

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blazer over a white top and dark trousers, is walking through a modern glass entrance of a building. She is holding a white object in her right hand. The entrance is framed by large glass panels and dark metal. The background shows a building with a grid-like facade.

Investment in people

One year, three continents and lots of new experiences

Sonova has been offering its High Potential Program (HPP) as part of its staff development plan for over ten years. Léonie Fauvet, a young Frenchwoman, has participated in this training scheme for future managers. Personal development and international networking go hand in hand here.

Léonie Fauvet's hands fly across the keyboard of her computer as she uploads images, adds hashtags, and inserts links. This young woman with friendly brown eyes works in Sonova France's headquarters in a suburb of Lyons, where she is responsible for the Phonak brand's social media presence in the local market. As Digital Marketing Manager, she looks after channels such as YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and a blog called "EcouteEtMoi". She really enjoys her work, especially as it gives her ample opportunity to act on her own initiative. "When I started working for Sonova four years ago, this role didn't exist at all. It has been newly created, so I can define a lot of it myself." The 27-year-old, who has a Master's degree in International Marketing, holds the purse strings for the budget and enjoys comparing notes with her social media colleagues in other countries as part of her work. Keeping an eye on synergy and cooperation is a particular interest, "but the content is often not a perfect fit for my market. I'm now pretty good at judging whether or not I can adopt existing content from other Phonak countries, and I make those decisions myself," she explains confidently. The young woman's independence is impressive – especially to her line managers, who put her forward for the HPP.

"The HPP Program is the flagship career development scheme we offer our staff," explains Claudio Bartesaghi, Sonova Group's Vice President Corporate Human Resources Management & Communications, who headed up the international professional development program for several years. "The slots on offer are very restricted, with 30 participants selected each year; we have something like three times as many applicants as places in every round," says Claudio Bartesaghi. A multi-stage selection procedure is used to whittle down candidates. "The selection criteria include the employee's performance over recent years and development potential as identified by their line manager." But this is not all – Sonova has adopted a broad-brush approach: "In addition to examining these various business functions, we take geographical considerations and gender balance into account when assigning places."



Léonie Fauvet

Léonie Fauvet managed to hold her own in the rigorous selection procedure and was the youngest of the 30 participants in 2018. But age is of only secondary importance as far as Sonova is concerned: “We’re more interested in asking what stage the employee has reached in their career. In her late 20s, Léonie brings digital marketing skills to the table that very few 45-year-olds are likely to possess.” The HPP lasts a whole year and involves workshops for which the participants are divided into five or six groups to complete interdisciplinary projects on topics set by the Management Board. Léonie’s group was tasked with evaluating customer service, and the team compared notes in regular Skype calls between meetings. As Léonie remembers: “We had a conference call every two weeks – but not until 7pm, because of the time difference. In my group, there were even participants from the US and New Zealand.” The workshops were held in Chicago, Ho Chi Minh City and Sonova’s headquarters in the Swiss town of Stäfa. Claudio Bartesaghi outlines the reasons for this approach: “With international requirements expanding all the time, we have distributed the training course across three continents, America, Asia, and Europe. This also allows participants to build up a network right across the group.”

Léonie, a sports enthusiast from the renowned wine region of Beaujolais, particularly enjoyed the trip to Vietnam: “We visited the production facility where our hearing aids are manufactured. The program gave me an entirely new and very comprehensive perspective on the market for hearing solutions, and on our company as a whole. I found it extremely valuable to meet staff from such a wide range of business segments,” she recounts with excitement. Her day-to-day work is now also benefiting from the experience and expertise acquired on the HPP.

Once the program has been completed, Sonova assesses the benefits each participant has gained from the course. Claudio Bartesaghi is very happy with the results: “All participants expand their network globally and describe the program as extremely practice-oriented and relevant to their day-to-day work. Moreover, at least two-thirds of participants climb the next rung of the career ladder within 18 months of completing the course.” Here, the HPP is making a significant contribution to Sonova’s objective of filling more vacant management and expert roles with recruits from its own ranks.

“The more talented staff members we can train in-house – and thus retain within the company – the better,” says Claudio Bartesaghi, adding “I’m also convinced that diverse teams will make better decisions and boost Sonova’s capacity for innovation.” This is why Sonova makes a special effort to recruit women and staff from a range of cultural backgrounds for management roles.