

# Leading a Culture of Innovation and Fostering Change

An Interview with Annette Rippert, Group Chief Executive – Strategy & Consulting, Accenture

**EDITORS' NOTE** In addition to her role as Group Chief Executive – Strategy & Consulting, Annette Rippert is also a member of Accenture's Global Management Committee. Prior to assuming her current role, she led Accenture's Technology business in North America. Throughout her distinguished career, Rippert has led Accenture's business across multiple industry sectors, including communications, media and technology, as well as health and public service. She is a frequent speaker



Annette Rippert

on strategic issues of technology and its disruptive impact on business and government in forums such as the Harvard Business Review, MIT Sloan Management Review, Fast Company Best Workplaces for Innovators, U.S. State Department and U.S. National Intelligence Agency, as well as key industry and partner conferences. She is an avid supporter of women in technology and received the 2018 Woman of Excellence Award in STEM from the National Association of Female Executives (NAFE) and the 2017 Leadership Award from Women in Technology. Recognition for her work includes the CIO 100 Award and Smithsonian Computerworld Award. Rippert joined Accenture in 1986 and was promoted to partner in 1998. She earned her B.S. degree in electrical engineering and computer science from Northwestern University and a master's degree in management and strategy from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. She is a member of the Northwestern McCormick School of Engineering Advisory Board.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Accenture ([accenture.com](https://www.accenture.com)) is a global professional services company with leading capabilities in digital, cloud, and security. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries, Accenture offers Strategy & Consulting, Interactive, Technology, and Operations services – all powered by the world's largest network of Advanced Technology and Intelligent Operations centers. Accenture's 506,000 people deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity every day, serving clients in more than 120 countries. Accenture embraces the power of change to create value and shared success for its clients, people, shareholders, partners, and communities.

**How do you describe Accenture's culture and how critical is culture to Accenture's industry leadership?**

Innovation has always been at the core of our business. We sit at the intersection of industry, technology, and human potential, and at the heart of all of this is our unique culture. That culture is deeply rooted in a collection of core values – the most fundamental of which is client value creation. You'll see this value come to life in every one of our people. Our business thrives on a powerful global network that allows us to deliver exceptional service to our clients wherever they do business.

Our people are innovators, creators, and constant learners who strive to solve our clients' most difficult problems. It's this drive in our people, cultivated by our culture, that creates a dynamic energy of collaboration that really sets us apart. It's a tangible difference that clients can feel and a critical part of what makes us the transformation partner of choice for so many organizations. It's also why it's hard for people to leave Accenture and replicate what we do elsewhere.

**Will you provide an overview of your role leading Strategy & Consulting and how you focus your efforts?**

I lead our Strategy & Consulting business at Accenture. We are a global team of more than 40,000 people – strategists and consultants, industry and function experts, data scientists and human performance professionals – all masters of change and innovation. Our collective mission is to help clients envision, shape and realize their future.

The pandemic has resulted in a once in a lifetime period of transformation. The disruption our clients are facing is without parallel. Every industry has been impacted, some profoundly. Our clients are looking ahead at the urgent changes they must make to better connect with their customers, improve their resilience and forge a new path to sustainable growth – this is where my team comes in. We know that speed matters. We invested to couple our strategic industry expertise with even more data, AI, insights and assets to deliver digital transformation at breakneck speed.

Operating at this speed and scale requires an ever-increasing level of specialization, coupled with a unique understanding of the disruptive impact of technology. That's why I am investing to raise the TQ (Technology Quotient) of each of our 40,000 people.



Working remotely has meant embracing new ways of collaborating – from Microsoft Teams to Oculus virtual reality



*Annette Rippert delivering a keynote on the value of data in driving innovation and breakthroughs at Oracle Open World 2019*

**What have been the keys to Strategy & Consulting’s strength and leadership and how do you define the Strategy & Consulting difference?**

Our approach in Strategy & Consulting is unique in the market, and there are a few key elements that set us apart. The depth of our industry knowledge is a long-held advantage as is our ability to deliver complex transformations on a global scale. We infuse all our offerings with data and intelligence to unlock insights for our clients. We hold a significant leadership position in terms of how we partner and innovate with the biggest players in the technology ecosystem. Finally, we are masters of change who can leverage innovation, data, and insights to help our clients transform at speed and at scale.

We draw strength by going to market as “One Accenture,” leveraging skills from across our company, including Strategy & Consulting, Technology, Interactive and Operations, to deliver end-to-end value. This is something unique to Accenture. No other competitor can match this breadth of capabilities.

All these elements combine to make us the partner of choice for our clients who need to rapidly reinvent their organizations to better connect with customers and other stakeholders, improve resilience, and grow sustainable value.

**What is the target market for Accenture’s Strategy & Consulting business and is it primarily focused on large, global corporations?**

Our primary market for Accenture’s Strategy & Consulting business is the Global 2000. Today, we serve 91 of the Global Fortune 100. We work across more than 40 industries in 120 countries.

As leading thinkers, it’s also important to keep ourselves at the forefront of innovation, and that means working with companies who show promise in emerging stages. Accenture has a strong track record of partnering with companies who were not yet in the Global 2000 but then went on to become the next disruptors.

We also engage with small, innovative organizations when we think we can help propel their growth. For example, we engage with over 5,000 startups through our Accenture Ventures program. It’s these activities that allow us to capture early stage innovation and leverage it for our large-scale clients.

**Will you highlight the strength of the Strategy & Consulting workforce and how critical is it to build a diverse workforce to resemble the diversity of Accenture’s clients?**

At Accenture we believe in a culture of equality. Our commitment to our people and to accelerating equality for all has never been more relevant than it is today. We are deeply committed to ensuring our workforce reflects the diversity of our clients and the communities in which we serve. For me, diversity is not only a commitment, but a workforce imperative. Innovation sits at the heart of our work. I believe that diversity of people brings diversity of thought, which expands the richness of innovation and drives better results. That is why diversity is a matter of strategic importance for our success, and that of our clients.

We’ve committed to a goal of a 50/50 gender balance by 2025, and recently announced ambitious goals to increase our African American and Black, and Hispanic American and Latinx communities. Through our Black Founders Development Program, we’re also working to help Black business owners and leaders grow

their technology businesses through more direct access to venture capital, corporate mentorship and by connecting them with Accenture business partners and clients.

Lastly, our position of leadership in diversity is bolstered by our transparency. We were among the first companies to publicly share our diversity targets and we continue to take an active role in leading this conversation.

**Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to lead in the industry and what advice do you offer young women interested in a career in the industry?**

I absolutely believe there are strong opportunities for women to lead in the consulting industry. Look no further than my own company, led by CEO Julie Sweet, who was recently named #1 on *Fortune’s* “Most Powerful Women” list. The Accenture C-suite also includes five other senior women – including myself and our CFO, CHRO, CMCO and CIO. That said, our industry needs more women at the top. To accomplish this, we have more work to do.

It is vitally important that we continue to foster the next generation of women leaders. Accenture’s latest research with Girls Who Code reveals that 50 percent of women in tech roles leave those positions by age 35, never going on to be the leaders that they could be. We need more programs, like the one I sponsored with iRelaunch, to help women return to the workforce.

In addition, we know that early role models can change the game for young girls. Programs such as working with young girls in middle school, internships, and apprenticeship programs do make a difference. It’s why we sponsor initiatives like Hour of Code.

I think it is important to foster connections with other women in our broader industry and ecosystem. For example, I’ve been an active sponsor for diversity initiatives together with my clients, with community organizations, and with ecosystem partners like AWS and Microsoft.

My advice to any woman interested in a career in consulting is to go for it. This is an exciting field. There are a variety of career paths and it is a level playing field for all. There’s no better time than now to be a woman in consulting.

**You joined Accenture in 1986. What has made the experience so special for you?**

What I love about working at Accenture is the challenge of conquering complexity, helping clients reimagine how they operate, and tackling large-scale, tough problems. I’ve been fortunate to be part of a number of groundbreaking industry shifts. I have created new products and services, reimagined new ways of working, and delivered net new value for my clients. Seeing the impact has been immensely rewarding.

Now I have the privilege of leading Accenture’s Strategy & Consulting business into the next era. This comes at a unique time in history as it’s clear to me that the industry of consulting is itself undergoing disruptive change. I am on a mission to lead that change and fundamentally reinvent the business of consulting. ●