Manufacturing Onboarding Best Practices

Get Your New Factory Hires Up to Speed Faster With Training Software

Thanks (or no thanks) to the pandemic, many manufacturers' employee turnover and onboarding costs have increased. In 2019 only, American manufacturers spent $26 billion on learning and development efforts. This is exacerbating the industrial skills crisis and has forced companies to raise wages to compete for qualified candidates and, in many cases, reduce production due to a lack of staff. In fact, 75% of manufacturers mention that they are still facing challenges attracting and retaining a quality workforce.

Researchers have found that a high-quality onboarding experience should include setting expectations, building role-specific skills, and introducing company culture to new team members, which strongly influences employee satisfaction and long-term retention and organizational profitability. The cost of replacing an employee can range anywhere from half to two times their annual salary.

Studies show that companies with standardized onboarding have better productivity early on and higher retention, while newcomers who miss out on comprehensive training experience frustration, confusion and uncertainty.

A study from Purdue University examining the onboarding experience of new hires at US manufacturers uncovered a damningly low opinion among study participants: they all reported insufficient, non-standardized onboarding training, compounded by a lack of management support and poor communication.

Whether it's a knowledge deficit amongst companies or limited resources, there are tools available that can help manufacturers tackle these common challenges altogether.

Why is Onboarding so Important?

Onboarding is a critical process for any manufacturing organization. It sets the tone for new employees and provides them with the tools and knowledge they need to become productive team members. A positive onboarding experience can make employees feel supported and valued, while a negative experience can lead to a high turnover rate and decreased morale.

Studies show that only 66% of frontline workers are satisfied with their organization's training and development opportunities. And only 59% are happy with their company's communication practices. Training today is still falling short. These numbers demonstrate that manufacturers still have a ways to go in improving their onboarding programs to meet employee needs and expectations.

Furthermore, approximately two-thirds of employees under 25 said they stay with their current employer because of training and development, and career opportunities. The good news is that these valuable, difficult-to-entice younger employees were more motivated to stay because of quality training than older workers, so a good training program should be considered part of your retention strategy.

With that being said, here are the top reasons why onboarding is vital

1. First impressions matter: A good onboarding experience can make new employees feel they are being taken care of and that their employer is invested in their success. This can lead to a more engaged workforce right out of the gate.

2. Safety: According to the Institute for Work & Health, employees in their first month on the job have more than three times the risk for a lost-time injury than workers who have been at their job for more than a year. This is why ensuring new employees receive comprehensive safety training during onboarding is crucial.

3. Employee retention: According to a study by the Aberdeen Group, the first six months of employment are the most critical period for employee retention. A positive onboarding experience can help to reduce turnover during this period, as new hires will feel more engaged and invested in their role.

4. Faster time to productivity: This is a key goal of any onboarding process. Manufacturers want their employees to hit the ground running and become contributing team members as quickly as possible. However, this can be at odds with the above-mentioned points. It's essential to strike a balance to ensure that new hires are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their role effectively while also being productive as soon as possible.

What Should Onboarding Include?

When it comes to onboarding new frontline employees, it's important to have a standardized training process that covers all the necessary skills. We recommend that you cover these three main categories in your onboarding program.

1. **Corporate and Factory-Wide Foundations:** This typically covers health and safety, corporate vision, security, and quality. These skills are important for all employees, regardless of their role, and in many cases are required for compliance reasons. Although these foundations typically only make up around 10-15% of your training content, they can represent a big burden on L&D resources because of the number of team members that need to be trained and the regular recertification requirements. This type of training is typically conducted in a classroom, although there is an opportunity to leverage eLearning and online exams for improved training efficiency.

- **Safety Training:** This training should cover all relevant safety regulations, emergency procedures, and personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements.
- **Quality Training:** Quality compliance training is critical for ensuring that all employees understand the importance of maintaining quality standards, adhering to regulations, and following best practices. Quality training typically covers topics such as product quality control, process validation, documentation, audits, and non-conformance management.
- **Company Culture and Values:** Introduce new employees to the company's culture and values. This can include an overview of the company's mission and vision, a review of the company's core values, and an explanation of how the employee's role fits into the larger picture.

2. **Role-Specific Operations:** This category covers job-specific skills related to operations and should include an introduction to the job role and the skills required to perform it effectively. Training content should be constantly evolving to reflect best practices gained from production and typically makes up 50-75% of onboarding content. On-the-job shadowing is by far the most common way to deliver role-specific training but has known shortcomings - most notably that the senior team member delivering the training is no longer fully available for production during this period, and there is often inconsistency in training.

3. **Troubleshooting:** The final category covers troubleshooting and maintenance skills, which is typically 10-20% of the training content. The emphasis placed on this content will obviously vary based on the role (i.e. maintenance workers) and whether your factory has a Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) program in place. By including all three of these categories in your onboarding program, you can ensure that your new employees have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their roles.

Modernize Onboarding With a Connected Worker App

Connected Worker apps are not designed to replace or eliminate shadowing or classroom training but to supplement it, in order to help overcome their well-known limitations and the current growing labour challenges. The goal of Connected Worker apps is to reduce the reliance on traditional training methods, and support continued learning beyond formal training events, leading to more efficient and effective onboarding.

Onboarding With Poka - Training Delivery Method

1. Link out to external resources for corporate or compliance e-learning modules.

2. Host recorded classroom sessions or short instructional videos.

3. Supplement shadowing or on-the-job training with always-on-hand digital work instructions or troubleshoots.

4. Validate skills via self-assessments, exams or endorsement by trainer.

5. Track completed skills to ensure compliance and skills mastery for faster time to productivity

How to Use Poka's Connected Worker App

If you're looking to improve your manufacturing organization's onboarding process, consider using a Connected Worker app like Poka.

Here are key ways Poka can help you tackle common onboarding challenges:

1. **Creating a roadmap:** With the Skills feature, building out a three-step training plan becomes more accessible than ever. These plans give new hires visibility into their onboarding journey and help them understand what is expected of them regarding skills proficiency, content review and assessments. By utilizing skills categories, training can be prioritized to address the most critical areas first.

For instance, in Step 1, new hires cover essential onboarding skills, such as safety and quality. As they progress, the focus shifts to operational skills, including startup and changeover. Lastly, trainees will cover maintenance-specific and troubleshooting skills as they get more time on the plant floor with running equipment. By Step 3, the goal is to have new hires completely competent and able to operate the machine, troubleshoot common issues, and perform any necessary preventative maintenance. Providing a clear roadmap gives new hires a timeline so they know when they're expected to meet professional development milestones and can progress through their onboarding consistently and as quickly as possible while maintaining training quality.

Step 1
10-15% of training content

Health and safety, corporate vision, security, compliance and quality.

Step 2
50-75% of training content

Operational skills, including startup and changeover.

Step 3
10-20% of training content

Maintenance and troubleshooting skills. Employee should be fully independent.

2. Establishing a standardized skills database: Digital Work Instructions establish training and operating standards and provide new hires with multi-media, role-specific training content made by your plant subject matter experts. Content can include archived written work instructions, video lessons, diagrams, photos, troubleshoots, one-point lessons, equipment information and more. Everything an operator needs to do their job in one easily-accessed app. Creating a database of role-specific skills ensures that all employees receive the same high-quality training covering the same material.

3. Conducting fair and uniform evaluations: Poka offers several ways of evaluating competencies: self-assessments, trainer assessments, automatically graded exams, and endorsements by authorized managers or supervisors. These features provide a reliable and consistent method for verifying new hires' understanding of the training material and tracking compliance if training records are audited. Companies can ensure that all employees are evaluated equally by setting clear expectations and defining the baseline skill level required to achieve those expectations.

4. Simplifying training administration and content creation: Reduce trainers' workload and improve training programs' efficiency with automatic Skills Management. When a new hire is added to the system, their skills are automatically assigned based on their job role. As they review material and are assessed, their review history is logged for compliance/audit tracking, along with their ranked proficiency in their personal skills matrix so their trainer can easily oversee their progress. Goodbye tracking spreadsheets and signoff checklists!

Creating content is so much faster, as is updating content. One packaging company was able to create basic digital SOPs in only an hour with Poka, shortened considerably from the previous six-hour average. They were able to save even more time creating SOPs for complex equipment, which took three hours instead of the usual 11. Changes are instantly pushed out to all users, eliminating the need to reprint books and training materials. With less work all around, trainers can focus on improving the training experience and delivering better outcomes for trainees. In fact, we've seen reductions in training administration from:

50% reduction in man-hours to maintain training program and skills matrixes

Tetra Pak

**75%** reduction in training creation and administration

BARRY CALLEBAUT

5. **Improving communication during onboarding:** Poka's Factory Feed gives new hires a way to get to know team members and creates a sense of community across production and the company as a whole. Public recognition of successful training milestone completion is another best practice that can help keep new hires motivated and engaged. The Issues Management capability in Poka gives new hires a place to reach out for help when an issue arises that they have not seen before. Senior team members can quickly respond with answers ensuring production keeps running and knowledge is shared.

6. **Giving control to learners:** Poka allows learners to access training content anytime, anywhere, and reference it as needed. This means they can fit training in as opportunities arises, whether that's at the start of their shift, or during downtime. It empowers learners to be autonomous and proactive in their development. They can complete onboarding modules faster, review complex material and even upskill if they want to grow their skills faster. This level of control not only leads to better engagement and retention but also provides a more personalized learning experience. Workers can become more efficient, productive, and effective in their roles, while organizations benefit from a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

7. **Ensuring compliance and safety:** Simplify tracking and auditing of compliance and safety training records by ensuring that all employees have received the necessary training and passed an exam or assessment, proving their ability to perform their jobs safely and to standard. Poka maintains individual viewing history, work instruction content version history and assessment records complete with comments and grades. Being able to track and audit training records in real time provides organizations with a powerful tool to mitigate risk and ensure compliance while keeping their workforce safe and knowledgeable.

Ultimately, investing in effective onboarding and training can lead to improved job satisfaction, higher retention rates, and a more productive workforce.
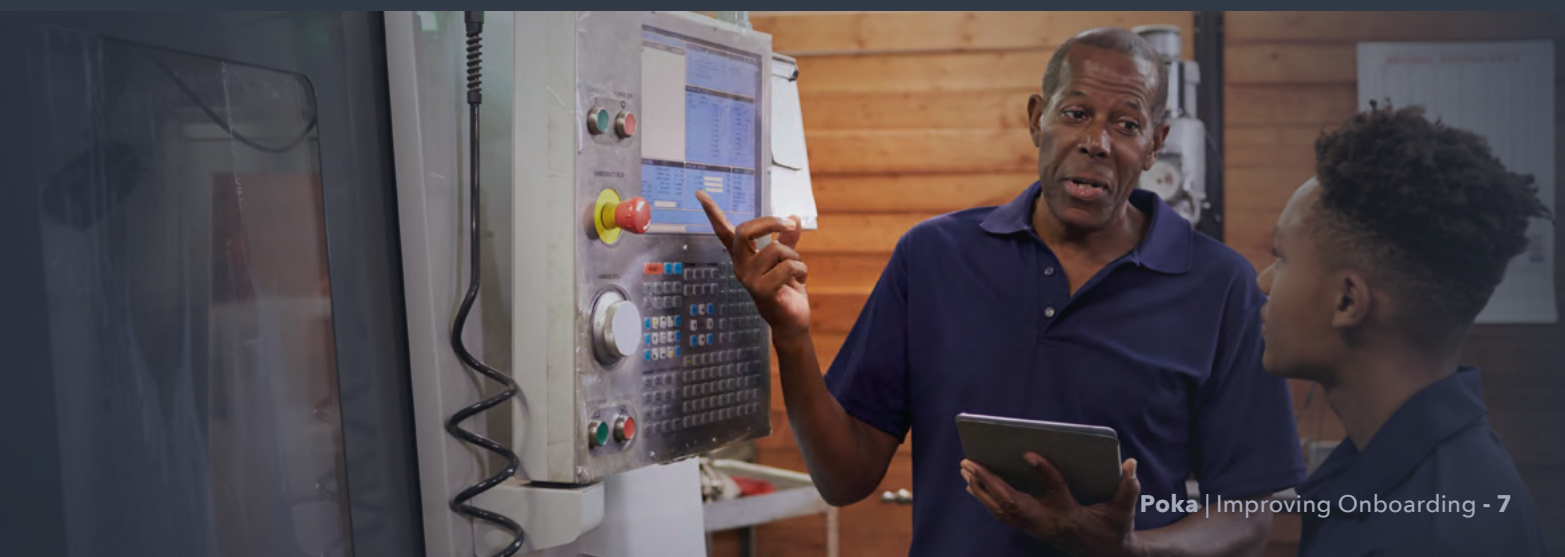
Bel Group Onboarding
Before and After Highlights

Without Poka	With Poka
Written Work Instructions	Multimedia Digital Working Instructions
Work instructions hard to distribute	Work instruction on a tablet at working place
Difficult to know if employees read documents	Automatic reading notifications
Skills follow up hard to complete and access	Skills matrix accessible by an employee or by the whole team
Employees schedule published on board	Employees' schedules are shared and available to all
Technical information for production on board	Technical information available at each piece of equipment
Document control and distribution difficult	Automatic document control and distribution
Employees with questions need to talk to somebody	Employees consult Work Instructions when needed
Limited communication that doesn't reach all employees	Every employee can communicate via the newsfeed
Tags used to declare problems or improvements	Every employee can post an issue
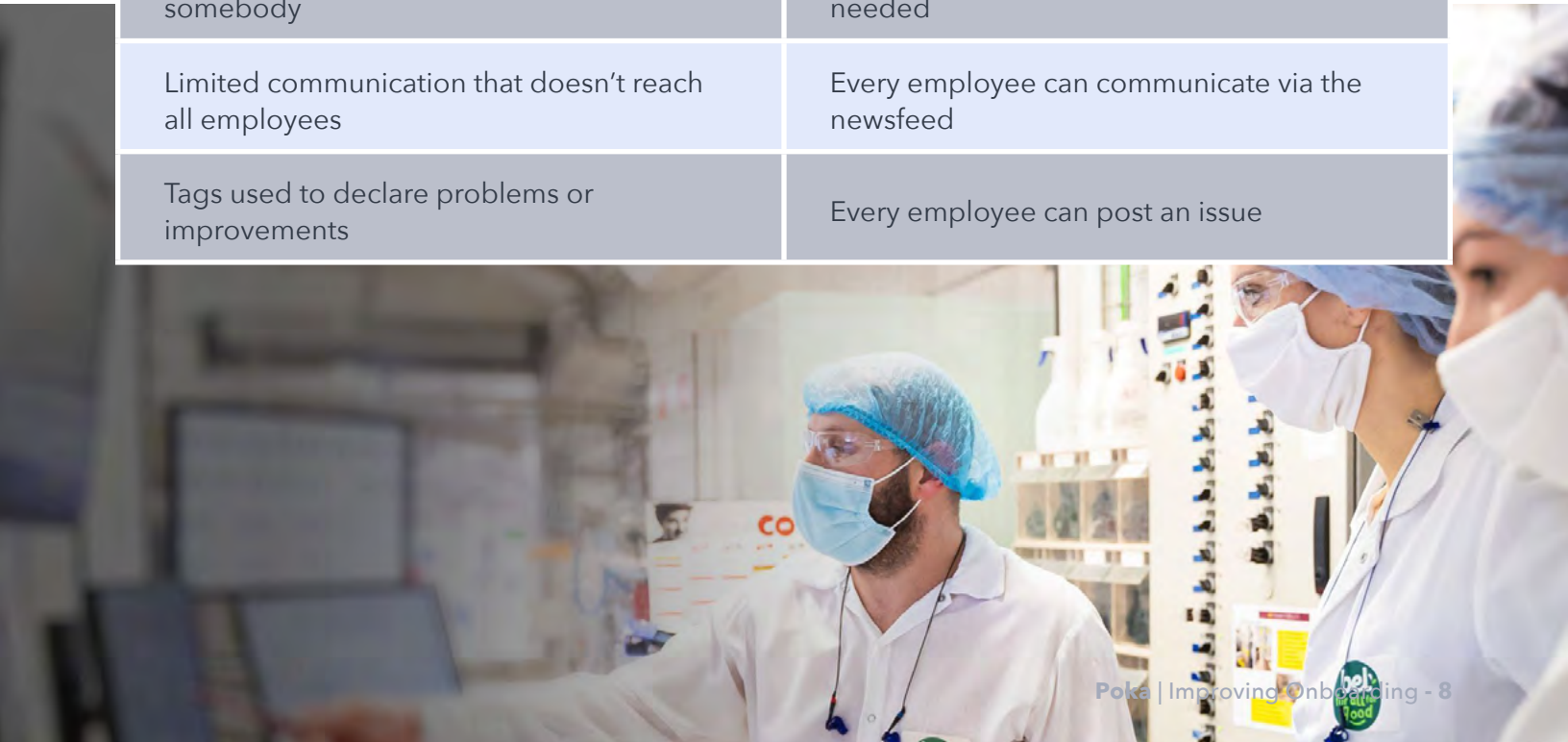
Benefits of Digital Training in Onboarding

Battling skills gaps and labor shortages is driving up costs for manufacturers across the balance sheet, including training delivery. American manufacturers spent $26 billion on learning and development efforts in 2019 and 2020. And onboarding costs are one of the top 5 barriers Canadian manufacturers face when hiring new employees. One of the best ways to counteract this is to get new hires up to speed as quickly as possible, so they can contribute to the organization's productivity. Autonomous learning supported by traditional training methods is demonstrated to shorten onboarding times. Poka has helped reduce onboarding time by as much as:

-15%
Tyson

-30%
Domtar

-40%
DANONE

Using Poka, new hires can access standardized training content autonomously without the need for an instructor or senior operator. This means that new hires can learn at their own pace and have access to training content whenever they need it, leading to faster time to productivity and a more efficient workforce. Senior operators and other trainers are also pulled away from core responsibilities less often to perform training, resulting in fewer scheduling challenges and less cost for the organization. In fact, 44% of surveyed manufacturers are now making training material available on demand as they see the benefits of providing this type of resource to frontline workers.

It also allows manufacturers to improve their productivity. With new hires able to quickly learn the necessary job skills and start contributing to the organization's productivity, the organization can realize significant productivity gains. This was made evident at L'Oréal Canada, where they were able to onboard 26 new employees in one year using Poka, while achieving a 5% month-over-month improvement in OEE. Historically, an onboarding event would be associated with a drop in productivity. Before implementing Poka, a similar situation resulted in a 6% decline in OEE.

Overall, by streamlining the onboarding process, reducing the reliance on in-person training methods, and improving productivity, manufacturers can position themselves for success in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Case Study

NUTRICIA

Before introducing Poka's Connected Worker technology at the Nutricia plant in Zoetermeer, Netherlands, all the typical onboarding challenges were evident. Nutricia, a Danone brand specializing in therapeutic food and infant formula, used the buddy (shadowing) principle to train new operators. It used to take three months for a new operator to be fully qualified, during which an experienced operator is only partially available for production. In addition, work methods were inconsistent among different operators, which led to confusion.

Using Poka, Nutricia was able to improve their onboarding process for new operators—they were able to reduce training time and cost by 40%. By allowing employees to collaborate and share best practices, the app enables the creation of instructional videos and job breakdown sheets that describe consistent work methods. This ensures that all new employees are trained the same way, reducing the risk of confusion and improving health and safety procedures.

With instructional videos and manuals at their fingertips, new employees can access learning materials anytime, reducing the reliance on experienced operators and shortening the onboarding period. The shortened onboarding time is mainly due to the fact that Danone now feels comfortable cutting some content out of the onboarding curriculum because;

"New operators don't need to learn everything during onboarding because now we are confident they can find it when they need it."

Jorn Vroegh
Learning & Development Manager, Danone

Additionally, the app allows for tracking and endorsement of new employees by more experienced operators, providing recognition for a job well done. Overall, Poka has allowed Nutricia to streamline their training process, improving productivity and ensuring consistent quality and safety practices among their operators.

Getting New Hires On Board

Effective onboarding is vital for manufacturing companies to ensure that new hires can contribute to the company's success. A positive onboarding experience can lead to engaged employees, reduced turnover, increased productivity, and improved safety.

Traditional onboarding methods, such as classroom training, reviewing written SOPs, and shadowing, can present challenges that limit training effectiveness. Connected Worker apps, however, offer a solution to many of these challenges. With the use of a Connected Worker solution, manufacturers can deliver personalized, role-specific training that is easier to retain and comprehend. This results in faster onboarding times, increased consistency in training methods, and improved safety.

Overall, using Connected Worker apps is a modern approach to onboarding that can help manufacturers save time and money while also improving the quality of their new employee onboarding.

Book your demo today or visit us at poka.io