Interview with Carmen de Miguel
Offer Manager, Water and Wastewater Segment at Schneider Electric

Women and water: Closing the gender gap

In this new interview of 'Women and Water', we spoke with Carmen de Miguel, Water & Waste Water Offer Manager at Schneider Electric. With a consolidated career in the water sector, Carmen participated last September at the Smart Water Summit with a presentation on the Smart Water Solutions of the company.

Carmen de Miguel has worked in the water sector for more than 20 years. Upon finishing the Agronomic Engineering MSc. in 1996, she collaborated with the Hydrology and Hydraulics Group of the University of Córdoba, with EMACSA (Municipal Water Utility of Córdoba) and Aguas de Écija in the implementation of information and simulation systems for water networks. In 1998, she started working for DHI (Danish Hydraulic Institute), first in Denmark and later in the Spanish branch in Madrid as head of the Urban Hydraulics Department. In this position, de Miguel established contacts within numerous water and engineering companies in Spain as she provided consulting services, technical assistance and training.

In 2005, she joined the (previously known as) Abengoa Information Technology subsidiary, Telvent, as the Hydrology and Hydraulics domain expert and the head of a simulation group that executed projects in Spain, Latin America, Middle East and Africa. They developed and implemented solutions for network operation, leak detection and decision support. At Telvent

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and since the integration with Schneider Electric in 2012, de Miguel was also Solutions Manager for Hydrology, Wastewater and Smart Cities, responsible for R&D projects and Solutions Architect. In early 2017, she became Offer Manager for Water and Wastewater, in charge of products and solutions for the business segment.

1. **In the water sector, an important gender gap persists. What do you think is the problem?**

   The water sector, like the engineering and construction sector in general, has traditionally been male. When I started working in Spain, there were hardly any women occupying positions of responsibility, although there was an increase of young engineers or graduates joining the workforce. After some years, many of those young professionals were not promoted like their male colleagues and in some cases, they earned a lower salary while even performing the same functions. I think it is a cultural problem, a persistence of traditional roles and stereotypes, a lack of awareness and solidarity, not only in the water sector, but in society in general. It is true that progress is being made and thanks to the efforts of many women and men, we can see a change in the trends with business initiatives that are raising awareness of the issue, but much remains to be done. The presence of women in the water sector in technical or business management areas is significantly lower than in areas related to law, marketing and communication or human resources. From my point of view, it is necessary generational change and to some degree a mindset change as well.

2. **Does your entity have programs and / or tools that promote equality and aim to close this gap?**

   If there is anything that distinguishes Schneider Electric, it is its social responsibility and its commitment to diversity and inclusion. In this company, diversity is valued at all levels and a culture of inclusion and respect is fostered. Gender diversity is one of the strategic pillars of the company and a priority in its agenda, with numerous programs and initiatives such as:

   - **Equality Commission:** the development and implementation of all types of processes and protocols that guarantee equal treatment and possibilities within the company.
   - **Gender Salary Gap:** since 2015, allocates a % of the annual budget of salary increases to eradicate the gender wage differences, in equal work circumstances.
   - **Mentoring programs:** since 2015, board members and managers of the company carry out orientation programs with employees with development potential.
   - **Increase the number of women managers:** conduct an annual analysis and detection of employees with potential and to foster their development and promotion to management positions, with a special focus on women.
   - **Hiring Policy:** setting of criteria in the selection processes, where there should always be gender parity among the selected candidates, including the final phase of the process.
   - **Global Family Leave Policy:** measures supporting employees to manage personal life and work.
   - **Promotion of teleworking and labor flexibility** in the workforce.
   - Link to the United Nations campaigns HeForShe and Women’s Empowerments Principle (WEPs).
Since January 2018, Schneider Electric, along with 104 other companies from all sectors worldwide, is included in the Bloomberg Gender Equity Index (GEI), which recognizes its commitment to gender equality.

3. **What other measures (in addition to those contemplated by the companies) would be, in your opinion, effective to achieve parity in the water sector?**

The implementation of new technologies that require new professional profiles and different ways of working, combined with the incorporation of a new generation in all areas of the sector, will contribute to favoring equality. And undoubtedly education, as a basic pillar of a society, is a key factor to achieve this evolution. The equality that is seen in the classroom must be transferred to all levels of the labor and business world. This is, at the end of the day, everyone’s responsibility - men and women; within our family and social environments, as well as at institutions, educational centers and companies.

4. **Speaking in the first person, what difficulties have you faced throughout your career because you are a woman?**

The main difficulty I have faced has been work/life balance. I have been fortunate to be part of companies in which being a man or a woman does not imply any professional difference and I have always been supported by my colleagues and superiors. I have received great appreciation and confidence in my work while working for many years in a fairly specialized area. But there is a stage in which combining family and work demands, i.e. time schedules and travel, that make it really difficult. Personally, and like many other women, I have given up some promotional opportunities so to have a more balanced private life and professional life, after which I have acquired new responsibilities. I have been fortunate to always have the support of the company and my family, for which I am very grateful.

5. **What other challenges do you think it is a priority to address in the sector?**

Family and work balance is crucial to be able to advance towards equal opportunities and the elimination of barriers and wage gaps in the sector. In many companies the time schedules are still very rigid and presence in the workplace is required throughout the day. Flexing schedules or encouraging telecommuting are measures that revert to the benefit of the company, since they favor motivation and personal involvement in the work.

I believe that we must continue to break down stereotypes and normalize equal opportunities and the presence of women in positions of responsibility, especially in the technical or business area, with equal conditions of men.

6. **In contrast, what do you think are the greatest achievements in the sector?**

I would highlight the technification in the water industry, the efforts to protect the resources and rationalize their use, to increase service and standard indicators under adverse economic conditions, together with the incorporation of all actors in water cycle management. There is a dynamic evolution in the sector right now, which affects not only the adoption of new technologies but also the creation of new business and work models. All this favors the incorporation of more women in the workforce and the future.