

COMPLETING THE CIRCUIT

AAMIR PAUL STEERS EFFORTS TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND BOOST SUSTAINABILITY.



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As president of Schneider Electric North America Operations, Aamir Paul (’00) leads all operations from strategy to execution in Canada, Central America, Mexico, and the US—delivering best-in-class solutions for customers across the company’s Energy Management and Industrial Automation businesses. And his journey to become the leader of the company’s largest and fastest-growing region has roots at Northwestern.

Paul jokes about his foremost objective upon arriving at Northwestern Engineering in fall 1995.

“Make the most of this,” says Paul, an immigrant from Pakistan who commuted to campus from his home on Chicago’s North Side.

For Paul, Northwestern delivered a strange juxtaposition—an environment simultaneously intimidating and accessible. While the challenging nature of early chemical engineering courses and the campus’s intellectual horsepower occasionally pushed him out of his comfort zone, Paul also felt encouraged to be inquisitive.

Everything blended beautifully for him when he joined the Walter P. Murphy Cooperative Engineering Education (Co-op) Program. An educational initiative combining alternating periods of academic study with full-time stints of paid work experience, the Co-op Program pushed him to connect his classroom work to industry, crystallizing his strengths and helping him evaluate career possibilities, including opportunities beyond traditional chemical engineering routes in industrial plants, refineries, and laboratories.

After graduating from the McCormick School of Engineering in 2000 with a degree in chemical engineering, Paul packed up his Nissan Sentra and drove to Austin, Texas, to work for Dell—“the hot technology company of the time.”

Rotating through different units at Dell, he thrived in a world largely dominated by electrical engineers and computer scientists. By his 30th birthday, he was in London, leading a \$1 billion, 300-person team of sales professionals focused on small and mid-sized businesses across the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Itching for a change and ready to return to Chicago, he moved back to the area in 2013 and joined Schneider Electric, a global leader in energy management and automation with a strong presence in the US. Nearly half of American homes feature Schneider circuit breakers, he says, and it’s statistically impossible to avoid a data center powered by Schneider when online for more than six hours. Most enticing for him, however, was that Schneider held a clear and compelling purpose: to drive progress and sustainability for all.

Now president of Schneider North America Operations, which includes 46 factories and more than 35,000 employees, Paul and his team are enabling more efficient, resilient, sustainable energy and automation for data centers, buildings, homes, industries, and critical infrastructure in the US and around the world. Earlier this year, *TIME* placed Schneider atop its list of the world’s most sustainable companies.

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Paul’s work with Schneider has also reconnected him with Northwestern. The company has long been involved with the Master of Science in Energy and Sustainability program, including joint development of technologies with faculty and students, and continues helping the University pursue its ambitious sustainability targets.

“It’s a wonderful full-circle moment for me,” Paul says.

DANIEL P. SMITH