

# Innovation, Insight and Talent

An Interview with **Debra (Debbie) A. Polishook**,  
Group Chief Executive-Accenture Operations, Accenture

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Debbie Polishook assumed her current post in September of 2016. Prior to this, she was Group Operating Officer for Accenture Operations.*

**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.*



Debra A. Polishook

## Would you discuss the vision for creating Accenture Operations?

Accenture Operations came into existence in 2014, when we combined our infrastructure and cloud services with our Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) capabilities. We have been delivering BPO services for well over two decades. As technology began to play a critical role driving innovation in business processes and we moved the business strategically to an “as a service” model, we extended the capabilities within the operations business to include infrastructure and cloud services.

The creation of Accenture Operations was a strategic response to digital transformation; through the business unit and its capabilities, we provide a business platform based on advanced processes, infrastructure, data and talent that delivers breakthrough performance results for our clients.

We are disrupting and reinventing the market's current capabilities. We achieve this through continuous innovation, workforce transformation and an investment strategy that focuses on developing world-class talent and next-generation capability. This capability has data at its core. We leverage human skills enhanced by automation, advanced analytics, machine learning and natural language processing to unlock unique intelligence to provide our clients with relevant insights to drive growth and competitive advantage.

## What are your key priorities for Accenture Operations as you look to the future?

Our priority will always be to deliver superior business outcomes for our clients. In practice, this

will mean focusing on three key areas: innovation, insight and talent. All three are critical ingredients for delivering on our intelligent operations vision.

In terms of innovation, we are scaling our automation, data and artificial intelligence capabilities through reskilling and investing both organically and inorganically. Regarding data-driven insight, we are focused on aggregating “anonymized” client data and fortifying it with third-party data sources. Our recurring solutions model provides Accenture a unique “data trap” to collect and own proprietary “anonymized” data sets that can fuel AI, machine learning and other emerging technologies.

Most importantly, we'll continue our focus on and invest in our talent. We are committed to finding and growing the best talent with the industry expertise and digital skills needed to deliver the best business outcomes for our clients.

## What has been the key to Accenture's consistent industry leadership?

Accenture is filled with people who have been here 10, 20 and yes, like me, more than 30 years. We are also a company with a workforce that is predominantly “millennial” and will be welcoming Gen Z graduates in 2018. Over the years, our leadership teams have created and sustained a workplace culture centered on challenging and fulfilling work, innovation, entrepreneurship, supportive colleagues and a shared sense of accomplishment. We're making a real difference to the business of our clients, the communities where we work and live and, by extension, the world at large.

Another major factor has been the sheer variety of opportunities at Accenture, the result of being an innovation-led company that never stands still. I have worked across a wide variety of clients, industries and business functions. For more than 30 years I have enjoyed a front row seat implementing transformational technologies while helping our clients reinvent their businesses. There is always a new frontier and I love playing a role in exploring, applying and living it.

As for Accenture's consistent industry leadership, I don't think there's much of a secret to it. Accenture has always been quick to identify the technologies that will really transform business and make the appropriate investments to attract and develop the best capability and talent. We give our people the training, tools and processes to let them do what they do best – help clients achieve their

desired business outcomes and successfully grow their businesses.

## Accenture places a major emphasis on building a diverse and inclusive workforce. Would you discuss these efforts?

Inclusion and diversity are an indelible part of our company culture and are embedded in our core values. We understand that diversity brings different ways of thinking that add value to our organization, fuel innovation, and help us best meet our clients' needs. We employ people from a wide range of cultures, ethnicities, beliefs, backgrounds and languages and offer a completely inclusive environment that embraces different ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientation, ages and disabilities.

Our efforts to build a diverse workforce run throughout the company. We've created an environment where our people can feel comfortable, be themselves and contribute freely. This lies at the center of our #beOperations program. #beOperations centers on a series of principles which we believe will create a truly inclusive workplace. For example, we expect our leaders and employees to encourage, recognize and enable their colleagues, and to foster a positive and collaborative work environment where everyone feels supported.

## Do you feel that there are significant opportunities for women at senior levels in the industry and how is Accenture leading in this regard?

It's well documented that there aren't enough women in senior roles in business and government. This is particularly true of the corporate boardroom: if you look at S&P companies, something like just one in five board members are women. This isn't good enough.

Within enterprises, it's important that the right roles are given to the right people regardless of gender and that we adequately remunerate and reward women employees at all levels. Clearly, our companies need to reflect society at large, and that means we need to promote more women into leadership roles and ensure that they are equally represented in succession planning. I share Accenture's vision to have a completely balanced slate for every role.

Accenture is committed to and focused on achieving a completely gender-balanced workforce globally, with 50 percent women and 50 percent men, by 2025. In 2016, women made up 30 percent of the newly promoted managing directors and we are focused on increasing this each year until we achieve our vision. ●