



# “At Vanilla, we defend and commit to solid values that guide us throughout our mission”

Who is Silvia Pazos Rodríguez? After 10 years in the field of international events and conferences, we went to meet this leader who almost two years ago years ago created her own project, Vanilla Project. Founded with pillars such as ethics and human values, the company stands out for its integrity and its attempt to provide a better world. Find out more in our issue of Pontos de Vista!



SILVIA PAZOS RODRÍGUEZ

**F**irst of all, to give our readers some context, tell us a little about how you decided to set up Vanilla Project and how it is built around pillars such as excellence, rigor and human values.

I've been working in the field of international events and conferences for more than 10 years, and I've worked for various organizations focused on education and social impact, working closely with policymakers. This was when the desire to create my own project was born. Basically, the VanillaProject brand was born out of my passion for debating ideas. Creating moments of conversation on challenging topics with personalities who inspire us, as a way of opening up our collective awareness of the problems facing society and the world. In addition, the accuracy and integrity of human values are part of the way I live and deliver everything I do, and they are imprinted in various ways on this project too.

One of your main aspirations, among others, is to support and assist the business world in realigning and even designing its mission so that, in addition to corporate profit, it can support the evolution of the world and the challenges that lie ahead. How important is this philosophy and how has it been successful?

I've been delving more and more into the topic of conscious capitalism, which has inspired me a lot. The premise behind this philosophy is that companies should operate ethically while pursuing profit. This means that they should consider serving all stakeholders - from their employees, to humanity and the planet we inhabit - and not just focus on their management teams and shareholders as has been the usual practice. The concept of conscious capitalism was created by the co-founder of Whole Foods, John Mackey, and marketing professor Raj Sisodia - who I had the pleasure of meeting in person in New York and who was on stage at VanillaProject in 2023 in a project designed for the United Nations' PRME initiative.

Basically, it's about uplifting humanity through business and organizations, where profit is

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a necessary means to achieve its purpose and not an end in itself.

That's why I believe there's still plenty of room for us to look at (and perhaps redesign) the mission of many organizations based on this philosophy, and design implementation and communication strategies geared towards this greater purpose - sometimes in the form of events and conferences, but not necessarily. And this is where VanillaProject stands.

**What sets you apart is the way you look at the world, in other words, you promote leadership that is supported and consolidated by human values and ethics, which allows you to deliver your best to clients and projects. How does this organic approach allow you to be more in line with the guidelines of conscious capitalism?**

We all have witnessed leadership models that don't work and that are not at all adjusted to the current times, to the needs of people and the world, which is why so many anti-political movements and wars are still raging. This is largely due to a profound misalignment of human and ethical values, which have been lost in the face of the ferocious evolution that has brought us this far.

I believe that leaders who are driven by passion and purpose in what they do, with solid values, in a unique combination of intellectual and emotional skills, lead to better companies,

teams and results - as already proven. It's such a balance, in which differences enhance success even more. And this vision naturally aligns with the philosophy of conscious capitalism. Leaders with a global vision and boldness, who make companies and their people reconnect with their essence, recognizing the importance of human leadership in shaping a world that is not only technologically advanced, but also compassionate, inclusive and in tune with ourselves.

I am a passionate advocate of the values of humanity, of the pillars that sustain us as a human species, guided by the wisdom of our ancestors and those who have left their mark on history. And at Vanilla, we defend and commit ourselves to solid values that guide us throughout our mission. Our projects. Values that transcend cultural boundaries, and which reflect the pillars on which we build strong communities, and ultimately a better world for all.

**Is it legitimate to say that the concept of "Conscious Capitalism" is what makes your work different? Tell us a little about this mission.**

Yes, indeed. And it's in the genesis of the Vanilla brand. There is an overall strategy of action, of choosing the projects we enter, of the causes Vanilla decides to pursue, which are in line with the concept of conscious capitalism in some way, helping organizations on this path and inspiring others to follow this model.

Vanilla's mission is to build a better world through its initiatives, the way it inspires, the way it promotes human values and ethics, because I believe that change in a society starts with each one of us. If we know what drives us, what we stand for, we can give ourselves to the world from another place, contribute in a unique way and change our surroundings - and step by step develop better people and, consequently, better societies.

**The truth is that we live in a global village increasingly marked by competitiveness and the promotion of profit and capitalism without values. Do you feel that company leaders are receptive to this concept of "Conscious Capitalism"?**

There is still undoubtedly a great deal of resistance to accepting and integrating this concept into companies, as the struggle for power, endless profit and fierce competitiveness between companies, sometimes to an exaggerated degree, is still the general practice.

Conscious businesses and companies focus on finding solutions for our planet and society, not just creating new forms of consumption. But as conscious consumers we all have the power to simply choose from a place that reflects our core values, and this is undoubtedly an opportunity for change. To be increasingly aware of our individual and collective choices. To choose brands and companies that generate a positive



and significant impact on the planet, on society, and to put together strategies to find new solutions to the world's problems. For me, this isn't just a trend, it's a new philosophy of life that young people are already following. Today they are the ones who choose companies, not the other way around - and this is undoubtedly a profound change that is already happening in the system. And our mission must be to push and amplify all generations towards a general acceleration.

**Silvia Pazos Rodríguez, you are the Founder and CEO of Vanilla Project. What are your main responsibilities and how would you describe your role within as a leader?**

I have a degree in management and throughout the 20 years of my professional career I've worked in different sectors - from consultancy to telecommunications, construction and architecture, and more recently education and government - and I've been able to adjust to different realities, from SMEs to multinationals to non-profit organizations. It was the latter that marked me out the most, and where I specialized in the area of events and designed different international conferences on the world's current challenges. At these major events I had the opportunity to meet incredible and inspiring people with a broad outlook of the world and a desire for change, to create an impact with their words.

As the leader that I am, driven by the human values that characterize me, by the desire to see change in this world, I feel that I have a responsibility and a mission to create a positive impact, as a driving force for our global community. In a way, to humanize the world, bringing to light a new set of inspiring and authentic leaders, driven by their sense of purpose in life, and projects that I consider unique and that deserve to be highlighted.

As the founder of VanillaProject, I take care to select the projects and organizations with which I collaborate, ensuring alignment with the values I defend for the brand. We create the concept, redesign the mission, reinvent projects, create differentiating strategies, design new patterns of collaboration, make things happen and inspire action. In essence, this is what Vanilla offers.

**What milestones are most symbolic for you and what challenges have you had to face along the way?**

Perhaps the most challenging thing for me has always been the balance between my personal and professional life, as I truly give all of myself to each project. But as the mother of three boys - twins among them - it hasn't always been easy to manage the dreams of creating, making things happen, but at the same time being present and watching them grow. Today I feel I've found that balance, and although the journey has



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been intense at times, I feel very fulfilled in the path I've taken so far, without losing my essence as a woman.

**How, in your vision, can we continue to make progress in promoting gender equality and promoting female leadership in all sectors of society?**

For me, gender equality shouldn't be a goal in itself. We know that there are industries that will never achieve these goals. But more than gender equality, I'm an advocate of balance. Complementarity. Being unique and authentic. Being able to bring out the best in each other, to contribute to projects, regardless of gender.

We know that women generally have characteristics that set them apart from men when it comes to leadership, and that in some situations female leadership can be more effective, while in others it can be more effective than male leadership. I would say that our greatest concern as a global society and as a Portuguese society is to train leaders - men and women - who are increasingly human, authentic and creative, in a combination of strategic vision and commitment to our people, our planet and our future. Basically, to lead organizations in a responsible, inspiring way.

There's no doubt that today the challenges of a leader are very complex and challenging, and it's very easy to criticize the decisions made, but sometimes I wonder what I would have done if I had been in that or another place? Would we all have the courage to make difficult decisions, sometimes knowing that the risks would have a huge impact? It's not easy to be in leadership positions, and it's undoubtedly more comfortable for many to be led than to lead.

**What message would you like to send to all women who, on a daily basis, live with various challenges and difficulties simply because they are women?**

I'd say don't let the challenges and hardships consume you in a negative way, take advantage of these opportunities that life gives you to be stronger. Keep believing in yourselves, in what makes you unique. Because the truth is that nobody chose to be born male or female. For me, it's a question of respect for who we are, of imposing our own limits when interacting with others, of being free in our way of being, of expressing ourselves, of saying what we think - even if others (whether male or female) don't approve.

I want to believe that in a few years' time this issue will not be a concern, naturally in Portugal and in more developed countries. Not least because the new generations and future leaders won't allow it. Today we are all much more aware of what is happening in society, with access to information and studies. Somehow, I feel that we can all be the driving force behind change and encourage those who are not yet on this path. To stand up for the values we believe in and not be afraid to be who we are.

**What can we expect from you and from Vanilla Project in the future?**

VanillaProject, despite being almost two years old, already has several projects in the pipeline. But although the ambition is great, I've always been careful to design each project in a unique way and think about it in detail, enjoying this phase of strategic design and a lot of creativity. You can certainly expect more inspiring projects.

Because education is considered the cornerstone of individual and collective progress, which has the power to transform lives and societies, this will be one of the areas where Vanilla will continue to leave its mark. It is in education that the maximum potential of the human being resides, and when properly nurtured, it can achieve extraordinary feats. The ability to think critically and creatively, allowing individuals to question, innovate and find solutions to the complex challenges we face as a society. By investing in education, we are investing in the future of humanity, ensuring that we all have the opportunity to reach our full potential and thus contribute to a better world. ■