



# DRIVING OUR FINANCE JOURNEY WITH SAP

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

**Melissa Burgum** [00:00:04] Hi, I'm Melissa Burgum, Accenture's Assistant Controller and I'm here today with Carsten Poulsen, a Managing Director in our Finance organization leading our technology transformation. The Accenture Finance organization has been on a journey to transform into a finance organization of the future. Today, we'll take a look at how SAP is helping us with that journey by helping us drive value from technology. Thanks for joining us, Carsten.

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:00:28] It's always good to be with you.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:00:31] Carsten, we've been on a transformative journey for a while now. Can you share some insights about this journey?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:00:37] Yes. So first of all, I start by saying that for us in Accenture Finance, this transformation is not a project, but it's a constantly evolving journey and it's all focused around us providing value for Accenture, our clients and for our people. Our journey goes back all the way to the early years following our IPO, and that's where we laid the foundation for our journey. So, we put in place a global finance offering model. We implemented a consistent data model and we, very importantly, put in place one single global instance of SAP. And since then we've built on this strong foundation. We've done shared services. We've done business advisory COEs. We focused on global collaboration and resilience. For the last three to five years, we've really, really accelerated in terms of our technology investments.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:01:24] Can you talk a little bit more about those technology investments and how technology is playing a role in our transformation?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:01:30] Sure thing. So, we've created end to end business processes so that we can support our client account teams, so that we can support our business runners and all our supporting functions, with everything that we need to know from a data process and technology perspective. And the backbone and really the foundation for this has been our technology architecture program, where we've got SAP S/4 as one single global instance.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:01:54] As the assistant controller, I really appreciate you having one consistent, one global instance of SAP and also global process standardization. Can you talk a little bit more about that and why those are so important?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:02:07] Yeah. So, the context for this is that Accenture employs around 500,000 people. We serve clients in 120 countries. So, we operate the firm as a truly global company. So, for us, it's strategically important that we can operate our business in a way that really encourages and enforces this global collaboration. And you can say that operating one global instance of SAP, that supports, and, in some ways, it even enforces this collaboration. In addition to that operating, one ERP has also brought us a number of benefits in terms of full traceability of data all the way from full global results down to the



transactional level. We even covered a lot of automation opportunities and indeed also around our ability to use the power of data to provide real-time insights and analytics to our business.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:02:59] Data is absolutely critical to the way that we operate today. Can you talk a little bit more about how we use SAP to leverage data?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:03:07] Yes. So, for us, SAP S/4 provides full data integrity. It gives us one source of truth and it enables Accenture Finance to maintain our robust and resilient finance processes. SAP is really the core foundation and the enabler which powers our business processes and our applications. Wherever we can, we try to store our data and all our metrics definitions within SAP so that all of our consuming applications and our processes can leverage the same data source getting back to a principle of one source of the truth. And this is how we really use SAP to power our insights and maintain full data integrity across our global business.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:03:48] Switching gears a little bit, we recently moved into the cloud. Can you talk a little bit about that experience and the benefits that we're seeing?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:03:56] Yes. So, this was another big step for us in how we've enabled our Finance transformation. We've completed now our cloud migration and we are now fully in the cloud with SAP. As you know Melissa Accenture is a strongly growing business over many years. So, for that reason, we've got a strategic objective of staying ahead of demand from a scalability perspective and this is of course to make sure that we can support our business growth. And being in the cloud has really been a game changer in that respect. Just as an example, Melissa, so what used to be a six to nine-month project to scale our infrastructure, that's now something that we can achieve almost instantly. In addition to that,

we've also realized significant cost savings and we've taken out the need for big CapEx investments. And, at the same time, we've also positioned us for even better future use of our data.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:04:46] It's really an incredible achievement. And speaking from experience, it went very smoothly. The transition went very smoothly. Can you talk a little bit more about what else we're doing to remain agile?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:04:56] Yes, we operate in a complex and constantly changing business environment. And for that reason, of course, we want our application landscape to be a living system so that we can evolve at pace and with agility. And this applies both to how we adapt to organizational changes, but also for leveraging new innovation. And the main principle for our EIP is to stay current. And this brings with it benefits in terms of lower total cost of ownership. But it also helps us to avoid the big and very complex system upgrades. But most importantly, it gives us it gives us these strategic options to leverage new innovation when they become available. And regardless what those capabilities might be, whether it's automation, machine learning or predictive analytics, we are constantly exploring new ways to complement our Finance people with technology so that we can respond faster and better to our business challenges. And staying current on our platform is essential to making that happen.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:05:52] It really has opened the doors in terms of new things that we can do. Some of the things that you mentioned were predictive analytics and machine learning. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:06:01] Yes, they are, they are both very important levers for us to enable our Finance strategy. So, we want to move our people away from the traditional transactional tasks so they can focus their time and their skills on planning, analyzing and advising our business. So, let me give you two examples.



Within Treasury, we've now implemented predictive analytics. And not only does that give us real-time visibility to our global cash position, but it also helps us to look forward and predict the future cash needs in each of our geographic markets. And that has got a big benefit for us because that means that we can limit the amount of cash in our local markets and we can centralize that excess cash and use that for global investments. In terms of machine learning, we are currently going through a pilot phase where we want to leverage machine learning for our cash application. So, this is really around leaving it to the machines to do the matching of client payments against our invoices and the benefits that we expect to get from this are, of course, in terms of accuracy and speed. But even more importantly, we hope that this will free our people to work on more complex issues.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:07:08] We've accomplished so much already. But I know we're always looking forward to the future. Can you talk a little bit about what's next in terms of innovation?

**Carsten Poulsen** [00:07:16] Yes. So, first of all, we want to continue leveraging new SAP capabilities as they become available. The key focus areas will be the ones that I've already mentioned. So, it's around automation, predictive analytics and machine learning, but also very, very importantly, we want to use the power of data in the cloud to how we provide actionable insights to the business. And in doing this, we will, of course, continue our very, very close partnership with our global I.T. organization so that we can help jointly assess and implement these new capabilities to the benefit of Accenture overall, but also our internal finance organization.

**Melissa Burgum** [00:07:52] Carsten, thanks for joining us today and explaining about our journey to transform into a finance organization of the future. It's been an amazing journey so far

and I really look forward to seeing what's coming ahead. Thanks to our listeners for joining us today. Feel free to check back in with us and see what new and exciting things we have on the horizon. There's a lot more to come. Thanks again.

**Narrator** [00:08:12] Thank you for joining today's podcast. Be sure to subscribe to the Accenture Future Ready Finance Podcast series on Apple podcast or Spotify.

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