



2023

# Onboarding

Category Guide

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**Sponsors:**



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# INTRODUCTION:

## The evolution of onboarding from pre-hire to full life cycle.

On average, people hold more than ten different jobs in their lifetime<sup>1</sup> - in addition to internal moves they may make within a single organization. That is a lot of time during your career onboarding - filling out compliance forms, learning about a new company, department, and role, and getting acclimated.

Each move becomes a pivotal time for long-term engagement and retention for organizations and employees. Do they feel supported, wanted, safe, valued, or seen? Are you able to help them adjust to their new experience? Will they clearly understand who and what you do before being expected to deliver?

The way a company guides and supports employees through each of these moves falls under the umbrella of Onboarding.

What many of us experienced early in our careers as "new hire orientation" has evolved significantly over the past decade into what we now call Onboarding. More than just a name change, Onboarding developed into a broader philosophy of supporting new employees through the transition to a new company - social connections, culture assimilation, and more.

This increased focus on new hires has produced valuable business research showing the value of these programs. As retention and internal mobility are becoming major focus areas for companies, broader strategies are taking root, ensuring employees are prepared for other transitions at work, not just initially as new hires.

Today, Onboarding includes programs for preboarding & new hires, as well as full employee lifecycle experiences such as crossboarding during internal transitions, offboarding exiting employees, and reboarding previous employees coming back from leave or rejoining the organization.

## KEY INSIGHTS.

01

While compliance and administrative requirements remain the "must-do" of Onboarding, the modern approach to Onboarding has broadened to include socialization, culturalization, training, retention, and Day 1 readiness.

02

Onboarding consists of the transitions throughout the employee lifecycle: preboarding & new hire, crossboarding, offboarding, and reboarding.

03

Companies' investment in onboarding programs leads to higher retention, engagement, and productivity.

04

Onboarding and crossboarding are top areas of purchase for companies this year.

05

The onboarding technology market is moving to solutions that offer easy compliance completion and connections through socialization and culturalization.

# PART 1: ONBOARDING TODAY



While most companies have some onboarding program, very few employees strongly agree that their organization does a great job onboarding new employees<sup>2</sup>. A significant factor is the limited scope that many companies are approaching Onboarding, like orientation - but with technology.

**Onboarding done well isn't about the technology - it's about the relationship built between the person and the company.**

Modern Onboarding aims to create an individualized, consistent experience that enables employees to be supported in preparation for and throughout the transition. This is the time in an employee's experience to affirm their decision to make the change - whether it be to join the organization, assume a new role, or move to a different company.

Understanding the various types of Onboarding and the six components of Onboarding today are important during process updates or total redesigns.

## Types of Onboarding.

Holistic Onboarding impacts every aspect of the employee experience. While the first few days an employee is at an organization may involve the most paperwork, other transitions may take more adjustment in connecting with co-workers or acclimating to performance expectations. Each transition brings challenges and benefits from a thoughtful onboarding program to provide guidance and support.

Employees today expect more than tasks in Onboarding; they expect an experience that defines and describes what it is like to be an employee at an organization or department and prepares them to start being productive. As more research has come out around the impact of employee experience on engagement and retention in the past few years, organizations of all sizes have shifted focus to building better employee experiences starting from day 1. An engaging and effective onboarding experience benefits both companies and employees during the various types of transitions.

## Preboarding & New Hires

Preboarding and New Hire programs are used for employees new to the organization. This type of Onboarding confirms the incoming employee's decision to join the organization and prepares them for success in their first few days, weeks, and months.

Onboarding was initially created for this time in the employee lifecycle, so preboarding and new hire usually is the most developed onboarding program. It has the most activities - 54 on average<sup>3</sup> - and can be the longest - lasting up to 12 months after hire. New employees who feel supported and prepared stay at their organization longer. 70% of employees are more likely to stay at their organization for at least three years when they've had a great onboarding experience<sup>4</sup>.

### Preboarding & New Hire Goals

- Connect how the new employee's role supports the organization's mission, vision, and values - this plays a key role in engagement and retention.
- Establish the performance expectations for the first day, week, and month - this supports quicker productivity.
- Ensure equipment and access is ready on Day 1 - New hires are excited to get started, so make sure the logistics are ready when they are.

## Crossboarding

Crossboarding programs are used for an exiting workforce that is moving to a different role within the organization. While that is often a promotion, today, we are seeing an increase in internal mobility for a new worksite location, redeployment to a new position due to a restructure or downsizing, and lateral moves to expand skills or focus on an area they are more interested in. While these employees are already familiar with the company culture, they are entering new roles, expectations, and relationships. They need to connect with their new co-workers and team and adjust to the new work they will be doing.

Almost 9% of employees are promoted yearly, and over 17% are promoted to a manager role<sup>5</sup>. Many will receive little to no training for this new role. While most of these changes include new responsibilities, few companies fully enable these employees to succeed in the transition - supporting both the social and tactical impact of the position change.

Crossboarding addresses these situations and provides a supportive plan to prepare the employee and ease the changes. Less than one-third of leaders<sup>6</sup> feel their organization is successfully developing and cultivating "ready now" leaders, leaving many of those who are promoted unprepared.

The crossboarding program should focus more on skills/training, team socialization, role function, and confidence-building to bridge the gap between these employees' previous and new work. The level of an employee should not be a factor, 3:4 of executives consider themselves unprepared for a position because of inadequate onboarding processes<sup>7</sup>.

### Crossboarding Goals

- The current and future managers should coordinate the transition timing and work handoff both for the employee in transition and the team they are leaving/joining.
- Connect the employee to peers across the organization that will be part of the new function, especially those they may not have interacted with in their previous role.
- Provide the right levels of training and support for the new role based on a personalized experience

## Offboarding

Offboarding programs are designed for employees leaving the organization, temporarily or permanently. When done right, this type of Onboarding allows a smooth continuation of work and productivity while continuing the brand promise and positive experience for the worker - even in not-so-positive situations. While preboarding and new hire programs welcome new employees and set them up for success, offboarding bids them farewell and prepares the company for after they leave.

Offboarding should be equally as intentional as the new hire experience for both the compliance and remaining worker impact of the situation. More than 40% of employees report increasing workloads due to employee turnover<sup>8</sup>. By making this a planned, organized process, you can minimize the impact on customers and other employees to make the transition as seamless as possible.

The offboarding process includes several administrative and compliance requirements, which can affect the company's bottom line if not done correctly. Removing employee access to systems and services has real security implications, yet many companies struggle to implement a process. One survey found that most companies cannot tell who has left the organization or if they still have access, while 20% of companies reported that failure to cut access to a former employee led to a data breach<sup>9</sup>.

Technology solutions allow your team to easily track, collect, and document system access, legal forms, technology returns, exit interviews, and other processes needed when someone leaves. Onboarding software is being leveraged to ensure exit processes are compliant and the onboarding experience is designed to end as smoothly as it began.

#### Offboarding Goals

- Collect feedback - Exiting employees can offer honest insights into the workplace if you allow them to be candid.
- Transfer project knowledge and work to remaining team members during this timeframe.
- If forms (severance, etc.) need to be completed, this is when and how to manage those to be completed efficiently.
- Update system access upon separation to ensure data and financial security.

# 20%

**of companies report data breaches after a former employee's access was not removed upon dismissal<sup>9</sup>.**



## Reboarding

Reboarding is used for former employees rejoining the organization permanently or temporarily. This could include former employees returning from leave or retirement, as well as alums. The purpose of reboarding is to help to return employees gain awareness of new or different projects or ways of working that have been put in place since they left.

For employees returning from a temporary leave, this process may focus on updates to policies and procedures that were launched, a new technology that has come about, a structured way to ease back into their prior workload and details of projects that started or continued, and reconnecting with co-workers or new hires that joined since they were away.

Companies should carefully plan a journey unique to the employee that considers their previous role and the timeline at which they have been away and incorporates training focused on products and service updates.

### Reboarding Goals:

- Technology, process, team, and other updates should be provided. Even if nothing has changed, a refresher will be helpful when they've been away from the workplace.
- Ensure compliance pieces, like I-9 re-verification, are required for returning employees, so be sure these are included. You may have in-house legal form updates that are needed as well.
- Focus on the socialization and culturalization aspect that is most important to them; they likely don't need all of the "new hire" process - so spend the time on what is important to them - recognizing their historical context.

### **Analyst Note:**

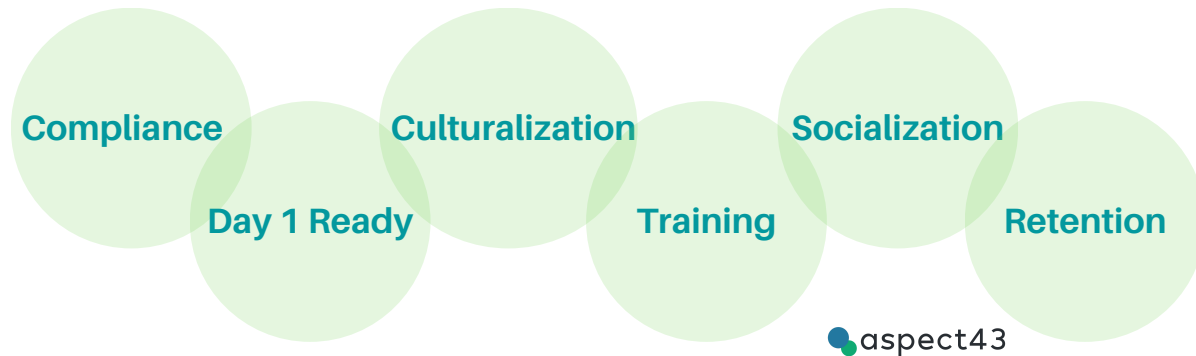
**The need for reboarding has increased in recent years. According to a recent study, 1 in 5 workers who resigned during the past two years have returned to their employer, and another 41% would consider it.<sup>10</sup>**

## Components of Modern Onboarding.

We have found six core areas in modern onboarding programs that should be addressed to support a positive outcome during each employee's transitions: Compliance, Day 1 Ready, Culturalization, Training, Socialization, and Retention.

Each of these stages has a direct impact on the business impact and ROI of a program and should be looked at as components vs. stages or steps. They are done in each type of onboarding to various degrees - but will exist in all solutions focused on employee experience, retention, and business value.

### Today's Onboarding Programs



### Administrative & Compliance

Compliance is the non-negotiable of any onboarding program, and it exists to protect both the worker and the business. The "must-do" of all onboarding programs includes new hire forms and processes such as tax forms, I-9, payroll set-up, notifications, policies, and regulatory training. While these check-the-box items are required, that doesn't mean they have to be tedious. Companies who do this well utilize technology to ensure the candidate experience is maintained in all aspects of the program.

While compliance requirements exist throughout an employee's experience, Onboarding includes a higher concentration than others. The average new hire is assigned 41 administrative/compliance tasks to complete<sup>11</sup>.

Compliance considerations as part of the onboarding process:

- Compliance guidelines are needed for your W2 employees and the contingent workforce - freelancers and consultants that may work with you.
- Where work is done also affects compliance requirements. As a more significant percentage of workers live across state lines from the main business site, smaller and smaller companies have to understand unique state and local regulations for each worker.
- Crossboarding employees may be changing work types that bring additional safety requirements or training.
- Offboarding often requires unemployment insurance notifications, benefit notices, and final pay specifications.

## **Day 1 Ready**

Day 1 ready is to ensure the company, department, and leader are prepared for the new hire on "day 1".

Many companies use some combination of emails, checklists, and excel spreadsheets, combined with an employee self-service case, to complete this. When you create a strategic process around all of the things that have to be planned and executed before a new hire starts - laptop, security logins, software access, business cards - even a desk to sit at - you reduce the costs, time, and risk of it not being completed.

When you factor in the engagement type of options like t-shirts, branded coffee mugs, or other personal touches to make them feel welcomed, the day one readiness is only expanded. You also make it easier on your internal teams and provide analytics and insights about where bottlenecks or issues are occurring to help improve processes.

## Culturalization

This is where Onboarding becomes more about the new hire in that role. It connects them to the business - who you are, how you do things differently, and why what you do matters. It helps them understand your company's story, mission, vision, goals, and what it is like to be a part of the team. There may be some shared language, history, or even brand colors you all wear on certain days. Culturalization is letting them "in" to things they may not have known as a consumer or just researching your company, making them feel part of something bigger.

Companies are doing this step in one-on-one and group sessions in person or through cohort training programs that feel very personalized to the participant and create a real sense of connection.

## Training

In nearly every role, there will be some level of training needed - a CEO will need to understand better the details of the customers they service, a salesperson will need to understand the product, and a waitress has to learn the menu and flow to the kitchen. Training during Onboarding is about getting that person up to speed and productivity as quickly as possible while supporting the employee experience and confirming their decision to work for you.

The training we see today as part of the onboarding process includes some of the core "hard" skills to do the job right but has had a much bigger focus on the soft skills. A particular focus for many companies has been on inclusion, customer success, and team dynamics. This is different than the sharing of the company's inclusion or customer focus - and really helps the individual test and develop their skills individually.

**Training during Onboarding is about getting that person up to speed and productivity as quickly as possible while supporting the employee experience and confirming their decision to work for you.**

## Socialization

Socialization is how well the individual feels they fit at a personal level. A recent survey by BetterUp found that nearly 75% of workers are not satisfied with their relationships at work<sup>12</sup>.

Employees need to feel personally connected with people at work and comfortable with their day-to-day - who is on my team, where is the closest grocery store, where do we go for lunch near work, etc. This includes that informal level of details and connection to their team and more formal programs like mentors or a pre-scheduled series of meetings with co-workers both in and outside your team over your first few months.

More recently, we are seeing hybrid approaches emerging - especially in organizations with a high number of remote workers - that creates cohort and group-guided conversations covering culturalization, some training, and this socialization process all in one over a series of months.

## Retention

An overall retention focus ensures you have a strategic approach to the other components, which all tie into your employee experience and retention strategies.

Modern onboarding programs run 4-12 months, with many organizations wrapping up around month 6. As part of this stage, ongoing feedback and conversations with the new hire ensure their needs are met, questions are addressed, and they feel individually valued.

A generic onboarding survey isn't ideal as a touchpoint for their day 3, 7, or even 14 check-ins when someone they know should be who reaches out (coordinator, recruiter, etc.) - but it may be OK at day 60, 90, and 120 for a soft check-in.

**75%**

**of workers are not satisfied  
with their relationships at  
work.**



## PART 2

# THE BUSINESS IMPACT OF ONBOARDING

Improving or starting an onboarding program - especially a holistically approached one - has a broad business impact and requires full business support. Doing onboarding well can be challenging, but not doing it well can be expensive. These programs directly impact your retention - with a two-fold increase in new hires looking for other opportunities immediately following a bad onboarding process<sup>13</sup>. In addition, fines and penalties due to compliance failures can cost a company \$1.1 million<sup>14</sup>.

More than 90% of companies agree a good onboarding experience has a crucial impact on the short-term retention of a new employee<sup>15</sup>, and more than half of all HR leaders believe it increases employee engagement<sup>16</sup>.

Additional research has shown strong onboarding programs increase new hire retention by 82% and improve productivity by 70%<sup>17</sup>. Businesses can see the fruits of these efforts reflected in revenue: 78% of organizations that invested in onboarding reported increases in revenue in the last fiscal year<sup>18</sup>.

However, there is a significant gap between employers, and employees' assessments of onboarding programs, with companies rating their onboarding experience significantly higher than employees' ratings<sup>19</sup> - Only 12% of employees<sup>20</sup> would strongly agree that their organization does a great job onboarding new employees

This blind spot could keep employers from self-correcting and cause them to miss out on the positive retention, engagement, and productivity that strong onboarding programs bring, especially around retention.

Our 2022 Insights at Work research found employee retention the top concern for companies. This is partially due to the multiple other areas of cost that are factored into looking at turnover - replacement cost, customer impact, productivity, employee impact on workers left behind, and the direct costs related to training that employee as a new hire. Most new employees don't reach full performance for 8-12 months<sup>21</sup>, yet one-third leave their job before that<sup>22</sup>. This means these quick turnover workers never reach peak productivity, plus the organization must bear the cost of replacing them.

A strong onboarding program addresses these concerns by saving time and money and retaining employees.

**1:5 companies are having  
issues with people leaving  
during the first 60 days of  
employment<sup>23</sup>**

## PART 3

# ONBOARDING TECHNOLOGY: MARKET & BUYING INSIGHTS



Onboarding solutions help companies support people through transitions in their career - new hire, crossboarding, offboarding and reboarding - by designing, delivering, and automating workflows to improve the experiences and outcomes. They also provide tracking, analytics, compliance, and workflows designed to support the business needs and impact as the individual moves through those transitions.

With the increased focus on remote work and employee experience, the popularity of onboarding tools has dramatically increased. Our 2022 research found that nearly half of all companies with over 500 employees planned to invest in onboarding or crossboarding technology this coming year.

Today's solutions include a mix of custom point solutions doing a specific part of the process (compliance, i-9 verification, WOTC, training, etc.), essential solutions to primarily automate forms and data collection with some engagement perks mixed in, and robust solutions that support all of the components we outline - either directly or through API/Channel partners.

The cost of these systems also fluctuates greatly, with some included in a full-suite HCM solution and others being part of the talent acquisition platform or a stand-alone solution. There was little correlation between cost and quality of the product during our research, so we strongly advise you to look at your particular needs and create a system that fulfills all your needs and can integrate seamlessly with other solutions.



The onboarding technology category was one of the slowest developed categories in HR Tech after coming out strong and ahead of the market.

After nearly a decade of little growth or progress since the first modern onboarding solution was introduced in 2007, we are starting to see a turn for the better.

We expect to see this trend of improvement continue category-wide if the standalone, full suite, and ATS platform players execute the roadmaps presented and the companies continue to demand solutions better than what was available a decade ago.

If we do not see growth in this space, it will be because the technologies missed the focus of where companies' needs are today.

**49%**  
**of companies with  
over 500 employees  
expect to buy  
onboarding or  
crossboarding  
technology this  
year.**

## **Buying Considerations for Onboarding.**

As with any HR technology purchase, there are several factors and considerations you should keep in mind to ensure you are buying a solution that meets the needs of your internal teams, business, and the employees themselves. Onboarding has some unique factors to keep in mind as you need to think about it from an internal and external perspective, much like other candidates facing technology.

When you are looking at making an onboarding purchase, we strongly advise against running an RFP. Most RFP processes produce poor outcomes and low adoption rates, especially for point solutions. The technology and needs of your organization have likely changed over time, especially if you bought a system more than 36 months ago

## Process Recommendations

Our process recommendation is five steps: Understanding your organization's needs, researching vendors as partners, making a shortlist, looking at solutions again and getting pricing, and preparing for implementation and change management.

- **Understanding your organization's needs** - who are you trying to support with this technology purchase? Even if you aren't doing it now, is it possible you will be using the system beyond new hires for crossboarding (mobility), offboarding (downsizing), or reboarding before the end of the three-year term? What about specialty solutions like learning or compliance tools?
- **Research vendors as partners** - take time to do product demos without a "scripted" demo - ask questions about how other companies are using the solutions, and ask to see unique features or the "special sauce" that differentiates them. You will never truly see or understand these things using an RFP. How do they accomplish the needs you identified in the first step?
- **Make a shortlist.** After looking at several different solutions, make a shortlist of products. For onboarding, you will likely be focusing on the option provided in your core HR suite, the option provided by your ATS, and possibly a stand-alone tool. It would not be unusual to include some solutions focused on particular areas like learning cohorts, remote workers, compliance/regulation, etc., in this stage. You may build a tech stack that meets your needs with partners/integrations.
- **Look at the solutions again and get pricing.** Do a deeper dive into the shortlist onboarding tools and supplementary products. Ask how they can work together, see examples if possible, and learn the differences and pricing to see what features are worth the extra money (if needed) for your team.
- **Prepare for Implementation & Change Management.** No matter how "easy" they say it is, it isn't. Every product requires process considerations, change management planning, and details about the details to make it work efficiently and effectively. Make sure you have a person or team that can dedicate themselves to representing your needs and wants from step 1 through the process. Ask various employees to participate in a few feedback sessions to make sure what you are building is good for HR and suitable for new hires, current employees, managers, IT, and anyone else that may have some onboarding responsibilities.

## Key Considerations for Onboarding Tech

In addition to the process of evaluating and buying, there are key considerations you should address when considering how you are looking specifically at the technology.

**It isn't about what; it is about how.** Most solutions offer similar standard functions (again, why the RFP is not very handy), so the question becomes less about if the product does it and more about how it does it. User experience has a direct impact on adoption and employee satisfaction. Is the mobile experience just for specific roles, parts, or across the board?

**Can you address your entire workforce?** The workforce includes more than direct employees, so ensure the types of workers your company has today and plans to have in the future can use the new technology. Does the solution support contractors, temp workers, and consultants? How are they priced if part-time?

**Admin, Compliance, and Document Management.** Paperwork is an essential part of onboarding. Companies leverage onboarding technology to create, send, sign, store, and keep an audit trail for important documents like tax forms such as W-4s and I9s, other regulatory forms that may need signing, benefits paperwork, employment contracts or employee handbooks, and more. Do the push updates reflect changes in federal, state, and local laws keeping you in compliance? Does the information quickly transfer into your pay, benefits, and HRIS system?

**Can they integrate easily with your other systems?** Integrations are needed for most onboarding tools as a pivotal part of the process during key transitions for employees that will impact multiple different systems. This integration ensures the correct information flows to the appropriate channels - the incoming employee, the company, payroll, banking, etc. Integrating with learning solutions and providers makes it easy to distribute and track training participation if it's not part of the onboarding solution natively already.

**Planned, repeatable yet personalized processes.** By carefully planning the onboarding experience for each employee, required processes are more likely to be completed accurately internally and by the employee. A personalized experience ensures IT, Security, Marketing, the new leader, and even the team get the information they need to be ready for that employee joining or leading. It also makes that employee feel welcomed, seen, heard, and ready for the next steps.



# CONCLUSION

Companies that want to recruit and retain talent recognize onboarding as the bridge between the candidate experience and the established employee for new hires and existing employees participating in internal mobility moves. For most companies, transitioning from "orientation" to a technology-based onboarding to building a strategic program that applies to all employee transitions - is a journey they are just starting but adopting quickly.

Those that adopt a more modern onboarding approach reap the benefits of retention, engagement, and productivity, as well as the security of complying with ever-changing federal, state, and local regulations and union requirements.

Technology can make designing and delivering onboarding experiences easier for both employees and the company. Most onboarding solutions focused on the preboarding and new hire phase until recently. While some software has expanded to include different types of onboarding, the market is ready for another round of revolutionary technology to bring all the pieces together to support the holistic onboarding experience - preboarding & new hire, crossboarding, offboarding, and reboarding.



# About The Authors



Aspect43 is a leading analyst, advisory & strategy firm - and the experts behind the biggest names in HR and Work Tech. Each year we conduct research with hundreds of organizations to help understand the needs, goals, and challenges they face to hire, manage and retain their workforce. This data-driven approach has been presented at conferences to thousands of practitioners, been read by more than 100k people globally and helped more than 300 vendors & investment teams quickly identify and solve challenges impacting market alignment, customer satisfaction, user adoption, revenue, product gaps, brand impact, and investment.

Connect with them via their [website](#), [twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

**Sarah White, Founder & CEO of Aspect43**, is a leading analyst, consultant, and speaker in the area of work technology - focused on improving the experiences of how we hire, manage and retain our workforce. You may have seen her in a number of national media sites, on stage at conferences around the globe or on one of the top influencers in HR, Tech, Recruiting and WorkTech over the past decade. She is also the founder of HRTechCircle, JobsinHRTech and an advocate for voice of the customer programs. Connect with her on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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A very special thank you to our lead sponsors for this report - Equifax, SilkRoad Technology, and Kunik.



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# Footnotes

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