

Interview Series.

Leaders making a difference, 2024.

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Cristina Santos

Business Director, Univar Solutions

With a career spanning more than 30 years, Cristina is currently Business Director of Univar Solutions, a global chemical and ingredients distribution company. Closely linked to the chemical industrial chemical sector, Cristina's career has been marked by the continuous pursuit of perfection in the essentials, respecting people and their individualities.

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How did you start your career in the chemical industry?

My first degree was in Humanities. After a period of study and training abroad, I returned to Brazil and started my career in a chemical company, where I translated technical reports, among other activities. In this position, I had the opportunity to get to know the ins and outs of the "chemical world" and I fell in love with it. I soon moved on to other roles, always with the perspective of growing and valuing processes.

Currently, I work as a business manager for a global company, in the Health and Nutrition Unit for Latin America. Under my management, we distribute chemicals and ingredients, providing integrated solutions for the food and pharmaceutical industries. Throughout my career, I have worked in various segments of the chemical industry, such as agro, cosmetics, cleaning and now with pharma and food, all of which have high regulatory demands, requiring special attention to robust and efficient processes.

During these more than 30 years, I have always worked to continuously improve processes and operations, with great dedication and discipline, focusing on constant learning and refining ways of working to achieve better results.



How can corporate culture and good leadership make a difference in managing the continuous improvement of operations?

I believe it all starts with people. They make the difference. From the moment we focus and make sure we have the right people in the right places, aligned with their capabilities, competencies and attitudes, we can increase our tolerance for the mistakes that are part of growth. And in doing so, we provide environments that are psychologically safe and which can foster innovation and transformation.

It is important to underline that changing thoughts and cultures is continuous work, with no finish line. It requires a deliberate, planned and daily effort. The role of close and present leadership, with active listening and radical honesty, in an environment of high stakes and care for people, is fundamental. It is essential the culture of the organisation is constantly evident in the attitudes and behaviours of leaders, embodying the core values of the organisation. There is no success or cultural adherence when leaders are not the references. The leader is the example and the vector of change. I'd conclude with a couple more important points: the quality of recruitment and selection, the involvement and dedication of leaders and, finally, the courage to make decisions, always in search of a high-performance team.

// I have always worked with the aim of continuously improving processes and operations, with great dedication and discipline, focusing on constant learning and refining ways of working to achieve better results."

1. SCOTT, Kim. Radical Candor. St. Martin's Press: 2017.



// Our company works with market leaders in the Agro, Pharma and Food segments. Good EH&S, ESG and overall process management is a basic premise and a calling card for the success of our business".

Q What impact do other areas have in helping to continuously improve operations so that the company is better positioned to withstand industry volatility and succeed in the long term?

In the organisation where I work, one of our values is that "together we win", i.e. it's one gear. Our company works with market leaders in the agri-food, pharmaceutical and food segments. Good EH&S, ESG and process management in general is a basic premise and a calling card for the success of our business.

To give an example from a business point of view, we work with the big five in the agricultural sector, producing part of their product range in our facilities. If we do not manage safety, sustainability and process robustness well, we will not be able to achieve long-term partnerships with these players. Always keeping in mind the importance of each and every one of our employees. The well-being and professional experience of people has a direct impact on the quality of our solutions and the experience of our customers.

Q If you had to identify three key factors for sustaining continuous improvement in your industry sector, what would they be?

Firstly, people and culture. Secondly, the robustness of processes. Thirdly, systems to make data manageable and processes reproducible.

Q What initiative or action have you taken in your career that has made a difference and that you are most proud of?

I don't see anything in particular. For me it is a question of continuity, of building, of developing high-performance teams, of taking care of people, of striving for the basics to be perfect every day. I am proud to be recognised as a demanding professional who always seeks the best, respecting people and their particularities.

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