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Richmond, BC V7C 4X2

December 1, 2020

Benjamin George

Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer

Speakbox

Vancouver, BC

Dear Mr. Benjamin George,

Here is my feasibility analysis report on how to effectively onboard new employees remotely at Speakbox. I believe these recommendations will improve the current onboarding process that will positively impact not only new but current employees. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude and thanks for your participation in one of the conducted research interviews.

Given these challenging times of 2020, many companies were caught off guard by remote work in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote onboarding requires new strategies, additional resources, and refined processes to properly adapt to the consequential challenges that companies may face while working remotely. This report will investigate the impact of remote work on productivity and social integration. In addition, a feasibility analysis of the research results, including interview and survey data, will also be conducted to provide more appropriate and applicable suggestions. The proposed improvements will streamline the onboarding process for new employees and provide them with a better experience overall.

I have enjoyed my work on this report and would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to reach out after 5pm at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email me at jksdeluz@student.ubc.ca.

Kind regards,

Jen K. Deluz

Enclosure: Feasibility Analysis of Effectively Onboarding New Employees Remotely at Speakbox

Feasibility Analysis

of Effectively Onboarding New Employees

Remotely at Speakbox

for

Benjamin George

Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer

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# Abstract

As companies transition into remote work in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, new and current employees may find themselves struggling to adapt and encounter several challenges along the way. To mitigate the potential onboarding issues for new Speakbox employees, this report will propose recommendations based on the analysis of primary research, conducted through an internal survey and interviews, and secondary research of existing studies and publications. Orientation, training, coaching and support, support tools and processes, and feedback must all be taken into consideration to determine practical and feasible solutions (Britto, et al., 2020, p. 4). This report will also investigate the impact of remote work on productivity and social integration for employees. To refine and streamline the remote onboarding process for new employees, Speakbox should consider the proposed recommendations to ensure effective and successful onboarding.

# Introduction

Speakbox is a growing social enterprise providing mental health professionals with an effective practice management software. The platform has continued to grow by developing new tools and features based on feedback given from existing clinicians. Given current circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, public health experts strongly recommend companies to encourage all employees to work from home. Remote work will aid in preventing and mitigating disease transmission around offices, public transit, and households. Acting in accordance with guidelines for health and safety, the onboarding process will also be done remotely to follow workplace guidelines and risk mitigation set out by the government.

Onboarding involves processes of integrating new employees into their role, their team, and the company. These processes are split into two parts:

* Cultural assimilation – conveying the company’s culture, values, and expectations to transition new employees into the company and their team.
* Work training – providing the necessary tools, resources, and guidance to transition new employees into their role.

Whereas, remote commonly describes employees working away from their physical environment (Colihan, et al., 1998, as cited in Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 1). They may work at home, in a shared public space, or any location of their choice. The idea of remote work is that employees can work in any chosen location and effectively contribute to their team (Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 1).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, companies had limited time to develop new onboarding procedures as they began their transition into remote work (Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 1). Numerous disadvantages accompany a team as they transition into an entirely virtual workforce. Unfortunately, several of these challenges negatively impact companies. Companies and employees may face certain struggles as they adjust to working remotely. As companies and employees adjust to working remotely, they may face certain obstacles

To better understand the remote onboarding process, including challenges encountered while onboarding in a pandemic, six areas of onboarding and remote work will be explored by posing the following Research Questions (RQs):

*RQ1* What obstacles are the current employees facing while working remotely?

*RQ2* Will it be beneficial to develop a unique onboarding plan for each new hire according to personalities?

*RQ3* How is workplace productivity impacted by remote work?

*RQ4* What actions can the company take to eliminate workplace isolation?

*RQ5* Which activities do employees believe promote team building and teamwork?

*RQ6* What are the approximate costs for implementing the provided suggestions, such as communication tools or team bonding activities?

Primary sources of research will be collected through surveys and interviews with new and existing employees at Speakbox. These methods will provide valuable insight on the opinions and perspectives of employees.

This report will serve to provide refinement recommendations for the current onboarding process to effectively integrate new employees remotely into Speakbox. These recommendations also consider the potential costs of the suggestions.

# Data Section

## Impact of Remote Work

Remote onboarding presents unique challenges in comparison to local onboarding because new employees begin work off-site (Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 1). As companies and employees adjust to working remotely, they may face certain obstacles that have a negative impact on job satisfaction through productivity and social integration issues.

**Productivity.** An employee’s team connection and physical workspace is directly associated to job satisfaction and productivity (Boland and Fitzgerald, 2004, as cited in Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 8). Challenges concerning trust, physical proximity, and self-awareness can arise while working in a team. Lack of trust creates ineffective teams with reduced transparency and communication; employees may conceal weaknesses and mistakes or even hesitate to provide constructive feedback in areas of expertise. Trust is essential within a team because it sets realistic goals and promotes accountability. However, poor communication is still possible because of the absence of a physical work environment. The lack of body language, facial expressions, or tone of voice can be misconstrued depending on certain communication methods. Whereas, productivity will benefit because of remote work, gaining advantages such as work autonomy, reduced interruptions, and flexible schedules (Ford, Milewicz, et al., 2019, as cited in Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 2). Employees feeling a lack of visibility and support for their work within internal and external teams can quickly impact motivation, in turn affecting productivity. A good team connection is beneficial for all parties involved, while also bringing value to the company.

**Social Integration.** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote work, it is encouraged to build a culture of allyship for remote employees (Hernandez & Rodeghero, 2020, as cited in Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 9). Remote work restricts opportunities for employees to bond, which may hinder the ability of establishing relationships with coworkers (Hill, 2020, p. 397). Employees may also find it more difficult to feel connected and a part of the company. The nature of remote work, scheduling difficulties, lack of running into colleagues in the office, etc. can increase the feeling of isolation between teammates (Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 4). Teaching the origin or purpose behind certain rituals helps the existing team recalibrate and connect to why they were introduced in the first place (Hill, 2020, p. 397).

## Investigation of Employees: Interviews and Surveys

The investigation of employee opinions and perspectives should be taken into consideration prior to modifying the current onboarding process of Speakbox. A survey and several interviews were conducted and further analyzed below.

### Survey All Employees. To understand the effectiveness of the current onboarding process at Speakbox, all employees were given the opportunity to anonymously provide feedback on their views on remote work and onboarding. The number of employees at Speakbox may impact and influence the interpretation of the findings, in the form of a limitation, because a small sample size is surveyed.

#### ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE

As an initial starting point, Figure 1 and Figure 2 visualize the overall outlook on the current onboarding experience and quality of the training process. This gives valuable insight on effectiveness of the current onboarding process and if it should be improved.

**Figure 1.** Overall Quality of Onboarding Experience for Survey Respondents

**Figure 2.** Overall Quality of Training Process for Survey Respondents

#### COMMUNICATION

 To minimize poor communication within a team, it is important to first understand the communication methods that employees vastly prefer. Figure 3 reveals that employees have a collective preference for video communication. Whereas, e-mail communication is the least popular for the survey respondents. It is helpful for employees to remain mindful of potential miscommunication that can damage team connection.

**Figure 3.** Workplace Communication Method Preferences for Current Employees

#### TEAM BUILDING

Despite the overall importance of team connection and social integration, not all employees may find it personally important. Some employees may prefer having a “Time Clock” or “Nine to Five” mentality where work is considered as work, so long as they are productive, and work is done. To gain better understanding of Speakbox employees, Figure 4 and Figure 5 both reveal that sense of belonging and team building have varying importance from moderately to extremely important.

**Figure 4.** Sense of Belonging Importance for Survey Respondents

**Figure 5.** Team Building Importance for Survey Respondents

 Taking into consideration the previous results concerning importance of sense of belonging and team building, it is important to understand that not all team building activities work. An employee can differ vastly between colleagues, including preferences in participation of certain team building activities. To determine and cater future team building activities for Speakbox employees, survey respondents were asked to specify their interests in specific team building activities with the opportunity to provide additional suggestions. Although no additional suggestions were provided, Figure 6 visualizes the participation interests.

**Figure 6.** Interests in Team Building Activities for Survey Respondents

### Interview Current Employees. All three co-founders of Speakbox were interviewed to gain actionable insight on their current views of remote work and the onboarding process. Several questions were asked to understand their overall perspective on remote work; all three interviewees have relatively positive thoughts but seem to agree that there are some compromises to be made along with many potential challenges.

# 💬 *Generally speaking, depending on the role, there are a lot of advantages. Remote work opens flexibility and our idea of work hours. However, productivity is my biggest concern. It is the biggest challenge because there is potentially less accountability.* (A, Scott, Telephone Interview, 2020)

# 💬 *There is a tradeoff between flexibility and freedom; everyone must be willing to put in the time to receive some sort of value. Any time you have people out of an office, it is hard to make people feel motivated and accountable. Whether someone takes one break or five, I don’t care as long as there is a system and expectation that makes me feel like my team is motivated and accountable.* (B, George, Telephone Interview, 2020)

# 💬 *I love it because I have had a sleeping disorder for 16 years. I am less productive during the day versus at night when I am more awake. Companies are so used to synchronous work. Remote work makes it easier to adapt to asynchronous work. However, engagement is different. The main concern with working remotely is losing interest. The excitement is hard to get remotely. Now, the task has to be really interesting.* (V, Prugnaud, Telephone Interview, 2020)

### Several other questions were asked to understand their overall perspective on the importance of social interaction and team bonding; all three interviewees agree similarly on the degree of importance but differ in the explanation as for why. They also have differing perspectives on team building activities.

# 💬 *I’m a very social person. I find team bonding pretty important; the extroverted side of my introverted side. I see my team as more than just colleagues. In general, I like activities that are brief, yet specific, activities that I find more favorable. I hate cliché team building activities. I prefer spontaneous things that do not put me on the spot.* (A, Scott, Telephone Interview, 2020)

# 💬 *Communication is super important so no one feels like they are working by themselves. Team bonding is very important. You need to ensure that there is a sense of a team. If you are going to team build, do it right. Keep the comradery alive. Five to ten people are ideal because it becomes less valuable the more people there are. It should be fun having one engaging activity as an entire team.* (B, George, Telephone Interview, 2020)

# 💬 *Going into the office can be someone’s only social interaction but sometimes people do not want to socialize and that should be okay. Social interaction in the form of meetings about spring planning or scrum daily meetings can quickly lead to time wasted; paying people to be more productive versus just talking about it. I find team bonding pretty important but not mandatory. Everyone is different, there are other people who are quiet and do not want to engage but can be good workers. Personally, I suck at small talk and would prefer the creative or active activities. I like to solve problems with people, and it works better for me.* (V, Prugnaud, Telephone Interview, 2020)

## Considerations for New Onboarding Process

Before establishing and proposing recommendations for Speakbox, it is necessary to take into consideration all data findings from both primary and secondary research to determine the most applicable and appropriate solutions.

**Desired Outcomes.**

Employee onboarding has six short-term processes, all in which have intended and desirable outcomes of their very own (Bauer, 2011, as cited in Britto et al., 2020, p. 4). To provide recommendations to effectively improve the current onboarding process, it is necessary to perform an analysis of the research findings from the investigation, in addition to existing studies and publications.

#### ORIENTATION

Workplace orientation is the initial process of helping new employees to understand important aspects of their roles and organizations, including the company's culture and values (Klein & Weaver, 2000, as cited in Britto, et al., 2020, p. 4). It lays down the initial foundation between the employee, company, and team. This is the perfect time to assign an onboarding buddy and an onboarding technical mentor to help with training.

#### TRAINING

Workplace training is a mandatory process to give new employees the confidence, clarity, and skills required by their job (Britto, et al., 2020, p. 4). Up-to-date documentation can allow new employees to ramp up more quickly with resources they can refer back to. Training facilitates the adjustment of new employees to their jobs, specifically concerning self‐efficacy, role clarity, and knowledge of culture (Bauer, 2011, as cited in Britto, et al., 2020, p. 4).

#### COACHING AND SUPPORT

A mentorship program can ease new employees at their own speed into the company, offer advice, and answer specific questions. Opportunities for informal interaction with colleagues are created for new employees to adapt more easily to the new work environment (Britto, et al., 2020, p. 4). Having a support system that a new employee can lean on helps to promote team connection.

#### SUPPORT TOOLS AND PROCESSES

Several tools and support processes that lead to onboarding success are:

* Onboarding plan – a formal document containing a timeline, goals, responsibilities and available support
* Stakeholder meetings – involves all onboarding stakeholders to provide new employees with the opportunity to acquire the information they need
* Onboarding online – track onboarding progress against the new employee’s development and career plans (Britto, et al., 2020, p. 4).

#### FEEDBACK

Constant feedback and guidance are mandatory for new employees to understand and interpret reactions of their coworkers (Britto, et al., 2020, p. 4). New employees develop their skills, knowledge, and performance based on the constructive feedback given. One-on-one meetings are crucial to promote open communication and asking for help. It is a successful space for individuals to feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns.

### Cost Approximation for Implementation. Choosing the right technologies and tools is vital because it plays an important role at all times in a company. To showcase the cost approximation of tools and online team building activities, Table 1 provides a brief example of a few available options to choose from. There are many tools that offer a free plan which companies can quickly take advantage of to improve quality of life in a workplace.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Name | Pricing |
| Business Communication Platform | Slack | FreeStandard - $8 USD/mo.**\***Plus - $5 USD/mo.**\*** |
| Video Communication Service | Google Meet | FreeEssentials - $8 USD/mo.**\*** |
| Video Communication Service | Zoom | FreePro - $200 CAD/yr.Business - $270 CAD/yr. |
| Collection of Business Applications | Google Workspace (includes Google applications) | Business Starter - $7.80 CAD/mo.**\***Business Standard - $15.60 CAD/mo.**\***Business Plus - $23.40 CAD/mo.**\*** |
| Video Game Digital Distribution Service | Steam | Free |
| Video Game Digital Distribution Service | Origin | Free |
| Party Game | Jackbox Games | $9.99 - $99.99(standalone titles, individual games, bundles, and party packs) |
| Digital Music Service | Spotify | Free |

**\***price per active user

**Table 1.** Current Pricing of Suggestions

# Conclusion

To understand the remote onboarding process and the challenges that new hires face during the process, several research questions were asked at the beginning of this report. Previous studies and publications revealed the challenges new employees face concerning orientation, training, coaching and support, support tools and processes, and feedback. In addition, a survey and several interviews with Speakbox employees were conducted to collect further data for analysis. With the initial purpose of providing refinement recommendations for the current onboarding process to effectively integrate new employees remotely into Speakbox, the recommendations are found below.

## Recommendations

Speakbox can create a clear and easily modifiable onboarding process for each new employee with the following recommendations:

* promoting open communication and asking for help
* encouraging teams to turn on cameras
* scheduling one-on-one meetings
* providing information about the company
* emphasizing team building and team connection
* assigning an onboarding buddy
* assigning an onboarding technical mentor
* supporting multiple onboarding speeds
* providing up-to-date documentation (Ford, Houck, et al., 2020, p. 7)

Additionally, it would be highly beneficial to follow up after the probation period and gain constructive feedback for onboarding improvements.

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# Appendix A: Interview Questions

## Interview Questions

1. What are your thoughts on working remotely?
2. How important is social interaction in a workplace?
3. Can you describe your communication style?
4. What is your biggest concern about working remotely?
5. How important is team bonding?
6. Would you participate in team building activities?
7. If yes, what are some activities or ideas you would enjoy?
8. Would you work in person if you had the opportunity to? Please explain.
9. If yes, what do you miss the most about working in an office?
10. What are some suggestions that can be done to improve our current onboarding process? (i.e. Professionally, emotionally, physically, or mentally)

# Appendix B: Survey Questions

## Survey Introduction

I am an undergraduate student at UBC working on a technical writing project. The purpose of this survey is to collect data for an analysis and investigation that aims to provide recommendations for effectively onboarding new employees to Speakbox. The final formal report will be addressed to Speakbox employees and management. In combination with information provided by publications and studies, this survey will assist in the recommendations to effectively refine the current onboarding process. The survey contains 8 questions, and it should take about 5 to 10 minutes of your time. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and your responses will be anonymous. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time. You are also free to decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer. I am appreciative and grateful for your generous participation. Thank you.

## Interview Questions

1. Have you started a new job remotely before your current company?
	1. Yes
	2. No
2. How would you rate your overall onboarding experience with your current company?
	1. Very satisfied
	2. Satisfied
	3. Neither agree nor disagree
	4. Dissatisfied
	5. Very dissatisfied
	6. Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. How would you rate the quality of the training process during your onboarding?
	1. Very satisfied
	2. Satisfied
	3. Neither agree nor disagree
	4. Dissatisfied
	5. Very dissatisfied
	6. Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you have any suggestions to improve the training process?
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5. Which communication methods do you consider effective within a workplace?
	1. E-mail
	2. Text
	3. Video
	4. Phone
	5. Face-to-face
	6. Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. How important is a sense of belonging in a workplace?
	1. Extremely important
	2. Very important
	3. Moderately important
	4. Slightly important
	5. Not at all important
7. How important is team building in a workplace?
	1. Extremely important
	2. Very important
	3. Moderately important
	4. Slightly important
	5. Not at all important
8. Please indicate your interest in participating for the following activities:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Very interested** | **Somewhat interested** | **Neutral** | **Somewhat uninterested** | **Not at all interested** |
| **Game night** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Trivia night** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Team lunches** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Karaoke** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Weekly jukebox (share music)** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Baking/cooking competition** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **One-on-one (coffee break)** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Virtual office (replicate office)** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Craft night** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Beer o’clock (drinks)** |  |  |  |  |  |

1. If you have any other activities or ideas that you would enjoy as a team building activity, please list them here.
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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