

MARCH 2022 | S21 - SPRING EDITION

WIL MAGAZINE

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MONTH



/ CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MONTH THE WIL WAY /
A SNEAK PEAK INTO THE BRILLIANT & INSPIRING MINDS OF WOMEN AT HEC
THANK IT FORWARD || WIL HIGHLIGHTS || WHAT'S TO COME

WIL MAGAZINE

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WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



WIL is an official professional and social club within the HEC Paris MBA Program.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to share the Spring edition of the WIL magazine. This **International Women's Month**, we celebrate **WOMEN OF HEC** who have been the pillars of this institution we call **HOME**.

Ever wondered what it's like to be an HEC Security personnel? An HEC Canteen administrator? A partner on the HEC campus supporting your significant other through their MBA journey? A woman who had to come by herself for her MBA within months of her marriage? If so, please read further. I assure you that this **journey will be meaningfully exciting** and **you will be inspired** by reading about these amazing women.

We are grateful to all these strong, confident women who came forward to share their powerful stories with us.

We hope you love reading about their experiences as much as we loved creating this magazine for you! **#WeWIL**

Tej

TEJAL PRADHAN
PRESIDENT,
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP CLUB



WHEN PASSION TAKES OVER



Tatiana Maghdissian
interviewed by Bhavya Shah

*You may have seen her smiling every day while you wait in the **Canteen** line to pay for your food. However, let's read further into the life of Tatiana and her message for all of us.*

How do you manage to be cheerful and calm at the end of a hard day's work?

I really like what I do here at HEC. Because of that, I am usually in high spirits at the end of the day, even though I may be physically tired. I guess my team here in the Canteen has a huge role to play and I love to work with them.

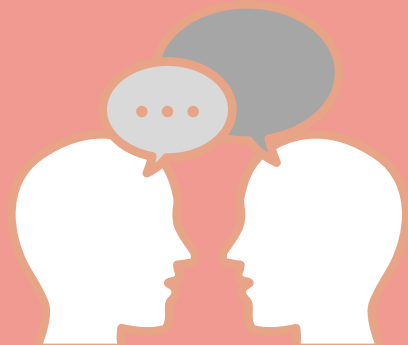
How have you coped with COVID? Can you tell us about the challenges faced?

In the first few months of COVID, it was work from home and everything was shut. So I could take care of the children staying at home. After a few months however, we had to come back and work from campus. My husband helped me with the planning logistically, as it wasn't easy given the children were there, but I was also really looking forward to getting back to work. Later when my children got COVID themselves, we got help at home to manage things. The whole phase was of course mentally tiring, but we managed.

Whom do you go to (community/person) when you need a pillar of support?

laughs

One thing I have learned to do well is to speak out about my problems, and not keep everything inside, as that becomes too difficult. I do not have any specific person to go to, but I usually confide in my mother, husband and children, in no particular order. Doing this has really helped me cope with the difficulties I have faced.



What is your favorite part about working here at HEC?

I love the environment. It's beautiful, the forest area and the overall setting where HEC is located. Above all, I just love working with my team. I have been working here at HEC for 20 years now, and it is my team which really gives me the energy to thrive.



Do you have anything to share with other women who play multiple roles - mother, employee, and a support giver to the family?

Broadly, there are 3 things I want to share with other women who may also be leading challenging lives.

Firstly, it really helps if you have someone at home, like your husband, who can help with the planning and logistics, so that it becomes easier to work. This is important especially if you have children.

Secondly, I feel women need to spare some time for themselves and do things they are passionate about. In the process of taking care of everyone else and working, they should not forget to take care of themselves.

Lastly, find a job you enjoy doing. If you do that, it is easier to get back home and not be frustrated or angry. At the end of the day, home and work are very interlinked. So the boundaries are very thin - you want to be your best self even when you reach home in the evening, and a job you are passionate about can help you to be in a good frame of mind, at least most of the time.

What do you do when you aren't working?

I don't have too much free time on my hands. But when I do get some time, I try to squeeze in some sports. I go walking on the weekends. During the weekends, a lot of my time also goes to my children's extracurricular activities - football and karate.



If you didn't do this current profession, what would you have liked to do?

I prefer manual work - the sort of work where I don't have to use my mind too much. Hence, I had started off with cooking in my free time and eventually moved to work here at HEC. If I wasn't doing this today, I would have liked to work in the field of medicine and health care. I love to counsel my colleagues and friends when they are not feeling well!

A SINCERE THANK YOU TO MY “MOMS-IN-SPIRIT”

By Vernice Arahan, MBA S21

In January 2002, I lost my mom to breast cancer that had metastasized to the liver. My family and I were devastated but we weren't alone. A whole community coalesced around us made up of family friends, classmates, colleagues but most especially moms. Since losing my mom, I have gained so many “moms-in-spirit” who have given their love, guidance, and support throughout the years. They did not replace my mom and the influence she would have had but they all have provided me key lessons for my life that I carry with me now as I continue to establish myself as a strong woman of color leader and professional.



My Lola's Consistent Acts of Service

First and foremost, among all the moms-in-spirit, is my “Lola”, my maternal grandmother who stayed with my dad, my sister and me after my mom passed away and stood in as the matriarch of our home. My Lola had joined us from the Philippines to be with our family while my sister and I were growing up in New Jersey. Sometimes, there was a bit of a language barrier when it came to everyday communication but that never stopped my Lola from doing little things for us to make sure we felt loved and supported, like always making sure there was a warm bowl of Filipino food waiting for us whenever we got home from school or giving random but reassuring hugs throughout the day. She was always consistent, and only recently have I realized how important that constant support was for me growing up.



My Ninangs and Titas' Dedication

In the Filipino culture, "Ninang" is a term for godmother, someone chosen by parents to act as a fellow guide in both faith and life, while Tita is indicative of a female elder and family friend. I grew up surrounded by my Ninangs and Titas, all family friends who my parents had met through their work and by living in our tight-knit Filipino American community.

Just like my mom, a lot of my Ninangs and Titas are nurses. Over the years, I have witnessed their dedication to their work and the compassion with which they serve their patients and communities. Especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, many of them went to great lengths to ensure the health and safety of their patients. Their service continuously inspires me as they put themselves at risk for the sake of others, dedicated to their occupation.



My Mentors' Perseverance

Over the years, I have had the fortune of working for strong women leaders at the head of key organizations and departments focused on financial, racial and social empowerment and inclusion. All of them had to overcome significant barriers and challenges to their authority and standing. Often, they also had to balance work life with a growing family life. While undeniably there were setbacks, all of these women have persisted in their missions and work. They have never lost sight and awareness as women at the head of organizations and what that responsibility means, including opening the door for others in terms of training and providing opportunities to rise up in their organizations.

Consistent acts of service, compassion, and perseverance are all lessons that have become core to my being and way of life as well as my approach to the professional world as I seek to work with organizations that have strong impact in the communities they serve and the change they seek to make. As I think about International Women's Day, I want to honor all these women who have served their families, communities, and countless others every day and will continue to do so going forward. To my Lola, my Ninangs and Titas, and all the women who have had an impact on my life, thank you always for the lessons and the guidance. I wouldn't be here without you.

A LOOK INTO THE LIFE OF AN HEC PARTNER

Julia Poberezhnaya

interviewed by Liliia Kalimullina

*Julia Poberezhnaya has moved to France with her husband David, who is pursuing his MBA degree at HEC. **Julia is an owner of Bubolab startup** and the mother of a beautiful 1-year old girl. We asked Julia to share with us her experience of living here.*

Bubolab is a learning courses aggregator platform, which provides services to individuals and corporations. The platform name is the union of two Latin words: “bubo”, an owl, which designates wisdom, and “lab”, abbreviated from “laboratorium”.

What were your initial thoughts when you knew that your partner was enrolled at HEC?

Frankly speaking, I was the one who got the idea for him to apply for an MBA abroad in the first place. The trigger for the whole story was my boss, who enrolled to the Stanford MBA program.

At first, after David and I received a Bachelor's degree together, he didn't want to get a Master's unless it was somewhere abroad. I supported him and decided it was a great idea to show David that an MBA would be an attractive option. Therefore, I applied for a visa to the USA, and we went to New York and California to visit my boss. During our stay there, he just constantly asked her questions: “how?”, “what?”, and “why?”. Eventually, he got excited about the idea of getting a high-quality education and getting an MBA abroad.

How did you decide to move together with your husband to France?

I have always been convinced that families should move together. Therefore, the question of whether to stay apart or not has never been raised between us. I also believe that he needs support, he wants to be with his family, with his daughter. Even though he really likes the studying environment here, it is essential to take care of him, being close, cooking dinner, stroking on the head, etc.



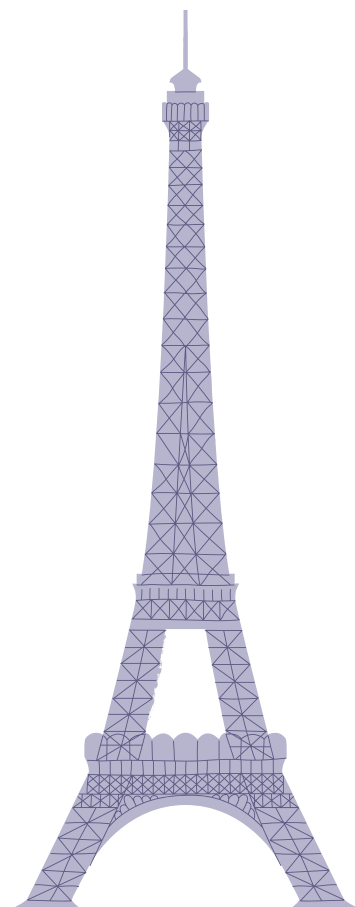
An adding factor was that we had a successful example with my boss, who had already embarked on the same journey. Specifically, she enrolled at Stanford when she was pregnant, so she moved with her husband and studied there with a one-year-old child. Of course, her case helped develop a confidence that everything will work out if you want it to.

Was it difficult for you to move abroad?

Actually, we were already prepared for that as at the beginning of the previous year we already had an experience of moving abroad. I wanted to give birth to my child in Israel and David could get an Israeli passport, so we decided to move there. Although initially, we planned to stay there for 3 months, it was such an exemplary move. It showed us that we should not be afraid and that everything will work out. Therefore, we moved here very easily, even though we moved with a 6-month-old child.

What is the most exciting of moving abroad with your partner?

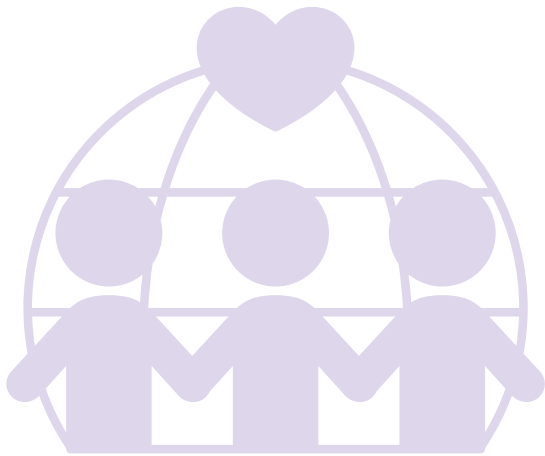
I was very excited about the fact that the best MBA school is located in France because I like this country so much. In fact, the first time when David and I visited Paris together, I saw the Eiffel Tower sparkling with lights and I just burst into tears because of the beauty and happiness (I had never been to Paris before and didn't expect this to happen). For me, being in such a wonderful place is an additional source of strength, positive emotions, and motivation. Even when I am tired and the weather is bad, I get inspired by the charming architecture here.



I know that you are the owner of the Bubolab startup, a platform which aggregates educational courses. How did you manage to switch your business and work remotely?

In fact, the pandemic played a major role in this transition. When COVID started, there was no question whether remote work was possible or not. Although, I really liked going into the office and meeting my colleagues there, we all had an understanding that we needed to set up this new mode. Due to this, we now understand we can create almost everything online. It's great and it's convenient. Surely, I sometimes have difficulties managing my employees, as I cannot control their work in the way I would have done if we were in the office, but everyone in our team is very understanding and ready for a little push through Zoom.

Additionally, I have a perfect example: my sister. She also moved to London with her husband. She maintained her job in a Russian pharmaceutical factory, but started to work online. I once again recognized that everything can be negotiated. There were some transition requirements, but now she opens Zoom, and observes what is happening on a factory there, what people are doing. Of course, at some point, maybe somewhere the quality may drop a little, but it will recover with some experience.



What has been your approach to building a support network here in France?

Before coming here I planned to regularly visit campus and meet people there. However, our daughter is growing and changing fast right now. She is very active and needs to be given more emotions and attention, therefore, I have less free time for building a network so far. At the same time, I see that all students of HEC and their partners who live in Versailles really want to get in touch and are proactively seeking opportunities to do this. For example, we have already scheduled our first meeting on March 1st.

How do you find the strength to combine all these different roles at the same time?

I don't know...It doesn't seem to me that I find strength. In fact, I am gradually adapting. At first, you get used to one role, such as becoming a mother. At that time, it is necessary to understand that you will not sleep as much as you used to. After that, you add other responsibilities and adapt once again. So far, I'm not that good with time management, so it happens sometimes that I don't go for a walk for several days, but I try to take some breaks and find time to just be with David to go for a walk in Paris. However, I would also say that having a well-defined goal helps you to find strength.

How do you organize childcare being abroad?

Thankfully, I have a lot of support from my parents, on both sides. My mom and David's mom are able to come here in turns, which is incredibly helpful. This, of course, maybe difficult for those who do not have the support of parents or relatives with a child. In this case, a possible option may be finding a nanny here. You can find other ways too.

As for medical care, we had a very good experience with it in Paris. Once our daughter fell ill and had a fever, we were very scared because this was the first time she got sick. So, we visited a children's hospital recommended by our friend in Paris. We were kindly helped by the doctor, everything went well, and our baby recovered very soon. It's also worth noticing all services were covered by David's insurance as you can attach children to social insurance for students.



What would be your advice for current and future partners coming to HEC?

In fact, I have one main piece of advice: you should definitely learn French. I really like French, and I usually want to say a lot in French. However, I started learning it only when I realized that a move to France was coming. So every time I still have to switch to English. Fortunately, English always helps to communicate with people, but knowing the local language indeed improves your standard of living.

SPIRITS HIGH AND A CHEER IN THE EYE

Anouk Guiffemand

interviewed by Aayushie Pareek

*She is the first person you might meet once you step on campus. Her exuding positivity and constant smile from behind the **Reception Desk** make you believe that HEC indeed is a place full of the warmest people and the brightest minds.*



How do you manage to be cheerful and calm at the end of a hard day's work?

I am not really tired after going to work, I love that, and even if I wake up early I have the motivation to spend some time with my roommates. I am someone who is very positive and I love to spend time with people that's why I have roommates. It motivates me to spend the day positively. I am not tired at all.

How have you coped with COVID? Can you tell us about the challenges faced?

Thankfully no one had COVID in my family but it was really challenging at the time because I had to work and it affected everyone. The job was challenging, but in terms of health, I didn't know anyone who had COVID. I was also in a new job at the time and it was very stressful and no one was sure about keeping their jobs, but now it's better I hope.

Is there anything positive that has come out of it that is here to stay?

To take care of others, it became very important to keep in touch with people and to take some news and I think this is the best part about COVID. Everyone took the time to talk to their family, ask if they are okay because a lot of people are alone and a lot of people were sick. Take care of others.





Whom do you go to when you need a pillar of support?

I am always trying to think about the situation and wonder if it's going to be as stressful as it is in one year or in one month; if not, then I will not stress about the situation. I try to be positive like that and think about something I like and always be happy, I do something that makes me happy. I see my friends when I am feeling low and I forget everything.

What is your favorite part about working here at HEC?

It's been 5 months since I started working at HEC. Seeing and meeting a lot of people every day would be my favorite part. I have had the opportunity to meet people from different countries. Everyone has different ideas and it is very interesting to hear their stories. This is my everyday job here and I couldn't be happier.

Quick Responses

Do you have anything to share with other women who play multiple roles - mother, employee, and a support giver to the family?

I think, if you don't want to do something and you are wondering why you are doing it, then you should probably stop doing it.

What do you do when you aren't working?

I love being with my friends.

If you didn't do this current profession, what would you have liked to do?

I would have liked to work in the field of event management. I have done that in the past and maybe I will do that again in the future.

LONG DISTANCE MARRIAGE

By Ruby Hsieh, MBA S21

I am incredibly lucky to have my family's support for doing an MBA. My mom and my husband have been extremely supportive throughout this journey. Oh yes, I am married. ***Many people are surprised when they discover that I got married just before the MBA started and had to come to Paris alone.***

Some people, jokingly, say that MBA is an abbreviation for “Married But Available”. In my opinion, even married people have the right to know others. However, after making wedding vows and exchanging rings, we should be loyal to the marriage unless the marriage cannot be continued anymore. Running a long-distance relationship may not be easy, especially while stepping into a brand-new, young, and attractive environment with many great choices. Nevertheless, if you work on your relationship with all your heart and diligence, it should not be so difficult.

I am more than happy to share with you how my husband and I keep our marriage warm and how he is so supportive even though we have not met in person since the start of this MBA i.e., for almost 7 months.

To begin, we call each other every day. The time difference between France and Taiwan is 7 hours. Usually, I use the lunch break to chat with him to exchange our daily life. Thanks to advanced technology, we can chat as if we are in the same room together.



We talk about everything - such as how my study group worked together and did very well on our ethics project, how I invited a few of my friends over for tangyuan (a traditional Taiwanese dessert), how the WIL (Women in Leadership) and APAC (Asia Pacific) clubs will work together for the Squid Game party and especially about how much I miss my hometown cuisine when we eat hot pot in Paris. Sometimes, even when I am struggling with my MBA academics, my husband discusses the cases with me as if he is also a part of S21. Moreover, he likes to tell me about the process of his new construction project such as the blueprint completion, and how he rented a new office and is working on the interior design right now. No matter how little the thing is, I believe it is crucial to share your everyday life with your partner.

Secondly, my husband helps take care of my family back in Taiwan. He usually visits my family, lets me know about their health and life situation, and even helps them solve their problems. While having dinner with my family, he will often tell my grandma about my life in France and connect us via video call since my grandma does not use a smartphone. In addition, he also drives my mom, stepfather, and my brother to explore nice restaurants and enjoy meals together. He often listens to my brother's worries and even plays with my adorable puppies. Recently, he even helped my aunt deal with a house rental issue. To be honest, I am not sure if I can handle as well as he handles my family. I appreciate how he is with my family and how I need not worry about them even when I am so far away.



Thirdly, I genuinely believe that any relationship can work given the right amount of effort and love. Even though we are not with each other, we still try to create some small acts of romance. For example, when my husband's birthday was approaching, I went to Galeries Lafayette and picked out a gorgeous belt as his birthday gift with a handwritten card. My husband also sent me some Chinese medicine to help me strengthen my immune system. Also, he got me a filter shower head that filters hard water since I kept complaining to him about my hair loss and hair knots. These actions may sound like a drop in the ocean, but these indeed help us cherish our marriage more.

Honestly, **my MBA journey is making our marriage stronger** and more fresh day by day. Before walking down the aisle, we were together for over 10 years. We have always been each other's love and best friend. That means we were always together, and we seldom spent time alone. But now, both of us have a period and space to enjoy being with ourselves and think about our future.

Studying for an MBA was always a plan on my list. But when I got married, I realized that I could not postpone my MBA anymore. We had some friction during the application period, but finally, we reached a consensus. I deeply appreciate my husband's respect and support for my decision.



Some people ask me - “How do you know he is the right guy?” It may sound cliché, but it is true.

First, you need to reach a consensus on your future life. I mean, there must be clarity over the sacrifices that need to be made, and you will have to reach an agreement on what your future life should look like.

Second, you should feel comfortable in your own skin when you are with each other. You don't have to force yourself to accept something you don't like or even hide your real feelings and thoughts.

Furthermore, it is great if both of you have a healthy physical, mental, and financial situation.

Last but not least, if you and each other's family can love each other, it would be a plus.

I don't think it has always been the best of times for our marriage. However, we always try our best to maintain and work on our marriage, face difficulties together, and deal with frictions as a couple.

As they say - '**C'est la vie**'. I truly wish and hope that each one of you has a great relationship in his/her life as well!



TAKING CHARGE OF DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Maria Fernanda Pineda

interviewed by Ana Arias Nava

Quick Facts

Country last/longest lived:

Mexico

Profession:

Corporate Lawyer for BAT

Do you live on campus?

No



What was your initial reaction when you knew that your partner was enrolling in HEC?

I was very excited about the new adventure, but also nervous because our lives would change. I understood that getting accepted to the MBA was something very hard to achieve and I was proud, but we also had to consider many factors so that this would be feasible for both of us.

How did you decide to move together with your partner to France? Was it difficult for you?

It was a decision we made as a couple as it was not an option for us to have a long distance relationship. This decision for me, however, was a personal challenge as it meant that I had to leave my friends and family behind and consider how to adapt to my own career aspirations. It was also a particularly challenging decision as we had a few family bereavements in the two years prior to the move.

What has been the most unexpected challenge of moving abroad with your partner?

The level of uncertainty we must deal with. I love plans, so that has certainly been hard. For example, when we first got here, we didn't know where we were going to live and now, we don't know if we must move again for his summer internship. Additionally, I had never been to France before, so that added another layer of complexity.

What has been the most unexpected benefit of moving abroad with your partner?

The move has allowed us to spend time together alone and solidify our bond. We have lived together before but we always had people around us, like our families and friends. Now we are by ourselves and we are strengthening our relationship through communication and reliance on one another. Another benefit is about being able to travel to different places. Europe is very accessible and seeing new places is really enjoyable.

What has been your approach to building a support network here in France?

I was lucky to get advice from my cousin, who had gone through a similar situation 8 years ago. She said that I had to be part of the YES club – which meant saying yes to any opportunity that would come my way, especially at the beginning of the MBA, when people are more open to making new friends and smaller groups have not yet formed. So sticking to that has definitely helped me meet new people!



What has been the most helpful tool to get acquainted with living in France?

Languages. Knowing basic French has been a good tool to help me get around. My English knowledge has been a plus as well since it has helped me establish relationships. I also have to say that I'm impressed by how many people speak English in France, which is contrary to the general stereotype. I was initially advised that Spanish would be more helpful but in reality, no one seems to have an issue speaking in English.



So you mentioned you are still working. How did you negotiate working remotely with your employer for (at least) 16 months?

When I first told my employer that I was moving to France with my husband, I confirmed with the team that I wanted to figure out a way to continue working with them. Since day one, the top management of my company was extremely supportive, and together we looked for possible opportunities, while they mentored me along the way. It was not easy, I had to present my case to top executives and as a team we knocked on many doors, but we finally found a great opportunity that has allowed me to expand my knowledge and network at BAT, while I also contribute to the team in Mexico and other LATAM Countries. It has been an amazing experience, and I will be forever grateful for their support and trust!

What would be your advice for current and future partners coming to HEC?

My advice would be that you must look out for yourself. It is paramount to take responsibility for your needs and make sure you find ways of developing the aspects of your life that are important to you: professionally and personally, something that makes you happy for your own mental health and well-being. The YES club is a great idea. Be open to different cultures and activities, and most importantly, be yourself and don't be afraid!



ENSURING SECURITY FROM THE AIRPORT TO HEC

Rachelle Gougsa

interviewed by Aayushie Pareek & Bhavya Shah

*It's a typical day at HEC. You head out to Paris for a quick dinner. You arrive on campus after 10 pm. You knock on the security room door to ask for their help to let you in since your HEC ID card won't work after 10 pm. Ever wondered how hard it is for this **Security Personnel** to ensure the safety of us HEC citizens? Let's read how it is for Rachelle to be a woman security personnel!*

How do you manage to be cheerful and calm at the end of a hard day's work?

laughs

It depends, sometimes it's very hard and sometimes it's okay; in any case when you are a woman you have 2 jobs. Even if I work 12 hours, I then start another job at home, so most of the time it's natural, right? Even after you are tired, I don't think you need to think about this, you just have to do it. I don't have time as such for things like yoga, meditation, etc.



How have you coped with COVID? Can you tell us about the challenges you faced?

Well, I started this job in the middle of COVID; it's not my real job. I work in the airport. So, it was good for me to break the monotony of my job and think about other things, do a course, etc. No, no- it was good for me! I worked even at the airport, and it was a 2nd job, so in fact I worked at the airport, HEC and at home. (3 jobs!) I practiced my English also.

Whom do you go to when you need a pillar of support?

looks up toward the sky

Because, from where I come, from Ethiopia, we think God will do everything and does everything and so God is a support I have. Also, my two children are my support.

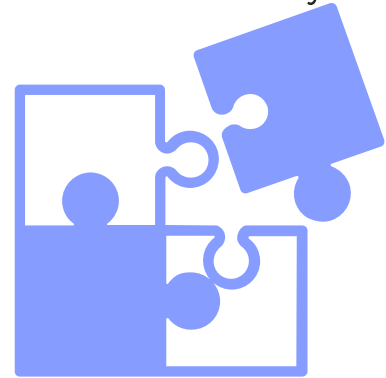
What is your favorite part about working here at HEC?

You meet the world here, I think, you see, I appreciate conversing with Indian people, Pakistani, English, African, French, German. The area is also very nice. I like it.

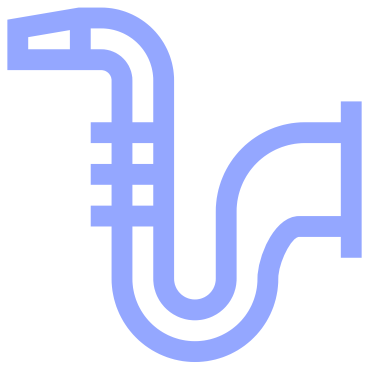


Do you have anything to share with other women who play multiple roles - mother, employee, and a support giver to the family?

Well, I don't know how to say, but each morning, I don't say, I'm a woman - no no no, you see I understand what you mean - I don't agree when you say tomorrow is Women's Day. It's not Women's Day - because our day is 365 days a year, so it's our right (La droit de la femme), I'm not really a feminist. Also, I am not alone here, I have the father of my children. Since you separate your jobs, I don't do everything at home - he takes care of our children, because he works and I work; so everybody works, and the children are going to school. If I am here, he needs to pick up the children. If we respect each other, I think we can manage. It's not because I am a woman, doesn't matter if I am woman or man. Now it's 2022, it's not a big deal to be a woman, for me. I like to say we are the same, men and women. And most of the time I say, my value is more than 10 men.



What do you do when you are not working?



I like saxophone. I try. I am still taking lessons. I have been learning for the last 12 years! I am not very good because I stop and then I start, but I am always with my saxophone. I didn't do 1 year completely, you see. But I'm still with my saxophone. Voila! Usually, Ethiopian women are very strong. I don't say that I'm strong but I try to be strong.

It's a culture, and this kind of a job, it's usually men, so they try to tell me "what are you doing here?" and I say, I'm like you! "You like money?", they ask me. And I say, "Don't you?" You see, it's the African people and the Arabic people, you know the culture, so the woman is...You see?

If you didn't do this current profession, what would you have liked to do?

I am currently a commercial coordinator at the airport, and have been working for 23 years. I like cooking, so my dream is to open an Ethiopian restaurant and I tried it in 2009. It was a bad situation in 2009...bad economic crisis, and then later, I opened a food truck, and then for a year I did a good job, but then 2009 and 2010 were bad years. So I went back to the airport. I tried, so I am satisfied. When I want to do something, it also depends on the money and with whom you are living, because some men are not ok with it. But my husband said you want to try, go for it. I think we need to be like this, if you want to do something, you should go for it.



LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY



Sambrita Das : EMEA Delivery Head for SAP Services at AWS

interviewed by Ira Banerjee

You have evolved as a leader and now are responsible for the delivery of SAP Services in the EMEA region at AWS. That is such an inspiring journey for young professionals. As a woman leader, what is your leadership style and how do you think it has helped you progress in the tech sector?

That's an interesting question and honestly, I have thought about it many times 'Do I actually have a style?'. I do believe that leadership comes naturally to everyone, you cannot really copy & paste it from someone else; you can get inspired by someone.

So whenever I have looked back on the type of work I have done or do now with the teams (I have a large team spread across EMEA), I feel my way of leadership is to connect with people through emotions.



I connect with my work with emotion and with people as well because I think as a woman leader that makes you quite different. Women leaders I believe bring to the table that extra emotional quotient. Additionally, I also believe in a lot of growth and transformation. I try to constantly challenge myself and transformation is one of the key areas. I constantly work with my team, motivate them to take risks, make their own decisions, empower them and own up to whatever the consequence (success or failure) may be; because it's not guaranteed because when you take the risk it may fail and the entire team should own it together. It's not like the old days of blaming each other. So that's my way of looking into the team as a leader.

You switched jobs mid-COVID. Data is showing that COVID and work from home have impacted women much more than men because WFH has really blurred the boundary between office and home space. What are your thoughts on this? Have you also faced similar difficulties in maintaining balance?

I think the whole concept of working from home for an indefinite period is new for both men and women. Initially, it might have seemed like a breather for people like us who always had to keep commuting from one place to another but slowly the challenges started surfacing. Personally, I felt a lot of challenges physically like getting stuck to your work desk for long hours. I think a lot of people had mental health issues as well. Unknowingly we started pushing the whole idea of closing for the day because in the office you had the idea of closing for the day, going back home, but when you are working from home it all seemed like an endless period of continually working. So I guess this concept has impacted both genders not only women in particular at least from how I see it.

I also think today's generation has also changed a lot; if I speak from my home perspective both me and my husband kind of share the household work. Yes, the work-life balance did get turned upside down, but even here it affected both genders. In today's generation, men in the house do a fair share of household work, so I would say the entire situation has impacted everyone in general, at least that's how I see it.

There is a lot of conversation revolving around 'personal space'. From your personal experience, with a demanding career, as a wife and a mother, how practical is it to find time for this 'personal space', and do you have any tips for people juggling between responsibilities?

IMPORTANT!

Personal space is your space and you have to get it in your own right. No one will come and put it in a tray and say 'You worked enough, take a break'. No one will say that. So the key is prioritization and saying 'No'. As much as it sounds bad, you have to say 'No' at some point. As a woman with multiple roles, at home and at work, you need to constantly revise the list of what is important to you.

You have to delegate what can be delegated and say 'No' to what is not needed, and defer what can wait. So, you must constantly shuffle between these three columns to 'Share your work which can be done - don't take everything on you; it's very important', 'Don't give importance to everything - not all emails are important the day it was received, so you can always defer answering some emails for example' and 'then there are things which you cannot take up at all. Then you can always say no.' I also strongly believe as a woman that you cannot pour from an empty cup. So you have to always ensure that you yourself are completely filled up so that you can give it back either at work or at home.



It can be anything - enjoying a cup of tea in the morning, going out for a walk. Even when you are taking an office call, you can just go out for a walk, get some fresh air, or write in a diary - like I do every day at the end of the day. Whatever it takes, just do it. It's true that not all days are equal, you can't be just doing things every day, some days are unplanned, some days are challenging, but you can still do that one thing which you like. And especially in today's world, standing in 2022, smart work is more important than hard work. You cannot say I have worked 24/7. If you have to do groceries, laundry, there are apps for everything - just do it the smarter way.

And last but not least - and very important - don't let guilt catch up to you. As a woman, I think, and sometimes it also has to do with our cultural upbringing as well, that we have peer guilt, societal guilt. For example, you have to be the best, don't let people dictate that for you; you know what is best for you, what is best for your work, what's best for your baby and home. Don't get caught up in the trap of being perfect for everything, because it will eat up your personal space and happiness.

Motherhood undoubtedly takes a very special place in a woman's life but it also brings with it challenges that you have never faced before. As a career-driven woman, what is the biggest challenge you have faced while balancing between these two roles?

Yes true, motherhood comes with its own set of challenges but first I will say what it has taught me. I think it has taught me to be really strong, lead with empathy, and be really compassionate. If my baby is not listening to me, I cannot just say that I am abandoning you, and the same probably goes with your team and work as well. These are some of the things which have grown in me automatically, I probably did not have that much patience before.

But it also comes with its own challenges and while juggling the two roles, the biggest challenge will be running against time. You will constantly question your priorities. If my baby is crying and I also have to take a client call, which one takes priority? And there is no answer book to that. Like I said before, only you know what is important. So, that constant mental math is what you must keep doing. Sometimes, it definitely gets a little tiring, but in the end, I think it's rewarding, because with your baby it is quality over quantity, when she has grown up a bit, you cannot be with her 24/7.



Similarly, at work, you have a team, and you can rely on your team. So obviously time is of the essence over there and multi-tasking, even though I do not believe in multi-tasking since you do only half of everything, but we still try to do half or a little of everything just for our peace of mind. So these are certain constant juggling acts that come with motherhood, at least in the initial years, when you are balancing it with your career.

How important is it to have support from one's place of work for future and current mothers? Like during pregnancy, women who are expecting or when they return, since she is in this constant dilemma of caring for her newborn and giving her best in her professional role. How can organizations be more inclusive and supportive in this matter?

I love this topic and love this question. I think I can just go on and on because there are so many things I had thought of during my pregnancy but I will try to keep it as short as possible. Pregnancy is such an important journey for a woman. The body goes through so many hormonal and physical changes, you have a baby brain – you keep forgetting, but on top of everything you are doing your work. There are organizations working towards it, but I think there is one thing that's not there yet which is a support group.

A constant support network group isn't just asking 'How are you? Eat well', but rather, constant support to check whether the pregnant person is not able to take the elevator, stairs, maybe the person is not able to park her car, etc. Whatever is needed for the person, it's a rollercoaster journey, and this type of support is absolutely needed.



Another thing is words of encouragement. At this stage, this can really do wonders, because a woman is fighting a lot of battles during this time.

After maternity is a crucial period as well, the organizations should ensure that the comeback process is as smooth as possible, without making the woman feel like the company is doing a favor. For example, if somebody wants to extend her maternity leave, there should not be a difficult conversation about her job being at stake. The conversation should make the person feel comfortable with her decision. Women should not feel pressured to return to work thinking that if I don't join now, I will lose my job.

Next, maternity is giving birth, it is not a defect. So, any eligible women should still be eligible for promotions, pay raises, etc. I think the maternity benefit process should also be taken care of. Not all organizations are very good at it, the benefits process should be revised and made sure that it is well-covered. Many women also go through postpartum depression, so companies should support them with regards to this as well.



The other topic is regarding supporting women employees after pregnancy with breastfeeding both for work-from-home and also for in the office. In the office, make sure there is a separate room, and whatever help is needed to pump or feed the baby. It is essential since there is no alternative. Also, by offering a flexible work schedule, there shouldn't be a conversation where the organization makes the employee feel that the company is making an adjustment for her. Most importantly make her feel valued when she returns.

Sometimes, women also feel a lot of insecurity since there is so much expectation and the diverse roles she is playing in her life. I feel that family and community support have big roles to play in this matter. What is your take on this?

I think support or no support comes from family first. Some women have very good family support and I would put my hand up for this, because whatever I am today, I had the courage of doing certain things, make certain decisions of different measures and magnitudes, all because of my upbringing, even now I get immense support from my husband. But I also know that not all women have this support and that's the sad part.



There is a lot of discussion going around ensuring women's rights, supporting women but the very concept of supporting women, I have a problem with that. Like the very thought of supporting women, why do we need that? Why do we have to make her feel insecure? This is a very questionable topic to me. This is both yes and no. I mean yes the support should come from family and community as a whole but at the same time we need to question why do we need to give

support. We don't need to support men, then why is it that we need to empower or support women? Either we have to support a person in general when they need it irrespective of gender or we need to think about where we are heading towards if we still need to talk about empowering and supporting women.



If we still need to think that a woman is vulnerable or insecure about taking certain steps in her career or a decision in her life, I guess it all starts from home most of the time but it also is collective within the society itself. So we definitely need to stop and think about why there is this whole terminology about supporting and empowering women and where it is coming from. If you are good at work, you cannot be good at home, if you are good at home, you cannot take up a job or you cannot travel, if you are not married etc., so we need to get to the root cause and think about where the problem lies. We can support individual people to grow, but if we have to support a gender then we are actually regressing and not progressing.

"HEC 8" OUR S21 WOMEN LEADERS

This term, **8 of the MBA Clubs** are led by **Women Presidents**.



(L-R) Vernice Araham (**Impact**), Ava Gurekian (**Healthcare**), Eunjee Lee (**APAC**), Aminata Seck (**Black in Business**), Tejal Pradhan (**Women In Leadership**), Puja Khanna (**Product Management**), Jacklyn Burgo (**Luxury and Retail**), and Léa Bory (**Marketing**).



Shoutout to all these amazing women for leading their clubs to new heights!

thank it forward...

*we often forget to take time to appreciate important people in our lives
here are some special shoutouts to some spectacular women!*

I am forever grateful to my mom for not just telling to imbibe the values of grits and perseverance in pursuit of my daily goals, but also by leading by example. In all my pursuits, I try to replicate her qualities. If I am half as hard working as her, I would consider myself a success.

Jowber Sadiq

My mom has always been a positive contagion of energy and support in my HEC journey. She consistently motivates me to find my purpose and be the best version of myself in everything I do.

Melanie Jurena

I feel extremely lucky to have my partner, Mansi, in my life. Her contagious enthusiasm made me want to be more outgoing and enjoy new experiences. She inspired me and gave me the courage to be fierce about my values and stand up for what I believe in. I want to thank her for being a strong pillar in my life that I can lean on, no matter the circumstance.

Utsav Banka

My wife accompanied me here. Not only does she handle her own business back in India, which takes most of her entire day, she makes sure my life here is super comfortable. While we share the chores, she does indeed take up the majority of it to make sure I get time to properly pursue my studies. Further, no matter what, I'm never alone here, thanks to her.

Anurag Poddar

I've been crazy blessed with amazing female role models in my life - my mom, my grandmom, my aunts, my friends - They encourage me to be better every day! They've inspired my work, applauded my art, cheered at my sporting events, supported me through the tough times, and celebrated the good. Special shoutout to my mom - She's taught me to be independent and assertive but also vulnerable and empathetic. How to work hard and achieve your goals, but also take the time to enjoy life. It's funny how you get to a certain age and you realize that your parents have been growing up with you. Being a woman in this world isn't easy, but the women in my life have shown me that it's beautiful.

Puja Khanna



thank it forward...

her courage was her crown and she wore it like a queen

- atticus -

I cannot thank my wife enough. She quit her job to accompany me with our 3-year-old son to campus. She is continuously making an effort to balance between her *me* time and our family time. On weekdays, she drives our son to kindergarten nearby and picks him up in the afternoon, as well as learning English and French through talking and chatting with people here. On weekends, she takes lessons on how to make bread, a new activity she has found interest in while here in France. Her positive attitude towards expanding her boundaries encourages me to push myself to become even better and helps me focus on my studies at HEC without any concerns.

Kazutaka Yajima



I am really lucky to have been inspired, motivated and mentored by great women in my life. Throughout my life, I have learnt great lessons of resilience, grit, love, and care from them. Right from my mother, to my friends, to my managers and mentors, to colleagues, everyone has played a huge role in who I am today. Each one of them have been essential and necessary in making me learn how to be a better member of the society who continuously tries to overcome to age-old biases and norms. I have observed them be strong and unwavering in times of difficulty and handle every situation with graceful confidence. All of them have inspired me to be a better ally. It wouldn't be wrong to say that I wouldn't be here if it were not for the women around me. Everyone of them have played a huge and critical part in my personal journey of trying to be a better person and I get to learn more and more everyday. It's about getting to know my flaws and trying to rectify them and I have been extremely blessed to have some of the best people in my life guide me through that journey. Here is wishing everyone a very happy Women's Day and I hope to be inspired more everyday from the most awesome people in my life and be a better ally and person.

Yash Kaushal

I would like to thank my two sisters Naidú, and Narubí Martínez. Although we are peers, I've always looked up to both for being guiding principles in my life, not only supporting me across my journey in life and my professional career, but also for teaching me valuable lessons while being examples I aspire to emulate.

Oscar Martinez

thank it forward...

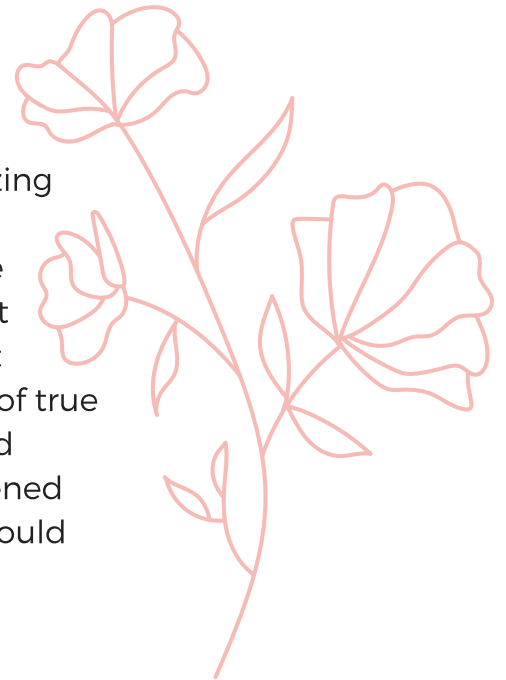
here's to strong women. may we know them. may we be them. may we raise them.

Thank you to Jessy Shajan for being the Essy to my M. I cannot imagine my HEC experience without you! Thank you Ayse Akcali for twerking out with me and keeping me sane! May our endorphins power us through the end of this term. Thank you Dohee Kim for your amazing Korean fried chicken! Can't wait to go to your restaurant someday. Thank you Whitney Mo for helping me rediscover my love of tiramisu and for being an amazing travel buddy!

Madeleine McClintic

From my childhood I have always been surrounded by amazing women who inspired me, starting from my mom who have juggled with her highly purposeful and demanding job - she is a nephrologist - two kids and a family business. She taught me to work hard, shoot for the stars and never give up. But it was not only the family members who developed my vision of true women leadership, but also my fellow female colleagues and manager whose dedication, empathy and creativity enlightened and guided me through my career. I truly believe that we should celebrate womanhood every single day, especially today.

Anna Dragina



I have always been inspired by my sister, Darienne, who despite being younger, has always been a constant support in my life and has taught me so much about how to face and take on life. While we are opposites in personality, we have always chosen to work and thrive together in our respective fields. We know that we are always there for each other, have been and always will be. I want to sincerely thank Darienne for being my rock when times get tough and my biggest cheerleader no matter what.

Love always - Your Ate,

Vernice Araham

Irina Scarlete is the embodiment of a purposeful leader that goes beyond 'business-norm' and embraces empathy-driven decision making. In the pursuit of a more impactful career Irina welcomed me into her home and family, consistently challenging me to strive for better while supporting my passion for sustainability. Irina inspired me to reject the status quo and pursue a future where responsible leaders shape the society and environment we want our children to live in. Irina is always there to support me and has encouraged me to continuously improve and strive to be a purposeful leader for society as a whole.

Marko Tvrtkovic

WIL HIGHLIGHTS

AMAZON PARTNERSHIP



HEC Paris Women In Leadership Club is proud to welcome Amazon as our sponsor!

At Amazon, the spirit of innovation is part of their DNA. They strive to hire the brightest minds from universities all around the globe, and they have technical and non-technical career opportunities throughout Amazon for students from all backgrounds.

HEC Paris Women In Leadership Club is proud to be associated with a company that reflects diverse perspectives and encourages progress - a mission very close to the Women In Leadership Club's values - Purpose. Platform. Progress.

WIL HIGHLIGHTS

PROJECT LIGHTHOUSE



The poster features the HEC MBA PROGRAM logo in the top left corner. The main title 'Project Lighthouse' is written in a large, purple, handwritten-style font, with 'wo.mentorship program' in a smaller, sans-serif font below it. A central photograph shows two women sitting at a table, smiling and looking at a laptop. To the right of the photo is a circular logo with a white 'w' on a purple background. Below the photo, the text reads: 'Join us for our 3 part series || Apply by February 5th!' and 'Alumni Connect | CV Review | Peer Networking | Industry Insights'. A QR code is located in the bottom left corner of the poster.

The Project Lighthouse: wo.mentorship program was launched on January 21st.

The program has connected **Mentees** (current women MBA candidates at HEC) targeting a particular industry with a **Mentor** (HEC MBA Alumni) from the same industry.

The **Mentors** provide any form of guidance to the mentees who are navigating through their MBA journey into the industry of their choice i.e., **BE A LIGHTHOUSE** guiding the Mentee's career ship.

The **Mentees** have the opportunity to explore the below avenues:

1. One-on-one CV review sessions with the mentor
2. Peer networking sessions
3. Industry and interview insights

WIL HIGHLIGHTS

WOMEN WHO INSPIRE SERIES



As part of our Women Who Inspire series, the Women In Leadership Club wanted to bring **women leaders** across **different industries** to talk to us about their experiences, challenges, and opportunities to look forward to. To date, we have covered Technology, Entrepreneurship, and Data.

SESSION 1: WOMEN IN TECH



We collaborated with the **HEC MBA Tech Club** for our first speaker, **Mia Leondakis**, who is the former Vice President of Business Transformation and Automation at VMware. She spoke about her challenges in the tech industry and how she fought against all odds.

WIL HIGHLIGHTS

SESSION 2: WOMEN IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP



As part of this session, we wanted to conduct a **Mini-Trek** for some talented HEC women to **Station-F (the World's largest start-up campus)**.

Our agenda for the trip was:

- Doing a Station F tour
- Having a guided Incubateur tour by **Anna Schwarz** (the HEC point of contact for the HEC Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center)
- Conducting a Speaker Session with **Shaheena Janjuha-Jivraj** (Forbes Contributor and Assistant Professor - HEC Paris, Qatar), and **Emma Cochrane** (Director of Strategic Projects - HEC Paris Innovation & Entrepreneurship Center)
- Meeting the Women Entrepreneurs (**Clemence Demerliac [Cofounder: AdAlong]** and **Juliette Lailier [Cofounder: Kreme]**) at Station F to hear about the current challenges.

We had applications across the **S21 MBAs, J22 MBAs, EMBA, and MiMs**. Unfortunately, due to the tour limit, we could choose only **10 out of the 70** talented applicants.

WIL HIGHLIGHTS

SOME PICTURES FROM OUR FEBRUARY 17TH STATION-F VISIT



WIL HIGHLIGHTS

ADDED TOUR! MARCH 3RD STATION-F VISIT!

We added an additional tour to Station-F on March 3rd after the **overwhelming response** to our visit on February 17th. Our guest speaker for the day was **Camille Franceschi [Cofounder: Joonbot]**. We are glad to see these visits encouraging more women to explore the field of entrepreneurship.



WIL HIGHLIGHTS

SESSION 3: WOMEN IN DATA

HEC

WOMEN WHO INSPIRE

/ women in data /

Manuela Mesa

Consulting Manager at Artefact

Join us! March 7th, 2022 @ 8pm

QR Code

Business Analytics Club x Women in Leadership

We collaborated with the **Business Analytics Club** to hear from HEC alum **Manuela Mesa**, who is a Consulting Manager at Artefact. Manuela shared about her work and the exciting projects at Artefact and also highlighted her experiences by being at the intersection of Data, Consulting and Technology.

COMING UP NEXT...

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR MARCH 10TH!!



To all the strong, smart, beautiful, and confident women of HEC,

Women In Leadership Club invites you to celebrate this **International Women's Month** in the most fun, exciting, and truly **"WIL"** way!

Come sing your heart out and dance the night away at our **Karaoke Cocktail Party!**

Scan the QR code for tickets

limited spots available!



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