

Addressing Diversity and Inclusion: Going Beyond the Benchmark

Insights from Workplace Intelligence's Panel of HR and Diversity Leaders



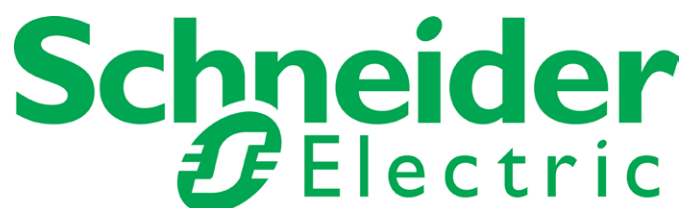
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What were the driving factors that made your company focus on diversity and inclusion?

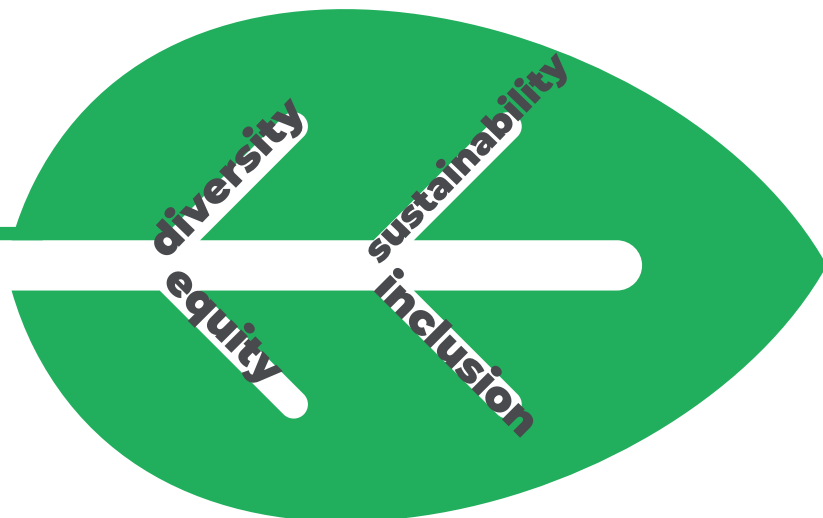
I'd like to start by looking at the internal factors for Schneider, since part of our company focus is providing energy management and automation solutions to the world. And that's grounded in a very strong belief at Schneider Electric that access to energy and digital tools is a basic human right.

When we think about that business mission, the way we have to deploy to serve our customers, our stakeholders, and our partners is through a very local, very equitable, and very diverse workforce. We always say that we believe we're the most local of global companies, because with over 100 countries in which we operate, our business model requires us to have proximity to customers and talent at a very local level. So the notion of creating equitable energy access and a diverse workforce to serve that purpose, and to meet the needs of our customers around the world in a very local manner, is probably the primary strategic driver.

At a more basic level, we have about 140,000 employees. We know that diversity, equity, and inclusion are some of the top engagement drivers for our workforce. It's why they come to work

for us, and it's why they stay. And many of our employees are really interested in diverse career paths—whether it's cross business or cross geography—and that's also part of our DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) value proposition.

The other thing I'll add is that from an external perspective, a lot of the DEI push at Schneider Electric is very much driven by what we see in the market, just like every other company. For Schneider, DEI and sustainability are the top reasons that future talent comes to join us and chooses to stay with us. We know that especially for incoming generations, it's part and parcel of the kind of work experience people want. We also believe that these priorities differentiate us within the sustainability and energy space. I think the rapid growth of ESG funds and investment priorities there, which entail a lot around DEI and sustainability, speaks volumes about the criticality of these priorities from the investment side of the house.



What are your 2021 D&I priorities and why are you focusing on them?

I'm still in collaboration with our management and our board on what our key priorities are, but I will start with a couple. For us, one overarching theme is creating more equity. And that's why we keep enhancing the "E" part of DEI and are working toward creating equal opportunity for all our people, regardless of background profile and location. It sounds very grand, but the way we make it more granular and practical is by truly taking a DEI lens to every stage of the employee experience—from the moment they are attracted to us and know about Schneider, to all the life stages that they experience with us. So overall, that is how we create more equity and a more equal chance of success for all our employees around the world: through their experiences, through processes, and through policies. That will continue to be a big priority for us.

I think the **other things that are really accelerating in 2021 are our new ways of working and flexible work. We know that especially for diverse talents—whether it's gender, whether it's home**

life situation, whether it's generation—it's key that they're able to work with more internal flexibility, an internal gig mindset, and with more inclusion and more trust. Just last fall in Q4, we rolled out our refreshed global flexibility policy to address new ways of working. The policy establishes a global standard, and for all countries to meet that standard or to surpass it, we want to formalize and really endorse a hybrid work model of work-from-home and work-from-office. Given our very diverse population, this is quite a big ambition for us.

The other piece for us ties to our five priorities globally for DEI, which are around gender, generation, nationality/ethnicity, LGBTQ+, and disabilities. Given some of the things that happened in 2020 in key markets like the U.S., addressing racial equity and topics of systemic racism will be a big priority for us in 2021. We'll also continue our work around improving inclusion for employees with disabilities, empowering women, and increasing generational diversity.



What have been your biggest challenges as you pursued your D&I programs?

So, I've been Chief Diversity Officer for a little over four years now. In terms of challenges, the one that I see the most is how do we engage all of our people—but especially our leaders—to make sure they prepare the diverse workforce of the future. Not just for today, but really for future, future Schneider.

I'll give you an example. We know we've worked really hard at the top levels of our leadership when it comes to increasing gender diversity. Today, our executive committee, which includes the direct reports to the CEO and chairman, consists of 38% women. We can do better, but we're pleased about the progress. Also, it's worth noting that three out of five business markets are led by women driving the P&L.

But for the longer term, i.e., our talent pipeline, this is where we fall short, and we have to do more in 2021. That means making sure people not only select and hire for their immediate needs and make key decisions around diversity, but also

plan that pipeline in the future. The challenge we face is definitely frontline management, which is the first critical level where the percentage of women is much lower—it's in the low 20% range. We want to make sure we really start to change the mindset of making talent decisions for the future and planning the pipeline.

The other thing about talent decisions that's still a challenge is that while there is a lot of support at the top, we sometimes struggle at other levels of the company. When you're faced with a singular talent decision—who to pick for that one critical role on your team—I do have to openly say I think we still face certain biases. Our managers sometimes want to hire someone who can do the job tomorrow, versus hiring for potential or diversity. And that's something we continue to work on through education, data, and some governance.

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What have been your most effective D&I programs to date and how have you measured their success on your overall business performance?

One program I would highlight is an interesting digital innovation that we've been working on at Schneider Electric called Open Talent Market (OTM). During the middle of the last year amidst the crisis, we realized that around the world, there was a lot of mismatch between the supply and demand of internal projects and work. There were many businesses that had extra work that needed to be done, or employees with differing schedules or free time. To address this issue, we decided to accelerate a pilot that we had started called Open Talent Market.

Essentially, it's an AI-driven technology platform that matches employees with full-time jobs within Schneider, as well as part-time internal gigs, projects, and mentoring. We expanded the program globally to all of our countries mid last year, and we have six months of data so far. From a DEI perspective it has truly helped to make transparent and democratize the opportunities that exist in those dimensions, projects, and jobs.

But it's shaken the tree a little. For some managers it's disruptive because we're encouraging employees to take responsibility for their own career development. So far, we've had about 40,000 employees signed on with a profile, 1,500 project matches around the world, and 3,000 people involved in mentoring. And we truly believe it's a transparent way to cross all angles of diversity while enhancing people's career development. So that's one example of an effective DEI program at Schneider.

When it comes to measuring success, at Schneider we're quite public about the importance of driving metrics around DEI and sustainability. But these metrics should have a purpose, and they should have accountability and some teeth to them. The main anchor for Schneider is what we call our Schneider Sustainability Index (SSI), which is very much aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our Index includes metrics around everything from climate to human rights to employee development, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion. We track the metrics every quarter, and we get audited externally each year. We just launched a new version of the SSI, a five-year game plan. We use this as a catalyst to drive more performance around priorities like DEI, and we also tie the goals to employees' and leaders' bonuses at the end of each year.

I think when metrics are applied in the right way and in a clear way, and the SSI is a good example, we can learn a lot from it. I would highlight that tying DEI metrics to business performance is a key best practice for us.

What is your vision for the future of D&I and what can be done today to realize that future?

So now we're dreaming really big. For me—and I'm speaking on behalf of Schneider, but maybe also for many corporates—I believe a growing trend is the idea that companies need to take a stronger role in DEI. Not only to advance DEI within our company and for our workforce, but also to be more proactive, more impactful, and to contribute to society at large. I think more and more we see the interconnectedness between public sector, private sector, and non-profit, and you can't separate yourself from that synergy.

But I'm very realistic; I know companies are not the panacea for DEI challenges like economic disparity, systemic racism, or access to energy. However, I do believe that through partnerships, companies can have a greater impact. At Schneider we're driving our DEI strategy more broadly, to really look at the societal impacts that we create in those efforts.

That is one part of the bigger vision for me. And then the other piece, like I mentioned earlier, is that because our workforce at Schneider is so diverse, we're really interested in creating a level playing field and exploring what equity means for every employee. We know we can't only focus on women or only focus on early career employees or only focus on a certain minority. While we want to address all those unique needs, we also believe in the notion of equity, equal access, and equal opportunity. I think that's a powerful thread for us that creates monumental impact over the long-term.

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February 2021

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