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## Women in Controls



# Contents



# Introduction

In today's dynamic business landscape, internal controls are more vital than ever. Beyond mere compliance, they are strategic enablers, guiding organisations through myriad challenges, building confidence for success, and creating tangible value for businesses, their employees, and society at large.

At Deloitte, we sought out the bold minds who are actively shaping the future of internal controls. This publication proudly features insights from ten of our female client leaders from across the globe, each navigating their unique controls transformation journey.

This initiative recognises leadership and the broad range of backgrounds within the internal controls profession. By amplifying the voices of these leaders at the forefront of internal controls, we aim to foster knowledge exchange, build a vibrant community, and share their invaluable perspectives on their journeys and future priorities. We are confident that this piece will inspire the next generation to embrace internal control as a dynamic and influential career path, ultimately contributing to a resilient global business environment.



# Introduction



"The aim is to move from a passive, retrospective view of risk to a dynamic, real-time understanding that enables nimble decision-making and a forward-looking approach to controls."  
- **Mirra Sondhi (Deutsche Bank) [UK]**



"A crucial lesson I have learned is the paramount importance of managing the human element of change; embracing controls and compliance as a positive force – it is often more challenging than the technical aspects."  
- **Agnieszka Arshamian (Scania) [SWEDEN]**



"We don't just check boxes; we empower the business to grow responsibly."  
- **Kim Norton (Uber) [US]**



"True transformation requires integration, ownership, and a willingness to change—not just within the GRC function, but across the organisation."  
- **Sanne Overbeck (Maersk) [DENMARK]**



"Internal control is a unique bridge between finance and business, requiring both technical expertise and strong communication."  
- **Sarah Wang (ECARX) [CHINA]**



"Better controls outcomes require cross-functional collaboration—multiple perspectives lead to better remediation decisions and a stronger overall program."  
- **Katisha Fortune (CBRE) [US]**



"My key lessons include the importance of listening to those executing controls—ensuring controls are both effective and practical—and the power of teamwork, as our success depends on the collective efforts of everyone involved."  
- **Sarah Brophy (Smurfit Westrock) [IRELAND]**



"I see us as the company's 'primary care physician', ensuring oversight and control, a vital counterpoint to the sales focus and revenue."  
- **Yuko Kondo (Toyota Tsusho) [JAPAN]**



"Rather than only identifying issues after the fact, my team aims to deeply understand core operations and provide confidence that today's processes and controls are working—so the business can transform quickly while knowing where to prioritise if there are weaknesses."  
- **Kelsey Brown (Walmart) [US]**



"The value we deliver is now shaped by meaningful collaboration and clarity about expectations. I'm very mindful that we need to strike the right balance between supporting business objectives and fulfilling board requirements."  
- **Chelsey (Rio Tinto) [AUSTRALIA]**

# Key themes

Drawing from the insightful interviews with our client leaders, a set of pivotal themes emerged, highlighting the evolving landscape and future direction of internal controls:



## Integration of Technology and Automation

Widespread adoption of automation, AI, and advanced analytics is transforming how controls are designed, executed, and monitored.

Organisations are shifting from manual, retrospective controls to real-time, technology-enabled assurance and continuous control monitoring.



## Evolving Regulatory and Compliance Landscape

Increasing regulatory requirements (e.g., Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX), global standards) are a major driver for strengthening and harmonising control environments.

There is a need for controls to be flexible and adaptable to both global and local regulatory changes.



## Collaboration and Breaking Down Silos

Success in controls relies on cross-functional collaboration—between risk, compliance, audit, technology, and business teams.

Combining second and third line responsibilities, or integrating controls with business processes, is seen as a way to reduce silos and improve risk visibility.



## Data Governance and Reliability

Reliable, well-governed data is foundational for effective controls, faster insights, and scalable assurance.

Data lineage, clean inputs, and robust governance structures are increasingly prioritised.



## Culture, Change Management, and Stakeholder Engagement

Embedding a positive controls culture and securing leadership buy-in are critical for sustainable change.

Overcoming resistance and ensuring controls are seen as enablers (not obstacles) is a recurring challenge.



## Risk-Based and Prioritised Approach

Organisations are moving from “checklist” or activity-based controls to risk-based, prioritised frameworks that focus on the most critical risks and value-driving activities.

Visualisation tools and clear methodologies help secure management engagement.



## Continuous Learning and Skills Development

The pace of change demands continuous upskilling—especially in technology, data analysis, and digital tools.

Future controls leaders need to be intellectually curious, adaptable, and committed to lifelong learning.



## Hybrid Talent

There is a growing emphasis on building diverse teams with backgrounds in technology, business, analytics, and traditional controls.

Diversity of thought is seen as essential for creativity, innovation, and addressing biases in AI-driven controls.



## Communication and Influence

The ability to communicate complex controls concepts clearly to stakeholders, boards, and business leaders is increasingly valued.

Controls professionals must translate technical topics into actionable insights and value narratives.



## Future-Focused Leadership Qualities

Key qualities for future leaders include agility, resilience, strategic thinking, ethical judgement, and the courage to experiment.

Leadership is measured not just by technical expertise but by the ability to drive transformation, build strong teams, and foster a culture of curiosity and improvement.

# Participants' profiles



# Participants' profiles



**Agnieszka  
Arshamian**

**Head of Internal Control,  
Scania**

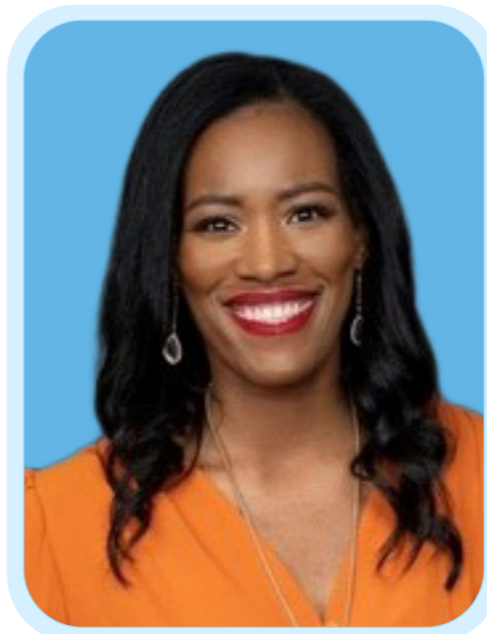
Agnieszka Arshamian's controls journey demonstrates the importance of structured, risk-based internal controls, leadership engagement, and the human side of change. Her experience highlights the growing role of technology and automation, the need for continuous improvement, and the value of diversity. For future controls leaders, she emphasises courage, curiosity, patience, and confidence, along with a commitment to learning and balancing career ambitions with personal priorities.



**Chelsey  
Rowe**

**Head of Group Internal  
Audit, Rio Tinto**

Chelsey Rowe exemplifies how controls functions are evolving to meet the demands of a complex, global, and rapidly changing environment. Her journey highlights the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and continuous learning, underpinned by a strong ethical foundation. For future controls leaders, she advocates resilience, curiosity, and a proactive approach to both technical and leadership development as the keys to success in the controls profession.



**Katisha  
Fortune**

**Chief Risk, Ethics and  
Compliance Officer, CBRE**

Katisha Fortune's journey demonstrates the power of integrating risk, compliance, and assurance functions to create a holistic, value-driven approach to controls. Her leadership emphasises collaboration, continuous improvement, and the strategic use of technology. For future controls leaders, she advocates intellectual curiosity, agility, communication, and a relentless focus on business value as the keys to success in an evolving risk landscape.



**Kelsey  
Brown**

**Internal Audit Leader,  
Walmart**

Kelsey Brown's journey illustrates the imperative for internal controls to rapidly adapt to operational change and leverage technology, transitioning from retrospective review to providing real-time assurance and strategic insight. Her leadership emphasises curiosity, critical thinking, innovation, and partnership with the business. For future controls leaders, she advocates for continuous learning, relationship-building, and a relentless focus on adding value in a rapidly changing world.



**Kim  
Norton**

**Global Head of Financial Risk  
Management, Uber**

Kim Norton's journey exemplifies the evolution of controls from a compliance-driven function to a dynamic, business-enabling partner. Her leadership is defined by curiosity, innovation, and a commitment to developing future leaders. For those entering the field, she advocates for curiosity, technical and business acumen, and the courage to challenge and collaborate in shaping the future of controls.

# Participants' profiles



**Mirra  
Sondhi**

**Head of Technology Risk and Innovation, Deutsche Bank**

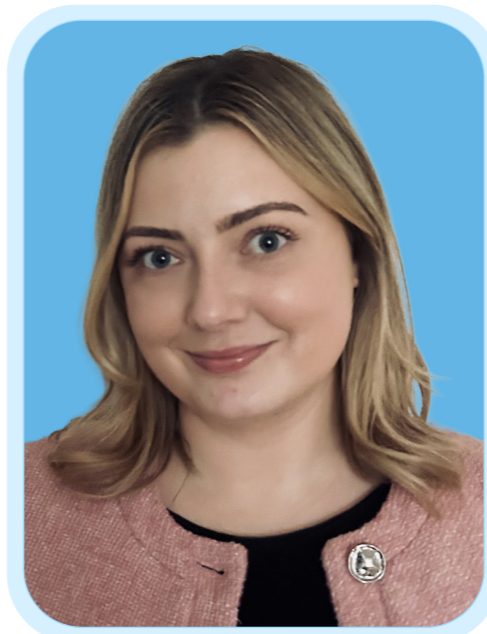
Mirra Sondhi's journey illustrates the critical shift towards embedding proactive, first-line technology risk management directly within business operations, transforming controls into a strategic enabler for informed decision-making. Her experience underscores the importance of embedding risk management into organisational culture, leveraging technology for continuous improvement, and championing diversity as a driver of innovation and resilience in the future of controls.



**Sanne  
Overbeck**

**Head of Governance, Risk and Controls (GRC), Maersk**

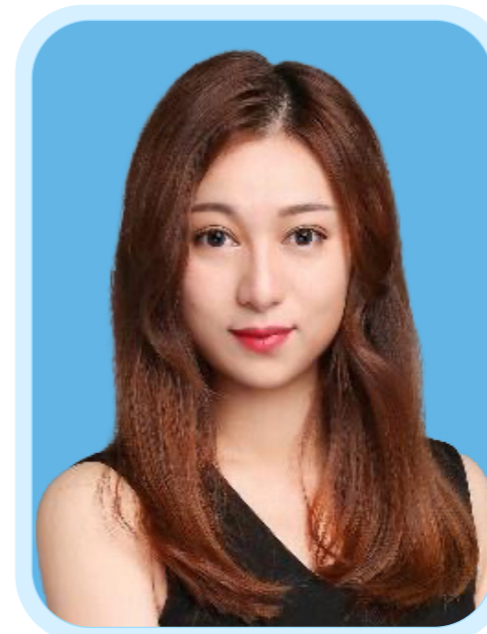
Sanne Overbeck's journey demonstrates the power of integration, collaboration, and adaptability in transforming controls from a static, siloed function to a dynamic, business-embedded capability. Her experience highlights the importance of diversity, analytical skills, and curiosity in shaping the future of controls, and offers practical advice for aspiring leaders on how to succeed and drive meaningful change in a rapidly evolving landscape.



**Sarah  
Brophy**

**Senior Director, Group Internal Controls, Smurfit Westrock**

Sarah Brophy's journey illustrates the evolution of internal controls in a global, fast-changing environment. Her leadership is defined by curiosity, collaboration, and a pragmatic approach to balancing compliance with operational realities. For future controls leaders, she advocates for continuous learning, proactive engagement, and building strong relationships as the foundation for success in the controls profession.



**Sarah  
Wang**

**Internal Control and Compliance Director, ECARX**

Sarah Wang's journey demonstrates the evolution of internal controls in a technology-driven environment. Her leadership is defined by cultural change, communication, and a commitment to continuous learning. For future controls leaders, she stresses the importance of exploring new technologies and staying updated on global policy and regulatory changes to thrive in the profession.

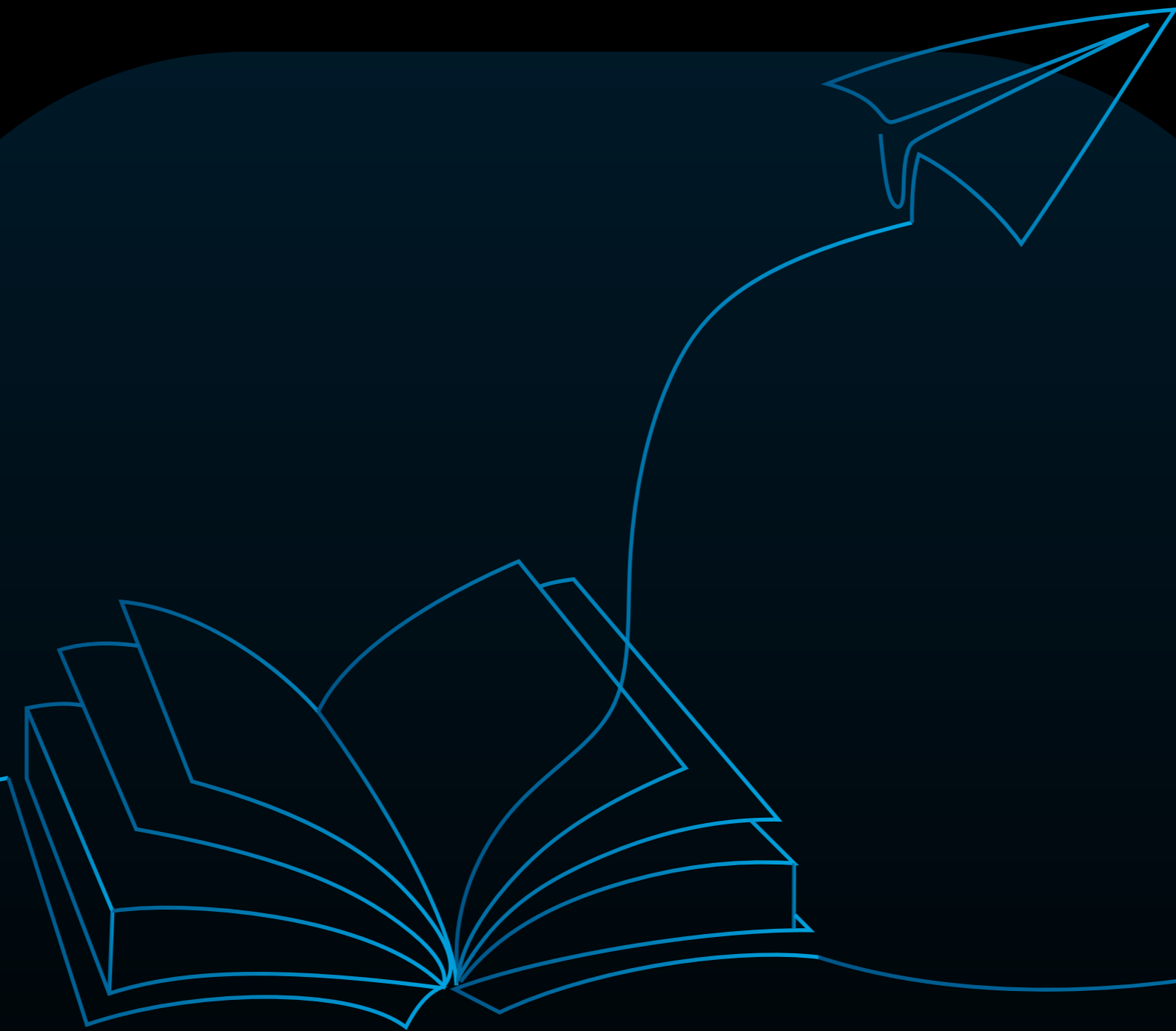


**Yuko  
Kondo**

**Executive Officer and Deputy CFO, Toyota Tsusho Corporation**

Yuko Kondo's journey demonstrates the value of collaboration, curiosity, and resilience in building a robust control environment. Her leadership highlights the importance of fostering greater collaboration across teams, embracing digital transformation, and cultivating a positive environment where all contributions are valued. For future controls leaders, she advocates for adopting a positive mindset and actively engaging with every task, viewing challenges as opportunities to learn and grow.

# Read their stories



# Agnieszka Arshamian

Head of Internal Control, Scania



## About You

### What is your current role and key responsibilities, and how does your role contribute to the overall success of your organisation?

I am the Head of Internal Controls at Scania, responsible for the global internal control systems across the Group. My role within Corporate Control, a global group function, involves reporting to the Senior Vice President and working closely with the CFO and Audit Committee.

Our function has a strong Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) profile, covering risk domains across the business. We support Scania's strategy by ensuring structured operations, verifying data accuracy, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the finance processes, and providing reliable information to decision-makers enabling sound business decisions and supporting the company's long-term success.

### Could you describe your career journey into controls? What initially drew you to this area, and were there any pivotal moments or mentors who shaped your path?

My journey into controls began with a return to Scania four years ago, aiming to establish consistent internal control practices. Before this, I spent many years in the financial sector, primarily in Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC), leading regulatory projects and working in internal audit. I also have experience reviewing internal controls at government agencies.

My interest was ignited during a major implementation project at a bank, which led me to the Financial Supervisory Authority, a pivotal moment where I gained deep insight into regulatory processes and organisational culture.

Moving from the highly regulated financial sector to Scania, I brought a structured risk management approach, firmly believing that internal control creates value when clearly connected to business processes and culture, ensuring people understand its purpose and contribution to robust risk management.

### What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career so far, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?

I am most proud of successfully leading large, complex projects from inception to completion, particularly in developing implementation frameworks and establishing intricate internal control systems. I have achieved this twice – once at a bank and again at Scania.

A crucial lesson I have learned is the paramount importance of managing the human element of change; embracing controls and compliance as a positive force – it is often more challenging than the technical aspects. Leadership engagement is vital, as it allows us to better connect with business goals, move beyond mere compliance and truly create meaningful value for the organisation.

## About the Controls Journey

### Could you describe the controls journey at your organisation? What were the key drivers, objectives, and phases of this?

Scania's controls journey was primarily driven by the need for regulatory compliance when the company was listed on stock exchanges in Germany and Sweden. Beyond compliance, our objective was to integrate controls with business processes and ensure accurate data supports decision-making.

We launched a long and structured project, divided into multiple phases, prioritising different companies and topics. Throughout, we maintained a strong change management approach, adapting and reprioritising as we learned.

Flexibility and openness have been essential, and as the system matures, we are now exploring automation and AI to further enhance our controls, recognising this as an ongoing journey.

### If you had to highlight one specific achievement within your organisation's controls journey, what would it be? Please describe the situation, your actions, and the positive impact.

One achievement I am particularly proud of is introducing a clear, risk-based approach to our controls. We transformed the methodology and

made it visually appealing, which simplified complex discussions and made it easier for management to engage. Securing leadership support early was crucial for anchoring the change and driving efficiency from the start.

Another key success was ensuring a smooth handover from project teams to the line organisation through clear communication, significantly increasing the likelihood of successful embedding of controls. Working with an external partner during this complex implementation also required flexibility and responsiveness, which was vital to the project's success.

### What were the biggest controls challenges encountered and what strategies did you employ to overcome them? What key learnings emerged from these challenges?

I believe a key ongoing challenge and trend is the use of technology to integrate and automate controls within process flows, minimising manual work. This requires our process owners to be engaged and take ownership of these initiatives. While we provide framework support, it's crucial that those who own the controls see the value and lead the efforts to embed controls effectively.

# Agnieszka Arshamian

Head of Internal Control, Scania



## About the Future of Controls

### What are the most significant trends shaping the future of controls (e.g., technology, regulation, globalisation)?

Automation and the use of new technologies in control testing, whether real-time or periodic, are particularly significant. We need to continuously evaluate how processes and controls are implemented and assess their effectiveness to detect and rectify deviations early.

Two major focus areas are: reducing dependency on individuals when staff changes occur to ensure seamless and timely operation of controls; and improving efficiency, for example, by completing tasks that currently take four hours in just one.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will also play a role, especially in continuous monitoring. While AI could test controls, the timing is crucial; we need to detect weaknesses quickly, not wait for a later testing phase. Competence and buy-in of AI are also critical factors as we review and develop these aspects going forward.

### How is your organisation preparing for these future challenges and opportunities? What specific initiatives are underway?

We have a clear strategy and long-term goals in place to ensure everyone is aware of upcoming transformation. We need to become more efficient and purposeful, placing greater emphasis on values and culture, which are integral parts of our long-term plans.

At the same time, we have short-term plans focusing on what can realistically be achieved in the near future. It is important to have a realistic view of how quickly controls and changes can be implemented, and to understand the company's shared plans for this transformation, identifying opportunities to act and at what pace. These plans and strategies exist, and the challenge lies in identifying and translating them into actionable opportunities to work with.

## About the Future Generation

### What skills and qualities do you believe are essential for future controls leaders to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape (e.g., technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, increased regulatory scrutiny)?

For future controls leaders, there are two key areas to consider: character qualities and competencies.

**Character qualities:** Future controls leaders must understand the broader framework of internal control, work in a risk-based manner, and have a genuine interest in the issues at hand. Patience is essential, as meaningful change happens gradually. Leaders must stay focused on long-term goals while working steadily on daily improvements.

**Competencies:** A strong interest in internal control, understanding different types of risks (e.g., fraud, errors), and knowing how to design relevant controls are vital. Interest in regulations and process improvements is also important. The role is rewarding for those who are motivated by supporting management and driving continuous improvement.

### What advice would you give to those aspiring to enter and excel in controls roles?

My advice is to have courage—dare to take on tasks and challenges that seem complex or overwhelming. Be curious and ask questions; don't hesitate to seek clarity. Be confident and secure in your role, knowing that setbacks are part of the journey and that support is available from your manager and team.

Courage, curiosity, patience, and confidence are key. Recognise the fantastic opportunity this role offers to learn and grow. Be humble about the complexity of the work, but brave enough to tackle big issues. When managing professional and personal responsibilities, seek role models and be honest with yourself about the balance you want. There are many ways to find solutions—be secure in your decisions and committed to your career path.

# Chelsey Rowe

Head of Group Internal Audit, Rio Tinto



## About You

### What is your current role and key responsibilities, and how does your role contribute to the overall success of your organisation?

As the Head of Group Internal Audit at Rio Tinto, I play a critical role in championing robust governance, risk management, and internal controls at the highest levels of the organisation.

By delivering independent, risk-driven assurance and strategic insights to the Board and senior leadership, I ensure that significant risks are proactively identified and mitigated. My work not only safeguards the company's assets and reputation but also drives continuous improvement and innovation, empowering Rio Tinto to achieve its strategic goals and maintain a competitive edge.

Ultimately, my contribution underpins the organisation's resilience, operational excellence, and enduring success, creating lasting value for both the company and its stakeholders.

### Could you describe your career journey into controls? What initially drew you to this area, and were there any pivotal moments or mentors who shaped your path?

My journey into the world of controls began in external audit, where I built a solid grounding in risk assessment and internal controls. When I joined Rio Tinto in 2007, I found myself continually challenged and inspired by the sheer scale and diversity of the company's operations. Over the years, I progressed through roles spanning finance, reporting, and business transformation. Each experience has deepened my understanding of controls and risk management and reinforced their importance far beyond the boundaries of finance alone.

There was never a rigid career plan steering me towards controls; instead, it was the encouragement of mentors and an openness to new challenges that shaped my path. Their guidance prompted me to stretch beyond my core skill set and embrace broader opportunities. These formative experiences highlighted for me the essential role that strong controls play in driving lasting value and resilience across an organisation.

### What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career so far, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?

I'm proud of the progress I've made, particularly in strengthening relationships with the business and streamlining core processes (all central to a successful and highly effective audit function), but I know that none of these achievements would have been possible without the dedication and collaboration of the entire team.

Our collective efforts have laid a strong foundation for effective partnership and operational efficiency across the organisation. Ultimately, my own success is deeply intertwined with the success of those I work alongside.

Looking ahead, I see our journey as far from complete. We're on the brink of a true transformation, where digital tools, data, and AI will enable us to reach greater coverage, reduce costs, and operate in an even more agile and effective way.

While I'm grateful for what we've accomplished so far, I'm excited by the opportunities that lie ahead.

## About the Controls Journey

### Could you describe the controls journey at your organisation? What were the key drivers, objectives, and phases of this?

At Rio Tinto, our focus has steadily advanced towards stronger governance, risk management, and compliance across a complex, global organisation.

This evolution has been steered by regulatory requirements (such as Sarbanes Oxley), the drive for operational efficiency, and the need to align with strategic objectives. Our work has encompassed rigorous risk assessments, thoughtful control design and implementation, automation of reporting, and a dedication to ongoing monitoring and improvement, all supported by a culture committed to accountability and transparency.

Over time, our approach has evolved from a primarily compliance-driven and transactional approach to one rooted in genuine partnership, shared understanding, and mutual purpose.

The value we deliver is now shaped by meaningful collaboration and clarity about expectations. I'm very mindful that we need to strike the right balance between supporting business objectives and fulfilling board requirements. Ultimately, our collective aim is to build a resilient, efficient, and well-governed organisation.

### If you had to highlight one specific achievement within your organisation's controls journey, what would it be? Please describe the situation, your actions, and the positive impact.

As an organisation we've shifted focus from a long list set of actions to prioritising those critical few that meaningfully moves the dial.

The most valuable learnings, both for my team and the business, have come from addressing those more complex, high-impact actions, rather than administrative tasks. It's also been essential to align implementation timeframes with the actual duration of risk exposure, ensuring controls are both timely and effective.

### What were the biggest controls challenges encountered and what strategies did you employ to overcome them? What key learnings emerged from these challenges?

The biggest challenges have included managing change across diverse, global teams, integrating new technologies into legacy systems, and navigating different jurisdictions with varying regulations amid business growth.

To overcome these obstacles, I've focused on clear communication, proactive stakeholder engagement, and tailored training programs.

A key part of our success has been maintaining curiosity and seeking out insights from those with deep knowledge of local areas. This approach has reinforced the necessity and positive impact of adaptability, highlighted the importance of building trust, and demonstrated the value of continuous feedback and iteration to embed sustainable controls.

# Chelsey Rowe

Head of Group Internal Audit, Rio Tinto



## About the Future of Controls

### What are the most significant trends shaping the future of controls (e.g., technology, regulation, globalisation)?

Several major trends are shaping the future of controls.

Technologies like automation, AI, and advanced data analytics are transforming how organisations enhance efficiency, accuracy, and real-time risk monitoring.

At the same time, regulatory environments are evolving rapidly, and the complexities of operating in a globalised world are further compounded by a rise in localisation and nationalism. This is driving the need for flexible controls that can adapt to both international standards and diverse local regulations.

Finally, the integration of controls into broader, enterprise-wide risk management frameworks is becoming standard practice, ensuring that risk oversight is holistic and aligned with strategic objectives. This shift ensures oversight aligns with strategic priorities, supports sustainable value creation, and enables agility amid ongoing change.

### How is your organisation preparing for these future challenges and opportunities? What specific initiatives are underway?

We are harnessing technology to generate data-driven insights and to streamline routine tasks, allowing our teams to focus on higher-value activities.

Current initiatives include implementing automated reporting tools and working closely with other assurance providers to ensure a comprehensive, integrated approach to risk and controls.

## About the Future Generation

### What skills and qualities do you believe are essential for future controls leaders to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape?

Future controls leaders need strong analytical and digital skills, adaptability, strategic thinking, and the ability to communicate complex issues clearly. Leadership qualities such as resilience, collaboration, and ethical judgment are also essential to navigate uncertainty and drive positive change.

The emergence of AI brings tremendous possibilities alongside new risks and a changing set of skills. Many of the capabilities needed in controls were once learned through direct experience and mentorship. Now, as automation handles routine tasks, it's important to take a more deliberate approach to learning, providing opportunities for problem-solving, exposure to new technologies, and meaningful development.

In an era of rapid technological change, particularly with AI and automation, professionals in controls require fluency in digital tools and data analytics to anticipate challenges, uncover risks and opportunities, and drive better decisions. This digital expertise, alongside adaptability to evolving regulations and business models, forms the foundation for effective controls, enabling efficient processes and deeper

insights. Strategic thinking ensures alignment with broader goals, while clear communication builds trust. Indispensable leadership qualities such as resilience, collaboration, and ethical judgment are crucial for navigating uncertainty, ensuring stability, strengthening relationships, and upholding moral responsibility and organisational reputation. The paramount challenge and opportunity lie in preparing future leaders for these dynamic demands.

### What advice would you give to those aspiring to enter and excel in controls roles?

Be open to new challenges and continuous learning, build a strong network of mentors and peers, and have confidence in your ability to add value beyond technical expertise. Focus on developing both your technical and leadership skills, and don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone—some of the most rewarding opportunities come from embracing the unknown.

Remember, it's okay not to have all the answers, but be curious, ask thoughtful questions, and seek out opportunities to learn from every situation and from those around you. The combination of resilience, curiosity, and a willingness to collaborate will set you apart and empower you to make a real difference.

# Katisha Fortune

Chief Risk, Ethics and Compliance Officer, CBRE



## Building the Future of Controls at CBRE

Katisha Fortune serves as CBRE's Chief Risk, Ethics, and Compliance Officer, a role that intentionally brings together both second-line and third-line responsibilities. Under the second line, she leads ethics and compliance, data privacy, and the enterprise risk program; under the third line, she oversees internal audit and SOX assurance. She describes this combined model as a practical way to reduce silos, help the enterprise understand how risk work fits together globally, and create a clearer path for escalating and addressing risk across the organization.

## What she's most proud of: team, insight, and value

When Katisha reflects on accomplishments, her first focus is people: she takes pride in building a leadership team strong in reporting, dashboards, multidimensional risk thinking, and translating technical topics into board and stakeholder-ready language. From there, she points to measurable program maturation—establishing and continuously enhancing key performance indicators (KPIs) and key risk indicators (KRIs) across her departments.

Just as important is a cultural shift in how controls work is justified. She emphasizes moving away from activity for activity's sake and toward programs that clearly tie to a specific threat or business value, supported by data that can explain "why this matters" in realistic terms.

## How the controls operating model is evolving: collaborate, consolidate, automate

A consistent theme is that better controls outcomes require cross-functional collaboration. Katisha sets an expectation that teams coordinate and work through issues together—because multiple perspectives lead to better remediation decisions and a stronger overall program.

On the technology side, she highlights the value of reducing fragmentation: CBRE adopted AuditBoard and eliminated multiple overlapping tools, with similar consolidation efforts in areas like anti-money laundering (AML) and anti-corruption/bribery. She also describes experimentation with automated agents and other self-service options to speed internal customer experience—reserving human effort for higher-severity issues requiring judgment. GenAI, in her view, is particularly powerful for extracting deeper insights from large volumes of data (including transaction data) that exceed what traditional tools and manual analysis can reliably surface.

## A controls career shaped by "seeing the whole risk cycle"

Katisha traces her controls mindset to her early career as an attorney, where trusted advising inherently means identifying and managing risk. Her experience across transactions and litigation—and later in-house roles—reinforced how failures in governance and controls can show up downstream as regulatory action, litigation, or major enterprise consequences. That end-to-end visibility became a key driver in why she leaned into risk, controls, and compliance leadership.

## Data lineage and governance: foundational, not optional

Katisha underscores that accelerating insight depends on trust in data. While she notes CBRE doesn't have a formal "data steward" role in this context, she describes putting stronger governance around shared platforms—especially to manage appropriate information sharing and segregation for sensitive functions like audit and SOX assurance. More broadly, she links the future of controls to data reliability, clean inputs, and scalable governance that can support repeatable insight.

## The future of controls: faster insight, higher expectations, harder value proof

Looking forward, Katisha expects an ongoing push to move faster and generate deeper insights with AI—along with potential team contraction paired with higher expectations for analytical strength. She also flags a classic controls leadership challenge: as controls become more effective and incidents decline, it becomes harder to prove value based on what didn't happen. That means organizations must evolve KPIs/KRIs and value narratives—potentially by demonstrating how automation and AI improve monitoring and control assurance even when incident trends flatten.

## The next generation: hybrid talent and clear communication

For future controls leaders, Katisha describes a "hybrid" profile: intellectually curious, tech savvy, continuously learning, able to apply skills across multiple domains with AI as a companion, and able to communicate complex concepts clearly because stakeholders will increasingly expect that level of clarity. She also notes that even for compliance leadership roles, she is increasingly recruiting for data analysis background and experience, not only subject-matter expertise.

# Kelsey Brown

Internal Audit Leader, Walmart



## Building Controls That Keep Pace

Kelsey Brown is a leader in Internal Audit (IA) at Walmart, supporting the company's core business areas. After working across finance, technology, and controllership over a long tenure, she returned to IA and has spent recent years helping audit evolve to match a fast-moving operations environment.

## From “look-back” auditing to confidence in today’s foundation

In her current role, Kelsey focuses on keeping pace with operational change while maintaining strong control foundations. Rather than only identifying issues after the fact, her team aims to deeply understand core operations and provide confidence that today's processes and controls are working—so the business can transform quickly while knowing where to prioritize if there are weaknesses. She also views IA as an important voice in ensuring leaders make informed, risk-based decisions, even when the organization chooses to accept certain risks.

## What she’s most proud of: getting the right partners involved earlier

Kelsey is most proud of moments when IA helped the business move faster by engaging compliance and other partners earlier, particularly in “incubation” areas that test, learn, and then scale rapidly. With IA often having a seat at key forums, she sees a responsibility to ensure other relevant functions—legal, compliance, and technology partners—are included at the right time to support better risk decisions before scaling.

## Why controls became her lane

Kelsey traces her path to risk and controls back to two moments: an internal audit internship and a major finance transformation. In the transformation, she worked to build controls in from the beginning, because fixing gaps after the fact is always harder. She loves breaking down complex processes, figuring out what could go wrong, and stitching the full picture back together. That combination has consistently led her to risk and controls roles.

## The biggest challenges—and what she learned

A recurring challenge is discovering issues later than desired, reinforcing the need to be engaged earlier and operate at the business' speed. Another challenge is information overload: auditors receive massive volumes of business data and inputs, and the hard part is synthesizing it into insight and action. Kelsey also highlights the pressure of volatility and change—asking whether historical processes and controls are strong enough for new levels of complexity, and where enhancements are needed.

## Staying current: making learning a team habit

Kelsey emphasizes creating a culture where teams can test and learn, experiment with tools, and build confidence through exploration. She reinforces learning with knowledge-sharing mechanisms such as hackathons, lunch-and-learns, and structured time for teams to share what they're trying and learning.

## The future of controls: global complexity and “agentic” change

Looking ahead, Kelsey expects the controls environment to be shaped by macro forces—especially a more truly global e-commerce customer base and regulatory complexity that crosses more geographic lines. She also anticipates a shift in assurance as organizations rely less on manual processing and more on technology or “agent-like” models—changing what strong financial controls look like and pushing more emphasis toward technology-dependent assurance (including SOX considerations like IT general controls).

To prepare, she describes a journey toward Aligned Assurance—reducing disconnected risk and compliance efforts—alongside building a more data/digital assurance foundation so AI and agents can synthesize information faster and generate better insight. Kelsey repeatedly underscores the need to get clear on what the data is and what information is needed to enable the next level of assurance.

## The next generation: what will matter most

Kelsey believes durable leadership skills will remain essential—critical thinking, judgment, communication, and the ability to connect dots and communicate to executives. At the same time, she sees a near-term need for more tech-savvy talent who can embed AI into audit processes, while recognizing that the tools themselves may become easier to use over time.

# Kim Norton

Global Head of Financial Risk Management, Uber



## Evolution and Future of Controls at Uber

Kim Norton, Uber's Global Head of Financial Risk Management, epitomizes how leadership in controls can both safeguard an organization and propel innovation. Her journey reflects the changing face of internal controls—where technical insight, business acumen, and a passion for discovery are indispensable.

## A Role at the Crossroads of Compliance and Innovation

Kim's role at Uber is multifaceted. She leads the company's SOX and SOC (System and Organization Controls) compliance programs, shapes risk management strategies, and partners with diverse teams across the business to ensure process excellence and readiness for regulatory demands. Reporting to the Chief Accounting Officer with a direct link to Uber's Audit Committee, Kim stands at a strategic crossroads: "We don't just check boxes; we empower the business to grow responsibly," she says.

Her greatest achievement is fostering future leaders and embedding what she calls a "commitment to curiosity." She credits her team's willingness to experiment and innovate, rather than conform to traditional compliance norms. This curiosity-driven culture encourages her team to view controls as a lever for business success—not just a series of mandated checkpoints.

## From Curiosity to Controls Champion

Kim's career started in a far different lane: she studied veterinary medicine before switching to accounting, driven by a fascination for the underlying logic of business. Her experience as an auditor exposed her to the power of well-designed controls and the broader impact they have on organizational health. It was the opportunity to truly understand, influence, and improve how organizations function—which ultimately inspired her to specialize in risk and controls.

Her controls transformation has not been without challenges. Before technology-enabled change and innovation could scale, Kim led a mindset shift, repositioning the controls brand from a traditional compliance and assurance function to a strategic business partner focused on innovation and technology, while maintaining the right balance between independence and business integration. By building bridges, embracing new processes, and creating space for calculated experimentation, she overcame inertia and unlocked her team's ability to perform at their best.

## Preparing for What's Next

Kim foresees several trends that will redefine controls: a shift towards internal development of technology resources; the irreversible momentum of automation and AI; and the heightened importance of data accuracy and process transparency. She notes that "buy-versus-build" decisions in controls technology are becoming more frequent, but cautions organizations to avoid rushing into "fully baked" tools without assessing fit and rigor.

Uber's journey includes major investments in digital transformation. Her team prioritizes building analytics, automation frameworks, and data lineage capabilities that support flexibility and rapid response in a volatile regulatory landscape. Kim believes robust data governance will be central to future-proofing controls and enabling even greater business integration.

## Embracing Change in a Tech-Driven World

The controls landscape has been transformed by technology and rapidly shifting regulations. Kim highlights that every function within Uber—whether business, compliance, or operations—now operates in a technology-infused environment. Her approach is "leading edge," leveraging AI, automation, analytics, and data-driven methods to enhance both risk identification and business enablement. The future, as she sees it, is about moving beyond back-office thinking. Controls should operate at the frontline, offering insights and adaptable solutions that drive both compliance and sustainable growth.

To thrive in such a fast-paced world, Kim prioritizes continuous learning. She actively recruits professionals from IT, engineering, and analytics alongside controls experts, creating an interdisciplinary team poised to solve tomorrow's problems. Regular engagement with industry peers, technology training, and keeping a pulse on regulatory changes are essential tools in her arsenal.

## Shaping the Next Generation of Controls Leaders

Looking ahead, Kim emphasizes the qualities that will define tomorrow's controls leaders: agility, a deep sense of curiosity, willingness to challenge assumptions, and the ability to envision end-to-end solutions. She urges aspiring professionals to "focus on the details but never stop asking the next question," highlighting that true value lies in understanding the business, not just applying rules. Technical expertise—especially in data and technology—is essential, but so are collaboration and the courage to experiment.

Success, for Kim, is ultimately measured in impact. It is seen in building leaders, in creating an environment where innovation can thrive, and in ensuring that controls act as both a safeguard and a catalyst for Uber's growth.

Kim Norton's vision represents a broader shift in the controls field: where compliance, creativity, and business transformation are intertwined—and where the controls function is a cornerstone of organizational agility and growth.

# Mirra Sondhi

Head of Technology Risk and Innovation, Deutsche Bank



## About You

### What is your current role and key responsibilities, and how does your role contribute to the overall success of your organisation?

I am the Head of Technology Risk and Innovation at Deutsche Bank. My responsibilities lie within the first line of the business, covering corporate banking, investment banking, and operations. My role focuses on technology risk, encompassing both information technology and information security.

I contribute to the organisation's success by embedding first-line risk management directly within the business, ensuring that business heads, not just technology leaders, are equipped to address regulatory questions concerning technology risk.

### Could you describe your career journey into controls? What initially drew you to this area, and were there any pivotal moments or mentors who shaped your path?

My entry into controls was definitely not by choice. Fresh out of university with a degree in Electronics and Communications Engineering, I joined the graduate programme with a major accounting firm. I was placed in audit, which, provided an invaluable foundation in understanding controls and business operations.

My career then progressed through various roles: I moved from external to internal audit, supported

clients in regulatory readiness, and even became involved in Section 166 reviews—all of which deepened my appreciation for controls as a tool to understand and manage risk, not just to tick regulatory boxes. My career has spanned across multiple financial services sector organisations, and now Deutsche Bank, with each role reinforcing the importance of controls in enabling risk-informed decision-making.

Mentors, and a broad network I built through my roles and community work, significantly shaped my critical thinking and career path.

### What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career so far, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?

Among my proudest achievements are being listed in the Financial Times' Top 50 Next Generation Future Leaders and Top 100 Influential Leaders in Information Technology.

I am also incredibly proud of co-founding the "Multicultural Professionals Forum" at the UK House of Lords. These experiences taught me the profound power of influence and focus in driving and accomplishing your goals.

## About the Controls Journey

### Could you describe the controls journey that you have gone through? What were the key drivers, objectives, and phases of this?

When I first started, the controls journey was very much focused on meeting regulatory obligations. This evolved into maturing our risk taxonomy and ability to articulate risk exposure, understanding design and operating effectiveness, and categorising and focusing on controls mix (preventative, detective etc.).

The next phase has been about innovation—moving from periodic, manual control testing to continuous control monitoring (CCM). While CCM has been discussed for years, only now, with advances in automation and AI, are we able to implement it effectively. The aim is to move from a passive, retrospective view of risk to a dynamic, real-time understanding that enables nimble decision-making and a forward-looking approach to controls. My objective is to shift from passive, backward-looking risk views to proactive, real-time insights.

### If you had to highlight one specific achievement in the controls journey, what would it be? Please describe the situation, your actions, and the positive impact.

My biggest achievement was establishing the first-line technology risk function at my previous organisation, a role that didn't exist before I joined. I defined the function's scope, developed key metrics (both leading

and lagging indicators), and created regular forums for senior management, including CIOs and the CTO, to discuss risk and emerging issues. This fundamentally shifted the organisation's approach from merely reacting to audit findings to proactively self-identifying issues, owning policies, and managing the control framework. This significantly improved our relationship with the second and third lines of defence. I feel incredibly proud of what I had built there.

### What were the biggest controls challenges encountered and what strategies did you employ to overcome them? What key learnings emerged from these challenges?

The biggest challenge was resistance to change and embedding the culture that "everyone is a risk manager." I worked to translate this concept into actionable policies, removing barriers that made risk identification burdensome. This involved aligning the "tone from the top" with operational realities and simplifying the process for individuals to raise concerns without needing to fully define the risk or remediation. Building a consensus around the necessity for change was crucial to the success of the process.

On a personal / professional front, I learned the importance of building connections beyond my immediate teams to gain insights and hone professional skills, which is crucial as one progresses in their career and address various challenges in their path to achieve their goals and objectives.

# Mirra Sondhi

Head of Technology Risk and Innovation, Deutsche Bank



## About the Future of Controls

### What are the most significant trends shaping the future of controls (e.g., technology, regulation, globalisation)?

I see "control by design" as a key trend, much like "secure by design" in tech development. This means embedding controls directly into processes and policies from the very beginning, making the process itself the control, rather than adding controls as an afterthought. Large Language Models (LLMs) and automation are enabling this by leveraging historical data and trends to design processes differently and embedding controls as part of the design process itself. A practical example is designing applications where segregation of duties is inherently built into access management.

### What are the biggest challenges and opportunities you foresee relating to the future of controls journey?

Organisations face significant challenges in the AI-driven future, including the continuous validation and verification of AI models to ensure fairness and

accuracy beyond the initial design phase. It is crucial to avoid isolation between technology and business functions, fostering close collaboration as controls require business context to be effective. Furthermore, securing genuine investment from senior leadership for learning and development to upskill teams is paramount to prevent organisations from falling behind.

Opportunities include the current phase of "human-augmented by AI," where Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) are crucial for verifying models, addressing biases, and providing value that large language models cannot yet. The long-term opportunity lies in "AI-augmented human" capabilities, where AI enhances human roles, necessitating upskilling for higher-value tasks and leading to an evolution of job roles. Furthermore, the inherent biases in AI models present a significant opportunity to actively encourage "diversity of thought" in their creation, ensuring the world built through these models reflects diverse human experiences.

## About the Future Generation

### What skills and qualities do you believe are essential for future controls leaders to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape (e.g., technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, increased regulatory scrutiny)?

Future controls leaders will need a blend of technical and business skills. While coding and data literacy are increasingly important, so too are critical thinking, adaptability, and the ability to collaborate across functions. Future leaders need to recognise that while AI can handle basic functions, the value of Subject Matter Experts who can verify models, address biases, and bring unique human insights will become even more important. The essential quality is the willingness to continuously learn and adapt, understanding that job roles will evolve, and pivoting to bring value that AI cannot currently replicate.

### What advice would you give to those aspiring to enter and excel in controls roles?

Now is the best time to enter risk management, especially technology risk, which underpins all other forms of risk. My advice to younger generation is to embrace the opportunity, build networks, seek mentors, and not be afraid to speak up or advocate for themselves. A variety of perspectives is the best antidote to bias in AI and controls, so your contribution is not just valuable—it is essential. Be proactive in shaping your career, but do not limit your learning and experience gained solely to your workplace.

# Sanne Overbeck

Head of Governance, Risk and Controls (GRC), Maersk



## About You

### What is your current role and key responsibilities, and how does your role contribute to the overall success of your organisation?

My current role is Head of Governance, Risk and Controls (GRC) at Maersk, overseeing the controls across the entire global organisation. As Head of GRC, we own the internal control framework methodology, act as advisors for the first line, and provide oversight of the control environment. Maersk is undergoing a significant transformation to become the integrator of global logistics, and my role ensures a strong control environment to support this strategy and deliver successful outcomes. By embedding strong controls, we help Maersk achieve its strategic ambitions and maintain operational resilience.

### Could you describe your career journey into controls? What initially drew you to this area, and were there any pivotal moments or mentors who shaped your path?

My background is somewhat atypical for this field—I come from finance, management, process management, and transformation, rather than a traditional controls or audit background. I was a stakeholder of GRC for years as a global process lead at Maersk, which gave me a deep appreciation for the importance of risk management and process controls, as well as the challenges in collaborating with GRC. I didn't actively seek out a career in controls; rather, I was approached to take on the role and drive its transformation, supported by a leader who believed in my ability to make a difference.

Throughout my career, I have benefited from strong mentors and leaders who encouraged honest, transparent conversations and supported my development. One formative experience was documenting lessons learned after a major transformation programme, which taught me the value of understanding decision-making and respecting different perspectives. In my current role, I had the support of a leader with deep audit expertise, which complemented my own skills and helped me grow into the role.

### What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career so far, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?

I am particularly proud of two achievements at Maersk. First, we introduced a new control framework methodology that, in less than three years, is now fully integrated and embedded within the company's process management methodology and owned by the business—it's no longer just a GRC initiative, but part of the company's DNA. Second, I am proud of my team's transformation: most of the original team remains, and they have embraced new roles, becoming highly respected facilitators and coordinators. Their willingness and ability to adapt has been inspiring.

The key lesson is that true transformation requires integration, ownership, and a willingness to change—not just within the GRC function, but across the organisation. Building trust, fostering collaboration, and supporting people through change are essential for lasting success.

## About the Controls Journey

### Could you describe the controls journey at your organisation? What were the key drivers, objectives, and phases of this?

The transformation journey was driven by a burning platform: Maersk's overall transformation required a risk-based control framework integrated with process management to ensure successful delivery. Previously, controls were based on financial statement line item risk assessments, not on processes, and the outcomes were not meeting expectations.

Key phases of the journey included:

- 1. Restructuring the team** for greater focus and clarity of roles.
- 2. Defining a methodology** that could work for Maersk.
- 3. Testing and refining the methodology** to ensure it was fit for purpose.
- 4. Building the team's capability** to embed the framework.
- 5. Rolling out the framework at scale** across the organisation.
- 6. Ongoing transformation**—now that the foundation is in place, we are shifting towards a more analytical, risk-based approach, linking controls to business performance and prioritising oversight where it matters most.

This multi-step journey involves focusing our GRC efforts for maximum impact, evolving our framework to meet business needs, and emphasising communication to ensure the first line understands the principles

behind their actions. While our aim is for the first line to own and execute risk assessments and controls, with us providing support and oversight, current challenges mean our efforts must be prioritised until the first line fully develops the necessary capabilities and grasps the purpose of controls, which is vital for improving quality and driving continuous improvement.

### If you had to highlight one specific achievement within your organisation's controls journey, what would it be? Please describe the situation, your actions, and the positive impact.

We significantly moved the dial for controls culture across Maersk, a collaborative effort where many leaders and global process owners embraced, sponsored, and advocated for the journey. While GRC played a key role, strong allies were crucial. This has resulted in a significant cultural shift, with Global Process Leads now actively seeking ways to improve, automate, and prioritise controls.

Our most significant ongoing achievement is providing leadership with the necessary oversight and insights into our control environment precisely when they need it, especially while navigating a transformation where the new methodology doesn't yet cover everything.

# Sanne Overbeck

Head of Governance, Risk and Controls (GRC), Maersk



## About the Controls Journey (Cont.)

### What were the biggest controls challenges encountered and what strategies did you employ to overcome them? What key learnings emerged from these challenges?

Our established risk management foundation, built on sound manual controls, has served us well. However, in an era of accelerated change, driven by innovations such as AI, we recognise the need to enhance our agility. This presents an opportunity to think ahead, leverage technology, and utilise our data to adapt and move at the required speed, necessitating a quick shift in the way we work.

The strategy to achieve this involves several key areas: fostering collaboration across the organisation, including second and third lines, process leaders, and process excellence teams. It also requires developing robust business cases for significant technology investments that deliver broader organisational value beyond just controls. Furthermore, capability development within GRC is crucial, fostering a curious and innovative mindset. Ultimately, the goal is to tie controls as closely as possible to data, enabling predictive capabilities for faster risk identification, real-time exposure prediction, and dynamic risk management. The key learning is that this transformation requires collaborative effort, leveraging technology and data to move at the required speed.

## About the Future of Controls

### How is your organisation preparing for these future challenges and opportunities? What specific initiatives are underway?

Our current initiatives are focused on preparing for the future of controls, driven by technology, greater efficiency, and insight. This involves linking business

performance and controls by integrating control design with business performance metrics and KPIs, leveraging data for early warning flags and reports to enable proactive deep dives, continuously testing new ideas to innovate our approach, and actively undertaking external benchmarking to find solutions beyond GRC.

## About the Future Generation

### What skills and qualities do you believe are essential for future controls leaders to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape (e.g., technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, increased regulatory scrutiny)?

When I took over the GRC function, it was composed largely chartered accountants from major accounting firms. I early on recognised the crucial need for diversity of thought to drive creativity and development, leading to the instrumental addition of process transformation, project management, and business expertise. While chartered accountants and business professionals remain foundational, strong analytical skills are now essential for everyone, alongside a critical curiosity about AI and emerging technologies, requiring a willingness to explore technological solutions.

### What advice would you give to those aspiring to enter and excel in controls roles?

Controls is a great stepping stone for ambitious individuals, offering deep organisational insight and fundamental risk management skills. It's important to seek out supportive leaders who offer flexibility and understand the importance of balancing work and personal commitment. Don't be afraid to pursue opportunities - confidence in your abilities is key to taking on new challenges and achieving your goals.

Networking can be challenging, but it's not an insurmountable obstacle. Do your best, accept the challenges, and know that you can succeed without fitting into traditional networking circles.

# Sarah Brophy

Senior Director, Group Internal Controls, Smurfit Westrock



## About You

### **What is your current role and key responsibilities, and how does your role contribute to the overall success of your organisation?**

I am the Senior Director, Group Internal Controls at Smurfit Westrock, one of the world's largest sustainable packaging providers. My responsibilities include developing and monitoring a robust and effective control environment across the Group, overseeing our entire global SOX compliance programme, and partnering with management to support control design, implementation, and training. This role is particularly dynamic and fulfilling, as Smurfit Westrock has just filed its 10-K after our first year of SOX compliance with a clean audit opinion, having successfully remediated a previously reported Material Weakness. This is an achievement that we are very proud of and being part of Group Internal Control throughout this period provided a rare opportunity to design and develop the SOX framework from the ground up, enabling us to make a significant and lasting impact on the Group's financial governance and overall control environment.

### **Could you describe your career journey into controls? What initially drew you to this area, and were there any pivotal moments or mentors who shaped your path?**

After qualifying as an accountant in external audit, I joined Smurfit Westrock's Internal Audit department. I was initially attracted by the chance to gain a deeper understanding of the business and to engage with diverse cultures through international site visits.

Although I planned to stay for only a couple of years, I remained for nearly seven, drawn by the constant learning and new challenges. I progressed from financial auditor to leading the EMEA & APAC team. In 2025, I moved into my current Group Internal Control role, just as the SOX programme was beginning. My Internal Audit experience and the relationships I built across the business have been invaluable. I have also benefited greatly from strong mentorship, which has shaped my approach and professional growth.

### **What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career so far, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?**

This year, our first year of SOX compliance, has been the most fulfilling and proudest of my career. The coordinated effort required to bring our 'new to SOX' teams up to speed and ensure they understood the requirements has been immense. Witnessing the progress made in such a short time has been incredibly rewarding and a testament to the collaborative culture at Smurfit Westrock. I've been particularly inspired by the dedication of our control owners, who have worked tirelessly to embed new processes and standards. Being able to support and guide them through implementation has been very fulfilling. This year has also been a tremendous learning experience. My key lessons include the importance of listening to those executing controls—ensuring controls are both effective and practical—and the power of teamwork, as our success depends on the collective efforts of everyone involved.

## About the Controls Journey

### **Could you describe the controls journey at your organisation? What were the key drivers, objectives, and phases of this?**

Smurfit Westrock was formed through the combination of Smurfit Kappa and WestRock in July 2024. Prior to the combination, Smurfit Kappa's dual listing in London and Dublin meant it was not subject to the SOX Act, whereas WestRock, listed on the NYSE, was already fully compliant with SOX regulations. The merger and subsequent NYSE listing triggered the requirement for SOX compliance in 2025. Our journey had two main strands: elevating controls in 'new to SOX' environments to meet the required standards, and sustaining compliance in legacy WestRock operations amid significant change. The key drivers have been regulatory requirements and the need to harmonise and strengthen our control environment across a newly combined, global business.

### **If you had to highlight one specific achievement within your organisation's controls journey, what would it be? Please describe the situation, your actions, and the positive impact.**

Remarkable progress has been achieved in our 'new to SOX' environments over a very short period, requiring

significant work and dedication across our global company, which experienced considerable change and new requirements. This success was driven by ensuring clarity and consistency in messaging, supported by numerous information-sharing sessions, global guidance materials, and a focused effort on addressing business uncertainties.

### **What were the biggest controls challenges encountered and what strategies did you employ to overcome them? What key learnings emerged from these challenges?**

The greatest challenge has been balancing robust controls with practical implementation. Introducing new requirements can increase workloads, so it's vital to seek practical solutions and engage directly with those responsible for implementation. Listening, asking questions, and incorporating feedback—even small efficiencies—can make a meaningful difference. Importantly, we view the current state as a starting point, always open to improvement through technology, process refinement, or innovation. Exploring these opportunities is key to evolving our control environment in a sustainable and scalable way.

# Sarah Brophy

Senior Director, Group Internal Controls, Smurfit Westrock



## About the Future of Controls

### What are the most significant trends shaping the future of controls (e.g., technology, regulation, globalisation)?

Technology is the most significant trend, transforming how controls are executed and monitored. Advanced tools offer opportunities to reduce manual effort, enhance accuracy, and improve timeliness. As internal controls professionals, we have a responsibility to stay informed about emerging technologies and actively explore ways to leverage them for the benefit of our control owners, creating efficiencies, reducing administrative burden, and improving the overall effectiveness of the control environment. However, this must be balanced with strong governance—automated controls need careful design, rigorous testing, and ongoing monitoring to ensure compliance and effectiveness.

### How is your organisation preparing for these future challenges and opportunities? What specific initiatives are underway?

We are collaborating with our technology development team to introduce AI and identify opportunities to drive efficiencies, particularly in controls execution and testing. Our initial focus is on reducing administrative burden and streamlining processes, supporting control owners to achieve their objectives more efficiently and with less time investment.

## About the Future Generation

### What skills and qualities do you believe are essential for future controls leaders to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape (e.g., technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, increased regulatory scrutiny)?

Future controls leaders need a genuine interest in learning, especially regarding technological advancements. Equally important are soft skills: the ability to listen, understand different perspectives, and adopt a pragmatic mindset. The future of controls will be shaped by those who combine curiosity for new technologies with empathy and practicality, building resilient and forward-looking control environments.

### What advice would you give to those aspiring to enter and excel in controls roles?

Actively seek out every opportunity to learn and grow. Be curious, proactive, and willing to get involved in new projects or initiatives—even outside your immediate expertise. Growth comes from challenging yourself, stretching your thinking, and expanding your perspective. Each experience is a chance to broaden your knowledge, develop new skills, and build valuable relationships.

# Sarah Wang

Internal Control and Compliance Director, ECARX



## About You

### What is your current role and key responsibilities, and how does your role contribute to the overall success of your organisation?

I am the Internal Control and Compliance Director at ECARX. My main responsibilities include timely identification of risks, formalising and understanding business processes, designing controls, and overseeing their effective implementation. My goal is to ensure a solid internal control environment and compliance with US listing requirements, particularly those relevant to SOX.

### Could you describe your career journey into controls? What initially drew you to this area, and were there any pivotal moments or mentors who shaped your path?

I began my career as an auditor with a major accounting firm before joining ECARX. I held various roles in internal audit and financial controls at ECARX. My first exposure to internal control was particularly appealing because it allowed me to apply my financial and auditing knowledge while working closely with

different business departments. Internal control is a unique bridge between finance and business, requiring both technical expertise and strong communication. I chose to specialise in this area because it offers a balance between supporting business efficiency and managing risk, and it provides a holistic view of the organisation.

### What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career so far, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?

My proudest accomplishment has been leading ECARX through its first 20F annual report and SOX compliance after going public in 2022. Building the internal control framework from scratch under tight timelines was challenging but highly rewarding. The key lesson I learned is the critical importance of communication and alignment—success required close cooperation across internal and external partners, and proper alignment of objectives and expectations. Effective communication significantly increased our efficiency and effectiveness.

## About the Controls Journey

### Could you describe the controls journey at your organisation? What were the key drivers, objectives, and phases of this?

When I joined ECARX, I was initially responsible for internal controls in China. As the company expanded internationally, my remit grew to cover global internal controls, with a strong focus on SOX compliance. The key driver has been the company's rapid globalisation and the need to meet high standards for internal controls across diverse geographies. Our journey has involved continuous learning, adapting to new business models, and implementing controls that address both business and system risks. The process is ongoing and requires constant adaptation as the business evolves.

### If you had to highlight one specific achievement within your organisation's controls journey, what would it be? Please describe the situation, your actions, and the positive impact.

A significant achievement has been fostering a culture where business colleagues understand and value internal controls. Initially, there was resistance, as controls can be perceived as sacrificing efficiency. Through persistent communication, real-life case sharing, and training, we helped colleagues see the value of controls in protecting both the company and themselves. This shift led to greater initiative and ownership of controls by business teams, resulting in a more mature and proactive control environment.

## About the Future of Controls

### What are the most significant trends shaping the future of controls (e.g., technology, regulation, globalisation)?

Technology and system development are the most significant trends. Automation, AI, and advanced systems are increasingly used to reduce manual work, improve efficiency, and enhance reliability. As companies globalise, there is a growing need for robust systems that can support consistent controls across multiple geographies and regulatory environments. Understanding local laws, taxation, and trade compliance is essential, and technology is key to bridging gaps and ensuring global connectivity.

### How is your organisation preparing for these future challenges and opportunities? What specific initiatives are underway?

ECARX's strategy is to drive global business expansion, with technology and systems as key enablers. We are investing in high-tech solutions to connect operations across countries, enabling us to quickly adapt to local regulations and business environments. Systematic solutions are prioritised to overcome the limitations of human resources and to ensure reliable, efficient, scalable internal control as we grow internationally.

## About the Future Generation

### What skills and qualities do you believe are essential for future controls leaders to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape?

Exploration of new technologies and methodologies, as well as staying updated on global policy and regulation changes, are crucial. On a personal level, professional communication and continuous learning are essential. Internal control professionals must be able to interact effectively with both internal and external stakeholders, adapt to change, and maintain a long-term perspective on building sustainable control environments.

### What advice would you give to those aspiring to enter and excel in controls roles?

Stay curious and keep learning. Curiosity drives you to explore different business areas and functions, helping you quickly adapt to change and identify risks. Continuous study is vital, as regulations, laws, and accounting standards are always evolving. Approach each new challenge with fresh eyes and a willingness to learn—this will help you design effective controls and grow as a professional.

# Yuko Kondo

Executive Officer and Deputy CFO, Toyota Tsusho Corporation



## About You

### What is your current role and key responsibilities, and how does your role contribute to the overall success of your organisation?

I am an Executive Officer and Deputy CFO, overseeing the Legal, Internal Audit, and Compliance Management Departments. My role involves promoting collaboration across organizational boundaries. While the Internal Audit Department reports directly to the CEO and operates independently, I strive to ensure it is integrated with other departments, preventing silos and fostering a balanced and integrated approach.

I make it a priority to create opportunities to work with members from diverse backgrounds, to collaborate, and to incorporate a variety of perspectives into our operations.

Corporate functions often work in isolation, but I believe in breaking down these barriers. A purely compliance focused approach can hinder overall operations. My role is to ensure a balanced perspective, optimizing the entire company for success.

### Could you describe your career journey into controls? What initially drew you to this area, and were there any pivotal moments or mentors who shaped your path?

My career began at Tomen Corporation, a trading company, where I was the first woman hired into a career-track position in international legal affairs.

Tomen was a company known for its open and free-spirited culture, almost like a collection of individual businesses. However, in the 1990s the company

faced significant financial challenges, leading to debt forgiveness and ultimately, the company's absorption by Toyota Tsusho Corporation in 2006. Witnessing the restructuring process highlighted the crucial role of strong corporate structure and sustainable profitability. I see corporate functions like Legal as the company's "primary care physician", ensuring oversight and control, a vital counterpoint to the sales focus and revenue.

### What are you most proud of accomplishing in your career so far, and what lessons did you learn from those experiences?

As a general trading company, we handle many dynamic projects, such as large-scale project financing, TOBs, and M&As. Our 2012 capital participation in CFAO, a French trading company, stands out. CFAO deals extensively in automobiles and pharmaceuticals across Northern and Western Africa, and this was the largest business investment project ever, involving complex negotiations, financial regulations and antitrust laws. In the automobile sector, CFAO was a competitor of our company, which made the negotiations particularly challenging at times.

Working across France and Japan for over a year, I often had to structure proposals and present them under immense pressure, knowing my judgment could significantly influence the success or failure of the project. The success of that deal was incredibly rewarding, teaching me the value of perseverance and strategic thinking under pressure.

## About the Controls Journey

### Could you describe the controls journey at your organisation? What were the key drivers, objectives, and phases of this?

Our company implemented a company-wide initiative called "Check10." The Check10 initiative identified ten key risk areas that require the most attention, including Product, Credit, Business, Currency & Financing, Internal Controls, Human Resources and Labor Management, Information Security, Misconduct, Logistics, and Workplace Safety and Environment. Each year, we evaluate and score these risks across risk level and management system for each business unit, creating heat maps to visualize quantitative and qualitative risks. This data driven approach allows us to identify and address issues and strengthen our global risk management system.

Additionally, as the third line of defense, we conduct audits to enhance monitoring. Given the global and diversified nature of our operations, increasing audit coverage remains a challenge. To address this, we are actively promoting risk-based auditing.

### If you had to highlight one specific achievement within your organisation's controls journey, what would it be?

As part of our risk-based auditing approach, we have introduced Essential Audits. Given the large number of

subsidiaries and affiliated companies we oversee, it is not efficient to monitor all audit targets with the same level of energy and resources. Even when conducting site audits, the traditional approach has its limitations. To address this, we have implemented Essential Audits, which focus solely on the most critical risk areas. This approach incorporates the concept of prioritization and concentration into the selection of audit items.

This approach has allowed us to expand the coverage of internal audits and successfully focus on the most critical risks the company needs to address, all while gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the overall risk landscape.

### What were the biggest controls challenges encountered and what strategies did you employ to overcome them? What key learnings emerged from these challenges?

The initial roll out of Check10 and Essential Audits was challenging, especially in a large, diverse organization. Gaining stakeholder buy-in and engagement required significant effort. However, leveraging Toyota Group's culture and emphasis on standardization and continuous improvement, we successfully integrated these processes from the second year onwards.

# Yuko Kondo

Executive Officer and Deputy CFO, Toyota Tsusho Corporation



## About the Future of Controls

### What are the most significant trends shaping the future of controls (e.g., technology, regulation, globalisation)?

I believe that, especially over the past decade, the types of risks that need to be addressed through control activities have been increasing. This trend is unlikely to reverse, making it increasingly important to effectively implement controls over these risks. In this context, the use of technology is essential, and it is necessary to adopt digital transformation and systematic approaches to address these challenges. Regarding new regulations, often originating in Europe, they are becoming global standards. Strengthening the second line of defense, which is most attuned to cutting-edge developments, and ensuring effective collaboration between all three lines of defense is key.

It is crucial to build an organization where the second line can raise alerts quickly, and the first and third lines are equipped to respond effectively to those alerts. This will be vital for the organization's success in managing risks and maintaining robust controls.

### How is your organisation preparing for these future challenges and opportunities? What specific initiatives are underway?

We are focusing on strengthening the second line of defense and enhancing collaboration, including educating the first line.

We are also exploring initiatives to involve future executive leaders in the audit organization, providing them with foundational knowledge for their future roles.

## About the Future Generation

### What skills and qualities do you believe are essential for future controls leaders to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape (e.g., technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, increased regulatory scrutiny)?

It is important to always stay curious and approach work with a high level of awareness. Staying ahead of the curve by actively adopting new technologies, such as generative AI, is particularly crucial in an ever-changing environment.

Additionally, while learning from the past is valuable, future oriented thinking is essential. When you dedicate yourself fully to your work, it becomes even more enjoyable.

### What advice would you give to those aspiring to enter and excel in controls roles?

Adopt a positive mindset and actively engage with every task, viewing challenges as opportunities to learn. When I joined the company, I was asked to train for both career-track and clerical roles. Rather than seeing this negatively, I embraced it as a chance to learn about the company's systems. Your approach and attitude can significantly influence your opportunities and outcomes. Stay curious, increase your intellectual curiosity, and enjoy your work—this will enrich your experience and contribute to a stronger control environment.



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