

IRJ

International Railway Journal

June 2022 | Volume 62 Issue 6
www.railjournal.com | @railjournal

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French struggle for new entrants



IRJ's Women in Rail Awards 2022

Profiling 12 women from around the world who are achieving remarkable things in their careers.



Leading by example

The rail industry women who are blazing a trail and inspiring others

IRJ's editorial team shines the spotlight on the 12 winners of our inaugural Women in Rail Awards.

RESearch shows that companies with diverse workforces are more likely to innovate, capture more markets, and make more informed decisions. It is also better for the bottom line. A McKinsey study from 2015 found that companies with a diverse workforce are more likely to experience greater financial returns than less-diverse counterparts.

Yet employment diversity is an area where the railway industry typically lags behind, especially in its share of women versus men. The railway has traditionally been viewed as a dirty and dangerous working environment, which has reinforced gender stereotypes of what is considered suitable work for men and women.

Many railways and rail industry companies from around the world are working hard to shrug off this perception and present themselves as a more inclusive and positive place to work. For example, the Community of European Railways and Infrastructure

Companies (CER) and the European Transport Workers Federation (ETF) signed the European Social Partner Agreement on Women in Rail in November, which aims to attract more women to work in the rail sector.

This is a story we have reported on before in IRJ. We have looked at policy and efforts to encourage women to join the sector, and written many times about the barriers to entry.

It was apparent from this reporting that more could be said of the women driving this change within their respective organisations: the engineering trail-blazers putting their male colleagues in the shadow; the leaders building effective teams and achieving remarkable results; the role models inspiring the next generation of women to join the railway industry. This is why we set up IRJ's Women in Rail Awards, to tell these stories and to motivate others to follow in the footsteps of these women.

What follows are profiles of 12

remarkable women from across the globe.

Each was nominated by a peer, many of whom went into extraordinary depth about their colleague's achievements and the work they do. Much of this goes beyond what is expected in their paid position. Where we can, we have spoken to the women ourselves to get their own perspective on their career. We have asked them about their experiences of the rail sector, the challenges they have faced, how they have overcome them, and their hopes and expectations for the future. As one award recipient, Roberta Marchesi of ANP Trilhos, Brazil, remarked: "Being among the 12 women brings visibility and opens the way for the other women to appear and space for those who have not yet been seen."

We sincerely hope you enjoy reading the stories of the winners of IRJ's inaugural Women in Rail Awards as much as we enjoyed putting them together.

Anneri Robinson, rail and transit systems and operations lead, Hatch Africa, South Africa

ANNERI Robinson has been in the rail industry for 30 years, during which time she has coached and guided several young industrial engineers, including at a time when this discipline was new to the rail industry. Two female engineers that she mentored remain in the industry today after nearly three decades, one having been general manager at Transnet Freight Rail for many years, and who still today recognises that Robinson's coaching and mentoring have been instrumental in helping her to achieve.

At Hatch, Robinson continues to mentor at least two industrial engineers each year, assisting with professional registration which has enabled several of her mentees to secure project management appointments on major projects. One such young engineer was awarded the Industrial Project of the Year in 2021 for his involvement in a large passenger rail audit, under Robinson's guidance as project manager. In addition, she is mentoring three young female engineers under the SHeEngineers programme, established in a private capacity by a Hatch engineer who was mentored by Robinson.

Outside work, Robinson is active in social outreach programmes in the Guateng area, collecting and distributing clothing and organising the distribution of food to those in need during the Covid-19 pandemic, when she also started a virtual orchestra at Hatch which was highly successful in raising spirits and creating a platform for different cultures across the globe to get to know one another.





Priannka Kumar
lead engineer, Aurecon,
Australia

PRIANNKA Kumar specialises in signalling. A member of the Institute of Engineers Australia and of the Institute of Railway Signal Engineers (IRSE), she has been selected to participate in the Horizons Programme 4.0 organised by Britain’s Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB), a six-month international programme aimed at developing tomorrow’s leaders today.

In 2021 Kumar was also chosen to take part in the Australian Rail Association’s Women in Rail mentoring programme. Described by her nominator as “a rising star in the Australian rail industry,” for the past two years she has been mentoring junior engineers in technical skills such as signalling arrangement plan design and more general skills including time management and project delivery.

She devised a new approach to training graduate engineers in signalling at Aurecon, which has allowed graduates to gain experience through tasks directly related to their daily work, improving their technical skills and gradually allowing them to become fully functioning members of the team.

Kumar was also a member of the Aurecon Spirit team, an inter-disciplinary community service initiative which helped the not-for-profit company Ability Works to gain access to the Australian rail industry.

Ability Works is dedicated to providing meaningful employment for disabled people and those experiencing disadvantage, and Kumar was able to use her network of contacts to help the company reach decision-makers in the industry.

Annie Adams, executive vice-president and chief transformation officer, Norfolk Southern, United States

RESPONSIBLE for IT, human resources, labour relations and communications, Annie Adams has been a catalyst for change and innovation throughout her 21 years in the railway industry. In her current role, she has made it a personal goal to attract and retain diverse talent at the company’s new headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, created under a \$US 575m initiative which Adams was responsible for overseeing.

To inform the design, she benchmarked other companies to create a building that aligns with the needs of providing a safe and collaborative workspace for all. At the head of several cross-functional teams, Adams drew on her background in human resources and industrial and organisational psychology to design amenities that provide an alternative venue for employees to interact and collaborate.

She has brought her passion for technology to the forefront of the new building by creating a technology-enabled workspace. Sustainability was also built in, through close attention to energy consumption, water use and ventilation.

Adams took the move to the new headquarters as an opportunity to create a progressive outlook on nurturing a healthy and productive company culture and as a clear embodiment of Norfolk Southern’s commitment to employee safety and wellbeing.





Debbie Schrapfer,
Assistant, vice-president and
chief diversity officer,
Union Pacific, United States

DEBBIE Schrapfer is focused on meaningful change, and challenges everyone to embrace and move forward along the path of diversity, equality and inclusion.

Prior to taking up her current post in 2020, she founded UP's LGBT employee resource group, Bridges, and was influential in creating an organisation that supports LGBT employees and increases awareness, understanding and empathy regarding LGBT issues.

As the first president of Bridges, Schrapfer was instrumental in influencing company-wide change at UP that included adding transgender healthcare benefits, extending domestic partner options in health insurance, and drove policy on anti-discrimination requirements in UP's supplier and corporate giving programmes.

She is currently leading work to identify unintended barriers within the company, influencing senior managers to move more quickly, and to develop a diversity scorecard which will enable department heads to meet goals on gender and ethnic diversity, as well as supplier diversity.

Schrapfer is also deeply involved in creating understanding, dialogue and action at the individual level, mentoring employees at the start of their careers, and challenging executives to get personally involved in advocacy for women and ethnic minorities. Schrapfer is described as being fearless in tackling the difficult questions of race relations and unconscious bias. She "not only builds programmes, but also builds people."

Rabaa De Laforcade, operations director, Colas Rail Egypt, Egypt

RABAA De Laforcade says she has seen much improvement in diversity in the 28 years since she entered the construction industry, but thinks there is still work to be done.

An electrical engineer by profession, De Laforcade says she was initially interested in moving into the airport construction sector before an opportunity came about on the Cairo Metro project that allowed her to remain working with Colas Rail Egypt. She initially began working in the design department before moving up to become project director and finally operations director.

"It was very, very difficult in the

beginning, in a male dominated culture in the Middle East," she says. "It took a lot of hard work."

De Laforcade is now looking to pass on that experience to others moving up through the sector and is known for operating an open-door policy to her office for everyone, but particularly for women.

"I try to prepare the young women with me, to teach them that they have to fight for it, but they will succeed," she says. "It's changing all over the world. In Egypt we see that you have more and more women in high positions such as ministers."

Despite the success and hard-won wins, work still remains to be done and

giving advice to other women, including holding a Women's Day.

"It's very important to listen and to talk, it helps in their work but also in their personalities," she says. "It develops a good spirit between people."

De Laforcade was nominated by Colas Rail - International CEO, Christophe Mansuy, who says women in the rail sector were not always recognised for their talent as senior managers.

"Rabaa is the kind of person to beat the odds, and despite the challenges she has always shown resilience in difficult times," Mansuy says. "A very hard worker, she demonstrates enthusiasm and team spirit and made her way up through the organisation with everyone's respect. We are proud and lucky to have her in our team."

Mansuy also cited De Laforcade's efforts to mentor young female colleagues "in an industry and a country not yet gender-balanced," as well as her extensive knowledge and skills that are well appreciated by Colas Rail's clients and partners.

"Rabaa is a role model for all Colas Rail Egypt employees," Mansuy says. "She demonstrates outstanding generosity and rare humility, always giving credit to her team and to others. She also developed the ability to influence stakeholders. She stands firm on her position, provides endless support in difficult times and modestly smiles when celebrating success."



De Laforcade says a particular goal of her's is to see a woman appointed as an site construction manager.

"The field of construction is not easy for ladies, especially on site," she says. "There are a lot of women working in the offices, but not on site."

In order to pass on her knowledge and experience, De Laforcade says she spends much of her time listening and

ANNIE ADAMS - 2022 IRJ WOMEN IN RAIL WINNER



For over 21 years, Annie Adams has been a catalyst for change and innovation at Norfolk Southern. With a passion for advancing sustainability initiatives and driving technological innovation, she has moved NS forward, especially as she led our relocation to our new corporate HQ in Atlanta last year.

Annie embodies leadership, innovation, and a technology-driven mindset as a woman in the c-suite, an increasingly important role in our industry as we empower young women in the STEM fields to join us in creating the railroad of the future. Congratulations and thank you for all you do for NS.

To learn more visit
[norfolksouthern.com](https://www.norfolksouthern.com)



Natasha Zulkifli, stakeholder director, YTL Construction, Malaysia

FOLLOWING stints with government agency, the Land Public Transport Commission (Spad), public transport operator Prasarana, and now private firm YTL Construction, Natasha Zulkifli has seen Malaysia's railway industry "from all different angles" during her 10-year career in the sector.

She is a high achiever. Among a long list of accomplishments, Natasha was part of the project team that conceptualised the Kuala Lumpur - Singapore high-speed project in 2013 and that same year she helped to set up a branch of the Institution of Railway Signalling Engineers (IRSE) in Malaysia. She has organised various international exchange programmes to support railway knowledge building in Malaysia, including with Japan and Transport for London.

She also represented Malaysia in 2017 when negotiating the joint venture operating consortium for the rapid transit system that will operate between Johor Bahru and Woodlands North in Singapore, and organised a Mobile Learning Unit in a converted double-deck bus to promote the 192km Gemas - Johor Bahru double-track project on which YTL Construction is working.

These successes have landed Natasha recognition by the German government

as one of its Remarkable Women in Transport in 2019, and as the inaugural winner of the Malaysian government's Outstanding Woman of the Year in Rail Award in 2021.

Natasha is a passionate advocate of inclusion, especially creating opportunities for women to enter the railway sector, which has not always been easy in a conservative country like Malaysia. She is the founder and director of Women in Rail (WiR) Malaysia, a free network designed to promote equality and diversity in the Malaysian railway industry. Natasha says she was inspired to set up the group by the founder of Britain's WiR group, Adeline Ginn. Like the British organisation, WiR Malaysia facilitates networking opportunities and promoting existing or creating new opportunities for women to access railway education and employment.

"I've been blessed to have bosses and role models who helped me blossom in my career," she says. "I was extremely lucky to have had many different opportunities throughout my career as well as the confidence to pursue them. Not every woman is as lucky as me."

Role model

This sense of opportunity drives Natasha to act as a role model for young women. As well as providing support for its more than 500 members through conferences and online events, WiR Malaysia has hosted Leadership Talks with more than 5000 primary, secondary and tertiary-level students. These talks are aimed at encouraging young girls to consider studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects at a higher level and to consider rail as a career of choice.

"I started all of this because young girls need to know when they graduate what is coming in Malaysia and where the railway industry is headed," she says. "It is really important to have role models, and that is not just me, so many other women go and talk to these kids and it's nice to see that we're warmly embraced, even by state education institutions."

The pandemic has

presented challenges to the sector, and Natasha admits the morale of many female industry employees has been hit by wage reductions and working from home. Some even lost their jobs, a situation compounded by a curtailing of railway investment in Malaysia in recent years.

However, WiR Malaysia has pushed on, and while some online events took a little time to get going, Natasha is "proud" of the Love Local series, which showcases what female business owners have done to ride out the crisis.

Her next big project is WiR Connect, which aims to take the British and Malaysian concepts global.

Natasha says she has had early interest from the Baltic countries and Britain, and she is looking to bring in participants from the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, and Japan. "WiR Malaysia has funded the set-up of WiR Connect and we want to use WiR UK's global network to push it even further so that different countries can create their own small community, and when they start to create activities online, other countries can participate as well," she says.

"If you have a bunch of women who have seen what I do here in Malaysia and they want to do it in their home country, but they're worried that their boss won't allow them the time off or they don't have the funds to set this up, they can join WiR Connect and they can immediately see others in their country who have signed up. You can then get together for lunch, for coffee and before you know it, you are working together."

Natasha is looking to host an in-person conference in Malaysia later this year, and in the longer term she hopes WiR Connect can facilitate greater mobility among female employees to work on rail projects around the world. Indeed, she says the network could help to nurture a global female talent pool, which will improve the rail sector's overall competitiveness, an intriguing and potentially exciting prospect.

"I want to make the global rail community shrink in a way that will allow our industry to be at the forefront of national infrastructure investment," she says. "You can put money in housing, in oil and gas, in finance, in all these sorts of industries. But let's create that avalanche, that wave of excitement in rail, so that countries and governments will say we're going to spend it here."



María Luisa Domínguez, president, Adif, Spain

MARIA Luisa Domínguez's ascent to become chairwoman of Spanish infrastructure manager Adif in 2021 was not by chance. "I had been drawn to trains since I was a young girl," she says. "During my years at university I discovered many new aspects that drew me even more to this sector."

During her more than 30-year career as a civil engineer, including 23 years at Adif, Domínguez has been at the forefront of the development of Spain's now 3700km high-speed network.

In 2005, at the age of 36, she was appointed as projects deputy director responsible for the design of new high-speed lines and associated stations in Spain, managing an annual budget of €45m. She subsequently led the design of the Madrid - Zaragoza - Barcelona - French Border, Madrid - Valencia, and Córdoba - Málaga high-speed lines.

In May 2007, she was promoted to studies and projects director, leading a multidisciplinary team of 40 and managing a €400m budget. In 2018, she was appointed as strategic planning and

projects managing director and joined the Adif board, before her appointment as chairwoman in 2021.

Domínguez praised those who have helped her along the way. "Throughout my career as projects director I faced challenging projects which really required the best of our team, not just from me," she says. "I am extremely proud of the work our engineers and experts have been doing."

Domínguez says Adif is facing a period of transformation, with the liberalisation of high-speed services, the need to hire 6000 new staff over the next four years, and the challenge to digitalise the company.

With women only accounting for 16% of Adif's staff, Domínguez says she is still often the only woman in the room and there is more work required to increase representation.

"That is why we are encouraging them with many different programmes that aim to attract them to STEM jobs, and we hope to be successful," she says. "We need to celebrate that we are no longer missing the skills of 50% of our population."



Indeed, Domínguez says her advice to other women considering a career in rail was to dare to try it. "Railways are fascinating and there are so many different areas they could find interesting: commercial, technical, PR, engineering, and innovation."



Heather Waugh, Train Driver at Freightliner Group Ltd

Freightliner congratulates Heather Waugh on her recognition in this year's "Women in Rail" feature.

Heather's resiliency and deep appreciation for the industry is a guiding example for rail workers across the U.K. every day.

To learn more about Freightliner and its career opportunities, visit [freightliner.co.uk](https://www.freightliner.co.uk).



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Roberta Marchesi,
executive director and CEO,
ANPTrilhos, Brazil

“I think the rail industry chose me,” says Roberta Marchesi, who was speaking to IRJ’s Brazilian correspondent, Renata Passos. “I started my career working in infrastructure, in the area of ports and waterways.” She then moved to the public sector, monitoring government projects, when she received the invitation to set up ANPTrilhos, Brazil’s

national association of passenger rail operators.

“Today I am passionate about the sector,” Marchesi says. “ANP Trilhos was created because there was no single association for passenger operators in Brazil. We managed to give the sector a voice.”

Marchesi’s work focuses on integrating Brazil’s passenger operators by offering a platform to exchange experiences and best practice for the mutual improvement of all operation in Brazil. An example highlighted by her nominator is the formation of a Covid working group, which resulted in a weekly follow-up bulletin to help Brazilian operators to understand the national scenario and the impact on passenger demand. She is also a successful fundraiser for rail and has played a key role in developing laws and regulations suited to the reality of passenger operation, and ensuring the interface between national operators and the Brazilian government.

Marchesi faces a challenge as often the only female in the room. All 20 members of ANP Trilhos are men, and all the directors of its member companies are male too. “But I am proud to say that everyone respects my opinion as executive director,” Marchesi

says. “They welcome me as an equal.”

Outside the organisation, she finds the need to earn respect is a daily task. “These issues of prejudice are more visible at sector meetings, when I represent ANP Trilhos, and I am the only woman.” Marchesi points out “The rail sector in Brazil is already a minority. That’s why I decided to base my work on my work. Not my gender. I don’t want to be recognized for being a woman, but for being competent.”

Marchesi regularly seeks to recognise the role of women in the rail industry, and has engaged the sector in issues concerning female safety. She campaigned against introducing a female-only car on metro trains, arguing that this measure restricts the freedom of the victim rather than punishes the aggressor, and that women should be feel free and safe when using public transport.

Her hope is to encourage more women into the rail sector, where she says there is “fertile ground” for a career.

“My personal desire is to be able to see other women reach leadership positions in companies which are still dominated by men,” she says. “But I don’t just want it to be an opportunity for being a woman, but for competence. Diversity of management thinking is essential.”



Nicely done, Debbie.

Congratulations to Assistant Vice President – Workforce Resources and Chief Diversity Officer Debbie Schramper for being named one of IRJ’s 2022 “Women in Rail.”



BUILDING AMERICA®



Rosalina Reyes, driver trainer, Haramain High-Speed Railway, Saudi Arabia

AS the trainer of Saudi Arabia’s first female train drivers, Rosalina Reyes has surely secured her place in the history books. The group of 30 women aged between 22 and 30 were selected from 28,000 applicants, and according to Reyes, this response “illustrates the willingness of many Saudi women to join in the social and economic change that is taking place in the country.”

It is a story that has made headlines around the world. However, Reyes’ own career path has been no less remarkable, given that she only entered the railway industry when she moved from Cuba to Spain, armed with a degree in physics and a Master’s in optics and lasers. She trained as a driver with Renfe in Barcelona, one of only five women in a group of 75 trainees. “Thankfully, there are hundreds of female train drivers in Renfe today,” Reyes says.

She went on to drive commuter services, freight and high-speed trains between Madrid and León. In training other women to drive trains in Spain, she has worked to overcome the stereotypes associated with this profession, such as the need for physical strength.

Described as an exemplary student who helped lead the way for both female and male classmates in Barcelona, Reyes has fulfilled a personal ambition by joining Haramain High Speed Railway. To do so, she has had to overcome initial reluctance and doubt to become the first female trainer of both female and male drivers in Saudi Arabia. “All I needed to do was to get used to new infrastructure, a new train and new regulations, to respect the customs and traditions of the country and to do my job,” she says.

“The creation of these jobs has shown women that they could do what was unthinkable in this country a few years ago: to get behind the controls of a high-speed train.”

“I have never felt that being a woman has been an obstacle in my professional career,” she continues. “My best advice to women who are thinking of starting their professional career as train drivers is to be informed about the characteristics of this job. It requires a lot of responsibility, but it is also highly rewarding.”

Heather Waugh, driver, Freightliner, Britain

HEATHER Waugh joined freight operator Freightliner in 2019, following 12 years at ScotRail. She has been an advocate for encouraging more women into rail and rail freight in particular, challenging perceptions of this traditionally male-dominated sector through media appearances and being active on social media. Waugh features on the Careers page of the Freightliner website, sharing her experiences of life in the cab.



Having witnessed a suicide when at ScotRail, she is also a keen advocate for mental health awareness and volunteers with Samaritans. Waugh encourages her male colleagues to discuss their worries or concerns with her as she feels they are able to speak more easily with a female co-worker.

In November 2021 she was invited to speak at COP26 in Glasgow, addressing an event on equality, diversity and inclusion, and has been invited to speak in Vienna as part of the European Year of Rail. “So many amazing people in the rail industry have educated me to understand the importance of visibility, and have encouraged me to use my voice,” she says. “But most rewarding of all is to be supported from people within your own grade. It’s why I ensure I do these things in my own time, and at my own expense. I think it makes the message more credible.”

HATCH



Congratulations to **Anneri Robinson**, Rail & Transit, Systems & Operations Lead, for being named one of International Railway Journal's Women in Rail winners!

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Candis Rhodes, manager sustainability, rail strategy, Rio Tinto Iron Ore, Australia

WHEN Candis Rhodes entered Australia's mining sector more than 11 years ago, she chose the rail division as an area where she could best use the unique set of skills from her Master's in logistics and supply chains.

"Rail was a really deliberate move, I was looking to say, 'where are my actual studies relevant, and where could I be a superstar' because there's not many people like me," she says. "There weren't that many women in rail or people who had a strong education background. And at the time, all the technology projects in rail were just starting to come through."

Her first project was on switching from paper to electronic train graphs for train scheduling. "Getting people away from paper graphing, which they've been doing for more than 60 years, it was just unheard of, and they hated me," she laughs. While this switch had failed to take hold three times in the past, Rhodes was able to frame it in a way that showed staff that once the new processes had been adopted, they would have a skill that no-one else in the world would have.

"It was quite a feather in my cap, and it gave me an opportunity to manage the train control team of 120 or so people," she says.

Rhodes was also involved in the train control development of the AutoHaul automated heavy-haul freight railway, a world first.

Rhodes decided it was then time to move to a less demanding role that allowed her more time to be with her family, eventually leaving the sector to become a consultant, a role she held for

four years. While the projects she was involved in weren't rail related, they gave her experience in managing mega projects, a skill that has been integral in her current role as manager of Rio Tinto's sustainable rail strategy.

"I took this role because I wanted a huge project that was technology or R&D based, because that's what my strengths are in, and I wanted to create a great team again," she says. Her work has included developing a business case to purchase battery-electric locomotives, with Rhodes' team securing a \$US 130m investment in April to purchase four locomotives.

Alongside her work for Rio Tinto, Rhodes also has a big passion for mentoring and has been involved in both the Women In Mining WA programme and iTrack mentor programme run by The Smith Family non-profit where Rhodes mentors 14-15 year-old students.

Rhodes has considered writing a book to answer some of the more frequent questions she has been asked while mentoring women, such as whether they will be affected by leaving the workforce to have a family, and how best to re-enter work. Others concern behaviours that women develop in the workplace, such as always apologising, always offering to make the coffees, or always being the one to have to organise team events. "Don't do them," Rhodes says. "Because there is an imbalance there, you

have to be very conscious about how you do it."

One obstacle Rhodes is trying to challenge is the idea that a background in rail is required to work in the rail sector. "You can teach people rail," she says. Instead, employers should be looking at skill sets rather than just experience when hiring people, as well as promoting the sector to a wider range of possible applicants.

"I don't know if this is an Australian thing, but I never heard about rail before I worked in rail," she says. "There were no role models who were saying come work in rail, this is the opportunity." Now that she is in a position to promote the opportunities in rail for women and other underrepresented groups, Rhodes says she still struggles to find

opportunities to speak at conferences and other events. "I think that's something that we could do to push rail," she says.



Janaina Schoenmaker,
legal manager, Metrô, Brazil

JANAINA Schoenmaker has worked for Metrô, the operator of the metro serving São Paulo, for 14 years and has been responsible for the legal framework behind the city's single ticket initiative. She has also worked to promote women to leadership positions within the legal management team at Metrô, where 53% of such posts are now held by women.

Schoenmaker has organised forums at work to discuss issues such as gender, racism, social inequality and sustainability, and approved company regulations on volunteer work. She implemented an internal leadership development programme which has a focus on expanding strategic vision and individual awareness, with a focus on self-knowledge. In collaboration with the technical team, Schoenmaker implemented an administrative restructuring programme which shares with the employee the ability to choose where to work and in what capacity.

Under her leadership, the legal management department has become something of a talent incubator at Metrô, as Schoenmaker coaches staff in preparation for taking up new roles elsewhere in the company. The department recorded an employee commitment score of 81.4% in an internal survey carried out in 2020, the highest at Metrô, and no doubt due in part to team-building initiatives implemented by Schoenmaker, such as a pet day, family day and a Master Chef competition. **IRJ**