Oracle AI World with Nancy Estell Zoder

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SPEAKERS

Nancy Estell Zoder, Steve, Trish

S **Steve** 00:09

Welcome back to the HR Happy Hour Network. My name is Steve Boese. I am with Trish Steed. Trish, how are you?

T **Trish** 00:14

I'm fantastic. Good to be with you in person again.

S **Steve** 00:18

Yeah, it is great to see you. We are at Oracle AI World in Las Vegas, day one, and my gosh, I have never seen this event so massive. It's got to be a record-breaking event. There's energy, excitement, new technology, just massive crowds. Trish, I I was blown away today.

T **Trish** 00:38

The rumor is that it's sold out. So I would say just just based on what I've seen, you're right. The energy's there, the excitement is there. So many announcements in the keynote this morning, and in the follow up sessions, and so we thought we'd dig into it here today.

S **Steve** 00:53

Yeah, it's there's so much happening in enterprise tech and HCM tech and tech in general, right? That's not a surprise. But to help us understand some of the new announcements and understand what they mean, especially for HR folks. We have Nancy Estell Zoder. She is the Group Vice President of Product Strategy at Oracle. Nancy, welcome back to the HR Happy Hour. How are you?

N **Nancy Estell Zoder** 01:13

Thank you so much. Thrilled to be here, mostly because there is a lot of activity taking place here, not just at Oracle, but the world in which we live, and a great opportunity to talk about it strategically.

S **Steve** 01:25

Yeah, for sure. And you know, we've all been in this space for a while, and I'll speak for myself. I thought maybe we were done with like just huge transformative change. I, what else could have there been? And that's not true at all. I mean, in fact, the the product announcements and the product direction, and just philosophically what's happening to these systems, it's some of the biggest change I think I've ever seen in 25 plus years. Nancy, you've been doing this a while yourself,

N **Nancy Estell Zoder** 01:53

Right? I mean, I've been in this space for almost 30 years, not quite, but almost 30 years, and really have seen the transformations take place as we've as we've evolved through various types of technology, but this is so different, and it's different. And I think Trish you just said it, which is the energy is different around what customers are recognizing as the value and the opportunity that AI actually brings, and more specifically, the evolving role of HR.

T **Trish** 02:21

Right? I wonder, Nancy, if you could maybe start with, you know, for the last few years we've been talking about AI assistance, and Oracle has been at the leading edge of that, right? You've had all of you working so diligently to make sure that you're bringing forward the technologies and the techniques that people really need to be getting into their organization. How is that changing? It seems like we've now moved away from assistance. We're now using AI for execution. Seems to be more of the message. Is that true?

N Nancy Estell Zoder 02:52

You're absolutely right. I mean, and and we've really gone from AI assisting and generative AI to support some of those core HR functions to really looking at how the management of work, workers, and workforce is in fact impacting the overall business, and how AI is in fact supporting that in in the context of reasoning, but then ultimately to your point, Trish, in terms of execution.

T Trish 03:19

And that was always somewhere we were missing. We were hoping it would go there. I think too, Steve. You mentioned just the speed of things that we've been seeing in the space. This is a prime example, right? In terms of a leader in the industry who's actually getting things, not just answering questions, but helping people do the work and get the outcomes they're desiring. Is that what you were saying? I know you just came back from. You both just came back from Unleash in Paris. Yeah. Is that also what you were seeing there, and kind of hearing from these large organizational leaders?

S Steve 03:52

Yeah, I think so. I I think the the speed from which we went from hey, you know, Chat GPT is pretty cool, and it'll it'll help you write some text, or it'll. We can configure an assistant to help you look up answers right in the employee handbook and return those to your phone. That was really cool when that came out too. The speed from which we went from those kind of you know 1.0 kinds of applications to some of the things we saw today, like the the Fusion Companion and the Fusic Agentic Home, both of which I'd love for you to talk about and help us understand, Nancy. Got just a couple of years. This this is not 10 years. This is two years.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 04:33

Or months.

S Steve 04:34

Yeah, right.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 04:35

Right in months. And I think that's one of the fundamental opportunities that we're in fact seeing with our AI investments, and I know you mentioned Companion and Home, but we also have Fusion Qua.

S Steve 04:46

Yeah.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 04:47

Which is truly how we're transforming how work, in fact, gets done and the overall operating system of work, and the unique opportunity that HR has in helping to design and orchestrate that work. Now, I will say, you know, one of the things that that we've found, especially just in the last couple of weeks, from Unleash to AI World, we've had many customer meetings, many partner meetings, where we're talking about that whole transformation and the opportunity we see with AI. Ultimately, we've gone from experimentation and you know, leveraging some AI technologies to come back with some general information to recognizing the importance of context and really demonstrating value with the adoption of AI, which is why our customers and our partners are really looking at how they can help drive a design of that new work.

T Trish 05:40

Yeah. Well, can you maybe dive deeper on Oracle Fusion Claw because I think that's where, as HR leaders or even other business leaders, it was a disconnect maybe between Steve, to your point, maybe asking what was in a handbook and having it return something in a generative fashion. We're now into this era where they can actually help move the needle to get to the outcomes. What are the things that you're providing through Claw that they didn't have before?

N Nancy Estell Zoder 06:09

And I think there's a couple of key areas for which we're providing through Claw. Now, Claw is an extension of our agentic applications, which we introduced earlier this year. And essentially, what that it means is that they're a team of agents that are working on behalf of a process or an outcome that we're trying to to to work towards. What Fusion Claw provides is the ability to take an outcome and come up with recommendations based on context. That context is based on policies, potential rules within the organization, or other signals that can come from supply chain ERP and/or other external sources to drive the recommendations they need to support the outcomes. Now we've got these new fusion claw solutions like workforce orchestration, which is where we've really reimagined the workforce planning process and the execution of those plans. That's a great example of how work is in fact changing. Strategic workforce planning is not a point in time anymore. It has to be based on a specific trigger or signal that takes place and could happen daily if necessary. We've got things like our agentic contract management solution, which is a big investment that that we've made in order to better support compliance. So, lots of opportunities, unique capabilities with Fusion Claw. One thing that is important to note with Fusion Claw is we've delivered seven distinct use cases in HCM. You're going to see a lot more in the net next release, and we're working very closely with our partner community to grow the industry and market specific support that our customers need today. We don't have the luxury of time anymore.

S Steve 07:53

Yeah, is it safe to say for folks who are listening to this, who are in HR, and and we're throwing a lot of terms at them now, right? We started with generative AI, agentic, and agentic apps, and now we're talking about Claw. Is is it sort of safe to say that we're moving towards a place where we're where these capabilities turn AI from just a useful assistant or a useful companion, if you will, to to technology that will really help understand your business, understand rules, understand policy, work within your governance structure, et cetera, and help you actually deliver outcomes. Right. That this is unlocking that potential.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 08:37

That's exactly right. It's and I will actually say it takes it one step further because it's enabling you to do things that you've never been able to do before. So, where in the past, and let's use that workforce planning use case, organizations looked at it as a as a point in time, potentially quarterly, sometimes annually, and more times than not, it took as much time to consolidate the data that's required as it did to analyze that data. And then, when you take into account the analyze the analysis of that data, the application of it, and the potential impact of those scenario plans was a whole nother effort that potentially could take weeks. Right? If you're actually bringing in HR, operational leads, and finance as part of that overall process. Delivering it as a fusion application means that those agents are in fact doing that work for you. Now, what it ultimately means is that I couldn't do that before, right? I needed my various individuals in order to get it done, and it took a lot of time. It took effort, and to be fair, sometimes that data became stale as part of that process. I mean, we all know the history behind like global global headcount reports and compensation reports and things like that, and the challenges that that that HR has dealt with in order to effectively manage.

T Trish 10:00

You're giving me PTSD here a little bit. No, you're right. I think as as a former Oracle customer, when I was an HR leader, right, an EBS, which I loved at the time, I thought that was like it was the best thing that you could get, right. And so, but it's so exciting to see now the difference. I mean, it would take us minimum day, like two or three days to pull some of these reports you're talking about.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 10:23

And now you're not just talking about reports. You're coming up with recommendations, and there's accountability to those recommendations. And we uniquely provide receipts on each of those interactions, which actually explains the algorithm. It also explains the source of the data for which the AI is is making those recommendations from to ensure not just accuracy but ensuring the understanding that's required for it to be most effective.

T Trish 10:49

Well, and I think people are maybe fearful they won't have that audit trail, and so definitely when the receipts portion was announced this morning, I mean I was smiling because I thought, okay, now as a leader, not just an HR leader, just a business leader, you can actually feel more comfortable. You're you're not just a person in the loop. You are still very involved in all of these recommendations, but you have all of this information behind you and the accuracy, and then the proof, right?

N Nancy Estell Zoder 11:18

And you bring up probably one of the most critical points, which is the business leader really having kind of a stake in the game for HR. Not that they didn't before, but it's like now they become such a critical driver, and mostly because of the access that they now have to these recommendations.

S Steve 11:36

Yeah, these are some really critical points, right? You mentioned Trish. You mentioned the old eBusiness Suite. I'm a legacy Business Suite person, but one of the really cool things of the of which there were many, Nancy. Quite frankly, cool things about eBusiness Suite was a little function called backslash whatever about this record, right? Do you remember about this record, right? Yeah. And what did it tell you? It said when the record was updated and by whom, right? That, but that's all it told you. It didn't tell you why or how how that person came to that calculation. Yeah, came to that judgment to make that change. It just and you could go chase that person down, right? But to have the ability to really understand at at a really detailed level how the how the tools, how the agentic tools are actually functioning, working, and reasoning and decisioning, going to be critically important because as we've talked about a little bit on the show in some in other contexts, and we'll continue to talk about trust in these systems is critically important for effectiveness, for adoption, and for if they're really going to fundamentally change the way we operate, and so I'm sure you guys have thought about trust very, very deeply.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 12:47

That's a huge part of it, and a lot of it is driven by the fact that you know a year ago, year and a half ago, there was a lot of experimentation and a lack of visibility. Not so much in Oracle solutions, but just in AI in general. Sometimes there was a little bit of a black box idea, right? When it comes to AI, and there was this suggestion that organizations were going to turn things on just to try it to see what the results are, and they didn't have that explainability, which is why it was so critical for us to prioritize that, especially as we started looking at that complex work that Fusion Claw is actually delivering on.

S Steve 13:22

Yeah.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 13:23

It's not doing the easy work. I mean, we always have a reference to to that. You hear a lot of references to how AI is going to, in fact, complete the repeatable work. That's a that's a true statement when you think about the AI agents. But Fusion Claw is different. Fusion Claw is looking at that complex thinking, the complex reasoning that's required to really do things that we wouldn't have suggested AI to do, and more specifically, HR wasn't able to deliver on in the past.

T Trish 13:57

When you think about the way that Fusion Claw compares to maybe just other vendors in the space. One of the things that I hear from others is more of a marketing strategy, the use of AI. And when you talked about that black box, that is still in existence. So for me, I'd I'd love you just maybe talk a minute about the difference that you all make when you when you think about AI is not just something that's bolted on top of what you already had, right? We heard again today, reiterated in several of the keynotes. It was in sessions that this is something that you all have built from the ground up. Maybe for someone who is not as familiar with this type of foundational AI, how does that actually make a difference, based on maybe just what someone else might be offering that doesn't include from the ground up?

N Nancy Estell Zoder 14:49

That's such a great question and such a critical point to our strategy, which has been a fundamental foundation of our strategy from the beginning. Which was that, we knew that you know years ago when we started our AI journey. Well, I will say even a decade ago when we were looking when we delivered machine learning, and we were one of the first vendors that delivered machine learning, especially in a SaaS environment. And as we continued on that AI journey, was to in fact have it built into the system of record, and the primary reason for that was the accountability, the visibility, the security that would be required in order to best support our customers. What we've actually found the bigger value is in the agility, because at the end of the day, we all know that every one of our customers across geographies and across industries have a governance policy or program around AI adoption. Looking at every single AI feature is is not sustainable, especially in this growth market. And so, really having something that is built in is enabling our customers to have a governance strategy that will enable faster adoption in order to support the changing needs of their business. So, being built in, not bolted on, is is applicable to not just the technical constraints that would be applied in that bolted-on scenario, but also the governance and the business aspect of it.

T Trish 16:24

And that's so important. Again, that just goes back to the trust, right? You have to choose a vendor that has a solution you can trust, that you're doing the right things, you're doing the work behind the scenes that they need, and then being able to to ask those questions.

S Steve 16:39

Yeah, I think the the platform providers, the system of record providers, just have a just a huge advantage here in the value that they can bring to the table when combined with the agentic applications. And Nancy, I I mentioned companion and home briefly at the top of the show. I want to make sure before we run out of time, you get a chance to explain those. They're new announcements here at AI World, and they reflect something very, very interesting that's happening in enterprise software in general, which is just how people are going to more and more engage with their enterprise applications at the workplace. I'd love for you to talk a little bit about those those two announcements, if you don't mind.

N Nancy Estell Zoder 17:18

Well, and it's it's not just how they're going to engage, but how that engagement is truly fundamentally changing. And again, there's this expectation that you have the ability to support natural language engagement with not just applications to support transactions, but especially when we start looking at things like Fusion Claw in order to reason and give you the business support that or organizational support that's required to support that workforce that you need, Fusion Home fundamentally changes how you're in fact interacting with the application. It means that you've got that single point of entry in order to support in a natural language way, to interact with the application to get the information you need. It means you don't need a service layer. It means you don't need an additional layer on top in terms of how you're interacting. You've got that Oracle home. Taking it one step further is Oracle Companion, which is bringing Fusion home, the the fusion home, as well as all the different other solutions potentially, in one space for which you can interact and get the information you need in the context that's required, but also in a trusted environment for which you can manage to. It's super exciting because it really does illustrate, you know, as we look at our AI strategy, it's very different from the other vendors in the marketplace. Other vendors will focus on specific key value propositions. Perhaps it's in the area of experience. Perhaps it's in the area of expansive AI capabilities in terms of the different LLMs and the opportunities there. We're looking at it from the perspective of how we can best support that broader system of record, not just HR, ERP, supply chain across the board, and how that actually can impact the business, the experience with Oracle Companion and Oracle Home, as well as you missed one key announcement, which is our FSCR's, our our fusion setup and configuration registry, where we're truly reimagining how customers can adopt our solution at an exponential speed, which is the third kind of pillar. That's the one I, you know.

S **Steve** 19:40

Yeah, that's critically important as well, for especially for folks who've been through the the wars of implementation or the wars of upgrades, or just really just the process of getting the system to kind of respond and react to your unique requirements, which it's half art and half science. And half expensive, quite frankly, right? So, yeah, we didn't get a chance to talk about that. We probably would ask Nancy to come back at some future point to talk a little bit about implementation, because God, it's an underserved topic, right? These systems do require, you know, they need to be implemented the right way, right?

N **Nancy Estell Zoder** 20:24

And that that's a key part of our strategy in terms of our AI investment is our ability to provide capabilities to our customers to not only recognize the value of this really cool tech like Fusion Claw and other capabilities, but actually help them deploy it in the way in which they require that deployment with best practices in mind, but also working with our partners for industry and market specific opportunities.

S **Steve** 20:49

Yes, well.

T **Trish** 20:50

I think that's where, as someone who's been through implementations of all sorts, but even with Oracle, I think you've always shown a light on what the leaders needed to understand, but it was still maybe not even enough. And so, having this extra help, this assistance that will tell the the buyer what they can do that they maybe haven't even imagined yet, that's so exciting. And I think you are known as a company that sort of holds the hands of your your customers, right? You stay very close to them once they go through implementation, and once they're actually then seeing some of these important outcomes. So very exciting. We we definitely need a whole show on it.

S **Steve** 21:30

Yeah, we we do. We've touched on I think most of the major announcements from an app perspective coming out, but we've only just touched on them. So we will put some links in the show notes for folks to read more about these announcements, of course, and catch some of the videos coming out of Oracle AI World as they become available, you definitely want to see the some of the keynote demos this morning were fantastic. And just you know, shout out to our friend Chris Leone did a wonderful job. Right, and AI Chris was good. AI Chris, we love that. Nancy, so great to see you. Thank you for share shedding some light on on the importance of these announcements, what HR leaders can learn from about these announcements, and how they can have an impact in the organization. Thank you so much.

N **Nancy Estell Zoder** 22:09

Thank you, and I'm so glad to be here. Really appreciate you guys coming out.

S **Steve** 22:12

Awesome. Well, thank you for listening from AI World. My name is Steve Boese. I'm with Trish Steed, of course. This has been the HR Happy Hour Show. Stay tuned. We've got more to come from Oracle AI World.