



Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

HR Director Boardroom Summary

January 2025



Chaired by

EVERSHEDS
SUTHERLAND



Speakers:



Chloe Themistocleous
Principal Associate
Eversheds Sutherland



Gary Cookson
Director
EPIC HR Ltd

Discussing the topic:
*'Leadership for the New World
of Work'*

Our recent HR Director Boardroom session provided a thought-provoking discussion on Leadership Development for the New World of Work. This session, led by Gary Cookson, Director of EPIC HR Ltd, and Chloe Themistocleous, Principal Associate at Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP, explored how leadership development must evolve to meet the challenges of today's workplace.

Gary Cookson is a recognised expert in workplace performance, with extensive experience leading HR, OD, and L&D functions across all sectors. A prolific speaker, trainer, and writer, he is renowned for his authentic, people-focused approach, as well as his expertise in designing and delivering virtual training programmes. His thought leadership has earned him recognition in the HR Most Influential awards and invitations to speak at global events.



Chloe Themistocleous is an accomplished employment lawyer specialising in defending complex employment tribunal claims. Chloe has a strong litigation practice, regularly representing businesses across the UK at both Preliminary and Final Hearings. She also brings extensive experience in negotiating settlements and representing clients at judicial mediations, ensuring businesses navigate employment law with confidence.

With insights from two industry leaders, this session offered invaluable strategies to help HR professionals future-proof their leadership development initiatives.

The modern workplace is evolving at an unprecedented pace. From the rise of hybrid working models and AI to shifting employee expectations, the role of managers and leaders is being reshaped before our eyes. Effective leadership has become the cornerstone of organisational success. It is the key to fostering productivity, cultivating a positive workplace culture, and driving alignment between employees and company goals.



However, the rapid changes brought about by digital transformation and hybrid work environments have revealed a critical challenge: many managers are struggling to adapt. Their traditional mindsets and skill sets, honed in pre-pandemic, office-centered environments, are no longer sufficient for leading digitally connected teams. This disconnect is creating friction between employees' expectations and organisational demands, particularly as leaders navigate the complexities of remote and hybrid dynamics.

Why Leadership is Changing

Leadership today is undergoing a profound evolution, driven by several trends that are reshaping the workplace. One of the most significant changes is the generational shift in the workforce. Gen S and Millennials now make up a substantial portion of employees, and their values and expectations often clash with traditional management approaches. At the same time, organisations are navigating the complexities of managing multiple generations, each with distinct needs and perspectives.

Another driving force is the growing emphasis on wellness. Twenty-five years ago, well-being was rarely discussed in the workplace. Today, it is a critical priority. Leaders are now expected to understand and support the mental health and emotional well-being of their teams, which requires a level of empathy and adaptability that many have not previously developed.

Adaptability itself has become a cornerstone of effective leadership. Leaders must be able to navigate diverse needs, drive continuous improvement, and establish governance structures that support their teams in a hybrid environment. The post-COVID reality has introduced new challenges, including sensory deprivation for leaders accustomed to face-to-face interactions and the difficulty of building trust and rapport with remote teams. These challenges require leaders to develop entirely new skill sets to stay effective.

The rise of litigation and more complex workforce needs further complicates leadership in the modern workplace. Managers are increasingly dealing with employees who require tailored support, whether for neurodiversity, mental health, or other personal circumstances. This requires a more nuanced approach to leadership that balances organisational priorities with individual needs.

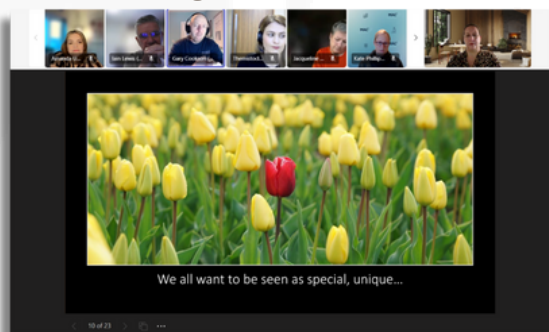
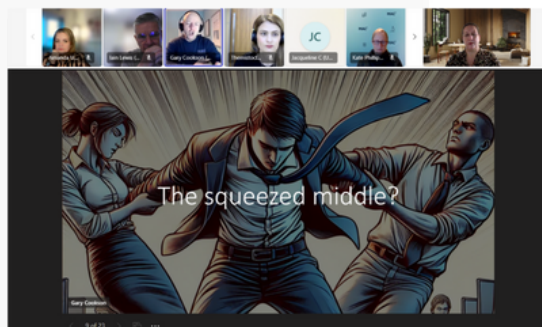
The Challenges Leaders Face

The challenges of hybrid and remote work environments have highlighted a critical reality: many leaders are struggling to keep pace. Face-to-face management was once a sensory experience, where body language, tone, and nonverbal cues played a crucial role in interactions. In hybrid and remote settings, this sensory input is often lost, creating uncertainty and making it harder for managers to connect with their teams.

Leaders promoted since the pandemic often adapt better to these changes. Having never relied on outdated management habits, they are more comfortable with remote-first tools and workflows. Conversely, leaders with years of experience in

traditional office settings often find themselves struggling to unlearn habits and develop new ones.

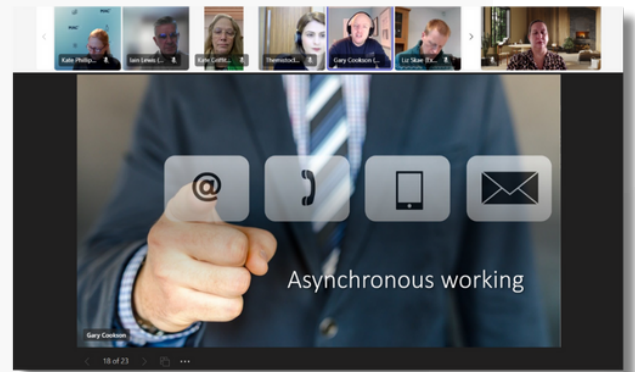
One of the most pressing challenges is the tension between organisational demands and employee expectations. Many senior leaders, influenced by traditional office-based mindsets, are pushing for a return to in-office work. This has created a disconnect with employees who value flexibility and have become accustomed to hybrid models. Managers find themselves caught in the middle, trying to reconcile the views of their teams with the expectations of senior leadership. This "squeezed middle" dynamic highlights the need for managers to embrace new mindsets and skills to succeed in this evolving landscape.



At the heart of these challenges is a fundamental shift in what it means to lead. Leadership today requires a focus on managing outcomes rather than monitoring presence. It demands a new approach to trust-building, one that emphasises empowerment and clarity rather than control. Managers must learn to trust their teams to deliver results, even when they are not physically present.

Building Trust and Adaptability

Trust is the foundation of effective leadership in a hybrid workplace. Unfortunately, trust is often misunderstood. Many managers worry that remote work will lead to reduced productivity, but this often reflects their own uncertainty about managing remotely rather than a lack of trust in their teams. Building trust requires leaders to set clear expectations, communicate openly, and measure performance based on outcomes rather than activity.

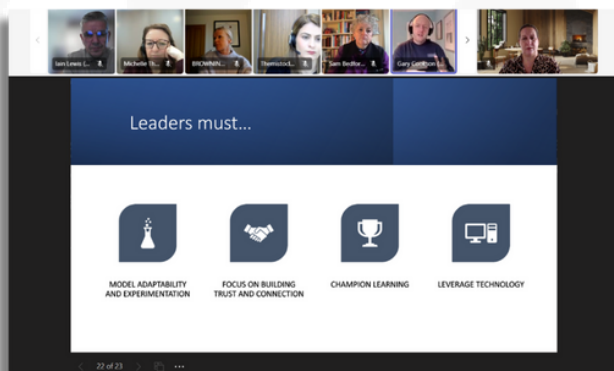


Data can play a crucial role in fostering trust and adaptability. By leveraging insights from operational systems, tools like Microsoft Viva, and behavioural analytics, managers can gain a deeper understanding of work patterns, productivity, and collaboration. This data allows leaders to personalise the employee experience and identify pain points that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Leaders must also adapt their styles to meet the diverse needs of their teams. Empathy is critical in this process. Whether managing an introverted employee who thrives in a remote environment or an extroverted team member who struggles with isolation, leaders must understand and address the unique challenges faced by everyone.


Rebooting Leadership Development

To navigate these challenges, organisations must rethink their approach to leadership development. The traditional methods that prepared managers for in-office leadership are no longer sufficient. Leadership development must now focus on building skills that are critical in a hybrid and remote context.



Interpersonal skills are more important than ever. Simple actions, such as greeting team members in the morning or celebrating achievements, require intentional effort in a remote setting. Managers must also learn to build team dynamics explicitly, setting clear expectations around communication, conflict resolution, and collaboration.

Continuous learning is essential for both managers and their teams. Leaders must encourage their teams to acquire new skills, adapt processes, and replan as circumstances change. This requires a mindset of agility and a willingness to embrace innovation. AI, for example, can augment decision-making and streamline workflows, but leaders must ensure that technology enhances human connection rather than replacing it.




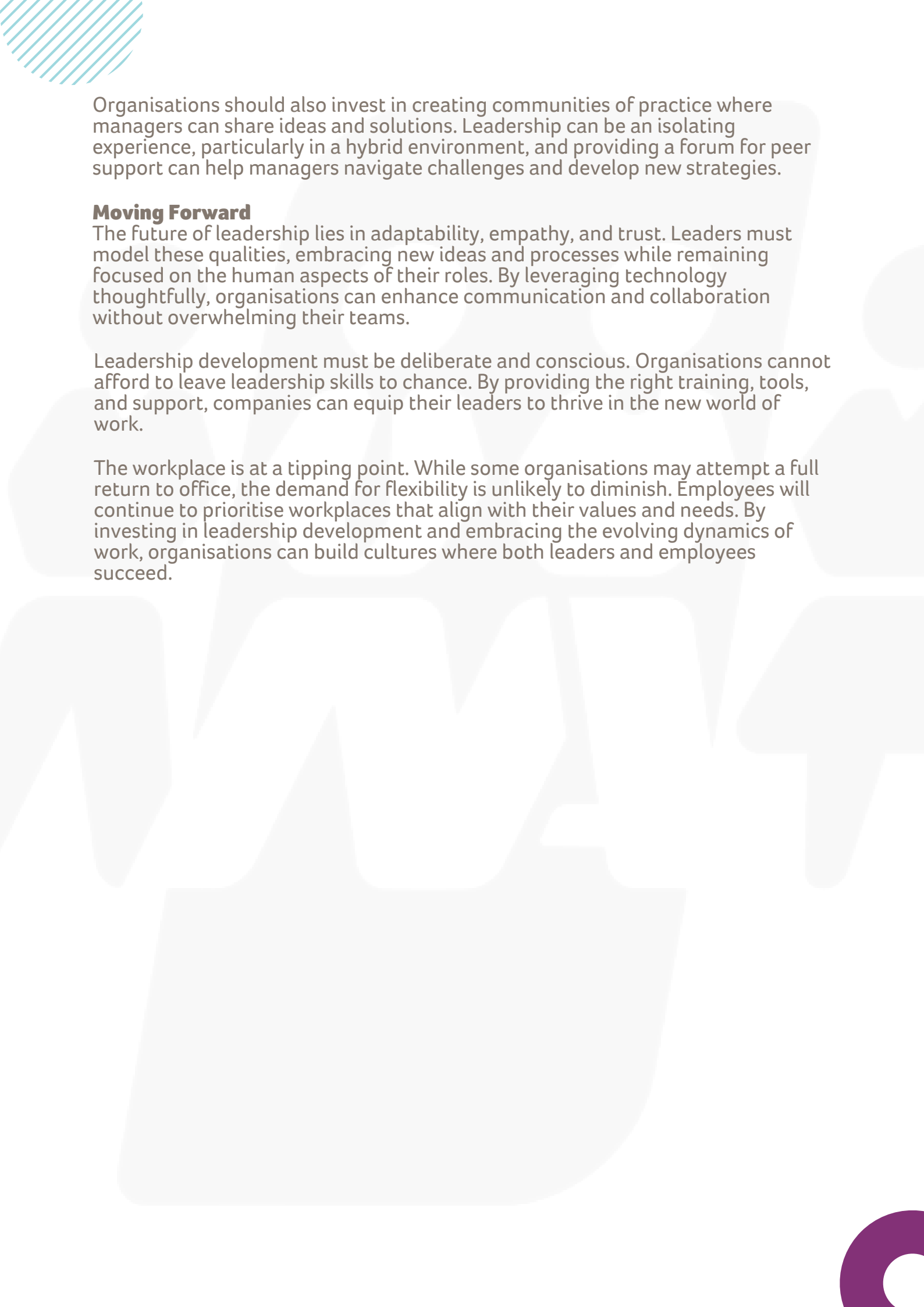
Organisations should also invest in creating communities of practice where managers can share ideas and solutions. Leadership can be an isolating experience, particularly in a hybrid environment, and providing a forum for peer support can help managers navigate challenges and develop new strategies.

Moving Forward

The future of leadership lies in adaptability, empathy, and trust. Leaders must model these qualities, embracing new ideas and processes while remaining focused on the human aspects of their roles. By leveraging technology thoughtfully, organisations can enhance communication and collaboration without overwhelming their teams.

Leadership development must be deliberate and conscious. Organisations cannot afford to leave leadership skills to chance. By providing the right training, tools, and support, companies can equip their leaders to thrive in the new world of work.

The workplace is at a tipping point. While some organisations may attempt a full return to office, the demand for flexibility is unlikely to diminish. Employees will continue to prioritise workplaces that align with their values and needs. By investing in leadership development and embracing the evolving dynamics of work, organisations can build cultures where both leaders and employees succeed.





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](https://www.ashleykatehr.com)



Apprentice
Employment
Agency



Graduate
Career
Solutions



Stafforce



Nicholas
Associates



Ashley Kate
HR & Finance



olano

Sedex Member

stronger
together

2024
Proudly
Partners



IASME
GDPR



R&B
Member



disability
confident
EMPLOYER

APSCo
United Kingdom