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PRESENT

TOP 30 TALENT LEADERS OF 2025

This issue continues Forbes India's Top 30 Talent Leaders 2025 series,
featuring the next set of leaders shaping India's talent landscape.

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Abhilash Nair is a seasoned talent acquisition expert with over twenty years of experience driving growth for India's presence in leading American tech firms.

His impressive career includes positions at IBM, Intel, and Google, where he witnessed India's tech industry evolve from mere outsourcing to full product ownership. Now at Zscaler, Abhilash focuses on strategic workforce planning and building effective teams. He strongly advocates for diversity as a catalyst for innovation and is valued for his results-driven leadership, committed to completing tasks with integrity and dedication.



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

Abhilash Nair sees the recognition as a moment of gratitude and affirmation following over twenty years in talent leadership. He considers it significant national acknowledgment of his long-term efforts rather than just a one-year achievement. Additionally, he appreciates sharing the spotlight with peers he regards as established leaders in their fields, finding the recognition both humbling and motivating.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Abhilash highlights the real impact of expanding India centers for global tech giants like IBM, Intel, Google, and Zscaler. He has observed and helped shape India's transformation from primarily an outsourcing hub to a center for full product ownership. He considers this shift as evidence of strong confidence in India's tech talent and views his role and his teams' efforts as crucial in supporting this change by developing and scaling highly skilled teams across various India locations.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

The key insight has been recognizing the importance of cultivating a genuinely diverse workforce. Abhilash highlights that diversity enhances not just team culture but also boosts product design and innovation. He recalls instances where input from diverse perspectives markedly transformed product development, reinforcing his conviction that inclusive teams deliver superior results. Maintaining diversity during organizational growth has become an essential and non-negotiable principle in his approach.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

When Abhilash started his career, talent roles were mainly execution-focused and transactional. Over time, the role has evolved into a strategic partnership with the business. Now, he acts as a trusted advisor involved in workforce planning, organization design, and long-term capability building. Talent leadership has moved from just fulfilling requirements to shaping how organizations attract and maintain critical skills, especially in technology and product-driven fields.

How do you identify the right talent?

Finding the right talent is typically a thorough and repetitive process. Abhilash thinks the decision becomes obvious once candidates pass the full evaluation and a consensus to hire is achieved. Although this journey might include examining many applications and conducting multiple interviews, the result is clear and concrete. The challenge is to remain patient and dedicated to finding the right match, rather than hastening the process.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

Abhilash considers the impact of AI-driven automation on early career roles as the biggest future challenge. As entry-level positions become more automated, hiring at this stage may decrease, potentially leading to a future gap in mid-career talent supply and demand. Without sufficient investment in early career pipelines now, organizations could encounter increased competition, higher costs, and talent shortages in the coming years.

Rapid fire

Abhilash, if not in talent leadership, might have been a professional golfer. His superhero power would be sharp deduction skills, inspired by Sherlock Holmes, to analyze data and surroundings more accurately. He doesn't focus on a single talent, valuing everyone's uniqueness. His hero is his father, a senior Indian Army officer, from whom he learned discipline, service, and duty. He always emphasizes focus on execution and measurable results. His advice to talent leaders is to prioritize building strong relationships and stakeholder trust, starting with clear stakeholder mapping and ongoing engagement.



ABHILASH NAIR

Senior Director, Talent - Zscaler
Cybersecurity



Adhar Jain is a seasoned talent acquisition expert with around 15 to 16 years of experience, transforming human resources from merely operational functions to strategic business partnerships. He now oversees talent acquisition at GlaxoSmithKline and is known for his focus on data-driven decisions and purposeful organizational growth. Adhar strongly supports coaching and mentorship initiatives, aiming to foster cross-functional ecosystems that emphasize ethical leadership and inclusivity. His career reflects a transition from traditional policies to a focus on product and experience design, ensuring that talent strategies actively drive business innovation.



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Adhar Jain, this recognition is highly meaningful on a personal level. He initially set out to work for a multinational, but being recognized by Forbes India affirms that his people strategy is effective, driving business growth and innovation. Beyond personal pride, it boosts his personal and employer reputation, opens new networking opportunities, and lends credibility to the talent initiatives he is building and growing within the organization.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Adhar finds great pride in coaching and mentoring others. Watching his mentees develop into managers and leaders, often surpassing him, brings him deep satisfaction. He emphasizes creating purpose-driven organizations and applying data-driven strategies that generate real business results. For him, shifting decision-making from intuition to evidence-based approaches has been a pivotal milestone in his leadership development.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

Influence always outweighs authority. Adhar advocates that true impact stems from blending evidence with relationships and leveraging data for human-focused decisions. He highlights the need for measurable results, straightforward dashboards, and quick pilots to demonstrate value. His ongoing work includes coaching leaders and collaborating closely with them to ensure solutions are sustainable, not just theoretical.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

Over the past 15 to 16 years, Adhar's role has transformed from focusing on operational delivery to becoming a strategic business partner. Talent leadership has evolved from managing policies to designing products and experiences, from relying on intuition to making decisions based on data, and from standalone HR initiatives to integrated, cross-functional ecosystems supported by technology. Additionally, the role has shifted from a compliance-centric approach to emphasizing ethical and inclusive leadership.

How do you know when you have found the right talent?

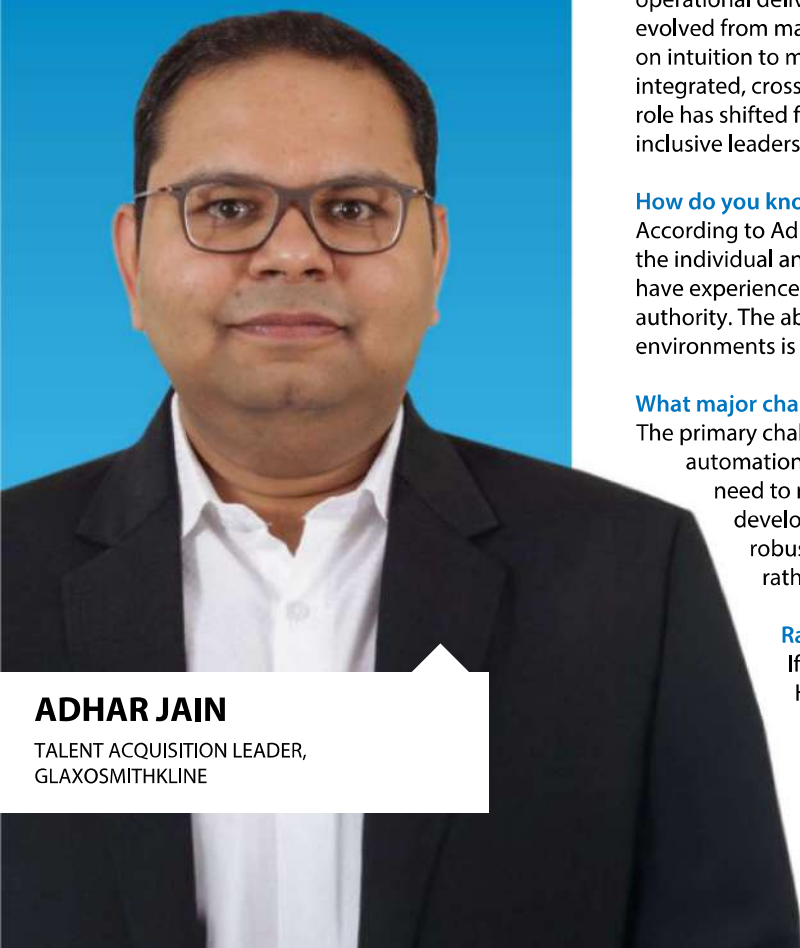
According to Adhar, the right talent shows early results. Trust builds quickly between the individual and the team. He looks beyond resumes to assess whether candidates have experienced failure, learned from it, and delivered results without formal authority. The ability to grow through setbacks and perform in ambiguous environments is central to his evaluation.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

The primary challenge will be managing ongoing change brought by AI and automation, while safeguarding careers, fairness, and well-being. Talent leaders need to reskill their workforce, manage talent with a focus on results, and develop hybrid, skill-based organizations. Success hinges on practical pilots, robust governance, and viewing learning and mobility as strategic tools rather than just HR initiatives.

Rapid fire

If Adhar isn't a talent leader, he'd likely work in business with his father. His dream superhero power would be the ability to pause time for deep diagnosis and speed it up to fuel innovation. The most unique talent he's come across is transferable curiosity. His hero is his first manager, who showed him the importance of patience and calm leadership. One of his favorite habits is weekly reflection and prioritization. His advice to talent leaders is to hire for potential, provide deep coaching, and create a safe space for people to fail and learn.



ADHAR JAIN

TALENT ACQUISITION LEADER,
GLAXOSMITHKLINE

Ashish Mishra is an experienced human resources expert with 18 to 20 years in talent acquisition and strategic people management. He currently holds the position of Associate Vice President at Cvent, where he prioritizes a people-first and business-aligned HR approach. Throughout his career, Ashish has built high-performing, people-centric teams and effectively expanded mobility and campus initiatives. He champions data-driven decision making and asserts that true leadership relies on influence through knowledge rather than formal authority.



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Ashish Mishra, this recognition is humbling and thoughtfully reflects the teams and organizations he's partnered with over the years. He sees it as reassurance that a people-first strategy, when aligned with business goals, genuinely makes a difference. Instead of viewing it as an individual achievement, he regards it as validation of the collaborative effort involved in developing robust talent systems and high-performing teams.



Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Ashish takes pride in creating teams that excel while remaining human-centered. Over almost twenty years, he has focused on increasing impact without sacrificing empathy. Notable efforts include launching internal mobility initiatives, preparing campus talent for corporate roles, and enhancing employer branding, all of which have contributed lasting value to organizations and individuals.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

Three key lessons have shaped his leadership development. First, having a thorough understanding of the business is vital. Talent leaders who deeply understand the company they support tend to be more credible and effective. Second, decisions should rely on data rather than just instincts. Data adds rigor, clarity, and consistency to talent strategies. Third, the ability to influence others without formal authority is essential. True leadership is rooted in knowledge and trust, not titles.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

Ashish notes a clear transition from merely fulfilling requisitions to building strategic partnerships. Talent leaders now serve as consultants to the business rather than merely supplying talent. This change includes moving from role-specific hiring to skill-focused workforce planning, making decisions based on data instead of instinct, and shifting from strict office environments to hybrid and remote work models. Today, talent leaders are integral in shaping learning initiatives, internal mobility, engagement efforts, and long-term workforce planning in complex settings.

How do you identify the right talent?

The right talent is revealed when a candidate's achievements match the organisational culture and when ownership and engagement are apparent during evaluations. Ashish emphasizes that interview panels should be clearly aligned on their assessment criteria. Due to the constraints of brief interviews, he prioritizes behavioural and cultural compatibility. While technical skills can be developed through training, behavioural alignment is key to long-term success.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

The key challenge moving forward is AI, not to replace jobs, but to empower current workers to be more effective and efficient with AI. As AI adoption accelerates, talent leaders need to connect technology with people by promoting responsible, thoughtful implementation.

Rapid fire

If Ashish weren't a talent leader, he might have become a life coach or teacher, roles that enable deep engagement with others. His dream superpower is time dilation, which would let him slow time for more presence and reflection. Superman has always been his hero, representing hidden strength and identity. One consistent habit he has is organizing his day around clear priorities. His guidance to talent leaders is to adopt AI thoughtfully and communicate its benefits clearly, emphasizing that AI boosts efficiency without replacing human potential.



ASHISH MISHRA

ASSOCIATE VP, HUMAN RESOURCES –
TALENT ACQUISITION – CVENT, INC



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Atul Sahgal, the recognition is undoubtedly a proud moment, but more importantly, it affirms the talent acquisition vision and strategies he has implemented. He sees it as acknowledgment not only of results but also of intent. The award also highlights the world-class team he manages, which consistently achieves both scale and quality for the organization. He believes the recognition belongs as much to his team as to himself.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

His journey has been largely shaped by the trust from mentors and leaders, which gave him the confidence to take calculated risks, experiment with new methods, and view failure as a necessary part of innovation. Being in an environment where leaders foster exploration enabled him to test various ideas in talent acquisition, embrace quick failures, learn from them, and ultimately succeed. He considers this supportive environment fundamental to his development as a leader.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

Agility is the most essential skill in today's rapidly evolving talent environment. Second is making decisions based on data. Choices should be evidence-based, not instinctual. Third, and possibly most crucial, is keeping people at the forefront. Although technology's role in talent acquisition grows, Atul emphasizes that the human element continues to be vital for establishing trust and creating lasting value.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

The role has changed considerably over the last twenty years. Previously, success was about filling positions. Now, it focuses on providing quality at scale, meeting tight deadlines, and competing intensely. Talent leaders need to think strategically, respond swiftly, and rely on data-driven choices. The shift has moved from individual performance focused on metrics to leadership that influences strategy, agility, and quality all at once.

How do you identify the right talent?

Atul considers hiring less about specific skills and more about potential. He prioritizes learnability, adaptability, and flexibility, valuing talent that can grow and learn over immediate competence. He advocates investing in early talent, especially campus recruits, and developing them gradually. For him, long-term success depends on qualities like learnability and adaptability rather than fixed skills.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

The primary challenge moving forward is to balance speed with quality. While agility is crucial in a race against time, it should not compromise hiring standards. Technology and AI play vital roles as enablers, yet talent acquisition must retain its human element. It remains a deeply human-centric process that depends on personal involvement and judgment in addition to digital tools.

Rapid fire

If not a talent acquisition leader, Atul would probably be a strategist in a Formula One team, attracted by the precision, speed, and high-stakes decisions involved. His dream superhero power would be the ability to pause time, since timing is everything in talent acquisition. The most unusual talent he's seen was a candidate with a severe stammer who went on to become one of the organization's top coders, reminding us to look beyond surface impressions. His hero is himself, because he believes in being accountable for his actions and choices. One helpful habit he has is preparing for the next day the night before. His advice for talent leaders is to welcome change, keep investing in learning, use technology and AI wisely, and always remember the importance of the human touch.



Atul Sahgal is a seasoned human resources executive who currently serves as the Senior Vice President and Global Head of Talent Acquisition at Cognizant Technology Solutions. He oversees a world class recruitment function that is responsible for delivering high qualitative and quantitative volumes for the organization on a global scale. His career is defined by strategic agility and a commitment to data driven decision making. Atul is recognized for his ability to navigate the rapidly changing talent landscape while maintaining a focus on learnability and the essential human touch in the recruitment process.



ATUL SAHGAL

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND GLOBAL
HEAD OF TALENT ACQUISITION,
COGNIZANT TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Chetana Patnaik, this recognition represents a collective achievement rather than just personal success. She considers it an endorsement of the people, culture, and systems developed at LTIMindtree. Most importantly, she values transforming HR from a simple transactional role into a strategic business partner. Initiatives like the Rhythm culture framework, enhanced culture activation, AI-driven HR transformation, and integrating data insights into the talent ecosystem have established a solid foundation for sustainable growth.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Chetana emphasizes the transition from administration to architecture as the key milestone in her journey. Her focus has shifted HR from merely policies and compliance to actively shaping culture, enhancing capability, improving the people experience, and driving business results. She views talent leadership now as a vital catalyst for transformation, innovation, and agility, rather than just a support role.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

Contextual intelligence is just as important as capability. Although technology and AI analytics have improved decision-making sophistication, Chetana argues that understanding people, teams, and the wider business environment is what truly drives impact. Capability alone, without context, constrains results. Effective leadership comes from combining data with a deep understanding of human dynamics.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

The role has shifted from focusing mainly on operations and efficiency to being closely tied to business outcomes. Previously, success was defined by compliance and streamlined processes. Now, talent leaders act as architects of culture, skills, and expansion. They are tasked with harnessing technology, fostering innovation, and building environments that promote agility and large-scale transformation.

How do you identify the right talent?

The ideal talent naturally appears where capability, curiosity, and aspirations intersect. Although skills matter, qualities like mindset, adaptability, and shared values truly distinguish someone. When expertise is paired with positive behaviors and alignment to the company's culture, it creates a foundation for enduring success and long-term value.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

The main challenge will be balancing rapid technological change while ensuring humans remain central in the workplace. Talent leaders need to adopt AI and advanced tech without sacrificing empathy, trust, and human connection.

Rapid fire

If she weren't a talent leader, Chetana might have pursued a career as a teacher, coach, or university professor, focusing on shaping careers. Her ideal superpower would be the ability to recognize hidden potential in people and assist them in unlocking it on their own. The most unusual talent she has seen involves individuals with strong technical skills but low emotional quotient, a combo that can often hamper their impact within organizations. Her role models include S. N. Subrahmanyam, Chairman and MD of Larsen & Toubro, and A. M. Naik, from whom she learned how to build institutions, make bold decisions, and prioritize meritocracy. She habitually addresses problems without attributing them to specific individuals. Her advice for talent leaders is to embrace change while maintaining a human touch.



Chetana Patnaik is a forward-thinking human resources leader, currently serving as the Chief Human Resources Officer at LTIMindtree. She is known for her strategic contributions to organizational change and her dedication to developing frameworks that foster a strong corporate culture. Throughout her career, she has played a key role in integrating data-driven insights and artificial intelligence into the talent ecosystem to support sustainable growth. Chetana strongly advocates for meritocracy and believes that a leader's true success depends on their ability to build institutions while maintaining meaningful human connections with their team.



CHETANA PATNAIK

CHRO, LTIMINDTREE

Poonam Yadav is a high-impact talent leader at Aditya Birla Group, with a distinctive background in sales, marketing, and business development. Her entry into human resources was unplanned, but she has dedicated her career to driving major new business launches within the group. Poonam is known for her strategic focus on employer branding and her steadfast dedication to resilience and humility in leadership.



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Poonam Yadav, this recognition is both a proud and humbling moment, as it reflects more than just her individual effort. She sees it as an acknowledgment of the continuous pursuit of excellence at Aditya Birla Group, supported by her team, mentors, and managers. The honor represents a collective commitment to building strong talent systems, rather than just personal achievement.



Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Poonam's career has taken an unconventional route. She started in sales, marketing, and business development, then shifted into HR almost by chance. Having worked across various functions, she feels this diverse experience has enhanced her effectiveness as a talent leader. The post-pandemic period has been both the most challenging and fulfilling, during which she served as a strategic talent acquisition leader helping to establish several new businesses within the group. Enhancing her company's employer branding globally during this time has been especially gratifying.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned in your journey as a talent leader?

Poonam's core principle is staying focused and resilient. She believes that every career experiences ups and downs, and achieving success requires maintaining steadiness while preparing for surprises. She considers HR to involve the most unpredictable element: people, which makes contingency planning crucial. She stresses the importance of having Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C ready to handle uncertainty efficiently.

How do you identify the right talent?

While skills determine whether someone is suitable for a specific role, Poonam emphasizes that attitude is key to long-term success. She seeks individuals who are resourceful, curious, and demonstrate consistent behavior regardless of hierarchy. Whether engaging with support staff or senior leaders, the right talent stays humble and engaged. Poonam believes that this attitude makes individuals valuable investments over time.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

Poonam observes that talent acquisition has shifted toward a more strategic focus. The main challenge now is not finding enough talent, but rather attracting candidates who are ready to dedicate time and take responsibility in developing large organizations. Less emphasis is placed on titles and seniority, and more on their capacity to contribute effectively with skills and attitudes that match the future needs of the organization.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

The main challenge is attracting suitable talent in a competitive market. Although talent is plentiful, identifying candidates who value accountability and long-term impact over titles is still tough. Talent leaders need to focus more on contributions than titles to create sustainable organizations.

Rapid fire

If Poonam were not a talent leader, she would have gone into entrepreneurship, managing all facets of a business. Her dream superpower would be the ability to fly, enabling unrestricted movement. Her hero is her mother, who instilled humility and focus in her. She has a consistent habit of listening carefully for unspoken messages, connecting people, situations, and insights to make better choices. Her advice to talent leaders is to listen intently, especially during key hiring moments, and to act with mindfulness.

POONAM YADAV

GROUP HEAD TALENT STAFFING,
ADITYA BIRLA GROUP



Priti Kataria is an experienced human resources expert with more than twenty years in the talent industry. She currently holds the position of Chief Human Resources Officer at Birlasoft, where she has played a key role in guiding large-scale organizational change and capacity development efforts. Priti is known for her strategic HR style, stressing the importance for HR leaders to be closely connected to the business and to have a solid understanding of financial factors. Her leadership approach is based on humility, honesty, and a dedication to combining data insights with intuition and experience.



What does being recognised as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Priti Kataria, the recognition signifies both pride and humility. She feels pride because it highlights the increasing acknowledgment of HR and talent as key strategic factors that support organizational ambition, growth, and sustained impact. At the same time, she views it as an act of humility, connecting her to a broader community of leaders engaged in meaningful work to empower businesses. She regards this recognition not as personal validation but as a collective achievement contributing to overall business success.



Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Priti reflects on her journey rather than pinpointing a single moment, sharing a heartfelt story of over twenty years of growth and achievement. What she treasures most are the opportunities where she could drive meaningful change with tangible results. From leading enterprise-wide programs on talent retention, engagement, and onboarding to creating meaningful structures around employee development, she highlights initiatives that have made a big impact across various parts of the business. Recently, programs like Project Athena, which focus on building technical, sales, delivery, and leadership skills, stand out as highlights of her career. For Priti, the most rewarding moments come when talent initiatives are seamlessly woven into the core priorities of the business, making a genuine difference rather than isolated efforts.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

Humility, honesty, and hard work are still core values in a people-focused profession. Priti highlights the need to be highly data-literate while valuing experience and intuition gained over time. She believes effective decision-making depends on analyzing data related to business, people, talent, and skills, without losing the contextual judgment that comes from real leadership experience. This balance has been shaped by mentors and career anchors that influenced her approach.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

When Priti started her career, HR mainly concentrated on compliance, record-keeping, and organizational hygiene. Now, these are considered basic expectations. Talent leaders must function as business partners with a seat at the decision-making table. It's crucial to understand the business, financials, and balance sheet, as well as how talent influences organizational performance. The role has evolved from peripheral support to being integral to business strategy and execution.

How do you identify the right talent?

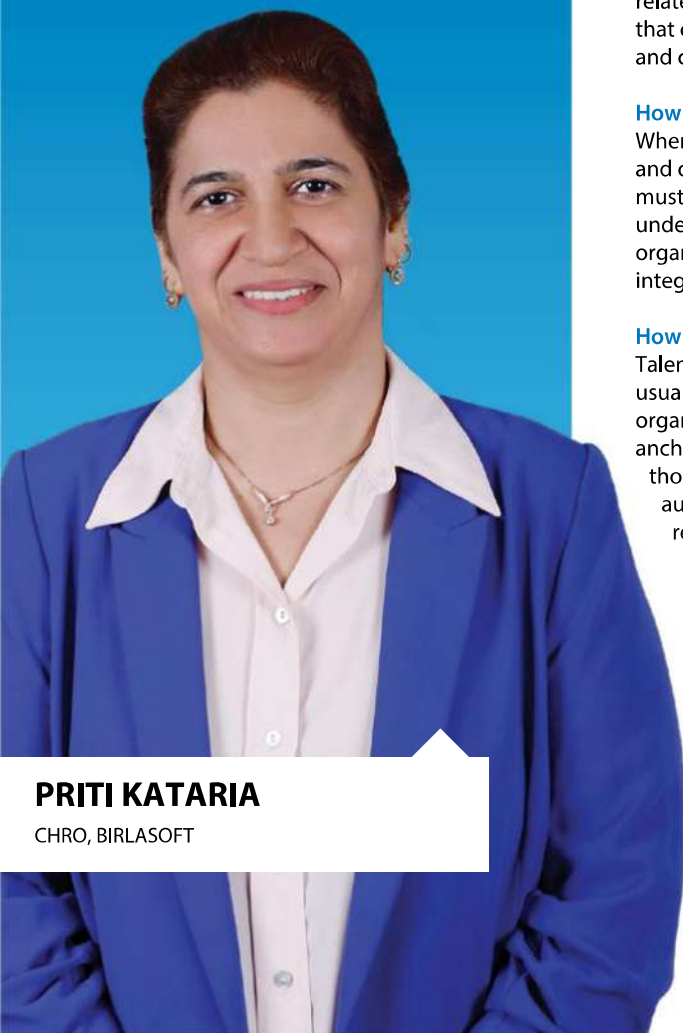
Talent identification differs across levels. While assessing technical and functional skills is usually clear-cut, hiring for leadership roles is much more intricate, particularly in organizations going through change. Priti seeks leaders who are at ease with ambiguity, anchored by core values, and able to manage change effectively. She focuses on thoroughly exploring candidates' previous projects and assignments to gauge their authenticity, depth, and relevance. Carefully crafted, targeted questions are used to reveal true capabilities and suitability.

Rapid fire

If Priti hadn't become a talent leader, she might have gone into academia as a university professor or tried her hand at civil services, both childhood dreams of hers. Her perfect superpower would be to eliminate commute times, especially in busy cities like Mumbai and Bengaluru. She believes that often, the most remarkable talents are found among quiet contributors who make a big impact without seeking the spotlight. Her heroes include her mother, who reinvented herself professionally after retirement, and her daughter, who constantly reminds her to stay aware of unconscious biases and adapt to changing work environments. One thing she's always kept is the habit of arriving early at the office. Her heartfelt advice to talent leaders is to strike a balance between being strong business partners and trusted advocates for employees, fostering psychological safety through genuine engagement.

PRITI KATARIA

CHRO, BIRLASOFT



Priyanka Anand is a leading human resources executive responsible for shaping talent strategies across Southeast Asia, Oceania, and India. Renowned for her courageous decision-making and significant business contributions, she specializes in cultivating future-oriented talent on a large scale while upholding a people-centered approach. Priyanka effectively integrates data and technology into talent management processes, aligning these tools with profound cultural insights derived from managing teams in various regions. Her leadership philosophy advocates for psychological safety and maintains that authentic solutions originate from understanding human realities rather than adhering to inflexible frameworks.



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

Priyanka Anand finds the recognition profoundly humbling and collective, seeing it as a reflection of the teams and leaders she's collaborated with rather than a personal achievement. It symbolizes her journey marked by bold decision-making, clarity, and significant contributions to the business and its people. Her greatest value lies in cultivating future-ready talent at scale while ensuring that people remain at the core of every decision.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Priyanka takes pride in leading HR across various countries and cultures. She has learned that solutions can't be applied uniformly; they must be tailored to each culture's way of functioning. She values integrating data and technology into talent decisions while accounting for cultural differences, ensuring strategies are effective in real-world contexts rather than just in theory.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned in your journey as a talent leader?

She contends that listening is essential for effective talent leadership. Her experiences have underscored the value of listening attentively and consistently. She has discovered that psychological safety emerges when individuals feel genuinely heard and can speak freely. Although frameworks, models, and consultants offer valuable insights, authentic solutions stem from understanding people's real-life experiences. Key lessons she has learned include being present, the capacity to unlearn and relearn, and recognizing the importance of diversity.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

When Priyanka started her career, talent management was mainly focused on processes, compliance, rules, and policies. Over time, it has transformed into a strategic function closely linked to business results. Nowadays, talent leaders are expected to foresee change instead of just reacting to it, and to proactively promote long-term growth for the organization and the business.

How do you identify the right talent?

She considers identifying the right talent one of the most intricate challenges for leaders today. For her, the ideal talent aligns skills with attitude and mindset. She values curiosity, learning agility, and a true sense of ownership beyond capability. When talent is appropriate, it not only performs well on its own but also elevates the entire ecosystem around it.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

Priyanka identifies the main challenge as developing future-ready skills quickly enough to keep pace with technological changes. In an era led by AI and 5G, talent leaders need to close the gap between ambitious business objectives and the skills employees must acquire. This involves establishing clear, skill-focused pathways and providing ongoing opportunities for skill development.

Rapid fire

If Priyanka were not a talent leader, she would opt to be a business leader who also advocates for talent. Her key strength is her highly solution-focused approach to challenges. She often discovers unexpected talents in individuals when they are given opportunities beyond their initial expectations. Her hero is her father, from whom she learned resilience and self-belief. One core habit she follows is taking bold risks. Her advice to talent leaders includes staying curious, trusting others, leveraging technology as an enabler, and always prioritizing the human element in leadership.



PRIYANKA ANAND

VP AND HEAD HR, SOUTHEAST ASIA,
OCEANIA, AND INDIA, ERICSSON INDIA



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Rajat Adhikari, this recognition holds personal and professional significance. It validates his role as a talent leader and boosts visibility for Mastek, the organization he represents. More than just individual praise, Rajat views this platform as a chance to enhance employer branding and foster greater engagement with the broader talent community across professional networks.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Rajat considers working closely with CXOs across different organisations the most defining aspect of his journey. Direct collaboration with CEOs, COOs, and CFOs provided him insight into how senior leaders approach decision-making, prioritize results, and assess success. His exposure to operational planning, budgeting, and cost-saving measures offered a comprehensive understanding of how talent choices impact business outcomes. He also openly discusses mistakes he made along the way, highlighting that these experiences enhanced his focus on details and strategic thinking.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned in your journey as a talent leader?

Rajat has learned that providing a thoughtful response is more effective than reacting impulsively. He believes that rushing into decisions often results in poorer outcomes. By taking the time to analyze the situation, carefully consider details, and respond in a strategic manner, he makes choices that benefit both the organization and its people. This principle has influenced his leadership style over the years.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

Rajat asserts that modern talent leaders are viewed more as strategic advisors rather than mere implementers. As traditional methods remain familiar, companies now demand smarter, quicker, and more innovative solutions. Talent leaders are required to leverage business insights, generate novel ideas, and explore new talent sourcing strategies. This also involves expanding diversity considerations beyond conventional criteria and embracing faster, more effective hiring models that align with business objectives.

How do you identify the right talent?

Rajat believes that the ideal talent is a self-motivated individual with a keen interest in growth, understanding their role's impact, and creating value. He seeks candidates eager to develop along with the organization. Employer branding is essential too; maintaining a strong presence on social media, job sites, campuses, and hackathons, along with encouraging employee referrals, builds trust and enhances candidate engagement, helping organizations attract suitable candidates.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

The main challenge is shifting from outdated, basic talent acquisition methods. Talent leaders who neglect to upskill or embrace new technologies could fall behind. Rajat emphasizes the importance of staying updated with emerging tools and learning to hire more efficiently using technology-driven strategies.

Rapid fire

If Rajat were not a talent leader, he likely would have followed a career as an electronics engineer. His dream superhero power would be mind-reading. His greatest hero is his father, who instilled values like commitment, punctuality, integrity, and honesty in him. He advises talent leaders to begin with small steps, aim high, stay humane when in authority, prioritize integrity, keep learning, share what they know, and work toward becoming experts in their fields.



Rajat Adhikari is an experienced talent acquisition strategist with a strong background in electronics engineering and workforce management. He is currently the Vice President at Mastek and has previously held key leadership roles at global companies like Wipro, Mindtree, and Infogain. Rajat is recognized for his ability to collaborate directly with CEOs and CFOs to align talent strategies with cost savings and financial planning. His leadership approach emphasizes strategic patience, data-driven advice, and a "think big" attitude that focuses on long-term success rather than reactive measures.



RAJAT ADHIKARI

VP - TALENT ACQUISITION AND
WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT, MASTEK



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

Shweta Mohanty feels genuinely appreciated because the recognition highlights the meaningful work she's doing at SAP, especially in blending people strategy with business goals. She sees the award as perfectly timed, coming when SAP is actively transforming and innovating in its human resources practices. More than just personal praise, it celebrates the team effort in aligning talent priorities with the company's overall objectives.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Shweta highlights her role in driving change and enhancing organizational resilience during transitions. With nearly 24 years of experience, she has navigated multiple change cycles and finds guiding organizations through these times, while maintaining high employee engagement, to be the most fulfilling part of her work. She appreciates her contribution to SAP India's transformation initiatives and its focus on long-term career growth.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned in your journey as a talent leader?

Shweta has shown a strong talent for developing effective organizational relationships. She feels HR sometimes gets too caught up in operational details, overlooking chances to make a broader impact. By creating connections and establishing clear objectives, she has successfully encouraged valuable collaborations and addressed complex organizational issues.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

Shweta explains that talent leaders play a crucial role in leading large-scale transformations. Their duties extend beyond refining processes to include innovating and building new capabilities within their organizations. Being present at the decision-making table during significant changes is now indispensable. Currently, talent leaders act as trusted advisors, steering organizations through change and helping them prepare for future obstacles.

How do you identify the right talent?

Shweta emphasizes attitude over pure skills. She believes that while skills can be learned, qualities like learning agility, resilience, and openness to change are key to long-term success. In a fast-changing world, candidates who can unlearn and relearn are more valuable than those with fixed expertise. She seeks people willing to start fresh when needed and to adjust to evolving expectations.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

Shweta emphasizes that the biggest challenge is keeping up with constant change. While the future remains uncertain, talent leaders will be assessed on their ability to develop skills, leverage ecosystems, and promote long-term careers within their organizations. This balance will be a crucial measure of effective leadership.

Rapid fire

If Shweta weren't a talent leader, she would opt to be a chef, believing that success hinges on mixing the right ingredients. She doesn't pinpoint one hero but instead draws inspiration from various mentors who have influenced her views on business and leadership. Her key advice to talent leaders is to let go of past successes, listen carefully to frontline voices, stay flexible, and cultivate resilience for the years ahead.



Shweta Mohanty is a distinguished human resources leader with nearly 24 years of experience driving transformation across global organizations. Currently serving as the Vice President and Head of HR at SAP India, she has been a key figure in integrating people strategy with business strategy during a period of significant technological and operational shifts. Shweta is recognized for her ability to build organizational resilience and foster a culture of continuous learning. Her leadership style is defined by a commitment to streamlining processes and guiding teams through transformative periods by building capabilities at every level of the organization.



SHWETA MOHANTY

VICE PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF
HUMAN RESOURCES, SAP



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Supriya Ahuja, this recognition affirms her view that talent acquisition is a key strategic advantage. She considers it an endorsement of a human-centric approach, where every candidate functions as a brand ambassador. More than just a personal achievement, the honor represents her team's combined efforts, the trust of the organizations she has worked with, and the candidates who influenced her outlook. Ultimately, the recognition underscores a common mission: shaping the future one mind at a time.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Supriya highlights the evolution of talent acquisition from a simple, transactional hiring process into a strategic talent intelligence center. Rather than merely responding to immediate needs, her teams started forecasting demand, advising leaders on market trends, and proactively developing key talent pools. She considers rearticulating the function as a strategic partner instead of just a service provider her most significant accomplishment.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

The key lesson has been mastering the art of listening. Supriya sees talent acquisition as more than just aligning skills with roles; it requires understanding candidates' aspirations, fears, and the hidden motivations behind their career choices. She considers empathy a strategic strength rather than a soft skill. Often, the best hires result from conversations where candidates truly feel recognized and understood.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

The role has shifted from simple order taker to a strategic business partner and chief experience officer. In the past, success was measured by volume hiring. Now, it revolves around creating ecosystems. With the advent of remote work, AI, and the gig economy, talent leaders serve as psychologists, futurists, and change agents. They provide guidance on compensation, location strategies, and DEI initiatives, while also managing the candidate's initial experience with the employer brand. Additionally, talent leaders now act as brand stewards, data interpreters, and partners in change management.

How do you know when you have found the right talent?

Supriya observes the moment when the conversation moves from what a candidate desires to what they aim to create. With training in NLP and therapy principles, she evaluates present-moment awareness, subconscious language, adaptability, and systems thinking. She believes interviews should prioritize talent, curiosity, and the intangible spark that can elevate teams over perfection.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

The main challenge is balancing AI and human roles. As automation handles routine tasks, the demand for human skills such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and creativity will grow. The talent competition is moving from a focus on skills to a focus on purpose, urging leaders to articulate not only what their organizations do but also why they matter.

Rapid fire

If Supriya weren't in talent leadership, she would likely be a professional counsellor or executive coach. Her dream superpower is enhanced intuitive clarity that ensures full alignment during conversations. She admires Oprah Winfrey, who taught her the strength of deep empathetic questioning. Journaling is a regular practice for her. Her key advice to talent leaders is straightforward: move beyond selling jobs and focus on shaping futures.



Supriya Ahuja is a distinguished talent acquisition leader who has significantly transformed the recruitment landscape at Sony Pictures Networks India. As a certified NLP practitioner trained in therapy principles, she applies a refined psychological perspective to human resources. Her career is characterized by the strategic development of the talent function from a transactional "order taker" into a proactive talent intelligence hub. Supriya advocates for human-centric leadership, emphasizing active listening, empathy, and the alignment of individual aspirations with organizational objectives.



SUPRIYA AHUJA

VP - TALENT ACQUISITION AND
CAMPUS RELATIONS, SONY PICTURES
NETWORKS INDIA

Tathagata Basu is a distinguished human resources leader with over 21 years of experience across the talent management and organizational development (OD) spectrum. Currently the Chief Talent Officer at Piramal Pharma, he has served as both an external consultant and an internal HR leader, solving diverse people challenges for a wide variety of clients. Tathagata is recognized for his ability to translate business needs into robust people strategies, including succession planning, leadership development, and fostering inclusive cultures. His leadership is defined by an inquisitive mindset and a commitment to helping individuals and organizations fulfill their full potential.



What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

Tathagata Basu regards the recognition as both an honor and a privilege, not just a personal achievement. He views it as a reflection of his team's collective efforts and the work of Piramal Pharma in talent management and organizational development. To him, the acknowledgment confirms ongoing effort, shared responsibility, and the systems developed to enhance people's capabilities and culture.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Over his 21-year career, which includes consulting and in-house HR roles, Tathagata now finds his work at Piramal Pharma to be the most fulfilling phase. He takes pride in creating a solid succession planning framework, simplifying talent acquisition and attraction processes, and building a strong leadership development structure. Most importantly, he values fostering a culture of belonging that attracts, keeps, and deeply engages a diverse range of talented individuals as the most meaningful achievement of his journey.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

Tathagata emphasizes that the most crucial skill is inquisitiveness. He advocates for persistent questioning to connect business requests with specific, measurable outcomes. Without this clarity, talent solutions might stay superficial rather than make a meaningful difference. This approach of continuous inquiry guarantees that people strategies are aligned with and support overall business performance.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

Over the years, Tathagata has observed the role shift from merely taking orders to becoming a trusted advisor. Currently, talent leaders are expected to serve as consultants to business leaders, assisting in designing talent strategies, establishing quality standards, and reimagining recruitment and retention approaches. The role now requires good judgment, insight, and collaboration instead of just straightforward execution.

How do you identify the right talent?

While tools and assessments are useful for evaluating cognitive and behavioural skills, Tathagata considers context to be the key factor. He emphasizes understanding the business needs, current team structure, and future role trajectory. He seeks candidates who offer incremental or complementary skills that improve the team, rather than duplicate existing abilities. This approach of adding value, rather than replacing, indicates the right talent fit.

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

Tathagata highlights three important challenges. First, it's about skillfully navigating a constantly changing and uncertain environment with foresight and agility. Second, it involves helping organisations fully embrace a tech-first approach in this AI-driven world. Third, it's about engaging a diverse, cross-generational workforce by thoughtfully balancing the expectations of newer generations with the invaluable strengths of experienced talent. By tackling all three challenges together, we set the stage for future success in talent leadership.

Rapid fire

If Tathagata weren't a talent leader, he would have been a teacher. His ideal superpower would be helping children worldwide follow their passions to reach their full potential. The most remarkable talent he has seen is leaders who highlight others' strengths instead of their own. His hero is Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, admired for his conviction and moral integrity. His habits include consistent reading and taking detailed notes during meetings. His advice for talent leaders is straightforward: forge your own path, elevate standards daily, and remain dedicated to continuous growth.



TATHAGATA BASU

Chief Talent Officer, Piramal Pharma

Tiyash Mazumder Bagchi is a passionate human resources leader who guides the global people strategy at Dr. Reddy's Laboratories. She is driven by a love for learning, growth, and a deep commitment to honesty. Tiyash is appreciated for her forward-thinking approach, viewing recruitment as part of a larger ecosystem rather than just filling vacancies. She has proudly mentored many of the organization's top leaders and works hard to foster a culture where everyone feels empowered to find their voice and purpose.



TIYASH MAZUMDER BAGCHI

GLOBAL HEAD HR, DR. REDDY'S LABORATORIES



What does being recognised as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

For Priti Kataria, the recognition signifies both pride and humility. She feels pride because it highlights the increasing acknowledgment of HR and talent as key strategic factors that support organizational ambition, growth, and sustained impact. At the same time, she views it as an act of humility, connecting her to a broader community of leaders engaged in meaningful work to empower businesses. She regards this recognition not as personal validation but as a collective achievement contributing to overall business success.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

Priti reflects on her journey rather than pinpointing a single moment, sharing a heartfelt story of over twenty years of growth and achievement. What she treasures most are the opportunities where she could drive meaningful change with tangible results. From leading enterprise-wide programs on talent retention, engagement, and onboarding to creating meaningful structures around employee development, she highlights initiatives that have made a big impact across various parts of the business. Recently, programs like Project Athena, which focus on building technical, sales, delivery, and leadership skills, stand out as highlights of her career. For Priti, the most rewarding moments come when talent initiatives are seamlessly woven into the core priorities of the business, making a genuine difference rather than isolated efforts.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned as a talent leader?

Humility, honesty, and hard work are still core values in a people-focused profession. Priti highlights the need to be highly data-literate while valuing experience and intuition gained over time. She believes effective decision-making depends on analyzing data related to business, people, talent, and skills, without losing the contextual judgment that comes from real leadership experience. This balance has been shaped by mentors and career anchors that influenced her approach.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

When Priti started her career, HR mainly concentrated on compliance, record-keeping, and organizational hygiene. Now, these are considered basic expectations. Talent leaders must function as business partners with a seat at the decision-making table. It's crucial to understand the business, financials, and balance sheet, as well as how talent influences organizational performance. The role has evolved from peripheral support to being integral to business strategy and execution.

How do you identify the right talent?

Talent identification differs across levels. While assessing technical and functional skills is usually clear-cut, hiring for leadership roles is much more intricate, particularly in organizations going through change. Priti seeks leaders who are at ease with ambiguity, anchored by core values, and able to manage change effectively. She focuses on thoroughly exploring candidates' previous projects and assignments to gauge their authenticity, depth, and relevance. Carefully crafted, targeted questions are used to reveal true capabilities and suitability.

Rapid fire

If Priti hadn't become a talent leader, she might have gone into academia as a university professor or tried her hand at civil services, both childhood dreams of hers. Her perfect superpower would be to eliminate commute times, especially in busy cities like Mumbai and Bengaluru. She believes that often, the most remarkable talents are found among quiet contributors who make a big impact without seeking the spotlight. Her heroes include her mother, who reinvented herself professionally after retirement, and her daughter, who constantly reminds her to stay aware of unconscious biases and adapt to changing work environments. One thing she's always kept is the habit of arriving early at the office. Her heartfelt advice to talent leaders is to strike a balance between being strong business partners and trusted advocates for employees, fostering psychological safety through genuine engagement.





What does being recognized as one of the Top 30 Talent Leaders of 2025 mean to you?

This recognition affirms the broader responsibility of talent leadership in shaping the future workforce. It extends beyond recruitment to job creation, enhancing employability, and strengthening an organization's reputation as an employer, underscoring human capital's role in driving growth.

Which part of your journey to talent leadership are you most proud of and why?

The pivotal moment came six to seven years ago when I spearheaded technology integration into recruitment, overhauling processes to enhance experiences for both candidates and recruiters. This shift to a fully technology-enabled process brought efficiency, consistency, and scalability to talent operations.

What has been the biggest lesson or skill you have learned in your journey as a talent leader?

Process evolution ranks as the key skill I have honed over 20 years, through reengineering recruitment and meaningfully integrating technology. The goal remains building systems that deliver better outcomes for candidates and recruiters alike.

How has the role of a talent leader changed over the course of your career?

Recruitment has grown far more complex in two decades, from straightforward candidate attraction to navigating shifting markets, client demands, and AI tools like generative AI, requiring constant adaptation in sourcing and selection..

How do you know when you have found the right talent?

It starts with deeply understanding client job requirements and converting them into clear skill criteria, then applying structured, multi-stage filtering. In the BPM industry, this prioritizes skill mastery over volume to fuel business growth. .

What major challenge lies ahead for talent leaders?

Skills scarcity tops the list as AI, generative AI, and agentic AI advance, demanding proactive upskilling to equip people for future roles and cultivate the right capabilities.

Rapid fire

If not a talent leader, what would you be?

Ans- I'd pursue entrepreneurship with my own startup.

Q. Who's your hero and why?

Ans- My family, especially my father, who instilled integrity from the start.

Q. One habit you've always kept

Ans- Integrity

Q. One advice for talent leaders

Ans- Stay future-ready, invest time in recruiting and developing people, and focus on upskilling to meet future business needs.



Yogesh Kumar Rustagi is a seasoned human resources expert. With over two decades steering talent strategies in the competitive BPM landscape, Yogesh has pioneered digital transformation in recruitment, streamlining processes to boost efficiency and deliver seamless experiences for candidates and hiring teams alike. His visionary approach marries cutting-edge technology with human-centered design, elevating Concentrix's employer brand and fueling sustainable growth amid evolving market demands.



YOGESH KUMAR RUSTAGI

VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCE,
CONCENTRIX DAKSH INDIA SERVICES



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