

## CSR case studies



# Accenture plc

**Accenture Development Partnerships is a not-for-profit programme that combines the provision of employee development opportunities with helping NGOs, foundations and donor organisations in the international development sector.**

### ● The company

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, committed to delivering innovation to business and governments. With industry and business process expertise, broad global resources and a proven track record, Accenture mobilises the people, skills and technologies to help clients improve their performance. With approximately 140,000 people in 48 countries, the company generated net revenues of US\$15.55 billion for the fiscal year end 31 August 2005.

Accenture's approach to corporate citizenship, as it prefers to call corporate social responsibility, reflects its business vision, its code of business ethics and its six core values. The approach seeks for Accenture to play a full, relevant and positive role in society. The company also seeks to understand the impact of its actions on all its clients, employees and the broader community, and through this better understanding its aims to build mutually beneficial relationships. In essence, corporate citizenship should lever the core capabilities and knowledge of Accenture's people to have a positive impact.

This case study focuses on a programme established by Accenture that provides consultancy services on a not-for-profit basis to the development community and enables employees to diversify their career experiences.

### ● The drivers

The drivers for the establishment of the Accenture Development Partnerships programme were two-fold; first, to satisfy current and future aspirations of employees and, secondly, a latent demand within the development community for business consulting and technology expertise to help them reach their own goals (which were restricted by cost).

### ● Taking action

Accenture had established charitable foundations and had given funding for good causes. But the company believed it could do more by leveraging its people and knowledge to tackle some of the challenges facing the world, for example health issues and the digital divide between northern and southern hemispheres.

Before the Accenture Development Partnerships programme was initiated in 2002, Accenture had allowed its employees to take sabbaticals, for example volunteering with Volunteering Services Organisation (VSO) and had provided secondments to other development organisations. Its employees had also carried out pro-bono work where Accenture provided its staff for free, for example for charities. However, there was no cohesive strategy underpinning the different approaches.

The creation of Accenture Development Partnerships was employee led starting from a

partnership with the VSO. Staff who took leave of absence volunteering with the VSO said, on their return, that they could have done more if they had had the resources of the company behind them. This made the company think about whether it would be possible to establish a programme that could achieve this and at the same time deliver training and development for staff, so that they could bring new skills back into the company.

Before Accenture Development Partnerships could be established the company needed to make a business case to its board. The team developing the idea wanted to get buy-in and funding from all parts of the company. The tactic in involving all groups, including the leadership in the UK and the International Chairman for Accenture, was successful. Funding from all parties for a feasibility study to assess the business case was agreed in 2002.

The feasibility study aimed to address three questions:

1. Was there a market for Accenture's services in the NGO sector, for example with organisations like Oxfam?
2. Would the programme be financially sustainable?
3. Would Accenture staff be interested?

The feasibility study used a mixture of desk-based research and questionnaires.

The results of questionnaires from 3,000 employees revealed that those most interested in the programme were also the best performers within the company. The NGO community/development 'industry' also expressed an interest in partnering on projects, but told Accenture that paying full market rates was an issue for them. The results were analysed and provided a pilot Accenture Development Partnerships in 2003 with UK staff working on a handful of overseas projects.

Accenture Development Partnerships was set up to deliver the same high level of innovation and best practice enjoyed by its commercial

clients, but at rates in line with the development/NGO industry norm. The consultancy offered is on a not-for-profit basis; so the professional fees levied are designed to cover cost, not to generate profit. This is achieved through a three-way contribution comprising sponsorship from Accenture who provide consultants at marginal cost, free of profit and overhead; contribution from employees through a voluntary salary reduction (50%) and contribution from clients through the payment of fees, which are set at a fraction of usual commercial market rates.

The lesson learnt from the pilot projects was that there was tension caused by a difference in styles between NGO customers and consultant providers. To resolve this, the managers of the pilot followed the recommendations of the initial feasibility study, which were to identify the entrepreneurs and risk managers within organisations who would be more open to the consultancy work style.

Participants on Accenture Development Partnerships do not treat it as a sabbatical, but as an integrated career option with real consultancy work in testing conditions. To be selected for the programme Accenture candidates need to be among the top performing staff – so it motivates those interested in applying to do well in their jobs – and possess a minimum of three years experience. They are also assessed for their 'soft' skills such as adaptability, diplomacy and how they fit within a team.

Since its inception Accenture Development Partnerships has been oversubscribed with volunteers and selection for places is competitive. As the programme has rolled out into other Accenture country offices to meet the growing demand, it was decided that each country should commit to an annual quota of participants based on the size of the practice.

Since 2003, there have been over 100 projects completed in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Each project varies in duration but is typically 3-6 months, long enough to make an impact but not to build dependency. Multiple teams of

people have participated in Accenture Development Partnerships. In 2005 over 100 staff each worked for an average six months on a variety of projects falling within the six areas of Accenture's core expertise: strategy and planning; organisational development and change management; operational effectiveness; supply chain management; information technology; and customer relations management.

As a result, a variety of programmes in local communities have been transformed with the aid of hitherto inaccessible business expertise. For example, in Kenya, Accenture Development Partnerships helped the Government develop e-learning programmes for 27,000 nurses over three years. In the Balkans, it assisted a multilateral donor in facilitating small business capacity and the self-employed to operate in a post-conflict transitional economy. Another collaboration, with a major United Nations agency, reviewed ways in which their global supply chain can more effectively bring medicines and other provisions to children.

● **The business benefits**

The major benefit of Accenture Development Partnerships is that it brings Accenture's services to those organisations operating in developing countries that could not previously be reached.

For Accenture the programme helps it differentiate itself from its competition in terms of attracting and retaining staff. Attrition among those employees who have participated in the programme is lower than the average across the business. Survey feedback indicates companies' operating socially responsible business practices are very much on the graduate agenda. In the 2006 High Flyers Survey, the largest student research project in the UK, the number one characteristic that job hunters thought was 'very important' in a prospective place to work was 'Joining a Socially Responsible Employer'. Accenture Development Partnerships helps address this aspiration.

Lastly, it helps Accenture staff develop new skills and approaches that they can apply on future assignments when they return to the commercial practice.

● **Why is it CSR?**

Accenture Development Partnerships seeks to fulfil the gap where there is a need for assistance in the development community while at the same time meeting its staff's aspirations for a varied career supported by Accenture's capacity. Both training and development in the workplace and support to communities are two components of corporate citizenship/CSR. Accenture Development Partnerships has been driven by the aspirations of employees – not profit. The markets in which it operates will probably take 15-20 years to mature.

● **What next?**

Since its inception in 2003, Accenture Development Partnerships has completed over 100 projects and involved over 200 employees. It has extended the programme to 19 countries as at November 2006 and will continue to grow by involving more countries across the Accenture organisation. In the last year Accenture Development Partnerships has doubled its growth and the demand from its client market within the development sector, coupled with the huge interest in the programme internally, indicate that this trend is set to continue.

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