Ashoka
Creating and scaling an innovative talent development program

High performance. Delivered.
Client profile

Ashoka is the largest network of social entrepreneurs worldwide, providing start-up financing, professional support services and connections across the business and social sectors, and a platform for people dedicated to world change. Ashoka launched the field of social entrepreneurship and has activated multi-sector partners across the world that increasingly look to entrepreneurial talent and new ideas to solve social problems.

Opportunity

Because of its mission to support social innovators in getting started, growing ideas and collaborating, Ashoka understands the importance of professional development. The engine of innovation and entrepreneurship is the people, and so people need high levels of critical skills, especially skills in what Ashoka calls "changemaking": teamwork, empathy, problem-solving and leadership.

Senior leaders at Ashoka realized that its ability to accomplish its mission could be compromised by skills gaps across the private sector, as well as the citizen sector—organizations with a social mission. Its analysis and research led to identifying six priority areas for development, a mix of hard and soft skills—areas including leadership, partner/relationship management, fundraising and budget management, agile project management, and negotiation and conflict resolution.

Lacking a talent development model that could promote these skills at scale, Ashoka began working with Accenture Strategy.

Solution

**Accenture Innovation Challenge**—In 2014, Ashoka became the chosen non-profit to participate in the Accenture Innovation Challenge, in which hundreds of undergraduate and advanced-degree students compete to develop solutions for challenges faced by nonprofit organizations. Winning teams are then paired with Accenture Strategy professionals who work on a pro-bono basis to implement the solution.

Teaming with Accenture Strategy throughout late 2014 and early 2015, the students and Ashoka worked to design a model that would be able to scale Ashoka’s talent development plan to a national, cross-sector level.

**The “weLearn” solution**—The winning solution, from Georgetown University, was called “weLearn,” a blended learning model combining curated massive open online courses (MOOCs) with virtual facilitated discussions among participants. The unique design addresses cost issues by using available, respected content but then also enables reinforcement of the learning experiences through online, real-time reflections and exchanges of ideas with other participants. The weLearn approach also brings together both private-and public-sector organizations to co-create the learning environment and enable ongoing connections among participants.
Program delivery model and prototype—Accenture Strategy worked with Ashoka to test the solution and develop a program delivery model for implementation. In an initial phase of work, Accenture created and tested a prototype solution in only two-and-a-half weeks, using Ashoka and Accenture participants. The prototype enabled Accenture to refine components of the solution such as group design, content curation, planning and logistics.

Accenture Strategy incorporated key prototype findings into the final, comprehensive delivery model. The model encompassed overall strategy, objectives, delivery, program management and evaluation. Accenture also outlined key processes and provided supporting documentation to operationalize weLearn at scale.

Private-sector assessment—Finally, Accenture Strategy helped Ashoka assess private-sector organizations and identified three potential partners that could especially benefit from weLearn. Accenture developed and created pitch decks with customized value propositions for Ashoka to engage those partners in the promise and potential of weLearn.

Results

Advancing Ashoka’s agenda—Accenture Strategy’s work with weLearn has advanced Ashoka’s agenda to bring about large-scale social change through improved connections and learning experiences among public- and private-sector organizations. The rapid prototype accelerated the testing of the weLearn model, uncovering strengths as well as areas for improvement.

Accenture Strategy’s refinement of the weLearn delivery model provided a playbook allowing new partners and Ashoka leads to easily and efficiently launch the next phase of the weLearn program.

Spread the weLearn program through Ashoka’s network—The work to support communications with potential private sector organizations will allow Ashoka to more easily and confidently spread the weLearn program through its network, existing partners, weLearn incubation partners and citizen-sector organizations.

A multi-year vision—WeLearn is a multi-year vision, and Accenture Strategy has helped Ashoka to define a roadmap toward the realization of that vision. Accenture’s recommendations within that roadmap include targeting additional private-sector partners to continue developing and refining weLearn. Once the weLearn model is fine-tuned, Ashoka can continue to scale the program to other private- and citizen-sector organizations.

After the initial incubation period, Ashoka may develop mechanisms to enable its private-sector partners to replicate weLearn with other citizen-sector organizations. In addition, Ashoka can offer weLearn to citizen-sector organizations to pursue their own private-sector partners. Ultimately, weLearn could become an open source model, further advancing Ashoka’s goal to make everyone and every organization a changemaker.
About Accenture

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