

Q&A WITH CEO

Setting out strategy to meet challenges

Deloitte plans to prioritize world-class governance, gender parity and CSR

By JING SHUIYU
jingshuiyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Sharon Thorne, the newly appointed chair of the Deloitte Global Board of Directors, envisions good prospects for China as the economy continues to grow. Thorne is the first woman to hold the position of global chair in the world's largest professional service company. She chose China for her first outbound business trip after taking up the role.

Thorne underscored the significance of the China market for its "size, scale and growth." "The country has significantly increased domestic demand including consumption, which will underpin the successful economy," she said.

In a recent interview with China Daily, Thorne elaborated on her three priorities as the new global chair, and shared her expectations for China-US trade tensions and Britain's planned exit from the European Union, or Brexit.

What are your aspirations as the new Deloitte global chair, globally and in China?

We are undergoing unprecedented changes globally. The fourth industrial revolution is having a massive impact on our clients and our business. We have been investing significantly to help our clients navigate these challenges. We need to not only enable our clients to transform digitally, but also teach our employees the right skills for the future.

As part of getting Deloitte fit for the future, we are globalizing the way we operate, so we can deliver to clients more seamlessly and consistently around the world.

I have three priorities coming in as the global chair. The first is to ensure that we have world-class

governance to oversee the changes we are going through.

The second is to promote inclusion continuously. I am a champion of Deloitte's commitment to gender parity and am looking to make sure we can deliver on that.

The third is to promote our signature global corporate social responsibility program, WorldClass. This is about empowering 50 million people, to help them with education, to learn business skills, and in some cases to help lift them out of poverty.

Last year as part of our globalization strategy, we brought our firms in China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Asia together. This is about our tilt to Asia from a global perspective, where China is critical because of its size, scale and growth. By creating this platform and combining our resources, we can deliver to clients much more effectively.

How do you assess the role of the Chinese market in your global business strategy and layout?

China is important because of the enormous economic growth the country has been experiencing and the fact that an increasing number of Fortune 500 companies are now based in this market.

Our China firm helps us to serve local businesses that have operations outside China. We also need employees from the China firm to help us serve clients in the United States and the United Kingdom, for example, if they need support. The demands on the China firm will increase as the Chinese economy continues to grow and we are excited about what the future holds.

China-US trade tensions have been a hot topic over the past year. Have they changed your view on prospects for China's economy and markets?



Deloitte's booth at the 2019 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing from May 28 to June 1. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The whole business community has been watching what is happening between the US and China. It has exerted a significant potential impact on the world economy. There is rising concern about the protectionism that is starting to emerge. The International Monetary Fund said recently that the ongoing issue would negatively affect global growth.

It is difficult to predict how the China-US trade tensions are going to unfold. It will have an impact on both sides. We hope the tensions will be resolved as soon as possible. I hope that the two sides can have some good discussions during the ongoing G20 summit.

I think the growth that China has been experiencing and the fundamentals that have been put in place should mean the country will continue to be successful, continue to grow. The country has significantly increased domestic demand including consumption, which will underpin the successful economy.

More importantly, China is continuing to improve its business environment for international companies. As long as people can see that continuing, it will be very positive.

The World Bank endorsed China for its continued dedication to facilitating foreign investment. Obviously, what is happening now is affecting some people's views. However, most people feel China is such an important trading partner that they will continue to invest.

Have China-US trade tensions affected Deloitte as a global professional services organization?

We continue to watch any significant global events closely. However, given our worldwide presence and knowledge of global markets, we can help clients and stakeholders navigate any of the challenges, and identify and mitigate emerging risks.

Next year, Deloitte will have been in business for 175 years, and over the decades, we have adapted to address challenges. The company has a presence in so many countries that it provides us with natural hedges and flexibility.

A host of Chinese companies have been investing overseas, and more foreign firms are coming to invest in China. That is an irreversible trend. Deloitte in China has been able to play a key role in helping homegrown companies invest



CV

Name: Sharon Thorne
Age: 54
Nationality: British
Career:
2019: Deloitte global chair
2017-19: Deloitte North West Europe deputy CEO and managing partner global & strategy
2007-11 and 2013 to now: Member of Global Board of Directors, Deloitte
2006-08: UK managing partner talent, Deloitte
1998: Admitted to Deloitte partnership
1986: Joined Deloitte
Education: Bachelor's degree in philosophy, economics and politics from Oxford University; a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
Family: Married

CHINA DAILY

abroad and foreign firms come into the China market. Deloitte in China is very supportive of the Belt and Road Initiative and helping companies take advantage of that.

Brexit is another uncertainty. With no deal in sight, what should we expect in the next few months?

The whole thing is extremely uncertain and complex. It has been changing almost daily. We are watching how Brexit is developing closely. If I had a crystal ball, I might be able to give you a better answer.

It is really hard to predict what the outcome is. We have been advis-

ing our clients to plan for a range of scenarios including no deal.

It is challenging and is undermining business confidence in the UK and Europe. However, I think the UK has a strong economy. In the medium term, it will be successful no matter what happens with Brexit. Positive factors include our education system, stable regulatory environment, our approach to innovation, and the broad base of the economy.

You are the first woman to become Deloitte global chair. What does it mean to you?

It is amazing. I feel exceptionally honored to have the opportunity to become Deloitte global chair. I have been with Deloitte for over 30 years and it is my proudest moment.

I have talked about being passionate about inclusion. We have launched a global initiative focused on gender parity, which aims to attract, retain and increase the number of women at all levels through the organization, particularly the leadership team.

Our China firm is a fantastic example of promoting gender parity. We need to get more women into the most senior leadership roles, and make enhanced efforts on that globally. The board at Deloitte has a key part to play, which is to keep challenging leadership in all our firms to do more about gender parity.

In China, we have some great initiatives. There is an excellent mentorship program, which aims to promote gender diversity and focus on developing future female leaders. Sponsorship is one of the most important factors in empowering women. A good statistic is that the first female partner in the China firm was appointed in 1985, and currently 60 percent of the workforce are women.



Online

See more by scanning the code.