HR·LEAD
Powering Strategy
Through People.

Inclusion by Design: **Fixing the Systems Behind How The Work Gets Done**



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1. Inclusion By Design

Inclusion is not only about culture, behaviours or good intentions. It is also about how we design the systems behind everyday decisions.

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Inclusion by Design: Fixing Systems

Fixing the systems behind how work gets done

WE OFTEN ASK:

"Are we making fair decisions?"

TODAY, LET'S ASK:

"Have we designed a system that makes fair decisions easier?"

Fairness

Designing unbiased processes that provide equitable opportunities for everyone.

Consistency

Standardising decision making so outcomes don't depend on individual bias.

Access

Removing systemic barriers to give everyone equal access to resources.

Accountability

Building clear tracking and ownership to ensure equity goals are met.

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2. Would You Call This Inclusive?

Three everyday workplace situations can look perfectly reasonable and still create very different employee experiences. The answer isn't always obvious — and that's the point.

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Fair / Unfair / It Depends?

Are these inclusion problems?

Scenario 1
Remote Work Policy

A company allows managers to decide whether employees can work remotely.
There is no central guidance.

Scenario 2
Performance Reviews

Two employees perform at the same level.
One manager gives almost everyone "Meets Expectations"; another rarely gives anything below "Exceeds Expectations".

Scenario 3
Company Events

An international company holds its annual event in one location.
The destination is selected primarily because it's affordable and easy to organise.

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3. From Intention to Design

Good intentions establish the direction, but they do not guarantee consistent outcomes. Inclusion by design builds fairness into the way decisions are actually made.

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INCLUSION BY INTENTION

"We want everyone to have equal opportunities."

Relies on:

- good judgement
- individual behaviour
- manager interpretation
- good intentions

INCLUSION BY DESIGN

"Our systems make fair and consistent outcomes more likely."

Supported by:

- clear criteria
- defined decision rights
- consistent processes
- transparent exceptions
- measurable outcomes

The Shift

Hoping for consistency → Designing for consistency

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4. Values → Behaviours → Systems → Outcomes

Values tell us what we believe.
Systems help us deliver it consistently.

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How Values Become Outcomes

1. Value

Equal Opportunity

The foundational intent to evaluate every individual fairly and without bias across all hiring channels.

2. Behaviour

Fair Assessment

Interviewers actively assess candidates fairly against standardised benchmarks, not gut feelings.

3. System

Structured Framework

- Defined competencies
- Structured questions
- Evidence based scoring
- Decision record

4. Outcome

Consistent Hiring

More consistent, objective, and fully explainable hiring decisions across the entire organisation.

⚠ What Happens When You Remove the System?

"Hire the best person."

Without a structured system, intent falls apart. Every interviewer must independently interpret what "best" means, introducing subjective bias, inconsistent standards, and unexplainable outcomes.

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5. Where Exclusion Quietly Enters the System

Exclusion does not always come from explicit rules. It can emerge from ambiguity, inconsistent judgement, unequal access and uncontrolled exceptions.

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Designing Inclusive HR Systems: 4 Critical Decision Areas

1. Hiring

Problem: "Hire the best person."

Who defines best? Are questions consistent?

- Are candidates assessed against criteria?
- Who gets exceptions?

Better system: Defined competencies → structured interviews → evidence-based scoring → decision record

2. Performance & Promotion

Problem: "Managers nominate high performers for promotion."

Ask: Who gets noticed? Someone doing excellent work quietly may have a very different outcome from someone with an advocating manager.

Better system: Clear criteria → evidence → calibration → decision

3. Access to Opportunities

Who gets strategic projects, conferences, travel, visibility, or training?

Problem: If the answer is "Managers decide," inclusion depends heavily on the individual manager.

Better system: Transparent allocation criteria & open application processes.

4. Decision-Making & Exceptions

Ask: Who is allowed to make exceptions? This is where many systems break.

The Risk: You can have a beautifully designed policy, but if exceptions are given based on who asks or who knows whom, you create inequality through the back door.

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6. Find the System Problem

Your challenge is not to identify who behaved badly. Look underneath the individual decision and find what in the system allowed different outcomes to emerge.

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System Inconsistencies: 3 Real-World Scenarios

SCENARIO A — PROMOTION

Two departments use the same framework.

Team A: Manager regularly nominates employees.

Team B: Manager expects employees to ask.

Result: Team A gets significantly more promotions after 2 years.

SCENARIO B — HIRING

Managers receive a job description and interview candidates however they think appropriate.

Result: Recruitment discovers wildly inconsistent candidate pass rates across hiring managers.

SCENARIO C — DEVELOPMENT

Every employee has a €2,000 annual budget, but must proactively ask their manager to use it.

Result: Only 35% of employees utilise their budget after one year.

Your Challenge: Analyse the System Gaps

1. **Where is the risk?** What hidden variables or unwritten rules create inequality?
2. **What behaviour is the system encouraging?** Are you rewarding merit or self advocacy?
3. **Who might experience a disadvantage?** Who gets left behind by manager discretion?
4. **What small system change would make the outcome more consistent?** How do we design fairness?

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7. What Did You Find?

A problem may appear to belong to an individual manager, while the real weakness sits in the process. If the same inconsistency can happen repeatedly, the system deserves attention too.

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LOOK BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL DECISION

Promotion

Is the problem the manager...

or a system that allows two completely different routes to promotion?

Hiring

Is the problem the interviewer...

or a process with no common assessment standard?

Development

Everyone has the same €2,000 available...

but does equal availability mean equal access?

The question changes from: ~~"Who made the wrong decision?"~~ to: **"What allowed inconsistent decisions to become normal?"**

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8. The Inclusion by Design Check

Use five simple questions to test whether a people process supports fair and consistent outcomes. The same check can be applied to hiring, promotion, development, flexibility, travel, events and beyond.

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THE INCLUSION BY DESIGN CHECK

01
WHO DECIDES?
Decision-making power

02
BASED ON WHAT?
Clear & objective criteria

03
WHO HAS ACCESS?
Opportunity & visibility

04
EXCEPTIONS?
Consistency & control

05
WHAT WE MEASURE
Accountability & outcomes

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: PROMOTION

WHO DECIDES?
Manager + leadership

BASED ON WHAT?
Defined promotion criteria + evidence

WHO HAS ACCESS?
All employees meeting relevant criteria

EXCEPTIONS?
Defined escalation / calibration process

WHAT WE MEASURE
Nominations → promotions → outcomes across teams

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9. Governance Without Bureaucracy

Consistency does not require layers of approval. Good governance allows decisions to stay close to the work while creating clear criteria, controlled exceptions and visibility of outcomes.

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GOVERNANCE ≠ MORE APPROVALS

Bureaucracy

- Manager
- HRBP
- HR Director
- Committee
- **Approval**

Multiple layers delay action & dilute ownership

Lightweight Governance

1. Clear criteria
2. Decision made at the right level
3. Only exceptions require review
4. Outcomes monitored

Fast, autonomous execution backed by transparent boundaries & objective measurement.

Good Governance Means

- Clear criteria
- Clear ownership
- Visibility
- Accountability

"The goal isn't to remove human judgement.

It's to give human judgement better guidelines."

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10. What Will You Redesign?

Bring the discussion back to a real process you own or influence. The challenge is to identify one small design change that makes the fair outcome easier to achieve.

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WHAT WILL YOU REDESIGN?

1. Pick One Process

That you own or influence:

- Hiring
- Performance
- Promotion
- Development
- Flexible working
- Travel / Events
- Something else

Where does fairness currently depend on individual choice?

2. Identify One Small System Change

Maybe it's...

- Clearer criteria
- Better visibility of opportunities
- Defined decision ownership
- Transparent exception rules
- Better measurement

Small adjustments lead to scalable, systemic fairness across outcomes.

3. The Ultimate Goal

Make the fair outcome

the easier outcome.

When inclusion is built into the design, people don't have to fight the system to do the right thing.

Redesign the default path so that equity is naturally achieved.

Challenge: Identify one change this week that lowers friction for a fair decision.

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Inclusion is not only something we believe. It is something we design.

Make the fair outcome the easier outcome.

THANK YOU