Developing Remote Onboarding of New Hires. Analyzing Needs for HR Consultancy Services for Kulmia Group Oy.

Marianne Nevalainen

Author(s) Marianne Nevalainen	
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The world of work was not only temporarily shaken in the beginning of year 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather rearranged the way no one probably had imagined before. The change towards work being remote-based in many organizations and even industries inspired this thesis, which was written within the Human Resources specialization. The overall purpose of this thesis was to study how companies' remote onboarding of new hires could be developed further to provide the same possibilities as onsite onboarding. The goal was to find out, whether there were needs for related HR consultancy services that could be offered by the commissioning company Kulmia Group Oy.

The thesis consists of a theory section and an empirical section. The theory section focused on the onboarding overall and included elements, such as, the process, the techniques and the legal requirements. Furthermore, assimilation and its elements, social integration and organizational commitment, were studied. Finally, the remote context regarding onboarding and assimilation was explored, and also onboarding's connection to employee engagement was briefly introduced.

The empirical section was completed after the theory section and it was carried out with qualitative interviews. Five Human Resources professionals were interviewed to obtain data of their companies' remote and onsite onboarding processes to compare them and to identify general areas of development for remote onboarding. Finally, the data was analyzed with adapted dialogical thematization.

The research showed, for example, that the difference between remote and onsite onboarding was not necessarily considered substantial and that most of the challenges existed within assimilation. Furthermore, a few areas of development for remote onboarding were identified and by paying more attention to them, organizations could develop their remote onboarding processes further.

Based on the literature review and the findings of the research, recommendations to the commissioning company were produced, thus, it could be concluded that the need for HR consultancy services exists. The recommendations were directly connected to the areas of development and consisted of, for example, offering consultancy advice regarding monitoring of remote onboarding, promoting personality and behavioral assessments and helping clients in determining the overall approach to onboarding.

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1   Introduction

This is a research type Bachelor's thesis for Degree Programme in International Business in the major of Human Resources Management (HRM) in Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

This chapter first presents the background for the thesis and proceeds then to the research question, demarcation, international aspect and benefits. Also, the commissioning company and the key concepts for the thesis are presented in this chapter.

A note to the reader, in this report the pronoun he refers to both genders.

1.1   Background

The year 2020 forced many employers and employees to face changes in their working environment and ways of working because the COVID-19 outbreak began to shake the world. In a very short time, they had to adapt to remote work and Steemers, Erickson, Popiela and Levanon (2020, 2) expects remote work to remain even after the pandemic. A survey conducted twice in 2020 first for almost 150 and then for over 300 Human Resources Executives in the US, revealed that one third of them expects that almost half of the workforce in their organizations will continue working remotely. More specifically, this concerns employees working in higher, office-based roles. According to the survey, productivity has increased in many organizations as well as organizations' willingness to hire remote workers, which supports the continuation of remote work. (Steemers & al. 2020, 2-3, 6.)

The aforementioned offers great possibilities for both employers and employees, when work is not necessarily limited to a certain city or even a country's borders anymore. Organizations can hire from longer distance and even internationally, and on the other hand, talents that would not normally apply might do so. However, in many organizations employees are used to being managed at the workplace and human resources processes are generally designed to be run at the office, so the change in the world of work not only require a lot of changing and adaptability from organizations and their employees, but also from the human resources (HR) field in general. In her article Faragher (2020), brings up a comment of one people and services director of how working completely remotely is totally different from working from home every now and then. According to her, managers need to, for example, re-think communication with their employees and find ways how to

support them with work-life balance. She also highlights that managing daily HR processes such as recruitment and onboarding has to be considered from another perspective.

When over a year of remote work caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has passed and the ending of it is still unclear, it has become important to start thinking how HR processes can be run fluently and efficiently in the new normal. All the aforementioned in mind, the focus in this thesis was in the beginning of the remote employee life cycle, in onboarding of new hires. Onboarding has short- and long-term outcomes that do not only concern the new hire, but also the organization. Even though organizations might not necessarily experience very short-term indications of successful onboarding, the long-term indications, such as, shorter time to productivity, retention rate and employee engagement are remarkable and all reflect to organizations' bottom lines (Bauer 2010, 6; Little 26 February 2019). For the new hire, on the other hand, there are already many short-term outcomes. Social integration is one example of them and it comprises of things, such as, getting inside to the organization and feeling comfortable and accepted amongst co-workers and superiors (Bauer 2010, 6). Social integration is related to sense of belonging, which is reached naturally to some extent at the workplace, but in the new work arrangements posed by the year 2020 workers might not physically belong to the organization. It is not only the ones working remotely that might have hard time to feel the sense of belonging, but also the ones working onsite to feel unified with the remote workforce. (Volini, Schwartz, Denny, Mallon, Durme, Hauptmann, Yan & Poynton 2020.)

1.2   Research Question

This thesis aimed to analyze needs for HR consultancy services regarding development of remote onboarding in order to create recommendations for the commissioning company. The outcomes of this thesis offered detailed information on different companies' remote onboarding processes and their areas of development to be acted upon. With results obtained from the research and support provided by the literature, the author was able to create recommendations for the commissioning company.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis was: how can companies' remote onboarding of new hires be developed further to provide the same possibilities as onsite onboarding. Based on these results, which consultancy advise can Kulmia Group Oy offer to its B2B clients to better meet their needs. The research question was divided into five investigative questions (IQ) as follows:

IQ 1. What are the companies' current practices in remote onboarding of new hires and how do they differ from onsite onboarding?

IQ 2. How are the new hires assimilated into the companies' through remote onboarding?

IQ 3. What kind of challenges have companies faced in remote onboarding of new hires?

IQ 4. What kind of practices have companies found useful in remote onboarding of new hires?

IQ 5. What recommendations can be given for developing remote onboarding processes of new hires further?

The theoretical framework components, research methods, related interview questions and analysis and results chapter for each investigative question are presented in the overlay matrix in Appendix 1.

1.3   Demarcation

This thesis was research-oriented and studied remote onboarding processes of new hires through interviewing management-level HR professionals. The thesis focused on the employer's point of view and, thus, focused rather on the structural overview and planning of onboarding than dove deeply into the practical job guidance that is often given in teams and between the new hire and his manager. Furthermore, this thesis focused only on onboarding of new hires rather than onboarding of companies' existing employees. The companies the research focused on had previously completed onboarding onsite, but had shifted to completing it remotely at least for some new hires who, in turn, started their work remotely. However, since often for example working equipment is handed over at the office premises, in this study that kind of practice was considered eligible as long as it was indicated in the data. Legislative requirements regarding onboarding were only subject to Finnish legislation in this thesis. Finally, from amongst the consultancy services offered by the commissioning company, this thesis focused only on HR consultancy services.

1.4   International Aspect

The topic fulfilled GLOBBA's requirement of an international aspect since most of the companies the research concerned had international operations and the commissioning company also operated in other Nordic countries.

1.5   Benefits

The author created recommendations for remote onboarding of new hires for the commissioning company to use internally, but also offered it the opportunity to provide them fur-

ther for its own clients, which was an external benefit. Additionally, the thesis produced insightful data for the HRM field, since many companies are engaging in remote onboarding with their new hires. Since many companies have adjusted to the new normal during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is very likely that rather than returning to completely onsite, they will continue operating remotely or in a hybrid model when it is over. When new hires receive good onboarding to their work and have a possibility to build relationships with their co-workers, they will be proficient in their job faster and are likely to be more engaged in their work. This is likely to decrease employee turnover and foster retention, which benefits companies' bottom lines not limited to this research. The author went personally through remote onboarding during writing this thesis, so the research allowed her to generate in depth knowledge and understanding of the topic, which will serve as an asset on her future career.

1.6   Key Concepts

Onboarding or organizational socialization "is the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and knowledge she or he needs to participate as an organizational member" (Van Maanen & Schein 1979 in Morrison 2002). Onboarding is more comprehensive than orientation and it "equips new hires with the resources to become fully engaged and culturally aware members of a productive workforce" (Hillman 2010).

Onsite onboarding refers to onboarding performed at the workplace, for example, in an office or another location where the job is to be completed (Koifman 19 November 2020).

Remote onboarding could be also called online onboarding, since it is performed through online channels. Companies are used to conduct onboarding mainly onsite, but the pandemic has made remote onboarding a safer option and companies are increasingly engaging in it. (Koifman 19 November 2020; Bibby 15 September 2020.)

Assimilation refers to new employee becoming an organizational member through interacting with members of the organization (Gailliard, Myers & Seibold 2010, 554-555).

Employee engagement according to MacLead and Clarke (2010) is the result of two way relationship, where an employer is able to create such conditions that employees are committed and willing to give their best to the organization. Kruse (2012) goes even further by stating that engaged employees are emotionally committed working for an organization's goals.

New hire or "newly hired employee means an employee who has not previously been employed by the employer" or an employee who has been previously employed by an organization, but not for the last 60 days (Social Security Administration s.a.). The latter condition may vary between countries.

1.7 Commissioning Company

Kulmia Group Oy is a management consultancy company established in 2004 and its core competences are development of customer experience, sales and leadership (Kulmia 2021a). The company is based in Helsinki, Finland, but has commissions also in other Nordic countries. Kulmia Group Oy is a parent company for a research company Kulmia Insight Oy and under the Kulmia brand there is also an independent executive search and leadership assessment company Kulmia Leaders Oy. (Pöllänen 12 March 2021.)

In 2020 Kulmia Group Oy employed seven people, but it is frequently searching for new talents. Together with the personnel of Kulmia Insight Oy and Kulmia Leaders Oy there were 16 employees in 2020. Kulmia Group Oy's revenue has remained quite stable between 1.4 and 1.8 million euros over the past five years and profit has varied between 31.000-126.000 euros. In 2020 the company's sales totaled 1.1 million euros and profit was 8.000 euros. (Finder 2021a; Finder 2021b; Finder 2021c; Kulmia 2021b.)

Kulmia Group Oy is very up-to-date with digitality and has implemented commissions via online tools already long before the COVID-19 pandemic, but was forced to transform everything to work remotely due to the pandemic outbreak in 2020. Kulmia Group Oy currently offers smaller scale HR consulting, but would like to expand the offering. For the topicality of remote onboarding, the company sees demand for services related to it. Additionally, Kulmia Group Oy aims to grow and to hire new workforce who would, due to the current situation in the world, work remotely, so remote onboarding practices would not only make a great addition for the company's service offering, but also for its internal practices. (Pöllänen 12 March 2021.) The aforementioned in mind there was a need to study the topic.

2 Remote Onboarding and Assimilation of New Hires

This chapter dives in the theory related to onboarding and assimilation, which are the two concepts this thesis was built around. Onboarding is studied first generally, after which in the subchapters the legal requirements together with a glimpse to history from orientation to onboarding, the onboarding process and the techniques are studied. The chapter continues from onboarding to assimilation, which is studied first generally and then in the subchapters theories related to social integration and organizational commitment are studied, and they are followed by a brief review into connection of onboarding and employee engagement. The remote aspect is introduced in the end of both subchapters. It needs to be remarked here that even though assimilation is considered to belong under onboarding, due to the structural requirements of the thesis document it is presented as a same level subchapter as onboarding.

Figure 1 below depicts the theoretical framework of this thesis and the key concepts the thesis is built around. As can be seen from the figure, onboarding and assimilation are seen as central, interacting elements that aim, for example, for employee engagement.
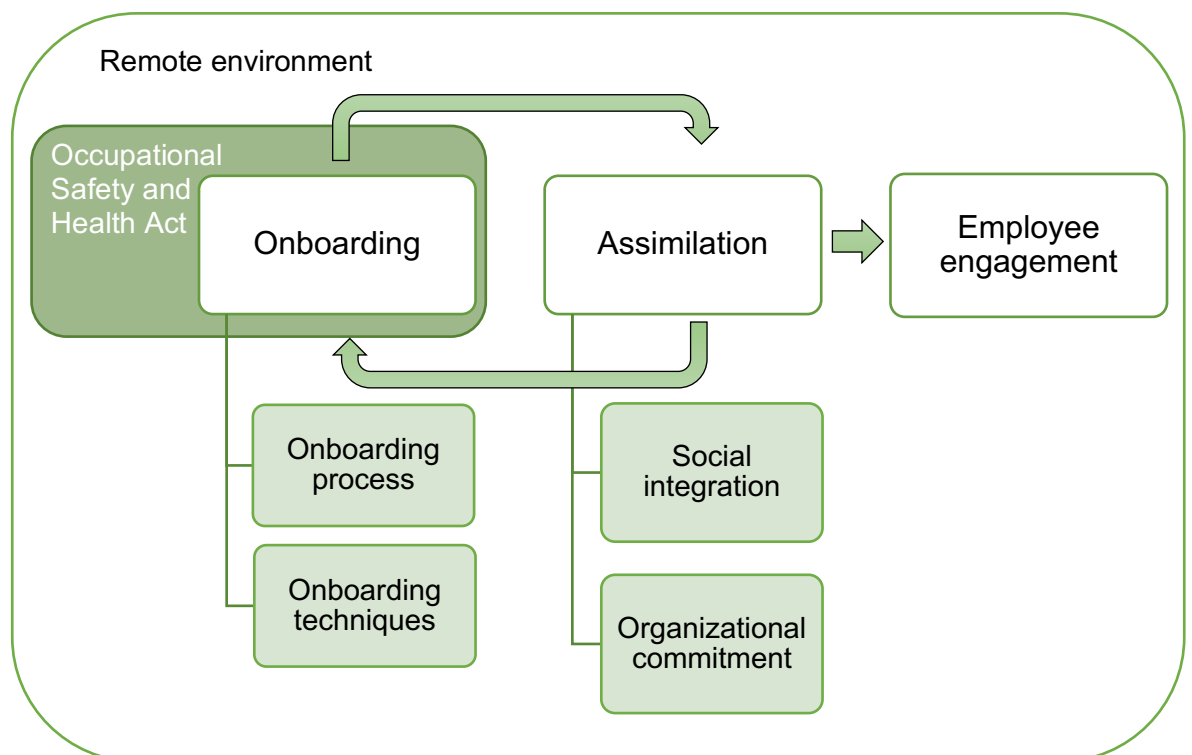

Figure 1. Remote onboarding and assimilation of new hires

2.1   Onboarding

Onboarding or organizational socialization as academics also call it (Bauer 2010, 1) and as was referred in the key concepts "is the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and knowledge she or he needs to participate as an organizational member" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979 in Morrison 2002). Little (26 February 2019) defined onboarding as an ongoing process between making the decision to hire a new employee until that employee has become a fully contributing member of the organization, which implies that onboarding actually begins already in the recruitment and selection phase. Furthermore, the CEO of Bamboo HR stated that onboarding should be seen as "an ongoing talent strategy" (Maurer 16 April 2015). Bauer (2010, 2) divides onboarding into four sequential levels, which are known as the four C's:

- Compliance – legal requirements and policies
- Clarification – job task and expectations
- Culture – formal and informal norms
- Connection – interpersonal relationships

Organizations' engagement in these levels determines also on which level is their onboarding strategy and the strategy levels could be divided into passive, high potential and proactive (Bauer 2010, 3). The table below depicts the connection between the aforementioned levels and concepts.

Table 1. The four C's and Onboarding Strategy Level (adapted from Bauer 2010, 3)

Onboarding Strategy Level	Compliance	Clarification	Culture	Connection
1 Passive	YES	SOME	LITTLE/NONE	LITTLE/NONE
2 High Potential	YES	YES	SOME	SOME
3 Proactive	YES	YES	YES	YES

The four C's are presented in the horizontal axis and the onboarding strategy levels instead on the vertical axis. The table shows that the higher the level, the more C's the onboarding consists of. The proactive strategy level includes all four C's and an organization that is in that level is seen to complete onboarding in a systematic way and to consider it as a part of their HRM strategy (Bauer 2010, 4). On the other hand, a passive organization is seen to cover only the legal requirements and the role related matters.

The four C's were used as a basis for a study in 2017 that examined their effects on work attitudes such as utility, organizational commitment, organizational support and job satisfaction. According to the study, which involved over 700 employees, employees whose

onboarding consisted of all four C's, showed higher rates on the aforementioned work attitudes, which in turn implied that including all the levels in onboarding, new hires' subsequent work attitudes would be a lot better. (Meyer & Bartels 2017, 14, 22-23.)

The reason for hiring new workforce presumably is the need for additional contribution and the faster the new hires are able to be productive in the organization, the better (Bauer 2010, 1). As briefly discussed in the introduction, onboarding does not necessarily provide clear short-term outcomes to the organization and, in fact, it usually affects efficiency, since rather than doing their work as always personnel have to adapt and even re-organize when a new employee starts (Eklund 2018, 31-32). This is likely why "many organizations view their onboarding process as an expense rather than as an investment, they adopt a short-sighted approach to the process" (Stanley 2012 in Caldwell & Peters 2018, 27). What these organizations do not see is by doing so they might activate a rat race, whose consequences can extend unreasonably far. The new hire is under a great amount of stress when starting a new job and if he does not receive proper onboarding to his work, he will not likely meet the expectations of the organization. The reason for insufficient onboarding could be that the organization is not prepared for the arrival of the new hire and its resources are put too tight when he arrives. Unfortunately, this not only affects the organization, but also the new employee and at worst might cause him to leave. (Eklund 2018, 19, 32-33.) According to Humantelligence (2021), even 20% of employees leave in the first 45 days and furthermore Maurer (16 April 2021) claims it to take from three to six months for 90% of the new hires to decide whether they are going to remain in the position and success of onboarding is seen as key factor in making that decision. For the organization leaving of a hire means that the recruitment and onboarding process needs to be run again and a rough estimate for the cost of it according to Wigert and Pendell (2019) is up to two times the employee's salary. However, this unfortunately not so rare example could be largely avoided with preparation and systematic planning of the onboarding, which minimizes the efficiency loss and in longer term affects the organization's bottom line via decreased employee turnover and time to proficiency (Eklund 2018, 31-32; Humantelligence 2021).

Until now the focus has strongly been on the employer's side, but there is also the side of the new hire. It is not only how the employer organizes and implements the onboarding, but also how the new hire responds to it. The new hire's attitude, eagerness to learn and to ask questions matter a lot. A new hire can bring new perspective and notice things that organizational insiders have not, but this is possible only, if the organization is open for the new ideas and perspectives. (Eklund 2018, 38-39.) In the figure 2 below, onboarding is depicted as an interactive process between the individual and the organization, where

the role of the one performing onboarding and the one receiving it varies between the aforementioned members.

Individual

Employee as the onboarder

-Presenting own opinions

-Feedback and improvement ideas

-"New eyes"

Employee being onboarded

-Initiative-taking and searching for information

-Showing competence

-Learning and reflecting

-Familiarizing with working environment

Performing onboarding   Building cooperation   Receiving onboarding

Organization as the onboarder

-Familiarizing with the work environment

-Guidance and teaching

-Monitoring and supporting

-Feedback

Organization being onboarded

-Continuous development

-Developing onboarding process

-Receiving feedback

-Openness for new ideas

Organization

Figure 2. Four perspectives of onboarding (adapted from Eklund 2018, 39)

In the figure 2 the new hire as an individual is placed at the top and the organization instead at the bottom on the vertical axis. In the horizontal axis the ones performing onboarding are on the left and the ones receiving it are on the right. Cooperation is seen to be built in the middle as a result of these four elements. The interactive model shows the new hire that he is important to the organization and is wanted to be heard and the organization instead might learn from the new hire and get development ideas (Eklund 2018, 39-40). Furthermore, when the onboarding is interactive, it is also efficient and "it is also only way to tie the individual's and the organization's objectives closer to each other, which is inevitable regarding engagement" (Eklund 2018, 40).

2.1.1 From Orientation to Onboarding

Terms orientation and onboarding are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same essentially. Orientation is the formal process of completing the paperwork and introducing the organization's principles and policies to the new hire and is often part of a larger, ongoing onboarding that involves several people from the organization and can last until a year (SHRM 2021).

In Finland orientation is required by the law because it includes a lot of occupational safety related aspects to ensure that the employees are able to perform their job safely. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002) sets the minimum requirements for orientation and according to it:

> Employers shall give their employees necessary information on the hazards and risk factors of the workplace and ensure, taking the employees' occupational skills and work experience into consideration, that:
> (1) the employees receive an adequate orientation to the work, working conditions at the workplace, working and production methods, work equipment used in the work and the correct method of using it, as well as to safe working practices, especially before the beginning of a new job or task or a change in the work tasks, and before the introduction of new work equipment and new working or production methods;
> (2) the employees are given instruction and guidance in order to eliminate the hazards and risks of the work and to avoid any hazard or risk from the work jeopardising safety and health;
> (3) the employees are given instruction and guidance for adjustment, cleaning, maintenance and repair work as well as for disturbances and exceptional situations; and
> (4) the instruction and guidance given to the employees is complemented, when necessary. (Occupational Safety and Health Act 738/2002)

Even though some of the above referenced parts are highly health and safety related, the requirement for orientation to one's work can be seen especially from the first part. It needs to be noted that the degree of safety and health related orientation varies depending on the field of business and job role.

The legal requirements set the absolute minimum orientation that employers have to provide to new employees and there are some organizations that do only that. The reason for minimal onboarding could be the nature of the employment contracts in the company, for example, if there are a lot of temporary workers. (Eklund 2018, 28.)

2.1.2   Onboarding process

Rather than considering onboarding as a separate process, it should be tied to other HR processes in the organization and ultimately to the organization's strategy (Eklund 2018, 27). As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter onboarding begins already in the recruitment and selection phase and according to Peterson (s.a. in Maurer 2021) companies that begin onboarding on the official starting day are already late, and he advises to, for

example, handle the required paperwork via technology before that. Onboarding process should be planned in advance, but too strictly planned process might be difficult to organize because the organization has to be able to perform its daily operations despite it and it might be hard to estimate what there is to come. Additionally, also the personal characteristics of the new hire affect the process, since for example the pace of learning can vary between candidates. However, a rough plan for example for three months could be established for the onboarding of the things that the new hire needs to learn during that time. In the figure 3 below the process has been divided into six parts to give an overview of the process. (Eklund 2018, 89, 92.) Furthermore, the connection to recruitment and to performance appraisals are added in the original figure because they can be considered to make continuums with the onboarding process and according to Eklund (2018, 88), it would be purposeful to see these continuums with the different HR processes.
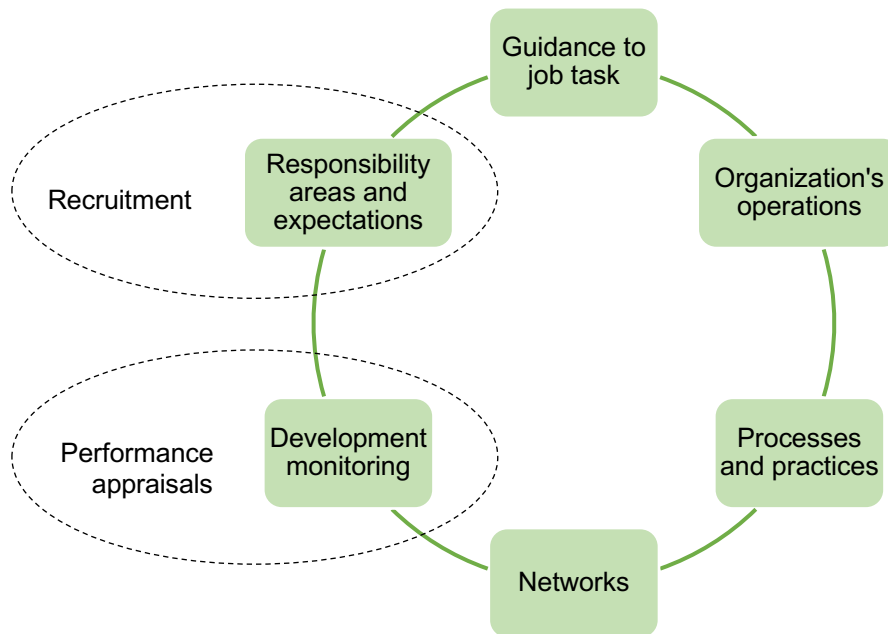
Figure 3. Onboarding process divided in six different sections (adapted from Eklund 2018, 92)

Responsibility areas and expectations for the new hire are discussed already in the recruitment phase and deepened in the onboarding phase. (Eklund 2018, 93-94.) In addition, Peterson advises to clarify the responsibility areas also to the team (s.a. in Maurer 2021).

The guidance to job task begins to put the responsibility areas and expectations into practice through hands on guidance. In this section it is important to remember that rather than making assumptions of the new hire's capabilities and knowledge, also seemingly

self-evident things should be said out loud. Check-lists are good way to make sure that also those things are covered. The level of working life skills knowledge including, for example, communication and interpersonal skills might vary between individuals, so they should be taken into account as well. (Eklund 2018, 96-98.)

Organization's operations include information of the organization such as history, current state and future view, services, customers and competitors. The purpose of this part is to draw a clear picture of the organization to the new employee and link it to his work, so the purpose of the position is considered as a part of a larger whole. (Eklund 2018, 99-101.)

Processes and practices include for example the used software, support systems, payroll, healthcare and meeting practices specific to the organization. Many of these are needed every day and for that it is important to pass them to the new hire. When going these through with the new hire it is important to remember that all of these might be new for him and there is a limit how much information one can take in once. (Eklund 2018, 102-103.)

Networks cover the social contacts in the workplace. Investing in networks is a crucial part of onboarding because first of all the person responsible for the onboarding himself might not always be available, so the new hire should have someone else who can help him. (Eklund 2018, 105-106.) Valamis (2021) advises to set meetings for the new hire with representatives of different departments and co-workers with whom the new hire will be working closely because it gives the understanding of the organization's structure and enables networking at an early stage.

Development monitoring refers to monitoring the progress of the new hire during onboarding, which gives a possibility to give two-way feedback and through it to also develop the onboarding process. (Eklund 2018, 109-110.) Specific and reachable goals should be first set for the onboarding and specific follow-up discussions for them could be set, for example, after 30, 60 and 90 days to follow-up and also to engage the new hire (Eklund 2018, 90-91; Falcone 2018). Furthermore, the data of the onboarding process should be, according to Wigert & Pendell (2019), also connected to other organizational metrics, such as, "engagement, performance and exit data". Performance appraisals have been connected to development monitoring in the figure 3 because development monitoring in the onboarding could be seen as a type of performance appraisal that companies organize for their new hires to discuss about their performance and to set goals.

There are many versions of onboarding processes and the introduced is just one of them. Every company and new hire is different and the onboarding process should be adjusted based on their needs. (Eklund 2018, 91-92.) The duration of onboarding process depends on the organization, but rather a general opinion from staffing and HR is that it should last for at least one year (Maurer 2021).

2.1.3   Onboarding Techniques

Onboarding can be performed in many ways and onboarding processes may include several different delivery techniques. Before studying different techniques in detail, a few classifications are presented. Onboarding techniques can be divided in six different tactics, which are presented as opposing pairs below:

- **Collective and individual** depending on whether onboarding is performed in a group setting for more than one new hire or in an individual setting.
- **Formal and informal** depending whether the individual is onboarded separately from other employees and the normal work or rather along with them and the normal work.
- **Sequential and random** depending on whether the onboarding process follows a specific structure and sequence that the new hire is aware of beforehand or if the process is rather free-form.
- **Fixed and variable** depending on whether the onboarding has a timetable or not.
- **Serial and disjunctive** depending on if the organizational insiders are involved in the onboarding of the new hire or not.
- **Investiture and divestiture** depending on whether the feedback received from the onboarding supports the new hire's identity or not.
  (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo & Tucker 2007, 709.)

Despite the classifications, some of the onboarding techniques can be performed in variety of ways, which makes explicit classification difficult. To give an example, almost all of the below presented examples can be either fixed or variable in schedule. Examples of onboarding techniques are preboarding, classroom training, observation, collaboration, mentoring, buddy system, introductory sessions, employee owned-onboarding, onboarding technologies, online studying, games and personal-identity socialization (Eklund 2018, 182-184; SHRM 2021; Zielinski 2019). Since some of these are common concepts and practices, they are not explained further, but the more unfamiliar ones are explained in more detail below.

Preboarding describes the activities performed between signing the contract and the starting date in order to connect with the employees. Examples of preboarding activities

are an office tour, a welcome package sent to the new hire, a contact from an onboarding buddy or even documents sent to the new hire to sign. (SHRM 2021; Maurer 2021.)

Mentoring is learning from more experienced professional. The mentor shares his knowledge with the new hire through own experience and supports the new hire in the job. Mentoring can be formal or more informal and last from weeks to years depending on the organization. (SHRM 2021.)

Buddy system consists of the same idea as mentoring, but there the one supporting the new employee is a peer rather than an experienced professional. The buddy or peer helps the new hire in daily work from very basic navigation at the office to more demanding tasks and sharing the silent, unwritten information of working in the organization. (SHRM 2021.)

Introductory sessions refer to meetings organized with important people in the organization for example with representatives of different departments and teams to get to know them and enable networking. It is suggested to have an agenda in these sessions to avoid shallowness in the conversation. (Valonen 24 February 2021.)

Employee owned-onboarding involves recently hired employee in onboarding a new employee. Clearly this is not always possible in because there is not always suitable, recently hired employee helping in the process, but the benefit of it is that the recently hired employee has the most recent knowledge of what the completely new hire needs to know. Also, like with a buddy, talking to a peer about certain matters might be easier than talking to a manager. (Wilde s.a in Zielinski 2019.)

Onboarding technologies aim to facilitate the onboarding process and, for example, preboarding could be handled over them. They enable continuous communication and some of the technologies allow integration of other platforms with them, so for example the recruitment platform could be integrated to an onboarding platform. (Zielinski 2019.)

Games are used to make learning fun and they are increasingly used as onboarding technique. However, consideration is needed of what parts of the onboarding can be put in form of a game. Additionally, debriefing of the game after it is over is very important to ensure that the meaning is clear for the new hire. (Eklund 2018, 185-186.)

Personal-identity socialization is an onboarding technique or an approach that is built around new hire's strengths. Organizations often emphasize a lot of the organizational

identity and might forget the individual characteristics in trying to get the new hires to adopt the organizational identity. A study that compared personal-identity socialization to organization-emphasizing onboarding and standard onboarding found that the best outcomes were produced by the personal-identity approach. According to the study, when the new hires were onboarded emphasizing their personal identity, it lowered employee turnover, made relationships between workforce stronger and even increased customer satisfaction. This idea behind personal-identity socialization lays on self-esteem promotion and identity conflict avoidance that might be caused when individuals are asked to fit in an organizational mold. Starting a new job is often very stressful to employees, but it was found out that if they were allowed to bring their personal strengths to the job and be themselves, starting a new job was not nearly as stressful. Additionally, when new employees can bring their strengths to the position and execute them in the work, they are likely to find the job also more satisfying and be more engaged in it. An organization can benefit from this technique because when the new employees are allowed to bring fresh perspective to the organization, they may find out and solve some organizational problems that the organization is not aware of when viewing them from inside. (Cable & al. 2013).

2.1.4 Remote Onboarding

To this point the discussion has been around onboarding overall without indicating a specific context. Until the beginning of year 2020, in many organizations work was performed at the workplace, however, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 that forced the shift to remote work has changed this image in many organizations, since employers have started to recognize the benefits of remote work (Koifman 2020). At the point of writing this thesis, remote working has started to become a new normal in many organizations and for that the remote context for onboarding is now introduced.

Onboarding, whether performed onsite or remotely, should essentially have the same goal: making the new hires fully contributing members of the organization and engage them along the way to ensure productivity and retention (Little 26 February 2019). According to Glazer (2020), the importance of hiring the right people is greatly emphasized in remote work because not everyone is capable to work in the remote environment and recruiters need to be honest about the nature of remote work because a team cannot work efficiently, if there are members that do not fit in the remote environment. He considers this as a key point and mentions that their company's interview process includes a question regarding the candidate's adjustment to remote work in addition to screening of the traits such as time management, self-motivation and self-discipline throughout the recruitment process.

Planning the remote onboarding process in advance is crucial for it to be successful. It should be thought through what needs to be done before the first day, what happens in the first weeks and how getting to know the rest of the organization is arranged. It should be noticed that even though in remote work the new hire has more responsibility because leading by hand is not possible, he still needs frequent communication with and support from his manager. (Valonen 24 February 2021.) The onboarding techniques discussed earlier can all be performed in onsite as well as in online environment, but their implementation is different because the employees are not physically in the same place (Vujasin s.a). Even though it is important to plan the remote onboarding so that the new hire do not feel forgotten, it should not be made overwhelming either. Working from home is different than working in office in many ways and at the office there are often informal breaks caused by disturbances such as someone knocking on the meeting room's door, but for remote environment these do not happen the same way and they should be taken into account. (Maurer 2020.)

Technology is a key in remote onboarding and when used wisely, it can allocate more time for more important things. When for example the documentation and other administrative tasks are done before the starting date it not only keeps up necessary communication with the new hire, but also saves time for creating connections and bonds between the team and the new hire and serves also as a preboarding activity. (SHRM 2021; Zielinski 2019). The new hire needs to have all the needed equipment, software and applications in order to start working and some companies send laptop and phone to the new hire along with videos how to take them into use and an alternative to this is to have scheduled phone call with IT representative who walks the process through with the new employee. At LinkedIn the equipment is prepared and sent to the new hire and everything is remotely downloaded to the laptop after he has signed in with correct credentials. (Pearson s.a. in Maurer 2020; Maurer 2020.)

Vujasin (s.a.) brings up the importance of utilizing video conferencing as a substitute for face-to-face interaction and not to replace it with pre-filmed videos even the videos' easiness might be tempting. Videos serve well as tools for example for showing the new hire the office outlook, but do not convey the culture and enable interaction (Vujasin s.a.). If companies have some established practices to be conducted with the new hire onsite, they should tried to be rather reorganized than abandoned in the remote onboarding. For example, if the new hires are used to be taken for lunch in the first day, it can and should be done remotely as well. (Navarra 2020.)

2.2 Assimilation

In the previous chapter it was addressed that orientation could be seen as the formal part of onboarding required partly by legislation and it usually also includes completion of paperwork related to the new hire and learning about organizational norms (738/2002; SHRM 2021). However, the rest of onboarding has been only generally covered. According to Learning Development Consultant Danny Lee, after the formal orientation has taken place, then the new hires "actually join the team" (CliftonStrengths 2020, 00:22:29).

As stated in the very beginning of this chapter, academics refer to onboarding as organizational socialization (Bauer 2010, 1) and Morrison (2002) claimed that socialization literature divides organizational socialization in learning and assimilation elements. Meyer and Bartels (2017, 11) instead used the terms orientation and employee socialization to describe onboarding. They reflected with these terms to Bauer's four C's that was presented earlier in the text and claimed that the first two, compliance and clarification, referred to orientation and the latter two, culture and connection, to employee socialization (Meyer & Bartels 2017, 11).

Terms such as employee socialization, integration and assimilation are used to refer to becoming an organizational member, but their meaning is not essentially the same. Myers & Oetzel (2003, 439) claimed assimilation to consider both viewpoints, the organization's and the new hire's, and to be more interactive process than integration, where only the individual adapts to the organization (Gibson & Papa 2000; Myers 2005, in Gailliard, Myers & Seibold 2010, 553). Gailliard and colleagues (2010, 554-555) claimed that "assimilation happens as a result of processes involving interaction between the focal person who is assimilating and other organizational members". Employee socialization like integration is seen more as one way adaptation to organization from the new hire's perspective, when he transforms from an organizational outsider to an insider (Meyer & Bartels 2017, 11). Since assimilation takes into account both viewpoints and, thus, is theoretically the most comprehensive one of the listed terms, it was used in this thesis. However, it needs to be addressed that the concept of assimilation in this thesis refers solely to HR and socialization literature related assimilation, which do not imply anything negative as the concept of assimilation might be considered in other contexts. Even though the concept of integration might be increasingly used today and is more common as a term, assimilation as a concept has been used more broadly in HR and socialization literature over the years and for that it was used in this thesis.

Through their studies Myers and Oetzel (2003, 449) created six-dimensional model called Organizational Assimilation Index (OAI) for measuring the organizational assimilation and these dimensions are:

- **Familiarity with others**: establishing relationships with co-workers through meeting them and learning how to interact with them, and getting a sense of community.
- **Acculturation**: "learning and accepting the culture"
- **Recognition**: "being recognized as valuable, either by superiors or co-workers" and considering one's work important
- **Involvement**: contribution to the organization
- **Job competency**: knowing how to perform a job well
- **Adaptation and role negotiation**: negotiating and adapting to one's role. (Myers & Oetzel 2003, 443-444.)

In 2010 the OAI was reconceptualized and extended by one dimension by Gailliard and colleagues (2010, 568) to comprise of:

- Familiarity with co-workers
- Familiarity with supervisors
- Acculturation
- Recognition
- Involvement
- Job competency
- Role negotiation. (Gailliard & al. 2010, 568-569.)

Most of the original dimensions were considered valid in the reconceptualization, but compared to the previously listed, it can be seen that familiarity with others has been separated to co-workers and supervisors and adaptation has been left out from role negotiation. According to Gailliard and colleagues (2010, 569) familiarity with others was divided in two because it improved scale reliability. The dimensions listed above give an understanding of what elements assimilation consists of and additionally, they can be useful in integrating new employees, developing assimilation efforts and fostering culture. It needs to be noted that assimilation is a dynamic process that evolves throughout employee's tenure, so it is not limited only to new hires. The OAI is claimed to be suitable for many organizational settings, which is an important factor regarding this thesis since the focus is on remote onboarding. (Myers & Oetzel 2003, 450-451.)

Assimilation could be further divided in social integration consisting of "attachment to a work group" and organizational commitment consisting of "attachment to an organization overall" (Morrison 2002) and they are briefly studied in the next sections.

2.2.1 Social Integration

"Social integration is largely a process of developing relationships", which evolves through understanding organizational culture through learning from co-workers and adjusting

one's own behavior accordingly (Morrison 1993, 174). Morrison (2002) in her article discussed about theories provided by socialization literature regarding new hires' learning and assimilation through interaction and relationships with their co-workers, and went herself further by studying how do different social networks affect them. For this thesis the most important finding of her study was the assimilation outcome: social integration was found to be stronger when newcomers had larger rather than smaller networks. Based on her study she concluded that a new hire needs two types of networks: informational network to acquire information and a friendship network in order to feel integrated, and she also suggested that the employees responsible for onboarding should think how they can provide opportunities for building them.

Socialization literature has long claimed integration to be the new hire's responsibility, but when studying social capital's role in new hire socialization Korte and Lin (2013) considered it rather mutual between the new hire, co-workers and managers. Organizational socialization or onboarding process "requires not only learning the tasks of the job and the mission of the organization, but also attention to the social dynamics of the work group". Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, 243) considered social capital to consist of three interrelated dimensions: cognitive, relational and structural, and Korte and Lin used their model as basis in the study. Shortly, the structural dimension describes how the new hire fits in the organization's structure, cognitive dimension is about understanding how things are done in the organization and the relational is about getting to know the members of the group, and the organizational socialization process of a new hire has elements from all these three (Korte and Lin 2013). Through qualitative interviews they found out that the relational dimension was the strongest of the three. Based on the study the quality of the relationships within the group was considered as a crucial element, which additionally affected the cognitive and structural dimensions. As regards the cognitive dimension, it was important for the new hires to know how things are done specifically in their team. Finally, the findings regarding the structural dimension indicated that it was important for the new hires to understand their position in the organizational whole and based on that make connections and learn who they can ask for help. (Korte and Lin 2013.)

Eklund (2018, 105-107) also brought up the importance of building networks during onboarding and similarly emphasized that the person responsible for onboarding should facilitate and assure their formation. The work community should also be prepared for the coming of the new hire and thorough that start building foundation for teaming, since it does not build itself. However, formation of networks is not only the work community's and the onboarder's responsibility, but the new hire needs to be active as well. Every company has quiet information that is not written anywhere and is not necessarily planned to be

shared. However, networks serve as communicators of this information. "Quiet information is linked strongly to for example organizational culture, procedures, practices and unwritten rules" and it can very beneficial for the new hire to perform well in his job. (Eklund 2018, 105-108, 154-155.)

Belonging is one of humans' basic needs and one of the theories explaining it is Abraham Maslow's famous motivation theory called hierarchy of needs that divides human needs in five levels and the logic behind them is that the lowest level need has to be satisfied first before it is possible to move upwards to the next level (McLeod 20 March 2020). However, Maslow (1979, in McLeod 20 March 2020) elaborated his model that the lower level needs do not need to be fully satisfied before moving to the next level and the order with some of the higher level needs can vary between individuals. Love and belonging, that comprises of relationships with family and friends, but also at work that create sense of belonging, was considered the third need only after physiological and safety needs. To put the importance in perspective, the physiological needs are required for human body to survive and examples of them are food, drink and water, and safety needs instead refer to being safe and having security in life and examples are financial security and health. (McLeod 20 March 2020.)

The sense of belonging that hierarchy of needs refers to, focuses only on relationships with people. However, Volini and colleagues (2020) considered sense of belonging at work to construct of three attributes:

- Comfort – fair and respectful treatment
- Connection – being connected to co-workers
- Contribution – being able to "contribute to meaningful work outcomes".

They considered the three attributes to build on top of each other in the presented order and the third attribute, contribution, to be the strongest driver for sense of belonging.

2.2.2 Organizational commitment

Eklund (2018, 68) defines organizational commitment as "employee's willingness to remain as an organizational member and commit to its operations and goals". The first impression of the organization conveyed through onboarding is said to affect the new hire's commitment even in the long run (CliftonStrengths 2020, 00:15:53). Morrison's (2002) study of how the types of relationships affect onboarding revealed that new hire's organizational commitment was stronger when his friendship network consisted of many individuals across the organization. Meyer and Bartels (2017, 12) studied how the level of onboarding affected the organizational commitment and according to them, if during

onboarding new hires are able to connect to an organization's culture and build relationships with co-workers, they are more likely to commit to the organization. Also, if the new hire has an opportunity to gain experiences in groups, has role models to follow and receives frequent feedback from co-workers during onboarding, the level of organizational commitment is likely to be higher (Bauer & al. 2007 in Meyer and Bartels 2017, 12). To conclude, it could be said that the social integration can be considered as enabler of organizational commitment.

Fulfilment of psychological contract between employer and employee is also claimed to foster organizational commitment. When a new employee is hired to an organization in addition to a signed employment contract, there is also an intangible psychological contract made between the employer and the new hire. The psychological contract is characterized by both parties' unwritten expectations towards each other and willingness to give to each other. The targets and goals of both parties have an effect on the formation of psychological contract that is seen to evolve throughout the employment when these factors change. (Eklund 2018, 62.) When the onboarding process including assimilation is functional, new hires are more likely to feel connected to the organization. Additionally, it shows to the new hires that the psychological contract is honored from the employer's part, which also fosters culture. (Yamkovenko and Hatala, 2015; Caldwell & al 2011, in Caldwell & Peters 2018, 35.)

"Organizational culture refers to the system of values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape how work gets done within an organization" (Volini & al. 2020). Culture is an "aggregate of repeated habits" created by all employees, but if a certain kind of culture is wanted, it requires leading. However, without knowing what the organization's culture is about, it is impossible to lead and develop it. When the organizational culture is known, leaders can "intentionally use the culture towards the whatever team aspiration or business aspiration, or that destination where they want to go to". (CliftonStrengths 2020, 00:21:30; 00:05:35-00:05:45; 00:06:14.) Culture can be seen from organization's actions and it should be aligned with what the organization claims for example through its values, mission and vision. However, many times these are either not actually aligned, are not clearly enough bridged for the new employees or the employees do not understand their purpose in the bigger picture. (Hinds & Elliott 2021; Sundram & Patel 2019; Gabsa 2018.) Gabsa (2018) states that brand loyalty towards an organization begins from onboarding and for that what has been claimed in the recruitment phase should remain and onboarding should support that. The new hires need to feel connected to the company, so they want to remain there and if the emotional connection is high, it is more likely that the new hires will remain loyal. (Gabsa 2018.)

2.2.3 Remote Assimilation

According to Vineberg (s.a., in Maurer 2020) the purpose of onboarding is to build foundation for relationships with co-workers for the new hire and to get him heard in the workplace, which is even more important in the remote environment. It would be the best option regarding networking with the organization and new hire's own team to organize the first day at the office. However, since that is not always possible, a familiarizing moment should be organized virtually with closest co-workers and the new hires own team and it can happen over a virtual coffee moment without connection to business. (Valonen 24 February 2021.) Savage (2020) advises to ensure that the onboarding process includes social learning techniques such as collaboration and observation, where the new hire works with a co-worker. Tavaila (3 March 2021) also advises to include non-work related small talk in the beginning of remote meetings and emphasizes the use of camera in them. One-to-one discussions between the new hire and the team members foster community and should be advocated a separate time. As discussed in the onboarding techniques, a buddy would be a great support for the new hire because asking questions might be easier from him and the same applies in the remote context. (Valonen 24 February 2021.) One-to-one discussions between the new hire and his manager are important for building connection especially in the remote setting, but it is important to understand that each phone call or virtual meeting over a project is not considered as one-to-one discussion. (Vilkman 1 March 2021).

Company culture is conveyed strongly through people and in an onsite setting it is forming strongly by itself through the office outlook, people's behavior and way of dressing, but in the remote setting it does not form the same way because employees do not physically meet each other. However, organizational culture is very important in fostering belonging and unity and it should be maintained in the remote work. Company's presentation material usually includes values and other information about the company as was discussed in the last section, but they are not enough to create a sense of an organization's culture for the new hire since it requires people to convey it in everyday operations. (Hinds & Elliott 2021; Vujasin s.a.) Success of the formation of remote culture is seen differently in organizations. Some organizations has claimed it to be more humanized and that their employees have become even closer to each other because they go to each other's homes virtually and some has claimed that they are separating from each other when there is no physical presence. On the other hand, remote work enables reforming the company culture, but it will not happen without someone intentionally leading it. Leaders need to think what kind of remote culture is wanted and put effort in communicating it. (Hinds & Elliott 2021; Wigert & Pendell 2019.) One advice is to add more internal touchpoints whether

they are weekly meetings or weekly events fostering creativity or team spirit. "Organizations will undoubtedly require a mix of practices that enable efficient, inclusive engagement while at the same time preserving aspects of synchronous and in-person activities that strengthen culture" (Hinds & Elliott 2021). Glazer (2020) also highlights transparent leadership because open communication and feedback fosters trust and creates safe environment. According to Hickman and Maese (26 March 2021), managers need to take the first step and trust that their employees are doing their work. In addition to knowing one's colleagues as co-workers, getting to know them as humans builds foundation for trust. (Tavaila 3 March 2021.)

Some organizations have been using personality and behavioral tests in their recruitment processes to determine whether a candidate is a good fit. However, now when remote work has become the new normal in many organizations, they might be useful to consider either in the recruitment phase to determine the candidate's suitability or later in the onboarding phase to get to know the individual better. Getting to know new people in remote context is certainly different than when being physically in the same place. The way people approach work differs between individuals and knowing how one's team members' individual characteristics affect their work could make managing the remote team more effective and improve their performance (Hickman & Asplund 2019). There are several personality and behavioral tests implemented for this purpose such as CliftonStrengths assessment and DiSC. CliftonStrengths assessment measures how individual thinks, feels and behaves (Gallup 2021) and DiSC, that stands for Dominance, influence, Steadiness and Consciousness, is a personal assessment tool that measures individual's behavior in different situations. There are several versions of DiSC for example for assessing leadership, workplace and conflicts. (Disc profile 2021.) The new hire's team has great effect on onboarding and according to Learning Development Consultant Danny Lee a useful tool for enabling teaming and speeding up the familiarization of the new person is above mentioned CliftonStrengths assessment. Danny Lee talks about his own onboarding experience and says that when onboarding is targeted to one's strengths and the process is tried to be seen through the new hire's eyes, it is powerful, inspiring and motivating. (CliftonStrengths 2020, 00:22:20; 00:25:30; 00:31:55-00:32:50.)

Cable and colleagues (2013) in their principles for onboarding emphasize the employees' identity and strengths, and helping them to introduce those to the organization. According to their four principles, companies should realize that they are the people who make the organization, they should help the new hires to identify their strengths and introduce the new hires with their best selves to the co-workers and finally ask the hires how their

strengths could be applied to the work. They continue that the benefits of doing the afore-mentioned are that the new hires become more invested in their work, feel stronger con-nection with the co-workers, experience less stress and are more satisfied, which also leads to higher retention.

2.2.4 Employee Engagement as an Outcome for Successful Onboarding

Employee engagement is a concept that has several definitions, but the core is that it is formed in two way relationship in which an employer is able to create conditions where an employee gives more about himself (MacLeod & Clarke 2010). William Kahn, who intro-duced the concepts of personal engagement and personal disengagement in 1990 stated that "in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances – in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (Kahn 1990, 694). The emotional connection was brought up earlier in the organizational commitment section and it could be linked to Kahn's emotional aspect of employee engagement. When new hires understand their purpose in the larger organizational whole and see that their work has a meaning, they begin to feel emotional connection (Gabsa 2018). This not only builds foundation for organizational commitment, but also for employee engagement.

Employee engagement and onboarding can often be spotted in a same context and the reason is that employee engagement is seen one of the goals for onboarding (Little 26 February 2019). Even though employee engagement is a long-term outcome, the very be-ginning of employee life cycle has a great effect on it. Directly put by Robinson (s.a, in Hirsch 10 August 2017) "onboarding is a magic moment when new employees decide to stay engaged or become disengaged". According to Pendell (2018) relationships are the largest driver for employee engagement and when reflecting to the previous chapters the importance of social contacts and relationship building was highlighted especially regard-ing remote onboarding.

Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation called hierarchy of needs that was dis-cussed in chapter 2.2.1 has been applied in employee engagement to explain its for-mation and the logic behind it is the same as in the Maslow's version. This is depicted be-low in the figure 4.
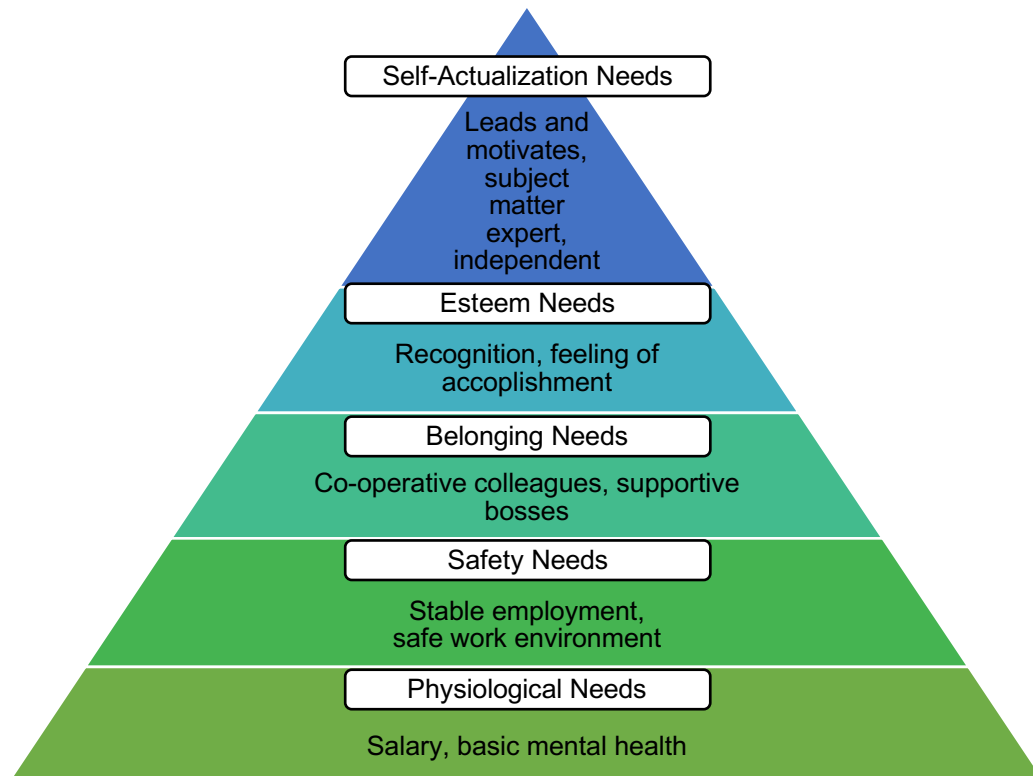
Figure 4. Hierarchy of Employee Engagement (adapted from Roy 28 January 2021)

According to Roy (28 January 2021) basic need for employees is salary, which is located in the first level of the figure 4. When considering the employee life cycle salary is something to be discussed and agreed before the employment begins. When proceeding the in the levels upwards, their reflection to onboarding is introduced. The safety needs on the second level are about the creating safe environment to the new hires, where they can bring their perspectives and ideas safely to the new organization, so the organizational culture is highly involved in it. Establishing social relationships and having organizational culture enabling organizational commitment create sense of belonging that was recently discussed and is placed as the third level need in the figure 4. The new hires need feedback and also recognition during onboarding from their managers and co-workers and it is also needed for engagement, which is presented under esteem needs in the figure 4. These elements that are at least partly introduced in onboarding serve as enablers of employee engagement. Naturally these enablers need to be in place also after the onboarding in order for employees to be engaged, but the author wanted to introduce the connection with onboarding.

Roy (28 January 2021) also introduced a pre- and post-COVID-19 aspect along with the application of employee engagement, which is an interesting point regarding this thesis since in the pre-COVID-19 time many businesses operated onsite whereas post-COVID-19 time it is likely that the remote operations are more common. In the post covid-19 time

the psychological and safety needs are not so obvious anymore because there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the future. Many employees are likely to remain working remotely in the post-COVID-19 time, which challenges communication with co-workers and managers. An attention needs to be paid in feedback and recognition in order for it not to become compromised in the remote times because it might affect the engagement of the employees. (Roy 28 January 2021.)

Onboarding can result in employee engagement, which, in turn, affects organization's success, but rather than being a single outcome, employee engagement reflects to several other important things for a company. To name a few, employee engagement has been connected to several performance outcomes such as customer ratings, profitability, productivity, reduced employee turnover and reduced absenteeism and they all reflect to organizations' bottom line. (Sorenson 2013.)

3   Research Methods

Selected companies' remote onboarding processes were studied in this thesis with qualitative methods, more specifically with qualitative interviews. This chapter explains the empirical research process of the thesis and it is divided in the following subchapters: research design, population and sampling, data collection and data analysis methods. Finally, this chapter deals with reliability and validity of the research.

3.1   Research Design

In order to answer to the research question, different kinds of data and evidence is needed, and research design is used to guide the path between these two. Research design answers, for example, to the following questions regarding designing and gathering of the data: "what types of data, what ways to gather, how to gain access, how to document, how to plan the analysis". (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 28, 31, 33.) There are two higher level research approaches called qualitative and quantitative that aim for different kind of results and thus are used for different purposes. "Qualitative research uses words and sentences whereas quantitative research is based on numbers" and where quantitative research aims for generalization, qualitative research "aims to describe, understand and interpret a research phenomenon". (Kananen 2017, 35.) Due to the difference in these approaches, also the research design might be different and since this thesis engaged in qualitative research, the research design is only presented for that approach.

Rather than proceeding straightforwardly, qualitative research process is circulating and adjusts when new things evolve. This gives a great amount of flexibility for the researcher, but also increases complexity. However, the key elements of the research are good to be planned in advance to get an overall picture of the process and to avoid confusion, even though the elements may change during the process. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 28, 28, 33-34; Kananen 2017, 71.) The figure 5 below presents the key elements of a qualitative research design. The steps one to three have been introduced in the chapter one of this thesis and this chapter continues from there.
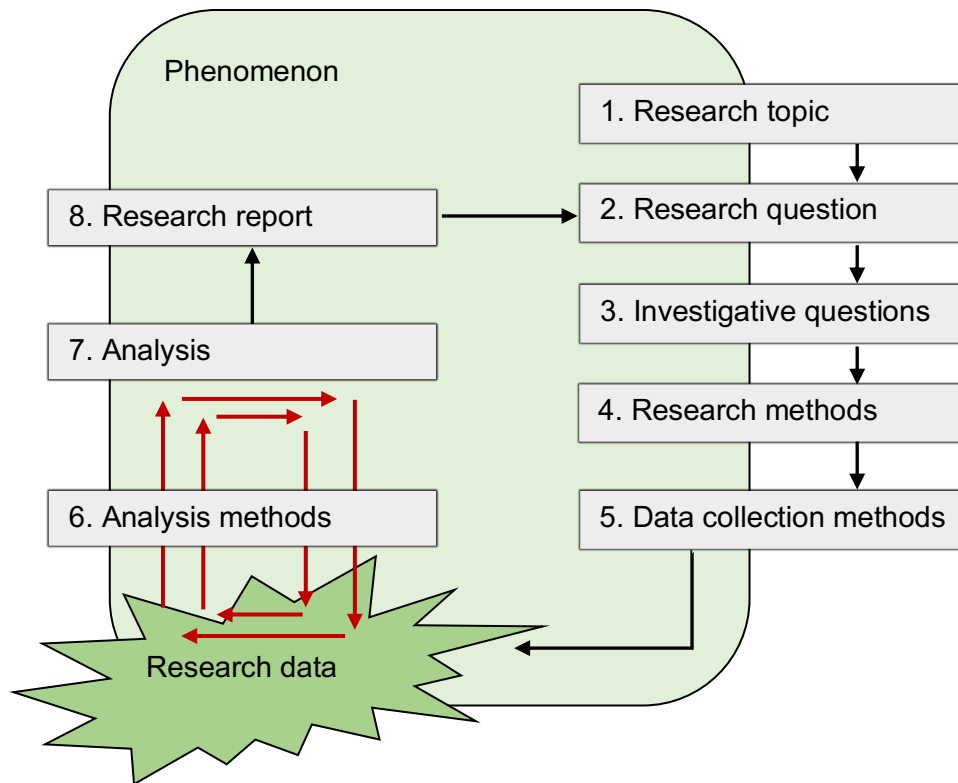
Figure 5. Qualitative research process (adapted from Kananen 2017, 52)

The research design for this thesis is visually presented in figure 6 below and the following subchapters describe the different elements regarding this research in detail. The data of companies remote onboarding of new hires was collected through investigative questions one to five and the fifth investigative question additionally concluded the data obtained from the preceding questions. The research question and the investigative questions are presented in chapter 1.2.

Research phase	Phase 1
Respondent	HR professionals
Data collection	Interview
Data analysis	Adapted dialogical thematization
Relationship to investigative questions	IQ1-IQ5
	IQ5

Figure 6. Research design

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population consisted of the commissioning company's current clients and leads, but since there were hundreds of them, the company made a discretionary sampling for the author. The sample was made based on the c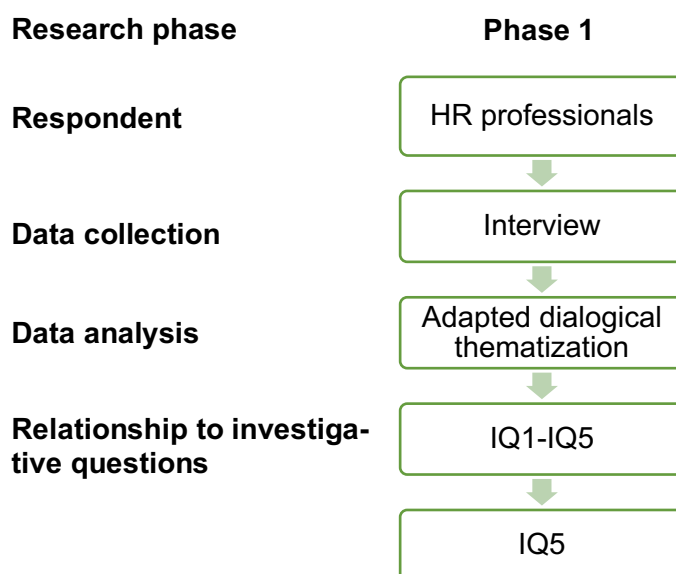ommissioning company's assumption that the suggested companies could provide good insights into the topic. There were seven companies selected from the sample because they had previously conducted onboarding onsite and later shifted to remote onboarding at least with some new hires. These companies' management level HR professionals and other management level professionals were interviewed because they were considered to be the most eligible to answer to the questions and to produce the most insightful responses because they had the knowledge and they continuously worked with these processes and issues related to them. Finally, saturation, "which means that the research results provided by different sources begin to repeat each other" (Kananen 2017, 179) was considered to be reached with a sample of five to seven representatives.

3.3 Data Collection

Qualitative research was the best suited method for this study because in-depth data from each company's perspective was needed to understand the current state of their remote onboarding and as was discussed in the beginning of this chapter, according to Kananen (2017, 35) "qualitative research aims to describe, understand and interpret a research phenomenon." There are several methods under the umbrella of qualitative research and the selected method should support the research question. In this research, interviews were the selected as the method for collecting data because they enabled interaction between the author and the interviewee, and they could produce new data that has not been published anywhere. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 29-30, 91-92, 94.)

The interviews were thematic, which means that the themes for them were decided in advance (Kananen 2017, 88) and more specifically they were drawn from the theory that was presented in the theoretical framework in the chapter two of this thesis. Interviews can be further classified into different types based on how structured they are and the following three are ordered from the most structured to the least:
- structured and standardized
- guided and semi-structured
- unstructured, narrative, informal and open (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 94-95).

Out of the aforementioned interview classifications this thesis used guided and semi-structured interview type, which means that there was an outline for the interview questions, but the author had the possibility to change the order and even wording of the questions

during the interviews (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 91-92, 94). In addition, the author wanted to hold the possibility to ask clarifying questions, so the semi-structured format was the best option.

The interview was divided into five themes according to the investigative questions: current practices of remote onboarding compared to onsite onboarding, integration and relationship building (assimilation), challenges in remote onboarding, and useful practices in remote onboarding. Finally, background data was asked in the end of the interview. There was rather a great number of questions under each theme, especially the first one, since the data was collected only once from each interviewee. The author wanted to send the main interview questions to the interviewees in advance to give them the possibility to prepare for the interview. The interview framework is available in Appendix 1. in Finnish and Appendix 2. in English. Even though the interview questions were sent to the interviewees in advance, they were not visible to them during the interview because the author did not want them to focus on reading the questions during the interview to ensure that the time was used efficiently. The author had additionally a list of ready-made sub-questions that could be asked, if the interviewee did not cover them in the primary questions. The interviews were held in Finnish for the Finnish speaking interviewees and for the rest in English, and all interviews were held between May 25th 2021 and June 25th 2021. They were anticipated to last for an hour, but after the first interview the author asked to extend the time to one hour and 15 minutes to avoid rushing. All of the remaining interviewees agreed to the time extension and the length of the interviews varied between 38 minutes to one hour and 31 minutes.

Since the topic concerned remote onboarding and the COVID-19 pandemic was limiting the physical contacts, the interviews were conducted online with Microsoft Teams. In addition, some of the interviewees were abroad, so in person meetings would not have been possible to organize without additional costs. Microsoft Teams also allowed recording of the interviews, which the author preferred because they could be ran more fluently than by taking notes at the same time and it also made transcribing of the data more efficient. The interviewees' permission for the recording was asked already in advance via email along with asking their permission to publish the research results, so there would not be issues regarding that at the publishing stage either. Regarding the publication it was agreed that the names of the interviewees as well as the companies they worked for remained anonymous. Each interview began with introductions between the author and the interviewee, making sure that the recording and publishing was still fine, and going through the possible questions that the interviewees had. At the end of the interviews the interviewees were thanked for their participation and told how the process was going to proceed regarding

the publication and the research results. Using the video camera during the interviews was not asked, but all of the interviewees kept their video cameras open throughout the interviews.

3.4   Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis aims to "describe, interpret and understand the researched phenomenon" and the analysis begins, in fact, already in the data collection phase because already then the researcher obtains the first impression of the data. Data can be analyzed with several methods and the role of theory is one determinant for the selection of the analysis method (Puusa and Juuti 2020, 143, 151.) This thesis was theory-driven, so the research as well as the analysis highly reflected to the theory presented in the chapter two of this thesis.

Dialogical thematization was used as the data analysis method, since it considered that "the starting point for the research process is theoretical thinking, to which the research question, methodology and data collection are based on" (Yin 2003 in Puusa & Juuti 2020, 157), which applied to this research as well. The list below presents one example of the steps for dialogical thematization, however, the steps were slightly adapted in this thesis.

1. **Reading the data**, which includes transcribing it.
2. **Categorization of the raw data**, which comprises of finding categories from the transcribed data that are relevant regarding the theory as well as the research question.
3. **Transforming categories into themes** because the established categories themselves are not sufficient for the analysis. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 161-165.)

In this thesis the data obtained from the interviews was first transcribed with Microsoft Excel to get it in a written format. As theories were strongly guiding the research, the interview had been divided into five higher level themes according to the investigative questions already in advance and the interview questions had been grouped under them forming predetermined categories, which also guided the analysis. During transcribing of the data it was also arranged so that the matters with common meaning were brought together, which is according to Nurkkala (2018, 29 in Puusa & Juuti 2020, 152) is called coding. After this had been done for each company the coded data was summarized in a table to serve as basis for the analysis. There is a screenshot of the table in Appendix 4, but since the amount of data also made the table extensive, it only partly covers the matter related to the second investigative question. Furthermore, to avoid recognition, the order of the companies has been mixed and all of them have been titled as "Company X" in the screenshot-version. In the analysis the author was looking for patterns as well as dif-

ferences within, but also over the borders of the categories that are described in the chapter four. During the analysis stage it became evident that two interviewees were not relevant to the research question and they had to be given up.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Assessing credibility is required in theses and in qualitative research the credibility measures are called reliability and validity. "Reliability refers to persistence of research results and validity to that right things have been researched" (Kananen 2017, 81.) In order to the research to be considered reliable, same results should be able to be produced with two similar researches. However, the concept of reliability is not quite that simple because the context affects people's behavior and, thus, even though the methods would be the same, it is rather impossible that two researchers ended up with exactly same results. (Kananen 2017, 175; Puusa & Juuti 2020, 180.) Whereas reliability is related to actual implementation, validity is more concerned about planning. In that sense, in addition to the analysis stage, credibility assessment is an important aspect to consider already in the research planning stage because research related adjustments can be still made then. Even though the credibility assessment concepts are the same for qualitative and quantitative research approaches, they vary in content. In qualitative approach the credibility assessment is highly dependent on the researcher because he is the one making all the decisions regarding the research. (Kananen 2017, 175-176.)

To be able to assess the credibility, the research needs to be sufficiently documented (Kananen 2017, 176). In this thesis the research approach and method as well as the method for analysis were considered carefully to be suitable for the selected topic and have been justified in related subchapters along with a step-by-step description of the research process. Also, the themes for the interview were supported by the theoretical framework build for this thesis.

Saturation can also be considered as one credibility criteria (Kananen 2017, 176) and as was mentioned in the chapter 3.2 it was anticipated to be reached with five to seven interviews, thus, seven interviews were held. The aim of all aforementioned measures was to ensure that reliable and valid research data is produced. The credibility of this research is further assessed in chapter five.

4   Data and Results

This chapter presents the research data and the results obtained from the qualitative interviews for each investigative question separately, but based on the analysis, there has been some reorganization regarding the content, especially regarding the fifth investigative question. This was done to avoid repetition and to have the data reported in relation to relevant content. In order to make the structure of the subchapters more clear and the navigation easier, the categories, according to which the data was coded in the analysis stage, and the relevant interview questions have been added to the subchapters. The background data of the companies the interviewees represented is presented first.

4.1   Background Data

In the research five HR professionals were interviewed and the table below presents the companies based on the interviewees' title, the number of employees, the number of employees onboarded remotely, the industry in which the company operates in, and the state of international operations. The names of the companies and the interviewees were kept anonymous.

Table 2. Background data

Company	Interviewee's Title	Employees	Employees onboarded remotely	Industry	International operations
A	HR Director	180	10	Forestry	Yes
B	HR Manager	215	30	Publishing	Partly
C	HR Director	280	20	Media	No
D	HR Business Partner	221	20	Computer tools	Yes
E	HR Specialist	62	35	SaaS-services	Yes

Most of the companies employed over two hundred employees and the number of employees onboarded remotely varied between 10 to 35. The companies were from different industries and three of them had international operations and one had partly. All of the companies had engaged in remote onboarding for the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, so at the moment of the research a little over one year, but two of the companies had done some parts of onboarding remotely already before. The titles of the interviewees varied between HR Director, HR Manager, HR Specialist and HR Business Partner, and to avoid recognition, all possible additions in the titles referring to other business areas have been removed.

4.2 Current Remote Onboarding Practices and Their Differences to Onsite Onboarding Practices

This subchapter covers the data obtained to answer the first investigative question, which was about the companies' current remote onboarding practices and their difference to onsite onboarding practices. Most of the questions were asked under the first theme in order to get a comprehensive idea on how the remote onboarding process of the interviewed companies had been organized and to begin to map the areas of development as well as useful practices. The subchapter introduces first the remote onboarding practices and in the end their differences to onsite onboarding practices.

Recruitment and onboarding (Question 1.1)

In the beginning of the interview the author wanted to find out whether the companies had considered the remote aspect when recruiting new workforce by asking how they took it into consideration. The question was followed by a sub-question of whether they were looking for specific skills or traits when hiring workforce that they would not necessarily be looking if the employee was hired to work onsite and if they were not, what would those skills and traits be. Three of the interviewees brought up that their recruitment was handled completely remotely, but in none of the interviewed companies specific skills or traits had been looked for. However, when asked what those skills would be, the interviewees listed traits and skills, such as, self-management, sociability, courage, collaboration and communication as well as cultural fitness. Additionally, one interviewee considered the remote recruitment and selection process as a test itself, if the candidate managed through it. Glazer (2020) suggests that skills and traits would be directly asked from the candidates, but also screened for example with reactions to specific interview questions already in the recruitment phase because if the work is to be done remotely, the people need to be capable of doing it and not everyone is.

Remote onboarding process and techniques (Questions 1.2 and 1.5)

The second interview question asked about what kind of steps the companies' remote onboarding processes consisted of, which was a higher level question and had a lot of sub-questions. Ultimately almost all of the questions under IQ one belonged under that question, but the author wanted to ask them separately to get more comprehensive data of the different steps. The question was asked in the beginning to get the interviewees to think about the whole process first and then gradually deepen it to cover the different steps. However, three of the interviewees gave quite a detailed description of the process

already when asked and two responded better through sub-questions. During the analysis it was noted that the responses in question 1.5 regarding what techniques were used in remote onboarding were largely overlapping with the second question because the different steps often included certain techniques by which they were completed and for that the responses are presented together.

All of the companies used the same written onboarding plan or a process graph that served as a plan for remote and onsite onboarding, but two of the companies had renewed their onboarding process after shifting to remote onboarding and stated that they would proceed according to the new one, if they later returned to onsite onboarding. Additionally, three of the companies had the plan or the whole process in a written format in a platform that was directly used during the remote onboarding. The usage of platform or software in remote onboarding was rather common among the interviewed companies and only one company did not use either. Zielinski (2019) claims onboarding technologies to provide several benefits to the companies related to, for example, communication, document transfer and preboarding. Of the interviewed companies two preboarded their new hires with the platform and one was in process of implementing it.

When asked about the beginning and duration on the onboarding process all of the interviewees considered the process to begin before the start date and one interviewee even said that it could be thought to begin from the recruitment phase, even from the job announcement, where the company is introduced to the candidate. Collectively, the duration was considered to depend on the new hire's experience and to vary from a few months until a year. Also Peterson (s.a. in Maurer 2021), agreed that onboarding should begin before the start date and last until a year depending on the candidate (Maurer 2021).

The author asked the interviewees whether they had involved recently hired employees in planning the remote onboarding and it had been done only in one company, in which it was considered beneficial and to have provided support for their own thinking. One considered it better to involve employees that had been working for a longer time in a position to participate in the planning, one had not done it, but considered it a very good idea that they could try, one had done a survey for the new hires to find out how they had felt about the remote onboarding and how it could be developed, and the last one had interviewed the new hires rather informally regarding development of the process. The question was rather referring to interactive planning than collecting feedback, which is covered later in this subchapter. Involving the recently hired in planning the process could be called employee owned-onboarding and it is seen to be in the rise because the recently hired people have the most recent knowledge of what is needed to be taught to the new hire (Wilde

s.a. in Zielinski 2019). Furthermore, the author suggests that this type of technique would not only help to plan the onboarding, but it also promotes interactivity and shows to the recently hired that his opinions matter. The interactivity of the onboarding process was also asked from the interviewees and it will be covered later in this subchapter.

Different techniques that the companies used in remote onboarding were a tutor or a buddy that three companies mentioned, introductory sessions and having all new hires trained in groups that were also brought up by three companies and additionally, the new hire's manager's role was considered important in onboarding. It was challenging for the companies to list different kinds of techniques that they used in remote onboarding and in onsite onboarding apart from covering things in Microsoft Teams, but they were able to be withdrawn from the interviewees' responses. Some additional techniques were asked from the interviewees with sub-questions regarding work equipment handover, preboarding, pre-recorded videos, using an onboarding technology and practices that were given up when shifting to remote onboarding.

The work equipment was handed over at the office in most of the companies, but two of the interviewees said that it was also possible to send them to the new hire and one of them said that they had already done so with some of their new hires. As regards preboarding, two of the companies had a platform that the new hire got rights to already before the first day and one company was in the process of implementing a similar practice. One said that they had been thinking of doing a video that the new hire could watch and the last one said that they could provide material if the new hire wanted, but they did not do any specific preboarding because they did not want to bother the new hire since assumingly he was still working somewhere else. However, literature suggests that keeping in contact with the new hire already before the first day is crucial in today's job market and it additionally begins to engage him. It would not need to be any tasks to do or steps to complete, but rather at least completing the paperwork electronically, introducing the company or sending some company related apparel to the new hire's home, so he would feel that he is being waited and wanted to feel welcome. (SHRM 2021; Peterson s.a in Maurer 2021.)

Generally, the interviewed companies were rather using live Microsoft Teams meetings as replacements for face-to-face meetings in their remote onboarding than using pre-recorded videos, which is also highly recommended by Vujasin (s.a). Some companies had videos about earlier trainings or instructions, but not the way that the new hires would watch a set of videos instead of going things through with someone in an interactive way.

Consideration of individuality and interaction (Questions 1.3 and 1.4)

Question 1.3 aimed to find out how the companies adjusted the remote onboarding process according to an individual and all of the companies stated that it was experience that mattered and one company claimed that it was also role dependent. Furthermore, one of the companies said that the timing of the sessions could be taken into account if the new hire had, for example, small children and in one company they asked already in the final interviews the new hire's expectations regarding onboarding. According to Eklund (2018, 96-98) taking into account the new hire's experience is crucial since even the level of working life skills might vary a lot between individuals. Cable, Gino and Staats (2013) furthermore advise to even think about the new hire's strengths and adjusting the onboarding accordingly because it would reduce his stress and build foundation for engagement.

As mentioned earlier, the interviewees were asked about what they considered to be the level of interaction in their remote onboarding and in the sub-question whether they wish that the new hire would bring new ideas and perspectives to the company. All of the interviewees considered their remote onboarding to be interactive, but two of them additionally mentioned that there were certainly matters, for example policies, that were told one way to the new hires. Similarly, all of the interviewees wanted the new hires to bring new ideas and perspectives to the organization and one of the reason was because they might see things what the insiders would not and one interviewee said that due to long tenures, new ideas were well needed. The quote below summarizes the collective thoughts about this matter:

"We are strongly driving that we haven't hired these specialists here for that we would tell them one-way what they are supposed to do, but we rather want that every single specialist feels his right, but also responsibility to question that why things are done like this because otherwise we wouldn't learn anything." (Company A)

Monitoring remote onboarding (Question 1.6 and 1.7)

As mentioned earlier, the interviewees were asked how they asked and collected feedback from the new hires of the remote onboarding and it seemed to be an area of development for most of the companies. As mentioned earlier, some of the companies collected feedback in a form of a survey or as informal interviews, but the author got the understanding that there was not a standard practice in place that would be completed with all new hires. Apart from the others one of the companies had a very structured way for asking the feedback, which is quoted below.

"We have monthly one-to-one discussions with the manager and then we send this follow-up survey for new hires after a month, where we also ask that what is going on because the first month is always the most critical for the new hire. After the third month, we hold this HR and the new hire follow-up discussion, where we also refer to how the onboarding has succeeded, which also gives us feedback." (Company D)

According to the company quoted above, asking feedback has raised up things, such as, loneliness that was acted upon in the company right after, which gives a real life example of the importance of asking the feedback. Eklund (2018, 88-89, 109) claims that asking feedback relates to several things such as the possibility to develop the onboarding process, seeing the progress of the new hire and making adjustments if needed, and finally, it communicates the culture of caring about the thoughts of the new hire and for that it is very important. The response regarding the feedback also brought up monitoring the success of the onboarding, which was asked with a separate question in the interviews, but could be considered as an overall heading covering also the feedback. The rest of the companies rather generally connected the monitoring question to standard performance appraisals or one-to-one meetings with the manager, but in addition to the one interviewee that was quoted above, one also connected them to onboarding. One had unstructured one-to-one meetings and did not mention anything about performance appraisals. According to Eklund (2018, 88-89) goals should be set for onboarding when the new hire starts and their progress should be monitored during the process. Furthermore, according to Falcone (2018), specific follow-up discussions with the new hire could be set for example after 30, 60 and 90 days to monitor the progress.

Differences to onsite onboarding

All of the interview questions were phrased emphasizing the remote onboarding and the difference to onsite onboarding was asked as sub-questions regarding the process steps, techniques, feedback and monitoring. One of the interviewees had herself started working remotely and for that could not refer to onsite onboarding. However, it was found out that the company had established the whole formal onboarding after the interviewee's arrival, since the company did not have formal practice in place. This aspect being the only one the interviewee could not give responses to and there was still four interviewees that were able to give responses, the company was considered to be eligible for the research. However, regarding the differences, there were only four interviewees' responses analyzed.

All of the interviewees claimed that their remote and onsite onboarding processes did not have clear variation in the steps. However, one of the interviewees stated that they had added HR speed-dating to remote onboarding and had organized more one-to-one discussions during remote time. One company had implemented the platform for remote onboarding, but said that they were going to use it also in onsite onboarding. Regarding the techniques, it was stated that the things that were supposed to be covered together in a meeting room at the office, were covered in Microsoft Teams. However, one company had reformed their HR related onboarding practice to be completed for each employee separately from the prior one that was given in groups and another interviewee brought up that in onsite setting getting to know each other would be more natural than remotely.

The author approached the difference-question also from a different perspective with a sub-question that asked whether the companies had given up some onsite onboarding practices due to moving to remote onboarding and three of the interviewees responded that they used to have a lunch together with the new hire that could not be done in remote onboarding. However, conversely, one of these three companies had replaced the cancelled lunch by introducing a new practice during the remote onboarding, where the CEO organized a lunch with each new hire to get to know them. Navarra (2020) advises that rather than giving up existing practices, they should be reorganized because for example the lunch together is part of making the new hire feel welcome. Regarding the feedback two of the companies stated that they asked it the same way as remotely, one asked informally when remembered and one did not ask at all.

Finally, the very first interview question asked that whether the companies looked for some specific skills or traits when hiring employees to work remotely than they would, if they were hiring to onsite work, which could also be considered to screen the differences. However, none of the companies had looked for specific skills or traits in remote operations, so there was no difference to onsite.

4.3 Assimilation in Remote Onboarding

The second investigative question focused on building relationships with co-workers and the organization. It aimed to find out how the companies were involving teams in the remote onboarding, creating sense of belonging, communicating company culture and using behavioral assessments as facilitation tools.

Involvement of teams and internal networking (Question 2.1 and 2.2)

In all of the companies, the new hire's team was informed about his coming at the latest when he had been hired and one interviewee said that they informed the whole company, but emphasized that their personnel always knew when the company was hiring because they wanted offer the possibility to transfer internally.

In most of the researched companies, the new hire generally met his team virtually during the first week, but one interviewee considered it important that it would be one of the first days. Literature even suggests that it should be the very first day and according to Valonen (24 February 2021) it would be the best if the first day could be even held onsite. In all of the companies teams met either once a week or once a month, but two interviewees mentioned that if the first time to meet the team was not a weekly or monthly team meeting it could also be during a more informal, virtual coffee moment, Kahoot or music quiz session, which partly responds to what the interviewees were asked in question 2.2 about how the internal networking was enabled during remote onboarding. In addition to the above listed, other examples regarding internal networking brought up by the interviewees were, for example, planning beforehand who would be important people for the new hire to meet and the manager might make bookings to their calendar to enable networking with the new hire from the very beginning, one company had organized and facilitated a more of a free discussion with the new hires, where the employees tell more about themselves outside work through, for example, one's important pictures in order to get to know each other more personally, and in one company the HR organized a speed-dating type of meeting session with all the new hires from a certain period. One of the interviewees said that their employees have been naturally taking their own-initiative and agreed meetings with the new hires only to get to know them. These internal networking possibilities were not tied to business and facts, but rather to get to know the coworkers also over the team and unit borders. However, most of the interviewees stated that it depends a lot of the role how much the new hire meets people over these borders. One of the interviewees thought that all of the meetings should be rather based on facts and instead of organizing informal meetings, they were adopting a software, through which people could share more about themselves, if they wanted to. It needs to be noted that most of these organized networking possibilities were not limited to only remote onboarding, but were rather established as a practice for the remote work overall.

As regards the involvement of teams in the remote onboarding, two companies had involved team members already in the recruitment interviews, but otherwise the responses varied between the interviewees. In one company the team was considered to be mainly

responsible for the onboarding, one company brought up the buddy system, in one company the team was introduced in the platform, one company brought up weekly team meetings, and in one company it was highly dependent on the size of the team.

Sense of belonging (Question 2.3)

Common opinion about the importance of getting a sense of belonging during remote onboarding throughout the interviewees was that it is very important, but three of the interviewees considered it as a challenge or were worried about its formation. When asked about the ways of creating it, the interviewees gave examples, such as, by welcoming the new hire through connecting with him in online channels before his starting date, getting to know him as a person and not just as a co-worker, inviting him to different kinds of meetings, introducing the new hires to each other so they can support each other, having invested managers who take responsibility of the new hires and creating atmosphere that emphasizes collaboration. Additionally, the importance of the HR's presence in the remote onboarding process and monitoring was brought up. All of the examples listed by the interviewees were about connections to people. However, Volini and colleagues (2020) consider the sense of belonging to also have an organizational contribution aspect of individual having aligned goals with the organization and contributing to the organization's success. One of the interviewees, in fact, mentioned introducing the organization and how the work is done to the new hire, but did not bring up the organizational contribution.

Company culture (Question 2.4)

When asked how company culture was communicated in remote onboarding the interviewees collectively thought that it was done through showing an example, in other words behaving according what is claimed and one interviewee claimed that culture is communicated through every action. In remote onboarding from the management's side it was considered to require behaving as an example, communicating more and promoting low hierarchy. The two quotes below emphasize the management's role in communicating culture and connects it to the informal discussion, which is easily missing from remote work.

"We also talk outside the topic, not just about facts. There is also the power of example, a thought about that if the management does so, it is easier for others as well."
(Company A)

"I think it requires planning especially in the remote work and from the managers it requires – when we are not at the office there is no occasional meetings, so it requires that

you book the time from your people's calendars and book those coffee moments and do it consciously, that now I have time for my people. Activity from managers – of course it requires activity from all employees, but especially that the manager stays on track of what happens in his team and how his people are doing. There has to be time left for discussing about outside work matters." (Company B)

Adding more touchpoints is also suggested by Hinds and Elliott (2021) and they further emphasize the touchpoints' importance regarding organizational culture because in the remote environment the culture relies completely on people. According to them, the meetings do not have to be as long as in an onsite setting, but there should be more of them.

Personality and behavioral assessments (Question 2.5)

In the final question (2.5) for this theme the author wanted to find out whether the companies used personality or behavioral assessments in their remote onboarding to better understand the new hire's behavior, learning and foster teaming and none of the companies had used them in the onboarding phase. However, three of the companies had used them either occasionally in recruitment phase or later in no connection to onboarding, but rather to understand the team dynamics. Using the personality and behavioral assessments in the recruitment or in the onboarding phase would allow the remote onboarding to be better allocated towards individual's strengths, which would be motivating for the new hire and additionally, build foundation for teaming because through the assessment the team learns about the new hire as well (CliftonStrengths 2020). In addition to knowing the team members' better, managing remote teams would be easier for the manager as well (Hickman & Asplund 2019).

4.4   Challenges in Remote Onboarding

This subchapter covers the third investigative question, which focused on the challenges the companies had encountered in their remote onboarding. In addition it aimed to find out, what the interviewees considered to be remote onboarding's weaknesses and challenges in general and whether they had seen some negative effects to their companies after shifting to remote onboarding. These questions were asked directly from the interviewees under the third investigative question, but since challenges were brought up in other parts along the interview as well, they are all presented here.

Common challenges (Question 3.1 and 3.2)

Three of the companies considered having to use tools to contact co-workers as a challenge and two brought up lack of spontaneous meetings. Additionally, two brought up limited personal observation and another two of the companies considered creating sense of belonging or feeling united as a challenge and below there is a descriptive quote of the issue:

"Maybe the most challenging thing in this remote onboarding has been the onboarding to the work community. How we really make the person feel that he is part of the company X, when he works possibly even at the same desk as with the prior employer, so that he would really feel that now the job had changed and the work community has changed and he is being part of company X?" (Company B)

In addition, challenges that single companies had encountered were being too fact based, not having the so called coffee table conversations, where ideas are often born, and limitations to communicating company culture. When the interviewees were asked about the weaknesses and challenges of remote onboarding generally, many of them referred to the aforementioned company specific challenges, but additionally things such as distant feeling and challenges with working tools or internet especially internationally were mentioned.

Negative effects of remote onboarding (Question 3.3)

In the question 3.3 the interviewees were asked whether they had seen that remote onboarding had affected the company negatively and none of them had. However, one interviewee brought up that they had had an employee who did not attach to the role so fast. Even though having one person that did not attach that well, would not necessarily affect the company drastically, but if there were several of them it would, and for that it was an important finding. Certainly things leading to this kind of outcome need to be considered case by case, but something that could cause it, is that the person is incapable of working remotely. For that it would be crucial for companies to put more focus on hiring people that possess the skills and traits to work in the remote environment as was brought up in the earlier in this chapter.

4.5   Useful Practices in Remote Onboarding

The fourth investigative question focused on useful practices in remote onboarding. It aimed to find out what the interviewees considered to be working well and also what they considered as strengths of remote onboarding overall.

Useful practices in remote onboarding (Question 4.1, 4.2 and 5.1)

When asked directly what the companies considered to be working well in remote onboarding three of the interviewees brought up having a structured, planned process and two mentioned having more formal and informal touchpoints with the new hire. Solutions that were additionally brought up included: selecting the right employees who are able to work in the remote environment, having well-functioning tools to use such as Microsoft Teams, the buddy system, meetings with different teams and getting to know their work and having strong presence from the HR.

The interviewees were originally asked in question 5.1 what was important to take into account in remote onboarding and it was hoped to produce consistency regarding useful practices, but also some new solutions came up and for that the analysis was moved under this sub-chapter. It was brought up that instead of pouring all the information on the new hire once, things should gradually build on top of each other when is the correct time for them, there needs to be a good plan and the sessions need to be put in the calendar otherwise they do not happen, thinking beforehand what kind of employee is coming and what would he need specifically to make onboarding more individual and also having a safe atmosphere, which is quoted below:

"And then it is very important that there is that kind of atmosphere that a person feels safe to ask and it is not assumed that the things are understood only with one time telling, but rather that even though something has been told already once or twice, it is still okay to ask, if there is confusion. Creating that kind of safe atmosphere for the onboarding."
(Company B)

The author also aimed to find out good solutions for remote onboarding by asking whether the companies were going to continue remote onboarding after the COVID-19 pandemic was over and if not completely, which were the practices they were going to keep in question 5.5. By asking this question the author was hoping to find useful practices because otherwise the companies necessarily would not continue to use them. However, since the companies were still trying to figure out how they were going to work in the future, it was difficult for the interviewees to name which practices they were especially going to keep, but all of them except one stated that onboarding is likely to be completed in a hybrid mode also after the pandemic. One company mentioned that for example the company introductions especially the international ones could be held remotely and another interviewee said that the actual starting moment would be important to be kept onsite, but otherwise it could be implemented completely remotely.

Finally, the interviewees considered strengths of remote onboarding generally to be effectiveness, systematism, having flexibility in working place, functional tools that make it easy to show documents to each other and finally due to less travelling there was no commuting risk. However, there was one interviewee, who could not see remote onboarding to have any strengths.

4.6   Developing Remote Onboarding

The fifth investigative question focused on developing remote onboarding and it was designed to wrap up the interview. The interviewees were asked certain matter do reassure what was claimed earlier, obtain new data that had not been introduced yet and also to dive deeper in their goals for onboarding. However, in the analysis stage some of the responses were noticed to be more relevant of being described under other investigative questions related themes, for example, questions 5.1 and 5.5 were covered in the previous subchapter.

Development desires (Question 5.2)

The whole interview aimed to find out the development areas for remote onboarding, but in the final questions the author wanted to ask directly from the interviewees how they wanted their process to develop. Some of the matters that the interviewees brought up were interestingly related to the questions the author had asked during the interview, such as, involving recently hired employees in planning the process, taking into account the new hire's individual characteristics in planning the process, organizing the follow-up sessions and monitor the onboarding better, and separate the remote onboarding from the onsite onboarding. Other development desires were gamifying the process, making welcome-video to send to the new hires, creating a check-list of the matters to be covered during the onboarding and a template where the plan and schedule could be made, and finally having someone mainly responsible for the onboarding related matter. One interviewee said that rather than guessing how it could be developed, they wanted to take the ideas from the feedback gotten from the employees and another did not have any development desires.

Development areas

Throughout the interviews the author was screening for the development areas in remote onboarding and even though they were presented in the previous subchapters and will be

covered in depth in the following chapter along with producing the answer to the whole research question, they are gathered together here. The first development area is to take into account skills and traits suitable for remote work already in the recruitment phase, what none of the companies had done. The second is introducing employee-owned onboarding technique in remote onboarding that had been successfully tried by only one company. The third is trying to reform cancelled activities to work in remote onboarding, such as, the lunch with the new hire that had been cancelled by most of the companies. The fourth is monitoring the onboarding better and the fifth is utilizing personality and behavioral assessments in remote onboarding or already in the recruitment phase.

Goals for onboarding and successful onboarding (Questions 5.3 and 5.4)

The interviewees were also asked, what they considered as being a goal for remote onboarding or onboarding overall and what did they thought that an organization could gain from successful onboarding. Even though these questions considered onboarding rather generally, the author wanted to ask them to find out what the companies aimed at with onboarding to justify their approaches with it and whether they considered employee engagement as a goal. Three of the interviewees said that the goal was to prepare the new hire so that he could work independently, and the rest two brought up that creating the feeling of unity and being part of the company. In addition, one company brought up that the goal is also to build relationships and another one mentioned that making the new hire feel welcome. The question 5.4 asked instead, what they considered that an organization could gain from successful onboarding and the responses varied between the interviewees. One said that the new hire could get the organization to see the blind spots that the organizational insiders could not see anymore, one interviewee brought up the new ideas that the new hire brings, one mentioned that through successful onboarding the new employee can work independently without consuming others' resources and the rest two brought up that the employee becomes enthusiastic and motivated, and one of them also mentioned that the employees are more engaged. Employee engagement was introduced as an outcome for successful onboarding in the chapter 2.2.4, but only one of the interviewees mentioned it. However, all of the interviewees were asked in a sub-question what kind of connection they considered that successful onboarding and employee engagement had. All of them considered there to be a connection, but it was not specified much except by one interviewee that is quoted below:

"I see that it has a big meaning and it has a very strong link because if a person feels – has a strong feeling of that this is a good place to be and this is handled well, the moment

of beginning, the first impression, it will indeed reach far and I see there to be a big mean-
ing. And on the other hand, if the onboarding has been carried out truly badly, it will affect
negatively and might continue gnawing for a long time – not to mention if there is no
proper teaching received that you simply cannot do your job, it will also appear as bad
performance." (Company D.)

The interviewee quoted above brought up the effect of first impression that also Little (26 February 2019) referred to by claiming that even though employee engagement is a longer-term thing, the very beginning of the employment affects it.

5   Conclusion

The research question of this thesis concerned developing remote onboarding processes further to provide the same possibilities as onsite onboarding and finding ways on how the commissioning company Kulmia Group Oy with its consultancy services could help its B2B clients. The answer to the overall research question is divided so that the key findings regarding investigative questions one to four, that build the foundation, are presented first and the recommendations to the commissioning company are presented in the following subchapter along with answering to the fifth investigative question. In addition, reliability and validity assessment, commissioning company feedback, suggestions for further research as well as the author's reflection to learning are presented in this chapter.

5.1   Key Findings

Investigative question one that focused on the interviewed companies' current remote onboarding practices and compared them to onsite practices presented that the remote onboarding of the researched companies was generally in a good state, when compared to theory covered in the chapter two of this thesis. However, there were some development areas identified within the process that are presented as recommendations for developing remote onboarding in the next subchapter. It was a challenging to compare the differences to onsite onboarding because according to the interviewees, there really was not that many differences. All of the interviewees considered the only difference to be that the matter was covered in Microsoft Teams rather than together in a meeting room at the office, but in addition, the author noticed that most of the companies had given up a lunch with the new hire in remote onboarding. Apart from the aforementioned and a few details that were all from one company, it could be concluded that the differences between remote and onsite onboarding were only minor or non-existent. However, the author assumed that the coffee moments and other rather informal sessions, covered under the second interview question, were introduced in remote onboarding or in remote work overall, but since it was not asked whether the companies also had those practices in onsite onboarding, they could not be considered as a result. An understanding that the author was left with regarding the differences was that the interviewees did not want to draw a clear line between remote and onsite onboarding. However, the environments are still different and to give an example, in the remote setting unexpected breaks do not happen the same way as they would at the office when someone for example knocks the meeting room's door, which should be taken into account in remote onboarding (Maurer 2020). Additionally, as was brought up by one of the interviewees, informal conversation do not formulate the same way remotely, so it is easy to fill the remote onboarding days with facts and so make them exhausting to the new hire.

Regarding the investigative question two that focused on assimilation of new hires in remote onboarding, most of the companies had informal activities where the employees met each other and got to get to know each other in addition to weekly or monthly team meetings. In remote environment where people do not incidentally meet at the coffee machine to catch up, these sessions need to be organized. In fact, in remote environment nothing happens without organizing, but interestingly at the same time, Hinds and Elliott (2021) suggests that touch-points should be organized even more often. This was also brought up by most of the interviewees. All of the companies emphasized people regarding assimilation, however, there is also the organizational commitment side of assimilation that was not considered by the interviewees. According to Volini and colleagues (2020) employees want increasingly today to connect to the organization in addition to people and they want to know what is their purpose in the organization and how they can contribute to a larger whole. They continue that regarding sense of belonging it is, in fact, contribution to the organization that is the strongest driver for sense of belonging.

The third investigative question aimed to find out the challenges the companies had encountered in remote onboarding and the largest challenge was having to use tools to contact co-workers. Otherwise, the challenges were related to assimilation, such as, creating sense of belonging and lack of spontaneous meetings. Even though, as was pointed out in the key findings of the second investigative question, many of the interviewed companies had several touchpoints with the new hires and the employees overall in remote environment, it was found out that most of the companies had still cancelled a lunch with the new hire in remote onboarding. It is easily thought that some practices cannot be organized while working remotely, but a mistake would be to give them up because their purpose might be to make the new hire feel welcome and they could also be organized virtually (Navarra 2020). The author considers attitude to be a strong driver in determining the degree to which companies are willing to engage in assimilation related practices. Especially the informal moments might feel silly and be taking the time from the actual work, but according to Nevogt (31 August 2020), remote workers are substantially more productive than onsite workers because they do not, for example, have as many distractions as the workers onsite. Thus, there would certainly be time to have more informal sessions in the schedule to get to know people, and that is why the author considers attitude to be a great determinant for it. In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the shift to remote work was forced and certainly seen as temporary solution by many companies, but after one and a half years of pandemic it is not so temporary after all and the author thinks that by not embracing remote onboarding and especially its social side, its potential is not fully reached. Furthermore, Hinds and Elliott (2021) suggest that "leaders must recognize that thriving in the new era of work depends on being open to new formulas."

Finding useful practices in remote onboarding that the fourth investigative questions was looking for received varying answers, but increasing communication with formal and more informal touchpoints and having the process planned well, for example, with the use of a platform were the key practices. A technique called introductory sessions, which refer to meetings organized with important people in the organization, for example, with representatives of different departments and teams to get to know them and enable networking (Valonen 24 February 2021) as was brought up in the chapter covering the onboarding techniques on the page 15, was also brought up as an useful solution by one of the interviewees and three of them had it as a part of their remote onboarding process. This technique provides the new hire with larger informational network, which is suggested by Morrison (2002). It would be also helpful regarding creating sense of belonging because through it the new hires would better understand their role in the organizational whole and know how they can contribute (Volini & al. 2020).

5.2 Recommendations

This subchapter comprises of the author's recommendations to the commissioning company Kulmia Group Oy and, thus, answers to the research question. The recommendations are closely related to the development areas that emerged throughout the research and were briefly introduced in chapter 4.6.

The first recommendation is that Kulmia Group Oy could help its clients in planning the remote onboarding process and there are a couple of things that could be suggested to them based on the research. Even though the focus was on onboarding, recruitment as a HR process is closely tied to it. If a company was hiring a new employee to be working remotely, it would be important to look for skills and traits in the candidates that enable and support what is needed by remote work as suggested by Glazer (2020). None of the interviewed companies had done so, but Glazer (2020) claims that looking for skills such as time management, self-motivation and self-discipline as well as screening their appearance throughout the recruitment process could at least reduce the risk of hiring a candidate that is not after all capable of working remotely. Furthermore, an employee-owned onboarding technique, which means involving recently hired employees in planning the onboarding, had been tried only by one of the researched companies. However, it would be a good addition to the remote onboarding process because the recently hired have the most recent knowledge of what needs to be known and it could also produce development ideas regarding the process (Zielinski 2019). Furthermore, it is communicating to the new hire that his opinions are valued and his ideas are taken into account in the organization (Eklund 2018, 39-40), which also supports an interactive onboarding model presented on

the page nine. The author recommends the commissioning company to encourage its clients to look for specific skills and traits when hiring for remote employment and to try the employee-owned onboarding technique in order to develop the remote onboarding process.

Secondly, the personality and behavioral assessments, that were not generally used by the researched companies, would create a solid foundation for remote onboarding because they would provide a lot of information of the new hire. The assessments would also promote individual approach in remote onboarding, which Cable and colleagues (2013) suggested and approaching onboarding from the new hire's strengths would make it more motivating for him (CliftonStrengths 2020). In addition, if the whole team had the assessment results it would taught the new hire a lot of his team and help in bringing them together, which is especially important when working remotely. Kulmia Group Oy has qualifications for example for DiSC, and using it as tool in remote onboarding could be introduced for its clients either as a part of the recruitment phase or during an early stage of remote onboarding.

One of the most central areas of development revealed by the research concerned monitoring of the remote onboarding process. Even though all of the interview companies did something at least informally for monitoring onboarding, for example asked feedback in the beginning or at the end of a meeting, a planned approach that was specifically meant for monitoring the remote onboarding would ensure that first of all, it will be completed and secondly, that it will be completed for all new hires. Kulmia Group Oy could be a valuable help in not only recommending and designing how the monitoring could be organized, but also helping in its implementation through the commissioning company's subsidiary, research company Kulmia Insight Oy. Thus, this is the third recommendation for the commissioning company and it could be offered especially for clients that have higher hiring volumes. The reason why the monitoring is so important, is because it makes it easier to do adjustments during the process, it shows to the new hire that he and his progress is cared about and finally, the organization can benefit from the new ideas regarding the remote onboarding process or something else emerged by that (Eklund 2018, 39-40, 109).

Remote onboarding overall has its strengths and weaknesses and as was found out in the research, matter related to the social side, assimilation, was posing most of the challenges in the companies. As a fourth recommendation the author suggests Kulmia Group Oy to provide its clients a consultancy advice regarding the importance of investing in the social side of the remote onboarding, not forgetting the organizational contribution mentioned in the previous subchapter, or making an intentional decision to hold some parts of

the process onsite, which also leads to the fifth recommendation. Remote work is likely to remain at least to some extent after the COVID-19 pandemic is over and many companies, including most of the companies participating in the research, are going to continue working in a hybrid model. Kulmia Group Oy could help its clients in assessing and selecting the onboarding approach between remote, hybrid and onsite by introducing their attributes and also their requirements. When knowing the weak spots of remote onboarding the commissioning company could advise its clients what to avoid or give recommendations on what should be held onsite. Furthermore, some of the recommendations also apply to onsite onboarding, such as, the employee-owned onboarding technique, monitoring, and utilization of the personality and behavioral assessments, so the commissioning company could provide consultancy advise also regarding onsite onboarding.

There were several things listed on how the commissioning company Kulmia Group Oy could help its clients with developing remote onboarding, so in conclusion it could be said that there is a need for HR consultancy services related to remote onboarding. Finally, since the commissioning company is also doing onboarding remotely, it could reflect the findings of this thesis to its own practices as well.

5.3   Reliability, Validity and Commissioning Company Feedback

The reliability and relevance aspects of this thesis that were initially presented in chapter three are further assessed here. Firstly, when the interviewees were initially contacted their permission was asked for the recording of the interviews as well as for publishing the results produced with this research. It was then also agreed that the interviewees' names and the companies' names would remain anonymous. These were ensured again in the beginning of the interviews along with going through any possible questions the interviewees were to have, to create a safe and trusting environment for the interview. All the interviewees had received the main interview questions in advance, so they could familiarize themselves with them before the interview, if they wanted to. All of the interviewees were treated equally throughout the research process and the setting was same for all of them. The interviews were also recorded because it did not only facilitate the transcription, but also enabled going back to the interviews several times to ensure that the author had understood the matter correctly and, thus, the results would be more reliable. Furthermore, recording of the interviews made it possible to include points that the interviewees could not come up with when the question was initially asked, but referred to that later.

Total of seven interviews were held, but unfortunately, at the analysis stage the author decided to give up two of the interviews because despite these interviewees strong connection to remote onboarding they were not HR representatives and were not able to provide

answers to many of the interview questions due to the missing HR viewpoint. This adjustment was done to ensure the reliability and validity of the research results and after it all the interviewees were HR professionals, so it can be concluded that they had the relevant knowledge to answer to the questions and that they were good representatives of the population. The author should have decided to include only HR representatives in the research already when contacting the companies initially. However, the remaining companies, who the interviewees represented employed between 60 to 280 people and all of them had onboarded remotely 10-35 new employees and thus can be considered as reliable sources.

One of the interviewees had herself begun to work remotely and for that did not have extensive experience of the onsite onboarding, so the comparison between the remote and onsite onboarding could not be done equally for all of the companies and this concerned especially the results received from the first investigative question. However, this was not considered to be falsifying the results because the difference between onsite and remote onboarding was not seen significant from the other interviewees' perspective.

There was variation in the techniques the interviewees responded to the questions, which brought challenges to the data collection stage. Some of the interviewees gave long answers to single interview questions and during the interviews it was challenging to stay on track regarding which of the interview questions had already been covered. Also, some of the responses were vague and did not necessarily answer to the questions asked. However, the author had several sub-questions in order to make sure that everything had been covered, even though it brought some repetition to the interviews.

It would have been beneficial, if a test round of the interviews had been done before starting the actual interviews to find out whether there was a decent number of questions, whether they were in correct order, if there were overlaps, and finally, whether the time allocated for the interview was enough. The second investigative question should have included the aspect of differences to onsite onboarding to give even more comprehensive data of the differences and some of the questions under the investigative question five could have been included in other IQs or be better thought through because in the current format the questions did not necessarily produce a coherent whole. However, taking in to account all aforementioned aspects, the author considers the research results to be reliable and valid.

The commissioning company gave the following feedback to the author after the thesis was completed:

"Marianne's thesis fulfilled well the objectives that were set together in the planning stage. The thesis was completed diligently, thoroughly and with high-quality. It was very valuable to get viewpoints and practices for remote onboarding from the representatives of the companies. We received concrete recommendations on how we could help our clients in their remote onboarding processes. We at Kulmia have helped our clients in developing virtual meetings and remote leadership for almost 10 years, so in this situation the topic is very timely and useful for us. We went through the concrete recommendations with Marianne and we can also apply them in our own operations. Many of the recommendations were also suitable for hybrid and onsite situations. We are also going to make a video of the work with Marianne for our clients to watch. Thank you, Marianne!"

Tapani Pöllänen, 6 September 2021

Training Director, Partner

Kulmia Group Oy

5.4   Suggestions for Further Research

Since this thesis studied only the employer's point of view, a study that would focus on the employees' side could give valuable insight on how the remotely onboarded employees have experienced the remote onboarding, and what should be changed or added to make it even better. That kind of study would also describe the practical job guidance that is often the manager or the team's responsibility even though the HR often gives the framework for it. Furthermore, the findings of this research could be used as a basis in planning the new research.

Employees in many companies have worked remotely for one and a half years and when plans are now being made in many companies regarding how they are going to work in the future, it would be interesting to find out how the decisions are made, how much are the employees heard, and do they even let their employees decide the place where they work. As the conducted research suggests, it is likely that in many organizations work will be carried out in a hybrid model in the future, thus, it would be interesting to find out how the hybrid teams are managed and what kind of challenges are faced. Many of the professionals interviewed brought up the lack of the spontaneous conversations at the coffee machines in remote onboarding, which is going to remain partly, if some percentage of the employees work from home. The ones at home cannot be forgotten even though a certain percentage would go back to the office. An important point related especially to hybrid work, is equality. Some of the team members could always be onsite and some always remote, for example, for locational reasons, but in order to manage these teams equally careful consideration is required. According to Hickman and Maese (26 March 2021), remote teams often require more check-in conversations because the occasional ones are

missing unlike in the onsite environment, but they need to be fair to the onsite employees. They also point out that both groups' need to have the same opportunities and their opinions need to have equal weight in decisions. Additionally, recognition and informal feedback does not happen the same way in the remote environment, but they should not be overlooked (Fosslien & West-Duffy 2019).

Nevogt (31 August 2020) lists the advantages of remote work such as increased productivity due to lack of distractions, less sick leaves because from home it is possible to work even though being a little sick because there is no need to worry about spreading it and remote workers often work extra hours. The time of COVID-19 pandemic has presented how efficient remote work can be when moving from meeting to another happens with a mouse-click, but that cannot continue forever and it would be interesting to find out how the reverse side of it has been taken into account in organizations.

5.5 Reflection on Learning

The whole thesis process was eye-opening and taught a lot about project management, working with data and doing research, even though at some points the freedom with the implementation was almost overwhelming. The top moments were when after asking a question in the interview an interviewee paused and said that a very good question that they had not considered at all, but would definitely do so afterwards.

Selecting qualitative research as a research approach was not the easiest choice, but was definitely the right one for a topic like this. Even though the whole research process had been planned well in advance and the author was well prepared for the implementation, there were still things that the author had not given a thought. Doing the analysis required a lot of time to study, think and reflect especially when there was a lot of data. What came as a surprise to the author was the amount of time needed for thinking in between the writing sessions. Doing commissioned research was a motivating privilege because it fostered the feeling that the research had a purpose.

Having experienced remote onboarding during writing of this thesis put things in perspective for the author and gave a lot of ideas regarding what kind of data to look for. The author considers the selection of the topic to be successful for its timeliness and not only for its connectedness to the author's specialization, but also to the situation in the world. Furthermore, the new hire onboarding as a HR process is closely tied to other HR processes, thus, the author also learned about other processes in both, the theoretical part, but also in the empirical part. Certainly the whole writing process, but especially the knowledge generated, will be a great advantage in the author's career.

The author considers the timing of the research to be very good, even though the COVID-19 pandemic had been on for over a year because it was not over at the moment of writing the thesis and many companies were thinking how they will work in the future. Furthermore, the companies had more experience on remote onboarding compared to if the thesis was written, for example, a year earlier and, thus, they had identified the areas of development and the useful practices. By considering the findings of this research, common pitfalls can be avoided and the remote onboarding process or the practices completed remotely in otherwise hybrid model can be made functional for the new hire and for the organization.

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Appendix 1. Overlay Matrix

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theoretical framework	Research Methods	Interview Questions	Data Analysis and Results (chapter)
IQ 1. What are companies' current practices in remote onboarding of new hires and how do they differ from onsite onboarding?	Onboarding, remote onboarding, onsite onboarding, orientation, Occupational Health and Safety Act	Qualitative interviews of HR professionals analysed with dialogical thematization.	1.1-1.7	4.2, 5.1
IQ 2. How are new hires assimilated into the company through remote onboarding?	Assimilation, social integration, organizational commitment, employee engagement	See above	2.1-2.5	4.3, 5.1
IQ 3. What kind of challenges have companies faced in remote onboarding of new hires?	See above	See above	3.1-3.3	4.4, 5.1
IQ 4. What kind of practices have companies found useful in remote onboarding of new hires?	See above	See above	4.1-4.2	4.5, 5.1
IQ 5. What recommendations can be given for developing remote onboarding processes of new hires further?	See above	See above Conclusions	All	4.2-4.6, 5.2

Appendix 2. Haastattelukysymykset: Etäperehdytyksen Kehittäminen

1. Nykyiset etäperehdyt-tämiskäytännöt uusille työntekijöille	1.1 Miten etätyöskentely on otettu huomioon uusien työntekijöiden rekrytointivaiheessa?
	1.2 Minkälaisista vaiheista etäperehdytysprosessinne koostuu?
	1.3 Kuinka paljon muokkaatte etäperehdytysprosessia perehdytettävän yksilön mukaan?
	1.4 Minkälaisia etäperehdytyskeinoja käytätte? (esi-merkkeinä: mentorointi, työkummi, havainnointi,…)
	1.5 Koetteko etäperehdytyksenne olevan vuorovaikut-teista, informaation siirtoa yritykseltä uudelle työnteki-jälle vai jotain muuta?
	1.6 Milloin kysytte tai keräätte palautetta uusilta työn-tekijöiltä etäperehdytysprosessista?
	1.7 Miten mittaatte etäperehdytyksen onnistumista?
2. Integroituminen & ihmissu-hteiden luominen	2.1 Miten osallistatte uuden työntekijän tiimiä tai tii-mejä etäperehdytysprosessissa?
	2.2 Miten sisäinen verkostoituminen on mahdollistettu etäperehdytyksessänne?
	2.3 Miten luotte yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta etäpereh-dytyksessä?
	2.4 Miten välitätte yrityskulttuuria etäperehdytyksessä?
	2.5 Teetättekö uusille työntekijöille persoonallisuus- tai käyttäytymisarviointeja (esimerkiksi CliftonStrengths tai DiSC) ymmärtääksenne paremmin heidän käyttäy-tymistään ja oppimistaan sekä edistääksenne tiimiyty-mistä?
3. Etäperehdytyksen haasteet	3.1 Mikä etäperehdytyksessä on ollut haastavaa?
	3.2 Mitkä ovat mielestäsi etäperehdytyksen heikkouk-sia ja haasteita yleisesti ja erityisesti yrityksessänne?
	3.3 Onko etäperehdytyksellä ollut joitain negatiivisia vaikutuksia yritykseenne? (esimerkiksi korkeampi hen-kilöstön vaihtuvuus, lisääntyneet poissaolot,…)?

4. Hyvät etäpere-hdytyskäytännöt	4.1 Minkä olette kokeneet hyödylliseksi tai hyvin toimi-vaksi etäperehdytyksessä? Miksi?
	4.2 Mitkä ovat mielestäsi etäperehdytyksen vahvuuk-sia yleisesti ja erityisesti yrityksessänne?
5. Etäperehdytyksen kehit-täminen	5.1 Mitä etäperehdytyksessä on tärkeää ottaa huomi-oon?
	5.2 Miten haluaisit etäperehdytysprosessinne kehit-tyvän?
	5.3 Mikä on tavoitteenne etäperehdytyksessä (tai pe-rehdytyksessä ylipäätään)?
	5.4 Miten koet organisaation voivan hyötyä onnistu-neesta perehdytyksestä oli se sitten tehty etänä tai paikan päällä?
	5.5 Aiotteko jatkaa etäperehdytystä myös koronapan-demian jälkeen?
6. Taustatiedot	6.1 Mikä on roolisi yrityksessänne?
	6.2 Millä alalla yrityksenne toimii?
	6.3 Kuinka monta työntekijää yrityksenne työllistää?
	6.4 Toimiiko yrityksenne kansainvälisesti?
	6.5 Kuinka pitkään yrityksenne on tehnyt etäperehdy-tystä?
	6.6 Kuinka monta uutta työntekijää yrityksessänne on karkeasti perehdytetty etänä?

Appendix 3. Interview Questions: Developing Remote Onboarding

1. Current practices in remote onboarding of new hires	1.1 How have you taken into account the remote aspect when recruiting new workforce?
	1.2 What kind of steps does your remote onboarding process consist of?
	1.3 How much do you adjust the remote onboarding process according to the individual?
	1.4 What kind of techniques do you use in remote onboarding? (examples are mentoring, buddy/tutor, observing,…)
	1.5 Do you consider your remote onboarding to be interactive, one way information transfer from organization to the new hire or something else?
	1.6 When do you ask or collect feedback of the remote onboarding process from the new hires?
	1.7 How do you measure the success of the remote onboarding process?
2. Integration and relationship building	2.1 How do you involve the new hire's team(s) in the remote onboarding process?
	2.2 How is internal networking enabled during remote onboarding?
	2.3 How do you create sense of belonging in remote onboarding?
	2.4 How do you communicate the company culture through remote onboarding?
	2.5 Do you complete some kind of personality/behavior assessments (e.g. CliftonStrengths or DiSC) for the new hires to better understand their behavior and learning, and foster teaming?
3. Challenges in remote onboarding	3.1 What has been challenging with remote onboarding?
	3.2 What do you consider being weaknesses and challenges in remote onboarding generally and specifically in your company?

	3.3 Have you seen some negative effects to your organization after you started doing onboarding remotely (e.g. higher employee turnover rate, increase in absences,..)?
4. Good practices in remote onboarding	4.1 What have you found useful or working well in remote onboarding and why?
	4.2 What do you consider being strengths in remote onboarding generally and specifically in your company?
5. Developing remote onboarding	5.1 What are important things to take into account when completing onboarding remotely?
	5.2 How would you like your remote onboarding process to develop?
	5.3 What is your goal in remote onboarding (or in onboarding overall)?
	5.4 What do you think that an organization can gain from successful onboarding whether done remotely or onsite?
	5.5 Will you continue remote onboarding after the pandemic is over?
6. Background	6.1 What is your position in the company?
	6.2 What is the industry the company operates in?
	6.3 How many employees does the company employ?
	6.4 Does the company have international operations?
	6.5 How long has the company engaged in remote onboarding?
	6.6 How many employees approximately has the company onboarded remotely?

Appendix 4. Analysis Table

Related interview questions	Pre-determined categories	Sub-categories	Company X	Company X	Company X	Company X	Company X
2.1	Involvement of team(s)		The whole work group is presented in the platform, weekly/monthly team meetings.	Depends on the size of the team. Does not know what in practice happens in the team. Team meetings (varying schedule).	Overall: Meetings with the team, mornings together weekly (for one employee group), spring party over Teams - sent something home for the employees, involving team members in recruitment.	Involving team members in recruitment, buddy system and weekly team meetings.	Team is mainly responsible for the onboarding, weekly/monthly team meetings.
		Informing about the new hire	In weekly or monthly meetings, informing on intranet.	Informs the whole organization about the new hire, when the contract is signed. Emphasized that the personnel know when the company is hiring to enable internal transfers as well.	Telling what kind of person is hired, from where, what kind of experience has and where will be working.	When the new employee is hired and it's then agreed who is responsible for the onboarding.	Telling to the team well ahead in a team meeting and to the whole company afterwards. When starts and what kind of background. It is agreed who is responsible for onboarding.
		Meeting own team	When starts or is starting.	Generally during the first week.	During the very first days - emphasizes its importance.	Generally during the first week in team meeting, virtual coffee moment, music quiz.	When there is a team meeting (could be also virtual coffee moment or Kahoot session), some teams have once a week some once a month
2.2	Internal networking		Does not see point in having meetings with no relation to business - has to begin from facts, going to adopt a software. Considers as challenge.	Rather informal session on Teams where employees meet each other. Discussion facilitated with introductiory slides about themselves.	It needs to be thought and planned who the new hire meets - it needs to begin from the day one	Virtual coffee moments and music quizzes. People actively contact the new hires even from other teams to welcome them and get to know them. Solidarity of newest news in sharing tips.	Having more relaxed moments put in the calendar. Virtual company-wide coffee moments, Kahoot sessions, music quizzes.
		Meeting over team and unit borders	Depends on the team - some have more than others.	At least in the onboarding day. Depends a lot of the role.	During the scheduled meeting with different units.	Monthly meetings, road map meetings and customer meetings with other team members.	see above
		Ensuring informal discussions and interaction	Taking the new hire along with from the beginning. Manager or tutor (kummi) has a big role in it.	Tries to enable it. Trusts the teams and does not have a mechanism to ensure it.	Teams is important channel: chats, coffee moments, meetings with the team, mornings together weekly (for one employee group), spring party over Teams - sent something home for the emoloyees.	Virtual coffee moments, music quizzes.	see above
2.3	Creating sense of belonging		It is crucial that it forms. Challenge.	By getting to know each other, sharing things also outside work and trying to find common interests. Sharing information about the organization: culture and how the work is done. Considers important that the new hires meet each other. It is a concern whether the sense of belonging forms when you do not meet in person.	By taking the new hire along to everything. Considers this the hardest part.	Considers the pre-employment connectedness important and creating atmosphere where things are done and learned together. The culture needs to be what is said about it.	Emphasizes the importance of HR onbording where the culture and what it means to be part of the company means. The monitoring (feedback and follow-up) are very important. They have tried to have 1:1 even more often during the remote work.