

Interview series.

Leaders making a difference, 2024

International
Women's Day
edition



Betül Susamis Unaran

dss⁺ Impact Advisory Board Member. Chief Commercial Officer and Member of the Executive Leadership Team at Unilabs

This year's **Ambassador for the dss⁺ Leaders Making a Difference initiative**, **Betül Susamis Unaran**, member of the dss⁺ Impact Advisory Board and Chief Commercial Officer at Unilabs, discusses her drive to transform healthcare, diagnostics and ultimately make a difference in people's lives.

 Find **Betül Susamis Unaran** on LinkedIn

dss⁺



This is the fourth year dss+ has celebrated the professional achievements of women

in business in honour of International Women's Day on March 8th, 2024. What motivated you to champion this year's initiative?

As a former member of dss+ Board of Directors and now member of the new dss+ Impact Advisory Board, I have been impressed with the female leaders I have met so far. I think it's important to see examples of female leaders to help to inspire and encourage other women to realise their potential and climb up the career ladder. When I look at my leadership team it's a very balanced one. This is not because we set out to achieve this, it happened naturally based on talent and expertise. We, as female leaders, bring a lot of value and impact to the table and we are empowered by our potential, and need to spread this empowerment.



Tell us about your professional journey into leadership roles and what shaped your chosen career path?

There have been several milestones and key decisions in my life that have helped to shape my career choices. This goes back to my childhood when we relocated from a small city in the middle of Turkey to Istanbul, a big city with big opportunities. My ranking as one of Turkey's top 40 students provided the opportunity to study at a German high school in Istanbul. This was a very important choice in my life, as I learnt German before learning English and it gave me the structure, the discipline and analytical approach that I have kept throughout my life. I then studied Industrial Engineering at an American university in Istanbul, in English. During my final year internship at Procter & Gamble, I realised that my interest was in business rather than production. With roles in Germany and Turkey, I worked with Procter & Gamble for four years, before embarking on my dream to do an MBA at a top school, INSEAD.

I had another dream which was to work for a top consultancy, which also came true; I worked with top management and gained exposure to different industries that were bringing impact to people and businesses. I started in London and then moved to Switzerland, into my first healthcare role, working at Ferring Pharmaceuticals. Their mission statement was 'people come first' and this was very meaningful to me. I drove commercial excellence initiatives and opened the digital chapter for the company, developing, and implementing the digital vision and strategy. This was another milestone and was also at a time when digital disruption was really hitting healthcare. I then led the digital agenda for Novartis Pharma who wanted to leverage data and digital to reimagine the impact the company has on people's lives. It was fascinating and I worked on very innovative projects including the first treatment and digital solution combination approved for asthma patients.

Another milestone came when I encountered the Zur Rose Group (DocMorris), the biggest online pharmacy in Europe, bringing health solutions and services to people in a very entrepreneurial set-up, and accepted the role of chief strategy and digital officer. Everybody was looking at us as to how to create a digital healthcare ecosystem in Europe. This is something I'm incredibly proud of, especially the health journeys we have created for obesity and diabetes, and I was one of the leaders of the company in touch with the banks and stock market. Then I joined Unilabs as chief commercial officer, where I am driving commercial transformation for healthcare and diagnostics. The company has a long-term ambition to transform the lives of people and patients, touching millions of lives.





That's an inspiring journey. How has this shaped your ability to lead teams, particularly in terms of optimisation and change management?

When I think about my experience, what is fascinating is to see how you can bring a different mindset to companies. It's very important from an operations perspective, but also any change management programme. The focus must be on deep engagement of colleagues in the programme, culture, and agile mindset. Over the last ten years we have talked a lot about agile mindset. This is not a new mindset but an important one as it is rooted in operations and execution and enables continuous improvements, learning, measurement, and adaptation. Agile mindset is at the core of any change management. It's about continuously looking at the KPIs, progress areas, failings, then adapting, and improving. This always needs linking back to the purpose, the impact, colleagues then know why they are doing something. When you see a leader putting the customer in the centre and making bold decisions – that's really inspiring, and I will always remember two CEOs in my own career journey whose boldness, purpose and motivational leadership was really inspiring.



Agile mindset is at the core of any change management. It's about continuously looking at the KPIs, progress areas, failings, then adapting, and improving.



What impact are technological advancements having in terms of improved efficiencies and efficacy in healthcare?

Over the last two decades we have seen amazing progress in terms of technology, digital innovation and data across sectors and the value chain. When you look at operations there's a lot around automation, usage of sensors, data and technology for training and preventive maintenance purposes, minimisation of downtime, it's mind blowing, then you see the impact on efficiencies, the impact on people in terms of the quality of work and life. Then there's the continuous running of data and KPIs, there's minimal downtime, it's amazingly efficient. We have tested using tech, AI and VR training tools to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Data and AI tools are advancing in healthcare, for example if you look at the use of AI tools for diagnostics where you can improve efficacy and efficiency at the same time - the numbers are astounding. One of our recent studies has shown how AI-assisted radiologists have been able to increase cancer detection rates by a fifth while halving workloads. This major study is the first to trial AI in a national breast cancer screening programme, demonstrating its potential to advance screening accuracy and efficiency. This is the impact of AI. It's an amazing tool and there's so more to come.



How else does your industry need to adapt operationally to make sure they maintain a competitive edge?

Safety will always be the first item in our business reviews. It has to come first because it means we are doing our job in the right way, taking measures to make it safe, effective and efficient for our colleagues and customers in the way we work. We take safety incidents seriously, it's one of the critical elements for the health of the business. At the same time, sustainability is becoming increasingly important and central, both for the future of the world and businesses because sustainability is becoming a value for employees as well as customers. If companies want to keep delivering products and services that are preferred by people, then we must take care of the planet and the people. It's not only about efficiency, diversity, and impact on the climate from emissions, it's about being an authentic company that doesn't just tick the sustainability boxes. This must be felt by employees and customers, it's about being sustainable across all dimensions.



Safety will always be the first item in our business reviews. It has to come first because it means we are doing our job in the right way for our colleagues and customers.



And finally, what would be your top drivers for operational excellence?

It's critical to understand customer needs and preferences and then link this to operations. Operations is not far away from the customers and is not only commercial, marketing, packaging; operations make a difference in the quality, speed, personalisation, and other aspects of delivering meaningful products and services to our customers. Then these need to translate into operational requirements and continuous improvements mindset. Colleagues need to know that by working in an operationally excellent way they are bringing impact to the business and customers. It's also important to be open to improving and learning every day, thinking about what we do and how this links to the business purpose and impact on customers.

dss⁺

Protect. Transform. Sustain.

[linkedin.com/company/consultdss](https://www.linkedin.com/company/consultdss)

twitter.com/consultdss

[youtube.com/consultdss](https://www.youtube.com/consultdss)

[instagram.com/consultdss](https://www.instagram.com/consultdss)

www.consultdss.com