THE CLIENT

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world’s largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders.

With approximately 375,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

THE CHALLENGE

As digital technologies are changing the world, businesses are looking to apply technology innovations to compete in their respective industries and sometimes across them. To enable Accenture to help their clients succeed in this environment, the company must continually enhance its innovation in technology. To stay a step ahead of the digital technology curve and all its business implications, Accenture needed to equip its technology leaders with fresh learning, the mindset, and the skills necessary to anticipate these changes with their clients.

THE SOLUTION

Designed specifically for Accenture Technology’s high potential technology managers, the Accenture Technology Executive Development Program is a 12-month, global learning engagement that takes place primarily online. Unlike a typical e-learning format where sessions are pre-recorded and allow little or no interaction, this program is conducted in real time and in a highly interactive virtual environment. MIT Sloan faculty deliver lectures and lead discussions from MIT campus for an audience spanning multiple time zones, countries and cities via Adobe Connect, an online platform with a simple and intuitive user interface.

The platform has interactive features like breakout rooms where participants can have a small-group discussion and virtual whiteboards for recording findings and comments, which are visible to everyone in the group. Participants can do verbal reports of their group work, very much like they would in a traditional classroom setting. An ever-present chat box allows for consistent flow of comments and quick responses by the faculty or participants. An instant polling capability helps faculty to gauge the audience’s understanding of a specific topic during a live session. The synchronous, real-time delivery creates a collective learning experience, ensures learning consistency and reduces business interruptions that a regular campus class could cause.

The convenience of virtual delivery provides another important advantage—more MIT Sloan faculty are able to contribute their time and expertise for recording findings and comments, which are visible to everyone in the group. Participants can do verbal reports of their group work, very much like they would in a traditional classroom setting. An ever-present chat box allows for consistent flow of comments and quick responses by the faculty or participants. An instant polling capability helps faculty to gauge the audience’s understanding of a specific topic during a live session. The synchronous, real-time delivery creates a collective learning experience, ensures learning consistency and reduces business interruptions that a regular campus class could cause.

The program gives participants a unique opportunity to interact with MIT Sloan faculty, senior Accenture Technology leaders, and peers across the Accenture Global Delivery Network. Typical of all MIT Sloan custom executive education engagements, the curriculum was developed collaboratively with our client to address the company’s immediate business needs and its long-term goals. The program comprises three modules critical to
technology leadership: strategy, capability, and change management. Each module consists of a number of synchronous virtual sessions and culminates in a project launch. Project assignments are designed to assess the participants’ understanding of new concepts and fine-tune their ability to apply new knowledge to real client challenges in action-learning projects.

To strengthen the shared learning experience across Accenture’s global offices, the program offers opportunities for participants to get to know their peers and faculty in person. A three-day session at the end of the first module brings everyone together in one location, and at least one session in each module is conducted via Accenture’s Connected Classrooms—a hybrid platform that allows small groups to gather in physical classrooms across the globe and connect digitally via video with other groups and faculty.

THE RESULT

The learning space created by the program allows the participants an opportunity to step back, be exposed to and be thoughtful about the issues and new developments that affect Accenture, their clients and future challenges.

Luis Linhares is a Senior Manager in Sao Paolo, Brazil. As part of an action-learning project, Linhares applied what he learned in the program immediately to solve a client’s business challenge. “I designed a platform that would link customers, salespeople and third parties who would also benefit from this particular platform,” he explains.

Divya Parambath is leading an offshore delivery team in the R&D space for a large pharmaceutical client. “The MIT Program was absolutely informative and gave me various perspectives of understanding a problem. I am able to appreciate a situation much better and see deeper. The action learning assignments really helped with real-life business situations.”

Jay Parry, a Senior Manager, Technical Architecture at Accenture Canada sees the program as “a competitive advantage” for the company. “I can change the way you do business tomorrow by changing a couple of things, but is that disruptive? You’re not going to make a fundamental difference in the way you work, not tomorrow. But in two years, you can. This program is opening our eyes to think more in that way,” he says, adding, “I have been to many other training courses and this is by far the best.” Jay also emphasizes the importance of the program’s global scope, “This is an opportunity to learn about the global challenges facing our clients, to explore questions from new vantage points and to seek innovative solutions based on a global perspective.”

While participants are learning from the faculty and from each other, the program designers at MIT Sloan Executive Education and their counterparts at Accenture are fine-tuning the optimal mix of delivery methods. “We learned that, while we've launched virtually, bringing people together live for one major three-day event was essential,” says Heber Sambucetti, Director, Global Learning & Talent Development at Accenture. “We did that to solidify the connections among the participants, their commitment and accountability to continue forward in teams that would spill over into the rest of the year.”

Nelson Repenning, the Program Faculty Director at MIT Sloan, agrees, “There is no question that the digital delivery is going to be a big component of all major education programs because the economics are so different. At the same time, unless there is a massive improvement in the technology, which we assume some day will be, I think the right answer is going to be a mix of face-to-face and online. So, the exciting part is really to figure out how to leverage that complementarity between the two different modes.”

Both organizations are looking forward confidently to continuing this innovative experience—and experiment—with the next group of participants.
WHY MIT

Accenture Technology needed a learning partner to help employees around the world acquire new skills to stay ahead of the competition in the high-velocity technology marketplace. After a rigorous search, they found a strategic fit with MIT Sloan.

“We saw a big similarity between MIT and Accenture,” explains Sanjeev Vohra, Global Managing Director of Technology Capability, Accenture Technology. “We use technology to solve business challenges and create opportunities. MIT Sloan faculty have deep knowledge of how the strength of technology can make businesses more effective.”