



# Fresh perspectives on leadership

Women at the helm



November 2024  
KPMG Lower Gulf



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# Foreword

Exceptional leaders distinguish themselves through visionary thinking, resilience, and a relentless commitment to fostering an inclusive culture. In the Middle East, women leaders are breaking barriers and redefining leadership norms. Their approaches often include a deep understanding of their organizations, a proactive stance on innovation, and a commitment to mentorship. These leaders are setting new benchmarks in their industries, demonstrating that excellence in leadership transcends gender.

Our report delves into the strategies of extraordinary leaders, emphasizing the persistent challenges they navigate and the innovations they champion to foster a more inclusive and progressive business environment.

In an era where technology is rapidly transforming industries, women leaders are harnessing advancements like AI, machine learning, blockchain, and IoT to drive growth and innovation. These technologies streamline operations and open new avenues for leadership and decision-making. The next three years will see increased AI integration in management, requiring leaders to adapt and acquire new skills to navigate this tech-driven landscape effectively.

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria are integral to business strategy. Women leaders are attuned to the ESG agenda, recognizing its importance in building sustainable and socially responsible businesses. Their approach involves compliance with global regulations and proactive initiatives aligned with the UAE's vision for a sustainable future.

The UAE government's role in promoting women leadership in the region is crucial. The National Policy for Empowerment of Emirati Women - 2031 and the UAE Gender Balance Council Strategy 2026 are pivotal in facilitating equitable participation, reducing gender gaps, and promoting gender balance in decision-making positions. These initiatives provide a robust framework for women leaders to thrive and drive the nation's progress.

By sharing their experiences, the leaders in this report provide valuable inspiration for aspiring CEOs, highlighting that challenges are opportunities for growth and learning. We hope their insight sparks meaningful conversations.

## **Marketa Simkova**

Head of People,  
KPMG Middle East LLP,  
KPMG Lower Gulf



**“Women leaders are attuned to the ESG agenda, recognizing its importance in building sustainable and socially responsible businesses.”**

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# Cultivating integrity and diversity for success

I recognize that our business is only as good as our people, with leadership serving as a crucial pillar guiding our organization to success. My focus is therefore firmly set on building the next generation of leaders who must not only possess exceptional business acumen but must also embody an organization's values.

In today's dynamic landscape, I believe emerging leaders must be passionate, entrepreneurial, and resilient. They must also possess the vision and skills to effectively execute their ideas, all while maintaining a customer-centric mindset.

Personally, I consistently push the bar by challenging myself to improve, not through competition with others, but through personal growth and aligning with market trends.

Identifying high-potential talent within our organization is a strategic priority. We meticulously observe their career trajectory and assess their potential to lead. Subsequently, we craft bespoke training and leadership programs tailored to prepare them for upcoming opportunities and possibilities. Our approach ensures that our emerging leaders are not only prepared to take on greater responsibilities but are also aligned with our company's vision and values.

A strong organizational culture begins with integrity, which is an essential pillar for overall success. Leaders must be able to guide the business independently while upholding the highest standards of integrity and fostering a thriving workplace that supports its employees. Therefore, it is critical to hire the right leadership talent that reinforces the desired culture. In 2017, we launched the Landmark Happiness Programs, our employee engagement initiative designed to enhance the professional growth and well-being of our employees. Through its four pillars—Cares, Connects, Inspire, and Innovate—we partner with our employees across the organization to foster a culture of continuous development and support.

Diversity and inclusion are integral to a strong organizational culture. It is a mix of perspectives that fosters innovation and enhances our ability to respond to market needs. It's about bringing together individuals from various backgrounds—across age, gender, and skill sets—to work collaboratively, challenge each other, and enrich our organizational culture. This collective synergy strengthens our leadership's decision-making and thought processes.


Diversity must translate into substantive contributions to the organization and the leadership team. Our commitment to inclusivity is reflected in our hiring practices, mentorship programs, and how we cultivate an environment where diverse talents can thrive. By encouraging diverse voices and ensuring fair treatment, we drive creative solutions and better understand the dynamic markets we serve.

Modern leadership is about adaptability while holding on to core beliefs, integrity, and a strong customer-centric approach. Through a commitment to employee engagement and development, it is vital to create an environment where people are motivated and empowered to excel. By investing in employees' growth and well-being, leaders can build a resilient workforce ready to propel their organization into the future.



**Renuka Jagtiani**  
Chairwoman,  
Landmark Group



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a light blue collared shirt, is smiling and looking towards the right. She is holding a white notepad in her hands. The background is a bright, modern office space with large windows and green plants. A blue rectangular box is overlaid on the lower left side of the image, containing a quote in white text.

**“Modern leadership is about adaptability while holding on to core beliefs, integrity, and a strong customer-centric approach.”**

# Creating a culture of innovation in healthcare

A culture that encourages deeper shared values and habits is vital for running an organization. Healthcare enterprises require culturally competent care in order to succeed. Having worked in the healthcare industry for over two decades, I've realized that becoming the group CEO of a premium healthcare company requires both business leadership and human multiplier skills. Diplomacy, advocacy, business management, and financial acumen are all necessary.

Women make up a significant portion of the healthcare workforce. Therefore there is a clear need for more women in leadership positions because women make the majority of healthcare decisions. They are also the primary providers in healthcare institutions, so it makes sense that women hold top roles in businesses where their contribution is critical. I believe in workforce diversity and the strength that comes from its differences. Belonging is a fundamental human need. In the workplace, it implies feeling accepted, welcomed, and valued for who you are. Employees with a sense of belonging are more engaged and productive at work. As a leader, you must strive to create an environment in which every employee feels respected and empowered to be themselves.

Today's medical institutions have developed from emergency care for major medical conditions to organizations that promote longevity and preventative medicine. The UAE's domestic healthcare sector is expanding due to the demographic shifts towards an ageing population. Life expectancy in the UAE is increasing; but so is the prevalence of chronic diseases. Therefore, the UAE's healthcare system is shifting its focus to comprehensive, personalized, and preventative care in response to the changing demands and expectations of its citizens and residents. An increasing number of elderly people in the UAE is expected to drive up demand for specialized services and wellness centres in the future, especially as individuals resort to preventative

care and alternative therapies to manage healthcare risks and chronic conditions<sup>1</sup>. The demand has grown for rehabilitation clinics, mental health facilities, oncology centres, and dialysis centres. Furthermore, the long-term resident population will also result in higher demands for maternity, neonatal, and pediatrics services.

Patients can use digital technology to actively participate in their treatment and manage their long-term medical conditions. Healthcare providers are increasingly relying on virtual consultations, telemedicine, technologically equipped and assisted intensive care units (tele-ICUs), remote monitoring services, home lab tests, and online prescription medicine purchasing. Many hospitals in the UAE have embraced robotic and AI-assisted procedures. These surgeries allow procedures to be performed more precisely and accurately, with fewer complications and shorter recovery times. There is also a growing demand for genome sequencing, and the country intends to develop personal gene therapy and precision medicine for its citizens.

Dubai, in particular, has evolved as a destination for patients seeking medical care from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the neighboring GCC countries. The city's strategic location, safety, state of the art healthcare infrastructure and high-quality services, reasonably priced treatment costs in comparison to the Western world, and an influx of highly skilled medical professionals are all contributing factors to this surge in demand.

Employing the power of AI, medical imaging algorithms, augmented reality, and the Internet of Things, the virtual "hospital" that technologies like AI can bring to the table enhances disease diagnosis accuracy, enables medical professionals to access advice and knowledge transfer via an electronic platform during complex robotic surgeries, and remotely monitors



patients, tracks their vital signs, and alerts emergency personnel to administer critical care when needed.

CEOs could produce more profitable and growth-oriented forecasts with the help of AI. AI-powered technologies may help CEOs with strategic planning and forecasting by analyzing massive volumes of data to detect patterns, anticipate market moves, and simulate alternative business scenarios. AI lowers the cost and uncertainty of decision-making, allowing for new business models and strategies while increasing operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. This enables CEOs to create more agile, adaptable, and future-proof business plans.

Being a leader is not a simple endeavor, but with passion, resilience, and an invincible dedication to perfection, you will thrive as an exceptional leader. My career trajectory in healthcare commenced when I was working as a dentist. However, after taking on the responsibility of caring for my family and two children, my work life required some downtime. I embraced motherhood and took an intentional hiatus from work to enjoy the benefits of raising my family. When my children began attending school and growing independent, I chose to return to work, but not as a dentist. I was given the opportunity to work in clinic administration at Aster in 2003. I chose to embrace change and accepted an administrative position, joining as a clinic supervisor in Aster. This was a challenging phase since, as a new employee learning about a job I had no prior experience with, I had to take on the administrative function from the outset. As a result, I began learning my role on the job from the ground up, beginning at the front desk, to progressing to the billing counter. This experience helped shape me into a more effective leader within the organization because I got to familiarize the nuances of running the organization bottom up.

To develop an inventive workplace, I believe in building a culture of trust and collaboration among my coworkers. A flat leadership style enables teams to take ownership of their projects and experiment with novel concepts without the fear of consequences or criticism from above. Medicare encourages diverse teams, provides training and development, rewards and recognizes creativity, and promotes cross-functional collaboration.

**“Women are the primary providers in healthcare institutions, so it makes sense that women hold top roles in businesses where their contribution is critical.”**



**Dr. Shanila Laiju**

Group Chief Executive Officer,  
Medicare Hospitals and Medical  
Centers



**“As the Head of Ethics, I work towards ensuring we have the right tone at the top, our values and code of conduct are well understood and effective mechanisms are in place for our people to discuss what’s on their mind.”**



# Tech-driven, people-focused: ethical leadership

In recent years, technology has revolutionized the way we work: you only have to look at how Microsoft Teams has become ingrained in workplaces over the last four years. AI is already being used in some way by the majority of organizations, so we need to embrace its benefits to keep pace. It can help us analyze vast volumes of data efficiently, allow us to hyper personalize services to our clients, create efficiencies in the way we work and enable our people to focus on more interesting work. Nevertheless, with any change comes challenges. Those related to AI include ethics, regulation and managing uncertainty that this change brings to our workforce through the expectation that Generative AI could eventually replace back office jobs. CEOs need to be cognizant of both the opportunities and challenges. If they get it right, AI could boost growth rates and develop workforces at a rate higher than we have ever experienced.

It is essential to foster and maintain a positive company culture that strives to eliminate unconscious bias. This is an area very close to my heart because as the Head of Ethics, I see culture as critical to our success. I work towards ensuring we have the right tone at the top, our values and code of conduct are well understood and effective mechanisms are in place for our people to discuss what's on their mind. Our people are our biggest asset so it's important we foster a culture free of any form of bias and where staff feel supported.

I am a British Indian mother of two, and recently I celebrated my 20 year anniversary at KPMG. I'm lucky to work in a company where diversity is seen as important and where I've been supported as I've grown with the firm. It is now my turn to ensure the new generation of talent get the same opportunities I did. In my experience, diversity brings different views, which enables innovation. This in turn results in growth. Diversity makes good business sense.

I always say that change is the only constant in my line of work. I've found that if I'm at the forefront of this change, I can help to shape it so naturally I invest a lot of time on self-learning and research. Personally, I spend time early every morning on activities that energize me because that gives me a sense of achievement and helps me to focus on the day ahead.

The people in my team are all so different—what works for one person may not be right for someone else. Some prefer on-the-job coaching, others have strong relationships with mentors or have benefitted from cross department shadowing. I encourage them to peruse whatever route drives their passion.



**Anita Khanna**

Partner, Head of Ethics and Independence  
KPMG Lower Gulf, MESAC,  
Middle East

# Collaboration, inclusion, and AI: the future of leadership

As a leader, I champion the principles of agility, which underscore the importance of adaptability and responsiveness to change. This approach allows my team to swiftly pivot and tackle new challenges, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. I involve my team in decision-making, encouraging diverse input and co-creating solutions. This not only empowers individuals but also strengthens team cohesion and ownership.

I place a high value on open communication and active listening, ensuring that every voice is heard, and every perspective is considered. I also leverage technology to enhance team connectivity, using tools that facilitate real-time feedback and brainstorming sessions regardless of our physical locations.

I am a strong advocate for continuous learning. I cultivate a knowledge-sharing culture through regular sessions and workshops, ensuring that our team is consistently updated and inspired. These initiatives not only empower individuals but also strengthen our collective ability to confront challenges head-on.

Technology and AI will continue to significantly shape organizations in the following years by enhancing decision-making through efficiently analyzing large datasets, identifying trends, and providing actionable recommendations. It will continue to improve efficiency by automating routine tasks, freeing up our team to focus on more strategic initiatives, increasing productivity, and allowing us to allocate resources more effectively. By leveraging machine learning algorithms, we can tailor our offerings to meet individual preferences, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. AI tools will assist us in talent acquisition and employee development. AI is far more valuable than harmful and embracing it can drive our organization forward. Still, it requires a thoughtful approach to harness its potential while mitigating risks.

Hand in hand with further tech and AI adoption, a positive and inclusive culture is crucial for employee engagement. When employees feel valued and included, they are more engaged, which leads to higher productivity and lower turnover rates. An inclusive culture also supports innovation and creativity, encouraging everyone to contribute ideas. It improves talent attraction and retention and the organization's performance overall. Companies prioritizing inclusivity often experience better business outcomes, as diverse teams are more effective in problem-solving and decision-making.

Fostering a culture that actively eliminates unconscious bias creates a fair and respectful workplace and drives the organization's overall success. It leads to a more engaged workforce, increased innovation, and improved performance, positioning the organization for long-term sustainability.

Investing in personal and professional development as a leader is crucial for one's growth and setting an example that inspires one's team. I encourage the next generation of leaders to inspire, guide, and empower emerging talent, actively mentor individuals who show leadership potential, offer their teams personal insight, and help them navigate challenges, fostering their confidence and developing critical leadership skills over time. Do not hesitate to provide constructive feedback whenever possible. Lastly, I urge future leaders to lead by example, be transparent, promote continuous learning, support innovation, foster a growth mindset and self-awareness mindset, and not forget to celebrate success.



**Angela Montoya**

Head of Process, Data and  
Technology, Human Resources  
Etihad Airways



**“Technology and AI will continue to significantly shape organizations in the following years by enhancing decision-making through efficiently analyzing large datasets, identifying trends, and providing actionable recommendations.”**







**“A positive culture encourages open and honest feedback, removes fear of retaliation, and rewards the right behavior and values.”**

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# Lessons from the frontlines

Today the global corporate leadership training market size is valued at USD 36.6 billion<sup>2</sup> and Amazon alone lists over 60,000 titles on leadership. But if a training or book was enough to create a leader, why is there a dearth of good leaders?

I have been in consulting for over 18 years, worked in different organizations, in different countries, and held different managerial and leadership roles. I've lost count of books I have read, podcasts I have heard and trainings I have attended on leadership. Looking back, I realize that the most I learned about leadership was not from books, podcasts or trainings. It was on the job, keeping calm in the midst of a crisis, staying neutral while dealing with a conflict, firefighting with the team to get jobs, facing the music for a goal we didn't achieve, celebrating a goal we did achieve, having a difficult conversation, beaming with pride at a teammate's success and putting an arm around a teammate who was struggling. Here are a few things I learnt along my journey and that worked for me.

A leader leads by example, not by force. Your team will replicate your values, behavior and work ethic. If you want to build credibility and inspire people, you have to embody the values and model the behavior you expect from your team - you have to walk the talk. Hypocritical leaders who usually resort to a "do as I say" approach, pulling ranks and setting standards they do not intend to follow, eventually lose respect and influence. In the words of Simon Sinek, "Leadership is not a license to do less, it is a responsibility to do more."

A positive culture encourages open and honest feedback, removes fear of retaliation, and rewards the right behavior and values. A positive culture translates into an engaged team, which in turn reflects in their contributions, productivity, efficiency, teamwork, motivation, absenteeism, and attrition. Culture is also increasingly becoming a criterion for prospective employees

in selecting their employers. What you encourage or tolerate eventually becomes your team's culture. You can prepare a great strategy but in a toxic culture that is mere academia. Don't hesitate to be the change you want to see.

Strengths lie in differences, not in similarities. An extension of culture is building a diverse and inclusive team that offers unique perspectives and ideas. In an environment with a positive culture, teams will bring their authentic selves to work, challenge the status quo, encourage innovation and drive continuous improvements. According to Forbes<sup>3</sup>, inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87 percent of the time, twice as fast in half as many meetings. But diversity is not just limited to gender, race, ability and age; it is also cognitive.

No leadership style fits all. Leadership needs to be agile. Traits and styles must keep pace with the evolving demands of the workplace. So, as a leader, follow the maxim of Roy T. Bennett: "Listen with curiosity. Speak with honesty. Act with integrity."



**Aabha Lekhak**  
Partner, Value Added Tax  
KPMG Lower Gulf

# Balancing tradition and innovation: tax in a digital age

I grew up in a traditional Mexican family where women were not typically encouraged to voice their opinions. However, my father always pushed me to express my thoughts, stay curious, and seek learning opportunities.

I began my career in Mexico, working for Lufthansa, and later moved to Argentina to work for Chevron in various roles, including global Corporate Tax. During this time, I was also involved in the implementation of SAP FICO for the Americas. This sparked my interest in technology and systems.

Throughout my career, I've always been passionate about Tax and Technology. Although many believe that Tax requires human intervention, I believe that technology can significantly reduce this need. For example, AI could potentially prepare a Tax return.

When I joined Unifrutti, I believed that the best way to optimize the Tax function was through technology. I envisioned a user-friendly, cloud-based ERP that supports accurate reporting for all user levels. This system could be accessed from any device and automate most of the compliance tasks, including interactions with external advisors. It would also provide daily task management, ensure auditable trace, and assign visibility based on user role. Hence we introduced a new system, LocTax. Keeping up with the ever-evolving Tax and Transfer Pricing landscape can be challenging but, in my view, LocTax provides updates through its system by having interfaces with IBFD (the International Bureau of Fiscal Documentation), an authority on cross-border taxation, and Avalara, a software that automates tax compliance.

Visionary leaders are those who recognize the immense value of advanced technologies and the indispensable need for a single source of truth for data. To all future leaders, I leave you with this: embrace technology, keep an open mind to the infinite solutions in your field. But remember, amidst the whirlwind of your career, to care for your mental and physical health. Make time for hobbies, cherish moments with family, engage in sports, or find peace in meditation.



**Elisa Del Palacio**

Group Finance Manager (Taxation)  
Unifrutti Group





**“Visionary leaders are those who recognize the immense value of advanced technologies and the indispensable need for a single source of truth for data.”**

# Nurturing bold and creative leadership

Empowering the next generation is at the heart of what I do. It's all about trust—giving young leaders the space to be bold, creative, and take charge of their growth. I believe in creating an environment where they can experiment with fresh ideas and explore new perspectives without the fear of failure holding them back. It's not just about guiding them; it's about stepping back, evolving our own mindsets, and embracing the fact that innovation often sparks when we let go of the old ways.

Mentorship and coaching play a huge role too. Leadership isn't something you just figure out; it's learned through real-world experiences, good guidance, and self-discovery. In today's fast-paced business world, supporting young talent with the freedom to grow, alongside mentorship, is how we build resilient and forward-thinking leaders.

As a client-facing partner, staying relevant and adaptable is my commitment - to myself and for our clients. I believe in continuous learning and keeping a pulse on the latest trends. This isn't just about knowing what's new; it's about creating a culture where we're ready to pivot, experiment, and embrace new ways of working. I believe in balancing big-picture strategy with a hands-on approach, making sure my team feels both supported and empowered to take the lead on their own projects.

I push my team to stay curious, question the status quo, and view change as a chance to innovate rather than a setback. Transparency and open communication are core to my working style—I've found that when people feel heard and understand the company's direction, they're more engaged and motivated to bring their best ideas forward. Ultimately, my leadership style is about blending strategic vision with a personal touch, leading by example, and making sure everyone feels that they're part of the journey.

AI is here to elevate how we work. Over the next few years, we will see AI drive personalization, making our services smarter and more tailored to client needs. But it's not just about efficiency; it's about blending human creativity with AI's capabilities. Yes, AI is a double-edged sword, and while it brings productivity gains, it requires thoughtful integration with ethical boundaries in place. CEOs need to be digitally literate, open to lifelong learning, and capable of leading with empathy and ethical responsibility.

For CEOs, this means evolving skill sets. They need to be digitally savvy, committed to lifelong learning, and ready to navigate the ethical complexities that come with AI. Beyond technical know-how, CEOs must lead with empathy, be agile in decision-making, and foster a culture where technology and human talent complement each other. AI is reshaping leadership, and those who can blend digital literacy with a strong ethical compass will lead the way.

In my role as the Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (IDE) Lead at KPMG, I'm passionate about refreshing our culture and driving inclusivity every day. Creating a culture that prioritizes inclusivity is a continuous effort. We open up dialogue, encourage continuous learning, and embed diversity and inclusion goals into each individual's personal development plans. I lead by example, showing my commitment to inclusivity in every decision I make. When you create an environment where people feel safe to share their experiences, that's when you start breaking down barriers. When everyone feels heard and valued, it strengthens our ethical foundation and builds lasting trust across teams. It's not just good for culture—it's good for business because diverse teams are more innovative and engaged. It drives collective success.

Inclusion is a performance booster—it's that simple. By promoting open dialogue, encouraging

inclusive leadership training, and setting inclusivity and diversity as a tangible goal, we ensure that every team member feels they belong and they are celebrated. When people feel seen and valued, they bring their best selves to work, which sparks bold innovation and stronger collaboration. This kind of environment isn't just good for our culture—it directly drives better business results. Diverse teams aren't just nice to have—they're essential to our success. This approach helps us innovate more boldly and collaboratively, driving better results.

Leadership is an evolving journey. I stay curious, always learning, and encourage my team to do the same. It's about fostering a growth mindset, where everyone is encouraged to question, explore, and bring new ideas to the table. I also learn a great deal from my team—new ideas, new perspectives, and even constructive challenges to my thinking. Empowered teams are the foundation of a successful, future-ready organization.



**Gunjan Shroff**  
Partner, People & Change  
KPMG Lower Gulf



**“I push my team to stay curious, question the status quo, and view change as a chance to innovate rather than a setback.”**



# Embracing lifelong learning

I believe in demonstrating the qualities I wish to inspire in future leaders—resilience, integrity, adaptability, empathy and a commitment to continuous learning. Leadership is not just about achieving results but also about maintaining a healthy work-life balance. By modeling this behavior, you set a powerful standard for what true leadership looks like.

Leaders should cultivate a culture of open communication where ideas can flow freely, and creativity is encouraged. They should take the time to recognize achievements, whether big or small. Appreciating milestones results in a motivated and engaged team that feels valued and driven to continue excelling. Keep your doors open, inviting fresh perspectives and new approaches.

I believe in leading with empathy. I prioritize understanding my team on a personal level, taking time to meet with each member individually. This approach allows me to connect with them beyond their professional roles—understanding their motivations, challenges, and aspirations. By genuinely listening and engaging with each person, I create an environment where they feel valued, heard, and supported. I focus on identifying what drives each team member and tailor my support to help them grow. Whether it's providing specific feedback, offering learning opportunities, or aligning their work with their personal goals, I strive to empower each individual to reach his or her full potential.

These approaches differentiate leaders who are not just focused on outcomes but also deeply committed to the personal and professional growth of each team member. By leading with empathy and a genuine desire to help others succeed, I build strong, motivated teams that are ready to take on any challenge.

I believe we must embrace technology and AI, as they will continue to revolutionize how

organizations operate by making processes more efficient, data-driven, and customer-focused. For our organization, AI will enhance decision-making, optimize operations, and personalize stakeholder experiences. By automating routine tasks, AI allows teams to concentrate on strategic and creative work that drives greater value. However, this evolution will come with challenges, as we must redefine and continuously develop our skills to thrive in this new era.

Our organization is currently in the policy development stage of our ESG strategy, laying the groundwork for integrating sustainable practices into our operations. In my department, we are actively learning and preparing to conduct ESG audits, equipping ourselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to assess and report on our company's ESG impacts. This proactive approach ensures that we are not only setting up robust ESG policies but also positioning ourselves to effectively measure and improve our performance in alignment with global standards.

A positive company culture that actively addresses unconscious bias is crucial to the overall success of an organization. I began by first examining my own actions, attending various training sessions to deepen my understanding of unconscious bias and develop strategies to mitigate it. I consciously apply these skills in my day-to-day interactions, including during interviews, to ensure fair and unbiased decision-making. To hold myself accountable, I also seek feedback from colleagues to double-check my approach and remain vigilant against bias. By leading by example, I aim to inspire others to commit to continuous learning and self-reflection, fostering a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

I actively promote diversity and inclusion by building a team that represents a wide range of



backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, including professionals from various regions across the Sultanate, a balanced mix of genders, and diverse age groups. This inclusive environment fosters creativity, innovation, speed and better decision-making. I also advocate for diversity and inclusion in various forums, and at any opportunity I get, emphasizing its importance in driving organizational success. I believe that when people feel seen, heard, and valued, they are more engaged, which leads to enhanced performance, adaptability, and overall growth. By championing diversity, we not only strengthen our teams but also position the organization for long-term success.

As a leader, I am committed to continuous learning and personal development. After obtaining my ACCA and CIA certifications, I pursued additional certifications and am now aspiring to continue my Master's degree studies in a reputable college. In today's rapidly evolving landscape, staying current and constantly expanding one's knowledge is essential. I promote a similar mindset within my team by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and learning. I support their development through tailored on-the-job training, secondments, international assignments, and carefully planned training opportunities. By leading by example and actively investing in my own growth, I aim to inspire my team to embrace lifelong learning, ensuring we remain agile, knowledgeable, and prepared for future challenges.



**Nabila Saif Salim Al-Jasri**  
Chief - Internal Audit  
Oman Investment Authority

**“Appreciating milestones results in a motivated and engaged team that feels valued and driven to continue excelling.”**



# Unleashing potential through tailored mentorship

As a leader, I am dedicated to cultivating a diverse environment that fosters strong connections and a positive workplace culture. I believe that empowering my team to develop their strategies autonomously is key to ensuring that every voice is heard. My commitment lies in creating a space where team members feel confident sharing their ideas and perspectives. This supportive atmosphere encourages individuals to challenge themselves, contribute diverse viewpoints, and build strong relationships. It is essential that everyone feels safe in voicing their differences and remains open to learning from one another, even when it means rethinking their initial assumptions.

Effective leadership requires a commitment to lifelong learning. Staying informed about new business trends is important for both personal and team growth. I believe in sharing these perspectives to foster engaging discussions and debates within my team. The more involved team members become, the more motivated they are to seek additional knowledge and formal education on relevant topics. This is a reciprocal process. My team's insight fuels my own drive for continuous learning and sharing.

The integration of technology and AI is reshaping the future of business and leadership. These tools have the potential to cultivate a new generation of leaders by emphasizing critical and strategic thinking while streamlining operational tasks. However, this potential comes with challenges; leaders must be prepared to guide their teams through the transformative process, ensuring successful adoption of these technologies while mitigating associated risks. By doing so, we can boost productivity, create more opportunities for analytical and strategic thinking, and maintain high standards of service.

Equally important is our commitment to ESG principles. ESG is no longer viewed as a standalone segment of the business; it is now a fundamental, cross-functional element integrated into our daily operations. ESG influences our decision-making and shapes how we conduct business, ultimately reflecting in our results. I believe that while some still see ESG as a target to achieve, it should be regarded as a new way of conducting business. My goal is to ensure that this message resonates throughout my team, reinforcing our shared responsibility to drive sustainable practices.

A positive company culture that actively strives to eliminate unconscious bias is a critical aspect of my leadership philosophy. I address biases directly and ensure they are corrected immediately. As a woman in leadership, I recognize the importance of confronting unconscious bias rather than accepting it. This need not be confrontational, as it can be approached straightforwardly and promptly. I encourage all women to speak up and not let these moments slide.

Research consistently shows that diverse teams lead to more successful and sustainable businesses. While talent should always take precedence in hiring, it is essential to recognize that women brought into organizations based on merit require tailored support to advance into leadership roles. This support includes enhancing their visibility, facilitating networking opportunities, and celebrating their successes.

As we witness a significant shift in the workforce with more women entering various industries, addressing the imbalance of leadership positions remains vital. Most of these positions are still held by men. To change these dynamics, we must

foster a culture of equity that allows both women and men to share domestic responsibilities while empowering them equally to pursue their careers.

In my experience, I have seen many women with immense potential hindered by a lack of exposure and professional networks. To counter this, I make it a point to recognize the contributions of all team members, ensuring they receive appropriate exposure and equal opportunities to build strong networks and solid careers.

Furthermore, organizations must adapt to the evolving landscape by empowering families to determine how to organize their routines and responsibilities. This approach enables family members to support one another in achieving personal goals while dedicating themselves to their careers. With the right organizational support, no one needs to sacrifice their aspirations; instead, they can find a way to balance and achieve these goals together. Providing equal benefits to both women and men is determinant for achieving this balance. By equally offering flexible work arrangements, access to childcare, remote work options, parental leave, and other supportive benefits, organizations can create an environment where all employees can thrive both personally and professionally.




**Archana Narwani**  
Group Executive Director –  
Strategy & Transformation (Acting)  
Modon Holding



**“I have seen women with immense potential hindered by a lack of professional networks. I make it a point to recognize the contributions of all team members, ensuring they receive appropriate exposure.”**



A woman in a black dress stands in a modern office, presenting to a group of people seated around a table. She is holding a pen and gesturing with her hands. The office has large windows overlooking a cityscape, and there are modern pendant lights hanging from the ceiling.

**“I encourage future leaders to venture beyond their comfort zones and deliberately place themselves in situations where they will be challenged to learn and hone crucial leadership skills such as analytical thinking, adaptability, and sound decision making.”**



# Building stronger teams in turbulent times

During times of widening political polarization, mounting geopolitical tensions, and unceasing technological disruption, navigating a leader's path is no leisurely journey. It requires mastery of a wide spectrum of skills, knowledge, and competences, and a focus on anticipating, responding to, and managing a rising tide of internal and external risks that converge to challenge the organization's stability.

In such a tumultuous environment, I encourage the next generation of leaders to develop an analytical mindset, to be authentic, and to be resilient. To learn and to adapt to constant change and moving priorities, but without losing sight of their own aspirations and values. This way they may experience a double sense of accomplishment, through the legacy they will bequeath to their organization, and the growth they will witness personally and professionally.

To promote this mindset among my colleagues, I share personal stories with them about the way I have overcome challenges that at the time seemed insurmountable, and the means I have deployed to get there. The one common factor that shines through time and time again is the support I have received: whether from a mentor, a coach, a colleague, or a friend. With this in mind, I make a point of emphasizing that active listening, empathy, and engagement with team members are key traits of a strong leader.

Through sharing anecdotes about how my challenges turned to achievements, I hope to show aspiring leaders that each experience presents an opportunity to learn and grow. This can happen in a corporate environment that fosters the exchange of diverse ideas and embraces the concept of learning from one's mistakes. Drawing from my own experiences and background, I encourage future leaders to venture beyond their comfort zones and

deliberately place themselves in situations where they will be challenged to learn and hone crucial leadership skills such as analytical thinking, adaptability, and sound decision making.

Becoming a successful leader is a continuous journey of self-development. And it is my wish that I too may encourage the next generation of leaders to enhance their skills and to cultivate the qualities that will help them put their best selves forward and set them apart.



**Katerina Pagoni**

Director, Head of Anti-Money Laundering and Sanctions  
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# Sources

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Publication name: Fresh Perspective on leadership

Publication number: 5332

Publication date: November 2024