



A guide to Virtual Onboarding  
in the Laboratory Environment



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Onboarding is a critical step in the employee lifecycle and research shows that the quality of onboarding has a major impact on the overall job satisfaction and retention of employees. According to survey research, organisations considered in the top 20% in terms of onboarding had 91% first year retention and 62% of new hires reaching their first year goals compared with the bottom 30% of organisations which reported 30% and 17% goal completion for the same timeframe.

In a world where we are increasingly having to utilise the virtual options available to us, how can businesses integrate a successful onboarding programme into the virtual world.

During times where physical contact needs to be limited (during a global pandemic for example!) onboarding can be a more challenging experience for roles that require a person to be onsite. How do you effectively recruit and onboard where the usual processes are not possible? For some elements of the role: documentation that needs submitting, health and safety policies, company culture, intro to other parts of the business, systems and tech as well as training, the advice in our main virtual onboarding blog would also apply.

With the use of video technology the recruitment process has been fully assimilated into the virtual world. Hinterview, Skype and Zoom are some technologies SRG has been using to help clients continue to hire.

### **Laboratory environments:**

Virtual tours of the lab can easily be made on handheld devices. Think about pre-recording an introduction to the lab and the people that are working there to be sent either at the recruitment stage or once a hire has been successful. This may take a couple of shifts to fully cover everyone if social distancing is in place, however that way the new hire is able to see the lab and colleagues in situ and see how the company has adapted to this new reality we find ourselves in.

### **Onboarding in a Laboratory environment - Evaluate the risk**

In the short-term, onboarding a new hire into a laboratory environment should not require any excess practices over and above those in place for existing workers. A series of short-term and longer-term strategies for business continuity however will accelerate the digital transformation many businesses are already facing and adapting quickly to. We are continually working with our clients to find solutions to the safe onboarding of new hires and here are some suggested processes that have been working well.

Laboratory workers don't have the luxury of being able to work from home, so essentially plant leaders need to look at 3 main areas: protecting the workforce, managing risks to ensure business continuity and continuing to drive productivity at a distance.

### **Protecting the workforce:**

A new hire will want to know that they are safe when entering a new environment, likewise existing staff will want to know that they are protected from any new person or persons joining their environment. Laboratory leaders are looking at implementing different working practices to limit the movement and mixing of the workforce whilst maintaining productivity. Clear communication of the health and safety processes in place are vital.

Common areas of concern to address:

- Is a process of regular testing for the virus in place?
- Have the work areas been made safe(er) for the workforce (hand sanitising stations etc)
- Is extra PPE provided?
- Has distancing been put in place?
- Are the areas being regularly cleaned?
- Are screens in place if and where possible?
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams, partnering or pods' (so each person works with only a few others).
- Consider the possibility of staggered shifts. This will significantly reduce crowds and potentially cater to individuals' personal circumstance (childcare etc.)

**The government is clear that workers should not be forced into an unsafe workplace.**

- If satisfactory social distancing measures are not available – i.e. people must work face-to-face for a sustained period with more than a small group of fixed partners - then you will need to assess whether the activity can safely go ahead. Again, no one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment.

Formulise and then communicate your policies. Ensure a two-way communication process is in place. Studies looking at practices developed during previous viral outbreaks, shows this open flow of communication helped maintain productivity and reduce absenteeism as employees felt less vulnerable.

### **Considerations for your onboarding process:**

- Risk assessments. There are interactive tools available to support you online, the official Government document recommends the tool from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/assessment.htm>.
- Ensure every new hire is tested for the virus and results documented

### **Consider digital approaches to elements of onboarding:**

- What documentation can be completed online, prior to start date?
- What training can be moved online to accelerate capability-building and allow (new) employees to develop skills remotely?
- Move team meet and greets to virtual environments. See our full guide to Onboarding in the Office Environment.
- Move shift-handovers to the virtual environment to minimise team cross-over contact
- Consider how existing technology can help with onboarding: Some businesses are starting to utilise VR technologies to help operators familiarise themselves with new tasks. This also allows remote employees to provide training, advice and support in situ.

### **Longer-term strategies: the accelerated 4<sup>th</sup> revolution**

The pandemic has forced many businesses to accelerate their digital strategies. Now we are in the middle of change, it is becoming obvious that existing systems can be overhauled and it is creating an opportunity to help businesses to look beyond technology, and find ways to give the greatest number of people the ability to positively impact their families, and communities. This is creating a favorable situation for employers who are able to adapt and

create working environments that utilize technology as well as an environment of wellbeing for their employees.