

# A career journey in sustainability:

Three questions for Alex Schuman, Head of Corporate Sustainability and Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, Schrödinger

**M**any pharmaceutical and medical device companies are making huge environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments, such as striving to achieve carbon neutrality, and aiming to reach diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals. In order to get there, they need corporate sustainability experts to lead, organise, and help implement these initiatives.

We are delighted to have a conversation with one of these experts, Alex Schuman, who has made a successful and fulfilling career in sustainability that spans over a decade. Alex specialises in driving long-term corporate sustainability and ESG strategies, ESG reporting, sustainability communications, philanthropic giving, volunteerism, workplace mental health, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. In 2021, she was named a Sustainability Leader Award Finalist in the inaugural World Sustainability Awards. She is currently the Head of Corporate Sustainability and DEI at Schrödinger.

– Editor-in-Chief

**MEW:** There are many industry buzzwords and acronyms related to sustainability. One is corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the other is environmental, social, and governance (ESG). Why are these important for companies and the healthcare industry?

**Alex Schuman (AS):** It is incredible to see how, over the last 18 to 24 months, the general consumer of information is dramatically more aware of concepts and terms like “sustainability”, “ESG (environmental, social, and governance)”, and “CSR (corporate social responsibility)”. I believe that there is an argument that could be made for all of these terms being synonymous, but, based on where expectations are headed, and where the conversation is going, I tend to focus more on sustainability and ESG.

To use a metaphor, to me, ESG is a list of ingredients, and sustainability is the whole pie.



*Alex Schuman*

Having a really good recipe for your ingredients is going to give you the most delicious pie. My job? To figure out what ingredients exist across the organisation and then develop that perfect recipe.

One of the first things that I do when entering an organisation is aligning on these definitions up front. It is incredibly difficult to develop a comprehensive strategy, one that touches all

areas of a business, if those involved are not all using the same words to mean the same thing. It may seem simple, but defining sustainability and ESG are two of the most important things that any organisation can do when developing a strategy and framework in this space. This fact is true regardless of industry, and it can and should help shape all related decisions.

**MEW:** How did you get into this field?  
What drives you to excel in what you do?

**AS:** Coming out of my undergraduate degree, I didn't have a specific vision of success. I was focused on staying in the city where I graduated, and I was lucky enough to get a job at a local medical device company that – unbeknownst to me – would position me to create a career in sustainability.

Through a bit of luck and a lot of proactivity, I ended up being placed on a project that would change the course of my career (or perhaps just provide the direction I had been seeking). My first foray into the world of sustainability was helping the company to create a charitable donation application for local community organisations to apply for funding from the company. What started with an application for hospital galas and local nonprofits, grew into

supporting a wide variety of community engagement initiatives. Fast forward a few years and I was helping the company develop its first sustainability report and related function. During this time, I went to business school in the evenings to learn more about how a business worked – I knew that if I didn't understand the ins and outs of a business, I would never be able to ask the right questions.

I consider myself incredibly lucky to have found a career that, not only do I enjoy, but is inherently rooted in helping others. I have always been passionate about positively impacting those around me, and how lucky am I to be able to make a career out of it! The impact of those in the sustainability industry is enormous. I feel grateful to be able to consider myself a member.

**MEW:** You were one of the finalists at the 2021 World Sustainability Leaders Award. This is an amazing achievement. How did it feel?

**AS:** Being recognised as a finalist for the first World Sustainability Leaders Awards was a great honour and one that I cherish. Whether it is an award for me individually, my team, or my company, being thought of and recognised for your work is always incredibly validating. There are a lot of sustainability awards that exist these days, and it absolutely feels good to be acknowledged, but what is most important is the work itself. I believe that awards, rankings, and ratings can provide great insight as to what is expected next and may also provide great validation for work done to date. However, they are not the ultimate goal. The goal is to make the most impact possible, wherever possible. That's the real reward.

# Save the date

## 53<sup>rd</sup>



EMWA



## Conference

Berlin (Germany)

03 May–07 May 2022

## 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

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