Annelies Moens

Managing Director, Privcore, Superstar of STEM

t is hard to be what you cannot see, and women are still seriously under-represented in STEM leadership roles. The lack of diversity in technology industries, particularly in leadership roles was highlighted recently in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022 which found women make up only 24 percent of leadership roles in the technology sector. However, representation has increased in recent years.

Annelies Moens is one of Australia's Superstars of STEM for 2021-2022. She recently spoke about her career journey to high school students across Australia to encourage more women and girls to create the roles they want, on their terms, so they can create more humane technology and shape industry to reflect the diversity of the world.

The Superstars of STEM program sets out to smash stereotypes of what a scientist, technologist, engineer or mathematician looks like by helping brilliant women and non-binary experts in science, technology, engineering and mathematics to become highly visible media and public role models and show girls that STEM is for them.

Moens founded Privcore, a privacy risk management consulting company helping businesses and governments make privacy core to their business. She has been consulting on privacy for ten years and working in privacy since 2001 when she landed her first privacy role at the federal privacy regulator — now the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) — as an investigator and auditor.

She is a trailblazer in privacy and is paving the way for others to develop careers in privacy as a cofounder of the International Association of Privacy Professionals in Australia and New Zealand. Today, privacy (along with cybersecurity) is one of the most in-demand careers as a result of technological advances that enable organisations to collect ever more information about people.

A career in privacy did not exist when Moens was at high school and she has been telling students that, in ten years' time, most of them will have careers that do not exist today. The start of her privacy career (unbeknownst to her at the time) was studying computer science through years 8-12 at an all-girl high school.

Moens and her colleagues had no perception of gender bias in their high school computer science class. They experienced this only when they graduated from high school and embarked on university studies in information technology and computer science classes amongst a sea of male students.

In her second year of university studies, Moens was awarded a scholarship to study artificial intelligence (AI) in Utah, which is vying to become Silicon Valley 2.0.

She has since combined her passion for information technology and computer science with a law degree and an international MBA, and says the cross-functional knowledge and skills she has gained are invaluable for navigating the complex world of privacy risk, and for running a consulting practice.

Because we cannot easily predict what our world will look like even ten years from now, Moens identifies critical thinking as the most valuable skill to acquire. "If you have an ability to question, to challenge assumptions, to think differently, to understand different perspectives, and do not always follow the herd, you are well on the way to creating your success and helping those around you succeed."

Today we are in what she calls the 'mass-customisation era'. "We have the industrial era's ability to produce goods and services at scale but with the bespoke characteristics of the pre-industrial era where services and goods were custom-made: think of the local tailor and cobbler of the past.

"With technology and personal information we can influence each individual in the world. Personal information can be used to develop customised insurance premiums, craft what people see and hear through newsfeeds, influence how people

drive through telematics, monitor health, tailor advertisements and so forth. However, a key challenge is to ensure the level of personalisation does not erode human autonomy and choice, which privacy helps protect."

Meanwhile, Moens says data breaches and ransomware attacks are creating challenges for the privacy and security professionals who help data custodians keep the trust of the public.

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"In order to navigate our increasingly complex world we need diverse thinkers who can think broadly across ecosystems and make technologies work for us in ways that minimise privacy and security risks so as to protect one of the most vulnerable and valuable resources in the world: information about people."

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My role is to protect one of the most valuable and vulnerable resources in the world – information about people.

ANNELIES MOENS
Privacy expert