

## A conversation with Katie Sellers

Solmaz Purser reports



### Can you briefly explain your current role?

I am the HR business partner for AXELOS, so that I means I support and advise the senior leadership team on people activities and the people strategy. It's very varied, and some of those activities include things such as, supporting interviews, reviews, appraisals, pay reviews, and the gender and BAME pay gap that we did in July. I also provide support with recruiting and selecting candidates for any vacancies.

### What has your career path been?

I had literally no idea what I wanted to do; I just did what I enjoyed. I enjoyed business and psychology and chose those for my A-levels (UK 16-18 qualification).

I found a business psychology degree, which led quite nicely to HR. I applied to lots of graduate schemes and got into one straight out of university. From that role I decided to see if I could get a job in a HR partnering role, and did that in a couple of businesses until I came here.

### Have you faced any challenges as a woman in your industry?

I consider myself quite fortunate that I have progressed quite quickly. In my role, I often sit at the, usually male dominated, senior leadership table. At the beginning of my career I was young and one of very few women in a senior meeting.

However, as my confidence grew, I felt more comfortable contributing to these meetings. Being one of the few, if not the only woman, does make it more daunting to contribute. But you can sort of stick out for a good reason, as being different can provide you with a different perspective.

### What advice do you have for women starting out on their journey?

I would say try to find something you enjoy. There is this notion of going after your dream job, which is brilliant if you've got one, but I never had a dream job. I think one of the reasons that I've been successful is that I have things in my job that I enjoy. There are boring bits in every job, but find stuff you enjoy and try to do as much of that as you can.

### Do you feel you are expected to act differently than a man in the same role?

No, I don't think so. A lot of that comes down to the leaders I've worked for. HR certainly feels more gender balanced and you do find more women in HR than in other industries. I also think in HR we should be better at measuring people against objective success criteria. If we can't do that ourselves, we've got no hope.

### What would you say is your best personality trait, career-wise?

My drive to get stuff done. I've got a bit of a reputation, if you want to it done, get Katie to do it! My enjoyment comes from having done it, not in the doing of it. I'm very driven to learn and try new things. If that means taking on something that scares me, that's ok. The openness to just have a go has really helped

me.

### How has the industry changed since you've been in it?

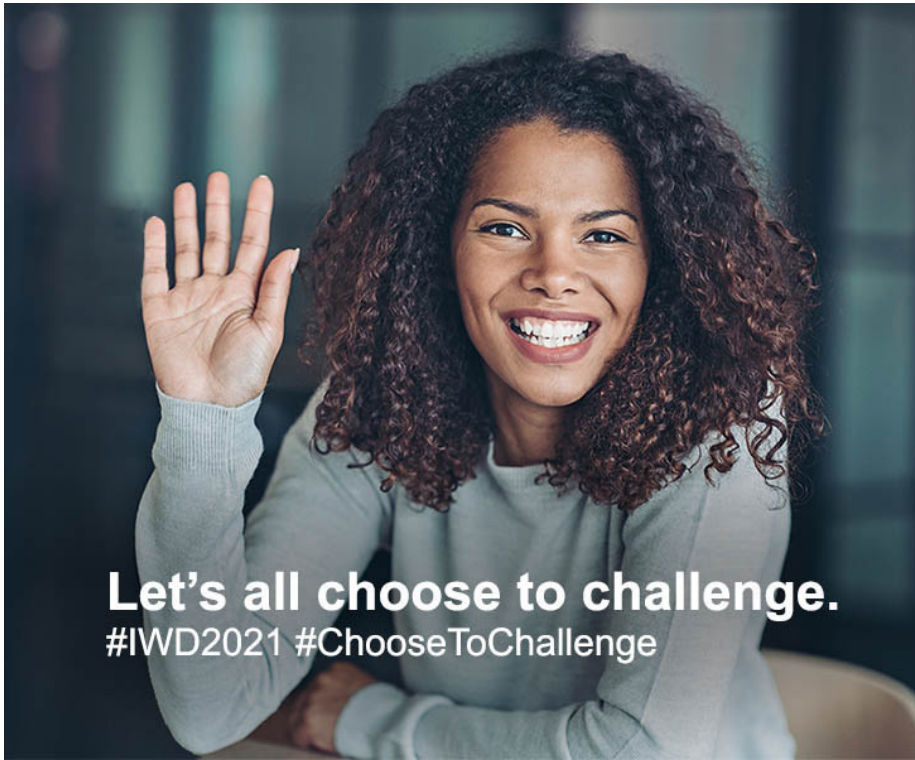
There's a greater focus now than ten years ago on the challenges of developing a diverse workforce. The other big thing for HR is the role of technology and data, which is true for many industries. One example is how we as a business have had to rely on tech to get through Covid, and that we now use data more and more to inform our practices to provide feedback to the business.

### The theme for International Women's Day this year is Choose to Challenge. What does that mean to you?

I think this means not only taking personal responsibility for myself, but also taking responsibility for challenging something that I think is wrong.

### What one issue do you think is most important for women in the professional world today?

I think we must be conscious of the impact of Covid. We know that women are more likely, but not exclusively, to take on caring responsibilities. I'm proud to say that Capita and Axelos have policies to support employees in those situations.



**Let's all choose to challenge.**  
#IWD2021 #ChooseToChallenge

We have wellbeing initiatives where we encourage those who are struggling to get support.

**What does a gender equal world look like to you?**

Somewhere where our differences are just viewed as that, that we don't have stereotypes or expectations based on gender or another physical characteristic.

**The international women's day campaign is 'choose to challenge'. How can workplaces challenge gender bias?**

Just by being aware of them. Last year we completed the gender pay gap report. As a result, we implemented unconscious bias training, introduced gender balanced interview panels, and decided to tell interviewees the salary at the same point in the interview process. We also ensured that interviewees faced the same questions and expectations, regardless of their gender.

**During your career in HR, how have you seen the progression of women's issues in the workplace and what do you think will happen in future?**

There has been a significant shift in women's voices. There has been the Me Too movement, a greater visibility of women in sport, politics, and media. The introduction of shared parental leave in 2015 speaks volumes. I don't know what will happen in the future, but I hope to see the evolution of female leadership.

**How can organizations support women to move into leadership roles?**

At AXELOS we have implemented the leadership profile assessment. This is delivered

processes candidates via online games, to see if they have the necessary leadership skills.

**AXELOS works with professionals from all over the world. How can we deal with the cultural differences that arise during these relationships in regard to women's rights?**

Capita are designing a zero-tolerance policy on harassment and discrimination. Capita works in many countries with very different laws. If we disagree so vehemently with a country's laws, should we even operate there? This is a difficult question. We want to know that the people we are dealing with are treated fairly, but how do you decide what's fair?

**What are your thoughts on women in tech?**

Wouldn't it be great if we lived in a world where that isn't even a question? Society seems to push girls away from STEM. By the time it comes to choosing careers, many girls decide to avoid the STEM route. To get more women into tech, we really need to challenge the perception that STEM is not for girls.

**How do you encourage and empower other women at AXELOS?**

The first step in achieving gender equality and equity is by acknowledging and breaking down those existing biases. For example, last year we implemented unconscious bias training. Some employees also avoid employing women of a certain age, in case they decide to start a family. My role as a HR business partner is to discuss, acknowledge, and challenge these issues with managers.

'A challenged world is an alert world'

#ChoosetoChallenge  
#AXELOSforEquality

