

Protecting the Company in an Uncertain World

Interviews and Profiles



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Maria Pernas, Group General Counsel, Commercial and Contract Management, Capgemini

Maria Pernas joined Capgemini in 2017 as group general counsel, rapidly implementing an in-depth transformation program to further align the legal department with the business objectives of the company. Five years on, ACC spoke to Maria to find out where things are now.

ACC: You have vast experience working as a GC in multinational firms. Currently, you serve as Group Executive Committee member in charge of Legal and Commercial and Contract Management at Capgemini. Please tell us what motivated you to pursue a career in law and what your current position involves**?**

Maria Pernas: I went to law school because I wanted to become a diplomat. I was attracted to international relations, politics, and multicultural environments. During my legal studies, I quickly became particularly interested in business operations and technology, two passions which I have spent my entire career working on. I soon received an offer to join a large law firm and I then decided to build an international career in the private sector.

Currently, I am responsible for the legal and commercial and contract management teams. In my current role, I see legal not only as a conformity tool but also as something to provide a competitive advantage to accelerate the group's growth and contribute to driving profits.

In recent years, new issues have emerged: the pandemic, risks associated with the geopolitical environment, implications of the new ways of working as well as employees' well-being, increased cybersecurity threats, etc. We have also witnessed a patchwork of new regulations (data, competition, regulations linked to digitization and new technologies, etc.) which impact the way we operate and each of our different stakeholders, but also offer great opportunities for innovation if properly addressed. In this new context, we are "legal strategists." My work is not only being "guardian of the temple" but helping Capgemini manage this new landscape and get ready for what's coming.

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This role allows me to combine the experience I have gained through my legal and business background with my passion for technology, in a human-centric, agile, and innovative company where every day is different.

ACC: What place do GCs hold within Capgemini?

Pernas: I have been at Capgemini for more than five years now, and I can proudly say we are value contributors, acting as business enablers and trusted advisors to the management.

In a highly competitive business environment, we want to bring to Capgemini excellent technical skills, innovative solutions to increasingly complex legal challenges, and a forward-thinking mindset combined with strong transformation capabilities.

We need to be actors in the transformation of today's business and the legal positioning within Capgemini is recognized by all GCs being part of the senior executive boards and committees.

A truly multicultural workplace

ACC: Being a leader in consulting, digital transformation, technology and engineering services, Capgemini has a global presence. With teams located across the world, what is the role of the multicultural workplace to you? What have been some challenges you have faced and lessons you learned from working with your international colleagues?

Pernas: Having spent my entire career in multicultural organizations, I have no doubt that teams with diverse backgrounds, from different nationalities, genders, and cultures, foster innovation and contribute to obtaining the best results. A multicultural workplace provides a world of opportunities for professional and personal development: We can learn from others, discover new ways of doing things, and build outside-the-box solutions.



A multicultural organization offers equal opportunity, produces valuable ideas, and promotes cultural diversity in the workforce. Mushakesa / *Shutterstock.com*

To take the most out of it, it is essential to develop an inclusive and respectful working environment and Capgemini is definitively a role model in this regard. Capgemini is truly a melting pot of all cultures and nationalities, where everybody can thrive.

A particular challenge is communication: making sure everyone works from the same semantic baseline and that culturally-implied messages do not lead to miscommunication. It is very important to make sure we all “speak” the same language and apply the same codes to avoid misunderstandings. Cultural awareness is essential across the teams and, for example, in our case, having a huge presence in India, I’m very keen on all my team members getting to know the Indian culture and customs better.

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DEI at Capgemini

ACC: What is your assessment of the current state of diversity and inclusion in Capgemini and its legal team?

Pernas: At Capgemini, we’re breaking down barriers to a better future. By having a diverse workforce and fostering an inclusive culture, we’re building a place where everyone feels valued. We want to be the company of choice for women in IT, we are committed to equity for all with a fair representation of people with disabilities and from underrepresented minorities and we are strongly committed to tackling racism, building an LGBT+ friendly culture and empowering inclusive leadership.



Representing all minorities and sexual orientations creates room for positivity and allows individuals to be treated fairly in the workplace. Andrey_Popov / *Shutterstock.com*

The Capgemini legal community is also fully committed to creating equal opportunities for all. We do this, not only through supporting Capgemini-wide programs (some lawyers are also local diversity and inclusion leaders), but through our own initiatives. Years ago, in 2018, we launched our Global Corporate Social Responsibility Legal Network.

We are proud that our legal community currently comprises 58 percent women, with 60 percent female representation on our legal leadership teams. We promote gender equality and, among others, every year we select talented women for the opportunity to participate in the European Network for Women in Leadership Program aimed at developing, supporting, and advancing female leadership.

We facilitate a safe environment that respects all sexual orientations by strongly supporting our “Take Pride, Take Action” program. Our legal teams across the globe are involved in intern and mentoring programs to open up pathways for those who may encounter particular difficulties in entering the legal profession. Notable examples include Step Up intern programs, legal internship programs in the United Kingdom and the mentoring of First Nations lawyers in Australia. This supplements our involvement with broader Capgemini inclusion activities such as the creation of a Spanish local inclusive school to train disadvantaged people in information technology.

We are fully committed to playing our part so that everyone can get the future they want with Capgemini.

Sustainability by design

ACC: We see that sustainability and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) are very high in the Capgemini Legal and Commercial and Contract Management (CCM) agenda, can you tell us more about that?

Pernas: Building a sustainable ecosystem is at the very heart of Capgemini's purpose: *Unleashing human energy through technology for an inclusive and sustainable future.* We recently published our ESG policy with ambitious targets.



Creating a sustainable ecosystem is one of Capgemini's primary goals and that first starts with building a ESG policy. Blue Planet Studio/ *Shutterstock.com*

And sustainability is also a key pillar of Impact, the Capgemini Legal Department's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. We believe that we can actively contribute to achieving our group's goals and, more generally, to making a positive impact on society. We want to be the reference in sustainability in the in-house legal and in the commercial and contract management professions, and this translates into strong commitments and very concrete actions.

We have been pioneers by launching our Legal and CCM Sustainability Centre of Excellence, which focuses on developing expertise, monitoring our internal targets, and contributing to the application of "sustainability by design" in all the areas in which we operate.

The Department of Joy

ACC: Where do you place well-being at the workplace?

Pernas: I personally place a very high priority on the well-being of our teams. With hybrid working now becoming part of our new normal, my priority is to provide the legal and CCM teams with a motivating environment that helps maintain their mental and physical well-being. For instance, one of Capgemini's core values is to have fun, so we created what we named "The Department of Joy," where team members volunteer to organize get-togethers, virtual Pilates classes, virtual cafés, picnics, and Zumba online classes. In recent months we have also run a series of webinars on the art of well-being which were interactive sessions covering topics such as mindfulness, posture, how to

relieve stress, and foods to boost immunity.

All of these initiatives are available on our Legal Well-being online microsite, along with other materials aimed at equipping our team with the right toolset to support their personal and professional well-being.

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Staff

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