Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

HR Director Boardroom Summary

September 2026

Chaired by

EVERSHEDS SUTHERLAND

Speakers:

Mark Hammerton
Partner
Eversheds Sutherland

Elizabeth Potter
HR Director | Senior People Leadership | Executive Partnership | PLC and International Experience

Discussing the topic:

'Leading Through Constant Change - Equipping leaders to navigate and deliver transformation.'

Key Theme

A consistent message throughout the discussion was that change is no longer a project with a definitive end date. Organisations are operating in an environment of continuous transformation, requiring leaders and HR teams to move away from reactive approaches and towards adaptive, people-centred change models.

Data, transparency and consistent communication were identified as critical enablers in helping organisations navigate change while maintaining engagement and trust.

Current Change Challenges Facing Organisations

HR leaders highlighted several common themes currently impacting their organisations:

- Cost pressures and productivity challenges
- Using AI to drive efficiencies and reshape ways of working
- Restructuring programmes and maintaining employee engagement
- Managing the impact of global tariff increases
- Ongoing M&A integration challenges
- Talent attraction and retention pressures
- Supporting employees through what many described as some of the most difficult restructuring environments seen in recent years

A recurring observation was that organisations are often managing multiple change programmes simultaneously, increasing the complexity of leadership and communication.

Designing the Change Journey

Successful change begins with careful design.

Key Principles

- The employee journey should sit at the heart of any change programme.
- Leaders must have absolute clarity on the desired end goal.
- Communication should prioritise quality over quantity.
- Honesty is essential for maintaining trust throughout periods of uncertainty.
- Organisations must remain mindful of cultural differences, whether across UK regions or international teams.
- Consideration should always be given to how employees will interpret and experience the change journey.

One participant summarised this as:

"Leaders need equipping, not simply briefing."

HR's role is not to act as a blocker to change but to ensure those responsible for delivering messages are comfortable, confident and involved at the appropriate stages of planning.

Leaders must understand not only what is changing, but why change is necessary. Being deliberate and intentional in the design of the change journey was viewed as essential to successful execution.

Equipping Leaders to Lead Change

The discussion highlighted the importance of supporting leaders throughout transformation initiatives.

Effective Practices Include:

- Regular leader check-ins
- Continuous information gathering and feedback
- Providing leaders with consistent responses and messaging
- Using storytelling to bring the vision to life
- Actively involving middle management in generating ideas and solutions

Supporting the "Squeezed Middle"

Attention was given to middle managers, who often carry the greatest burden during periods of change.

These leaders are required to:

- Communicate difficult messages
- Maintain team engagement
- Deliver business performance
- Manage their own uncertainty

Including them in planning and solution development creates ownership and strengthens commitment.

M&A Integration Lessons

A common challenge during mergers and acquisitions is that leaders are often enthusiastic during the planning phase but experience declining confidence and engagement once implementation begins.

This highlights the importance of strong change design.

At these critical moments, organisations must consciously decide whether to:

- Remove leaders from elements of the programme, or
- Invest additional time, coaching and resources to support them through the process

The consensus was that investment in leadership capability often delivers stronger long-term outcomes.

Managing Uncertainty and Preventing Narrative Creation

One of the strongest discussion points centred around human behaviour during periods of uncertainty.

When information is limited, people naturally fill gaps themselves and create their own narratives.

To avoid this, organisations should clearly articulate:

The Change Story

- What is changing?
- Why is the change happening?
- What is the intended destination?
- What are the benefits for the organisation?
- What are the benefits for individuals?
- When and how will updates be provided?

A clear and consistent narrative helps reduce speculation and anxiety.

The Importance of Consistent Communication

The group agreed that once the central change story has been established, its fundamental message should remain consistent.

While details may evolve over time, the core narrative should not change.

Key Communication Principles

- Communicate regularly, even when there is little new information to share.
- Avoid creating communication vacuums.
- Explain what is known and be honest about what is not yet known.
- Create opportunities for employees to ask questions.
- Keep channels open and accessible.

Several leaders noted that sometimes the most valuable communication is simply confirming that there is no significant update.

Regular communication prevents misinformation from filling the gap and reinforces trust.

As one attendee commented:

"People would rather hear there is no news than be left to create their own version of events."

There was also recognition that people are naturally inclined to assume the worst when faced with uncertainty. Open and honest communication helps counter this tendency.

The Human and Ethical Dimension of Change

The discussion also explored the legal and ethical responsibilities associated with organisational change.

An important principle shared was:

"Just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should."

Beyond legal compliance, organisations should consider the lasting impact of decisions on individuals and organisational reputation.

The aspiration should be that employees can look back on a change programme and say:

"I was treated fairly and with respect."

Providing a positive employee experience remains important, even when outcomes are difficult or unpopular.

Building Adaptive Organisations

Participants agreed that the future belongs to organisations that can continually adapt.

Rather than viewing change as a series of isolated projects, businesses should build adaptability into everyday operations.

A useful analogy compared modern organisations to smartphone software updates:

Phones are constantly updated and improved behind the scenes, yet the user experience remains intuitive and stable.

The same principle should apply to organisational change, where continuous improvement occurs without creating unnecessary disruption for employees.

Key Takeaways

1. Make Change a Continuous Conversation
Regular dialogue is more effective than periodic announcements. Communication should be ongoing rather than event driven.

2. Review and Adapt Constantly
Change programmes should be regularly assessed and refined based on feedback, outcomes and organisational needs.

3. Pause and Engage Key Influencers
Taking time to ensure the right stakeholders are involved and aligned is critical to successful implementation.

4. Focus on Employee Experience
People may not always agree with decisions, but they should consistently feel informed, respected and supported throughout the process.

5. Be Honest Rather Than Simply Nice
Transparency builds trust. Difficult messages delivered honestly are generally more effective than overly optimistic messaging that lacks credibility.

6. Communication is Everything
If there was one clear conclusion from the discussion, it was this:

Communication is the single most important factor in the success of any change programme.

When organisations communicate clearly, consistently and honestly, they are far more likely to maintain trust, engagement and momentum during periods of transformation.

Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

Part of Nicholas Associates Group

Contact us

If you're looking for a new recruitment opportunity or want to find out more about what our Group can offer, please get in touch.

ashleykatehr.com

Apprentice Employment Agency

Graduate Career Solutions

Stafforce

Stafforce Ports

Nicholas Associates

Ashley Kate HR & Finance

olano

ERANGO