

HIRE GROUND



ISSUE FOUR

The magazine
for leaders
in talent

What stubbornly high
insolvency rates mean for ED&I

6 top tips
to grow your business

What does HR look
like in 2025?

How to build a positive candidate
experience: lessons from the
charity sector

Introduction

The world of work keeps shifting, and so must the way we hire, support, and grow people. In this issue of Hire Ground we're digging into the changes, challenges, and possibilities that shape talent strategy today - from the rise of AI to the realities of job market contraction and the urgent need to keep inclusion on the agenda. With insight from those working across sectors, we explore what HR might look like in 2025, how candidate experience can be transformed by compassion, and why stubbornly high insolvency rates could roll back years of progress in ED&I if we're not careful.

We hear from leaders in tech, charity, local government and recruitment who are all facing similar questions. How do we hire fairly when time is tight and budgets are tighter? What does meaningful inclusion actually look like beyond the buzzwords? And how can we keep the human touch in a world increasingly shaped by algorithms?

Tribepad was built to help teams make better, fairer hiring decisions. In these pages, we shine a light on stories and strategies that show it's possible. We know better recruitment means better experiences which builds better organisations. And that's good for us all.

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6 top tips to grow your business



Dean Sadler, CEO of Tribepad

Dean is the CEO and co-founder at Tribepad. A forward-thinking tech founder, with 25 years experience leading companies including Plusnet, where he helped grow the business from a handful of employees to over 700, selling it to BT in 2007. Here are his top tips for leading a team to success.

01.

Communication is key. Whatever you want to achieve, you normally need the support of others to help you reach your goals. So being able to communicate effectively on your vision and what you want to achieve is paramount to success. Because people process information in various ways, create a team that can connect with each of them.

02.

Create strategy via consensus. Have a high level view then fill in the details with the team, getting buy-in from the ground up. Over the long term it means fewer false starts so you get where you need to be faster.

03.

Micromanaging is akin to telling someone you don't trust them. Never a good look. Identify objectives, give them the tools, and then get out of the damn way!

04.

Ditch the ego. The CEO role casts a long shadow. But it's lonely at the top. Having an ego will just mean you don't get the truth when it's really needed.

05.

Ditch the bias. It's so easy to gravitate to people who look like you. Trouble is that it's an echo chamber. Hire people of all backgrounds and abilities and you'll see dynamism and creativity go through the roof.

06.

Remember your business is built on people. And they have lives. Take an interest in their hobbies, give them time off to be with families, and remember life goes on beyond 5.30pm.

22% fewer jobs as job market shrinks at the start of the year

Our data shows there were 22% fewer jobs available between December 2024 and February 2025, compared with the previous year - pushing applications per job up 86% in December and 72% in January.

Over the latest quarter there were 108,739 roles on Tribepad's platform, down from 139,308 December 2023 - February 2024, reflecting economic uncertainty and businesses reducing hiring activity in the face of increased employment costs, a minimum wage increase and employer National Insurance contribution rise.

By the end of 2024, the **UK unemployment rate was 4.4%**, and 1.56 million people aged 16+ were unemployed, a rise of around 210,000 over the 12 months. With a high unemployment rate (peaking at 6.1% in London), competition for roles is intensifying. In January 2025 an average of 35.5 people applied for every role - up from 20.7 in January 2024. On average that meant people had a 2.82% chance of getting a job, all things being equal - a stark reminder of the challenging job market.

The data reflects broader economic pressures on businesses and workers alike. With **ONS data showing 31 consecutive months of declining vacancies**, organisations are being forced to reduce costs while job seekers are faced with fewer opportunities and increased competition. Added to this is a rise in one-click applications and AI, meaning jobseekers can apply at scale.

Dean Sadler, CEO from Tribepad said: "The job market is shifting. Businesses are pulling back on hiring due to economic pressures and the latest budget, while job seekers are stepping up their search. With an average of nearly 36 applications

per role, competition is fierce. Employers need to adapt their recruitment strategies to handle the volume and find the right people - of which there are plenty. But speed can't come at the expense of fairness - tackling bias and ensuring equal opportunities must stay a priority."

Martyn Cohen, 45, from Hertfordshire is currently looking for a job in sales. He says: "The current job market is undoubtedly more competitive than I've experienced before! I'm searching for senior leadership roles, but each one seems to attract hundreds of applicants. Recruiters are increasingly prescriptive, often prioritising exact role or industry matches over transferable skills or the quality of achievements. The realities of modern recruitment can make the process even more challenging.

"I've had some interviews, but so far, I've generally been told I'm overqualified. While I see this as a positive reflection of my extensive experience and ability to add value, it's frustrating when this counts against you.

"With over 25 years in sales and operations and extensive network, some days the lack of roles or generic/automatic rejections can be very frustrating, and it takes extra effort to stay positive and focused! It's a challenging process, but I'm confident the right opportunity is out there."

A call for smarter recruitment

Tribepad's data highlights the need for businesses to adapt their recruitment processes to manage higher application volumes effectively. Smart hiring tools and data-driven decision-making are key to navigating this challenging landscape and ensuring businesses can attract and retain the talent they need.



AI in HR

Artificial Intelligence. How do we feel about it? We hear a lot about both the pros and cons of AI when it comes to all things hiring, recruitment, ED&I and HR. So we thought we'd canvas the field and see what industry folk have to say. Read on for opinions.

AI can help tackle bias

Neil Armstrong, Chief Commercial Officer of [Tribepad](#)

"We hear a lot about how AI can sometimes cause problems for diversity, equity, and inclusion, but at Tribepad, we're flipping that narrative. We're using AI in smart, thoughtful ways to make sure great people get great jobs -and here's how it works."

"First, we're using AI to tackle bias head-on. It helps us analyse job descriptions to remove words or phrases that might discourage certain groups from applying. It can also anonymise applications during the screening process, so decisions are based on skills and experience alone - not names, schools, or anything else that could invite bias."

"But it doesn't stop there. AI dives deep into the data to show us where there might be gaps or imbalances in things like pay, promotions, or even the diversity of your talent pipeline. It gives businesses the tools to take meaningful action and create fairer workplaces."

"For us, it's not about replacing people; it's about using AI to make hiring processes better, fairer, and more inclusive. It's all part of our mission to help businesses find the best talent, while giving every candidate an equal shot at success."

AI will increase productivity

Mark Standen, Director of Technology at [Acorn by Synergie](#)

"Market intelligence has provided a great deal of information around the job losses with regards to AI and whilst some commentators have said this will be a detriment to humans there are fundamental upsides to the creation of a new way of working."

"Yes, there will be tasks that are better afforded to AI and Automation – mundane tasks can be completed with greater accuracy in administration, Human Resources, Finance and Operations. However, humans will still need to be a face to these departments. What will happen is productivity will increase within these teams and more will be able to be completed in these departments."

"What will also happen much like when the World Wide Web was released to humanity is the creation of opportunities we didn't know about or have in 2025. The technology development will create many opportunities within fields like AI and Machine Learning, Data Analysts and Scientists and Digital Transformation specialists."



“Jobs requiring empathy, creativity or intricate human interactions are less likely to be fully replaced by AI. While AI will help and increase knowledge there is always going to need to be “human in the loop” engagement.”

“The future is extremely bright and the job market and skill needs will only increase as it has done in every industrial revolution to date.”

Skills matching

Claire Lebarz, CTO and Chief Data and AI Officer at Europe’s largest freelance platform [Malt](#).

“Language models are transforming recruitment by enabling more skills-based matching between talent and companies. AI-powered platforms are revolutionising talent sourcing by allowing businesses to quickly identify freelancers with the right expertise, reducing administrative burdens, and creating more efficient, inclusive hiring processes. For example, at Malt, we’ve seen AI helping hiring managers define project requirements and identify talent more accurately, enabling not only projects to start 15% faster but also supporting hiring managers to create descriptions that are a lot more attractive to top talent, for which there always is high competition.”

“Looking ahead, AI will continue to drive the adoption of “superteams” – dynamic combinations of internal employees and freelance experts – which foster innovation, flexibility, and scalability. These teams will become essential as companies navigate talent shortages and rapidly evolving skill requirements, especially in tech and data.”

“There’s much to be hopeful about. AI has the potential to democratise access to opportunities by removing biases in candidate selection and opening doors for underrepresented talent. However, there are important watchouts: ethical AI usage is critical. Transparency, data privacy, and minimising unintended bias in algorithms must remain priorities. Businesses must approach AI responsibly, ensuring it empowers people rather than marginalising them. At Malt, we see AI as a tool that enhances human decision-making rather than replacing it.”

How to build a positive candidate experience: lessons from the charity sector

Nick Thomas (Assoc. CIPD) – Senior Consultant at [Charisma Charity Recruitment](#)

Nick has over 16 years of experience in the charity sector, with a background that includes Charity Development Executive, Centre Manager of a debt charity, and a Church Leader. He has also worked in recruitment within wealth management. One of Nick's proudest achievements is co-ordinating the set-up of community bakery - Communibakes. Outside work, he's a coffee enthusiast, record collector, long-suffering Southampton FC fan, and a proud dad trying to explain why supporting Southampton builds character.

How to build a positive candidate experience: lessons from the charity sector

There was a big national UK charity that I thought I really wanted to work for.

- A charity I had been supporting each month for years.
- A charity whose social media posts I eagerly engaged with.
- A charity I used to feel proud to associate with.

But my opinion of this unnamed charity has sadly changed after trying to apply for a job with them on five separate occasions. Each time, they never got back to me.

Unfortunately, this is not an unusual experience. Over the last five years, I've been in the job market three times due to redundancy, contract endings, or searching for a better fit. I've applied for countless

roles in the charity sector, and the disrespectful process can often feel like a paper cut marathon—small stings of stress and frustration that somehow add up to a gaping wound.

It shouldn't be this way.

When a candidate spots a role of interest, their journey may look like this:

1. **Discussing the role** with family or friends, weighing the opportunity.
2. **Researching the organisation** thoroughly to ensure they understand its mission, culture, and the role itself.
3. **Carefully crafting the application** and a tailored cover letter.
4. **Seeking feedback** from friends and family to fine-tune the application.
5. **Submitting the application** with hope and anticipation.



Then begins the painful waiting game.

The first week

In the first week after applying, you're checking your email constantly. Thoughts flood your mind:

- Have they seen my application?
- Do they like it?
- Will I make it to the next stage?

Every night, you go to bed wondering if tomorrow will bring a response.

The second week

By the second week, hope starts to waver. You tell yourself:

- Maybe they haven't reviewed all the applications yet.
- Maybe they plan to get in touch but haven't had the time.

You even check your spam folder just in case. Deep down, though, the silence is deafening.

The third week

If the acknowledgement email states something like, "If you haven't heard from us within three weeks, consider your application unsuccessful," you cling to that final week. But self-doubt starts creeping in:

- Why wasn't I chosen?
- Do I lack the necessary experience?
- What made other candidates stand out?

Why recruitment matters for charities

Charities (actually all organisations) should prioritise compassionate, supportive practices in recruitment.

Candidates invest not just their time but also their emotions into applications.

Ignoring this can impact their mental well-being, leave a lasting negative impression and is just unethical.

Having transitioned back into recruitment myself at Charisma Charity Recruitment, I've observed significant room for improvement in how charities handle candidates. That's why I believe recruitment planning should include this key question:

What experience will our unsuccessful candidates have?

The charities I partner with know I uphold high standards for candidate care. If an organisation falls short, I am here to guide them, offering constructive insights and frameworks to support them in giving feedback. However, if advice goes ignored and they don't see the value, then it is very unlikely I will work with them again. For example, I won't work with one national charity as they declined to provide any feedback to our unsuccessful candidates.

10 Tips for a respectful and effective candidate experience

Here are my ten recommendations to ensure a respectful and supportive candidate experience. While tailored to the charity sector, I believe these tips can benefit other sectors:

1. **Offer initial calls before applications** - Save candidates time by offering 15-minute calls to discuss the role and answer questions. If the role doesn't seem like a good fit, be upfront and tell them. This transparency prevents wasted effort.
2. **Read cover letters before CVs** - Especially in the charity sector, roles can vary greatly. A well-written cover letter contextualises a candidate's experience and avoids misinterpreting their CV.
3. **Share interview questions in advance** - Provide candidates with the themes or specific questions ahead of time. This allows them to prepare thoughtful responses and reduces interview anxiety.
4. **Take your time with interviews** - Some candidates need a bit longer to find their footing. Start with a clear introduction, reassure them, and ask probing questions to draw out their potential.
5. **Be transparent and honest** - Set clear expectations about timelines and processes. If a candidate asks how many people are in the running, tell them. Honest answers, even to difficult questions, will build trust.
6. **Prioritise communication** - Get back to all candidates, whether they're rejected pre-interview or post-interview. Stick to the timeline you've shared. If there are delays, let candidates know.
7. **Make rejection calls personal** - Dedicate at least 15 minutes per candidate for rejection and feedback calls. Start by ensuring it's a good time to talk, then deliver the outcome and offer constructive feedback.
8. **Offer detailed feedback** - Share insights on their CV, cover letter, interview performance, and even LinkedIn profile, if applicable. Highlight both strengths and areas for improvement.
9. **Follow up with written feedback** - If there are more than three pieces of constructive advice, provide them in writing after the feedback call. This helps candidates reflect and improve for future opportunities.
10. **Say thank you** - Throughout the process, thank candidates for their time, effort, and energy. Acknowledge their contributions and the value they bring to the sector.

Closing thoughts

Recruitment is about more than filling roles. It's an opportunity to build lasting relationships and leave a positive impression on every candidate, regardless of the outcome. Charities, in particular, have a responsibility to model their recruitment practices on the same values they champion in their cause: empathy, respect, and care.

By fostering transparency, communication, and thoughtful feedback, organisations can turn even rejection into a learning experience for candidates.

Ultimately, treating applicants with dignity and gratitude not only enhances their experience but also reinforces your organisation's reputation as one that values people. This approach will leave a lasting positive impression, encouraging candidates to speak highly of your organisation, even if they don't land the role. After all, how you treat people during the recruitment process speaks volumes about your culture and priorities.

Every unsuccessful candidate interaction (and lack of interaction) leaves an impression. May I encourage the charity sector to leave a positive one.



What does HR look like in 2025?

As seen in [TechRound](#)

We've been talking a lot about 'tech for good' and it's an industry that is growing at a rapid rate. In 2025, technology will be central to tackling key recruitment challenges like bias and ghosting, creating fairer, more efficient hiring processes - and AI will play a huge role.

Bias in hiring, whether unconscious or systemic, remains a significant issue—one that our research shows 90% of people have experienced. When carefully designed and monitored, AI systems can evaluate candidates based solely on their qualifications, experience, and potential, removing unconscious human prejudices from the equation. Features like anonymised CV screening, intelligent job matching, and diverse candidate recommendations can open doors for individuals who may have been overlooked in traditional processes.

AI will also tackle ghosting by automating consistent and meaningful communication. Chatbots and natural language processing tools

can engage candidates in real-time, provide updates on their application status, and even offer tailored feedback. This keeps candidates informed, engaged, and respected, building trust in the hiring process.

For HR teams, AI can handle repetitive tasks like scheduling interviews or shortlisting candidates, allowing recruiters to focus on the human aspects of hiring—like building relationships and assessing cultural fit.

At the same time, AI-driven insights can help organisations forecast talent needs, identify trends, and make more strategic decisions.

At Tribepad, we see technology as a way to enhance—not replace—the human aspects of recruitment. It's about supporting HR teams to deliver fairer, faster, and better hiring, so organisations can build diverse, talented teams while offering every candidate the respect and clarity they deserve.

How Tribepad helped Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Councils turn quantity into quality

A fairer, faster hiring experience

Recruitment in the public sector can be a challenge, even with the right tools. But when outdated software, increasing demands, and inefficient processes get in the way, hiring becomes even harder. That's where Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Councils found themselves before partnering with Tribepad.

Despite attracting candidates, their recruitment process was slow, admin-heavy, and inconsistent. Roles were proving difficult to fill, hiring managers were overloaded with paperwork, and candidates faced a frustrating experience. They needed a system that could streamline recruitment, improve efficiency, and deliver a fair and structured hiring process. That's exactly what Tribepad provided.

Transforming recruitment at Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Councils

Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council share a Chief Executive and provide shared services for around 200,000 residents. Their recruitment team of just two people handles around 140 hires a year, a significant workload given the complex and highly regulated nature of public sector hiring.

They are part of WM Talent Acquisition, a shared service that includes 16 public sector organisations. In 2023/24, these organisations worked together, led by West Midlands Employers (WME), to

procure and implement a modern Applicant Tracking System (ATS). After an extensive review, WME selected Tribepad as its strategic ATS partner. Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Councils were among the first to adopt the system, completing implementation in just 10 weeks.

The challenges before Tribepad

Before using Tribepad, Malvern Hills & Wychavon's recruitment process faced multiple obstacles:

- **Slow and manual processes** – Endless paperwork, reliance on email, and a lack of digital tools slowed hiring down.
- **Inconsistent candidate experience** – Applications came through various platforms, creating a disjointed process.
- **Difficult-to-fill roles** – Certain positions, such as Civil Enforcement Officers, were nearly impossible to recruit for.
- **Low-quality applications** – Hiring managers wasted time sorting through unsuitable CVs.
- **Limited visibility** – A lack of structured reporting made it difficult to track recruitment performance.

With the job market becoming more competitive, it was clear that the councils needed a recruitment platform that could improve efficiency, increase application quality, and reduce time to hire.



The results: better hiring, faster processes, happier candidates

Since implementing Tribepad, Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Councils have seen dramatic improvements:

Time to offer reduced by 75% – Hiring times dropped from 16 weeks to just 22 days.

Faster onboarding – The time taken to complete references and onboarding was cut by a third, now completed within one week.

100% of roles filled – With 77 offers made, the councils achieved a steady pipeline of great talent.

Application quality doubled – They received a 100% increase in average applications per role.

Improved hiring for difficult roles – Five Civil Enforcement Officer vacancies, previously near-impossible to fill, were successfully recruited.

Better candidate experience – A modern, mobile-friendly system streamlined applications and kept candidates engaged.

“There’s been a huge increase in application quality. We’re getting the people now who actually want the job and are willing to invest some effort. It’s very unusual now that interviews aren’t successful.”

Jill Moore, HR Systems and Recruitment Manager

Efficiency gains: from admin overload to automation

Before Tribepad, recruitment was weighed down by manual work. The process involved:

- Printing and handling endless paperwork
- Copying data manually between systems
- Managing applications and offers via email
- Chasing references and onboarding documents

With Tribepad, these inefficiencies were eliminated. Hiring managers now have self-service access, recruitment workflows are automated, and everything is managed in one central platform. This means less admin, fewer delays, and a hiring process that runs smoothly from start to finish.

“We’re not doing all that manual work now. Tribepad has saved us a huge amount of time. Everything is so much easier than before.”

Peter Davies, Recruitment Advisor

Candidate experience: engaging from application to hire

Previously, candidates found the application process slow, outdated, and unclear. They had to navigate multiple platforms, register separately for different systems, and often lost track of their applications. Onboarding was similarly disjointed, with contracts and documentation handled outside the system.



Now, Malvern Hills & Wychavon can:

- Set benchmarks and KPIs for key hiring metrics
- Spot bottlenecks and refine processes
- Support hiring managers with relevant data
- Adapt to changes in the job market more effectively

“Tribepad has very good reports already written that you can generate almost instantly and schedule to send wherever you need them. That saves us a lot of time, sheds light into our processes, and helps us support our managers.”

Jill Moore

Now, with Tribepad, candidates benefit from:

- A modern, mobile-friendly interface
- Automated status updates and communication
- A self-service portal for tracking application progress
- Integrated onboarding, keeping everything in one place

These changes have led to a 77% completed application rate across 900+ applications, ensuring that more candidates successfully complete the process.

“If you look now, our candidates are engaged from the time they’ve submitted their application through to the close date, and if they’re successful, from interview until they’re hired. The candidate experience is so much better now.”

Jill Moore

Smarter hiring decisions with better data

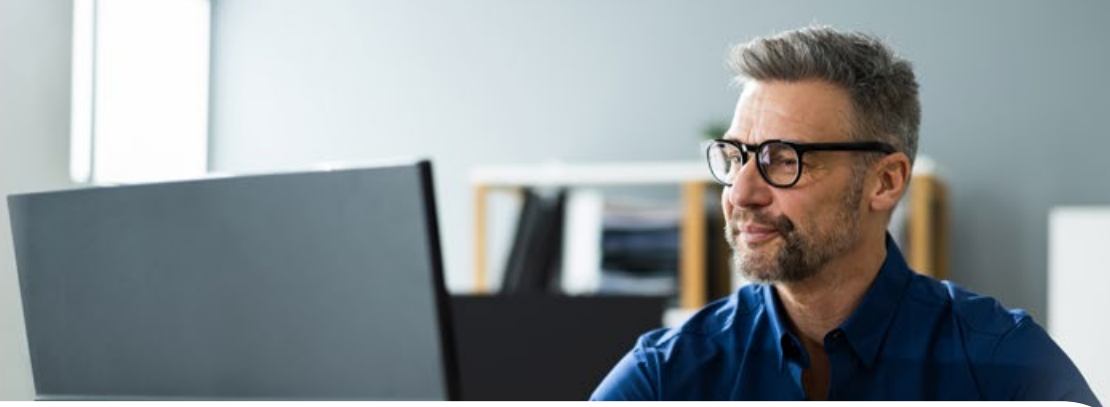
One of the biggest challenges before Tribepad was the lack of visibility into recruitment data. Without structured reporting, it was difficult to measure performance, track hiring trends, or identify areas for improvement.

A recruitment success story

By switching to Tribepad, Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Councils have transformed recruitment from a slow, admin-heavy process into an efficient, candidate-friendly experience. With automation, self-service tools, and data-driven insights, they are now hiring faster, attracting better talent, and providing a fair, structured recruitment process.

As a result, recruitment has gone from being a challenge to a competitive advantage. The councils now have the technology and processes to hire the right people efficiently, ensuring they can continue serving their community effectively.





What stubbornly high insolvency rates mean for ED&I



Neil Armstrong, Chief Commercial Officer, Tribepad

The latest [ONS insolvency figures](#) paint a concerning picture for businesses across the UK. In 2024, there were 23,872 registered company insolvencies—a 5% decrease from 2023, which had the highest annual number since 1993. So down, but stubbornly high. Companies are shutting down, redundancies are on the rise, and economic uncertainty is making employers hesitant to hire. At the same time, Labour's new initiatives with National Insurance and wage rises (people do deserve to be paid fairly) are causing further unease among some businesses who are already navigating choppy waters.

Amid this turmoil, much of the discussion is understandably focused on job losses and hiring freezes. But what's being overlooked is the significant threat to equality, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I). We know that when businesses enter survival mode, long-term commitments like fostering diverse and inclusive workplaces often slip down the list of priorities. They become the words on the wall, the brand slogan, a nice to have – not something absolutely fundamental to not just fairness, opportunity, and progress, but profitability and productivity.

The risk of ED&I regression in hiring

It's pretty simple. When the job market tightens, competition for roles intensifies. Our latest data shows that the job market is tougher than ever for applicants, with 119% year-on-year increase in November applications, and 48.7 applications per job - up 286%. Yet on the other hand there has been a 24% decrease in jobs advertised. Fewer jobs, more applicants.

And with more applicants per vacancy, hiring teams are under growing pressure to move fast and reduce risk.

That can mean relying more on gut instinct or traditional "safe" hires, people who fit the familiar mould rather than those who bring new perspectives and experiences.

Sounds awful right? But it's human nature. When time is short, recruiters and hiring managers are more likely to fall back on unconscious biases, whether they realise it or not. That could mean selecting candidates who look, sound, or think like those already in the business. And so without deliberate checks and balances, inclusive hiring practices can quickly unravel.

The disproportionate impact on marginalised groups

Layoffs don't affect everyone equally. Women, ethnic minorities, disabled employees, and other marginalised groups are often **among the first to be impacted**. **Research has shown time and again that in times of economic stress, diversity takes a hit**, whether through redundancies, reduced career opportunities, or the quiet fading away of inclusive policies.

For many businesses, this isn't intentional. But when cuts need to be made quickly, the decisions often reflect existing inequalities. If diverse employees are more likely to be in lower-paid or precarious roles, they're more vulnerable. If inclusive hiring practices aren't actively protected, the next wave of hires may not reflect the diversity that businesses have worked so hard to build.

Keeping ED&I on the agenda when budgets are tight

It's easy to assume that ED&I is a "nice to have" in tough times. But the reality is that businesses that deprioritise inclusion now will struggle more in the long run. Diverse teams aren't just good for social impact, they drive **better decision-making**, improve innovation, and create **stronger, more resilient organisations**.

So how can businesses keep ED&I at the forefront when every decision is under scrutiny by the finance team? The key is to make inclusion a habit, rather than an extra initiative. That means embedding fair hiring practices into every stage of recruitment, rather than treating them as an add-on. It's just what you do.

Technology can play a huge role in this. The right systems can help remove unconscious bias by focusing on skills, experience, and potential rather than personal background. Structured interviews and anonymised applications can level the playing field, ensuring that every candidate is assessed on the same criteria. And real-time hiring data can highlight gaps or trends, helping businesses course-correct before inequalities become entrenched.

Upskilling and career mobility as a path forward

We're big believers that the right job can lift people up and transform lives, having seen it happen time and time again. In an uncertain job market, career mobility is more important than ever. But too often, the best opportunities, whether that's upskilling, reskilling, or internal promotions, aren't equally accessible, whether that's due to a lack of processes or even nepotism on the golf course.

For businesses navigating economic uncertainty, investing in internal talent can be a win-win. Upskilling employees not only fills critical gaps but also builds loyalty and engagement. But without an inclusive approach, these opportunities may not reach those who need them most.

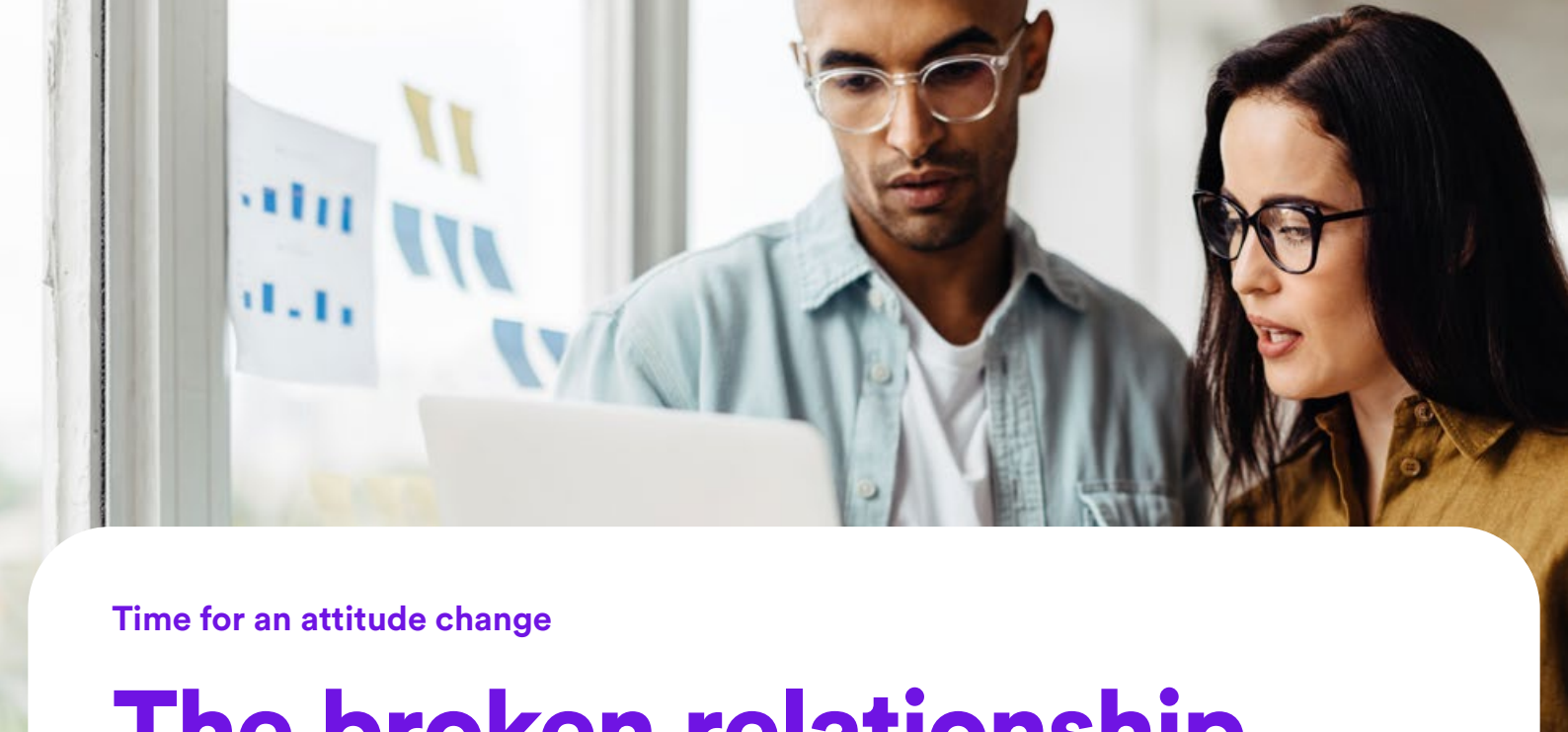
That's why businesses need to take an active role in ensuring fair access to career progression. That could mean transparent internal hiring processes, targeted mentoring and sponsorship programmes, or using skills-based assessments to identify potential beyond traditional job titles.

A defining moment for businesses

It's true that the continued high rate of insolvencies is creating an unpredictable landscape, and businesses understandably need to focus on survival. But the choices they make now will shape their workplaces for years to come.

Prioritising ED&I isn't just about doing the right thing, it's about building stronger, more adaptable businesses that are better equipped for whatever comes next. We may be due some 'precedented' times, but goodness knows when they will be. Companies that keep inclusion at the core of their hiring and workforce strategies won't just weather the storm, they'll come out of it stronger.

The businesses that emerge successfully from this period will be the ones that understand that fairness and opportunity aren't just optional extras, they're essential to resilience and growth.



Time for an attitude change

The broken relationship between companies and job seekers

By [Adam Nichols](#), Marketing Headhunter at [Rosslyn David](#) and Founder of [The Job Hunt Academy](#)

Adam Nichols is a headhunter at Rosslyn David and founder of The Job Hunt Academy, an online resource offering job search tools, playbooks, and consultancy. As an advisor to The Marketing Leaders Collective and author of The Talent Attraction Guide, he draws from over 50,000 hours of recruitment experience. His latest guide offers practical insights on using the 4Ps of Marketing in recruitment, helping hiring teams create the most attractive job offerings possible.

In my role as headhunter and founder of The Job Hunt Academy, I have a front-row seat to the trials and tribulations job seekers face in today's market. Although I work outside of in-house talent teams, I see trends that are equally as relevant. Every day, I speak to around five job seekers, each with different backgrounds and unique skill sets. Despite the range of experience, skill, and career levels these individuals bring, there's one troubling experience they all share: the way they're treated by hiring companies. Over the past year, almost every job seeker I've encountered has voiced frustration, disappointment, or outright hurt from their encounters with hiring processes.

While there are companies making genuine efforts to treat candidates well, the prevailing narrative is clear—many hiring practices are not just ineffective; they are often disrespectful. This is not only a call for better practices from companies, but a chance for the entire recruitment profession—both in-house and external teams—to reconsider how they handle hiring, from outreach to offer.

Let's be clear: we're not talking about unqualified applicants or "serial appliers." I'm referring to skilled, dedicated, and highly employable people who are eager for an opportunity to contribute to a company.



Yet, they face avoidable and often demoralising obstacles created by companies themselves—barriers that are costing these businesses access to top talent and causing lasting harm to people who deserve better. The way companies handle their hiring processes desperately needs reform, for the benefit of candidates and the integrity of the companies themselves.

Companies are ignoring good, talented people

A common theme is that applicants simply don't hear back. Talented, well-suited candidates submit applications and receive... nothing. Radio silence. Even with modern applicant tracking systems (ATS) that allow for automated responses, an overwhelming number of candidates receive no acknowledgment. For the applicant, this lack of basic recognition sends a clear, negative message about the company's culture and respect for individuals.

Why does this happen? Often, companies are inundated with applicants, but isn't this predictable?

If job openings draw hundreds of applications, perhaps more effective screening methods, clearer role descriptions, and proactive communication practices need to be in place. Ignoring applicants reflects a careless disregard for the time and effort job seekers have invested in putting themselves forward.

Reaching out—only to go silent

There are cases where companies do reach out to promising candidates, initiating contact and gauging their interest, only to vanish after receiving a positive response. The candidate, encouraged by initial outreach, is left waiting in limbo, checking their inboxes for replies that never come. This ghosting behavior reflects poorly on the company's professionalism and ethics. Worse yet, it diminishes the job seeker's confidence and adds unnecessary strain to an already stressful process.

Such occurrences suggest that some recruiters or hiring teams are either untrained or overstretched. Whether due to inefficiency or a lack of accountability, failing to follow up on direct outreach shows a disregard for candidates' time and interest.

Incompetent or ill-prepared hiring staff

In many cases, job applications are reviewed by individuals who lack training, knowledge, or context about the role itself. This can mean a disconnect between the role's actual requirements and the hiring team's interpretation, leading to arbitrary rejections of otherwise strong candidates. When people involved in hiring don't understand the position, they miss critical insights into which candidates would truly be a fit.

The issue here is often organisational. Hiring managers need to involve skilled personnel who understand the role and market, enabling informed evaluations. For applicants, it's devastating to be dismissed by someone who barely grasps what their application represents, and for companies, it means the real potential for missing out on great employees.

Lack of feedback following interviews

A job interview requires time, preparation, and often emotional investment from candidates. Yet, many companies provide little to no feedback, simply stating, "It's a no from us," or worse, never responding at all. A short, tailored message or basic feedback could go a long way in leaving candidates with a sense of closure and professional courtesy. In the absence of feedback, candidates

are left in the dark, unsure of what went wrong or how they could improve, leading to frustration and a negative perception of the company.

For companies, this is an opportunity to build good rapport. Constructive feedback, even if brief, shows respect for the candidate's time and leaves a positive impression, even when the outcome isn't favorable.

Exploiting candidates' time and expertise

Another disheartening trend is the tendency of companies to demand extensive work samples or project proposals as part of the interview process.

Candidates pour hours into creating presentations, strategic plans, or other deliverables, essentially offering free consultation. Then, if the candidate isn't selected, they may not even get a follow-up or acknowledgement of their effort.

This practice raises serious ethical questions about how companies leverage candidate labor without compensation or genuine interest.

Cancelled roles and broken commitments

One of the most painful experiences for candidates is making it through an entire hiring process only to have the role "put on hold," "cancelled," or redirected. For job seekers, it feels like a betrayal after investing so much time and energy. While sometimes unavoidable, companies should have the foresight to confirm budget and role requirements before initiating a hiring process. Transparent communication around shifting priorities or delays can help manage candidates' expectations and avoid unnecessary disappointment.

So, what's the solution?

This widespread issue calls for a collective rethinking of hiring practices, led by companies themselves but possibly supported by broader regulatory frameworks.

Here are some avenues for improvement:

1. **Centralised Accountability:** An ombudsman or central body could create a framework to ensure minimum standards in recruitment, similar to how certain industries enforce customer service standards. Such an entity could support guidelines and best practices that prevent candidates from being ignored or exploited.
2. **Application Process Improvements:** Companies should aim to streamline application processes and improve candidate communication at each stage. Investing in automated but personalised responses and better follow-up protocols could improve efficiency and respect for applicants' time.
3. **Transparency and Commitment:** Companies should ensure roles are approved and funded before advertising, and should clearly communicate any changes in timeline or direction. Respect for candidates' time and effort must be at the core of these processes.
4. **Empathy and Training:** Hiring staff should be trained to handle applicants with empathy, considering the stress of job seeking. Candidates deserve a process that treats them with the respect and dignity they'd expect as future employees.

For a company, a candidate's experience during recruitment is a preview of what their work environment might be like. As businesses strive to build strong brands and company cultures, how they treat applicants must be a part of this image. When companies take candidates seriously, they not only attract better talent but also create a reputation that benefits their entire organisation. If hiring practices are not transformed, businesses risk not only damaging their own reputations but also losing out on the very people who could drive them forward.



Supporting women of colour in recruitment

By Ruth Kudzai

Diversity in recruitment is a topic that's been discussed at length, and while we've made progress, the road ahead is still long. Tools like anonymised applications, inclusive job descriptions, and diverse hiring panels have helped open doors for underrepresented groups. But let's be honest: these measures are just the starting point. The real challenge often comes later — during interviews.

For women of colour, the interview stage can be where unconscious bias creeps in, despite the best efforts to avoid it.

It's not intentional, but it's there. Whether it's assumptions about how someone "fits" into a team or unspoken doubts about leadership potential, bias continues to shape outcomes in subtle yet significant ways.

As a corporate woman who's navigated these challenges, I understand how frustrating this can be. Even when we recruit with the best intentions, the pressure to meet diversity targets or the lack of deep understanding about how to foster inclusivity can derail the process. The solution isn't just clever recruitment tactics, it's a fundamental shift in how we view and value talent.

The problem with targets

Diversity targets are well-meaning. They push organisations to think about representation and hold them accountable for creating opportunities. But the flip side is when targets become the sole focus, the process can feel forced. Instead of looking at a candidate's skills, potential, and fit for the role, the emphasis shifts to ticking boxes.

This doesn't just harm organisations, it harms the very people these targets are meant to help. Women of colour may feel like they're being hired to "fill a quota" rather than because they're the best person for the job. It's a sentiment I've heard echoed in coaching sessions and professional circles, and it's a barrier to genuine inclusion.

The challenge lies in balancing the need for diversity with the commitment to hiring for skills.

These two goals aren't mutually exclusive, but achieving both requires intention, education, and a willingness to rethink traditional recruitment practices.



Addressing unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias is a tricky thing to tackle because, by its nature, it's unintentional. Most hiring managers don't set out to exclude anyone, but biases are deeply ingrained, shaped by societal norms, personal experiences, and even the media we consume.

For example, studies have shown that names, accents, and even hobbies can influence hiring decisions. A woman of colour with a name that's perceived as "difficult to pronounce" might not make it past the first round, even if she's the most qualified candidate. These biases aren't always deliberate, but their impact is undeniable.

So, how do we address this? Education is key. Hiring managers need training to recognise and challenge their biases, not just during interviews but throughout the entire recruitment process.

This isn't about pointing fingers or assigning blame, it's about equipping people with the tools to make fair, informed decisions.

Recruitment for skills

At its core, recruitment should be about one thing: finding the best person for the job. Skills, experience, and potential should be the driving factors behind every hiring decision. But in practice, this can get lost in the noise of diversity targets, organisational pressures, and unconscious bias.

Recruiting for skills means looking beyond surface-level attributes and focusing on what a candidate can bring to the table. It's about asking the right questions, setting clear criteria, and evaluating candidates against those criteria—without letting biases cloud the process.

One way to achieve this is through structured interviews. By standardising the questions asked and the criteria used to evaluate responses, organisations can reduce the influence of bias and ensure a fairer process. It's not a perfect solution, but it's a step in the right direction.

Building a talent pipeline

Diversity in recruitment is about creating a pipeline of talent that supports underrepresented groups at every stage of their careers. This requires a long-term approach, one that goes beyond filling immediate vacancies.

Mentorship and sponsorship are two powerful tools for building this pipeline.

As someone who's benefited from sponsorship in my own career, I know how transformative it can be to have someone advocating for you. Sponsors don't just open doors—they help you walk through them with confidence.

Organisations should also invest in development programmes that support women of colour in their professional growth. This could include leadership training, networking opportunities, and initiatives that highlight and celebrate their achievements.



Creating inclusive cultures

Recruitment is only part of the equation. For diversity to truly thrive, organisations need to create cultures where everyone feels valued and empowered to succeed. This means addressing not just hiring practices but also workplace policies, team dynamics, and leadership structures.

Inclusive cultures are built on transparency, respect, and a commitment to equity. They require organisations to listen to their employees, challenge discriminatory practices, and actively promote a sense of belonging.

Representation matters

Representation is one of the most powerful tools for breaking down barriers. When women of colour see themselves reflected in leadership, it sends a clear message: “You belong here.” It challenges stereotypes, inspires confidence, and paves the way for others to follow.

But representation isn’t just about optics—it’s about creating meaningful opportunities for women of colour to lead, innovate, and make an impact. This requires organisations to actively seek out and support diverse talent at every stage of the career ladder.

A shared responsibility

The journey to truly unbiased recruitment is a collective one. It requires organisations, hiring managers, and individuals to work together, challenging assumptions and rethinking traditional practices. It’s not easy, but it’s necessary.

For women of colour, the barriers to career advancement are real. But with the right strategies, we can start to dismantle them. By recruiting for skills, addressing unconscious bias, and building inclusive cultures, we can create workplaces where everyone can thrive.

The work doesn’t stop at recruitment—it’s about creating a ripple effect that transforms organisations from the inside out. Because when we get this right, the benefits go far beyond the workplace. We’re not just hiring employees; we’re building a better, more equitable future.

A photograph showing the back of several people's heads as they sit in rows of red upholstered chairs in a dimly lit seminar or conference room, looking towards the front.

Dates for your diary

23rd April

HR Technologies

London Seminar Theatre 2, 15:50 - 16:20

'Finding the Right Fit: Why it's so important & how to do it'

30th April

Care Show

London

8th May

The Recruitment Events Co. RL 100 Surrey Summit

Stop The Bias: Part 3 presented by Neil Armstrong

15th May

Inhouse Recruitment Live, Manchester.

Stop the Bias: Part 3 presented by James Pratt.

11th June

Inhouse Recruitment, Talent Attraction Conference, London

2nd July

Inhouse Recruitment DEI Conference, London.

DEI with DFS presented by Matt Ingram-Smith

10th July

The Recruitment Events Co. Recfest UK 2025, Stevenage.

The Bigger, Fatter Recruitment Quiz 2025 with Neil Armstrong.



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