

ATD'S BEST ON

CASE STUDIES



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Introduction

In the Spring of 2016, 500 Accenture executives gathered at the company's North American learning campus, the Q Center of St. Charles, Illinois, for the annual Managing Director School. The pinnacle event was a fireside chat that opened the floor to questions from participants. Sitting casually next to one another on stage in white swivel chairs, listening and responding to the questions were Accenture's Chairman and CEO Pierre Nanterme and Chief Leadership and Human Resources Officer Ellyn Shook.

Or were they?

Actually, Nanterme never left Paris that day, and Shook stayed in New York. The assembly of leaders peppering them with questions in the outskirts of Chicago were talking to a pair of holograms. Nanterme and Shook were beamed from two Accenture studios where they could also hear and see their audience at the Q Center.

They just weren't there.

To celebrate their technological feat—the double-hologram meeting was apparently a first in corporate America—the two even managed a virtual fist bump.

Accenture has much more to celebrate. The company has completely transformed its business over the past 15 years, from a 75,000-person consulting house focused on North America to the world's largest comprehensive professional services firm, with 380,000 employees around the globe. Since the company went public, annual revenues have jumped from \$11 billion (in fiscal year 2001) to \$31 billion (in fiscal year 2015). Accenture's share price has quadrupled in a decade.

And in the past three years, Accenture learning and talent development has responded to this global growth by executing an equally dramatic revolution in learning. The double hologram was a perfect metaphor for the new approach. At today's Accenture, talent development marries cutting-edge technology to intimate human interaction.

Learning was once heavily concentrated in St. Charles, even if it meant tearing a Kuala Lumpur consultant away from clients for a round trip of lengthy flights. The Q Center's learning star has now exploded into a supernova of six regional

learning centers—adding facilities in Ireland, Spain, England, India, and Malaysia—dozens of high-tech connected classrooms, and mobile learning in the pocket of every Accenture employee. The concept is called Accenture Connected Learning; its mantra is simple: “Time away to learn . . . and learning all the time.”

At every level, and in every location, the latest advances in telecommunications and electronics are embraced, but always to serve human interaction, not to strangle it. Tech and touch are the yin and yang of Accenture Learning & Talent Development. “We bring technology in purposefully, and then we take it out. Because technology enhances for all the reasons we know, but we want to have this connectedness,” explains Rahul Varma, the visionary chief learning officer at Accenture. “We are on a path to be the most uniquely human organization in the world.”

Key Elements of Accenture Connected Learning

- ▶ Regional learning centers for face-to-face talent development without excessive travel
- ▶ Connected classrooms for person-to-person interaction that leverages limited faculty across locations
- ▶ Social learning such as learning boards to channel external and internal resources into learning paths
- ▶ Mobile and personalized learning for skills training on-site and as needed
- ▶ Nuggetized learning to accommodate busy employees and increasingly short attention spans
- ▶ Communities to connect professionals across the globe with shared interests, work, and passions
- ▶ Virtual learning for live remote instruction

History

Accenture evolved out of the Andersen Consulting business of Arthur Andersen, headquartered in Chicago. The consulting arm split from the Big Five accounting firm in 1989, and took on its new name in 2001. Derived from “accent on the future,” the name was invented by an employee in a competition. (Arthur Andersen since collapsed in the wake of the 2001 Enron scandal.)

At the time, Accenture was still almost exclusively a business consulting firm. The largest office was in Chicago, while learning programs took place an hour away in St. Charles, on the banks of the Fox River. The learning campus was originally a Roman Catholic liberal arts college, with property and recreational facilities added from the neighboring country club in a land swap. The Q Center still has its 18th hole.