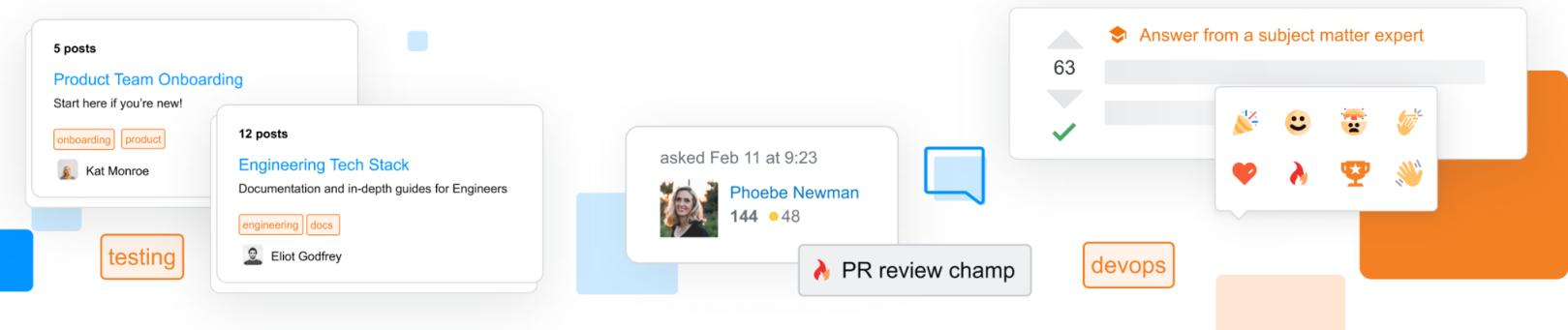# Onboarding new hires with Stack Overflow for Teams Playbook

Every employee's journey through your organization begins at onboarding. Does your onboarding welcome new employees into the fold, and set them up for longevity?

This playbook will cover the components of good onboarding, the importance of rapid learning from Day One, and measuring onboarding success with Stack Overflow for Teams.

Table of contents

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. — Will Rogers

An employee's first day is an opportunity to create a great impression. That impression begins with their onboarding. Those first few hours are critical in setting the tone for their experience, and then you have a couple more weeks to set the tone for each person who walks through your doors.

We've heard time and again that companies use Stack Overflow for Teams as a major part of their onboarding framework. To ensure that we support onboarding for teams of all sizes, we've researched good and bad onboarding, tools that help onboarding processes, and what teams like and dislike about onboarding.

We'll walk you through the do's and don'ts of good onboarding from Day One to beyond, and how you can use Stack Overflow for Teams to set up your new hires for rapid learning. This playbook is best suited for hiring managers and People teams that are directly involved in the onboarding framework.

The components of good onboarding

Starting a new job isn't easy. You're probably throwing more information at a new hire than they can process. It takes a village to do onboarding well: from people ops, to the hiring manager, to teammates, to people on other teams entirely. A rough estimate is that 12-14 people can be involved in onboarding a single new hire.

Good communication starts on the first day. As much as possible, the knowledge that new hires need should find them; they shouldn't have to go digging in too many places.

At Stack Overflow, we use our own knowledge sharing and collaboration platform, [Stack Overflow for Teams](#), as an integral part of the onboarding process. Our onboarding process comprises four components:

> ✔ Content
> ✔ Culture
> ✔ Inter-departmental transparency
> ✔ Future planning

Content

As you plan for new hires, you sift through your documents, notes, and repositories, determining what you want new hires to know.

Creating and managing content is how you ensure all of those policies are communicated during onboarding. From password processes and initial security measures to the company mission and the review cycle structure, you'll be documenting everything.

At Stack Overflow, all of our internal knowledge lives on [Stack Overflow for Teams](#). New hires (and not-so-new hires!) are free to revisit it at any time. The information stays current, because people are updating it all the time with the latest knowledge. Whatever you use, you should make sure that your new hires have continuous access to onboarding information. Write articles, how-to guides, checklists, or company hierarchies and contact information. Then make sure that information is visible to all. What type of content should you develop? Here are some ideas taken directly from our onboarding:

✔ Employee handbooks

✔ Processes and procedures

✔ History of the product(s)

✔ History of the organization

✔ Tests and results

✔ Company updates

✔ "First 12 weeks at [Company]" checklist

Using the knowledge base to streamline onboarding is just one of the many use cases. We've found success using our own platform to proactively share lessons learned and reactively respond to teammates with questions in an asynchronous and productive way. The platform is easy to access and updates are made quickly to ensure knowledge stays accurate for the next person who is looking to reuse it.

We work frequently according to the principle of "knowledge reuse" - aka, if someone has a question, it's likely that another person down the line will have the same question. So if we publicly list the question along with some helpful answers and context, we're answering that question in perpetuity.

Managers should be able to customize onboarding content in dynamic, engaging, and relevant ways. Whether that's through articles, Q&As, how-to guides, videos, or other visuals, onboarding will have a different flavor in each organization. This onboarding content lives in a central hub that also contains knowledge that is necessary outside of the onboarding process. It includes solutions, answers, and historical context to help teams overcome their blockers.

Culture

There's a direct relationship between how much an employee understands the corporate culture and how quickly they can integrate into their team. You will need to explain the components of the culture and give pointers right away.

While "culture" can have several definitions, think about the specifics of your organizational culture handles situations like the following:

- ✔ How do people work together - is it mostly autonomous, or heavy on the teamwork and communication?

- ✔ Do you frequently use meetings to hash things out, or do people try to limit meetings to strictly when necessary?

- ✔ How do people in your organization socialize? When and where do people have fun and bond?

- ✔ What extracurricular activities are available?

- ✔ Where should a new hire look for mentorship?

- ✔ How do your company's mission and values filter down into the day-to-day?

Feel free to look outside of formal documents to share cultural information. For example, maybe your personnel team has a video wherein they interview colleagues and ask about their backgrounds and career paths.

Inter-departmental transparency

The best answers to questions can come from anywhere. But the first step, for new hires, is knowing exactly where "anywhere" is. Does your organization have one Design department, or are specific product-focused designers placed on different teams? How does content and marketing work? Who is involved in the software engineering lifecycle?

Org charts and subject matter experts' contact information should be widely accessible. As you create your onboarding framework, think about how to surface contacts and useful information from every department, and make it accessible beyond the confines of that specific team.

Future planning

One of your major goals with onboarding is to show new hires that they can have a long and fulfilling career within your organization. With Stack Overflow for Teams, you can apply the practices of onboarding across all seniority levels and tenures. For example, after someone receives a promotion, or transfers to a new team, or comes back from a sabbatical.

Onboarding is about personal progression. A new hire's progression doesn't need to stop, just because they "age out" of being a new hire. So try to extend your onboarding best practices to all employees in all situations. What does that look like?

1. Mapping key goals and milestones
2. Laying out the best practices for moving from an individual contributor to a manager with direct reports
3. Creating spaces for an employee to develop something new ([like Google's famous 20% projects](#))
4. Laying out expectations at each rung of the corporate ladder
5. Use cases and success stories around experiments, a new practice, an insight uncovered, or cross-team collaboration
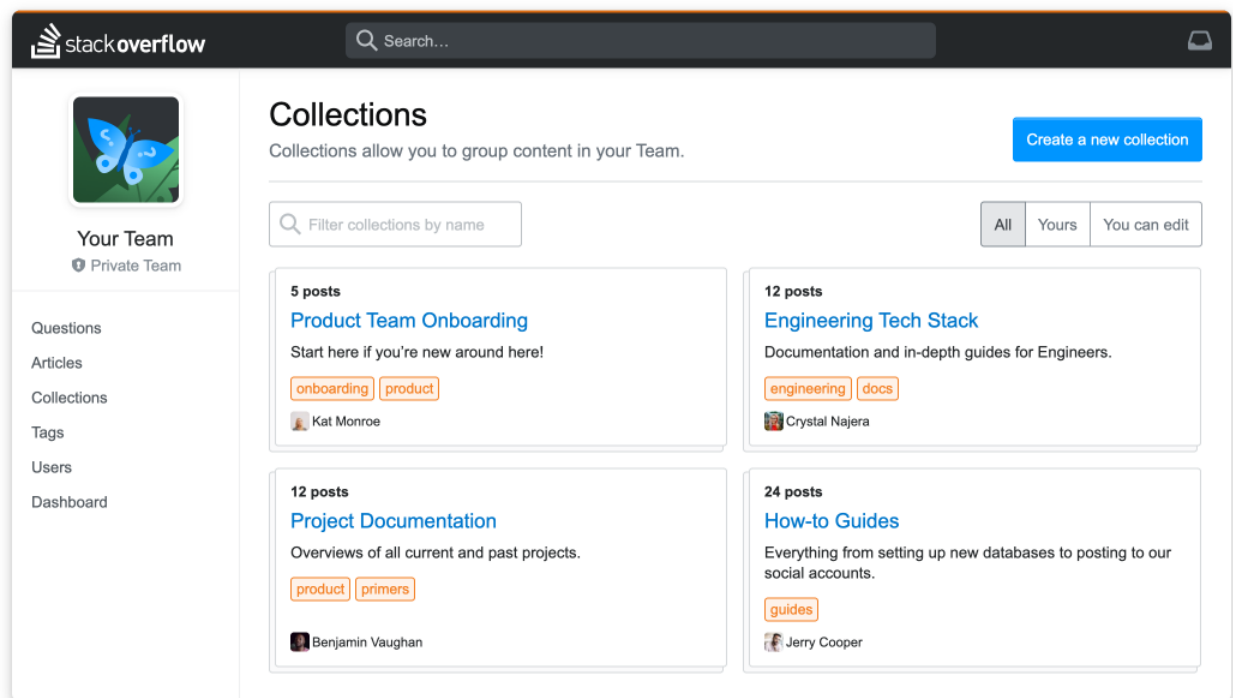
We put this "continuous onboarding" philosophy to work through Stack Overflow for Teams. We've created "Collections" for many of our internal teams. Collections are groups of articles, Q&As, how-to guides, and other useful information about a certain topic. These collections are easily searchable and anyone can contribute to them. That way, employees at all stages of their careers feel empowered to harness the collected wisdom of their peers. We have collections around topics like "How to talk about Stack Overflow", "Customer success collateral", "Enterprise architecture", "Managing people," and more.

We also incorporate Stack Overflow for Teams into a new hire's day-to-day, for example incorporating it into ChatOps so that knowledge they didn't know they needed becomes available.

Wherever you keep information, make sure to set up a self-serve solution, so career-enriching information is highly visible for those across your organization: both new and not-so-new employees.

Retention is higher when new hires feel there's an interest in their whole career path. This type of planning should follow the employee for their entire time at your organization.

What new skills do they want to acquire?
Do they want to manage people?
What if they eventually want to switch teams
- what does that transition look like?

It can be tempting to rush through the learning curve and get your new hire working on projects as soon as possible. But that's a short-sighted approach. Give them a "why?" for their work. Show that you're committed to their long-term success.

Preliminary planning for the future doesn't need to cost a lot or take up a ton of time. It can be as simple as providing a space for new hires to list their goals, development plans, and where they see themselves in one year, two years, and five years within the org.

Also, provide access to members of teams from across at least two departments. That way, your new hires gain exposure to individuals and teams outside of their own. Who knows? They may end up running those teams some day.

Rapid learning from Day One

Set new hires up for rapid learning from their very first day, including both role-based learning and new skills acquisition. Rapid learning programs and platforms should facilitate self-paced and directed learning paths. We use our Stack Overflow for Teams instance to accomplish these goals with minimum disruption to our senior team members.

To get new hires to a place where they can self-serve knowledge, you have some planning to do. We'll dive into the things you can do on the first day of your new hire's journey into your organization.

What you can do

1. **Are your smartest subject matter experts inputting their wisdom into the Stack Overflow for Teams hub?**
   As you grow your instance of Stack Overflow for Teams, you'll want to designate SMEs to answer important questions that will serve as the foundation for knowledge reuse in the future.

2. **Appoint an official onboarding liaison**
   For every little question, a new hire may not feel comfortable asking their new manager. Appoint one or more onboarding liaisons who can answer those questions. It's helpful to have someone in the IT department who can help with setup. For everything else, someone on the People team will do.

3. **Set up some IT in advance**
   Especially if your new hire is remote, technical woes can cause severe stress on Day One. Set up all of the IT processes and personalizations that won't require the new hire's input. If you can download some needed software in advance, and make a new laptop as compliant as possible, you will relieve the burden on your new hire.

4. **Create specific formal and informal appointments**
   In a post-COVID and remote world, flexible work environments are becoming the norm. Overall that's good, but it may take away from spontaneous opportunities for team bonding and friend-making. So set up some time for both formal and informal conversations for your new hires. It might mean a virtual coffee, some meeting debriefing, a lunch, or a discussion about business objectives. At Stack Overflow, our mostly remote team has "Stack Roulette" chats, where 3 people selected at random have a 30-minute video call.

5. **Over-explain**
   Many organizations rely on implicit, word-of-mouth ways of communication company norms and processes. Resist the temptation to rely on these implicit means of communication. Document

"about us" information, dress code, etiquette norms, brand highlights, and team member interviews. Remove ambiguity, remove stress!

6. **Set clear expectations for onboarding, specifically**
   What do you want to accomplish with onboarding? You should have a formal checklist. By the end of the week, your new hires should know about and do x, y, and z. Communicate these expectations to your new hires at the beginning of onboarding. For example, your new hire should:

   ☐ Have a laptop and key technical processes and admin set up

   ☐ Understand how their responsibilities fit into the overall organizational hierarchy

   ☐ Have a high-level but clear plan for their first 100 days on the job

   ☐ Recognize the organization's products /services and mission

   ☐ Have an idea of the level of formality involved in team and company culture

   ☐ Have a meeting or check-point set up in the near-future with their onboarding liaison

   ☐ Understand where they can find information, outside of their team, whether that's through a company knowledge hub or somewhere else

   ☐ Know where to go for key communications and presentations

What your new hires can do

1. **Create a "first impressions" document**
   Just as you're focused on making a first impression, your new hires can provide feedback on their first impressions. They have a fresh pair of eyes, so in the first few weeks, they have an unbiased and unfiltered viewpoint into their team. Are you doing something wildly different that they've never seen before? Are there processes they've always used that you're missing out on? They can capture these first impressions in an article, and then share them with the team in a visible place. Just as you have a lot of wisdom to share, so do they. Also, they can add any questions that they don't currently see answered, so your team can expand its potential for knowledge reuse.

2. **Contribute to the collected team knowledge**
   Your new hire is probably a subject matter expert in something that you're currently missing. After all,

that's why you hired them. They should feel there's an open forum for them to share, train, and correct where possible.

3. **Ask questions on Stack Overflow for Teams**
   There's no better way to understand the common questions and concerns of new hires than by hearing it directly from them. Set aside time in your onboarding weeks to allow new hires to ask questions on the platform, and become acclimated to using Stack Overflow for Teams.

4. **Set up 1:1s with tangential teams**
   Your new hire may sit on the DevOps team, but they'll be interfacing with Product, Marketing, Sales, and Senior Leadership. Give them the opportunity to develop relationships that will inform their work and deepen their understanding of cross-team collaboration.

Case study: **Onboarding with Stack Overflow for Teams in action**

When [Doctolib needed to onboard several new hires from all around the world, they perfected their onboarding process using Stack Overflow for Teams](#). Founded in 2013, Doctolib is one of the fastest-growing e-health services in Europe. Its app is used by millions to book health appointments and conduct virtual consultations with doctors. This approach to medicine is more important today than ever, and Doctolib was recently chosen by the French government to assist users in scheduling their COVID-19 vaccinations.
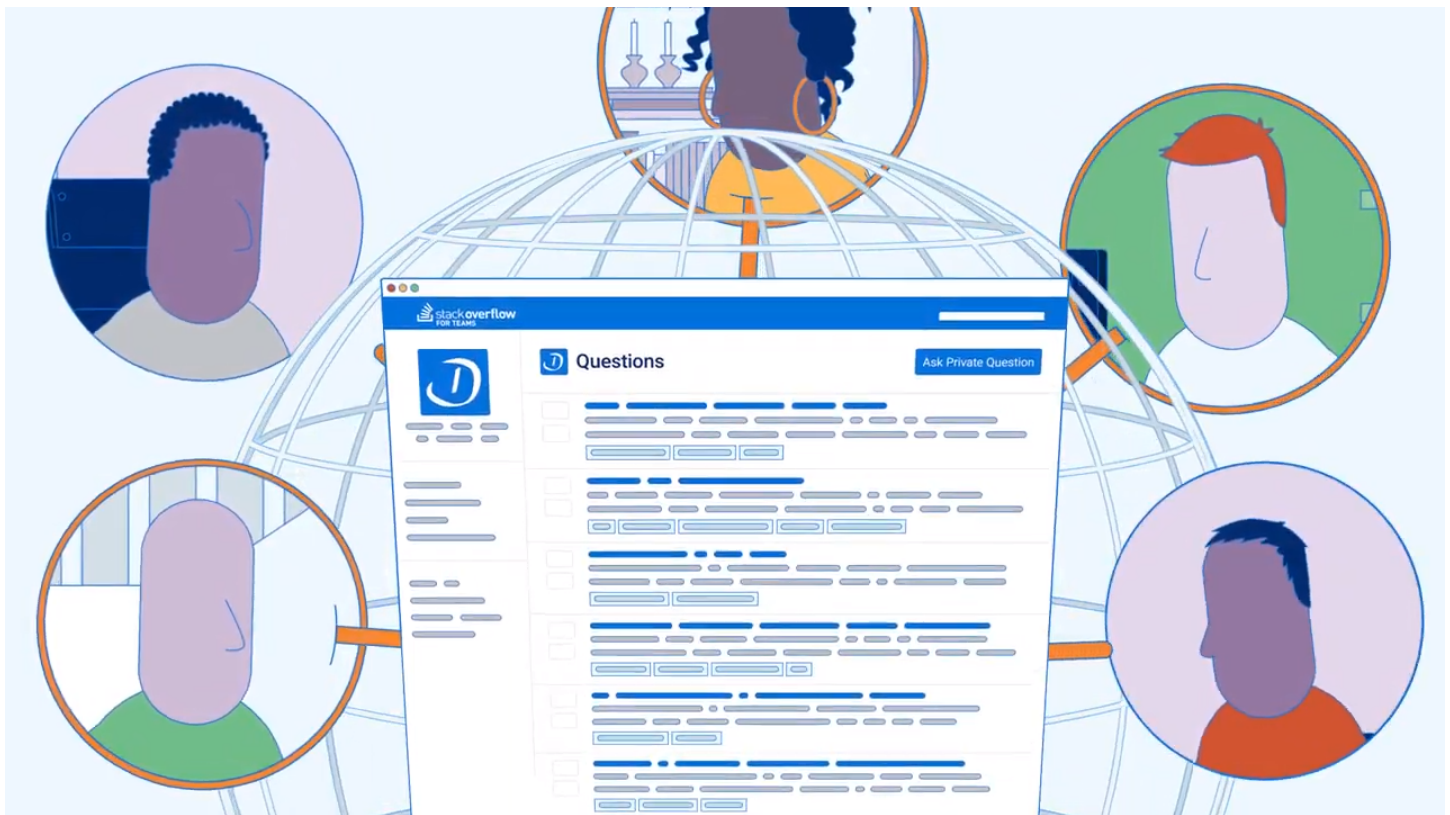
In 2019, they had 10 teams of software developers, each working on a feature of its app. Today that number is over 22, with plans to grow to 40 in the near future. The engineering department is split between Berlin and Paris, and with a headcount of more than 300 developers and tech workers, the company knew it needed to find a way to share knowledge effectively across the two offices.

That's why Doctolib used Stack Overflow for Teams to build its own internal instance of the Q&A platform. New hires could identify subject matter experts and avoid wasting time— both theirs and their colleagues —when searching for solutions to obstacles. New hire Fábio Guerreiro noted, "We can easily see which person usually answers which type of questions and create a mental map of which person we should go talk to."

Guerreiro's experience proved that Doctolib had achieved one of its core goals: getting knowledge out of the heads of their engineering team members and into an accessible format that everyone, even new hires, could easily search and understand.

> 〝〝
>
> **When I joined, I immediately had this huge sense of community. Everybody is super available to help.**
>
> Fábio Guerreiro, Full-stack Engineer at Doctolib

"When I joined, I immediately had this huge sense of community. Everybody is super available to help."

He described Stack Overflow for Teams as Doctolib's own tech community. Team members collaborate on questions and answers to synthesize different viewpoints into the strongest answer. "We debate through it. Sometimes this means we split a question in two. Sometimes it means we combine several answers into one. We might chat in the comments, or via our Slack channel for Stack Overflow questions, and then always feed back the result into an answer."

Doctolib saw knowledge reused **14 times** a day and more than **400 times** a month.
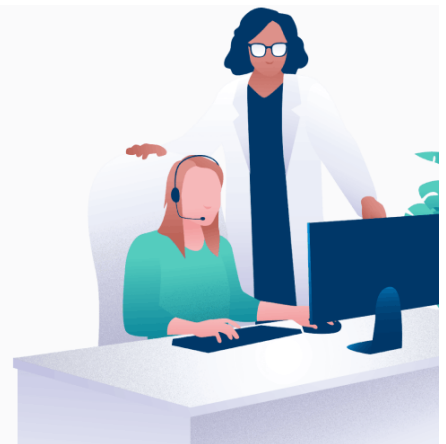
Within their knowledge-sharing tech stack, Stack Overflow for Teams has filled the gap for collaborative documentation, but also made existing knowledge more accessible. And new hires quickly feel empowered to scale up into net contributors.

Measuring onboarding success with
Stack Overflow for Teams
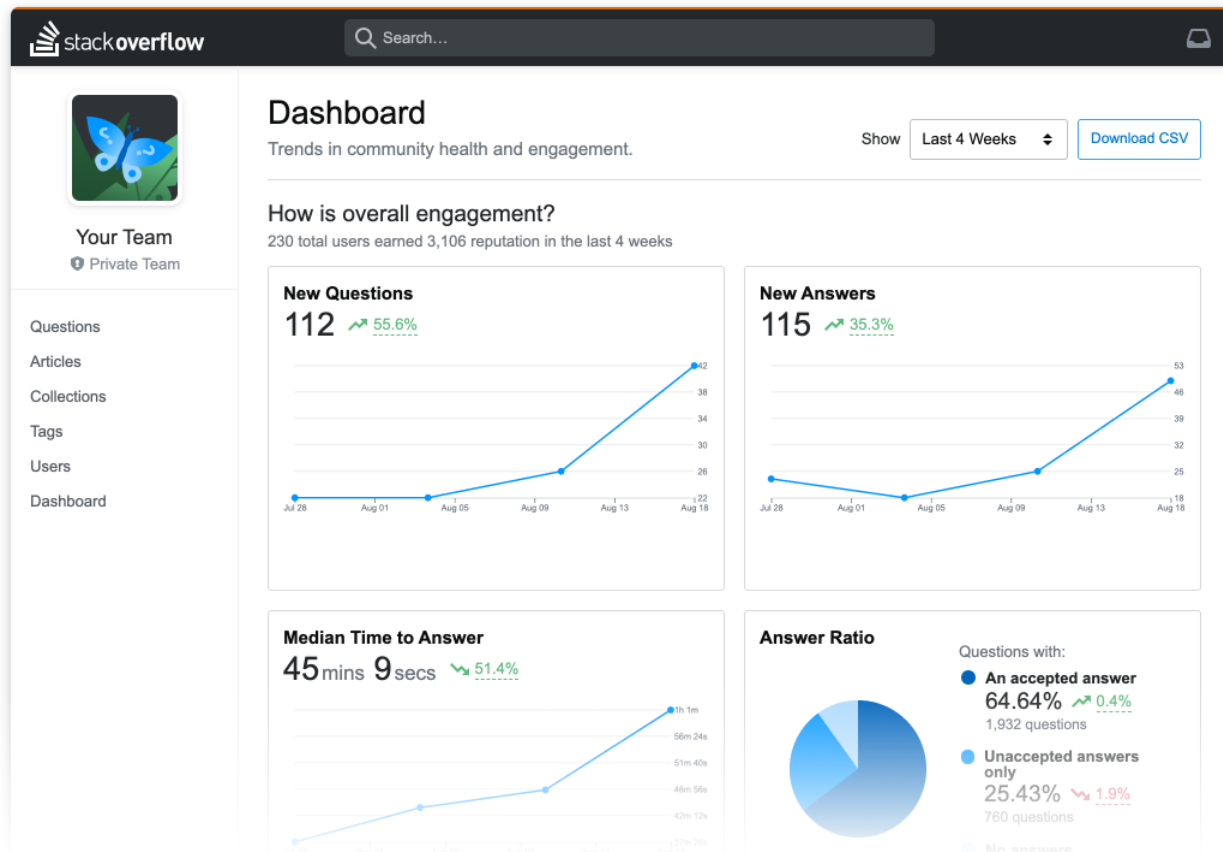
Onboarding success can feel flimsy if you aren't measuring it. Sure, there are some external markers, like word-of-mouth feedback, or how long a new hire stays on in your organization. But to set intentional markers of success, and objectively evaluate them, you need to go one step further. Here are some ways you can measure your onboarding success, and continually improve upon your framework.

1. **Your process is repeatable**
   If you've created a repeatable onboarding process, that's a measure of success. Have you seamlessly figured out the handoff between the HR team and the hiring manager? Have you developed a survey to get some quick feedback from new hires and hiring managers after each round of onboarding? Is knowledge truly being reused? Have you created automated email campaigns leading up to Day One that inform a new hire about what they can expect? Have you figured out the sweet spot in terms of the number of days that the official onboarding process takes place? Once these things are consistent

and repeatable, that means you've got an onboarding framework.

2. **Your process is not SO repeatable as to be inflexible**
   Yes, you need repeatable processes and frameworks. But should onboarding an engineer look exactly the same as onboarding a copywriter? No. That's why you've allowed room for easy customizations depending on the new hire's team, role, experience level, and location.

3. **You've created a feedback loop**
   Do not let new hires onboard and then vanish into the night, never to be heard from again. Collect feedback from them, specifically about onboarding. Ask what you should do more of, what you should do less of, and what else they need. Are they leaving the onboarding week with some lingering confusion about something? Try to keep refining your onboarding until there's generally very little confusion when it's all over.

4. **You've got data**
   It's one thing to anecdotally notice employee tenure and turnover. But make sure you're actually keeping track of how long employees stay, on average, at your company. Does it vary by department, manager, location, or seniority level? How does onboarding impact those figures? With clear insight into retention, you'll learn to pinpoint areas of weakness, and avert flight risk before it's an issue.

5. **Your training completion rates are high**
   Another metric to pay attention to is the training completion rate. Poor training completion rates serve as red flags. They mean that the onboarding and training process you've designed isn't working. That may mean you don't have enough buy-in across your organization, or your onboarding is too long or too short, or you're not properly showcasing how training helps job performance and career path goals. Good employee engagement in training means you have a higher chance that new hires are moving from novices to net contributors when it comes to your organization. Good training completion rates also indicate that morale is probably high and employees are engaged.

Learn more about how Stack Overflow for Teams can help support your onboarding efforts. [Read on](#).