

Drive Defines Her: How HR empowers females and diversity at Porsche Middle East and Africa

07/03/2025 Any organisation is only as strong as the people within it. That is why the role of the Human Resources team at the Porsche Middle East and Africa FZE (PME) regional office in Dubai is absolutely crucial to the success of the brand's operations across the Middle East, Africa and India.

Behind the scenes, Charlotte Sewart and Hanna Strauss play vital roles as the Human Resources department. They ensure the necessary resources are available and the work environment is supportive, demonstrating a truly people-focused HR approach.

“I come from a background that taught me the value of hard work and resilience. To me, corporate life represented a new world full of exciting possibilities,” said Sewart.

Charlotte, with 19 years of HR experience, joined Porsche Middle East and Africa FZE six years ago, playing a crucial role in building its HR department from the ground up. Facing the challenge of building

a department in a rapidly growing region, she focused initially on establishing core recruitment processes, developing comprehensive HR policies, and creating a robust employee onboarding experience.

Now, she collaborates with the CEO and Executive Committee on organizational design, recruitment, talent management, and strategic vision. Recognizing the region's diverse landscape, Charlotte ensured the team reflected it.

Over 22 nationalities represented

“A critical part of this foundation was building a team that could navigate the diverse landscape of our region,” said Sewart.

“Our strength is our diverse team. Our staff represent over 22 nationalities. This diversity is crucial when covering a region of 16 markets across 15 countries. We prioritise hiring culturally adaptable individuals and foster a flexible culture to navigate regions as diverse as India, Morocco, and the Gulf.”

Charlotte's career path, marked by hard work and resilience, began with scholarship-based studies and international experience, leading her to Dubai. Her advice to young professionals is clear.

After four years as a one-woman team, Hanna Strauss joined Charlotte.

Hanna was born and raised in Stuttgart, the home of Porsche. Her father’s passion for cars, which extended to his repair shop and restoration projects, made her connection to the automotive world personal.

“I really grew up around car lovers,” said Strauss.

“My father restores cars as a hobby too. One of his projects was an old-timer 911 Targa from 1973.”

Over the course of three years at PME, Hanna has taken the reigns on various responsibilites, from recruitment to onboarding of new employees. She also works with the legal department regarding labour law updates.

To Hanna, the company’s culture can be summed up in a Ferry Porsche quote, one that she enjoys sharing during her presentation to new joiners: ‘In the beginning I looked around and could not find the car I dreamed of, so I decided to build it myself.’

While this speaks to the foundation of the very first Porsche car, Hanna views this quote as particularly relevant to the PME office.

Charlotte echoes that sentiment, noting that one of the Porsche values, ‘Pioneering Spirit’, feels

especially relevant to the Dubai-based regional office. The size and agility of the organisation allows for the kind of ground-breaking work that is often associated with start-ups. Charlotte also notes that this attitude comes straight from the top.

Every voice matters

“We have a feedback culture. The Executive Committee and CEO actively look for new ideas and improvements. Every voice is heard. You just have to speak,” said Sewart.

For Charlotte, speaking up and building trust with the company's leadership has allowed her to carry out a number of new initiatives.

“I've been advocating for more flexible work offerings for over a decade in the UAE,” said Sewart.

Despite complex legalities and inherited policies, Charlotte successfully integrated flexible work offerings into the company's policies. These efforts benefited employees and fostered an inclusive environment for a diverse workforce.

“We diversify because the best results and ideas are born from different minds,” said Sewart.

“We celebrate that mix, and everybody has a voice at the table.”

Hanna's background, while deeply inspiring, left her curious to see more of the world. Her love of people and adventure pushed her to leave for London, where a planned one-year trip abroad turned into eight. After several years in Melbourne, Australia she then relocated to Dubai.

Hanna took on culturally enriching roles in Marketing, Events, and Learning & Development, before finding her true calling in Human Resources. She is adamant that working in HR is about more than just being a ‘people-person’.

As well as dealing with staff from over half a dozen departments in the organisation, Hanna also enjoys detail-oriented work, in particular her tasks as a business partner to finance where processes and attention to detail are vital.

Gardeners in HR

Charlotte and Hanna promote diversity through innovative work options and collaborations with local academic institutions. To them, fostering diversity is not simply about meeting targets and filling positions — though PME does boast several global ‘firsts’ — but it is also about the grassroots work of cultivating a sense of excitement. PME works to be seen as an attractive employers for young job-seekers of all backgrounds, and especially for young women in what is a male-dominated industry.

“I call us gardeners in HR. We are gardeners because a plant takes time to grow,” said Sewart.

“But you know what? We will sow the seeds, we will water them, and we will shed some sunlight on them. We will keep those roots alive until the business is ready for them to sprout.

"Individualisation will be the driving force of innovation and the future of working."

The HR duo believes employees should be viewed as consumers, offering a polished, personalised experience that adapts to their evolving needs.

Recognising team talent

It is especially important, in their field, to shed light on successes, allowing the space for top performers to shine. Charlotte repeatedly uses the words ‘guru’, ‘oracle,’ and ‘expert’ to describe Hanna's many skills.

“Hanna puts the people front, right and centre,” said Sewart.

“I see that perfectionism and support she gives everyone. And honestly, I know Hanna is right for her role because our colleagues used to come and queue up at that office door for me, and now they queue up for Hanna.”

Drive Defines Her

In their roles, Charlotte and Hanna demonstrate how personal drive translates into tangible contributions to Porsche Middle East and Africa FZE. Their work embodies the 'Drive Defines Her' spirit.

Porsche Middle East and Africa FZE is proud to highlight the work and success of female leaders across the region. The ‘Drive Defines Her’ content series also celebrates the talented women behind Porsche.

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