



Morison KSi

# Collaborative, genuine and empowering

8 March, 2021

Celebrating Morison KSi's Women Leaders



Building Better  
Business Globally



# Collaborative, genuine and empowering: Celebrating Morison KSi's Women Leaders

8 March, 2021

This year we are celebrating, in a meaningful way, our Morison KSi women leaders; it is a day to remember our achievements and successes and to feel proud. This celebration has two facets, events and our thought leadership report. On Monday 8 March, 2021 we will host our own events where our panellists will share with us their journeys, challenges and advice. Over 40 women, from members in 18 countries, have contributed to a ground-breaking piece of research which explores how our diverse leadership continues to contribute to our firms' sustainable success in their markets.

These impressive role models have generously shared their personal professional journeys and how their experiences and approach to clients and employees have shaped their inclusive leadership styles. The report is truly inspirational for anyone considering a role in the accountancy profession though it is certainly not limited to it. Perhaps more importantly it provides deep insight into what inclusive and genuine leadership is. Therefore, anyone who is looking to develop their own leadership approach would benefit from reading this report.

As Directors in Morison KSi's governance structure, we were encouraged that so many of the contributors (82%) were willing to consider a leadership role within the association's boards and growing number of committees. As evidence demonstrates, diversity at the board level provides better results. The decisions may be more challenging to realise, but the outcomes are far more robust.

As part of the Morison KSi Strategy (2020-2023), the association is committed to, **'promoting diversity and be more inclusive in our activities as an association'** this celebration is therefore our first step in delivering this aspect of the strategy.

We hope you will join us in celebrating our talented women from around the world.

**Sandra Ataman**  
(North American Regional Board Chair and member of the International Board)

**Yelena Epova**  
(North American Regional Board member)

**Isabelle Strecker-Hazan**  
(European Regional Board member)

**Doris Moraschi**  
(European Regional Board member)

**Afwaz Alkhuzam**  
(Asia Pacific Regional Board member)

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*As we will see today there are many women in senior leadership positions in MKSi member firms all across the world; some of these women have been pioneers in their markets, paving the way and nurturing other professionals. We honour and thank them for their guidance, courage and perseverance.*





# Contributors

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**Anna Mordkowicz** Van Havermaet

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# Introduction

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This report has been a joy to bring together; the comments, from over 40 leaders, are genuine, uplifting and inspirational. While 18 different countries are represented in this research, there are no material differences in responses with respect to culture or region. This report highlights consistent themes from these role models and demonstrates the strength of diverse leadership. As a development tool, it should be a guide to all inspiring leaders who strive to develop their own authentic approach to leadership. The structure of this report uses interview-style questions to explore the personal and professional journeys of our contributors as leaders in their firms.

This is the first time that Morison KSi has celebrated International Women's Day in such a tangible way, however it will not be the last. We hope you enjoy reading this as much as we enjoyed reading the contributions; we have much to celebrate!

Memoria, Sarah, Michelle and Rachel





## Why did you choose this profession as a career? What benefits did you foresee and how have benefits manifested themselves?

Challenge, curiosity, flexibility, independence and people

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"I was looking for a profession that allowed me to connect with people, drew on my technical expertise and provided me with independence and a high level of responsibility." Our members enjoy the intellectual challenge that this profession provides. It has enabled them to draw on their technical strengths in finance, maths and logical thinking and apply them to solve problems that benefit their clients and their own firms. The attraction to the profession was also pushed by their interest and curiosity about business. "Accounting, of course, is the language of business", "I was interested and inspired by business stories and the numbers and people behind the stories". "Being an auditor gave me the possibility to face the most difficult and complicated problems in accounting; exactly what I wanted." This love of business has not only helped their clients but, more fundamentally provided them with a strong foundation in terms of building their own firms.

The fact that the accountancy profession has many different avenues and therefore opportunities, was also appealing, "There are so many different options for someone with an accounting background I knew that I would always be able to find a job. I have used my accounting background in several different capacities throughout my career."

This profession has provided flexibility and independence, "It lends itself to greater flexibility in balancing a career and personal priorities." It has given our members the opportunity to build their own firms, using their own, unique leadership styles.

Fundamentally, our members have chosen and thrived in this profession because of the people: their peers, their employees and their clients. There is a strong commitment to and recognition that all three groups contribute to their personal and professional fulfilment, "I have gained experiences, forged strong and beautiful relationships with stakeholders I have worked with and that has driven my passion."

## What was your path to the leadership position you currently hold?

Hard work, self-motivated and committed

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Among our members we have many 'firsts': first female founders in their markets, first female managing partners and first female partners of their firms. These women have broken glass ceilings or, in the case of their own firms, did away with them altogether! They and those who have followed them are inspiring. Each has worked very hard, and in many cases, worked their way up through the same firm. "I have set performance standards of excellence with diligence, patience with hard but smart work." "It was not an easy journey to arrive to the leadership position I currently hold. It took me 15 years of hard work, commitment and delivery of exceptional results in order to do so."



What is clear is that this drive, and commitment to clients' success and delivery has been instrumental in their own success. "I have committed to delivering high-quality work, managing internal relationships whether they're staff, peers or superiors, and relentless focus on clients' needs."

Some have been lucky to have mentors and inspiring leaders around them, supporting their development and ensuring that they were given the freedom to explore their own leadership style. "The leaders I met along the way guided me to the leader I am now. The journey to the top is not an easy path." "I worked my way up with the help of some very supportive mentors to eventually be Partner. Now after 18 years in the firm, I am the Tax Partner-In-Charge of the department."

## How would you define leadership? How does your definition manifest itself in your leadership style?

**Collaborative, genuine, caring and empowering**

If there was a Morison KSi leadership style for our women, it would be encapsulated in these four words. While our members acknowledge that they are ultimately accountable, their style is collaborative. There is a deep-rooted belief in caring and motivating employees and empowering and trusting them to deliver. It is about clearly communicating a vision and direction but not ordering others in how to do things. "My style is collaborative, and I had to recreate the firm into a modern practice, contemporary in its outlook and function."

"My role is about developing a vision for our overall organisation, focusing on learning, continuity, sustainability and putting employees first... there is no room for a big ego."

Therefore, leadership is determined by "the impact that they bring to their organisations and the people around them." "For me leadership should start with serving others and leading them to achieve objectives and goals." This is done by "believing in others and caring about the people around you." It is about "carving a path for their success." To lead successfully one needs a "positive, motivational attitude" where you act as a "team player and not as a commander." "True leaders don't create followers they create more leaders." they don't ask others to do something that they wouldn't do themselves.

Leaders take risks, which can be frightening and requires courage. Having self-belief and the ability to empower others to take risks is how an agile and dynamic environment is fostered. By ensuring that goals are challenging but achievable, leaders and their teams can accomplish and deliver great things.



*I worked my way up with the help of some very supportive mentors to eventually be Partner. Now after 18 years in the firm, I am the Tax Partner-In-Charge of the department.*

Monic Ramirez  
Sensiba San Filippo LLP



*My role is about developing a vision for our overall organisation, focusing on learning, continuity, sustainability and putting employees first... there is no room for a big ego.*

Lieve Hendriks  
Van Havermaet







## How has your role evolved over time? Has it become increasingly technical or general in nature? Why do you think that is?

Creative, strategic, organisational and people-oriented

Three-quarters of the respondents felt that their role had become more generalist and the remaining quarter felt that demands for both had increased with seniority. The technical demands have been driven by advances in analytics and digitisation and the requirement to understand how these elements impact on the delivery of the firm. In addition, some have stated that client requirements have driven their need to be more industry focussed, "Clients want to know that you understand them. It's hard to solve their problems if you don't know what they do." It is also evident, that those who have a great deal of experience, find it easier to be creative in how they synthesise information and solve problems. With seniority comes greater confidence and the deep passion that they bring to their roles.

For all of our leaders, their focus has shifted towards strategic and organisational issues. As leaders they are responsible for the sustainability of their firms and therefore the people in their charge. "Being positive and able to have a clear picture to bring the team to the next level is paramount to growing and for the future sustainability of the firm."

When organisations grow, roles can also grow with them "I am now leading the company through several roles instead of my department. Our company has grown over the past 15 years from 40 to 150 people, so my role has evolved also."

Our leaders attribute their firms' growth to having clear vision and purpose and the ability to provide direction to meet these. That doesn't mean that the path is rigid, far from it, good leaders need to be able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances without losing sight of the goals.

Fundamentally, the firms' success is about the people. "The more mature your leadership becomes, the more you are involved with people, and leading people is the greatest challenge (and reward). If you see more people joining and following your organisation, that only means that they believe in your leadership cause."



*“Being positive and able to have a clear picture to bring the team to the next level is paramount to growing and for the future sustainability of the firm.”*

**Magdalene Ang**  
R Chan & Associates PAC

## Have you made a conscious effort to ensure your workplace is diverse? What benefits and challenges has diversity brought?

Market advantage, diverse views, four generations

Diversity comes in many forms and our leaders focused on gender, ethnicity, culture, race and age. There was a split as to whether creating a diverse environment was conscious or not, but what was clear is that diversity has brought more opportunity. "...it just happened. You get more experienced over the years, so it's a natural process to have a more diverse workplace. Getting more experiences also leads to more challenges, new clients and new projects." For others who had approached diversity in a deliberate way, "We have people from many countries, backgrounds, ethnicities, beliefs. You have to be diverse to represent such a diverse client base."



This definitely helps us be competitive in the market enabling us to attract clients from different backgrounds.”

In the workplace today it is not uncommon to have four generations in one firm; this poses its own opportunities and challenges, “Younger generations have taught us the use and benefits of technology where the older generations have greater interpersonal skills.” The younger members also brought vibrancy with their different perspectives. The challenge lies in leveraging the different views and weaving it into something that can benefit the firm. “Values, manners and expectations towards colleagues and work often differ. One needs to know one’s own and other generations better - this is an important step in dealing better with this ‘new diversity’ and taking advantage of the richness that it brings.”

Some of our member firms have made a conscious effort to support women, in particular, to help them develop their leadership roles through mentoring. While keeping exceptional talent is always a challenge, research has demonstrated that more diverse and inclusive workplaces are happier, more agile and robust.

## What impact has diverse leadership had at your firm? Has it been helpful during the COVID crisis?

### Agile, empathetic, finding balance

“Leaders with different backgrounds and experiences will see the same issue in different ways and will suggest different solutions, increasing the chances that one of those solutions will be a hit!”

The sentiment that diverse leadership has provided diverse views to make better decisions is universal. Having women in leadership roles had better prepared organisations for the challenges that COVID-19 brought. “Working from home did not exist prior to my starting my family and proving to the other partners that I was committed to caring for my growing family while furthering my growth in the company. When COVID-19 hit, we already had instilled a WFH policy for working mothers and a flexible approach for others – we were therefore able to effectively WFH almost immediately.”

The crisis has enabled firms to understand and rely on different team members’ capabilities. In many cases it has been felt that it has strengthened the individual’s leadership and communication skills.

There has been a conscious effort on the part of our leaders to accommodate individual needs, ensuring that flexibility is built into schedules while ensuring that life-balance and well-being is maintained. The natural tendency for women to be compassionate and genuinely caring of individuals has created greater cooperation between teams. “COVID-19 has impacted us like all others. But it has brought us closer together, although virtually.”

From a commercial perspective the crisis has enabled firms to showcase their diverse talent, making them more attractive to a wider client base.



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*Younger generations have taught us the use and benefits of technology where the older generations have greater interpersonal skills.*

**Pudmanee R Beeharry**  
Morison (Mauritius)





## What is your advice to young female professionals coming into the accountancy profession?

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*As a woman, you still have to work twice as hard but decide what is best for you and give it 200%.*

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*Believe in yourself and express your ambitions.*

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*Set your goals and do everything to achieve them.*

**Natia Shengella**  
Bakashvilli & Company LLC

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*Always strive for excellence, value people and empower them... take care of yourself so you can take care of others.*

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*Work hard, learn fast, work well in teams with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures, feel free to ask questions, interact professionally and consider the firm you work for as your second family.*

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*Just be yourself and step out of your comfort zone sometimes.*

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*Surround yourself with positive people with a growth mindset – avoid negativity.*

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*Stay authentic and honest, build networks.*

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*Don't lose your identity – don't try to be like someone else although learn from the best at the same time!*

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*Build a strong referral network to help grow your business as it's never too early. Build a strong personal network to help you achieve your goals.... Take help when offered and give it when the opportunity presents itself.*

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*It is the value you bring that will earn you respect from your peers.*

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*Accountancy is a people business, not a numbers business, which can make it harder than you expect but also so much more rewarding!*

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*Be smart, courageous, hardworking, patient, persevering and goal oriented.*

“

*Follow the path that is right for you, work on your weaknesses and don't overestimate your strengths.*

“

*Learn everything!*



## If you could speak to your 21-year old self, what advice would you give?

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*It's ok to create boundaries with work and your personal life.*

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*Start working on issues earlier.*

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*Be more confident.*

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*Live and enjoy your life.*

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*Know your value and self-worth, take on new challenges even if that means failing.*

“

*Make sure you are good at what you do and above all, do what you enjoy doing.*

“

*Success doesn't happen to the faint hearted.*

“

*Articulate and demonstrate what your personal and professional values are.*

“

*Believe in your dreams.*

“

*Relax, you are as smart as anybody out there.*





## If there is a particular leader you look up to, what is it about them that is so compelling?

The attributes that our leaders admire in others, in great part, is reflected in the style that they have adapted themselves. They admire those that are entrepreneurial, understand management and teamwork, those who take care of their employees and are able to show empathy: leaders who are able to demonstrate commitment, integrity, expertise and passion in all that they do. Finally, Morison KSi leaders admire those who empower others to be their best selves, those who are creative, innovative and altruistic.



*"I advise women to make their voice heard, their knowledge acknowledged, and their aspirations clear. Aim for the sky, because why not?"*

**Lila Leno** Calibre CPA Group, PLLC



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## Research methodology

The Morison KSi Executive team with the support of the initiative from our 5 female board directors, initially approached all female principal and secondary contacts within the association. A set of interview-style questions were sent to all participants for their direct contributions. In some cases, the questionnaire link was circulated to other members of internal leadership teams. All contributions were welcomed and have included both accountancy and legal professionals. The report itself is a summary of over 20 pages of feedback from over 40 individuals.



## Get in touch

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