04

Assessing and Managing Wellbeing in Hybrid Settings

Co-funded by the European Union

Post pandemic empowerment programme

Exercise 4.1
Mind your posture

Activity Type:
Group (or pair)

DESCRIPTION

This is a group activity where participants observe one another and, more specifically, how they sit in front of their screens (PC or smartphones) to highlight most common mistakes which affect wellbeing..

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this activity, learners will achieve the following learning outcomes:

- becoming more aware of the consequences of a bad posture in front a personal computer for long while working.
- becoming more aware of own posture.
- improving and keeping a right posture.
- being able to critically see someone's posture finding out common mistakes.
- being able to suggest their team how to improve its posture.
- being stimulated in "testing" and proposing within their venture a new profile acting as a "wellbeing keeper or ambassador".

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- PROSPER online course
- Attached PPT – Mind your Posture
- Learners' mobile phones
- (chairs, table, personal computers / laptops)
- Flipchart with suitable markers

TIME REQUIRED

50 min. + 30 min for intro/debriefing.

Mind your posture

Theoretical background

It is advisable that the trainer get acquainted with the subject of the relationship between posture in front of a screen and wellbeing.

Following resources can be used:

- Montare Behavioral Health "How posture influences your physical and mental health" https://montarebehavioralhealth.com/posture-and-mental-health/

- Salman Gurung, 2023, "How long should you sit in front of a computer" https://thenaturehero.com/sit-in-front-of-computer/

- People Magazine Staff, 2020, Average U.S. Adult Will Spend Equivalent of 44 Years of Their Life Staring at Screens: Poll https://people.com/human-interest/average-us-adult-screens-study/

- Southern California Orthopedic Institute (SCOI), FRANK J. D'AMBROSIO https://www.scoi.com/services/physical-therapy/importance-good-posture

Preparation

It is recommended that participants are familiar with the concept of wellbeing and what can influence it from a more "physical point of view" prior to engaging in this activity. Also, since it involves group cooperation, it must be preceded by an introduction of participants and an ice-breaker activity.

Introduction

The learners should review the following parts of the PROSPER online course:

- Module 2 / Unit 2 "Assessing & Monitoring well-being in hybrid settings": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-2-assessing-monitoring-well-being-in-hybrid-settingsmodule-2-unit-2/
- Module 2 / Unit 3 "Work related stress prevention and actions": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-3-work-related-stress-prevention-and-actions/

This can be done either as a homework assignment prior to the start of the training, or via projecting the PPT for 15 min. in the beginning of the activity.

Activity description

Step 1) The trainer divides the group in pairs (3 to 5). He/she asks member A to take a picture of member B (part of the same pair) while sitting in front of the PC /smartphone/ notes with member B's smartphone to avoid any privacy concern (in this way the photos taken are saved on the mobile of the person snapped).

Ideally the photo shall be taken when the person has a screen in front of them and uses hands to work on the PC. It is advisable to take three pictures: one from behind the person, one lateral and one from the front. If no PC is available, the photos can be made with the person simply sitting at a table.

Then member B takes a picture of member A using his/her smartphone to avoid any privacy concern.

If there are only 3 – 4 learners a very similar activity can be carried out in a group. In this case mobiles are exchanged among participants and each one takes ideally three pictures of the person who has the mobile in his/her hands. The aim is that every single student has on his / her smart phone three pictures of himself/herself sitting in front of a screen. **5 min.**

Step 2) The trainer presents what is written in the supporting PPT for this activity showing the desirable correct posture while sitting in front of a screen. **10 min.**

Step 3) The trainer gives the following instructions to learners.

- Again in pairs one member explains to the mate how to correctly sit with oral instructions as previously learnt from the PPT. The one who is giving instructions takes some pictures of the person so that in the future when he/she sees them, he/she immediately recalls what the best posture is. Then roles are exchanged. **10 min.**

- In case of smaller groups instructions are given for example by two people and a third one takes pictures of the person who is under "observation" for improving his/her posture. Everybody has to sit and follow the oral instructions of the mates on how to correctly sit. **15 min.**

- One by one everybody goes to the flipchart and writes down / draws a sketch of a big "mistake" with regards to the hints presented in the PPT.
   20 minutes

Debriefing

1) Highlight most common posture mistakes and suggest possible solutions (for example adjustable table and/or chair – ergonomic, put books under the screen/laptop, sit closer or far away from the table, …)

2) Ask the learners what is the most "difficult" hint to follow and why

3) Encourage them to hang in the office or next to the coffee machine some pictures / messages to remind people to sit correctly to promote well-being.

4) Any time people can also have a look at the pictures (before and after the lesson) on their own mobile phones.

5) Propose to select / award / name a colleague in the firm as "wellbeing keeper or ambassador". The person may organise every now and then the same activity done in the classroom or encourage colleagues to take breaks and do exercises.

6) Inform pupils that there are several apps available

for their wellbeing. A specific example is: https://smartposture.net

7) Make them stand up and propose some easy stretching exercises like Seated Cat-Cow **15 - 20 minutes**

Proper and improper imposture

Credits: Mitindo.it

Mind your posture

We spend more and more time sitting at a desk in front of the PC or Smartphone. **Average U.S. adult spend equivalent of 44 years of their life staring at screens.** People are spending more than 17 hours a day on screens during normal life!

A correct posture is thus key in order to prevent and avoid both eye strain, neck, shoulder and back pain as well. Beware that a correct posture is also beneficial for your eyes and, overall, your wellbeing (and thus productivity).

29%

Time spent in front of a screen in normal day
71%
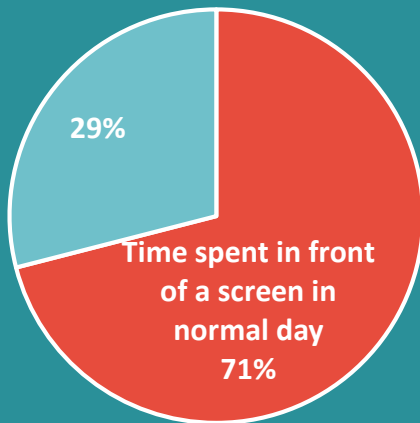
7 HINTS FOR A PROPER POSTURE

1) Keep your back straight! Do not bend nor hunch over. An ergonomic chair may help.

2) Keep your head up, your shoulders relaxed and your eyes in line with the PC screen, and your shoulders "open." If your PC is too low and this does not allow you to be comfortable, take advantage of the books or laptop riser.

3) Rest your feet on the ground. The best position to maintain when you are at the PC is with your feet firmly on the ground, with your legs forming a 90-degree angle.

4) Choose the right chair and adjust it properly.

5) Elbows should form a 90-100 degree angle and be aligned with the wrists.

6) Keep the right distance between eyes and screen.

7) Take regular breaks and do exercises.

Proper posture
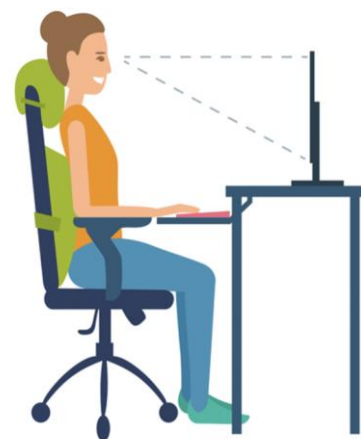
Credits: PostureNet

Exercise 4.2
Performing stress risk assessment

Activity Type: Individual (in pairs – SME / Line manager and employee)

DESCRIPTION

The activity consists of raising awareness of the importance of performing stress risk assessment to evaluate how employees are feeling within the SME. The trainer provides some concrete examples SME / Line managers can adapt and use in their own ventures.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this activity, learners will achieve the following learning outcomes:

- being aware of the consequences for both employees and employers of a situation of distress / uneasiness in the working environment.
- being aware of the importance of monitoring stress by administering questionnaires.
- being able to create and perform risk assessment questionnaires.
- being able to process data, store them and plan future actions to be monitored.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- PROSPER online course
- Attached PPT: Risk Assessment
- Digital and/or printed copies of the handouts to this activity (i.e. template questionnaires and template action plan).

TIME REQUIRED

60-65 min + 15 min for intro/debriefing.

Performing stress risk assessment

Theoretical background

It is advisable that the trainer get acquainted with the subject of creating effective questionnaires, the causes of stress in hybrid settings, the meaning and the usage of action plans.

Following resources can be used:

- IMotions, "How to design a questionnaire, https://imotions.com/blog/learning/best-practice/design-a-questionnaire/

- Pew Research Centre, Writing survey questions, https://www.pewresearch.org/our-methods/u-s-surveys/writing-survey-questions/

- Resourceful Scholars Hub, A comprehensive guide for designing and administering a questionnaire, https://resourcefulscholarshub.com/comprehensive-guide-for-designing-and-administering-questionnaire/

- Condeco, The link between hybrid working and positive mental health, https://www.condecosoftware.com/blog/positive-mental-health/

- Better Health Channel, Work-related stress, https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/work-related-stress

- European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Managing stress and psychosocial risks E-guide, https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Eguide_stress_ENGLISH.pdf

- European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Campaign toolkit, https://healthy-workplaces.osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/campaign-toolkit

- European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, OiRA: free and simple tools for a straightforward risk assessment process, https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-resources/oira

Preparation

It is recommended that participants are familiar with work related stress and its causes (and possible solutions/actions to implement). They shall also have some knowledge on how to create an effective questionnaire, how to communicate its performance, how to write an action plan.

The learners should review the following parts of the PROSPER online course:

- Module 2 / Unit 1 "Digital Wellbeing and Work Related Stress": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-1-digital-wellbeing-and-work-related-stress/

- Module 2 / Unit 2 "Assessing & Monitoring well-being in hybrid settings": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-2-assessing-monitoring-well-being-in-hybrid-settingsmodule-2-unit-2/

- Module 2 / Unit 3 "Work related stress prevention and actions": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-3-work-related-stress-prevention-and-actions/

This can be done as a homework assignment prior to the start of the training.

Introduction

The trainer might want to do to a quick recap of the 3 Units learners had to study as a preparatory assignment. This may be done in a Q-and-A session or via projecting the PPT for 15 min. in the beginning of the activity.

Performing stress risk assessment

Activity description

Step 1) If the learners and trainer do not know one another, it is advisable to introduce themselves.

The trainer presents the topic of the lessons but, before going into more details by projecting and discussing the dedicated PPT, asks the participants if they ever monitor the employees' stress at work, if yes how and which are the measures taken to reduce it. This is a sort of knowledge-sharing ice-breaking discussion. **25 min**

Step 2)

- The trainer presents the PPT and the examples of templates of questionnaires.

- The trainer stresses the subject of the questions, how they are built, how the answers are formulated to underline some possible tricks for an effective questionnaire.

- The trainer also draws SME / Line managers' attention to the importance of keeping well organised records, to draft an action plan and monitor the changes potentially occurring.

40 min

Debriefing

1) Highlight most common mistakes in writing and administering questionnaires and suggest possible solutions (change types of questions and types of answers)

2) Remind the importance of having (and possibly sharing with the team) an action plan.

3) Recall to always administering questionnaires at given intervals.

15 min

Adaption to online mode

If the training is delivered online, provide the participants with the PPT and, only at the end, the attachments so as not to lose learners' attention while presenting.

There are no significant changes needed.

Performing Stress Risk Assessments

There are many sources of stress (like for example financial problems, work, personal relationships, parenting, daily life and busyness, personality, health) but the most important one is the workplace.

Stress matters

- **For employees** affecting their happiness, productivity, the way they behave and communicate with colleagues, how much they eat (46% of women are more prone than men - 27% - to overeat while dealing with working stress – according to a Randstad report in 2029), the sense of belonging to a company and much more

- **For employers** as there is a high employee turnover, low levels of creativity and productivity, increased absenteeism.

Stress factors may include

1. workload

2. lack of support

3. changes at work

4. tight deadlines

5. long working hours

6. too much responsibilities

7. lack of managerial support

8. low salaries

9. inability to be themselves at work (especially for Millenials and Gen Zs)

Cost of workplace stress

- Effective stress management reduces sickness absence costs by up to 20%. (StressManagementSociety, 2016)

- Stressed workers incur healthcare costs twice as high than other employees. (HealthAdvocate, 2009)

- The consequences of stress-related illnesses cost businesses an estimated $200 to $300 billion a year in lost productivity. (HealthAdvocate, 2018)

- Absenteeism in the workplace due to depression costs the economy around $23.3 billion per year. (APA, 2015)

- 12.8 million working days are lost in a year due to work-related stress, depression, or anxiety. (HSE, 2019)

- 12% of respondents have called in sick because of job stress. (Maximize Success Academy, 2020)

- Workplace stress leads to a 50% increase in voluntary turnover. (HBR, 2015)

Useful definitions… let's refresh some key ideas

A **hazard** is something that has the potential to cause harm (i.e. slippery floors, lifting activities, electricity, chemicals, etc) A shark has the potential to cause harm! A **risk** is the likelihood and consequence of that harm being realised. Risk of shark attack in the water may be high. Risk of shark attack on the beach may be low/non-existent.

A stress risk assessment is a systematic procedure to identify potential stressors in the workplace and evaluate the risks they pose to employees' health and well-being. The purposes of a stress risk assessment are:

- to identify areas within the company that may be contributing to elevated levels of work-related stress. Examples are workload, work schedule, level of control over work, relationships at work, role within the organization, and changes at work.

- to set up intervention strategies to limit work-related stress thus favouring a safe and healthy working environment and climate.

Performing a work-related stress risk assessment

- Look for the hazards in the job
- Decide who might be harmed and how – determine the risk to target and tailor your assessment
- Evaluate the risk and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done (keep track in an action plan)
- Record and communicate significant findings (including the actions to be taken)
- Review the assessment and revise it if necessary at appropriate intervals

Potential psychological hazards

The following six potential psychological hazards are as detailed in the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards of the Oxfordshire County Council which we propose as a potential baseline for carrying out work relates stress questionnaires (one template is also provided).

1. Control
This is how say the person has in the way they do their work.

2. Support
Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

3. Relationships
Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

4. Role
Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

5. Change
This is how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

6. Demands
Includes issues like work overload/underload, work patterns and the work environment.

Templates you can adapt and use

PROSPER partners provide you with two templates you can adapt to your organisation and maybe specific stressors you have detected.

Always remember OiRA: free and simple tools for a straightforward risk assessment process, https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-resources/oira developed by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

The suggestion is to administer the questionnaires preferably in a digital manner for easing the retrieving of results and their storage, otherwise you can administer them during a bilateral call with your employees or give them the printed version and let them fill them in.

Once you evaluate the results you can determine some possible actions to implement described in an action plan (template available as well). In parallel or as a consequence of the action plan SME / Line manager can also go for a Stress policy (see Module 2, Unit 3 of the PROSPER online course).

Do not forget to perform work-related stress regularly and keep communicate with your team to reduce stressors and improve overall well-being and thus productivity!

What can we do in order to avoid work related stress?

First of all ASSESS the status quo and then ACT!

Exercise 4.3

Deep dive in causes of stress at work and possible actions

Activity Type: Group – online only, for example through Gather.Town

DESCRIPTION

This is a group activity where participants describe what happens where they work as regards six causes of stress at work and, at the same time, share what they are currently doing for facing these causes thus improving the working environment.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this activity, learners will achieve the following learning outcomes:

- being aware of the six causes of stress at work.
- being aware that their actions may improve or worsen stress at work for their team.
- being capable of observing what is going on as per a safe and healthy working culture.
- being capable of making up / choosing actions to implement for reducing stress at work.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- PROSPER online course
- Attached PPT: Deep dive in causes of stress at work
- Personal computer connected to Internet
- An avatar created in Gather.Town

TIME REQUIRED

30 min + 120 min (maximum) + 60 min for debriefing.

Deep dive in causes of stress at work and possible actions

Theoretical background

It is advisable that the trainer get acquainted with the subject of the causes of work-related stress (from a more psycho-social point of view) and possible mitigation actions manager can implement.

The teacher should be acquainted with Gather.Town (https://www.gather.town/blog/guide-getting-started).

Following resources can be used:

- University of Cambridge (Human resources), "Causes of work related stress", https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/managing-stress-and-promoting-wellbeing-work-policy/policy-statement/causes-work

- Concordia University, St. Paul, "Work Stress: Causes, Symptoms, and Solutions" https://online.csp.edu/resources/article/work-stress/

Preparation

It is recommended that participants are familiar with the concept of Wellbeing and what can influence it from a more "physical point of view" prior to engaging in this activity. Also, it is important that they are aware there are some actions they can do.

As the activity is totally delivered online participants are invited, prior to it, to watch the tutorial of Gather.Town to know what they can do in this collaborative online platform.

Prior to the activity learners will have received an invitation from the trainer to Gather.Town and create their avatars.

The learners should review the following parts of the PROSPER online course:

- Module 2 / Unit 1 "Digital Wellbeing and Work Related Stress": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-1-digital-wellbeing-and-work-related-stress/

- Module 2 / Unit 2 "Assessing & Monitoring well-being in hybrid settings": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-2-assessing-monitoring-well-being-in-hybrid-settingsmodule-2-unit-2/

- Module 2 / Unit 3 "Work related stress prevention and actions": https://course.prosper-project.eu/module-2-unit-3-work-related-stress-prevention-and-actions/

This can be done as a homework assignment prior to the start of the training.

Introduction

The trainer might want to do to a quick recap of the 3 Units learners had to study as a preparatory assignment. This may be done in a Q-and-A session or via projecting the PPT for 15 min. in the beginning of the activity.

Deep dive in causes of stress at work and possible actions

Activity description

Step 1) The trainer shows what learners can do within Gather.Town especially for those who are not familiar with the tool and lets them introduce themselves. 10 min

Step 2) On Gather.Town the trainer presents the PPT of this activity. 20 min

Step 3) Instruct the participants as follows:

- The trainer has created 6 rooms (one per stress cause described). In each room there is a board where learners are invited to share their current working environment situations / what they have experienced in relation to the given stress cause.

- All together will agree on two appointments (each of which of 1 hour) when learners go to Gather.Town and discuss with mates in relation to a given stress cause. The aim is that everybody can share his / her thoughts and business cases with the other learners. Everyone is also invited to write some notes or questions on the boards he / she finds in a given room. It is like a "free entrance" slot. The trainer is present and he / she acts a coach and an IT buddy if needed.

- The above mentioned exchanges shall be within 2 weeks in order not to lose the momentum.

Debriefing

1. The group meets and discusses what is written down in all boards in a closing / recapping happening lasting one hour in Gather.Town.

2. The trainer leaves the outcomes in a chosen place within Gather.Town when pupils for X weeks after can go, see and exchange with the other mates.

Adaption to online mode

If the training is delivered face-to-face, provide the participants with six flip charts (one for each stress cause analysed). The trainer invites participants to go and exchange for 40 minutes on the subject of the exercise. The aim is that everybody has a say in all six causes of stress depicted. Meanwhile the trainer takes notes so as to be able to present the results besides the whole class during the debriefing. Finally the debriefing takes place lasting no more than 40 minutes. The trainer will send the learners photos of the written sheets and some notes to remind them what they can possibly do to mitigate stress at work.

Deep Dive in Causes of Stress at Work

Stress at work is detrimental for both employees and employers! Stress is not perceived equally but it depends on person's' age, disability, behaviors, skills and experiences.

There are some circumstances which cause stress. One can find several lists but in our online course we follow the Health and Safety Executive approach which is quite solid and encompasses many areas (six) that can lead to work-related stress if not properly managed. https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/causes.htm Source: Appendix 5 of the Stress at work policy (https://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/public/corporate/hr/hr_toolkits/policies/StressatWorkOct2010.pdf)

Health and Safety Executive is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. Just to provide you with another example you can also have a look at what the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety lists as per Psychosocial Risk factors: https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mh/mentalhealth_risk.html

Causes of stress at work:

Psychological hazard – Demands

Includes issues like work overload/underload, work patterns and the work environment.

What should be happening in the company is the following:

- the organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work

- people's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands

- jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees

- employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Causes of stress at work:

Psychological hazard - Control

This is how say the person has in the way they do their work. It involves having meaningful discretion over how, when, and where work gets done.

Workers lack control at work when they feel they have little or no say in how they accomplish their daily tasks, are subject to excessive levels of supervision or surveillance, or cannot reasonably predict their schedules from week to week.

What should be happening in a firm is the following:

- where possible, employees have control over their pace of work

- employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work

- where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work

- the organisation encourages employees to develop their skills

- employees have a say over when breaks can be taken

- employees are consulted over their work patterns.

Causes of stress at work:

Psychological hazard – Support

What should be happening in a firm is the following:

- the organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees

- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff

- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues

- employees know what support is available and how and when to access it

- employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and

- employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues. Support helps employees manage internal and external pressures in the workplace.

Causes of stress at work:

Psychological hazard – Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behavior.

Workplace relationships are the human interactions taking place in a work environment. They shall always be based on mutual trust and respect.

What should be happening in a firm is the following :

- the organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness

- employees share information relevant to their work

- the organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour

- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour which can be reported by employees.

Causes of stress at work:

Psychological hazard – Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.

Roles refer to one's position on a team. Each team member has a role to play defined by skill set and experience. The point is that all roles have their value in the collaboration of a team.

What should be happening in a firm is the following:

- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible

- the organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities

- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear

- systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

Causes of stress at work:

Psychological hazard – Change

What should be happening in a firm is the following:

- the organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reason for proposed changes

- the organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals

- employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs.

- employees are aware of timetables for changes

- employees have access to relevant support during changes.

This is how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Facing causes of stress at work

Having understood what the main broad categories causing stress at work are, there are some actions and working «styles» managers can implement to reduce as much as possible the causes described so far.

Here is what for instance a manager might do:
- being present for his / her team and let them speak up
- assign tasks depending on people's skills and capabilities without overloading them
- recognise people's accomplishment and try to ensure a long lasting and fairly paid job
- encourage lifelong learning
- promote a collaborative working culture
- spur a sound, effective and efficient communication
- prioritize onboarding
- ensure a good work – life balance.