

Meghan M. Biro: On this week's episode of WorkTrends, we're talking to Jill Goldstein from Accenture about HR tech, HR transformation, and of course, the big challenges HR leaders are facing.

Meghan M. Biro: Welcome to The WorkTrends Podcast from TalentCulture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro. Every week, we interview interesting people who are re-imagining work. Join us on Twitter every Wednesday, 1:30 PM Eastern using the hashtag #worktrends.

Meghan M. Biro: I tell you, I have HR transformation on the brain today. I was just reading a report about a new survey from The Hackett Group. A majority of the leaders who responded expect to see digital transformation make an impact within the next two to three years. In truth, I was thinking it would be like the next six minutes, but here is what's really interesting to me. The report shows that most HR operations are behind in developing the people, the leaders, and these are the people who lead our, guess what? Our constantly-changing workplaces. It's not just about the tech, everyone. It's about people and strategy, and also rethinking the way our organizations work to set us up for the long haul if you want to stay in this game. It's not easy work, but it's incredibly important work.

Meghan M. Biro: Here today with me is Jill Goldstein. She is a great example of somebody who's really thinking ahead about the future.

Meghan M. Biro: Today's guest is Jill Goldstein, and Jill is the Global Practice Lead of Talent and HR Operations at Accenture. She oversees their work with 130 clients, so she's got this really unique perspective on all kinds of organizations are thinking about HR transformation. Welcome to WorkTrends, Jill.

Jill Goldstein: Thanks, Meghan.

Meghan M. Biro: I thought it was kind of cool when we were in the green room just now. You were like, "You and I shook hands a couple of years ago, right?" It's a small world.

Jill Goldstein: It certainly is, and what I find so interesting is the pace in which the market is changing and the fact that the networks are coming together fairly frequently, so I suspect that you and I will start to meet more frequently.

Meghan M. Biro: I sure hope so because secretly, I'm not going to lie, I know where you live and I'm thinking maybe part of next winter I can come on down to Fort Lauderdale and just loaf. Would that be okay with you?

Jill Goldstein: Absolutely.

Meghan M. Biro: Listen, are you indeed in Florida? Is that... I've heard through the grapevine that you are, but I know that you are really busy and you're basically a world traveler. Where is Jill today?

Jill Goldstein: Well, I did actually travel quite a bit this week. I started off in London and then I was in Chicago, but I'm very happy to tell you that today I'm talking to you from Fort Lauderdale.

Meghan M. Biro: What is your favorite airline? I must know.

Jill Goldstein: Well, I have to say that my favorite airline domestically is probably Delta, and internationally, it just depends.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay. I'm tied for Delta and JetBlue here in the States, and internationally, I am just not doing enough international travel at the moment to care, frankly, but... right? How's that for transparent?

Jill Goldstein: That's very honest.

Meghan M. Biro: Yeah, exactly. Listen, what's going in your world?

Jill Goldstein: Oh, my goodness. Well, I have to say that I'm really excited about the discussions that I'm having with HR organizations around the world. Their unwavering commitment to driving value for the businesses they support, their commitment to developing and upskilling their workforce, and their commitment to applying technology that makes sense for their organizations and the investments that are required to drive their business.

Meghan M. Biro: Wow, you've been busy.

Jill Goldstein: I have been.

Meghan M. Biro: I always want to know where people start off from, where your early beginnings are, so how did you get into HR?

Jill Goldstein: The interesting thing is I'm finding that this story isn't as unique as I once thought it was. I started off my career as an accountant, actually, and I started off as an auditor and then I went to a staff accountant and then I found out that actually I was pretty bad at it. Rather than kicking me out, my boss at the time who was the controller tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to become the financial arm of human resources. I started off in human resources really focusing on payroll, compensation, and benefits. As I grew my career and got more responsibility and moved across different organizations, I began to get a little frustrated by how little investment I saw being infused into human

resources, even though most organizations talked about the importance of their people as their greatest and most differentiating asset.

Jill Goldstein: Over time, I thought, "What's the best way that I can help my colleagues across HR be more impactful in what they do? About 13 years ago, I actually moved over to the service provider side of the house where I could be a revenue-generating part of the business, and as long as I demonstrated an ROI, was more likely to get investment to build the assets and capabilities that we needed to deliver value for organizations and HR professionals around the world.

Jill Goldstein: That's how I got into HR, and more specifically, the role that I'm in today.

Meghan M. Biro: Basically, HR is important to you because you're tired of everybody out there, and I'm talking to you out there utilizing WorkTrends as a hashtag, talk to us. How do you feel about all of this? I think so many people are giving lip service to people being their greatest asset. I'm frankly getting a little tired of it. Let's hear about... right? Jill [crosstalk 00:06:12]-

Jill Goldstein: That's right.

Meghan M. Biro: Come on. We've been talking. Talking is not enough. We're talking here today and let's talk about actions.

Jill Goldstein: Absolutely. I've been an HR professional for 25-plus years. I think people continue to be a differentiation for so many organizations around the world, but yet managers feel undersupported, HR feels underenabled, and employees generally are frustrated with the way that they access information and transact business across HR. It's time for organizations to step up and make the investment, and as a service provider, I'm in the unique position to enable HR professionals around the world.

Meghan M. Biro: You work with a lot of organizations that are trying to figure out how to use HR tech to transform business. How do you see HR leaders struggling with this? I know they're out there and I'm hearing the rumblings, so tell us more about what you're seeing and feeling and hearing.

Jill Goldstein: Well, I think anyone who's gone to an HR tech conference in the last few years is generally overwhelmed when they see 400, 500, 600 booths, each representing a new or emerging technology in the HR space. The pace of change is dizzying to HR professionals and I think generally it is so hard for anyone to keep pulse of what's valuable and what's fun, but perhaps a little less effective and fit for purpose for business. That I think probably has to be the number one frustration that I'm seeing.

Jill Goldstein: The second is that many HR professionals have actually received some level of investment within their HR organization to deploy a cloud HCM. I think that

many HR leaders, having deployed the cloud HCMs, are quite frankly struggling to recognize the business value or achieve the business case that they first envisioned when they started on the transformation journey.

Meghan M. Biro: Why do you think that is?

Jill Goldstein: Well, I think a lot of it depends on the organization. Generally, though, many organizations perceive it a technology initiative. If I go from my on premise today to a cloud HCM tomorrow that has delivered self-service out of the box, just by nature of deploying the cloud HCM I'm going to be in a better place. What we've learned in talking and working with our clients is that it's a lot bigger than that. It's a business transformation that may start as early as reviewing policies and programs to make sure that the rules used to configure the cloud HCM really help employee and manager self-service adoption rather than hinder it.

Jill Goldstein: I think the next thing I would mention is the fact that many of our clients and the HR organizations maybe underestimate the amount of effort and focus they need around data. Data becomes the currency of the cloud HCM working. It becomes the enabler of self-service adoption and the core of analytics and insights going forward, and in many cases it feels like HR organizations figure that they'll get to that next, and in reality, they should probably get to that first.

Meghan M. Biro: Love that. That's a really interesting angle you just are talking about. Why aren't we talking about people first? Why aren't we talking about culture first? If you don't have those two things in place, digital transformation will not occur. It won't occur now, and it won't occur in six months.

Jill Goldstein: That is actually beautifully said, Meghan. As we work with organizations around the world, there are typically three stakeholder communities that HR is focused on. The first is making sure that their operations or shared services organization is enabled and humming to provide noiseless back office capability. The second is around making sure that their HR business partners, and the rest of HR including COEs, are really enabled and empowered to deliver value to the business. The third is really anticipating the spoken and unspoken needs of employees, which could include perm and temporary workers as well as line managers to access information and transact business.

Jill Goldstein: If you start with the end in mind, how to best do that, given your culture, your organization, your business challenges, generally HR organizations are able to derive a lot more value from deploying the technology we're talking about.

Meghan M. Biro: I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that you get tons of calls that are filled with crisis intermittently, or maybe even often, so what mistakes are people making? What usually is happening when there's this chaos that ensues?

Jill Goldstein: Well, we have found that generally HR organizations are relatively satisfied with the level of employee self-service adoption. Depending on the process and the workforce that we're talking about, we generally see adoption in terms of 80 to 95%. Where HR organizations tend to get frustrated and where I get the calls are when they recognized the fact that deploying the cloud HCM in and of itself really only results in a manager's self-service adoption of 25 to 40%. What's generally happened is that there's been an assumption that because you are making transactions easier in the HCM, managers are going to change behavior.

Jill Goldstein: The best example I can give is when a manager needs to terminate an employee. Generally today in many organizations, there's a pretty robust checklist of things the manager needs to do with help of HR to terminate and offboard an employee. If you're being pragmatic, only two of those items in the checklist are inherent within the cloud HCM, and so it's unlikely that managers are going to change their entire behavior on how they terminate and offboard an employee just because two of the arguably 15 to 20 steps are now automated. Really, taking a step back, thinking about the experience, the journey the manager has to take more completely and figuring out how the cloud HCM works in that tends to be a lot more successful in increasing up manager self-service adoption, as an example.

Meghan M. Biro: If you had one wish that I could grant you today when it comes to HR tech vendors and what they might do different, what would that be?

Jill Goldstein: I think HR tech vendors have done what many HR organizations have done for the last few years, and that is they think about HR function, so there's a recruiting module, there's a learning module, there's a compensation module, there's a performance module. Payroll, lead, benefits, et cetera. I think we're all recognizing in this world of experience in driving value that HR professionals generally are looking at different ways with engaging with their workforce and delivering service around what I call moments that matter, and redesigning the service delivery model and the experiences from the employee-manager point of view.

Jill Goldstein: If I were going to dream, I would actually dream that the cloud HCM providers actually do a better job of aligning to that. Breaking out of their traditional back office silos around modules and thinking a lot more about the way people use the technology. I think the use historically has been very focused on the HR professional, but I think generally we're all more mature as a function and we realize that that's only one of several stakeholders that need to be accounted for.

Meghan M. Biro: HR vendors, hope you're listening out there. Are you... is anyone out there? Let's talk insider baseball for a minute. Who do you view as the most important consumer of HR?

Jill Goldstein: That's a super good question. I don't know that there is a most important because if you think about just about any activity that happens within or across HR, there are different stakeholders at the same activity. You can have the employee, the manager, and the HR professional all having equal levels of responsibility and accountability and input for a specific outcome. I think it's less important about who they primary consumer is, although that's definitely a non-negotiable.

Jill Goldstein: What I would suggest is we start with the outcome. If you think about a new joiner onboarding the organization, the outcome is around accelerating time to productivity. Maybe increasing new joiner retention or performance, and when you start with the end in mind and then the role of each stakeholder and what becomes important, I think it's little bit more obvious in the ecosystem of everything that has to happen.

Meghan M. Biro: You said that it was a good question that I just asked, and I guess my next question would be, why does this matter so much right now?

Jill Goldstein: I think that as an HR professional, many of have had conversations with the business where the business continually struggles along with us to find the right talent in the marketplace. A lot of it, quite frankly, is why we're looking for skills that don't actually exist in abundance, and so there's a question around how to acquire or build or borrow or bot the right talent and then continue to retain and build that talent over time.

Jill Goldstein: I think that HR needs to be able to focus their attention on that and really pivot away from the day-to-day transactional work. Making sure that the back office, even the middle office and parts of the front office are as technically enabled as they can will provide the HR business partner as well as many of the COEs with the capacity, the capability, and the insights to drive that value.

Meghan M. Biro: Will you talk to the audience about COE? You've said that... you've dropped it a couple of times, and I just want to make sure that everybody knows what that is and what that means.

Jill Goldstein: Thanks for that coaching.

Meghan M. Biro: No problem [crosstalk 00:16:34]-

Jill Goldstein: Depending on the organization, you may refer to that as center of excellence or center of expertise. It's essentially a small strategic component of an HR operating model that understands the market and their particular area and helps to create strategies, programs, and policies to enable it. We typically talk in terms of a recruiting COE or a compensation COE or a benefits COE. Those are the people responsible for working with the business and articulating how much

we want to pay for talent. What is the mix of fixed and variable? Stability of the people who set the business rules for the rest of HR?

Meghan M. Biro: Jill, you are all business. That's what we like about you. See this? I'm going to bring out my WorkTrends crystal ball, and it's time to look into the future just a little bit. Talk to us about what's most important for any HR leader and how they can prepare their organization for what is now the future? It's all happening really quickly as you mentioned. You and I both go to these HR tech conferences and it's mind-blowing when you look at just the amount of vendors in the space and emerging technologies and levels of adoption are pretty incredible right now. Where does this all leave us when we talk about people first or culture first? Let's talk. You can talk about the next six months or the next six years in this equation.

Jill Goldstein: Well, I think generally as HR professionals, we need to realize that this era of being an expert to some extent may be less important. What is increasing in the importance is the need for us to be agile, fluid, and understand that we need to bring in people at specific points based on the business challenge that we're trying to achieve. Even though it is important to understand HR, to be an HR professional it's equally important to understand that we don't know what's going to come around the corner in the next six to 12 months. I think that agility, flexibility, professional curiosity becomes super important.

Jill Goldstein: I think looking further than that, I'm super excited about the future of HR. For years, we talked about earning a seat at the table. I would tell you in the next few years, I think we will be the table.

Meghan M. Biro: Sure that.

Jill Goldstein: People will continue to be the difference in good versus great in driving the business agenda, and as HR really enables ourselves more and more and leaves the transactional policing personnel work in the rear view mirror, we are going to be the reason that organizations succeed to focus on talent. That's why I'm super excited to be part of this industry.

Meghan M. Biro: You think HR's back office is going bye-bye?

Jill Goldstein: The way I talk about it is if these cloud HCM providers do their job well, I'm really not going to have the material business in the next 15 to 20 years because most of the activity will be handled by the technology. Yes, I think it will look very different.

Meghan M. Biro: What skills do you think HR practitioners, leaders, people interested in culture and people and everything else we call HR, what do you think are most important right now to not get left behind? I know a lot of people out there are worried about that?

Jill Goldstein: I think to the point you were spoofing me on just a little while ago, I think you need to make sure that as HR professional is you're continually tied to the business. In order to be relevant, we have to make sure that what we do is fit for a purpose for the business that we're serving and not necessarily the next or hottest HR trend. The second thing I would say is that we need to really focus on customer service. I think that in many cases, organizations have become a little too accustomed to being order takers. I think it's our turn to drive the agenda and advise and consult with the business in a very powerful way. The third is I think we have to be less intimidated of data and technology more generally as the key enablers for everything I just talked about.

Meghan M. Biro: Jill, I think it's safe to say that you are the table. You are living proof [crosstalk 00:21:02]-

Jill Goldstein: Man, I'm going to come on and talk to you more often, Meghan.

Meghan M. Biro: You're living proof that there's an HR table. Seriously.

Jill Goldstein: Well, that is one of the things I came over to the service provider side of the house to do, and I'll tell you that I see a horizon for HR professionals that maybe I was a little less hopeful for a few years ago. If I'm at the table, then I want to invite everyone to come join me.

Meghan M. Biro: I'm in. Out there in the ether of WorkTrends, are you with us? I think I hear something. Yes, you are. Okay. Tell us, where to next, world traveler?

Jill Goldstein: I right now go where my client base asks me to go. I'm fortunate enough to have an amazing group of organizations that I talk to on a fairly regular basis. Both sharing what other clients are doing, but also understanding a little bit more about what they see for themselves in the next few years and how I can better adjust what we're doing within Accenture to anticipate and deliver that. I think more literally, I'm heading off to New York, probably back to London, and maybe back to Chicago in the next few weeks.

Meghan M. Biro: Life is good with Jill Goldstein. Thanks for stopping by today.

Jill Goldstein: Thanks for the invite.

Meghan M. Biro: Let's keep the party bus moving. Join us for our WorkTrends Twitter chat. We're going to be on the Twitters with Jill Goldstein on Wednesday, May 1st at 1:30 PM Eastern, 10:30 AM Pacific. Join us to talk about how work is transforming in your world. I want to hear from you. If you'd like to get our Twitter chat questions in advance, sign up over at talentculture.com and you can get that newsletter delivered into your inbox every week.

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