

Leading From a Place of Value

An Interview with Pallavi Verma,
Managing Director, North American State, Provincial & Local Government-Health & Public Services, Accenture

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to her current role, Pallavi Verma oversaw quality, client satisfaction, and risk management for Health & Public Services (H&PS) globally. Before that, she was responsible for Accenture's Operations & Management portfolio for North America. In addition, she previously led Accenture's higher education practice in North America. Verma joined Accenture in 1987, and has worked with public sector clients and U.S. higher-education institutions to implement complex systems and help clients transform their back office operations. Verma serves on the board of Democracy Prep Public Schools and is on the Global Women's Leadership Council for Accenture's H&PS operating group. She earned her bachelor's degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.



Pallavi Verma

least five years and 95 have been clients for at least 10 years, which says a lot. We understand our clients' businesses, know what drives them to be successful, and do what it takes to help them achieve high performance. It's about adding insight and expertise and leveraging our best thinking and the latest technology toward their business goals.

We lead from a place of value, which really differentiates us too, particularly in Health & Public Services, where our government and health clients are experiencing unprecedented change, from managing new legislative and regulatory requirements to leveraging innovative technologies. Also, we focus on attracting and retaining the best talent, and ensuring that our executives have the right set of core values to lead our clients and our people.

COMPANY BRIEF Accenture (accenture.com) is a global management consulting, technology services, and outsourcing company with more than 305,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience and comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world's most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments.

When you first joined Accenture, could you have imagined you would spend so much of your career there?

I've stayed for two important reasons. The first is Accenture's people. Everyone is extremely smart, and there is a culture of camaraderie, stewardship, and helping each other. It's all part of our secret sauce. The second reason is the opportunity to grow and the amount of learning that Accenture has afforded me. I stretch every year, either through learning a new line of business or working with new clients, or just doing different types of work. This keeps me mentally energized.

Would you talk about the strength of Accenture and the Health & Public Services operating group, as well as the advantages that this part of the business offers?

What differentiates Accenture are our client relationships. We have relationships with more than 4,000 clients in more than 120 countries. All of our top 100 clients have worked with us for at

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This is critical for Health & Public Services where we get to make an impact on citizens. That is, we bring value not just to our clients, but ultimately, to the taxpayers they serve.

For example, we have been working with our state clients to help them adjust to the changes of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the different eligibility requirements for people who now have healthcare for the first time.

In working with the public sector, it can take a long time to get things done. Is it hard to get results with organizations that might move a bit more slowly than Accenture?

The right public service leaders know how to drive transformational change. Without the political will and the commitment to change, most will not succeed. We do factor that in when we consider what business opportunities to pursue.

Once we decide to embark on a major transformation project, there are ways to drive the speed at which things happen. And sometimes legislation can be a forcing device, like the ACA, which mandated that public sector entities had to move fast, and they did.

How critical has it been to have the diversity of your client base mirrored within your workforce?

Collectively, Accenture employees represent a tremendous variety of cultures, ethnicities, beliefs, and languages. This diverse experience is invaluable in helping us to truly understand and be relevant to our clients. Our company has done a number of great things to make sure that we're inclusive in our workforce.

We're an absolute meritocracy: The level of effort you put into your work is what you get out of it. That said, we have a lot of great programs that celebrate people of diverse backgrounds. We're proud that we have more than 100,000 women at Accenture, and there is a strong focus on making sure that women are represented at all levels. Within Health & Public Services, we launched an effort to drive awareness of gender and diversity. We acknowledged that we all have some level of "unconscious bias," regardless of our background, so it's about bringing that to the forefront and recognizing it to make sure we're treating all people fairly.

What can be done to ensure more leadership opportunities are available for the next generation of women?

We're making tremendous progress, but we need to continue to help women who sometimes "opt out" of new opportunities or challenges. At Accenture, we are committed to supporting our women's professional goals and aspirations, and to helping them define their personal approaches to success. I coach women and talk to them about how they don't have to fit a particular profile but they can lead with their own strengths. They might take a different path and they don't need to be just like the male bosses they've had. It's incredibly rewarding to see women who take the leap of faith with confidence in themselves. Accenture is the kind of place that stretches as well as supports people throughout their career journeys. ●