Ethics in the “Age of Intelligence”

Written by Chad Jerdee, General Counsel & Chief Compliance Officer, Accenture; and Patrick Rowe, Deputy General Counsel, Accenture

Accenture has a long history of acting with integrity, and our Code of Business Ethics (Code) will always will be fundamental to how we operate. Eighteen months ago, we decided to review our Code. The rotation of our business to new technologies and offerings prompted us to think more about how human ingenuity could be enhanced by intelligent technologies. With an increasingly complex business world, we felt it was more important than ever to empower our people with the tools and updated resources they need to work in accordance with the highest ethical standards.

What followed was an ambitious project that brought together many parts of our organization, challenged us to think differently about how we interact with our people, and allowed us to experiment with new, cutting-edge technology. The result is an updated Code, and a new user experience — that we believe helps empower our people to make good decisions and act with a sense of responsibility to the environment around us.

Evolving to meet today’s business reality

We started by benchmarking ourselves — by looking at the codes of companies and organizations that we admire. We also talked to our people, key leaders, and our external counsel to get their feedback. We did this through a combination of one on one discussions and a survey with a sample of our people at different career levels. Finally, we engaged one of our businesses, Fjord, to help us think about design in a different and human-centered way.

This design-led approach gave us three simple insights:

- The Code should inspire our people to make good and ethical decisions.
- We must provide a simple, intuitive and engaging platform accessible from anywhere, on any device.
- Our people want to receive information as if they were talking to a person.

**Human-centered experience:** We moved away from a static version of our Code to an interactive Website for our people. We made our Code experience accessible across all devices and platforms, and included Browse the Code functionality, a Making Good Decisions tool, and links to our relevant internal policies and resources to create a “one-stop-shop” to help make it easier for our people.
Patrick Rowe
Rowe is one of the Deputy General Counsel at Accenture with global responsibility for ethics and compliance, employment law, regulated offerings and geographic matters. His responsibilities in ethics and compliance include the code of business ethics, Data Privacy, Anti-Corruption, Trade Compliance, AML, Competition Law and Government Compliance. Rowe joined Accenture in 1995 and has had a variety of different roles in the legal group. Prior to joining Accenture, Rowe specialised in litigation at an Australian law firm.

Chad Jerdee
As General Counsel, Chad Jerdee has ultimate responsibility for all legal support to Accenture, serving as principal counsel to senior leadership and the board of directors and leading the company’s Legal department. As head of the Legal department, he oversees all legal services, the contract management and government relations functions. As chief compliance officer, Chad is responsible for managing legal and regulatory compliance programs that enable Accenture to operate around the globe while adhering to the highest ethical standards. He is also a member of Accenture’s Global Management Committee.

What’s next
We are continuing to promote our updated Code through a robust communications plan, including a recognition program where our people can earn “flairs” for completing each of their monthly training modules within ten days, and encouraging our leaders to embrace and share our Code, setting the right tone from the top.

Our roadmap to continue evolving our employee experience includes implementing artificial intelligence and machine learning, embedding the chatbot into other employee collaboration platforms and exploring other forms of input, such as voice.

We are excited about the future enhancements, but for the moment are enjoying promoting the new Code and the experience both internally and externally.

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We also created an anonymous, easy-to-use chatbot, referred to as “COBE,” to help guide our people to the information and resources they need in the moment they need them. Built on a natural language processing engine, COBE turns what was a legal document into a living resource. Examples of common questions it can respond to are:

• How can I deploy an AI solution for my client?
• What can I say about a client project on social media?
• Can I buy my client a gift?

To ensure our people feel comfortable asking questions or reporting an issue without fear of reprisal, we have made interactions with the chatbot completely anonymous. Designed to evolve, COBE will become increasingly more helpful as more questions are asked. Responses will be continuously tailored to ensure we are providing the right information, and we will learn if there are new topics that we need to address.

More approachable and updated content: To make it intuitive and easy to understand, we shortened and reorganized the Code around six fundamental behaviors. We cut almost a third of the text, but also included new topics ranging from the use of new technologies to human rights. For example, a new section outlines our pledge to develop artificial intelligence systems that are secure, transparent and explainable.

So how are we doing?

We internally launched our updated Code in late 2017, providing an easy way to help our people access the information they need, when and how they need it — to make ethical behavior a natural part of what we do every day.

The uptake of the new experience has exceeded our expectations — there have been more views of the online Code in one month than there were in the past eighteen by a wide margin. Many of our people are also interacting with COBE. And for the first time we have real-time insights into the questions they are asking and the types of information they are looking for. We plan to use this information to build on the questions that COBE can address, and to look at topics that need a particular focus in training and communications.

We have also rolled out an entirely new approach to training. We created more frequent, bite-sized training (5-10 minutes of relatable multi-media content) designed around the way people learn today. The training modules will continue throughout the year, covering each of the six fundamental behaviors and keeping our Code top of mind. So far, our people have enthusiastically embraced the training change, evidenced by an unprecedented early completion rate and overwhelmingly positive feedback.

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