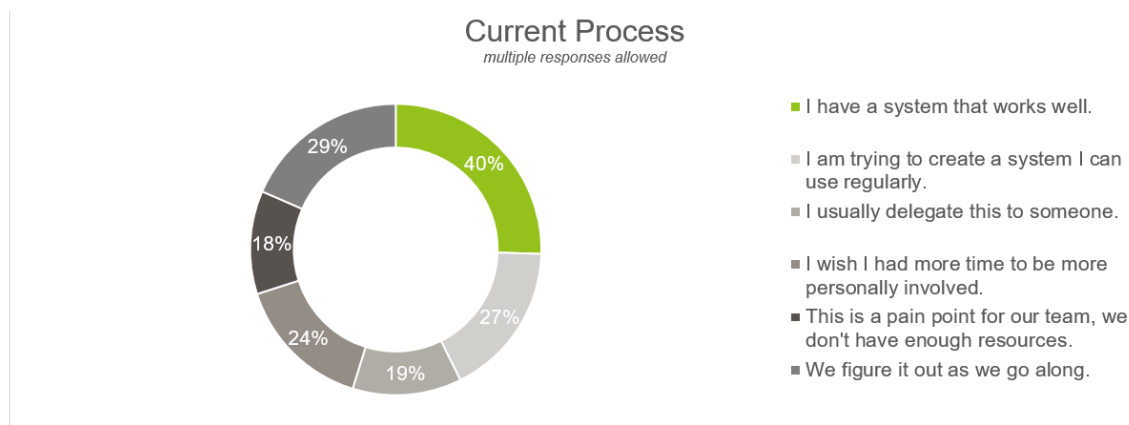
Also, in the survey managers responded a lack of a strong process in later-stage steps in onboarding such as job skills training (25%), effective use of a Buddy (46%), cultural onboarding (55%) and building stakeholder alliances (65%). Over time, these numbers should go down as managers build confidence in these steps.

Social media impressions in Evonik's official pages for the period July-November 2020 were high with around: 7,000 impressions/views in Twitter; 28,400 in LinkedIn; 6,900 in Facebook; 8,600 in Instagram. This is important because managers at Evonik also visit all these pages and sometimes learn about what we are doing through our external social media.

Qualitative Outcome

Since the launch of the onboarding initiatives, the onboarding team was able to establish not only the team as key contributor to HR's support for the business, more importantly the business managers has recognized that a good onboarding is critical to their success, with 85% of the surveyed manager expressing this. Stronger collaboration with IT department, with a joint body set-up for regular meeting to thresh out IT-related process and concerns, was established since August 2020. Region HRs were also regularly updated with the current onboarding initiatives and both working together to ensure seamless process and support provided to new hires.

Feedback and Buy-In

The team have received strong positive feedback from the business, employees and HR community through stakeholder follow-up sessions and emails. The functions and regions have been reaching out to the team as well to collaborate. Business representatives, e.g., Evonik Regional Presidents, Global HR Executives, Business Line Executives and Global HR Partner collaborate and work together in the welcome sessions for the new hires. Requests are coming from various functions and the business divisions as well to get included in the welcome session and in the Going Purple site for them to be able to reach the new hires. More so, a very close collaboration with Evonik's Culture team, Engage and Retain department ensure that from the onset Evonik's culture, values and D&I strategy are imparted to the new hires and newly integrated employees.

Senior-Level Commitment

As well, feedback from new employees thru emails, teams call and requests to present onboarding in their business meetings as well requests from Evonik's CHRO to present this topic on how Evonik has been supporting onboarding thru the crisis in the Evonik's

Executive Board and Works' Council meetings bode well for the buy-in and positive reception of this initiatives.

Overall

Lessons Learned

In 2020, the Onboarding team was able to establish not only a framework but also actual develop and roll-out initiatives to provide digital onboarding support for new hires, integrated employees, hiring manager and the buddy. The feedback has been very positive and even as a young organization, the team was able to establish itself as global expert for hiring and onboarding.

These five simple principles for solution development has really helped the team: (1) pressing business need for instance — virtual onboarding support during this crisis period; (2) low-hanging fruits — using existing Evonik digital platforms and technologies to reach as much stakeholders as possible; (3) build on best-cases and existing good practices (copy with pride philosophy) internally as well as from external benchmark; (4) ensure buy-in and support of the regions by integrating local processes into the overall global process; and (5) be bold, innovative, try and not be afraid to kill what does not work.

Collaboration inside and outside of the team, rather than working in silo and the importance of communication with all stakeholders were key success factors in this very quick turnaround as well.

And more importantly, viewing things in a pragmatic way is the key to survive especially in challenging times. The opportunity presented by the COVID-19 crisis, working from home and the need for quick turn-around when it comes to supporting employees was seized on by the team using agile and old-fashioned project management methods. This really worked to the team's advantage.

The team has learned that to be successful and reach more new hires and hiring manager, they need to communicate more regularly and increase usage of Connections in the Americas and APAC. Recognizing that using more LinkedIn and YouTube channels also increases this likelihood the team plans to actively use these channels to reach internal employees as well.

Service Outlook

In 2021, the onboarding team planned to go further in the provision of the support for new hires. While the team continues rolling out established initiatives, it will focus on institutionalizing Hiring and Onboarding processes and solutions in Evonik across all new

hires including those who work in the production. Therefore, having a similar Day 1 and Month 1 experience for production employees across Evonik is a key priority. Partnership with leaders in Evonik's manufacturing centers will be imperative as this process is designed.

Future programs are addressing the more complex roles including the very complex onboarding of colleagues in production facilities. Production employees do not have the same level of computer access that will require either a change to the process or an investment in technology. This is a remaining challenge that must be addressed if onboarding is to be available to all employees.

Furthermore, there is the upcoming November 2021 roll-out of the Workday hiring and Onboarding modules that will automate further the defined processes, notifications and support.

There is also a need to benchmark against best practice organizations and ensure continuous improvement for Evonik's own onboarding processes and framework.

Figure 13: 2021 and Beyond

All screenshots provided by Evonik Industries AG

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