

# Going Purple: Evonik's Onboarding Framework Uses Design Thinking to Jumpstart Productivity

Evonik Industries AG

Best Unique or Innovative HR Program

June 2022



## Company Background



Company-at-a-Glance	
Headquarters	Essen, NRW, Germany
Year Founded	1847 but Evonik as brand introduced in 2007
Revenue	€12.2 billion
Employees	33,000 (as of December 2020)
Global Scale	Present in more than 100 countries, in all regions globally
Customers/Output, etc.	<p>Evonik is a specialty chemical company. Its customers are the different divisions of Evonik, including Specialty Additives, Nutrition &amp; Care, Smart Materials, Performance Materials, Technology &amp; Infrastructure and corporate administrative functions.</p> <p>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).</p>
Industry	Specialty Chemicals
Stock Symbol	EVK
Website	<a href="http://www.evonik.com">www.evonik.com</a>

## Budget and Timeframe

Budget and Timeframe	
Overall budget	€6,500 (for Key Visuals)
Number of employees involved with the implementation?	Four FTE from full time Onboarding Team members 3.5 FTE from other HR squads, IT and other departments (on project basis)
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	7.5 FTEs
Timeframe to implement	February 2020-March 2021
Start date of the program	April 2020

## Business Conditions and Business Needs

While there is a need to have a global onboarding process and initiatives in Evonik, the coronavirus 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. The Global Onboarding team, established in October 2019 and staffed with skeletal resource 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:

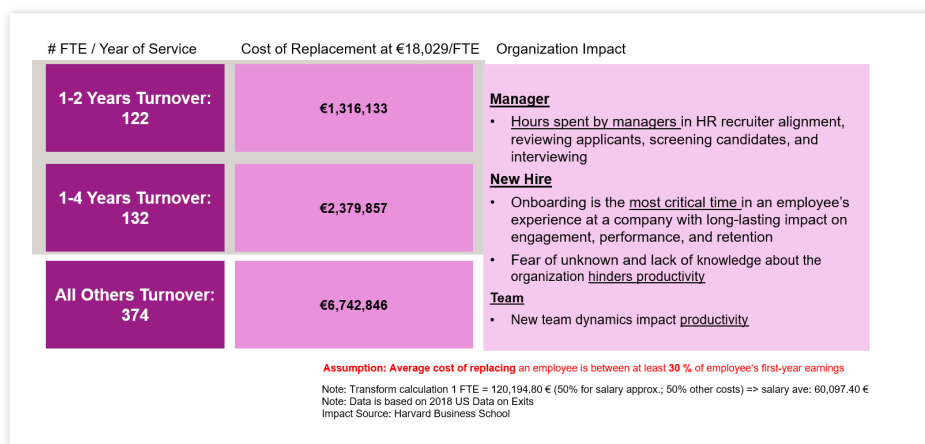
- In 2020 with the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown, the pressing need for virtual onboarding was highlighted and must be addressed to support new employees hired while the rest of the team are in home office
- Evonik had a global onboarding framework Going Purple defined in 2018 but not yet implemented since there was no responsible team before. It needed to be revisited to ensure that the framework was still valid and addressed the business needs.
- Decentralized approach to onboarding largely focused on: the documents for signature, the Day 1 orientation and Evonik Starting Kit learning journey — therefore, no similar new-hire employee experience across Evonik.

In 2018, Evonik's L&D estimated around €3 million costs of replacement for employees with one to four years of service leaving the company in 2018 alone in North America

region. If factoring in those who are longer in the organization, the costs for replacement and onboarding rise up to around €10 million for North America. These figures convinced the Region Management of North America as well as the global HR to focus on onboarding, which until then was a side topic addressed as part of the hiring process for documents and contract signatures.

**Figure 1: 2018 Cost of Replacement for Employee Turnover in Evonik's NA Region**

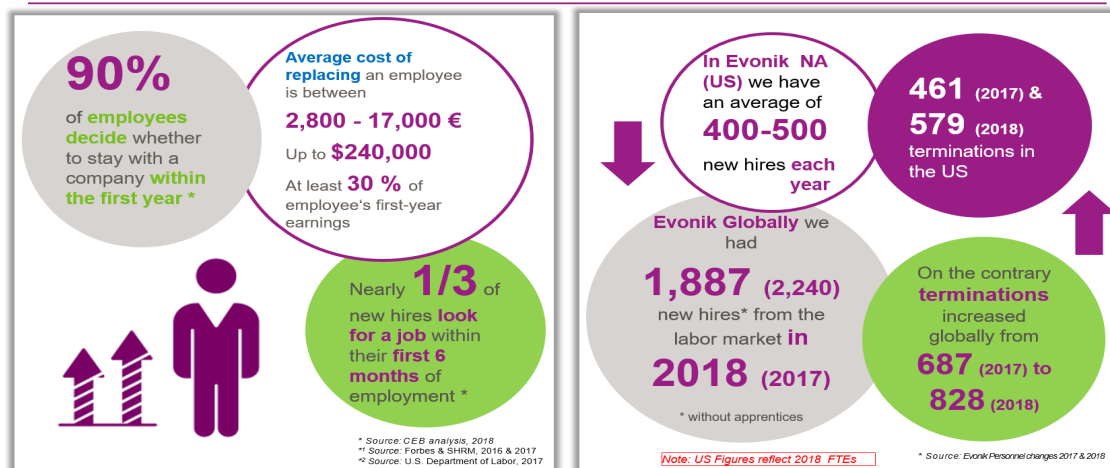
**€3M cost of replacements for turnovers of Employees with 1-2 years of service - a compelling reason to focus on the New Hire Onboarding in Evonik**



While there are several factors for employee turnover, research shows that new hires decide within their first year to stay longer and be engaged to grow in the company. Culture, integration and department support play a big part — areas that are addressed with a strong onboarding program.

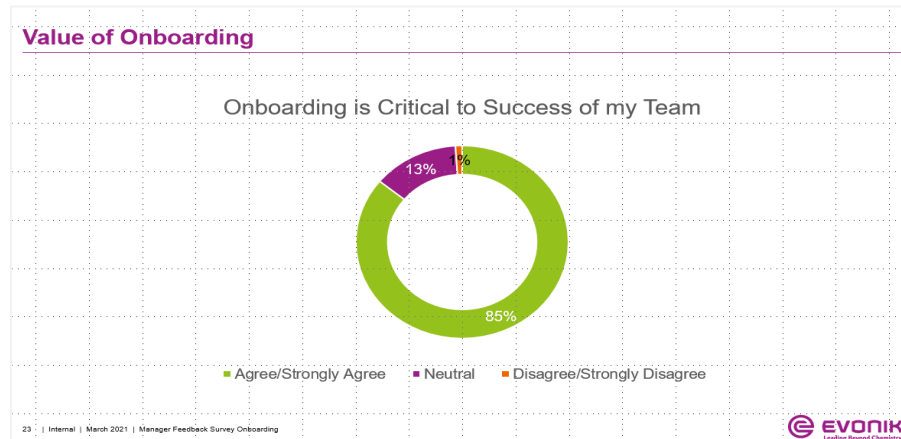
**Figure 2: Infographics Why Onboarding is Important for Evonik**

**Business Challenges – Why is Onboarding so important for Evonik?**



This is not only recognized by HR. In fact, in dialogue with Evonik region presidents and as reflected in the results from the recent survey with the 3,300 line managers, the need for onboarding was highlighted several times with 85% of the respondents saying that onboarding is critical to the success of the team.

**Figure 3: Evonik Line Manager’s Survey Response to the Value of Onboarding**



Under the HR 4.0 Transformation of Evonik HR, recognizing that new-hire onboarding is critical and value adding to the business to ensure effective support for new hires, faster integration and productivity curve for new employees, as well as a tool for retention of employees for Evonik, the Global Onboarding Department, responsible for the global end-to-end hiring and onboarding processes and content, was created in October 2019 and officially staffed in February 2020 with 1.5 full time FTEs while the remaining six FTEs were still in their old HR role and will officially start in Dec. 1, 2020. This was the start to transforming strategic onboarding in Evonik.

## Overview

To ensure a unique and inclusive onboarding experience for new hires and thus build a win-win relationship with employees, the Onboarding team has developed the new global onboarding framework for Evonik: “Going Purple” within which the goal, guiding principles and core elements for onboarding at Evonik, is defined.

### Going Purple: Evonik’s Onboarding Framework

Evonik has defined the full onboarding experience and moments of truth for a newcomer to include his/her first six months within the new role. Guided by the principle “employee-owned journey,” the framework aims to empower new hires to shape and pace their own onboarding and progress. This is best illustrated with the GPS-like key visual to emphasize the employee’s ownership of the journey supported by the six Going Purple elements.

The Going Purple Framework is envisioned as Evonik's interactive smart GPS tool for the new hire's onboarding journey.

**Figure 4: Evonik's Going Purple Onboarding Key Visual**



A new hire's effective onboarding journey is a joint effort from the line manager, IT and support function, the department's team, the buddy, HR and the new hire. This "Going Purple" framework is inclusive — it aims to support everyone involved in the onboarding of new hires and employees transitioning into new positions within Evonik.

**Vision:** Onboarding sets the new hire to success by providing the toolbox to jumpstart productivity and supporting the employee's journey into total integration into Evonik's culture

**The Going Purple Guiding Principles:** These are the underlying core philosophy or guiding principles that serve as check and balance when coming up with any onboarding initiative or solutions offered to the organization:

- **Employee-owned** — While support is provided, it is the employee who owns the development journey. This is in line with the development principles of Evonik.
- **Enabled community support** — Hiring managers, HR and the buddy will be provided support to enable them to support new hires successfully.
- **Linked to Evonik Culture & D&I Strategy** — At the core of integration is, of course, the company's values and strong stand on diversity and inclusion.

- **Digital Technology as the backbone** — To make onboarding efficient and far-reaching, Evonik makes use of available digital systems and tools whenever possible.
- **Value-adding to the business** — It is not just about “feeling good” or a “nice to have,” it is also equally important that onboarding provides added value to Evonik and therefore must be focused on activities that will be value-added.
- **Onboarding Elements:** These are the identified six essential themes or pillars for solution offers that will be provided for onboarding of new hires.
- **Buddy Program** — A peer mentoring approach to integrate new hires by providing them with needed support thru a designated buddy during the onboarding period
- **L&D Offers and Opportunities** — Curated learning and development opportunities customized for the new hires and M&A integrated employees; e.g., Evonik Starting Kit learning Journey; Hiring Manager's Onboarding Journey; M&A Employee's Learning Journey
- **Onboarding Technology** — Digital system and platforms to simplify onboarding and provide better support for new hires across Evonik; e.g., Going Purple Online Connections Community; learning journeys in LILY Digital learning platform; and coming soon in November 2021 is the Workday Onboarding App
- **Networking and maintaining contacts** — Facilitate regular connection building tools; e.g., Virtual Mystery Lunches for new hires; New Hire Vlog Series: video blogs by new hires sharing their own onboarding experience; New Work & Life Diary Blog series featuring new hires published in the Going Purple online connections community site
- **Community Support** — Support everyone involved in the onboarding of new hires and employees transitioning within Evonik; e.g., “Being SOME-BUDDY: a new hire buddy's” learning journey; Hiring Manager's learning journey and onboarding checklist planner; HR support
- **Open Feedback and Check-ins between new employee and manager** — Encourage open feedback and communication through: Reminder provided for Manager and new hires to set proactively check-in sessions with manager/new hire and schedule at least two regular feedback sessions within the first six months



## Design of the Program

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Defining onboarding as not a one-off orientation event, but rather an employee journey that spans from the signing of 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 the onboarding project team and in consultation with line managers and global HR partners.

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

With the onset of the coronavirus 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 meeting 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 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.

- Onboarding For Evonik: An Innovative Approach

Designing the framework and solution with the view of providing a great employee experience along the early stage of employee's journey while balancing the need of the business required several dialogs, external research and pilots. More importantly, pivoting the onboarding experience away from one- to three-day face-to-face orientation toward a longer timeframe needed some creative and digital approaches. On the good side, the pandemic crisis provided an opportunity for this digital transformation as the acceptance for digital, sustainable solutions are being welcomed by the majority.

Defined as a six-month journey to integrate, 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.

**Figure 5: Evonik's Six-Month Onboarding Journey for New Hires**





**Figure 6: Onboarding Initiatives in Evonik**

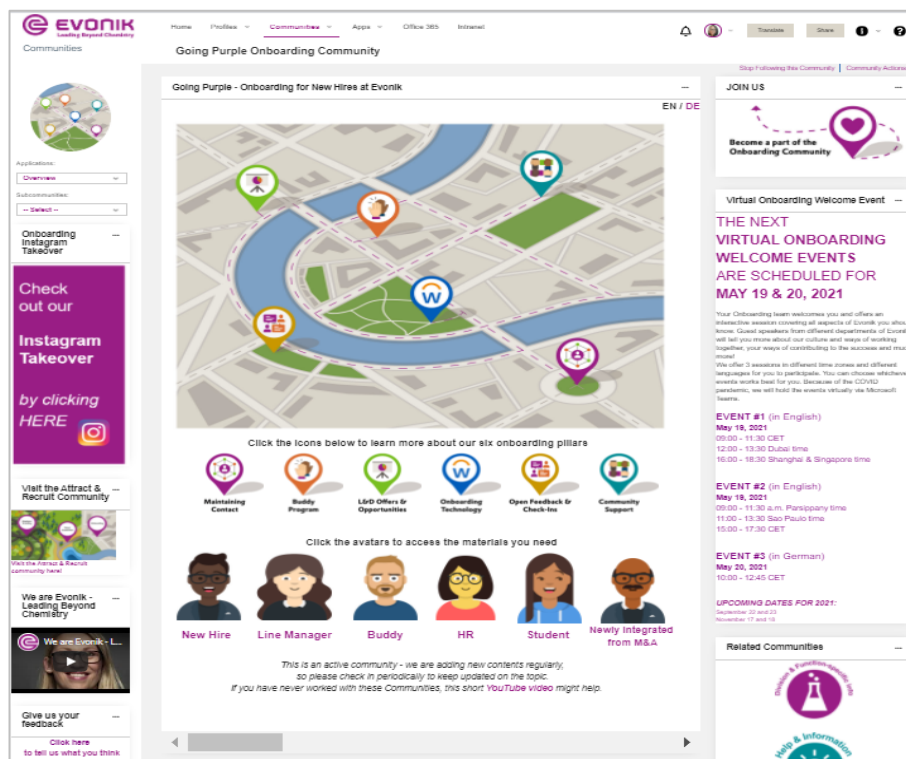

## Delivery of the Program

- Implementations (April 2020 – onward)

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

Going Purple Online Connections Community Platform — launched June 2020 with 1,600+ members. This is now considered Evonik's One-Stop Shop for Onboarding Resources and internal Facebook-style platform for new hires, hiring manager, buddy and M&A integrated employees. Since its launch, the site has been widely used for reference for onboarding. A budget of €6,500 was spent for the key visuals and icons used for the framework and this site.

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

**Figure 7: Homepage of the Going Purple Onboarding Connections Community Page**


The platform is highly interactive and user-friendly with the aim of being able to find what the person needs in less than five clicks. Any icon and highlighted links can be clicked to jump off to more information.

Using Design Thinking's persona-approach, users can click on the persona best representing them. This will lead them to the most important information and helpful links. There is also the option to click on the GPS elements representing the six elements/pillars for onboarding where they will be taken to a WIKI page with more information on the current offers and contact persons, especially curated by topic are the related communities.

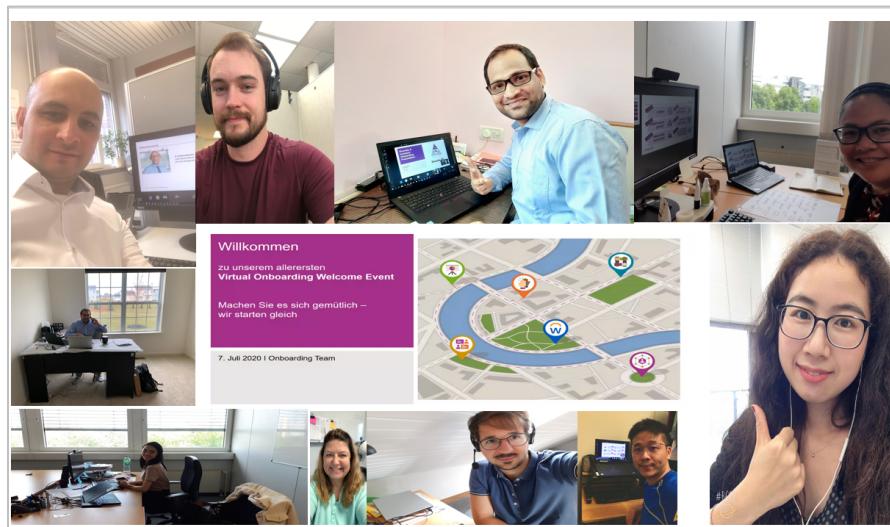
The site is kept up to date by an onboarding expert for community management. New hires are able to network through forums, blogs and sub-communities. Upcoming events are announced through news and in the upper right-side where the schedule for latest events are shown.

To communicate about the launch a communication campaign involving publication in the Evonik Intranet news, presentation to HR bodies, email blast to the HR community, articles in the various active communities were done. The team also utilized LinkedIn and Instagram to further reach line managers and new employees who may not be so active in the internal connections' communities of Evonik.

Sustainable communication measure include the standard email to the hiring manager that is sent by Talent Acquisition Managers and Region HRs as well as the Purple Whisper email sent to new hires.

- Virtual Onboarding Welcome Events (Quarterly)** – First event in July 2020. So far attended by around 880 participants and with very positive feedback. The Virtual Onboarding Welcome Events is a quarterly digital welcome event for new hires of Evonik. The goal of the event is to welcome employees, provide essential introduction about Evonik and a venue to network with fellow colleagues to create a sense of belonging to the company. There are three sessions conducted: for Asia (English), Germany and EMEA (in German) and for North, Central and South Americas (English).

**Figure 8: Snapshot of the Participants from One of the Virtual Welcome Sessions**



- “Welcome to Evonik World”** — Special Virtual Welcome Events are also offered for newly integrated employees from M&A acquisition. This is worked out by the Onboarding team with the Business Line.
- The Purple Whisper** is a monthly email communication (in English, Chinese, Portuguese, German) to all new hires for a period of six months. This starts six to eight weeks from day 1 into Evonik. Each Purple Whisper drop contains three simple bite-size learning or suggestion to use for their onboarding. It ranges on topics such as workplace tools and productivity tips, well-being, Evonik information and culture. It also include a nudge with a call for action; e.g., “have you logged on to your ESK 4.0 LJ, or have you set a check-in session with your manager yet?” All purple whisper update files are also made available in the Going Purple site to allow all employees and line managers access.

- The New Hire Vlog Series** — This is a platform for new hires to share their own onboarding experience for other new hires to experience another perspective of working for Evonik. All episodes show a video blog that was created by new hires themselves to encourage open communication and learning from one another. It is published internally in the Going Purple site, and in Evonik's learning platform LILY as a channel: NEW HIRE ONBOARDING VLOG CHANNEL. Externally, it is in Evonik's Career site, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram Channels for wider reach to employees. Additionally, this is also a good employer branding tool to attract target candidates to the company.

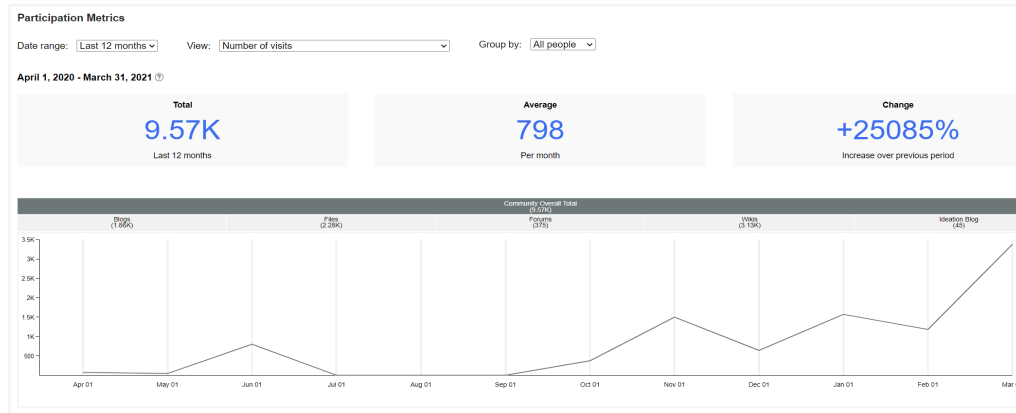
**Figure 9: Snapshot of the Participants from One of the Virtual Welcome Sessions**



## 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 at 1,620 and around 10,000 visits to the site since launch.

**Figure 10: Going Purple Site Impressions Metrics**


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- Eight weeks after their starting date at Evonik, all of the new hires receive an invitation link to the Evonik Starting Kit Digital Learning Journey to accompany them with needed information, soft skill support and self-reflection using the 6-month milestones defined — 831 employees (55%) out of the 1,500 (100% of new hires received invitation) enrolled to the course. This is a really impressive number as this is based on voluntary enrollment
- 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.
- Purple Whisper is sent to all new hires; additionally, it is accessed in the Going Purple Site and is one for the most accessed contents there with around 500 downloads/update.

### Quantitative 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 in 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 has 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

Feedback from new employees through e-mails, 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 through the crisis in the Evonik's Executive Board and Works' Council meetings, bode well for the buy-in and positive reception of this initiatives.

**Figure 11: Feedback from New Hires in One of the Evonik Virtual Welcome Sessions**





## Overall

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### 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

The onboarding team plans 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.

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 which 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 was the upcoming roll-out of the Workday hiring and Onboarding modules which 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 12: 2021 and Beyond Focus**



All illustrations provided by Evonik Industries AG

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