



Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

HR Director Boardroom Summary

May 2025



SEE Change
Happen

Chaired by

EVERSHEDS
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Speakers:



Sally Isaacs
Partner
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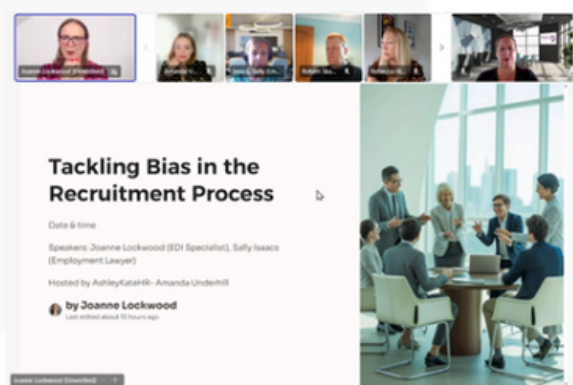


Joanne Lockwood
Founder and CEO
SEE Change Happen

Discussing the topic:
*'Inclusive Recruitment and
Employee Engagement'*

On 15 May 2025, senior HR leaders and professionals came together for an engaging and thought-provoking boardroom session facilitated by Joanne Lockwood, an expert in inclusive workplace practices and founder of SEE Change Happen. The conversation centred on how organisations can embed inclusion into recruitment, not as an afterthought, but as a foundational principle that guides every step of the hiring journey.

As companies continue to grapple with attracting diverse talent, responding to shifting workforce expectations, and managing reputational and legal risk, the timing of this discussion could not have been more relevant. Joanne challenged attendees to examine long-held assumptions and provided a compelling case for redesigning recruitment processes through an inclusive lens.

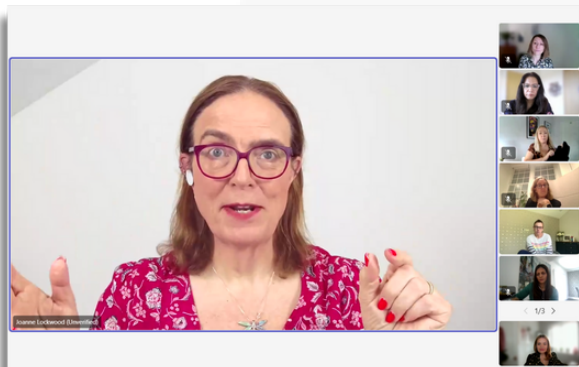


Rethinking the Starting Point

The session opened with a crucial question: Where does inclusive recruitment really begin? Often, inclusion is only considered at the interview stage, if at all. But Joanne encouraged participants to go back to the very beginning, before a role is even advertised. The way job descriptions are written, the platforms used to promote vacancies, and even the assumptions about what “good” looks like all play a part in who sees a role, who applies, and who feels like they belong.

A key takeaway was the need to move beyond traditional methods. Job boards and CVs have long been the default, yet they come with baked-in bias and limitations. CVs, Joanne noted, are essentially sales documents created to appeal to unconscious biases and to filter candidates based on often arbitrary preferences. In reality, they say little about a person’s potential. Interviews, too, frequently mirror the preferences and backgrounds of those conducting them, which creates additional barriers for those who don’t fit the mould.

This naturally led to a discussion about overlooked talent pools people with dyslexia or neurodivergence, individuals with physical disabilities, returning mothers, and those who have experienced long-term unemployment. Too often, hiring processes are designed with a narrow idea of the “ideal candidate,” rather than with inclusion in mind. To counter this, organisations need to think more creatively and intentionally about how roles are shaped and marketed, and who is missing from the room.



The Commercial, Legal, and Moral Case

Throughout the session, there was a strong emphasis on the threefold rationale for inclusive hiring: the moral imperative, the legal requirement, and the commercial benefit. Inclusive recruitment isn’t just about doing the right thing it’s about mitigating risk, enhancing reputation, and securing better business outcomes.

Joanne highlighted that many companies unwittingly expose themselves to legal risk by making job adverts overly specific, or by including “essential” criteria that cannot be justified. Discrimination, she reminded the room, can occur from the very first point of contact with a candidate often the job advert itself. Organisations must be able to demonstrate why a requirement is necessary, and ensure it is not disadvantaging people without lawful justification.

There was also a discussion around reputational risk, especially in the age of social media and online employer reviews. Candidates expect transparency and empathy. When hiring processes feel cold, transactional, or dismissive, organisations not only lose good talent—they risk damaging their brand. Feedback, for instance, was identified as a major gap. Candidates frequently report receiving no response or impersonal rejections, particularly those who have been out of work for six months or more. This lack of engagement is both a missed opportunity and a source of frustration.

Navigating the Pushback

The session also tackled a more uncomfortable truth: the increasing narrative in parts of the media that inclusive hiring is “woke” or biased against so-called traditional candidates. Joanne addressed this head-on, explaining that when organisations fail to articulate the purpose behind their inclusion efforts, the work can appear superficial or tokenistic.



Clarity of intent is essential. Inclusion should never be about optics; it should be embedded in the organisation’s mission and values, with a clearly articulated strategy. The “why” needs to resonate differently with different audiences. For some stakeholders, the moral case will be compelling. For others, the commercial advantages such as better outcomes in bids and tenders, or access to broader talent pools will be more persuasive. Whatever the angle, the narrative must be authentic and aligned with organisational purpose.

Culture, Generational Shifts, and Workforce Planning

A particularly rich part of the discussion focused on the future of workforce demographics. With Millennials turning 50 by 2031, and Gen X expected to remain in work longer due to changes in pensions and economic pressures, organisations must look beyond graduate schemes and early-career programmes. Many attendees noted that while entry-level hiring receives significant attention and investment, support for mid-life and later-life workers remains limited.

This raises questions about how we design work for people whose priorities are shifting whether that’s caring for ageing parents, returning to the workforce after a break, or seeking purpose beyond salary. Joanne encouraged organisations to look at the local demographic data when workforce planning. For example, recruiting for minimum wage roles in affluent areas presents challenges around travel and affordability. Without this contextual awareness, even the best-intentioned recruitment strategies can fall flat.

Inclusion isn't just about who joins an organisation it's about ensuring every individual can thrive once they're there. And some of the changes made to support a few for example, flexible working or alternative interview formats can benefit the wider workforce.

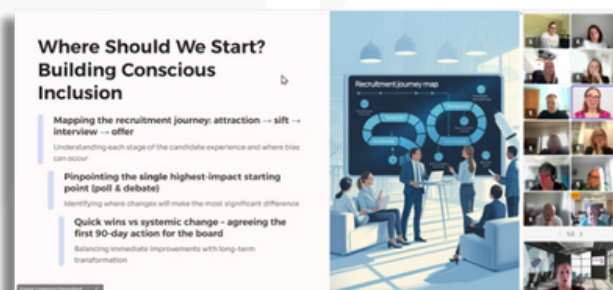
Myths, Misconceptions, and AI

The conversation also took aim at some persistent myths in hiring. These included the idea that CVs must be two pages long, or that degrees from certain universities are a marker of success. Joanne encouraged HR leaders to interrogate these norms. Who decided two pages was ideal? Why is a degree really essential for this role? And what are we missing by excluding people who don't meet these arbitrary criteria?

There was also a discussion about the use of AI in hiring. While there's potential for AI to help reduce bias, it must be deployed carefully and ethically. A common pitfall is over-reliance on automation without human review, which can exacerbate existing biases rather than eliminate them. The key, Joanne argued, is not to eliminate human involvement but to use technology to support better human decision-making.

Final Reflections

The session concluded with a reminder that inclusive recruitment is not about perfection it's about intention, structure, and continuous improvement. Organisations must be proactive in setting expectations at the start of the recruitment process, so they have a framework for evaluating and adjusting as needed.



Perhaps the most powerful takeaway was this: you can't have hiring processes that are cheap, fast, and high quality all at once. Trade-offs exist, and leaders need to be clear about what matters most because inclusion is not a one-time initiative, but a sustained commitment to fairness, equity, and business excellence.

If you're interested in taking a deeper look at your organisation's hiring practices, now is the time. Whether it's revisiting job adverts, redesigning assessments, or investing in training for hiring managers, the journey toward inclusive recruitment starts with a single question: who are we missing, and why?

For those who couldn't attend the session, we hope this summary provides a valuable window into the discussion and a strong prompt to keep the conversation going in your own organisations.



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