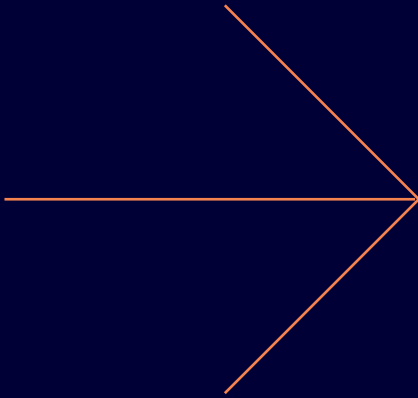


Crafting Tomorrow

Leaders' perspectives on technology



Christel Heydemann

CEO

Orange Group

The CEO Corner

in discussion with



Aiman Ezzat

CEO

Capgemini

Capgemini 





Christel Heydemann
CEO, Orange Group

Christel began her career in 1999 at Alcatel, where she held various management positions. In 2011, she was promoted to Director of Human Resources and Transformation and member of the Executive Committee.

Christel Heydemann joined Schneider Electric in 2014. In 2017, she became Executive Director France Operations of Schneider Electric and member of Schneider Electric's Executive Committee. In 2021, she was named Director Europe Operations, a position she held until the beginning of 2022 when she became Chief Executive Officer of the Orange Group, having served as a member of its Board of Directors since 2017.

She is a graduate of École Polytechnique and École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées. Christel is an Officer of the French Order of Merit and a Knight of the French Legion of Honor.



Aiman Ezzat
CEO, Capgemini

With more than 20 years' experience at Capgemini, Aiman Ezzat has a deep knowledge of the Group's main businesses. He has worked in many countries, notably the UK and the US, where he lived for more than 15 years.

Aiman was appointed CEO in May 2020. Prior to that, from 2018 to 2020, he served as the Group's COO and, from 2012 to 2018, as CFO. Aiman is also on the Board of Directors of Air Liquide and is a member of the Business Council and the European Round Table (ERT) for Industry. Aiman is a Knight of the Legion of Honor.

Emerging Tech and AI

Which emerging technology trends are you most excited about?

— **Christel:** Quantum technologies are extremely exciting, especially when it comes to cybersecurity. For example, using quantum key distribution [QKD] to better protect data. But the technology that excites me the most is AI.

AI isn't new, but the speed at which it's evolving – especially when combined with advances such as quantum computing – makes it truly disruptive. I'm particularly excited about how AI could accelerate progress in other fields of science, from physics to drug discovery and healthcare. In fact, I don't think there's a single area of research that AI won't accelerate. Rather than just adding complexity to an already complex world, AI could help us solve humanity's big challenges.



AI could help us solve humanity's big challenges"

Christel Heydemann

— **Aiman:** Generative AI [Gen AI] and agentic AI are at the forefront. AI is evolving from copilots to autonomous, reasoning agents capable of orchestrating complex tasks across supply chains, predictive maintenance, and customer engagement. This shift will enable new AI ecosystems that drive efficiency, resilience, and innovation at scale.



Next-gen robots can handle complex, interconnected tasks, improve decision-making, and enhance operational efficiency across industries"

Aiman Ezzat

Second, large language models (LLMs) are transforming robotic capabilities to near-human levels and surpassing human capabilities in some tasks. Next-gen robots can handle complex, interconnected tasks, improve decision-making, and enhance operational efficiency across industries.

Third, there's growing interest in sustainability-focused innovation. AI is not only transforming industries but also driving the resurgence of clean energy sources, such as nuclear, to meet the growing demands of digital technologies.

Where do you see AI and, in particular, Gen AI having the biggest impact?

— **Aiman:** Agentic AI represents a new frontier of digital transformation, accelerating efficiency and value creation by automating highly variable processes that traditional technologies cannot automate. I believe AI agents can transform the way in which businesses operate. Successful enterprise operations require AI agents working seamlessly with humans, under human control. I like to call this human-AI chemistry. We see Gen AI assistants and AI agents as tools to assist people (such as coding assistants) by augmenting and amplifying human ingenuity (for example, in developing new molecules). Most professions will be affected by AI one way or another and, whatever their seniority, they should learn how to use these tools. This should be a massive change-management priority for business leaders.

In the short term, the most promising fields are business process operations with agentic AI workers for hyper-automated operations 24/7; go-to-market, with enhanced customer targeting, experiences, and interactions; IT, as in software development with coding assistants and agents; testing automation; knowledge management, such as creating documentation, etc.; and in the delivery of greater value in terms of CX and new products delivered faster and better, including with improved R&D (such as developing new molecules or lighter parts in automotive/aerospace).

— **Christel:** AI has already had a huge impact at consumer level. Interestingly, a lot of that usage today is for fairly simple things, like getting answers or summaries quickly.

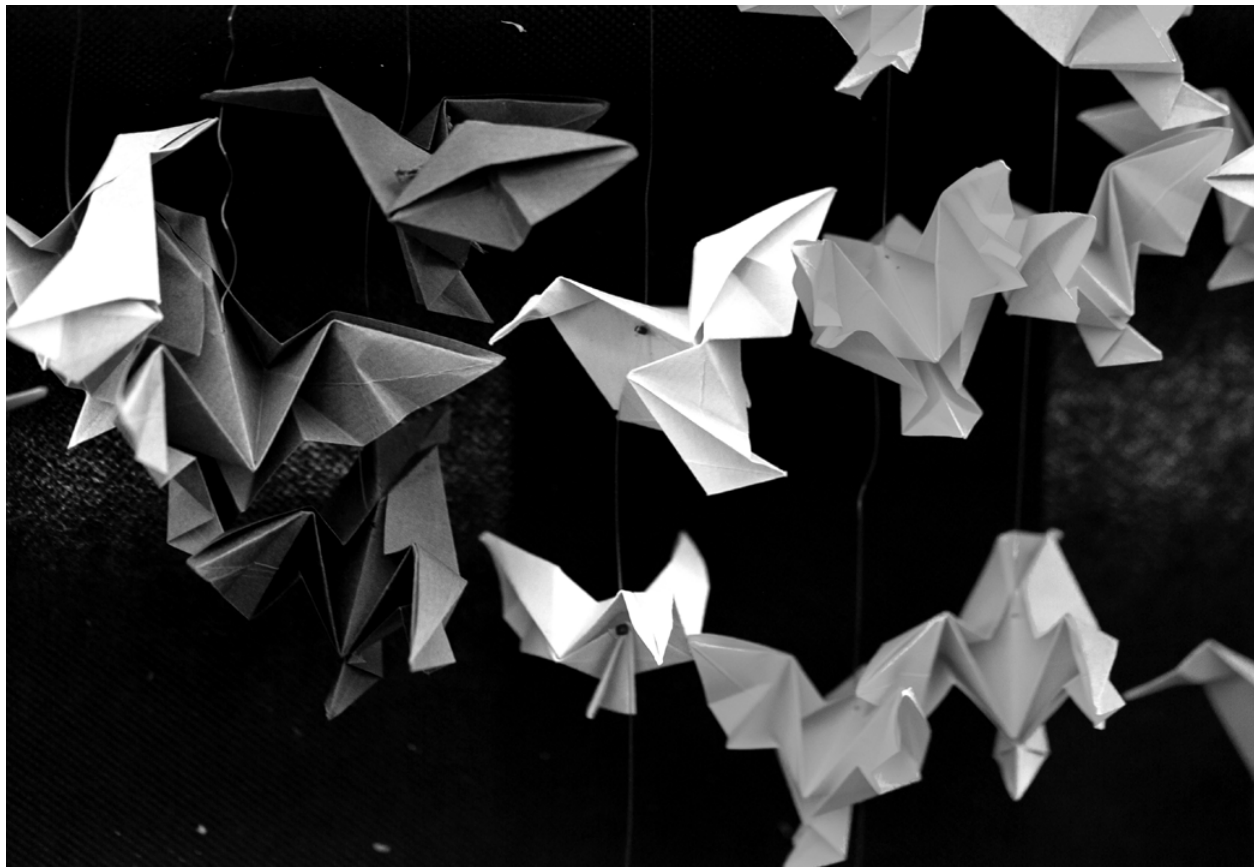
In the professional world, one of the biggest impacts we see right now is in software development. AI coding assistants are speeding up programming, and that affects many tech companies. At Orange, it's also changing how we work by bringing a lot of efficiency in-house. AI makes a difference in almost every routine process, from automating fraud detection in banking to streamlining compliance checks. In the telecom sector specifically, we're working on what you might call AI-driven or "intent-driven" networks. We're also applying AI to improve customer service. Gen AI offers more personalized self-service tools, smarter chatbots, and so on, which ultimately raise customer satisfaction.

I also see great potential for AI to be used as a personal coach or assistant for employees. Think of an AI mentor that helps you learn new skills or navigate challenges at work, at your own pace. Today, if you want to upskill, you might take a course or ask a manager – and sometimes people feel shy or judged in those situations. But an AI tool is completely non-judgmental. It's just there to help you whenever you need it. I believe using AI in that way – to empower employees in their own development – could be very impactful.

“

I also see great potential for AI to be used as a personal coach or assistant for employees"

Christel Heydemann



What do you think is the biggest hurdle to scaling AI?

— **Aiman:** It's not the technology. It's trust, governance, and organizational readiness.

While most organizations have moved beyond pilots, only 9% have successfully deployed Gen AI across multiple functions/locations. This highlights the challenge in operationalization, rather than experimentation. Capgemini research shows that the portion of organizations that trust in fully autonomous AI agents has declined from 43% to

“

The portion of organizations that trust in fully autonomous AI agents has declined from 43% to 27% in the past year”

Aiman Ezzat

"Scaling AI is less about algorithms and more about building trust, governance, and a culture ready for hybrid human-AI teams"

Aiman Ezzat



27% in the past year, and many have yet to put in place robust governance frameworks. This lack of trust and governance slows adoption and creates risk.

The data foundation is also critical. AI-at-scale leaders rank improving data quality and accessibility as the number-one enabler of success. Without strong data governance, hybrid cloud architectures, and democratized access, AI initiatives remain siloed and fail to deliver enterprise-wide impact.

Finally, human-AI collaboration and cultural transformation are often underestimated. In the short to medium term organizations will have AI agents working within human teams. Blended teams – where humans and AI agents collaborate – will become the norm, driving productivity and innovation. Reskilling, new operating models, and fostering “human-AI chemistry” are essential to sustainable, trusted AI adoption.

In short, scaling AI is less about algorithms and more about building trust, governance, and a culture ready for hybrid human-AI teams.

— **Christel:** Anyone can play with ChatGPT and get it to draft an email or summarize a document. Those use cases are relatively straightforward and can bring quick wins. And as long as you put data safeguards in place, rolling out those basic tools to employees isn't too difficult.

But if you want AI to fundamentally reinvent processes, that's a much bigger challenge. You need well-organized, accessible data. You might have to re-engineer processes to integrate AI effectively. Often, you even have to change the culture of the organization, so that people trust the AI enough to use it in their daily decisions. Scaling AI isn't just a matter of installing some software. It means rethinking entire workflows that have been in place for years. That kind of change doesn't happen overnight.

“

**It means rethinking
entire workflows
that have been in
place for years”**

Christel Heydemann

Telecoms and AI

What impact do you think AI will have on telecom networks, and what does an AI-driven network look like?

— **Christel:** AI will have a massive impact on telecom networks, both in how they're used and how they're run. From an infrastructure point of view, AI applications are going to generate huge amounts of data traffic. Whether the AI is running in the cloud or out at the edge (in a factory or on a smartphone, say), it needs to send data back and forth. That means networks will carry a lot more data, and different kinds of data, than they do

“

We anticipate that, by 2030, around two-thirds of all network traffic could be related to AI in some way”

Christel Heydemann

today. We anticipate that, by 2030, around two-thirds of all network traffic could be related to AI in some way. When you think about it, that's enormous.

AI-driven traffic will have different patterns and requirements. If you look at the history of networks, 20–30 years ago, most traffic was voice calls. Then the internet brought a surge in data traffic. More recently, video streaming exploded, which meant our networks had to handle a ton of data going from the network to users. Telecom operators responded by building content delivery networks and beefing up capacity to make video streaming smooth. Now, with AI, we expect a lot more upstream traffic (devices and sensors sending data to the cloud for processing, or users uploading content for AI to analyze). Some AI applications will also demand low latency. For instance, if you have an AI-driven control system in a factory, it needs real-time responsiveness.

Our current network architectures are designed mostly for heavy downloading (video, web browsing, etc.). We'll likely need to re-engineer parts of the network to cater to this new AI-driven pattern. Technologies such as 5G (and, eventually, 6G) are already pushing in this direction. They allow more flexible routing of data and edge computing, which brings some processing closer to the user to reduce latency. In an AI-driven network, you'd see a lot more intelligent routing of data: “Send this data to a cloud server for heavy processing” or “Handle this request right at the edge node, near the customer, because it's latency-sensitive.”

On the operations side, AI is going to be indispensable for managing and securing complex networks. Keeping everything running optimally is a huge task. AI can help by analyzing vast amounts of network data in real time and adjusting or flagging issues. For example, an AI system could predict that a certain network node will become congested in the next five minutes and proactively reroute traffic, or it could detect a hardware fault and alert us to fix it before it causes an outage. AI can also filter out the noise. In network operations centers, we get thousands of alerts, and many are false alarms. AI can learn to tell the difference and only raise the truly important issues.

“

With AI, we expect a lot more upstream traffic”

Christel Heydemann

In cybersecurity, AI is a tool for both attackers and defenders. We’re using AI to strengthen our defenses: detecting unusual patterns of network traffic that might indicate an attack or identifying malware. But we know attackers are also using AI to find new vulnerabilities or to automate attacks. So, it becomes a bit of an arms race. An AI-driven network will likely include AI “guardians” that continuously monitor and protect it. Manual monitoring just can’t keep up with the speed of attacks nowadays.

“We’ll likely need to re-engineer parts of the network to cater to this new AI-driven pattern”

Christel Heydemann



— **Aiman:** AI will fundamentally transform telecom networks by making them autonomous, predictive, and service-centric. Tomorrow's AI-driven networks will be self-configuring, self-healing, and self-optimizing, enabling telcos to deliver superior performance and new revenue streams. AI will integrate deeply into network operations, enabling real-time anomaly detection, predictive maintenance, and proactive issue resolution.

Gen AI is already revolutionizing network operations by providing intelligent document querying, automated troubleshooting, and conversational interfaces for technicians, reducing downtime and improving resilience. Agentic AI will unify customer service and network operations, creating end-to-end automation that eliminates silos and accelerates problem resolution, while reducing costs and penalties.

How do you see the future of the telecom sector, and what role will software play?

— **Christel:** The telecom sector is at a crossroads. On one hand, telecom has been the backbone of huge technological shifts – for example, the shift to mass cellphone use. Our networks were (and are) the foundation that made innovations like smartphones useful. Most of the time, though, people don't even think about the network until something goes wrong with it. Then, we realize how central it is to modern life. Also, if there's a natural disaster (floods, wildfires, storms) or a major cyber incident, people rely on telecom networks to contact loved ones and get help. It's a responsibility we take very seriously.

On the other hand, another big question for the future of telecom is economic: how do we capture more value from the digital economy? Over the past couple of decades, the big tech and internet companies, rather than telcos, have captured a lot of the profit and value from new digital services. That dynamic isn't sustainable over the long term. So, moving forward, telcos are looking to monetize services more effectively. Part of that is working with the big content and tech companies to find fair models. Another is developing our own new services. This is where software comes in, whether it's IoT platforms, cloud services, or AI services, to move up the value chain.

“
**How do we capture
more value from
the digital economy”**

Christel Heydemann

“

In Europe we have a very competitive telecom market but, currently, it's too fragmented"

Christel Heydemann



This ties into the question of scale. In Europe we have a very competitive telecom market but, currently, it's too fragmented. For instance, the US and China each have just a handful of large telcos, whereas in each European country you might have three, four, five operators fighting over a relatively small market. This makes it hard to achieve the scale to invest heavily in new technologies and get strong bargaining power with equipment suppliers and phone manufacturers. The European regulatory environment was created about 20 years ago, when the priority was breaking up monopolies and encouraging competition within each country. Back then, that made sense. It brought prices down for consumers and drove adoption. But, despite the market having matured, in 2025 we're operating under largely the same rules. We need to rethink those rules to reflect new realities.

Recently, an EU-commissioned report by [former European Central Bank President] Mario Draghi made this point very clearly: Europe should modernize its telecom regulations and encourage consolidation. I agree with that perspective. Growth is about new services, rather than new customers. In a low-growth environment, having five competitors where two or three would suffice means revenues get spread too thinly. Telecom is a business with high fixed costs. You need a certain scale to be efficient. If we can achieve greater scale (for example, through mergers or partnerships), we can be more efficient and invest more in innovation and network upgrades.

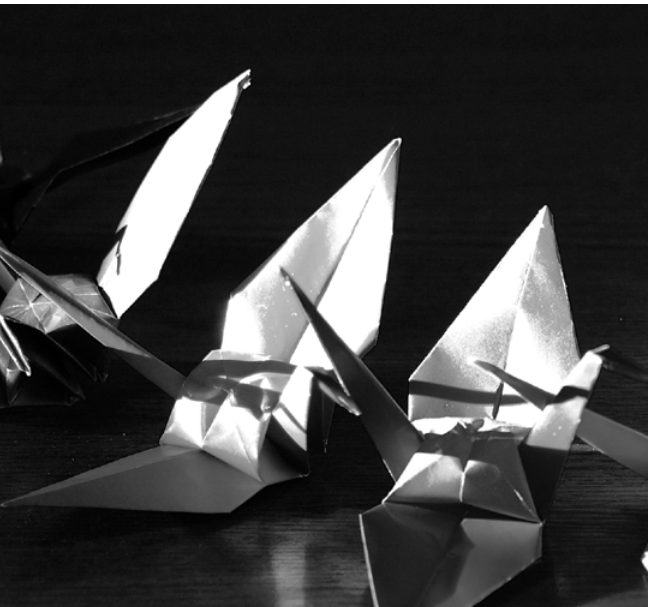
“

Europe should modernize its telecom regulations and encourage consolidation"

Christel Heydemann

Scale also matters when dealing with global tech giants. A bigger, consolidated European operator would have more sway when negotiating with Apple or Google on things like network features or revenue-sharing models. Right now, if you're a smaller operator, it's hard to influence those discussions.

The networks of the future will still be our core, but we'll develop more software, more services, and more partnerships to ensure we capture a fair share of the value. Providing excellent connectivity is non-negotiable. But we also want to grow beyond connectivity, so we remain competitive and relevant in the digital economy.



“

Leaders everywhere are asking: How do we make sure we don't lose control over our future? Europe has lost ground in many areas of tech over recent decades"

Christel Heydemann

You've mentioned Europe and sovereignty. Why do you believe consolidation is so important in this context?

— **Christel:** Technological sovereignty is about a region or country maintaining control over its tech destiny. This concern comes up a lot in Europe, as well as Africa and the Middle East. Leaders everywhere are asking: How do we make sure we don't lose control over our future? Europe has lost ground in many areas of tech over recent decades (there's no European equivalent to Google or Apple), so we have to be smart and defend the strong positions we do have, while building new capabilities for the future.

One of Europe's challenges is that, on a global scale, even our biggest companies are relatively small. In telecom, for instance, Orange is the second-largest operator in Europe, which sounds great, but in global terms our size is modest. When we negotiate with giant companies like Apple, Google, or Amazon, a single European operator – or even a single European country – doesn't have a lot of clout. These companies operate across the entire world, with billions of users, meaning they set terms. That's a tough position for us, as European businesses, to be in.

This is where consolidation comes into play. By consolidation, I mean encouraging the formation of larger, stronger European entities (through mergers, alliances, etc.) that can stand toe-to-toe with the global giants. If we had, say, a pan-European telco, instead of many smaller national ones, that larger entity could invest more in new technology, achieve better economies of scale, and have more influence in partnerships or negotiations. The same logic can apply in other tech industries. Size isn't everything, but it does matter when you're competing globally.

The EU has recognized these issues. We've seen new regulations like the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and Digital Services Act (DSA) introduced to curb the dominance of the big global tech platforms. The upcoming AI Act is designed to ensure AI in Europe respects our values. All of these are important steps to protect consumers and competition. However, regulation alone is not enough to guarantee Europe's tech sovereignty. We also need our own champions. That was a key message in the report led by Draghi: Europe must build competitive European firms. Instead of 10 fragmented markets, act as one big market, so our companies can scale up.

Now, specifically in telecom, Europe still has dozens of operators. The US, by comparison, has three big mobile carriers for a similar-sized population. That gives you an idea of how fragmented we are.

Consolidation in telecom could mean better, more efficient networks and a healthier industry that can afford to invest in next-generation technology (such as 6G, or fiber everywhere, etc.). It could also support our sovereignty by ensuring we have European operators with the clout to implement European priorities (such as covering rural areas or building secure networks to European standards).

Sovereignty isn't just about who runs the networks. It's also about who develops and controls AI and the other new technologies that will shape the future. We have amazing car companies, energy companies, pharmaceutical

companies in Europe. If they all embed AI and become more competitive, Europe stays strong. If they hesitate because of lack of resources or fear of the unknown, we risk falling behind not just in tech, but in those industries, too.

We should regulate AI to address risks (privacy, bias, etc.), but we must not over-regulate to the point that we stifle innovation, because other regions will absolutely forge ahead. Europe should aim to lead in areas such as ethical AI, industrial AI, AI at the edge (where we have some advantages with our engineering and manufacturing base). We don't have the dominant social media platforms or the dominant smartphone operating systems, but new battles are coming with AI and other tech. We have to position ourselves to win some of those.

How do you use AI in your day-to-day role as a CEO?

— **Aiman:** I believe Gen AI can advance beyond simply being a productivity tool to become a co-thinker for managers in organizations of all sizes, aiding in problem-solving and decision-making. It can become a sparring partner, offering fresh perspectives and challenging assumptions, even enhancing strategic thinking and leadership development. It is one of the inputs I take before I make a decision.

— **Christel:** To be honest, I don't use AI in a very heavy or specialized way day-to-day – at least, not yet. But I do take advantage of some of the tools out there. For example, instead of doing a traditional Google search for information, I might put a question to our internal AI assistant or to a tool like ChatGPT to get a quick, synthesized answer. It often gives me a more concise answer than wading through pages of search results.

The biggest boost I get from AI is in managing information flow. I receive a lot of lengthy documents – reports, presentations, analysis. We have an internal AI-powered tool (it's like our own ChatGPT trained on corporate content) that can generate summaries of these documents. So, if someone sends me a 50-page PowerPoint deck, the AI can produce an executive summary or bullet-point highlights. This has been a game-changer in terms of saving time.

Of course, as a CEO, if it's a critical matter I won't rely solely on the AI summary. But it's a fantastic starting point. If something in the summary catches my eye, I'll jump into that section of the full document to learn more. It's a way of triaging information.

I've also been working to train and educate myself and my executive team on using these tools effectively. We held a workshop where we experimented with writing prompts to get better outputs from AI. We're extending that kind of training throughout the company. This includes understanding their limitations. I enjoy testing the AI and seeing where it might misfire. I'll sometimes deliberately ask it a question to which I know the answer, just to gauge its accuracy. It's a reminder that you still need a critical eye. AI can streamline a lot of things, but you can't 100% outsource your judgment to it.

Another area where AI comes into my work routine is communication. I know some of my team members use AI to draft emails and even brainstorm ideas for presentations. I've tried out Gen AI to see if it can rephrase a complex message more clearly, or to summarize long email threads. I'm not a salesperson, so I'm not using AI to, say, write sales pitches every day, but I know our sales and marketing folks are exploring those applications. For me, it's more about efficiency in reading and research. And I do find it helpful. AI shaves hours off of mundane work for me each week, which is pretty significant. It lets me spend more time on the human aspects of the job that AI can't do, like strategy, mentoring, and so forth.

Women in leadership

How can we break down the barriers to more women reaching senior leadership roles?

— **Christel:** That's a multifaceted challenge that many companies and societies are grappling with. I think the solution lies partly in empowering women themselves, and partly in changing the culture around them.

“

We often find that women, even extremely talented ones, are less inclined to put themselves forward for promotions or high-profile projects"

Christel Heydemann

We often find that women, even extremely talented ones, are less inclined to put themselves forward for promotions or high-profile projects. There's a lot of research showing that a woman might feel she needs to meet 100% of the job criteria before applying, whereas a man might only feel he needs to meet 60%. So, one barrier is this confidence gap and a tendency to self-withdraw from opportunities. We can encourage women through mentorship and sponsorship programs, and by creating an environment where they feel their contributions are valued. I always say, the more we showcase strong female role models, the more other women will see a path for themselves. It's inspiring to see someone who has a similar background or faced similar challenges succeed. It makes it seem more achievable for the next person.

On the company side, it starts with a genuine commitment at leadership level. At Orange, we've made it a clear priority to help women progress. That means we set measurable targets (for instance, increasing the percentage of women in top management by a certain amount), and we track progress as we would with our financial metrics. We also have initiatives such as leadership development programs specifically for high-potential women, and training for all employees to address unconscious bias. These efforts signal that we're serious about change. And it requires sustained effort. It's about building an inclusive culture where women have equal access to opportunities and feel valued, personally and professionally.

— **Aiman:** Breaking down barriers for women to reach senior leadership roles starts with disrupting persistent gender stereotypes. Our research found that, while the vast majority of leaders agree women are as effective as men, stereotypes around future-critical skills such as AI, automation, and data analysis remain deeply entrenched. Nearly half of male executives in our research perceive these technical skills as "masculine." Left unaddressed, this bias could widen the leadership gap.

There's a few things leaders can and should do:

- **Interrupt bias systematically:** Train leaders to spot and challenge bias and make hiring and promotion criteria transparent.
- **Embed technical fluency:** Ensure all leaders, regardless of gender, have access to training in AI and data skills, which are increasingly vital to advancement.
- **Democratize sponsorship and mentorship:** Provide equal access to mentors, sponsors, and high-visibility assignments.
- **Normalize flexibility:** Make flexible work options available to everyone, supporting both women and men in balancing work and life.



Christel Heydemann
CEO, Orange Group

"AI will have a massive impact on telecom networks, both in how they're used and how they're run."



Aiman Ezzat
CEO, Capgemini

"Scaling AI is less about algorithms and more about building trust, governance, and a culture ready for hybrid human-AI teams."

