

## Excellence in Practice 2019



Schneider Electric  
/ INSEAD

# Purposeful leadership in a digital world

“The world is changing very fast,” says Olivier Blum, Chief Human Resources Officer of Schneider Electric. “We have to adapt the leadership and culture of the entire company to face this environment.” Such, in 2015, was the daunting challenge faced by Schneider, a global leader in energy management and automation with 150,000 employees across 100 countries.

The good news for Blum and his team was that the new corporate strategy, “Schneider is On”, provided a framework for this vast global organisation to become an agile digital innovator – a partner rather than a mere provider for customers in a volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous and rapidly digitising (VUCA+D) world. Five simple strategic pillars had been identified to help in this task: do more; digitise; innovate; step up; simplify.

The bad news was that the company’s leadership development was yet to catch up with the strategy. “We were sleepwalking through a tired old formula,” says Peter Hope, Vice President of the Schneider Leadership Academy, who was responsible for identifying a select group of executives and sending them on a traditional, face-to-face programme that was anything but innovative or digital. “The classes culminated in a ritual presentation to the Executive Committee that went precisely nowhere,” adds Hope, as he recalls the old way of doing things.

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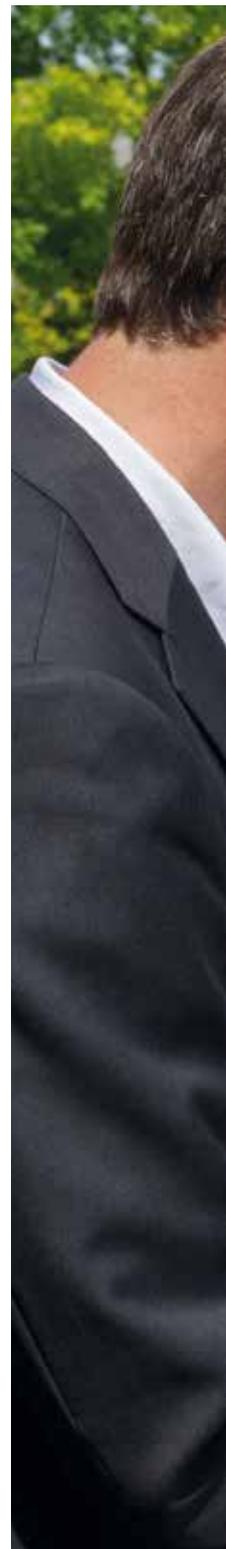
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## Develop true leaders of people, not followers of leadership formulae

It was a chance meeting at a management conference that gave Hope a glimpse of an alternative way forward. One of the speakers was INSEAD professor, Gianpiero Petriglieri, who argued that, when “leadership development” focuses on helping people conform to a mandated model, it only develops dutiful followers. For Hope it was a light bulb moment.

Over the following months, the two men stayed in touch and introduced each other to several of their colleagues. Although Schneider and INSEAD had much in common – both leaders in their sectors that had globalised from French origins – the two organisations had never worked together. As Hope’s boss, SVP Talent and Diversity, Tina Mylon, says, “We were sceptical about engaging with such an academic institution, but what I loved about them was their human approach. They roll up their sleeves and get stuck in.”





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SILVERSchneider Electric / INSEAD  
**Purposeful leadership in a digital world****Tailor to the leadership level, not just the organisation**

Gradually, over the course of a year, informal conversations and breakfast meetings gave way to a written brief, a series of formal interviews, a contract and finally an ambitious design for a system of leadership development covering Schneider as a whole. In fact, the collaboration resulted in a suite of four overlapping programmes, each carefully tailored to the needs of a different leadership level, as follows.

**• L1 “Leading with Vision for executive leaders (SVP/EVP)”**

Classes, workshops, experiential learning and coaching covering not only leadership but also digital strategy and cultural change.

*5.5 days on campus, followed by ongoing leadership coaching online*

**• L2 “Leading with Purpose” for senior leaders (VP)**

Leadership elements similar to L1; additional learning about conducting business across cultures (delivered on campus); courses on strategy in the age of digital disruption (delivered online).

*5.5 days on campus, 5 weeks part-time study online, ongoing leadership coaching online*

**• L3 “Leading with Influence” for mid-career leaders (Directors, Senior Managers)**

A shorter time spent on face-to-face leadership development than for L1 and L2, with a curriculum based on a personalised leadership profile; additional online content on the “Innovator’s Method”.

*3.5 days on campus, 4 weeks part-time study online, ongoing leadership coaching online*

**• L4 “Stepping up to Leadership” for early-career leaders (Managers, individual contributors)**

Curriculum on “leading yourself and others” and “strategy for turbulent times”, all delivered entirely off-campus.

*8 weeks part-time study online, ongoing “virtual” group coaching from peers*



Neither INSEAD nor Schneider had ever undertaken a project of this scale and complexity. Perhaps most daring of all, the plan at L4 was to deliver a leadership-development programme, entirely online.

**Digital disruption in both form and content**

INSEAD’s resident expert on digital learning, Professor Chengyi Lin, is adamant that developing soft skills online, though daring and innovative, makes perfect sense. He claims, “As a subject, leadership is like any other: there are elements of learning that work online, others that don’t.” Indeed, young high-potentials, who are the main target audience for L4, have no problem with learning anything in a digital environment. Furthermore, they are comfortable assessing and addressing their strengths and weaknesses through interactive, online methods.

The other key to the programme’s success – at all levels – is that leadership is always taught alongside more technical content, thus integrating behavioural and social skills closely with technical and strategic ones. At L3, for example, Schneider and INSEAD were fortunate to have Professor Nathan Furr, whose research on the “Innovator’s Method” for bringing entrepreneurial practices into large organisations was a perfect fit for Schneider’s desired transformation, as well as the contribution required from mid-career leaders. These and other tools and techniques provided the basis for live case studies and project work through which to practise leadership by nurturing innovation.





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30% for a major customer through a new system of remote digital maintenance. Marcos Antonio De Souza (L3, 2018) from South America has implemented a continent-wide redesign of purchasing operations, thereby freeing up an extra one or two hours per day per buyer. Whalid Gherbi (L2, 2017) did a project as part of the programme that will result in an estimated €15 million increase in business over the next five years. Scale up the customer satisfaction, cost savings and revenue increases across a global operation, and the benefits are incalculable.

### **Tangible impact across the organisation**

Fast-forward to 2019 and hundreds of participants have experienced the programme. Schneider has completed a full “business review” of the initiative, and the verdict from all parts of the organisation is overwhelmingly enthusiastic, resulting in an expansion of the partnership with INSEAD. In April 2019, for example, a new “L0” was delivered – in response to demand from the Executive Committee, whose members have been so struck by the impact on their teams that they too wanted the opportunity to explore how to step up their leadership. Similarly, later in the year, a new programme specifically for Schneider’s women leaders will be launched, again combining digital learning with a face-to-face summit at INSEAD.

The best evidence for the programme’s impact, however, is the experiences of past participants. Carine Glass (L2, 2017) from France says she has achieved a cost saving of

### **The power of partnership and commitment**

Schneider and INSEAD have succeeded in devising a truly innovative multi-level, programme that meets the company’s strategic needs. But none of this would have happened without partnership and commitment. By taking the time to learn about and challenge each other, the two organisations have created a model that augments the value of both personal and digital learning, achieving a scale and impact that neither party envisaged during the initial chance meeting at a conference.

As Oliver Blum, Schneider CHRO concludes, “Wherever I travel in the world, I meet people who say they’ve changed the way they lead as part of the programme.”

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