



Social services: lead with impact

Delivering better outcomes for citizens now and post-pandemic.



Contents

Creating social services for the long run	03
Taking the pulse of the citizen	04
Agencies under strain	06
Priority 01 Become more responsive	07
Priority 02 Become more accessible	11
Priority 03 Embrace new technologies with human ingenuity	13
Conclusion: Towards a brighter future for citizens—and agencies	21



Creating social services for the long run

Never have social services had a more vital role to play in people's lives.¹ Even before COVID-19 hit, the need for government assistance was rising steadily in many countries, spurred by trends such as ageing populations.²

But now the pandemic—and the measures to contain it—have intensified the strains on the elderly and other vulnerable groups, especially the unemployed: **in the first half of 2020, nearly 600 million full-time jobs were lost worldwide.³**

Social services agencies have been on the front line of the crisis, deploying critical services and handling an explosion in workload. But while agencies' response has been extraordinary, the pandemic has exposed entrenched vulnerabilities in their organisational structures, delivery models and systems.

What's clear is that legacy ways of working and delivering services won't stand up to future demands—and that these must be reinvented to meet society's changing needs and expectations.



Taking the pulse of the citizen

As these challenges play out, what do the ultimate end-users—citizens themselves—think of the social services they’re currently receiving?

All of the respondents came from ten countries—Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Singapore, the UK and the US.

Between July and September 2020 we surveyed more than 7,000 people who’d received a social service within the past two years, and 600 executives currently leading social services, employment, public pension and child welfare agencies.

What did we find?

Inevitably, citizens' perceptions varied from country to country.

But whether social services agencies' role centres on formulating public policy, implementing it or both, they face daunting and rising challenges—in helping get people back to work, keeping them safe, and providing other types of vital support.

For example, 24% of citizens expect to use more social services in the future, even as 40% are already using employment-related services more often.

45%

of citizens believe they face a high risk of contracting COVID-19 at work...

...and

56%

now shoulder significant caregiving responsibilities at home.

But the need for more government support has not translated into more positive views of government: some **31% of respondents rated their trust in government as low today**, compared with just 23% before the pandemic.

And the best ways for social services agencies to rebuild citizens' trust? Shorter waiting-times and better communication around eligibility for services.



Agencies under strain

Not surprisingly, social services agencies are feeling the strain. Most executives said the need to do things like create new digital offerings, handle soaring demand for digital services and respond quickly to policy changes poses big challenges for their agencies.

Worryingly, only 49% rated their own organisation as highly prepared for current and future challenges, down from 55% pre-pandemic. More than 70% of executives and citizens agree or strongly agree that social services will look very different in the years ahead.* As agencies rethink how—and what—they offer citizens, three priorities stand out.

+70%

of executives and citizens expect social services to look very different in the years ahead.

*72% of citizens strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'The COVID-19 pandemic will be a turning point for government: the way they deliver services to citizens will be very different going forward'; 73% of executives strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'The COVID-19 pandemic will be a 'point of no return' for social services: strategy and operations will look very different going forward'.



Priority 01

Become more responsive

Agencies today face higher demand for their services, new technical hurdles such as social distancing rules, and rising expectations among citizens over service quality. All of these developments make it harder to deliver services quickly and effectively—yet this will be never more vital in dealing with crises to come.

Singapore sets the pace.

That said, some of the more digitally advanced countries—notably Singapore—have made great strides. Some 80% of the Singaporean citizens we surveyed said they'd received a service in a new way since the onset of the pandemic, such as switching to virtual delivery—immediately available, personalised, available through new digital channels, or bundled—compared to just 54% in the other nine countries.

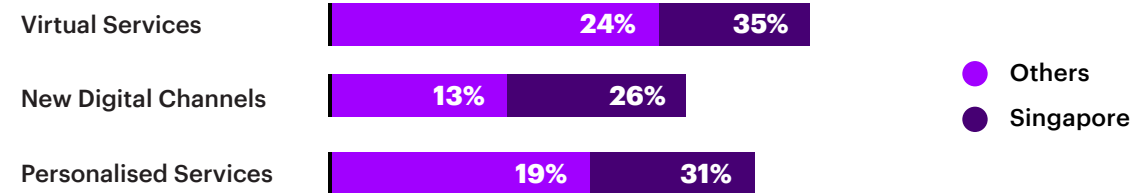


Figure 1: Digitally advanced countries

Others are also making headway.

Canada

In March 2020, Accenture helped the Canadian Government launch a new unemployment benefit—**the Canada Emergency Response Benefit—providing financial support to Canadians impacted by COVID-19.** In just four days, Accenture set up a call centre for a team of 2,600 Canada-based agents, produced over 25 dual-language process documents and delivered 1,400 hours of training to enable remote handling of calls. Throughout April, as millions of Canadians applied for financial relief, the agents were successfully managing more than 40,000 calls a day⁴—while providing a better, faster service to citizens.

USA

Agencies are also teaming up in new and more productive ways with ecosystem partners. In the US, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services is collaborating with Eckerd Kids, a non-profit, to alert social workers to high-risk scenarios.

To do this, the agency has implemented machine-learning software that monitors welfare data and sends alerts proactively to workers. During a three-year pilot in Tampa, Florida, the same software helped reduce child deaths from family abuse to zero.⁵



Germany

A further way agencies are becoming more responsive to citizens is by providing services that are more personalised and adaptable. Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour is developing an end-to-end service anchored by a website tailored for individual users, for example by **offering different services depending on their specific needs and demographics**. The aim is to connect every citizen to the service or information they need within just three clicks.⁶

Norway

Meanwhile, in Norway, the Labour and Welfare Administration has **developed a personalised pensions service**. The website brings together pensions data from various sources to present a cohesive view of the individual citizen's retirement savings, while also enabling scenario modelling and providing investment suggestions. Having made life easier for Norway's pensioners for several years, the service now receives some 884,000 visits annually.⁷ The same number of visits per head in the US would equate to 51.4 million a year.

Norway's personalised pension service receives

884,000

visits per year.⁷



Anticipating demand

The world's most effective agencies go beyond responding to citizens' needs with new and more tailored services. They also anticipate demand, and "bundle" their offerings to ensure the right combination of services is easily accessible to the right citizen at the right moment. Once again, this is an area where Singapore's agencies excel.

Parents there can now use a single smartphone app—developed by the country's Early Childhood and Development Agency—to register a child's birth, find and choose

schools and access health records. The ultimate goal? To create a single app for Singaporeans to use for all their government interactions.⁸

Looking across the efforts by leading social services agencies worldwide to be more responsive, a clear theme emerges: those in the vanguard have the biggest impact on their citizens' lives by delivering services in a frictionless way, and meeting citizens' needs with personalised experiences wherever and whenever they require. But despite pockets of excellence such as those we've highlighted, most social services agencies across the world are not yet making the most of the powerful tools available to them.

Tellingly, only

11%

of the executives we surveyed said their agencies **have deployed new services on a large scale during the pandemic.** So most agencies still have much further to go.



Priority 02

Become more accessible

Our research indicates clearly that improving accessibility and transparency helps to build trust and belief in the leadership and support offered by government.

But an equally important message is that making services more relevant will do little good if citizens are not aware of the choices open to them: 89% said they lack sufficient guidance on what services they're eligible for. Long waiting-times are another problem, with over one-third of citizens—37%—saying these are their biggest obstacles to receiving a high-quality service. And 43% added that reducing waiting-times would be the best way to increase their trust in government.

43%

added that reducing waiting-times would be the best way to increase their trust in government.

Improving communication

An often-undervalued benefit of deploying digital technologies is the opportunity to improve communication with citizens.

Crucially, this is also a key way to make social services more accessible. Early in the pandemic, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)—which manages unemployment benefits for America’s second most populous state—saw the number of calls to its hotline surge from 20,000 to 200,000 a day. **How to handle this tenfold increase?** The agency partnered with Accenture to create “Larry”, an artificial intelligence-powered Q&A agent on TWC’s website. **In its first week, Larry interacted with 168,000 visitors and answered nearly 500,000 questions.** The upshot: more Texans received vital support, as America’s unemployment rate soared to its highest since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Reaching out across society

As well as smart technologies, making social services more accessible can also involve broader forms of public outreach.

During 2020, Accenture worked with the Government of India’s Digital India Corporation to create the “myGov Saathi” chatbot. myGov Saathi now provides reliable information about the coronavirus to 1.3 billion citizens across the country.

myGov Saathi can handle queries from 300,000 users per day and 20,000 concurrent users per minute, bridging the information gap between the Indian Government and citizens.

myGov Saathi also provides a convenient and powerful channel for communicating accurate information to safeguard lives—

especially given the prominent but unwitting role played by young, asymptomatic people in spreading COVID-19.

Even with vaccines rolling out and a potential loosening of social distancing rules in prospect, citizens will be seeking to access more services virtually going forward.

Accenture’s Virtual Visits Solution is another way that governments are making services more accessible

while increasing trust through safe, on-demand delivery. The completely virtual solution allows for self-service booking of appointments, sharing of documents and information, and follow-up interactions to maintain ongoing engagement between citizen and service provider.



Priority 03

Embrace new technologies with human ingenuity

As we've highlighted, delivering improvements in both responsiveness and accessibility is vital for agencies to impact lives and livelihoods.

But each of these goals brings its own challenges—and agencies need to devote effort and investment inside their organisation for citizens to see results on the outside. Particularly important in keeping pace with citizens' needs is embedding an organisational mindset that supports the development of new ideas and the adoption of new technologies.

Seizing opportunities generated by change

A case in point is the switch to remote working that many social services agencies made almost overnight. While this sudden migration posed fresh challenges, especially initially, our research confirms that it has also has created new opportunities.

For example, as Figure 2 shows **46% of social services executives told us that working virtually has improved their employees' productivity**—against 29% reporting no change and 24% reporting a decline. And a positive balance of executives said remote working has improved their employees' communication, collaboration, innovation and morale.

A majority or positive balance of executives said remote working has improved employee innovation, collaboration, communication, productivity and morale.

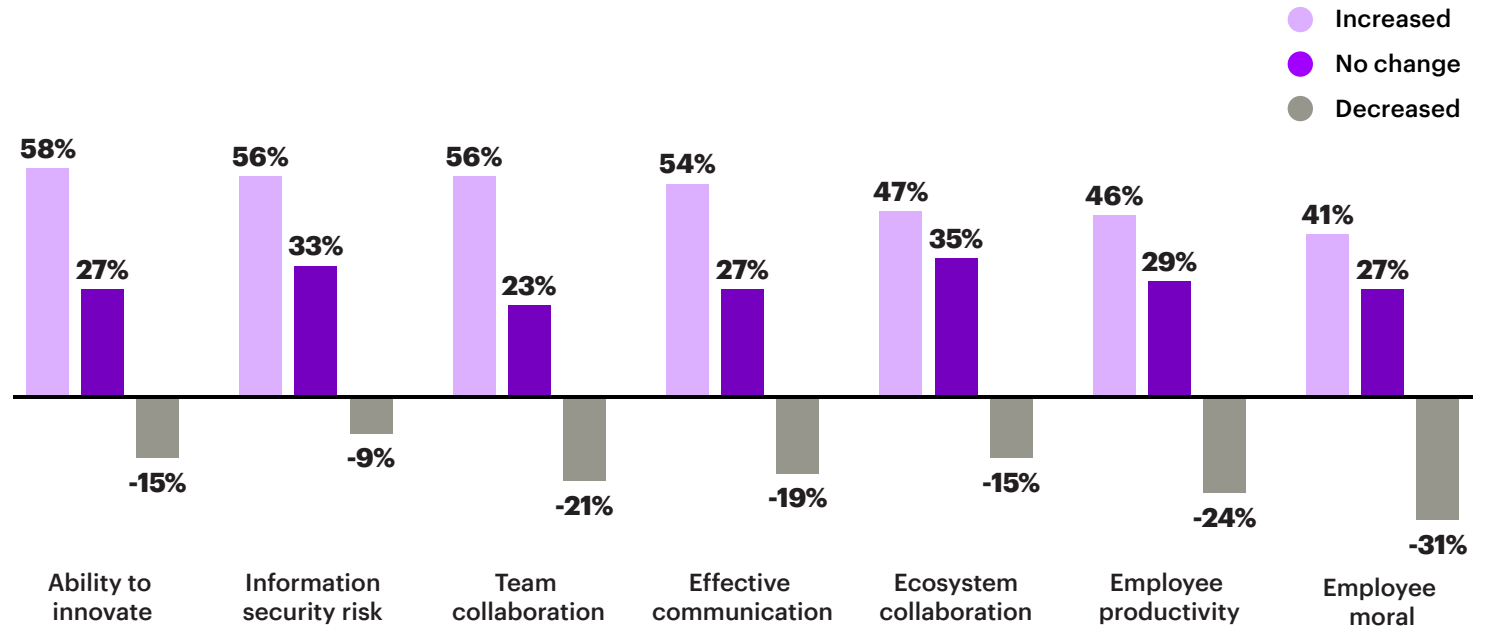


Figure 2: Remote work is creating opportunities

Creating opportunities

To make the most of the resulting opportunities, agencies need the ability to develop and implement or adapt to new policies quickly and smoothly.

Unfortunately, only 20% of the executives we surveyed strongly agreed that their agencies have the agility to pivot swiftly as conditions change. This needs to be addressed: there's no doubt that combining an agile mindset with the right technologies can enable an agency to deliver better outcomes and experiences for citizens.

Only

20%

of executives strongly agree that their agencies can pivot swiftly.

Indonesia

There was a great example of this in Indonesia in 2020, centred on the Government's support for impoverished households. **In all too many countries, social safety nets are not funded or structured sufficiently well to handle the kind of sharp rise in need triggered by the pandemic.** In early 2020, Indonesia's national government tackled this problem head-on.

How? By working in partnership with the World Bank and local community groups, it applied advanced analytics to quickly identify and help 12 million newly-impooverished households that would not otherwise have received timely support.⁹



Sharing ideas and data

These are the kinds of benefits that flow from an agile mindset. And being agile can also mean being ready to borrow good ideas from other organisations.

Before the pandemic, Accenture launched a joint research project with the Australian National University's (ANU) Centre for Social Research and Methods (CSRM). The shared goal was to extend CSRM's microsimulation policy modelling platform with leading-edge desktop visualisation tools to fast-track the evaluation of new policy options.

The result of the project?

Policymakers now have a powerful desktop analytics platform to conduct real-world modelling and forecasting of the fiscal impacts of social policy decisions. Alongside the power of collaboration, our research also highlights the need for agencies to base their assumptions about citizens' preferences on evidence, not hearsay. Take data privacy. Contrary to what many agencies might expect, 66% of the citizens we surveyed said this is a relatively low concern. And 85% would be open to sharing their data with agencies in exchange for better services.

85%

would be open to sharing their data with agencies in exchange for better services.

However, to succeed in increasing data-sharing between citizens and governments, agencies must take greater precautions:

56% of executives said cybersecurity risks to their agencies have escalated since the start of the pandemic.

This is reflected in real-world attacks.

For example, the US Department of Health and Human Services experienced 132 data breaches between February and May 2020, a 50% increase over 2019.¹⁰

And as well as improving security, agencies must also be sure to share data in line with data protection regulations and explain clearly to citizens what they intend to do with it.

56%

of executives said cybersecurity risks to their agencies have escalated since the start of the pandemic.

US Department of Health and Human Services experienced 132 data breaches between February and May 2020.

50% increase over 2019.¹⁰

Tech investments postponed

Benefits delayed for citizens and employees.

While an agile mindset is vital for agencies to offer citizens more relevant and accessible services, something else is also essential: investment in new technologies. But, as Figure 3 shows [on the next page], this is something that most agencies appear to be postponing—even as employees see the benefits of the investments made to date. Our research figures tell the story.

56%

of executives said their agencies have not yet invested in virtual work solutions.

61%

haven't invested in "modular and flexible infrastructure", such as cloud.

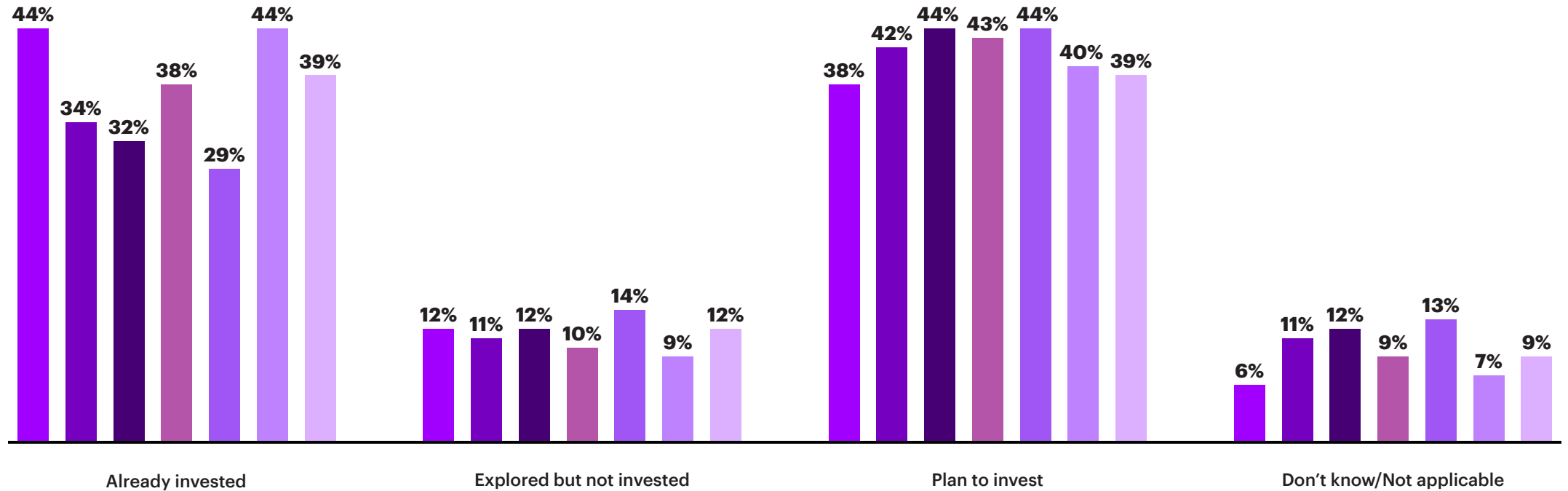
68%

haven't invested in big data and analytics.

71%

haven't invested in artificial intelligence.

Priority 03 Embrace new technologies with human ingenuity



Most executives said that their agencies haven't yet invested in AI, analytics, big data or cloud.

- Virtual work and/or collaboration solutions
- Modelling/forecasting analytics tools to improve operations
- Big data analytics to inform interventions
- Digital self serve channels for citizen-facing services
- AI support for staff and improved operations
- Data sharing capabilities
- Modular/flexible infrastructure i.e. cloud

Figure 3: Agencies are delaying essential tech investments

Priority 03 Embrace new technologies with human ingenuity

Governments—whether local, national, or supranational—that make the necessary technology investments now will generate big rewards faster for their citizens.

The European Union has got the message: in October 2020 it committed up to €10 billion over the next seven years to develop European-based cloud computing capacity, to strengthen the continent's public and private sectors.¹¹

The European Union
has committed

€10B

over the next seven years
to develop European-
based cloud.





Towards a brighter future for citizens—and agencies

Alongside its other impacts, COVID-19 has dramatically underlined the crucial role of government social services in supporting countries' most vulnerable citizens. It has also demonstrated the need for more effective delivery of social services.

Technology is clearly part of the solution. But an equally important enabler is embracing new organisational mindsets and ways of working. Agencies that commit today to meeting both imperatives will open the way to a brighter future for their citizens—and for themselves.

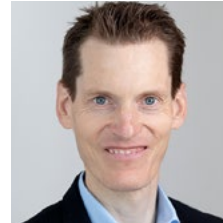
Contact any of our authors or contributors to talk about how these ideas can be applied to your human services, employment, welfare or pensions agency.

Authors

Rainer Binder
Meghan Yurchisin

Contributors

Gaurav Gujral
Bjørn Tore Holte



Rainer Binder
Managing Director
Public Service,
Social Services Lead
rainer.binder@accenture.com

Rainer has more than 20 years of experience working with government agencies and large commercial organisations across the globe. He is a recognised expert in supporting social services, employment and pensions agencies in the fields of strategy, business transformation, program management, IT-program delivery and solution design. He has an Economics degree from the University of Hohenheim and is based in Germany.



Meghan Yurchisin
Senior Principal
Public Service,
Accenture Research Lead
meghan.yurchisin@accenture.com

Meghan Yurchisin has more than 12 years of experience researching and advising government clients around the world. Her current portfolio focuses on how macroeconomic, geopolitical, and technology trends affect public service organisations and their strategic response. Meghan holds a BA from Grinnell College and an MBA from the University of Oxford. She is based in Washington, DC, USA.

References

- ¹ In this report, “social services agencies” are government agencies that distribute unemployment benefits, pensions, and disability benefits, as well as those that provide family-support and other welfare services.
- ² https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/economy-finance/2018-ageing-report-economic-and-budgetary-projections-eu-member-states-2016-2070_en
- ³ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf
- ⁴ <https://www.accenture.com/ca-en/insights/public-service/coronavirus-government-leap-ahead-digital-transformation>
- ⁵ <https://gcn.com/Articles/2016/07/26/child-welfare-analytics.aspx?Page=1>
- ⁶ <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/success-bundesagentur-fuer-arbeit>
- ⁷ https://www.accenture.com/t20160517t013806__w_/no-en/_acnmedia/pdf-19/accenture-facing-up-future-four-elements-dynamic-personalized-services.pdf
- ⁸ <https://www.psd.gov.sg/challenge/ideas/feature/bundling-public-services-for-citizens-with-moments-of-life>
- ⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/01/community-led-responses-to-covid-19-the-resilience-of-indonesia>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/number-cybersecurity-attacks-increase-during-covid-19-crisis>
- ¹¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-pledges-e10-billion-to-power-up-industrial-cloud-sector>

Copyright © 2021 Accenture.
All rights reserved.

Accenture and its logo are
registered trademarks of Accenture.

About Accenture

Accenture is a global professional services company with leading capabilities in digital, cloud and security. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries, we offer Strategy and Consulting, Interactive, Technology and Operations services—all powered by the world’s largest network of Advanced Technology and Intelligent Operations centers. Our 514,000 people deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity every day, serving clients in more than 120 countries. We embrace the power of change to create value and shared success for our clients, people, shareholders, partners and communities. Visit us at **www.accenture.com**

Disclaimer: This content is provided for general information purposes and is not intended to be used in place of consultation with our professional advisors.

This document makes descriptive reference to trademarks that may be owned by others. The use of such trademarks herein is not an assertion of ownership of such trademarks by Accenture and is not intended to represent or imply the existence of an association between Accenture and the lawful owners of such trademarks.