

# Defining the role of HR leaders and DEI managers in Hybrid & Remote Work

**“Preventing discrimination in hybrid settings is not a one-off initiative, it is an ongoing commitment to seeing, hearing, and valuing everyone, everywhere.**



## Key concepts and definitions

Human Resources Leadership encompasses strategic workforce planning, talent acquisition, employee engagement, compliance, and performance management. HR leaders are responsible for aligning people strategy with business goals and cultivating a productive organisational culture (Ulrich et al., 2012).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) managers focus specifically on building inclusive workplaces where employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued and respected. Diversity refers to representation across identity categories such as race, gender, age, and ability. Equity involves ensuring fair treatment and opportunities for all, while inclusion speaks to the environment of belonging and engagement (Shore et al., 2011).

While HR traditionally focused on administration, recruitment, and compliance, modern HR leaders are expected to act as strategic partners and change agents (Ulrich et al., 2012). DEI professionals emerged more prominently in the 2010s as organisations recognised that inclusion was not automatically achieved through diversity hiring alone.

Both roles require leadership, systems thinking, and collaboration across departments. Increasingly, HR and DEI professionals work in tandem to design policies, training, and metrics that shape inclusive employee experiences and support organisational growth. HR leaders and DEI managers must co-create inclusive systems that are resilient and responsive.



# Responsibilities in shaping inclusive policy and driving change

In an increasingly digital and decentralised workplace, HR professionals and D&I leaders play a crucial role in safeguarding equity and preventing discrimination. Remote and hybrid work structures, while offering flexibility and cost-efficiency, also create new challenges around visibility, fairness, and inclusion.

HR and D&I departments are tasked with designing and enforcing inclusive workplace policies that uphold legal standards (such as the UK Equality Act 2010) while reflecting the cultural values of the organisation. In remote contexts, this includes ensuring equal access to information, advancement, and visibility for all employees—regardless of location, disability, caring responsibilities, or digital literacy.

HR and D&I leaders must also act as agents of change, championing initiatives that move the organisation towards greater inclusion. **In hybrid models, this might mean revisiting performance evaluation criteria, adapting onboarding procedures for remote hires, or providing training for managers to lead diverse, dispersed teams.**

Their role is also strategic: inclusion policies should not remain static but evolve in line with emerging trends in technology and work habits. Remote-first inclusion audits, inclusive digital communication practices, and accessible remote meeting protocols are just a few examples where HR and D&I leaders can set new standards and expectations.

## Barriers to implementation and acceptance

Despite the critical importance of inclusive practice in hybrid settings, the implementation of such policies can be met with resistance from employees or managers.

A first challenge is acceptability among staff. Remote workers, particularly in organisations with a history of presenteeism, may feel sceptical about inclusion efforts that seem superficial or disconnected from day-to-day realities.

Additionally, some team members may resist change due to unconscious bias or fear of losing relative privilege (e.g. visibility for office-based staff versus home-based staff). In hybrid teams, employees working remotely are often unintentionally excluded from informal conversations, mentoring opportunities, or visibility during performance reviews.

From a managerial perspective, adapting leadership styles to be inclusive remotely is not intuitive. Many managers lack training in inclusive virtual leadership, and may struggle with issues like equitable task distribution, inclusive feedback, and awareness of cultural or gender-based communication norms in digital spaces.

# Conclusion

The hybrid and remote work era has redefined not only where we work but how inclusion is experienced and how discrimination can take root in subtle, untraceable ways. HR and D&I leaders carry the strategic and ethical responsibility of steering organisations towards fairness, but they cannot do it alone.

By equipping managers with inclusive tools, engaging employees as co-creators, and aligning policies with values rather than appearances, organisations can build workplaces where diversity thrives, even across digital divides. **Preventing discrimination in hybrid settings is not a one-off initiative, it is an ongoing commitment to seeing, hearing, and valuing everyone, everywhere.**



## Further reading and bibliography

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