

**Suggestions on Effective Corporate New Employee Orientation Program for Human
Resource Specialists**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to suggest strategies for preparing new employee orientation programs for private section organizations. More specifically, the study addressed challenges and approaches for effective orientation programs. The paper discusses two curriculum and instruction models. A model designed by Finch and Crunkilton was adapted for a general and department orientation development. The Mager and Beach's model was suggested to use for job orientation development.

Introduction

With the development of today's global market, organizations are continuously seeking ways to grow and keep competitive through training. At the same time, giving new employees confidence in their decision making process for the organization as well as improving their efficiency and effectiveness are key concerns for organizations. The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD, 2006) estimates that U.S. organizations spend \$109.25 billion on employees' learning and development annually, with nearly three quarters (\$79.75 billion) spent on the corporate sponsored training activities with the remainder (\$29.50 billion) spent on external services. With such a considerable investment in employee training, new employee orientation is an important component. This paper addresses the challenges and approaches to organizing effective orientation programs and maximizing organization investments.

An orientation program is a form of employee training designed to introduce new employees to their roles and responsibilities, co-workers, and organizations (Klein & Weaver, 2000). Well-designed orientation programs provide a positive return for the employer in many ways: employee productivity, loyalty, retention, and contribution. Consequently, new employee orientation is of a major importance to the organization and an important focus for most human resource departments.

Challenges

New employee orientation is important for all companies. However, according to a recent survey from the U.S. executive search firm, Salveson Stetson Group, about two-thirds of corporations admit that they need to improve orientation programming (Amble, 2006). Human resource department faced challenges on how to organize effective orientation training to provide employees with the resources they need to be successful (Robbins, 2002).

Orientation programs are faced with four major challenges. The first is the lack of clearly stated goals and objectives. Many companies did not state specific objectives for their orientation programs (Scanlan, 1965). *Projections* (n.d.) gave three basic reasons that orientation programs missed their goals – lack of planning, disillusionment about the new employees, and the feelings of new employees that they simply did not fit into the company.

The second challenge was the delivery of appropriate and accurate information to new hires. Some companies offer only one or two days for orientation training. Too often, employees felt that they did not get enough information or the amount of data overwhelmed them. *Projections* (n.d.) reported that many new hires thought that orientation was overwhelming, boring, and/or too simplistic.

The third challenge dealt with balancing the variety of needs of individuals and those of the company. Each employee had their own needs and expectations. Companies and departments also had expectations for the new employees. Balancing the different needs and maximizing satisfaction for both sides is a problem for orientation training.

The last challenge was how to lessen new hires' anxiety and make them feel welcomed into the company. The emotion investment associate with orientation training was often neglected. Typical orientation training sessions focus on imparting information. However, previous research showed new hires also required help in setting up new relationships and in lessening the anxiety and stress that accompanied the newcomer experience (Bourne, 1967). According to Richard and Linn (1999), "emotional investment was a pivotal dimension of group effectiveness" (p. 105).

Approaches

An orientation program should be well-planned, and comprehensive in nature. An effective development process can improve employee orientation training. Belilos (1998) suggested three stages for orientation process: a general orientation, a department orientation, and a specific job orientation. General orientation focuses on organization itself, such as organizational goals, mission, values, history, and culture. A departmental orientation includes departmental mission and goals, organizational structure, department functions, products' introduction, etc. A specific job orientation is performance-based or product-based training. It varies with individual positions and focuses on technical training. To satisfactorily meet the above challenges, it is important to note that the first, third, and fourth challenges involve the identification of orientation goals and learning materials. The second challenge addresses the delivery of instruction. Two curricular and instruction models guide the process to resolving the challenges.

General Orientation & Department Orientation

Finch/Crunkilton model

HR specialists can adapt the Finch-Crunkilton model to meet the above four challenges in both general and departmental orientation. The model provides detailed guidelines to develop vocational and technical curriculum and prepare students for employment. The model includes four phases (see Figure 1). The first phase, entitled *Planning Curriculum*, consists of the steps of establishing a decision making process, and collecting and assessing school and community-related data. The second phase *Establishing Curriculum Content* includes a strategy for developing curricular content, making content decision, and developing goals and objectives. The third phase, *Implementing the Curriculum*, contains instructions for identifying and selecting materials, developing content, and selecting delivery strategies. The fourth phase, *Assessing and Refining Curriculum*, explores assessment strategies and solutions for program improvement.

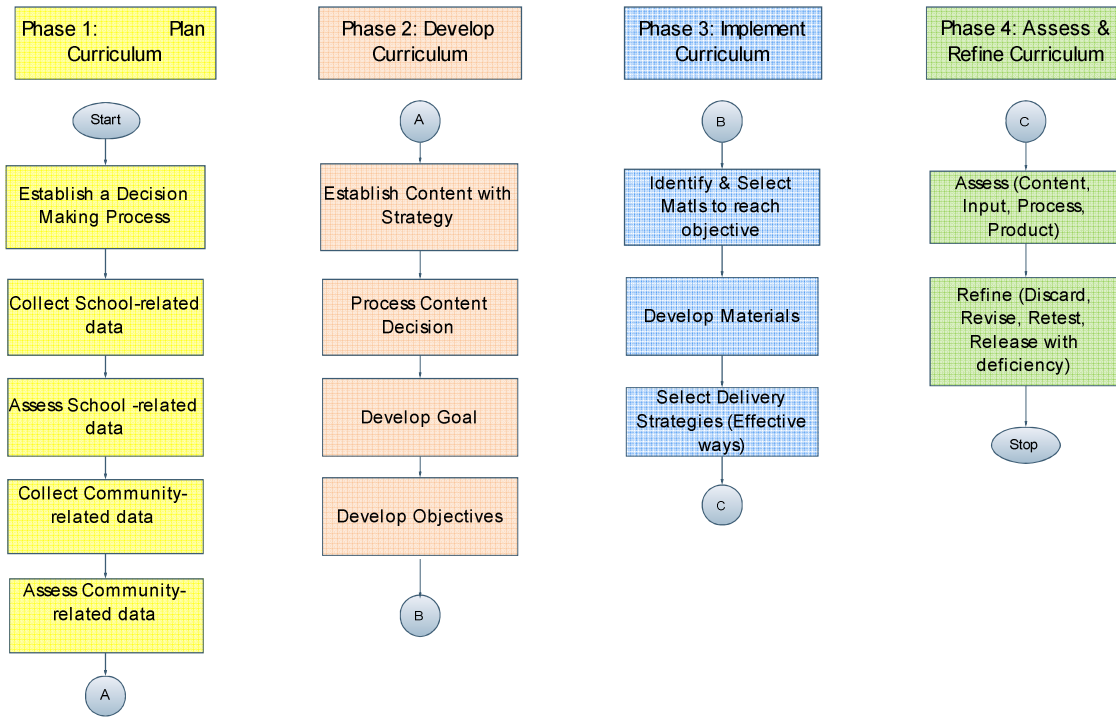


Figure 1. Finch and Crunkilton model

Adapted orientation model

HR specialists can adapt the above model to organization and department orientations by changing several inputs. In the first plan phase, HR specialists can change school-related data and community-related data to Organization and department-related data. Also, to balance the needs of employees, it is appropriate to add employee-related data in the first phase as one input for training objectives identification. During the *Developing Curriculum* phase of the model, it is important to establish informational contents to support company and HR strategy. Implementing curriculum is the third phase. In the step of identify and select learning materials, HR specialists can use an employee handbook as a prime tool in the phase.

Employee handbook

An employee handbook was the primary resource in defining the conditions and terms of employment, and the benefits available to employees. Devon (2006) stated that an employee handbook was the company's communication tool for information and policies to employees.

A well-planned new employee orientation program was important for both employees and the company when supplemented with an employee handbook. Berkeley (2006) explained that a good employee handbook set clear ground rules for employees. Also, the handbook protects an organization from lawsuits if an employee claims to have been unfairly disciplined or fired. Weiss (2007) suggested it was best if the employer sent

the new hires a welcome letter, an employee handbook, and a written job description before their first day on the company. Gavin and Jawahar (2002) suggested the following contents be placed in an employee handbook:

1. Company information: included at the beginning of the employee handbook with a welcome letter, a brief description and a discussion of the company's mission and values.
2. Rules and expectations: addressed by policies, which include prohibited conduct, right to intellectual material, privacy right, arbitration, solicitation, and dress code.
3. Procedures: followed steps or actions if any of the policies or rules is not followed. Procedures included a broad definition of harassment, authority when complaints happen, and an indication of what will follow after a complaint solved.
4. Benefits: required to be included in employee handbooks by US law. Benefits may include social security, unemployment insurance, and workers compensation, whom each benefit applies and what criteria will be used to, and who to contact with questions.

Assessment

Assessment and Refinement is the last phase of the Finch-Crunkilton model. It is important for HR specialists to value the assessment phase. A suitable assessment can help balance the variety needs from employees and the company. The purpose of an assessment is to determine how well orientation programs meet both the needs of the organization and those of the new employees.

Two sources for assessment are recommended for HR specialists. One is the new employees themselves and the other is the leaders of the organization. A survey can be used for employee assessment. Management actively involved is critical and they are a good resource to provide feedback for improving orientation program.

A survey can be conducted with new employees to find out what they want to gain from the orientation training. Kirkpatrick's model can be applied to assess the orientation programs. Bates (2004) clarified the four levels of Kirkpatrick's model. Level One was to assess learners' reaction to the program to find out how well they liked it. Level Two assessed the learners' knowledge. Level Three assessed how the learners applied what they learned on their jobs. Level Four measured the impact of the training on the whole organization. Branham (2005) suggested surveying new hires to find out how to minimize new-hire surprises in the future to meet mutual expectations from companies and new employees. Branham also suggested that "unmet expectations is the primary reason that 4 percent of employees leave the job on the first day and 50 percent quit during the first 6 months. Related is the fact that 40 percent of new executives also fail within the first 18 months" (p. 3). Follow-up can work as an ongoing part of orientation evaluation. Hacker (2004) believed that ongoing orientation was its most ideal

form. Ongoing evaluation of the orientation process resulted in regular refinements and occasional revisions.

Management has an important role in new employee orientation. A needs assessment for leaders would assess if anything is missing from the current orientation training. Amble (2006) cited that an agreed-upon plan between the new employees and their supervisors should be prepared to measure the new employee’s performance and expectations within the first 12 months. Wheeler (2006) suggested that managers need to provide meaningful discussion and reflective work experience since they controlled all career progression and opportunities of the new employees. Meeting with managers would also help to show concern for employees, provide basis for decision making, and build loyalty. The adapted model for orientation is illustrated in Figure 2.

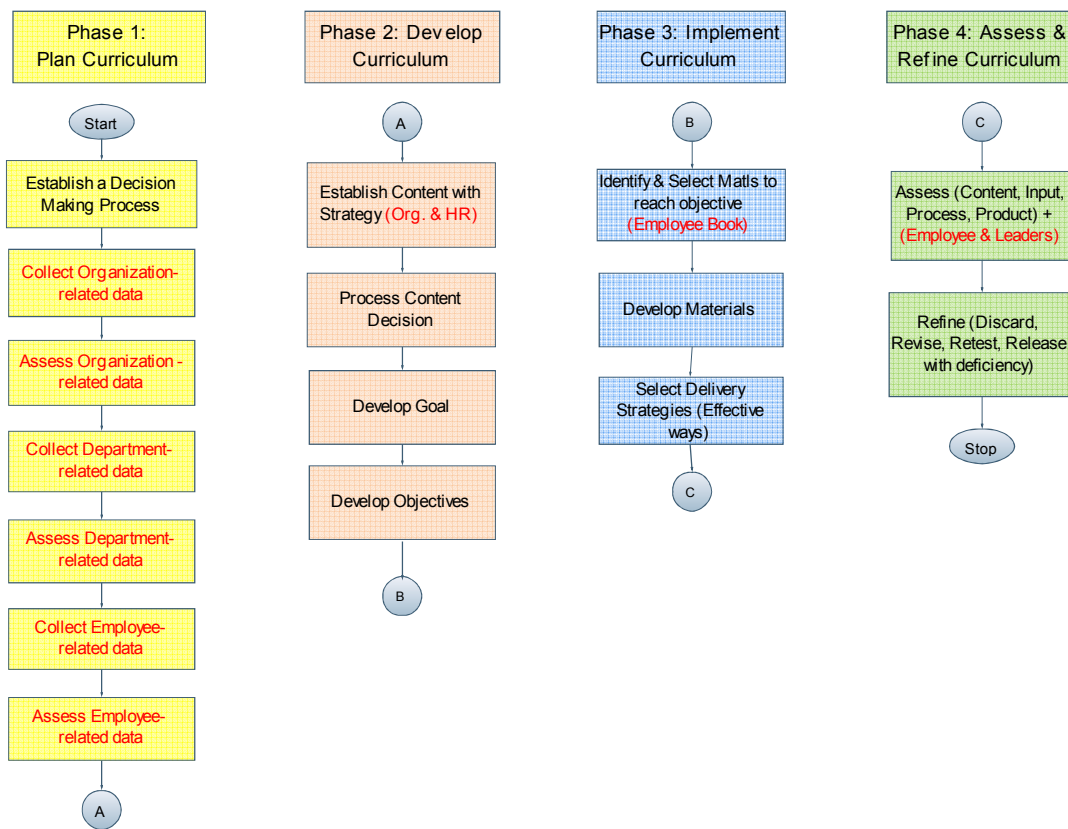


Figure 2. Adapted Finch and Crunkilton Model to Orientation.

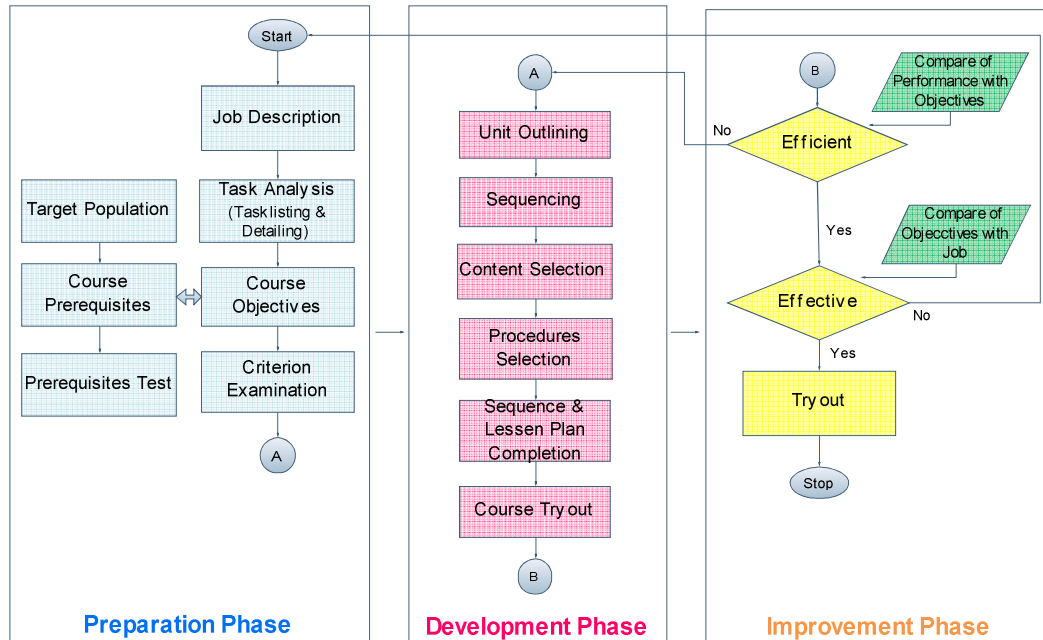


Figure 3. Mager and Beach's Model.

Job orientation

HR specialists can use Mager and Beach's model to develop a job orientation section. The model provides detailed steps for course objectives identification and instructions development for vocational and technical education/training. The process is illustrated in Figure 3. Mager and Beach's model is composed of three phases: Preparation, Development, and Improvement. The preparation phase guides the analysis of an occupation in terms of work activities, course objectives, and criterion examination. The development phase focuses on the preparation of materials needed to attain the course objectives. The development phase guides classroom instruction, including course content, procedures, and sequences. The improvement phase assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of the instruction. It guides the assessment of student performance in terms of the stated learning objectives. Human resource specialists can apply a pre-test and a post-test to determine participants' knowledge, skill and abilities before and after the session. Effectiveness assessment addresses the issues of course objectives. It assesses how well curriculum instructors identify what to teach by comparing the course objectives with the jobs. If the training program failed in the efficiency assessment, the curriculum instructors will review the development phase to refine the instruction process. If the training program failed in the effectiveness assessment, the curriculum instructors will go back to the preparation phase to revise the identified course objectives. During the entire process, organizations can develop "buddy" or "mentoring" program to provide support and guidance for new employees. *Projections* (n.d.) reported:

Whatever orientation materials are included in the process, they should encourage participation in creative and entertaining activities that reinforce the necessary

skills and information. New employees must also have guidance and assistance throughout the process from a mentor or buddy, as well as their manager. (p. 5)

Overall, a new employee orientation program is a well-planned, systematic procedure that includes well-identified goals and well designed curricular and instruction.

Conclusion

The central problem being addressed in the paper concerned were the challenges and approaches contributing to an effective orientation program in corporations. The adapted Finch and Crunkilton model provides detail curriculum and instruction information for orientation program design. The Mager and Beach's model will be a good resource for job orientation development. Human resources department can use the paper as a process guideline for their orientation programs.

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