

IWD spotlight on Executive Director, Bernice McNaught

Bernice McNaught is Executive Director, Repayments and Customer Compliance at SLC

Technology careers are still often seen as being male-dominated and perhaps, not a traditional road to business leadership. But women are making headway in both tech and the boardroom, getting there through many different routes. What's the key? Follow what interests you and have the right support around you at the right point of your career.

I have benefited from very specific interventions from teachers, lecturers, managers who pushed and encouraged me to overcome the doubts we all have when it comes to our abilities. Indeed I have a lot to thank my guidance teacher Ms Duncan; without her support I wouldn't have considered studying science. She passionately believed that your choices in life should be based on your ability and not your gender.

I wasn't particularly interested in academic study, but LEAN (from Toyota) and systems thinking fascinated me. I spent the last year of my degree here in Scotland, followed by a PhD at Manchester, studying manufacturing and product development techniques in high tech industries. I loved the practical application of theory.

The completion of my PhD aligned with a period in the early '90s when large technology companies were hiring software developers in their droves, so it seemed natural to join Oracle as a developer and I spent almost 8 years in product development and latterly, on client projects. This led to a long stint at Deloitte where I was able to marry the technical skills with business and functional skills. Again, that marriage of learn and do (what we now call agile delivery) appealed to me.

What I didn't realise at the time was that I was developing some foundational skills which I still call upon today. Technology and engineering, both science topics, teach us to approach a problem or to design, build, test, measure a solution methodically and analytically, using proven techniques, keeping a constant eye on data at the heart of the process. Those skills serve me well in the various roles I play here at SLC, as the executive director in charge of SLC's repayments and customer compliance business, the change function and as the business sponsor of our transformation programme, Evolve, which is fundamentally a technology-enabled transformation. Both the business and the technical skills we need to exploit the new technologies we are implementing are a critical part of our transformation.

The people side is of course vital to both executive leadership and to transformation. That mostly comes with the experience I've gained as I've taken on more responsibility, working with teams here at SLC, seeing people develop and grow skills is a highly rewarding part of the job.

It is a broad mix of skills that are required to sustain us and allow us to thrive into the future. We live in a technology-enabled world, more women working their way through STEM careers will ensure that we have the best balance of diversity across the business and in the boardroom.