

Conversations for tomorrow

Quarterly review
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CHARISE LE

Chief Human Resources Officer,
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ENSURING A GLOBAL AND LOCAL PEOPLE RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC



Charise Le is the chief human resources officer and member of the executive committee at Schneider Electric, a global leader in the digital transformation of energy management and automation. After 15 years in various human resource

roles across Schneider Electric, Charise took on the CHRO role in April 2020.

The Capgemini Research Institute spoke to Charise to understand the impact of the pandemic on Schneider Electric's people strategy, virtual ways of working, and talent management.

**PEOPLE LEADERSHIP AND OPERATING
MODELS IN A PANDEMIC ENVIRONMENT**

Given the dynamic nature of the pandemic around the world, how has your operating model helped to empower local teams?

— I quickly learned that there’s no one-size-fits-all approach during a crisis like this. The situation in every country is so different and constantly changing, and so we must adapt and manage the crisis on both a global and a local level.

We had already been running a multi-hub operating model pre-pandemic. Our corporate philosophy is “multi-local” and our operating model supports this ambition. Our multi-hub strategy splits our headquarters across four hubs: France for Europe, Hong Kong for Asia, Boston for North America, and most recently, India. We empower our employees and leaders to make decisions that benefit the local community. For example, when it comes to our product offerings, we empower our teams to customize and personalize our services and solutions, recognizing that each customer in each of our markets is unique. We also took this approach to managing our people and ways of working during the pandemic. Our multi-hub model and local focus works very well – particularly during this crisis – and it ensured our local teams were empowered.

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Chief Human Resources
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THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AND FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING

What impact has virtual working had on your workforce?

— As the pandemic hit, we had 89% of our employees globally go fully remote. A small, but critical group of our employees continued to work at our plant sites. Interestingly, during this time, employee engagement reached its highest level since 2012 – something we discovered through our employee engagement survey, “One Voice.” We measured the level of employee engagement asking the same six questions we always do – for example: “I would not hesitate to recommend Schneider Electric to a friend seeking employment.” We also added a specific set of questions linked to the pandemic which covered areas such as manager support, communications, health and safety, and employee perception of how we were handling the crisis. Our Employee Engagement Index in 2020 was 69%, which is the highest since 2012 when it was at 55%. To my mind, this means we did something right

What model are you developing for future ways of working?

— We asked employees about their preferences for the future way of working. Overall, 83% of our employees told us that they prefer a hybrid work model with a mix of work from home and work from the office. We did see some variations in this preference across countries, gender, job type, age. For example, we saw that Chinese employees’ work preference was to work from the office most of the time. We can have a geocentric approach and give the flexibility locally to adapt our global policies based on local regulations or preferences.

In October 2020, we enhanced our “Flexibility at Work” policy, making two work-from-home days a global standard across the company. This global policy supports our ways of working today and will support it post-COVID-19. All our teams across countries and job roles, including our field and sales personnel, are part of this new model. The only adaptation to this global policy is our factory and plant employees, who given the nature of their job roles, need to be physically present.

It is not easy to take a global decision like this and apply it to all the countries we operate in because of cultural resistance, which is quite strong in certain countries. Culture change takes time, but I strongly believe the future way

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of working is hybrid, so we must prepare for that. It is also important to note that we are not a “work from everywhere” company. While we support work from home or work from “somewhere” modes, we also deeply value face-to-face connections with colleagues and customers to drive innovation.

How do you balance the increased pressure on the business given the economic climate and the risk for employee burnout?

— I think the most important thing to do is simply acknowledge it. We recognize working in a hybrid mode is not easy – it is not an innate skill and it incurs unique challenges for individuals, leaders, and teams. Managing life and work is never easy, and now employees must do it at the same time.

We are training our managers to engage employees with more empathy and care and to adjust their leadership and communication style with remote working. And employees are learning that empowerment comes with responsibility in this new hybrid model. For example, our playbook lays the expectations for managers and employees in this new hybrid mode. We ask our managers to have ongoing conversations with their employees to agree on how they will work operationally in terms of remote versus office-based and to set goals for their working relationship so no one misses the opportunity to connect physically with colleagues.

TOMORROW'S TALENT: ATTRACTING TALENTED PEOPLE, BUILDING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, AND SUSTAINING CHANGE

Thinking about the future, how is Schneider Electric adapting its hiring approach to a hybrid model and the potential for diminished geographical boundaries for recruiting talent?

— From a talent perspective, recruiting broadly regardless of geography is not something new for us. We set up our multi-hub model to be closer to the customer in each of the three regions, and also to support our employees and increase our attractiveness among future talent. We want to be the “most global of local companies” in any country we operate in. Our decision-making power does not sit centrally in our headquarters, but rather it is dispersed

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to the regions. We have one-third of our global roles spread equally in the three regions: Europe, North America, and Asia. I am a good example. As the CHRO based in Shanghai, I was not required to move. It is very unique as you often see C-suite executives required to be located in the headquarters. If you are not mobile, the job moves to you at Schneider. Our goal is to have 80% or more of our positions taken by local talent within each region, with approximately 20% of

employees in roles within each region living anywhere in the world. These initiatives help to attract external hires – both experienced and university graduates – as we can hire people from around the world.

What concrete actions are you taking to achieve your ambition of gender equity?

— Our 2025 ambition is a 50/40/30 gender balance, meaning women comprise 50% of all hiring, 40% of frontline managers, and 30% of senior leadership.

We are focused on building a gender-balanced leadership pipeline to reach our goals. As of the end of 2020, 47% of our executive committee was female, with women

50/40/30

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comprising 24% of the senior leadership and 25% of managerial positions. One way we are accomplishing this is expanding our internal talent pool of women leaders by focusing on hiring and including more women in sales and technical roles. To date, for example, women make up 21% of STEM roles with a hiring rate of 34%.

We have also launched the Schneider Women Leaders' Program (SWLP) – a global leadership program for high-potential mid-career women. It's a nine-month coaching and virtual workshop experience, culminating in a three-day virtual global summit. To date, we've had 236 high-potential women across all regions participate, and it has helped us move closer to our 2025 ambition of more women in mid-level leadership roles.

What are some other employee groups your diversity initiatives focus on?

—Globally we focus on five key diversities: gender, generations, nationality/ethnicity, LGBT+, and people with disabilities. For each of these, we have a mix of global and local actions. For example, for generational diversity, we are committed to providing more opportunities for two key populations: people early in their careers and senior talent. We want to double the size of our early career programs, which include internships, development programs, entry-level roles, and co-ops. This reflects that youth has been impacted significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of unemployment and joblessness. Digital and virtual working is an enabler for how we accomplish this goal.

One of our 2025 ambitions is to have systematic career review and development plan for employees 10 years before retirement. Senior workers have also been strongly impacted by COVID-19, so we want to focus on this population too, and we made a commitment to support our senior talent for the last mile of their career. With the world population living longer and staying in the workforce longer, we believe the workforce of the future is one which values experience and expertise in intergenerational collaboration, capitalizing on the advantages of early and senior talent, and other generations.



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