



# LEADING

With over 20 years of experience at McDermott International, VP of global QHSES, **Shirlie Macatangay** is a trailblazer within the industry. In this exclusive feature, she shares her journey to leadership and discusses the importance of mentorship and women empowerment in the workplace.

# THE WAY

Words by: Angitha Pradeep | Images: Supplied

Over the past few decades, women have made significant progress in breaking down barriers and achieving success in leadership positions across various industries. They have provided exceptional skills, talent, and expertise as well as diverse perspectives. From CEOs to department heads, talented women have steered their companies to new heights, with studies showing that having equal representation of women in leadership positions positively correlates with profitability.

In predominantly male sectors such as oil and gas and construction, women have traditionally faced significant obstacles in reaching senior leadership positions. Many companies in these sectors have recognised the opportunities and are addressing process and unconscious bias through training, programmes and initiatives. For instance, companies proactively train employees about unconscious bias and commit to and take specific steps to create an inclusive culture.

McDermott is a Houston-based engineering and construction company specialising in EPC, designing and delivering complex energy and oil & gas infrastructure projects. The company has more than 100 years of global experience with world-class projects and more than 50 years of operations in the Middle East. Shirlie Macatangay is a trailblazer and valued leader within McDermott. Macatangay joined the company more than 20 years ago and now leads the company's Quality, Health, Safety, Environment and Security (QHSES) function globally.

Macatangay began her career as a university professor in the Philippines and transitioned to a career in the oil and gas industry when she joined Foster Wheeler Philippines as an HSE administrator. "I fell in love with the HSE profession because it involved collaborating with employees and helping them perform their work in a safer manner," she says. "It was a unique opportunity to utilise my teaching background in a practical setting."

Macatangay's hard work and dedication to the HSE field did not go unnoticed, and she was offered a job with McDermott in Dubai in 2002, which she states was the first stepping stone in her long-driven HSE career. She elaborates on her career growth and journey: "Within a year of joining the company, I secured sponsorship to acquire an international HSE diploma, and that was followed by a number of cross-functional, on-the-job training opportunities."

In 2010, Macatangay was appointed as the HSE Training Manager for the Middle East region. She mentions that her appointment was a part of her career development plan at McDermott, which was created in consultation with her boss and mentor.

"In 2010, there was no QHSES training function and framework; it was a completely new function. I was tasked with building an original HSE training function from the ground up and establishing the framework, process, and tools," Macatangay recalls, pointing out that by 2015, McDermott's corporate HQ recognised her successes, and she was asked to do the same for the company's global employees. "It was a challenging and rewarding experience," she adds.

Continuing, Macatangay says: "In the same year [2015], I was appointed as the Global HSE Training Manager, a role that offered a unique blend of responsibilities with a 70% global focus and 30% Middle East focus, as I was in the process of transitioning my regional duties to my successor."

In 2018, following the merger of McDermott and CB&I, Macatangay

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McDermott won the Global OPITO Employer Award in two different years, for its commitment to a safe and competent workforce.

relocated to Houston, where she continued with the global training role within the combined organisation.

"In addition to my training duties, I was tasked with additional overall QHSES functional programmes and initiatives as well as leading the company's global response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which was one of my key tasks."

In April 2022, she was appointed Vice President for Global QHSES, a role that requires Macatangay to spearhead the global QHSES strategy for the organisation. "My primary role is to sustain and align the global QHSES strategy with the corporate strategy and ensure that key competencies associated with the function are maintained by providing our professionals with necessary learning and development plans," she states. "I am grateful for the opportunities and challenges that have supported me in growing and succeeding in my career."

#### Positive impact

Expanding on the challenges, Macatangay highlights several barriers she has faced over the past 20 years. "Initially, moving from the Philippines to Dubai and shifting industries presented some difficulties. From a career perspective, it was like starting from scratch. To progress on my desired career path, I had to develop new skills and acquire new knowledge."

She also touches upon the challenges she faced during her early years in the Middle East. "At the time, there was a degree of bias, often unconscious, based on race, age, and gender," she recalls, adding that this was a formidable challenge that tested her resolve. "However, the adversity fuelled my determination to succeed, despite having moments of self-doubt."

Despite these challenges, Macatangay elaborates on her substantial accomplishments: "I am proud to have established McDermott's QHSES training framework, which has

since expanded globally." Under her leadership, the organisation received the Global OPITO Employer Award in two different years, recognising its commitment to a safe and competent workforce.

"Leading McDermott's global response to the Covid-19 pandemic and aligning with the company's operational values was a huge leap forward," she adds. Additionally, McDermott's 'Taking the lead with QHSES' program demonstrated Macatangay's efforts in building a robust QHSES culture in the organisation, an outcome which led to the launch of the company's operational values, highlighting critical risk present in the workplace and identifying ways to address them.

In an industry that is often perceived as male-dominated, it is essential to acknowledge the incredible success of many women. When asked about the significance of being a female member of the industry, Macatangay says: "I believe that the oil and gas sector is genderless;



Guy McLearn and Shirlie Macatangay



Building a strong partnership with frontline leaders in driving QHSES excellence through training programmes.

however, I agree with studies that have proven how diversity drives innovation. The presence of female members in the industry also brings new solutions, develops new ideas, and strengthens the competitiveness of organisations.

“Furthermore, women bring unique qualities to the table that are essential for success. As a female leader, I have observed that women are often result-driven and multi-taskers. These traits are critical in ensuring that organisations not only remain competitive but also achieve their business objectives.”

When asked about the changing perception of the oil and gas industry, Macatangay comments: “Traditionally, the industry was perceived as male-dominated; however, with the growing number of women in construction and oil and gas, this perception is changing. Successful companies are challenging long-standing stereotypes, and it is working.”

Macatangay reflects on her experience: “I remember going to the construction sites, including our vessels, 15 to 20 years ago when the perception of women in the industry was very different. But this perception is gradually evolving with the increasing representation of women in the field.”

#### Metamorphic milestones

“I’ve been fortunate to have mentors throughout my 22-year career,” says Macatangay, elaborating on the importance of having role models in the company who can offer guidance and support in building successful and fulfilling careers.

“McDermott has consistently invested in my personal and professional development from the moment I joined the company, and has recognised my potential. I have been given opportunities and resources, which have been instrumental in advancing my career. These included on-the-job training, continuing education and coaching, mentoring, and cross-functional assignments.”

She further elaborates: “This holistic approach has played a vital role in my professional growth, and

I always compare my career journey to the metamorphosis of a butterfly. Through my mentors, I grew from a caterpillar to a colourful butterfly; they guided me with the right tools.”

Macatangay is also passionate about paying it forward and mentoring young professionals as they start their careers. “I want to help others reach their full potential, just as my mentors did for me,” she says. “I hope to produce more butterflies in the industry and help others realise their unique colours and strengths.”

Macatangay speaks highly of a mentor she had for 21 years, the late Guy McLearn. “He was a legend at McDermott and played a crucial role in helping me realise my potential,” she recalls. “I’m grateful for his guidance, and his legacy continues to inspire me even after his passing.”

**“AS A LEADER WITHIN THE INDUSTRY, I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS AND DRIVE CHANGE TOWARDS IMPROVING THE PARTICIPATION AND PROMOTION OF WOMEN WITHIN OUR ORGANISATION AND BEYOND.”**

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Production employees taking pride in their craft after the completion of an intensive rigging course led by Shirly Macatangay.

#### Adding value

Regarding diversity and inclusion in the workplace, Macatangay believes that companies in the Middle East are making strides in promoting gender equality, particularly in the hiring process. “We are seeing more company-led efforts and initiatives related to diversity and inclusion,” she says. “However, there is still room for improvement in enabling women to reach senior leadership positions.”

Macatangay explains: “As a leader within the industry, I have had the opportunity to witness and drive change towards improving the participation and promotion of women within our organisation and beyond. In this regard, I firmly believe that combining industry-led initiatives with government and legislative support will greatly enhance progress towards gender equality in the workplace.”

“Additionally, I am involved with private networking organisations such as CHIEF, a women’s group which offers professional and personal support and advice. My goal is to be an active member and use my experiences to inspire and mentor new members. I have also been actively involved in initiatives such as lunch and learn sessions and inspirational talks within McDermott’s Global Women’s Network (GWN). However, I recognise that there is always room for growth and improvement, and I am constantly seeking ways to expand my impact and advocacy for diversity and inclusion.”

When asked what she would say to her 16-year-old self or the current generation of young women, Macatangay’s advice is imbued with wisdom and insight. She encourages them to strive for growth and development, to be bold, to take risks when the opportunity presents itself, and never lose sight, no matter how difficult the journey may be.

She brings the conversation to a close with a poignant reminder of the power of perseverance: “It’s important to remember that the journey towards success may not always be smooth. There may be obstacles and challenges along the way, but it’s crucial to remain focused on your inspiration and purpose. Keep your eyes on the prize, and don’t let setbacks deter you from your path.” **EW**



Shirly Macatangay with the HSE team during the early years (2002) at the Jebel Ali Fabrication Yard.