June 2025

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Many organizations struggle to create engaging and effective onboarding experiences, often focusing on paperwork rather than fostering connections, culture, and career pathways. Accenture overcame this challenge by developing a globally consistent onboarding program, the New Joiner Experience (NJX), featuring extended reality (XR). Launched in 2021, NJX centers around One Accenture Park, a virtual campus where new employees collaborate, explore company innovations, and build their Technology Quotient. This immersive onboarding experience has been very successful, with over 400,000 employees participating as of December 2024. Employees consistently rate it over 4.6/5, and Accenture has achieved a positive return on investment, initially driven by reduced travel costs. Beyond financial benefits, XR-based learning has improved knowledge retention and strengthened employee engagement. Accenture's journey offers five key lessons.[1]

Introduction

"Despite the current focus on gen AI, we have never relented on the 'metaverse' concept and extended reality in the enterprise, most specifically within immersive onboarding and learning." —Jason Warnke, Global Lead of Accenture Experiences

Many organizations encounter significant challenges in crafting engaging onboarding experiences for new employees. For example, a Gallup report revealed that only 12% of employees strongly agree that their organization does a great job of onboarding new hires; 58% of companies also admit to focusing primarily on processes and paperwork during onboarding, neglecting essential aspects like networking and team building.[2] Other research, meanwhile, found that 47% of companies struggle with onboarding employees due to infrastructure-access challenges.[3] These statistics underscore the widespread difficulties companies face in creating effective and engaging onboarding programs.

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1 Iris Junglas is the senior accepting editor for this article.
2 *Why the Onboarding Experience Is Key for Retention*, Gallup, available at https://www.gallup.com/workplace/235121/why-onboarding-experience-key-retention.aspx.
3 Lau, G. *25 Surprising Employee Onboarding Statistics in 2025*, Strong DM, April 29, 2025, available at https://www.strongdm.com/blog/employee-onboarding-statistics.

Figure 1: Spaces Within One Accenture Park

On the other hand, employees who receive effective onboarding feel 18 times more committed to their organization, according to another study.[4] Today's employees seek immersive experiences to build connections, gain an understanding of the company's operations and envision potential career paths. Extended reality (XR)—an umbrella term encompassing virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other technologies that bridge real and simulated worlds—can be a powerful enabler, delivering a consistent, cost-effective and immersive experience that engages new employees.[5]

Since 2021, Accenture, the consulting giant, has featured an immersive virtual campus that leverages XR within its revamped "New Joiner Experience" (NJX). *One Accenture Park* is a fantastical virtual world that immerses employees in Accenture's client solutions, culture and core technologies (see Figure 1). New joiners work as teams to solve challenges, while discovering locations such as Imagination Plaza, Ingenuity Tower, Cloud Island and Aqua Lab, and are guided by facilitators called *One Accenture*

Park Rangers. Employees traverse *One Accenture Park* in teams to develop a solution for a fictitious client, collect virtual items as they learn about the company and discover career paths. New employees also boost their "Technology Quotient" with the key technologies that every employee must know, such as generative AI, cybersecurity, cloud and XR. Employees also return to *One Accenture Park* throughout the year for both scheduled events and informal gatherings.

Employees consistently rate the *One Accenture Park* learning experience highly (over 4.6 on a 5-point scale) and make thousands of unsolicited positive posts on social media. As of December 2024, more than 400,000 employees have attended *One Accenture Park* experiences.

Accenture also generated a positive return on its investment in *One Accenture Park*—one that was initially based on lower travel expenditures for onboarding new joiners in physical offices. While not every organization matches Accenture's scale of 799,000 employees, many for-profit companies, nongovernmental organizations and government agencies onboard thousands of new hires annually, making a business case for XR immersive learning possible. As such, many organizations can gain valuable insights from Accenture's journey.

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4   Ibid.

5   Stackpole, B. *The Business Impact of Extended Reality*, MIT Sloan, November 8, 2023, available at https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/business-impact-extended-reality.

Accenture's Road to Immersive Learning

Before NJX, Accenture's onboarding was decentralized, with significant variation across regions. After signing the acceptance letter, some employees received exciting welcome kits that included "goodies," such as branded hoodies, while others received less comprehensive welcome kits. For orientation, new hires in one part of the world received a few hours of sessions, while in another, the onboarding program spanned multiple days, with additional training sessions throughout the year.

This inconsistency led to noticeable disparities, which were brought to the attention of Accenture's senior leaders through social media. Katy Geraghty, Global Head of Onboarding, told us, "We were creating a population of the haves and have nots. Everyone deserves the same warm welcome."

The push to rethink onboarding accelerated in 2020, due to employees feeling disconnected during the global pandemic. In March 2020, Accenture transitioned approximately 95% of its global workforce to remote work. Instead of new employees traveling to orientation events, Accenture needed to onboard them remotely; much of the initial experience was passive learning, through readings and slide decks. New employees reported feeling disconnected. As Geraghty explained: "Our new joiners were leaving the experience without a strong connection to our core values or a clear understanding of our purpose. They couldn't explain to their friends and family what we do or how we help our clients."

Olly Jeffers, Global Onboarding Innovation Lead at Accenture, believed XR could help employees feel more connected. He reached out to Jason Warnke's team, which had been actively experimenting with XR since 2018. At the time, Warnke's team was exploring Microsoft's AltSpaceVR, a platform composed of user-generated virtual worlds, where users could gather, communicate, collaborate and interact in both small and large groups. Warnke's and AltSpaceVR's teams had envisioned the concept of an "Nth floor"—a virtual office space where employees from around the globe could come together to collaborate, connect and engage in shared activities. They also brainstormed the idea of a virtual campus, a digital environment that would be much larger than an office.

By mid-2020, Jeffers added a short VR experience for new employees based in Ireland and the U.K. The response from new joiners was overwhelmingly positive. Jeffers told us: "We did something small, we just got them into VR, had them connect and talk to each other, and they loved it. It was a hit. And the comments were just fantastic. The global onboarding team saw the power of it; they wanted to be a part of it."

Concurrently with Jeffers' local initiatives, Accenture was planning a major rebranding focused on the speed of change. In October 2020, its new mission publicly became "To deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity." A few months later, Ellyn Shook, Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO) and Amy Fuller, Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), asked Geraghty's team how they could design a consistent, scalable new-joiner experience that inspires and equips employees to embrace the new mission.

Geraghty wanted a virtual campus to be a key feature of the onboarding process. The team started developing *One Accenture Park* by rapidly moving through iterations of development, based on feedback from the learning team and facilitators, local onboarding teams and pilot sessions with new joiners. The team invited Julie Sweet, CEO, to experience the prototype with VR headsets. She immediately saw the possibilities, suggested improvements and set an aggressive timeline. The team was excited by her enthusiasm but cautioned her about the implementation schedule. Warnke recalls telling Sweet, "This has never been done before—it's going to be really hard, even harder than mobile adoption in the enterprise." Sweet responded, "That's exactly why we need to do it. We need to solve this so we can help our clients navigate similar disruptions."

While Geraghty's team was preparing the global onboarding teams for NJX, which included demos of *One Accenture Park*, Warnke's team worked with Meta to make VR headsets enterprise-ready. Meta's VR headsets were originally designed for consumers and accessed using a Facebook account; Accenture now needed Meta to integrate VR devices with Accenture's identity authentication system.

While this activity was happening inside Accenture, October 2021 marked a pivotal moment for XR, when Mark Zuckerberg changed Facebook's name to Meta in anticipation of the "metaverse" becoming the next iteration of the Internet. Global interest in metaverse soared, as evidenced by Google Trends reports. Accenture adopted the term metaverse just as it was shipping 30,000 VR headsets to new employees in their redesigned welcome kits. Metaverse was off and running.

Over the next few years, the employees continued to be delighted with NJX and their visits to *One Accenture Park*. Paul Daugherty, Chief Technology and Innovation Officer at the time, reported that 94% of employees rated the experience favorably.[6] He also pointed to a study by Stanford University's Virtual Human Interaction Lab, which found that knowledge retention rates improved by 33% with VR.[7] Some employees, however, experienced dizziness when using VR headsets. As a result, Daugherty said that Accenture learned to keep VR experiences short (under 20 minutes) and to offer web-based access in order to be more inclusive.

Today, the NJX experience is consistent and delivered globally. In 2025, Accenture anticipates onboarding 130,000 employees with the new process, with *One Accenture Park* as a main attraction.

Five Lessons on Immersive Learning

Accenture's story can help other organizations improve their own onboarding experiences.

1. Scale Will Not Happen Without Senior Management Support

While this lesson applies to the deployment of many technologies, it is nonetheless critical for XR-enabled immersive learning. Accenture's CEO, CHRO and CMO all wanted a globally consistent new-joiner experience that included XR—and they wanted it delivered quickly. Their urgency and support accelerated the rapid development and launch of NJX and *One Accenture Park*. As Warnke said: "We were very fortunate to have visionary senior leaders. We continually tell clients that senior management sponsorship is essential. Without it, progress will be very slow and inefficient."

2. Make XR a Part of a Larger Immersive Learning Experience

Accenture uses a variety of immersive learning activities to onboard new employees. Its Core Values module, for example, includes a 90-minute storytelling workshop to bring the topic to life through participants' own experiences, held outside of the virtual campus. Facilitated by a trained expert, new joiners reflect on personal stories to connect to one of the values, write their chosen value on their hand (or on paper), then pair up to share their stories. Next, the new employees enter *One Accenture Park* to reinforce their learning. The employees' avatars collect six pieces of gear for a zipline activity associated with the six fundamental behaviors in its Code of Business Ethics.

In another example, Accenture created an immersive experience to teach new employees how it develops client solutions. The immersive experience unfolds in three phases for groups of eight to ten people (within cohorts of 100-200 new joiners). Teams are first introduced to a mock client and their challenge outside of the virtual campus. In *One Accenture Park*, they then explore how the company has helped actual clients solve similar problems. Finally, the teams reconvene outside of the virtual campus to present what they've learned. As Geraghty told us: "The immersive learning experiences make large concepts feel personal and relatable. The multiple bite-sized experiences reinforce learning and the opportunities to pair and form teams fosters connection."

3. Web-Based Access Is Effective, for Now

Organizations must choose how immersive learning experiences will be accessed—through web browsers or VR headsets.[8] Accenture initially focused on VR headset access and shipped 30,000

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6   The Future of Onboarding, with Accenture's Paul Daugherty, Microsoft, June 15, 2022, available at https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/podcast/the-future-of-onboarding-with-accentures-paul-daugherty.

7   Baum, G. 6 *Things to Know About Augmented Reality*, Electronic Design, December 5, 2016, available at https://www.electronicdesign.com/technologies/embedded/article/21802070/6-things-to-know-about-augmented-reality.

8   Lacity, M., Mullins, J. K., and Kuai, L. "Evolution of the Metaverse," *MIS Quarterly Executive* (22:2), June 2023, pp. 165-173.

of them to new employees. As NJX scaled globally, the company pivoted to web-based access because of cost and accessibility. Today, 100% of new employees are introduced to *One Accenture Park* using a web browser. As Jeffers explained: "We are still seeing the amazing reaction and positive feedback and comments from a 2D experience. It's been very exciting."

Yorke Rhodes, Microsoft's Director of Digital Transformation, believes that 80% of VR immersion can be experienced without VR headsets. He also told us: "Realizing immersiveness without headsets accelerates adoption as a way to enhance online meetings, meetups and virtual metaverse-like experiences." As Warnke concluded: "While the headsets today are too big to wear all day, we will see a future where XR devices shrink, cost less and are everywhere." Warnke predicts that XR devices will become ubiquitous, allowing employees to access both work and play on the same device, much like smartphones today.

4. Unsolicited Social Media Posts Provide Insight into Employee Sentiment

While Accenture gathers formal feedback from employees, it also monitors social media to gain insight into their sentiments. As noted, a few years ago, social media revealed that the company's decentralized onboarding approach was fostering a culture of "haves" and "have-nots." More recently, social media posts have highlighted positive employee reception to the newly designed, globally consistent, onboarding and immersive learning program.

For example, Accenture initially thought university hires would embrace *One Accenture Park* due to their familiarity with avatars and gaming, while experienced hires might not. One surprising insight from social media: Even senior hires found it refreshing. Immersive learning helped such workers to feel current and to discover something they may have hesitated to explore on their own. As Jeffers stated: "We knew onboarding had a direct impact, but the unexpected activity on social media has been incredible. New joiners are posting selfies and photos with their start groups inside *One Accenture Park*, sharing how amazing their experience was. When employees take the

initiative to share such moments online, it speaks volumes."

5. Deliver an Immersive Learning Product, Not a Project

Whereas an immersive learning project has an end date, an immersive learning product is an ongoing offering that needs regular content updates, enhancements to leverage emerging technologies and sustained marketing.[9] *One Accenture Park* is constantly evolving based on observation and feedback. For example, the initial design dispersed digital teddy bears throughout the park to serve as a fun collectible. In practice, some employees raced through the space to collect the bears without being mindful of the broader learning objectives. Jeffers' team redesigned the experience so that each collectible is associated with a learning objective.

Accenture had to rebuild the *One Accenture Park* environment in 2023 because Microsoft decommissioned AltSpaceVR to focus on its more advanced XR platform, Microsoft Mesh. While AltSpaceVR allowed employees to revisit the space at any time, Microsoft Mesh is event-driven, requiring scheduled events to bring people back. The company worked with Microsoft to incorporate the functionality to revisit the space anytime while also gaining access to new and improved features in Mesh.

Just as an external product must be continually marketed, so too must an internal immersive learning product. While the initial ROI for Accenture was justified by travel savings back in 2020-2021, the Global Onboarding Team needs to continue marketing NJX to its leaders because they examine costs and investments yearly. As Geraghty told us: "We must be prepared to answer the question of 'Is this still the right investment?' Some leaders asked us why we were still onboarding with metaverse; isn't metaverse dead? We never wanted a 'metaverse' because it was the cool thing to do. We wanted a virtual campus to provide an immersive learning experience for our new joiners. And so, we call it 'immersive learning,' which resonates well with leaders."

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9 Nelson, R. R. "Transforming to Digital Product Management," *MIS Quarterly Executive* (23:1), March 2024, pp. 1-18.

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