TECH TRENDS 2025: A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN AI AND WORKFORCE

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

VO: This is **The Lens**- Life Sciences Reinvention in focus.

Tom Lehmann 00.11

Welcome to **The Lens**! I'm your host Tom Lehmann, and welcome to a conversation about the impactful changes happening in life sciences organizations. In this series we showcase the progress that has been made, and the challenges that were faced by organizations along the way and we explore the way the industry is being reimagined and reinvented.

However, this episode is a little different and is an opportunity to feature a broader industry perspective. For more than 20 years, Accenture has published an annual Technology Vision that reviews and identifies emerging technology trends with the greatest impact in the coming year. We also reflect on how those trends have evolved over time.

In this year's report there are 4 trends shaping the future of business and society:

- The exponential expansion of AI and how that's upending systems
- Differentiating the customer experience when every interface looks the same
- How foundation models, like Large Language Models, are reinventing robotics, and
- How People and AI define a new virtuous cycle of learning, leading, and creating

My guest for this episode is David Hole, who is the global lead for Accenture's Life Sciences talent & organization practice. We are going to focus on the 4th theme about People, AI and learning, leading, and creating. I hope you enjoy this episode!

Tom Lehmann 01:25

Hi David, welcome to The Lens.

David Hole 01:27

Good to be here.

Tom Lehmann 01:29

So over the past year and a half, there's been a huge amount of focus on—and talk about—generative AI. So that includes, I would say, both the wow factor of what these technologies can do, but also this conversation around the impact that it might have on just all facets of our lives. And that includes, of course, how it might transform work and the workforce that does that work. And so what I want to focus today's discussion on is that intersection of intelligent technologies and humans. So to get started, we might still be in the early days, but how is generative AI really transforming the life sciences workforce?

David Hole 02:10

So that's a great question to kick off this discussion, because I think it's recognized that Gen AI is revolutionizing the workforce in life sciences, and that is being driven by what we in our Tech Vision 2025 call the "binary Big Bang." And that's a phenomenon that refers to the exponential growth of AI agents and the reinvention of how organizations are building their digital systems. So, it's no longer about AI being a tool. It's really becoming a partner in innovation, and that means it can handle complex tasks, make data-driven decisions, and those are roles, activities that were traditionally the sole domain of human experts. And so, we can imagine a world in which AI collaborates with scientists, for example, to create medicines faster and more efficiently, but also brings a new era of productivity across business operations, really across the value chain, new ways of engaging with customers and patients. And so, it really is the dawn of, I think, a new age when we think about the workforce.

Tom Lehmann 03:21

And so I'm going to build on a couple of examples that you had there around AI and its collaboration with scientists—and what does that modern scientist look like, you talked about customer engagement or patient engagement, which is certainly very important in our industry here. Break it down for me, though, what skills are going to be necessary for that future workforce? So if this is going to be transformative change, I would presume then you're going to be talking about a very different skill set in the future. What does that look like?

David Hole 04:01

So I think it's multifaceted. I think the future workforce in the life science industry will need a completely new suite of capabilities, if you will, in order to thrive alongside Gen AI, and I think that's key alongside Gen AI. So there's a need for an agentic workforce, one that embraces autonomy, responsibility, strategic decision making, and these skills require people to, of course, build technical acumen—and I'll come back to that in a moment—but also to additionally build other skills that will be of a premium, if you will.

So let me talk about technical acumen first, because I see that as really involving three distinct components. One is proficiency in emerging technologies, being immersed, if you will, in the latest developments in biotechnology, genomics, data analytics and other fields. The second around technical acumen, I think is then the application of tools and agents, using advanced tools and methodologies to conduct research—and not just scientific research. Research across the value chain. Analyze data in order to develop new treatments, enhance operations, and again, engage customers and patients, and the third is then applying technologies to identify and address complex challenges. And so building technical acumen is, of course, key and essential, and we see lots of organizations in life sciences focused on that at the moment. But I did say there are other skills and capabilities within the suite of requirements for an agentic workforce, and these include, in no particular sort of order of priority, strategic thinking, the ability to set long term goals, navigate systemic complexities, developing adaptable strategies. It includes effective resource management, which is key to scaling for projects and delivering innovative solutions.

There's a whole range of what I would term human-centric skills such as empathy, communication, collaboration, ethical decision-making, which is a core competency to ensure that employees in the life science environment are aligned to the needs of both customers and patients. A couple of other areas I would point to, skills around personal agency, autonomy and responsibility, and that's really about the ability to take initiative, to hold oneself accountable, which requires a strong sense of self awareness, the ability to operate within ethical and regulatory boundaries demanded by the industry, and finally, I think there's a need to hone the ability to navigate the complexity of diverse systems, of diverse data sets, stakeholder groups, resources to achieve desired outcomes. So going forward, I think there's a balance between building skills, upskilling and re-skilling the organization around AI tools and technologies, but balance with blending with human intuition and human-centric skills to really drive business outcomes.

Tom Lehmann 08:00

So let me come back to a couple of things that you said in there—and thank you for that perspective. So this agentic workforce, right? So explore that just a little bit for those that are unaware of that term or what that might look like, and how does an agentic workforce complement the human workforce, if you will? But I'll start there, just explore that just a little bit more for me?

David Hole 08:25

So at its simplest, if you will, it's looking at workflow, and it's looking at those activity tasks that lend themselves to, in effect, being conducted by an AI or Gen AI agent, the machine side of the equation, if you will. And that then frees up capacity on the human side of the equation to redirect the individual to those activities, those tasks that really rely more on the human dynamics and the human capabilities that drive value, whether it's to the organization, the operation, or again, back to interface with customers and patients. And so that takes us into those skills that I mentioned, of the touch points with others, it requires you know, sophisticated communication skills, that require empathy, that require collaboration, that bring an ethical dimension into decision making and the like. And so it's the balance between the two.

Tom Lehmann 09:50

So as you look at how this might play out, then, right? If you think about what will be required, as far as the skill set needed, but also really trying to evaluate what's really going to drive value in an organization—because there's no shortage of opportunity—but not all of it's going to actually translate into the appropriate balance between investment upfront, ongoing investment, and actual sort of benefit to the organization. How much of this, then, in an organizational structure, gets democratized to say, "Okay, everyone, just have at it. Go do your thing, go create whatever type of technology intervention you're going to have with these agents," versus maybe a desire to pull a little bit more central, a

little bit more common governance across different business functions. What are you seeing, and where do you think that's going to play out?

David Hole 10:25

So I think that's a really important question, because I do think there is a direction of travel that is around the democratization of work, and it flows in part, and it's linked to learning journeys as well. There's personalization and learning journeys that reflect the democratization of work. But I think in your question, you're touching on something that's important, which is striking the right balance, and that plays out at two levels- one is the strategic level, but one, I think, is then at the tactical everyday ways of working level.

At the strategic level, you alluded to it, I think in the framing of the question, organizations need to be cognizant of where they're going to put their focus, and that obviously starts with their business strategy, but its understanding where in the organization are we driving disproportionate value creation? Or alternatively, are we protecting against value erosion? And from a strategic perspective, the strategic choices I think of leaning in, in those type of areas within development, for example, that's an obvious place to look but also areas of operations and into the commercial sector and making choices around where they want to deploy resources. That's at the strategic level.

I think that the more tactical day to day is striking a balance between fostering a culture of trust, of autonomy, where leaders are actively sort of empowering their people to take decisions, to experiment, to model agentic behaviors, but doing that alongside setting clear expectations and holding employees accountable for the outcomes. Thereby, you're achieving this sort of balance between democratization and autonomy but responsibility. So, it's autonomy within a framework of purpose and responsibility for outcomes.

Tom Lehmann 13:15

All right, thank you- it's helpful. And again, I think this is one of those challenges, right, in the organization. I think you used the expression "balance," right? You've got to find that balance there in the organization. And part of

that balance, I think, ultimately comes also with, "Okay, how much do I need to move my workforce along on a path in order to actually be successful in this space? Which requires, and you used this expression before, "upskilling," right, so how do I do a talent lift here to make sure I've got the right folks ready to do the job that's going to look like what's in the future. And you mentioned two things before, the technical acumen and then human-centric skills. So we were talking about generative AI, in its disruptive benefits, if you will, for how we can change work. How does it play a role, actually, though, with the learning and development side? So in and of itself, is creating change, but how does it play a role to actually facilitate that learning journey?

David Hole 14:04

This is a really interesting area, because I think what's happening simultaneously, and we're finding this in work we're doing with a number of clients who are seeking to partner with us to basically support them in upskilling their organization, around technical acumen, around some of those human centric capabilities that I mentioned. What's happening simultaneously, though is, Gen AI is also disrupting how we actually create and deliver learning within an organization. So the two are sort of going hand in hand. Gen AI is able to create personalized learning experiences tailored to individual needs. It provides real time feedback. It helps employees improve on a continuous sort of virtuous loop, if you will. And that is one of the drivers of fostering shared knowledge constant development, which in turn has the outcome, I think of making organizations more adaptive and resilient. And coming back to your point about democratization, I think that personalization of learning then feeds in to democratization of learning. So the employee is increasingly having control and agency of access to and consumption of content. And what we are seeing organizations doing that we're working with in life sciences is encouraging that process and rewarding that sort of growth mindset, that we can personalize a learning path for you, and through democratization of access to content, you can curate your own learning experience.

Tom Lehmann 16:10

Thanks for that, and I think it gives me a perspective around the learning side, it's facilitating a much more of a personalized learning experience. Are you seeing or do you anticipate, it's also playing a different role around just creativity and innovation in general?

David Hole 16:25

I do. I think creativity and innovation are really at the heart of the process and I see a world where generative AI is actually creating or creating a particular role in inspiring new ideas and solutions. Back to the link to the personalization, democratization of learning, because it can provide dynamic learning paths that are tailored, really to an individual's progress, to their interest, to their career aspirations, I think it can therefore connect people to explore, for them, uncharted territories and that is a catalyst for creativity. It can challenge people to

push the boundaries of what they know, push the boundaries of what they're exposed to, and that, I think, in turn, pushes the boundaries of what's possible. So I think that gets us into what we term again, in our research, this virtuous loop of learning.

Tom Lehmann 17:40

Alright, so do me a favor, then, let's look ahead. So, if you just summarize where we're at, and then I'm going to ask you to look into the future here. So, we see incredible potential with these types of technologies, we're beginning to see the real impact of that. However, it requires to really get that impact, you have to reinvent the work, you have to change the way that things are happening today. That has an impact on the workforce that actually does that work, which then leads to the fact that we've got to move our talent along this journey, which is becoming more personalized to the individual and into the role that they play. What can organizations be doing now and what's that call to action, if you will, to prepare for this future and really get the benefit from generative AI within their organization, in whatever part of that business where they operate?

David Hole 18:22

Yeah, great question. I think you know, the starting point for me is perhaps an obvious one, but I think it requires organizations to be proactive in how they look at embracing Gen AI and how they then equip the workforce. So it's important, as we've said, to upskill and re-skill the organization, important to work now on building those personalized learning experiences and using that as a trigger to building a culture of innovation.

In terms of a call to action, I would summarize it this way. I'd say that in a dynamic field like life sciences, where we have employees being asked to increasingly navigate complexity at both speed and scale, we're creating the ideal environment to embrace agentic working and build an agentic workforce. And so I think the call to action is for organizations to seize the moment and seize the opportunity. It requires them to think not only of the technical skills they need to build, but also those human centric skills that I mentioned.

And I'm seeing that the leading companies that we're working with are those that are on the path to successfully integrating that combination of skills, successfully democratizing the learning experience and doing that in line with those strategic choices of where they want to lean in in terms of Gen AI within the organization—whether it's in the service of science, whether it's driving operational excellence, or whether it's creating new experiences and better ways of engaging with customers and patients. And so, the call to action is to recognize the transformative nature of the opportunity Gen AI on ways of working, the workforce and how that drives the talent agenda.

Tom Lehmann 21:00

Well, thank you, David, I think I'm going to bring it to a close there. I think a good discussion across a range of topics here, not only where we are right now and what we're seeing in the industry, but also as you just close there, what the potential is, and what organizations need to do to actually embrace this and see the benefit from it. So, thank you very much for your perspectives and for joining today.

David Hole 21:15

You're welcome. Thank you.

Tom Lehmann 21:20

As I conclude this insightful conversation, it’s clear that generative AI is not just a tool but a transformative partner in the life sciences industry.

By reshaping the workforce, AI is enabling unprecedented innovation and efficiency, handling complex tasks, and augmenting data-driven decision making. The future workforce will need to blend technical acumen with human-centric skills, creating a dynamic balance that drives value and fosters collaboration.

If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to leave us a review and subscribe on your favorite podcast platform so you don't miss an episode. Until next time, this is Tom Lehmann and this is The Lens.