



# TAKING THE LEAD

Learn more about the top initiatives of this year's CHRO of the Year Award finalists in EMEA.

By Taylor Thompson

Long gone are the days of human resources as a back-office function; CHROs now find themselves in the midst of executive decision-making and business strategy.

Today's CHROs are not only tasked with overseeing their organisations' entire personnel and onboarding procedures, but are also expected to drive transformational human capital efforts. In fact, new research from ServiceNow finds that 75 per cent of CHROs believe that their role has become more strategic in the past three years with a strong focus on increasing employee productivity (75 per cent) and driving corporate performance (64 per cent),

What does HR need in order to make an impact in today's environment? "...business understanding, HR craftsmanship, and a lot of leadership (is needed) to achieve this," says Hein Knaapen, CHRO of ING.

Technology is also a driver. "We need to create a more engaging employee experience with use of technology to facilitate the journey," says Pradeep Bhaskaran,

head of HR at Cognizant Technology Solutions. "The biggest challenge that organisations face whilst driving the digital change agenda is to manage the expectations of their people."

Enrico Palumbo, HR director at SAP SE, agrees: "A CHRO needs to think disruptively, understand the potential of technology, and be eager to create an efficient and engaging end-to-end experience. We must focus on the workplace-related needs of the individuals rather than organising processes around the 'employee lifecycle.'"

And for Saurabh Upadhyay, vice president of HR in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa at Bacardi, HR impact comes by "...enabling mechanisms that support individuals and teams to personally engage, connect, and support each other to drive positive change in the organisation."

Learn more about the impact of the 2018 CHRO of the Year Award finalists for EMEA here. The winners will be announced at the *HRO Today Forum* in Amsterdam.



**PRADEEP BHASKARAN**

Head of HR,  
Cognizant  
Technology  
Solutions

Since taking over as Cognizant Technology Solutions' head of HR for continental Europe in 2007, Pradeep Bhaskaran's daily tasks have grown from managing 10 European countries to overseeing HR operations in 46 different countries across Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific, and Latin America. Alongside his managerial growth and the expansion of his team from only three professionals to 130 today, Bhaskaran has also established an innovative HR structure for his organisation that operates sustainably across several countries.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

Under Bhaskaran's leadership, Cognizant has established a number of innovative programmes, including health and well-being, employee assistance, and diversity and inclusion. With a passion for empowering local HR business partners to consult on employee matters, Bhaskaran has driven a strong shared services initiative that produces tangible results for his organisation and its members.



**NATASHA DILLION**

Chief People  
Officer,  
Inmarsat

As chief people officer for satellite communications company Inmarsat, Natasha Dillon has brought necessary skills to the organisation seeing as her 20-year career in the industry and in consulting has helped her develop a specialisation in HR transformation and organisational change. During her tenure at Inmarsat, Dillon has overcome a number of obstacles, including the risk of resistance to change in her operations and the risk of stagnant business innovation.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

Not only has she owned and driven the HR transformation programme introduced at Inmarsat, Dillon has helped the organisation discover an entirely new philosophy and approach to their everyday business that wouldn't otherwise have been realized.



**HEIN KNAAPEN**

CHRO,  
ING

Hein Knaapen has introduced a very focused perspective on the contribution of the HR profession to value creation at ING. In his view, HR enhances management capability and creates better leaders and managers. They lead the business, they drive its value creation, the HR function builds their capability to do so. In doing so, the HR-team at ING has built a number of powerful people solutions for use by its management, like a new performance management practice, a very powerful leadership programme, and the establishment of a behavioural code that captures both the legacy of the bank and its culture change.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

When analysing the scope of the impact these initiatives have had on ING's operations, the sheer number of employees committed to the company provides insight into Knaapen's positive results. In fact, ING has 50,000 total employees and over 1,000 employees in HR alone. From the perspective of cultural transformation, the organisation is widely recognised as an industry leader in five out of nine of its organisational health measures. It also ranks in the top quartile of its field for three out of eight performance management metrics and four out of five leadership metrics.



**JORIS  
MONARD**

HR Manager for  
the Netherlands,  
Siemens

As HR manager, Joris Monard was presented with the task of rebuilding and restructuring the entire onboarding process of new employees at Siemens. Upon discovering the need for a strategic workforce planning initiative, Monard researched, evaluated, and ultimately determined that the benefits of a new approach would outweigh the risks for his organisation. Now, upon being hired at Siemens, candidates complete a nine-month long training programme designed by Monard that follows a performance incentive plan with an HR-driven approach and connects employees with mentors.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

Under Monard's new onboarding initiative, Siemens' retention numbers skyrocketed to nine out of 10 people whilst its employee satisfaction amongst new hires rose to over 70 per cent. Additionally, this new plan helped diversify Siemens' workforce, which typically consisted primarily of Dutch males. The results have been positive with women representing 50 per cent of new hires. Out of 15 young professionals recruited in the past fiscal year, seven were women and five were expats.



**BRIGHTON  
MWIINGA**

Former Head  
of HR and  
Administration,  
Prudential Life  
Zambia

Through the launch of Prudential Life Zambia, Former Head of HR and Administration Brighton Mwiinga proactively handled his leadership over the local team whilst avoiding industrial unrest. Not only did he lead Prudential's new office through a total transformation of organisation and culture, but he worked to implement a strategic employee engagement plan, an employee self-service integration, and several benefits and policies structured under a rewards model.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

The success in transforming Prudential Life Zambia's practices to better align with organisational goals is likely due to the number of staff policies that had been introduced under Mwiinga's command. Some of his top initiatives include a talent and retention policy, the implementation of a training needs analysis (TNA), a comprehensive diversity and inclusion programme, an improved communication system, wellness programmes, and capacity-building activities that have all proved beneficial for employees. Thanks to Mwiinga's efforts, Prudential Life Zambia has seen a shift in yearly staff turnover rates from 25 per cent to less than 5 per cent overall in the last two years.



**LEENA  
NAIR**

CHRO,  
Unilever

Leena Nair, Unilever's first female, Asian, and youngest CHRO to date, is an exceptional visionary leader setting the strategic direction for HR and her entire organisation. Nair's work is continuously driven by her desire for inclusion, which has been integrated into her company's culture through several initiatives for mothers, LGBT employees, and employees with disabilities. This CHRO has set out to debunk typical workplace standards and stereotypes, and with 90 per cent of employees proud to work for Unilever, her efforts have proven to be successful.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

In her role at Unilever, Nair has helped implement a number of employee-focused programmes that address issues such as leadership accountability and measurement, maternity and paternity support (MAPS), agile working, mentoring partnerships with INSEAD, and supporting women in STEM fields. Under her leadership, which is driven by a passion for inclusion and gender balance, Nair has helped sustain an "Employer of Choice" title in 44 of Unilever's 52 recruiting markets and increase female representation at managerial levels from 38 per cent to 47 per cent in the last six years.



**ENRICO PALUMBO**  
HR Director,  
SAP Switzerland

As SAP worked to transform itself into a leading cloud company, Enrico Palumbo, the organisation's HR director in Switzerland, was tasked with diversifying the workforce to better understand the language and desires of their customers. In order to improve recruitment efforts, Palumbo worked to implement a sourcing campaign that featured series of events to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. With the help of both employees and external talent, attendees were introduced to a number of relevant topics such as mindfulness, diversity and inclusion, and the future of technology and design, and given insight into SAP as a potential place of work.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

To set these events into motion, Palumbo had to establish a team ready to carry out the plan. From securing funding from the executive board to recruiting appropriate attendees and gaining support through branding and communications, a lot of important moving parts were managed under Palumbo's leadership. His work even introduced a virtual reality onboarding tour for candidates to test drive SAP's workplace.



**MELVIN ROGERS**  
Director of HR,  
Sytner Group

Driven by a passion for people and business development, Sytner Group's Director of HR Melvin Rogers set out to crusade an initiative based around improving communication, growing employee engagement, and ultimately, retention. With his extensive knowledge in the field, Rogers knew he needed to take in-house employee reviews one step further and put the employees at the heart of the organisation. Through this came an online review system that now provides Sytner's 7,500 dispersed employees with regular, quality check-ins with their line-managers. A user friendly, balanced two-way process, which is very easy to use. The innovative 1-2-1 system was created in-house by Sytner's HR team and talented IT software developers.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

From gaining high-level buy-in to making a business case for the initiative, Rogers' project wouldn't have come to fruition without his drive for increased employee engagement. Since the launch of the online employee review system in early July, over 4,500 performance reviews have been conducted and 5,000 more are scheduled to be completed in coming months. And whilst Sytner is already known for its industry leading low employee turnover rates, the organisation expects its attrition rates to fall as team members begin to feel more engaged and appreciated.



**SAURABH UPADHYAY**  
Vice President  
of HR for Asia,  
the Middle  
East, and Africa,  
Bacardi Limited

As vice president of HR for Bacardi Limited's Asia, Middle East, and African (AMEA) business regions, Saurabh Upadhyay was faced with the task of realigning AMEA with Bacardi's broader organisational goals. Upadhyay set out to create a turnaround in performance in a number of different areas. He did this by making organisational redesign and leadership changes, driving succession planning, increasing employee engagement, focusing on talent acquisition and onboarding, communicating recognition, and building a capable HR team.

**INNOVATION AND IMPACT:**

Whilst risks were high, Upadhyay still set forth in implementing his desired changes for Bacardi and saw tangible results. By introducing a set of behaviours and cultural pillars of Bacardi, he was able to not only increase employee engagement scores for the region to 78 per cent, but keep regrettable attrition rates in AMEA below 10 per cent, with the Middle East and Africa region with none. And 100 per cent of the identified top talent has been retained in the region.