WOMAN IN TECH
MAGAZINE

EXECUTIVE ARTICLE
WITH CABO VERDE TELECOM
STRENGTHENING THE BRIDGE BETWEEN
AFRICA AND THE WORLD

CVTelecom

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═ SPARKLE

IN **RECENT YEARS, WE'VE SEEN A GROWING EMPHASIS ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE TECH SECTOR. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE DIVERSITY CONTRIBUTES TO INNOVATION AND SUCCESS IN THESE INDUSTRIES, AND WHAT INITIATIVES HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION UNDERTAKEN TO PROMOTE IT?**

I think the simplest answer is in the definition of innovation: the realization of ideas to create something new or different for the benefit of something or someone; ideas don't have any gender, age, nor nationality, and this is my starting perspective when reasoning about the contribution of diversity to our industry and to evolution in general. An open flow of thoughts is the basis for a virtuous approach to results, success, and evolution.

The tech industry has been under scrutiny with respect to diversity and inclusion, as it traditionally used to attract more male talents than female ones, mainly for cultural reasons; but the history is full of amazing female scientists that have significantly impacted our present: Ipazia in the I century A.D., Marie Curie, or Marisa Belisario in our close past, show that mathematical and technical mindsets have nothing to do with gender. I have seen this trend dramatically changing in the last ten years, not only in terms of number of women employed or in managerial roles in the tech industry, but mainly in terms of perspective and approach of young generations. In my mentoring activity to young female university students, I meet every year enthusiastic, well-prepared, self-aware and optimistic young women that are mathematicians, engineers and economists and who have grown up with no bias and with a solid background of fairness and equality. This gives me a clear indication that we have done a good job in preparing the field for the next generations to work in a very synergetic way. During my career I have been very lucky to work for innovative and visionary organizations that had respect and equality as part of their undisputable core values. In Sparkle, the company where I am working now, diversity and inclusion is not a slogan or just an item of our Code Of Business Ethic (COBE), but a way of behaving that is part of our DNA: we are an international company with seven hundred employees around the world, so we experience every day the amazing contribution that different cultures, approaches and time zones can bring to business and human growth. When I first joined Sparkle, I was really impressed by the level of cooperation, respect, and warm acceptance that I found in my team and in the rest of the organization. Furthermore, Sparkle is very visible and vocal with initiatives like 4W4I (4 Weeks 4 Inclusion) and YEP (Young Women Empowerment Program), that aim at boosting diversity and inclusion. I am very proud of being a woman manager in Sparkle.

AS TECHNOLOGY RAPIDLY EVOLVES, WHAT EMERGING TRENDS DO YOU FIND MOST EXCITING OR DISRUPTIVE, AND HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF FEMALE EXECUTIVES IN POSITIVELY SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE TELCO AND TECH SECTORS?

As part of my role as Head of Product Management I scout technology trends and innovation seeds every day and I can say that the pressure of innovation is very high and we are now in a disruptive moment. There are many exciting emerging topics but the two I am mostly involved with, at the moment, are related to automation in the telcos and identity management. As end users, we are very spoiled when talking about automation, as we are addicted to perform activities with simple clicks on smartphones and tablets, but the same thing applied to the telco space, where we are delivering end-to-end circuits, throughout the globe, implies great complexity. To implement automation in the telcos many network players and many stakeholders need to talk the same language and act in a very synchronized way. The interesting trend that I see is an acceleration of standardization and adoption of commonly agreed guidelines and protocols by different actors. Sparkle is driving these initiatives. Another very attractive trend, somehow related to automation, is the decentralized management of identity and the Zero Trust approach. I see that the future of digital business is at a crossroad: just considering that 40% of internet traffic originates from malicious bots with cybercrime causing $10.5T in damage annually by 2025, and that approximately 15 billion connected Things in 2022 (doubling every three years) lack a trusted, verifiable identity, we have the proof points that the cost of trust is growing exponentially for organizations, threatening the profitability of new and existing digital businesses. Any device connected to the internet is an attack vector on our digital business, and the advent of generative AI makes this perspective even more urgent. The Zero Trust approach is one of the answers to mitigate risks. This means that no entity trusts

another entity at any given time, even if the prior transaction was trusted. Consequently, every participant must be able to always authenticate and authorize every single digital business interaction. Since this is not possible through centralized means at scale, we need ways to establish trusted identities that are self-sovereign and decentralized. In other words, we need identities that will be always controlled by transacting entities without relying on any third party. There is an initiative called Integrated Trust Network (ITN), which Sparkle is part of, that is the first Web3 infrastructure for trusted, self-sovereign identities for businesses. The ITN is backed by industry consortia and global companies. The ITN was specifically created to address the threats to highly decentralized digital business transactions. I am the co-chair of such initiative that I regard as revolutionary.

When talking about shaping the future of our tech industries, there is no gender differentiation; it's always a matter of vision, knowledge, understanding of trends, courage of being disruptive and, most important, growing good teams. There is no best idea or contribution that gets effective in shaping the future if there isn't a great team supporting it. And this is what I love most of my job.

MENTORSHIP AND ROLE MODELS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN FOSTERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FEMALE LEADERS. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT A MENTOR OR ROLE MODEL WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER, AND THE LESSONS YOU'VE LEARNED FROM THEM?

I totally agree with the statement that role models are crucial in fostering the next generations. Our body is what

we eat, but our mind is shaped by what we experience and we breath since we are kids. My role model has been my mother. Young wife and mother of the Seventies that has grown up two girls, mainly alone, as my father was shipping most of the time, being captain of petrol ships. I have always had the picture of a very delicate, sweet and caring woman that was able to cope with any difficult situation, with intelligence and determination, as if it was the most normal thing in life. We lived easy and difficult experiences, but we coped with them and grew with the belief that we just "could do it"! This attitude impressed my mind, and I grew up with no distinction between pink and blue, female or male tasks, possible and impossible. This helped me in life and especially in my career: I like to achieve challenging tasks, to express my potential, but without ever compromising my nature and my intrinsic values. I hope I was able to share with my daughter, my team and the people I am working with that there are no limits of what we can do with our talents.

THE PANDEMIC HAS ACCELERATED DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION EFFORTS ACROSS INDUSTRIES. HOW HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION ADAPTED TO THIS NEW DIGITAL LANDSCAPE, AND WHAT ROLE DO WOMEN LEADERS PLAY IN DRIVING DIGITAL INNOVATION?

The pandemic has drawn a demarcation line between a past and a present that is much more digitalized. Fortunately, many enterprises had already started the digital transformation journey during the previous years, but that sad event made it mandatory for many businesses to survive. Sparkle, being a global service provider offering connectivity, digital assets and

cloud services to other carriers and multinational enterprises, was very much advanced, when the pandemic happened, so it wasn't a major disruption to our way of working and doing business; nevertheless, our transformation was accelerated too with all the implications that remote working has imposed to connectivity, security and cloud adoption. We are a very modern, flexible international company, fully aligned among all legal entities worldwide and throughout all internal processes. We are continuously investing into digitalization, to increase agility and automation, which helps streamlining processes and business transactions with much more speed and reliability than any manual alternative. I think that the role of women leaders in driving digital innovation is key, because of our ability to think outside the box and get inspired by triggers from different areas Sparkle is a strong promoter of the contribution that our perspective can give to innovation, and it is not by chance that there are many woman managers in the organization: in particular, our CIO is a woman who also chairs the "Women@MEF" project at MEF organization, representing a concrete example of inclusion and fairness in any of our departments.

ABOUT ANTONELLA

Antonella Sanguineti has more than twenty years of experience in Telecommunications, standing as senior expert in Optical and IP transmission and Product Management. She started her career in R&D System & Technology at Italtel, Pirelli Optical System and Cisco, but spent most of her career in the Strategic Product Management area, at Ericsson,

dealing with Optical, Fronthaul, Microwave and IP telecommunications networks since 2005.
She joined Sparkle in 2021, with the role of Head of Product Management for the enterprise business. Her contribution to Sparkle is multifold: while driving the company's portfolio transformation to an enterprise business with the introduction of innovative technology, she is also an

active promoter of the company as a contributor to MEF's development of standardisation for the telco ecosystem and actively engaged as co-chair of the Integrated Trust Network (ITN) initiative and its application in the context of automation and Lifecycle Service Orchestration (LSO).
In 2023 she was selected among the Capacity 20 Women to Watch