

**Implementing a strategic employee onboarding
program for a global ICT company
Case Basware**

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<p>The strategic importance of attracting and retaining employees and maximizing their productivity is increasing in a global knowledge-based economy.</p> <p>Strategic onboarding is an important aspect of strategic Human Resources Management. A global company level onboarding program creates value by providing transparency and consistency across the organizational silos. Eventually, the benefits of strategic onboarding will contribute to the company's strategy execution.</p> <p>This study focuses on how to create a global onboarding program for the case company Basware. The thesis presents general concepts and processes of onboarding and how to implement a strategic onboarding program for a company in which the human capital is the main asset.</p> <p>The main objective of the study was to investigate how to implement an onboarding process in a global organization. The goal was also to understand how onboarding is currently planned and implemented at Basware: what are the good practices and required development items of onboarding and what are the most urgent items to develop.</p> <p>In the study, the current situation, development requirements and best practices were analyzed, surveying all personnel groups related to the onboarding: recently hired employees, their hiring managers and local Human Resources globally.</p> <p>The collected data was analyzed by using both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The main finding was the lack of consistency in onboarding practices. Despite of the issue, the company had succeeded in the social integration of new employees. Combined with role clarity and self-efficacy, they have possibly had an impact on the high employee engagement and low attrition rate.</p> <p>Based on the comparative analysis between the results and theory, an onboarding program proposal for Barware was created. The proposal included the fundamental elements of onboarding, being globally consistent and, at the same time, adjustable based on different requirements set by countries, functions and individuals.</p> <p>The proposed company level program will help to ensure that all important elements of onboarding will be covered in an effective, equal, and consistent way. It will support the Basware's people strategy very well and drive further the global process culture in the company.</p>	
Keywords Onboarding, Strategic Human Resources Management, International Human Resources Management	

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1 Introduction

There is an ongoing transfer process from a resource-based economy to a knowledge- and service-based economy in the global labor market. Due to the increased complexity of jobs and globalization, companies' competitive advantage depends more and more on the human capital. The strategic importance of attracting and retaining employees and maximizing their productivity is increasing.

Strategic onboarding is an important aspect of strategic Human Resources Management. A global company level onboarding program creates value by providing transparency and consistency across the organizational silos. Eventually, the benefits of strategic onboarding will contribute to business execution, engagement level, leadership and organizational culture, contributing to the company's strategy execution.

This study focuses on how to create a global onboarding program for the case company Basware. The thesis presents general concepts and processes of onboarding and how to implement a strategic onboarding program for a company in which the human capital is the main asset.

In the study, the current situation, development requirements and best practices were analyzed, surveying all personnel groups related to the onboarding: recently hired employees, their hiring managers and local Human Resources globally. Based on the theoretical framework and survey analysis, a proposal on how to create a global onboarding program for Basware was created. Additionally, one urgent development item, improvement of product trainings, was selected based on the survey results and the first development cycle of training was completed as a part of the thesis project.

1.1 Background for the study

This thesis was conducted for Basware Human Resources, the global Learning & Development unit. The author identified a need for a consistent onboarding process in her earlier job role as an Operations Manager, leading Production teams in multiple countries. In February 2017, she suggested the thesis topic to Human Resources department, which already had set a goal to improve the onboarding processes and practices in the company starting 2017.

Basware is a provider of networked purchase-to-pay solutions, e-invoicing, and financing services for businesses. It enables organizations to grow their business and to unlock value across their operations by simplifying and streamlining financial processes.

(Basware 2017a.)

Basware was established in 1985 and listed on NASDAQ Helsinki (BAS1V) in 2000. It has more than 1800 employees in 13 different countries and its headquarter is in Espoo, Finland. In 2015, Basware reached a turning point in its transition from a license-dominated company to a cloud and SaaS-based company. SaaS removes the need for Basware's customer organizations to install and run applications on their own computers or in their own data centers as Basware offers them as a service. Cloud-based service means that Basware's cloud-based technology lets organizations access software, storage and other IT infrastructure elements without the burden of maintaining and upgrading them.

(Basware 2017a; 2017b.)

The company has complemented organic growth with key acquisitions; it has been the company's growth strategy to expand operations by acquiring companies. Since 2002, the expansion has been truly global. (Basware 2017c.) During 2016 and continuing in 2017, Basware has had the biggest recruitment focus in India and Romania. Especially in these countries the competition for talent is heating up, and it is challenging to find skilled workers. It is essential to recruit knowledgeable staff, have them stay in the company and be productive.

1.2 Study objectives, limitations and value for Basware

The research problem was selected and defined based on the needs of the case company. The main objective of the study was to investigate how to implement an onboarding program in a global organization. The research questions were:

- How onboarding is currently planned and implemented at Basware?
- What are the good practices and required development items of onboarding?
- What are the most urgent items to develop?

It was a known fact that there were no general onboarding program at Basware. This study focused on a real problem that Basware Human Resources needed solve; how to launch a global onboarding program which would meet the nowadays requirements. However, there were no visibility to all existing practices and requirements across the organization. The study provided a holistic view on the status, and a proposal how to implement a global program by considering local requirements, development items, and best practices that were hidden in different parts of the organization.

The target groups of the survey were employees who joined Basware between the 1st of July 2016 and 31st of March 2017, their hiring managers and local Human Resource units. In this study, onboarding was considered to start from the joining date of a new employee. Limitations were made based on the job grade of new employees as the lowest and highest job grades were excluded. This study examined the topic from the approach of a global organization where human capital is the main asset.

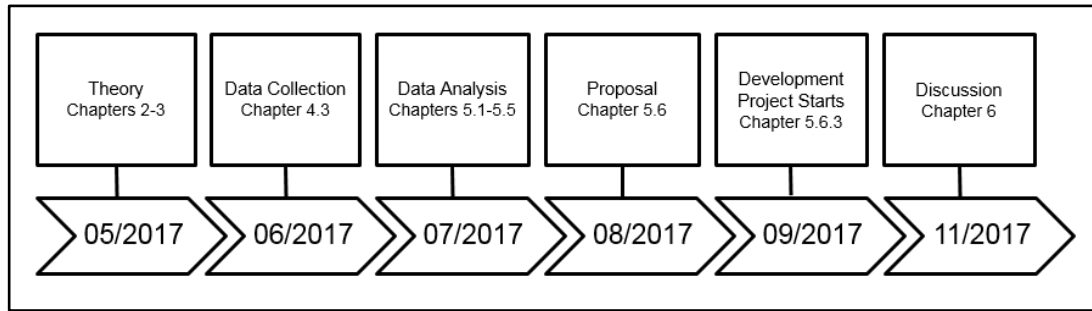
1.3 Report structure and project steps

The concept of onboarding was investigated from the perspectives of strategic human resources management and known onboarding concepts. Chapter 2 explores onboarding as a strategic tool, its role in International Human Resources Management and the benefits of onboarding. Chapter 3 presents how to design and implement a strategic onboarding program.

The survey methodology is presented in chapter 4. The case company Basware and its current state of onboarding was investigated by performing surveys for recently hired employees, their hiring managers and local Human Resources in different geographical locations. Onboarding experiences of employees were analysed by using quantitative methods. Furthermore, email queries and interviews were conducted with hiring managers and local Human Resources to learn the current practices and development needs of onboarding at Basware. In addition, the existing onboarding materials and company internal data were reviewed. The results are presented in chapter 5.

After analyzing the status, a proposal on how to create a global onboarding program was created. Also, the most important development items and best practices were included. The proposal is presented in chapter 5.6. Chapter 6 discusses the key findings and suggestions for further development.

The research project started in May 2017 with theory collection and planning. The survey phase was completed during the summer and data analysis was finalized in September. Finally, the proposal was completed in November 2017. The project steps are shown in picture 1 and the complete project schedule is presented in appendix 8.



Picture 1. The thesis structure and timeline

1.4 Key concepts

According to Kauhanen (2010, 151), **onboarding** comprises of all actions that will help an employee to know his or her working community, work place and actual work. Stein & Christiansen (2010, 24) emphasize that onboarding includes the full set of experiences to which the new hire synthesizes and responds in the first year, not just the few actions that are owned and managed by centralized HR functions. Also, terms induction and orientation are often used. According to Surbhi (2016) the term induction can be defined as the introduction of the newcomer to his/her job whereas orientation provides basic information about the employer organization.

In this thesis, onboarding was considered to begin from the joining date and to continue until the employee is productive and part of the usual Human Resources cycle. It includes administrative and social aspects as well as knowledge transfer. Induction was used in the survey to describe the introduction to a job role.

Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM) emphasizes a fit or integration between HR strategy and business strategy and the use of a set of HR policies and practices that are integrated with each other and with the goals of the organization (Rees & Smith 2014, 20). According to Armstrong & Taylor (2014, 16), SHRM is influenced by the concepts or strategy and strategic management.

International Human Resources (IHRM) is concerned with the management of human resources in multinational companies in the different national contexts where they operate. Such contexts are separated by time, distance and culture. IHRM is also driven by the organizational approach to both international strategy and development. (Rees & Smith 2014, 442–443.)

According to Tayeb (2003, 251–252), IHRM is broadly speaking about the world-wide management of Human Resources. The purpose of IHRM is to enable a multi-national enterprise to be successful globally. This can be achieved by the implementation of the multi-national enterprise's global strategy, whilst creating sufficient flexibility to meet local conditions. Simply, IHRM is the management of human resources in multinational corporations.

2 Onboarding as a strategic tool

According to Bauer (2010, 17) successful onboarding is the key part of any human resources management strategy. With the high cost of recruiting, business leaders must understand that effectively integrating new hires into the organization is important to ensure their success. This chapter presents the onboarding concept, how onboarding is seen in international, strategic human resources management, and which are the goals and benefits of successful onboarding.

2.1 Onboarding concept

According to Kauhanen (2010, 151), onboarding comprises of all actions that will help an employee to know his or her working community, work place and actual work. These include knowing the company's business idea, vision, values and practices and other people, such as the new colleagues, customers and other important stakeholders. Work guidance means receiving an induction to the new job role and expectations related to the new role.

Stein & Christiansen (2010, 24) emphasize that onboarding includes the full set of experiences to which the new hire synthesizes and responds in the first year, not just the few that are owned and managed by centralized HR functions. On the other hand, Little (2015) claims that effective onboarding should conform the new employee to allow him or her to become a contributing member of the staff in the shortest period possible, while engaging the employee to enhance productivity and improve the opportunity for the company to retain the employee.

Organizations have their own versions of onboarding programs, processes and practices through which new hires learn the required attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviors. Literature and internet present many different onboarding processes that managers can use. However, the same content is not suitable for all, and therefore it is important to develop a baseline of content that serves as a basis for knowledge and is common across all new hires. Additionally, it is necessary to identify content that needs to be tailored for different segment's needs. Organizations should especially pay attention to groups of employees that are difficult to recruit. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 266.)

A written onboarding plan is a formal document, which outlines the specific timeline, goals, responsibilities and support available to the new hire. The most effective onboard-

ing plans are usually written, communicated to all members of the company and consistently applied and tracked over time. Onboarding can be both face-to-face and online. Technology can also be used to follow the onboarding process, automate basic forms, track progress against development and career plans and help stakeholders monitor new employees to see when they may need additional support. Proactive organizations often create check-in meetings at specific intervals to help new employees receive the information they need in a timely manner. (Bauer 2010, 9–10.)

A new employee needs the confidence, clarity and skills to do the job he or she has been hired to do. Potential training for new employees includes hard skills, soft skills and onboarding skills. If a new employee has low levels of self-efficacy at the start, training is even more necessary to boost subsequent ability to cope and perform. Training can show newcomers how to proactively help their own adjustment and therefore encourage successful onboarding. (Bauer 2010, 11–12.)

Stakeholder involvement is valuable for successful new employee onboarding because stakeholders can help newcomers manage and meet expectations. They can influence new hires by not only sharing information but also serving as role models. A mentor can teach new employees about the organization, offer advice, help with job instruction and provide support in social and political terms. New employees may consult mentors with questions that they are hesitant to ask from their managers in a fear of seeming incompetent. Opportunities for informal interaction with colleagues and adequate information will help the new employees adapt more easily to the new work environment. (Bauer 2010, 10–11.)

New employees may find it challenging to interpret positive or negative reactions they receive from co-workers. This means they will often need feedback and guidance. New employees seek and receive information, and companies vary in how well they use feedback tools during the onboarding process. Common approaches to employee feedback are for example performance appraisals and 360-degree feedback. Normally, organizations conduct appraisals once or twice a year, so quarterly meetings can be helpful when integrating appraisals into the onboarding process. (Bauer 2010, 13.)

Employees can help or hinder their own onboarding. Information-seeking and feedback are proactive behaviors that may help them adjust as they ask questions about different aspects of their jobs, company procedures and priorities; they all are about making sense of the new workplace. Workers may seek information using more passive methods, such

as monitoring the environment, viewing the company web site or reading written literature. However, only little insight into the company culture and unwritten rules will emerge from passive methods. (Bauer 2010, 13.)

When onboarding is considered strategic, it is a process by which the workforce is reconstituted and enrolled to align with a firm's primary emerging business strategy. Ideally, onboarding programs bring together stakeholders from across the enterprise, provide a comprehensive, designed integration into the firm and address both new hires' diverse needs and the firm's strategic goals. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 24.)

2.2 Strategic HRM

According to Rees & Smith (2014, 9), the goal of SHRM is to achieve competitive advantage through skilled, committed and well-motivated workforce. Hunt (2014, 28) explains that the purpose of strategic HR is to get employees to do what the company needs them to do to achieve its business objectives. The term used to describe this is business execution. Driving business execution is ultimately the responsibility of line managers directly supported by HR.

According to Hunt (2014, 31), companies must develop multiple processes to support different types of business execution needs. He breaks these into six general categories of business execution drivers: alignment, productivity, efficiency, sustainability, scalability and governance. The first driver, *alignment* can be achieved when people focus on the things that matter for delivering the strategy. It requires rapid and systematic communication of business goals to employees throughout the organization. As the outcome, the organization will see the connection between high-level strategies and how employees spend their time at work. It is about understanding what goals are important to company's overall strategy and what goals are expected to accomplish. (Hunt 2014, 32.)

Productivity is related to defining, evaluating and improving performance. It is high when people are doing what they are asked to do. It depends on leaders holding employees accountable for their results and employees being given the incentives and resources which are required to create the results. It is also important to understand the difference between alignment and productivity; it is the difference between knowing what an employee should do and how he or she is doing it. (Hunt 2014, 32–33.)

Efficiency means achieving results using the minimal possible resources. It is about how efficiently a company is using the available resources. It can be achieved for example by

having people with the right skills in the right positions. It requires recognizing and retaining excellent performers, appropriately managing poor performers and allocating rewards and resources in a way that maximizes productivity. (Hunt 2014, 33.)

Sustainability means maintaining stable and consistent performance over time. It requires minimizing the risk of unplanned loss of critical talent required to achieve key strategic goals. Ensuring sustainable results of a company over time requires understanding whether key people in the company are engaged and fully committed to the organization. To control sustainability the key is to develop processes to manage employee turnover and knowledge transfer effectively. (Hunt 2014, 34.)

Scalability can be achieved by having processes in place to ensure a steady supply of the talent needed to execute company strategies. When a company is in the growth mode, scalability is the key element of business execution because it is important to be able to efficiently reduce or reallocate the workforce based on shifting business needs and strategic focus. It can be summarized that creating processes to attract, develop and retain the needed resources will support the company's evolving business needs. (Hunt 2014, 34.)

Governance is related to security, compliance and risk management. It is about the concern if anyone in the company is doing something that could create significant liabilities for the business. It is about creating methods that reduce the likelihood that employees will do something that will put the company at risk or long-term disadvantage. The work includes for example creation of processes to reduce the risk. (Hunt 2014, 34–35.)

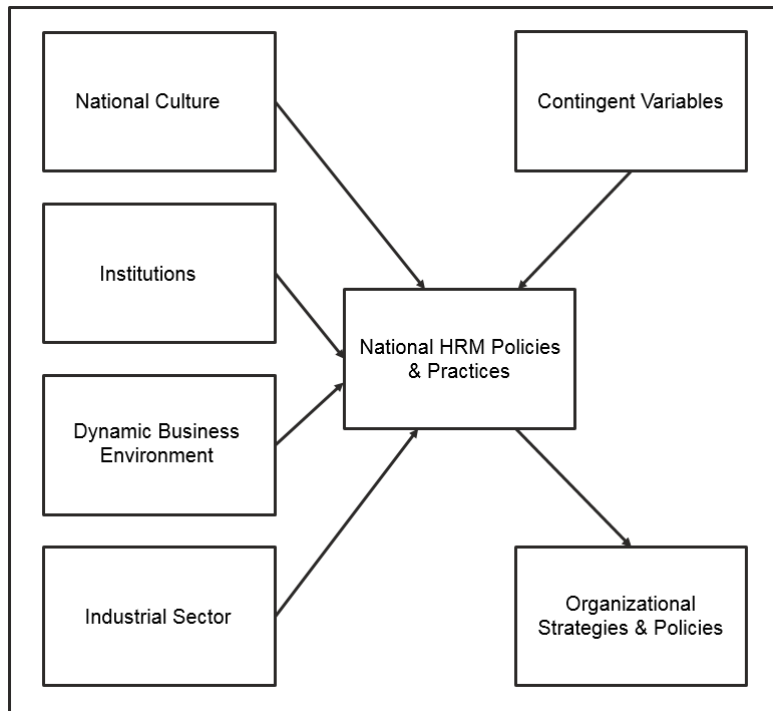
The business execution drivers link to strategic Human Resources processes of right people, right things, right way and right development. The business value of different HR processes depends on which business execution drivers are most critical to achieving a company's strategic goals. Table 1 shows how HR processes impact business execution drivers. (Hunt 2014, 41.)

Table 1. Relationship of strategic HR processes to business execution drivers (modified Hunt 2014, 41)

Driver	Right People	Right Way	Right Things	Right Development
Alignment		○	○○	
Efficiency		○○	○	
Productivity	○	○○	○	○
Scalability	○○			○○
Sustainability	○○			○○
Governance	○	○○		

2.2.1 The global aspect

IHRM can be broadly defined as the worldwide management of Human Resources. The purpose of IHRM is to enable a multi-national company to be successful globally, achieved by implementation of the company's global strategy, whilst creating sufficient flexibility to meet local conditions. IHRM includes the typical human resources, such as recruitment, dismissal, staff development and redundancies at international level. Compared to domestic human resource management, IHRM also includes more non-consistent functions. There are multitude of factors which influence international HRM, such as institutional issues, cultural differences and legislative practices, affecting the processes of people management within different nations and regions. Picture 2 presents the contextual factors determining HRM policies and practices. (Tayeb 2003, 252; 2005, 8; Rees & Smith 2014, 443.)



Picture 2. Contextual factors determining HRM policies and practices (modified Tayeb 2005, 22)

According to Janssens (2001), cited in Rees & Smith (2014, 445) there are four main approaches to IHRM: the exportive, adaptive, integrative and synergistic approach. These approaches are reflecting management’s orientation to international management. The *exportive approach* means that HR best practices are exported from another country. The *adaptive approach* means that if the host country has the best practice of HRM that appears to be more efficient, this process will be adopted. In the *integrative approach*, many practices are adopted from various countries. Finally, in the *synergistic approach* new HRM practices are formulated through recognizing and integrating approaches from the individual cultures involved. (Rees & Smith 2014, 445.)

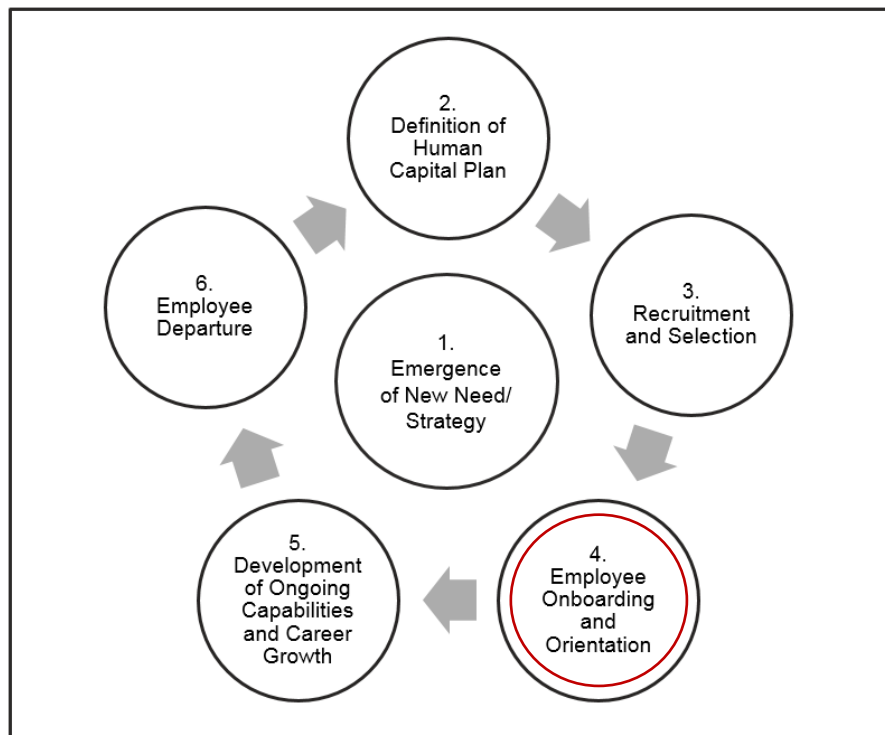
The management of people from varying cultures and diverse backgrounds is often considered the essential linkage for organizational success. The challenge is whether the organization can successfully manage these cross-boundary differences, while agreeing to HR policies and practices in a way which is coherent throughout the company. HR practices must be sensitive to local factors and critical aspects of national difference. In addition, there is also the concern over managing these differences in a cost-effective manner. (Rees & Smith 2014, 444.)

The global aspect also impacts onboarding. According to Kauhanen (2006, 164–165) and Tayeb (2005, 22–23), different features of cultures and, above all, the orientation to the

company's organizational culture should be taken into an account in onboarding as well as employees' personal life and the cultural background. In addition, different local factors bring their own impacts on the onboarding process.

2.2.2 Onboarding in the human capital lifecycle

Thompssen (2010, 16) places onboarding as the third of six phases in the human capital lifecycle which is presented in picture 3. Thompsen's (2010, 6) human capital lifecycle model connects all facets of human capital management by including the phases an employee experiences from the recruitment process to departure. Each of these phases must be carefully planned and executed to optimize human capital performance. Once the talent has been recruited and hired, onboarding serves as the critical step to ensure that new employees connect with and effectively contribute to the mission of the organization as quickly as possible. (Thompssen 2010, 16.)

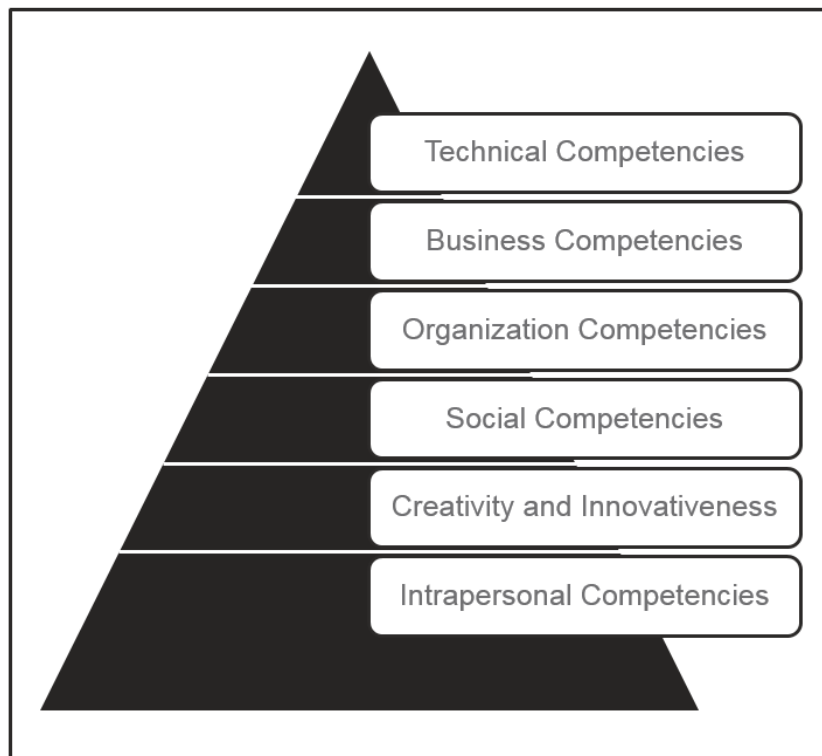


Picture 3. Human capital lifecycle (modified Thompsen 2010, 16)

Boxall & Purcell (2016, 12) claim that a company enjoys a human capital advantage when it employs more talented individuals than its rivals. They also present another dimension, the organizational process or social capital advantage, which occurs when talents of individuals are successfully combined in collaborative activities. When social capital is superior to those of company's rivals, even more powerful forms of human resource advantage occur.

According to Illeris (2011, 50–54), competences are related to the application of knowledge in a specific situation; a person being qualified in a broader sense. It means that the person can apply his or her professional knowledge in relation to the requirements inherent in uncertain and unpredictable situations.

According Viitala (2013, 180), the competence of an individual can also be explored using the knowledge pyramid. Professional competence can be thought of as a collection of skills in which a person succeeds in his or her role. Garava & McGuire (2001), cited in Viitala (2013, 180), compare the pyramid to an iceberg where only the highest peak, the skills and information, may be visible. The lower levels of the iceberg represent the factors which regulate the occurrence and development of the upper levels, such as the social role, the features and the motives. In the pressure of constant changes in working life, the capabilities at the lower end of the iceberg are becoming more and more important. Picture 4 presents the pyramid of individual's skills. (Viitala 2013, 180–181.)



Picture 4. Competence pyramid (modified Viitala 2013)

Virtainlahti (2009, 62–63) claims that strategy can be used to define what knowledge is needed and how existing skills are developed in accordance with objectives. In practice, the skills and workforce required by the business strategy will be ensured by human resources strategy.

Boxall & Purcell (2016, 166–167) emphasize that the role of line managers is particularly important in converting the HRM policies to practice, however they remind that line managers may find themselves struggling if the wider system is not supportive. The immediate supervisor plays a critical role as the key agent of the organization through which members form their perceptions of the organization. It is much easier to trust someone you know especially if you share their values and find them to be a person of competence and integrity. (Boxall & Purcell 2016, 166–167.)

2.3 The benefits of onboarding

According to Stein & Christiansen (2010, 64–67) onboarding can be considered as a service to a new employee and, at the same time, it is a tool for organizations to fully benefit from their employees through engaging them and supporting their growth process. Bauer (2010, 4) claims that researchers have identified four major elements related to both job roles and social environment that organizations can use to help new employees maximize their onboarding success.

The first element for successful onboarding is *self-efficacy* in job performance. To the degree that a new employee feels confident in doing the job well, he or she will be more motivated and eventually more successful than less confident counterparts. It is important to support employees' confidence as they operate in a new organization. Self-efficacy has been shown to have an impact on organizational commitment, satisfaction and turnover. (Bauer 2010, 4.)

The second task-related element is *role clarity*. Performance will suffer if expectations are ambiguous. Role clarity or its flipside, role ambiguity, is a good indication of how well-adjusted the new employee is. Measuring role clarity can help organizations stop potential performance problems before they get worse. If new employees say they understand the roles they occupy, that indicates higher role clarity. Measures of role clarity are among the most consistent predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment during the onboarding process. (Bauer 2010, 5.)

Social integration is the third element of successful onboarding. Meeting and starting to work with organizational insiders is an important aspect of learning about any organization. In addition, new employees need to feel socially comfortable and accepted by their peers and superiors. Research has long found acceptance by peers to be an indicator of adjustment. Integration into one's work group is positively related to commitment and turn

over. High-quality relationships with leaders and other team members are also related to favorable onboarding outcomes, including performance and job satisfaction. (Bauer 2010, 5–6.)

The fourth aspect, *knowledge of an organizational culture*, emphasizes how essential it is to help new hires get acquainted with the company's unique culture. Understanding an organization's politics, goals and values and learning the firm's unique language are all important indicators of employee adjustment; all in all, it is associated with commitment, satisfaction and turnover. (Bauer 2010, 5–6.)

Bauer (2010, 6) concludes that effective onboarding can improve employee performance. Key onboarding activities, such as clearly communicating performance expectations, providing feedback, involving co-workers and peers and providing training, are integral to boosting performance. Onboarding also helps a manager to better assess how a new employee fits within the organization and, ultimately, whether he or she is the right person for the job. This is especially useful during the probationary period since afterwards it is more difficult to remove low performers. Organizations perceive effective onboarding as improved retention rates, time to productivity and overall customer satisfaction. (Bauer 2010, 6.)

Stairs & Galpin (2010), cited in Armstrong & Taylor (2014, 197), claim that high levels of engagement have been shown to relate to lower absenteeism, higher employee retention, increased employee productivity, improved quality, increased sales, higher profitability and enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty. Both commitment and engagement are associated with the feelings of individuals about their organization (Armstrong & Taylor 2014, 186.). Armstrong & Taylor (2014, 194) also present an approach where engagement is recognized to include both job and organizational engagement.

According to Berger & Berger (2011, 332–333), employee engagement impacts the bottom line. They have presented a research by Towers Perring, involving over 35,000 employees at dozens of companies, which revealed that employee engagement affected for example sales growth, customer focus and turnover. According to a study by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, employee engagement had even more significant impact during difficult times. (Watson Wyatt 2002 cited in Berger & Berger 2011, 333.)

Berger & Berger (2011, 332) also claim that among the under-recognized effects of poor onboarding is that it affects employer's leadership viewed by the new hire. Leadership effectiveness is largely dependent on whether employees trust that their managers are

truthful, have employees' best interest in mind, and know what they are talking about and what they are doing. The first impression is powerful, and if the new hire gets a negative impression about the organization, future actions and decisions by management will be viewed with skepticism. (Berger & Berger 2011, 333.)

Also, methods have been created to reveal the financial impact of onboarding success. Stein & Christiansen (2010, 39) calculate the financial impact by combining employee attrition and productivity, also called *the New Hire Contribution* (NHC). Maximizing the New Hire Contribution of employees, the revenues created by or operating costs reduced by each employee are maximized. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 38; 42–43.)

The NHC is calculated based on the evaluation of four variables: capability, context, connectedness and drive. *Capability* is the combination of individuals' intelligence and skills including the capacity to develop. *Context* is an individual's understanding for example of his or her organization, business and industry based on education and experience. *Connectedness* represents individual's internal and external relationships to the organization, which are relevant to the business, function and the role of hire. *Drive* is the employee's level of pursuit of excellent. These elements can be scored; however, the contribution purposely excludes the issue of resources like budget and tools made available. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 38.)

Talmundo (2017, 7) presents a calculation formula to analyze the return of invest (ROI) for the first year of an employee, where the current productivity per employee is multiplied with the productivity increase. This result is multiplied with the number of employees in onboarding program and the annual retention rate with onboarding program. Finally, when the investment of onboarding program is deducted from this number, the result is the first year's return of invest. The formula is presented in figure 1.

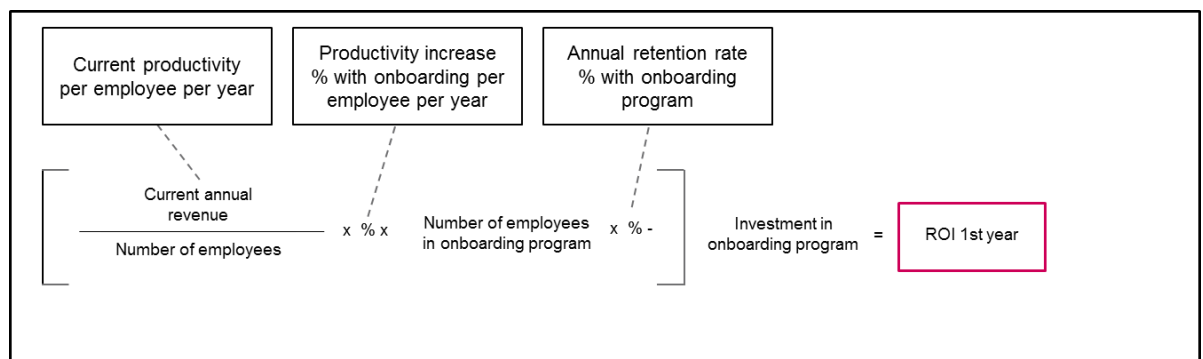


Figure 1. Calculation model for ROI of onboarding program (modified Talmundo 2017, 7)

2.4 The current trends of onboarding

Based on a survey by Equifax (Forbes 2017), more than half of all employees left their job within their first 12 months in 2016. Consequently, according to Forbes (2017), more and more companies are turning the efforts towards employee retention, starting from onboarding. Forbes presents different trends that are likely to be seen this year. First, companies realize that providing clear guidance on the culture and how to maximize an employee's success within it is a strategic priority. Because new employees are often unfamiliar with the cultural nuances of the new workplace environment, one of the trends is about purposefully introducing candidates to the workplace culture. (Forbes 2017.)

Forbes (2017) also emphasize the role of mentoring and buddies. A veteran employee can be assigned to plan a welcome event and introduction and to connect with the new employee. A mentorship program can be established to integrate the new person with the teams. New employees should have someone that will walk them through the soft skills of how things work. (Forbes 2017.)

Onboarding will be carried out in co-operation with the team as companies will onboard employees using a "First 90 Days" mindset. From Day 1 to Day 90, a new employee will be walked through every detail that affects their job and improves their adjustment within the company culture and the organization. Across the organization, many people will be responsible for making sure that the first 90 days set a positive tone and precedence for an employee. (Forbes 2017.)

The key factor in successful onboarding will be following up throughout the process to be sure that new employees are integrating into the culture and receiving the support and education they need to be successful in their new position. Finally, to succeed employees need clear goals and objectives, the right tools to achieve the goals, honest and regular feedback for career development and consistent acknowledgment of a job well done. (Forbes 2017.)

It is also expected that companies will bring more external onboarding coaching or support to help new hires' adjustment as soon as possible. This is based on the assumption that since onboarding is a critical success factor and managers are constantly lacking time to invest in individual onboarding, more external onboarding support will be used to help the new employees. (Forbes 2017.)

AAC Global performed a survey in Finland in September 2017 at the Esimies & Henkilöstö Messut (Manager & Personnel fair) and in LinkedIn. 132 respondents from more than one hundred organizations in Helsinki metropolitan area responded to the survey, which investigated how companies are carrying out onboarding and what are the most important trends in future onboarding. In addition to Forbes, also AAC (2017) found out that the organizational co-operation in onboarding will increase; instead of exclusive responsibility of the supervisor or HRM, the onboarding routine had started to change by increasingly involving other people in the new work community. (AAC Global 2017.)

Another finding was that the most common method of induction, getting familiar with traditional documentation, was considered as the weakest part of induction. Also, video tutorials and other digital content were thought to be weak orientation. This suggested that passive self-study is not meaningful for employees nowadays. However, self-study and versatile digital content were a growing trend in induction. Therefore, the need for improvement may not be in the method of teaching but in the way this kind of content has traditionally been produced. It seemed that interactive and logically structured learning will become more important, whether it is self-directed or guided learning. (AAC Global 2017.)

Finally, the survey revealed that the results of onboarding were not measured according to most respondents. Systematic, organization wide methods to follow the success of onboarding were poorly exploited. (AAC Global 2017.)

3 Strategic onboarding program

Many companies have onboarding practices that are deployed across the enterprise in inconsistent ways. Strategic programs perform better because of clear delineation of roles and accountability for performance. Also, systems are established to provide support and right tools. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 14; 36–37.) This chapter presents three different strategic onboarding program concepts.

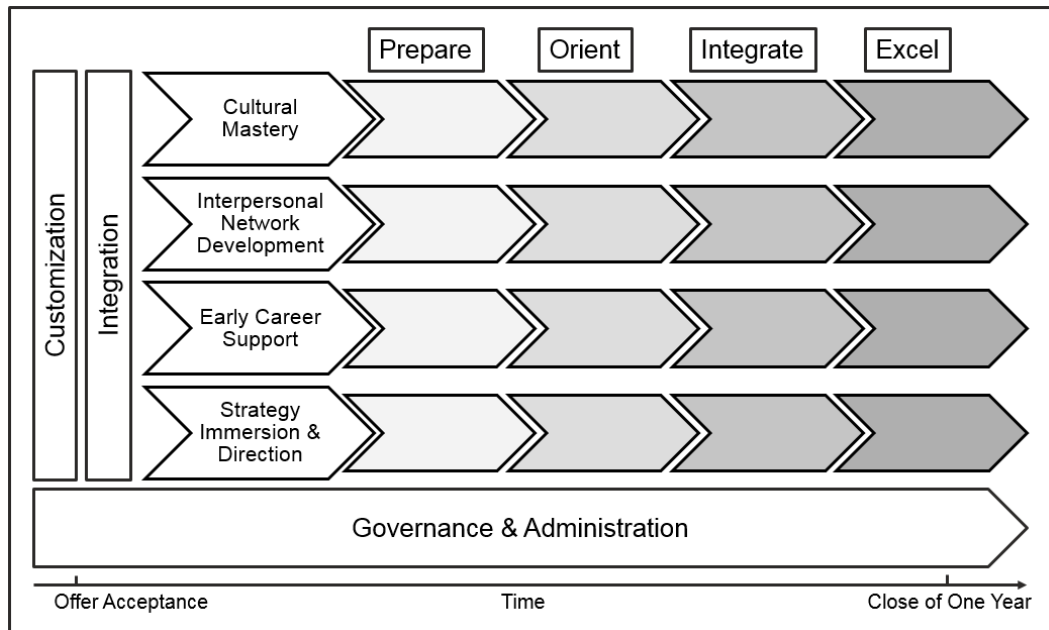
3.1 Conceptual theories for an onboarding program

Several strategic onboarding program concepts exist. They present slightly different approach to the fundamental elements of an onboarding program. However, many similarities exist between the different conceptual theories as each of them recognizes for example the importance of cultural mastery and social connections or networks. Also, clarity of organizational goals or strategy and own job role is included in each conceptual theory in some form.

3.1.1 Onboarding Margin™

Stein & Christiansen (2010, 22; 65–67) have developed an onboarding concept where the goal is to reach greater execution against the strategic and business plans. This can happen by reaching a quicker time to productivity, increasing the level of productivity, reducing levels of attrition and reducing operating costs. These benefits are called the Onboarding Margin™.

The model is presented in picture 5. The concept includes four content pillars, which are interrelated to the person's ability to make the organization his or her own. These pillars are cultural mastery, interpersonal network development, early career support and strategy immersion and direction. Two of the pillars, strategy immersion and direction and early career support, are also known as power elements increasing especially the productivity and enduring commitment to the organization. These program elements act as a contributing force for the four factors: capability, context, connectedness and drive, which impact eventually the productivity of an employee. The four areas evolve in four different steps, which are preparing, orienting, integrating and exceling. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 38; 65–67.)



Picture 5. A Systemic onboarding model (modified Stein & Christiansen 2010, 78)

Cultural mastery means mastering both the organizational culture and the national, religious and personal cultures. Cultural induction is rarely used in the business environment, which often is concerned only with performance, thus lacking understanding of the value of cultural performance. Moreover, many managers assume cultural commencement to happen naturally without any facilitation. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 64.)

Interpersonal network development concentrates on developing connections and networks among people throughout the organization. It means that employees will fit better into the organization, acquire perceptions and create own paths to knowledge and resources. By including this type of social aspect to orientation, the company may add considerable value in the eyes of the employees. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 65.)

Early career support is the first of the power elements, increasing especially the productivity and cultivating commitment to the organization. This is an important factor when building solid and constantly progressing career paths, which can be offered by the organization but only if the personal development of the employee is supported. Equally important is to make sure that career possibilities are made available and known by the new employee, who makes comparison between these possibilities and personal aspirations from the first day at the office. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 65.)

Strategy immersion and direction is the second of the power elements. It increases the appreciation and acknowledgment of importance of the job in the eyes of the new employee. Knowing how the employee creates success for the company with his or her work

is important. The employee should be introduced to the subjects of what, why and where to gain comprehensive view of the organization's purpose and goals. (Stein & Christian-sen 2010, 65–66.)

3.1.2 Four pillars by Watkins

Watkins (2013, 28) talks about four pillars of effective onboarding. The pillars, business orientation, stakeholder communication, alignment of expectations and cultural adaption, should be focused to overcome onboarding barriers in a company.

Business Orientation is the most straightforward part of onboarding. It means learning about the company. Regardless of position, it is beneficial to learn about the brands and products one will be supporting. *Stakeholder Connection* is essential for building productive working relationship with key stakeholders, also horizontally. As Watkins points out: “You don't want to be meeting your neighbors for the first time in the middle of the night when your house is burning down”. (Watkins 2013, 28–30.)

Expectation Alignment relates to the fact that often understandings, which are developed before joining a company, prove not to be fully accurate. It is also important to understand the expectations of all key stakeholders in addition to own manager, such as the key people in finance at corporate head-quarters if the employee is working in a business unit. Finally, *Cultural Adaptation* is based on the assumption that culture is a set of consistent patterns people follow for communicating, thinking and acting, all grounded in their shared assumptions and values. (Watkins 2013, 28–30.)

3.1.3 Four C's

Bauer (2010, 2) calls the building blocks of successful onboarding as Four C's, which are presented in table 2. The degree to which each organization executes these four building blocks determines its overall onboarding strategy, with most firms falling into one of the three levels.

Compliance includes teaching basic legal and policy-related rules and regulations to employees. Clarification refers to ensuring that employees understand their new jobs and all related expectations. Culture is a broad category that includes providing employees with a sense of organizational norms, both formal and informal. Connection refers to the vital interpersonal relationships and information networks that new employees must establish. (Bauer 2010, 2.)

Table 2. Four C's (modified 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

If a company is engaged in Passive Onboarding, it is about functional needs only, overlooking clarification, culture and connection. Furthermore, companies at this level have no formal strategy in place to meet employee needs in all three areas, and onboarding is likely viewed as a checklist of unrelated tasks to be completed. Some role clarification may be given, but neither Culture nor Connection is addressed, at least as a coordinated task. (Bauer 2010, 2–3.)

On High Potential Onboarding level, organization addresses compliance and clarification and may also touch on culture and connection as part of the formal onboarding strategy. However, in these organizations the complete process has not yet been established in a systematic way, including all aspects of the last two C's, across the organization. (Bauer 2010, 2–4.)

On the Proactive Onboarding level, all four building blocks are formally addressed. Company on level three is systematically organizing onboarding with a strategic HRM approach. Only minority of organizations achieve this level. (Bauer 2010, 4.)

3.2 Designing and implementing an onboarding program

According to Stein & Christiansen (2010, 254) a successful redesign of onboarding program starts with defining a clear future vision and a plan. First, organization needs to identify the main problems that onboarding can address, the size of opportunities, the root causes of the problems and the most practicable solutions, considering the organization's unique circumstances, operating conditions and constraints. Proper diagnostics also help an organization to set the right priorities. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 236–243.)

Stein & Christiansen (2010, 236–243) present four steps for conducting a diagnostic evaluation of a company's onboarding effort. First, the *current state* of the program is assessed. The most important needs of the organization are identified to prioritize the key

onboarding opportunities. Understanding the current system activities, tools, and resources, which exist for new hires, allows to diagnose the root causes of program underperformance as well as dissatisfaction among new hires and managers. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 243.)

After the status assessment, an evaluation is made about how well the current activities, tools and resources meet the needs of new hires, managers and the organization. The goal is to identify program elements where issues are identified and elements which are working well. It is also important to identify the best practices in different parts of an organization and to find ways to spread those practices which can be adopted within the whole company. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 245–246.)

Stein & Christiansen (2010, 245–246) also suggest doing an *external benchmarking* by analyzing the program elements and techniques deployed by leading onboarding programs or main labor competitors. In addition, consulting employees who have transferred from other peer organizations is beneficial. However, before copying any best practices it is important to understand how they relate to the company's strategic objectives. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 247–249.)

The third phase is *opportunity identification* where the topics that require greater investment and prioritization are being identified. When determining the priorities, it is important to balance the potential impact with the cost or degree of difficulty in implementation. It is recommended to consider which opportunities bring early wins since these can help make buy-in for later phases. In addition, it is important to know what cannot be changed in implementing a new program. At this phase, it might be beneficial to focus on only one prioritized organizational unit at a time. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 249–251.)

The final phase is *organizational validation and buy-in*. It is important to convince the required stakeholders about the idea of onboarding improvements. Key stakeholders should be engaged from the beginning of the process, for example, by enabling them to evaluate the current state of onboarding and encouraging them to identify possible improvement opportunities. As a result, these stakeholders will feel more ownership and they will be able to communicate in a compelling way the key changes which will emerge from the onboarding redesign. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 251–252.)

The *implementation phase* requires a solid project management effort. The phase includes presenting the business case created during the diagnostic phase, translating it

into a coherent blueprint and executing on this blueprint. A blueprint is a design architecture documentation for an onboarding program, enabling all design and stakeholder participants to coordinate along a single, comprehensive design. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 259.)

When developing the content of an onboarding program, the full range of tools, technology, resources and content elements should be considered to deliver the program seamlessly. One option is, for example, to assemble an advisory committee with representatives from each business area or function, instructional designers, the IT department, field members from HR and a representative from facilities. The business area representative should represent the local culture and the business goals of their respective business areas. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 265.)

Bauer (2010, 17) emphasizes that understanding who owns the onboarding process, and who controls various steps in the process is vital to onboarding success and sustainability over time. Simply writing down a formal plan will not help new employees succeed if the important stakeholders and new employees are not engaged to interaction.

When developing the onboarding program content, it is important to create a clear plan and materials to support change management within the organization. Input mechanisms such as a cross-functional steering committee can help gather detailed design and program input. Collecting regular input throughout the process is critical if diverse stakeholders are to engage into a truly systemic program. One option to consider is developing a regular news cycle about the onboarding initiative. During the development phase, team members should develop documentation that the team can use during program implementation to inform the broader organization about the initiative's goals and estimated impact. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 268–269.)

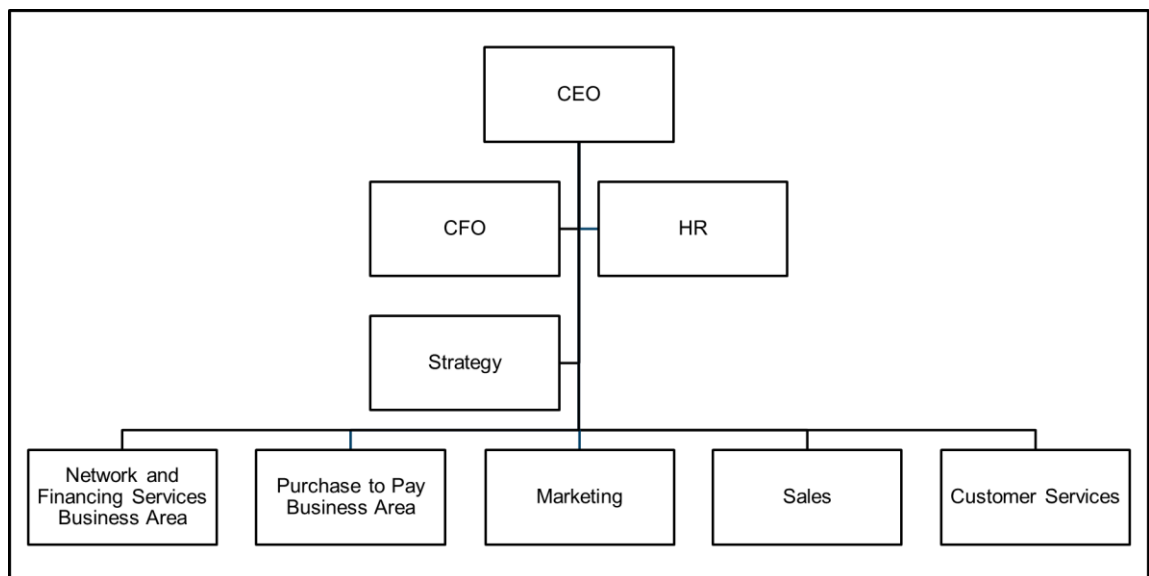
Like any major program roll out across a large organization, it should be executed after a successful program pilot. The pilots can take place concurrent with ongoing content development to allow time to collect feedback and make changes before a broad scale implementation. Onboarding design team should gather feedback not only from the pilot, but they should also conduct surveys with new hires and new hire managers. By observing the pilots, it is possible to determine elements which work and those which do not, which elements deliver the greatest excitement and offer the greatest educational value, and which elements are not being delivered as intended. Organizations can choose to pilot for example in selected regions or business units, by phase or new hire type. (Stein & Christiansen 2010, 269–271.)

4 Survey methodology

This chapter presents Basware as a case company and the empirical part of the work; what methods have been used and how the research has been conducted. This chapter also discusses why these methods have been selected. In addition, the reliability and validity of the research are presented.

4.1 Basware as a case company

The case company Basware Corporation started its international operations in 1999. Ever since, major part of its growth has been achieved through mergers and acquisitions. The organization consists of the following functions: Network and Financing Services Business Area, Purchase to Pay Business Area, Marketing, Sales, Customer Services and Corporate Functions. Picture 6 presents the Basware organization. (Basware 2017c; 2017d.)



Picture 6. Basware organization (modified Basware 2017d)

The structure of Human Resources department allows to control the main processes in the corporate level but also enables the required decision making in a regional level. The Vice President of HR is leading the department and is a member of the Basware Executive Team. Regional HR Directors and Managers are responsible for their own geographical areas, and the HR representatives in different functions are responsible for their own areas globally. Also, the learning and development roles in Human Resources are global. (Basware 2017d.)

The mission of Basware's HRM is to have the right people in the right place at the right time. Company drives a customer focused high-performance culture aligned with the company's strategy. The goal is to ensure Basware's position as a market leader by creating an environment of innovation and creativity. Basware's people strategy includes six elements or levels, which are presented in picture 7. (Basware 2017d.)



Picture 7. How Basware delivers the strategy (modified Basware 2016)

Onboarding is not presented as a part of human resources lifecycle and there is no existing global onboarding process. Each country and each manager follow their own practices when a new employee joins the company.

4.2 Research strategy

The main goal of this study was to investigate how to implement a global onboarding program for Basware. Action Research was chosen as a research strategy for the study because according to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2012, 183–184) it is designed to develop solutions to real organizational problems through a participative and collaborative approach. The purpose of the Action Research strategy is to promote organizational learning and to produce partial outcomes through identifying issues, planning action, acting and

evaluating action. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, 183–184.) By using Action Research it was possible to involve stakeholders in the organization while, and simultaneously conducting the research.

In this study, onboarding was considered to start from the joining date of a new employee. All countries and functions were in the scope of the survey. Limitations were made based on the job grade of new employees as the lowest and highest job grades, 5 and 11–13 were excluded. Employees with job grade 5 were identified as more short-run, supplementary capabilities, where the skill requirement is lower. Employees with the highest job grades, directors and executives, were excluded partly due to specific requirements related to their job level.

The target group was employees who joined Basware between the 1st of July 2016 and 31st of March 2017. The employees who joined after the 31st of March 2017 were excluded from the survey as it would have been too soon to evaluate their onboarding experience from learning perspective.

4.3 Data collection

The objective of the data collection was to achieve a holistic view of the status of onboarding at Basware, and therefore three employee segments were identified as necessary for the data collection:

- employees who had recent experience of onboarding
- hiring managers who were responsible for onboarding of these employees
- Human Resources representatives who were responsible for the local processes and compliance of onboarding.

4.3.1 Survey for recently hired employees

The data collection from the recently hired employees was conducted by using an electronic questionnaire of Questback survey tool. Using a tool provided an efficient method of collecting responses from a large sample before a quantitative analysis.

The employee questionnaire was created based on the research questions: how onboarding is currently planned and implemented at Basware and what are the good practices and required development items of onboarding. The themes of the questionnaire included onboarding process and content, and feelings and experiences of onboarding. Additionally, the survey included questions related to the onboarding outcomes which presented in the theoretical framework; performance, job clarity, social integration and engagement.

Questions about employee demographics were included to make it possible to analyse country- and function specific survey results. The questionnaire is presented in appendix 1.

The survey consisted of 15 questions in English. The questionnaire contained drop-down questions, vertical single-select and multiple-choice questions, single-select matrix questions and satisfaction metric to rate the overall onboarding experience. Two open questions were included to give the respondents an opportunity to clarify potential improvement needs and ideas. The questions were designed in a clear way to ensure that they are easy to read and quick to answer. The time required for answering the survey was approximately 5-7 minutes. The questions were reviewed by Human Resources and based on the received feedback the survey form was finalized.

167 full-time employees, who joined the company between the 1st of July 2016 and 31st of March 2017, were invited to participate in the survey. 161 employees received the invitation successfully. The survey was open from the 13th of June 2017 to 26th of July 2017. During that time, 82 employees responded to the survey, resulting in the response rate of 50,9%. All participants responded to more than 80% of the questions, which can be considered as a complete response.

4.3.2 Survey for hiring managers

The goal of the hiring manager survey was to understand how managers were onboarding employees in different countries and organizational units of Basware, and what were the good practices and required development items of onboarding. Another target was to collect the existing onboarding materials and documentation, which was not shared publicly throughout the organization.

The qualitative data collection method included email questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and studying the existing documentation. The email questionnaire is presented in appendix 2. The themes of the questionnaire included onboarding process, onboarding goals and measurements, improvement needs and best practices of onboarding.

The questionnaire was sent in the last week of July 2017 to all 43 managers of the 167 employees who were in the scope of the employee survey. 12 of them responded, resulting in the 29% response rate. The first seven respondents were also interviewed in an online meeting. The 30-minutes follow-up interviews were arranged to gain understanding about the findings from the questionnaire, mostly regarding the diversity of practices which

were identified in the survey responses. The interview questions were provided beforehand in the calendar invitation. Notes from the interviews were written in separate word-processed files which were anonymized.

Due to the low response rate the results of hiring manager respondents could not be generalized to represent all hiring managers; however, the goal to access additional data sources, for example team-specific onboarding processes and documentations, was met. The collected documentation provided an excellent insight into the diversity of practices and requirements. Countries or functions of hiring manager respondents were not presented in the results to ensure the anonymity of the survey participants.

4.3.3 Survey for local Human Resources

The questionnaire for the local Human Resources units was created to collect information about country specific onboarding processes and practices which were conducted by Human Resources. The purpose was also to understand the reason behind the possible country specific differences and to collect the existing onboarding material.

The Human Resources survey was qualitative. The data collection focused on the Human Resources representatives of the three largest locations; the respondents of Finland, India and Romania were interviewed in a 30-minutes meeting. In addition to these semi-structured interviews, a structured email questionnaire was sent to other seven Human Resources representatives. The themes of the Human Resources questionnaire were aligned with the hiring manager questionnaire. Questions were included about onboarding process, onboarding goals and measurements, improvement needs, and best practices. The survey questions are presented in appendix 3.

The interviews were transcribed by writing in separate word-processed files which were anonymized. The questions were numbered to ensure efficient data categorization. The same key questions were presented both in interviews and emails. However, in the interviews the use of questions varied based on the interview to give a specific organizational context related to the research topic. Interviews also allowed additional questions to gain depth to the data obtained in the specific country. The survey was sent out in the last week of June 2017. The number of respondents was 7 out of 10 invitees, resulting the 70% response rate.

4.4 Data analysis

The data from employee survey, which was conducted with a Questback software, was analysed quantitatively. The graphs and cross-tabulations were created by using the Questback tool. The first results were created without filters to understand onboarding status in general.

In the next phase of analysis, country and function-specific results were filtered. These results were combined with each other and with the company level results to identify significant differences. Also, cross-tabulations were made based on the onboarding effort: employees, who had received a planned onboarding, who had participated in some trainings and who had started to work immediately. This made it possible to find relationships between the onboarding method, the employee experience and the outcome of onboarding. Finally, answers to the open questions were analyzed by counting how many times a certain key word appeared in the written answers.

In the hiring manager and Human Resources surveys, qualitative data from emails and interviews needed to be converted into results. The answers to the questions were analyzed by counting how many times a certain key word appeared in the answers. Also, relations between answers and explanations were analyzed to learn about the context while presenting analytical findings; this understanding was considered important in the design phase of onboarding program for example when attempting to understand country- and function specific requirements.

4.5 Validity and reliability

Validity in qualitative research means “appropriateness” of the tools, processes, and data. It is concerned with how well the research measures what was intended to assess, and to which extend the findings are really about what they profess to be about. (Leung 2015; Saunders et al. 2012, 192–194)

In qualitative research, the essence of reliability lies with consistency. Reliability refers to whether the data collection techniques and analytic procedures would produce consistent findings if they were repeated on another occasion or replicated by a different researcher. (Leung 2015; Saunders et al. 2012, 192–194.)

In this survey, the reliability was enhanced by selecting a wide scope of survey participants: employees, their managers and Human Resources to get a global, holistic view of the topic. Also, the data collection was standardized for each survey participant group.

The steps and other details of the survey were documented during the project. In the interviews the answers were written carefully down by avoiding own assumptions about the meanings of interviewee's answers.

Considering validity, the respondent groups and chosen research strategy Action Research were appropriate for the research topic. Also, the questions answered to the research questions to which answers were searched. However, it was learned later that some of the questions were not necessary for this research. Also, one ambiguity was recognized by the author in the employee survey questionnaire. In the question 12 ("I have a high-level understanding about Basware products and services") it was identified that word "high-level" could mean different thing for different persons. It could be interpreted as deep level of understanding or understanding the main points only.

5 Results

The structure of this chapter is based on the research questions. Findings on each research question are grouped from the data analysis of employee, hiring manager, and Human Resources respondents and presented in the following sub-chapters. All graphs are available in appendix 4.

5.1 Demographics

The employee respondents worked in 13 different countries and majority (78,1%) presented the three largest Basware locations: Romania, India and Finland. The rest 22% worked in 10 other Basware countries. The biggest respondent group (42,7%) was Customer Services function, but all other functions were presented as well. The employee demographics are shown in figure 2.

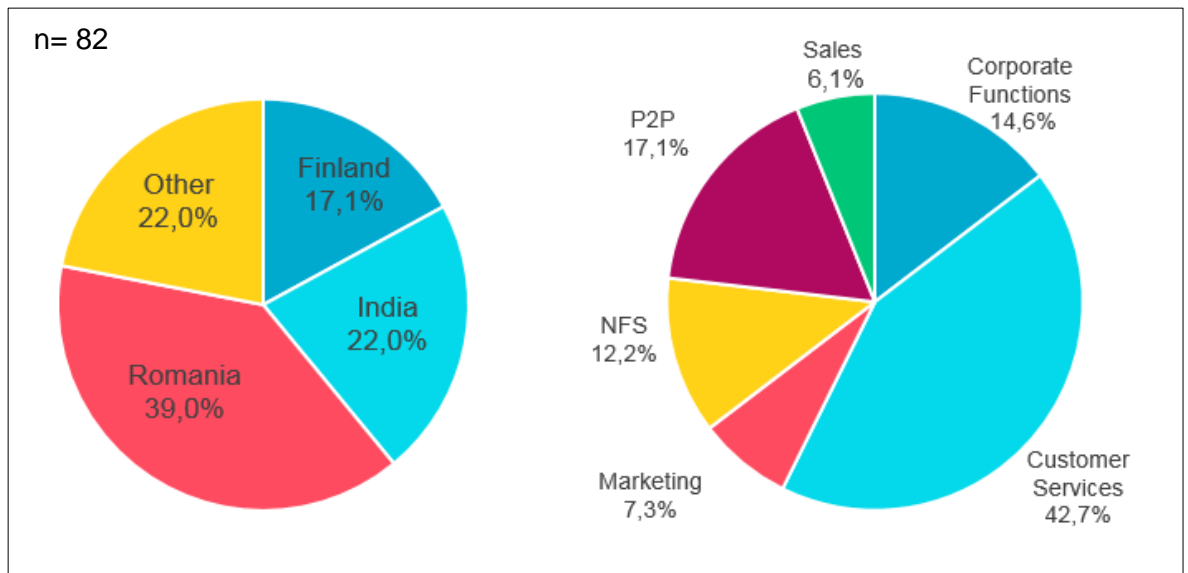


Figure 2. Countries and functions of employee respondents

5.2 The current state of onboarding at Basware

According to the survey the responsibility of employee onboarding was shared between a local Human Resources department and hiring managers. However, onboarding activities were carried out by many stakeholders; members in new hire's own team or in other teams, line manager, HR and dedicated trainers. In some teams, the responsibility of onboarding was partly or fully assigned to a named buddy. According to the employee respondents, induction was conducted most often with own manager (75,6%) or colleague (70,7%). Figure 3 presents the parties which participated in the induction.

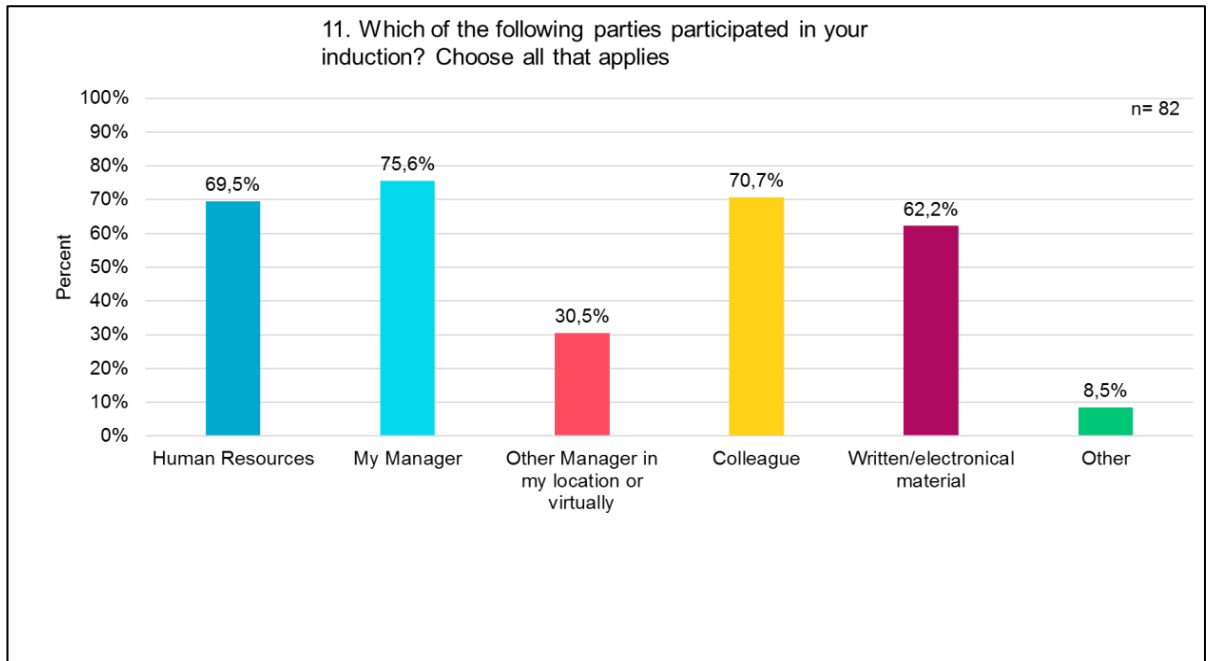


Figure 3. The parties who participated in the employee induction

As part of the survey, Human Resources representatives and hiring managers were requested to provide their existing onboarding documentation. Most local Human Resources units and majority of hiring manager respondents used their own onboarding documentations. The collected documentation covered variety of topics from soft skills and technical content to process policies and complete onboarding processes.

According to Human Resource respondents the evaluation of onboarding success varied between countries from non-existence to six weeks, and to four- and six months frequency. Also, each hiring manager had different evaluation practices. Some managers preferred check-points after one, three and six months. In one team feedback was provided monthly. Some managers invited regular feedback meetings with new employees while in another team the evaluation was done by providing new employees with formal and informal feedback.

According to Human Resources respondents, the onboarding implementation included familiarizing a new employee with his or her working community and environment, and covering administrative topics. Most employee respondents (80,5%) had been contacted between the signing date and joining date. The highest contact rate (88,9%) was in India. According to Human Resources and hiring manager respondents the contact methods varied between countries and teams: new hires were contacted by email, by sending a bucket of flowers or by providing short status updates via SMS.

Majority of employee respondents felt comfortable asking questions during their induction, had a good idea what they are expected to do in the new role and that the person responsible for their induction had relevant expertise. These three statements received the highest scores. The lowest score (25,6%) was related to the level of understanding of Basware products and services. Also, a minority of respondents (37,8%) had a good idea what they can do to have a successful career at Basware and what is expected of them in their probation period.

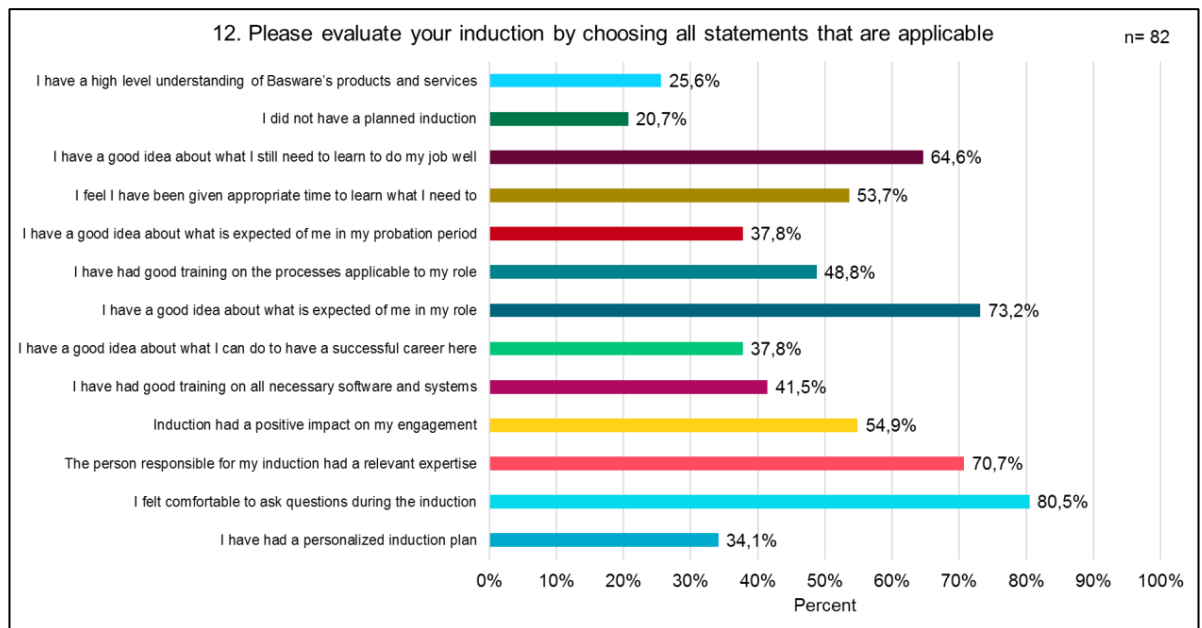


Figure 4. Employees' evaluation of induction

According to employee respondents, most onboarding activities were covered during the first weeks in the company. Almost all respondents had been introduced to their team (97,6%) and had their seat, accessories and accounts ready on the first day (89%). Explanation of the code of conduct received the lowest score (68,3%).

Most employee respondents (93,9%) received a planned induction or some training without specific plan. A minority of respondents started to work immediately. In Romania, every employee respondent had received either a planned induction or at least some training. Respondents who had started to work immediately, had completed less onboarding activities during their first weeks in the company. 20% were explained the code of conduct, company policies and job description or introduced to key contacts. Figure 5 shows how onboarding related tasks had been covered during the first weeks with respondents who had started to work immediately.

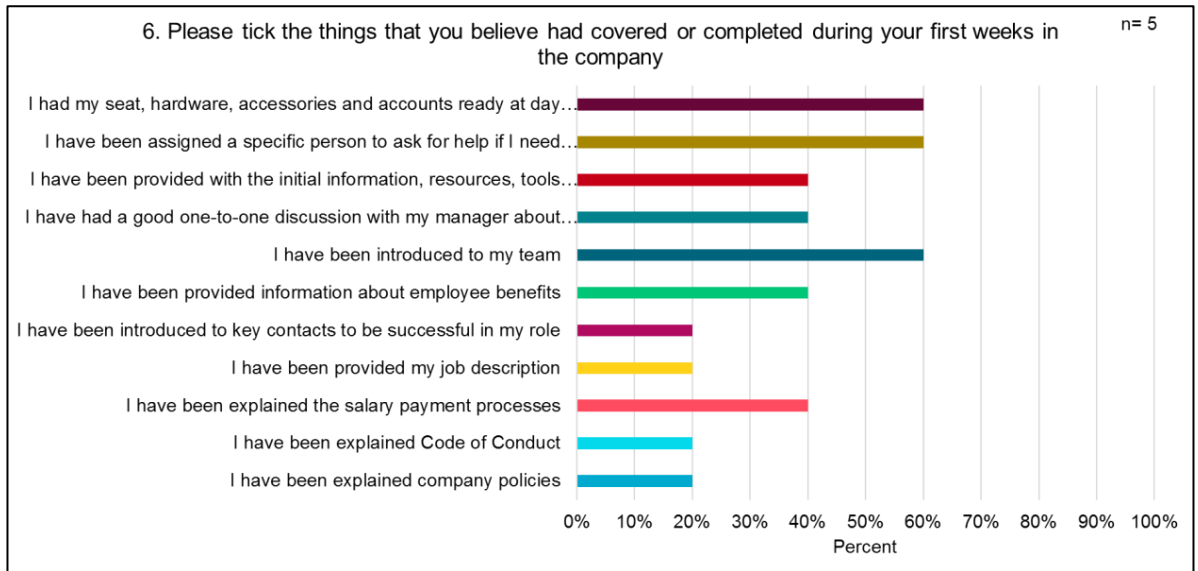


Figure 5. Things covered during the first week in the company by employees who started to work immediately

Also, other differences were identified these groups of employees. In general, majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (64,7%) that their on-the-job training had been effective. The respondents who received a planned onboarding had remarkably higher percentage (82,6%) than respondents whose onboarding was not planned. Figure 6 shows the effectiveness of on-the-job training from the employee respondent perspective.

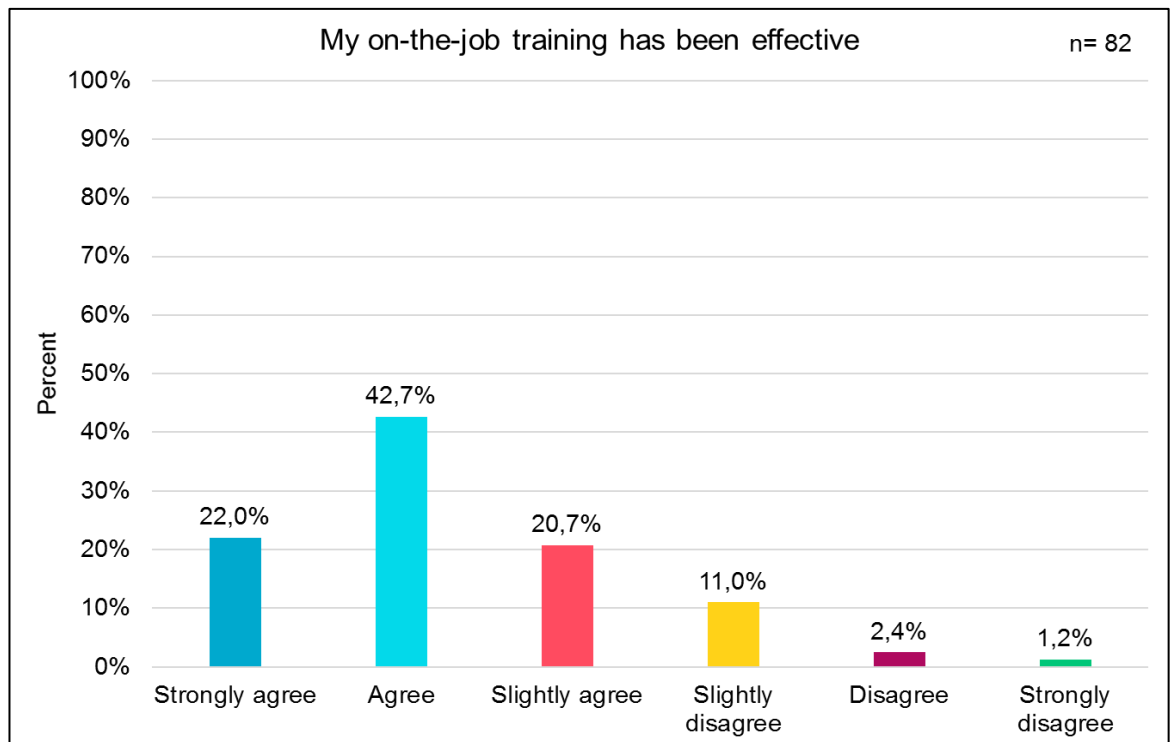


Figure 6. Employee respondents' experience of effectiveness of on-the-job training

76,9% of the employee respondents who received a planned induction agreed or strongly agreed that the information had been at the right level. Half (52%) of the respondents who had received some training agreed that the information had been at the right level. For the group who had started to work immediately the percentage was lower (20%). Figure 7 shows how respondents experienced the level of information.

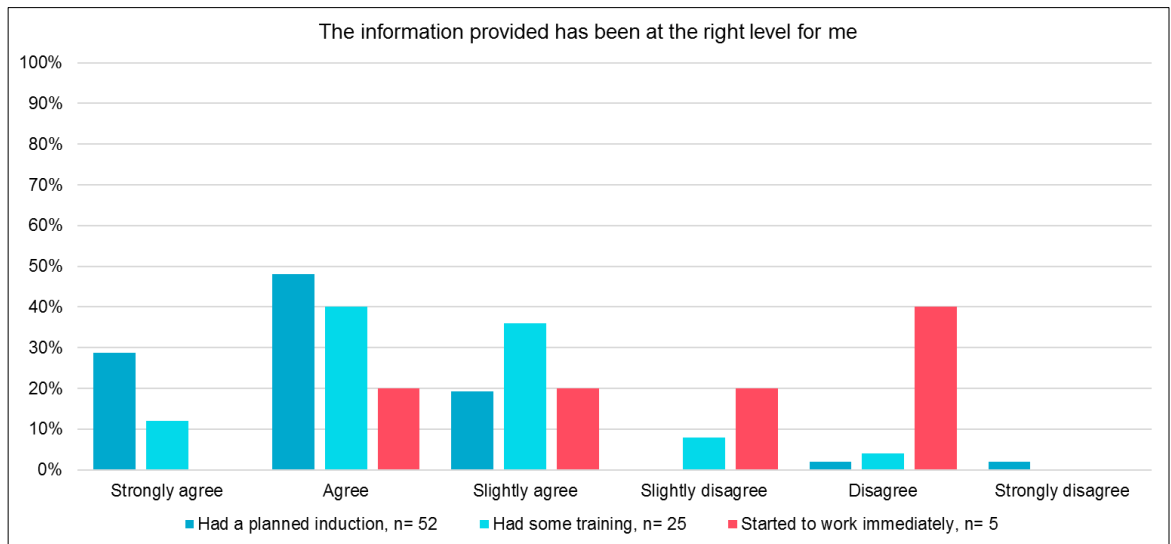


Figure 7. Employee respondents' feeling about the level of information provided to them

When evaluating the overall onboarding success and satisfaction, in most Human Resource and hiring manager respondents' opinion the onboarding succeeded reasonably well or well. However most respondents also identified needs for improvements which are presented in chapter 5.3.

The majority (79,3%) of employee respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall onboarding experience. The highest satisfaction level was in Romania where 90,6% of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied. The lowest satisfaction rate was in Finland where 64,3% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied and for 28,6% it was indifferent. Significant difference was identified between respondents who had received a planned induction compared to respondents who started to work immediately. 90,3% of respondents who received a planned onboarding were satisfied or very satisfied. 20% of respondents who started to work immediately were satisfied with their onboarding experience. The overall onboarding experience is presented in figure 8.

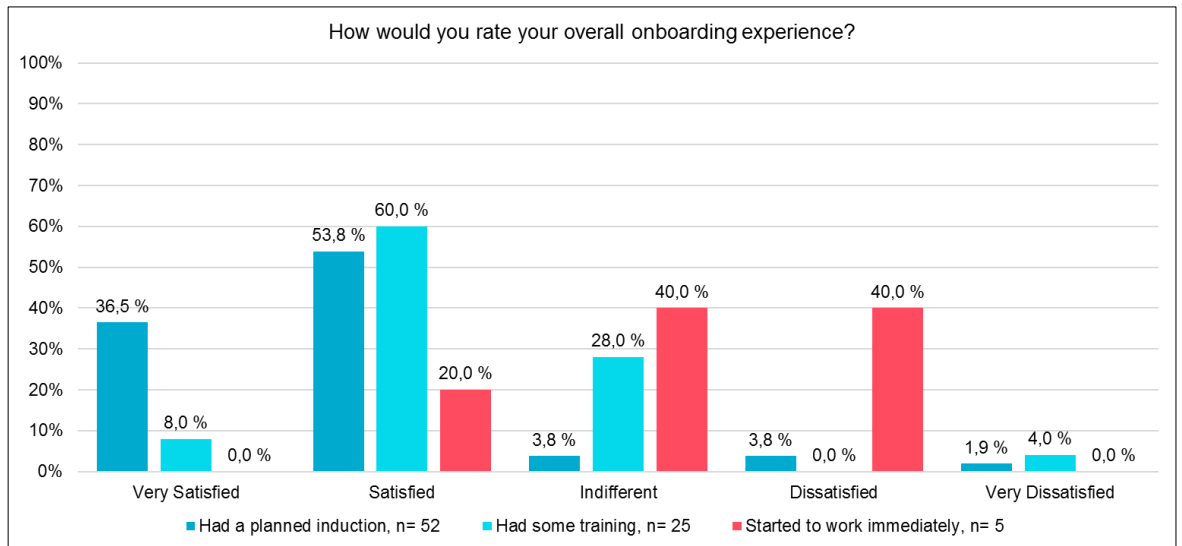


Figure 8. Employees' overall experience of onboarding

Many Human Resources respondents claimed that a key goal of onboarding is to make new employee feel welcome. According to the employee survey, most (92,6%) respondents felt welcome and they had established good relationship with the key people related to their role (89%).

The biggest differences were in Finland and India. In Finland, all (100%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel welcome and 85,7% said that they had established good relations with the key people relative to their role. In India, less respondents (83,3%) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel welcome; however, most respondents (94,4%) thought that they had established good relations with the key people relative to their role.

According to the survey the level of engagement was high. 95,1% of the employee respondents slightly agreed, agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend Basware as a great place to work. Most respondents (85,4%) agreed or strongly agreed that they saw themselves working at Basware in two years' time. In India this percentage was slightly lower (72,2%) than the global average. Globally, 82,7% agreed or strongly agreed that their role was still great for them. Only a minority of respondents (1,2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with sentence "I am proud to work for Basware"

Figure 9 presents the three things that employee respondents have most enjoyed so far working at Basware. Globally the three most enjoyed things were the people you work with (65,9%), learning new things (59,8%) and working conditions (40,2%). The three least enjoyable things were physical work environment (13,4%), sense of purpose to one's work (12,2%) and other unmentioned things (8,5%). respondents in different countries and

functions enjoyed different things. Country and function specific figures are presented in appendix 4.

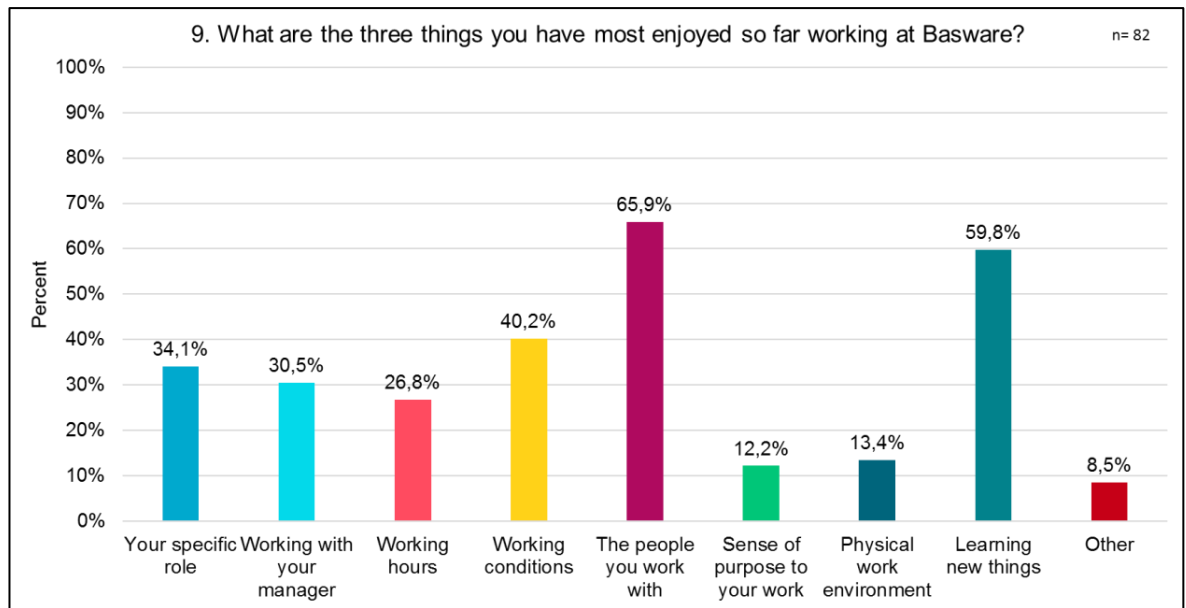


Figure 9. Three things that employees have enjoyed most at Basware

Hiring manager respondents' opinions about the time the employee should become productive varied from two weeks to half a year; suitable time until becoming productive depended on the position and the background of a new employee. At the time of the survey, 81,7% of the employee respondents felt productive. For the rest respondents it had taken more than 3 months to become productive. Majority (76,8%) of the respondents felt that they were performing well after 0–3 months in the company.

According to the employee respondents, the clarity of own job role was high. 89,1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they know what the organizational goals of their business unit are. Nobody disagreed. 91,5% of the respondents said that they understand how own role contributes to the organizational goals of the own business unit.

5.3 Good practices and required development items of onboarding

The raised improvement needs were relatively well aligned between all survey groups: Human Resources, hiring managers and new employees. However, one Human Resources respondent saw that no changes were required to the existing process. The improvement needs raised by Human Resources respondents were mostly related to the lack of aligned standard of induction: "A general induction should be provided to new employees and there should be a process owner". Also, standardized learning programs

were requested for different job groups. It was also seen important that all line managers are taking the same level of responsibility.

Also, many hiring manager respondents were missing training practices, induction documentation and induction follow-up or evaluation. Responses also pointed out a lack of clarity in responsibilities: "I do not know if follow-up is done by Human Resources department". On the other hand, especially hiring manager respondents' opinions about the overall process differed from each other the most. One wanted to have a strict process while another manager stated: "I don't think we need a more formal program – sometimes that can be in the way and hinder the actual work that needs to get done".

Employee respondents described the lack of structured and scheduled onboarding process: "We seem to be lacking an effective and well-designed onboarding program that focuses on teaching employees the skills, tools and processes they need to perform their specific job." The lack of consistency in the process became visible in different ways in the employee responses: "I noticed that people receive welcome introduction email when they start. I've always felt a bit slighted that one of those never went out for me."

Some hiring manager respondents raised a need for classroom training and dedicated trainer. Also, improvements both in training documentation and on-the-job training were suggested. Many employee respondents saw the importance of mentor or buddy concept: "It is very important to assign a mentor from the first weeks who can help in answering questions and guide during the first few months", However, the importance of skills and attitude of the trainer were emphasized: "The training for new people should be performed by skilled and motivated people (which was not in my case)."

In many feedbacks, respondents were looking for improvement regarding knowledge: "We could also benefit from better documentation on Basware products. I've heard feedback from Basware customers that they feel our support agents are often not prepared to handle customer questions and need better training..." The availability of updated information was also seen as a problem: "If one is expected to rely on the Basware intranet documentation, presentations, and courses for self-learning, then outdated material with obsolete routines and incorrect information needs to be deleted or updated. Often multiple variations of the same information can easily be found by using the search."

The number of employee, hiring manager and Human Resources respondents raised a need to understand the big picture, company domain and organization. Visibility to cross-functional teams and, in general, to know people in other parts of the organization were

considered important. One respondent described the issue: “None of the employee is aware what is happening in different units”,

Two Human Resource respondents raised a need for assessment metrics, such as employee attrition rate and how fast people become productive. “Initial 3–6 months are the most crucial. Induction should secure that the right resource has been hired and that expectations are met both for Basware and the new employee. Induction should make sure that the newcomer is up and running and settled in to his or her role.” One hiring manager respondent reminded that “after probation period it is difficult to make actions if the recruitment decision was wrong”.

The suggested tips and best practices were mostly related to social aspects. Human Resource respondents saw it important to be friendly and approachable and answer questions that the new employee might have. The most recommended best practice by hiring manager respondents was to assign a buddy who has the required competence, positive attitude and knowledge of the company. It was also seen important to create a training plan and to follow the schedule.

Employee respondents appreciated many best practices that also hiring manager and Human Resources respondents had listed. The social aspect, human interaction and warm welcoming were mentioned most often when employee respondents presented their positive experiences: “It’s great here. Lovely colleagues, all equipment and a Basware shirt lying on the desk =)”. Employee respondents also appreciated when all working equipment and accounts were ready when they joined in the first day of work: “Happy smiling faces, new laptop, a mobile, accounts/logins ready and set-up plus time to get to know team members and co-workers. All mentioned were there.”

The most popular good practice mentioned by employee respondents was a lunch with own team or manager: “I would have loved to have a "planned" team lunch during my 1st week here”. Also, ideas about a welcome message and to publish all new names in the intranet main page were suggested.

5.4 The most urgent items to develop

The urgency of the development items was calculated by counting on how many times the specific improvement need or recommended practice was mentioned in the survey responses. Four most mentioned items are presented in table 3.

The most urgent requirement was to provide employees with an onboarding process: a standardized plan that can be used when a new employee joins the company. The second urgent topic was to provide employees with training or documentation about Basware’s business area, products and services. Having a shared lunch session with the team was mentioned third often. The fourth item was onboarding metrics.

Table 3. The most urgent items to develop based on survey participants’ open feedback

Topic	Employee	Manager	HR	Points**
Onboarding process or standard	12	4	3	19
Business or product training / documentation	8	2	1	11
Lunch with the team	5	0	2	7
Metrics for the onboarding success	0	4	2	6

**One point equals to one survey respondents feedback where the item was mentioned as a development item or a recommended best practice

5.5 Key findings of the survey

All personnel groups who participated in the survey, recognized the lack of inconsistency in the process. The most urgent requirement was to provide employees with an onboarding process: a standardized plan to use when a new employee joins the company.

Most of the employee respondents, regardless of the organization or country, received a planned induction or at least some training. Majority of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall onboarding experience, felt productive and that they were performing well. Percentages for respondents who had received a planned onboarding were significantly higher than others.

Human Resources and hiring manager respondents shared the onboarding responsibility. Most respondents had their own onboarding processes which varied significantly from each other. The lack of onboarding structure or process was the main identified issue by

all survey participant groups. Based on the employee responses, other main deficiencies were the lack of Basware domain and product knowledge, inconsistency of lunch practices, and unclear performance expectations. The most popular best practice was a buddy concept and a lunch with a new employee.

6 Proposal for Basware

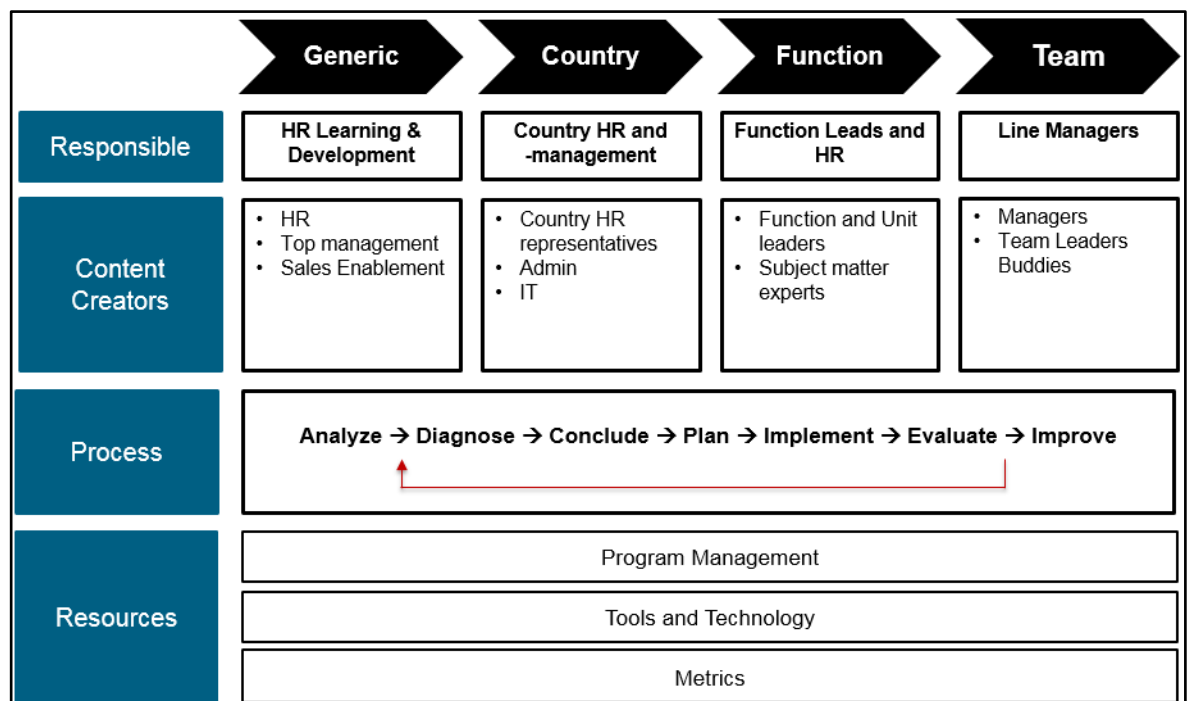
Based on the theoretical framework and the survey analysis, a proposal to develop an onboarding program for Basware was created. The main features of the proposal:

- The fundamental elements of onboarding are included.
- The urgent development items are considered.
- The program is globally consistent.
- The program is adjustable by local requirements.
- There is a global process owner for the program.

This chapter presents the design and proposed implementation process of global onboarding program. It is followed by the main onboarding elements which were defined based on the theoretical framework and survey results. According to the principles of Action Research, the actual development started simultaneously while conducting the research. In chapter 5.6.3 the status of the research is discussed and the first development project, creation of product trainings, is presented.

6.1 Implementation of the onboarding program

The next phase is to proceed in implementation of a company level onboarding program, which recognizes different local needs. It requires input from centralized Human Resources units, each country and function. Picture 8 presents the design of the program.



Picture 8. Model for designing an onboarding program for Basware

The first step is to assign a global program manager who:

- plans the program-level activities and the project schedule
- starts, stops and monitors progress of local projects
- manages program risks and issues
- sets procedures and resolves resource conflicts
- determines metrics.

For each country and function the key stakeholders are identified, and project participants assigned. The timeline and goals of the local project are set together. The first task is to specify the gaps and required improvement actions in the country or unit. This is done by assessing the current state of onboarding and defining the target state. Country and function specific results of this survey are provided to project use. Many countries and teams have well-working processes and practices in place; they are reviewed and analyzed. The common best practices are agreed on a country and function levels. It is important to include all defined onboarding elements (Chapter 5.6.3) in the program. Also, the collected development suggestions and recommended best practices should be considered. They are presented in appendix 7. The outcome is a blueprint which includes country and function specific practices and responsible persons.

Responsible persons of the new model are agreed in terms of content ownership and single onboarding tasks. The produced materials are stored in a common, agreed location. The final step is to train all required onboarding stakeholders, such as managers and buddies, to the new process.

The program needs to allow local adaptation, based on the requirements of different teams, job roles and individuals. The consistency is reached with one global framework, by agreeing and using common tools and agreed metrics, and by ensuring that all onboarding elements are included in the final onboarding process.

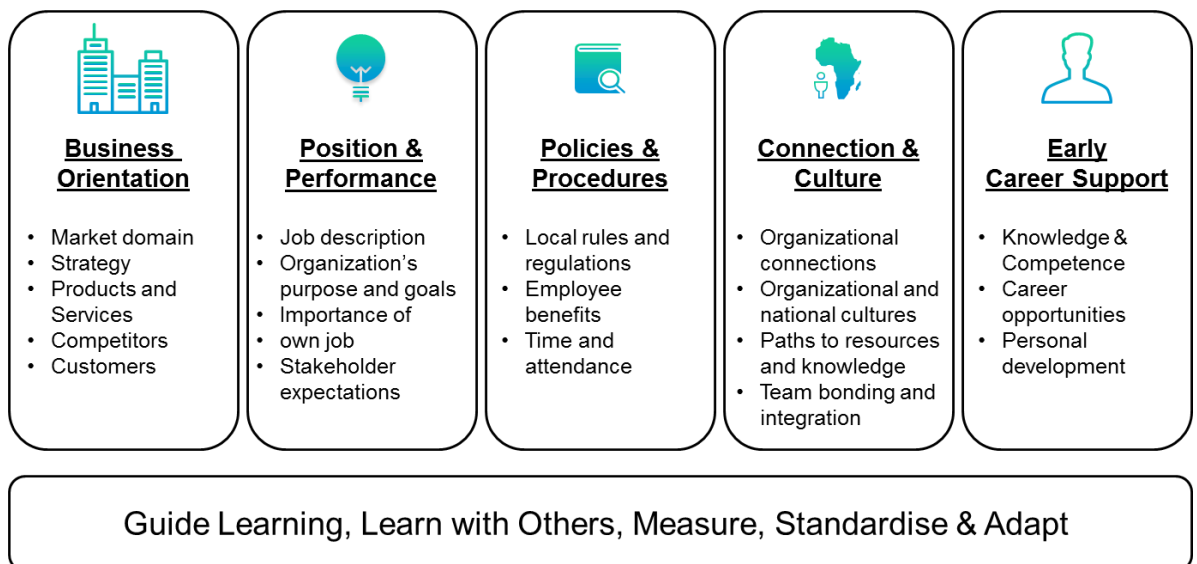
As part of Action Research, the results of projects will be piloted and measured. This approach will allow changes before a broad scale implementation. Also, the target is to promote organizational learning; the local stakeholders will learn to facilitate improvements of practices and continuous improvement can become a part of operations after the program is officially closed.

To ensure a buy-in from different stakeholders across the global organization, information about the onboarding initiative should be shared in the company, for example, by sending a regular newsletter about the progress, goals and impact of the program.

6.2 The main elements of the onboarding program

The common elements of the onboarding program were created based on the existing theories and the results from the survey. Two of the elements, business orientation and early career support, form a baseline, where the process is similar for all employees. For early career support, the existing HR tools and instructions will be used and finally each employee will be integrated into the Basware HR cycle; timing depends on in which month the employee has joined the company.

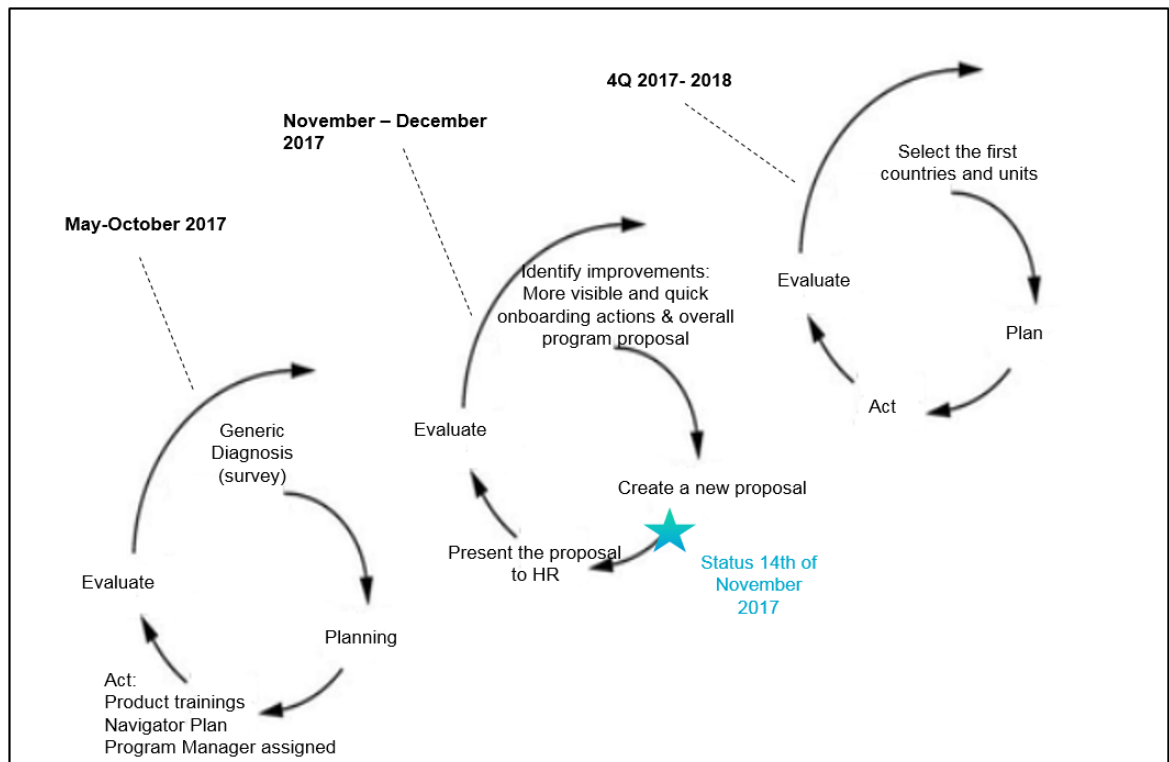
The exact content of other elements can be adapted to meet local guidelines, organizational and job role requirements and the individual needs of a new employee. The onboarding elements at Basware are presented in picture 9.



Picture 9. Elements of Basware onboarding program

6.3 The status of Action Research

The first stakeholders were involved in the program while conducting the research. The early plans were based on discussions with Human Resources representatives and the next step was to involve Sales Enablement in the program. They started creating product trainings for the generic company-level onboarding phase. Additionally, Human Resources created an intranet page, a navigator plan for the generic onboarding content and assigned a program manager. Picture 10 presents the status and the next phases of the program.

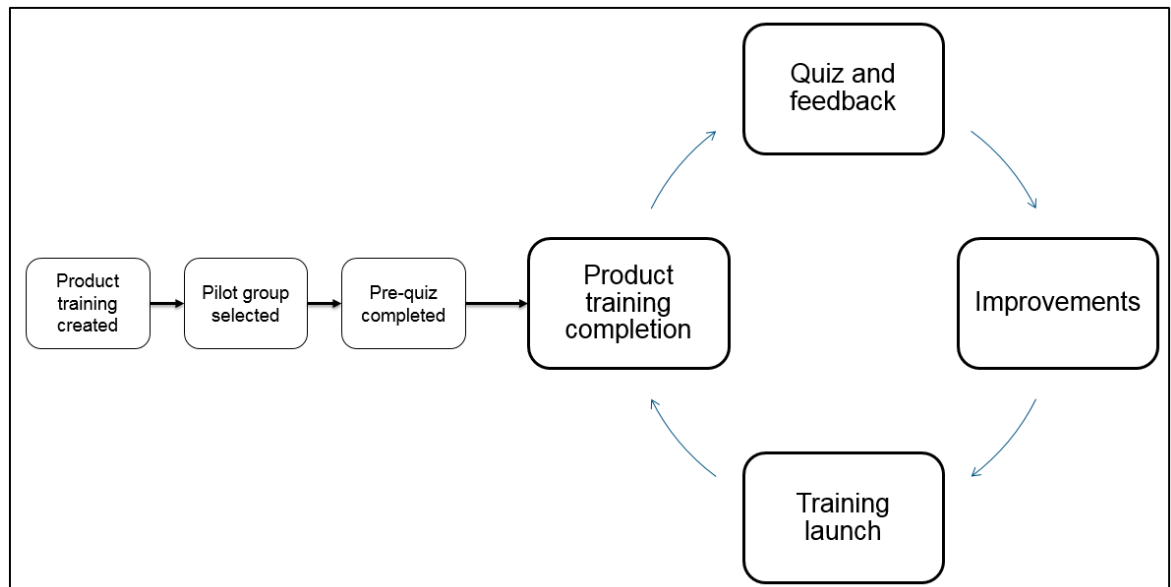


Picture 10. The development model and status of onboarding program (modified Saunders et al. 2012, 183)

The first development item: Product trainings

Knowledge of Basware products and services was identified as one of the urgent development items as only 25,6% of the employees stated they have a high-level understanding of Basware products and services. In addition, in open comments many provided feedback about outdated material and lack of training. The knowledge of products and services is essential, as it forms a background on which the competence can be built on. Therefore, product trainings were selected as a theme of a development project which started as a part of the ongoing thesis project. It was one of the generic, company-wide onboarding topics.

The work started by identifying a unit which was working already with product knowledge. Such a unit was the Sales Enablement team which is responsible for providing sales trainings. These product trainings are high-level and suitable for anybody to build basic understanding about Basware services. The team was willing to co-operate and provide the trainings to be used in an onboarding program for all Basware employees. In turn, author offered to find a pilot group which could pilot the first training. The decision was to develop the trainings by using the same development cycle model than in the overall program. The product training status is presented in picture 11.



Picture 11. Development model of product trainings

Accounts Payable topic was chosen as the first training topic. The goal was to provide a description what Accounts Payable is, who are the target customers and their personas and to present Basware solutions for this customer segment. The length of the created interactive self-learning was less than 30 minutes and additional videos which could be reviewed during the learning.

The first version of the training was created in October 2017. 11 employees who joined the company during 2017 were invited to the pilot (appendix 5), and six of them participated in it. The steps of the first development round were:

- Employees did a quiz and answered two questions which measured their prior knowledge level (wk. 43).
- Employees completed an e-Learning (wk. 44).
- Pilot group completed a follow-up quiz and provided feedback (wk. 45).
- Improvements to the training were decided (wk. 46).

The pre-questionnaire contained two questions and a quiz of 5 multiple choice questions which are presented in appendix 6. The first question was “How confident do you currently feel regarding speaking about Basware solutions for Accounts Payable?”. It was rated with scale 1–5 where 5 equals very confident and 1 equals very unconfident. The second question was “What is your current level of knowledge regarding Basware solutions for Accounts Payable?” It was also rated with scale 1–5 where 5 equals very good and 1 equals none.

After the training completion, the pilot group did a follow-up quiz a week later. It included the same two questions which measured the confidence level of the participant, and the questionnaire with five questions. The results are presented in table 4.

Based on the results, going through the e-learning increased the level of confidence and knowledge in the small pilot group. The level of confidence of speaking about Basware solutions for Accounts Payable increased by 66,7% and the result of the current level of knowledge regarding Basware solutions for Accounts Payable increased by 53,8%. Also, the average quiz score improved from 45/100 to 83/100. In the post-survey, on average, the usefulness of introduction module was rated 4,2 / 5,0.

Table 4. Learning results of a product training

Phase	Question 1	Question 2	Questionnaire
Before training	2,3 / 5	2,7 / 5	45 / 100
After training	4 / 5	5 / 5	83 / 100

There was also one development suggestion for the learning content: “I would like to learn more about our winning stories. Not only what the effect was but also which Basware solutions they are using, which values they were looking for and how we won these cases”.

The content of the training is updated by making selected training elements more compact, by clarifying certain parts of the content and by creating two additional in the quiz. The improved training will be launched throughout the organization in 4Q 2017. The proposal about including the winning stories will be considered in the following development cycle in 1Q 2018. The plan of the Sales Enablement team is to improve the training content in regular cycles also in the future.

7 Discussion

This chapter concludes the research by presenting the main findings of the research and by providing recommendations for the case company. This is followed by conclusions and the author's own learning. Some further research topics are also provided.

7.1 Main findings

According to Stein & Christiansen (2010, 14; 34–39), many companies have onboarding practices that are deployed across the enterprise in inconsistent ways, which creates frustrating experiences for both new hires and hiring managers. Additionally, there is possibly hidden excellence in the organization, which was the case at Basware. The survey revealed that the hiring managers were lacking standardized information, and managers were left to improvise their own solutions to integrate a new employee. The practices of teams varied from non-existing processes to a complete onboarding program. Especially the employee and manager feedback revealed a lack of aligned standard and the most urgent development item was to create an onboarding process.

Based on the survey results, planned onboarding resulted in the best induction outcome at Basware in terms of effectiveness, the right level of information delivered, coverage of important tasks and overall satisfaction of onboarding. According to Bauer (2010, 6), adequate and effective onboarding are related to, for example, higher organizational commitment and improved retention rates and time to productivity. At Basware, this relation between employees who did have induction and who only had some training, could not be proven; the engagement level in the company was high and attrition level was low.

According to Bauer (2010, 10), proactive organizations often create check-in meetings at specific intervals to help new employees get the information they need in a timely manner. Based on the survey by AAC Global (2017), it is common that the success of onboarding is not followed up at all. Indeed, based on the survey results, Basware should also deploy needed metrics to measure the quality of onboarding; some managers are evaluating the onboarding progress, but the practices varied significantly in different units.

Even though aligned standards are important, the importance of local adaptation must be considered. Rees & Smith (2014, 444) see the management of people from different cultures and diverse backgrounds as the essential linkage for organizational success. They emphasize with Stein & Christiansen (2010, 266) the importance of successful manage-

ment of differences, while agreeing coherent practices and policies throughout the company. The same content is not suitable for all, and therefore it is necessary to identify content that needs to be tailored for different segments' needs. The survey results support this theory. The surveys revealed job role, country and cultural specific differences in practices and for example in things that employees enjoy at Basware.

Based on the survey results, different local, team, job role and cultural requirements were taken well into account at Basware. It was visible especially in social matters. For example, HR and manager respondents described different ways how employees were contacted before the joining day. They were often different because of the culture and local habits. The need for adaptation to local and individual requirements was also mentioned in employee responses where country specific and personalized welcome kits and induction were suggested.

The importance of social aspects was very visible especially in the answers of HR and employees. Most Human Resources respondents mentioned that one of the most important goals of onboarding is that a new employee should feel welcome and that the implementation of the orientation included various social topics. Employees' responses supported HR's assumption about the importance of the social aspect. The positive comments were mostly related to practices with human interaction, which played an important role and made the new employee feel welcome.

At Basware, the engagement of employees was high. Also, the attrition rate was very low (1,6%) amongst the employees who were invited to answer the survey. The survey results support well the theories about the importance of social integration. Bauer (2010, 5–6) claims that integration into one's work group is positively related to commitment and turnover. Also, Armstrong & Taylor (2014, 186) write that commitment and engagement are associated with the feelings of individuals about their organization.

According to Forbes (2017), the importance of the mentoring and buddies is increasing. Also, Bauer (2010, 10–11) saw the mentoring concept important because opportunities for informal interaction with colleagues will help the new employees adapt more easily to the new work environment. Based on the responses from all survey participant groups, mentoring concept was seen valuable. It was seen important to have a named, more experienced colleague who can guide during the first few months. However, the importance of required skills and attitude of the buddy was also emphasized.

The social aspect is also related to interpersonal networks. Based on many theories, for example by Watkins (2013, 28–30), Bauer (2010, 5–6) and Stein & Christiansen (2010, 65) stakeholder connection or social integration is one of the main elements of a successful onboarding program. Boxall & Purcell (2016, 12) claim that company's human capital advantage is not only about talented individuals but also about social capital advantage, which occurs when talents of individuals are successfully combined in collaborative activities.

The current trend is also supporting this theory, since according to AAC Global (2017), the onboarding routine had started to change by increasingly involving other people; from the future work community of the new employee and from different organizations. At Basware, onboarding is normally conducted by multiple stakeholders and the social aspect is strong. However, the cross-organizational connection and knowledge about what other units and functions do was on a low level. This was one of the recognized development items.

According to Watkins (2013, 28), regardless of the position it is beneficial to learn about the brands and products that an employee will be supporting, and therefore business orientation is one of the four pillars of effective onboarding. In the implementation of training the method of learning is an important aspect. AAC (2017) claims that based on their survey, getting familiar with traditional documentation was considered as the weakest part of induction and that interactive and logically structured learning will become more important, whether it is self-directed or guided learning. Many employees were looking for improvement regarding knowledge transfer, for example better documentation and learning methods, which should be a mix of different tools, self-study and human interaction.

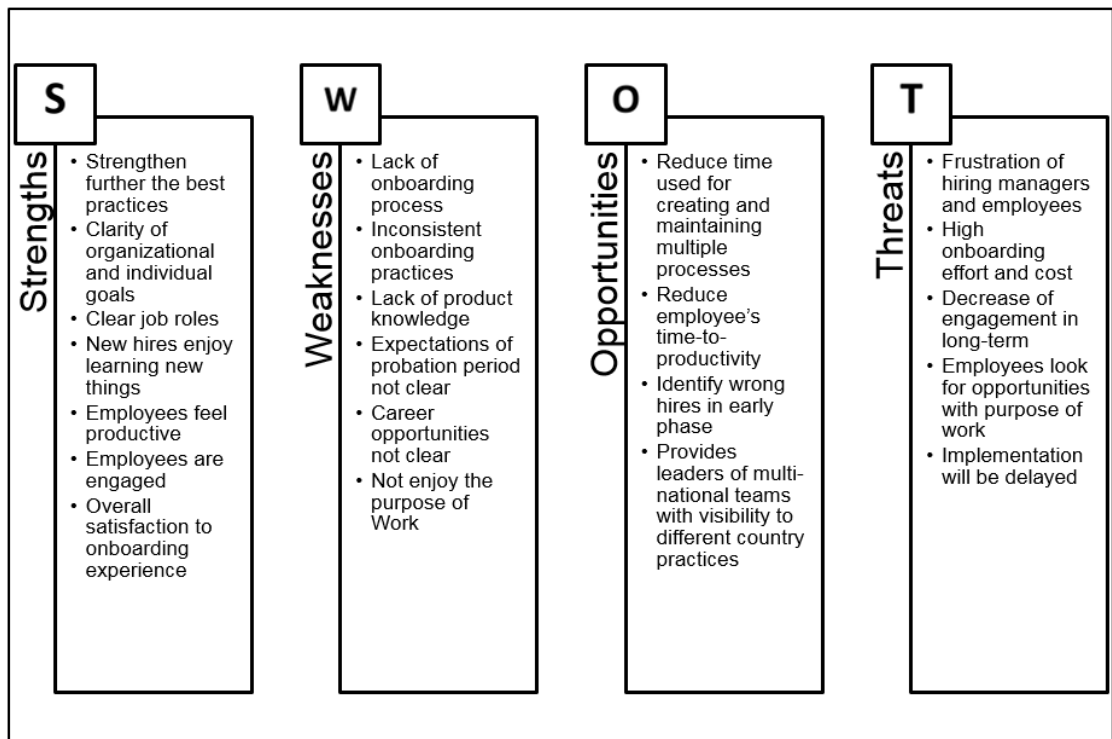
Based on the survey, the suggested best practices were mostly related to social aspects. However, also clarity related topics were covered well during the onboarding at Basware. Most employees knew what the organizational goals of his or her own business unit are and how their role contributed to the organizational goals of one's business unit. According to Bauer (2010, 5–6), measures of role clarity and organizational goals are among the most consistent predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment during the onboarding process.

To conclude, based on the reflection of results to the presented theories by Bauer (2010, 5–6) and Armstrong & Taylor (2014, 186) the connection or social integration, clarification and self-efficacy were the strongest areas of the current onboarding elements at Basware. Based on theoretical framework, they are proven to increase for example organizational

commitment and employee retention which were, based on the survey results, on a good level at the company.

The results do not support the Bauer’s model of three onboarding maturity. At Basware the basic administrative tasks are missing more often than the higher levels described in the four C’s model. Based on the discussions with Managers and Human Resources Management, the required focus areas are to create consistency and efficiency in onboarding across the organization by building a common framework.

To answer the question “How to implement an onboarding program for Basware”, the following aspects were observed. Onboarding program redesign should be executed as a project with appropriate program management, where the full range of tools, technology, resources and content are used. It is important to create a baseline of content that is common across all new hires. In addition, it is necessary to identify parts that need to be adapted locally or for key hire segments. Transparent local processes enable efficient operations and good people management in multi-national teams. Since the whole organization may not be covered simultaneously, it is important to select prioritized units and countries where the onboarding program is first deployed. By supporting and driving organizational learning, continuous development may become as part of local operations and the project continues to be implemented beyond its official end. Picture 12 presents the SWOT analysis of the proposed solution.



Picture 12. SWOT analysis of the proposed onboarding program for Basware

Based on the survey, the employees' understanding of Basware products and services was on low level (25,6%) and understanding of Basware's business area was defined as one of the urgent development items. Therefore, product training was selected as a theme for the first improvement project, which was started as part of the ongoing thesis project and the first development cycle was completed during the thesis project.

7.2 Recommendations

A complete implementation of a company-wide onboarding program would be an important next step towards a global process culture at Basware where the business areas often work separately. However, leading the project in all countries and functions simultaneously would require remarkable effort in terms of headcount and time. Therefore, a recommendation is to split the program into projects which are run in phases, starting with company level activities and proceeding to prioritized countries and organizations.

A thorough implementation of the program would allow evaluation of the program's impact which is also a recommended further development. Performance metrics during the early employment, attrition rate measurements, onboarding satisfaction surveys and ROI calculations would provide valuable information about the impact and benefits of the onboarding program. This data helps prioritize future onboarding activities and thereby provide a business case for the development items.

As a part of the program it would be interesting to investigate, how the competence of new employees can be better utilized at Basware. The usual approach in companies is to train a new employee and transfer knowledge to him or her. However, new employees can bring with them a lot of tacit knowledge that should be utilized more effectively.

Managers have critical role to ensure successful implementation of onboarding program. Only they can have the new practices implemented to daily operations; involving and engaging managers in the program is a key success factor.

7.3 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how to implement an onboarding process in the global organization of Basware. The work started by analyzing the current situation from the perspective of employees, hiring managers and Human Resources. The target was to investigate how onboarding is currently planned and implemented in the company and how employees experience their onboarding. To understand the focus and priorities,

the goal was also to identify the required development items and their priority and select a theme for the first improvement project to be implemented. An important task was also to identify the best practices which could be adopted across the organization. In the key findings, the impact of the current practices was evaluated by reflecting the survey results on the existing theories.

To answer the research questions and reach the main goal of the thesis work, Action Research used as a research strategy for the study. It provided a possibility to start participatory development activities while simultaneously conducting the survey. Reliability and validity of the survey were enhanced by selecting a wide scope of survey participants, and standardizing the question for each survey respondent group. The main challenge during the project was timing. Due to summer vacation season, the time pressure was always existing; employees were on vacation or acting as vacation substitutes of their colleagues.

Despite of the lack of consistency, the company had succeeded in the social integration of new employees. Combined with role clarity and self-efficacy, the outcome has possibly impacted the high employee engagement and low attrition rate. However, some of the key onboarding activities, such as clearly communicating expectations, involving the whole organization and providing training, require improvement. They are essential to boosting performance, time to productivity and overall customer satisfaction. A company level onboarding program will help to ensure that all important elements of onboarding will be covered in an effective, equal, and consistent way. The new program will support the Basware's people strategy very well and it will drive further the global process culture in the company.

7.4 Own learning

I am interested in international, diverse working environments. My professional history as a manager of acquired and other international teams have provided an opportunity to work with people from different cultures. At the same time, I have learned about challenges; complexity, lack of integration and different cultures which are hard to interpret. This thesis subject allowed me to dive more deeply into the topics of international business management, which was also the field of my studies. During this thesis I have been able to synthesize my acquired learnings. I also learned balance between reading a wide range of interesting information and focusing on the essential matters during the half-year journey.

Also, as a Product Manager for services which are built on human capital, learning to understand the wider organizational context behind the services was extremely valuable.

The most fruitful part of the thesis project was to get an insight into different parts of the organization: the whole system where the role of every employee is important.

If I was to conduct the thesis process again, I would structure the employee survey differently to enable easier data analysis and presentation. I would also leave out some questions that were not that essential with regards to the research questions and use a survey tool for conducting the hiring manager and Human Resources surveys.

It would have been great to be able to include the first country implementation of the proposed onboarding program in this report. Unfortunately, the schedule did not allow it. However, the work within the topic will continue in practice even the thesis project has become to an end.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Employee questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

We are launching the Basware Onboarding Survey today. We would love for you to take a few minutes to give your honest opinion on how you have experienced the onboarding (i.e. induction, orientation) you have received.

This kind of feedback is healthy and important. It lets our company know what is going well (and not so well) and helps decide where time and energy is best spent and what improvements are needed.

Your responses are anonymous and confidential, and information are securely collected and kept.

This survey is part of MBA thesis for Haaga-Helia Polytechnic in Helsinki, Finland. The target of the thesis is to create a global onboarding plan for Basware in co-operation with Basware Human Resources.

Best Regards,

Henna Karhunen

NFS Product Management

Employee demographics lets us understand how particular areas of the company feel. Countries where the number of respondents per function is less than five are grouped as 'Other' to ensure the privacy of respondents.

1) * My location is

Other

2) * When I started at Basware I worked for

The following questions includes things that are important for your successful onboarding here at Basware.

3) * Were you contacted by Basware between contract signing and joining date?

- Yes
 - No
-

4) * Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of these statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have established good relations with the key people relative to my role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My on-the-job training has been effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information provided has been at the right level for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am feeling productive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am feeling welcome here	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5) * Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of these statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I know what the organizational goals of my business unit are	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand how my role contributes to the organizational goals of my business unit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My experience of the organization has matched my expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I still feel like this is a great role for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My job role has matched with my expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6) * Please tick the things that you believe had covered or completed during your first weeks in the company

- I have been explained company policies
 - I have been explained Code of Conduct
 - I have been explained the salary payment processes
 - I have been provided my job description
 - I have been introduced to key contacts to be successful in my role
 - I have been provided information about employee benefits
 - I have been introduced to my team
 - I have had a good one-to-one discussion with my manager about my role
 - I have been provided with the initial information, resources, tools and contacts to assist me to be successful in my new role
 - I have been assigned a specific person to ask for help if I need during my induction
 - I had my seat, hardware, accessories and accounts ready at day one at Basware
-

7) * In your own opinion, how quickly you were able perform well after joining the company?

- Less than 1 month
 - 1-3 months
 - 4-6 months
 - 7 months or more
 - I do not know the way of working yet
-

The next questions measure the level of enthusiasm and connection that you have with Basware and how committed you are to stay with us.

8) * Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of these statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I see myself still working at Basware in two years' time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am proud to work for Basware	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I rarely think about looking for a job at another organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend Basware as a great place to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Basware motivates me to go beyond what I would in a similar role elsewhere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my contribution supports my organization to achieve its goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9) * What are the three things you have most enjoyed so far working at Basware?

- Your specific role
 - Working with your manager
 - Working hours
 - Working conditions
 - The people you work with
 - Sense of purpose to your work
 - Physical work environment
 - Learning new things
 - Other
-

Next, we would like to hear if you had a planned induction and how it went.

10) * Did you receive a planned induction after joining Basware?

- Yes, I did
 - I received some training but there was no specific plan
 - No, I started to work immediately
-

11) * Which of the following parties participated in your induction? Choose all that applies.

- Human Resources
 - My Manager
 - Other Manager in my location or virtually
 - Colleague
 - Written/electronic material
 - Other
-

12) * Please evaluate your induction by choosing all statements that are applicable

- I have had a personalized induction plan
 - I felt comfortable to ask questions during the induction
 - The person responsible for my induction had a relevant expertise
 - Induction had a positive impact on my engagement
 - I have had good training on all necessary software and systems
 - I have a good idea about what I can do to have a successful career here
 - I have a good idea about what is expected of me in my role
 - I have had good training on the processes applicable to my role
 - I have a good idea about what is expected of me in my probation period
 - I feel I have been given appropriate time to learn what I need to
 - I have a good idea about what I still need to learn to do my job well
 - I did not have a planned induction
 - I have a high-level understanding of Basware's products and services
-

Please think about time between signing your contract with Basware and when you felt you became productive.

13) * How would you rate your overall onboarding experience?



We would love to hear about your experiences and how we could improve the onboarding of our new colleagues!

14) Is there something we could have done to improve the onboarding (i.e. induction, orientation) process?

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15) How would you have liked to be welcomed in the first day?

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Appendix 2. Questions to hiring managers

Dear Line Manager,

As a part of my MBA thesis I am working in co-operation with Basware Human Resources to create a global onboarding plan for the company.

To understand the current situation and improvement needs we have completed a Quest-back Survey for the new Basware employees and collected information from the local HRs as well. Now I would love you to spend a few minutes and let us know about the induction practices in your team(s).

If no new employees joined to your team between **1st July 2016 – 31st March 2017** please ignore the questions. However, any thoughts and improvement ideas related to the topic are welcome and highly appreciated!

Questions to answer:

1. Is there any team- or position specific documentation that is used for induction of a new team member in your team(s)? **If yes can You please provide it to me.**
2. From your opinion, after which amount in time the employee should be productive in your team(s)?
3. In your own opinion which are the most important goals of the induction?
4. Who participate in carrying out the induction of the newcomers in your team(s)?
5. Is there any specific documentation or content that is provided to a new employee?
6. Is the result of induction evaluated at later stage?
7. In your opinion how well does the onboarding succeed in your team?
8. What should be improved in the onboarding/induction process, from the day the contract is signed with employee to the day that the induction program is completed?
9. Do you have any best practices or tips for induction process that would benefit other teams too?

Many thanks in advance.

Br, Henna

Henna Karhunen

Senior Product Manager

P.

E.

A. Basware Corporation, Linnoitustie 2, PL 97, FI-02601 Espoo, Finland

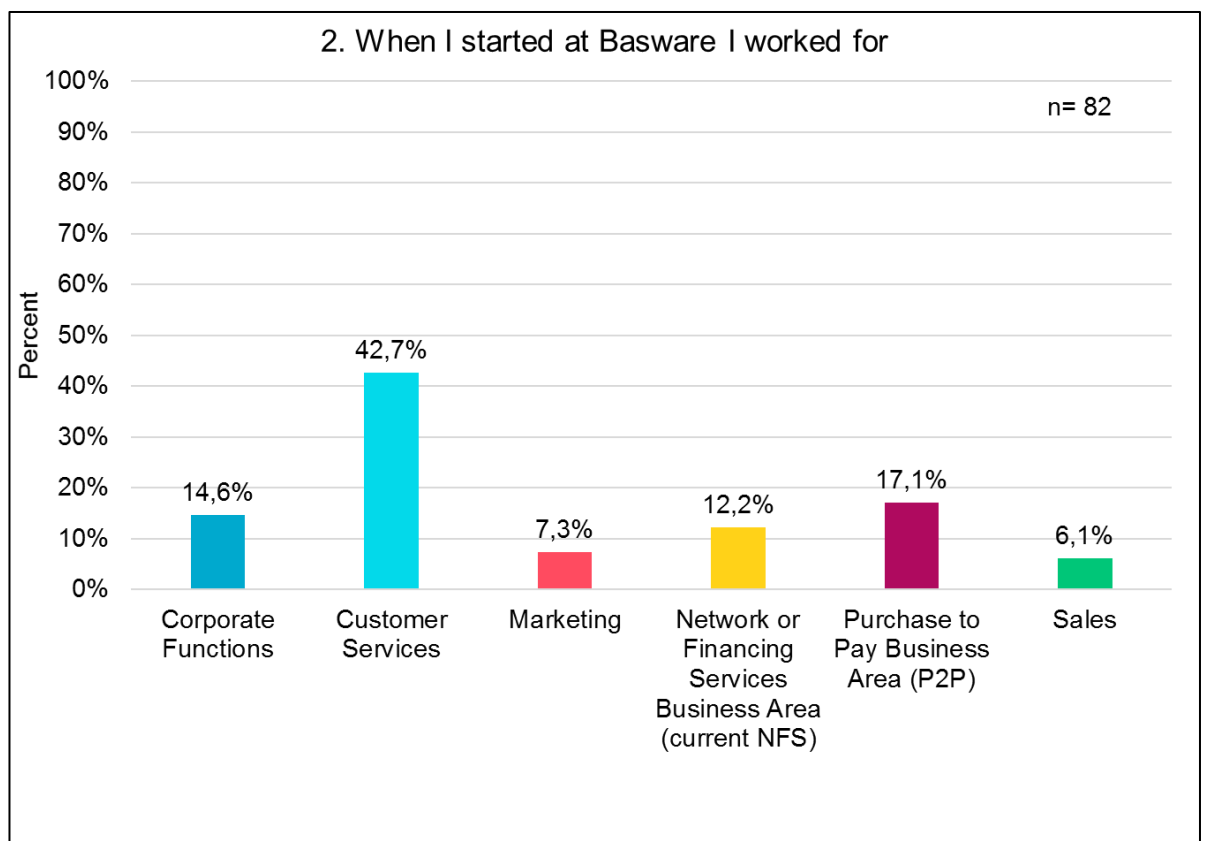
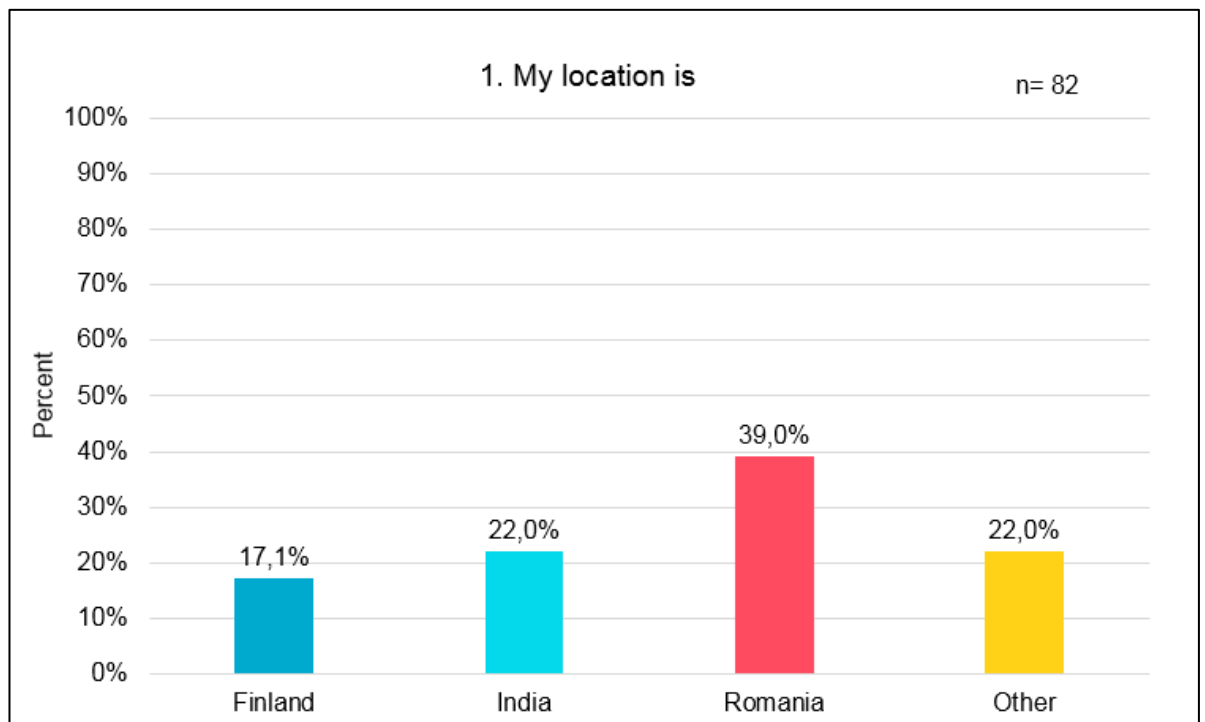
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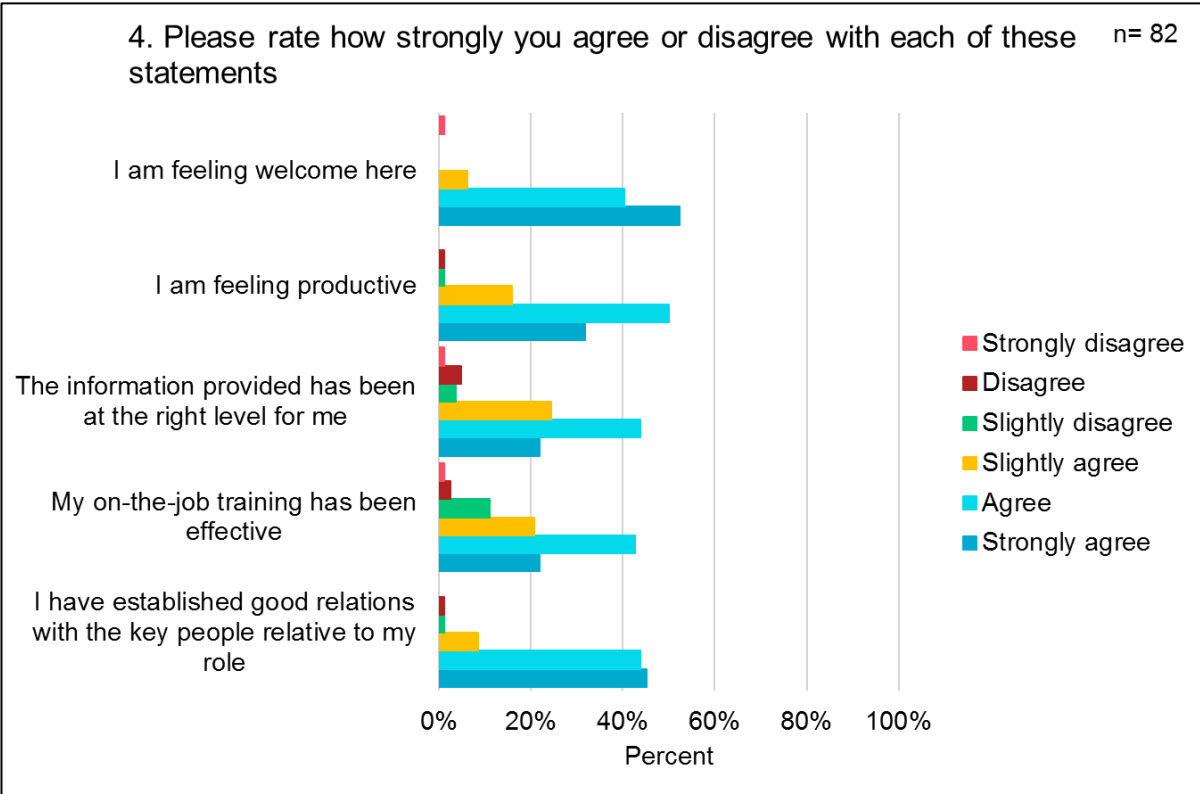
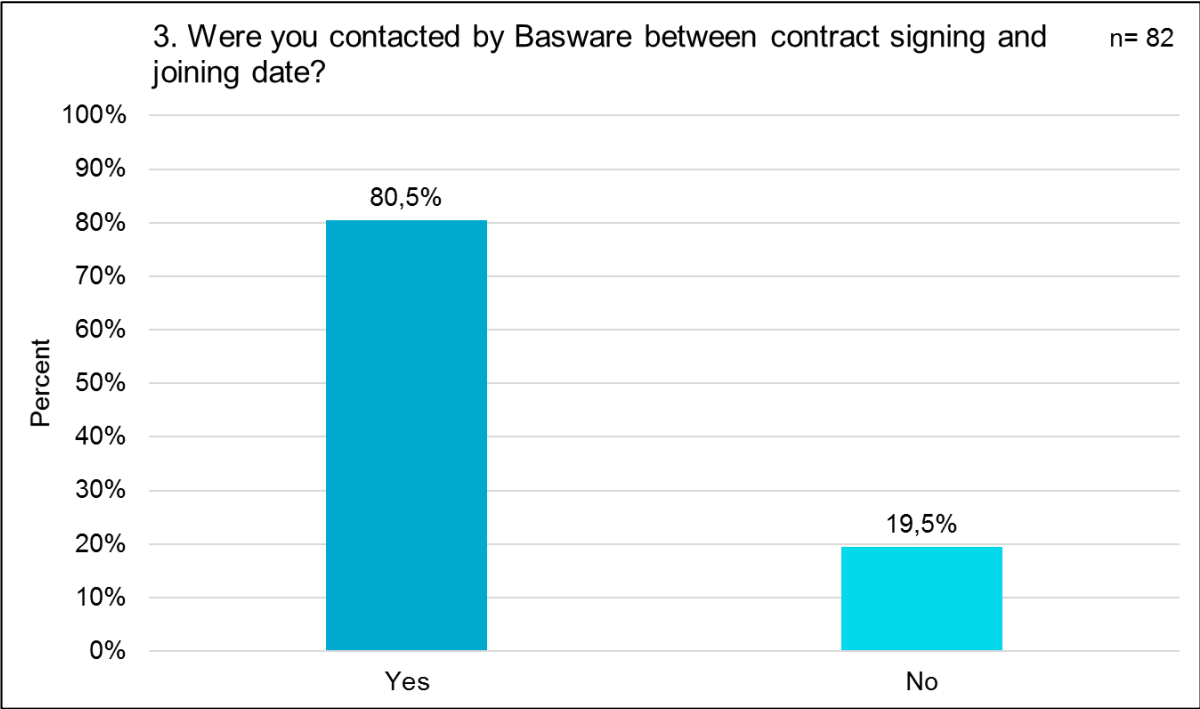
Appendix 3. Questions for Human Resources

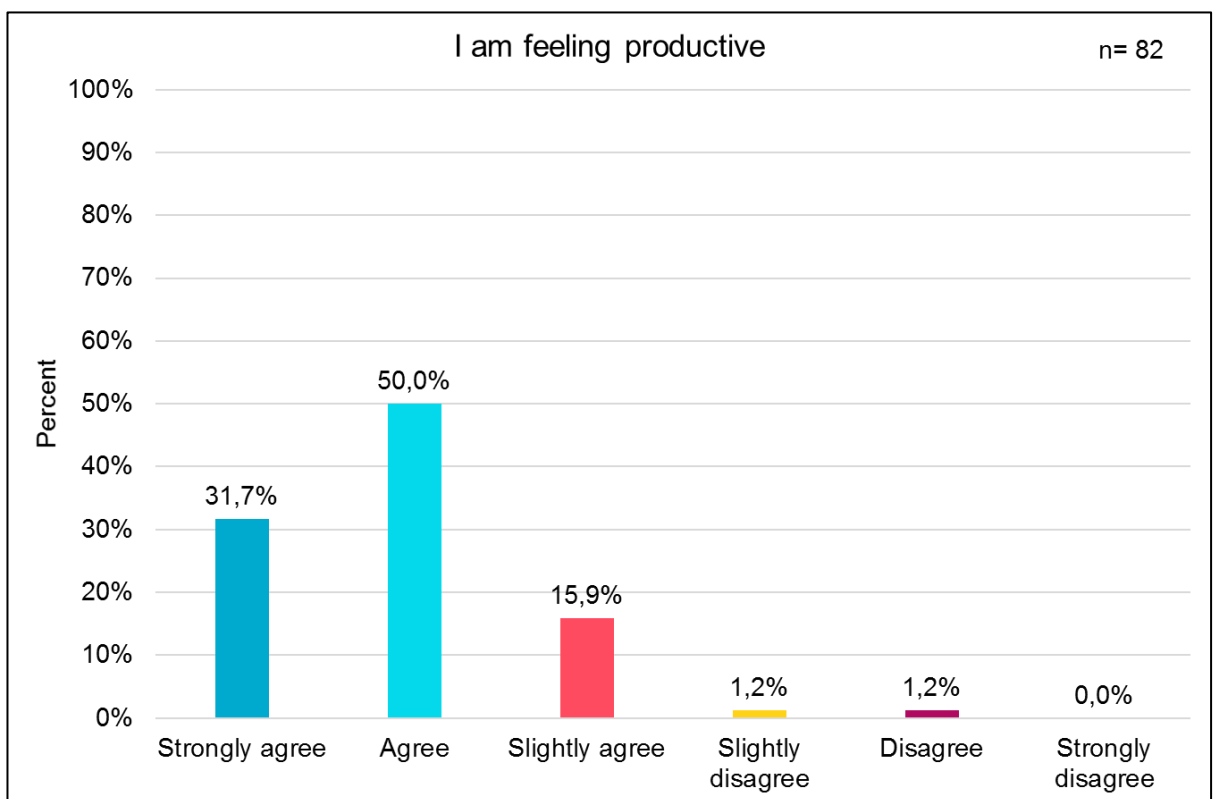
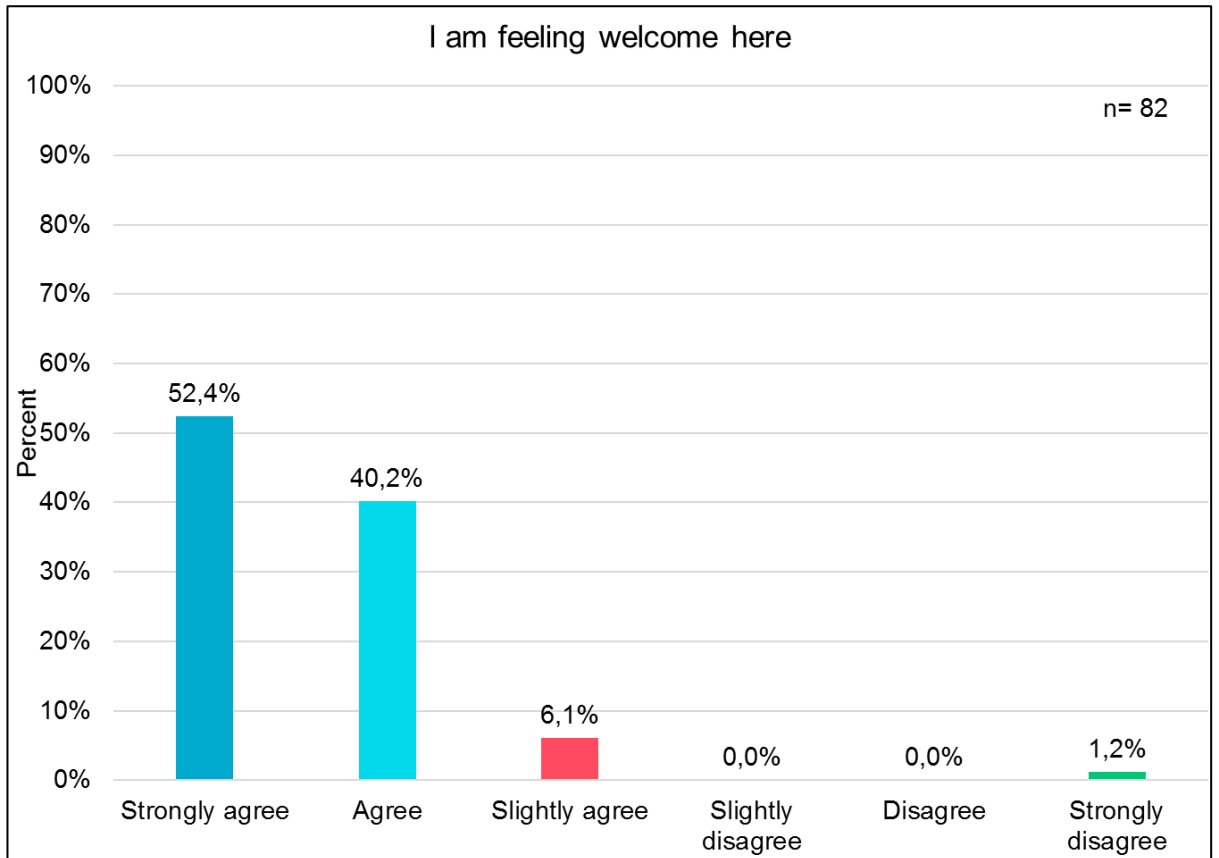
1. Is there an onboarding (i.e. orientation, induction) process or guidelines in your country, if there is, could you please send it to me?
2. Who participate in carrying out the induction of the newcomers? Is there specific documentation or content that is provided to a new employee?
3. From your opinion, after which amount in time the employee should know the Basware way of working?
4. Is the result of induction evaluated at later stage? In your own opinion which are the most important goals of the induction?
5. In your opinion how well does the onboarding succeed in your country?
6. What should be improved in the onboarding process, from the day the contract is signed with employee to the day that the induction program is completed?
7. Do you have any best practices or tips for induction process that would benefit other countries too?

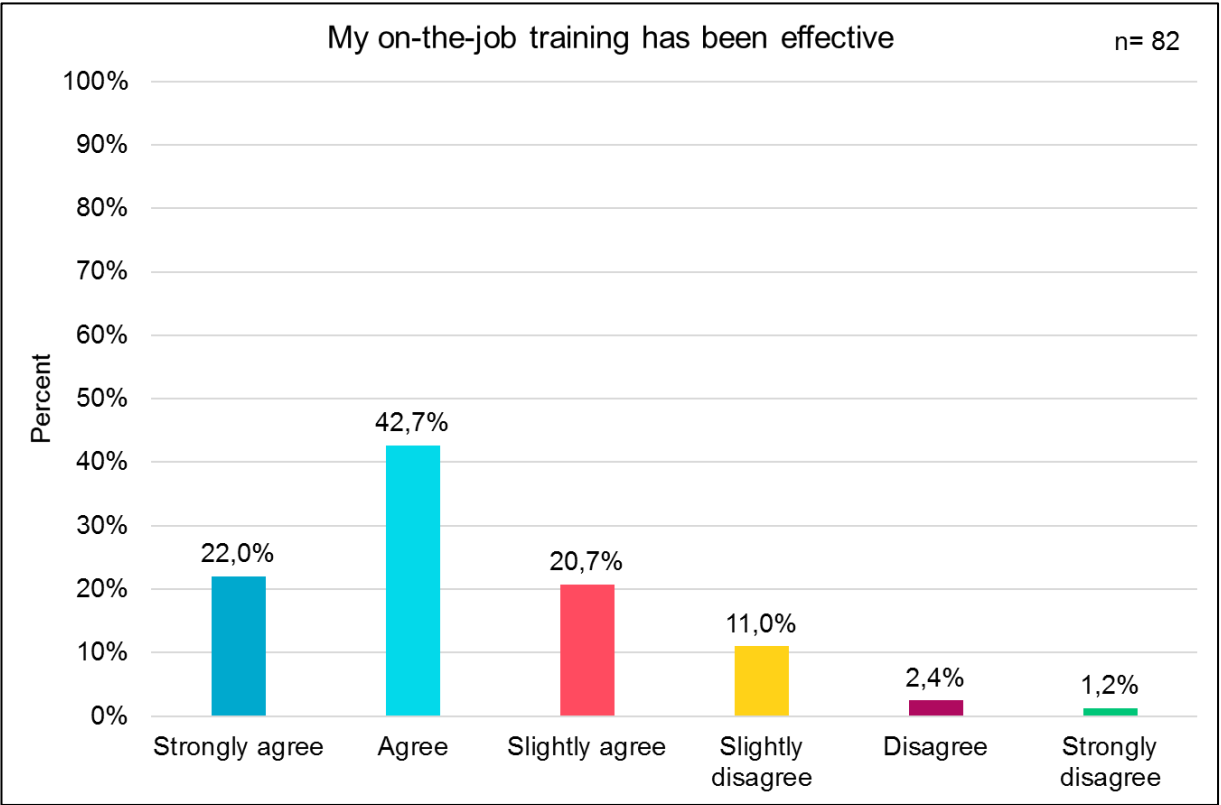
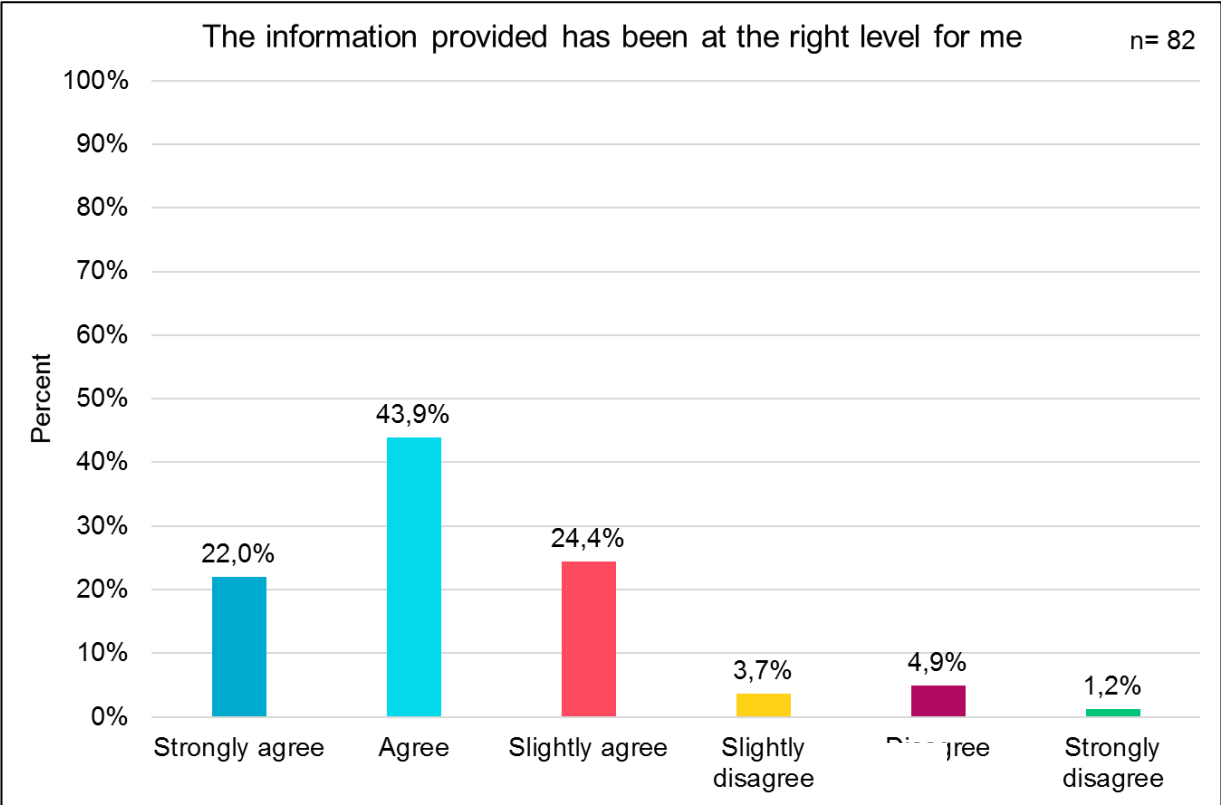
Appendix 4. Research results in figures

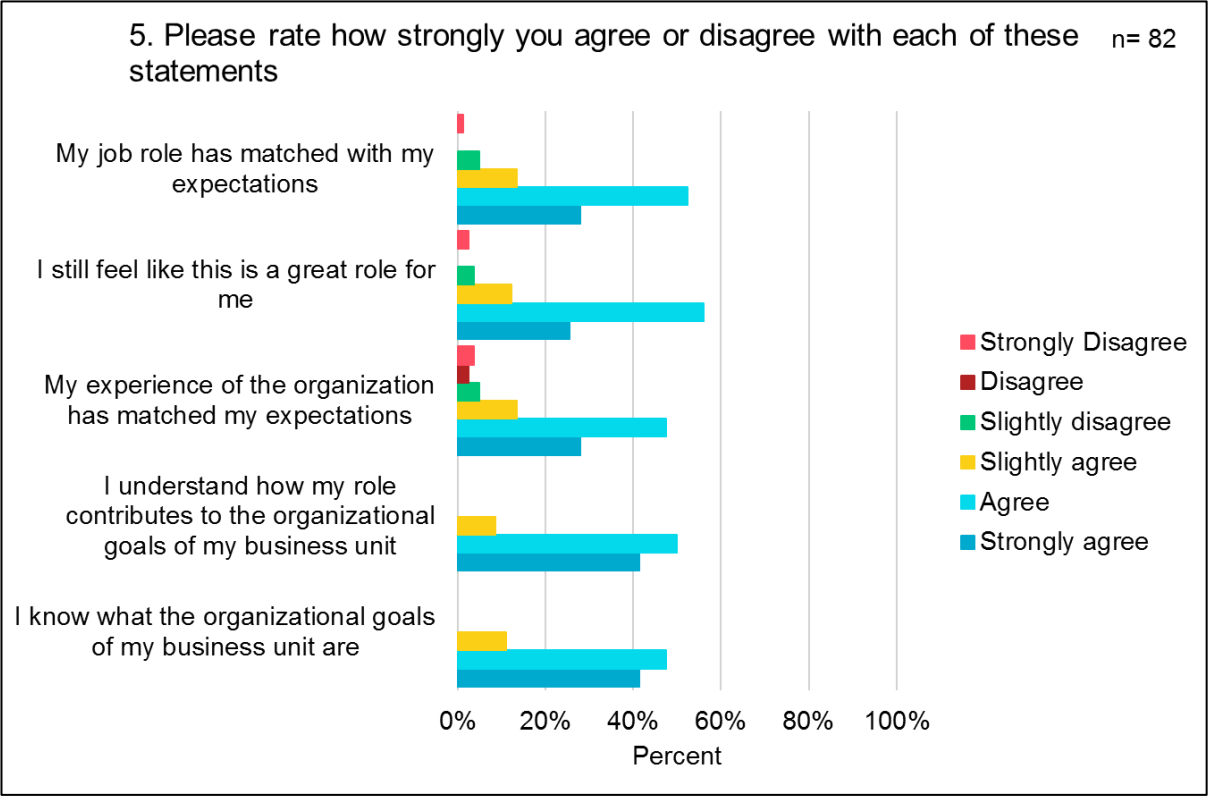
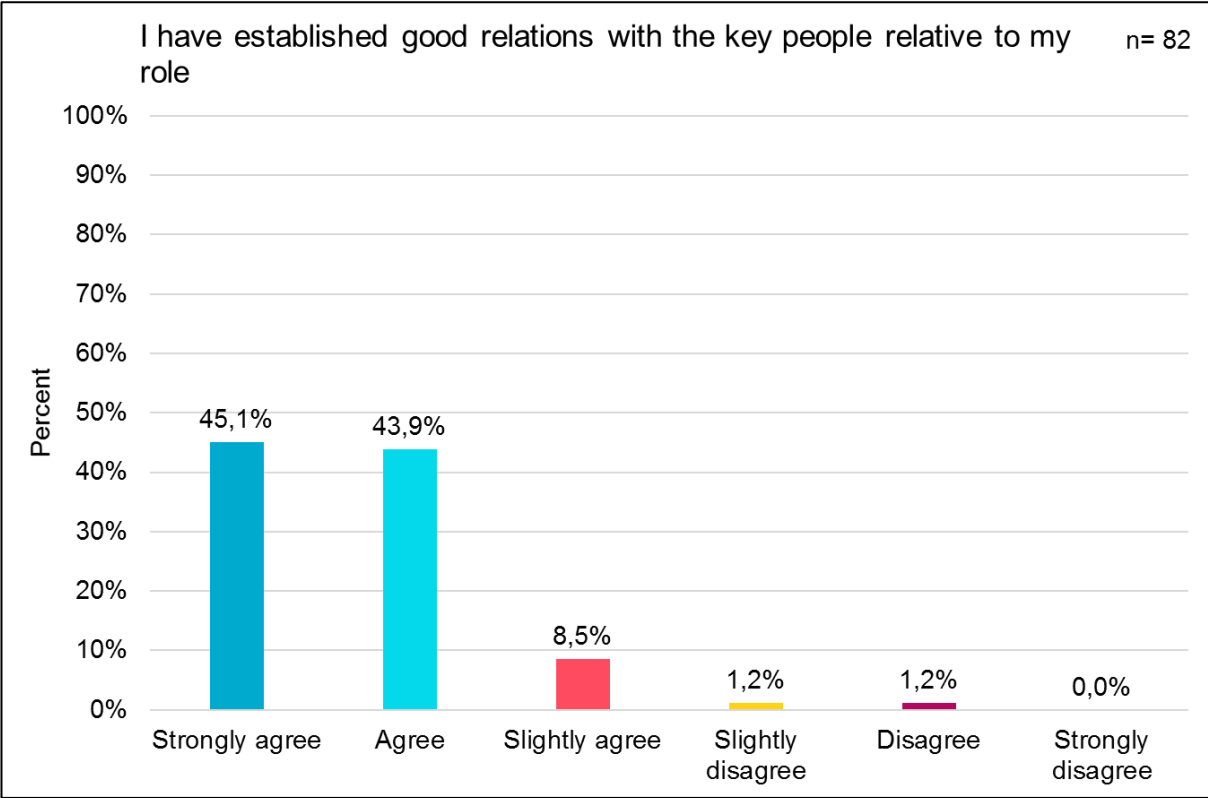
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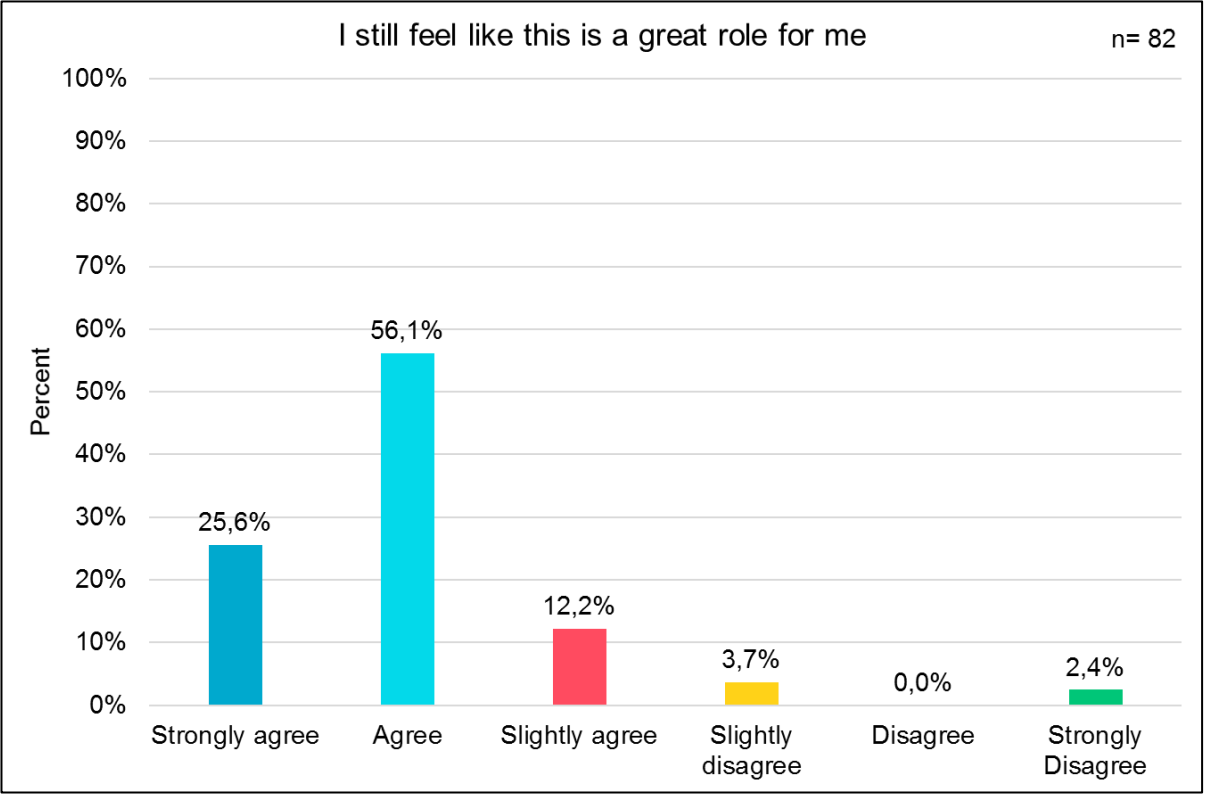
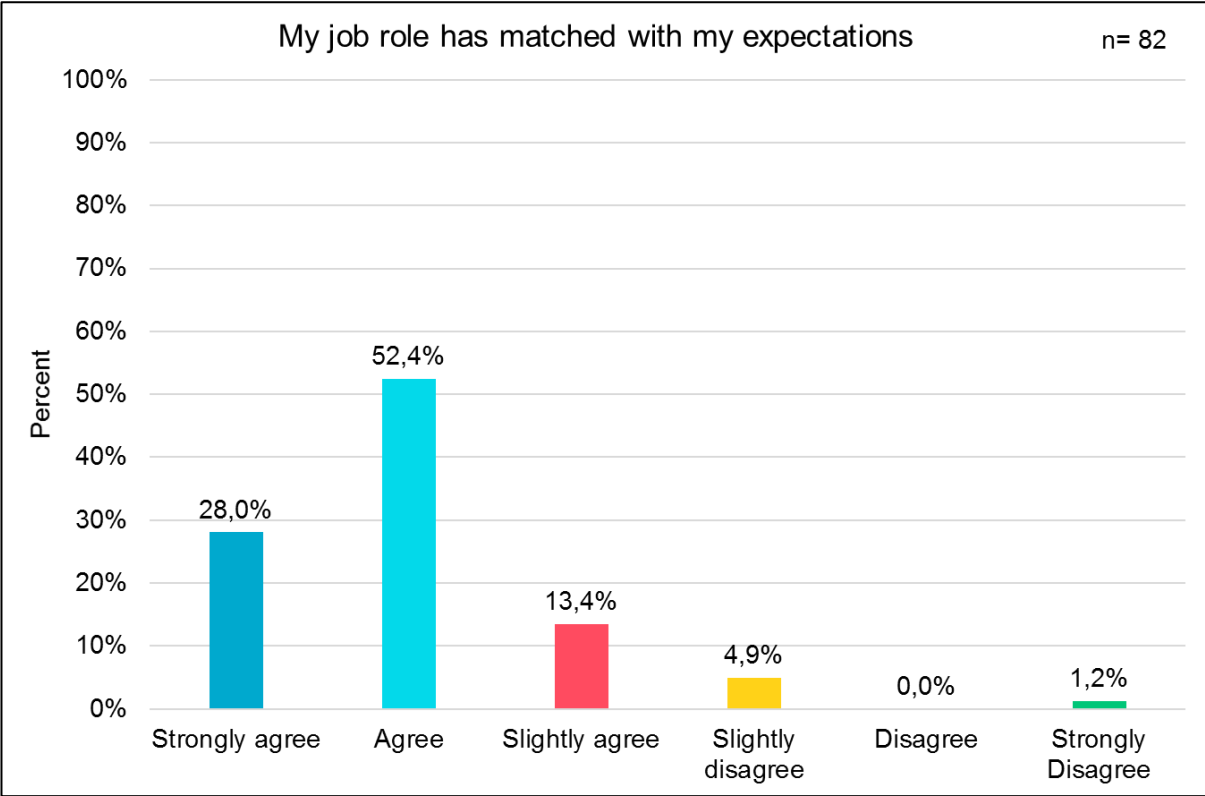


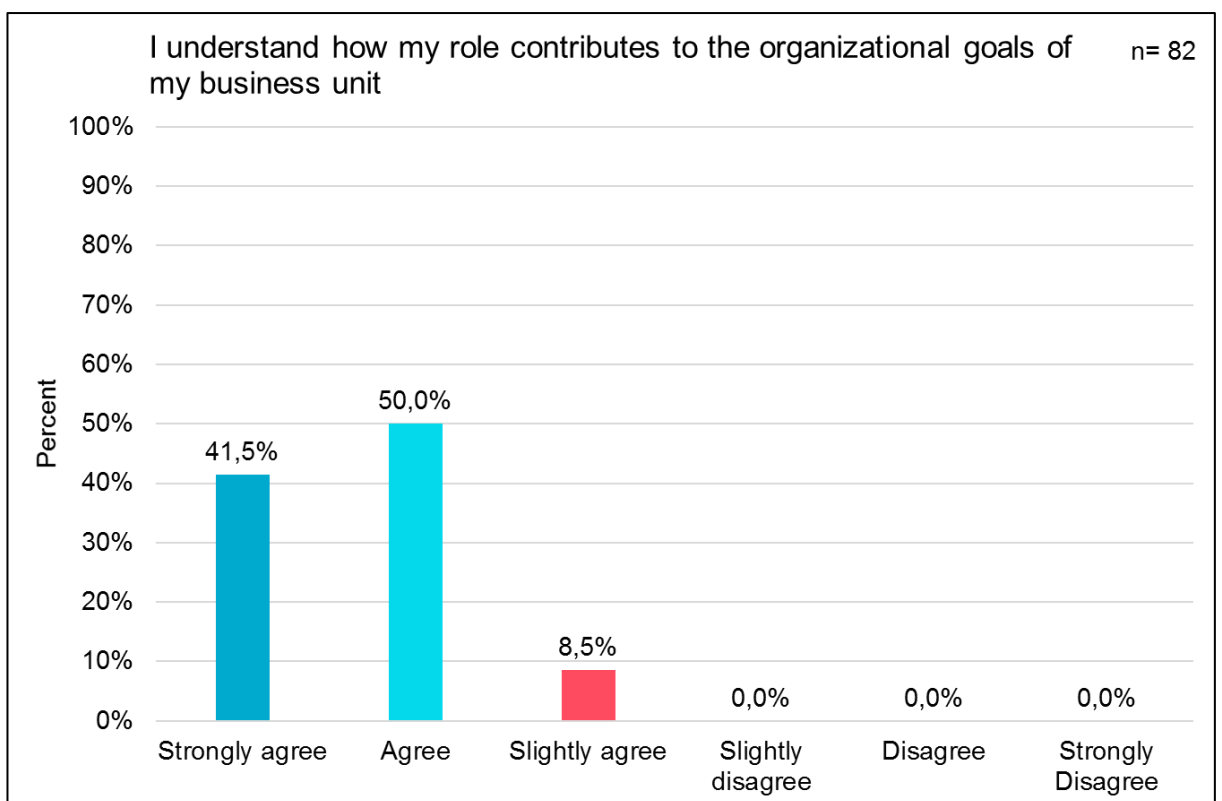
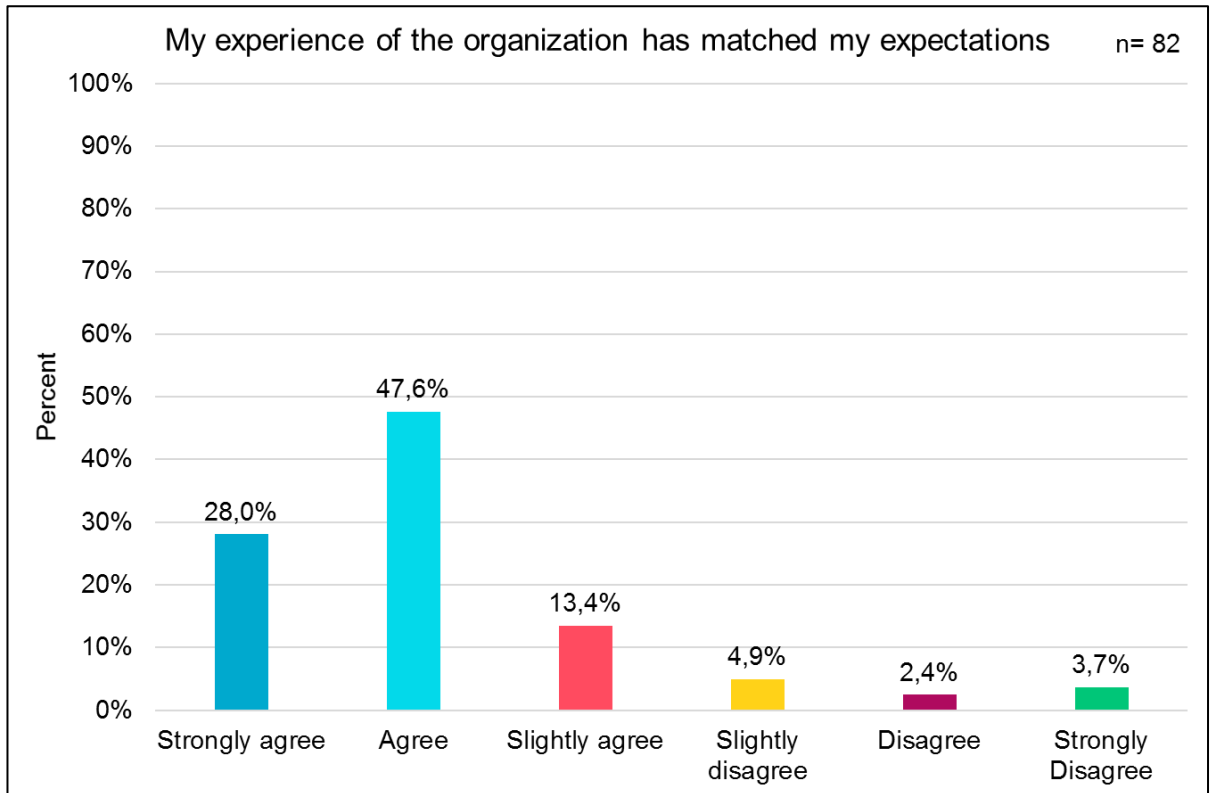


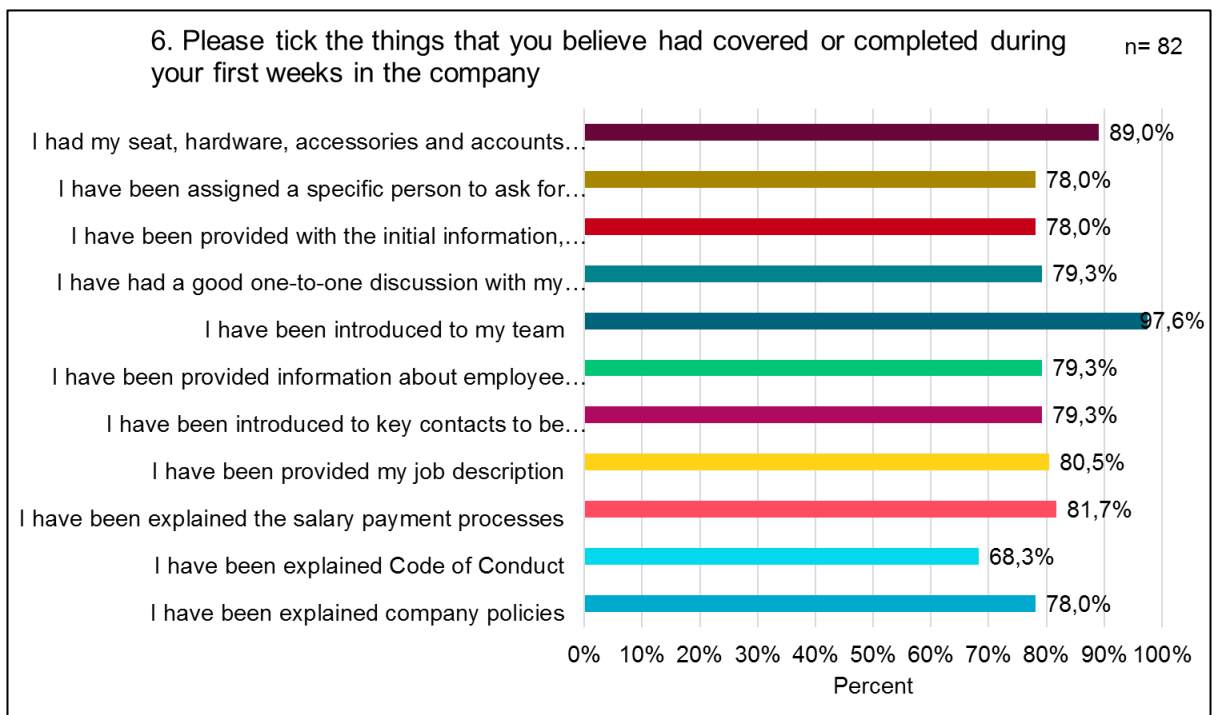
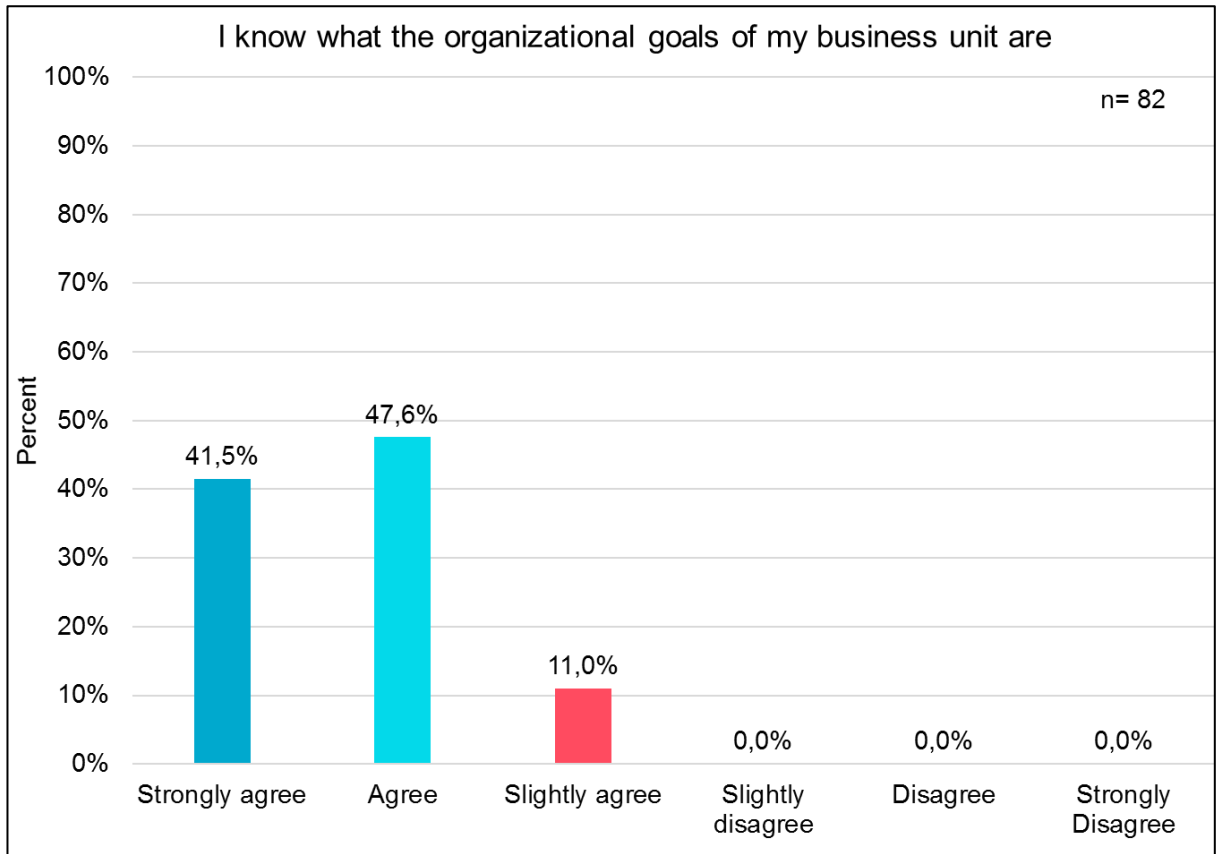


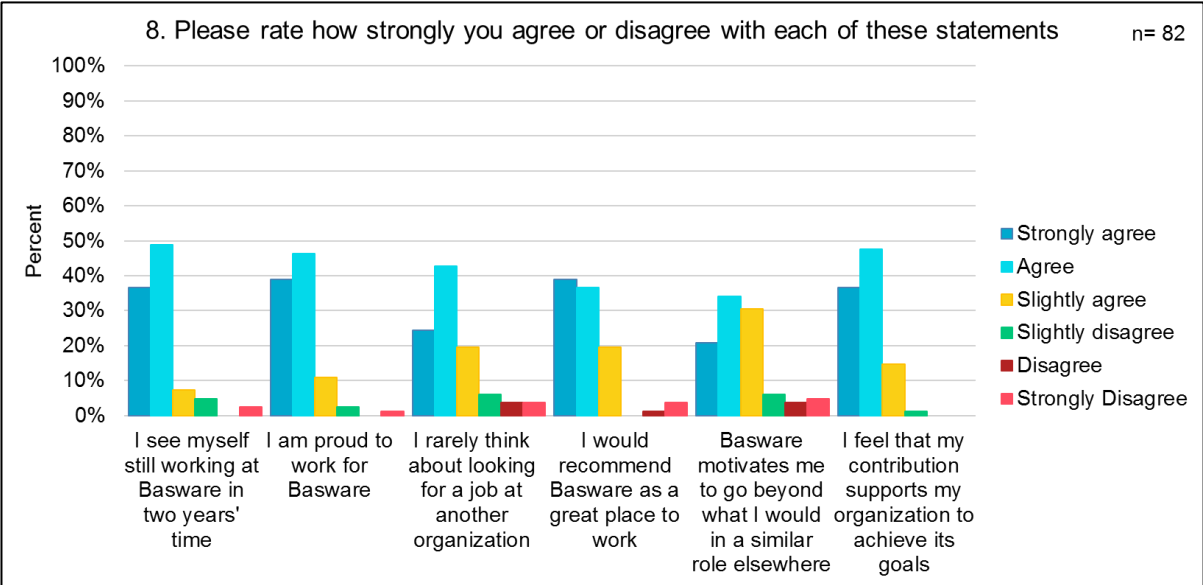
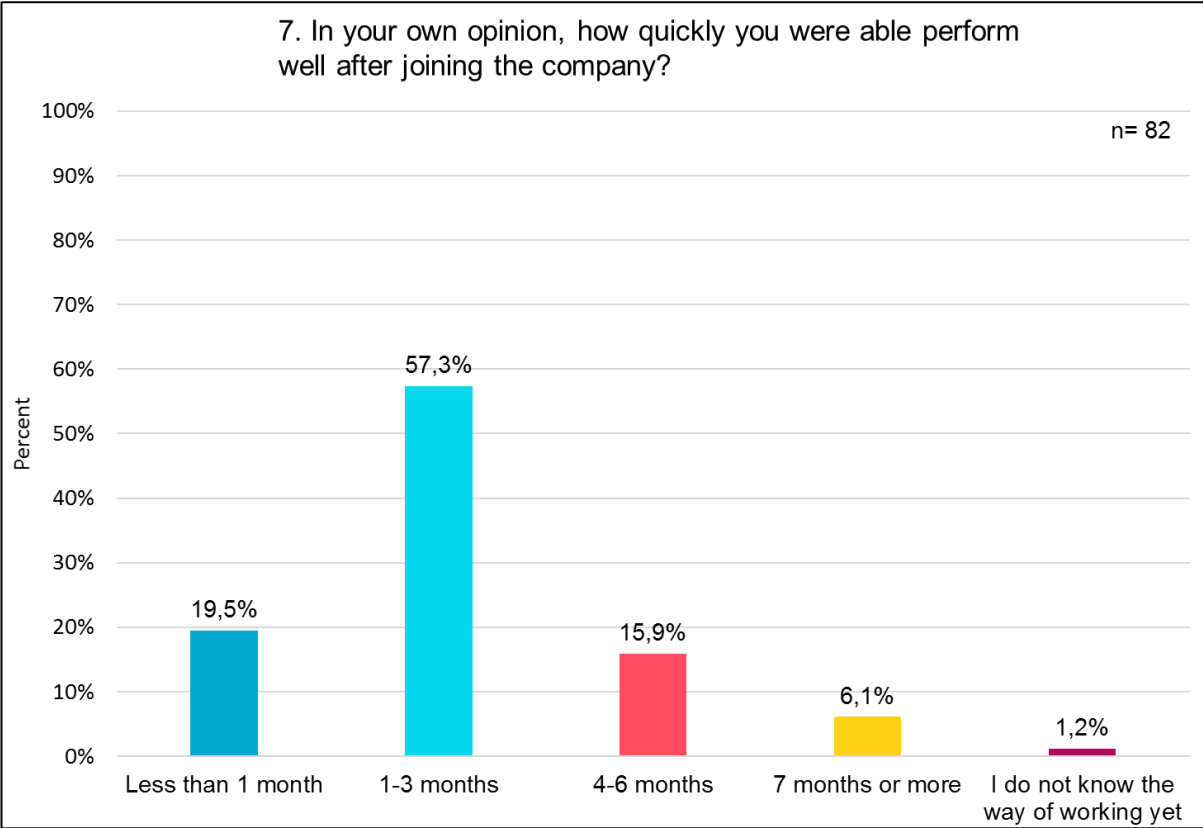


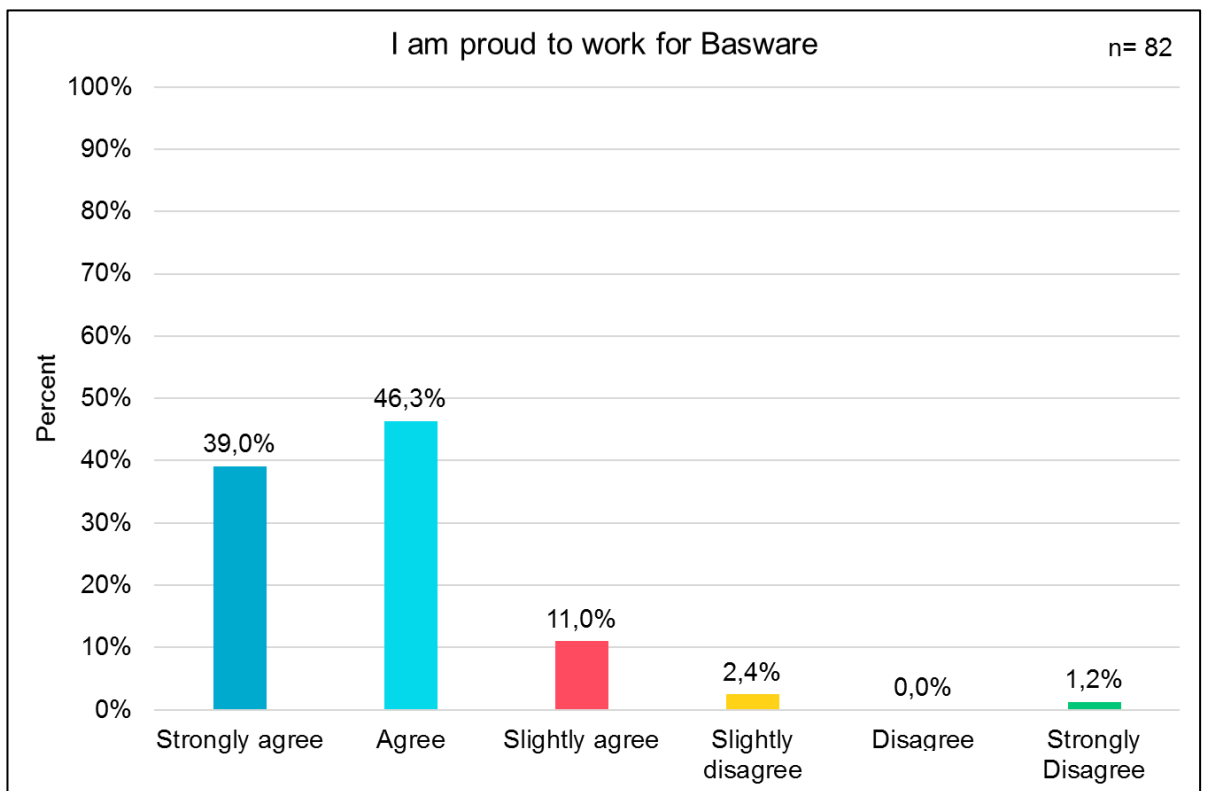
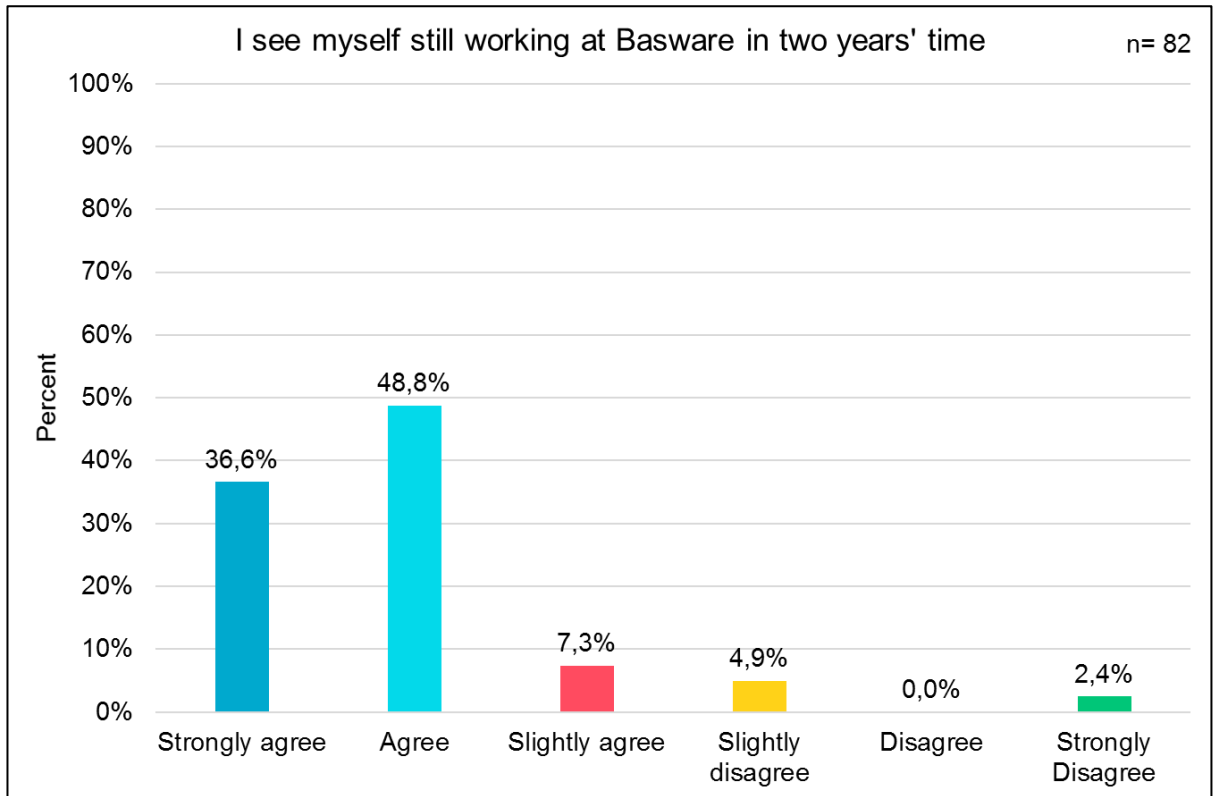


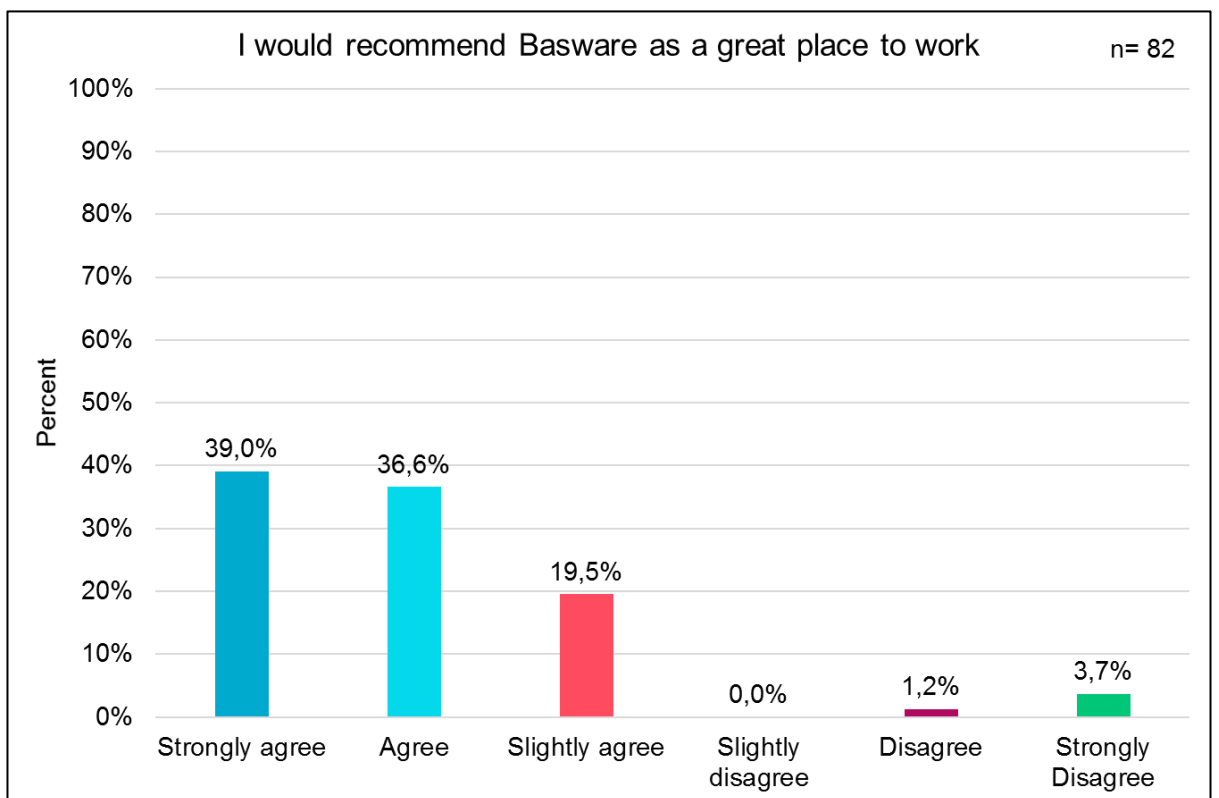
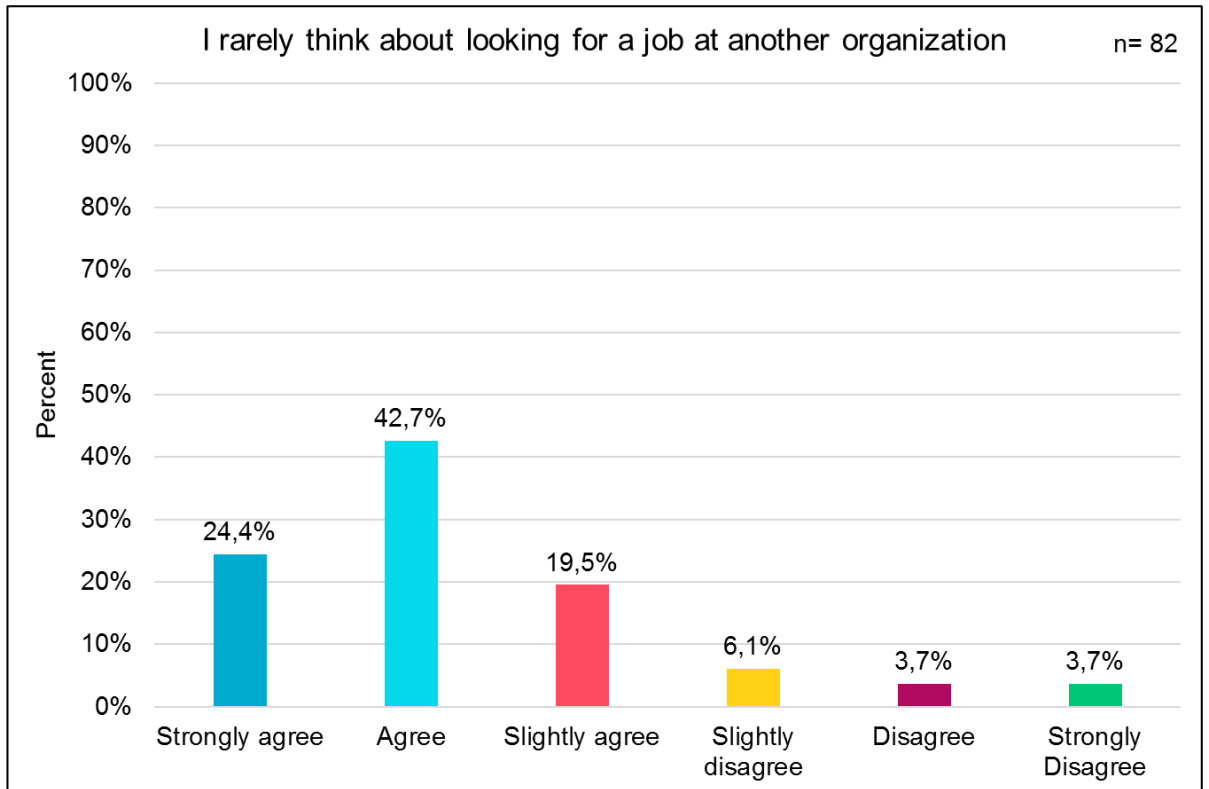


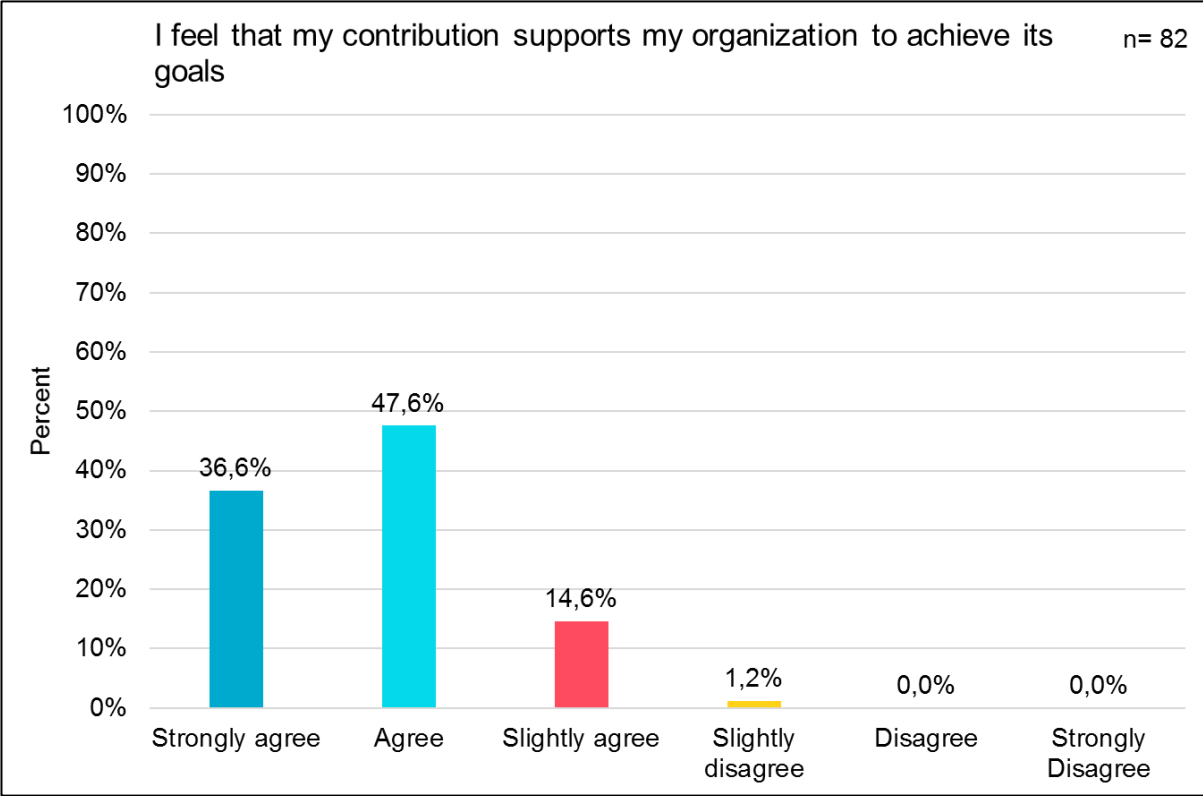
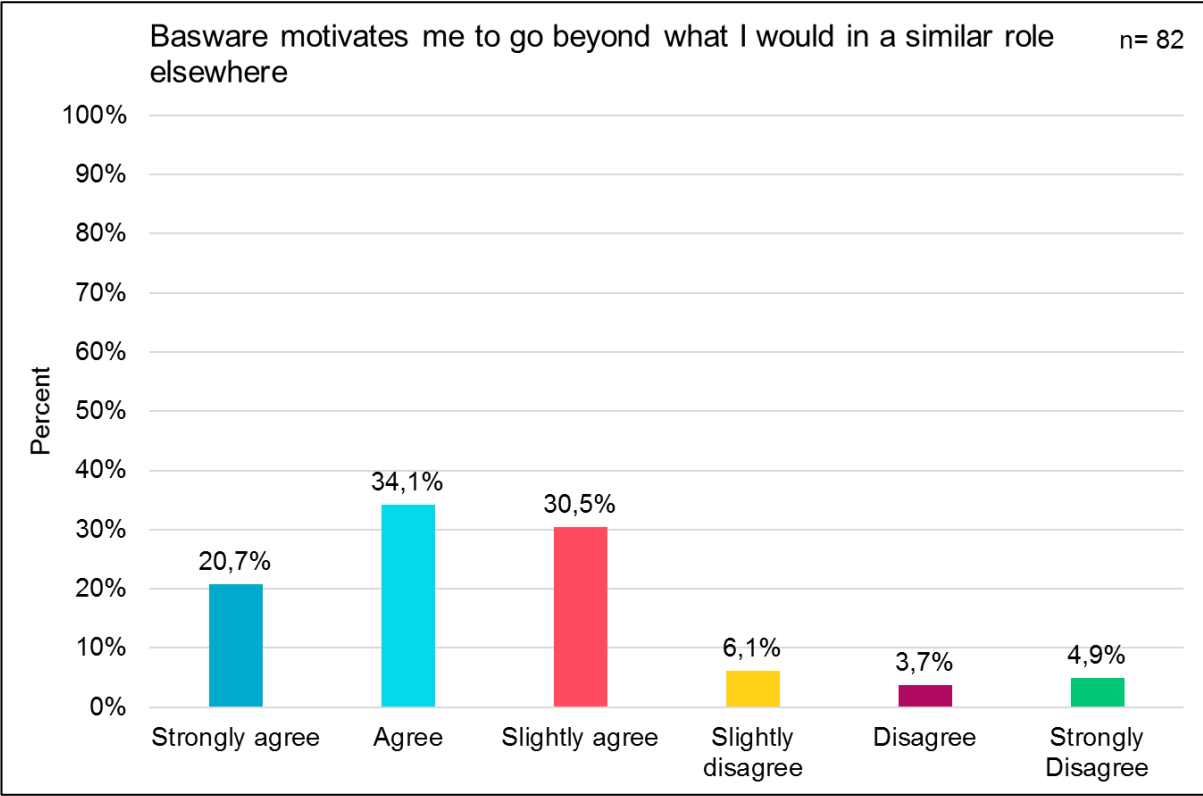


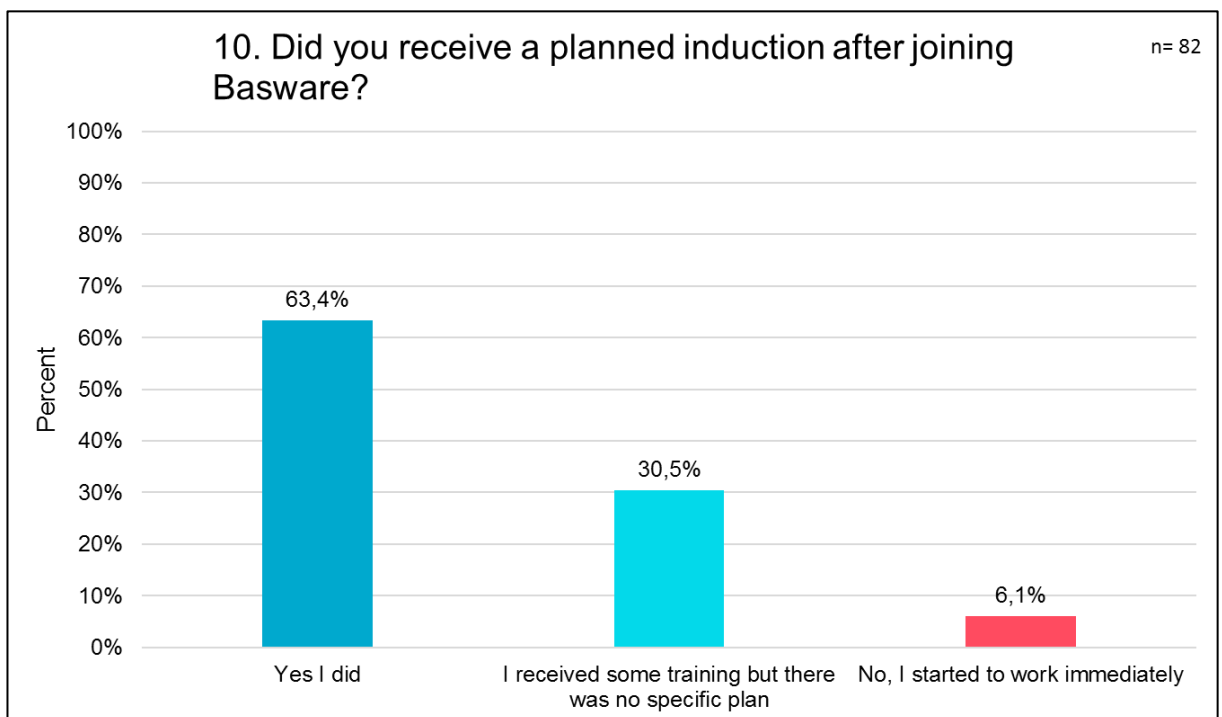
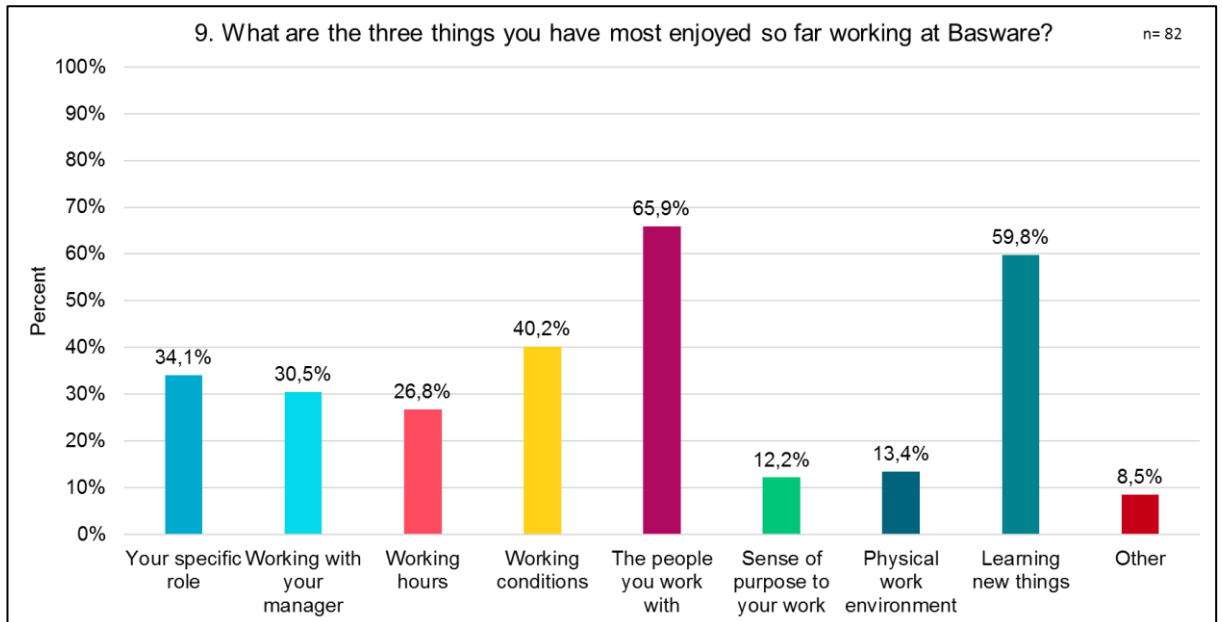


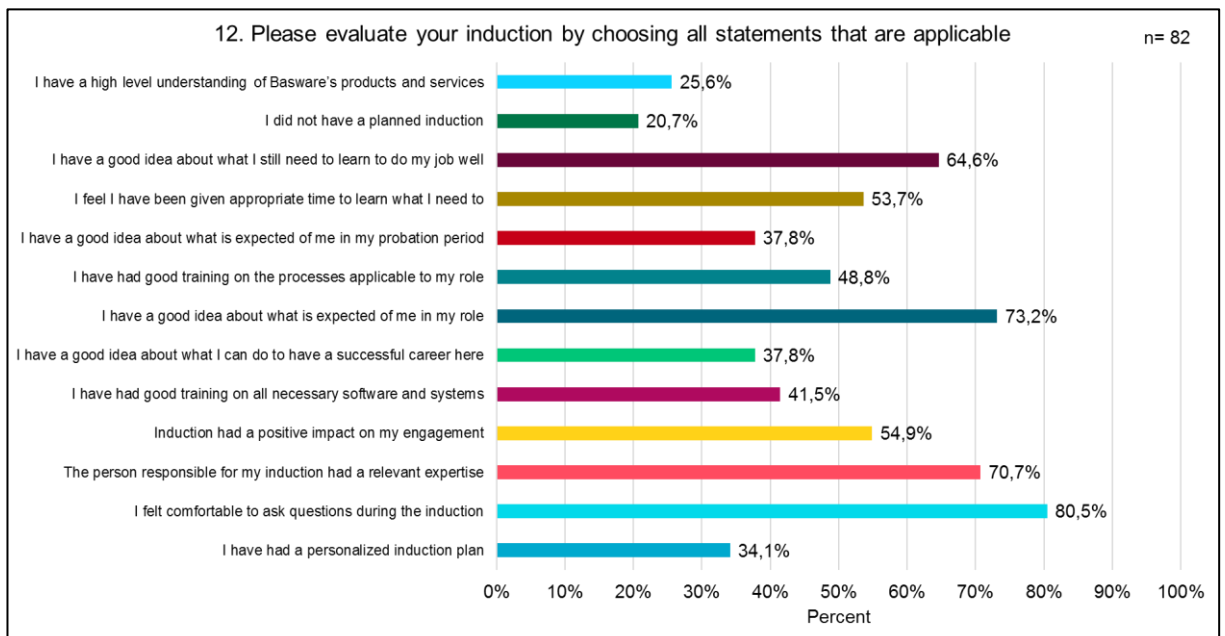
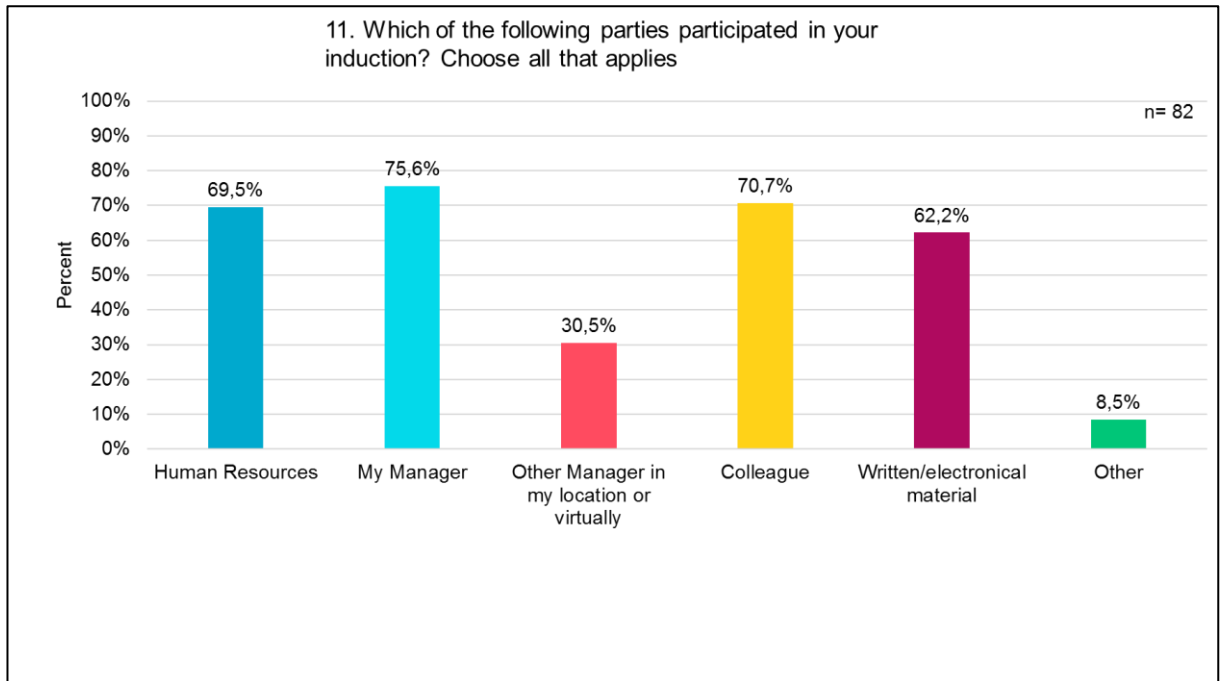


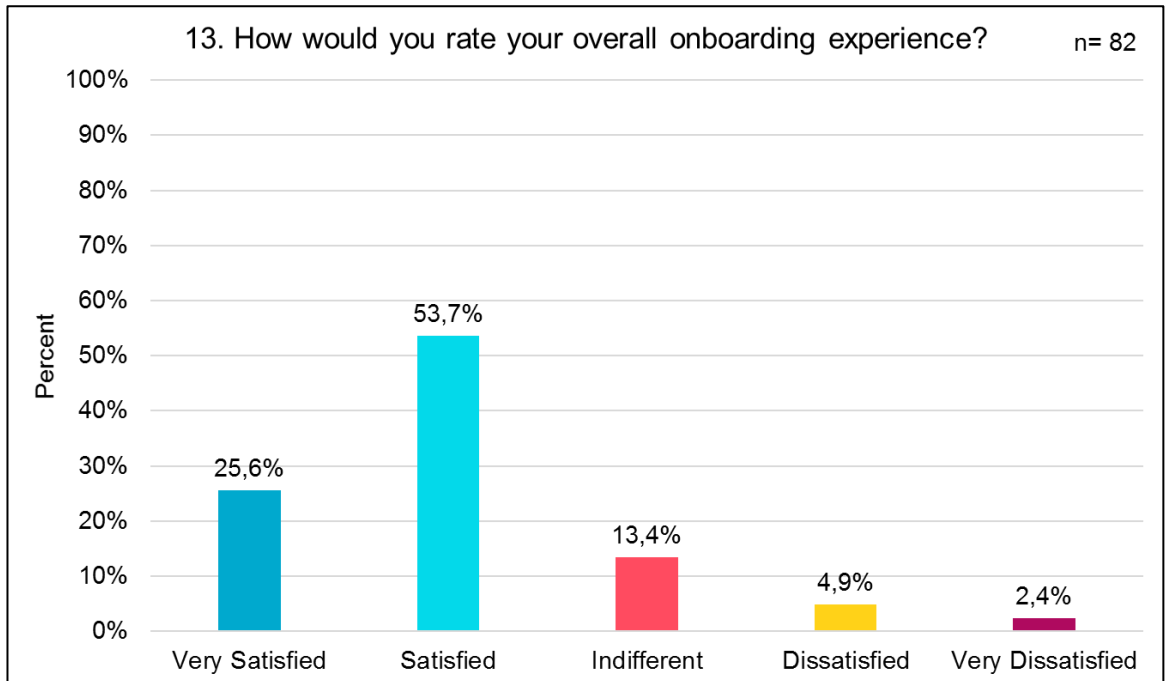












14. Is there something we could have done to improve the onboarding (i.e. induction, orientation) process? n= 36

Have the sales academy done earlier

I notice that people receive Welcome Introduction email when they start. I've always felt a bit slighted that one of those never went out for me (unless it was lost in my junk mail). I also think training could have been much more engaging and interactive.

I shared this with manager:

First Day

- Great having a working laptop with no login issues (after [redacted] tracked down my login id)
- Obtaining physical badge was easy (thanks [redacted]) – actually getting it activated was an extra step of me emailing [redacted]
- Spontaneous lunch with [redacted] was nice
- Call with HR was helpful ([redacted])

Recommendations for Future New Hires:

- Include the login ID info with laptop along with Wifi password
- During the badge activation, be sure to get access to gym (just in case)
- Would be nice to have a “planned” team lunch to welcome new hire (if schedules permit based on customer demands)

Ongoing

- Attending the 2 day off-site training was beneficial – meeting many people and learning about Basware
- Having a checklist of things to do is extremely helpful

•Being able to have time familiarizing myself with the team and tools has been great vs. jumping right into the fire

Recommendations for Future New Hires:

•May be helpful to categorize the checklist (almost by topic to make it easier to follow -as I played around in Project Place, I decided to move the new hire checklist over to PP as a new project plan and think it should be housed there for new employees (copy the template over to new employees as they start so they can become familiar with Project Place while training).

•Try to mix up the “reading” aspect of the training by strategically adding in more real life shadowing simultaneously

Induction should include hands on, and time should be given between sessions to try learned things.

The training for new people should be performed by skilled and motivated people (which was not in my case).

There are people with training/mentoring skills and people without these skills.

There are motivated people and unmotivated people.

Please choose the right trainers !!!

No Proper guidance by HR,I think there is no policy in Basware to provide 2-5 days lunch for new joinee Please make a policy.

There is No Proper guidance by HR about the salary structure and I think there is no policy in Basware to provide 2-5 days lunch for new joinee Please make a policy. On a first day when I joined Basware they already planned the induction that is surprise to me. I am not prepared for that. Generally in MNC's when you joined the organization they mailed the onboarding procedure.

Please create a new onboarding template and scheduled induction structure.

If one is expected to rely on the Basware intranet documentation, presentations, and courses for self-learning, then outdated material with obsolete routines and incorrect information needs to be deleted or updated. Often multiple variations of the same information can easily be found by using the search.

- There should be planned & robust induction in place, which is missing.

- Interaction/introduction with HR, Admin, Responsible team is missing at the time I joined Basware. I have self introduced.

Provide onboarding plan based on the profile and role.

There are good onboarding plans and trainings for consultants, but not for project manager.

I think, sometimes the spirit of the company is not as good as it could. The last month were very turbulent for all Baswareans so it was not easy to get a good feeling as a new employee. But with a little bit more enthusiasm, it could be much easier for new employees. But overall it makes me really happy to work for Basware!

There was no process at all, so any induction process would be an improvement

Induction structure needs to be planned and HR should take the initiative of employee bonding.

Thank you for coordinating this survey and giving me the opportunity to share my feedback. I am four months into my career at Basware, so I am still in an "ramp up" phase. We seem to be lacking an effective and well-designed onboarding program that focuses on teaching employees the skills, tools and processes they need to perform their specific job. Even though I was able to attend the Basware Sales Academy, far too much has been left to figuring it out for myself, and therefore a lot of time is lost on trying to figure out who can help and how to complete a tasks (e.g., how to gather the requirements and then prepare a proposal for a customer in CRM). We could also benefit from better documentation on Basware products. I've heard feedback from Basware customers that they feel our support agents are often not prepared to handle customer questions and need better training. It sounds like my area of the company is not the only one that needs a better onboarding/training program.

Country specific welcome kit would help to understand the basics about Office practicalities. In addition it would be Super good to have unit specific welcome kits including people you need to meet, distribution lists you need to join and so on.

I would like to have a clear orientation schedule. I don't remember if I had that at all..

A planned onboarding is surely a very helpful tool. There need to be a process with trainings and sessions on different relevant topics to get employees better and easier on board.

Yes a good practice guide for CRM

An introduction not only with the immediate team members, but also the head of each department, so that a fresher can grasp the overall process, the individual branches and their working. Each PO can give a small introduction about their department.

better explain product portfolio - what we sell and who we are, actually

N/A

more specific training

I would have needed more support with our p2p system - the right accounts, codes, how to use it, how to deal with your mobile phone bills etc.

A lot of things are left with your own activity and electrical material. I would raise the human interaction.

15. How would you have liked to be welcomed in the first day?

n= 25

I would have loved to have a "Planned" team lunch during my 1st week here.

No Any special welcome but just provide 2-5 days lunch for new joinee. And provide proper guidelines for new joined by HR.

Make a hassle free onboarding process and try to provide lunch in the office during the onboarding process.

One should feel during first day that this is the place to work, I am looking for.....

As it was!

The first day welcome was fine, just lacked any process or structure (i.e. there was no induction)

A welcome message at least.

My first day was fine in terms of being welcomed. I had what I needed for the first week.

My welcome was really nice. In general i think it would be cool to publish all the new names on the intra first page, not just the top executives. Maybe even have them write a few words about themselves. This way it is easier to welcome new people as they join.

I felt welcomed, I met all the persons on my floor and had a nice first day in the office.

The way I was welcomed!

It was a good experience. I have been introduced to every department. I don't think this should change.

An informal team lunch would've been a good addition!

On the way it happened

Happy smiling faces, new laptop, mobile, accounts/logins ready and set-up plus time to get to know team members and co-workers. All mentioned were there

I felt very happy when I entered in office first day.

what was organized was good enough, was nice to be introduced to the team etc.

The first day was ok.

Not much different than I was; Maybe more human interaction would've helped :)

My first day was beyond any expectations as I came around Christmas and the mood was amazing as such i can only wish that every other employee has such a great experience.

lunch with the team

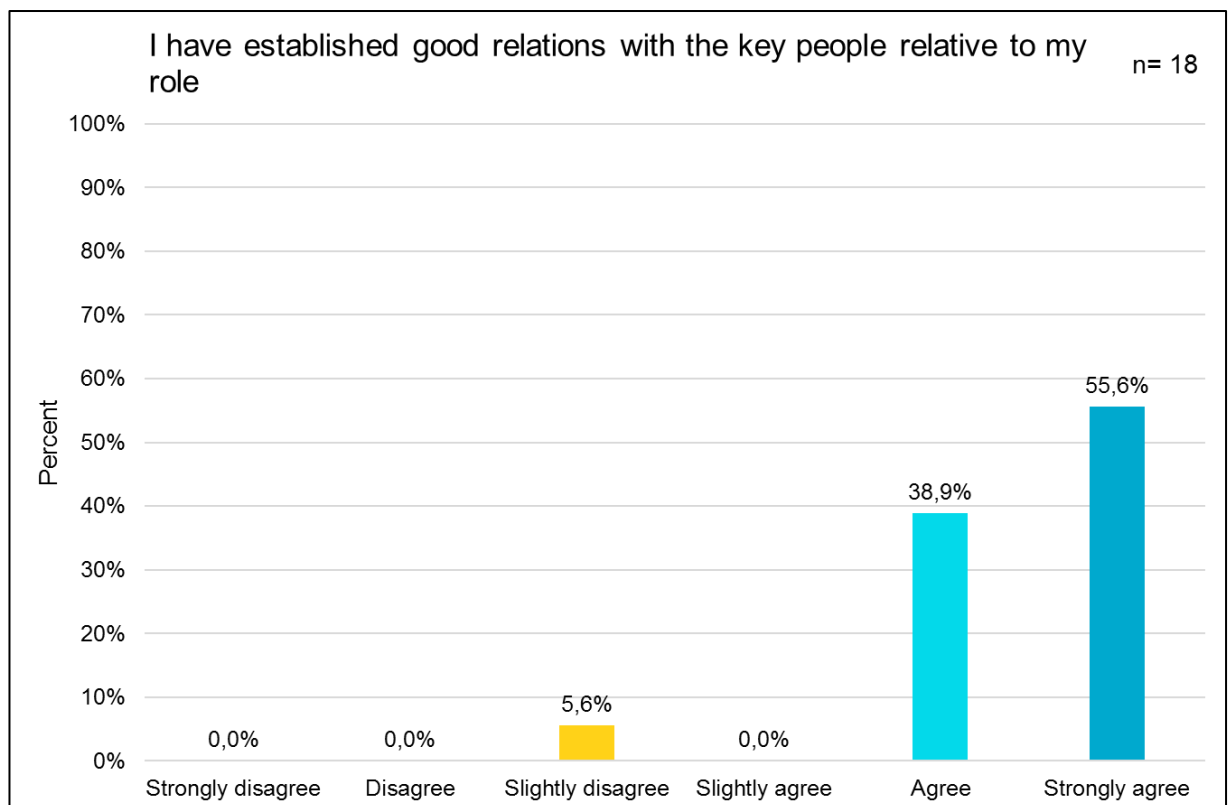
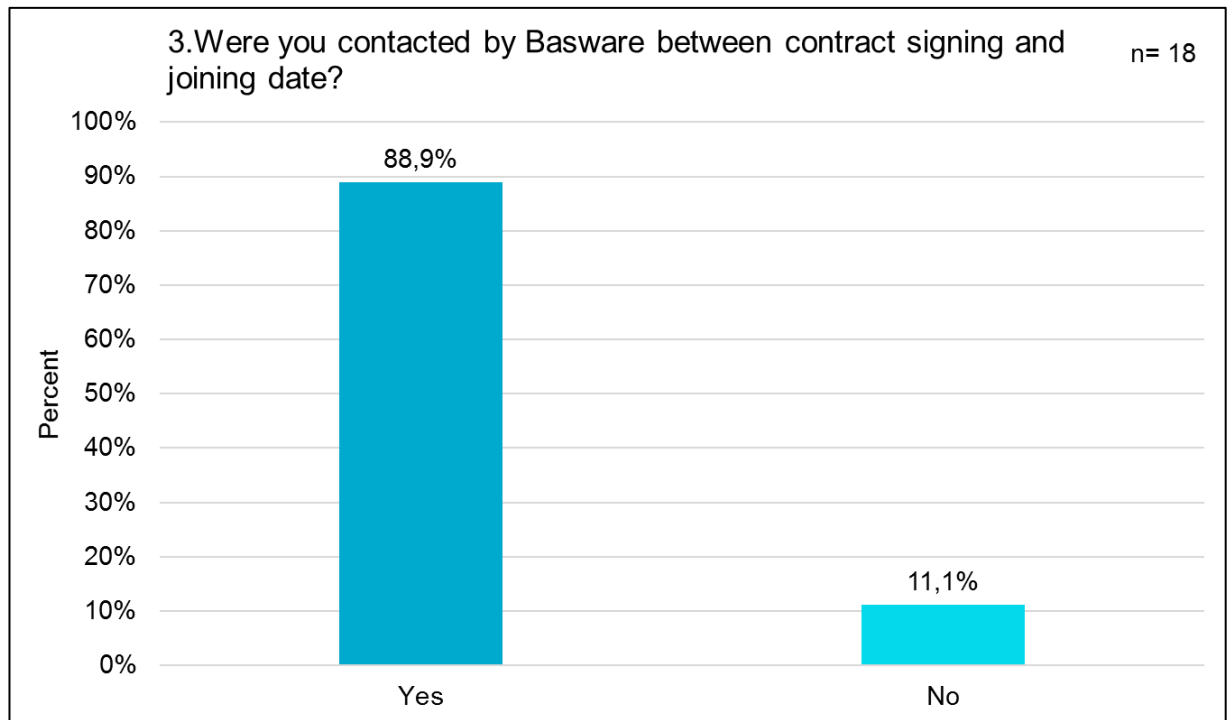
It's great here. Lovely Colleagues, all Equipment and a Basware Shirt lying on the Desk.
=)

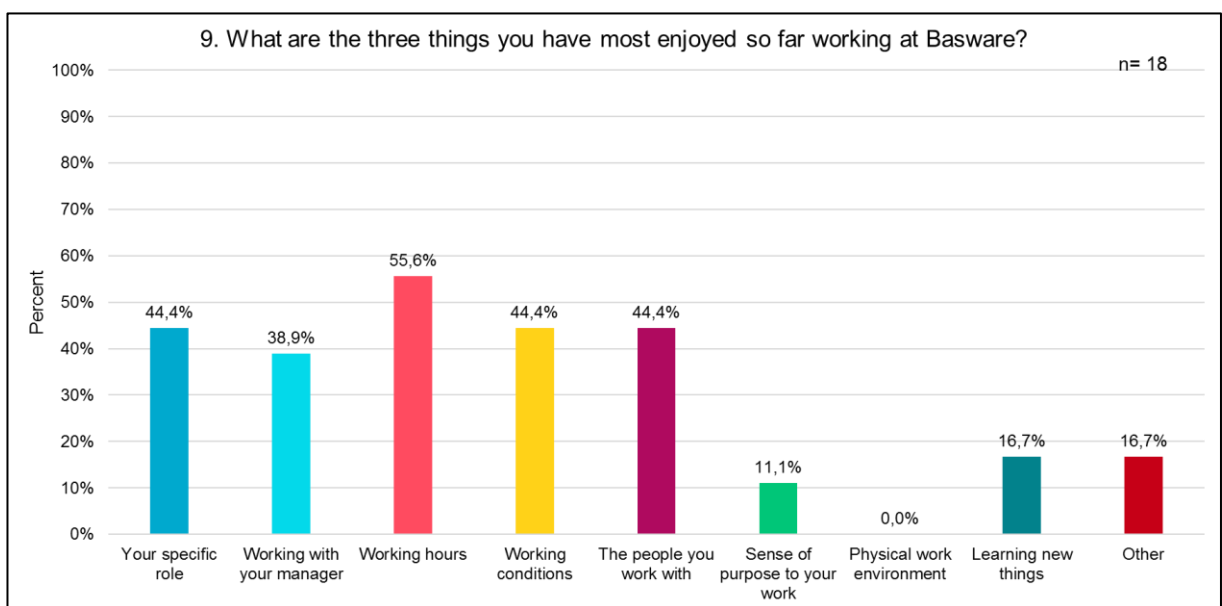
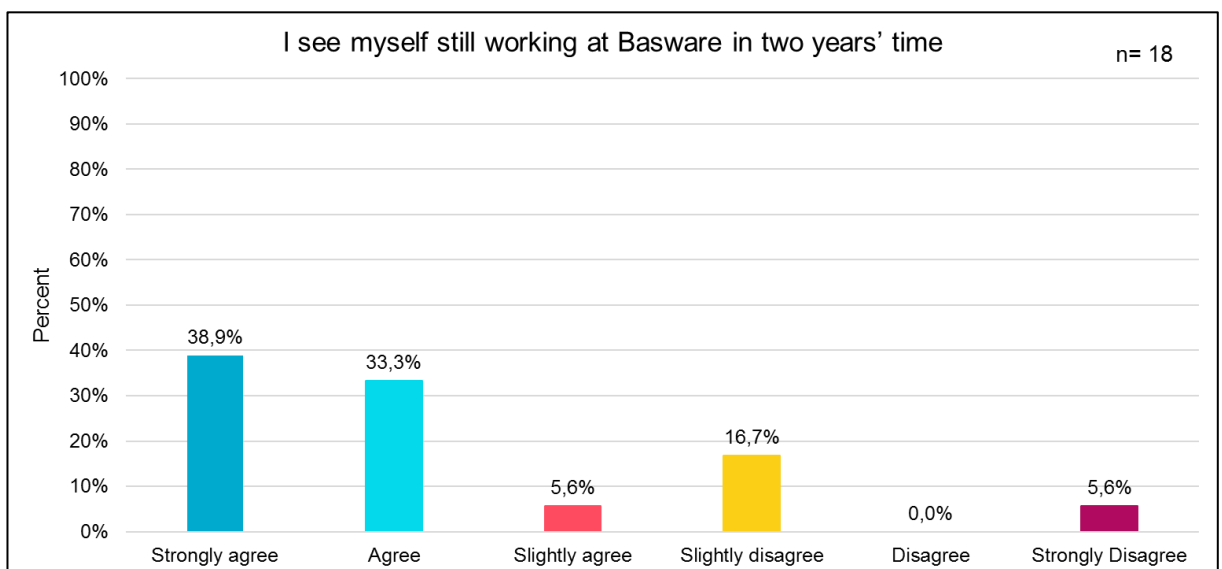
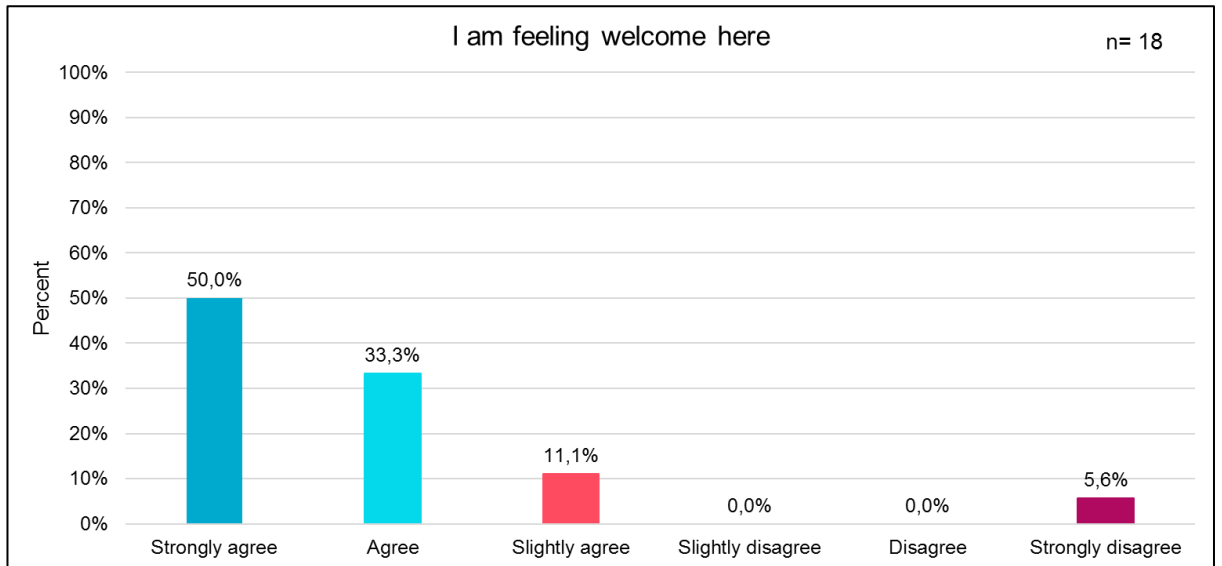
I had a very warm welcome. The HR personnel and the managers presented me the office and what were the plans for the days to follow.

it was perfect as it was

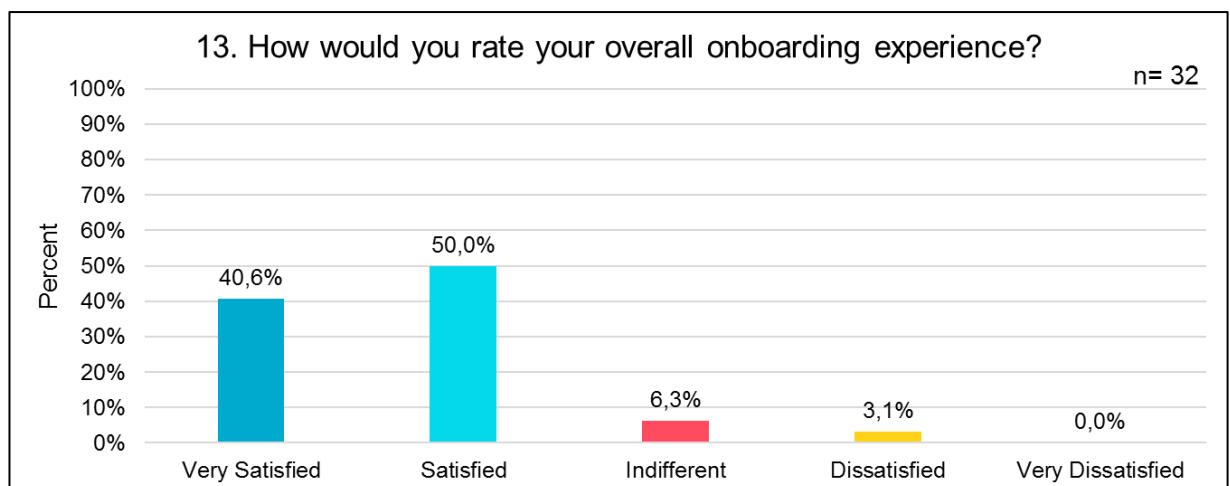
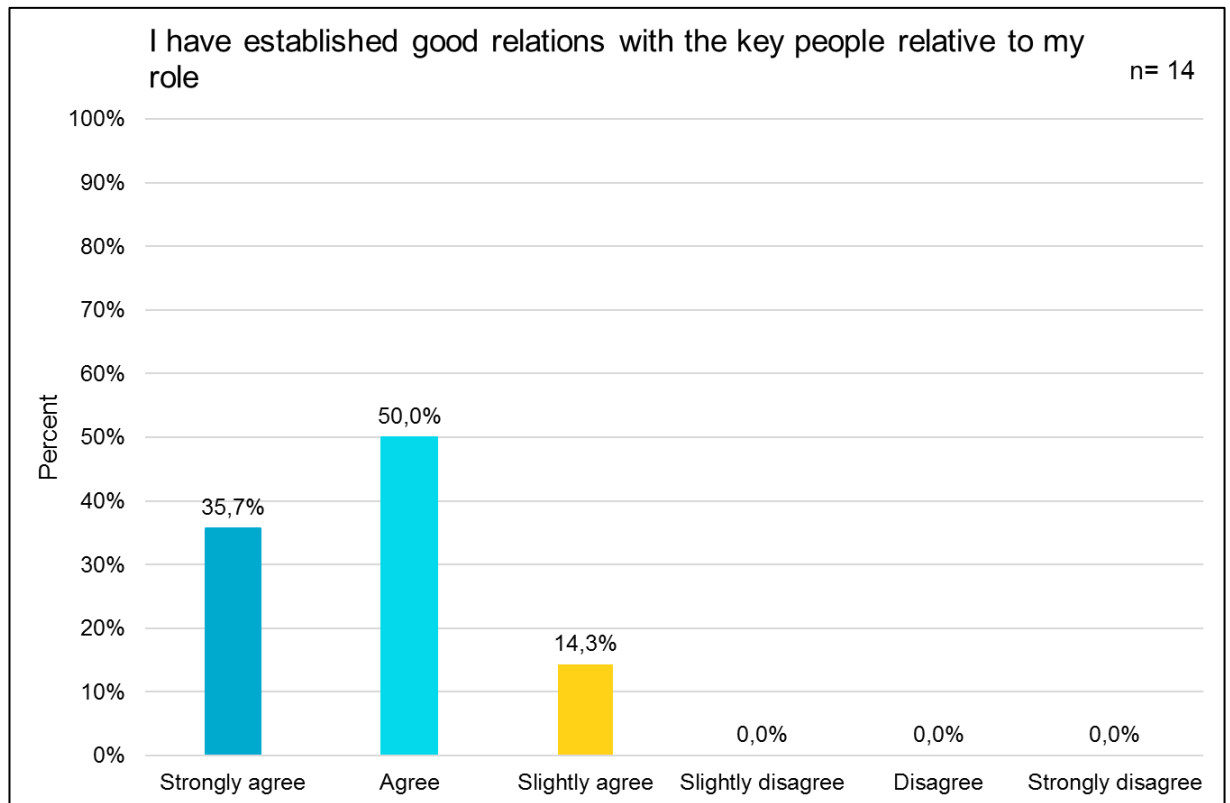
I felt welcome and was introduced with several people.

India

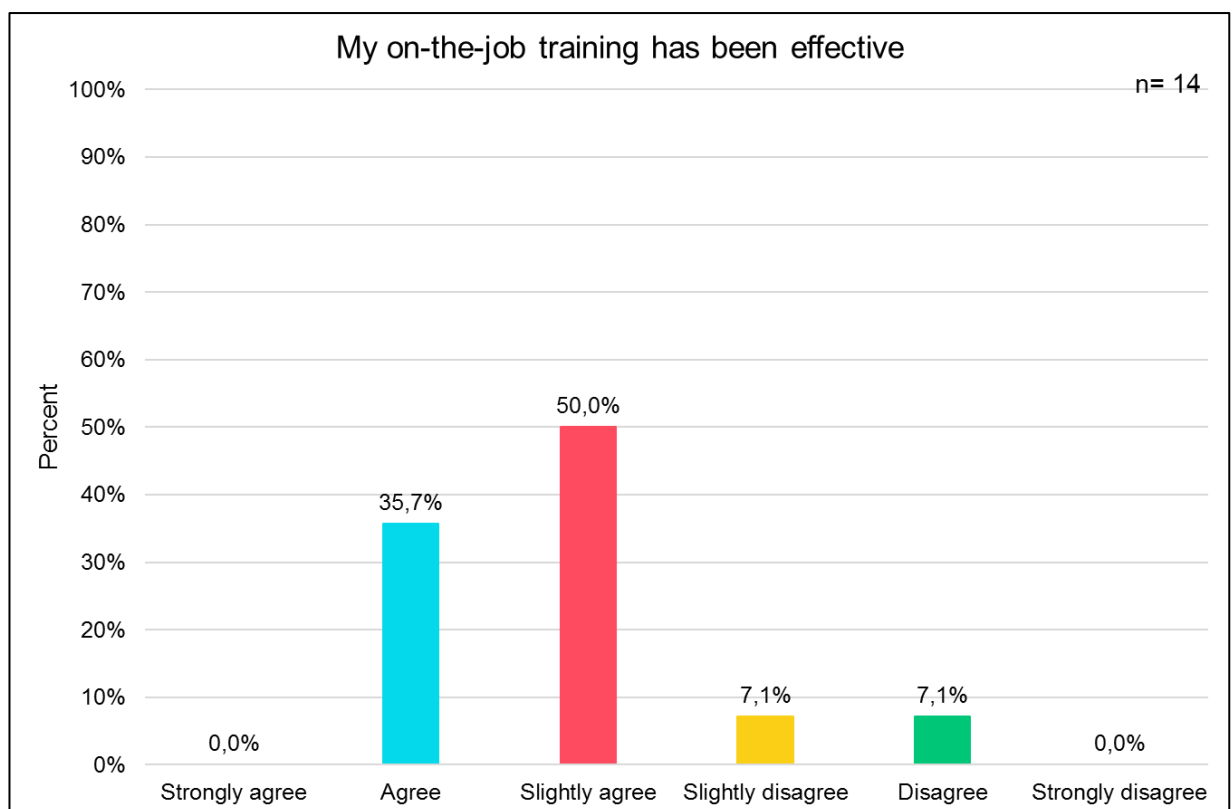
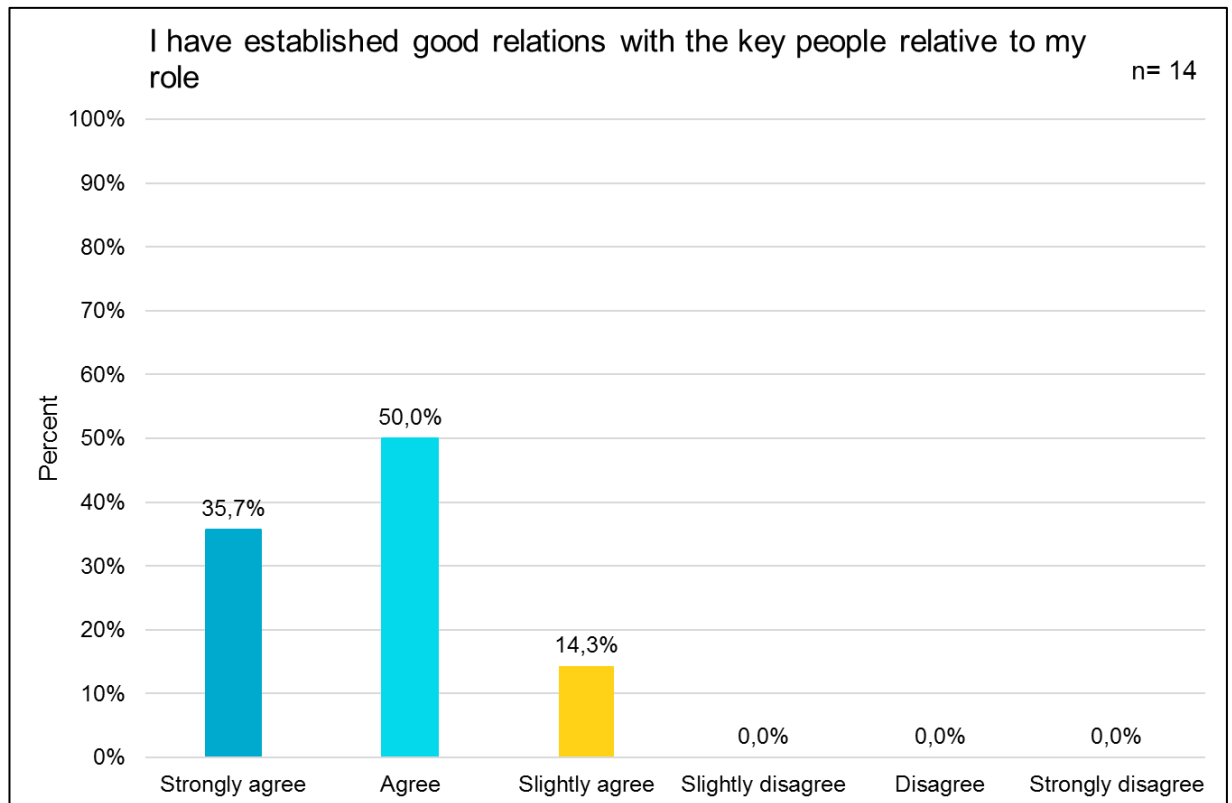


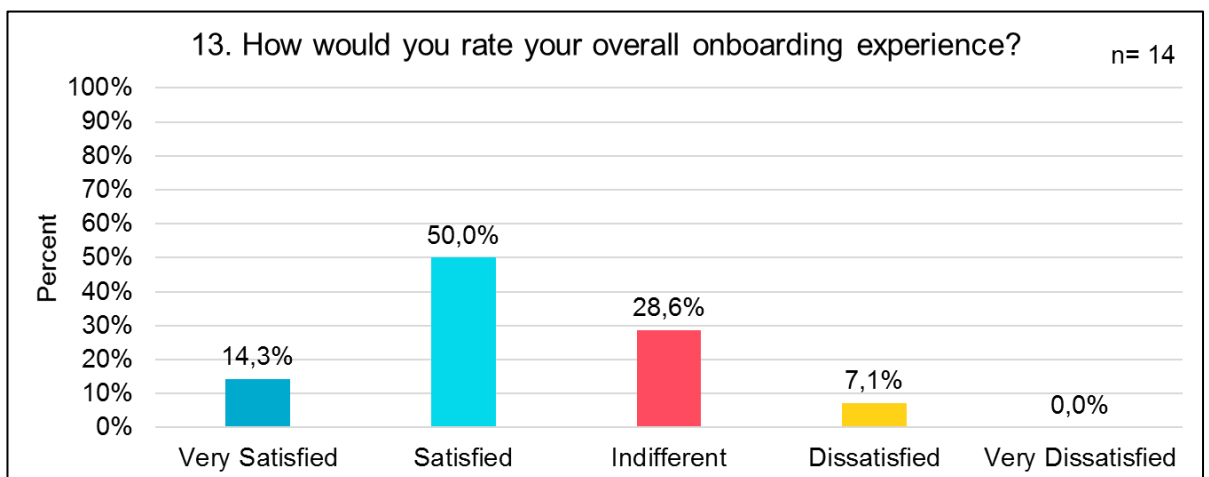
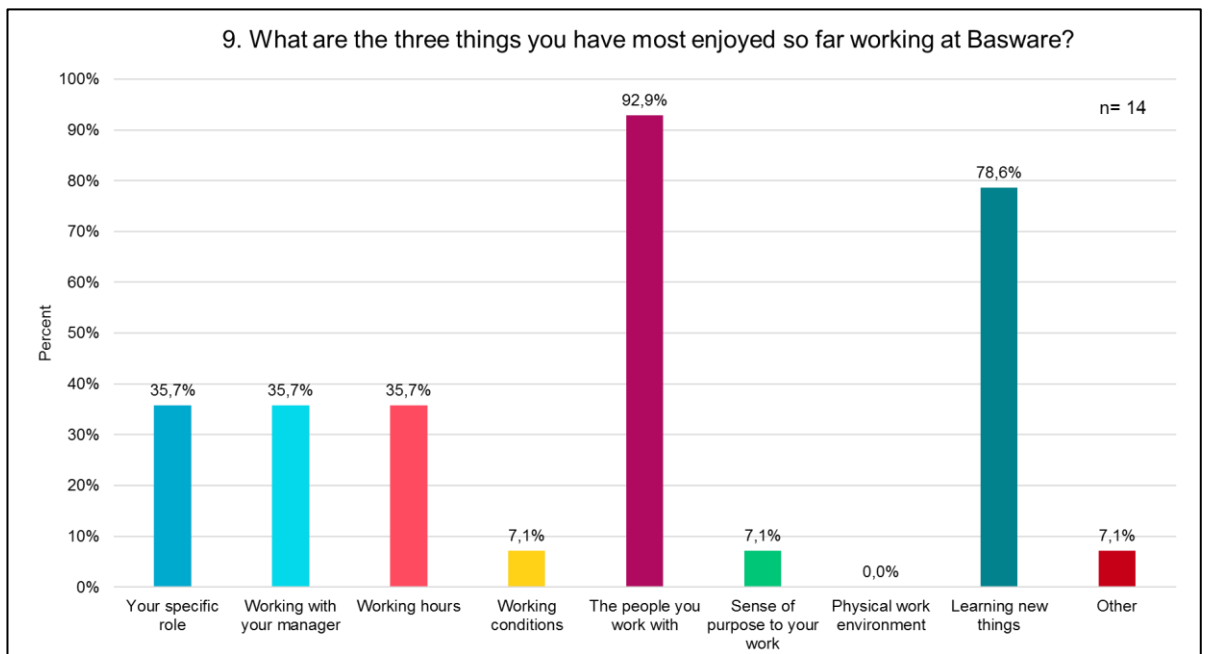
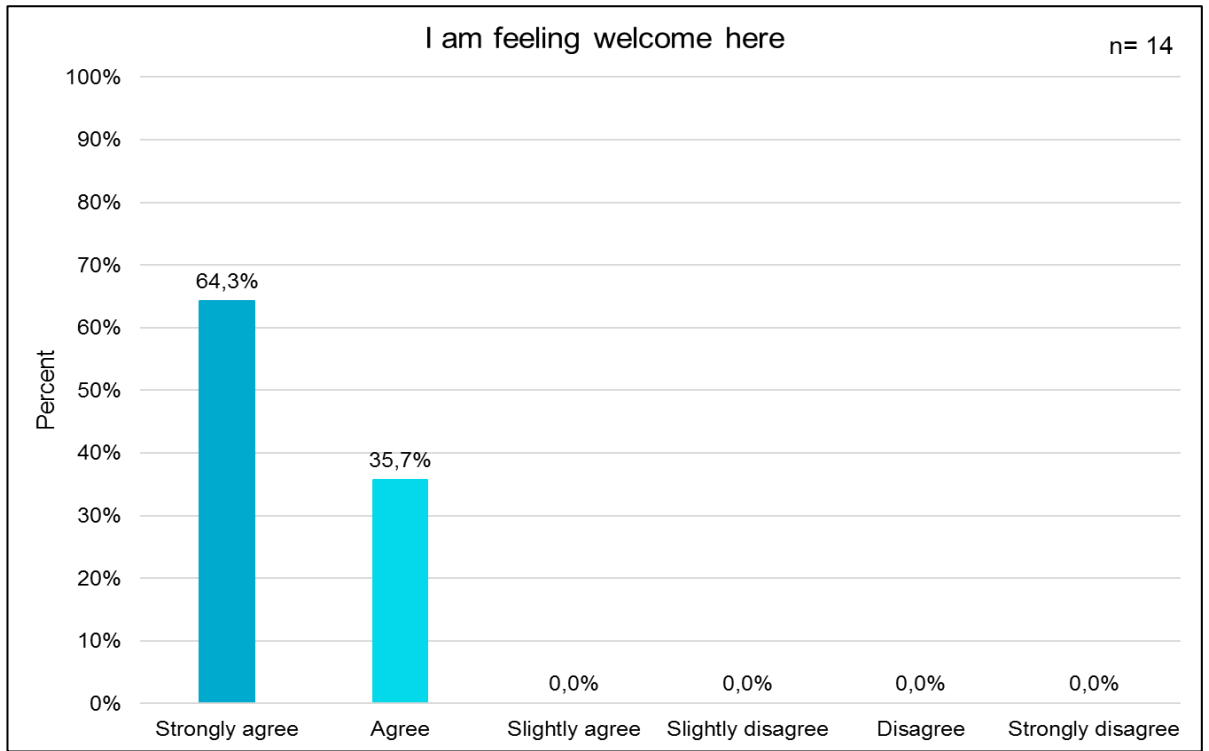


Romania

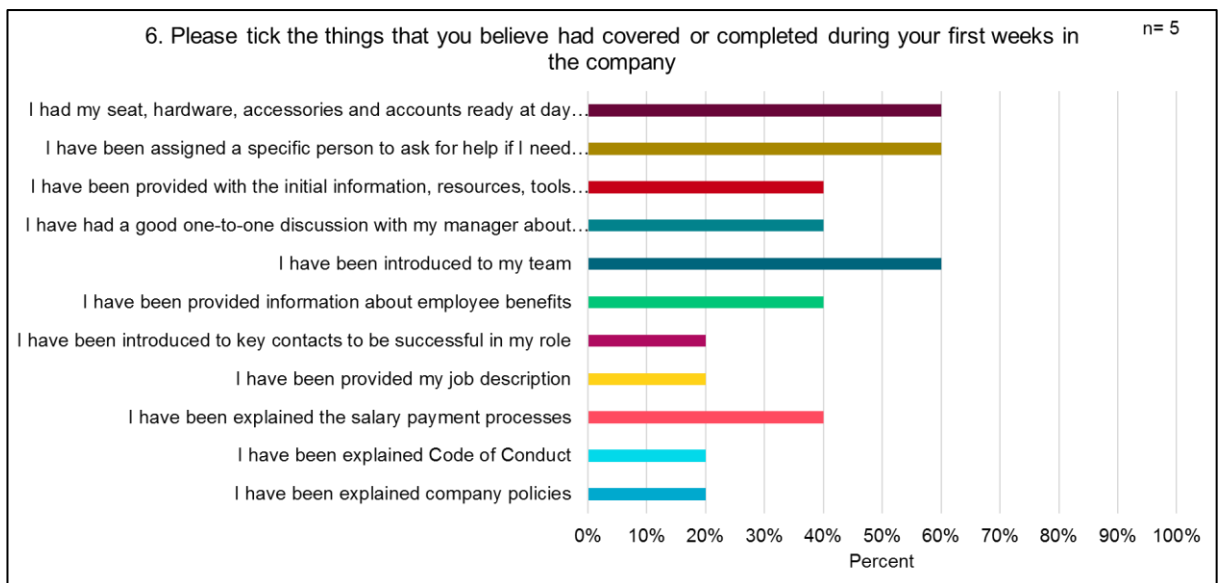
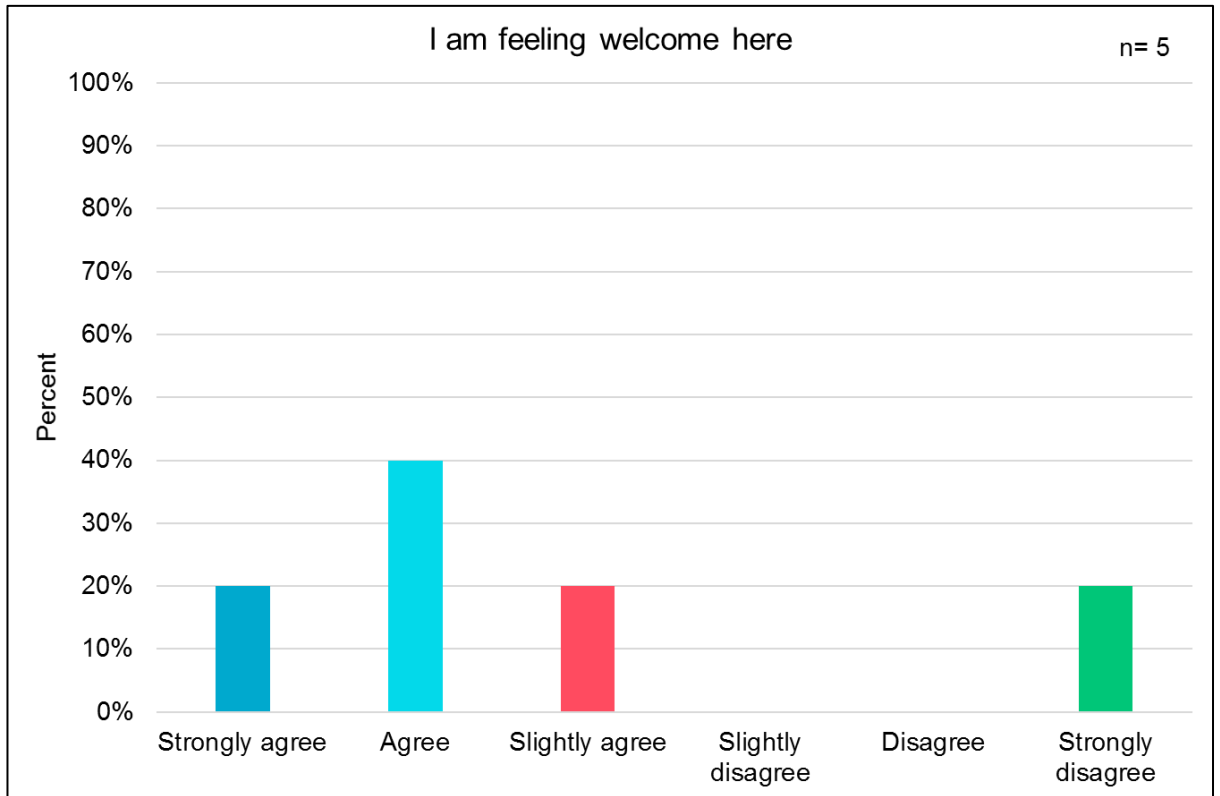


Finland

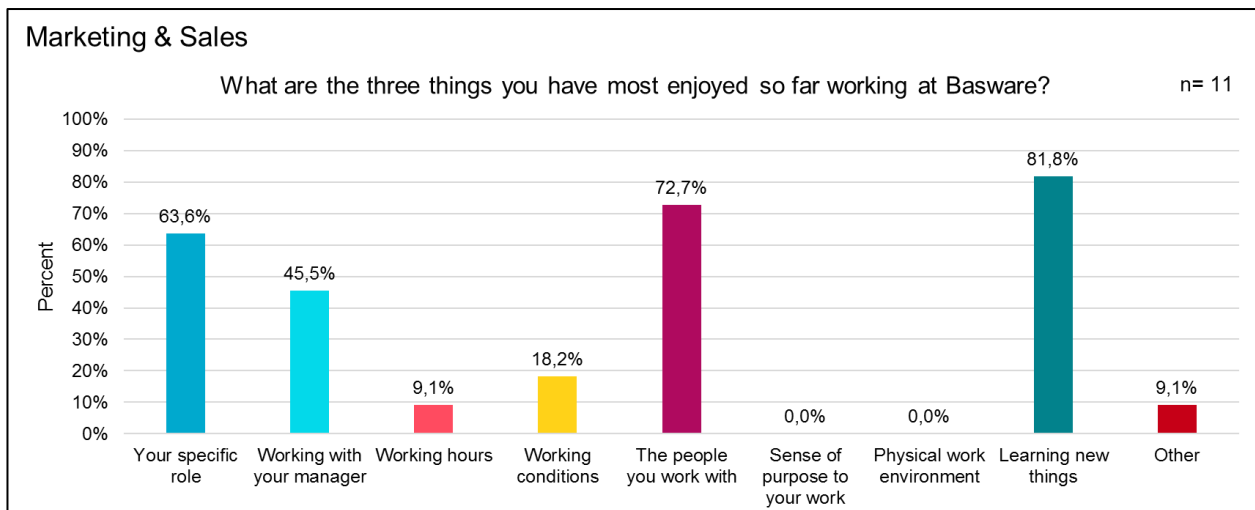
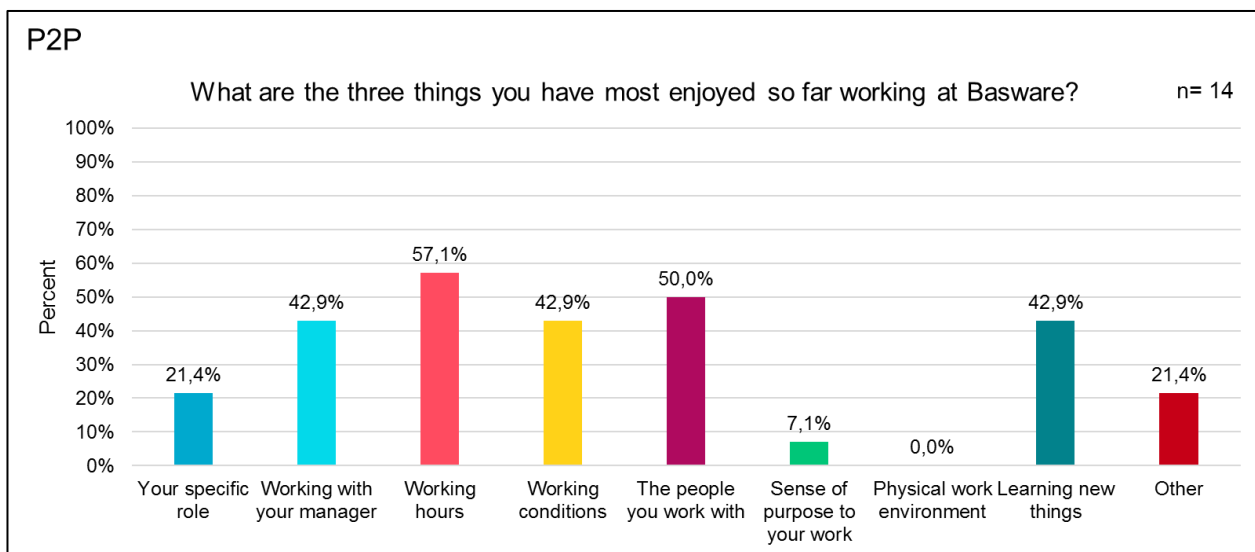
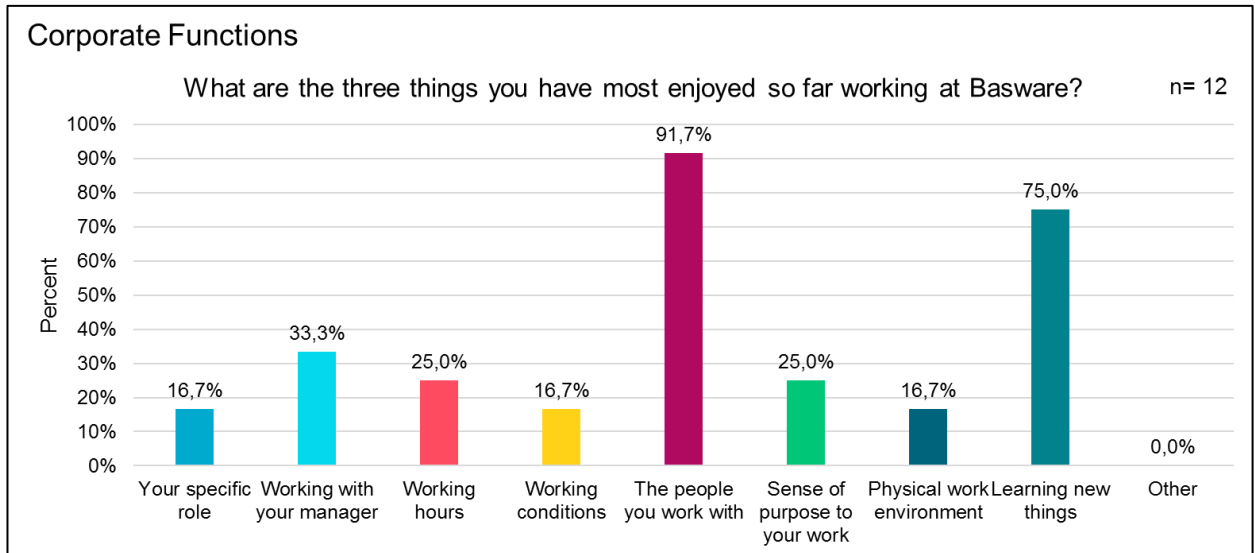




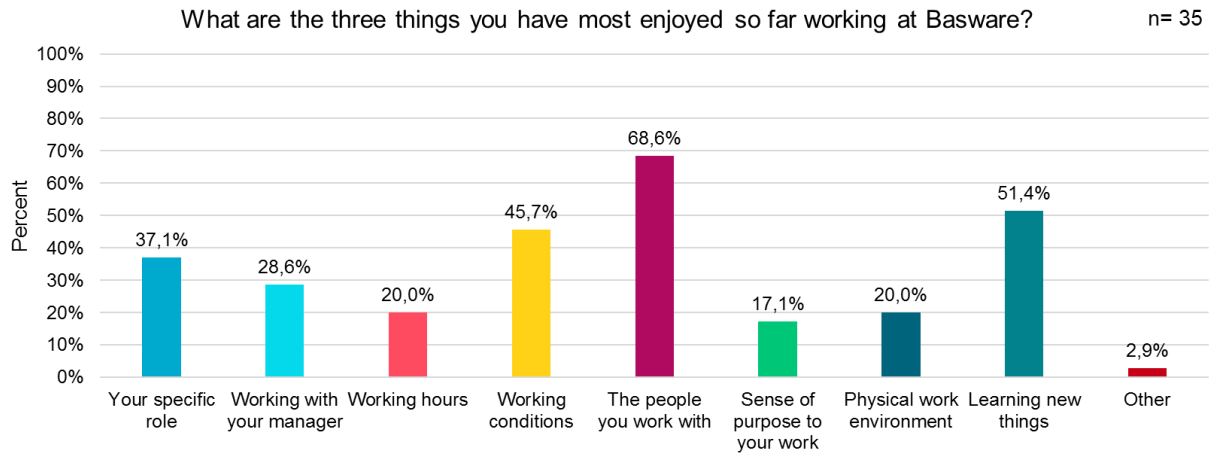
Employees who started to work immediately



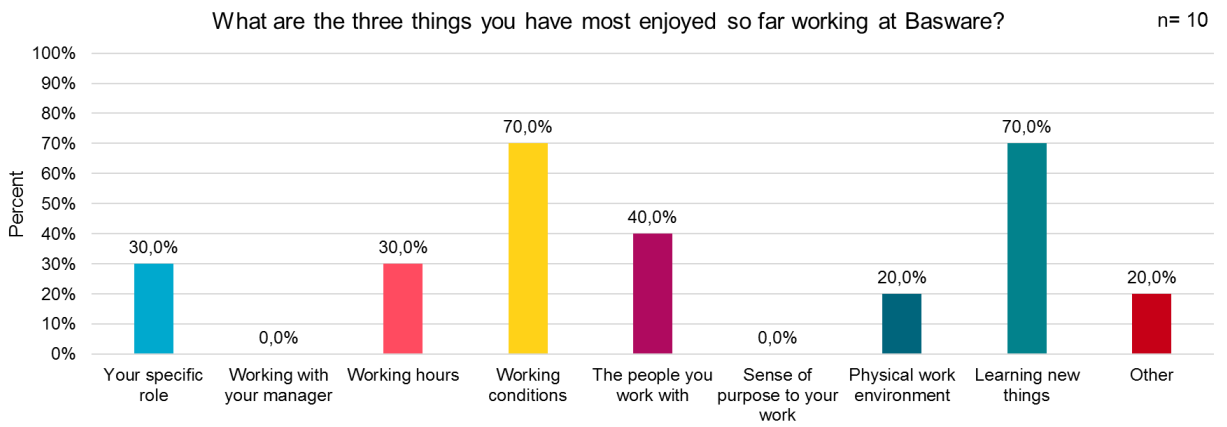
Functions



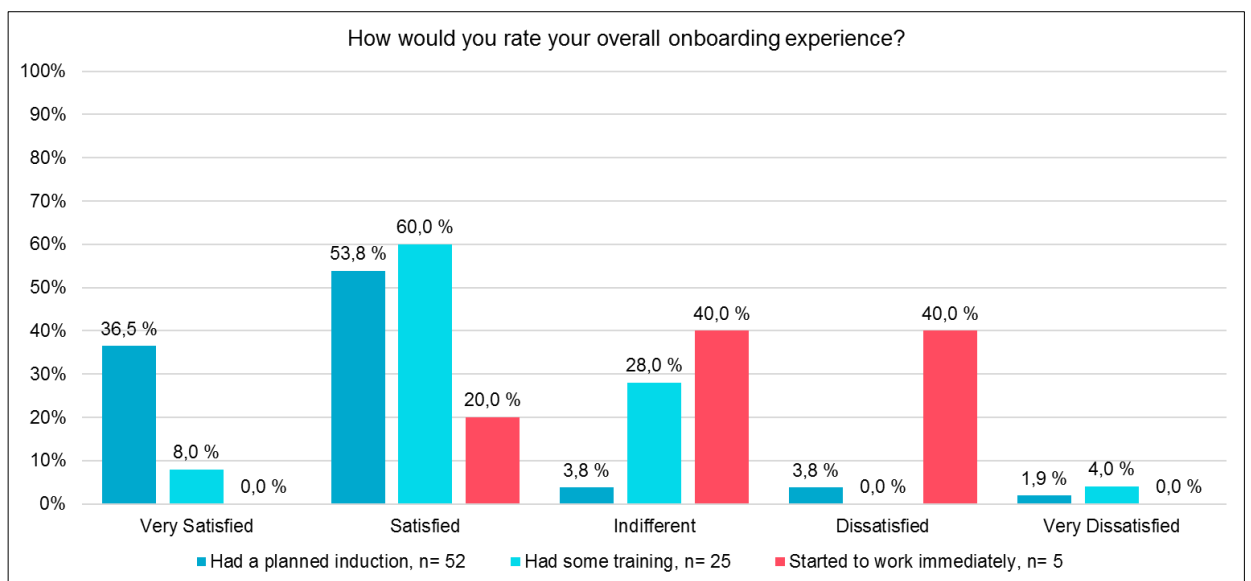
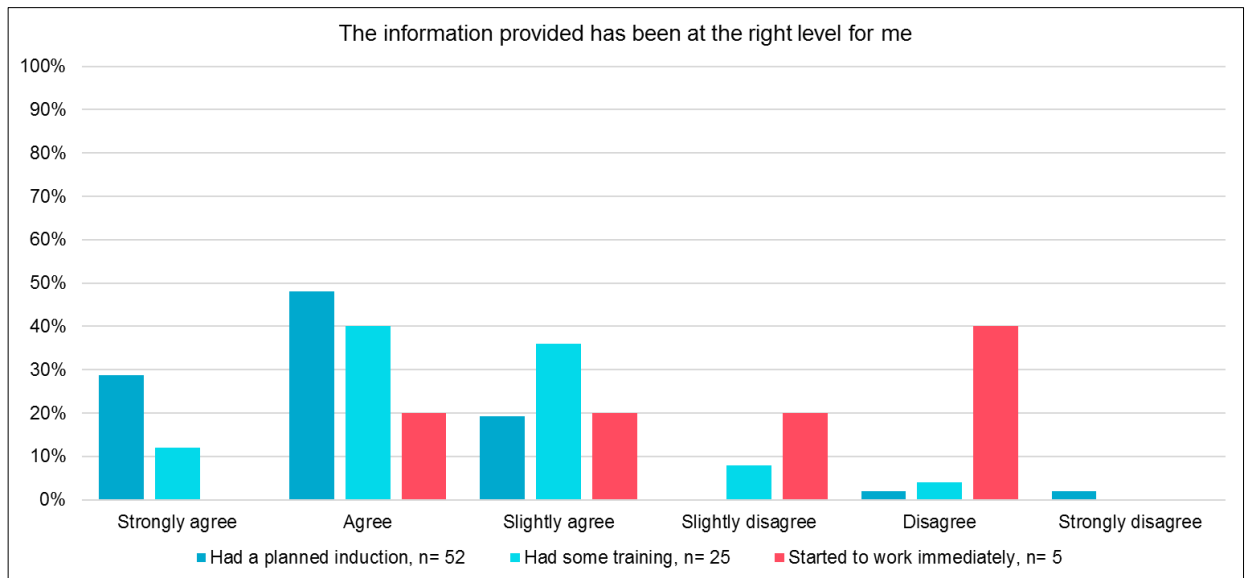
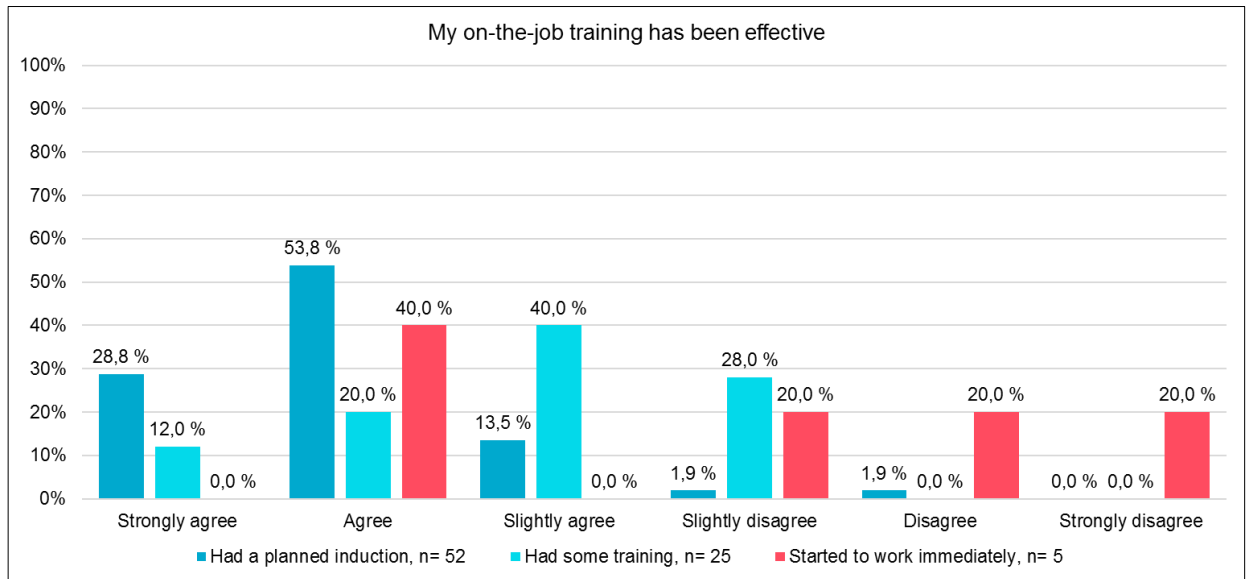
Customer Services



NFS



Cross-tabulations



Appendix 5. The participant letters of product training pilot



Welcome to Learn @Basware

Introduction to Basware Solutions for Accounts Payable

Welcome to participate in the Basware online learning program for new employees.

- 1) [Answer two-question survey](#) (multiple choice)
- 2) [Answer five-question quiz](#) (multiple choice)

Please complete the survey and quiz latest on Monday October 23rd.

After Monday October 23rd, and after completing the survey and the quiz, you will next receive a link to a short online self-learning *Introduction to Basware Solutions for Accounts Payable* module.

Thank you for participating! All your answers will be treated confidentially, and they will be used anonymously to make conclusions of the pilot program and the learning content.

If questions or comments, please contact Sales Enablement.



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Welcome to Learn @Basware

Introduction to Basware Solutions for Accounts Payable

Thank you for completing the pre-learning survey and the quiz.

Please click to the Introduction to Basware Solutions for Accounts Payable learning module. This is an introductory level course. The length of the module is appr. 15 minutes and includes a short quiz.

[Click to the learning module in LMS](#)

Within a week after completing the course you will receive a post-learning survey (3 questions) in a separate email.

Thank you for participating in the pilot group. Your time and feedback is extremely valuable to us.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Mirja Sipilä or Henna Karhunen.



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Appendix 6. Product training quiz

1. Which of the following KPIs are related to Accounts Payable?

Select one or more:

- a. Cost per Invoice
- b. Productivity - Invoice per FTE
- c. Invoice Processing Cycle Time
- d. Cost per PO
- e. Requisition-to-Order Cycle Time

2. Do the Basware invoice receiving services enable companies to receive invoices in any format?

Select one:

- a. No
- b. Yes

3. What is Basware Scan & Capture Service?

Select one:

- a. Customer scan invoices, and either validate themselves, let Basware do the validation, or both.
- b. Outsourcing of complete scanning, data validation and exception handling to Basware.

4. Which one of the following is true?

Select one:

- a. Smart coding is designed to create payments for recurring invoices.
- b. Both answers are correct.
- c. Smart coding is designed to help to find a correct cost allocation for non-PO invoices by looking into transaction history & templates.

5. Which of the following Basware AP solutions provides visibility into the entire P2P process?

Select one:

- a. Basware AP Automation
- b. Basware Analytics
- c. Basware e-Invoice Receiving

Appendix 7. The best practices and development suggestions

Development Suggestions

- Clarify what is expected in probation period
- Help employee to understand how he/she can have a successful career at BW
- Implement buddy concept
- Provide lunch for a new employee
- Provide a mix of learning methods
- Ensure that the buddy has skills and good attitude
- Create social channel (Yammer) to share onboarding ideas and questions (HR)
- Create a landing page in intranet for new hires (HR)
- Create videos of employees and by CEO (HR)
- Arrange regular get-together for new employees (HR)
- Ask managers and HRs to share existing materials in agreed location (HR)

Recommended Practices

- Send personal message and greetings from team members before day one
- Implement the basics prior to the first day
- Make the first day special, send a welcome letter
- Introduce new employees to their team members
- Take the employee to lunch
- Assign a buddy
- Schedule meetings and set objectives together
- Be clear with objectives, timelines, roles, and responsibilities
- Make the onboarding participatory and evaluate the progress
- Outline performance milestones and career trajectory for the coming months

Appendix 8. The project schedule

Task	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46		
1 Agree thesis topic																																					
2 Read theories and company materials																																					
3 Survey																																					
3.2 Create and agree the questionnaire																																					
3.1 Confirm employee and HR participants																																					
3.3 Launch employee survey																																					
3.4 Launch HR survey																																					
3.5 Launch hiring manager survey																																					
3.6 Analyze results, identify key findings																																					
4 Review literature																																					
5 Development item: product trainings																																					
6.1 Agree trainings with Sales Enablement and HR																																					
5.2 Plan training with Sales Enablement																																					
5.3 Review training content and quizzes																																					
5.4 Analyse follow-up quiz results																																					
5.5 Perform product training improvements																																					
5.6 Launch the product training																																					
6 Present proposal about overall program																																					
7 Close thesis project																																					