



THE
PRESSURE
INSTITUTE

INSTITUTE INSIGHT BRIEF

THE FIRST 90 DAYS UNDER PRESSURE

What employees and organizations reveal while learning to work together

**The first 90 days do not only tell us whether an
employee can do the job.
They also reveal how the environment works.**

For employers, workforce organizations, managers, coaches, and people leaders

THE CENTRAL IDEA

The employee is not the only one being evaluated

The first 90 days of a new job are often treated as a period of evaluation. Can the employee do the work? Are they learning quickly enough? Can they meet expectations? Will they fit the environment? Those are reasonable questions, but at The Pressure Institute, we believe the first 90 days reveal something larger.

While the organization is evaluating the employee, the employee is also experiencing the organization as it actually operates, not simply the organization described during the interview. The employee begins learning how decisions are made, how managers respond when something goes wrong, whether asking for help is welcomed, whether expectations remain consistent, and whether the workload they were told about resembles the workload they are now experiencing. This makes the first 90 days more than an onboarding period. It becomes an observation period.

The first 90 days are a two-way observation period.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS BEING REVEALED TOO

People learn the unwritten organization

During the first few weeks, a new employee is processing a great deal at once, from learning new systems and personalities to understanding expectations, relationships, and the unwritten rules that often matter just as much as the written ones. While the organization is watching the employee, the employee is also watching the environment and beginning to understand how that environment actually operates.

They are learning what happens when someone makes a mistake, what happens when expectations are unclear, what happens when help is needed, and what happens when pressure begins to increase. Those experiences can teach the employee far more about the organization than a handbook ever could. By the end of the first month, the employee is no longer learning only what the organization says. They are learning how the organization works.

A mistake

How is it handled?

Unclear expectations

Who makes them understandable?

A request for help

Is it welcomed?

Rising pressure

What changes first?

BEHAVIOR ACROSS TIME

Somewhere between day one and day ninety, behavior begins to shift

Day one does not tell us very much because a new employee is still reading the room, learning the work, and trying to understand expectations. By day 30, some of the uncertainty has started to decrease. By day 60, the employee has usually learned things that were never included in onboarding, including how managers respond when something goes wrong, whether people help one another, whether questions are welcomed, and which expectations are consistent and which ones seem to move.



By day 90, the employee is no longer simply learning the job. They have been learning how to function inside the environment, and that is when changes in behavior may become easier to see. The employee who asked questions freely during the first few weeks may become quieter, while someone who entered the organization cautiously may begin speaking up more often. Another employee who volunteered for everything in the beginning may start pulling back once the expectations, workload, and realities of the environment become more familiar.

The behavior is visible. The reason behind it may not be.

READING CHANGE IN CONTEXT

What Changed?

This is one of the questions we believe organizations should ask more often. If an employee begins the job asking questions and stops asking by day 45, the change matters. Perhaps they have learned the job, or perhaps they have learned that asking questions is not received well.

If an employee takes on every extra assignment, stays late, helps coworkers, and rarely says no, leadership may see strong initiative. It may be, but someone can be highly responsible and increasingly pressure saturated at the same time. This is why the better question is not simply what the behavior looks like, but what changed around this person and how they may be responding to it.

	WHAT CONTEXT MAY ADD
Fewer questions	The job may be clearer, or questions may no longer feel welcome.
Constant volunteering	Strong initiative may coexist with increasing pressure saturation.
Pulling back	The workload and expectations may now be better understood.
Speaking up more	The environment may be supporting confidence and adaptation.

Visible behavior does not always explain what produced it, which is why context matters.

THE INSTITUTE'S PRESSURE LENS

Pressure changes the question

At The Pressure Institute, we study a simple idea:

Pressure does not create behavior; it reveals it.

The first 90 days place people inside a concentrated period of uncertainty, learning, feedback, relationship development, expectation, and adaptation. People do not respond to those conditions the same way. One person may become more vocal while another becomes quieter. One person may move faster while another slows down. Someone may ask for help while someone else tries to manage everything alone.

The purpose is not to decide that one response is good and another is bad. The purpose is to understand what the response may be revealing about the person, the environment, and the interaction between the two.

MORE VOCAL

A response

QUIETER

A response

FASTER

A response

SLOWER

A response

A TWO-WAY REVIEW

The organization should be examined too

Organizations have well-developed systems for evaluating employees, including performance expectations, attendance standards, coaching, probationary periods, and corrective action. But the first 90 days should also create an opportunity for the organization to examine itself.

- 1 Was the onboarding process consistent?
- 2 Were expectations understandable?
- 3 Was support available when needed?
- 4 Did the actual role resemble the role that was described?
- 5 Did the manager have the time and capacity to support someone who was still learning?

If one employee struggles, the problem may belong to the individual. If several employees begin struggling at the same point, the organization may be looking at something larger. That is where the environment becomes part of the conversation.

WHAT DAY NINETY CAN TEACH US

Day ninety should give us more than a decision

At the end of 90 days, organizations often want an answer about whether the employee worked out. That decision matters, but the first 90 days can tell us much more.

What changed in the employee's behavior?

How did they respond to feedback?

When did they begin asking for help, and when did they stop?

What conditions appeared to support adaptation, and what conditions appeared to interfere with it?

The organization should then turn those same questions toward itself. What did these 90 days reveal about our communication, onboarding, managers, expectations, and operating environment?

The first 90 days do not only tell us whether an employee can do the job. They give us an opportunity to see what happens as that person begins working inside a new environment.

THE CLOSING QUESTION

What did the first 90 days reveal?

And maybe that leaves us with a different question:

What have these first 90 days revealed about the employee, and what have they revealed about the environment around them?

By day 90, we have had an opportunity to learn from both.

The real question is whether we noticed.



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