THE DATA & ANALYTICS LEADER TALENT MARKET SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND EXPERTISE NEEDED NOW

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Charlie Stack [00:00:00] The responsible I topic is one that that like every organization is going to have to start to address and we're going to get really efficient about what are the governance and ethics mechanisms for using AI in any sort of context.

Arnab Chakraborty [00:00:22] Hi everybody this is Arnab Chakraborty here. Once again, I'm a senior managing director at Accenture Data and AI. And we are again back with our AI Leaders podcast. And today I have the privilege of having Charlie Stack, who is the head of Global Data Analytics and AI practice at Spencer Stuart. Charlie, welcome to our AI Leaders podcast. You know that the topic of AI and generative AI has speaked up so much heat in a sort of frenzy you know after ChatGPT came out and I'm so excited that we are having this opportunity to talk together about the talent agenda when it comes to the topic of data and analytics and AI. So maybe, you know, just starting with the frenzy that I just mentioned earlier about ChatGPT and generative AI and you leading, you know, the whole data analytics AI at Spencer Stuart, what are you seeing, you know, in terms of the landscape and how is that

pivoting with generative AI?

Charlie Stack [00:01:19] Arnab I've been recruiting for a long time, almost 20 years at Spencer Stuart now. And as you know, I was an Accenture Consultant before that. I haven't seen such an abrupt shift in the market focus in a domain and really ever in, you know in my career doing this. Looked at, you know, two ways to look at the sort of talent perspective on that. One is I think it's a really hard time to be a data and analytics or just general digital leader in the world right now, because whatever it was that you thought you were working on six months ago, nobody cares about anymore. And suddenly, you know, the question is, will you know, how many prompt engineers do we need and what's a prompt engineer? And so, it's I think there's a bit of a whiplash factor in the market where I'm hearing internally in companies that, you know, that leaders specifically have a lot of concerns about an over pivot towards, you know, focusing in Gen AI right now amongst people who are in the Gen AI space. There are these two really divergent camps of, you know, people who feel like, you know, the entire world shifted overnight and

nothing's going to be the same ever. And the pace of change from here forward is going to be super radical and you better get on board. And then, you know, there are those who feel like the whole thing is a bit overblown right now. And, you know, you have people citing the, you know, like just the lack of power generation to support, you know, the development of a GPT you know five. Right. I mean, it's so it's just a very interesting time. But for sure the amount of focus on Gen AI is like nothing I've ever seen before.

Arnab Chakraborty [00:03:22] Yeah, I know. Very interesting perspective from you, you know, and the whole comment about the, you know, over pivot and the balance between the machine learning world the large language model world. Right. But, you know, everything said and done, I feel the ChatGPT and the frenzy of Generative AI is just creating so much more buzz about the impact, you know, of data analytics and AI you know, in the C-suite, in the CEO's office. And then generative AI is kind of, you know, helping us create that level of interest and passion around the topic. And it can be a great door opener for the machine learning world as well. So, I see it with, you know, half glass full mindset here that, you know, it creates more opportunities for everybody who is in the data analytics and the AI space as practitioner. And one thing yeah...

Charlie Stack [00:04:16] No the thing that's different for sure is that, you know, all of the prior, you know, generations of, you know, like deep analytics, data science, you know, machine learning work have been pretty inaccessible if you're a non-technical person. I mean, I work at an almost billion-dollar company now, a billion-dollar enterprise. And, you know, I can tell you firsthand, even companies that are, you know, billion dollar businesses have had a really hard time figuring out how to how to make investments in machine intelligence that produce returns because, you know, you needed to hire a team of skilled engineers and skilled data scientists and, you know, skilled algo developers and skilled software developers to embed the insights. And I think the big thing, you know, the

like the really the thing that's very different here is just how accessible it is right? That's you know, you and I can sign on and I can do real work with a basically free online version of this thing that that's pretty impressive. It's a little bit like, you know, what happened when you know, when we when Google invented the search bar or whoever really invented the search bar.

Arnab Chakraborty [00:05:41] Yeah. Yeah. No, no, absolutely. Absolutely. I think it's quite the inflection point. And I think, you know, what still stays constant is what you just mentioned is the teams and the talent that comes together. Obviously, you know, in today's world, we had a certain kind of talent pool that was required. Maybe with generative AI as you said, we need a different skill pools and different talent profiles, probably engineers being an example of that. And but having said that, I think, you know, the talent DNA and the and the teams that we set up around the spaces, I think there are some common teams, you know, that can still hold good and that's what I'm coming to you with your rich experience of you know, placing so many senior leaders in the data analytics place space in the companies today that the leaders that you would place in the future of the enterprises as well. What are some of the key themes you know key tenets of creating these successful data analytics teams you know that you have seen have been very, very successful in organizations. Are there some key learnings that can be taken, you know, as the new world of the initiative takes off here?

Charlie Stack [00:06:47] Yeah, there's sort of I like to talk about four, you know, really important themes that most organizations, you know, don't typically or haven't typically sort of grasp fully. You know, the first of which is that at the core of all this, the vast majority of the work up until now and we'll have to see what the impact of Gen AI is on automating lots of technical tasks. Right? So that's one really big potential area of impact that I'm seeing with Gen AI. But up until now, most companies have underestimated the extent to which, you know, the machine intelligence problem for an organization is really an

engineering challenge, right? Like for most organizations, you know, it's not going to be your ability to write a differentiated algorithm that is where the majority of the value comes from. It's going to be do you have the engineering discipline to harvest data assets at scale to feed the algorithm? Right? And if you make the algorithm a little better, but you just feed it really bad data or mediocre data, you don't tend to benefit a lot. You keep, you know, just an off the shelf algorithm and you're feeding. It was really, really robust, well-structured, timely, you know, and unique. You can capture a lot of value without doing much other than that. And so, you know, that's one. Two, I think many organizations still are in this mentality of and I don't think I don't by the way, I think this gets amplified by, you know, the large language model shift that we're seeing, if anything, but really lack any sort of product delivery discipline around the way that they do data science and machine learning. Right. So, if you're you know, if you've grown up in software companies, you understand how important, you know, product motion and product methodology are. And typically, in these organizations, you're the product organization is really the you know, the group that, you know, sort of runs the show. They're making the decisions about how do we interpret the way people use our product, and they use that to, you know, to, you know, to set the product roadmap as you look forward to, you know, to decide which parameters, which new user features we're going to test and learn on the engineers go execute that work. Right. And in most data and analytics organizations, you sort of have these two traps like you have business people and then you have, you know, the nerds over here, right, the analytical people over here. And there's this sort of disconnect between like, am I asking the right questions, am I answering the right questions? So, there's this very unique set of product leaders and product disciplines that exist in the data and analytics space that the best companies that are really extracting the most value out of their data assets have invested in. You know, the third thing I would say you know, the org model needs a relook. And this is also listen in a you know Gen

AI world this is also going to accelerate right. I've always loved this notion that like at Amazon, you know, people will tell you that. The most junior person capable of making a decision should be the one making a decision. Right. And in most organizations, the org model sort of is upside down from that. Right. It's really senior people think that it's their responsibility to make key decisions, to take key decisions and to pass those down. Right. And they view the organization as like a you know; information comes up to me and I make decisions down. And in data driven organizations, what you realize actually is that, you know, that's a super-efficient, rather super inefficient way for information and decisions to travel through an organization. In really great data driven organizations you actually have this like inversion of that where it's, you know, you think about information going to the place where it's best suited, not necessarily up the chain. And so, you know, in in leading organizations, the data leaders typically are taking the, you know, the front foot on thinking about the structure of the organization, thinking about the hierarchical structure of the organization, but also thinking about how that correlates to data architecture and information architecture and how information assets travel around the organization. Not enough focus on that. You know, finally, I would say culture, change management. You know, this is a sort of front foot focus for organizations that do data and analytics well, sort of not the back office like, you know, tell me what I need to know and come back to me. We don't have an answer, but actually it's, you know, individuals from the analytics organization, from the data science organization, from the machine learning organization, really leaning in and spending time embedded in different parts of the business and, you know, and working more on their front foot to drive culture change in terms of how people make decisions or the types of questions that they ask. Those are the four really big things. I think the fifth thing that gets introduced by ChatGPT specifically is more around ethics and risk management, because I think where that's been an issue that's like a little bit of a, you

know, easier to get your hands around up until now. I think you know the responsible AI topic is one that that like every organization is going to have to start to address and we're going to get really efficient about what are the governance and ethics mechanisms for using AI in any sort of context.

Arnab Chakraborty [00:13:11] Oh, that's phenomenal. I think you had a lot to unpack there, Charlie. You know, right from the range of engineering talent to the product mindset to, you know, how you enable the whole talent and cultural change and then the whole responsible AI. I think, you know, this is easier said than done. You can think of, oh, I need all these skills and I will bring all these skills. But, you know, when you have, you know, a 100,000-member organization and you're trying to pivot, you know, then that organization, you know, with their data and AI acumen to reach where you are saying the need to be. It's quite an undertaking. You know, it's quite an undertaking. And we have seen that in the when we talk about the last mile adoption of data analytics and AI solution, it finally boils down to the talent, talent and the cultural rotation that we have been able to achieve. So, my point to you is that, you know, you advise so many different companies, you know, with their talent agenda and then you help them with their talent agenda. What should organizations be doing and leaders to be doing, You know, in your mind as we think of all the different, you know, variety of skills that they need to bring into the organization, how would they nurture their own organization, the people that are already there in the organization, how should they nurture, you know, their people so that, you know, they can actually rotate the existing people? Because you cannot just create this talent pool by hiring people or by acquiring people. You have to have a very focused effort in nurturing your existing talent and groom that talent pool and rotate that talent pool. What are a few things that you think client leaders should actually keep in mind, you know, in rotating their organization, talent and culture DNA?

Charlie Stack [00:14:54] Yeah Arnab, this is one of the topics that I'm super passionate about because I actually I worked with the return on AI institute and our team at Spencer Stuart over the last couple of years to examine, you know, what exactly this question like what is it that as a leader you know you can and should actually be doing and I think a big part of your question is, you know, not just like how do I hire really great people or how do I but like, you know, what am I do. Like, I mean, as I think about ChatGPT and everybody's jobs suddenly changing, you know, the utility of human work coming into question. You know, the big question is like how do I how do I continue to keep my people up to speed? Right. The world's moving so much more quickly. The stat my favorite stat of the day is, I think like, you know, post the invention of the public Internet, it was a decade before you had 20% of U.S. households, Internet connected. You know, when IBM and Apple, you know, were sort of releasing the first home computers in the eighties, it was another decade before 20% of U.S. households had right. ChatGPT had 100 billion daily active user monthly active users inside of two months, not two years. And so, you know, this this pace, I think if you're running an organization, you're asking exactly the right question. It's sort of how do I keep my people up to speed is going to be a really hard challenge for leaders. And I think about the change that we're going through right now as a fundamentally different one from the in terms of the learning mechanisms necessary, from the type of learning mechanisms that you see in L&D programs in organizations. So, like we all have anybody who's listening to this who works for a large enough company has an, you know, an L&D approach where, you know, there are some modules you can take. There's maybe a podcast you can listen to. Right. But it's sort of very passive, you know sort of and more sort of skill-based learning. I think the missing piece of learning in corporates right now is more about mental model shifts and systemic shifts. So, it's, you know, if you're like if you're an ice hockey fan, I'm not trying to teach each of my individual players right now how to have a slightly harder slapshot. I'm trying to teach them like a completely new offensive system. Right. And

when you're trying to learn a new system as a group. The learning mechanisms are totally different. You're not going to learn that by standing in front of the net with a bucket full of pucks and just shooting them at the net until you've mastered some new mechanic in your own swing, you've got to get out onto the ice into real world scenarios into simulations, right, with the other players on your team in order to unlock that new offense. And that's really the shift to me that I have not seen a lot of organizations fully embrace. Just like I could teach Arnab and Charli and each of our individual peers some new skills through modules. But I see a huge gap in terms of how organizations are thinking about moving teams through mental model shifts like this. And look, let's be I mean, you're on the front lines of this Arnab. Like this is a new offense you've got to run, right? This isn't just a like an individual skill. This is a completely new way of working for groups of people. And I just I don't see the training. So, you know, my last year has been spent developing a new product, offering the AI bridge program, which is mostly about the top senior bands of organizations. And how do you help them think about that mental model shift using gamified simulation, using, you know, applied to real use cases in your company learning at multiple levels below you in partnership with you. I know I mean, you know, Accenture's got, you know, the same sort of things that you're thinking about. And so, I think it's a lot more energy is going to get spent on like tech tools and like teaching people individual skills that will just completely go to waste because those people don't use those skills as a part of a new offense.

Arnab Chakraborty [00:19:56] I love your offense analogy, new offense analogy and, you know, creating a new mental model shift. And I think, you know, it's not that it's a textbook answer, right? It has to be it has to be developed for each company each enterprise it'll be different based on ecosystem that you play in, based on the market dynamics that you play in. So, it's going to be quite interesting. What's your view about the role of the ecosystem you know that has to be played here? You know, what role

of the academia in this? What should the academic world be doing differently, especially in the schooling system as we think about the future of the workforce? What's your view about the way companies need to actually work with, you know, ecosystem players in building the new mental model curriculum? We know that probably doesn't exist today, right? With the rapid change of technology that is going on underneath. I mean, any thoughts on that, Charlie?

Charlie Stack [00:20:55] Yeah, there's some really interesting stuff being done in academia right now. You know Northeastern university you know, put a ton of grant money towards building, you know, a new institute for experiential AI, which is led by my friend Usama Fayyad, who was for many years a corporate chief data and analytics and AI officer. And, you know, the focus of that is not to compete with Stanford and CMU and MIT on the dimension of, you know, super leading edge R&D. But rather to start to unpack the decades of R&D that's already been done, that's just sitting on a shelf somewhere, not really being applied to very much of use and to introduce it through corporate partnerships, through governmental partnerships to real world problems with students. So, you're you know, you're training, you know, the next generation using the stuff that's coming out of the lab but using it in a way that's applied to a real world problem at a company that makes cars or soda or, you know, or whatever, the product is. And, you know, Colby College like you know, who I think is a real innovator in the liberal arts space is taking liberal arts students and putting them through, you know, an experiential applied AI track as a part of their liberal arts education because they realize that you know, liberal arts... I went to a liberal arts college, you know, and you can probably tell from talking to me long enough was a philosophy major. You know, the whole notion of how you interrogate the world has changed pretty significantly. Right. You used to have to set up an experiment and then gather all the data to support it. And now you can just feed all the data and use that to produce your hypotheses or use that to detect right? So, it's

sort of even changed, you know, liberal arts, intellectual exploration, which is really interesting. And so, I think, you know, look, there's a lot of cool partnerships happening between, you know, reading research institutions and corporates. I mean, that's where, you know, ChatGPT and open AI come from. But I tend to think more about, you know, the like. How are we going to actually apply some of that to real world problems? And so, I just tend to be more interested in some of these more practical approaches that are being taken in academia. And I think it's a great time. Look, if you're a company thinking about how do I get into this space? It's actually not that hard to build relationships with schools who, you know, over the last five or six years have spun up programs and are training students how to be data scientists or how to be machine learning engineers. And these kids want to work on, you know, cool, interesting, real-world problems. And they're sort of there to be applied. So, you know, that's the facet of that that I find most interesting. I don't know if that fully answered your question.

Arnab Chakraborty [00:24:38] Yeah, I know. This is great. I mean, I just think about, you know, the different themes you unpacked. You know, you talked about there's innovative partnerships with academia, with the real-world practical view to it. You know, you spoke about, you know, what are the different dimensions of talent and skill that will be in the world of tomorrow? You know, as we advance, you know, with data analytics and AI, you know, you also talked about how leaders need to think about nurturing the talent and the workforce and change the cultural DNA of that organization. So, I think there was a lot that you unpacked in the last 20 minutes or so. What would be your one word of advice? You know, as you bring leaders into different data and analytics leadership roles, what if there is one thing you would advise them to watch, watch out for as they think over the next five years or ten years, what would be that one thing that you would ask the leaders to be watching out for?

Charlie Stack [00:25:32] I spend a lot of my day

talking to people who are on the very forefront of this, of these changes like you Arnab. And, you know, so it won't come, you know, come as any surprise to you but maybe some of your listeners that you know people who are working on the forefront of this are abnormally scared about, you know, the implications of ChatGPT societally. Right. Like this technology could be very disruptive to the normal functioning of, you know, politics and, you know, economic structures. And I mean, down to the very basic question of like, well, if you know, if ChatGPT can, you know, write, you know a computer program that would take one of my best developers three weeks in 10 seconds or it can, you know, review 1000 hours of legal briefs in 10 seconds and provide me with a summary or recommendations on what I should do. What exactly is it that people do? Right. Like what? You know, and, and so the big thing for me that I hope especially leaders, boards of directors, and CEOs are thinking about is there is so much potential here, but there is also a lot of risk. And for me like the number one thing is just risk reward assessment. Right. And I think that at present there are virtually no companies who have a proper risk reward apparatus established for this domain. I see a lot of places where there's like some risk management over here and then there's like some innovation people working in a lab over here. They don't really talk to each other. As ideas come down the pipe there's this sort of like late-stage process of evaluating, okay, what could this possibly do? Right. But like in order to do this really well, because it's going to have major implications for the integrity that you have with your employees, the integrity that you have with your customers. You know, you have to have that that kind of risk reward assessment, which is part of good product management. Right. Right at the center of it. And so, I think that a lot of the potential like dystopian future stuff that could happen can be mitigated if, you know, corporate, you know, corporate, global corporate, you know, universe kind of collectively establishes some rigor, you know, in terms of their practices there. I think if they don't, I think, you know, this thing could run out of control in ways that, you know, we've, you

know, leave us in a place of either requiring, like really messy emergency legislative cleanup or, you know, potentially catastrophic disaster.

Arnab Chakraborty [00:28:52] It's a great word of advice. I just like the phrase about risk and reward apparatus. Right. Every enterprise needs to have that. I think that that's a great word of advice, Charlie, I'm present of the time out here. Really big, big thanks to you for sharing your perspectives. I think everybody listening to this podcast, I'm sure you have got a lot out of it. And if you have questions, comments and suggestions, you know, please feel free to reach out to Charlie and myself and we'll be happy to follow up this conversation one on one as well. So, thank you, Charlie, and really appreciate the time together here.

Charlie Stack [00:29:28] Arnab, always a pleasure. Talk to you soon.