



Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

HR Director Boardroom Summary

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Chaired by

EVERSHEDS
SUTHERLAND



Speakers:



Tom Bray
Partner
Eversheds Sutherland



Sharon John
Global Head of
Total Rewards
We Soda

Discussing the topic:
'Building at Scale: Reimagining Total Rewards'



This session was led by Sharon John, Global Head of Total Rewards at We Soda and an experienced Global Total Rewards Leader, and Tom Bray, Partner at Eversheds Sutherland, specialising in employment law, transaction support, organisational change and international workforce strategy. Together, they explored how organisations can design reward frameworks that support growth, scale internationally, remain legally compliant, and continue to attract and retain talent through periods of transformation, including IPOs and mergers and acquisitions.

Building Reward Frameworks That Scale

The discussion centred around the need for reward strategies that are globally consistent while remaining locally relevant.

Delegates explored how reward programmes can support business growth whilst balancing commercial realities, employee expectations, and increasing regulatory requirements.

Core Reward Principles Identified:

- Market competitive and cost efficient.
- Pay for performance, values and skills.
- Equitable, compliant and inclusive.
- Focused on growth and retention.
- Simple, transparent and valued by employees.
- Aligned with evolving legal frameworks, including pay transparency, anti-discrimination and data privacy requirements.

Participants agreed that reward strategies must be designed to withstand periods of rapid growth, market change and organisational transformation while continuing to reinforce culture and business objectives.

The Evolution of Total Rewards

A key theme throughout the discussion was that total reward extends far beyond salary. The group explored six interconnected pillars that influence employee attraction, engagement and retention:

The Building Blocks of Total Rewards

- Earn - Competitive base pay.
 - Achieve - Performance and reward alignment.
 - Share - Ownership and long-term value creation.
 - Thrive - Benefits and wellbeing support.
 - Grow - Skills development and career progression.
 - Belong - Culture, recognition and employee experience.
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Delegates noted that organisations often communicate salary effectively but fail to articulate the full value of their total reward offering, resulting in employees significantly undervaluing the investment being made in them.

Where the Pain Points Currently Are

Communicating Reward Effectively

Many organisations struggle to clearly communicate the value of benefits, wellbeing initiatives, career opportunities and recognition programmes.

As a result:

- Employees often focus purely on base salary.
- Reward investments fail to drive engagement.
- Retention opportunities are missed.
- The true value proposition can become diluted.

Skills Visibility and Workforce Capability

A recurring challenge was identifying and leveraging internal capability.

Participants noted that organisations frequently recruit externally for critical skills without fully understanding the talent and expertise already available within their workforce. This becomes increasingly important as AI, data analytics and specialist technical skills continue to shape future workforce requirements.

Maintaining Consistency Across Global Markets

Delegates discussed the challenges of balancing:

- Global reward philosophies.
- Regional market expectations.
- Cultural differences.
- Local employment legislation.
- Pay transparency requirements.

Achieving consistency without creating unnecessary complexity remains a significant challenge for international organisations.

Actions and Insights

Take a Skills-First Approach

One of the strongest discussion points focused on the growing importance of skills as a strategic reward lever.

Key observations:

- Skills are increasingly becoming a form of organisational currency.
 - Internal talent inventories are often underutilised.
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- Organisations should identify and map critical skills before seeking external solutions.
 - Reward strategies should increasingly recognise future capability alongside traditional performance measures.

Delegates agreed that organisations that effectively identify, develop and reward skills will be better positioned to adapt to changing workforce demands.

Strengthen Career Architecture

The session highlighted the importance of robust job architecture frameworks.

Why they matter:

- Provide clarity around career pathways.
- Support transparent promotion decisions.
- Enable consistent reward decisions.
- Improve succession planning.
- Enhance employee retention through visible progression opportunities.

Participants noted that younger generations increasingly expect clear development pathways and greater transparency regarding future career opportunities.

Wellbeing Must Be Part of Total Reward

Wellbeing was identified as a fundamental component of modern reward strategies rather than an optional benefit.

Discussion highlighted:

- Mental health support.
- Preventative health programmes.
- Women's health initiatives.
- Flexible wellbeing offerings tailored to different locations and employee populations.

The group agreed that organisations should elevate wellbeing within reward communications rather than treating it as a secondary benefit.

Preparing for IPO: Building Reward Governance at Scale

A significant portion of the discussion focused on organisations preparing for IPO activity.





Delegates explored the importance of establishing strong foundations before entering public markets.

Readiness Priorities

- Clearly defined pay policies.
- Total rewards philosophy.
- Robust job architecture.
- Structured pay review processes.
- Market benchmarking against peer groups.
- Executive compensation frameworks.
- Formal performance management systems.
- Short and long-term incentive plans.
- Clear documentation and governance structures.

Governance Considerations

- Compensation committees.
- Executive remuneration reporting.
- Data privacy compliance.
- Board oversight structures.
- Pay ratio reporting.
- Equity and incentive scheme management.
- Tax and payroll compliance.

A key takeaway was that organisations should begin governance and reward planning significantly earlier than many currently do, particularly regarding executive compensation disclosures and equity plan readiness.

Scaling M&A Activity Successfully

The discussion also explored why reward integration can often determine the success or failure of mergers and acquisitions.

Due Diligence is Critical

Participants agreed that the more time organisations invest in understanding:

- Existing reward structures.
- Benefits arrangements.
- Pension liabilities.
- Retention risks.
- Employee sentiment.
- Cultural dynamics.

the smoother post-acquisition integration becomes.





Benefits Harmonisation is Often Underestimated

Delegates highlighted benefits harmonisation as one of the most challenging aspects of M&A activity because:

- Existing benefits can be difficult to remove.
- Healthcare and insurance plans vary significantly.
- Legacy arrangements carry strong employee attachment.
- Costs can escalate quickly without clear planning.

Culture Cannot Be an Afterthought

A recurring theme was that organisations often focus heavily on operational integration while underestimating cultural integration.

Participants reflected that:

- Reward strategy influences culture.
- Communication influences trust.
- Culture influences retention.
- Retention ultimately determines integration success.

Legal and Compliance Considerations

Tom provided an overview of the growing legal complexity surrounding reward design. Areas requiring increased attention include:

- Equal pay obligations.
- Gender pay gap reporting.
- EU Pay Transparency Directive requirements.
- Pay transparency legislation globally.
- Data privacy regulations.
- Executive compensation reporting.
- Tax compliance and payroll governance.
- Employment status classifications.
- Worker consultation obligations.
- TUPE and employee transfer requirements during acquisitions.

Participants emphasised that compliance should not simply be viewed as a legal necessity but as an enabler of trust, transparency and organisational credibility.

Common Challenges Raised by the Group

Throughout the breakout discussions, delegates identified a number of recurring challenges when implementing reward initiatives:



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- Moving organisational priorities.
 - Inadequate systems and data.
 - Misaligned stakeholders.
 - Budget constraints.
 - Communication gaps.
 - Retention concerns.
 - Cultural integration during change programmes.
 - Balancing legal compliance with commercial objectives.

A consistent theme was the need for HR leaders to balance pragmatism, governance and employee experience when making reward decisions during periods of change.

Closing Summary

The session reinforced that effective total reward strategies are no longer simply about pay and benefits. They are a critical business tool that supports growth, retention, engagement and organisational transformation.

Whether preparing for an IPO, integrating acquired businesses, navigating global compliance requirements or responding to changing employee expectations, organisations need reward frameworks that are scalable, transparent and strategically aligned.

The key message from the session was clear: organisations that invest in thoughtful reward design, strong governance, effective communication and skills-based workforce planning will be best positioned to attract, retain and motivate talent in an increasingly complex and competitive environment.





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