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More Than a Wolcome: the positive Impact of Structure Onboarding on Newcomer integration :An Insider Case Study in the Algerian Pharmaceutical Sector

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Abstract :

Purpose This study examines how a structured onboarding and training system, combined with university partnerships, shapes talent attraction, integration, and retention within a highly regulated industrial context in an emerging economy.

Design/methodology/approach Adopting an interpretivist, insider case study design, the study draws on the perspective of the training manager who conceived and led the implementation of a two-year onboarding system (2021–2022) within a pharmaceutical company in Oran, Algeria. Data comprise 22 semi-structured interviews across three stakeholder groups (new recruits, experienced employees, academic partners), internal documentary evidence (HR audit reports, training materials), and direct observation, analyzed through Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis and interpreted through an Insider Action Research lens.

Findings The onboarding system operated effectively on dimensions within its direct influencesocial integration, role clarity, and early organizational attachment with recruits' engagement further amplified by a sense of participating in a period of significant organizational transformation. However, a documented pre-intervention turnover rate of approximately 60%, linked to compensation, contract precarity, and managerial treatment, indicates that onboarding alone could not resolve retention challenges rooted in structural HR conditions. University partnerships emerged as reciprocally motivated, serving academic institutions' own visibility objectives alongside firms' recruitment needs.

Originality/value This study contributes to onboarding research by demonstrating ho structured onboarding supports positive newcomer integration and early organizational attachment, while also identifying the organizational and structural conditions that limit its capacity to influence longer-term retention. It further extends onboarding theory by identifying organizational momentum

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as a contextual amplifier of onboarding effectiveness and by empirically clarifying the boundary between onboarding's influence and structural turnover antecedents in an underexplored emerging-economy context.

Practical implications HR practitioners in regulated, high-turnover industries should pursue structured onboarding as a genuine driver of integration, while explicitly pairing it with parallel investment in compensation, contractual security, and career development.
Keywords: Onboarding; Talent management; Voluntary turnover; Insider action research; University–industry partnership; Pharmaceutical industry

1. Introduction

The rapid transformation of professional expectations among young graduates, combined with the growing complexity of knowledge-intensive industries, has repositioned onboarding from an administrative formality to a strategic human resource lever (Bauer et al., 2025). This shift is particularly salient in highly regulated sectors, such as the pharmaceutical industry, where technical rigor, regulatory compliance, and scarce scientific expertise converge to make talent attraction and retention a persistent organizational challenge (Thunnissen, 2016).

In emerging economies, this challenge is compounded by structural tensions between higher education outputs and industry skill requirements (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). The Algerian pharmaceutical sector illustrates this tension acutely: despite steady industrial growth, companies report difficulties in translating academic training into operationally ready talent, and in retaining young professionals beyond their first year of employment. While onboarding has been extensively theorized in Western, large-firm contexts (Bauer, 2010; Klein & Polin, 2012; Saks & Gruman, 2018), empirical accounts of how structured onboarding systems are designed, implemented, and experienced within highly regulated industries in emerging North African economies remain scarce.

This scarcity is not merely geographic. Much of the existing onboarding literature relies on externally conducted surveys or short-term studies, offering limited insight into how onboarding unfolds from within an organization, across an extended implementation period, and from the perspective of the very actor responsible for its design (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Yet practitioner-embedded accounts when methodologically rigorous offer a depth of contextual understanding that external, cross-sectional designs cannot easily replicate (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

This article addresses this gap through an insider case study of a two-year onboarding and training system (2021–2022) implemented within a pharmaceutical company based in Oran, Algeria (hereafter "Pharma X"), from the standpoint of the training manager who conceived and led its implementation. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with three stakeholder groups newly recruited employees, experienced staff, and academic partners alongside a systematic account of the tools deployed (a dedicated training department, a 90-day onboarding pathway, and structured university partnerships), the study examines how these combined levers shaped perceived attractiveness, integration, and retention.

The article makes three contributions. First, it extends onboarding theory (Bauer, 2010; Bauer et al., 2025) to a high-compliance, high-scarcity industrial context largely absent from the literature. Second, it contributes methodologically by explicitly theorizing the dual role of practitioner and

researcher through an Insider Action Research lens (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), addressing reflexivity and validity concerns rather than leaving them implicit. Third, it offers empirically grounded managerial implications for HR practitioners in regulated industries operating in emerging markets.

1.1. Problem statement and research question

Pharmaceutical companies operating in emerging markets face a dual imperative: complying with stringent technical and regulatory standards while competing for a limited pool of young talent increasingly driven by expectations of purpose, mentorship, and career visibility (Bersin, 2019). Against this backdrop, the present study investigates:

How does a structured onboarding and training system, combined with university partnerships, shape talent attraction, integration, and retention in a highly regulated industrial context?

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on talent management, onboarding, and university–industry partnerships. Section 3 details the insider case study methodology. Section 4 presents findings triangulated across three stakeholder groups. Section 5 discusses these findings against existing onboarding models, and Section 6 concludes with theoretical, managerial, and research implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Talent management: conceptual foundations

Talent management refers to the systematic identification, development, and retention of individuals whose contribution is deemed critical to organizational performance (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). The field remains marked by persistent definitional ambiguity: Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz (2013) distinguish between exclusive approaches, which restrict "talent" to a high-potential subset of the workforce, and inclusive approaches, which treat all employees as potential contributors to organizational value. This distinction matters empirically for the present case, where the onboarding system addressed both newly recruited entry-level graduates and experienced professionals recruited into leadership roles two populations that exclusive talent management frameworks tend to treat asymmetrically. In knowledge-intensive and highly regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals, Thunnissen (2016) argues that talent management is inseparable from technical and regulatory competence: the "talent" pool is structurally narrowed by scarce scientific expertise and compliance requirements, intensifying competition for a limited labor pool. This aligns with recent evidence that strategic human resource practices grounded in human capital development constitute a key lever for sustainable organizational performance (Chachoua et al., 2026).

2.2. Onboarding as organizational socialization

Onboarding ; the process through which newcomers acquire the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to become effective organizational members (Bauer, 2010) has evolved from an administrative formality into a theorized construct within organizational socialization research. Bauer's (2010) widely cited framework identifies four dimensions of effective onboarding: compliance (understanding rules and procedures), clarification (role and performance expectations), culture (organizational norms and values), and connection (interpersonal relationships). Klein and Polin (2012) extend this by cataloguing the specific organizational practices orientation programs, mentoring, informational sessions that operationalize each dimension in practice.

More recent scholarship has moved beyond a purely organization-centric view of socialization. Cable, Gino, and Staats (2013) demonstrate that onboarding approaches emphasizing newcomers' authentic self-expression, rather than conformity to predefined organizational scripts, can improve retention and performance a finding with direct relevance to the tension observed in the present case between structured compliance training (GMP, quality protocols) and newcomers' individual motivations. Ashforth, Sluss, and Harrison (2007) similarly frame socialization as a bidirectional sense-making process rather than a unilateral transmission of organizational culture. Most recently, a large-scale meta-analytic review by Bauer et al. (2025) synthesizes several decades of socialization research and calls explicitly for more contextualized, sector-specific accounts of how onboarding tactics interact with newcomer proactivity a gap the present insider case study directly addresses in an emerging-market, highly regulated setting largely absent from this cumulative evidence base. This perspective is also consistent with a broader psychosocial understanding of organizational behavior, in which motivation, professional identity, satisfaction, and belonging emerge from the interaction between individual psychological processes and organizational relationships, culture, and structures (Meguellati et al., 2025).

2.3. Onboarding under regulatory and skill-scarcity constraints

Pharmaceutical and other Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP)–regulated industries impose onboarding requirements that extend beyond generic organizational socialization. Compliance training is not merely desirable but legally mandated (European Medicines Agency, 2022), and the technical complexity of production, quality, and regulatory functions requires a longer and more resource-intensive integration period than in less regulated sectors. Senge's (1990) concept of the "learning organization" where continuous, embedded learning becomes a cultural default rather than an episodic event is particularly salient here, and is empirically supported by Eraut's (2004) finding that a substantial share of professional competence develops informally, through mentoring and workplace experience rather than formal instruction alone. This suggests that onboarding effectiveness in regulated industries cannot be assessed solely through formal training completion metrics, but must account for informal learning channels such as peer mentoring a consideration incorporated into the present study's data collection (Section 3.3).

2.4. University–industry partnerships as a talent pipeline mechanism

Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff's (2000) Triple Helix model frames university–industry–government collaboration as a driver of innovation and economic development, positioning universities as active economic actors rather than purely pedagogical institutions. Applied to talent management, such partnerships function as a pre-onboarding mechanism: internships, co-supervised capstone projects, and joint training modules allow organizations to identify and pre-socialize candidates before formal recruitment, potentially reducing the adjustment burden typically absorbed during onboarding itself. In emerging economies characterized by a documented mismatch between higher education curricula and industry skill requirements (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), this pipeline function may carry particular strategic weight a proposition the present case examines empirically through interviews with academic partners (Section 4.4).

2.5. Beyond onboarding: structural antecedents of voluntary turnover

A critical gap in much of the practitioner-oriented onboarding literature is the implicit assumption that improved integration translates directly into improved retention. Meta-analytic

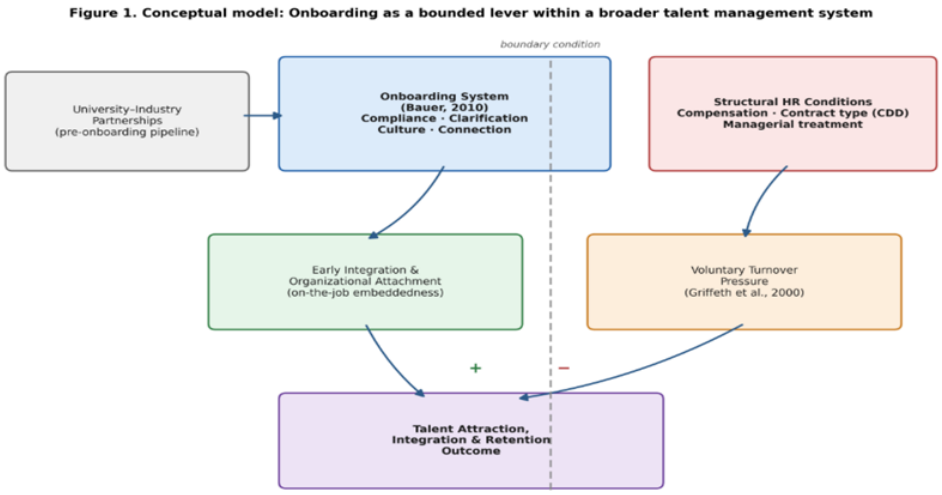
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evidence on voluntary turnover complicates this assumption. Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner (2000) identify pay, pay satisfaction, and job security among the most robust predictors of voluntary turnover across industries factors that lie largely outside the scope of onboarding interventions. Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez's (2001) job embeddedness framework further distinguishes "on-the-job" embeddedness (links, fit, and sacrifice within the organization) from "off-the-job" embeddedness (community ties), suggesting that onboarding which operates almost exclusively on on-the-job dimensions addresses only part of the retention equation. This distinction provides the theoretical anchor for the present study's central contribution: that onboarding can strengthen early organizational attachment while remaining structurally insufficient to offset retention pressures rooted in compensation, contract precarity (notably fixed-term contracts), and managerial treatment.

2.6. Synthesis and conceptual positioning

Taken together, this literature suggests three things relevant to the present study. First, onboarding is best understood as a multidimensional socialization process (Bauer, 2010; Cable et al., 2013) rather than a single administrative event. Second, its effectiveness in regulated, skill-scarce industries is shaped by structural features regulatory compliance load, informal learning channels, and the depth of upstream university partnerships that are underexplored in mainstream onboarding research (Bauer et al., 2025). Third, and most critically for this study's contribution, onboarding operates within a boundary condition set by broader structural determinants of turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000; Mitchell et al., 2001) that lie beyond its direct reach. The conceptual model guiding this study (Figure 1) therefore positions onboarding not as a standalone retention solution, but as one lever interacting with, and bounded by, compensation, contractual, and managerial conditions within a broader talent management system.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study (original figure).



Source : Created by the authors.

3. Methodology

3.1. Epistemological positioning: an insider case study

This study adopts an interpretivist, insider case study design (Yin, 2018), conducted from the standpoint of the training manager who conceived, implemented, and evaluated the onboarding system under investigation. Rather than treating this dual role as a limitation to be minimized, the

study explicitly theorizes it through the lens of Insider Action Research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), which recognizes that researchers embedded within their own organization possess a form of contextual access to informal practices, unwritten norms, and longitudinal change that external researchers rarely obtain (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). This positioning required deliberate attention to three recurring challenges identified in the insider research literature: preunderstanding (prior assumptions shaped by the researcher's operational role), role duality (balancing managerial responsibility with analytical distance), and organizational politics (navigating sensitive data, such as turnover and workplace conduct, without compromising participants or the organization) (Coghlan, 2019). Section 3.6 details the specific strategies used to manage these tensions.

3.2. Research site and organizational context

The study was conducted within a pharmaceutical company based in Oran, Algeria (hereafter "Pharma X"), between 2021 and 2022. This period coincided with two major organizational transformations: the creation of a new production unit and a broader site extension, which together generated substantial recruitment needs an average of 30 to 40 new hires per month, largely offsetting a comparable monthly outflow of departing employees. Internal HR audit reports covering the period preceding the intervention documented a voluntary turnover rate of approximately 60%, attributed primarily to compensation levels, prevalence of fixed-term contracts (contrats à durée déterminée, CDD), perceived unfair treatment, and working conditions. This baseline figure constituted the organizational trigger for the creation of a dedicated training department and a structured onboarding pathway.

The onboarding system pursued several concurrent objectives, reconstructed from internal documentation and the researcher's direct involvement: (1) facilitating the social and operational integration of new recruits; (2) mitigating recurring staffing shortages linked to high turnover; and (3) strategically repositioning the HR function itself notably through the creation of an "HR business partner" (RH de proximité) role intended to increase the visibility, accessibility, and perceived value of HR and training services among operational teams. This last objective reflects a broader logic of internal employer branding, whereby the onboarding system was also mobilized to legitimize HR as a strategic partner within the organization (Bersin, 2019).

3.3. Data sources and collection

Consistent with case study methodology's emphasis on triangulating multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018), three types of data were collected.

(a) Semi-structured interviews with 22 participants across three stakeholder groups: 12 newly recruited employees (hired 2021–2022, representing quality, production, logistics, regulatory, and commercial functions), 7 experienced employees who had witnessed the onboarding system's introduction, and 3 academic partners affiliated with partner institutions (Université Oran 1 Ahmed Ben Bella, École Nationale Polytechnique d'Oran, École Supérieure en Sciences Biologiques d'Oran). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Duration varied by stakeholder group: approximately 15–20 minutes for newly recruited employees, and longer sessions (30–45 minutes, approximately) for experienced employees and academic partners, reflecting differences in tenure, reflective depth, and availability. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide covering onboarding experience, perceived organizational culture, training relevance, and for academic partners perceptions of the university–industry collaboration. Audio recordings and interview notes

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were retained for all 22 participants; full verbatim transcription, however, was completed for a subset of interviews only, reflecting resource constraints typical of practitioner-led insider research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Where a verbatim transcript was available, findings are reported as direct quotations; where only detailed interview notes and audio were available, findings are reported as close paraphrases, cross-checked against the original recording for fidelity to the participant's meaning and phrasing. This two-tier reporting convention consistent with practitioner-embedded qualitative designs in which full transcription of every interview is not always feasible without dedicated research funding (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) is indicated explicitly for each illustrative extract in Section 4, and is treated as a methodological limitation in Section 6.3.

(b) Internal documentary data, comprising HR audit reports (turnover statistics, 2021–2022), internal onboarding presentation materials including a compliance/HSE module referencing ISO 9001 (quality), ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety), and ISO 26000 (social responsibility) certifications, structured job description templates (fiche de poste), and administrative integration guides covering social security affiliation (CNAS) and the organization's training department structure. These documents were used to contextualize and corroborate interview data rather than as standalone evidence, following standard case study triangulation practice.

(c) Direct observation, arising from the researcher's operational role as training manager throughout the intervention period, providing longitudinal insight into the implementation process that purely retrospective interviews could not capture.

Onboarding integration Protocol :

Figure 2. Overview of the onboarding and integration process for new recruits.



Source : Created by the authors for internal onboarding and organizational presentation purposes, based on the integration materials developed for new recruits at Pharma X.

This figure introduces the overall integration framework designed for newly recruited employees and highlights the initial questions and expectations associated with entering a new organizational environment.

Figure 3. Key dimensions and objectives of the onboarding process

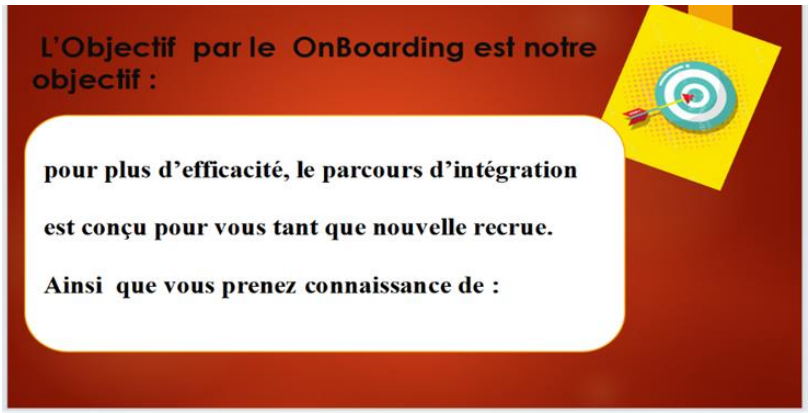
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Source : Created by the authors as part of the common onboarding and organizational presentation program for all new recruits at Pharma X.

This figure presents the main dimensions addressed during the onboarding process, including integration, performance, quality, collaboration, organizational values, job responsibilities, and team spirit.

Figure 4. Introduction to the objectives of the onboarding journey



Source: *Created by the authors as part of the common onboarding program designed for newly recruited employees at Pharma X*

This figure presents the general objective of the integration journey, designed to facilitate the new recruit's understanding of the organization and support a more effective transition into the workplace.

Figure 5. Introduction to Pharma X: organizational, cultural, and structural orientation



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Source: *Created by the authors for the common organizational orientation of newly recruited employees at Pharma X.*

This figure illustrates the introductory stage of the onboarding process, during which new recruits are familiarized with the organization, its personnel, its culture, and its organizational structure.

Figure 6. Core organizational values communicated during onboarding



This figure presents the principal values promoted during the integration process, namely responsibility, respect, well-being, integration, and productivity. These values constitute part of the common organizational framework communicated to new recruits.

Figure 7. Organizational values and corporate social responsibility orientation



Source: *Created by the authors for internal organizational presentation and awareness purposes during the onboarding of new recruits at Pharma X.*

This figure connects the organizational values communicated during onboarding with broader dimensions of corporate social responsibility, including environmental responsibility, employee well-being, ethical dialogue, and organizational commitment.

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Figure 8. Administrative and organizational integration tools



Source: *Created by the authors for the common onboarding program and organizational awareness activities for newly recruited employees at Pharma X.*

This figure illustrates practical tools used to support the administrative and operational integration of new recruits, including workplace-related documentation and access to organizational systems.

Figure 9. Administrative and workplace orientation tools used during onboarding

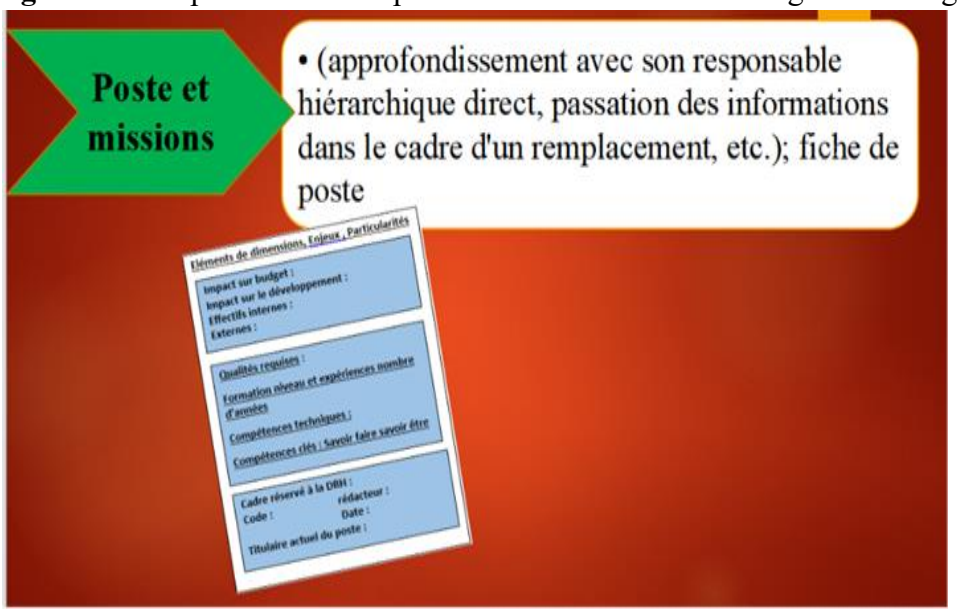


Source: *Created by the authors for internal onboarding purposes, adapted according to the administrative and operational requirements of the relevant employee category at Pharma*

This figure presents the main hygiene, safety, environmental, quality, and ISO-related concepts introduced to new recruits as part of their organizational integration and awareness process.

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Figure 10. Job position and responsibilities clarification during onboarding



***Source**: Created by the authors for internal onboarding purposes, customized according to job position, hierarchical responsibilities, and the specific requirements of each employee category at Pharma X.*

This figure illustrates the stage dedicated to clarifying the new recruit's position, responsibilities, hierarchical relationships, and job-specific expectations. This component was adapted according to the characteristics of each position and employee category.

Figure 11.(video) Promotion of team spirit and collective integration



***Source video**: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3FJivSwveM*

Used by the authors for internal onboarding and team integration purposes at Pharma X.

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This figure highlights the importance of team spirit and interpersonal integration as central components of the onboarding experience, supporting communication, collaboration, and a sense of belonging among new recruits.

Figure 12. Individual and collective engagement in organizational success



***Source**: Created by the authors for motivational and organizational engagement purposes during the onboarding of new recruits at Pharma X.*

This figure communicates the role of personal commitment, ambition, and work effort in achieving individual and collective objectives within the organization.

Figure 13. The "Wow Effect" as a collective onboarding experience



Source: Created by the authors for internal onboarding presentation and employee engagement purposes at Pharma X.

This figure illustrates the experiential and collective dimension of the onboarding process, emphasizing the creation of a positive first impression and an engaging integration experience for new employees.

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Figure 14. The "Wow Effect" as a collective onboarding experience



***Source**: Created by the authors for internal onboarding presentation and employee engagement purposes at Pharma X.*

This figure illustrates the experiential and collective dimension of the onboarding process, emphasizing the creation of a positive first impression and an engaging integration experience for new employees.

Table 01. Mapping of the onboarding protocol phases to the illustrative figures (original table).

Phase	Main onboarding component	Content illustrated in the protocol	Related figures
1. Initial orientation	Introduction to the integration process	Presentation of the onboarding protocol and the main questions and expectations associated with entering a new organizational environment.	Figure 1
2. Onboarding framework	Key dimensions of integration	Introduction to the main dimensions of the onboarding process, including innovation, performance, quality, collaboration, productivity, job responsibilities, and team spirit.	Figure 2
3. Integration objectives	Purpose of the onboarding journey	Presentation of the objectives of the integration pathway, designed to facilitate the new recruit's understanding of the organization and support an effective transition into the workplace.	Figure 3
4. Organizational familiarization	Discovering Pharma X	Introduction to the organization's personnel, culture, and organizational structure.	Figure 4
5. Cultural integration	Organizational values	Communication of the core values promoted by the organization, including responsibility,	Figures 5–6

		respect, well-being, integration, and productivity.	
6. Social responsibility awareness	Corporate Social Responsibility	Introduction to the social, environmental, ethical, and employee-related dimensions of organizational responsibility.	Figure 7
7. Administrative orientation	Administrative and organizational tools	Presentation of practical administrative documents and organizational tools supporting the initial integration of new employees.	Figures 8–9
8. HSE and quality awareness	Hygiene, safety, environment, and quality	Introduction to hygiene, safety, environmental requirements, organizational standards, and quality-related principles.	Figure 10
9. Job-specific integration	Position and responsibilities	Clarification of the employee's position, missions, responsibilities, and hierarchical relationships. This component was adapted according to the specific characteristics of each position and employee category.	Figure 11
10. Social and relational integration	Team spirit and communication	Promotion of collaboration, interpersonal communication, interaction, and a sense of belonging within the organization.	Figures 12–13
11. Motivation and engagement	Individual and collective commitment	Communication of messages emphasizing ambition, commitment, work effort, and contribution to collective organizational objectives.	Figure 14
12. Experiential integration	The “Wow Effect”	Creation of a positive, engaging, and memorable onboarding experience designed to support the new employee's first organizational impressions.	Figure 15

Source: *Created by the authors.*

3.4. Thematic analysis

Interview data were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis procedure: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final analytic narrative. Transcripts were coded manually, through iterative highlighting and annotation of interview notes and transcripts, with themes generated inductively from each of the three stakeholder groups before being triangulated

to identify convergences and tensions across perspectives notably between the largely positive integration narratives from new recruits and the structurally-rooted turnover drivers identified in the documentary data.

3.5. Reflexivity and trustworthiness

Given the researcher's dual role, trustworthiness was addressed following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, rather than positivist notions of objectivity inappropriate to an interpretivist design. Credibility was supported through data triangulation across interviews, documentation, and direct observation; dependability through systematic documentation of the analytic process; and confirmability through explicit acknowledgment of the researcher's preunderstanding and its potential influence on data interpretation, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as turnover and working conditions, where the researcher's managerial position could plausibly incline toward a more favorable interpretation than an external observer. This tension is addressed directly in Section 5 rather than minimized.

3.6. Ethical considerations

As this study originated from operational HR activities rather than a formal academic research protocol, informed consent was not systematically formalized at the time of data collection (2021–2022). This constitutes an acknowledged limitation of the study (see Section 6). To address this retrospectively, the following safeguards were applied prior to analysis and publication: all participants were anonymized (coded as R1–R12 for new recruits, E1–E7 for experienced employees, A1–A3 for academic partners); no individually identifying information (job titles at a granular level, names, or dates that could enable re-identification) is reported; and the organization itself is anonymized throughout as "Pharma X." The researcher's dual role as both training manager and study author is disclosed transparently (Section 3.1), and no data were used in ways that could professionally disadvantage any participant.

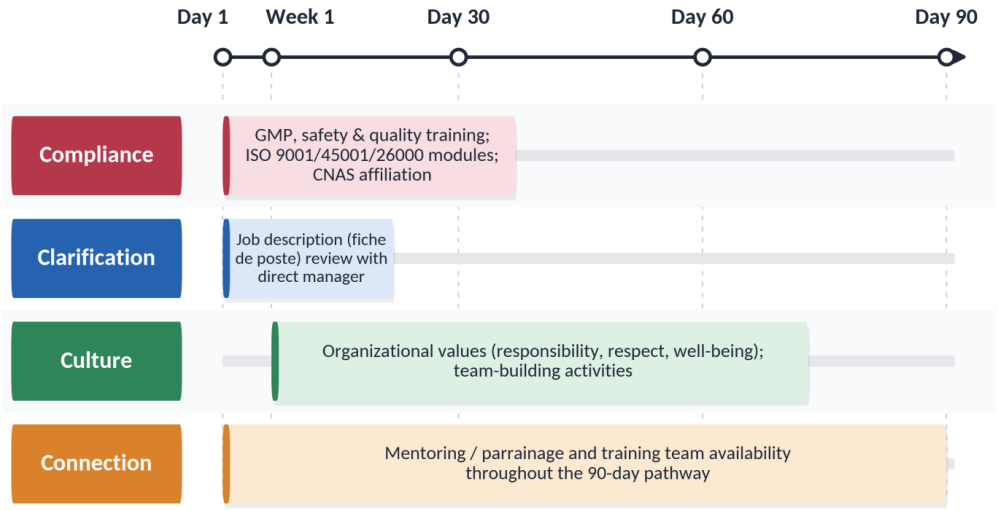
4. Findings

4.1. The onboarding system in context

Between 2021 and 2022, Pharma X implemented a structured onboarding and training system in direct response to a documented pre-intervention voluntary turnover rate of approximately 60%. The system comprised three interlocking components: a newly created training department responsible for annual training planning; a 90-day onboarding pathway combining compliance training (GMP, safety, quality including modules referencing ISO 9001, ISO 45001, and ISO 26000 certifications), structured role clarification through standardized job description templates, administrative integration support (including social security affiliation procedures), mentoring, and progressive integration into operational teams; and formal partnerships with regional academic institutions (Université Oran 1 Ahmed Ben Bella, ENPO, ESSBO). This period coincided with major organizational restructuring the creation of a new production unit and a site extension generating an average of 30 to 40 new hires per month.

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Figure 15. *The 90-day onboarding pathway at Pharma X, mapped onto Bauer's (2010) four dimensions (original figure).*



Source*: Created by the authors.*

4.2. New recruits' perceptions

Theme A Integration perceived as strategically meaningful. New recruits frequently connected their motivation to the sense of joining Pharma X during a period of visible organizational transformation. The concurrent creation of a new production unit and site extension appeared to reinforce recruits' perception that their integration coincided with strategically significant developments, rather than a routine hiring process.

Theme B Quality of human and administrative support. Consistent with the broader onboarding literature (Bauer, 2010, "connection" dimension), recruits emphasized the role of structured mentoring/tutoring (parrainage) and the availability of the training team during their first weeks as central to a smooth integration experience. One new recruit described a particularly positive onboarding experience, linking her satisfaction to her strong academic background in biology and framing the opportunity as a meaningful step in her professional development. She noted that the training team's explanations particularly regarding her job description (fiche de poste) and the contact details of key administrative staff (the HR business partner, the social security/CNAS declarant, and HSE staff) facilitated her practical integration into the organization (R_, paraphrased from interview notes).

Theme C Points of friction. Despite an overall positive account, recruits also described an adjustment period linked to the pace of work during their first weeks and the technical vocabulary specific to the pharmaceutical sector. Several also expressed a wish for more frequent informal feedback from supervisors beyond the structured 90-day pathway. This tension genuine enthusiasm coexisting with concrete adjustment difficulties is treated in the Discussion (Section 5) as evidence against an overly idealized reading of the onboarding system's effects.

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4.3. Experienced employees' perceptions

Theme D Perceived professionalization of HR practices. Experienced employees consistently contrasted current onboarding practices with the pre-2021 period, which they described as informal and dependent on individual managers rather than a coordinated organizational process. The creation of the training department was repeatedly cited as the turning point toward more harmonized, professionalized integration practices across departments.

Theme E Priority competencies identified. Experienced staff identified GMP mastery, digital competencies, and soft skills (communication, leadership) as priority areas for newcomers, while also noting that recruits despite strong academic preparation needed reinforced support transitioning from theoretical knowledge to operational practice.

4.4. Academic partners' perceptions

Theme **F** Partnership as mutual strategic opportunity. Academic representatives described the collaboration with Pharma X as an opportunity to strengthen their own institution's visibility and to secure practical terrain for their most ambitious, project-driven students framing the partnership as mutually beneficial rather than a one-directional service to the company. This reciprocal framing nuances the largely one-directional framing of university–industry partnerships common in the practitioner literature (Section 2.4). Partners also noted that while the collaboration was perceived as constructive, it remained under-formalized relative to its potential, echoing a limitation already identified in Section 3 regarding documentation of these partnerships.

4.5. Cross-group triangulation

Table 1 synthesizes convergences and tensions across the three stakeholder groups regarding perceived integration quality, the evolution of HR practices, and the role of the academic partnership.

Table 02. *Cross-stakeholder triangulation of findings (original table).*

Dimension	New recruits	Experienced employees	Academic partners
Perceived integration quality	Positive; linked to organizational momentum and quality of administrative/human support (Themes A, B)	Confirm marked improvement vs. pre-2021 informal practices (Theme D)	Not directly assessed; inferred positively through quality of stagiaire supervision
Evolution of HR practices	Benefited from structured 90-day pathway (Theme B)	Perceive professionalization and cross-department coordination since 2021 (Theme D, E)	Perceive Pharma X as an increasingly professionalized training partner
Role of academic partnership	Not directly assessed	Acknowledge involvement in mentoring and onboarding design	Framed as mutually beneficial: institutional visibility and terrain for students (Theme F)

Points of tension / limitation	Workload pace, technical vo cabulary, desire for more frequent feedback (Theme C)	Call for more visible career dev elopment pathway s	Partnership perceived as constructive but under-formalized (Theme F)

***Source**: Created by the authors.*

5. Discussion

5.1. Onboarding effectiveness: confirming and extending Bauer's (2010) model

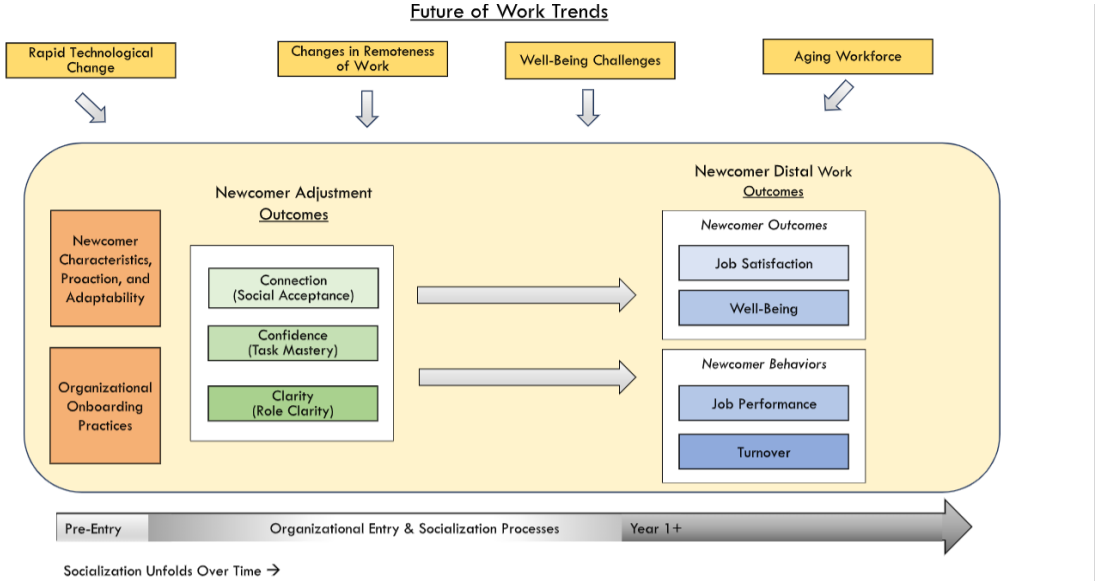
The findings confirm, in a previously underexamined setting, several core dimensions of Bauer's (2010) onboarding framework. New recruits' accounts of mentoring, team availability, and progressive integration (Section 4.2, Theme B) align closely with the connection dimension, while the structured GMP and quality training pathway operationalizes compliance and clarification simultaneously. What extends this model, however, is Theme A: recruits' motivation was not only sustained by these standard onboarding mechanisms but amplified by their perception of joining the organization during a period of visible strategic transformation (new unit creation, site extension). This suggests that onboarding effectiveness in the present case was partly contingent on a contextual factor external to the onboarding design itself organizational momentum a dimension absent from Bauer's (2010) original four-component model and worth incorporating into future onboarding frameworks applied to organizations undergoing simultaneous restructuring. This is consistent with recent field evidence that supportive and ethical managerial behavior strengthens organizational commitment, reinforcing the connection dimension as a key driver of newcomer engagement (Ouanouki et al., 2026).

5.2. The boundary condition: why onboarding alone did not resolve turnover

The study's central empirical tension a documented pre-intervention turnover rate of approximately 60%, alongside consistently positive integration narratives from new recruits is not a contradiction to be resolved in favor of one account over the other, but the study's principal finding. Consistent with Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner's (2000) meta-analytic evidence that compensation and job security are among the most robust predictors of voluntary turnover, and with Mitchell et al.'s (2001) distinction between on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness, the present case suggests that onboarding operates almost exclusively on the on-the-job dimensions of embeddedness role clarity, social connection, early competence-building while leaving compensation, contract precarity (notably the prevalence of fixed-term contracts), and managerial treatment largely untouched. Rather than concluding that the onboarding system failed to reduce turnover, the more accurate reading and the one adopted here is that onboarding remains a genuinely effective and necessary HR practice, whose retention impact is fully realized only when accompanied by parallel improvements on structural axes: compensation, contract security, and career development (Griffeth et al., 2000). This reframes onboarding not as a standalone retention solution but as one necessary, and conditionally sufficient, lever within a broader talent management system the argument visually summarized in Figure 1.

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Figure 16. Future of work trends and newcomer socialization over time.



Source: *Adapted from Bauer et al. (2025b, Figure 1).*

Figure 16 situates newcomer socialization within a temporal and contextual framework. Organizational onboarding practices and newcomer characteristics (proactivity, adaptability) shape three proximal adjustment outcomes, the "C's" of connection (social acceptance), confidence (task mastery), and clarity (role clarity). These in turn predict distal outcomes: job satisfaction and well-being, job performance, and turnover (Bauer et al., 2025b). The whole process unfolds from pre-entry to the first year and beyond, under the influence of broader future-of-work trends, notably rapid technological change, changing remoteness of work, well-being challenges, and an aging workforce.

The Pharma X case maps onto this model in three ways. First, the 90-day pathway operates on the left-hand side of the framework as an organizational practice: mentoring (parrainage) and team-spirit activities target connection, GMP and quality training builds confidence, and standardized job descriptions (fiches de poste) support clarity. Findings from Themes B and C are consistent with these proximal outcomes, while the frictions reported by recruits (workload pace, technical vocabulary) suggest that confidence is the dimension most dependent on time. Second, university partnerships act at the pre-entry stage, as a form of pre-socialization that lowers the adjustment burden borne during onboarding. Third, and most importantly, the case qualifies the causal chain implied by the model. While the proximal outcomes were positive, the pre-intervention turnover of approximately 60% shows that the link between adjustment and turnover is bounded by structural conditions (compensation, fixed-term contracts, managerial treatment) that onboarding cannot reach. The perception of joining a period of organizational transformation also acts as a contextual amplifier, comparable to the trend layer at the top of the framework, but specific to this setting.

5.3. University partnerships: a reciprocal rather than unidirectional mechanism

Academic partners' emphasis on institutional visibility and the search for "terrain" for ambitious, project-driven students (Section 4.4, Theme F) nuances the largely company-centric framing found in the university–industry partnership literature (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), which tends to foreground firms' access to talent pipelines. The present findings suggest a more genuinely reciprocal Triple Helix dynamic in this emerging-market context: universities actively

leverage industry partnerships for their own competitive positioning, not merely as passive suppliers of graduates. This has practical implications for how HR departments might approach such partnerships as co-branding opportunities rather than one-directional recruitment channels (Section 5.5).

5.4. Reflexivity: interpreting findings from an insider research position

Consistent with the methodological commitments outlined in Section 3.5, insider case study designs require explicit attention to how the dual role of practitioner and researcher may shape data interpretation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The consistently favorable tone of new recruits' accounts (Section 4.2) is considered here in light of this positioning: participants' awareness of the interviewer's operational role within the training department is a documented source of potential social desirability bias in insider research more broadly (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). This risk was addressed through data triangulation across the three stakeholder groups and through the deliberate inclusion of structural turnover evidence that complicates, rather than uniformly confirms, a favorable reading of the onboarding system (Section 5.2). This remains a methodological consideration inherent to insider case study designs rather than one fully eliminated by triangulation, and is noted as a limitation in Section 6.3.

5.5. Managerial implications

For HR practitioners in similarly regulated, high-turnover industrial contexts, three implications follow. First, structured onboarding investment is justified and should be pursued but expectations regarding its retention impact should be calibrated against, not substituted for, parallel investment in compensation and contractual stability. Second, university partnerships yield greater strategic value when explicitly co-designed with academic partners' own institutional objectives in mind, rather than treated solely as a recruitment pipeline. Third, embedding a dedicated HR business partner role (RH de proximité) within onboarding design appears to serve a dual function supporting newcomers directly while simultaneously repositioning the HR function's internal visibility and legitimacy (Section 3.2) a mechanism meriting further attention in the HR development literature.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations

6.1. Summary of contribution

This study examined how a structured onboarding and training system, combined with university partnerships, shaped talent attraction, integration, and retention within a highly regulated industrial context in an emerging economy. Drawing on an insider case study of a pharmaceutical company in Oran, Algeria, the findings show that onboarding operated effectively on the dimensions it can directly influence social integration, role clarity, and early organizational attachment while retention outcomes remained additionally shaped by structural conditions (compensation, contract precarity, managerial treatment) that lie beyond onboarding's direct reach. This reframes onboarding not as a standalone retention solution but as a necessary, conditionally sufficient lever within a broader talent management system.

6.2. Theoretical, methodological, and managerial implications

Theoretically, the study extends Bauer's (2010) onboarding model by identifying organizational momentum the newcomer's sense of joining the organization during a period of visible strategic transformation as a contextual amplifier of onboarding effectiveness not captured in existing frameworks, and by empirically anchoring the boundary between onboarding effects and structural

turnover antecedents (Griffeth et al., 2000; Mitchell et al., 2001). Methodologically, the study demonstrates how Insider Action Research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) can be rigorously applied to talent management research, offering a template for practitioner-researchers in similar contexts to theorize rather than conceal their dual positioning. Managerially, the findings offer HR practitioners in regulated, high-turnover industries a calibrated framework for onboarding investment: pursue it as a genuine driver of integration and early engagement, while pairing it deliberately with parallel improvements in compensation, contractual security, and career development pathways (Section 5.5).

6.3. Limitations

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the study is based on a single organizational case, which limits generalizability beyond similarly regulated, high-turnover industrial contexts; analytic rather than statistical generalization is claimed (Yin, 2018). Second, the insider positioning of the researcher, while theorized and addressed through triangulation (Section 5.4), cannot fully eliminate the risk of socially desirable responses from participants aware of the researcher's operational role. Third, informed consent was not systematically formalized at the time of data collection, a limitation addressed retrospectively through anonymization safeguards (Section 3.6). Fourth, the study does not draw on post-intervention quantitative turnover data; claims regarding the onboarding system's contribution to reduced attrition rely on qualitative stakeholder accounts rather than a statistically verified before–after comparison. Fifth, the sample 12 new recruits, 7 experienced employees, and 3 academic partners while adequate for thematic saturation within an exploratory case design, remains modest in size.

6.4. Directions for future research

Future research could extend this study in three directions: longitudinal quantitative tracking of turnover across cohorts before and after onboarding system implementation, to empirically test the boundary condition proposed in Section 5.2; comparative multi-case designs across several regulated industrial organizations in emerging economies, to assess the generalizability of the organizational momentum effect identified here; and dedicated inquiry into how university partners' institutional motivations (Section 5.3) shape the design and durability of university–industry collaborations over time.

Recommendations

For HR practitioners in regulated industries

Maintain and formalize structured onboarding pathways (90-day model), while explicitly communicating to leadership that retention outcomes require parallel investment in compensation and contract security.

Extend personalized follow-up beyond the initial 90 days, in response to recruits' expressed need for sustained feedback (Section 4.2, Theme C).

Formalize the HR business partner (RH de proximité) role as a dual-purpose mechanism for newcomer support and internal HR visibility (Section 5.5).

For academic institutions

Approach industry partnerships as co-branding opportunities aligned with institutional visibility goals, not solely as placement channels (Section 5.3).

Formalize collaboration agreements to enable more systematic tracking of partnership outcomes (Section 3, documentary limitations).

For policy and future research

Encourage sector-level data collection on turnover determinants in regulated industries to support future quantitative testing of the model proposed here (Figure 1).

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