AI LEADERS PODCAST: AUTOMATING THE ACCENTURE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE TO BE MORE INTELLIGENT

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

MARK MARTYNUS: Because if I stand up an AI asset, it could be the best model ever, but if it's hidden and people can't find it, it doesn't matter.

LEE BARRETT: Hi everybody. Welcome the AI Leaders Podcast. I'm Lee Barrett, a Managing Director for Accenture's Applied Intelligence Practice. I'm here today with Jason Warnke, a Senior Managing Director within Accenture, who's leading the Global Digital Experiences and Mark Martynus, a Managing Director at Accenture who's leading the Applied Intelligence Capabilities within our Global IT Team.

Glad to have you guys here today talking about how we're automating the Accenture Employee Experience to be more intelligent.

MARK MARTYNUS: Thanks, for having us, Lee.

JASON WARNKE: Yeah, it's great to be here.

LEE BARRETT: Awesome. So let's just jump right in. Mark, maybe you could tell us a little bit about what is AI Powered Automation?

MARK MARTYNUS: Yeah, sure, Lee. I think for me, I can go pretty deep here, but I always just like to keep it simple with saying, AI is the ability to provide insights to enable decisions. Just keep it really, really simple. But when getting into AI Powered Automation, this is an area where to me is the next generation. To me, it's about identifying patterns, making decisions on those patterns, automating those decisions and then, to me, most importantly, it's continuing to optimize those outcomes, so we could ultimately improve the experiences for our people in the field and using our tools.

LEE BARRETT: Great. Jason, how do you see that impacting our employees?

JASON WARNKE: Well, if we deliver on that promise that Mark talked about, I think for the employee, having those insights at time of need, at their fingertips, almost with a suggested next best action for whatever thing they're doing, right, imagine playing a role where that AI is helping you complete your work. As soon as you have the thought that you need a little bit of help or you want to check on some data before you make a decision, that data is there.

I think it has tremendous potential impact on the way that employees of all types, all roles perform their function and overall, will improve their experience.

They're getting out of all of that extra work they needed to do to verify, to go find data, to validate that data and then, to make decisions. It's there at their fingertips at the time of need.

LEE BARRETT: I couldn't agree more. So as you think about that impact, what are some of the social and ethical questions that need to be taken into account before implementing a program like this?

JASON WARNKE: There, obviously, has to be - in what I just described, has to be an incredible amount of trust in that data. And in order to get to a point where the employees, at whatever role they play, are trusting the data, they're making those point need decisions on, there has to be transparency in how that data is derived.

If I use an example of a really hot topic right now is the organizational data and telemetry from employee's use of collaboration tools and any type of tools that are used in the workplace. So you're looking at the telemetry and sort of understanding work patterns. It's a really hot topic right now. And having the employees trust the data and know how that data is being gathered, know how that data is being used and not being used and then, having the understanding of whether or not they're ethical or biases in that data. So that gets into the ethnical use of data. You want to know clearly where that data's coming from. You want to know if the bias in that data and how that data is presented is taken into account. And that takes a lot of – to get to what I described is sort of that ideal use case, there's a lot of work that has to go into that pipeline, all the way to the point that employee gets that data to use it to make a decision.

And I think I just use one example, but there's a ton of examples, you get into healthcare, for instance. And when the healthcare worker is going to use that insight to perform their function, there's a ton of trust in that equation, in that pipeline, from the point that that data was originally captured to how then that data is being reasoned over, so that you can make a decision.

So I think it gets into the promise of the use of AI to have people perform their jobs easier and better. A lot of work needs to go into ensuring that that is fully trusted all the way along the lines. So, yeah, it is a tremendous idea, it's a tremendous promise when we can

deliver on it and a ton of work needs to go into ensuring that that works the right way.

LEE BARRETT: I couldn't agree more, Jason, especially on that social and ethical angle. Trust could be one of the biggest challenges. How have you seen success in establishing that trust?

JASON WARNKE: I think it starts with, and Mark, I'd love your thoughts on this as well because Mark's team runs this for Accenture and has reasons over and manages over a ton of important data. But I think it starts with, in that use case that I described earlier, being upfront and transparent from the very start with how the principles on which you're going to use data in the enterprise. And I think in the case of employee related data, you've got to be very transparent, you've got to make sure that the employees understand your rules and principles for use of that data, what you will and won't use it for.

So I think it absolutely begins with transparency, it begins with having a team that's going to look at the ethnical use of that data and having everyone in that equation be aware of how that works.

MARK MARTYNUS: Yeah and, Jason, for me, I think every conversation I'm in always comes on the trust, bias and transparency. If it's not all three of those in every conversation, at least one or two of them to hit every time I talk about it, right. And to me, if you're going to produce and automate or provide outcomes, if people can't trust or you can't show that you're continuing to optimize it, people will no longer use it. And they're moving onto the next big thing. There's very little patients if you can't establish trust and produce the right outcome because there's so many different ways to get at what you need.

So that's one of the big challenges that I face constantly is, if we can't get trust, people move on which is the natural behavior that you have inside your company or outside your company, as a user from an experience standpoint.

LEE BARRETT: I couldn't agree more. So, Mark, beyond trust, what are some of the other biggest challenges that organizations face as they try to move into intelligent automation and AI? And let's say beyond just the proof of concept, but going into production and scaling it across the organization.

MARK MARTYNUS: Yeah, I think to me, the easiest part. It's easy to get it right. That's a big part of our methodology, a big part of a lot of the peers I talk to in the industry. It's important in two to three sprints, I should say, can you assess the concept, can you determine that there's value. Can you work very closely with your business and process owner, improve their value? If there's not, you have to be willing to move on very quickly because you can't fall in love with your idea. Just you have to be willing to fail and be able to move on.

It's after those two to three sprints that after you've landed, that's where it becomes challenging. So for me, often times when we end up proving that value, going from that small idea to industrialize, that's the big challenge. So we have to make sure that we build to operate and automate, but also build at speed. So those are two words that often are conflicting in our industry, right. So how do you find that right balance. But more and more, a lot of our conversations after proof and value, quickly turn to success definitions and adoption because if you aren't thinking about those items upfront and what do you want the outcomes to be and then, also have the operational procedures and after you do put the asset out to be industrialize, if you're not continuing the tune, it's like we're saying your trust is gone. And then, most important, and I know Jason will love this, to me, has been experience.

Gone are the days of you build something, you ask people to go to where you build it, you have to continually find ways to go to take it to where people are at. Because if I stand up an AI asset, it could be the best model ever, but if it's hidden and people can't find it, it doesn't matter. So I have to go take it to – I hang out in four or five different places every day. I'm guessing you guys probably hangout in the same type of place. If I don't take it to you, it doesn't matter what we come up with.

So, yes, the AI is a huge part of it, but it's the whole ecosystem coming together without having to create a lot of handoffs. So we have to make sure the IT process doesn't make it clunky, but it's all those groups of organizing around an outcome and eliminating and throwing things over walls and having that product outcome focus where we've seen it be successful, but also, if we don't have it, the challenge is almost insurmountable to overcome.

JASON WARNKE: Hey, Mark, I love that you're the guy now talking about experience and I'm going to actually mention or reference something that is so unlike me, but I know you and I get in discussions on it. And I know it's a challenge for many organizations which is data governance. A lot of what we talked about, it has to come down to whatever models that you're putting in those places where people are, that end of the line, that is foundationally built on the concept of the right people have the right access to the right data at the right time. And a complex organization that we're in, I always call data and insights as a team sport by its very nature. The moment you see a dashboard and you see data to make decisions on, you're going to ask questions, you're going to involve a party, the team members to get something done in most cases.

And often times, there is a lot of, hey, we should also ask so and so. And the moment that you bring in someone that wasn't originally intended for that, you've got to ensure that all is operating on the right ownership and governance of access to that data and that's a big challenge for an organization. I know for an organization our size, but many of our clients are in that same boat. That's a tough thing to get right and to constantly stay on top of because especially when we're talking about really critical private data, the healthcare data and the healthcare industry, etc., that data governance is crucial.

MARK MARTYNUS: Yeah and, Jason, data governance is not a one time or stand up a project, it's a grind. You have to grind data governance, you have to create, you know, trust is the keyword today it feels like. But you have to grind it out, you have to just continue to battle through, hey, who are we providing the access to? Should they have that access? But it's just conversation after conversation, you have to bring people together across the firm and remember who you serve most importantly.

It's not my data or Jason's data, its Accenture's data, but we have to protect it for the right individuals, but we have to make sure that we aren't looking in silos.

So governance, I think, that's one topic that when I talk with folks or talk with peers, constantly comes up. And I don't see it going away. I think it's going to get harder before it gets easier and we do have to figure out how we make it easier, so we can unleash further insights.

LEE BARRETT: Definitely agree. And I'm seeing that across our clients as well. The governance is not a one and done, it's an evolution and a journey. And it's interesting as you guys were talking about experience and the trust and the data and the types of recommendations. And, Jason, there's a lot of concerns around what AI could mean or would mean for the human workforce, how do you address these concerns?

JASON WARNKE: I think it goes back to, again, that trust and transparency, but when you start to think about coming to your employees, coming to your people with the point of view that we use this term all the time, Human + Machine. That the machine, in this case, the data and insights are there to actually augment the way that you do your work. They're going to help you make decisions better. They're going to – in the case of looking at organizational analytics around how people work and the patterns there, ultimately, we can use those patterns to help people work more efficiently, have more focus time, have less meeting time, there's all kinds of great benefits that you can talk to our people about, but you've got to bring them along in that journey. It's like any other journey, change and adoption sort of thing with people.

You've got to explain sort of the end outcome is there to benefit them, make their jobs easier to perform, make them more effective in delivering whatever function they deliver, helping their customers, etc., etc. And I think that is – you don't just start with, hey, we're going to capture and give you data and it's just going to make everything better. You've got to take them along that journey and that starts with, oh, by the way, this is foundationally based in a principle that says, this data is going to be used this way and not this way and it's there for your benefit and no other reason.

And I think that is something, you know, every time we do a project related to this, Mark's team is there with our journey and change management team to ensure that our business users of that particular application or those insights are there to bring the end users along on that journey. It's not just about, hey, oh, you wanted this thing, great, we're just going to deliver it. That you've

got to take them along on that journey from start to finish.

MARK MARTYNUS: Yeah, and change has been a huge part of our journey. The one thing about analytics though that really makes organizations thinking small chunks, which I think has now allowed us to bring that mindset and process to a lot of different areas. And it's also taking Jason and his team, I think, about changing a different way, which I think is a great way to think about it and not everything has to have a large change program to it. Hey, we've got this insight, how do we best want to go about it? And there are so many different tactics that our change folks take to really push items out. But the big part they do is making sure the success that we defined upfront continues to happen.

And I mentioned it before. If we're not getting success from it, move on. There's many other models to build. It's okay, sometimes things out live their life. And our change folks do a great job with that in terms of, hey, we're a year in, you may not be getting the value that you once desire if we've had a useful life, do we need to make tweaks. But it's really no different than building out software years ago. Analytics is just not a magic black box. There's a lot of labor, there's a lot of love, there's a lot of blood and a lot of sweat that goes into it, but it's done in much more micro ways.

LEE BARRETT: I couldn't agree more. So I'm just curious if there's any top examples for you guys on where or how we're augmenting the employee experience at Accenture to be more intelligent?

JASON WARNKE: So my favorite example at the moment, because I think it brings this whole concept to life that Mark referenced, which is bringing the data and insights to where people are. And a lot of times where people are these days are actually in meetings together. So it's one thing to do what we've done for decades. You create a dashboard, you have it out there, people are looking at that individually and then, inevitably, you're going to get on a meeting and someone's going to say, hey, did you see the latest report on dah, dah, dah? And they bring that up, if they haven't already sent emails back and forth about things they are seeing in the data that they want to ask about in a meeting, but inevitably they get on a call, they start discussing this.

Well, imagine if the data and insights came to the meeting with you. And so, one of the things we're working on right now and Microsoft Teams is what we use as our standard collaboration platform across Accenture. Imagine the Teams meeting itself, the canvas of that meeting now includes those real time data and analytics that then can be referenced and collaborated on in the meeting.

So every time you've got a recurring meeting, for a leadership team that's running this segment of the business, that data and insights actually coming to the meeting with you and the insights are there that you can discuss real time. And when someone in the meeting is going to manipulate the dashboard to sort of look at one particular aspect of it, everyone in the meeting sees exactly what's happening. And it's not something that is filled with a bunch of friction, you remove all that friction, you bring that right there to the meeting.

So this is to me something that we've not been able to do over the decades. We're finally now able to do with something like Microsoft Teams, just as an example of bringing data and insights to where people are in this case to the meeting with the team.

MARK MARTYNUS: That's a big change for my team too because we would say, you're going to out to Tool X. We would then embed the insight there. Now, it's really more and more tool agnostic and that's exactly we're following with Jason, as a partner, to say, hey, most people are hanging out in Teams in our organization, any insight that we do, we got to find a way to get it there. We have to. Let's stop having 5, 10 different browsers open of Tool X, Tool Y, Tool Z. Hey, you still want to get it that way? Fine, we'll make it available there to you, but the insight has to be able to live in multiple places and almost be technology agnostic, quite honestly.

LEE BARRETT: Great. Couldn't agree more. So it's interesting, as we say, come together and we mentioned Teams and, obviously, there's been a shift to remote working. I'm just curious what is the impact then on the experience and how are companies prioritizing what goals and future investments they're going to make in AI and automation with this remote scenario?

JASON WARNKE: I think one thing we have absolutely seen is people are doing a lot more meetings than they used to. I think the things that people work in an office together, if they needed to make a quick decision on something, they would just huddle in the corner of the office and say, hey, we saw this, let's make this decision based on this data. And now, you get this just sort of abundance of meetings to make even the smallest of decisions. And I think people over this timeframe have started to figure out, like I think there are other ways to jointly make a collaborative decision that isn't like we used, which is gathering in the corner of the hallway or around the coffee point. But we can actually make those decisions and the flow of work collaboratively using that data. And in the example we keep coming back to is bring those data and insights into a collaborative platform in this case, Microsoft Teams. In our case, Microsoft Teams, and allow people to make quick decisions there. And then, you are augmenting that experience when you bring it into the meeting. But you don't have to have a meeting to make a decision.

And if I use the Teams example again, one of the things that I think we've always had a disadvantage on the sort of use of analytics and dashboards in the past in an enterprise, even when you work together, is that when you would be looking at a dashboard, then you'd ask people questions, you would move filters on that thing to look at certain slices, the data your way, then you'd ask a bunch of questions. And when you did that, you did it via email and people were like, I don't know what Mike's talking about. I don't see what he's looking at.

Well, it was like that Mike had swizzled that data about 20 different ways to get that view. Imagine where I think we're headed with Teams and Power BI, where as you swizzled that data and you ask a question, that context is locked. And now, when you get the receiver of that ping from Mike, like what the heck is going on with our sales numbers? You see exactly what he's talking about and you can reference that because that context now comes with you. Context for that collaboration around data, I think, is something that's been missing for way too long and now, I think we're just on the precipice of changing the way data is used tremendously because of that.

And then, when we go into the office, that just gets much easier because pull it up on a Surface Hub, you can pull it up on a collaborative whiteboard and you can be using that data real time and have the context there for the remote people that aren't able to be there. I just think we're really exciting time for Teams using data together.

LEE BARRETT: Definitely. So you're talking about tools and collaboration. I guess, Mark, what do you see when you start thinking about how to assess technology and what factors do you take into account before selecting a tool or a technology.

MARK MARTYNUS: So I'm a huge sports nut and I view technology is almost like being a selector of technologies to me is almost like being a coach and having a team of players. The coaches that are most successful to me are the ones who adapt to the players they have versus being the ones that say, I've got one way of doing it, you're going to do it this way. I view technology in the space the same way. There's so many players out there. A company like Accenture, we use so many different platforms. And now, everybody has a core capability they offer us and then, they augment with AI.

And so, to me, I always like to say if you're using a vendor or a partner, say like a Workday, and they offer AI, use it. Let's figure out how we best use it. And you know what, if they're offering can take us part of the way there, great. And then, I'll have standard offerings on top of that to take it even further. But to me, it's always easiest in the ecosystem you're in if the product that you're using has some AI, use it, try it, leverage it. It usually comes with the licensing of it, right. And you'll have it at point of need.

And then, you come with the big enterprise solution behind it that can do that cross use cases or cross platform cases. But to me, I have to think about how I make it easy because when you start talking about moving data around systems, it can get very complicated very quickly. And that can then just turn it into a lot of conversations, a lot of governance, a lot of process, a lot of red tape.

So to me, I always have to remember, first, how do I get the information quickest, easiest and in the best experience for folks while doing that thinking about what's the right way to leverage technology and to operate. But I am very much a – I'm not a one size fits all person. And with all technologies, there's so much AI coming, leverage what you have. You don't always have to start something

big, brand new. I want to start with getting it out there and I'm a progress versus perfection person.

Now, that doesn't necessarily help the sprawl of technology side, but a lot of times you already have it in the house, use it. That's my big perspective on it.

LEE BARRETT: Great point. I agree completely. So I really appreciate you guys taking the time to talk to us about this topic. I don't know if there's any other closing comments or thoughts that you had before we wrapped up?

MARK MARTYNUS: I just appreciate the time and I love any time we can talk about data in the experience discussion because I actually do think one of the critical components in the enterprise, in particular, where our experience for our people can be massively augmented. It's by giving them that powerful data and insights that they can trust at point of need. I think this is one of the single biggest drivers to an improved employee experience. I really do.

JASON WARNKE: Yeah, and to me, there's no more exciting time. I mean concepts like this didn't exist five years ago and just being on the very cutting-edge of where the world is going, this is a topic that I could talk for hours on, Lee. It's just a lot of fun. It's having your career and fun mixed together. There's no better place to be.

LEE BARRETT: Well, maybe we'll turn it into a series. And with that, I want to thank the listeners for listening in. I want to thank you, Jason and Mark, for joining us. Just to recap, I'd some of the main trends or three main themes that I heard was trust, trust in the data, getting trust with our users, our audience, being able to prove value and how to scale it. And then, whether we're talking about tech tools, AI recommendations, how you're creating that experience, that's really going to drive adoption.

So with that, thank you guys for a great conversation. Remember to subscribe to or share the podcast with friends and colleagues. And with that, thank you for joining us.

JASON WARNKE: Thanks, Lee. Thanks, Mark.