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Leading in positive

Suzana Curic

“You have to invest in self-knowledge; when you understand who you are it is going to be a lot easier to lead”

Suzana Curic | Country Leader Amazon Web Services Spain and Portugal

Senior Industrial Engineer with more than 20 years’ experience in the information and telecommunications technologies industry. She has held various positions of responsibility at the company in recent years. Her work centres on helping businesses in Spain and Portugal become more competitive through innovation, data management, artificial intelligence and training in digital talent.

She began her professional career in the technology industry at Ericsson, where she worked for almost two decades. During her time at Ericsson, she held key roles such as Head of TV and Media Practice for the Mediterranean region and, subsequently, leading global sales for Ericsson Broadcast.

In 2017, she joined Amazon Web Services (AWS) as the Enterprise Account Manager. She then held mid-market, startups, and ISV (Independent Software Vendor) responsibilities, before leading the enterprise area. In 2022, she took on responsibility for the Enterprise division in Spain and Portugal.

In January 2024, she was appointed AWS Country Leader in Spain and Portugal, a role in which she directs the cloud, data and artificial intelligence strategy for the Iberian market. Her approach combines technological innovation, digital transformation and support for digital talent.

How would you define your leadership style?

In general, I would describe myself as someone who builds bridges. Because, ultimately, companies operate across multiple industries; organisations are highly matrixed, all companies. That is why I believe my strength lies in ensuring that strong interdependencies are created, even when the organisation does not always report to you. What really defines me is building bridges.

AWS is a very dynamic organisation, with a rapid pace of innovation; there were more than 3,000 new features last year, services you have to be very open to; we have to embrace them ourselves; it is what we then offer to our customers.

"Diversity is multi-faceted, it is not just about gender; everybody feels they belong to a minority at some point; you have to give a voice to every minority and create psychologically secure environments"

In this regard I always tell my team that there is one core leadership principle that has always existed, and will always exist: customer focus. When the world becomes volatile, focus on the customer, try to solve their challenges—you will provide them with value and earn their trust. No doubt about it, focus on obtaining in-depth knowledge of customer needs. That is also part of my leadership style.

How do you manage diversity?

For us or for me, it is multi-faceted; it is not just about gender. It includes race, culture, religion, age, etc. So how do you lead in that context? Through active listening, a lot of empathy and by trying to understand the people you are dealing with. In the end, they may be external customers or your own teams; you just strive to empathise with whoever you interact with. That is the key for me; understanding a little about your reactions and how to put yourself in another person's shoes, and about the challenges they are truly faced with.

If you really wish to be inclusive, if you want to build an inclusive organisation, you have to create psychologically secure environments; in other words, we are different, some of us speak more loudly and others more quietly, but the quieter ones could well have a valuable idea. At Amazon, we write a lot because we believe the loudest voices should not be the only ones contributing ideas; it is also essential to allow for the possibility of more introverted individuals contributing brilliant ideas. Inclusion is about enabling everybody around you to express their ideas and letting them be themselves.

How does technology resolve business challenges?

A report we have published on the use of AI (Generative AI) indicates that nearly half a million Spanish companies are already using AI; that is one company a day embracing this new technology. We see the challenges arising from this digitalisation, and the companies that are born with it, such as Cabify or Glovo. It is almost innate for them—they are born with one foot on the accelerator—and around 70% of them have it at their core. However, fewer than 10% of more traditional companies have adopted it as a central pillar of their business.

The challenges are often related to internal processes, and there is a critically important factor: talent. There is a shortage of talent, and companies ultimately have to find ways to drive programmes forward. We are supporting them in reskilling efforts, helping to upskill their existing employees. If you do not train people, that transformation will not become a reality and you will not be able to react to, to resolve, the challenges you face.

How important is sustainability for you?

Sustainability is another core pillar that we take very seriously. We arrived in Spain in 2012. In 2019 we decided to invest in data centres. We are now launching a new expansion, and one cornerstone of this technology is operating in a more sustainable way. That is the challenge, to develop at chip level while developing various technologies to ensure that, given the goals we have set, we are as sustainable as possible. At present, the data centres are operating entirely with renewable energy. What is more, we also decided to come to Spain because of its focus on renewable energy.

"Let yourself be guided by curiosity, adaptability and resilience; it is not only about technological skills—over 60% of the skills required for a professional career are soft skills"

Therefore, I believe sustainability is something we do, but we also assist other companies by offering them services, such as measuring their carbon footprint when they move a traditional data centre to the cloud, which can reduce their carbon footprint by more than 80%; we talk about "eating your own food", which means what we do ourselves we then try to adapt to other companies so that they might embrace it too.

How has your international experience affected your leadership style?

I have lived here for 25 years. I am from Sweden and my parents are Croatian. I believe multiculturalism greatly helps you understand the people you are dealing with. I often use the words "insider-outsider": whether you have been part of a minority or a majority, it helps you lead teams because at some point in time everyone is in a minority in the world. I have often formed part of a minority; almost always. In Sweden, I was the child of immigrants; in my career as an engineer, women made up around 20%. In leadership, we discussed earlier the importance of there being more "female role models". There is a shared awareness among many women in leadership of what it means to be in the minority, and a desire to ensure other minorities also have a voice.

What skills do you value most in the new generations?

Older generations have to understand the new generations The new generations are faced with the same challenge we faced when we were the new generation. Let curiosity guide you; I come from an engineering background myself; what you learn when you graduate today is not what you will find six years later in the market.

"Openness, humility, honesty and humour"

So I always say to the new generations—as was the case for ours when we were the new generation—, you must cultivate curiosity and adaptability, and work on your resilience... it is a volatile world. It is not only about technological skills, it is also about the capacity to understand certain topics. There is a study by Daniel Goleman that sets out the future skills required to perform at a high level, 67% of which are emotional capabilities; as a result I believe young people should deepen their knowledge of a field they are passionate about, but also work on their emotional agility, because the world is becoming increasingly volatile, and we need to look into that side of things.

What do you recommend to generate a positive impact on the team?

Openness and also humility. If you stop being humble, you stop learning. I believe in leadership based on humility is fundamental. Honesty, authenticity, transparency—being very honest is very important. And then, actually, humour: reducing the seriousness of things and adding this aspect to your leadership style.

Another pillar I always underscore: investing in understanding who you are. When you understand who you are, it becomes a lot easier to lead as yourself—as regards how you react to certain situations as a leader. You can also pass this on to your team so they also invest in this self-awareness. And this can then become your tool in this changing world.

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