



SHORT PAPER

Continuous Improvement in Action: Kaizen-Inspired Onboarding for Healthcare Employees

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ABSTRACT

Kaizen is a Japanese word which translates to change or improvement, and it is the cornerstone of several process improvement systems. In the learning and development (L&D) space, we are always seeking ways to improve and become more efficient and effective. This case study updates a previous one from two years ago. Through the kaizen of our onboarding and training program, we have seen an increase in employee longevity after completing our five-day new hire onboarding program. This improved program integrated a flipped classroom design and inclusion of multiple learning management system (LMS)-based courses, among other changes. We also gave managers choices for their new employees' onboarding program. In addition to double the number of employees being hired and onboarded, we also saw an increase of 6 percent in employees staying beyond the 180-day mark. We offer some suggestions to help streamline the onboarding process even further.

KEYWORDS

onboarding, medical records, kaizen, healthcare

1 INTRODUCTION

A hallmark of a healthy organization is the presence of *kaizen*. Translated from Japanese to mean “good change” or “continuous improvement”, this term also describes a way for organizations and teams to explore ways to reduce waste [1]. Organizations strive to make small, strategic changes to be better and more efficient.

In the learning and development (L&D) space, we also try to utilize kaizen principles to identify and remove waste. This may mean we swap out 2 hours of traditional teaching with a 30-minute video, or we may restructure how new associates experience their first day. Whatever the method, L&D professionals can make changes to improve.

In a previous case study [2], we reviewed how we had made changes to improve the experience of new healthcare workers. Specifically, we instituted 30-60-90 day check-ins with new employees. These check-ins appeared to provide greater support

Challacombe, D. J., Wilkinson, A., Gaeger, C. (2026). Continuous Improvement in Action: Kaizen-Inspired Onboarding for Healthcare Employees. *International Journal of Advanced Corporate Learning (iJAC)*, 19(2), pp. 15–21. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijac.v19i2.58583>

Article submitted 2025-09-09. Revision uploaded 2026-01-27. Final acceptance 2026-03-06.

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for the employees, which, in turn, reportedly increased productivity and accuracy in their work. The present case study is an extension of the work from 2022, documented in the previous case study.

1.1 Health information as a business associate

As background, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 and subsequent Privacy and Security Acts outlined the roles of professionals in the health information space [3], [4], [5]. Specifically, HIPAA denotes two types of professionals: Covered entities and business associates. The former are basically providers or entities that provide healthcare services, like health plans, health care providers, and health care clearinghouses [5]. The latter, business associates, describes those professionals who support covered entities. Business associates are contracted with covered entities to complete certain tasks. For example, a covered entity may outsource their confidential waste disposal to a company who specializes in the necessary steps to complete in order to satiate HIPAA requirements.

In this case study, the organization is a business associate. It provides multiple different specialized services to support the covered entities it has as clients. Among the specialized services are release of information (ROI) [2], data archiving, value-based care, and care coordination solutions.

The Privacy Rule and several other subsequent regulations have further defined the relationship between a covered entity and a business associate. Business associates are now subject to the same penalties as a covered entity would be if the regulations of HIPAA are not followed. This often means that business associate employees are held to a higher standard, as they must follow HIPAA and other regulations as well as ensure they are following any covered entity-specific guidelines.

1.2 The 2023 onboarding process

Onboarding is integral to employee success [6], [7]. It is different than just orientation, where the new employee is presented with logins, the employee handbook, and benefits information [6]. Onboarding is a process that involves the new employee's manager working in collaboration with the company's L&D team to ensure any necessary training is provided.

Prior to 2024, the onboarding process for the case study company was structured as an all or nothing approach for the first week. By default, all new employees were required to complete the first five-day onboarding training. This training consisted of synchronous instructor-led training regarding HIPAA, ROI concepts, and the propriety systems utilized for the position. From the new hires in 2023, only a handful of them did not complete the full week, usually due to a highly specialized position like in information technology (IT) or finance.

In December 2023, the authors, who are the primary facilitators of onboarding for this case study company, met in Orlando, Florida, to brainstorm a different approach to onboarding for 2024.

1.3 The 2024 onboarding process

After the December 2023 brainstorming meeting, we instituted several new changes for onboarding in the future. Specifically, we changed the following:

- Develop four different onboarding plans that hiring managers could choose for their new employees;
- Move all compliance-related training into the same learning management system (LMS) (vs. using two different LMSs);
- Create and integrate into Onboarding LMS-based courses that reinforce the material;
- Conduct 30-, 60-, 90-day surveys vs. assessments; and,
- Ensure feedback from the L&D team is communicated to hiring managers.

We believed that these changes would, as kaizen suggests, improve the onboarding for new employees. We also believed these changes would reduce waste such as the time spent with new employees who did not need the full training. By condensing our LMS platforms into one, we were able to remove about two hours of planning prior to the new employee start (as that was what was required by the previous LMS to create new users).

1.4 Using LMS courses for flipped desk approach

A flipped classroom is where students first review training materials prior to entering the classroom [8], [9]. The training materials the students review prior are often videos or engaging material. Then, when the instructor begins the lesson, the students can focus on having their questions answered. This approach has started to be used in corporate training [8] and also in healthcare education specifically with nursing students [9].

One of the changes with the 2024 Onboarding approach was the integration of LMS courses. We developed multiple courses to reinforce the materials. Many of these LMS courses were completed prior to the instructor-based synchronous lesson.

Our flipped desk approach accomplished several training successes. First, it reduced the time necessary for instructors to go over basic concepts. The students would already have reviewed the material prior to the lesson. Second, it created a culture of learning. Students started asking specific, often very nuanced questions about the processes. They had been given time to review the material leading up to the lesson, which allowed them to think creatively about the material. Finally, it gave us the ability to assign these courses to employees who were struggling following their first-week onboarding. This gave us flexibility to provide clear, consistent education at any time.

1.5 The current case review

The current case review examines the above process from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2024.

2 METHOD

2.1 Participants

Between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2023, there were 219 new employees hired, and between January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2024, there were 515 new employees hired. Of the total of 734 employees hired in those two years, 543 employees were hired for remote positions and 191 were hired for on-site or in-office positions. As of August 2025, 342 employees were still employed. For this study, we examined all the data from any employee who participated in one of our onboarding classes.

2.2 Materials

Using Articulate Rise and Storyline, we developed 14 courses designed to provide asynchronous learning on key ROI concepts. Included with these courses were four on the proprietary systems used for ROI, four on basic ROI concepts, three on client-specific documentation, one on customer service, and one on subpoenas and court orders. We also had a ROI assessment that consisted of 20 questions. A version of this assessment has been used for the past four years.

Additionally, we became more strategic in communicating with hiring managers. We would send out weekly emails to the hiring managers and carbon copy their direct managers (see Figure 1). These emails would provide detailed instructions on their expectations. These emails were especially helpful if a hiring manager was new or did not onboard many employees regularly.

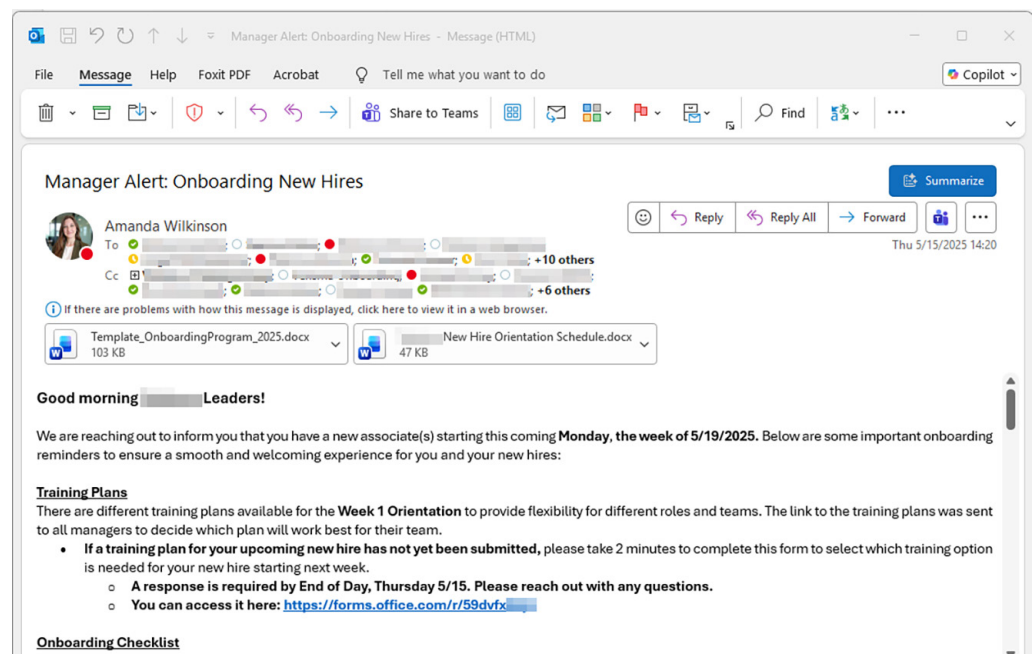


Fig. 1. Example email sent to hiring managers the Wednesday prior to the new employee start date

2.3 Institutional review board

The company’s VP of Human Resources and several executive leaders were consulted about the change in the onboarding process. The change was made solely for business purposes. We did not need to seek IRB approval since this type of case study would be considered an archival research project. However, the primary author did consult with the IRB manager for Fort Hays State University to verify this would be considered archival research.

3 RESULTS

We compared the length of employment (LOE) for employees in 2023 vs. 2024 against the number of days in training they participated in. In Table 1, we show a simple comparison between all employees who onboarded in 2023 vs. 2024. While there were over twice as many employees who onboarded in 2024 compared to the year previous, there was a negligible difference in LOE between the two years.

Table 1. Employment length (LOE) for all employees (EEs) hired in 2023 vs. 2024

	2023		2024	
	# of EEs	Percent	# of EEs	Percent
LOE < 90 days	46	21%	105	20%
90 days < LOE < 180 days	25	11%	55	11%
LOE > 180 days	148	68%	355	69%
Total	219		515	

When we examined employees who completed less than the full five days of onboarding in 2023 vs. 2024, we see that 100% of those seven employees who onboarded less than five days in 2023 had an LOE greater than 180 days (see Table 2). As stated previously, these seven employees were hired for specific roles like IT or finance. The LOE for employees in 2024 was less, but there were over 200 more employees who completed less than 7 days of training in 2024.

Table 2. Employment length (LOE) for EEs hired in 2023 vs. 2024 who onboarded less than 5 days

	2023		2024	
	# of EEs	Percent	# of EEs	Percent
LOE < 90 days	0	0%	55	24%
90 days < LOE < 180 days	0	0%	26	11%
LOE > 180 days	7	100%	153	65%
Total	7		234	

Finally, when we compared the number of employees who completed the full five days of training in 2023 against those in 2024, we see a higher LOE for those who completed the 2024 version of the training (see Table 3). In fact, 72% of employees in 2024 had LOEs greater than 180 days.

Table 3. Employment length (LOE) for EEs hired in 2023 vs. 2024 who onboarded the full 5 days

	2023		2024	
	# of EEs	Percent	# of EEs	Percent
LOE < 90 days	46	22%	50	18%
90 days < LOE < 180 days	25	12%	29	10%
LOE > 180 days	141	66%	202	72%
Total	212		281	

We also conducted correlations to examine the relationship between the training days, training year, and the current status (e.g., their LOE). We found a highly significant negative relationship between training year and training days, $r(732) = -.41, p < .001$. This would make sense as we provided more training day options in 2024 than were available in 2023.

As discussed above, we require all new employees in ROI to complete an assessment. Due to a change in our LMS, we have partial data for both 2023 and 2024 (see Table 4). This data shows that the those who completed the assessment in 2024 scored better than those who had completed the assessment in 2023.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of ROI assessment scores for 2023 vs. 2024.

	2023	2024
Number	101	171
Average	66.22	87.89
Standard Deviation	40.59	5.96

4 DISCUSSION

The current case study examines a medical records company’s onboarding program as it changed from 2023 to 2024. The results indicate not only a significant increase in the number of employees hired in 2024 vs. the year previous, but also a change in the number of employees who stayed beyond the 180-day mark for those who completed the updated 5-day onboarding program.

The team responsible for onboarding is a lean, three-person team. While the manager does help with some of the onboarding processes, the two trainers carry the bulk of the work. Keeping this in mind, the three trainers strategically planned for 2024 to make changes to the program, including the addition of 14 LMS-based courses and a fully asynchronous offering. This provided the hiring managers with choices so they could customize the onboarding based on both the new employees’ and businesses’ needs.

In addition to these changes, the corporate trainers also instituted a flipped classroom environment for much of the training. That is, the key concepts are introduced in an LMS course taken prior to the traditional lesson, and then the trainers elaborate on the key concepts. This allows both those new and those veterans of the medical records field to learn in a fashion congruent with their knowledge set. It also allows for questions to be formulated during the initial pre-work.

In addition to the LMS course and the flipped classroom design, the case study highlighted the effectiveness of providing choices for managers and conducting 30-60-90-day check-ins with new associates. All of this helped to not only reduce the administrative burden on the lean training team but also increased the team’s effectiveness.

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