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Maximizing productivity and financial gain:

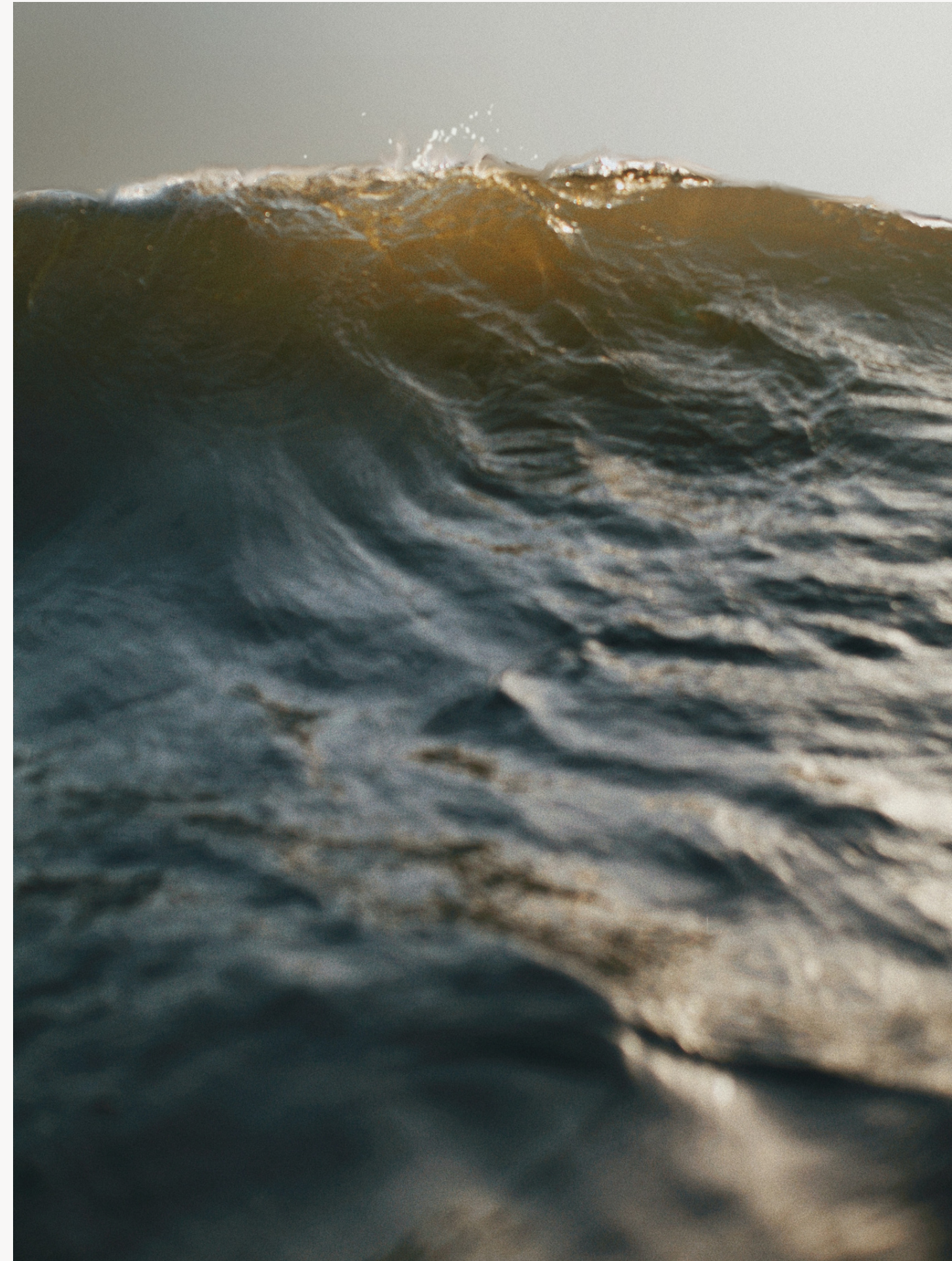# HOW TO ONBOARD SOFTWARE CONSULTANTS EFFECTIVELY

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Onboarding software consultants effectively is crucial for ensuring they can contribute to the project as quickly as possible. Here we present the steps for creating an efficient and user-friendly onboarding process that accelerates software consultants' path to productivity.

WHY IS EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING IMPORTANT?

An external software consultant bills by the hour. Hence, **the faster the consultant can start contributing to the project, the higher the monetary benefits for the client organization.** To maximize onboarding efficiency, planning is key. Here are the greatest benefits that a well-designed onboarding process offers to both the hiring organization and the software consultants:

➔ **Smooth integration**

A preplanned onboarding process ensures that new software consultants are smoothly integrated into the project, team dynamics, and workflows, reducing the likelihood of them feeling disconnected.

→ **Faster time to productivity**

A preplanned and well-designed onboarding process helps new hires become productive more quickly by providing them with the necessary tools, resources, and information to perform their job effectively. Moreover, you are able to remove potential effectiveness blocks, such as access permissions, access privileges and cognitional load, as these things have been taken into account in preplanning.

→ **Enhanced project efficiency**

Software consultants who understand project objectives, their roles and responsibilities from the outset are more likely to work efficiently. This can result in cost savings by reducing project delays, rework, and inefficiencies that can arise from misunderstandings or miscommunications.

→ **Efficiency and scalability**

Preplanning streamlines the onboarding experience for both the organization and the new hires (consultants and in-house employees), reducing the time and resources required to onboard each employee. Standardized procedures and documentation eliminate the need to reinvent the onboarding process for each new hire. Moreover, standardizing the onboarding process allows organizations to scale their onboarding efforts more effectively as they grow.

→ **Positive employer branding**

A positive onboarding experience can lead to word-of-mouth referrals and positive reviews, enhancing the company's reputation as an employer of choice.

→ **Mitigating risks of errors and omissions**

A well-designed onboarding process helps new software consultants understand the project domain and its characteristic, client's compliance requirements, quality standards, and best practices, reducing the likelihood of errors and omissions that could lead to costly rework, client dissatisfaction, or legal issues.

→ **Retention**

A well-planned onboarding process increases employee satisfaction and engagement, which in turn improves retention rates and reduces turnover costs associated with hiring and training new employees. Make software consultants feel supported and valued from the beginning, and they are more likely to stay with you.

EXAMPLE OF A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING PROCESS

What does a software consultant joining your project need to get to speed? Here's an example of an onboarding process that provides the consultant with all necessary tools, resources, and information to start contributing to the project fast.

→ **Pre-flight**

Provide a list of used technological stack before the first workday:

- Editor
- Technological stack
- Possible SDK etc. versioning
- CI/CD system in use (or used DevOps stack, if applicable).

Providing these offers software consultants an opportunity to install and familiarize with the tech stack in advance.

→ **Onboarding: First workday**

1. Safety orientation; safety protocols on-premises, resources for learning more about safety measures.

2. Quick introduction to the company, if beneficial, also teams and products.

3. Deep dive into what the consultant's business unit or team focuses on.
- What the software is about, what it is supposed to do
- Why the software exists
- Who uses the software

4. Project and role objectives

Clearly communicate the project objectives, timelines, milestones, and expectations to the consultant. These have most likely been discussed during the hiring process at some level, but recap doesn't hurt.

Make sure the consultant understands the scope of the project, what success looks like, and their own and other team members' roles within the team. Also introduce the people who hold answers to the most common "who should I ask about [technical issue]" questions. These often include testing, component layout, and substance knowhow matters, and your digital team can help map the most relevant people and subjects.

You may also want to introduce relevant decision-makers and key roles outside the project team. This helps the consultant to understand the decision-making hierarchy and establish important relationships that foster trust and collaboration. By effectively engaging with decision-makers and stakeholders, consultants can ensure that project goals are aligned, requirements are met, and expectations are managed throughout the project lifecycle.

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1. Domain orientation

Quite often onboarding is carried out with a "code-first" approach, and the software consultant's domain knowledge grows little by little during the project. For a software consultant, it is beneficial to get to know the domain first. Moreover, it is in the client organization's best interest to provide domain orientation for consultants as it will accelerate their path to productivity and facilitate effective communication and problem-solving.

Understanding the domain provides context for the software consultant to grasp the specific needs, challenges, and goals of the project. When consultants have the context, they can tap into their previous knowledge better, too. Other benefits include the ability to align technical solutions with the unique requirements of the domain and to identify and solve problems more effectively. Moreover, domain knowledge enables more effective communication between the consultant and stakeholders.

Depending on how specialized the domain is, one may use a couple of hours or days to do domain orientation. A helpful guideline is to explore domain-related aspects that may not be widely known and to maintain a focus on conceptual understanding.

2. Code orientation

In code orientation, achieving the right balance between documentation and hands-on learning is key. Documentation should be clear, concise, and to the point. It should provide a high-level overview of project requirements, the system's purpose, software architecture, code styles illustrated with relevant examples, and rules of engagement. These elements are crucial for consultants to quickly grasp and start working effectively.

Research consistently demonstrates the value of standardized coding styles in enhancing code readability. While standardization requires initial effort, it significantly reduces cognitive load, minimizes bugs, facilitates bug detection and debugging, and simplifies code expansion. This benefits both external software consultants and in-house developers, fostering a more cohesive and efficient development process. Even though standardized coding styles are not an onboarding requirement, they serve as a measurement of the client organization's maturity in software product development.

It's important to recognize that documentation rarely reflects the actual state of the project accurately; the source code does. Therefore, after gaining an understanding through high-level documentation, consultants should quickly dive into the code and start learning more by doing.

In summary, clear documentation plays a crucial role in aiding software consultants when seeking assistance or solutions. This results in shorter task completion times, ultimately improving efficiency. Furthermore, standardized coding practices ensure that everyone in the development team understands how to write, test, and review code effectively, contributing to a smoother and more productive development workflow.

PROTIP: VISUALIZE ALL THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF THE DEVELOPED SOFTWARE TO A FLOWCHART

This will:

- offer a clear visual representation of how the software functions, allowing consultants to quickly grasp the overall structure and logic of the system.
- highlight dependencies between different functions or modules of the software. This helps consultants understand the relationships between various components and ensures they consider potential impacts when making changes or additions.
- make troubleshooting issues or debugging code more effective as consultants can refer to the flowchart to identify potential points of failure or areas that require attention.
- enable the software consultant to contribute to the project as soon as possible.

CLOSING WORDS

In conclusion, providing a comprehensive and efficient onboarding ensures consultants grasp the big picture faster, rather than leaving them to navigate the complexities independently. Not only enhances this software consultants' contributions but also translates into substantial cost savings. Ultimately, how technical team members are onboarded reflects the organization's maturity in software product development.

To harness the introduced benefits, we encourage you to evaluate our organization's current onboarding practices and consider implementing a standardized process that aligns with the best practices outlined in this guide. Would you like a helpful hand for creating an effective onboarding for software consultants and internal team members alike, Witted is glad to help. Contact us to discuss your unique needs and explore how our expertise can lead your organization to software success.

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