



Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

HR Director Boardroom Summary

January 2026



Chaired by

EVERSHEDS
SUTHERLAND

Speakers:



Mark Hammerton
Partner
Eversheds Sutherland



Angie Sadler
Director of Client
Services – People
Factotum

Discussing the topic:
*'Strategic Leadership and Influence -
Positioning HR as a Key Driver of
Success'*

The HR Director Boardroom session explored how senior HR leaders can strengthen their influence and reposition HR as a core driver of organisational success. Chaired by Mark Hammerton, Employment Law Partner at Eversheds Sutherland, the discussion was led by Angie Sadler, Director of Client Services - People at Factotum. Angie's perspective was shaped by her experience as a global People leader, coach and mediator, alongside her background as a UK-qualified solicitor, while Mark provided legal and regulatory context drawn from decades of advising organisations on complex employment and workforce matters.

Challenging the perception of HR

Angie opened the session by addressing a long-standing contradiction within many organisations: while leaders acknowledge that people are fundamental to success, HR is still often treated as transactional, reactive, or only necessary when problems arise. She shared common perceptions she encounters, such as HR being viewed as policy-driven, administrative, or a "nice to have" rather than a strategic necessity.

The room reflected openly on their own experiences, noting that some leadership teams have been shaped by poor historic HR practice, which can undermine trust in the function. Others highlighted that much of HR's most valuable work is invisible, preventing issues, resolving conflict early, and managing sensitive employee matters, which can make it difficult to demonstrate impact. This invisibility, combined with confidentiality, often means HR's contribution is underestimated or misunderstood.

From operational support to strategic leadership

Building on this, Angie focused on what needs to change if HR is to be seen as a key driver of success. She drew a clear distinction between operational leadership, executing tasks and responding to immediate demands, and strategic leadership, which requires space to think, challenge assumptions and shape future outcomes. She emphasised that strategic HR leadership depends on deliberately asking better questions, rather than simply responding to instructions.

Using succession planning as an example, Angie demonstrated how HR can lead strategically by connecting people decisions to business continuity, retention, engagement and long-term organisational direction. She reinforced that HR's role is not just to fill roles, but to understand where the business is going and ensure it has the capability, leadership and culture required to get there.

"Its admin, policies and handbook..."

"We have enough knowledge between us in the SLT if we need it..."

"We never have any problems--_" OR
"We only need it when we have an employee problem"

"It's a support function...."

"It's a nice to have, not a must have."

The Perception of HR – Employers

Applying strategic thinking

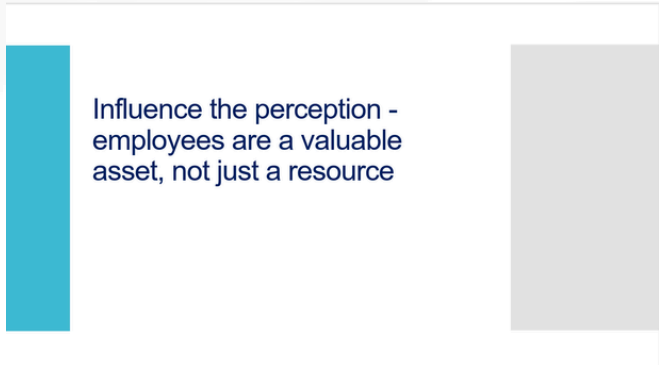
To bring this to life, the session moved into a breakout exercise based on a realistic business scenario: a B2B SaaS organisation planning to expand into Europe, starting with France and Italy, while also moving into B2C markets. Participants explored what questions HR should be asking at the outset.

Discussions quickly extended beyond recruitment into broader strategic considerations, including whether the expansion would be organic or via acquisition, why specific countries had been chosen, and how the organisation would operate across borders. Groups raised issues around workforce structure, payroll, tax, immigration, local employment law, budget, and the use of external expertise. Capability and succession planning were also central themes, particularly around whether the organisation had leaders internally with the right experience and whether the shift to B2C required different commercial skills. When feedback was shared, Angie highlighted how this type of structured questioning is exactly how HR builds influence - by shaping the route forward, rather than simply being asked to execute decisions already made.

Elevating HR to People and Culture

Angie then returned to the importance of reframing HR as People and Culture leadership. She noted that traditional perceptions of HR often focus on compliance, policies and problem-solving, whereas a People and Culture approach signals a proactive focus on wellbeing, talent, engagement, learning and development, analytics, inclusion and culture.

Participants acknowledged that changing this perception requires visibility and confidence, as well as consistent communication about what HR is doing and why. Several attendees reflected on the growing role HR plays in internal and external communications, employer brand and culture storytelling - further evidence that HR's remit is expanding beyond Operinto strategic influence.



Influence the perception - employees are a valuable asset, not just a resource

Legal change through a strategic lens

Mark Hammerton then introduced the legal context, focusing on the Employment Rights Act and its wide-ranging implications for employers. He reinforced Angie's earlier message, noting that while there is a risk of becoming consumed by tactical detail, policy updates, training and process changes, the real value lies in identifying which elements of the legislation pose the greatest strategic impact for each organisation.

Mark discussed areas such as changes to trade union access and recognition, shifts in unfair dismissal protection and qualifying periods, and reforms affecting zero- and low-hours arrangements and agency workers. He highlighted how these changes could alter risk profiles, cost exposure and management practice, depending on the organisation's workforce model. He also shared examples of organisations already taking a proactive approach by forming cross-functional working groups to prioritise risks, plan responses and align people strategy with commercial reality.

Preparing leaders and culture for change

A second breakout focused on how HR should respond strategically to these legal changes. Conversations centred on recruitment rigour, probation and early performance management, and the capability of line managers to manage people issues confidently and consistently. Participants recognised that many managers delay difficult conversations, increasing both risk and cost under the new legislative environment.

There was also discussion about balancing flexibility and protection in workforce models, particularly around zero-hours contracts, with acknowledgement that misuse has driven reform, even where such arrangements can work well when managed responsibly. Across all groups, the importance of leadership capability, transparency and education was seen as critical to minimising disruption and maintaining trust during change.

Leadership style, trust and influence

In closing, Angie brought the discussion back to leadership mindset. She emphasised that HR leaders elevate their impact when they operate as business leaders - deeply understanding the organisation, building strong relationships across the senior leadership team, and communicating in commercial, outcome-focused terms. Participants shared practical reflections on learning the language of the business, asking questions without fear, and avoiding HR jargon that can create distance rather than clarity.

Angie concluded by reinforcing that trust and influence are built through collaboration, visibility and belief in what you are saying. When HR leads with clarity, confidence and strategic intent, the function moves beyond transactional support and becomes embedded in shaping growth, performance and long-term success - positioning HR as a true driver of organisational value.

An Example:
Strategy for
Succession
Planning

Why?
Business continuity
Key person risk
Influential driver of retention and engagement
It is crucial for the direction and achievement of the company's goals and objectives



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