



A Walk in the Cloud

HR: From Supports to Stars

**Ellen Bencard, Accenture, UKI Local
Eminence Lead, Walk in the Cloud
Host**

**Speaker: Nicole Knott, Accenture,
Managing Director, HR Consulting
Lead, UKI**

Nicole Knott Bio:

Nicole is UK and Ireland's HR Technology & Innovation Lead for Accenture.

Bringing 15 years of experience in Global HR transformations, her expertise lies in HR functional and technical strategy and transformation. With this unique blend of HR functional and IT technical skills, she is equally confident in advising CHROs as CIOs in shaping cutting edge systems best empowering our people for the future of work. She enjoys reimagining the future of work and helping companies respond to the new expectations of employers and employees including future skills and a renewed EVP. Nicole is a new mum to one year old Ada so spends weekends at Rhyme Times, museums and soft plays.

Intro: Walk in the Cloud

Ellen: Today we're walking a familiar path, signposted: talent. In the United Kingdom, close to full employment with shortages of key skill sets like technology or medicine, what needs to change to unearth the talent we need? Or rather, who needs to change? Because today we're talking about Chief Human Resources Officers (CHRO) and their increasingly critical role in transformation programmes at large enterprises. Welcome back to Walk in the Cloud.

I'm your host, Ellen Bencard, and I'm here today with returning guest Nicole Knott. Nicole, before we get started, let's get something out of the way. We're about to dive deep on an implication of things in the UK and we both sound like Americans. I've lived in England for 25 years and been a British citizen for half of that. What's your status?

Nicole: I have been in the UK since 2015, approaching eight years in the UK and I'm not a British citizen... yet.

Ellen: But you have on the street cred. We are both Brits effectively as we talk about this. Let's start at the foundations of a potential problem. HR often gets classed as a support function, that language implies not leadership but following. I suspect you're

going to tell me that's a problem if HR leadership is going to drive significant change.

Nicole: That's right, and I would say we were a support function. However, now after the pandemic we've seen that the CHRO and the HR function has really stepped up to take care of their people, and the well-being of their people through some really challenging times. We've just come out with some research recently saying that 89% of CEOs surveyed said that the CHRO should have this central role in ensuring long term profitable growth for the organisation. This is something that the function of HR should be incredibly proud of because this is a result of the way the CHRO and HR function have shown up over these difficult times. Not just the pandemic, but through the war in Ukraine, inflation, energy crisis, etc. Now I think CEOs recognise that in order for them to have growth and reinvention of their own enterprise, they have to do it with their people, and they have to take their people along with the journey. They are recognising that the CEO needs to be the talent architect, they need to care about the talent of their people and how their people can be unlocked to deliver those growth imperatives that they're looking for.

Ellen: So, HR Chiefs if you're getting classified as support, there is problem number one because clearly what you're saying is the leaders are not support, they are leading.

Nicole: They are absolutely leading and CHRO is now really seen as the right-

Ellen: Accenture always argues that combining people, data and technology in the right way can boost productivity and revenue. But more Accenture research says only 5% of companies are making that happen. Do you recognise that scenario from the people you're talking to? More importantly, what role do HR leaders play in changing that very sad statistic?

Nicole: I think CHROs are recognising or have recognised that they've got a skills gap to address with their people. They have been advocating for greater learning opportunities and systems to enable driving a learning culture. They've been driving to reskill their people, recognising that the changes of the workforce are there for them to tap into. I think they've been doing things to get prepared for this change but the 5% is a shocking number and it really makes you think - how they can really tackle the gap that their recognising? We've seen in the UK, research saying that 30 million workers need to be reskilled by 2030. The good news is CHROs have been thinking about what they need to do in this space, but the difference is - how do they make sure that they don't just teach people these new skills, but actually are able to put people into roles that allow them to capitalise on that new skill that they've gained?

Ellen: And was that report before or after ChatGPT came into our lives?

Nicole: That is a great point, and I think actually this research was before Generative AI really stepped up. I think we're looking at even greater opportunity to reskill. We've got new research coming out that says 40% of work hours across industries can be impacted by these Large Language Models, which means that we've really got to think about the implications on our workforce and change and enhance even further the reskilling that we require to address these labour shortages.

Ellen: You are based in the UK, and you do most of your work here, but I know that we talked about you starting in the States and you've worked in many countries. Is what we're talking about here just typical of everybody or are there some specific challenges in the UK?

Nicole: I think everybody, I would say is struggling in some capacity with the reskilling elements. What I think is coming to the forefront for the UK specifically is, we've got requirements to produce things like the Gender Pay Gap report. As a result of that, we're actually doing the analysis and then being able to assess the data and the changes that other countries might not be doing. Whether we're better or worse it's hard to say, but we're at least measuring it. Which means were at least able to track progress or lack thereof.

Ellen: And what does the world look like on gender pay for the UK?

Nicole: For the UK we're seeing that

unfortunately still, 80% of the UK employers are paying men more than women.

Ellen: Still. The same jobs?

Nicole: Still. And they're actually saying the insights, as they dig into it, and this is what I think is great. The companies are actually talking about what's driving that and actually it's not because there's a shortage of capable women in the workforce. They've got fewer women in the senior roles. And why is that? It might be because they need to remove biases in the appointment and selection processes of senior roles and addressing things like childcare costs that might keep women from going back to work.

Ellen: We can look to our friends in the Nordics to see a very different approach to that and different levels of female executives. How about positives? Is there anything in the UK that you think is a particular opportunity for us?

Nicole: I think one thing that the UK is doing really well is driving skills as an agenda item across the government. We're seeing recently the approval of the childcare referendum which will do things to help get working mothers back into work. They're having conversations around, yes, we had many people taking early retirement. How can we think more creatively about bringing people back into work part time. Often when you look at roles advertised, very often these are full-time roles. Very few of

them advertised for part time. Actually, when you look at people who are retired and have immense skills, some of them may be really interested in working one day a week in a mentor type of relationship. That can drive great value for the organisation at a low cost.

Ellen: Nicole, we're reaching the end of our walk and I want to end by imagining that Chief HR Officers have total control of the agenda for their companies next board meeting. If they're going to lead the solution to Britain's talent challenges, what's on that agenda? Can you give me up to three things?

Nicole: I was going to say four, but I'll give you three

Ellen: Well, I might take four. Go ahead.

Nicole: First I would say that CHROs... we found data that suggested only a third of CHROs felt like they had the right combination of skills to empower them to be that growth executive that we were talking about. The first thing I would say is for CHROs to invest first in themselves. It's kind of like that oxygen mask moment.

Ellen: Yeah, put it on first!

Nicole: You put it on first. Make sure that you're leading by example. Also getting your functions up to the new demands that they have of them and then also then you're able to support the wider organisation. I would then say there is something about really,

assessing and creating talent in an innovative way. This is really about enabling the next generation of skills like the Generative AI topic today, etc. The second or third piece in this is about connecting the new dimensions of data, tech and people as we talked about earlier to unlock the potential. This includes people, data and having better ability to extract insights out of the day that you have and leveraging the systems that you have in your ecosystem already. Oftentimes we are only getting a fraction of the insights and the use out of those technologies that we have in our ecosystem. And being able to automate what we can to create meaningful work for the future that allows people to have good work. Finally, about leading reinvention beyond the HR function, and this is where the CHRO becomes really that growth executive, driving the skills of growth across the organisation into partnerships and investments across the organisation and the communities they serve.

Ellen: We could probably do four more podcasts just on that list. But for now, we have reached the end of our walk. Thank you very much for joining us. And I think you're my first repeat guest, so thank you for that.

Listeners, if you liked this episode then you definitely want to scroll back to season one, episode 7 where Nicole and I talked about what HR leaders need to know about cloud. You will also want to check out a whitepaper that Nicole briefly mentioned called the CHRO as a Growth Executive,

which dives into this topic in much more detail. You can find it on our website, click through the link underneath this episode on our podcast homepage or download the Accenture Foresight app from your favourite source of mobile apps. It is a fact packed, elegantly designed library of serious thought leadership all at the ready in your phone.

That's it for us this time. Hope to see you on our next walk in the cloud.

Outro: Walk in the Cloud.

Copyright © 2023 Accenture. All rights reserved. Accenture and its logo are trademarks of Accenture.