



# AI LEADERS PODCAST POWER OF SCIENCE AND ART FOR BUSINESS INSIGHTS

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

**Joe Depa [00:00:00]** Hi, I'm Joe Depa. I'm a Managing Director for Accenture's Applied Intelligence Practice, and I'm the Global Lead for Data Led Transformation out of Atlanta, Georgia. I'm here today with my friend Cecilia Wu. She is the VP of Global Insights at Walgreens Boots Alliance. So good to have you here today, Cecilia. Let's talk about science and art of data for business insights. I'm curious, you're dealing with some really interesting data at Walgreens Boots Alliance. You've got over a hundred million loyalty customers. You've got over 12,000 retail stores in the US alone. And I know you're working on an initiative that's really interesting called Single View Customer. Do you want to tell me a little bit more about that initiative?

**Cecilia Wu [00:00:40]** Thank you, Joe, a great honor to be here. I'm excited to talk about this project. The name of this project is what we call the Single View of Customer, so short is SVOC. The goal of this initiative is really to create an orchestration layer across retail and the retail pharmacy that enables one source of truth for customer-related DNA work, as a data and analytics work. There are a couple of components to it. First of all, of course, we want to provide a Single View of Customer across business domains. We need to stitch customer data across siloed data sources to build a composite view using Microsoft CI to get the mapping of customer identities across systems. As you would imagine, many, many businesses like ours, we've been here for years, and over the time we build many customer systems. And all for the right reasons at the time. But, we have many, many systems. As a result, we have probably more than one or two or three or even 10 customer systems, so we need to bring all the customer data together. The second one is we really need to support customer analytic code needs. Including things like customer analytics reporting, or predictive analytics, or customer journey intervention, or mission learning capabilities and so on and so forth. The third component to it is we want to organize data into analytical assets in the form of data and the decision products. The fourth component is derived customer insights and make them readily available for our business users. And fifth one is we want to also enable self-service. We want to do that by integrating with the data dictionary, data lineage and data quality reports as part of the data governance. Last but not least, we want to enrich customer data by integrating third-party and eventually public data assets into our ecosystem, so we have an even more robust customer data environment.



**Joe Depa [00:02:53]** Excellent. Yeah, I love that. And I know that working at Walgreens Boots Alliance, you have really interesting, complex data sets across your retail business, health business, and I think it's really fascinating when you think about all the different data sets that you have, how you're able to take that and unlock value with it. Do you want to talk a little bit more about how you initiated this project?

**Cecilia Wu [00:03:16]** Yeah, it's interesting you ask that way. Well, I've been in the insights and analytics field for years, and at very early in my career, one of my managers told me that as an insights professional I would always need to make trade-off between the quality of your deliverable, the cost of your deliverable and how much time that you need to take to deliver your project or your insights. However, as I learned over time, especially now that the data is so much readily available and the technology has really advanced, what I learned is if we have the right foundation, we can actually achieve all three at the same time, to some extent. Now you may wonder what exactly we want to deliver or what exactly we want to enable our team members to do? How can we enable our data scientists, or our citizen data scientists, with this environment? And I put a lot of thought into this. And one day I was making my salad and I finally came to the realization it's almost like your salad-making process. Might sound funny, but for those of you who had made a salad in the past, if you have a pre-packaged salad in your fridge, it's pretty easy, right? Two minutes, you can whip it together and you have a great lunch, and you can do it over your Zoom call because those are the things that we do now. But, if you don't have a pre-packaged salad, what will happen well is it will take time to make a salad. You may find some ingredients that need to be washed and cooked, or some other ingredients you may need to go pick up from the grocery store. Or better yet, you need to do some research to figure out where can I find that particular ingredient? Especially something that you are trying the first time. And by the time you made it, you're done. You don't want to eat it anymore. The timing is over. And this is very similar to the situation that we're dealing with in the data and analytics environment, day in and day out. Because our data scientists spend so much time trying to decide which data source they should use and how can they get access to that data source? Because keep in mind, our data environment is very complex, not all the data scientists have all the right access to the right data product or data ecosystem. And, sometimes, we also need to learn the kinks of the data that will be available to them. And so, my goal really is to create this pre-packaged salad, if you will, for our data scientists so that they can really spend their valuable time to do the things that they would love to do, they're passionate about. Not hunting the data and spend every single minute trying to do some groundwork. So, we want to make sure that we do the groundwork for the team members. And there's another type of talent that we have in our organization who are basically we call them the citizen data scientists. They may or may not have the programming skills, but they are great at running exploratory analysis if you can have the data readily available for them. And if we can have the SVOC foundation, then we would enable them to do that, as well.



**Joe Depa [00:06:44]** Yeah, I love your salad example, I was thinking about we've got a salad on-demand service where basically every week we get a salad sort of sent to our house from a local farm here, and so that's an even more on-demand environment than you're describing, that's a great analogy. You know, when I think about what you're doing it's actually a very complex, challenging data set you're dealing with. Like I mentioned, you have health data, you have provider data, you have pharma data, you have retail data, and you have a lot of it. You have a lot of it, both in the US and globally. And so my question to you is, what lessons have you learned through this initiative?

**Cecilia Wu [00:07:25]** That's a great question, we are thinking about it every day. So, first of all, it takes a village to do something like this, to your point. We have a very complex eco data system. It's a benefit for us because we have access to all kinds of data. It's also a curse for us because that does make our data environment even more complex. And, what we learned at just one or two months into the project, we very quickly realized that the benefit of this initiative is huge, and we will not be able to build Rome in one day. So, what we're doing now is we're really running this project as a true digital product management fashion, which means we are using very agile approach and build a priority alongside with the business input. And we have regular touch base with our business members and identify what are the things that are on the high list, on the priority list, and what we need to do first to achieve our ultimate goal. The second one is, it's complex. So, we inevitably will fail. So, what we learned is how we can fail faster and recover faster and also learn to celebrate small victories. Sometimes it sounds simple, but it's really, really hard for some of our data scientists and our data engineering is who are very much wired to, we need to deliver this big project in a very successful way. And last but not least, privacy in the retail pharmacy industry is complex to navigate, to your point. So, we're now working very, very closely with our privacy office so that we can work within the boundary of rules and the regulations and yet still achieve the goal of connecting customer full interaction with Walgreens, by leveraging some of those machine-learning and AI capabilities. So, really finding creative ways to build a connection instead of just rely on the raw data.

**Joe Depa [00:09:34]** That's excellent, Cecilia.

**Cecilia Wu [00:09:37]** So, Joe, you've been working with a lot of big companies. I'm sure you've seen a lot of development in the industry. So, would love to hear what are the things in your conversation on topics like this, what are your observations?

**Joe Depa [00:09:54]** No, I love your examples, Cecilia, because it really resonates with what we're seeing around different industries, across different geographies. And I believe this concept called, what we call data-led transformation, is something that has become frankly a CEO and boardroom priority. And what I mean by that is, what used to be a CIO or CXO-led initiative only, right, and maybe you had a few proof of pilots going, or some small initiatives, this idea is now becoming a company-wide initiative. And you can see that through the Single View Customer work that you're doing as well. It has C-level sponsorship across Walgreens, and you're leading the change. And so, I think that's consistent with what we're seeing across other clients is this concept that using AI to drive insights is becoming a boardroom and C-priority.



And I think what's happened is our clients have access to the technology. They have access to the data that they use to not have. And now the question is, what do I do with all this data on the collab? How do I unlock real enterprise value and outcomes from AI? How do I improve the customer experience? Which is what you're focused on. How do I improve operating efficiency or create new products and services? And so, all of those things now are sort of top of mind for our clients. It's more about unlocking the insights from all the data that they have. Cecilia, I was thinking about this, we completed a survey with MIT, and we had about 180 CDOs and CIOs across industries, and we asked them what their number one challenge was to implementing AI to scale. And the number one challenge that they mentioned was that 60 percent actually said that the number one challenge was talent, and the number two challenge was culture. And so, talent and culture are the most critical elements to enabling any type of data in AI initiative. And what's interesting about the survey's results is that it's the first time we have seen talent culture be so dramatically in the lead. It's always important, but it's something if you look two years ago, we saw a lot of answers around cloud and technology being the most important. That's still important, it's still on the list, but it's not the top of the list like we're seeing today. So, I think the question that we're seeing so many use, Cecilia, is how do you take this, these citizen data scientists, and how do you enable them to provide insights back to your organization? And once you can do that, that's when you really can see the value of AI.

**Cecilia Wu [00:12:09]** Yeah, absolutely. Couldn't agree more.

**Joe Depa [00:12:12]** So, any final thoughts that you would like to share with us today, Cecilia?

**Cecilia Wu [00:12:15]** That's probably the most important part, why we need to sit very closely with the business. And kind of show the business value while still maintaining our independence from data analytics capability, building perspective. So, it's really just a fine balance that we need to maintain. I love the idea of sharing our experiences and also learning from others. For instance, what you just mentioned about the talent and the culture, we've seen this in our development and our execution of SVOC, as well. To your point, how can we unleash the power of the citizen data scientist is a big change within our organization. Both among the citizen data scientists that group itself, as well as with our business partners and how they interact with the citizen data scientists and how they can expect it out of the citizen data scientists. Those are all the change management that we need to go through together as an organization. So, love it.



**Joe Depa [00:13:16]** Excellent. Thank you so much, Cecilia, for joining us today. I think it was super fascinating. You're doing some amazing work at Walgreens Boots Alliance. And I think about the recap from today, I think the three main details that Cecilia shared that are important for our audience. Number one, it's about taking really complex data sets and figuring out a way to harmonize those so that your citizen data scientists can actually use that data. I think number two was around creating a culture and culture in a way of working so that the organization was versed to adopt those datasets in a way that could hopefully drive value for the organization. Lastly, you mentioned that getting to speed to value. So, Cecilia mentioned that she's working on creating a foundational enabler for these data sets. But while she was doing that, she also was activating value along the way so that she's delivering real-time insights back to the organization so they can better serve Walgreen's customers. So, thank you so much for joining today. Please do feel free to share this podcast with friends and colleagues. Thank you.

**Cecilia Wu [00:14:18]** Thank you.

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