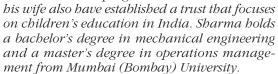# Reinventing for Growth

An Interview with Manish Sharma, Chief Operating Officer, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE *Manish Sharma is Accenture's Chief Operating Officer and a member of its Global Management Committee. He joined Accenture in 1995 and became a managing director in 2004. Before assuming his current position in 2022, Sharma served as Group Chief Executive – Operations, overseeing a comprehensive intelligent operations portfolio. He is a strong advocate for inclusion and diversity and founded the Accenture Rural program. He and his wife also have established a trust that focuses on children's education in India. Sharma holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and a master's degree in operations management from Mumbai (Bombay) University.*

Manish Sharma

COMPANY BRIEF *Accenture (accenture.com) is a leading global professional services company that helps the world's leading businesses, governments, and other organizations build their digital core, optimize their operations, accelerate revenue growth, and enhance citizen services – creating tangible value at speed and scale. Accenture is a talent and innovation led company with 738,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Technology is at the core of change today, and Accenture is one of the world's leaders in helping drive that change.*

What have been the keys to Accenture's industry leadership and how do you describe the Accenture difference?

Accenture really is unique in a lot of ways and no other company truly occupies the same space we do. Between our technology, assets and the end-to-end solutions we deliver to clients, the depth and breadth of our industry expertise and the incredibly talented people that work here, we are able to create 360° Value. This means that we drive and measure both financial performance and our progress toward our sustainability, talent and inclusion and diversity goals. It's how we pass on real benefits for our clients, people, communities, shareholders and partners. And I don't believe any one company can do it the same way that we do.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

I'm Accenture's Chief Operating Officer and a member of the Global Management Committee. I'm responsible for leading the company's global business operations, which includes overseeing the execution of our own Total Enterprise Reinvention. This is a strategy that we've adopted across our business, which is different from traditional transformations because we are reinventing every part of our business and doing it all at the same time and at speed – what we call compressed transformation. This allows us to break down the silos that exist in traditional business functions and transform key processes end-to-end, connecting people, technology and data to change the way we work and become more data and insights driven. By doing this, we are improving how we serve our clients and the experience of our people while delivering net benefits to our business and stakeholders.

How do you define Accenture's culture and values?

Accenture's culture is based on key values that center around our people, clients and communities. We prioritize our people and help them to reach their full potential through continuous learning and boundaryless opportunities – while creating a collaborative and supportive environment that is inclusive and diverse, and where we all act with respect and integrity. I believe we have the best people in the world working at Accenture and every day they prove it by providing exceptional service to help improve our clients' businesses as well as our own. We also have a strong commitment to supporting our communities around the world.

What do you see as Accenture's responsibility to be engaged in its communities and to be a force for good in society?

It's something we take very seriously and have several very successful programs and initiatives, such as the Accenture Development Partnerships where we work with various organizations to create social impact and help advance the Sustainable Development Goals. Over the last two decades, we have completed more than 1,900 engagements in nearly 100 countries in areas such as global health and

> **"Total Enterprise Reinvention is a strategy that we've adopted across our business, which is different from traditional transformations because we are reinventing every part of our business and doing it all at the same time and at speed… By doing this, we are improving how we serve our clients and the experience of our people while delivering net benefits to our business and stakeholders."**

> **"We have shifted from a technology landscape of static, standalone parts to a consumption-based composable architecture that allows us to plug and play the best capabilities to stay ahead of the fast pace of technology and business. And because we have a strong digital core built on a secure cloud-based data foundation, we can easily apply AI and other advanced technologies to help us make better, faster decisions..."**

nutrition, gender, inclusion and diversity, livelihoods and education, inclusive finance, humanitarian and refugees, agriculture, energy, climate and environment. I'm really proud to be part of an organization that is making such an impact in communities around the world.

How important is it for Accenture to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

It's critical to our business, which is why we've made it a key part of our strategy. I believe a key reason Accenture attracts such amazing talent is because we treat inclusion and diversity like every other business priority – we set goals, measure, collect data, have accountable leaders who embrace inclusion and diversity and have an action plan. We set a goal for Accenture to be gender-balanced by 2025, in other words, a workforce that is 50 percent women and 50 percent men, for those whose gender is binary. I'm proud to say in 2023, 47 percent of our workforce are women and we are on track to achieve our goal. Through our commitment to inclusion and diversity, it has enabled us to expand our talent pool and bring in the best people, because we know that diversity makes us better and more innovative. It takes all kinds of people to understand who your customer is because your customer is all kinds of people. Inclusion and diversity are essential components for improving the way businesses operate and how the world works and lives. We unlock our people's potential by investing in them, helping ensure they are net better off and feel a sense of belonging in working as part of inclusive and diverse teams. It also allows us to match their skills with our clients' needs and highlights the agility we have to evolve those skills over time. We're a skills-based organization so strengthening our talent pool and leveraging the full potential of data, technology and people is a key part of our own reinvention.

What has made it possible for Accenture to so effectively be able to adapt and evolve during times of global change and uncertainty?

About a decade ago, we set out to become a truly digital company. At that time, we were less than 20 percent in the cloud and within six years we successfully rotated our business to be 70 percent, and today we're 95 percent in the cloud. We have shifted from a technology landscape of static, standalone parts to a consumption-based composable architecture that allows us to plug and play the best capabilities to stay ahead of the fast pace of technology and business. And because we have a strong digital core built on a secure cloud-based data foundation, we can easily apply AI and other advanced technologies to help us make better, faster decisions during times of uncertainty. We've done a lot to strengthen our digital core and have also made big changes to break down silos and connect people, data and processes, giving us a more comprehensive understanding of what's happening across Accenture. This is enabling us to create a more data and insights-driven culture which is changing how we operate our business and allows us to be more proactive, better mitigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

Accenture recently announced that it will be making a $3 billion investment over three years in its Data & AI practice. Why is this significant for your clients?

We know that external forces will continue to disrupt business, and data and AI are absolutely necessary for leaders of large, complex organizations to quickly make decisions and implement them in an efficient way. We've been working with AI for a long time and know the value it can bring because we've seen it both in our clients' organizations as well as our own and as the pace of technology and business continues to accelerate, we're seeing more and more interest and demand from our clients. This investment will enable us to expand on how we're helping them responsibly advance their use of AI to grow faster and be more resilient.

You founded the Accenture Rural program. What was your vision for the program and how do you define its purpose?

Rural BPO is an "impact sourcing" program which I initiated at Accenture and continue to develop. This program focuses on creating partnerships with small business process services firms based in rural areas and provides employment opportunities to qualified youths. These opportunities help improve employees' standard of living and financial independence and provide vital training and mentoring that builds on their existing education, which is key for their long-term success. We are currently in three locations across India and one in the Philippines. Each center provides a sustainable model for driving employment and socioeconomic health in communities and we aim to repeat this model across South and Central America, and South Africa in the coming years.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

Listening, encouraging learning, being data-driven and, very importantly, creating a sense of belonging with a focus on equality. I try to lead by example while empowering people with the right skills, tools, data, and processes to enable them to deliver value while feeling valued.

You have spent more than 25 years with Accenture. What has made the experience so special for you?

There are so many things that has made my time at Accenture so special, but what stands out the most are the opportunities it has provided me and the people who have inspired me along the way. All the roles I've held have given me an opportunity to learn and grow, but none more so than my last year as COO. Other than CEO, I don't think any other role gives you such visibility across the business and ability to understand every single part of the company and really see what's happening end to end. It's incredible. And this has also given me more perspective on the power of data when you connect it across the various functions of the organization and being able to see what it means for all the facets of the business to see what makes business sense for the company. I'm grateful for the experience Accenture has given me and I'm trying to pay it forward by mentoring young leaders.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Learn, learn, learn. Ask questions, seek to understand, build a diverse network of people from different disciplines and stages of their careers that you can learn from. And take every opportunity to discover and try new things – and it's ok if something doesn't work out. Those collective experiences are so valuable as you grow in your career. ●