

My skills *Capacità al centro*

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Promoting Gender Equality and Inclusion in the Workplace: A Comparison of Best Practices

Gender equality and inclusivity are fundamental values recognised both nationally and internationally. In Italy, the UNI/PdR 125:2022 Gender Equality Certification was introduced to promote their adoption within organisations, whilst the United Nations has enshrined gender equality as Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, signed by 193 countries. However, these principles often struggle to translate into concrete actions within organisations: Italy's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index has dropped over the past three years (63rd in 2022, 79th in 2023, and 87th in 2024 out of 146 countries). This highlights the need for further support for businesses in implementing gender equality initiatives.

As part of the PARI Directive (Innovative Network Projects and Actions for Gender Equality and Balance), with a call for proposals approved and co-financed by the Veneto Region alongside the European Social Fund Plus (FSE+), the Venice School of Management at Ca' Foscari University conducted research within the project

SIADOM – *Social Innovation Alliance for Diversity Management and Innovation of Organisational Models*, led by Forema S.r.l. The project aimed to analyse best practices for embedding gender inclusion within various organisational contexts. Drawing upon the Employee Life Cycle (ELC) model, the research examined HR practices through a gender equality lens to identify pivotal actions that can be executed at each stage of the employee journey. The objective was to bolster the role of women in the workplace, based on insights from academic literature. This model was subsequently employed in an empirical study involving a diverse sample of Italian companies – varied in size and industry – that were pioneers in securing the Gender Equality Certification within their sectors. The result is a comprehensive dashboard of best practices to help companies promote inclusion at every stage of the employee life cycle.

Attracting Employees

Among the most effective initiatives in the attraction phase are partnerships with local educational institutions. Establishing a dialogue with the next generation of workers – who often hold different values and are particularly attuned to diversity and inclusion – is crucial. Welcoming students for internships or dissertation projects, participating in school-based initiatives, and actively encouraging young women to explore careers in traditionally male-dominated sectors not only broadens their horizons but also enhances employer awareness and attraction. Another strategic element is inclusive communication. The study highlights the importance of using gender-neutral language, adopting a tone that avoids aggression or excessive competitiveness (which can deter female applicants), and selecting imagery that reflects the company's commitment to diversity. Publicly showcasing the achievement of the Gender Equality Certification through communication channels was also well received by prospective candidates.

Hiring Employees

To achieve true gender parity during recruitment, companies should invest in objective, pre-defined evaluation systems. The anonymisation of CVs and the formation of selection panels that include at least one woman are also crucial steps towards fair and transparent hiring processes.

Integrating Employees

Several key practices have emerged to promote gender equality during the onboarding process. These include tailored integration processes to assist female employees as they transition into new roles, and the establishment of anonymous channels for reporting harassment or bullying.

Given the ongoing imbalance in familial responsibilities in Italy – with Save the Children data from 2024 indicating that one in five women leaves the workforce after their first child, and one in two following the second – providing support for parenthood becomes essential. Initiatives such as remote working and flexible hours enhance employee well-being and improve performance across the board. Another valuable resource is mentoring and coaching, provided for employees going through significant life changes, such as the arrival of a child or the care of an elderly parent. These programmes assist individuals in rebalancing and reassessing their career paths within a supportive environment.

Developing Employees

Mentoring and coaching also play a crucial role in career development and advancement, particularly when used to assist individuals in building self-awareness, enhancing soft skills, and pursuing well-defined professional goals – thereby overcoming any personal barriers they may encounter.

Training is equally vital. To generate lasting cultural change – both within organisations and society – gender equality and inclusion training must be offered

to all employees across all levels of the company, not merely on a voluntary basis or limited to one gender. For example, organisations could consider incorporating it into mandatory training, expanding the definition of employee well-being, and including it within the Risk Assessment Document (DVR). When designing a training programme, it is essential that it is experiential and engaging, capable of fostering long-term change and enabling the talents of all individuals to emerge and be valued, regardless of gender.

Performance Evaluation and Promotion & Compensation

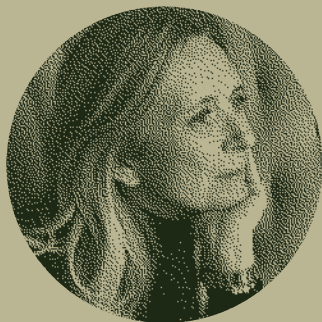
The research emphasises the need for clear, specific, and measurable criteria for performance evaluation and career progression. Fostering a 'feedback culture' – where employees receive constructive input regarding how their work is perceived and how they can develop – helps align individual aspirations with organisational goals. Another progressive practice is to disclose average salaries by job role, thereby creating a transparent benchmark and promoting equity in compensation.

Exiting the Organisation

Although still uncommon, conducting exit interviews to gain a better understanding of why individuals decide to leave the company is a practice of increasing significance. These insights can highlight areas for improvement and inform future strategic adjustments.

Conclusion

Organisations seeking to embed gender equality into their operations can consider this adapted ELC model as a valuable reference. It provides a structured approach for implementing diverse, impactful initiatives throughout all stages of the employee life cycle – ultimately fostering more inclusive, supportive, and equitable workplaces.



Lei & Business

Ionela Lorena Spalatelù

Student, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

in conversation with

Nadia Zenato

Manager of Zenato Azienda Vitivinicola srl e Azienda Agricola La Sansonina

Your family has established a strong winemaking tradition, but you have successfully adapted it to modern challenges. How have you integrated this legacy with your own entrepreneurial vision?

My family passed down not only a knowledge and passion for wine, but also a deep sense of responsibility for this legacy. For me, honouring tradition doesn't just mean preserving it – it means evolving it with awareness. Like every sector, the world of wine is constantly evolving: markets shift, consumer needs change, technology advances, and, above all, there is a growing demand for a more sustainable approach. My aim has been to preserve the identity and excellence that have made Zenato wines a benchmark, while also projecting our products into the future through innovative ideas. I've invested in enhancing the territory – because great wine starts with the land – and focused on innovation in both the vineyard and the cellar to improve quality while respecting the environment. I've also placed great importance on communication and promoting wine culture so that our story is not just told but experienced and shared with new generations. I believe the key is balance: respecting one's roots without becoming trapped in the past and having the courage to innovate while maintaining our authentic essence.

Today, wine is increasingly recognised as a product of culture and identity. How do you think women can positively influence the world of wine – not only as consumers but also as active protagonists in its development?

Wine reflects culture, local territory, and identity – and women have always played a fundamental role in this narrative, even if it has long remained in the shadows. Fortunately, things are changing. Women bring a unique sensitivity to the wine world, possessing a detail-oriented vision and the ability to innovate while honouring tradition. Our natural inclination towards care and

relationships enables us to forge genuine connections with both the land and those who appreciate and select wine. Additionally, there is a significant entrepreneurial aspect: an increasing number of women are now leading wineries with determination and competence, adopting inclusive and sustainable leadership models that integrate quality, ethics, and innovation. Another key point is the narrative surrounding wine. Women possess a unique talent for sharing the story of wine with authenticity – going beyond technical details to convey the emotion behind each bottle. This is essential in an era where consumers seek not only a product but also an experience and an identity they can connect with. I believe the real challenge isn't solely increasing the number of women in the sector, but also ensuring that their contributions are recognised and valued. The wine world requires diverse voices and various sensitivities – only then can it continue to evolve while remaining true to its most authentic soul.

As we look to the future, which measures do you think should be implemented to enhance women's employability in the wine industry? How can companies contribute to promoting strong, authentic female leadership?

Increasingly, women are selecting education and career paths related to wine – spanning from viticulture to oenology, from marketing to business management. However, we must address multiple levels to enhance employability and guarantee genuine growth opportunities.

The first step is investing in education; we need academic and training programmes that encourage young women to perceive the wine industry as a dynamic and open professional environment. Companies can contribute by promoting internships, mentorships, and tailored development pathways that showcase female talent and assist new generations in overcoming cultural barriers and lingering stereotypes.

But employability isn't just about access to work – it's also about how companies create inclusive environments and value women's contributions at every level. This means introducing flexible policies that enable women to balance their professional and personal lives without compromising their ambitions. It also means promoting leadership models based not on clichés but on skill, vision, and competence.

Female leadership in wine shouldn't just be viewed as 'possible' – it should be considered a recognised asset. True change will occur when we discuss women in leadership as a natural reality, based on merit and ability. Companies can make a genuine difference by rewarding talent regardless of gender and nurturing a workplace culture where women no longer need to 'prove their worth' but are appreciated for the value they bring.

In your experience as an entrepreneur and your dedication to social and cultural causes, how important is work-life balance to you – particularly in a complex business like winemaking? How do you navigate your leadership role alongside personal commitments?

Work-life balance is essential, particularly in a complex industry like winemaking. Finding this balance isn't always easy because wine is not merely a product; it embodies a living reality that follows the rhythm of nature and the market, requiring attention at every stage, from vineyard to bottle.

A perfect balance may be just an illusion – I prefer to talk about harmony and passion for what you do. Balance involves integrating the various aspects of life in a fluid manner, without viewing work as a sacrifice or personal time as a luxury. It's a daily exercise in awareness, priorities, and choices. You engage in the work because you love it.

In my leadership role, I've learned to delegate and trust the people I work with. Building a strong team of capable individuals who share my vision allows me not to be everywhere at once. I can concentrate on strategic decisions and fostering strong ethical values. This is crucial because often leaders feel such a weight of responsibility that they can never disconnect. However, I believe a good leader is also someone who understands how to create space for others, recognising talent and nurturing an environment where the business doesn't depend on just one person.

I personally find energy and inspiration by dedicating time to my passions and family and by sharing meaningful moments. Wine is a symbol of conviviality and beauty, and I enjoy embodying what I produce not only as an entrepreneur but also as a woman who loves culture, travel, and art. I truly believe that the quality of life of a business leader is reflected in the quality of their business choices: being curious and open to the world allows for a broader, more creative, and sustainable vision.

Balancing it all isn't simple, but it's possible – if you accept that there's no one-size-fits-all formula, only your own way of living your role with authenticity and passion.

Gender equality goes beyond representation; it encompasses access to opportunities and the acknowledgment of talent. What actions have you implemented within your company to cultivate an inclusive culture and promote the rise of female talent?

At our company, we focus on building an inclusive culture rooted in merit, collaboration, and a constant desire to learn and grow. One of the most important aspects, in my opinion, is supporting talent through concrete development opportunities. This includes offering ongoing training, encouraging women to assume strategic and decision-making roles, and, above all, creating an environment where they feel heard and supported in their professional growth. Flexibility is also key. The wine world demands great dedication, but I believe a modern business must also recognise the need to balance personal and professional life – without this being a barrier to advancement. That's why we aim to adopt work models that allow everyone on the team to express their full potential without sacrificing personal well-being. Supporting female talent involves not only creating opportunities within the company but also acting as a role model and reference point for those aspiring to enter the field. I actively promote women's leadership in the wine industry through networks, mentorships, and initiatives designed to bring visibility to women in wine. I believe that sharing success stories, experiences, and building connections is one of the most effective ways to inspire future generations and demonstrate that change is possible. Ultimately, it's not about favouring women over men; it's about creating a system where talent and passion are the sole criteria for growth. I believe this is a challenge not just for businesses, but for the entire wine sector: a fairer, more inclusive world that embraces diversity is one that is also richer in ideas, innovation, and quality.

With your passion and ability to think beyond boundaries, in 2019, you transformed your company into an artistic hub that supports emerging young artists from both Italian and international schools while also promoting your winery, local territory, and community through photography.

How did this project, which combines your two passions, come about? How important is it for you to educate younger generations about a more conscious and respectful approach to wine and the land?

The project we launched in 2019 originated from a simple idea, yet one that is deeply rooted in my vision of wine: wine is not merely a product – it is a cultural expression, a narrative that intertwines land, history, tradition, people, and beauty.

The idea of creating an artistic workshop within the winery stemmed from a desire to establish a dialogue between two worlds that actually have much in common. Like art, wine is made of emotion, detail, gestures, beauty, and time. Every bottle tells a story, just as every photograph captures a unique interpretation of reality. Giving space to young artists from Italian and international schools was a way of showcasing fresh perspectives on our territory and philosophy. It was fascinating to see how their sensitivity could offer a new, unexpected vision of our winemaking world. However, this project is not merely a tribute to art – it is also a commitment to future generations. I believe it is vital to educate young people in a more mindful and respectful approach to wine, and their surroundings.

To me, this project confirmed how wine can serve as a bridge between generations, disciplines, and different perspectives. I'm convinced that it's precisely through this kind of cross-pollination that we can continue to innovate without losing sight of our roots – constantly challenging ourselves anew.

Many of your business decisions are guided by environmental respect and a commitment to sustainability, merging tradition with innovation. What measures have you implemented to enhance your company's sustainability?

Sustainability isn't just a choice; it's a responsibility that every wine producer should deeply feel. Wine is born from the land, and only by respecting it can we secure a future not just for our company but for the entire winemaking community.

One of our major investments has been in vineyard management. We've introduced sustainable farming techniques to reduce environmental impact: we work with methods that promote biodiversity, minimise chemical treatments, and practise *green manuring* – an

ancient farming technique that naturally enriches the soil.

In the cellar, we've optimised production processes to reduce energy consumption and enhance resource efficiency. We minimize waste and use eco-friendly packaging materials, such as lighter glass bottles. Even our corks come from sustainable sources, and we're experimenting with 100% organic corks – because every detail matters when it comes to reducing our ecological footprint.

Sustainability is a social and economic commitment. That's why we closely collaborate with our community, supporting local employment and promoting initiatives that encourage a conscious wine culture. A genuinely sustainable business creates value not just for itself but for the entire community it serves.

What are your ambitions for Zenato in the coming years? Are there new markets, products, or technologies you would like to explore to expand your brand while maintaining a focus on quality and authenticity?

Zenato's future will always be guided by the values that define us: quality, authenticity, innovation, and respect for the land. We look ahead, knowing that the wine market is constantly evolving and that to remain true to our identity, we must be willing to innovate without losing sight of our history.

One of our key goals in the coming years is to strengthen our presence in international markets. To that end, we're working on communication and distribution strategies that will help us share our philosophy even more effectively – both in established markets like the US and Europe, and in emerging ones where we are seeing growing interest in high-quality wines.

On the production side, we continue to invest in research and innovation to improve quality in an environmentally responsible manner.

We're also expanding our efforts to promote the territory through increasingly immersive wine tourism experiences. I believe wine should be experienced, not just tasted – and we want to provide wine lovers with an authentic journey into our world, one enriched with encounters, culture, and discovery.

Beyond all the concrete projects, my greatest ambition is to keep the company's spirit alive: the family passion that has always guided us, the respect for

our history, and the desire to pass on a strong, evolving legacy to the next generation – one that remains true to itself. The future presents an exciting challenge, and the beauty of this profession lies in the fact that there is always something new to learn, to embrace, and to marvel at.

This year, you've been a mentor in the LeadHer project, a part of Ca' Foscari's Lei initiative. How is the experience going?

I'm thrilled to be part of the mentorship project, which gives me the chance to support two mentees. I hope to involve them directly in the life of the company as much as possible, given that one of them is currently studying abroad. For example, I'm already planning to invite them to attend Vinitaly, one of the most important events of the year for our winery, so they can experience the wine world up close and get a sense of our daily work.

I'm also considering offering a summer internship to provide them with hands-on experience and deepen their understanding of how this industry operates.

I firmly believe that education should connect more closely with the world of work, bridging theory and real-life practice.

I have great faith in the future and in the younger generations; their outlook on life, growth, and innovation inspires me. I believe I have much to teach, but equally as much to learn from them. Curiosity and a desire to discover are essential for growth and innovation, and that's the spirit with which I want to approach the future – both professionally and personally.

Nadia Zenato

From the very beginning, Nadia Zenato felt that her destiny was deeply rooted in her homeland – yet equally driven by a desire to travel, explore the world, and engage with different cultures. Today, she is responsible for strategy, sales network, and marketing at Zenato, the family-run winery founded in the 1960s in Peschiera del Garda. Now a thriving enterprise with around 90 hectares of vineyards, Zenato has expanded into Valpolicella, where it has undertaken a rigorous process of refining indigenous grape varieties such as Corvina and Oseleta. This work has proven decisive in the winery's international success, with its wines – including Lugana, Valpolicella, Ripasso, and

Amarone – now distributed in over 65 countries worldwide.

Nadia's love for her land and her appreciation of aesthetics, combined with a relentless drive to push boundaries, led her to embrace a bold challenge alongside her mother, Carla Prospero: to create a red wine in a region known for its whites. The result was *Sansonina*.

Nadia's connection to the world of wine, her sensitivity to the landscape, and her appreciation for the harmony of form, craftsmanship, and art have all inspired her to embark on a creative journey. This inspiration led to the creation of Nadia Zenato Jewelry, a line of jewellery influenced by the world of wine. In 2019, to consolidate and enhance the visibility of her cultural initiatives and efforts over the past decade, Nadia founded Zenato Academy – a space dedicated to supporting young artists.

Nadia's deep connections to the local territory are also reflected in her active participation in various local and national associations. She serves as National Councillor and Veneto Delegate for Le Donne del Vino (The Women of Wine), an Italian association of about 800 women dedicated to promoting wine culture. She is also a member of the Italian Young Wine Entrepreneurs Association, Women of Valpolicella, and the Young Industrialists of Verona group.

Engaged in industry networks, she is also a member of YPO – Young Presidents' Organisation, an international community of over 22,000 entrepreneurs and executives across 125 countries, dedicated to sharing ideas and experiences and fostering both professional and personal growth.

Nadia is also involved in charitable work. Through the family business, she supports Save Guinea, an international initiative run by the non-profit organization Spirit in Dance. This organisation aids Franciscan missions in Guinea-Bissau.



Wannabe Her

Manuela Biancoli

Student,
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in conversation with

Veronica Bassani

Cultural Project Manager at Accademia Perduta in Faenza and President of the cultural association Fatti d'Arte, Faenza

Wannabe Her is a column dedicated to discovering and promoting innovative, 'out of the ordinary,' or hard-to-access professional roles in fields of interest to Ca' Foscari students. In this issue, we explore the role of a project manager in the cultural sector.

Introduction

Working as a project manager in the cultural sector requires being adaptable to a fluid environment, where roles and budgets are often not as clearly defined as in other industries. Numerous dynamics come into play, with just as many figures involved in delivering a cultural project: artistic direction, technical staff, communications teams, and production units. These dynamics must be understood and managed with care and attention, always keeping in mind that the ultimate goal of any cultural project is to leave something meaningful with the audience.

Veronica Bassani is a cultural project manager at the theatre production centre Accademia Perduta in Faenza. While still in secondary school, she founded the cultural association Fatti d'Arte, which she currently directs. Since 2020, in collaboration with Faenza's SOS Donna anti-violence centre, she has been running Sorelle Festival, a cultural initiative dedicated to female empowerment through the arts and culture.

The Need for Hard and Soft Skills

To work as a project manager in the cultural sector, one must be inclined to be multidisciplinary and cross-functional. Each project has its own specific needs, and staying constantly up to date is essential for responding effectively. Soft skills such as clarity and grace under pressure are crucial in this role and can be developed and refined over time. Lifelong learning is vital and should go hand in hand with a humble attitude – one cannot be an expert in everything. For example, if you are working on a project focused on a

specific historical period with which you are unfamiliar, it is essential to dedicate time to research it. A good cultural project manager must also be capable of engaging with local communities and understanding their needs – never taking anything for granted.

It's equally important to ask questions and not be afraid to do so. Picking up the phone may seem like a small task, but it can be intimidating for younger generations. Yet it's precisely in high-pressure moments that the ability to communicate quickly and effectively makes all the difference.

Regarding hard skills, each project has its own technical requirements, but a universal skill essential across the board is the ability to write a funding application and identify the necessary stakeholders, whether they are partners, sponsors, or institutions.

Are specific qualifications required? Were there any gaps you needed to fill?

If you already know you want to become a cultural project manager, certain degree programmes can help. However, that doesn't mean you can't enter this field without them. My path, for example, was anything but linear.

I studied at a classical secondary school in Faenza, which provided me with a strong foundation in my areas of interest: theatre, art, and culture in general. That education instilled in me a lasting belief that culture is beautiful and participatory – a sentiment I still carry into the projects I pursue.

After high school, I wanted to enrol in a drama school, but my parents were concerned about this choice, so we had to compromise. I ended up earning a degree in nursing, even though I knew it wasn't my true calling. Throughout secondary school and university, I never stopped pursuing my passion for theatre and culture.

In 2015, while still in school, I co-founded the Fatti d'Arte cultural association with other young women. We organised workshops with artists, exhibitions, and theatre courses – activities we continue to run today.

After graduation, I planned to audition for the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, but at the same time, my father fell ill and eventually passed away. This made me question everything. When you're 23 and realise how suddenly life can end, you also understand there's no time to waste. I didn't go to Milan; I stayed in Faenza to be close to my father. In the meantime, my path crossed with

Accademia Perduta, which was running an advanced training course for actors and writers in Bologna.

Thanks to my nursing degree, I was able to enrol in a Master's programme in Cultural Project Design and Urban Regeneration – another area I deeply care about. That course opened my eyes to the existence of public calls and taught me how to write them effectively. It helped me truly grasp what it means to be a partner, a sponsor, an institution, a stakeholder – terms you often hear but rarely understand in depth.

Before becoming a cultural project manager at Accademia Perduta and working in parallel with my role at Fatti d'Arte, I spent three years as a freelancer, managing independent projects with museums, festivals, and cultural associations.

In 2019, the SOS Donna centre in Faenza reached out with a small budget and asked if I could develop a project that would explore gender-related themes through the arts. In 2020, with Fatti d'Arte, I created a festival focused on gender issues. That's how Sorelle Festival came to be – and it's now one of our association's most meaningful events.

What is your perspective on female representation in cultural event management? Is there a necessity for enhanced recognition?

I believe that women are highly present in the world of cultural event management. Behind the scenes, it's often women who are running things – think of make-up artists, costume designers, graphic designers. The real issue is that women's contributions often go unrecognised, and this isn't limited to the cultural sphere. Everything women do is frequently taken for granted – starting with domestic care. In my line of work, when everything runs smoothly, even amid chaos, it's often because women pay extra attention to detail – though that effort often goes unnoticed.

What inspired you to found the cultural association Fatti d'Arte?

We were still in secondary school when we started Fatti d'Arte. The association was born out of the desire to bring to our town something we felt was missing. For us, that meant theatre courses that truly reflected our tastes and needs. Therefore, we decided to invite artists we wanted to collaborate with and create a space for dialogue through theatre, addressing issues we cared about – especially gender equality.

Feminism has been the key to our journey from the beginning. Even in the scripts we wrote for the children in our theatre classes, we always aimed to convey messages of female empowerment, ensuring that gender equality was a central theme in everything we did.

You continued running Fatti d'Arte throughout university. How did you balance your studies and work? What challenges did you face, and what did you learn?

The key lies in making conscious choices and understanding what your priorities are at any given time. Of course, you need to pass your mandatory exams at university, but I've always believed that if there's an opportunity you don't want to miss, you should take it and sit the exam in September.

We live in a society that always demands high performance, so I think it's essential to take care of our mental health.

The ages between 20 and 35 is when we shape who we are in every aspect. Therefore, it's important not to deny yourself experiences – whether it's attending a festival or going on a date. The crucial thing is to listen to yourself, understand your priorities now, and not lose sight of them.

Since 2020, Fatti d'Arte has organised Sorelle Festival every March. Each edition focuses on a different theme – what themes have you explored, and what was the focus for 2025?

The first year we explored the theme of the body – both the political body and the concept of self-acceptance. The second year focused on women who break the mould, challenging societal norms with behaviours often perceived as brazen, but which genuinely pave the way for others. The third edition was dedicated to independence, inspired by the goddess Artemis, who surrounded herself with sisters and nymphs instead of men – representing emancipation and freedom from societal expectations. The fourth year focused on heretics – modern-day witches – exploring how they are 'burned at the stake' through online hate storms, which can be more damaging than fire itself. Last year, under the theme *Revolutionaries*, we examined the shift from marginalisation to active participation in society, addressing sexual and social revolution from a transfeminist perspective.

This year's theme is *Unleashed* – and we're exploring the concept of freedom:

the freedom not to be a mother, but also the freedom within motherhood; the freedom to express oneself, to choose, and to be fully oneself in every aspect of life.

Have you noticed a growing interest in women's issues during the festival? How would you describe the current atmosphere?

There's a wonderful energy – you wish it would never end. People come not just for the events but also to debate and engage, which is incredibly exciting. Last year, for instance, some men attending one of the discussions felt the need to vent about “all these freedoms women are taking”. I think for those accustomed to a certain patriarchal model, losing their privileges can feel uncomfortable. At the same time, there's a strong sense of togetherness and collective creation. The exhibitions – often abstract – manage to resonate with everyone, sometimes in a provocative manner.

We explore many themes that, together, create a sense of sisterhood and shared purpose – a genuine desire to be present and participate – something that has been absent for quite some time.

What advice would you give to a student or recent graduate wanting to start their own cultural association? Listen to yourselves, understand what you want to do, get organised, and go for it. Nothing is impossible. Yes, there are many limits and challenges, but I truly believe that if you listen to yourself, observe where you are, react and act accordingly, that's how revolutions are made.

Veronica Bassani

Born in 1994, works as a cultural project manager at the Teatro Comunale di Faenza for Accademia Perduta. Graduated from Classical High School in Faenza, she developed a passion for cultural and social projects early on, actively engaging in the city's community life from a young age. In 2015, she co-founded an association with other young women called Fatti d'Arte.

After high school, she earned a degree in Nursing from the University of Bologna, where she wrote an experimental thesis on theatre in therapeutic settings: *Theatre and Disability: Promoting Resilience*. She then pursued two additional educational paths: the first, an advanced training program for actor-writers, where she deepened her

knowledge of playwriting and stage production; the second, a master's in urban regeneration at *Demetra Formazione* in Ravenna, focusing on the connection between culture, the urban landscape, and social dynamics.

Today, she works between Faenza, Bologna, and Milan, constantly on the move and seeking new inspirations. She teaches theatre courses for children and teenagers, curates exhibitions and cultural events, designs and develops cultural projects and festivals for institutions and associations, and serves as the artistic director of Sorelle Festival.

A Place for Her

Personal Branding for Women: Making Your Value Visible

Sebastiano Zanolli
Manager and author

Why should a man talk about women's personal branding?

I get asked this question often. My answer? I've seen far too much female talent remain in the shadows, and that's a waste we simply cannot afford. In today's professional world, where visibility is just as crucial as competence, this tendency towards invisibility comes at too great a cost.

There's one truth I always reiterate in my workshops: “If you don't tell your own story, someone else will do it for you”. It's no coincidence that many women tend to hold back when it comes to promoting their own achievements. The result? A professional world that misses out on valuable opportunities, talents that remain untapped, voices that go unheard.

Let's clarify this: Personal Branding is not narcissism. It's about knowing how to enter a room and get noticed without shouting. It's the art of making your value visible with authenticity and strategy. However, there's a subtle, pervasive obstacle that frequently prevents women from shining: the ‘good girl’ trap. It's that constant whisper telling you to wait your turn, not to raise your hand, and not to shine too brightly. It's a voice that gradually transforms modesty into invisibility. Research indicates that women who openly discuss their achievements are frequently perceived as less likeable or excessively ambitious. This phenomenon, known as ‘likability bias’, compels many professionals to minimise their successes for fear of being judged.

Consider the example of Sheryl Sandberg, former COO of Meta, who, in

her 2013 book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, highlighted how women often underestimate their abilities in comparison to men, even when achieving the same results. Those who have dared to challenge this dynamic have demonstrated that visibility and authority can coexist without compromising authenticity.

To overcome these barriers, women's personal branding must be built on three fundamental, interconnected pillars.

The first pillar is a strategic digital presence. It's not about being everywhere but rather about being where it truly matters. A well-crafted online portfolio is worth more than a thousand random posts, and LinkedIn is not Facebook; every piece of content should serve a clear purpose and direction.

The second pillar is the right network. It's not just about collecting contacts but about cultivating meaningful relationships through carefully chosen professional communities, reciprocal mentorship programmes, and targeted collaborations that amplify your message. Within this network of relationships, Personal Branding finds the fertile ground to grow.

The third pillar, impactful communication, is perhaps the most delicate. This is where what I refer to as the assertiveness balance comes into play – finding the perfect equilibrium between strength and empathy. It's not about choosing whether to be ‘tough’ or ‘kind’; true authority emerges from the ability to navigate between firmness and understanding, adapting to the context without losing one's essence.

The resulting professional narrative is akin to a lighthouse in the fog: it isn't there to illuminate the entire sea, but to guide the right ships to your harbour. It's not about telling everything, but about conveying what matters, in the way that matters. In this process, authenticity becomes the secret ingredient – like salt in cooking: you don't see it, but it makes all the difference. In a market saturated with masks and meticulously crafted personas, the ability to be authentically professional becomes the true competitive advantage.

Women's personal branding is not merely a communication strategy – it's an act of empowerment. It involves occupying space in a world that frequently encourages you to remain in the background. It means sharing your story without awaiting anyone's permission.

There are no magical formulas in women's personal branding, but there are strategic tools that, if used consciously, can make a significant difference. It's not a mysterious art but a carefully calibrated blend of expertise, strategy, and the courage to be seen.

As a man, I must make an admission: I can observe, study, and analyse, but I will never fully understand what it means to be a woman in today's professional world. I will never completely grasp that delicate tension between visibility and authenticity, between assertiveness and empathy. These tools, these insights, these reflections – they merely serve as a map. The real challenge – harmonising these strategies with your own sensitivity, transforming them into something deeply personal and authentic – belongs to you. And it is precisely this personalisation, this ability to make every piece of advice and strategy your own, that will make the real difference. It's not just Personal Branding. It's Personal Being. And it's all yours.