

Fiery Leaders

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With a tagline as “the bank for a changing world”, BNP Paribas has introduced a leadership training programme aimed at developing the ever-burgeoning Asian market into a stronghold. HRM Asia finds out more.

French multinational bank BNP Paribas has shown great commitment to growing its business in the Asia-Pacific region.

Besides unveiling a S\$24 million regional training and development campus in Singapore in 2014, the company also launched its distinctive and highly-targeted leadership training programme Asia-Pacific Dragons (APAC Dragons) that same year.

The moves were in line with the bank’s Asian development plan, which was developed after the region was identified as one of BNP Paribas’ critical growth markets.

Asian Dragons

“This meant that we needed to have the right kind of leadership capabilities for us in the region,” says Angelo Pinto, Regional Head of Learning and Development and Head of the bank’s Asia-Pacific campus.

Leadership training, both at the global level and in Asia specifically, is a key part of that process, says Pinto.

“The main purpose is to essentially develop leaders for Asia from Asia.

“Therefore, training our people here on leadership techniques was one of the key priorities for us in the learning and development area.”

APAC Dragons, a comprehensive three-day learning and development programme conducted at the bank’s dedicated campus, was therefore created with the aim of equipping key senior managers from across the region with relevant know-how and competencies.

“We wanted a name which was distinct, as well as something that was very Asian. So we chose ‘Dragons’ because the dragon is a symbol of strength and transformation, and we believe that is an important value for our leaders in Asia to have,” explains Pinto.

Participants of the programme are typically individuals in senior executive positions, individuals who are due to take on senior roles in the near future, and senior-level high potentials.

HR plays a key role in identifying each of these groups of participants.

“We essentially look at managers who are already successful; people who already excel in what they do and are at a certain level of seniority. The programme helps them to further build their leadership capabilities,” says Pinto.

“The idea is to develop people further, so they grow to take on more responsibilities. In some instances, (they are able to) move from one business to another, or move from a country role into a regional role,” he adds.

Blended learning

APAC Dragons offers a “blended” approach to learning, Pinto emphasises. It is an interactive course that combines theory with application exercises.

“So you have very strong theoretical concepts being taught. But participants are also asked to implement these theoretical concepts in different scenarios.

“(In this way), participants are able to know exactly how to apply these techniques back at the workplace.”

The programme also invites a diverse set of speakers, from both inside and outside the business and its functions.

“You get people who are economists and people who are strongly on the business side, all the way through to specialists in strategies and execution. There are also people who come in to talk about people management and how you can adapt your leadership style,” says Pinto.

The programme focuses on three key development areas: personal leadership style, Asian macroeconomics, and strategy and execution.

The personal leadership portion first analyses each participant’s individual leadership style, and then considers what they need to modify in order to successfully navigate their current role and working environment.

The second part of the programme is where participants learn about the various economic trends taking place across Asia. This ensures they can appreciate and understand the unique business dynamics that are taking place.

“Participants will explore which economies are growing, which economies are stagnant, what kinds of markets we are seeing, and what are some of the economic things that we need to keep in mind,” says Pinto.

“Individuals will have a better understanding of how Asia as a whole looks like from a business perspective.”

Broad perspectives

When it comes to strategy and execution, participants learn about different types of strategic planning, and how these can be adapted to their individual styles or business environments. They also learn to build effective strategies to run their business over the medium and long-term periods.

Pinto says participants will gain a broader market perspective beyond their own specialised roles.

“All of them have a business role and responsibilities which are also country-specific,” he says. “Sometimes they are very product-driven but this helps them to understand trends and make predictions.”

The programme was developed alongside Singapore Management University (SMU), which created module content and course materials, and also brings in speakers to deliver the programme.

Pinto says SMU was chosen because it was “able to create the right bridge between classroom insights and workplace application”.

APAC Dragons takes place once a year, with 25 participants in each cohort. It was first launched in June 2014, with this year’s session kick-starting next month.

“The programme has grown – we’ve kept tweaking it along the way to make it more and more relevant to our people,” Pinto says. “The feedback from participants has been very positive. They feel it is a very different kind of programme from what they have attended before.”

A training landmark

The BNP Paribas Asia-Pacific Campus is the bank’s first training and talent development facility in Asia.

Opened in March 2014, the centre takes close to 4,000 employees through its doors every year for a wide range of learning and development programmes.

The school offers advanced programmes in eight areas: Talent Development, Leadership and Management, Individual Skills, Risk and Credit, Compliance and Regulatory, Product and Technical proficiencies, Diversity and Inclusion, and Business Culture and Social Responsibility.

The campus is made available to all employees across Asia, says Angelo Pinto, Regional Head of Learning and Development for the bank.

Located on a 14,000m² property, the facility consists of two restored historic buildings incorporating a modern infrastructure and the latest technologies. The training teams have access to a 200-seat auditorium, 14 training and conference rooms, nine fully-equipped meeting rooms, and outdoor verandas and gardens, as well as a restaurant.

“Setting up this campus was a very strong signal to our employees and to Singapore that we are prepared to invest in the long-term,” says Pinto.