CIPM
Sri Lanka

THE HUMAN EDGE
IN THE AGE OF AI
NATIONAL HR CONFERENCE 2026

CONFERENCE PROSPECTUS

MONARCH IMPERIAL,
SRI JAYEWARDENEPURA
14TH AND 15TH OCTOBER 2026

OVERVIEW OF THE THEME

A CONFERENCE ABOUT MORE THAN TECHNOLOGY

Beyond the Machine: Reclaiming What Makes Us Human

Technology can process, predict and produce at extraordinary speed. But it cannot replace the instincts that define good leadership: sound judgement, genuine empathy, earned trust, original thinking and moral clarity. NHRC 2026 turns attention to these irreplaceable human capacities, asking not whether AI will transform work, but how people can rise to meet that transformation on their own terms.

This is not a conference caught between hype and hesitation. It centres on a grounded, urgent question: how do we deploy AI to strengthen our organisations while making work feel more human, not less?

The agenda speaks directly to Sri Lanka's context, where AI adoption varies widely, training budgets are limited, workforces span generations and languages, and anxiety about job security runs deep. Beneath every strategy discussion lies a set of very personal concerns that employees carry: Will my job still exist? Can I trust a system to judge me fairly? Will I get the chance to grow? Does my voice still matter?

What delegates will take away: new ways of thinking, difficult questions worth confronting, and concrete steps to implement, anchored in the belief that AI should expand human potential, not erode human dignity.

KEY FEATURES OF THE CONFERENCE

EXPERT-LED TECHNICAL SESSIONS FROM LOCAL AND GLOBAL SPECIALISTS
Learn from global thought leaders sharing insights on key HR topics, trends, and practical strategies for your organization.

THE NATIONAL HR EXHIBITION
Explore HR innovations from industry providers, access new technologies, and build valuable professional connections.

THE GREAT HR DEBATE
Join discussions where HR professionals address pressing industry challenges and shape future practices.

PRESENTATION OF THE CIPM-BAURS LIFE TIME HR GOLD AWARD
Celebrate distinguished professionals recognized for their significant contributions to advancing the HR field.

PANEL OF SPEAKERS

CHIEF GUEST / KEYNOTE SPEAKER DAY 1

Dr. Hans Wijayasuriya
Chief Advisor to the President of Sri Lanka on Digital Economy

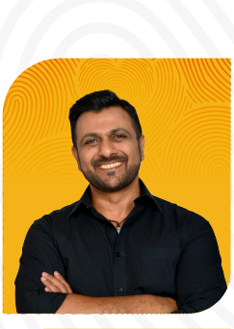
WILL BE CONFERRED HONORARY MEMBERSHIP BY CIPM DAY 1

Prof. Dave Ulrich
Speaker, Author, Professor, Thought Partner on Human Capability

KEYNOTE SPEAKER DAY 2

Prof. Harin Sellahewa
Dean of the Faculty of Computing, Law and Psychology, and Professor of Computing at the University of Buckingham.

Mr. Thushera Kawdawatta
Managing Director Sysco LABS



Mr. Kul Mahay
Executive Leadership Consultant, Director at Ignite Your Inner Potential Ltd

Ms. Arpita Chakraborty
Senior Director - Organisation & Talent Strategy at Mercer

Prof. Ajantha Dharmasiri
Professor in Management, Former Director of the Postgraduate Institute of Management and Past President of CIPM Sri Lanka

Dr. Ranjan De Silva
Managing Director / Chief Catalyst at Purposeful Leadership Ltd

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

HR Leaders' Forum

Mr. Ravi Jayasekera
Chief People & Corporate Affairs Officer at Hemas Holdings PLC

Ms. Wasanthi Stephen
Group Chief Human Resources Officer at Janashakthi Group

Mr. Sahad Mukhthar
Director - Strategy and Transformation at Brandix Apparel (Pvt) Ltd

Mr. Kanishka Ranaweera
Deputy General Manager, Human Resources at Commercial Bank of Ceylon

Moderator
Ms. Davina Kern
Chief Human Resources Officer at Central Bank of Sri Lanka

Business Leaders' Forum

Mr. Dinesh Weerakkody
Chairman at Union Bank of Colombo PLC

Mr. Damith Pallewatte
Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer at Hatton National Bank PLC

Ms. Manjula Mathews
Non-Independent Non-Executive Director at Janashakthi Group | Deputy Chairperson of First Capital Holdings PLC

Mr. Suren Fernando
Group Chief Executive Officer at MAS Holdings (Pvt) Ltd

Moderator
Eng. Thusith Gunawarnasuriya
Chief Executive Officer at Siam City Cement (Lanka)

AGENDA DAY 1

14TH OCTOBER 2026

NATIONAL HR CONFERENCE 2026

1.00 PM	Registration of Participants

MAIN CONFERENCE

2.00 PM	Great HR Debate Finals
3.30 PM	Tea Break
3.45 PM	Registration of Invitees
4.30 PM	Arrival of the Chief Guest & Keynote Speaker
4.40 PM	Lighting of the Oil Lamp
4.45 PM	National Anthem followed by CIPM Theme Song
4.50 PM	Welcome address by Dr. Neil Bogahalande PhD - President of CIPM & Chairman of NHRC Committee 2026
5.00 PM	CIPM Corporate Video
5.10 PM	Address by the Chief Guest & Keynote Speaker - Dr. Hans Wijayasuriya, Chief Advisor to the President of Sri Lanka on Digital Economy
5.30 PM	Address by the Guest of Honour - Mr. Victor Antonypillai, Principal Country Officer - International Finance Corporation (IFC)
6.00 PM	Entertainment Item
6.10 PM	Awarding the Pride of CIPM
6.20 PM	Presentation of tokens of appreciation to Strategic Partners
6.30 PM	Conferral of the CIPM Honorary Membership to Prof. Dave Ulrich (Speaker, Author, Professor, Thought Partner on Human Capability)
6.45 PM	Presentation of the CIPM-BAURS LIFE TIME HR GOLD AWARD (Exclusively sponsored by A. Baur & Co. (Pvt.) Ltd.)
6.55 PM	Vote of Thanks by Mr. Priyantha Ranasinghe, Immediate Past President, CIPM
7.00 PM	Fellowship

AGENDA DAY 2

15TH OCTOBER 2026

8.30 AM - 8.50 AM	Registration, Tea & Coffee	
8.50 AM - 9.00 AM	Overall Briefing NHRC 2026	**Mr. C. Hewapattini** Technical Committee Member, NHRC 2026
9.00 AM - 9.50 AM	**Technical Session 1** **Keynote speech including Q&A** Leading the AI Conversation at Work: The HR Leader's Playbook	**Prof. Harin Sellahewa** Dean of the Faculty of Computing, Law and Psychology, and Professor of Computing at the University of Buckingham.
9.50 AM - 10.30 AM	**Technical Session 2** The Algorithm and the Heart: Redefining Leadership in an AI-Driven World	**Mr. Thushera Kawdawatta** Managing Director of Sysco LABS
10.30 AM - 11.00 AM	Tea Break	
11.00 AM - 11.40 AM	**Technical Session 3** The Architecture of Trust: Leadership & Deep Literacy in a Fragmented World	**Mr. Kul Mahay** Executive Leadership Consultant, Director at Ignite Your Inner Potential Ltd
11.40 AM - 11.45 AM	Entertainment	
11.45 AM - 12.30 PM	**Technical Session 4 (Panel Discussion)** **HR Leaders' Forum** Where does the Tech stop? Human Accountability in AI-Driven People Decisions	**Mr. Ravi Jayasekera** Chief People & Corporate Affairs Officer at Hemas Holdings PLC **Ms. Wasanthi Stephen** Group Chief Human Resources Officer at Janashakthi Group **Mr. Sahad Mukhthar** Director – Strategy and Transformation at Brandix Apparel (Pvt) Ltd **Mr. Kanishka Ranaweera** Deputy General Manager, Human Resources at Commercial Bank of Ceylon **Ms. Davina Kern** Chief Human Resources Officer at Central Bank of Sri Lanka **Moderator**
12.30 PM - 1.45 PM	Lunch & Networking	
1.45 PM - 2.15 PM	**Technical Session 5** How Do We Strengthen Our Human Edge in an AI-Driven World?	**Dr. Ranjan De Silva** Managing Director / Chief Catalyst at Purposeful Leadership Ltd
2.15 PM - 3.00 PM	**Technical Session 6 (Panel Discussion)** **Business Leaders' Forum** AI in the C-Suite - Driving Performance Without Losing Humanity	**Mr. Dinesh Weerakkody** Chairman at Union Bank of Colombo PLC **Mr. Damith Pallewatte** Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer at Hatton National Bank PLC **Ms. Manjula Mathews** Non-Independent Non-Executive Director at Janashakthi Group | Deputy Chairperson of First Capital Holdings PLC **Mr. Suren Fernando** Group Chief Executive Officer at MAS Holdings (Pvt) Ltd **Eng. Thusith Gunawarnasuriya** Chief Executive Officer at Siam City Cement (Lanka) **Moderator**
3.00 PM - 3.05 PM	Entertainment	
3.05 PM - 3.45 PM	**Technical Session 7** Unleashing the Human Edge: Global Talent Priorities for Stellar Performance	**Ms. Arpita Chakraborty** Senior Director - Organisation & Talent Strategy at Mercer
3.45 PM - 4.20 PM	Tea Break	
4.20 PM - 4.50 PM	**Technical Session 8** Authentic Leadership in the Age of AI	**Prof. Ajantha Dharmasiri** Senior Professor in Management, Former Director of the Postgraduate Institute of Management and Past President of CIPM Sri Lanka
4.50 PM - 5.00 PM	Concluding Remarks by CEO CIPM	**Mr. U. A. C. Obeyesekere** Chief Executive Officer, CIPM

CHIEF GUEST / KEYNOTE SPEAKER (DAY 1)

DR. HANS WIJAYASURIYA

Chief Advisor to the President of Sri Lanka on Digital Economy and Chairman of GovTech Sri Lanka, Dr. Hans Wijayasuriya is a globally recognised telecommunications and digital transformation leader with over 30 years of industry experience.

Formerly Chief Executive Officer of the Telecommunications Business and Group Executive Director at Axiata Group Bhd., Dr. Wijayasuriya led telecommunications operations across Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Cambodia. During his career, he has held several influential regional and international positions, including serving on the GSMA Board and in leadership roles with GSM Asia Pacific and the TM Forum.

With more than 25 years of experience at CEO level, he has played a significant role in shaping the growth and evolution of the Asian telecommunications industry. His contributions have been recognised through prestigious industry honours, including the GSM Association's Chairman's Award and the Outstanding Contribution to the Asian Mobile Industry Award.

Dr. Wijayasuriya is a graduate of the University of Cambridge and holds a PhD in Digital Mobile Communications from the University of Bristol and an MBA from the University of Warwick. His expertise spans telecommunications, digital technology, business leadership and digital economy development.

WILL BE CONFERRED

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP BY CIPM (DAY 1)

PROF. DAVE ULRICH

Few individuals have transformed how a profession sees itself as profoundly as Professor Dave Ulrich. Over four decades, his pioneering work on the HR Business Partner model has helped redefine HR from an administrative function into a strategic driver of organisational value.

He is the Rensis Likert Professor of Business at the University of Michigan, co-founder of The RBL Group, and author of more than 30 books. His latest work, The Age of HR: Delivering Stakeholder Value Through Strategic Organizational Capability (2026),highlights the essential role of human capability alongside AI, emphasising that creativity, leadership, connection and vision remain uniquely human.

His enduring contribution is a simple but powerful shift: HR must focus not merely on activity, but on creating value for people, organisations and society.

It is with great honour that CIPM Sri Lanka confers Honorary Membership upon Professor Dave Ulrich, recognising his lifetime contribution to the transformation of HR and his profound influence on the profession globally.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER (DAY 2)

PROF. HARIN SELLAHEWA

Leading the AI Conversation at Work: The HR Leader's Playbook

AI has moved from experimentation to the core of business operations, and the AI conversation has moved from the IT department to the boardroom. The World Economic Forum projects that roughly 170 million new roles will be created and 92 million displaced by 2030 — a reskilling challenge that lands squarely on HR's desk. This keynote gives HR leaders a practical playbook for owning that conversation: shaping adoption, protecting people, and ensuring technology serves human potential rather than replacing it.

- The advantage no longer comes from automation alone but from redesigning work around human-led, AI-enabled teams — with HR as the architect of that redesign.
- Nearly 40% of employers cite the skills gap as their biggest barrier to using AI effectively; workforce readiness, not technology procurement, is the binding constraint.
- HR leaders must set the terms of adoption: which decisions always require human judgement, how reskilling is funded and measured, and how trust is maintained through transition.
- Practical frameworks for communicating AI change honestly — addressing employee anxiety about displacement while building genuine capability and confidence.
- The playbook positions HR not as a passenger of digital transformation but as the function that keeps humanity at the centre of it.

Key Takeaways: A working playbook for leading the AI conversation in their own organisation - which decisions stay human, how reskilling is funded and measured, and how trust is kept intact through change.

TECHNICAL SESSION 2

The Algorithm and the Heart: Redefining Leadership in an AI-Driven World

Mr. Thushera Kawdawatta
Managing Director
Sysco LABS

Algorithms can now analyse, predict, and recommend — but they cannot care, and they cannot be trusted with meaning. Research consistently shows that the majority of CEOs rank empathy as critical to leadership success, and that employees in empathetic organisations report far stronger commitment to their employers. This session explores leadership at the intersection of computational power and human connection, arguing that the heart is not the soft counterpart to the algorithm — it is the superior instrument.

- AI can simulate insight, but it lacks lived experience; authentic leadership credibility comes from human judgement forged through real accountability.
- Empathy is a hard commercial asset: inclusive, human-first leadership is directly linked to loyalty, engagement, and retention across multigenerational workforces.
- Leaders must resist outsourcing the human core of leadership — recognition, coaching, difficult conversations — to automated systems that render leadership transactional.
- Emotional and relational intelligence become premium capabilities precisely because they cannot be replicated at any scale of compute.
- A leadership model for the AI era: data informs, algorithms execute, but the human heart decides what is right and worth doing.

Key Takeaways: A renewed conviction that empathy is a commercial strength - and a leadership model in which data informs, algorithms execute, and the human heart decides.

TECHNICAL SESSION 3

The Architecture of Trust: Leadership & Deep Literacy in a Fragmented World

Mr. Kul Mahay
Executive Leadership Consultant, Director at Ignite Your Inner Potential Ltd

Today's leaders have access to more information, data and technological capability than any previous generation. Yet many are being asked to make consequential decisions with less certainty about what comes next.

In a world of continuing disruption, artificial intelligence and rising organisational anxiety, the greatest leadership challenge is not simply keeping pace with technology. It is creating the trust, cohesion and human judgement that allow people and organisations to adapt. In this engaging and thought-provoking keynote, Kul Mahay draws upon almost four decades of leadership experience to explore what people need from leaders when certainty is unavailable.

He introduces deep literacy, the ability to read what is happening beneath the data, including the emotions, relationships, assumptions and organisational dynamics that shape behaviour.

Kul will also present the Architecture of Trust, a practical leadership framework built around four questions people quietly ask of those who lead them: Do you know what you are doing? Will you do what you say? Do I matter in your choices? Can I speak honestly when I disagree?

The session will explore:

- Why pressure can narrow leadership thinking and make organisations less adaptive when adaptability matters most.
- How deep human literacy enables leaders to read the room, the system and the consequences behind the dashboard.
- Why trust is not simply a cultural aspiration, but an economic accelerator that reduces friction and strengthens execution.
- How credibility, integrity, humanity and connection create the foundations of organisational trust.
- What C-suite leaders and CPOs can do to strengthen executive cohesion, psychological safety and the organisation's capacity for change.

Key Takeaways: A practical framework for identifying where trust is being strengthened or depleted, together with powerful questions leaders can use to begin a more honest conversation within their executive teams and organisations.

TECHNICAL SESSION 4 (Panel Discussion)

HR Leaders' Forum: Where Does the Tech Stop? Human Accountability in AI-Driven People Decisions

Ravi Jayasekera
Chief People & Corporate Affairs Officer
Hemas Holdings PLC

Wasanthi Stephen
Group Chief Human Resources Officer
Janashakthi Group

Sahad Mukhthar
Director – Strategy and Transformation
Brandix Apparel (Pvt) Ltd

Kanishka Ranaweera
Deputy General Manager Human Resources
Commercial Bank of Ceylon

MODERATOR
Davina Kern
Chief Human Resources Officer
Central Bank of Sri Lanka

AI tools now screen CVs, rank candidates, flag performance risks, and recommend pay decisions, often before any human sees the individual behind the data. Yet regulators worldwide are unambiguous: the employer, not the algorithm, remains accountable for the outcome. The EU AI Act classifies employment-related AI as high-risk, and jurisdictions from New York to California now mandate bias audits and human oversight. This forum asks the defining governance question of modern HR: where, precisely, does the tech stop and the human answer begin?

- Accountability cannot be automated: employers remain legally and ethically responsible for people decisions even when AI tools shape or filter them.
- The danger zone is the invisible decision — candidates screened out before human review, with no one able to explain why; explainability is now a compliance and fairness imperative.
- AI trained on historical data can replicate and amplify past bias; human oversight is only meaningful when reviewers understand the system well enough to question it.
- Sri Lankan HR leaders must define their own red lines ahead of regulation: decisions that will always require human judgement, regardless of what technology permits.
- Practical governance for people functions: registers of AI-influenced decisions, documented human review, and clear ownership when outcomes are challenged.

Key Takeaways: A governance checklist for AI-driven people decisions - clear red lines, documented human review, and named accountability for every outcome an algorithm touches.

TECHNICAL SESSION 5

How Do We Strengthen Our Human Edge in an AI-Driven World?

Dr. Ranjan De Silva
Managing Director / Chief Catalyst at Purposeful Leadership Ltd

As machines master more of what we once considered uniquely ours, the question of human distinctiveness has become urgently practical. Less than five percent of occupations are fully automatable with current technology, yet the majority are being restructured task by task, leaving humans to double down on what machines cannot reach. This session is a reflective yet practical exploration of how individuals, leaders and organisations can consciously strengthen the capabilities that define the human edge: purpose, conscience, creativity and connection.

- Machines process information; humans create meaning. Purpose, values, wisdom and moral judgement remain beyond algorithmic reach and become more valuable as routine cognition is increasingly automated.
- Machines generate outputs; humans imagine possibilities. Creativity at its deepest level involves envisioning what does not yet exist, challenging assumptions and bringing new futures into being.
- Machines interact; humans connect. Empathy, trust and authentic relationships remain the ultimate differentiators between human leaders and automated systems, creating bonds that no interface can manufacture.
- Machines optimise performance; humans inspire growth.The workforce data confirms the rising value of socio-emotional intelligence, analytical thinking, adaptability and leadership as critical capabilities for the decade ahead.
- Machines extend capability; humans shape culture.The leadership challenge is not to compete with AI, but to deliberately develop the human qualities that enable individuals, teams and organisations to flourish alongside technological advancement.

Key Takeaways: A sharper understanding of how to strengthen their own human edge, together with practical ideas for cultivating purpose, judgement, creativity, empathy and meaningful human connection within themselves, their teams and their organisations.

TECHNICAL SESSION 6 (Panel Discussion)

Business Leaders' Forum AI in the C-Suite - Driving Performance Without Losing Humanity

Dinesh Weerakkody
Chairman at Union Bank of Colombo PLC

Damith Pallewatte
Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Hatton National Bank PLC

Manjula Mathews
Non-Independent Non-Executive Director at Janashakthi Group | Deputy Chairperson of First Capital Holdings PLC

Suren Fernando
Group Chief Executive Officer MAS Holdings (Pvt) Ltd

MODERATOR
Eng. Thusith Gunawarnasuriya
Chief Executive Officer at Siam City Cement (Lanka)

AI strategy has become a CEO-level mandate: around three-quarters of chief executives now personally own their organisation's AI direction, and enterprise AI spending is set to roughly double in 2026. Yet the emerging distinction between AI winners and watchers is not technological — winners reimagine how work gets done with people at the centre, while watchers layer tools onto old structures. Sri Lanka's most senior business leaders debate how to capture AI's performance gains without hollowing out the human culture that sustains them.

- The decisive advantage comes from redesigning workflows around human-AI collaboration with human judgement amplified, never displaced, by machine capability.
- Efficiency gains that erode trust are false economies: workforce confidence, retention, and employer brand are balance-sheet assets in the AI transition.
- Boards and CEOs must own the ethics of deployment: transparency about how AI shapes decisions compounds stakeholder trust over time.
- Reskilling is a P&L decision, not a CSR gesture — organisations that embed continuous learning as a performance metric will outperform those that automate first and ask later.
- Perspectives across banking, apparel, conglomerates, and FMCG on what human-led, AI-enabled leadership looks like in the Sri Lankan enterprise.

Key Takeaways: A C-suite view of what separates AI winners from watchers and the confidence to pursue performance gains without trading away the human culture that sustains them.

TECHNICAL SESSION 7

Unleashing the Human Edge: Global Talent Priorities for Stellar Performance

Ms. Arpita Chakraborty
Senior Director - Organisation & Talent Strategy at Mercer

Mercer Global Talent Trends 2026:

- Insights from over 11,800 voices globally - Employees, HR leaders, C-suite executives, and Investors - across 16 industries, 16 geographies, and a range of organization sizes.
- Core Theme – Driving Exponential Performance: Solving the Human-Machine Equation
- Top Social and Economic forces influencing People plans, according to executives
- Top People Priorities – C Suite, Investors, HR Leaders

Organizing Work & Talent in the human-machine era:

- How organizations are reshaping themselves with AI Adoption
- Redesigning for optimal human-machine teaming combination and reinventing for the human advantage
- Skills, Agility, and Leadership in the age of AI

Key Takeaways: A practical case-based understanding of how human-centred transformation can move from intention to measurable organizational impact.

TECHNICAL SESSION 8

Authentic Leadership in the Age of AI

Prof. Ajantha Dharmasiri
Senior Professor in Management, Former Director of the Postgraduate Institute of Management and Past President of CIPM Sri Lanka

Leadership is essentially to do with inspiring, influencing and initiating. Authentic leadership involves value-driven and value-creating approach having confidence in being vulnerable. It requires a high degree of emotional maturity. At a time when AI has a high tide as a "panacea for all illnesses," other factors such as emotional maturity are increasingly becoming complementary in filling the acute void of being holistic and humane.

This 30-minute interactive and engaging session will highlight five salient features:

- Challenges in being an authentic leader in the AI dominated world
- Empathy and effectiveness as twin aspects of excellence
- Producing "value" by practicing "values" with emotional maturity
- Beyond "high tech-high touch" harmony for better results
- Lessons from proven business leaders: Global, regional, local

Key Takeaways: A personal charge to lead with authenticity — practising values with emotional maturity so that human presence, not machine polish, defines their leadership.

REGISTRATION

Public	LKR 34,000
CIPM Members & Lecturers	LKR 32,000
CIPM Students	LKR 29,000
Foreign Participants	USD 250

GROUP DISCOUNT FOR COMPANIES

Reserve your table today! - Bring your team together and enjoy an exclusive 5% group discount when you reserve a table of 10 seats

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