



Bridging entry and excellence: Exploring onboarding's role in staff performance at a South African international development organisation

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree **Master of International Business** at The Independent Institute of Education, IIE/MSA

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DECLARATION

I, **Blessings Jijita**, declare that this study titled “Bridging Entry and Excellence: Exploring Onboarding’s Role in Staff Performance at a South African International Development Organisation” submitted for the Master of International Business degree to the Independent Institute of Education is my own work, and has not been previously submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes. Any assistance that I have received has been duly acknowledged in the study.

Except where reference is made in the text, this study contains no materials published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis or study presented by me for another qualification. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the study.

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Signature

Date: 31/03/2026

ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of onboarding practices on staff performance within an international development organisation (IDO X) operating in South Africa. Grounded in Organisational Socialisation Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, the research explored how onboarding facilitates staff integration, capability development, and contextual alignment in a complex development environment. A qualitative case study approach was adopted, guided by an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with staff members and human resource practitioners who had experienced onboarding within the organisation. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and insights, informing key findings, conclusions and recommendations. The findings revealed that structured onboarding practices significantly enhance role clarity, organisational understanding, and early stage productivity. Key elements influencing staff performance included an effective onboarding structure, strong human resources and managerial support, clear communication, and opportunities for social integration. However, challenges such as inconsistent onboarding delivery, limited resources, and constraints associated with remote and hybrid work environments were also identified. The study highlights that onboarding in IDOs must balance rapid integration with deeper contextual understanding to ensure sustainable performance outcomes. The study therefore highlights the need for organisations, particularly within the international development sector, to reconceptualise onboarding as a strategic function rather than an administrative task. Investing in structured, inclusive, and context sensitive onboarding practices is essential for improving staff performance, strengthening organisational capacity, and ensuring sustainable programme delivery in complex and resource-constrained environments. Future research should build on this study by examining onboarding practices across different IDOs in South Africa to determine how practices vary by organisational size, funding model and work modality, applying mixed methods research to combine qualitative insights with quantitative indicators to strengthen understanding of the relationship between onboarding and performance. This research contributes to the limited body of knowledge on onboarding within IDOs, particularly in the South African context. It offers practical recommendations for strengthening onboarding design, implementation and evaluation to enhance organisational effectiveness, and programme delivery in resource-constrained environments.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acronyms	
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit German Corporation for International Cooperation
HCT	Human Capital Theory
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
IDO	International Development Organisation
ILO	International Labour Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OST	Organisational Socialisation Theory
POS	Perceived Organisational Support
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa faces a range of developmental challenges, including poverty, inequality, and limited access to quality healthcare. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2024), South Africa has a population of approximately 63.1 million people, with youth unemployment estimated at 45.5 per cent and 56.8 per cent of the population living in poverty. These challenges collectively hinder national progress across sectors, including those with potential to serve as significant investment drivers for the economy.

UNDP's 2024 Human Development Report further highlights these constraints. South Africa was ranked 186 out of 193 United Nations member states on the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2024). Although the country recorded an HDI value of 0.740, which falls within the high human development category, this reflects a gradual improvement rather than sustained advancement. In the 1990s, South Africa's HDI stood at approximately 0.610, increasing incrementally over time. However, the rise to 0.740 in 2024 has been influenced by global shocks, including the global financial recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which weakened the South African economy and disrupted the delivery of basic services (UNDP, 2024).

This study investigated the role of onboarding on staff performance at a South African international developmental organisation (IDO X).

This chapter outlined the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research aim, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, the research scope, an overview of the research methodology, key concepts and closed with a snapshot of other chapters to follow.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Organisational performance and sustainability are strongly influenced by effective human resource management practices, with staff onboarding widely recognized as a key contributing factor (Bauer, 2010; Armstrong and Taylor, 2023; Armstrong and Taylor, 2026). Onboarding facilitates the integration of staff by equipping them with the skills, competencies, and organisational understanding required for effective

performance and early productivity (Klein and Polin, 2012; Armstrong and Taylor, 2026). Within international development organisations (IDOs), which operate in complex and dynamic environments, structured onboarding practices are particularly important in enabling staff to meet organisational expectations and contribute meaningfully within a relatively short timeframe (UNDP, 2024). In the South African context, onboarding plays a critical role in supporting staff to navigate demanding operational environments while responding to complex social and developmental challenges.

Onboarding is further utilised by IDOs as a strategic practice to support staff in becoming effective organisational members through the development of appropriate skills, behaviours, and social connections (Davila and Pina-Ramirez, 2018; Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). Through this process, employees gain a clearer understanding of organisational culture, expectations, and role requirements, facilitating a smoother transition into the organisation and enhancing efficiency and productivity (Godinho *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, effective onboarding is increasingly viewed as an important mechanism for attracting and retaining talent within the competitive global development labour market (Godinho *et al.*, 2023).

For onboarding to be effective, it typically incorporates a combination of practices such as orientation, training and development, organisational socialisation, and mentorship, all of which support staff in understanding their roles and responsibilities while aligning with organisational expectations (Krasman, 2015; Godinho *et al.*, 2023). Evidence suggests that well-structured onboarding frameworks contribute positively to employee engagement, organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and improved work performance (Krasman, 2015; Godinho *et al.*, 2023).

The significance of onboarding is particularly evident in organisations operating within challenging and resource-constrained environments. IDOs are tasked with addressing complex social and economic challenges, including infrastructure deficits, health concerns and poverty reduction (Micah *et al.*, 2021). Global institutions such as the United Nations, Plan International, World Vision, and Save the Children play a central role in coordinating development interventions and supporting countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Mingst, Karns and Lyon, 2022). Work within the IDO sector is highly contextual, demanding, and multifaceted, requiring staff

to combine technical expertise with adaptive capabilities, community engagement, and cultural sensitivity. As IDOs operate across diverse socio-economic, cultural, and institutional environments, the effective integration of staff becomes essential for sustaining programme effectiveness and organisational stability (Armstrong and Taylor, 2026).

In South Africa, IDOs function within particularly complex socio-economic conditions characterised by high unemployment, growing demand for service delivery, and persistent inequality (UNDP, 2024). These conditions necessitate effective development interventions and place increased pressure on organisations to deliver impactful and sustainable programmes. At the same time, IDOs face additional operational constraints, including limited funding, evolving policy conditions, and stringent donor oversight requirements. As a result, staff productivity and efficiency become critical factors in achieving organisational objectives and maintaining consistent performance.

The COVID-19 pandemic further transformed organisational practices across multiple sectors, including the IDO sector, leading to widespread adoption of remote and hybrid working arrangements. This shift significantly altered traditional onboarding approaches, with digital onboarding, online training, and virtual collaboration gaining increased prominence as organisations adapted to public health restrictions (Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro and Alfonso-Ruiz, 2020). However, these changes also exposed technological and infrastructure challenges, particularly in emerging economies where access to reliable electricity and internet connectivity remains inconsistent forcing operational disruptions (UNDP, 2022). In South Africa, ongoing load shedding and unequal digital access have directly influenced how organisations implement onboarding practices and, in turn, how quickly staff are able to become productive and effective.

While existing research demonstrates that effective onboarding has a positive impact on staff adjustment, performance, retention, and productivity, much of this literature remains focused on corporate settings within developed economies (Staunton, 2017; Godinho et al., 2023). There is comparatively limited research examining how onboarding practices operate within IDOs, particularly in the South African context. IDOs frequently recruit staff under diverse contractual arrangements, including project-

based contracts, consultancy roles, and volunteer positions, which may shape how onboarding is designed, implemented, and experienced. Understanding these dynamics is important for strengthening organisational capacity and ensuring staff are adequately prepared to contribute to development initiatives.

Ineffective onboarding practices may create significant challenges for IDOs, particularly because these organisations often operate under tight project timelines, donor compliance requirements, limited resources, and complex stakeholder expectations (ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2024). When onboarding is poorly structured, inconsistently delivered, or overly administrative, new staff may experience role ambiguity, limited understanding of organisational systems, weak social integration, and delayed familiarity with donor procedures and programme priorities (Bauer, 2010; Klein and Polin, 2012; Godinho et al., 2023). These challenges can reduce early productivity, increase dependence on supervisors and colleagues, and heighten the risk of errors in compliance, reporting, stakeholder engagement, and service delivery (Krasman, 2015; Davila and Pina-Ramirez, 2018; Godinho et al., 2023). In remote or hybrid working environments, ineffective onboarding may further limit access to informal learning, organisational culture, and peer support, making it more difficult for staff to adjust and perform confidently (Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro and Alfonso-Ruiz, 2020; Ziden and Joo, 2020). For IDOs, such onboarding weaknesses can affect not only individual performance but also programme implementation, organisational efficiency, and the timely achievement of development objectives (ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2024).

This study focused on an IDO operating in South Africa, referred to as IDO X, and examined the perceived influence of onboarding practices on staff performance within this context. By exploring staff perspectives and experiences, the research aimed to generate insights into how onboarding practices support productivity and efficiency within development organisations. The findings are intended to contribute to the existing human resource management (HRM) and onboarding literature, while offering practical implications for organisations seeking to strengthen staff integration and performance.

1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

IDO's play a critical role in addressing persistent socio-economic challenges such as poverty, health disparities and inequality across various regions of the world (Micah et al., 2021). In South Africa, these organisations contribute to development efforts by supporting government programmes, strengthening civil society initiatives, and implementing community-based interventions (UNDP, 2024; UNDP, 2025). The effectiveness of such initiatives is highly dependent on the capabilities and performance of staff, which has increased the prominence of human resource management practices within the sector. One such practice is onboarding, which supports staff in understanding organisational expectations, integrating into organisational culture, and performing their roles effectively (Davila and Pina-Ramirez, 2018; Dickson and Isaiah, 2024).

From a conceptual perspective, this study was informed by organisational socialisation theory, human capital theory and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. These theoretical frameworks suggest that early-stage investments in staff onboarding and development enhance role clarity, reduce power distances, enhance knowledge acquisition, and staff's capacity to contribute meaningfully to organisational objectives (Krasman, 2015; Mutua, Kimanthi and Kinyili, 2024). While these theories have been widely applied within corporate contexts, there is limited empirical evidence demonstrating how they operate within IDOs, particularly in the South African setting. Development organisations differ significantly from private sector entities, as they function within grant based funding models, strict accountability and compliance frameworks, and complex stakeholder environments. It is therefore important to examine whether established approaches to staff development and organisational integration are applicable and effective within the IDO sector.

In practice, IDOs rely heavily on skilled and adaptable staff who can operate in challenging social and operational environments. Weak or poorly structured onboarding practices may result in delayed staff integration, role ambiguity, higher turnover, and reduced productivity, all of which can negatively affect organisational sustainability and service delivery (Zia *et al.*, 2025). Conversely, effective onboarding practices have been shown to support faster staff transition, strengthen organisational capacity, and enhance overall performance (Krasman, 2015; Carucci, 2018; Godinho et al., 2023; Mutua, Kimanthi and Kinyili, 2024). Examining onboarding practices within

development organisations therefore has important implications for both organisational effectiveness and human resource management.

Furthermore, IDOs in South Africa operate within particularly challenging environments characterised by limited resources, funding uncertainty, and demanding programme targets. In such contexts, investing in effective onboarding practices represents a cost-efficient strategy for improving staff performance and reducing operational inefficiencies as staff are equipped with capabilities needed to perform their roles and duties effectively (Zia *et al.*, 2025). Insights generated through this research will assist organisational leaders, development partners, and human resource practitioners in designing onboarding approaches that are better aligned with the operational realities of the IDOs sector.

The study also aimed to address a gap in the existing literature. While research on onboarding has expanded in recent years, the majority of studies focus on corporate organisations within developed economies (Staunton, 2017; Godinho *et al.*, 2023). There is limited qualitative evidence exploring how onboarding practices are experienced and enacted within IDOs operating in developing contexts such as South Africa. By examining staff experiences within IDO X, this research aimed to generate contextually grounded insights that can contribute to both academic scholarship and organisational practice.

In summary, this study aimed to enhance academic understanding, inform operational practice, and support the broader development sector. By exploring how onboarding practices influenced staff performance within IDO X, the research also provided practical insights that support staff integration, improve service delivery, and strengthen organisational outcomes.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributed to academic knowledge, professional practice, and the wider development sector by providing research based insights into onboarding practices within IDOs operating in the South African context. By focusing on a sector and setting that have received limited scholarly attention, the research offered context specific evidence on how onboarding practices influence staff performance in development focused environments.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to human resource management and organisational behaviour literature by examining the relationship between onboarding and staff performance in a context that remains under researched. Existing onboarding studies predominantly focus on private sector organisations within developed economies (Staunton, 2017; Godinho et al., 2023). By examining an IDO operating in South Africa, this research extended current understanding of how onboarding functions within resource-constrained, development oriented environments, thereby enriching theoretical applications of onboarding beyond traditional corporate settings.

Practically, the study also offered valuable insights for human resource practitioners and managers working within development organisations. The findings are expected to assist organisations in identifying onboarding practices that effectively support staff integration, early stage performance, and role clarity. Strengthening onboarding processes may enhance staff efficiency, support organisational learning, and improve programme implementation in complex operational contexts.

The study is also significant for development partners, donors, and organisational stakeholders who support IDOs. The findings highlight the role of investment in human resource management practices, particularly onboarding, in strengthening staff effectiveness and organisational capacity. Such insights may inform more strategic organisational development initiatives and resource allocation decisions within the development sector.

Furthermore, the research holds relevance for the broader development context in South Africa, where IDOs play a critical role in delivering social interventions and supporting vulnerable communities (Micah et al., 2021). Enhancing staff performance through effective onboarding practices may strengthen the capacity of these organisations to implement development strategies and achieve sustainable outcomes.

This study provided contextually grounded insights that may inform future research, strengthen organisational practice, and support capacity building strategies within international development organisations.

1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Staff onboarding is widely recognised as a critical human resource management practice that supports effective employee transition into organisations, promotes early-stage productivity, and enhances role clarity (Davila and Pina-Ramirez, 2018; Godinho et al., 2023). Existing research indicates that well-structured onboarding practices positively influence employee engagement, organisational commitment, and performance outcomes (Krasman, 2015). As a result, many organisations have adopted onboarding as a strategic approach to improving staff efficiency and productivity.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to onboarding, much of the existing research has focused on private sector organisations within developed economies, with limited attention given to international development organisations (IDOs) (Staunton, 2017); Frogéli, Jenner and Gustavsson, 2023). IDOs operate under distinctive conditions, including donor-funded and project-based programming, complex stakeholder environments, and diverse contractual and employment arrangements. These contextual factors influence how onboarding practices are designed and how staff experience their integration into the organisation.

In the South African context, IDOs face additional operational challenges such as infrastructure limitations, resource constraints, and changes in work arrangements following the COVID-19 pandemic. These environmental conditions affect the implementation and effectiveness of onboarding practices, particularly in organisations that rely on remote, field-based, or hybrid working models (Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro and Alfonso-Ruiz, 2020). However, there remains insufficient empirical evidence examining how onboarding practices function within this sector and how they influence staff performance in such contexts.

The limited availability of context-specific research makes it difficult for development organisations to determine whether existing onboarding practices adequately support staff productivity and efficiency within their operational environments. Without a clear understanding of these dynamics, IDOs may struggle to implement onboarding approaches that enable staff to perform their roles effectively and contribute meaningfully to organisational objectives. This study aimed to address this gap by

examining the perceived influence of onboarding practices on staff performance within an IDO operating in South Africa.

1.6 RESEARCH AIM

The research aimed to examine the influence of onboarding practices on staff performance within IDO X South Africa.

1.7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore staff perceptions of onboarding practices at International Development Organisation X.
2. To examine how onboarding practices influence staff performance at International Development Organisation X.
3. To identify the challenges staff experience during the onboarding process at International Development Organisation X.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do staff perceive onboarding practices at International Development Organisation X?
2. In what ways do onboarding practices influence staff performance at International Development Organisation X?
3. What challenges do staff experience during the onboarding process at International Development Organisation X?

1.9 BRIEF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to investigate how onboarding practices influenced staff performance within IDO X South Africa. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as the study sought to explore staff experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of onboarding practices within their organisational context (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The research was underpinned by an interpretivist research philosophy, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that organisational phenomena are best understood through the perspectives and lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2014).

An inductive research approach was employed to allow insights to emerge from participants' experiences rather than testing pre-established assumptions or

hypotheses. This approach was suitable given the exploratory nature of the study and the limited existing research on onboarding practices within international development organisations in the South African context (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The research strategy followed a qualitative case study design, focusing on a single IDO, referred to as IDO X. This strategy enabled an in-depth examination of onboarding practices within a real-life organisational setting (Yin, 2018).

Data were collected through one-on-one online semi-structured interviews (via MS Teams) with staff members and human resource professionals who had direct experience of onboarding practices within IDO X. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share detailed accounts of their experiences while providing sufficient flexibility for the researcher to probe emerging issues relevant to onboarding and staff performance (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This method supported the collection of rich, context-specific data aligned with the interpretivist orientation of the study.

The study employed a mono-method qualitative design with a cross-sectional time horizon, as data were gathered at a single point in time. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who had undergone onboarding experience within IDO X and were therefore able to provide relevant and informed insights (Patton, 2015). The qualitative data generated from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, which facilitated the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns and themes related to onboarding practices and their perceived influence on staff performance (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

A detailed explanation of the research design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and analytical approach is presented in Chapter 3.

1.10 RESEARCH SCOPE

To enable the study, the researcher explored the views of staff from different departments, as well as human resource professionals, who had undergone the onboarding process. The scope of the study was geographically limited to a single international development organisation, referred to as IDO X, operating in South Africa.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical principles were applied throughout the research process to ensure the protection of participants' rights, wellbeing, and privacy. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Independent Institute of Education, Monash South Africa University (IIE MSA). An ethical clearance approval was obtained from the relevant Ethics Degree Committee, as well as formal permission from the international development organisation involved in the study (IDO X), prior to the commencement of data collection.

Participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, and how the information would be used. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before any interviews were conducted. Participants also granted permission for the interviews to be audio recorded for research purposes which were later transcribed. In line with ethical research practice, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or negative consequences (Creswell, 2014; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. The identity of the organisation was protected through the use of a pseudonym, referred to as IDO X, and no identifying information about individual participants was disclosed. Research findings were reported in an aggregated manner to prevent the identification of specific individuals. The study posed minimal risk to participants, as it focused solely on professional experiences related to onboarding practices. All data collected, including interview recordings and transcripts, were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with ethical data management standards (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Ethical considerations related to data management, research integrity, and participant protection are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

1.12 DELIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

1.12.1 Delimitations

This study was deliberately delimited to allow an in-depth exploration of the research problem. The research was conducted within the South African context and focused

on a single IDO, referred to as IDO X. This case based focus enabled a detailed examination of onboarding practices and their perceived influence on staff performance within a specific organisational setting (Yin, 2018).

The study adopted a qualitative research design to generate rich, descriptive data based on participants' experiences and perceptions of onboarding practices (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Participation in the interview process was limited to staff members and human resource practitioners who had undergone or been directly involved in onboarding processes within the organisation. This delimitation ensured that data were collected from participants with direct and relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation. A relatively small qualitative sample was intentionally selected in order to prioritise depth of understanding and contextual insight rather than statistical representation (Patton, 2015).

1.12.2 Assumptions of the study

This study was conducted based on several underlying assumptions. First, it was assumed that participants provided honest, accurate, and reflective accounts of their experiences with onboarding practices at IDO X. Given the qualitative nature of the study, the credibility of the findings relied on participants' willingness to share their perceptions and experiences openly during the interview process.

Second, it was assumed that participants had sufficient exposure to and understanding of the organisation's onboarding practices to meaningfully reflect on their influence on staff performance. This assumption was supported by the use of purposive sampling, which ensured that only staff members and human resource practitioners who had undergone or were directly involved in onboarding were included in the study.

Third, the study assumed that participants were able to recall their onboarding experiences with reasonable accuracy at the time of data collection. Although individual experiences may have varied, it was assumed that participants' recollections were adequate for exploring the perceived influence of onboarding practices on their performance.

Finally, the study assumed that the organisational context remained relatively stable during the period of data collection and that no major organisational changes occurred that could significantly alter participants' perceptions of onboarding practices.

1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.13.1 Onboarding

Onboarding refers to the process through which new employees are integrated into an organisation and supported in adjusting to their roles in order to become effective, productive, and engaged members of the organisation (Schafer and SHRM-SCP, 2025). The onboarding process typically begins once an individual accepts a job offer and may extend over several weeks or months, depending on organisational context and role complexity (Schafer and SHRM-SCP, 2025). In this study, onboarding is a central concept, as it represents a key mechanism through which staff performance is influenced within an international development organisation.

1.13.2 Staff Performance

Staff performance refers to the extent to which employees effectively and efficiently carry out their job responsibilities and contribute to the achievement of organisational goals (Mohamed, Matan and Farah, 2025). This concept encompasses both the quality of task execution, and the value employees add through their roles and duties (Mohamed, Matan and Farah, 2025). In this study, staff performance serves as a key indicator for examining the influence of onboarding practices on new and new-to-role employees.

1.13.3 International Development Organisation

An IDO is an entity that focuses on addressing socio-economic challenges faced by countries or regions, including poverty, inequality, health, and education-related issues (Benedek, 2025). Such organisations provide development assistance and support to regions most affected by structural and social challenges (Benedek, 2025). In this study, the concept of an IDO is essential for understanding how onboarding practices operate within a South African development context and how they influence staff performance.

1.14 REPORT OUTLINE

This dissertation is structured into five chapters, each of which addresses a specific component of the study.

Chapter 1 introduced the study by outlining the research context, background, and problem statement. It presented the research aim, objectives, and research questions, and explains the rationale and significance of the study. The chapter also outlined the research scope, methodology, ethical considerations, delimitations, limitations and assumptions, and defines key concepts relevant to the study. This chapter established the foundation for the research.

Chapter 2 presented a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the study. It examined the theoretical framework guiding the research and explores the role and operational context of international development organisations in South Africa. The chapter further reviewed existing literature on onboarding practices, employment characteristics within IDOs, and the relationship between onboarding and staff performance.

Chapter 3 detailed the research methodology adopted for the study. It outlined the research design, philosophical orientation, research approach, and strategy. The chapter further explained the sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures used to address the research objectives.

Chapter 4 focused on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected through online semi-structured interviews via MS Teams. The findings were discussed in relation to the research questions and are compared with relevant literature and theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 5 concluded the study by summarising the key findings and drawing conclusions based on the research results. The chapter outlines the contributions of the study, discussed its limitations, and provided recommendations for human resource practitioners, IDOs, and other relevant stakeholders. Suggestions for future research are also presented.

1.15 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the study by introducing the research context, background, and problem statement underpinning the investigation into the influence

of onboarding practices on staff performance within an IDO in South Africa. The chapter outlined the research aim, objectives, and research questions, and justified the study through the rationale and significance sections. Key concepts relevant to the study were defined, and the scope, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions were clearly articulated. In addition, the chapter presented a summary of the research methodology and addressed ethical considerations which guided the study.

Together, these elements established a coherent foundation for the research and clarified the direction and boundaries of the study. By situating the research within its organisational and contextual setting, this chapter set the basis for examining onboarding practices and their perceived influence on staff performance in an IDO.

Building on this foundation, Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature and theoretical perspectives related to onboarding, staff performance, and international development organisations. The literature review provided the conceptual and empirical grounding necessary to contextualise the study within existing research and to inform the interpretation of the findings presented in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a critical, debate driven synthesis of research on onboarding and staff performance, with a specific focus on IDOs operating in South Africa. Moving beyond sequential summaries, the review integrated three complementary lenses namely the Organisational Socialisation Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, to explain how onboarding can bridge "entry" and "excellence". The synthesis is grounded in operating realities that frequently characterise IDOs in South Africa, including donor dependence, project-based staffing, compliance intensity and multicultural teams (Micah et al., 2021; OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2024).

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND DEBATES

The study on the role of onboarding in staff performance draws from several theories which include Organisational Socialisation Theory (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977), Human Capital Theory (Wuttaphan, 2017; Mutua, Kimanthi and Kinyili, 2024) and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). These theories provide complementary lenses for understanding how onboarding supports newcomer adjustment, capability development and contextual alignment within IDOs.

2.2.1 Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST): mechanisms, evidence and critiques

OST explains how newcomers acquire the knowledge, behaviours and social bonds necessary for effective role performance (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). Contemporary accounts place perceived organisational support (POS) at the centre of adjustment across anticipatory, encounter and change/acquisition phases, linking early support signals to reduced anxiety, accelerated role clarity and stronger commitment (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Klein and Polin, 2012; Godinho, Vale and Torres, 2023). Evidence also suggests that structured onboarding, supervisor support and timely feedback are associated with stronger adjustment and earlier role effectiveness (Bauer, 2010; Frogéli, Jenner and Gustavsson, 2023).

Yet critiques remain. Psychometric concerns around socialisation scales and the linearity of stage models in fluid, cross cultural settings raise validity questions (Tuttle, 2002). For IDOs, where teams may be geographically dispersed, roles are project bound and staff mixes are multicultural, these tensions are non-trivial and suggest the need for flexible, context-aware socialisation tactics rather than rigid, uniform programmes.

2.2.2 Human Capital Theory (HCT): investments, returns and limits

HCT conceptualises onboarding as an organisational investment that builds capabilities through structured learning, mentoring and role clarification (Mutua, Kimanthi and Kinyili, 2024; Wuttaphan, 2017). In principle, capability accumulation should translate into productivity and quality of delivery; however, returns are contingent on complements such as psychological safety, peer support and practice opportunities, mechanisms emphasised by OST (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015). Overreliance on narrow output metrics risks neglecting social and cultural enablers. For IDOs, where staff operate in complex, cross-sectoral environments and may transition rapidly between projects, onboarding that pairs formal learning with relational support is more likely to yield durable performance improvements.

2.2.3 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's framework is frequently used to anticipate how norms around hierarchy, uncertainty and individualism shape onboarding design and newcomer expectations in multicultural teams (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). High power distance contexts may favour clear structures and authority cues, whereas lower power distance settings may benefit from participatory, feedback rich onboarding. Because cultural dimensions can be misapplied deterministically, this review treats the framework as a sensitising device for anticipating potential friction points rather than a prescriptive template (Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro and Alfonso-Ruiz, 2020).

2.2.4 Integrative Synthesis: A multi-mechanism view

Taken together, the theories imply three mechanisms through which onboarding can influence performance in IDOs: (1) social integration (OST) that reduces uncertainty and hastens role clarity; (2) capability accumulation (HCT) via targeted learning and feedback; and (3) contextual alignment (Hofstede) that adapts practices to cultural

expectations. Countervailing risks include information overload and resource intensiveness (Byford, Watkins and Triantogiannis, 2017), measurement validity concerns (Tuttle, 2002), and cultural mismatches that undermine trust. The implication is conditional effectiveness: onboarding performs best when structured learning is combined with supervisor support and culturally responsive touchpoints (Bauer et al., 2025; Klein and Polin, 2012).

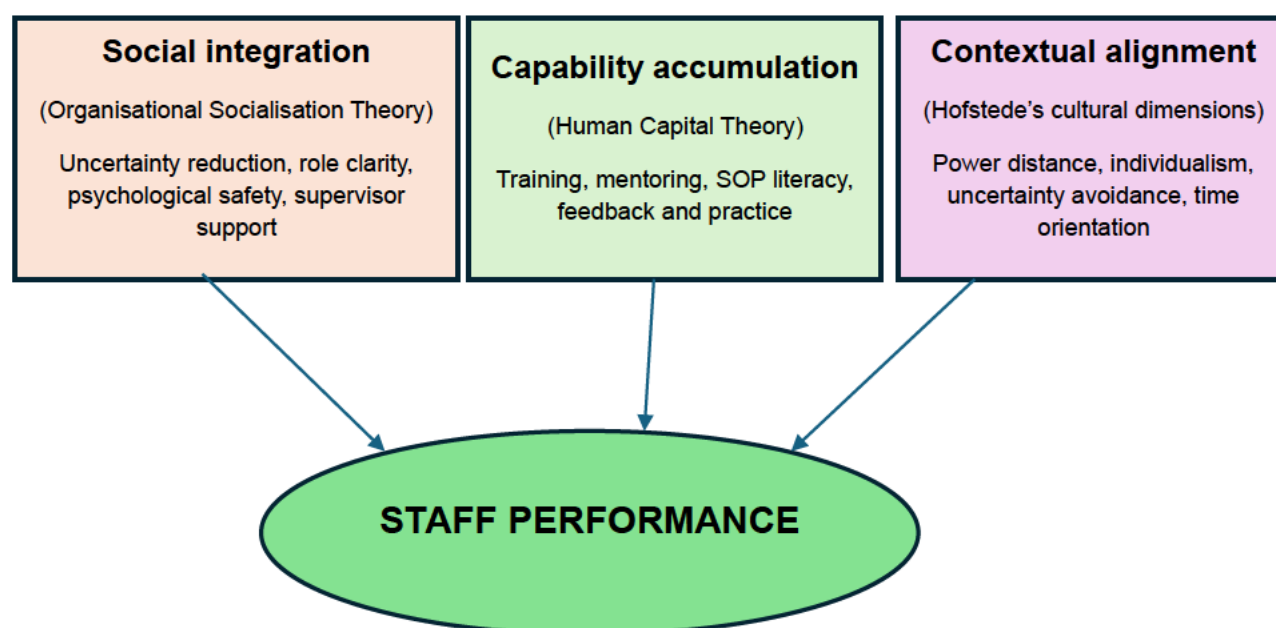


Figure 2.1: Integrated conceptual model - linking social integration (OST), capability accumulation (HCT) and contextual alignment (Hofstede) to staff performance in IDOs (*Own Construction, 2026*)

2.3 IDOS IN SOUTH AFRICA: OPERATING CONTEXT

South Africa hosts a diverse IDO ecosystem spanning NGOs, multilateral agencies and bilateral programmes active in health, education, governance and humanitarian response (Micah et al., 2021; OECD, 2021). Their footprint aligns with national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP, 2023; USAID, 2023). Practically, IDOs complement public systems in under resourced locales while navigating stringent donor compliance and reporting regimes. These conditions produce dual performance pressures, delivering short term grant outputs and building longer term capability within local teams, which raises the premium on onboarding that balances speed with depth (ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021).

South Africa hosts a diverse and intricate IDO ecosystem, a vibrant tapestry of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multilateral agencies, and bilateral programmes that collectively form a critical pillar of the country's developmental architecture (Micah et al., 2021; OECD, 2021). This ecosystem is not monolithic; rather, it represents a complex interplay of actors with varying mandates, funding streams, and operational philosophies. NGOs operating within South Africa range from small, community based organizations rooted in specific localities to large, internationally affiliated entities with national reach, often acting as the primary implementers of grassroots interventions. Multilateral agencies, such as those within the United Nations system including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO) provide technical assistance, policy guidance, and substantial funding pools that shape national strategies. Concurrently, bilateral programmes, such as those from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and the German Development Agency GIZ, channel significant resources aligned with their home governments' foreign policy and development cooperation objectives (OECD, 2021).

Collectively, these IDOs are active across a broad spectrum of sectors, with a particularly pronounced footprint in health where they have been instrumental in combating HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and more recently, in strengthening health systems resilience post COVID-19 as well as in education, governance, and humanitarian response, addressing issues ranging from gender based violence to food insecurity (Micah et al., 2021; UNDP, 2023). The sheer scale and diversity of this presence underscore the IDO sector's role not merely as a supplementary actor but as a deeply embedded component of South Africa's developmental landscape, a reality that brings with it significant opportunities for impact but also profound operational complexities.

A defining characteristic of this IDO ecosystem is its deep strategic alignment with both national development priorities and the global framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The South African Government's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 serves as the overarching blueprint for the country's transformation, outlining ambitious targets for eliminating poverty, reducing inequality, and building a capable, ethical state (UNDP, 2023). IDOs, in their programme design and funding proposals, consistently demonstrate a deliberate effort to map their interventions onto

the pillars of the NDP, ensuring that external support complements, rather than competes with, the state's own developmental trajectory. USAID's multi-billion-dollar health portfolio in South Africa is explicitly designed to support the National Department of Health's strategic plans, focusing on HIV/TB epidemic control and strengthening primary healthcare systems (USAID, 2023). Similarly, the work of multilateral agencies like the UNDP is intricately woven into efforts to achieve the SDGs, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), providing a shared global language of progress that unites government, civil society, and international partners (UNDP, 2023). This strategic convergence is not merely rhetorical; it is a practical necessity for IDOs seeking legitimacy, operational space, and long-term sustainability within the country. This alignment, however, also creates a complex dynamic where IDOs must constantly negotiate their role as both supportive partners and, at times, critical challengers to state capacity and accountability.

At the practical, ground level, the role of IDOs manifests most visibly in their function as essential complements to the South African public system, particularly in under-resourced locales. It is in rural provinces like the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, as well as in dense, resource-constrained urban townships, that the footprint of IDOs is most critical (Micah et al., 2021). IDOs often step in to fill critical gaps in service delivery, acting as implementing agents for public health programmes, providing educational support in underperforming schools, or facilitating community-based governance structures. In the health sector, IDOs frequently manage community health worker programmes that extend the reach of overburdened public clinics, providing door-to-door HIV testing, adherence support for antiretroviral therapy, and screening for non-communicable diseases (ILO, 2021).

In education, international NGOs may partner with provincial education departments to deliver early childhood development programmes or provide school-based violence prevention interventions. This complementary role, while vital, is fraught with tension. IDOs can inadvertently create a two-tiered system where well-resourced donor-funded projects operate alongside underfunded public facilities, raising questions about sustainability and long-term systemic strengthening (OECD, 2021).

Furthermore, the very presence of IDOs in these spaces necessitates a constant and often delicate negotiation with government counterparts to ensure alignment, avoid

fragmentation, and build, rather than substitute for, the public sector's own capacity. The success of this complementary relationship hinges on the ability of IDOs to navigate complex local politics, build trust with community structures, and demonstrate tangible value without creating dependency.

The operational reality for IDOs in South Africa is further complicated by the necessity of navigating stringent donor compliance and reporting regimes. Funding for development programmes is rarely unrestricted; it is tied to specific, often complex, contractual agreements imposed by bilateral and multilateral donors (ILO, 2021). These regimes dictate not only what can be funded but also how activities must be implemented, monitored, and reported. A USAID-funded programme operates under a rigorous framework of rules and regulations governing financial management, procurement, sub-award management, and environmental compliance, with detailed reporting cycles that demand a high degree of administrative precision (USAID, 2023). Similarly, funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, a major multilateral partner in South Africa, comes with its own set of performance-based financing metrics and stringent audit requirements.

For IDOs, particularly smaller NGOs, managing these compliance demands constitutes a significant administrative burden, often requiring dedicated staff for grants management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and finance resources that might otherwise be directed to frontline programme implementation (OECD, 2021). The culture of compliance, driven by donor accountability imperatives in their home countries, can sometimes lead to a risk-averse operational environment that prioritizes meeting contractual milestones over adaptive, context-sensitive programming. This creates a persistent tension between the flexibility required for effective community engagement and the rigid structures demanded by donor accountability frameworks, a tension that IDO leadership and project management teams must constantly mediate.

It is within this complex nexus of strategic alignment, local supplementation, and strict compliance that the dual performance pressures facing IDOs in South Africa are most acutely felt. These organizations are simultaneously tasked with two often competing imperatives: the delivery of short term, verifiable grant outputs and the cultivation of longer-term capability within their local teams and partner institutions (ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021). The first pressure, delivering short term outputs, is a direct

consequence of the results-based management paradigm that dominates the development sector. Donors require demonstrable results within the project lifecycle, typically three to five years, leading to a focus on quantifiable indicators such as the number of people tested for HIV, the number of teachers trained, or the number of policy briefs produced (OECD, 2021). This emphasis on what can be counted and reported quickly can incentivize a projectized approach that prioritizes the achievement of narrowly defined targets over more complex, systemic change. The second pressure building longer term capability represents a more nuanced and slower paced objective. It encompasses efforts to strengthen the technical skills of local staff, develop robust organizational systems within partner NGOs, foster leadership capabilities, and ensure that knowledge and expertise remain within the country beyond the lifespan of a donor grant (ILO, 2021). This capability-building dimension is often articulated in programme theories of change as a pathway to sustainability, yet it is notoriously difficult to measure and can be easily sidelined when short-term output targets are under threat.

The inherent tension between these two pressures creates a high-stakes environment for IDO management. A relentless focus on output delivery can lead to staff burnout, a transactional approach to community engagement, and the neglect of the very capacity strengthening that is supposed to ensure lasting impact. Conversely, an exclusive focus on long term capability building may result in missed short term targets, risking contractual noncompliance and a loss of donor confidence. Successfully navigating this duality requires a sophisticated organizational culture that values process as much as results, invests in adaptive management approaches, and maintains a clear vision of its ultimate development purpose beyond the immediate grant cycle.

This dual pressure system directly raises the premium placed on one of the most critical, yet often under acknowledged, organizational functions within the IDO sector: the process of onboarding. Onboarding, in this context, extends far beyond the conventional human resources practice of administrative orientation. It represents the critical period during which new staff members often recruited under tight timelines to meet grant startup or expansion targets are integrated into an organizational environment characterized by high complexity, stringent compliance requirements, and the dual performance pressures described above (ILO, 2021). The “speed”

dimension of onboarding is driven by the relentless clock of donor agreements. When a new grant is awarded, there is immense pressure to rapidly recruit and deploy staff to begin implementation and achieve “quick wins.” This often results in accelerated hiring processes and truncated orientation periods, where new hires are expected to hit the ground running with minimal lead time (OECD, 2021). The risk of prioritizing speed is that new staff may be inadequately socialized in the organization’s culture, its specific compliance protocols, and the nuanced political and social context of their work. They may be handed in complex budgets and work plans without a full understanding of donor rules or the organization’s internal risk management frameworks, creating a recipe for compliance errors, mismanagement, and staff burnout.

In contrast, the depth of onboarding is a more deliberate and holistic process that seeks to build a new employee’s capability for long term effectiveness. This approach recognizes that working in an IDO in South Africa requires more than just technical skills; it demands a deep understanding of the organization’s strategic purpose, its relationship with the South African government and local communities, the intricacies of donor compliance, and the organization’s commitment to capacity building and sustainability (ILO, 2021).

A deep onboarding process would typically involve structured mentorship, gradual assumption of responsibilities, cross-departmental exposure to finance, M&E, and programme teams, and explicit training on core values such as localization, equity, and adaptive management. It aims to create not just a technically competent employee, but a reflective practitioner who can navigate complexity, exercise sound judgment in ambiguous situations, and contribute to the organization’s longer-term goals of capability building.

However, depth oriented onboarding requires time, dedicated resources, and a deliberate organizational commitment that can be difficult to sustain when short term deliverables loom large. The premium, therefore, lies in an organization’s ability to design and implement an onboarding process that strategically balances speed with depth a process that enables new staff to become productive quickly without sacrificing the comprehensive preparation they need to contribute to sustainable, high-quality, and compliant programming (OECD, 2021). This is not a simple trade off but a strategic challenge that demands innovative solutions, such as phased onboarding

plans, the use of digital learning platforms for compliance training, and the deliberate cultivation of a learning culture where peer support and ongoing mentorship are institutionalized.

The IDO ecosystem in South Africa operates within a dynamic and demanding environment shaped by its diverse composition, strategic alignment with national and global priorities, and its vital role in complementing public services in under resourced areas. This operational landscape is characterized by the perpetual tension between the administrative rigidity of donor compliance and the flexibility required for effective community engagement. This environment gives rise to the central challenge of dual performance pressures, where organizations must simultaneously deliver immediate, measurable results while investing in the longer-term capability of their local teams and partners. It is within this crucible that the function of onboarding emerges as a strategic imperative, a critical process that determines an organization's ability to manage these inherent tensions effectively.

The premium placed on an onboarding process that balances the urgent need for speed with the essential requirement for depth reflects a fundamental organizational choice: to treat human resources as a dispensable input or as the primary vehicle for achieving sustainable, locally rooted development impact. IDOs are committed not only to fulfilling grant mandates but also to contributing to the long-term strengthening of South Africa's own developmental capacity, investing in a balanced, thoughtful, and context-sensitive onboarding process is not merely an operational detail; it is a foundational strategy for operational excellence, ethical practice, and ultimately, the realization of their development mission in an increasingly complex and resource-constrained environment (ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2023; USAID, 2023).

2.4 EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS SHAPING ONBOARDING DESIGN

IDO workforce structures combine project tied contracts with fixed term roles and a blend of national and international staff (Mingst, Karns and Lyon, 2022; ILO, 2021). Short project cycles compress the onboarding window; compliance regimes necessitate early role clarity, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) literacy and data stewardship; and dispersed, multicultural teams heighten the need for intentional social integration (Morales et al., 2021). These features justify treating onboarding as

a strategic capability that aligns people, processes and culture rather than as a one-off administrative task (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015).

Two IDO specific design imperatives follow. First, onboarding must accelerate 'time-to-context, not merely time-to-productivity by translating organisational purpose, donor rules and community expectations into role specific routines. Second, it must scaffold collaboration across national and international staff mixes, ensuring equitable access to information and mentorship irrespective of contract type or duty station. These imperatives are consistent with evidence linking supervisor support and structured learning to early adjustment (Bauer et al., 2025; Ibrahim, Yusof and Ibrahim, 2022).

The employment characteristics that define the IDO workforce in South Africa and globally constitute a foundational yet often under-examined determinant of onboarding design, shaping not only the logistical parameters of how new staff are integrated but also the deeper strategic potential for onboarding to function as a lever for organizational effectiveness, staff retention, and programme quality. The IDO workforce is characterized by a structural hybridity that fundamentally distinguishes it from more stable private sector or public sector employment contexts, combining project tied contracts of finite duration with fixed-term roles that are contingent upon sustained donor funding, alongside a deliberate blending of national and international staff who bring disparate experiences, expectations, and career trajectories to their work (Mingst, Karns, and Lyon, 2022; ILO, 2021).

This workforce composition is not accidental; it reflects the projectized nature of development financing, where multilateral and bilateral donors allocate resources for discrete, time bound initiatives, and where organizations must maintain staffing flexibility to scale up or down in response to funding cycles. The individual employee, this often translates into a career marked by serial fixed term contracts, with periods of employment interspersed with gaps, creating a landscape of precarity that influences how newcomers approach their roles and how organizations must structure their integration processes (ILO, 2021). For the organization, the constant flux of personnel with waves of recruitment accompanying new grant awards and waves of departures as projects conclude creates a chronic need for efficient yet effective onboarding that can absorb large cohorts of new staff with minimal disruption to ongoing operations. This structural reality means that onboarding cannot be treated as an occasional administrative routine but must be conceived as a recurring

organizational capability, one that is exercised repeatedly under conditions of urgency and resource constraint.

The temporal pressures imposed by short project cycles further compress the onboarding window, creating a foundational tension between the time required for genuine integration and the imperative to deploy staff immediately against demanding work plans. Most IDO projects operate on cycles of three to five years, yet the ramp-up phase during which recruitment, onboarding, and initial implementation must occur often consumes the first six to twelve months, leaving a compressed period for actual intervention before closing out activities begin (Mingst, Karns, and Lyon, 2022). For new staff hired into such environments, the expectation is that they will achieve full productivity within weeks, not months, often with limited supervision given that line managers themselves are juggling multiple projects and reporting deadlines. This compressed onboarding window is exacerbated by the fact that many IDO roles are funded under specific grants, meaning that a delay in a new hire achieving productivity directly translates into delayed project deliverables, which in turn triggers donor scrutiny and risks future funding.

Consequently, onboarding design in the IDO context must prioritize what can be termed accelerated integration, a process that condenses the traditional months-long trajectory of organizational socialization into an intensive period of weeks, without sacrificing the depth of understanding required for effective performance (Morales et al., 2021). This acceleration imperative challenges conventional human resources wisdom that emphasizes gradual role assumption and extended mentorship, requiring instead a more structured, modular approach that can deliver essential knowledge and skills in a tightly sequenced format.

Simultaneously, the stringent compliance regimes that govern IDO operations necessitate that onboarding deliver early role clarity, standardized operating procedure literacy, and robust data stewardship capabilities from the outset of employment. Development organizations operate within a dense web of donor regulations from the Federal Acquisition Regulation governing USAID funded programmes to the financial rules of the Global Fund and the procurement guidelines of the European Union each imposing specific requirements for how funds may be expended, how activities must be documented, and how results must be reported (ILO, 2021). Failure to adhere to these regulations carries severe consequences, ranging from disallowed costs and

audit findings to suspension or debarment from future funding opportunities. For the individual employee, the stakes are equally high: errors in compliance can lead to termination and, in an industry where reputational capital is paramount, can permanently damage career prospects.

Onboarding must therefore function as a critical risk mitigation mechanism, ensuring that every new hire regardless of their prior experience or seniority achieves a baseline proficiency in the specific compliance architecture of their organization and its donors before they are entrusted with independent decision making authority (Morales et al., 2021). This requires onboarding programmes that go beyond generic orientation to deliver role-specific training on financial delegation limits, procurement thresholds, sub award management, and the documentation standards required for audit readiness. Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on data driven programming and results based management means that onboarding must also cultivate data stewardship capabilities, ensuring that new staff understand not only how to collect and report data but also the ethical obligations associated with handling sensitive beneficiary information and the quality standards required for data to be used in donor reporting (Ibrahim, Yusof, and Ibrahim, 2022). The imperative to achieve this level of technical competence within the compressed onboarding window demands a departure from ad hoc, manager-dependent training approaches in favor of systematized, scalable learning solutions.

The employment characteristics of the IDO workforce are further complicated by the dispersed, multicultural nature of teams, which heightens the need for intentional social integration as a deliberate component of onboarding design. Contemporary IDO operations in South Africa typically involve a matrix of duty stations: national offices in cities like Pretoria or Johannesburg, provincial field offices, and remote sub-offices in rural districts, alongside home-based staff and frequent short-term technical assistance from international consultants (Morales et al., 2021). Teams are often composed of national staff from diverse South African backgrounds, international staff on expatriate assignments, and regional staff from elsewhere on the African continent, each bringing distinct professional norms, communication styles, and cultural assumptions about hierarchy, feedback, and collaboration. In such settings, social integration, the process by which newcomers develop trusting relationships with colleagues and internalize the informal norms of the organization cannot be left to

chance or to the incidental interactions of shared office space (Klein, Polin, and Leigh Sutton, 2015).

When new staff are geographically dispersed and teams are culturally heterogeneous, the risk of social isolation is acute, with consequences ranging from diminished job satisfaction to early turnover. Onboarding must therefore be designed to intentionally scaffold relationships, building across these divides, creating structured opportunities for newcomers to connect with peers, supervisors, and mentors regardless of physical location. This might take the form of virtual cohort based onboarding that brings together new hires across offices for joint learning, structured check-ins with supervisors that prioritize relationship building alongside task orientation, or the deliberate assignment of peer buddies from different teams or cultural backgrounds to foster cross cultural exchange (Bauer et al., 2025). The goal is to ensure that every new hire, whether a national programme officer in a remote field office or an international technical advisor at headquarters, has access to the informal networks and social capital that are essential for navigating organizational life and securing the support needed to perform effectively.

Collectively, these employment features the project-tied, fixed term contract structure; the compressed onboarding window imposed by short project cycles; the compliance driven need for early technical proficiency; and the dispersed, multicultural team configurations provide compelling justification for treating onboarding not as a one off administrative task but as a strategic organizational capability that systematically aligns people, processes, and culture (Klein, Polin, and Leigh Sutton, 2015). This reconceptualization of onboarding represents a significant departure from the conventional human resources paradigm, which has historically treated onboarding as a brief, transactional process focused on completing paperwork, issuing equipment, and delivering a cursory orientation to organizational policies.

In the IDO context, such a minimalist approach is not merely inadequate; it is actively counterproductive, leaving new staff to navigate complex compliance environments without adequate preparation, to form relationships across dispersed teams without structured support, and to achieve productivity under compressed timelines without the scaffolding that accelerates their learning curve. Strategic onboarding, by contrast, treats the integration of new staff as a core organizational process that warrants investment, design attention, and continuous improvement. It recognizes that in an

industry where human capital is the primary asset where programme quality is fundamentally a function of staff expertise, judgment, and relationships the way an organization brings people in is a direct determinant of what those people will be able to achieve. Strategic onboarding positions the function as a bridge between recruitment and performance, ensuring that the technical competencies and cultural fit identified during the hiring process are effectively translated into role-specific capability and organizational commitment (Klein, Polin, and Leigh Sutton, 2015). It further recognizes that onboarding is not solely the responsibility of human resources but is a shared accountability across HR, programme leadership, and line management, requiring coordination and alignment to be executed effectively.

From this analysis of employment characteristics and the strategic framing of onboarding, two IDO-specific design imperatives emerge that must guide the development of onboarding programmes capable of meeting the unique demands of the sector. The first imperative is that onboarding must accelerate what can be termed time-to-context rather than merely pursuing the conventional objective of time-to-productivity. Time to productivity, the period required for a new hire to achieve the expected level of output is a standard metric in corporate onboarding, but in the IDO context, it is an insufficient and potentially misleading measure of success. A new staff member can be productive and complete assigned tasks, submit reports, and attend required meetings without genuinely understanding the context in which their work is situated, and this gap between superficial productivity and deep contextual comprehension is precisely where errors, misalignments, and missed opportunities arise (Morales et al., 2021).

Time-to-context, as a design imperative, shifts the focus from task completion to sense-making, ensuring that onboarding systematically translates organizational purpose, donor rules, and community expectations into role-specific routines that new staff can internalize and apply autonomously. Organizational purpose in the IDO context is not a generic mission statement but a specific orientation toward the South African development landscape: an understanding of the organization's historical presence in the country, its relationship with the national government and provincial authorities, its partnerships with local civil society, and its particular theory of change for addressing issues like health system strengthening or education quality. Donor rules, similarly, must be rendered not as abstract policy documents but as practical

guidance that shapes day-to-day decisions about budget management, procurement, and reporting. And community expectations, perhaps the most critical yet most easily overlooked dimension of context, encompass the ethical obligations and relational norms that govern how staff engage with beneficiaries, community leaders, and local partners. Achieving time to context requires onboarding designs that integrate narrative, case studies, and experiential learning alongside formal training, using tools such as scenario-based exercises that simulate the kinds of decisions staff will face and structured debriefings with experienced colleagues who can articulate the tacit knowledge that underpins effective practice (Bauer et al., 2025). The goal is to equip new staff not only with the knowledge of what to do but with the judgment of when, how, and why to apply that knowledge in ways that are contextually appropriate.

The second design imperative flowing from the employment characteristics of the IDO workforce is that onboarding must intentionally scaffold collaboration across national and international staff mixes, ensuring equitable access to information, mentorship, and developmental opportunities irrespective of contract type or duty station. The blending of national and international staff is a defining feature of the IDO sector in South Africa, rooted in a historical legacy of expatriate technical assistance and a contemporary emphasis on localization and capacity strengthening (Mingst, Karns, and Lyon, 2022). This staffing model creates unique social dynamics that onboarding must proactively manage. International staff, typically recruited for shorter assignments and often housed in capital city offices, may have access to different information networks, professional development opportunities, and informal mentorship structures than their national colleagues, who may hold longer-term but fixed-term contracts and be based in field offices. Left unaddressed, these disparities can reinforce hierarchical dynamics that undermine collaboration, erode trust, and ultimately compromise programme effectiveness.

Onboarding that is designed to scaffold equitable collaboration begins by explicitly acknowledging these dynamics and creating structures that counteract them. This includes ensuring that all new hires, regardless of nationality or contract status, participate in the same foundational training programmes, establishing mentorship structures that deliberately pair international and national staff in reciprocal learning relationships, and designing information-sharing mechanisms such as shared digital workspaces, regular all-team check-ins, and transparent decision making forums that

prevent the emergence of information silos (Ibrahim, Yusof, and Ibrahim, 2022). It also requires that onboarding processes be sensitive to the distinct needs of different staff cohorts: international staff may require intensive orientation to the South African context, including not only programme-specific content but also practical guidance on navigating local systems and cultural norms, while national staff may bring deep contextual knowledge but require support in navigating the specific compliance and reporting cultures of international donors. A well designed onboarding programme recognizes these distinct starting points and provides differentiated pathways while maintaining a shared foundation of organizational culture and values.

These two design imperatives accelerating time-to-context and scaffolding equitable collaboration are not theoretical abstractions but are directly grounded in a robust body of evidence linking specific onboarding practices to early adjustment outcomes. The organizational socialization literature, spanning decades of research across sectors, has consistently demonstrated that structured onboarding programmes, supervisor support, and access to social networks are among the most powerful predictors of newcomer adjustment, encompassing role clarity, self-efficacy, social integration, and organizational commitment (Bauer et al., 2025; Ibrahim, Yusof, and Ibrahim, 2022). Structured onboarding characterized by a planned, sequential curriculum of learning activities, clear milestones, and designated responsibilities for managers and mentors reduces the uncertainty that newcomers experience and provides a framework within which they can progressively assume greater responsibility.

In the IDO context, structure is particularly critical given the compressed onboarding window and the complexity of information that must be absorbed; without a structured approach, new staff are left to piece together understanding through trial and error, a process that is inefficient and carries unacceptable compliance risks. Supervisor support, encompassing both task-related guidance and psychosocial encouragement, has been shown to be a key moderator of the relationship between onboarding design and newcomer outcomes, with effective supervisors able to compensate for deficiencies in formal onboarding processes and to personalize generic orientation to the specific needs of individual new hires (Bauer et al., 2025). For IDOs, where line managers are often themselves under significant pressure from project deadlines and multiple reporting lines, ensuring that supervisors have the time, skills, and accountability to support new staff is an essential prerequisite for onboarding

effectiveness. Finally, access to social networks, the informal connections through which newcomers learn organizational norms, identify who holds expertise, and build the relationships that enable collaboration, has been identified as a critical pathway through which onboarding influences retention and performance (Ibrahim, Yusof, and Ibrahim, 2022). The dispersed, multicultural nature of IDO teams makes intentional social network cultivation particularly important; onboarding that includes structured introductions, peer mentoring, and opportunities for informal interaction across geographic and hierarchical boundaries can accelerate the development of the social capital that newcomers need to thrive.

In conclusion, the employment characteristics that shape the IDO workforce in South Africa project tied contracts, compressed onboarding windows, stringent compliance regimes, and dispersed multicultural teams create a distinctive context in which conventional approaches to onboarding are inadequate and a reconceptualization of onboarding as strategic organizational capability becomes essential. The structural hybridity of the workforce, combining fixed term roles with a blend of national and international staff, demands an onboarding approach that can absorb high volumes of new staff under conditions of urgency while ensuring that everyone achieves the technical proficiency, contextual understanding, and social integration required for effective performance.

The dual design imperatives that follow from this analysis accelerating time-to-context rather than merely time-to-productivity and scaffolding equitable collaboration across diverse staff mixes provide a framework for developing onboarding programmes that meet the unique demands of the sector. These imperatives are not speculative but are grounded in a substantial evidence base linking structured onboarding, supervisor support, and social integration to positive newcomer outcomes (Bauer et al., 2025; Ibrahim, Yusof, and Ibrahim, 2022). For IDOs operating in South Africa, where the stakes of effective onboarding extend beyond individual performance to encompass donor compliance, programme quality, and the broader organizational capacity to deliver on development commitments, treating onboarding as a strategic investment rather than an administrative afterthought is not merely a matter of good human resources practice but a fundamental organizational imperative.

2.5 ONBOARDING APPROACHES AND DESIGN CHOICES

Within IDOs, onboarding design choices are significant because they determine how quickly newcomers acquire organisational knowledge, build relationships, understand compliance expectations and adapt to complex working environments (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015; Bauer et al., 2025). The literature distinguishes formal, informal, digital/remote and hybrid approaches (Kumar and Pandey, 2017; Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015; Ziden and Joo, 2020). Formal onboarding which involves structured schedules, learning pathways and checklists supports consistency and evaluability, especially when paired with supervisor support (Klein and Polin, 2012; Bauer et al., 2025). Informal tactics which involve peer mentoring, shadowing and communities of practice facilitate tacit knowledge transfer and belonging but can create inequity if left unguided (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015). Digital or remote models scale access and standardise experiences across sites, a trend accelerated post COVID-19 (Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro and Alfonso-Ruiz, 2020; Ziden and Joo, 2020). Hybrid designs combine structure with relational touchpoints. The principal trade-offs are clear: overly formal designs may stifle autonomy; purely informal designs risk inconsistency; and digital onboarding can weaken social bonds unless complemented by purposeful check-ins (Byford, Watkins and Triantogiannis, 2017).

Design principles for IDOs therefore include: (i) clarify essential compliance knowledge early (financial rules, safeguarding, data protection); (ii) pair each newcomer with a trained 'buddy' and a supervisor led 30–60-90 day plan; (iii) blend microlearning with field-based practice; (iv) schedule structured cross functional touchpoints to build networks; and (v) track progress with a lightweight checklist that flags risks without over bureaucratising the experience (Bauer, 2010; Davila and Pina Ramirez, 2018; Godinho, Vale and Torres, 2023).

2.6 FROM ONBOARDING TO PERFORMANCE: WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

Evidence generally supports positive associations between higher quality onboarding and outcomes such as role clarity, early performance, engagement and retention (Bauer, 2010; Godinho, Vale and Torres, 2023; Staunton, 2017). POS and supervisor support during the encounter phase are consistent predictors of adjustment and early effectiveness (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Klein and Polin, 2012). Nevertheless, effect sizes vary and causality is difficult to establish due to self-selection, common method

bias and context heterogeneity issues that may be acute in IDOs where projects, locations and cultures differ. Stronger designs triangulate multiple indicators (e.g., time-to-proficiency, attendance, supervisor ratings) and compare cohorts exposed to different onboarding designs (Klein and Polin, 2012).

Importantly, onboarding influences performance through dual pathways: capability (knowledge/skills) and social integration (belonging/trust). Studies of diverse teams suggest that culturally responsive support and peer ties are particularly salient for early effectiveness, complementing formal training (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Krasman, 2015; Staunton, 2017). In IDOs, where role ambiguity and environmental volatility are common, these pathways likely interact, underscoring the value of hybrid designs that combine structure with human connection.

2.7 SYNTHESIS OF GAPS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Four gaps recur. First, onboarding in African IDO settings remains under examined relative to corporate and Western public sector contexts (Micah et al., 2021; UNDP, 2023). Second, few studies model capability and social integration jointly, yielding partial accounts of performance (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015). Third, digital/hybrid onboarding has outpaced empirical assessment in low resource, high complexity environments (Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro and Alfonso-Ruiz, 2020; Ziden and Joo, 2020). Fourth, measurement concerns persist, with reliance on cross-sectional self-reports and debated scale validity (Tuttle, 2002). Accordingly, this study will (i) differentiate capability versus social integration mechanisms; (ii) examine boundary conditions relevant to South African IDOs (contract type, dispersion, cultural mix); and (iii) employ multiple outcome indicators aligned to donor and programme realities. The conceptual model in Figure 1 guides these choices.

2.8 MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION OF ONBOARDING IN IDOS

Rigorous assessment requires aligning indicators with intended mechanisms. Capability outcomes include time-to-proficiency, error rates on compliance tasks and demonstration of role specific competencies; social integration outcomes include perceived inclusion and supervisor rated collaboration (Klein and Polin, 2012; Staunton, 2017). Mixed methods design combining surveys, supervisor assessments and qualitative debriefs can mitigate common method bias and surface contextual nuances, especially in multilingual, multi-site teams (Klein and Polin, 2012).

2.9 FACTORS INFLUENCING STAFF PERFORMANCE BEYOND ONBOARDING

While onboarding has been widely recognised as an important human resource management practice that supports workplace integration and role clarity, it is not the only factor influencing staff performance. Staff performance is a multidimensional construct which is developed through environmental factors, managerial, psychological, and organisational interactions over time (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). Staff performance is the extent to which employees complete their duties successfully, which have been assigned to them, and they contribute to the aims, goals and vision of the organisation (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023).

According to Aguinis (2023), staff performance not only involves the completion of tasks but also certain behaviours such as innovation, adaptation to the organisational demands and collaborations. Koopmans et al. (2021) mention that staff performance must be understood through its interrelated dimensions, which are task performance, adaptive performance and contextual performance. The three dimensions mentioned are important to have within IDO as staff frequently operate in an unpredictable developmental, humanitarian and multicultural setting that requires technical competence and behavioural flexibility.

One of the most significant factors that influences staff performance at an IDO is having effective leadership. Effective leadership comes with strategic direction, emotional support, motivation and continuous feedback, which will help them to perform very well at the workplace. Having transformational leaders at the workplace who improve staff performances by creating a shared vision of the organisation, encouraging staff empowerment and innovation (Northouse, 2025). Transformational leaders who invest in staff performance recognise individual contributions and create environments in which staff at the workplace will feel supported and valued. However, having ineffective leadership leads to inverse conditions like role ambiguity, workplace conflicts arising and a decline in motivation, which reduces staff performance (Northouse, 2025).

Another important factor that influences staff performance at an IDO is staff engagement. Engagement refers to staff psychological investment in their work, which is made up of energy, dedication and the absorption of organisational activities. According to Schaufeli (2021), high engagement of staff consistently shows greater

productivity, an increase in service delivery and a stronger commitment to the organisation than of staff who are less engaged at the workplace. Engaged staff are more likely to exceed minimum expectations, improve the chances of a proactive environment for solving organisational problems and contribute innovative ideas which increase organisational effectiveness (Schaufeli, 2021). However, if engagement of staff is low it will lead to tasks not being met and performance does not increase, hence the need for meaningful work to be provided by the organisation for staff to be engaged with their work more (Schaufeli, 2021).

Organisational culture is another factor that influences staff performance at an organisation. Organisational culture are the shared beliefs, values, norms and behavioural expectations that shape staff behaviour in an organisation (Sharirlou, 2024). According to Sharirlou (2024), having a positive organisational culture creates an environment that has trust, innovation, collaboration and psychological safety, encouraging staff at the organisation to contribute more effectively towards the organisational mission and vision. Staff working within supportive cultures generally report higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment and increased performance. However, in environments in which the organisational culture is a negative organisational culture can undermine staff performance and make it more difficult to achieve organisational targets (Sharirlou, 2024).

2.10 MEASURING STAFF PERFORMANCE IN IDOS

IDOs have recognised that increasing staff performance requires systematic measurement, continuous monitoring and targeted interventions throughout the staff member's journey in the organisation. Performance management has evolved from traditional annual performance appraisal to the use of continuous performance management systems. According to Aguinis (2023), performance management is a continuous process in which an organisation identifies performance expectations, monitors staff progress, provides developmental feedback and evaluates performance outcomes in order to increase individual and organisational effectiveness, which are important aspects for an IDO.

The most popular approach that is used to measure staff performance is the key performance indicators (KPIs), which provide measurable benchmarks that allow organisations to evaluate whether their staff are achieving their goals and objectives.

According to Armstrong and Taylor (2023), effective KPIs should be specific, measurable, achievable, time-bound and of relevance, giving IDOs the ability to objectively assess staff productivity and contributions. In IDOs, the key performance indicators usually include programme targets, financial compliance, stakeholder satisfaction and project completion rates. These indicators help managers with objective evidence of assessing staff performance while ensuring the alignment between individual responsibilities and organisational objectives.

The other approach that is used to measure staff performance is the appraisal systems as they are very crucial in the process of evaluating staff effectiveness (Kaur and Singh, 2026). Traditionally, organisations used to rely on annual or end of year staff performance reviews in which the supervisors and managers used to assess staff performance and achievements over a twelve-month period. However, now organisations have shifted towards continuous performance discussions involving regular meetings between staff and managers. The regular meetings promote timely feedback, create opportunities in looking for new developmental needs and clarification of expectations before problems related to do with performances become significant. The continuous performance management approach is ideal for IDOs because of the nature of the environment in which they operate.

Recognition and reward systems influence staff performance by strengthening positive behaviours and increasing staff motivation. According to Figueiredo et al. (2025), staff who receive consistent recognition for their achievements show high levels of engagement with their work, a high level of commitment to the organisation and discretionary effort compared to staff whose efforts remain unrecognised (Rusin and Szandala, 2025). Recognition consists of financial rewards, professional development, career advancement at the workplace, such as getting a new promotion, leadership responsibilities and a letter of acknowledgement from the level management. IDOs operate in resource-constrained environments, such that they may not always use financial means as a way of recognition. However, they make use of non-financial recognition initiatives such as career advancement, acknowledgement from top-level management and leadership responsibilities to keep staff motivated, resulting in an increase in performance.

2.11 DESIGN RISKS, CONTRADICTIONS AND MITIGATIONS

Contradictions in the literature are instructive. While formal programmes are linked to consistency, they can feel impersonal; conversely, informal socialisation can deepen belonging but perpetuate inequity if access depends on existing networks (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015). Digital onboarding improves reach but may weaken early bonding (Ziden and Joo, 2020). Mitigations include modular curricula that protect time for peer connection; supervisor coaching on inclusive practices; and staged information release to avoid overload (Byford, Watkins and Triantogiannis, 2017; Godinho, Vale and Torres, 2023).

2.12 CONTEXTUAL MODERATORS SALIENT TO SOUTH AFRICAN IDOS

Three moderators are particularly salient. First, funding volatility and project turnover compress onboarding windows and privilege rapid role clarity. Second, multicultural team composition elevates the importance of culturally responsive practices e.g., explicit norms for feedback in high power distance contexts (Nickerson, 2023; Aoun, 2025; Frisch, 2023). Third, regulatory and safeguarding regimes require early SOP literacy to protect beneficiaries and organisations (ILO, 2021; USAID, 2023).

2.13 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Onboarding bridges entry and excellence when three conditions align: structured learning that accelerates capability, supervisor enabled social integration that reduces uncertainty and culturally responsive practices that fit team norms. In South African IDOs, achieving these conditions is challenging given project volatility, compliance demands and multicultural teams. The balance of evidence supports cautiously optimistic claims about onboarding's performance effects while surfacing design risks and measurement caveats (Bauer et al., 2025; Byford, Watkins and Triantogiannis, 2017). This synthesis informed the study's conceptual framework. The next chapter outlines the research methodology, including the research design, data collection, and analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 presents methodological choices that underpinned the study exploring how onboarding practices influenced staff performance within IDO X South Africa. It explains and justifies the philosophical positioning, research design and strategy, setting and participants, sampling, instruments and procedures, data analysis, measures to ensure qualitative rigour, as well as ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations. The chapter concludes with a brief summary that links these choices to the research purpose and questions.

The methodological approach was selected to address the study's purpose, namely to explore staff perceptions of onboarding practices and the ways in which these practices were perceived to influence early staff performance within IDO X. Since the research questions sought to understand meanings, experiences, and context-specific processes (rather than to test variables or measure causal effects), the study was positioned within an interpretivist, qualitative tradition and implemented through an exploratory single-case study design.

3.2 PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONING

The study was anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, which assumed that organisational reality was socially constructed through actors' meanings and interactions. From an ontological perspective, the research assumed a relativist stance in which multiple realities co-existed across staff groups depending on their onboarding experiences. Epistemologically, knowledge was co-constructed through dialogue between the researcher and participants during interviews which were done through video-recorded interviews, observations, and subsequent transcription. Axiologically, the researcher acknowledged the role of values and maintained reflexivity throughout data generation and analysis to minimise undue influence (Thanh and Thanh, 2015; Ryan, 2018; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout, 2021).

In practical terms, these assumptions informed the study's methodological decisions. Ontologically, the research treated onboarding and performance as experienced differently across participants and work modalities; therefore, it prioritised depth of understanding over breadth. Epistemologically, knowledge was generated through

interactive, open-ended questioning that allowed participants to explain how they interpreted onboarding practices within their specific organisational contexts. Axiologically, the researcher's role was acknowledged through video recording, and careful attention to language during interviews to reduce leading questions and to limit the imposition of personal assumptions. These choices aligned interpretivist philosophy with qualitative data generation and analysis procedures (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY

Although earlier drafts considered a phenomenological orientation, the final design was framed as an interpretivist qualitative case study, reflecting the flexibility of qualitative research design advocated by Flick (2022).

This allowed flexibility in drawing on phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience while remaining anchored in organisational process analysis rather than strict phenomenological reduction. This positioning strengthened alignment between the research questions, organisational context, and analytical strategy (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Given the aim to understand staff perceptions and the perceived influence of onboarding on performance, an exploratory, qualitative design was adopted. A single-case study strategy focusing on IDO X enabled an in-depth, contextualised examination of onboarding processes and their consequences for performance in one organisational setting. A single case was appropriate since the unit of analysis (one IDO operating in South Africa) offered a rich, bounded system where onboarding practices, work modalities (remote, hybrid and field-based), and performance expectations intersected (Yin, 2018).

The case study was primarily instrumental, because IDO X served as a bounded setting through which the study examined the broader phenomenon of onboarding practices and perceived performance effects within an IDO context. A single case (rather than multiple cases) was used to enable a richer and more detailed examination of processes, constraints and contextual features within one organisation, consistent with established guidance on in depth case study research (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

This design aligned with the study's research questions: (1) How did staff perceive onboarding practices at IDO X? (2) How did onboarding practices influence staff performance? (3) What challenges did staff experience during onboarding? These questions required access to lived experiences rather than variable measurement, thus justifying a qualitative strategy over a quantitative or mixed methods design (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

A quantitative approach was not adopted because the study did not seek to operationalise onboarding and performance into standardised variables or to test hypotheses; rather, it sought to capture nuanced accounts of how onboarding was experienced and interpreted across remote, hybrid and field settings. A mixed-methods design was also not selected because the project scope and resources were directed towards depth in one bounded organisational setting, and the qualitative component was sufficient to answer the research questions. This reasoning supported the selection of an exploratory qualitative design as the most appropriate methodological fit (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.4 RESEARCH SETTING AND CONTEXT

The study took place within IDO X, a South Africa based international development organisation operating in complex, donor-funded and project-based environments. These conditions characterised by diverse contracts, tight timelines, multi stakeholder coordination and frequent remote/field deployment shaped onboarding needs and practices. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

3.4.1 Population and Sampling

The study population comprised staff members of IDO X South Africa who had experienced onboarding across different working modalities, including remote, hybrid, and field-based settings. Purposive sampling was employed to select information rich participants with direct experience of formal, informal, and digital onboarding processes, consistent with qualitative research principles (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.4.1.1 Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that participants selected for the study were able to provide relevant, information rich and ethically appropriate insights into the onboarding practices of IDO X. In qualitative research, such criteria are important because they define the boundaries of the target population and support the selection of participants whose experiences are directly aligned with the research questions (Patino and Ferreira, 2018; Ahmad and Wilkins, 2024). Given the focus of this study on onboarding and staff performance, the criteria were designed to include staff with sufficient exposure to the organisation's onboarding processes and enough time in post to reflect on how those processes influenced their role adjustment and performance.

Participants were included in the study if they met the following criteria: they were current employees of IDO X in South Africa; they had completed the organisation's onboarding process; they had worked in the organisation for at least twelve months at the time of data collection; and they were willing to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent. The twelve months minimum period was considered appropriate because it allowed participants to move beyond the initial induction phase and reflect more meaningfully on the influence of onboarding on role clarity, confidence, adaptation and work performance.

Participants were excluded if they had been employed by IDO X for less than twelve months, had not completed the onboarding process, were consultants, interns or external service providers without direct experience of the organisation's staff onboarding process, or were unwilling to provide informed consent. These exclusions helped to ensure that the data were generated from participants with direct and comparable experience of the phenomenon under investigation, while also protecting voluntary participation and ethical integrity.

The use of clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria strengthened the coherence of the sampling strategy by ensuring that participants were selected purposively on the basis of their relevance to the research aim. This was consistent with the qualitative case study design, where the emphasis was not on statistical representativeness, but on depth, relevance and the ability of participants to provide rich accounts of the onboarding experience within the bounded organisational context of IDO X.

Sample adequacy was guided by qualitative norms for achieving thematic saturation. Data saturation was reached when no new codes emerged from successive interviews, which occurred by the eighth interview (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). As presented in Table 1, of the 21 staff members onboarded by IDO X over time, 10 were purposively selected based on having completed onboarding within the past 12 months or more, across different functions and working modalities. The final sample comprised eight participants representing onsite, remote, and hybrid arrangements. Participants included personnel from human resources, project management, audit, administration, finance, and procurement functions.

Table 3.1: Population size

Description	Population size	Target sample size	Actual Sample size
No of staff	21	10	8

3.5 RECRUITMENT AND ACCESS

Access was negotiated through the HR gatekeeper at IDO X following institutional ethical approval. An invitation email and participant information sheet were circulated to eligible staff. Interested staff contacted the researcher directly for bookings. Interview scheduling was arranged individually, and confidentiality was emphasised. Gatekeeper and ethics clearance letters were stored and redacted copies are referenced in the appendices.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted between August 2025 and September 2025. All eight interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes and were audio-recorded with prior consent. Transcriptions were produced during and immediately after each interview.

The interview guide was derived from the literature’s conceptual framework to answer the research questions within the context of the study. It covered four sections: (A) participant and role context; (B) perceptions of IDO X onboarding (formal, informal and digital elements); (C) perceived influence of onboarding on early performance; and (D) recommendations for improvement across work modalities. The full interview guide is

referenced as Annexure 1. Pilot testing with two staff members led to minor revisions for clarity and sequencing, consistent with guidance on the role of pilot studies in strengthening qualitative instruments (Aziz and Khan, 2020). A pilot interview was conducted with two colleagues who met the inclusion criteria but were not part of the final sample. Feedback prompted refinements to phrasing, ordering of questions to improve flow, and addition of prompts to elicit examples. Pilot data were excluded from the analysis.

The semi-structured format used open ended questions with follow up probes to elicit examples and clarify meanings, which was appropriate for interpretivist inquiry. The guide comprised of four substantive sections (A–D) with core questions and prompts that were mapped to each research question. Demographic/context questions were used only to describe the sample in aggregated form and were treated as optional; participants were reminded that they could skip any question they did not wish to answer. This approach reduced sensitivity risks while enabling contextual interpretation of responses across work modalities (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

3.7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT AND PILOT

Instrument development followed an iterative process. Draft questions were mapped to research questions to ensure coverage: Section B aligned to RQ1 (perceptions of onboarding); Section C aligned to RQ2 (influence on performance); and Section D aligned to RQ3 (challenges and improvements across modalities). Probes explored formal, informal and digital components; role clarity; confidence; and early productivity.

3.8 DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. All transcripts, field notes and observation checklists were analysed using thematic analysis for secure storage and analysis, as indicated in the research background information. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: familiarisation, initial coding, generating candidate themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. Coding proceeded inductively, while remaining sensitised to the literature

3.8.1 Familiarisation

This is the first process which is done after collecting the information from the participants so that it can be grouped accordingly (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The voice

recordings, non-verbal cues and audios are presented at this stage. All the information which was collected from the participants was accessed and understood in the context of the questions they were asked.

3.8.2 Coding

The second stage of the thematic analysis is known as “coding” in which the comprehension and meaning is rendered to the information which the participants would have communicated and similar responses will be grouped accordingly at this stage of the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Extracts obtained from the semi-structured interview are also effectively highlighted at this stage of the thematic analysis.

3.8.3 Generating Themes

This stage involved the development of themes, which represent broader and more interpretative patterns of meaning compared to initial codes (Braun and Clarke, 2022). At this point, related codes were clustered together to form potential themes, while codes that were not sufficiently relevant to the research questions or analytical focus were refined or discarded.

3.8.4 Reviewing Themes

This was done to ensure that the themes which have been generated have presented the actual data and information which passed by the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

3.8.5 Naming Themes

Naming themes refers to the process of assigning clear and meaningful labels that accurately convey the essence of each theme and are easily understood by readers of the study’s findings (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

3.8.6 Writing the Themes

This stage involved providing a detailed narrative of how the themes were developed, clearly demonstrating the alignment between the research methodology, the study’s aims and research questions, and the use of semi-structured interviews. It also explains how the thematic analysis was conducted systematically, following all prescribed stages in a logical and chronological order (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

3.9 ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Qualitative rigour was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility was supported by prolonged engagement with the setting, member checking, and triangulation of interviews and literature review. Dependability was promoted through an audit trail, detailed procedural documentation and consistent application of the interview protocol. Confirmability was strengthened via reflexive journaling and a decision log to separate interpretation from personal assumptions (Finlay and Gough, 2008; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Transferability was supported through thick description of organisational context, onboarding modalities and participant roles so that readers may judge applicability to similar IDO environments.

Table 3.2: Summary on how trustworthiness criteria were addressed in the study.

Criterion	How it was ensured in this study
<i>Credibility</i>	Member checking with a sub-sample; triangulation of interview accounts and literature review; and use of probing questions to elicit concrete examples.
<i>Dependability</i>	Consistent interview protocol
<i>Confirmability</i>	Reflexive journaling, storage of raw data
<i>Transferability</i>	In-depth description of IDO X context, onboarding modalities and participant characteristics (aggregated) to enable readers to judge applicability to comparable IDO settings.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance was obtained from the IIE MSA Postgraduate and Research Division prior to data collection. Written permission to interview participants within IDO X was sought and granted by the organisation's HR gatekeeper. Participation was voluntary and based on written informed consent, which included permission to audio-record interviews. Participants were reminded that they could pause or withdraw at any time without consequence. Data were anonymised at transcription; pseudonyms were used in all documents. Electronic files were password-protected and stored on encrypted

drives and can only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor. Given potential workplace power dynamics, interview scheduling was participant led, and interviews were conducted remotely in private settings to minimise perceived risks or interferences.

Ethical risks were considered in relation to organisational sensitivity and potential fear of managerial repercussions. These risks were mitigated by using participant led recruitment (direct contact with the researcher), emphasising confidentiality, and conducting interviews in private settings.

3.11 METHODOLOGICAL DELIMITATIONS

Delimitations included the decision to focus on staff who had an onboarding experience of more than 12 months within the organisation to align the scope with the research questions and resources available.

Although the sample size was small, it was consistent with qualitative case study norms where the objective was depth and saturation rather than statistical representation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

3.12 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the interpretivist, qualitative single case methodology employed to explore staff perceptions of onboarding and its influence on performance at IDO X South Africa. It detailed the research setting, sampling and participant engagement procedures, instruments and data collection, using thematic analysis, and strategies to ensure qualitative rigour and ethical integrity. These methodological choices were appropriate for addressing the research questions and underpin the credibility of the findings reported in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data generated through semi-structured interviews with eight staff members at IDO X. The chapter responds to the three research questions by examining: (RQ1) staff perceptions of onboarding practices; (RQ2) how onboarding practices influence staff performance; and (RQ3) challenges experienced during onboarding. Data was analysed manually using thematic analysis, consistent with the approach described in Chapter 3 (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

In alignment with Chapter 2, findings are interpreted through three complementary lenses, namely Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST), Human Capital Theory (HCT), and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions within the operating realities of South African IDOs, including donor dependence, project-based staffing, compliance intensity and multicultural teams (ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2023; Micah et al., 2021). Verbatim quotations are embedded throughout this Chapter to demonstrate how analytic claims are grounded in participant accounts. There is a logical flow/summary from one thematic analysis to the next.

4.2 PARTICIPANT PROFILE OVERVIEW

Eight participants took part in the study (five female; three male). Participants represented finance, project management, procurement, audit and human resources functions, and worked across on-site (n=3), hybrid (n=3) and remote (n=2) modalities. Tenure ranged from one year to twenty-two years, enabling the study to capture onboarding experiences across both recently onboarded and long-tenured staff, with participants' ages ranging from 33 to 53 years.

Table 4.1: Participants Profile (Own Construction, 2026)

Person	Age	Years in role	Job role	Gender	Race	Work setting	Nationality
1	37	3	Finance	Female	Black	On site	South African
2	33	6	Project management	Male	Black	Hybrid	South African
3	44	3	Project management	Male	Black	Remote	Cameroonian
4	53	22	Audit	Female	Black	Remote	Zimbabwean
5	35	1	Administration	Female	Black	On site	South African
6	48	20	Human Resources	Female	Black	Hybrid	Zimbabwean
7	43	14	Procurement	Female	Black	On site	South African
8	38	5	Human Resources	Male	Black	Hybrid	South African

4.3 OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND LINK TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Building on the manual thematic analysis process described in Chapter 3 and summarised in section 4.1, the analysis yielded five themes that cut across the three research questions: (1) Onboarding structure and overall delivery; (2) Human resources and management support; (3) Communication and adaptation; (4) Organisational culture and social integration; and (5) Role clarity and performance expectations. Each theme is presented below with supporting quotations, analysis, followed by an interpretive linkage to the theoretical lenses established in the literature review in Chapter 2.

4.4 Theme 1: Onboarding structure and overall delivery (RQ1; RQ2)

Participants described onboarding at IDO X as ranging from structured and well-coordinated to fragmented, informal, or overwhelming. Where onboarding was planned and sequenced, participants experienced a clearer pathway into the organisation. In contrast, compressed onboarding resulted in information overload and reduced the time available to process organisational knowledge. Different participants in the research experienced different encounters during their onboarding and these are some of the responses which were given by the participants in the research.

Participant 1 highlighted limitations in the digital onboarding process, citing unclear digital content and insufficient support during the onboarding period. She stated that:

“At our organization they made use of digital systems to onboard us and notify us about the different departments they have in the organization, some of the videos were not clear and there was no one to ask, even if he was there, he would assert that for some of the information, he would have to crosscheck, and this limited our understanding of the organization”.

This quotation highlights how digital onboarding can become ineffective when it is not accompanied by accessible support and clarification. Although digital tools were used to introduce organisational departments, the participant's account shows that unclear videos and limited follow-up weakened understanding rather than strengthening integration. This is significant because it demonstrates that technology alone does not guarantee effective onboarding; digital content must be clear, interactive and supported by knowledgeable facilitators.

Participant 2 did not feel psychologically safe during his onboarding process and delivery, he stated that:

“Instead of creating a good conducive environment for the new employees I honestly thought that the onboarding was a process, was more of being told how the organization can punish you if you violate its substantive rules and this made the whole process to be full of fear”.

This quotation demonstrates that onboarding content can shape the emotional tone of a newcomer's early experience. Instead of creating confidence, the participant perceived the process as punitive and fear based, which may have undermined psychological safety. The quotation is important because it shows that onboarding should communicate standards and compliance requirements without creating anxiety or reducing trust in the organisation.

Participant 4's onboarding experience was characterised by anxiety and insecurity, largely due to the timing and contextual circumstances under which the onboarding process was managed and delivered. She stated that:

“My onboarding at our organization was difficult because I arrived at the organization at a time when a lot of people had been retrenched and those who were even conducting the onboarding process always complained about job security due to funding and this caused a lot of anxiety, hence, to be frank and honest the onboarding process was difficult”.

This quotation shows how the wider organisational context can strongly influence onboarding experiences. The participant's anxiety was not only linked to the formal onboarding process, but also to organisational instability and concerns about funding and job security. This is significant because it suggests that onboarding in IDOs is shaped by both formal practices and the organisational climate into which newcomers are introduced.

The digital approach to onboarding was highlighted by Participant 5, who described her experience as well-structured and organised, with consistent HR support. She stated that:

"I went through the induction with HR, I got a link to the organization's policies where I can go read and familiarize myself and they notified me that if there were any other policies which I would want clarification on I should be in a position to ask and this is how the onboarding process went".

This quotation provides a contrasting experience in which onboarding was more structured and supportive. The participant received HR induction, access to policies and reassurance that clarification could be sought when needed. This is important because it shows that even a digital or policy based onboarding process can be effective when it is accompanied by clear guidance and accessible HR support.

Taken together, the quotations under theme 1 show that onboarding structure at IDO X was experienced unevenly. Some participants described onboarding as unclear, overwhelming or anxiety inducing, while others experienced organised induction supported by HR and access to policies. The pattern suggests that onboarding effectiveness depended not only on whether information was provided, but also on how it was sequenced, explained and supported, which directly shaped participants' early understanding of the organisation and their readiness to perform.

4.4.1 Interpretation through Chapter 2 theoretical lenses

These differences reflect OST's emphasis on how newcomers acquire task knowledge, social knowledge and organisational understanding through structured socialisation experiences (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). Chapter 2 also notes that perceived organisational support across anticipatory, encounter and change acquisition phases can reduce anxiety and accelerate role clarity (Godinho et al., 2023; Klein and Polin, 2012). In the structured cases, participants described institutionalised onboarding tactics (planned schedules, pre-onboarding information and access to policies) that align with these mechanisms. Conversely, experiences of information overload and unplanned induction suggest weaker socialisation scripts, increasing cognitive burden and slowing adjustment, conditions likely amplified in IDOs where systems, compliance and project demands converge (ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021).

4.4.2 Summary (RQs + theory)

Overall, participants' accounts suggest that where onboarding was structured, sequenced and supported, newcomers experienced reduced uncertainty and faster adjustment. This aligns with OST's uncertainty reduction logic and with HCT's framing of onboarding as an organisational investment that accelerates capability development; conversely, compressed onboarding created information overload and weakened early role clarity.

4.4.3 Theme takeaway

Structured onboarding operates as a primary uncertainty reduction mechanism that accelerates early adjustment and performance readiness. Building on the structural features of onboarding, the next theme examines how Human Resources and line management support shaped participants' onboarding experiences and performance outcomes.

4.5 THEME 2: HR AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT (RQ1; RQ2)

Human resources and line management support emerged as a decisive factor in whether onboarding translated into early performance. Participants linked supportive HR and supervisors to confidence, reassurance and clarity, while limited HR capacity was associated with self-onboarding and delayed cultural understanding. The first participant in the research also gave a comprehensive understanding of the role played by management by saying that:

“The induction between me and my manager helped positively in building trust. I can also state that the induction was important because it made me understand some of the processes within the organization and different personnel I can reach out to and be assisted, it was very positive”.

This quotation shows that manager led induction played an important role in building early trust and confidence. By helping the participant understand internal processes and identifying people who could provide support, management reduced uncertainty during the transition period. The quotation is significant because it illustrates that onboarding is not only an HR activity, but also a relational process in which line managers act as key socialisation agents.

The 3rd participant similarly reported the absence of HR involvement during his onboarding, which resulted in a largely self-directed onboarding experience. He stated that:

"There was no HR person. So, I just boarded myself, there were no proper handover notes. The organization told me that they were in the process of recruiting an HR focal person and currently there is no one since I know the job that I have been employed to do, I must go ahead and do what I am supposed to do".

This quotation reveals the consequences of limited HR presence during onboarding. The participant's account of "boarding myself" suggests that the absence of structured handover notes and HR guidance shifted responsibility for learning onto the newcomer. This is important because it shows how weak HR coordination can delay adjustment and increase reliance on trial-and-error learning.

Participant 4 highlighted ineffective onboarding facilitation and execution, attributed to the absence of both management and HR involvement during the onboarding process. She stated that:

"My onboarding process was not that effective this is because when I got recruited management was not around, they had gone for their annual meeting and those who were entrusted with doing with the onboarding process were not confident enough to execute the process".

This quotation indicates that onboarding support was weakened by the absence of management and by facilitators who appeared insufficiently prepared. The participant's experience suggests that even when onboarding is delegated, those responsible must have confidence, information and authority to guide newcomers effectively. This is significant because poorly executed onboarding can create uncertainty and reduce confidence in organisational systems.

Participant 8 reported a distinctly different onboarding experience, noting that support was differentiated by seniority level and perceived as hierarchical, with minimal support provided to junior staff. He stated that:

"I was recruited into the organization as a graduate trainee, therefore think that management felt my position was too junior for themselves to avail themselves, hence only middle level staff members came, we never saw the management but through

their emissaries, they notified me that I had their support, so it differs with organizations but the support was minimal”.

This quotation highlights how perceptions of hierarchy can shape onboarding support. The participant interpreted limited senior management involvement as a sign that junior staff received less attention during onboarding. This is important because it suggests that equitable onboarding requires visible and consistent support across staff levels, not only for senior or experienced employees.

Overall, the quotations under theme 2 show that HR and management support functioned as a major determinant of onboarding quality. Where participants received direct guidance, trust and confidence were strengthened; where HR or management support was limited, participants experienced self-directed onboarding, uncertainty and weaker integration. This theme therefore demonstrates that supportive onboarding requires coordinated involvement from HR, line managers and senior leadership to ensure that newcomers receive both technical guidance and relational reassurance.

4.5.1 Interpretation through Chapter 2 theoretical lenses

Chapter 2 frames onboarding as a strategic driver of performance when viewed through OST and HCT. Participants’ accounts indicate that HR and supervisors functioned as primary ‘support signals’ (POS) in the encounter phase (Klein and Polin, 2012). In HCT terms, HR-led sequencing, supervisor coaching and buddy support represent organisational investments in capability development that can reduce early errors and inefficiencies (Mignenan, 2021). Where HR capacity was absent, the organisation effectively transferred the investment cost to individuals through self-onboarding and trial and error learning.

4.5.2 Summary (RQs + theory)

The findings indicate that HR coordination and supervisor engagement acted as key support signals during the encounter phase, strengthening trust, confidence and early performance. Consistent with POS within OST, such support reduced ambiguity and facilitated integration, while HCT highlights these practices as capability building investments; where HR capacity was limited, participants reported self-onboarding and delayed adjustment.

4.5.3 Theme takeaway

HR and managerial engagement functions as a critical performance enabler by signaling organisational support and investing in early capability development. While support structures matter, participants also emphasised that onboarding outcomes depend on how information is communicated and how quickly staff can adapt to systems, protocols and expectations.

4.6 THEME 3: COMMUNICATION AND ADAPTATION (RQ1; RQ3)

Communication shaped how quickly participants adapted to the organisational context, particularly in environments marked by confidentiality, dispersed stakeholders and hybrid work. Participants described adaptation as constrained when onboarding required simultaneous delivery of work outputs, leaving limited room to learn.

The 5th participant in the research reported inconsistent communication norms during her onboarding, noting that the effort required to interpret and navigate multiple communication channels was mentally draining. She stated that:

“For me, the biggest gap was the inconsistency in communication channels. One manager would expect everything on email, another would want an instant message, and no one explained the ‘unwritten rules’ of who to contact for what. I found myself spending more energy figuring out how to communicate than doing my job. Adaptation wasn’t about learning the role; it was about learning 10 different personalities at once without a roadmap. You either sink or learn to mirror everyone else’s style overnight”.

This quotation highlights the practical burden created by inconsistent communication norms. The participant’s effort was diverted from performing the role to decoding different managers’ preferred communication channels and unwritten expectations. This is significant because it shows that unclear communication systems can slow adaptation and increase cognitive load during onboarding.

Participant 6 also reported challenges related to the organisation’s onboarding communication systems, citing limited feedback and a lack of follow-up. As a result, she indicated that she had to independently adapt and navigate the organisational environment. She stated that:

“I came from a very structured corporate environment, so the lack of formal feedback loops here was shocking. Communication was very casual, almost reactive. I kept

waiting for a 30-day check-in that never came. I had to adapt by forcing the communication myself to set up my own meetings, asking for clarity when I sensed tension. It felt uncomfortable because I don't like being pushy, but I realized that if I didn't initiate, no one would. So, my adaptation was self-driven, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but it added a layer of stress that probably could have been avoided".

This quotation demonstrates how the absence of formal feedback loops can force newcomers to take responsibility for creating their own communication structures. Although the participant adapted proactively, this adaptation created avoidable stress and discomfort. The quotation is important because it shows that onboarding should include structured check-ins and feedback points rather than relying on newcomers to request clarity independently.

Participant 7 identified organisational jargon and acronyms as significant barriers to integration during her onboarding, which initially hindered her ability to contribute in a timely and meaningful manner. She stated that:

"The language barrier was a subtle but real issue. Not in terms of speaking English, but in terms of technical jargon and internal acronyms. Everyone spoke in this shorthand that assumed I had been there for years. I didn't want to look incompetent by stopping every conversation to ask, 'What does that mean?' So, I spent my first few months silently translating and piecing together context clues. It delayed my ability to contribute to meetings because I was always two steps behind the conversation. I adapted by keeping a running glossary on my phone, but it was exhausting to have to translate the culture just to participate".

This quotation shows that language barriers during onboarding may involve technical jargon and internal acronyms rather than spoken language alone. The participant's need to silently interpret organisational shorthand delayed meaningful participation and increased the effort required to contribute. This is significant because it demonstrates that onboarding should explicitly explain internal terminology, acronyms and communication practices to support faster integration.

Participant 8 highlighted that onboarding communication was transactional, he stated that:

“Looking back, the communication was there, but it was purely transactional. I was told what to do but never why it mattered to the team or the organization. That made adaptation felt hollow. I was performing tasks correctly but did not feel integrated into the social fabric of the workplace. When a crisis hit three months in, I did not know who to trust or who to turn to because I had only ever engaged in surface-level updates. True adaptation, for me, did not start until I found one colleague who was willing to have informal conversations. That human connection bridged the gap that formal communication left open”.

This quotation highlights the limitation of purely transactional communication during onboarding. Although tasks were communicated, the participant did not understand the broader purpose behind the work or the relational networks needed during moments of pressure. This is important because it shows that onboarding communication should explain not only what newcomers must do, but also why the work matters and who can provide support.

The quotations under theme 3 show that communication was central to adaptation, yet participants experienced gaps in clarity, feedback, terminology and relational meaning. Where communication was inconsistent or transactional, newcomers had to invest additional effort in understanding channels, expectations and organisational norms. This pattern indicates that effective onboarding communication must be structured, explanatory and relational, enabling staff to adapt with confidence rather than relying on informal self-navigation.

4.6.1 Interpretation through Chapter 2 theoretical lenses

These findings align with OST’s focus on uncertainty reduction and sense making during socialisation (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). In addition, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions draw attention to how cultural expectations influence workplace behaviour and adaptation in multicultural environments (Nickerson, 2023). Participants’ accounts suggest that when communication is incomplete, particularly around confidentiality, stakeholder access and ‘who to approach’, newcomers must rely on proactive self-socialisation, which may be uneven across individuals and roles. Staged, role-tailored

information flows would therefore strengthen adaptation and reduce information overload.

4.6.2 Summary (RQs + theory)

Communication emerged as a central pathway through which onboarding either reduced or amplified uncertainty. Where protocols and channels were unclear, participants relied on proactive self socialisation, increasing risk of errors and prolonging adjustment. This supports OST's sense making focus and Hofstede's sensitising lens on norms shaping help seeking, while reinforcing the need, per HCT, for staged learning and feedback to consolidate capability.

4.6.3 Theme takeaway

Clear, staged and role sensitive communication is essential for reducing adjustment costs and preventing performance errors during onboarding. Beyond information flow, participants linked successful onboarding to how quickly they formed relationships, understood organisational culture and developed a sense of belonging.

4.7 THEME 4: ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION (RQ1; RQ2)

Participants linked early performance to the extent to which onboarding enabled social integration and cultural understanding. Being introduced to colleagues, knowing where to go for what, and feeling welcomed were described as enabling confidence and faster adjustment. However, social integration was more difficult in remote and hybrid conditions.

Participant 1's social integration was somewhat challenging, she had to adapt to fit within the office culture, she stated that:

Coming into this organisation, I quickly realised that culture is not what is written in the employee handbook; it is what people do when no one is watching. There was this unspoken code of conduct that everyone seemed to understand except me. I would see people staying late, answering emails at odd hours, and I felt pressured to do the same just to fit in. Social integration felt like I had to sacrifice my boundaries to be accepted. No one explicitly told me that this was the norm, but you pick it up from watching others. It took me a while to realise that belonging shouldn't come at the cost of your own well-being, but by then, I had already internalised the pressure”.

This quotation shows that organisational culture was experienced through informal norms rather than formal documentation. The participants learned expectations by observing behaviours such as late working and after hours responsiveness, which created pressure to conform. This is significant because it shows that onboarding should make cultural expectations explicit while also protecting wellbeing and healthy work boundaries.

Participant 2 highlighted social integration challenges in remote/hybrid settings stating that:

"My onboarding happened during Covid, so social integration was virtually non-existent. I was joining a team that had already built strong bonds before the pandemic, and I was the outsider trying to enter through a screen. There were no water-cooler moments, no spontaneous conversations. Everything was scheduled and transactional. I remember feeling like I was intruding when I joined team video calls because the rapport was already there, and I was just... there. The culture felt closed off, not intentionally, but because no one had thought about how to integrate a remote newcomer. I often wondered if I would ever feel like I truly belonged, or if I would always be the person on the other side of the screen".

This quotation highlights the social isolation that can occur when onboarding takes place remotely. The participant entered a team with pre-existing relationships but lacked informal opportunities to build rapport and belonging. This is important because it demonstrates that remote and hybrid onboarding require intentional social integration mechanisms, rather than assuming that team connection will occur naturally.

Participant 3 also suffered social integration as part of his onboarding experience, he stated that:

"To be honest, I struggled with the social side of things for a very long time. I am someone who learns best when I feel comfortable with the people around me, but because there was no structured effort to help me integrate, I remained on the periphery. The culture here is very fast-paced, and people assume that if you are not keeping up, it is because you are not capable. What they did not understand was that I was spending so much mental energy trying to figure out the social dynamics that I had little left for the actual work. I made mistakes because I was too afraid to

ask for help, I did not know who was approachable and who was not. It took me nearly a year to find my footing socially, and that delay absolutely affected my performance early on".

This quotation demonstrates how weak social integration can affect performance. The participant's uncertainty about who was approachable reduced confidence in asking for support and contributed to early mistakes. This is significant because it shows that belonging and social confidence are not separate from performance; they are conditions that enable newcomers to learn, ask questions and contribute effectively.

Participant 4 learnt things the hard way due to lack of social integration during onboarding, she stated that;

"I believe that organisational culture is something that should be intentionally taught, not just absorbed over time. In my experience, the assumption was that I would just 'pick it up' by observing, but observation only gets you so far. There are nuances like how decisions are made versus how they are formally communicated, or who really holds influence despite their job title. I had to learn these things the hard way, often by making small social missteps that left me feeling embarrassed. Social integration, for me, felt like a puzzle where half the pieces were missing. I eventually built relationships, but it required me to be relentlessly proactive in a way that felt unnatural. I kept thinking, 'If the organisation values integration, why is it entirely on me to make it happen?'".

This quotation shows that organisational culture was largely left for the participant to discover independently. The participant had to interpret informal power dynamics, decision making norms and communication patterns through trial and error. This is important because it suggests that cultural integration should be intentionally built into onboarding, particularly in complex organisations where informal rules influence how work is actually done.

Across theme 4, the quotations indicate that organisational culture and social integration were experienced as uneven and, in some cases, insufficiently supported. Participants described having to decode unwritten norms, build relationships independently and manage isolation in remote or hybrid settings. These accounts show that social integration is not an optional element of onboarding; it directly influences confidence, help-seeking behaviour, belonging and early performance.

4.7.1 Interpretation through Chapter 2 theoretical lenses

OST conceptualises social integration as a core adjustment outcome alongside task mastery and role clarity (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). The findings show that social integration mechanisms (introductions, buddy systems, ongoing check-ins) functioned as practical bridges from entry to performance. Chapter 2 further suggests that IDO environments, characterised by multicultural teams and hybrid work, heighten the importance of deliberate socialisation practices (ILO, 2021; UNDP, 2023). Under Hofstede's lens, social integration may also mitigate cultural distance by enabling safe help seeking and relationship building.

4.7.2 Summary (RQs + theory)

Social integration and cultural understanding were associated with confidence, belonging and perceived performance readiness. In OST terms, relational onboarding strengthens integration and psychological safety; through Hofstede's sensitising lens, deliberate cultural and relationship building touchpoints can reduce friction in multicultural, hybrid teams. These mechanisms complement HCT by creating the conditions under which training and knowledge can be applied effectively.

4.7.3 Theme takeaway

Deliberate social integration practices strengthen belonging and confidence, thereby reinforcing early performance in multicultural and hybrid contexts. Having considered culture and belonging, the final theme examines role clarity and performance expectations, highlighting how clarity (or lack thereof) shaped early decision making and productivity.

4.8 Theme 5: Role clarity and performance expectations (RQ2; RQ3)

Role clarity was consistently linked to performance and decision making quality. Participants described onboarding as valuable when it clarified expected outputs, standards, procedures and systems. Conversely, unclear expectations and simultaneous demands to deliver were described as undermining confidence and increasing the likelihood of errors.

The first participant in the research elucidated to ambiguity in role and priorities which impacted on her onboarding experience, she stated that:

"I have to work with standard procedures. If I did not receive procedures, it was going to be very difficult. Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened. I walked into my role with a job description that was vague at best, and when I asked for clarity on my key responsibilities, I was told to 'just see what needs to be done.' That sounds empowering in theory, but in practice, it meant I was constantly second-guessing whether I was focusing on the right things. I would spend hours on something only to find out later that it was not a priority. Performance expectations felt like moving targets, and without clear procedures, I had no benchmark to measure myself against. It made me feel anxious and uncertain for the first few months because I never knew if I was meeting expectations or falling short".

This quotation shows that the absence of clear procedures and role expectations created uncertainty in day-to-day decision making. The participant's vague job description and shifting priorities made it difficult to determine what work mattered most. This is significant because it demonstrates that role clarity is essential for confidence, prioritisation and accurate performance during the early stages of employment.

The third participant in the research was given tasks given without context, expectations were implied leading to failure/mistakes, he stated that:

"We are like months late that meant I had to hit the ground running while you're still trying to find your feet. I joined during a busy period, and everyone assumed I would just catch up. But how do you hit the ground running when you do not even know what the ground looks like? My manager was too busy to give me a proper induction, so I was given tasks without context. I did not know which projects were urgent, which were strategic, and which were just routine. I made mistakes because I misunderstood priorities, and then I was seen as someone who lacked attention to detail. But the truth was, I was operating in the dark. Performance expectations were implied rather than stated, and for someone who was still trying to find their footing, that was a recipe for failure. It took me much longer to deliver because I had to reverse-engineer what was expected of me".

This quotation highlights the tension between immediate performance pressure and the need for sufficient learning time. The participant was expected to deliver quickly despite limited induction, unclear priorities and insufficient managerial guidance. This is important because it shows that “hitting the ground running” can undermine performance when newcomers are not given enough context to understand what effective delivery requires.

The fourth participant also highlighted the disorientation they witnessed in the organisation, she stated that:

"What struck me most was the disconnect between what was said during the interview and the reality once I started. I was hired for one set of responsibilities, but within my first week, I realised that the role was much broader and ill-defined. People would say, 'We need you to take ownership,' but ownership of what? There were no clear boundaries, and every time I thought I had figured out my scope, a new expectation would emerge. Performance reviews were equally ambiguous I received feedback that I was doing well but no specifics on what to continue or improve. Role clarity is foundational to performance, and without it, I found myself compensating for working longer hours just to cover all possible bases. It was exhausting and unsustainable".

This quotation demonstrates how misalignment between recruitment messages and actual role expectations can create disorientation. The participant experienced the role as broader and less clearly defined than initially communicated, with ambiguous feedback reinforcing uncertainty. This is significant because it shows that onboarding should clarify role boundaries, performance standards and feedback expectations early to prevent overwork, anxiety and inefficient performance.

The quotations under theme 5 show that role clarity was a foundational condition for early performance. Participants who lacked clear procedures, priorities and performance benchmarks described uncertainty, longer working hours, mistakes and reduced confidence. This pattern indicates that onboarding must translate job descriptions into practical responsibilities, decision-making guidance and realistic performance expectations so that newcomers can perform effectively and sustainably.

4.8.1 Interpretation through Chapter 2 theoretical lenses

Within OST, role clarity is a central adjustment outcome, and Chapter 2 notes evidence that structured onboarding and feedback loops are associated with stronger adjustment and early performance (Bauer et al., 2025). Participants' accounts show that clarity emerged when onboarding included access to procedures, system orientation and explicit expectations. From an HCT lens, these onboarding investments build capability and reduce early inefficiencies (Mignenan, 2021). The tension between rapid performance expectations and time to learn reflects IDO boundary conditions discussed in Chapter 2, project timelines and donor-funded imperatives can compress learning windows, raising the importance of role-tailored onboarding.

4.8.2 Summary (RQ + theory)

Role clarity and realistic performance expectations were central to early effectiveness. Participants described how access to SOPs, system orientation and clear expectations supported decision-making and reduced errors, consistent with OST's role-clarity outcome and HCT's capability accumulation logic. Conversely, pressure to 'hit the ground running' without sufficient learning time reflects an IDO boundary condition that can undermine adjustment and early performance.

4.8.3 Theme takeaway

Role clarity and calibrated performance expectations are pivotal for enabling accurate decision making and sustainable early performance. The themes above converge on a coherent account of how onboarding practices shape staff performance through structure, support, communication, social integration and role clarity. The following synthesis consolidates these cross theme insights against RQ1–RQ3.

4.9 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS ACROSS RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Across RQ1, participants' perceptions indicate that onboarding at IDO X is unevenly institutionalised: some staff experienced planned, multi stakeholder induction while others encountered informal or minimal onboarding. Across RQ2, the perceived influence on performance operated through five pathways: (i) reduced uncertainty via structured delivery; (ii) higher confidence via HR/manager support; (iii) faster adaptation via clear communication; (iv) stronger belonging via social integration; and

(v) clearer decision making via role clarity and procedural knowledge. Across RQ3, the most salient challenges were information overload, limited time to learn due to immediate performance demands, ambiguity about stakeholders and protocols, and weaker integration in remote/hybrid contexts.

The quotations across Themes 1–5 therefore demonstrate that onboarding influenced performance through interconnected mechanisms: structure reduced uncertainty, support built confidence, communication enabled adaptation, social integration strengthened belonging, and role clarity improved decision making. When any of these mechanisms were weak, participants experienced delayed adjustment, higher stress and greater reliance on self-directed learning. This cross-theme pattern confirms that effective onboarding in IDOs must be designed as a holistic socialisation and capability-building process rather than as a once-off administrative event.

4.10 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter presented findings, analysis and interpretation of onboarding experiences at IDO X, grounded in verbatim evidence and interpreted through the theoretical lenses established in Chapter 2. The findings demonstrate that onboarding influences staff performance by shaping the structure of entry, the availability of support, the quality of communication, opportunities for social integration, and the clarity of role expectations. Where onboarding was structured, supportive and sequenced, participants reported faster adjustment and higher confidence. Where onboarding was unplanned or overloaded, participants described delays in integration, uncertainty and reliance on self-directed learning. These findings provide the basis for the conclusions and recommendations presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter synthesises the study's key findings and interprets their meaning in relation to the research problem, aim and objectives presented in Chapter 1, the literature and conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, and the qualitative methodology and thematic analysis reported in Chapters 3 and 4. The chapter restates the purpose of the study and summarises the research process, assesses the extent to which the research objectives were achieved and discusses the trustworthiness of the inquiry. It then presents grounded conclusions, proposes pragmatic recommendations for IDOs operating in South Africa and similar settings, highlights the study's contribution to knowledge and practice, identifies limitations and outlines directions for future research, before closing with a chapter summary.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The study investigated how onboarding practices influence staff performance within a South African International Development Organisation (IDO X). The research problem addressed a documented gap in context specific evidence on onboarding within IDOs, particularly in South Africa, where organisations operate under donor accountability, project-based staffing and increasingly hybrid work arrangements (Micah et al., 2021; OECD, 2021; UNDP, 2024). Although onboarding is widely associated with employee adjustment and early performance, most empirical work remains centred on corporate settings in developed economies, leaving uncertainty about the mechanisms and boundary conditions relevant to IDO environments (Klein and Polin, 2012; Staunton, 2017; Godinho et al., 2023).

To address this problem, the study adopted an interpretivist, qualitative single-case design, enabling an in-depth examination of onboarding as experienced by staff within one bounded organisational context (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with eight staff members who had direct experience of onboarding at IDO X, and the dataset was analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This approach was suitable for exploring meanings and lived experiences rather than testing causal relationships, and it aligned with the study's inductive logic and exploratory aims (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The conceptual framework integrated Organisational Socialisation Theory (OST), Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to explain how onboarding may shape performance through social integration, capability accumulation and contextual alignment (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015). Findings were interpreted through these complementary lenses to illuminate how different onboarding configurations either reduced or amplified uncertainty, enabled or constrained learning, and strengthened or weakened early performance readiness in hybrid and compliance intensive settings.

5.3 SYNTHESIS OF KEY FINDINGS

Across the three research questions, the findings converged on five interrelated themes: onboarding structure and delivery; HR and management support; communication and adaptation; organisational culture and social integration; and role clarity and performance expectations. Taken together, these themes indicate that onboarding influences staff performance through a combined capability–support–integration pathway: staff perform earlier and with greater confidence when onboarding provides sequenced information, accessible systems and SOP guidance, clear channels for support, and structured opportunities to build relationships and understand organisational norms (Klein and Polin, 2012; Godinho et al., 2023). Where these elements were absent or compressed, participants described information overload, uncertainty about protocols and stakeholders, self-directed onboarding and delayed adjustment, which in turn increased the risk of errors and extended the learning curve (Byford, Watkins and Triantogiannis, 2017).

5.3.1 RQ1: How do staff perceive onboarding practices at IDO X?

Staff perceptions of onboarding at IDO X were mixed. Some participants experienced a structured, planned induction with pre-scheduled meetings, access to policies and guided introductions; others reported minimal or informal onboarding, with immediate work demands and limited support. In OST terms, these contrasting experiences reflect differences between institutionalised socialisation tactics (structured and sequenced) and individualised, ad hoc tactics (informal and self-led), with corresponding implications for uncertainty reduction and adjustment (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977; Klein and Polin, 2012). The variability observed suggests that

onboarding was not consistently institutionalised across roles and modalities, contributing to uneven newcomer experiences and perceptions of organisational support.

5.3.2 RQ 2: In what ways do onboarding practices influence staff performance at IDO X?

Participants linked effective onboarding to faster performance readiness, improved decision making quality and confidence, largely through enhanced role clarity and earlier access to relevant systems, procedures and working relationships. These outcomes align with HCT's framing of onboarding as an organisational investment in capability development through training, mentoring and role relevant learning resources (Wuttaphan, 2017; Mignenan, 2021). However, the findings also demonstrate that capability accumulation alone was insufficient when social integration and perceived organisational support were weak. Supervisor engagement, HR coordination and opportunities for relationship building emerged as pivotal enablers of early performance, consistent with integrative onboarding perspectives that emphasise both socialisation and learning pathways (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015; Godinho et al., 2023). In hybrid and remote contexts, reduced face-to-face interaction increased the importance of deliberate connection and communication practices to maintain these mechanisms.

5.3.3 RQ 3: What challenges do staff experience during the onboarding process at IDO X?

The dominant challenges were information overload, limited time to learn due to immediate delivery expectations, ambiguity regarding communication channels and confidentiality protocols, and reduced social integration under remote or hybrid arrangements. These challenges are consistent with the boundary conditions highlighted in the literature, where complex compliance environments and project timelines constrain onboarding effectiveness and increase cognitive burden (Byford, Watkins and Triantogiannis, 2017; ILO, 2021; OECD, 2021). Through Hofstede's cultural lens, the findings further suggest that differences in expectations about hierarchy, uncertainty avoidance and help seeking may shape how newcomers interpret onboarding gaps, reinforcing the need for explicit norms and culturally

responsive guidance in multicultural IDO teams (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

5.4 CONCLUSIONS GROUNDED IN THE STUDY FINDINGS

This study set out to examine the influence of onboarding practices on staff performance within an international development organisation, with a specific focus on staff perceptions, the effectiveness of onboarding processes, and the challenges experienced during integration. Drawing on the five key themes, the findings demonstrate that onboarding is not a uniform or consistently implemented process, but rather a highly variable experience that significantly shapes early-stage employee performance, adjustment, and organisational commitment.

The findings from Theme 1 revealed that onboarding structure and delivery within the organisation were inconsistent, ranging from well organised, structured programmes to complete absence of formal onboarding. While some participants experienced clear scheduling, access to resources, and coordinated induction processes, others described fragmented, unclear, or even non-existent onboarding. In some cases, digital onboarding systems lacked clarity and interactivity, limiting understanding and engagement. Moreover, the presence of fear based messaging and organisational instability further undermined the onboarding experience. This inconsistency highlights that without a standardised and supportive onboarding framework, employees are left to rely on individual initiative, which can delay integration and reduce early productivity.

Theme 2 further emphasized the critical role of HR and management support in shaping onboarding outcomes. Where strong managerial involvement, guidance, and psychological safety were present, employees reported positive experiences, faster adjustment, and increased confidence in their roles. Conversely, the absence or limited availability of HR personnel and management resulted in self-directed onboarding, uncertainty, and ineffective integration. Organisational challenges such as leadership absence, competing priorities, and job insecurity also weakened support structures. These findings reinforce that onboarding is not solely an HR function but a shared organisational responsibility requiring active engagement from leadership to foster trust, clarity, and performance.

Theme 3 highlighted significant gaps in communication and adaptation processes. Participants reported unclear communication channels, inconsistent expectations, and a lack of structured feedback mechanisms. In many instances, onboarding was characterised by transactional communication, with little emphasis on meaning, context, or relationship building. Remote and hybrid working conditions further complicated communication, limiting opportunities for informal learning and support. As a result, employees were often forced to adapt independently, expending considerable effort to understand organisational norms, communication styles, and expectations. This self-driven adaptation, while developing resilience, introduced unnecessary stress and delayed effective performance.

The findings from theme 4 demonstrated that organisational culture and social integration were largely implicit rather than intentionally facilitated. Many participants described feelings of isolation, exclusion, or delayed belonging, particularly in environments characterised by cliques, remote work, or sink or swim cultures. The absence of deliberate social integration mechanisms meant that employees had to decode informal norms, power dynamics, and behavioural expectations on their own. This not only affected their sense of belonging but also had direct implications for performance, as social uncertainty reduced confidence, collaboration, and willingness to seek support. The study therefore highlights that effective onboarding must extend beyond formal processes to include intentional cultural orientation and social connection.

Theme 5 underscored the importance of role clarity and clearly defined performance expectations. A significant number of participants reported vague job descriptions, shifting priorities, and a lack of clear performance benchmarks. In many cases, expectations were either poorly communicated or entirely implicit, resulting in confusion, inefficiency, and anxiety. Employees frequently described “working in the dark,” relying on trial and error to determine priorities and success indicators. This lack of clarity not only delayed performance but also led to frustration and reduced confidence. The findings confirm that role clarity is foundational to employee performance and must be established early and reinforced continuously during onboarding.

Overall, the study concludes that onboarding within the organisation is a critical but under optimised process that directly influences staff performance. Effective onboarding is not merely about information dissemination but involves a holistic approach that integrates structured delivery, strong managerial support, clear communication, cultural integration, and explicit performance expectations. Where these elements are present, onboarding accelerates adjustment, enhances productivity, and fosters organisational commitment. However, where they are absent or inconsistent, employees experience prolonged adaptation periods, reduced efficiency, and increased stress.

The study therefore highlights the need for organisations, particularly within the international development sector, to reconceptualise onboarding as a strategic function rather than an administrative task. Investing in structured, inclusive, and context sensitive onboarding practices is essential for improving staff performance, strengthening organisational capacity, and ensuring sustainable programme delivery in complex and resource-constrained environments.

5.5 EXTENT TO WHICH THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES WERE ACHIEVED

The study achieved its stated objectives as follows:

Objective 1 (Explore staff perceptions of onboarding practices): Achieved through analysis of participants' accounts describing both structured and fragmented onboarding experiences and the factors shaping these perceptions.

Objective 2 (Examine how onboarding influences staff performance): Achieved by identifying multiple pathways linking onboarding to performance (role clarity, confidence, decision making quality, speed of adjustment), and by interpreting these pathways through OST and HCT lenses.

Objective 3 (Identify challenges experienced during onboarding): Achieved through identification of salient constraints, information overload, limited learning time, communication ambiguity and reduced social integration under remote/hybrid work and by situating these challenges within IDO contextual realities.

While the design does not allow causal attribution, the qualitative evidence provides a coherent explanatory account of how onboarding is perceived to shape performance

within the case organisation, thereby meeting the exploratory intent of the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

5.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness was addressed using Lincoln and Guba's criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened through the use of semi-structured interviews and probing for concrete examples. Triangulation of interview data with reflexive notes further supported credible interpretation, consistent with qualitative rigour guidance (Nowell et al., 2017). Dependability was supported through consistent interview procedures and documentation of analytic decisions, including maintenance of an audit trail and codebook during thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability was promoted through reflexive practice and a decision log to distinguish participant accounts from the researcher's interpretations. Transferability was enabled through thick description of the organisational context, onboarding modalities and role environments, allowing readers to judge the applicability of findings to comparable IDO settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018).

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The recommendations below are derived directly from the study findings and align with the improvement suggestions captured in the coded dataset (e.g., simplifying information shared, consistent communication, regular feedback, dedicated HR support, and hybrid friendly social integration mechanisms). They are designed to be realistic within resource-constrained IDO settings and are framed as actionable steps for IDO X and similar organisations.

Table 5.1: Key findings, recommendations and action steps:

Key finding (what the study showed)	Recommendation (what should change)	Actionable steps (how to implement)	Primary owner(s)
Onboarding was uneven and sometimes compressed, producing information overload and self-directed learning.	Develop a comprehensive plan to institutionalise a phased onboarding pathway (pre-boarding to 6 months) with	Develop a standard 30–60–90 day onboarding plan per role; stage essential compliance/SOP content in week 1, role-specific systems in weeks	HR Manager; Line managers

Key finding (what the study showed)	Recommendation (what should change)	Actionable steps (how to implement)	Primary owner(s)
	staged content to reduce overload.	2–4, and advanced context learning by month 3; share induction materials after sessions and issue reminders on critical points.	
HR and supervisor support signaled organisational support and enabled faster performance readiness; gaps led to self-onboarding.	Assign accountable onboarding roles and ensure dedicated HR coordination at country level.	Nominate an onboarding coordinator (HR focal point) for the country office; include onboarding delivery responsibilities in managers' performance expectations; ensure handover notes and role documentation are available before start date.	HR Manager; Senior management; Line managers; HR Officer
Ambiguity about communication channels, stakeholders and confidentiality protocols increased uncertainty and risk of errors.	Strengthen communication architecture and make protocols explicit from day one.	Provide a “who-to-approach” stakeholder map; clarify confidentiality and information sharing rules; establish a consistent communication survey (weekly check-ins in month 1, bi-weekly in months 2–3).	Line managers; Operations Manager; HR Manager
Hybrid/remote onboarding reduced social integration and belonging, undermining confidence and adjustment.	Embed deliberate social integration and hybrid friendly connection mechanisms.	Implement a buddy system; schedule cross functional introductions; where feasible, prioritise early face-to-face team connection (e.g., first month); consider periodic HR support visits or regional onboarding clinics to reinforce culture	Line managers; HR Manager; Senior leadership, HR Officer

Key finding (what the study showed)	Recommendation (what should change)	Actionable steps (how to implement)	Primary owner(s)
		and relationship building.	
Role clarity and access to SOPs/systems supported decision making quality, while immediate delivery expectations constrained learning time.	Calibrate performance expectations and block learning time, especially for senior or complex roles.	Define early deliverables that are feasible alongside learning; ensure timely access to tools/equipment and systems; provide role specific SOP summaries or user-friendly job aids; schedule structured feedback sessions on goals and progress.	Line managers; Operations Manager; HR Manager
Participants highlighted the value of organisational context and culture understanding beyond technical induction.	Expand onboarding content to include organisational vision, mission, purpose, values, culture, and wellbeing supports.	Provide a welcome pack covering organisational context, values, and support resources; integrate wellbeing check-ins; ensure policies are implemented fairly and adapted where appropriate to local operational contexts.	Senior management; HR Manager; Line managers

Collectively, these recommendations operationalise a “two-way” onboarding logic, in which the organisation provides structured resources and support while the newcomer actively communicates what will enable their success, thereby reduce adjustment costs and strengthen early performance (Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015; Godinho et al., 2023).

5.8 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLICY

The study makes three main contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence from a South African IDO context, addressing a geographical and sectoral gap in the onboarding literature (Staunton, 2017; Godinho et al., 2023). Second, it strengthens

theory by supporting an integrative, multi-mechanism view: onboarding influences performance most strongly when capability development (HCT) is complemented by social integration and perceived organisational support (OST), and when practices are sensitised to cultural and hybrid work realities (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Klein, Polin and Leigh Sutton, 2015). Third, it offers practice relevant guidance by translating the findings into realistic improvements (phased onboarding, explicit protocols, dedicated coordination, and hybrid friendly integration), which can inform internal HR policy, onboarding standards and performance management expectations for managers within IDOs operating under donor accountability and dispersed teams (OECD, 2021; ILO, 2021).

5.9 STUDY LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. The first limitation was the use of a qualitative single-case study design focused on one IDO operating in South Africa. The context-specific focus on IDO X limited the extent to which the findings could be generalised to all IDOs or to broader organisational settings. However, this limitation was consistent with qualitative case study research, where the aim is depth and contextual understanding rather than statistical generalisation (Yin, 2018). The limitation was minimised by providing a detailed description of the organisational context, research setting, participant characteristics, work modalities and onboarding conditions, thereby enabling readers to assess the transferability of the findings to similar development focused and resource-constrained environments (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The second limitation related to the relatively small purposive sample used in the study. The sample size limited the breadth of perspectives captured and did not allow for statistical representativeness. However, this was consistent with the qualitative nature of the study, where the emphasis is placed on depth, richness and relevance rather than numerical generalisation (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). This limitation was minimised by selecting participants who had direct experience of onboarding within IDO X and by including staff from different functions and work arrangements, including onsite, remote and hybrid settings. Data collection continued until no new codes emerged from successive interviews, supporting the adequacy of the sample for thematic analysis (Guest, Namey and Chen, 2020).

The third limitation was the cross-sectional nature of the study, as data were collected at a single point in time. This meant that the study could not examine how onboarding experiences and their influence on staff performance evolved over a longer period. However, this limitation was minimised by including participants who had been in post for at least twelve months, allowing them sufficient time to reflect on the relationship between onboarding, role clarity, adaptation and performance. This approach was aligned with the purposive sampling strategy used in the study, which sought to select information rich participants with direct and relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015).

Overall, these limitations did not undermine the purpose of the study, as the research sought to generate in-depth, contextually grounded insights rather than statistically generalisable conclusions. The limitations were addressed through purposive sampling, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, ethical safeguards, detailed contextual description, systematic thematic analysis and trustworthiness measures, including credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Braun and Clarke, 2022). Finally, the study focused on staff perspectives; incorporating additional stakeholder perspectives (e.g. line managers or HR leaders) could further deepen understanding of organisational constraints and implementation feasibility.

5.10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Building on these findings, future research could:

Conduct comparative multi-case studies across different IDOs in South Africa (or across regions) to test how onboarding practices vary by organisational size, funding model and work modality.

Adopt longitudinal designs that follow newcomers over 6–12 months to examine how onboarding experiences translate into sustained performance and retention outcomes over time.

Use mixed methods approaches to triangulate qualitative insights with quantitative indicators, thereby strengthening inference about onboarding–performance linkages.

Examine hybrid and digital onboarding specifically in resource-constrained environments to identify which virtual social integration practices best mitigate distance and strengthen belonging.

Explore culturally responsive onboarding in multicultural IDO teams, including norms related to hierarchy, feedback and help-seeking shape newcomer adjustment and performance.

5.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter restated the study purpose and summarised the research process used to examine how onboarding practices influence staff performance within IDO X in South Africa. It synthesised the core findings across the research questions, demonstrating that onboarding shapes performance through the interlinked mechanisms of structured delivery, HR and managerial support, clear communication, social integration and role clarity. The chapter assessed the achievement of research objectives and outlined the trustworthiness measures underpinning the qualitative evidence. Grounded conclusions were presented, followed by pragmatic recommendations aligned to the key findings and tailored to the operational realities of IDOs, including hybrid work and compliance pressures. The chapter also highlighted the study's contributions to theory and practice, acknowledged limitations and identified future research directions. Overall, the study reinforces the strategic value of onboarding as a capability building and socialisation process that can accelerate staff performance and strengthen organisational effectiveness when designed as a phased, supportive and context responsive pathway.

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ANNEXURE 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section A:

Intends to gain an understanding of the participants.

1. What is your name?
2. Are you new to the IDO or new to the role?
3. What is your job position/ job title?
4. How old are you?
5. How long have you been at IDO X?
6. What nationality are you?
7. What is your racial group?

Section B:

Intends to explore the staff perceptions on the onboarding practices at IDO X and its effect on their performance in hybrid, remote and field settings.

1. How would you describe the onboarding practices at IDO X?

Probe: Formal onboarding practices

: Digital onboarding practices

: Informal onboarding practices

2. What elements are included in the onboarding practices at IDO X?

Probe: Mentorship

: Training

: Socialisation

: Orientation

: SOP (Standard operating procedures or policies)

3. Can you describe your experience with the onboarding process when you joined IDO X?

Probe: Challenging

- : Complex
- : Interesting
- : Enjoyable
- : Difficult
- : Informative

4. Did you encounter any specific challenges or difficulties during the onboarding period? If so, what were they?

Probe: Poor communication

- : Scarcity of resources
- : Time Consuming
- : The environment

Section C:

Intends to explore how the onboarding practices at IDO X affect staff performance in hybrid, remote and field settings.

1. In what ways, if any, has the onboarding process influenced how you perform your job?

Probe: Clarity to role

- : Confidence at work
- : Productive
- : Efficient
- : Quick to adapt

2. Looking back, what aspects of onboarding do you think contributed most to your early success or challenges in your role?

Probe: Hard work

: SOP (Standard operating procedures)

: Resources were available

3. Were there any gaps in the onboarding process that made your adjustment to the organisation more difficult?

Probe: No support

: Difficult Environment

: Scarce resources

4. What improvements do you suggest for onboarding practices to increase performance?

Probe: Managerial involvement

: Having structured plans

: The use of digital onboarding

Section D:

1. How was your onboarding experience shaped by your work setting — whether remote, hybrid, or field-based?

Probe: Growth

: Interesting

: Hard working

2. What onboarding tools or approaches were most helpful for you in your specific work setting?

Probe: Managerial involvement

: Having structured plans

: Training and development

3. In your opinion, how could onboarding be improved to better support staff in your type of work environment (remote, hybrid, or field)?

Probe: More onboarding practices available

: Supervision and Mentoring

: SOP (Standard operating procedures)

ANNEXURE 2: IIE ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Our Ref: M. 1260725

Enquiries: [REDACTED]

01 July 2025



Outcome of Ethical Clearance for Master of Business Administration.

Student name: Blessings Jijita

Student number: [REDACTED]

Brand and campus: IEMSA



Dear Blessings,



Thank you for submitting ethics clearance for the study titled: *Bridging Entry and Excellence: Exploring Onboarding's Role in Staff Performance at a South African International Development Organisation*.



We are pleased to inform you that the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee considered and granted ethics clearance, with minor changes to the satisfaction of the supervisor. This means that you may proceed with data collection once you have addressed the comments shared by the HDC.

You are reminded to inform the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee of any changes made to the research methodology or title of the research prior to examination. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly.

All the best with your research studies.



Dr Reza Hosseini

Chair: Higher Degrees Committee



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ANNEXURE 3: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER

Consent form to conduct research at company/organisation/association	
I, [REDACTED], in my capacity as COUNTRY DIRECTOR of [REDACTED] SOUTH AFRICA, grant permission to BLESSINGS JIJITA to conduct research at the [REDACTED], JOHANNESBURG OFFICE FOCUSING ON STAFF WHO HAVE ONBOARDED WITHIN THE ORGANISATION IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS OR MORE, ACROSS ALL SECTIONS/DEPARTMENTS pending the outcome of the ethics committee of the IIE on the envisaged research. The student may only engage with members of the organisation/ company/ association if they can produce the Ethics Letter from the IIE. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve for the people I represent. I also reserve the right to remind the people I represent that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that this permission does not imply their participation. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are made available in IIE Libraries as well as on the IIE Repository. The below conditions must be applied whilst writing up the research report:	
Conditions concerning the anonymity of the company/organisation/association:	
The company/organisation/association must be kept <u>anonymous</u> in the research report.	☒
The company/organisation/association may be <u>identified</u> in the research report.	☐
Conditions concerning the publication of the research report:	
The research report will be made available on the IIE Repository...	
<u>Immediately</u> after completion.	☐
<u>After</u> a specified number of months has elapsed.	☒
Number of months, if selected:	6
[REDACTED]	
3 June 2025	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE 4: PARTICIPANT & AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORMS



A

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants

To whom it may concern,

My name is **BLESSINGS JIJITA**, and I am a student at The **IIE MSA**. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of **Dr Shamola Pramjeeth** about **This research will aim to understand how onboarding has influenced IDO X staff performance in terms of their roles and responsibilities, and how they feel about onboarding in the workplace environment. The aim will be to see what challenges staff experience during the onboarding process at IDO X and how their performance has been affected. The last aim of the research study will be to explore possible recommendations to improve the onboarding practices at IDO X in relation to new staff or new to role staff in remote, hybrid and field settings at IDO X. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the Influence of onboarding on staff performance and possible areas for improvement.**

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because **your experience during the onboarding process contributes significant value to this research endeavour and will add value to the existing body of knowledge and provide IDO X with strategies to their onboarding practices for future recruits. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to schedule our discussion either in a physical setting or through online platform, whichever you prefer. The interview will take between 30 minutes to an hour. The Interview will be recorded to assist me in capturing your thoughts and view points accurately.**

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about **your experiences and perceptions of the onboarding process at IDO X**. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at The IIE MSA, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Master's in Business Leadership. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Blessings Jijita

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dr Shamola Pramjeeth

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Participant or respondent Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by BLESSINGS JIJITA about understanding how onboarding has influenced IDO X staff performance in terms of their roles and responsibilities, and how they feel about onboarding in the workplace environment.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to participate in this research and be recorded for the purpose of data collection.

• My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private and confidential. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	Date

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ANNEXURE 6: CODING TABLE

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
How would you describe your onboarding experience?	"At our organization they made use of digital systems to board us... some of the videos were not clear and there was no one to ask..." (P1)	Unclear digital content; Lack of support during digital onboarding.	1.1. Digital onboarding limitations.	Theme 1: Onboarding Structure and Overall Delivery	RQ1, RQ2
	"...the onboarding was a process was more of being told how the organization can punish you... this made the whole process to be full of fear." (P2)	Onboarding focused on punishment; Process induced fear.	1.2. Negative emotional impact of onboarding.		
	"There was a document... the HR person made sure that she booked all the talks and courses... my	Structured schedule; Proactive HR support.	1.3. Structured and organized onboarding.		

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
	calendar was already filled in by the time I arrived." (P3)				
	My onboarding at our organization was difficult because I arrived... when a lot of people had been retrenched... this caused a lot of anxiety..." (P4)	Organizational instability; Anxiety due to context.	1.4. Contextual instability affecting onboarding.		
	"When I joined there was basically no onboarding process. So, I just joined and I immediately had to start with the work." (P7)	Absence of formal process; "Sink or swim" approach.	1.5. Complete lack of onboarding structure.		
	"Management was very supportive and very cautious with me and	Supportive management; Psychological	2.1. High managerial	Theme 2: HR and Management Support	RQ1, RQ2

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
To what extent did HR and management support your integration?	they gave me the room and latitude to make mistakes..." (P2)	safety to make mistakes.	support and trust.		
	"There was no HR person. So, I just boarded myself..." (P3)	Absence of HR function; Self-directed onboarding.	2.2. Lack of HR presence and support.		
	"...those who were entrusted with doing with the onboarding process were not confident enough to execute the process." (P4)	Lack of confidence in facilitators; Poor execution.	2.3. Ineffective facilitator support.		
	"The management came to be supportive, but they were not entirely focused as I later heard that most of them were serving	Management distracted by own job insecurity; Conditional support.	2.4. Management support compromised by		

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
	their 3 months' notice period..." (P7)		organizational instability.		
	"I was recruited into the organization as a graduate trainee... management felt my position was too junior for themselves to avail themselves..." (P8)	Support perceived as hierarchical; Minimal support for junior staff.	2.5. Support differentiated by seniority level.		
	"Communication was not that clear and, in many circumstances, you would not know what is to be kept private and this made my life very difficult..." (P1)	Unclear communication; Difficulty navigating organizational culture.	3.1. Ambiguous communication leads to confusion.	Theme 3: Communication and Adaptation	RQ1, RQ3

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
How was communication handled, and how did you adapt	"...my onboarding was done during the Covid-19 pandemic... I never got to meet my manager or my colleagues... my adaptation was not easy-going." (P2)	Remote onboarding challenges; Lack of physical interaction hindering adaptation	3.2. Adaptation challenges in a remote context.		
	"For me, the biggest gap was the inconsistency in communication channels... I found myself spending more energy figuring out how to communicate than doing my job." (P5)	Inconsistent communication norms; Energy drain from decoding channels.	3.3. Inconsistent communication norms.		
	"I came from a very structured corporate environment, so the lack	Lack of formal feedback; Self-driven adaptation.	3.4. Proactive adaptation in an		

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
	of formal feedback loops here was jarring... I had to adapt by forcing the communication myself..." (P6)		unstructured environment		
	"The language barrier was a subtle but real issue... in terms of technical jargon and internal acronyms... I adapted by keeping a running glossary on my phone..." (P7)	Jargon and acronyms as barriers; Individual strategies for adaptation.	3.5. Jargon as a barrier to integration.		
How did you experience the organisational	"Coming into this organization, I quickly realised that culture is not	Unwritten cultural rules; Pressure to	4.1. Tacit cultural norms and pressures	Theme 4: Organisational Culture and Social Integration	RQ1, RQ2

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
culture and social integration?	what is written in the employee handbook; it is what people do when no one is watching." (P1)	conform to unspoken norms.			
	"My onboarding happened during Covid, so social integration was virtually non-existent... The culture felt closed off... because no one had thought about how to integrate a remote newcomer." (P2)	Social isolation in remote work; Lack of intentional integration for newcomers.	4.2. Social integration challenges in remote/hybrid settings.		
	"Social integration, for me, felt like a puzzle where half the pieces were missing. I eventually built relationships, but it	Social integration left to the individual; Feeling that responsibility is misplaced.	4.3. Social integration perceived as an individual burden.		

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
	required me to be relentlessly proactive... 'If the organisation values integration, why is it entirely on me to make it happen?'" (P4)				
	"The culture here is very much 'sink or swim,' and nobody warns you about that during the interview process." (P7)	"Sink or swim" culture; Mismatch between interview promises and reality.	4.4. "Sink or swim" cultural expectation.		
	"I walked in expecting a structured welcome, but instead, I got a desk and a laptop and was told to 'get stuck in.'" (P8)	Lack of structured welcome; Autonomous culture leading to confusion.	4.5. Autonomous culture creating a sense of abandonment.		

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
How clear were your role and performance expectations?	"I walked into my role with a job description that was vague at best... I would spend hours on something only to find out later that it was not a priority." (P1)	Vague job description; Misaligned priorities due to unclear expectations.	5.1. Ambiguity in role and priorities.		
	"The challenge for me was that expectations were communicated once, verbally, and then I was expected to remember everything... 'How do I know if I am doing well if no one has told me what success looks like?'" (P2)	Verbal-only expectations; Lack of success metrics.	5.2. Lack of documented performance metrics.		

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
	"I joined during a busy period... I was given tasks without context... Performance expectations were implied rather than stated... a recipe for failure." (P3)	Tasks given without context; Implied expectations leading to mistakes.	5.3. Implied expectations leading to failure.		
	"There was no single source of truth regarding what my role entailed. I kept asking for a clear outline... but it never came." (P5)	No single source of truth; Unfulfilled requests for clarity	5.4. Absence of a definitive role description.	Theme 5: Role Clarity and Performance Expectations	RQ2, RQ3
	"I often felt like I was guessing what success looked like in this role...	Guessing at success; Need for			

Sample Interview Questions	Raw Data: Sample Quotations	Examples of Sample Codes	Categories	Themes	Link to Research Question (RQ)
	Role clarity is not just about giving someone a job description... It is about ongoing conversations..." (P7)	ongoing clarity conversations.			