Productivity in Uncertain Times Through the Elastic Digital Workplace

A practical guide of actions your business should take now

COVID-19 has turned into a global crisis, evolving at unprecedented speed and scale. It is creating a universal imperative for governments and organizations to take immediate action to protect their people. The virus continues to rapidly spread, to every continent, with most countries impacted and many new cases reported daily.

No industry is immune. All are grappling with the immediate impacts of COVID-19 in varying degrees of severity and complexity. Travel and tourism companies are experiencing the largest hit to their business since 9/11. Retail and consumer goods organizations are dealing with stock shortages due to production delays, disrupted manufacturing, and broken supply chains. Industry and technology conferences, along with large group gatherings, are being postponed or cancelled entirely. To protect their people, organizations are implementing travel bans, restricting who they let into their offices, and reexamining how their workplaces operate, and how their people work.

Experts do not know how long it will take to contain the virus. Leaders must prepare for the short-term while also developing new capabilities and ways of working that will seamlessly enable longer-term changes to how they operate.

The time to act is now. This document outlines the practical steps you should take to get started.

NOW 🌐 NEXT

Protect your people and your productivity

In this climate of crisis, your decisions not only determine how you operate in the near-term, but also significantly impact how you will operate in the future. Smart leaders will seize this opportunity to take swift action to navigate the crisis to avoid business disruption and potential revenue loss, forge new levels of trust with their workforce, and position their businesses for greater resiliency and productivity in the future.

An important first step is to begin planning to enable remote workers at scale. Develop and provide clear guidelines to your people about self-quarantine or travel restrictions. Prepare for a larger than normal percentage of employees to be on sick leave. Each company, industry and region will have different needs and requirements for workplace and people management, customer service, data management, and business continuity. But there are three major foundations that all organizations should consider.

1. Protect and empower your people:

Adjust your workplace to enable your people to work remotely through digital collaboration tools. Build the necessary skills around these new ways of working. Start cultivating a digital culture. Construct a workplace of trust.

2. Serve your customers' core needs:

Adapt to changing global and local conditions by serving your customers' core needs, including being transparent in your operations and compassionate in your engagements—all of which will create deeper, more trusted relationships.

3. Establish business continuity:

Ensure supplier relationships and business-to-business processes are effectively supported. Develop new business processes to adapt to new ways of collaboration and decision-making.

Start today:
The Elastic Digital Workplace

Accenture's Elastic Digital Workplace solution builds upon your core workplace experience and creates a highly extensible environment that allows you to quickly scale, and dynamically adapt to changing business needs based on global and local conditions.

The first step is a quick Elastic Digital Workplace assessment. This allows your organization to quickly evaluate your capabilities across a multitude of factors, and to prioritize where to focus.

While many organizations have some form of remote working environment, most have never conducted a full remote worker business continuity test, much less developed the culture, technology, communication and policies that will have to work together nearly simultaneously in today's global context.

**To get started**, you can consider the following five questions:

1. **How prepared is your organization to equip your employees to work effectively from remote locations?**

2. **Do you have a team dedicated to encouraging people to adopt collaboration tools?**

3. **Do you provide clear guidance to your remote workers on home office/network setup and troubleshooting?**

4. **Do you have a clear mobile device and application strategy that provides your employees clear guidelines on using personal (and company owned) devices?**

5. **Do you have collaboration solutions that seamlessly and securely connect with your customers and strategic partners?**

Accenture's Elastic Digital Workplace roadmap outlines six dimensions which have proven effective in quickly transitioning to a remote workplace environment:

- **Culture and Adoption**
- **Elastic Collaboration**
- **Virtual Work Environment**
- **Seamless Networking**
- **Distributed Continuity**
- **Adaptive Security**

Enable new workplace practices
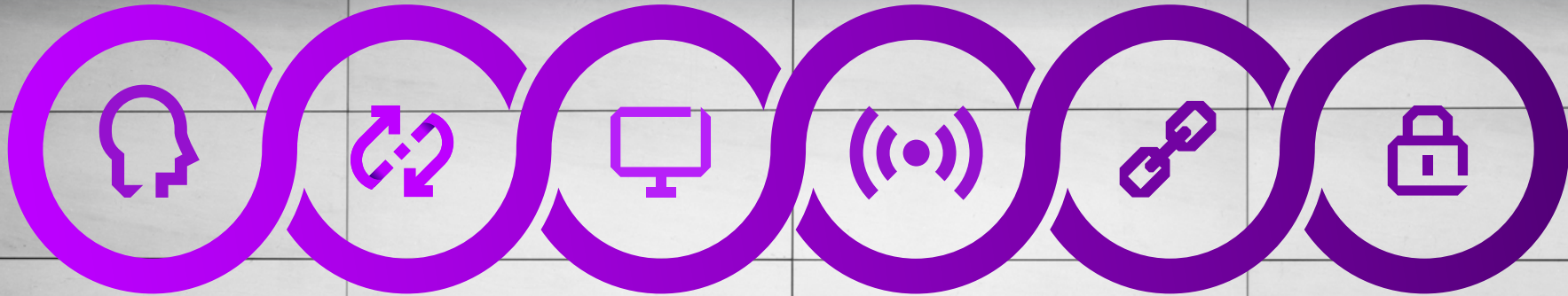
Culture and Adoption

Provide technology and environment optimizations for enabling effective remote working and activate communications plan to provide policy guidance both internally and externally.

Elastic Collaboration

Rapidly deploy collaboration tools across the organization and build bridges with your customers, partners and suppliers.

Virtual Work Environment

Evaluate network, accelerate device deployment, and leverage virtual environments to support increased mobile demand.

Seamless Networking

Enable reliable and secure remote network connectivity to employees homes and seamless integration with customers and partners.

Distributed Continuity

Enhance business continuity plans to include reduction in workforce, travel restrictions and large scale remote working environments.

Adaptive Security

Leverage exception-based processes, expand zero trust network access approach, and automate with endpoint management detection and response.

Culture and Adoption

At Accenture, we have become accustomed to a highly distributed and cloud-based way of working which we have evolved over the years. We rely on Microsoft 365 to create, connect and collaborate. We have a staff of highly-trained digital workplace adoption professionals who train people how to work effectively in remote environments.

Our people are accustomed to collaborating remotely on a continual basis with their coworkers worldwide. However, for many companies, remote working is a paradigm shift that can take time to adopt. If this is the case for your company, it is critical that you provide tools and coaching to help your leaders create the right environment to test and learn, and help people rapidly adopt new ways of working.

There are three main aspects:

- **Radical transparency —embrace a truly human approach:** Prepare your leaders to be empathetic and available to their teams. Use broadcast video to discuss the situation and actions that your organization is taking to protect your people, and to enable them to work with minimal disruption.

Accelerate adoption through expanding and fully embracing a change champion network. Champions and leadership should take every opportunity to showcase behaviors through demonstrations, such as document collaboration and enabling video in virtual meetings.

- **Cloud first:** Over the next month, move away from working on local versions of data and documents by adopting cloud-based applications and storage, which can support everything from document creation and application development, to task management processes and more.

- **Optimize for remote working right now:** Recommend best practices for an effective workspace at home, including ergonomics, reduction in distractions, and local network settings to provide the best employee experience. One example is turning off video to improve audio and collaboration during peak network loads.

Elastic Collaboration

Elastic Collaboration requires a rapid, and in some cases, exponential expansion of your current collaboration capabilities. With more employees working remotely, collaboration tools must immediately handle an increase in volume and load while also improving usability and productivity.

Actions to take immediately include:

- **Adopt and measure collaboration:** Starting today, expand the existing footprint of collaboration and communication capabilities to provide large-scale employee coverage. Enable SaaS-based solutions like Microsoft Office 365, Google G-Suite, Connect, WebEx and Zoom. Push collaboration applications to employees who currently lack them. Launch an employee education campaign, complete with user stories and relevant examples to encourage adoption.

- **Cross business enablement:** Identify key business-to-business contacts and relationships across your ecosystem. In the next 24-48 hours, assess current virtual meeting capabilities (web conferencing, video services) and deploy a pilot of video and messaging bridging services (e.g. Pexip, Blue Jeans) for seamless interaction with partners, suppliers, and customers. Create integrated communications and training materials to enable business users to adopt the shift in work style.

Virtual Work Environment

Virtual Work Environments provide employees with key resources they need to be productive, such as a secure laptop, and provide seamless access to corporate applications and data. Key aspects that should be addressed within the first two weeks are:

- **Device enablement and accelerate mobility:** Prioritize enabling workers who have critical roles in driving the business by ensuring they have the tools and access they need. Reclaim devices from users with more than one device and use contractor devices or explore creative sourcing options such as Device as-a-Service from providers such as Dell, HP and Lenovo. Over the next month, accelerate a "bring your own device" or mobility strategy for remote workers, and provide protections (such as Zero Trust Network and Bitlocker) and management solutions (including Microsoft InTune and VMware Workspace ONE).

- **Virtual desktops:** Within the first week, implement virtual desktop solutions such as Microsoft, Citrix, VMware or Amazon which offer virtualized workspaces that can extend across boundaries while allowing secure access to remote applications and data for employees who do not have access to secure mobile devices.

- **Large scale virtual sessions:** Enable interactive broadcast and web conference platforms to support the shift from physical to virtual workshops and conferences. Identify and train high touch session facilitators and support to attain the best user experience possible.
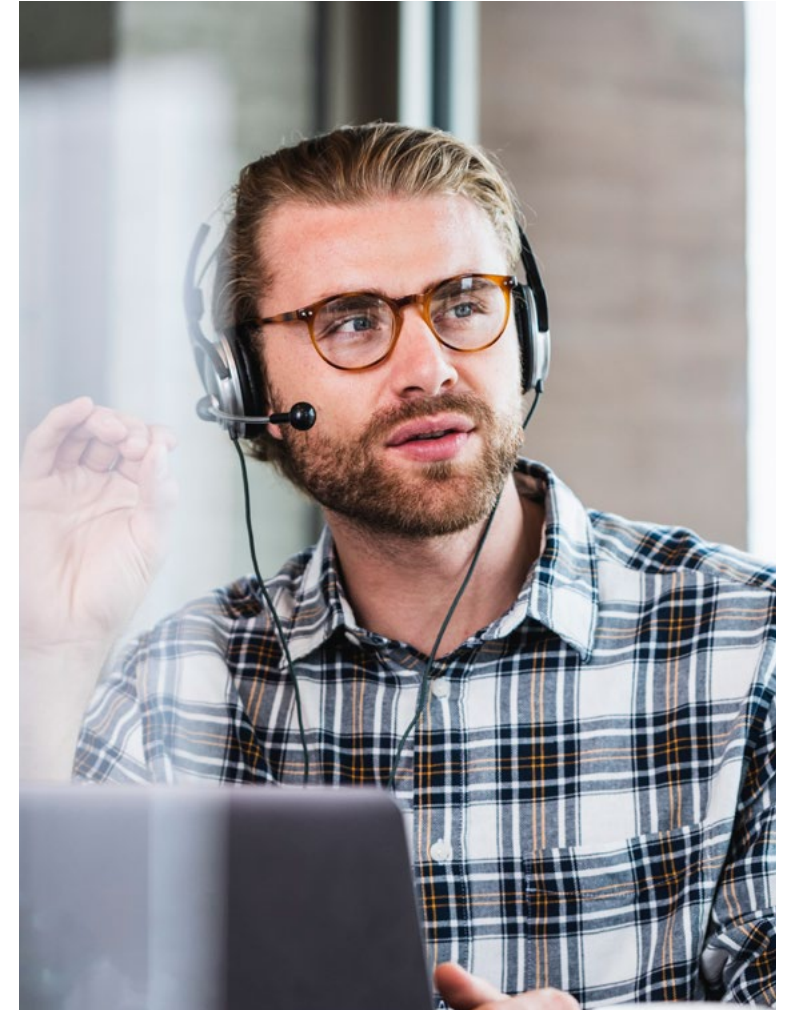
Seamless Networking

Working productively from home or other remote locations requires seamless, secure, and reliable network connectivity to corporate networks, cloud assets, and to strategic partners.

Over the first week, implement the following:

- **Virtual Private Network (VPN) capacity:** Rapidly compliment your traditional VPN technology with new cloud remote access solutions (e.g. Palo Alto Networks) that will improve remote worker experience, performance, and security while alleviating capacity risks on your legacy VPN solution. At the same time, confirm your capacity on traditional remote access technologies, such as VPN concentrators, Next Generation Layer 7 Firewalls, and circuits.

- **Remote and home networking:** Provide clear and prescriptive guidance to employees about broadband connectivity options and packages in their home locations. Consider subsidizing higher bandwidth and Quality of Service (QoS) solutions. As most network issues start at home, provide guidance to employees on the best WiFi home network solutions, such as dual radios and MIMO. Give advice on where to place the gateways, and direct people to use 5 GHz frequencies to avoid interference. Tell them how to configure the solutions to prioritize voice, video, and collaboration traffic, and help them troubleshoot issues.

- **Partner connectivity:** Establish a SWAT team to quickly provide, or to expand, business-to-business connectivity solutions to strategic partners.
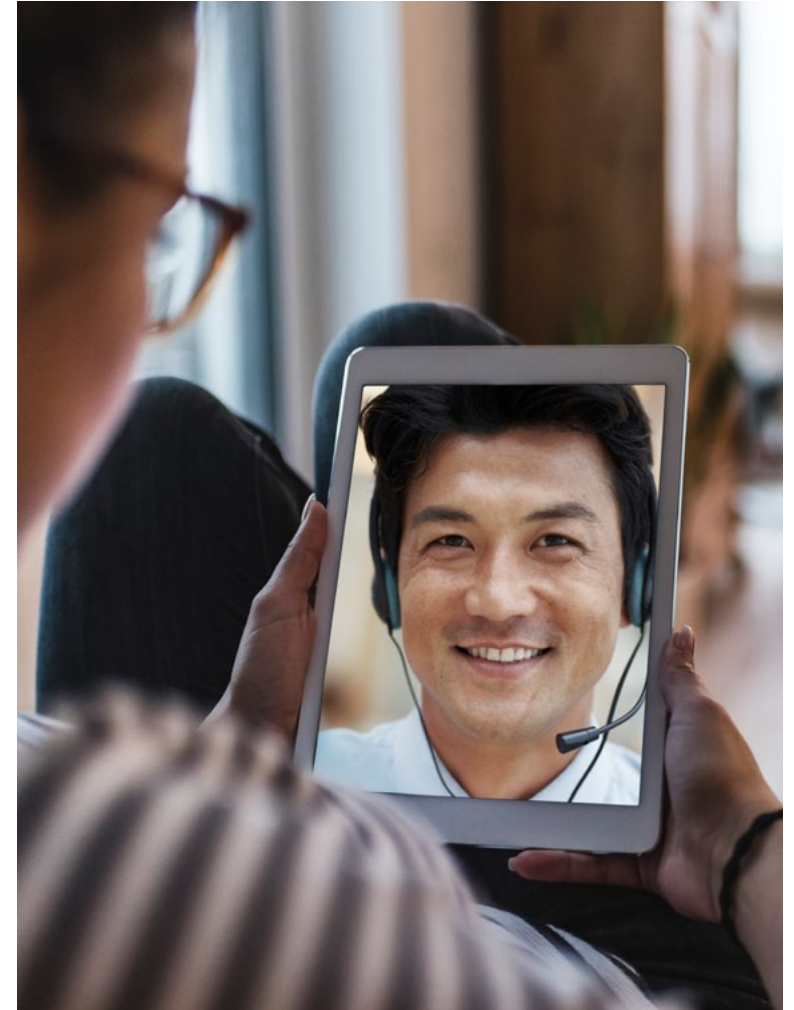
Distributed Continuity

The most important thing to get right during the COVID-19 outbreak is to protect your customers, employees, and partners. This requires clearly monitoring and assessing a quickly evolving environment, making rapid business decisions, and communicating clearly and prescriptively to your people on how to navigate the situation.

- **Monitor and assess:** Continuously analyze intelligence from leading health institutions, such as the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control, governments, and other NGOs. Activate crisis management processes and institute a task force as necessary.

- **Business planning:** Incorporate pandemic planning into your business continuity plans, which is similar to planning for catastrophic weather events. Run full scale human and department-based continuity tests.

Adaptive Security

🔒

While moving quickly to enable remote workers to respond to COVID-19 is very important, you cannot do so in a way that puts your business at risk of a security breach. This means rapidly addressing your security protocols and solutions to enable the expansion of remote connectivity, including:

- **Zero Trust network access:** Rapidly deploy a Zero Trust model with built-in technologies to enable secure application access without relying on traditional VPN solutions.

- **Endpoint Managed Protection, Detection and Response:** The expanded use of a multitude of devices in potentially less secure locations require additional protection. Build analytics and automation into Endpoint Management Detection and Response programs to reduce the amount of human intervention required.

How do I get started? The time is now

Unfortunately, the impact from COVID-19 is evolving daily, and this changing landscape means that guidance, restrictions and policies are also continuously being updated or adjusted.

Every deferred decision has real consequences on people, business and society. Time is of the essence. Here is a quick summary of how you can rapidly create a highly effective Elastic Digital Workplace:

1. The top priority is to immediately help employees adapt to remote working and optimize the experience to maximize productivity including how to effectively run large- and small-scale virtual meetings.

2. Immediately deploy or scale the use of collaboration tools, such as Microsoft Teams, and provide targeted prescriptive guidance for effective productivity for the remote connected workplace.

3. Organize an Elastic Digital Workplace Task Force today with representation from the business, Legal, HR, IT, Marketing and Communications and Security.

4. Equip traditional desktop workers with mobile solutions and implement Virtual Desktop solutions from Amazon, Citrix, Microsoft and VMWare and provide secure remote access to applications and data.

5. Use Accenture's experience and take advantage of limited free-use solutions from our ecosystem of strategic partners and providers to rapidly scale your capabilities to meet the new demand.

NOW 🌐 NEXT

How does Accenture manage its Elastic Digital Workplace?

Accenture's global workforce of more than 500,000 people are highly distributed, and accustomed to working in a very elastic workplace environment. Here are a few examples of our approaches on many of the things highlighted in this paper:

1. **Pervasive and scaled use of Microsoft 365:** Accenture's people have been accustomed to a highly distributed and cloud-based way of working relying on Microsoft 365 to create, connect and collaborate. We have deployed Microsoft Teams to our entire global workplace, and we are highly consumptive of calling/conference and video. In fact, our people use about 400 million minutes of voice every month. And, we rely on Pexip as a bridging solution to allow Microsoft Teams to be used across other conferencing services and endpoints.

2. **Digital worker change and adoption:** Engage digital workplace change management and adoption experts to help your people migrate to new ways of working in a remote environment.

How Does Accenture Manage its Elastic Digital Workplace?

3. **Leading from the front:** To demonstrate the new ways of working, it was critical that our people observed the new behaviors in the way our senior leadership works. A few examples include having the leaders turn on video on calls, using collaborative Microsoft Teams sites instead of relying on emails and collaborating on files in the cloud instead of emailing them back and forth.

4. **Business continuity team:** We are actively managing the evolving COVID-19 health crisis, with the safety and well-being of our people as our top priority, while continuing to serve our clients during this time. We are following direction from international health organizations, local governments as well as our own safety and security protocols, and actively monitoring the situation through a network of outside experts and organizations that provide us real-time information. Where applicable, we are following local government direction on office working arrangements, including self-quarantine and working remotely from home where appropriate. In line with our Infectious Diseases Plan, we are keeping our people updated and reinforcing our standard hygiene guidelines.

5. **A scaled and modern network:** Accenture employees are enabled to work anytime/anywhere securely all around the world. We have a global distributed team that supports connectivity with resilient circuits in each office and in our global WAN. We are cloud powered, and 95 percent of our capabilities required to serve our people are served through public cloud services, e.g. Microsoft 365, finance, legal, HR applications. Our people can work from home securely using their managed devices.

6. **Device enablement:** Accenture supports a wide array of device types. Most computers are company owned and comply to strict security standard allowing for secure work from any location around the world. We also support a wide range of mobile phones and tablets, most of which are employee owned. In order to enable communication and to protect our data and the privacy of our employees, we have deployed both mobile device management and mobile application management through Microsoft InTune.

How can Accenture help?

Here are the immediate next steps that we can help you put into action:

1. **Within 24 hours—assess your current state:** Analyze your current technology capabilities and your ability to scale out internally, including your current communications plan and support structure.

2. **Within 72 hours—identify how you can leverage existing technologies more effectively.**

3. **Within 5 days—develop a leadership and culture awareness change plan:** Include leadership communications that encourage employees to adopt key technologies that will enable them to work in this new environment, including conducting virtual meetings and large-scale events.

4. **Within 2 weeks—rapidly modernize and scale your collaboration capabilities as well as your workforce engagement plans:** Identify how to expand your workplace to the periphery, including a focus on home networking, broader networking, security, upgrading other tools and capabilities. Explore ways to help your people learn and embrace new ways of working with each other.

5. **Going forward—develop a comprehensive Elastic Digital Workplace Implementation plan**: Extend capabilities and establish detailed roadmaps that enable leaders to build trust and confidence in their employees and customers, for Culture and Adoption, Elastic Collaboration, Virtual Work Environment, Seamless Networking, Distributed Continuity, and Adaptive Security including integrated program management and governance.

To help our clients navigate both the human and business impact of COVID-19, we've created a hub of all of our latest thinking on a variety of topics.

Each topic highlights specific actions which can be taken now, and what to consider next as industries move towards a new normal.

From leadership essentials to ensuring productivity for your employees and customer service groups to building supply chain resilience and much more, our hub will be constantly updated. Check back regularly for more insights.

VISIT OUR HUB HERE
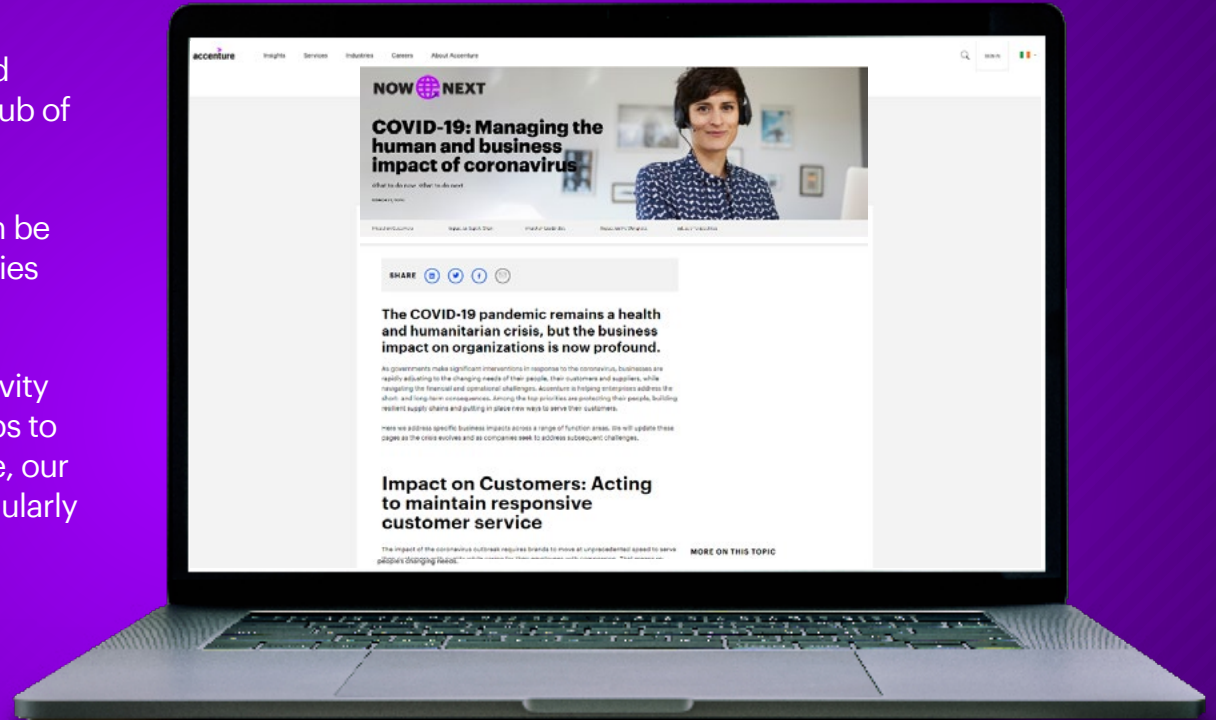
Contact Us

Eva Sage-Gavin
Senior Managing Director
Accenture Talent & Organization
Consulting

eva.sage-gavin@accenture.com

Keith Lippiatt
Senior Managing Director
Accenture Technology

keith.g.lippiatt@accenture.com

Jill Goldstein
Managing Director
Accenture Talent & HR Business
Process Services Operations

jill.k.goldstein@accenture.com

About Accenture

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 505,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

Visit us at **www.accenture.com**