



Interview: Sarah James
People & Operations Manager,
Savient



Can you start by telling us a bit about yourself and your roles in both Savient and the PA Forum?

I have over 20 years experience in providing support services to organisations. I joined Savient in November 2020, during a rapid period of growth, and my experiences and skills were a good fit for the team to be able to support and sustain that growth. The key aspects of the People and Operations Manager are to focus on continually improving employee engagement, championing a positive workplace culture, and embedding processes and procedures that support the business in achieving that.

The directors also had a desire to deliver a successful corporate social responsibility and wellbeing strategy for the company and I was able to take that vision and deliver that for the team. I have helped Savient to achieve our silver CSR accreditation, as well as International CSR status, and environmental green awards. The accreditations have shown how we have successfully integrated social responsibility initiatives throughout our business operations and that we are investing in social values as an essential part of our organisation workplace culture.

With regards to the West Midlands PA Forum, I joined over 5 years ago and became a committee member 3 years ago, where I help form and run the CSR Supporters group for the members. I was honoured to have won the West Midlands PA Forum “Ambassador for Change” award in 2022, and part of my pledge was a desire to support individuals and other organisations in their CSR journeys and provide the opportunity to give back to others in similar roles to myself.

I have learnt so much from having the opportunity to talk and work with business support colleagues across a range of industries in the West Midlands, the CSR Supporters group is in its third year and seeing the importance the sessions are having and the impact on other businesses is fantastic as they value the importance of CSR.

What is most rewarding about these roles?

Both Savient and the West Midlands PA Forum have given me the platform and opportunity to give back, improve employee engagement, and champion a positive workplace culture.



The opportunities to work on both a local and regional level supporting a wide range of people and organisations is really rewarding and I really believe Savient are leading in our eco-system both with our CSR and outreach activities within Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. The feedback from those I have been lucky enough to work with always makes me smile and anything I can do to help and support others on their CSR journey is amazing and I'm in a privileged position to have the opportunity to help others.

What challenges did you face when working in your PA roles?

In my previous role I was PA and Office Manager to the Managing Director of a company with 3 distinct and different organisations and business streams. Bringing the data together to present a group picture was a challenge. I was responsible for ensuring consistency of working, compliance, and risk management as we implemented the ISO standards and the volume and disparity of data was a real challenge to collate, review and manage to ensure compliance to achieve the ISO standards.

What tools that Savient provide do you wish you had had in previous roles and why?

Joining Savient has made me aware of just how much you can do with data, and that it doesn't have to be hard to be effective. The standards the company has developed around compliance, data congruence, searchability, reporting and proactive learning is powerful and presents information for non-technical people to make their decisions. Let's face it I'm a non-technical person but like to understand the information I'm presented with and how to manipulate that information to support the business.

I've also been interested to see how Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence can be applied to regular tasks to free up more time to focus on the why rather than the what. These are tools I am using in my day-to-day job so I can concentrate on the important tasks, which again are helping to drive the business forward.

If you were talking to a colleague in the West Midlands PA Forum about the challenges they face in reporting and managing disparate data sources, what advice would you give them?

Ask for help, you don't need to know what the solution is as long as you can describe the problem, which could be as simple as 'it takes 3 days every month to produce the board report because of all the different sources of information'. The Savient team are experts in taking those challenges and looking at how technology can be applied in simple, cost-effective ways to make life easier. I know that business support roles are key to supporting the business, you just need to understand how best to use the toolsets available to help solve a problem and I really think Savient can help. A conversation costs nothing, so what have you got to lose?



And finally, outside of work what do you do to relax?

I love musicals and have already booked to see 3 this year, being sat in the theatre with family or friends is one of my happy places! I also enjoy spending time out and about with my husband and children at weekends and of course as a season ticket holder, along with my mom, son and daughter at Birmingham City football, nothing can beat the enjoyment of watching your favourite football team each Saturday.

If Sarah's experiences resonate with you, please contact us on sarah.james@savient.uk.com and info@savient.uk.com for a no obligation discussion on how we could help. Let us remove the heavy lifting from your data processes so you can focus on the interesting parts of your role.



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