MEET THE MAESTROS

Meet the Maestros: Richard Forrest, Kearney Partner

In this episode of Sensei Labs' "Meet the Maestro" series, Jay Goldman interviews Richard Forrest, Lead Partner for Energy and Process Industries at Kearney.

Jay Goldman   August 22, 2023

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Topics covered:

- Challenges in aligning people, processes, and technology for transformation
- The shift from high-value manual work to technology-enabled solutions
- The evolving role of technology in consulting and its impact on business models
- Real-time communication and data-driven decision-making in transformations
- The role of technology platforms like Conductor in integrated transformations

Introduction and Summary:

In this episode of Sensei Labs' "Meet the Maestro" series, Jay Goldman interviews Richard Forrest, Lead Partner for Energy and Process Industries at Kearney. The conversation revolves around the challenges and opportunities organizations face in orchestrating people, processes, and technology to drive faster, more effective outcomes. Forrest shares his insights on how Kearney, as both a consulting firm and an organization undergoing its own internal transformation, is adapting to the rapidly changing demands of the Enterprise orchestration era.

Forrest emphasizes that the traditional high-value consulting model, where firms primarily provide insights and advice, is evolving. Clients now expect consulting firms to integrate technology, data, and external alliances into their service delivery to enhance productivity and effectiveness. This shift has required both Kearney and its clients to rethink how they orchestrate their internal processes and external engagements. Forrest highlights that this orchestration involves bringing together different capabilities at the right time, which has become a major challenge for many firms.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of new technologies and forced organizations to adapt to remote work environments. Forrest describes how Kearney, like many of its clients, had to learn quickly how to operate effectively in this new reality. He notes that while tools like Zoom and Teams have become essential, the broader lesson is that many existing technologies can be scaled effectively and should be embraced more openly in the future. Forrest also observes that the days when consultants were valued primarily for manual data processing and analysis are over, with modern tools automating much of this work.

As organizations move towards more complex, integrated transformations, Forrest highlights the importance of real-time communication and data-driven decision-making. He explains that clients no longer find static reporting (e.g., PowerPoints and Excel spreadsheets) sufficient for managing large-scale transformation initiatives. Instead, platforms like Conductor, which provide real-time visibility and collaboration, are becoming essential for both consulting firms and their clients. These platforms not only streamline project management but also help reduce risk by enabling transparent, fact-based communication across all levels of the organization.

Forrest also touches on the evolving expectations of clients. Whereas Kearney once had to educate clients on the value of using technology platforms in their transformations, clients now expect consulting firms to bring such solutions as a standard part of their offerings. This shift reflects the increasing complexity of transformation projects, which often involve cross-functional collaboration, cultural changes, and the integration of digital analytics.

In closing, Forrest offers advice for organizations embarking on transformation journeys. He recommends focusing on integrated transformation strategies, utilizing real-time communication tools, and ensuring that transformations are driven by clear value outcomes. He also underscores the growing importance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations, advising organizations to integrate ESG outcomes into their transformation efforts whenever possible.

Forrest's insights provide valuable guidance for organizations seeking to thrive in the fast-evolving Enterprise orchestration era.

Frequently asked questions

How has the consulting business model changed for transformation work?

Clients now expect firms to bring technology, data, and alliance partners as part of delivery, not just insight and advice. Richard Forrest, Lead Partner for Energy and Process Industries at Kearney, describes this as a shift that has forced consulting firms to rethink how they orchestrate their own capabilities, and notes that the era of consultants being valued for manual data processing is over because modern tools automate that work.

Why are PowerPoint and Excel no longer enough for managing transformation?

Because static reporting can't keep pace with integrated transformations. Forrest observes that clients no longer find PowerPoint decks and Excel spreadsheets sufficient for managing large-scale programs; they need real-time visibility and fact-based communication across every level of the organization, which reduces risk by surfacing problems while they can still be acted on.

Do clients expect consulting firms to bring a transformation platform?

A few years ago, consultancies had to educate clients on the value of a transformation platform. Forrest's experience is that clients now expect firms to bring such a platform as a standard part of the engagement, reflecting how much more cross-functional, cultural, and data-driven transformation projects have become.

What did the pandemic teach consulting firms about technology adoption?

That many existing technologies could be scaled far more aggressively than organizations had assumed. Forrest says Kearney and its clients learned to operate remotely almost overnight, and the broader lesson wasn't about any single tool but about being more open to scaling technology that already exists rather than waiting for a crisis to force it.

What advice does a Kearney partner give organizations starting a transformation?

Integrate the transformation rather than run it as parallel workstreams, use real-time communication tools, and anchor every initiative to a clear value outcome. Forrest also advises integrating ESG outcomes into transformation programs wherever possible, treating them as part of the value case rather than a separate track.

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