Alyana Versolatto

Excellent. How do you see sustainability and gender equity intersect, in regards to business?

Susan Uthayakumar

When I look at sustainability, what I see is a world that is enabled where everyone has equal access to resources and opportunities, that’s the way I see it, and if you look at the United Nations (UN) sustainability goals, so the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) goals, they centered around a prosperous and equitable community. From that perspective, I see them as equal. A sustainable world is a world where everyone is equally engaged and equally productive and has equal opportunities. So, for example at Schneider, we take sustainability very seriously. We have what we call the Schneider Sustainability Index that measures six long term goals. So, they relate to climate, they relate to equality and they related to society. So, when we have these SDG index, we thought about all the elements that need to work and all the areas in which where we need to show progress.

Alyana Versolatto

Excellent. What innovative technology has impacted the sustainability initiatives within the organizations you’ve worked with?

Susan Uthayakumar

Absolutely. So, I’m a firm believer that digitization is an enabler for decarbonization. Why I say that is when you digitize your operations or when you digitize your data flow, what you have a very good sense of is how you’re using the finite resources. So, let’s say, for example, electrical consumption, right, if you can track where there is waste in the consumption of electricity in your building, you can, then, put in controls and you can put in automation that can help you reduce your consumption. So, like that, every resource that you have - whether it is water, whether it is a different input to manufacturing - by digitizing, you are able to make intelligent decisions that optimizes the resources that you have. So, the more we have connective products, connective systems, and able to drive business decisions, it will mean we will use less resources. Using less resources means you produce less emissions. The second aspect of that for me, when you think about technology such as green materials or having green manufacturing, it also means you can extend the life cycle of your products, which means you produce less waste. So, technology and innovation I see as the saviour to their climate challenge that we have, and I think that all of us need to foster that innovation, whether on the business side or the technology side, and especially for a school like [the University of] Waterloo, sometimes I hear Waterloo being referred to as the little Silicon Valley of the north. I think enabling start-ups and funding them and guiding them and being available to them to accelerate the innovation is very important for the future that we need to sustain.

Alyana Versolatto

What are ways in which large companies can think about sustainability differently?

Susan Uthayakumar

Many ways. I think companies sometimes think of sustainability as something that is different from profitability, for example, and for me, the two go hand in hand. So, one, if you are conscientious about your emissions, that means you are using your resources optimally. That means less reductions and that means less cost. So, I equate decarbonization with greater profitability. I think its also very important for large companies to realize that the landscape has significantly accelerated on the need for sustainability. So, a couple of facts to share with you: 110 governments over the last quarter have come and said there are going to be zero emissions by a specific point in time, typically around 2040 to 2050. That means they are introducing legislation in their countries whereby they’re really looking to companies to lower their emissions. Second, two largest countries or two largest emitters, China and the US with the Biden Administration, had come forward with very specific plans on how they’re going to address climate, so that’s going to, again, accelerate the momentum. And the third thing that I would like to point out when it comes to companies, is that stakeholders, you know like you and I are demanding more sustainable products and sustainable processes. So, in order to stay relevant in the marketplace, this is not just a trend, climate change is not an ‘if’, but a ‘when’. So, everyone should be thinking about, how do they get ready for the change that has already happened and how do they stay relevant in the marketplace?