HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING

An Innovative Onboarding Program for New Hires in Accenture UK

accenturestrategy

COMPANY PROFILE

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations to clients in more than 40 industries. Forty percent of Accenture's workforce has been with the company for two years or less. Accenture's UK consulting business employs about 12,000 people.

OPPORTUNITY

In Accenture's UK consulting practice, 300 to 500 new analysts, most of them recent university graduates, join the Analyst Consulting Group (ACG) every year. These are passionate and ambitious people and Accenture is a fast-moving, complex organization which they need to navigate effectively.

New graduates need to familiarize themselves with how the company works and develop new knowledge, skills and behaviors in their first few weeks and months on the job.

Accenture heard from its analysts that the company had great induction and orientation but when this came to an end, new joiners wanted even more ways to tap into a support network. They wanted to feel an ongoing sense of belonging to the business and the culture, and were looking for more help becoming fully productive members of client delivery teams.

Accenture UK wanted to design an onboarding program that would effectively engage new hires and help them (1) become familiar and comfortable with the culture of the company; (2) learn and practice new behaviors. They built habits related to:
- Learning and collaboration
- Health and well being
- Finding and maintaining the right collaborative networks

SOLUTION

What can be done in 30 days to strengthen relationships with new joiners and prepare them to work and think differently as productive and engaged employees of Accenture?

That was the question asked by the onboarding training development team for new analysts in the UK. The team itself was made up of recent analysts themselves, helping to maintain timeliness and relevance of the design so it would focus specifically on the questions new joiners typically have in the important first few weeks.

The team worked with Accenture Strategy consultants to help accelerate change and encourage positive behaviors in light of that change. Using human-centered design workshops, the team identified the key "moments that matter" to new analysts (critical junctures that influence performance and engagement) and then crafted learning experiences targeted at those moments.

Three behaviors were highlighted as especially important to help new analysts be productive and successful:
- Learning to learn for yourself
- Learning to support yourself
- Learning to look after yourself

The team worked with a digital learning platform, Cognician, to build a series of fun, informative and engaging daily challenges, each specifically designed to reinforce one of the three key behaviors.

Each day the new analysts received a different challenge, which they could complete on either a PC or mobile device.

Three steps were involved:
1. A new micro-action was delivered via the digital platform. The program sponsor's avatar guided participants through the day's activity.
2. Participants accessed the challenge and completed the day's task. Each assignment took about 10 minutes to complete.
3. The sponsor's avatar posed a series of questions to reflect on the day's challenge. Insights were shared across the group, and peers could "like" and comment on each other's key takeaways.

Gaming elements in the interactions enriched the learning experience, engendered competition and helped maintain engagement. Weekly awards were given out for completing tasks, and a leader board showcased top performers.

The effectiveness of the program was due in part to its grounding in current understandings of neuroscience and learning: the use of smaller "bites" of learning and experience (which are more readily retained), and the fact that some competitive pressure can accelerate learning and behavior change.

The learning program is continuously enhanced through analytics, providing real-time data and monitoring to help Accenture continuously improve the program.

RESULTS

The success of the new analyst learning program can be understood in terms of the three key behaviors on which the challenges were focused:

1. Learning to learn for yourself: Time to productivity. All new analysts will have different types of responsibilities as they move on to client projects, so it is not possible to teach specifics for everyone in a learning program. Instead, the program is focused on helping analysts learn how to learn for themselves, using all the knowledge management, collaboration and learning tools available at Accenture.

    Results here were impressive. Compared to a control group that completed the onboarding process in a traditional way, the new program resulted in a 5 percent improvement in productivity among new analysts, measured in client chargeable time.

    Anecdotal evidence from supervisors also points to the success of the program. One manager noted, for example, that he was extremely impressed with one new analyst because "he knew exactly what his role was and was familiar with the basic terminology," something that ordinarily would have required significant time explaining. The manager attributed this to the 30-day focused learning program.

2. **Learning to support yourself: Time to connectivity.** Building a network of practice contacts, career counsellors and mentors is a key enabler of success and is a goal of each start group. New analysts build peer networks as they share their insights during the 30-day program. Analysis of word frequencies highlights "careers," "knowledge" and "experiences" as subjects generating the most discussion.

    When the new analysts join client projects they continue to use social collaboration platforms with their new teams. Each start group collectively has made over 1,100 connections on Accenture's internal social collaboration platform.

    One new analyst reported: "The 30-day program really helped me to hit the ground running as soon as I joined. I learned about how Accenture works in such a short amount of time. After 30 days it really felt like I belonged to something and I knew where everything was so I could be productive."

3. **Learning to look after yourself: Time to engagement:** Research shows that health and wellbeing are key enablers of engagement and, ultimately, the productivity of the organization. The learning challenges nudged analysts towards formal and informal wellbeing support available from Bupa (the healthcare group used by Accenture UK)— as well as Accenture's inclusion and diversity initiatives—and invited them to become mental health allies. Analysis found that individuals who "highly valued the needs and cares of others" were more likely to be found among top performers in the 30-day learning program.

Insights into learning effectiveness

Experience from the program administration to date has pointed to several insights about how to make these kinds of focused, short-term learning challenges especially effective:
*   Make it clear and understandable but also obviously valuable. The daily challenge needs to resonate with actual needs of the new joiners.
*   Don't make it too easy. Let people struggle a bit—maybe even try and fail occasionally— while also providing guidance through coaching.
*   Space out the learning. Build in repetition and practice because learning new behaviors requires practice as much as learning new skills.

Effective learning often depends on taking risks and not being afraid to fail. The digital technology at the heart of the Accenture learning program creates a space to learn and practice new behaviors in a safe environment, while harnessing passion and competition to accelerate professional development.

Join the Conversation

@AccentureStrat
www.linkedin.com/company/accenture-strategy

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 approximately 442,000 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.**

About Accenture Strategy

Accenture Strategy operates at the intersection of business and technology. We bring together our capabilities in business, technology, operations and function strategy to help our clients envision and execute industry-specific strategies that support enterprise wide transformation. Our focus on issues related to digital disruption, competitiveness, global operating models, talent and leadership help drive both efficiencies and growth. For more information, follow @AccentureStrat or visit **www.accenture.com/strategy.**