



# RETHINKING THE PROCESS AT EVERY STEP: EXPLORING HR TRANSFORMATION WITH ATOS

## Interview with Jean-Michel Estrade, SVP HR - Global Digitalization & Services at Atos



*Jean-Michel Estrade is an experienced HR leader with significant International and change management experience. In his current role at Atos, Mr. Estrade is responsible for the deployment of an integrated One HR solution worldwide to support local HR execution through people administration and payroll with a strong focus on technology and automation. This interview explores his experience in HR transformation and technology.*

### First, can you give a bit of background on Atos as an organization and how your HR operations are set up?

With a presence in over 70 countries, with around 100,000 employees, Atos is a truly Global IT Leader with Headquarters in Paris and Munich.

The HR organization has to reflect the Global organizational structure and approach with:

- ▶ **Global (fully verticalized) HR team**
  - Centers of Expertise (C&B, L&D, Recruitment ...)
  - Global Digitalization & Services-teams (Personal Admin, Payroll, HR IS, Data management & DataAnalytics)
- ▶ **And HR operations managed as a matrix between:**
  - GBUs (Geographical Business Units)
  - Divisions: Infrastructure & Data Management (IDM), Business & process Services (B&PS), Big Data & Security (BDS), Worldline, Sales & Marketing.

A contributor to Atos "Ambition 2019" strategic plan presented to Financial Analysts in November 2016, the HR Function has developed an HR Vision supported by a program called eTransformation.

A direct report to Executive Vice President of Group HR, I manage the Global Digitalization and Services department (GDS) which has been entrusted with the Program Management responsibility.

### How is technology playing a role in your HR eTransformation project?

Technology is often so appealing that one may get seduced into adopting technology for the sake of it without any further thinking around the key drivers for adoption.

At Atos, we believe that for successful transformation you must begin with the business challenge you want to address and then look at the technology that allows you to do this. What we strive to do is **rethink the process at every step**, taking into account the possibilities that are offered by technology. This moves us from solving one issue to leading a full transformation of the way things are done, with possible transfer of responsibilities and tasks from some to others.

For instance, the efficiency gain when providing staff access to HR data via tablets and smartphones will remain limited if this provision of terminals is viewed as a mere technology layer (remote access via tablet or smartphone) rather than a driver to implement a business transformation.

Alternatively, when HR data access are re-designed with some thought given to challenging and simplifying the processes keeping in mind the possibilities that technology can bring, productivity outcomes are far better.

By extending access to HR data through technology, some stakeholders (outside of the HR community) are empowered to access and modify the data. They are more proactive in human resource management and in so doing are actually increasing agility and reactivity of the whole company.

Coming to your question, **technology is a fundamental component of eTransformation**. By providing easier and secure access to HR data at anytime, from anywhere, and on any device, technology is a strong enabler to adopt end-to-end, employee-centric HR processes.

Employee-centric, not only because good HR should be, but also because it is the only invariant one can rely on when considering HR on a worldwide basis... whatever the location, an employee is hired, he/she is developed through training and promotions, he/she is compensated, he/she is appraised during his/her stay in the company... and one day employee and company will go their respective ways. All these career steps are generating or using data and this data is stored and maintained in a Global repository (in keeping with all regulations pertaining to Data Privacy and Data Protection).



So **technology is an enabler of the transformation**, it's not the core driver. The core driver is the business process. What do we want to do? What do we want to achieve? Can we achieve it via technology? And if so, can we rethink the process in such a way that some steps are no longer necessary?

A typical illustration would be about Offer Letter generation for an applicant after final interview. At the very last stage of the interview process is a manager whose decision will lead to Offer Letter generation. This last decider normally has all the information required for an offer letter to be generated, but traditionally he writes down this information to send to the HR department to process... This is a needless and wasteful step in the process when technology can provide this last interviewer access to Offer Templates so that she/he can capture the relevant data directly into the document, electronically sign and store the offer letter and mail it straight to the candidate. This approach translates in a significant decrease in the volume of necessary steps for the workflow and back-office tasks (editing, printing, getting document signed, sending and storing sent document).

The consequence of the approach is that a review is made in the dispatch of the responsibilities between the teams; a perfect illustration of the impact of technology in making boundary between Front and Back office less and less visible while ensuring proper tooling for control, access rights and signature rights. Delegations of authority can still be supported and managed via tooling but unnecessary steps have been taken away. This improves productivity but also limits opportunities for data breaches or typo errors in data capture.

Re-engineering processes is done with all stakeholders in the processes, internal of course but also external (including the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) providers where some of the administrative tasks may have already been outsourced). The labor-cost arbitration traditionally associated with the outsourcing decision for BPO becomes less favorable with streamlined processes leading to reduced number of admin tasks, and so less mobilization

of resources for a process. Technology through automation can decrease the human intervention in the process whilst ensuring increased quality and reducing total cost of operation - in internal as well as external costs.

**The work with our eTransformation program is process-driven**, with supportive technology.

**So that's related to an initiative that you have called "Zero Back Office." Can you explain a bit about what this means?**

The "Zero Back Office" initiative is neither an intention nor an objective... it is a concept that encapsulates the spirit of abolishing the frontier that has been established over time between front and back office activities. This border line has nurtured the idea that some tasks (client facing or employee facing) were generating more value to the company than others (purely admin and logistics). Technology is allowing managers to think in terms of one seamless process where the administrative dimension is embedded in the natural management actions and steps.

Thinking of the check-in process to board a plane can illustrate how some (if not most) administrative tasks have been transferred from airline employees to customers; this transfer has even become a value proposition to the traveler. As a passenger, it is usually easier to process your own check-in and choose a seat, to edit the boarding pass and the associated baggage tags, to put the tags on the luggage and ferry the luggage to the "drop your bag" conveyor belt.

What were administrative tasks have been transferred effortlessly, and, I would dare say, have become a selling proposition to the traveler who is looking for a seamless, no fuss experience in the way he boards a plane. The efficiency of the automated and self-service process is a very good trade-off for the queuing up at the counter.

Our eTransformation program is aiming for a similar trade-off for employees,

managers and operational HR in terms of HR data management and processes; why break down a process when as a stakeholder you can speed it up in a way that is consistent with your needs via self-service? Automation and self-service, well supported by access right management make stakeholders in a process self-reliant and more empowered... so more motivated.

Though the name and concept of "Zero Back Office" is catchy and meaningful, it is more a direction than an objective. Some back office tasks (for lack of a new word) will of course remain but they will be more expertise driven, more control oriented, more about adding value or expertise.

When re-engineering the processes, staying away from the temptation of being all encompassing and exhaustive is key; the guiding principle should be to look for simplification and optimization... and not for perfection and full exhaustiveness. If automated process can cover 90% of situations, it is already a success in terms of efficiency and productivity. The manager's responsibility is then to keep in mind that some instances will have to be managed out of process and will require some support staff. Some situations are too costly to automate because their occurrence is so rare and sparse; you don't need (or can't afford) technology for a situation that happens once every 5 years. So we try to optimize AND remain practical.

**When you are looking to begin a new project, how do you build the business case for it?**

The key driver to any new project is of course the assessment of the related and expected benefits, these benefits being monetary or non-monetary.

Non-monetary benefits can be the following: transforming the HR process can project a very positive image to the Y generation and the millennials; interacting in a seamless manner with applicants or staff via social media does indeed pay off in image and attraction terms.



In the very near future, if it is not already the case, receiving an offer letter by post will be seen as outdated when companies are now electronically transmitting offer letters with electronic signature to approve and accept in a click. This is basic. Sometimes the business case is just that - we have to keep up with what the market is doing. We have to keep up with the type of people we are trying to attract.

Monetary benefits sustaining the business case are easy to track; valuation of the freed-up time for HR staff is tangible, reduction of invoices coming from providers to whom some admin tasks have been outsourced is also a good contributor to the business case. Other mid-term physical savings can also be computed, e.g. storing documents electronically does free-up some useful square meters in large companies, which can be put to good use for hosting increased headcount.

Beyond the scope of the HR function, one will also be able to track some potential benefits of providing direct access to HR data for managers which results in less time spent contacting HR to request information. The productivity benefits on this front (outside of HR) should definitely not be disregarded.

Comparing these (recurring) monetary and non-monetary benefits with actual design and implementation (one-off) costs makes any business case around HR eTransformation very attractive indeed!

### What is HR's role in the Future of Work?

Transforming process, and the related change management, is all about introducing new perspectives and dynamics for staff and company, and all about investing in our teams. Time can be re-allocated towards some more productive tasks, towards more business understanding, towards increased attention to all staff and managers to better serve them.

It's about focusing the energy of the HR team on more meaningful tasks - meaningful to them and to the company. Automation, integrated HR workflows are coming; such events have to be anticipated to be managed in the best long term interests of employees and company.

Technology and its rapid pace of development are reinforcing to me the importance of HR. I therefore think that HR's contribution will be more and more key to the growth and well-being of a company and of its employees.

Less focused on administrative tasks - thanks to automation & self-service - the HR teams will become more forward-looking. They will be responsible for creating, alongside the managers, the good working environment and conditions for employees to feel recognized, to know that their potential acknowledged and nurtured, and rely on the fact that the whole company is focused on helping them on their own professional path. This is the vision that is to be shared with the teams to

compound their individual energies and channel it towards collective and dynamic ambition.

Besides some HR specialists or experts for highly technical matters such as Comp&Ben, L&D strategy, pension, or employment laws, there will be HR Generalists able to help and support managers in driving their teams, in defining a vision for the future, in developing staff, and so on.

HR Data analytics can reveal new potential and strategy in HR management that will ensure a steady increase in staff skills and competencies, thus warranting sustainable employment for our teams.

HR will shift from a day-to-day reactive approach to become a proactive, forward-looking function - one of anti-cipation. **This momentum, this shift will make HR jobs more meaningful to both the HR professional and the company.**

**I have a lot of faith in the benefits of technology...** but what would you expect from someone within Atos when our motto is **Trusted partner to your digital journey...** Let's walk the digital pathway together!

**Hear Jean-Michel Estrade's story of the Atos HR eTransformation at the upcoming HR Technology World Congress in Amsterdam, October 24-25, 2017.**

## PeopleDoc - HR Service Delivery Solutions in the Cloud

PeopleDoc is on a mission to make the difficult job of HR easier. The PeopleDoc HR Service Delivery platform helps HR teams easily answer employee requests on demand, automate employee processes, and manage compliance across multiple locations.

PeopleDoc cloud solutions include case management, process automation and employee file management. 100% software as a service, PeopleDoc solutions integrate with existing HR systems, can be implemented in 8-12 weeks, and are designed for agile ongoing use by HR teams serving diverse workforces.

PeopleDoc serves more than 650 clients with employees in 188 countries in twelve languages with a 100% customer retention rate. More information is available at [www.people-doc.com](http://www.people-doc.com).

