

Conversations for tomorrow

Quarterly review
N°2 — 2021

The Future of Work
Starts Now

| GET THE FUTURE
YOU WANT



GLORIA CHEN
Chief People Officer and
Executive Vice President,
Employee Experience, Adobe



LEADING WITH AUTHENTICITY THROUGH THE PANDEMIC



As chief people officer and executive vice president, employee experience, Gloria Chen leads people strategy and operations for Adobe, including talent development, diversity and inclusion, and all human resources functions for more than 23,000 employees across 75 locations around the globe. She has

held senior leadership positions in worldwide sales operations, customer service and support, and strategic planning.

The Capgemini Research Institute spoke to Gloria about how virtual working will evolve in a post-pandemic world, and the impact of new ways of working on diversity and inclusion efforts at Adobe.

“

The pandemic showed us that employees have unique sets of needs that we must consider.”

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE FUTURE OF WORK

How did your various employee populations adjust to remote working?

— The pandemic showed us that employees have unique sets of needs that we must consider. Our employee surveys indicate that early tenured and younger employees are more likely to want to be in an office. This reflects the fact that networking and in-person dynamics are critical factors early on in a person’s career, and that social interactions during work are important for younger employees. Studies have also shown that career progression slows down when people are remote. On the other hand, if we look at the needs of Gen X employees, they have young families, and they appreciate the benefits of working from home more as it allows them to balance their work and personal commitments.



Gloria Chen
Chief People Officer and
Executive Vice President,
Employee Experience,
Adobe

“

Studies have shown that career progression slows down when people are remote.”

How do you ensure that a positive work culture is maintained in a virtual setting?

— Prior to the pandemic, approximately 10% of our workforce was already remote. Our first reaction to the pandemic was a decisive action to send the remaining 90% of our global workforce home. One way we maintained our culture virtually was that we increased our employee engagement initiatives from the leadership team. For example, historically, we would do in-person town hall meetings quarterly with our top leadership. But we increased the frequency of these meetings to once every three to four weeks, given the uncertainty that employees were facing. And we have found that the dynamic of our virtual town halls is so different compared to our live ones. More employees can join and they are more engaged and are interacting in real time with colleagues all over the world.

We also gave employees an additional 20 days of paid time-off to use how they saw fit. For example, they might want to take care of children, deal with physical or mental health issues, or simply take a much-needed break. In the latter half of 2020, we also declared every third Friday as a global day off, in order to allow all employees to unplug collectively.

Moreover, we also conducted regular pulse surveys. Surprisingly, our initial pulse surveys showed that employee engagement had increased significantly based on factors such as satisfaction with their Adobe experience, whether they would recommend the company as a great place to work, and whether they think about leaving for another company. People were rallying together as a group which led to increased engagement. But at the same time, it is evident that the longer the period of turmoil and uncertainty is, the harder it gets for employees. As for inducting the new employees into the company culture, we moved to a virtual model of onboarding last year. We worked closely with the IT teams to revamp the onboarding process, to ensure it is a self-service process to get employees up and running, without the need for any physical interactions.

With 75 locations around the world, how does Adobe handle the dynamic nature of the pandemic (i.e., different situations in every country) from a people standpoint?

— As a global organization with a history of distributed teams around the world, this physical separation seemed blurred on a day-to-day basis. The pandemic revealed, however, that we are still physically separated in different places. And every region and even each site have unique needs. Leading through this change, where we have uniquely geographic differences, has been an eye opener for me. The mechanisms that we've put in place with our COVID-19 response team have worked effectively. We have constantly been opening and closing offices around the world as the conditions merit over the past year.

LEADERSHIP AND SKILLS IN A PANDEMIC ENVIRONMENT

What have you learned about leadership during the pandemic?

— My biggest learning from the pandemic experience has been the realization that resilient teams are built by resilient individuals. People coming together during tough times and supporting each other is what makes our organization resilient. And being a part of a supportive community allows the employees to be resilient individuals. I've learned that coming together and being our authentic, vulnerable selves is what allows teams to really flourish and thrive.

“

I've learned that coming together and being our authentic, vulnerable selves is what allows teams to really flourish and thrive.”

What are the skills that are critical for leaders today in this new environment?

— In my experience, great leaders are the ones who are proactively thinking about ways to keep in touch with their people. As we're dealing with a lot of challenges, it's vital to have that connection to make people feel that they belong and are supported. When people feel psychologically secure and connected, they are able to do what is required of them.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKSPACE

What are your views about increasing the presence of women in leadership positions in the tech industry?

— There are several angles to approach the representation of women in tech. First, it begins with the education system. Globally, we need to be doing more to nurture interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) among young female students and encourage them to study these disciplines. Secondly, we need to ensure that hiring practices are not biased, and this has been a point of attention for us. There should be constant efforts to make sure that hiring practices are fair towards all employee groups, including women and underrepresented minorities. And the third aspect is related to developing talent. In order to make progress and encourage women into leadership roles, we need to address people's ability to be effective and to grow internally.

We provide training and coaching to women in our organization to ensure they understand how to show up and speak up. "Leadership Circles" is our 10-month global women's development program designed to build and nurture their own leadership skills. At the same time, the impact of having role models should not be underestimated. Seeing women at multiple levels in the management chain serves as a motivation for all young women and has a positive impact on the company's culture overall.

How do you see the hybrid way of working supporting or hindering diversity and inclusion and pay parity efforts?

— We need to be careful as the current scenario has raised several challenges for women employees, specifically in the US. It is difficult to predict what the long-term implications of women leaving the workforce during the pandemic will be, but I think the flexibility that a hybrid workspace provides will be well received and it will make it easier for women to balance their work and family lives. For us, the key driver is to take the hybrid working model as the norm as we move ahead, and not an exception. As for under-represented minorities, the acceptance of remote working will expand the areas and regions we recruit employees which I believe will encourage diversity in the workforce. For example, we already have relatively large remote populations in areas where there is greater diversity than in the Bay Area.

We remain committed to global gender pay parity and pay parity with underrepresented minority groups. A number of different factors are considered with location being an important one. We ensure pay parity for all, provided the job and location are the same. Looking ahead, if people choose to change their status to permanently remote, then we will evaluate their compensation with respect to the job market where they are. We have been performing regular assessments for the same, and make suitable adjustments when needed. Moreover, given that we already had these mechanisms in place, I don't see the need for these to necessarily change.



Gloria Chen

Chief People Officer and
Executive Vice President,
Employee Experience, Adobe

“My biggest learning from the pandemic experience has been that resilient teams are built by resilient individuals.”

