

Chapter 8.21

Trends in Integration– Based Orientation in Academic Libraries

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ABSTRACT

When new employees join an organization, a great deal of information must be provided to support their success. While clarifying job duties, outlining operational procedures, and reviewing benefits details are priorities, integrating employees into the culture of the organization is perhaps the most critical, and most often overlooked, aspect of orientation programs. In the ever-expanding field of information science and knowledge management, it is imperative that organizations provide comprehensive orientation programs that not only welcome new employees but successfully integrate them to their long-term contributions to the organization and the profession. This chapter examines the importance of orientation programs and discusses how current orientation programs

in several academic and research libraries are effectively focusing on organizational culture and employee integration.

INTRODUCTION

Positive or “good turnover” in organizations is the combination of voluntary and involuntary turnover that keeps the organization “refreshing” itself. This turnover can be made up of poor performers who leave or it can be a manageable rate of turnover that brings in employees with new skills, insights and motivation. “Bad turnover” is when people we wish to retain leave or when turnover is so high that it results in poor morale, poor service to patrons, and other negative impacts. Testa (2008) states that in the U.S., workers in their early 20s move from job to job with just 10% staying with an employer for two years. Comparable data is

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not readily available for librarians, and while we might disagree on what constitutes the perfect balance between “good turnover” and “bad turnover”, the authors believe that we would all agree that losing 90% of a young workforce within a two-year window is unhealthy for any organization. In a recessionary economy, workers are much less mobile, but retention programs are no less important than they would be during periods of strong economic growth.

By devoting the necessary time, resources and energy into developing and delivering a comprehensive retention program, it is possible to reduce the amount of “bad turnover” in your library. A holistic retention program includes well articulated components like: integration-focused orientation to the organization and the position; training, staff and organizational development; mentoring, performance coaching and evaluation; structured rewards and recognition programs; remuneration packages; and, exit interviews. This chapter focuses on integration-focused orientation programs, explores the connections between employee retention and successful integration, and discusses how current orientation programs in several academic and research libraries are effectively focusing on organizational culture and employee integration.

ORIENTATION, INTEGRATION AND RETENTION

Increasing Employee-Organization Connections through Orientation

Many factors contribute to why librarians leave their libraries. Turnover studies in academic librarianship (Christopher, Tucker, 2008; Colding, 2006; Luzuis, Ard, 2006) cite reasons such as taking a position elsewhere, retirement, job satisfaction, unpleasant work environment and compensation as being major factors in why librarians leave their libraries. While well-structured

orientation programs will not address all of these issues, they might increase employee loyalty to the organization, increase job satisfaction, and improve the work environment, thereby mitigating some of these reasons.

Most large organizations, including academic libraries, have new employee orientation programs. Orientation programs range from an introductory session focusing on the completion of human resources paperwork to integration-focused programs that are a part of the more comprehensive retention programs mentioned in the introduction. Most new employees will have some sort of “training plan” that focuses on the elements of the specific position they were hired to do, but orientation programs are also a perfect opportunity for the organization to share its mission and values with new hires, to celebrate the arrival of a new colleague, and to show the new employee how their position fits into the organization as a whole. Initial impressions can be the key to a successful relationship between the new employee and the organization and can influence the employee’s decision regarding how long they will stay with the organization. Well-structured orientation programs communicate to the new hire that the organization is committed to their success and is willing to provide them with the tools needed to achieve that success (Mossman 2005).

One key to the success of any orientation program is having full participation and engagement from all levels of management. Library management and supervisors should understand the importance of such programs and completely support program goals and objectives. This support can be as simple as having library management send a welcoming email to the new hire or as involved as having them participate in the development and delivery of the program. It is not uncommon for supervisors to celebrate when a long-term vacancy has been filled by taking a much needed break. They take vacation missing important days in the orientation of the new employee and this can make a negative first impression of the

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