



Bhaskar Ghosh

EDITORS' NOTE *Bhaskar Ghosh is a member of the Accenture Global Management Committee. Previously, Dr. Ghosh led the Accenture Delivery Centers for Technology in India, and he was the global application outsourcing lead. He was also instrumental in building and managing the Accenture IT infrastructure service delivery capabilities within the Delivery Centers for Technology. Before joining Accenture in 2003, Dr. Ghosh was Vice President and global head of IT infrastructure management services at Infosys. Earlier in his career, he held several senior positions with Philips in India, where he worked extensively with the consumer electronics industry. Dr. Ghosh holds a bachelor of science degree from Calcutta University, a master's degree in business administration from Calcutta University, and a Ph.D. in business process management from Utkal University in India.*

COMPANY BRIEF *Accenture (accenture.com) is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology, and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions – underpinned by the world's largest delivery network – Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With approximately 373,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.*

Would you give an overview of technology services within Accenture?

As Group Chief Executive of Accenture Technology Services, I am responsible for our systems integration business and our application outsourcing business across the globe. Technology services is a very exciting area and the whole landscape is changing – client expectations are changing, the service model is changing. Within Accenture, I also manage our Global Delivery Network, which is more than 180,000 people operating in over 50 delivery centers around the world.

Building Intelligence

An Interview with Bhaskar Ghosh, Group Chief Executive-Accenture Technology Services

It's a large-scale operation and with the technology landscape changing so rapidly, it's an exciting time for us.

Let me start with one of the broad changes in IT today and how we are driving this change. First of all, the scope of IT is fundamentally changing. In the past, the scope of IT was primarily about managed services and managing the business. Today, the scope of IT is geared more towards growing the business. It's become a global business imperative.

Managing the business is about managing costs, managing payroll, managing forecasts and managing accounting, but now we are talking about growing the business, where IT is expected to create a differentiated user experience, create a different business model, and create a platform that will completely change the business model of an organization.

In the past, the primary value drivers were cost, quality, and capability. This is what clients would usually come to us for. Today, we are talking to clients more about speed, agility, digital, and cloud. This is related to business change as business IT is focusing more on driving business growth. Speed to market, agility, and flexibility are becoming more relevant than ever for clients.

In the past, other key value drivers for clients were globalization and industrialization. By globalization, I am referring to global sourcing and labor costs and, by industrialization, I mean doing the same work repeatedly to drive more productivity into processes.

Today, we are on a journey from simply more industrialization to intelligence and innovation. Everything we do today is about building intelligence into systems and platforms. This means deploying artificial intelligence, cognitive capabilities, and high-end automation and innovation in everything we do. This is because the primary value lever for clients today is much more than just labor cost arbitrage and industrialization.

The way we deliver technology services is also changing. The old approach was a waterfall model, a sequential model. Now, our users have more of a business imperative for speed to market, which requires a fundamental shift in approach. Today, we are more focused on a liquid delivery model. We are delivering technology services in more proximity to clients and utilizing methodologies like agile development and DevOps, which are becoming more pervasive.

All of these changes impact our applications services and systems integration business, and it drives three things.

Number one, it is driving a trend that I describe as “automate to optimize.” The primary driver for the optimization of operations is coming from automation.

Number two, when we go to our clients and assess their existing IT landscape, we look to automate as much of their operations as possible. We believe that most manual work will eventually get automated – that whatever can be automated will be automated. We are driving that automation journey for our clients and our first focus is to “automate to optimize.” We are helping them free up operational costs so that they can invest more in the future, more in CapEx, and more in their digital journey.

Thirdly, automation is about high-end tools and cognitive technology. It is about using more artificial intelligence and more analytics to drive productivity improvement.

For example, one of our clients was doing large-scale testing for all of their digital omnichannel operations. When they started they were looking to reduce their OpEx through more global sourcing and lower labor costs. We said we could reduce their operating costs by 50 to 60 percent just through automation. We put our automation architects to work and brought best of breed tools to the client. With that automation, we were able to drive that reduction in operating costs.

We recently introduced a new intelligent automation platform that we call myWizard. This platform has all the tools that Accenture has developed over the past 10 years and it has a lot of tools that we license from technology alliance partners who offer best-of-breed solutions. We bring a lot of industry assets and industry tools into myWizard, and we power that platform with analytics and artificial intelligence to dramatically improve productivity.

Those who think of Accenture think of a people business, but today, is it as much a technology business as a people business?

I believe that technology change is inevitable. This is going to happen. It is progressing over time and now there is a step-jump that will happen with these new technologies that are emerging. What we are driving today is to train our people quickly and effectively so they can do more high-end work and a different type of work. Much of new IT work is emerging and for someone who is doing manual testing today – well that world will probably not

exist tomorrow because of automation. What Accenture is doing is training our people across the company to upgrade their skills so they're more relevant for new high-end roles.

Last year, we spent approximately \$840 million on training and development for our people. We have very large capabilities in terms of online training and classroom training. For example, we have more than 800 learning boards that have online training capabilities.

At the same time, I'm recruiting hundreds of people as automation architects who can jump into a client engagement, review the requirements of an engagement, and understand the right details as to what level of automation is required, what tools are needed, what the right data points are, etc.

Accenture has a strategy in intelligent automation. We believe in a "people first" approach as our technology strategy. We believe that people and technology will co-exist. Things we are creating, like artificial agents and virtual agents, will significantly help our people do their jobs and not necessarily replace people.

As we drive our technology agenda forward, and as we drive more and more automation, I'm confident we can rotate our business and our people to the new IT. We will help them to learn new skills and pick up that work, which was not there in the past, because we believe in the "people first" concept where we help our people stay relevant for the future.

Do you find the understanding and impact of technology on their business is well understood today at the CEO level?

I talk to several clients every week. I feel that there is an awareness relative to automation, especially where those opportunities for automation are very clear. Everybody is talking about it – how to use more automation more effectively and adopt automation to drive productivity and change the way they want to operate.

The challenge is culture. Automation adoption and automation in the organization are a matter of culture.

I think enabling people to work with new IT and encouraging them to learn new technology and helping them stay relevant for the future and effectively use automation is a big challenge. It's a change journey and it's the culture of change each organization needs to drive.

Would you also talk about the Liquid Studio you recently opened?

Liquid delivery is a concept that we are working on. Our clients are telling us that they are getting different messages from different sources about technology delivery – the cloud, digital, and new technologies that are coming. They need an approach on how to adopt this new IT, so we came up with that approach, how to adopt that. We call it liquid, intelligent, and connected. These are the three building blocks of the liquid delivery in the future.

When I say liquid delivery, it's all about creating a more modular architecture. It's about adoption of agile and DevOps, and those types of methodologies. All development should be in a cloud-first, digital-first mindset. All development should be within open API architecture so it can change.

The logic and the background of the liquid architecture is that software is developed for change. Change will happen in the future, and software should be flexible enough to change at the speed of the business. That is the crux of a liquid architecture.

Along with this liquid architecture are two other components: intelligent and connected. When I talk about intelligent, it's not about the use of tools, but about integrated analytics within applications. We believe that all the applications should have a self-learning, self-healing capability once they are built so that maintenance costs can come down significantly after these applications are deployed.



Bhaskar Ghosh speaking at the Liquid Studio opening in Silicon Valley

When we talk about the connected concept, it's about the connection with the external ecosystem. In the past, when companies would develop an application, it was all about an "application in a box." It would run in a box, and then we would do the configuration and the testing. Today, the application needs to talk to the physical world in terms of the IoT and all IP-enabled devices. If we want to design the application of tomorrow, we need to make sure that it is completely developed with the right capabilities to connect to the external world. Also, it has to operate like an ecosystem.

Today we see that more organizations are developing the right level of platforms and are opening those platforms to other partners so they can all benefit from that platform. This is all about the connected ecosystem, which creates all the differences.

This is the concept of the liquid, intelligent, and connected.

What is happening today is more of a joint development process where we do the design thinking, we do the brainstorming, and we create the best solutions. We bring our industry and technology knowledge, while clients bring the right contextual knowledge to their business, and we sit together and create that solution.

Once the solution is created, we need to quickly move to prototyping and proof of concept. From there, we need to do the development in a very agile way and an iterative fashion.

The challenge that I have described cannot be addressed if one has a delivery center that is housed far away from the client. We need smaller delivery centers in close proximity to the client and with the right level of new IT skills and design thinking skills at those centers.

That is the concept of the liquid studio. We opened an Accenture Liquid Studio in Silicon Valley earlier this year, which has generated a very positive response from clients, and we will replicate that model in the future.

When you look at what you're doing, is that well understood by the next generation of leaders?

The type of person I recruit into the liquid studio is very different because it's run more like a start-up organization. This helps us recruit the best talent from the market and maintain a level of energy and innovation in everything that we do.

Some of the people who work there already have experience at Accenture working on cutting-edge technology and understand our business. We are also recruiting new and local talent from the best of schools in the U.S. We provide them with technology training and industry training, and utilize them effectively. As we scale up this model all over the U.S. and, in countries around the world, this will be a huge differentiator for us as well as a different face of Accenture.

We also work with a number of start-ups within our ecosystem and in the Liquid Studio. Many times, when we create a client solution, we allow our start-up partners to also participate in those sessions.

You're making long-term investments in technology. How do you balance short-term change with those long-term investments?

It is always a balance. Change in the technology is a continuous process. We have our long-term investment plan in technology in terms of innovation training for our people. The investment I'm making today in our people is very relevant for today, but five years down the line, we will make a similar investment on people but train them on a different technology.

You joined Accenture in 2003 but had been a leader at great companies before. What makes Accenture special?

I worked outside Accenture for a long time, in different roles. I would say there are three things that I see that make Accenture very, very different and creates huge impact. The first point is our talented people across the globe. In any area, what makes the difference is the right level of people with the right skills and right talent. I'm amazed when I talk to my teams across the globe and I see that passion in their eyes; I see how they're changing our clients' businesses.

The second thing is we bring the equal power of industry knowledge and technology knowledge. We are at the intersection of business and technology. You'll see that in our structure and how we deliver services from strategy to consulting to digital to technology to operations. All five are different capabilities that we bring seamlessly to our clients.

The third point is that we are one global organization. This is a huge source of strength for Accenture. I stated that in my organization, we have more than 180,000 people across more than 50 delivery centers. If you walk into any delivery center, people are doing work in exactly the same way. They use the same tools, they use the same processes, and they follow the same language. There is also collaboration across the units and there's no competition.

When I work with a client, whether I'm staffing people from Brazil to Mexico to U.S. to India to the Philippines, they all work together and deliver value. This whole organization works very much as a single organization and that is the secret sauce of Accenture. ●