



Walk in the Cloud

Accenture and Oracle: How to be an agile giant

Ellen Bencard, Walk in the Cloud Host

Ellen Bencard leads Accenture's marketing campaigns in the UK while also managing to nourish her journalistic roots as an established blogger on the arts, travel and fine dining. Her corporate work usually finds her behind the scenes, coaching her team to bring together big ideas, insightful commentators, exciting events and innovative channels in ways that inspire prospective clients. But this isn't the first time she's stepped into the limelight to show off her training as a reporter, writer and presenter. She's anchored a web-based YouTube series for BT called Top Tips for CIOs and was Northwestern University's on-site media spokesperson at the Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and fellow alumna Meghan Markle. Born and educated in the American Midwest, Ellen's lived in the UK since 1999 and is a proud dual citizen.

Alastair Watts, Head of HCM Cloud – Commercials Industries, UKI

Alastair has commercial responsibility for Oracle's Human Capital Management Cloud business across the UK and Ireland for the commercial industries sectors. He works in the Software as a Service (SaaS) market, is passionate about the Cloud and how this can positively impact organisations when it comes to the 'people agenda' and what this means for supporting business value. Prior to joining Oracle, Alastair has enjoyed 20 years in various senior sales and leadership roles across the HCM Applications sector and helping enterprise organisations embark on their transformation to Cloud. He has a great understanding of the competitive landscape in the HCM Applications market having previously worked at SuccessFactors and been a customer of Workday.

**David Middup, Managing Director
in Accenture's UKI Oracle Practice**

David has spent his career shaping and delivering transformational change, enabled by technology, with the last 12 years focussing on HR Transformation and HR technology. He has advised on transformation initiatives for multi-national organisations in a wide range of industries across Europe, the Middle East and USA. Having worked in 'Big 4' and niche consulting firms, and also directly for a Tier 1 Cloud vendor, he has seen the benefit that the Cloud brings to organisations not only from a technology perspective but also in simplifying ways of working, enhancing the user experience and building employee engagement.

Intro: Walk in the Cloud.

Ellen: Welcome back to Accenture's Walk in the Cloud. This is your host, Ellen Bencard, in search of straight talk about partnerships. We all get by with a little help from our friends. How does that work when you're dealing with massive organisations and cloud technology? In today's episode, I'm talking about business behemoths and agility. Any sports fan can tell you that the fastest, most flexible athletes usually aren't the biggest. Is the same true of corporations and government departments? I'm exploring that today with Accenture's David Middup. Hello, David.

David: Good morning, Ellen.

Ellen: And Oracle's Alastair Watts. Hello, Alastair.

Alastair: Good morning, Ellen.

Ellen: They both believe that size doesn't matter. That even the world's biggest organisations can be agile if they put the right structures in place. So, David, let me start with you. The corporate world has been talking about speed and agility for as long as most people can remember. Why is it so important now? Have the past couple of extraordinary years changed this conversation?

David: Well, Ellen, transformation is all about long term investment, but that all too often means a long wait for anything to happen. So being agile is about how to deliver real change incrementally.

This helps to achieve some of your business benefits as you go along and helps to keep people interested in the journey. In the market today, everything seems to move so quickly. So the opportunity, whether it's to capture market share, or to respond to an overnight change in market conditions such as COVID, must be addressed rapidly to be of any use. But rapid change tends to be achieved through digital innovation. And where agility comes in is ensuring that your organisation is already digitally fluent and able to take on board that digital innovation in a timely manner. And that digital fluency considers a mix of four areas. So the technology workers are actually provided with your workforce's skills and enthusiasm for taking on technology, the use of information and digital platforms to support day-to-day business operations, but also the leadership that's embedded into the culture to use digital. When all four of those facets are in place, workers really gain agility and the organisation leads in key performance metrics such as innovation and customer service.

Ellen: So there's a word kicking around, in corporate vocabulary right now, "digital native." And usually those companies are not big ones. Are big organisations at a natural disadvantage in a digital world that rewards agile speed?

David: Well, I think the thing about scale, is that when you're investing in digital, it takes equipment and it takes time. So the bigger the organisation,

the harder it is to pay for that investment. So organisations like the NHS for example, will struggle as much of it's to do with political will and resistance. But that extra investment is just hard to achieve than it is with a smaller organisation. But there are also, there are other factors. So the capacity of the organisation to absorb change, especially in COVID times. NHS, frontline staff may not have the time or the appetite to go on training or to help make back office processes more efficient. So any transformation, any project has to really sell the benefits to its customers. I.e, the frontline staff there.

Ellen: Right. And Alastair, let me bring you in now. If big organisations need to get better at this, which most do, how do they get started?

Alastair: I think that's an excellent question, Ellen. Certainly the transformation discussion has changed dramatically in the last two years. And what we are finding is that organisations are reverting back to smaller projects. Because actually understanding what you have in your business today, is really being as focused on since the pandemic has hit organisations around the globe. I mean even just basic, in the world of HR, which I operate in, the back to basics of understanding clearly how many employees you've got in your organisations, where they reside and how long they've been in the organisation, and are they okay if fundamental, basic information and data points?

So what we are seeing is that organisations are starting to revert back to smaller projects that then lead into a transformational journey, within those larger organisations. And I can point that specifically to Oracle, the company that I work for, where we have been on a systematic deployment of our own human capital management cloud technology, but done it in smaller projects, whether that be within regions or within countries. But breaking it down even further, just to start at basic projects, to get our data points accurate before we then continue the rollout and innovation to ultimately get to a transformational state.

Ellen: And Alastair, you mentioned cloud and let me pull that out a bit first to you, then to David. I mean, how does cloud fit into this? Can you give me some specifics about how cloud technologies help organisations to be faster and more flexible?

Alastair: So for us cloud is less about the technology and more about the service that is actually being deployed within the organisation. So think of this more as a subscription to a service rather than cloud being the utopia of, you know, how to get digital and digitisation working within your organisation. What cloud does for organisations though, is gives the flexibility to be able to deliver small amounts of incremental change within the business, but give very quick returns. And what we are seeing in the marketplace is that there is, you know,

the pandemic that has taken place in the last couple of years, has meant that organisations need to be more agile. They need to be more flexible. And the cloud gives that to organisations, by not having to invest in more infrastructure, not investing in more hardware, but allowing other operators in the marketplace that do this for a living to provide that service to their employees and to the organisation at large. Does that make sense?

Ellen: Yeah, definitely. David, do you have anything to add to that?

David: Yeah, sure. Really an HR system, it's not just for professional HR users, it's actually a people system. It's an organisation-wide people system, and probably the only system that does touch everybody in an organisation. So the whole organisation needs not only access to an intuitive cloud solution, but it also needs that digital leadership. So from on high, helping people to actually use that cloud service and ensuring that underpins all new operations. But also as a business transforms or takes on new cloud technology, the HR function itself needs to pivot to provide a different model of service. So where many employees are now doing self-service functions on the cloud solution, the value that HR adds is now different. And so that pivot needs to be aligned to the digital model and digital tools that are now available across the organisation.

Ellen: Yeah. And our listeners love tangible examples like that. Can I push you guys for more? Are there other stories that you can tell us of people who are managing to combine size with agility really well? Now I know that your clients like to keep their competitive advantages under wraps. So don't use names, but do you have any examples of people who are doing this well?

Alastair: So, there's no doubt about it. That in the world of Oracle, our clients are and have been learning how to use cloud. And there are a couple of examples where I can think of in particular, in the retail space where we have seen our clients actually want to take on the full ownership of the responsibility for deploying cloud within their organisations. So they've actually built up domain and subject matter experts within particular process areas within their business so that they can in turn, provide sort of more business value in an agile and responsive way to the changing demands of their stakeholders and the executives and their board. So we're seeing some really nice examples how, you know, organisations are taking more responsibility for their own destiny by having the skill sets in house rather than relying more and more on third parties, but using people like Accenture to help them with the change that goes on as part of these deployments. But being able to be very responsive and resilience, to the demands coming from their business and seeing some phenomenal returns as an example.

And if I just call out one in particular where this particular retail organisation recently deployed a project and saw upwards of 30% cost savings in the way that they recruit staff into their organisations, as just as a small example.

Ellen: Yeah. And we all know retail, there are a few people who have been under more pressure, the past two years. David, any other examples you can bring to the table here?

David: Well, the one, what I'd like to bring is actually flipping it around a little bit. And, I'm thinking of a petrochemical organisation I was working with where really cloud is great, but it's not the panacea, it's not the silver bullet that solves anything. And this particular organisation had different business models in different geographies, and without leadership that actually binds those together, cloud suffers. So decisions need to be taken to ensure that the cloud model can be implemented cohesively across the organisation. And if it's not, and if the decisions can't be taken, then the cloud solution is downgraded. And the business case for doing it in the first place is eroded. So the leadership and governance are essential, and that's across any cloud solution, but actually it was always true of any older technologies as well.

Ellen: The tools are only as good as the craftspeople using them. Absolutely.

David: Absolutely.

Ellen: We're talking about partnership in this series of Walk in the Cloud. Tell me about Oracle and Accenture. And, you know, those are both huge corporations. When you bring them together to make something even bigger, how does that help with speed and agility? David, let me start with you.

David: Thank you, Ellen. Well, I mean, the analogy is often about turning a super tanker, but actually if you spin the ship too quickly, the sailors fall over. So Accenture and Oracle can help with giving confidence to the organisation, providing that digital technical expertise, which helps sailors stay upright. And any transformation is the three way partnership. So knowledge of the underpinning product from Oracle, Accenture's experience of how to take the clients on the change journey, through HR strategy and operating models. And of course the client's knowledge of their own culture, organisation, and ways of working. So the strength from the relationship really comes from the interconnectivity, and knowing when to call on each other when needed and the trust that we have in each other is that it's all about the client's best interests at heart.

Ellen: And Alastair, what's your take on that?

Alastair: Well, I think David has put it very eloquently, Ellen. But one thing I would just add to that is, you know, at Oracle we think about this as a sort of a tripartite arrangement and partnership with our customers.

Oracle delivers wonderful technology, that's what we do for a living. But it's actually the partnership with our partners like Accenture and the customer, that actually makes the journey a reality, because it all needs to be based on business value and business outcome. And we don't have all the tools that is required to deliver that outcome in our business. Whereas, you know, working with partners like Accenture has such a broad spectrum of support, infrastructure and services that quite frankly, we, as Oracle just couldn't offer. So bringing that together, in sync with the client, and their resources and their skillsets in house is what delivers the service, and the business value outcome, in my opinion.

Ellen: Got it. And we're coming to the end of our walk. Every journey, including our walk today starts with just a single step. So in closing, if an executive from a giant sluggish organisation asked you what the first step she could take should be, what's your advice? Let me start with you, Alastair.

Alastair: Wow. That's a big question to end on, Ellen. I would suggest that that person should absolutely make sure, before they start on this journey that the entire executive and the board are brought into the outcome and the journey they are about to go on. Because without that support infrastructure around the individuals who are actually going to be delivering the outcome, quite often, these projects just never get off the ground or they fail in process. That would be my advice.

Ellen: And David, what's a different first step.

David: Oh gosh.

Ellen: You can't tap that one.

David: Well, mine is going to be slightly similar, but there's a phrase I've often used in the past. So I think from a delivery perspective, when on a project like this that, when things don't always go smooth as one might hope, and a phrase I've used in the past is about slowing down to speed up. So where things aren't necessarily on track, you don't just rush ahead trying to do more quicker. You actually need to step back, ensure those foundations are linking back to what Alastair said, the governance. Governance isn't just about the start of a program, it's actually about ongoing. So when times get tough, you really can keep going. So that's slowing down to speed up, making sure those foundations are in place, making sure leadership and decision making is there for the long-term.

Ellen: Well, gentlemen, I think you've given people a lot of reasons for hope here. You can be an agile giant, it just takes the right thought processes and teams behind it. So thank you both for coming on our walk today.

David: Thanks very much.

Alastair: Thanks very much.

Ellen: I hope you enjoyed today's walk. And if so, the whole team here at Walk in the Cloud would love to hear back from you. Give us a boost on social media, like us on your favourite podcast platform, share us on LinkedIn. Every little bit helps. And if you have comments or suggestions for future episodes, please find me Ellen Ferrara Bencard on LinkedIn, and drop me a note. Now, the next episode, we're gonna be talking about talent. With the great resignation in the news and organisations fighting for talent, how do people get and keep the right skills in the workplace? We're gonna get some ideas from the intersection of Accenture and Salesforce. I hope you'll join us.

Outro: Walk in the Cloud.