

Strategic Human Resource Onboarding and Employee Retention in NGOs Operating in Correctional Facilities in Rwanda

MUZIMA Richard

University of Kigali, Kigali City, Rwanda

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between strategic human resource onboarding and self-reported employee retention in three non-governmental organisations operating in correctional facilities in Rwanda. A cross-sectional convergent mixed-methods design combined a census attempt involving 110 employees with purposive interviews of 11 managerial informants. Ninety-nine complete employee questionnaires were analysed, representing a 90.0% response rate. Four onboarding dimensions were assessed: training and development, role clarity, organisational socialisation, and supervisor support. Pearson correlations and multiple linear regression were complemented by thematic analysis. Heteroscedasticity-consistent HC3 standard errors were used for coefficient inference. All four dimensions correlated positively with retention scores, with coefficients ranging from 0.474 to 0.699. The combined model explained 56.5% of score variation. Training and development ($\beta = 0.376$, $p = 0.009$) and supervisor support ($\beta = 0.360$, $p = 0.036$) retained significant positive adjusted associations; role clarity and organisational socialisation did not. Interviews highlighted practical readiness, clear responsibilities, belonging, and continuing supervisory guidance. The findings favour staged onboarding that combines correctional-context preparation with regular supervisor check-ins. Because retention was measured through intentions and attitudes, and the design was cross-sectional, the results establish associations rather than causal effects or verified reductions in turnover.

Keywords: Strategic onboarding, employee retention, training and development, role clarity, organisational socialisation, supervisor support, non-governmental organisations, Rwanda.

I. INTRODUCTION

Onboarding helps new employees understand their responsibilities, develop working relationships, and learn how an organisation operates. It is relevant to retention because early experiences can shape confidence, attachment, and willingness to remain. A meta-analysis by Bauer et al. [1] identified role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance as important elements of newcomer adjustment linked to employment attitudes and outcomes. These supports examining onboarding as a continuing adjustment process rather than only an initial administrative orientation.

The present study concerns employees of Prison Fellowship Rwanda, Dignity in Detention, and RABAGIRANA Ministries who work on projects within correctional facilities. These employees must understand both their NGO responsibilities and the institutional procedures governing correctional work. The study therefore considers preparation for security requirements, confidentiality, safeguarding, and relationships with correctional stakeholders alongside ordinary organisational induction. The relevant management question is which onboarding dimensions are most clearly associated with employees' willingness to continue working in these organisations.

Four dimensions were examined: training and development, role clarity, organisational socialisation, and supervisor support. Klein, Polin, and Leigh Sutton [2] distinguish concrete practices that inform, welcome, and guide newcomers. Their framework helps translate onboarding into observable activities, including access to information, introductions, and assistance. In a more recent study, Mosquera and Soares [3] examined corporate, manager, and co-worker welcome and

found that workplace well-being mediated the relationship between onboarding and turnover intention. This evidence draws attention to relationships and employee experience as well as formal induction content.

The contribution of this study is context-specific mixed-methods evidence from three NGOs involved in correctional-facility projects in Rwanda. It compares the separate correlations of the four dimensions with their adjusted contributions in a common model and uses managerial interviews to interpret the patterns. The research question is whether each onboarding dimension is associated with retention scores after accounting for the other dimensions. Throughout the article, employee retention refers to the measured intentions and attitudes, not an independently verified rate of continued employment.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Organisational socialisation provides the main explanation for how onboarding supports adjustment: employees learn expected behaviour, acquire work-relevant knowledge, and build relationships [1], [2]. Social exchange offers a complementary interpretation of training and supervision as signals of investment and support. Employees may respond to these experiences with stronger attachment. The three-component commitment model distinguishes affective attachment, perceived costs of leaving, and obligation to remain [4]. These perspectives guide interpretation, but commitment components and exchange mechanisms were not separately measured or tested as mediators in this study.

Training and development cover the adequacy of orientation, preparation for correctional work, confidence, and subsequent development opportunities. Role clarity concerns responsibilities, expectations, reporting lines, and understanding of contribution to project objectives. Organisational socialisation covers culture, inclusion, belonging, peer relationships, and familiarity with correctional work practices. Supervisor support includes accessibility, guidance, feedback, assistance with early challenges, and encouragement. These dimensions may overlap because supervisors deliver training, explain roles, and facilitate introductions.

Research on support during the first 90 days of employment underlines the importance of interpersonal experiences during newcomer socialisation [5]. Costa and Rodrigues [6] also examined interpersonal connections and engagement as sequential links between onboarding and talent retention. These studies provide reasons to consider both learning and relational support, while avoiding an assumption that their mechanisms automatically apply to the Rwandan correctional NGO setting.

Four null hypotheses were tested in the combined regression: H₀₁, training and development has no adjusted association with retention scores; H₀₂, role clarity has no adjusted association; H₀₃, organisational socialisation has no adjusted association; and H₀₄, supervisor support has no adjusted association. Decisions used a two-sided significance level of 0.05. The use of adjusted associations reflects the observational design and distinguishes each dimension's coefficient from its bivariate relationship.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design and participants

A descriptive and correlational cross-sectional design was implemented within a convergent mixed-methods approach. The target employee population comprised 110 eligible employees and HR-related personnel directly involved in correctional-facility projects in the three organisations. All were approached through a census attempt. Ninety-nine complete questionnaires were retained, giving a response rate of 90.0%. Separately, 11 HR managers, directors, programme managers, supervisors, and related managerial personnel were purposively selected for their involvement in onboarding and employee support; all completed interviews. The data are reported as 2026 primary data. The three organisations were selected study settings rather than a probability sample of all Rwandan NGOs.

Instruments and measurement

The employee questionnaire contained 28 statements scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each onboarding dimension contained six items; the retention measure contained four. Respondent-level composite scores were calculated as arithmetic item means. The retention items addressed intention to continue working, satisfaction with the employment decision, absence of near-term intention to leave, and willingness to recommend the organisation. The composite therefore captures a broader favourable employment orientation as well as intention to stay. It does not measure actual turnover or future tenure.

Items were reviewed for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives and operational definitions before administration. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. Interview data were collected through ten open-ended questions covering induction, role communication, integration, supervision, retention mechanisms, and improvements. The interviews supplied managerial perspectives on the processes represented by the questionnaire.

Analysis and diagnostic procedures

Complete questionnaires were checked for consistency; no item responses were missing in the retained survey records. Descriptive statistics summarised participant characteristics and construct scores. Pearson correlations assessed bivariate relationships, followed by ordinary least squares regression of retention on the four onboarding composites. Excel formulas were used for the quantitative calculations described in the study. The model was $ER_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1TD_i + \beta_2RC_i + \beta_3OS_i + \beta_4SS_i + \epsilon_i$, where ER denotes retention, TD training and development, RC role clarity, OS organisational socialisation, and SS supervisor support.

Diagnostic results indicated unequal residual variance (Breusch–Pagan $p = 0.010$) and a non-normal residual distribution (Shapiro–Wilk $p < 0.001$). Coefficient tests and confidence intervals therefore used heteroscedasticity-consistent HC3 standard errors, consistent with methodological guidance on robust regression inference [7]. Variance inflation factors ranged from 1.66 to 3.90 and tolerances from 0.257 to 0.603. These values did not exceed the study's screening thresholds, but substantial predictor overlap remained relevant to interpretation. The reported Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.345; this alone does not establish independence across employees within the same NGO. HC3 addresses heteroscedasticity, not organisation-level clustering.

Interview responses were analysed through familiarisation, initial coding, code comparison, theme development, review, and interpretation, following the general thematic-analysis sequence described by Braun and Clarke [8]. Anonymous identifiers KI1–KI11 were used. Thematic frequencies describe mentions within the 11 interviews; they are not estimates of prevalence among all employees. Quantitative and qualitative findings were compared for convergence and complementary explanations. No formal mediation analysis was conducted.

Ethical safeguards

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed of the academic purpose, confidentiality arrangements, and right to withdraw. Permission was obtained from participating organisations. Personal identifiers were excluded from analysis, quotations were anonymised, and operationally sensitive correctional information was protected.

IV. RESULTS

Participant profile and construct scores

Among the 99 employee respondents, 61 were men (61.6%) and 38 women (38.4%). Most were aged 36–45 years (59.6%), and 55.6% held a bachelor's degree. Field officers accounted for 34.3% and programme officers for 30.3%; psychologists, social workers, and other positions made up the remainder. Only 3.0% had less than one year of service. Accordingly, the survey mainly reflects established employees' retrospective onboarding experiences rather than a cohort of recent recruits. Eleven invited employees did not provide complete questionnaires, and their views remain unknown.

TABLE I: CONSTRUCT DESCRIPTIVES AND INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach α
Training and development	6	4.552	0.627	0.931
Role clarity	6	4.783	0.304	0.802
Organisational socialisation	6	4.768	0.314	0.719
Supervisor support	6	4.722	0.453	0.904
Employee retention	4	4.758	0.392	0.790

Source: Employee survey, 2026.

All construct means exceeded 4.5 on the five-point scale (Table I). Role clarity had the highest mean, while training and development had the lowest onboarding mean and greatest dispersion. The item on further training and skill development scored 4.455 (SD = 0.836), making development access a relative improvement opportunity. The retention mean was 4.758 and its median was 5.000. These high scores reflect favourable reported perceptions, with considerable ceiling concentration

that limits differentiation between respondents. Alpha values ranged from 0.719 to 0.931; internal consistency does not by itself establish that the constructs are distinct.

A. Bivariate relationships

TABLE II: PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX

Variable	TD	RC	OS	SS	ER
Training and development (TD)	1.000				
Role clarity (RC)	0.427	1.000			
Organisational socialisation (OS)	0.671	0.629	1.000		
Supervisor support (SS)	0.749	0.528	0.819	1.000	
Employee retention (ER)	0.692	0.474	0.616	0.699	1.000

Source: Employee survey, 2026.

All four onboarding dimensions correlated positively with retention scores (all $p < 0.001$). Supervisor support had the largest correlation ($r = 0.699$), closely followed by training and development ($r = 0.692$). Socialisation correlated at 0.616 and role clarity at 0.474. The strongest predictor intercorrelation was between socialisation and supervisor support ($r = 0.819$), indicating that favourable supervisory experiences and perceived integration were closely connected. Correlations alone do not distinguish their separate adjusted associations.

B. Combined regression and hypothesis decisions

The four-predictor model had $R^2 = 0.565$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.547$, and a standard error of estimate of 0.264. The conventional model test was $F(4,94) = 30.56$, $p < 0.001$, and the reported robust Wald F was 14.14, $p < 0.001$. Thus, the model accounted for 56.5% of observed variation in the survey retention composite. This percentage does not represent the proportion of actual turnover prevented by onboarding.

TABLE III: MULTIPLE REGRESSION WITH HC3 ROBUST INFERENCE

Predictor	B	Robust SE	β	p	95% robust CI
Training and development	0.235	0.088	0.376	0.009	0.060 to 0.410
Role clarity	0.170	0.200	0.132	0.395	-0.226 to 0.567
Organisational socialisation	-0.018	0.198	-0.015	0.927	-0.411 to 0.375
Supervisor support	0.311	0.146	0.360	0.036	0.021 to 0.601
Constant	1.490	0.587	—	0.013	0.325 to 2.656

Source: Employee survey, 2026.

Training and development and supervisor support retained significant positive coefficients (Table III). Holding the other dimensions constant, a one-point difference in training was associated with a 0.235-point difference in retention scores, and a one-point difference in supervisor support with a 0.311-point difference. The standardised coefficients were 0.376 and 0.360, respectively. Their small difference should not be treated as evidence that one is definitively more important; no test of the coefficient difference was reported.

Role clarity ($p = 0.395$) and socialisation ($p = 0.927$) did not show statistically significant adjusted coefficients. Their confidence intervals included zero. The small negative socialisation coefficient is not evidence that integration harms retention. H_{01} and H_{04} were rejected, while H_{02} and H_{03} were not rejected. These decisions concern unique conditional associations in this model and do not establish the absence of value in clear roles or social relationships. The source analysis also identified valid high-leverage observations, making sensitivity assessment particularly relevant to the supervisor-support estimate.

C. Interview themes and mixed-methods interpretation

The 11 informants included three HR managers, three programme managers, one director, and four other managerial or supervisory personnel. All described formal induction and the importance of role clarity, social integration, and supervisors. Seven specifically mentioned preparation for correctional-facility requirements. Their accounts linked training to readiness and confidence, and supervision to guidance, feedback, reassurance, and resolution of early difficulties.

TABLE IV: INTERVIEW THEMES AND THEIR RELATION TO SURVEY FINDINGS

Dimension	Interview evidence	Relation to survey results
Training and development	Orientation and practical preparation were linked to confidence and adjustment.	Converges with the positive adjusted training coefficient.
Role clarity	Job descriptions, reporting lines, and expectations were described as reducing uncertainty.	Supports perceived importance despite a non-significant adjusted coefficient.
Organisational socialisation	Introductions, teamwork, values, and belonging were described as supporting integration.	Provides context for the positive correlation and overlap with supervision.
Supervisor support	Supervisors provided continuing guidance, feedback, and assistance.	Converges with the positive adjusted supervision coefficient.

Source: Employee survey and key-informant interviews, 2026.

Informants recommended support beyond initial induction: seven mentioned regular follow-up or check-ins, five mentoring or peer support, two structured feedback, and two continuing training. These are overlapping mention counts, not mutually exclusive categories. The interviews provide plausible explanations for the statistical patterns, but managerial agreement cannot establish causality or demonstrate that role clarity and socialisation operate through training and supervisors. That proposed pathway would require direct testing.

V. DISCUSSION

The main finding is that training and development and supervisor support remained associated with stronger retention intentions after accounting for the other measured dimensions. Training may support willingness to stay by helping employees feel prepared for practical and institutional demands. Supervisors may sustain adjustment through accessible advice, feedback, and early problem resolution. These interpretations are consistent with newcomer-adjustment research [1] and research on early interpersonal support [5], while the present design does not establish either mechanism causally.

The findings also show why high descriptive scores should be separated from unique regression contributions. Role clarity was the highest-rated construct, yet its coefficient was not statistically significant after adjustment. Socialisation was highly rated and correlated positively with retention, but closely overlapped with supervisor support. Shared variance and restricted score variation offer plausible explanations. Non-significance therefore supports a cautious statement about the model's ability to distinguish contributions, rather than a conclusion that these practices are unnecessary.

Recent onboarding research places attention on well-being, interpersonal connections, and engagement [3], [6]. The interviews in this study similarly described belonging, confidence, and continuing assistance. However, those outcomes were not measured as separate mediators here. The article contributes evidence of associations in a specialised NGO setting and identifies mechanisms for future study; it does not confirm the causal pathways reported or proposed elsewhere.

For management, the evidence favours improving the delivery of onboarding across the early employment period. A practical pathway would combine orientation with correctional-context preparation, an accountable supervisor, role clarification, and scheduled 30-, 60-, and 90-day conversations. Peer mentoring can complement supervisor support. These are recommendations derived from the findings and informant accounts, not interventions whose effectiveness was evaluated in this study. Implementation should be assessed using both employee feedback and recorded six- and twelve-month employment outcomes.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations affect interpretation. Cross-sectional measurement prevents establishing temporal precedence and permits reverse explanations: employees who intend to stay may rate onboarding more favourably. The outcome is a self-reported composite, not recorded retention. Common-source measurement, social desirability, and high ceiling concentration may influence the results. Some onboarding items explicitly ask whether a practice influenced staying, creating content overlap with the dependent measure that could strengthen observed correlations. Reliability coefficients do not resolve this measurement concern.

The survey largely represents current, longer-serving staff and excludes former employees; survivor selection may produce favourable accounts. The 11 non-responding employees could also differ from respondents. Employees were nested within only three organisations, and the reported HC3 inference does not account for NGO-level clustering. The interviews

represent managerial perspectives, which may underrepresent employee criticism. Finally, the model excludes pay, contract security, workload, career prospects, and other possible retention determinants. Findings should therefore be generalised cautiously beyond similar settings.

Future research should follow new employees over time and link onboarding assessments to HR records of actual departures. A larger organisational sample would permit examination of NGO-level variation and clustering. Refining predictor items to avoid direct references to retention would improve construct separation, while factor analysis could assess measurement validity. Interviews with departing staff and employees reporting poorer onboarding could reveal experiences missed by the current survey. Longitudinal designs could then test whether adjustment, well-being, or belonging mediates later retention.

VI. CONCLUSION

Strategic HR onboarding was positively associated with self-reported employee retention in three NGOs implementing projects within correctional facilities in Rwanda. All four dimensions had positive bivariate relationships with retention scores, but training and development and supervisor support were the dimensions with statistically significant adjusted coefficients. The model explained 56.5% of variation in the measured retention composite. Role clarity and socialisation remained strongly valued in the interviews, although their separate contributions could not be distinguished in the combined model.

The findings support a continuing onboarding approach that equips employees for correctional work and maintains practical supervisory assistance beyond entry. NGOs can translate this into structured preparation, clear responsibilities, peer integration, and regular early-employment check-ins. The study's mixed-methods contribution lies in connecting employee ratings with managerial accounts of how onboarding is delivered in this setting. Its conclusions remain bounded by cross-sectional self-report measurement, overlapping constructs, favourable response concentration, and coverage of only three organisations. Accordingly, the study supports prioritising and evaluating training and supervisory support; it does not demonstrate that these practices cause lower turnover. Verification through prospective employee follow-up and actual employment records is the next step.

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