

HR insights podcast

Series 9 | Episode 10

PSA: This transcript has been written with assistance from AI.

Are we entering a new era of workplace inclusion?

Stuart Elliott (00:22)

Hi everyone, welcome back to HR Insights. Today I'm joined by a very familiar voice and a long standing friend of Elliot Scott, Sasha Scott. She is founder and CEO of the Inclusive Group. Sasha has joined us on HR Insights before. A lot of you would have listened to her previously. If you haven't, you can go back and re-listen to some of the podcasts that we did. Some of it we do talk about actually, so it is quite interesting to go back and flip through the archives.

A lot has changed since our previous conversations. Organisations are reassessing how they approach diversity, equity and inclusion. The language around it continues to evolve and the issues that might once have been viewed predominantly through a cultural people lens are increasingly intersecting with conduct, compliance and a wider business risk. Today, we're gonna explore what Sasha is seeing and hearing from organisations right here, right now.

Stuart Elliott (01:19)

Sasha, welcome back. How are you?

Sasha Scott (01:21)

I'm good. It's great to be back.

Stuart Elliott (01:23)

We were just talking, weren't we? How long has it been?

Sasha Scott (01:25)

Well, we're thinking it's at least two years. It feels longer.

Stuart Elliott (01:28)

Feels longer. Yeah, I was gonna say I think it's more like three or four. I d I wasn't sure, but yeah. Feels like well. But you look the same.

Sasha Scott (01:33)

Well, I'm little bit of help probably from some tweakments. but yeah, it's good to look the same. You're looking very well.

Stuart Elliott (01:42)

The listeners probably won't know. If I sound a bit off, I've been to the dentist this morning, so I'm a little bit conscious of that. But yeah, hopefully I look all right. Good.

Sasha Scott (01:50)

You're looking good, Stuart.

Stuart Elliott (01:52)

Very good. New listeners probably won't know who you are, so it'd be nice for you to do a little intro to you and your background.

Sasha Scott (01:58)

Yeah, thank you. So I'm Sasha Scott. I'm the founder and CEO of Inclusive Group and I've been in that space for about twenty-five years and we work with a global client base in a previous life for my sins. I was a banker at UBS and yeah, that's about it. Well I'm just

Stuart Elliott (02:17)

Never get board of that that story.

Sasha Scott (02:23)

So bad at maths. I just ha you know, had major imposter syndrome for about thirteen years. so you know, it's why I'm sitting in the seat now. Sometimes we just have to move and follow our heart, which is what I do. So I was in fixed income sales, so I sold derivatives to institutional clients.

Stuart Elliott (02:40)

You can't have been that bad at maths. That's pretty impressive.

Sasha Scott (02:44)

I was very bad at mass. If anyone knows what guilts are, I made a big error once on a guilt something or other. See, I can't even remember what it was. But I was in sales and sales I think is about relationships. And as long as you have the basics, it was the connection you have with your clients. And they have, you know, a bank of phones and they were speaking to, you know, twenty brokers a day. And I guess that therefore when your personality connects with somebody else.

That's the number that they punch when they want to sell a thousand guilts. Or buy.

Stuart Elliott (03:17)

Right. Or buy. But how long's the Inclusive Group been going now?

Sasha Scott (03:23)

So we've been going a quarter of a century. And it's something, Stuart, I'm really proud of because when that was set up, yeah, it's honestly it was fairly it was pioneering. there were not inclusion consultancies popping up all over the place. And I'm super proud of that. When did you twenty five years ago.

See I can't do maths, I know it because my oldest child, young adult, is twenty six and I remember him in nappies and me thinking, I need to do something else as well as being a mum.

Stuart Elliott (04:06)

That's fair enough. But you're right. It's twenty five years ago there was very little going on in this space at all. So you've seen well we'll come to it in more recently, but you've seen it sort of really boom probably what for the first maybe not the first five or ten years, but after that period, is that right?

Sasha Scott (04:23)

Yeah, that's exactly right. Initially it was pretty quiet in terms of the work. So I worked exclusively within financial services at that stage. and that was very helpful because that was an area I knew. I was familiar with trading rooms, I could speak to people who were coming to the training sessions, and there was a lot of and this is an interesting point given our conversation, it was a lot of compliance led training around conduct.

The market really exploded in around 2010, really around sort of 2008 through to 2010. That was the first time that we started to see a lot of business from different organisations and particularly from the legal sector. And the reason for that was that this was the first time that clients had turned around to their suppliers, particularly the legal suppliers, and said,

We need to know what you're doing around diversity. you need to demonstrate that it's an important value to us, so it needs to be to you. And that for us was an absolute spinner because then law firms started to invest in doing more around diversity. And I think it's safe to say a lot of those firms were out of their depth, didn't know what it was. So we had some experience from financial services that we were able to bring and that was a great steep learning curve for us as well. But one of the things I've discovered, particularly with law in in London, but I've found it in New York now and in LA, that if you do a good job, there is a lot of sponsorship and there is actually a lot of collaboration. And so our referrals are and still consistently are very, very high. Yeah.

Stuart Elliott (06:06)

Which is great. I always find it interesting it's finance and legal in the fact that a lot of the time they're seen as sectors that are maybe a little bit behind the times or a little bit backward. But it's interesting that they were maybe at the very start of this of the of the boom, as it were, in in this space.

Sasha Scott (06:21)

Well they were you know pretty forward thinking because they had to be. Right. so from a financial services perspective, around two thousand seven, two thousand eight, so we really are going back, this is when we started to see enormous headlines around discrimination claims, particularly sex discrimination, and the compensation if you're suing an organisation for discrimination is uncapped, it's blue sky. And so there were eye watering amounts being awarded to the victims / survivors of harassment and discrimination on various you know different areas, whether it's race, whether it's sex. And that you know, obviously has huge reputational implications and cost implications and recruitment implications. And so we were starting to see a lot of training because of that. So yeah, risk. Yep.

And the law firms I felt their push was more from their clients. Right. But client was saying you've got to do this or you won't be on the panel. So it's number one, right, we need to get our house in order. And yeah. So Yeah there are a lot of of obviously ongoing different reasons why back then there was a big focus on those areas around inclusion around diversity and equity. Yeah.

Stuart Elliott (07:42)

And it's sort of built to a bit of a maybe a crescendo sort of what, 2020 ish

Sasha Scott (07:47)

When we had the death of George Floyd in the US and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter movement and COVID and the pandemic. I mean, I remember sitting with my managing director, Jen Morris, at the beginning of the pandemic, like everybody else thinking, Are we gonna survive this? Yeah, both personally and from a business perspective. And 2020 was one of our record years.

And it was also interesting in terms of the way people work, because obviously the migration was to Zoom, which no one had really heard of, and then that exploded. And we realised this was for us a much more efficient business model because we could do you we could do probably I think our record in a day was fourteen workshops back to back. Yep. Whereas w that would never be achieved when I was running around London. Yeah.

Stuart Elliott (08:41)

Yeah, that's insane. I know I can I can only sort of back up what you're saying. Like we used to see a lot of roles like chief diversity officer roles back then would be sort of quite key. We'd even see them reporting to the CEO and not part of an HR function. They'd have their almost their own their own area. Yeah. which was amazing, I suppose, to sort of see that pop up at that at that time. And then I suppose what subsequently we've obviously seen a sort of it's it slowed down. It's slightly different in terms of how it's structured now, is that right?

Sasha Scott (09:11)

I think there's been a massive, massive recalibration. And isn't this just the course of history? And, you know, the ups and the downs and the circular nature of everything. but if we're thinking today about what you know, that area of diversity, equity and inclusion, we're at an absolute inflection point at the moment. And there's also been over the last couple of years a real pause and I think what's interesting about a pause is that's a time of reflection. Where do we go from here? it can be a real negative if it leads to a reduction of standards and a lowering of the bar. It can actually be a huge positive if it leads to a more mature form of what it was before. Yeah.

Stuart Elliott (10:03)

Yeah, I see exactly the same in terms of the recruitment lens as well. Like we always see it that the pendulum swings one way, but if it swings so much one way, it's gotta then right size itself. So it's gonna then swing a little bit the other way before it sort of comes back to that sort of balancing or tipping point, as it were. w where are we at now with things? Where would you say we're at right this minute?

Sasha Scott (10:28)

Well, we're at a stage where I think there is a maturity to the to this to the area, to the topic, to the sector. The language has changed. And what I would call the old language, the This space has always been filled with really complicated acronyms. And if we were to look at the acronym DEI.

That's now been very tainted. It's been weaponised, it's been tainted, but I think it's much more sensible to look at one word, which is inclusion, and use that as the bridge to far more operational business areas. Yeah. Because the whole area has matured dramatically with from what we see from our global client base.

And so now what we're looking at is conduct, culture, compliance, risk, and people. So there's been a disbursement rather than it's centered in one area. Yeah. And I think it's yeah, definitely. And I think that it's no longer helpful at all to use language. Which no one understands the problem that it's trying to solve.

Stuart Elliott (12:04)

Okay, that makes that makes sense. And we're seeing that too. So we're seeing less language around DEI and much more language around culture. Yeah. So that that's probably the phrasing that we are seeing a lot more of now is that, yeah, utilising how do we sort of put our culture in place? What does that mean? What does that stand for? because you're absolutely right. I get the impression the DEI phrase now, to your point about being weaponised, is been exactly that. Yeah.

Sasha Scott (12:33)

And I think the challenge is, does the culture that you describe match the culture people experience?

Stuart Elliott (12:41)

Yes. Yeah. And I think maybe that's what people had a problem with at times. I think the culture they experienced wasn't what the language that they were using. Absolutely. And I think they're try again, they're trying to sort of right size that. Yeah. That's really so if we if we bring that round to like right now, sort of current topics, what would you say is hot in terms of current topics?

Sasha Scott (13:01)

So I completely agree with you, Stuart, in terms of what you're seeing. I think the real focus at the moment is on culture, it's on fairness, and it's on how people are treated. whatever language the organisation uses, what really matters is what's actually changing and how people are experiencing it. So the hot topics really are how are those different areas working well together?

To create a culture that everybody can thrive in. Yep. And that is the marriage, dare I say it, of compliance, okay, risk, the whole conduct overview and the people function.

Stuart Elliott (13:46)

Yeah. Okay. And on the compliance risks I and I it's interesting when we were we were chatting offline on email and stuff yesterday, I remember saying about maybe not bringing up too much AI. Yeah. Is that compliance risk associated with AI in any way? I think.

Sasha Scott (14:00)

Absolutely. I mean you know, it's the topic that we're we're all hearing so much in about in the news. I mean, obviously we were recording this in September. Could be completely different tomorrow. But I noticed that POTES is now trying to rebrand off artificial intelligence to superintelligence, so losing some of that tag. But yeah, I mean AI is absolutely keeping clients awake at night. I think it's keeping a lot of us awake at night. And AI and risk is not just a you know government conversation, it's absolutely a corporate conversation.

Stuart Elliott (14:37)

Yeah, and we're seeing a lot of companies now trying to identify where they sit on that risk spectrum. So they're trying to work out how risky they wanna be when it comes to AIs. Yes. And also how risk averse they wanna be. So we've I've got a lot of clients now that actually like we don't want to touch it for a while. We wanna take a back seat on this until we're really comfortable with what it's gonna do and where it's gonna take us.

Sasha Scott (15:03)

Yeah, I'm hearing a lot of conversation or amongst my peers about how worried they are that there's an over reliance on AI in the workspace and it's effectively making people much more lazy actually and less engaged with their role. Yeah. So it's potentially is a monster when it comes to inclusion.

Because there's a detachment from it. And there's I think, yeah, well, we're all learning. I think it has many positives and you know, we could do a whole series of podcasts just about AI. But from an inclusion perspective, what I'm seeing is a cons a real concern about just what it does to the day-to-day workings of our job. Like, for example, I was talking to a cohort within aviation analytics recently. And this cohort is they're all in their twenties. And what they're being told is you need to use AI more and more and more and more.

And they are saying, Well, we're sitting as we most of us are, with the threat that actually this is, you know, this Frankenstein is going to, you know, completely disempower us and, you know, take our jobs anyway. So we're worried to use it, but we're being told to use it more. Yeah. So I feel actually when we're going back to the central topic of today, one of the massive challenges for organisations is how do we keep engaging with people when we're asking them to automate them the what they do a lot more?

How do we engage with people? The connection piece.

Stuart Elliott (16:48)

Well, I was talking to a tech company this morning and we were talking a little bit about the use of recordings. So one of the things that seems to be coming from AI is the utilisation of recording almost every conversation and how you could go into a meeting, a physical one, put your phone down, record the whole conversation, it all uploads your notes, which from the outside sounds a really smart idea in the fact it saves a lot of time, saves all that. But the bit that I'm not seeing is the people acknowledging that there needs to be consent on both sides to actually have that recording done in the first place, and then how you're going to use that and where you're going to save it and how safe is that recording. That's the bit that I'm not seeing. Everybody seems to be just jumping on the train without checking all of the different aspects. Like I suppose GDPR probably falls under that.

Sasha Scott (17:38)

So the governance is lacking. And actually interestingly, 'cause I'm very much at the coal face of anti harassment and non-financial misconduct. What I've noticed with conversations with clients is that the misconduct that happens now, let's say after work, drinks, you those sorts of issues because alcohol is in often very inextricably linked with this. Is it's the you know the HR department the next morning or the line is getting the story of this happened, but actually not only this happened, but I filmed the whole thing on my phone. Someone else has also filmed it. We have a risk that you this is going to go outside of the organisation before we have even have a chance of trying to manage the situation and listen to the parties involved and get to the you know, find out what's happened. So actually the risk is exponential because in the heat of the moment when we've had a few glasses of wine, you know, the chances are that video's gone already before anyone's even brought it into the office as this is a misconduct problem or a challenge, a challenging, you know, harassment situation, etc.

Stuart Elliott (18:52)

I have no doubt. I'm sure we've all seen those sort of WhatsApp video where it suddenly gets sent to one person before you know it.

Sasha Scott (18:58)

Spiral.

Stuart Elliott (18:59)

Yeah. Like it's it is gone. And regardless of whether anybody has consented to it or not to have that happen, it has gone and therefore it's seen. And you can't take that back. You can't unsee it.

Sasha Scott (19:10)

Absolutely. You can't unsee it but also gosh, we could go down so many rabbit holes with this. You we also know that there's a lot of false content out there.

Stuart Elliott (19:20)

Yeah. With well, especially with the rise of AI.

Sasha Scott (19:23)

Absolutely. So managing work situations is so much harder than it was two years ago when it comes to and which is the only side I see the people problem areas. Yeah.

Stuart Elliott (19:36)

So are we seeing is there a change now in what organisations are expected to take responsibility for? Is that what we're seeing a little bit?

Sasha Scott (19:42)

Well, what we've definitely seen with this maturity has been far more of a focus from the governance and the compliance side of things. So the regulatory expectations, whether we're talking about the SRA from the legal sector, whether we're talking about the FCA from finance, you know, has started to put a lot more expectations and a lot more regulatory I can't think of the right word regulations in place. And actually the FCA's most recent regulatory change around the FMSR need to check that. Came in on the first of September. And so yes, there is a lot more expectation of behaviour from managers. And where the complexity is going to really arise or is embryonically arising now in financial services, is being the communication between if I sit in risk or I sit in the people function or I sit in compliance in terms of the implementation. And so what we'll really need is inclusion around these different operational departments within business in and alignment. And that for me is a massive area that is keeping and will next year an ongoing keep clients awake at night around are we aligned, are we communicating? Have we got our house in order or are issues slipping through the gaps? Because what I think in compliance is a reportable issue might not necessarily be agreed in risk or on the people function. Right.

Stuart Elliott (21:25)

And what actually changes behaviour internally? What yeah, that's a very open ended question on that one, but what yeah, I suppose what do effective conduct and culture interventions actually look like?

Sasha Scott (21:37)

Well, you know, for someone who runs a effectively a training and consultancy, I would definitely not rely on training alone. I'd make absolutely sure that leaders model the behaviour that is expected and that the standards are applied unilaterally and consistently, including to high performers. Because historically it's often the high performers and or the rainmakers that slip through the gaps.

So it's about consistency. And what changes behaviour is consistency, it's guardrails and it's a follow-through, i.e., people are accountable for their behaviours. And for forever, there have been bad apples slipping through the net and slipping through the net and slipping through the net. But because we've seen such high profile claims and cases against particular individuals, particularly in financial services, without mentioning any names you know, the regulators have really responded to this. So it's much more rigorous. So it goes back to my earlier point that the whole area has matured. And I'm actually delighted because I think with the maturity and the fact that different parts of the business are now implementing and deploying change, we don't have to worry about an area being demonized or politicized. It's just good business practice and what we need is good leadership and that is the gap. That is the gap. It's always been the gap that people get promoted because they're intrinsically generally good at the underlying, but they don't come automatically with the people skills that create environments that you and I feel we belong, that everyone in our business is feel they belong, regardless of whom they are and whatever identifying pieces of them make them who they are.

Stuart Elliott (23:35)

It sounds really similar. I feel like this is very similar to sort of change programmes where you have to find the people that genuinely live and breathe what you're trying to do and they then need you need to see that in action. They're the ones that need to yeah, they need to see it, they need to live it, they need to breathe it. And once they do, that starts to filter through the rest of the organisation. Yeah.

Sasha Scott (23:55)

Like osmosis. Absolutely, absolutely. And it's really, really interesting because the kind of projects that I see a lot of now and that I absolutely love working on are quite medical. And what do I mean by quite medical? basically an organisation will come to us and say, "We have a problem", just as you might go to a doctor and say, "You know what, I'm feeling a bit off, but I don't know what it is". And the doctor will say to you, "Sorry about that, Stuart, you need to go and see a specialist". So you'll go off and see the specialist. And the specialist will run a set of tests. So we'll run like a set of tests and we'll look at the data. And you know, organisations are sophisticated. The data's already telling you there's a problem around attrition or there's a problem in this particular area. But then we'll come in with the stethoscope and go under the epidermis of the organisation.

And we conduct cultural audits. And this stuff is fascinating because it is really about deep, deep listening and then thematically coming up with here are the issues and here are some solutions. And so that medicalisation, although it's a really weird sort of parallel, I think is where organisations are going to continue to invest in. Because if you don't look at where the disease is, then the blood is in the water.

Stuart Elliott (25:18)

Yeah, and it's interesting you say that. I've definitely had a couple of clients where they've said that they've gone almost too far into almost like a colleague centric organizer. They've been become colleague centric in terms of how they've been perceived and they need to become more performance and business centric in terms of how they how they work, which has meant they've been a nice place to work, but their performance hasn't quite

Sasha Scott (25:40)

How interesting. Yeah. And a nice place to work isn't like gonna always make money. That's the thing, isn't it? Yeah. And yet it's what do people want from their workplace? Because when I have conversations with, you know, people in their twenties, and again, look, there are tropes here and stereotypes, but actually a I just don't like the word nice, but a rewarding place to work is you know, is that more important than the money I take home because actually, you know, everyone else has ruined everything for me, so I'm not gonna buy by that house for like thirty years. Yeah. Sounds like I'm being really horrible about younger people. I'm not I've please forgive me.

Stuart Elliott (26:20)

No, we'll come to that, but it is interesting I think on the performance because I am definitely seeing that more. I feel like people have looked at ways of improv improving the prof the P and L essentially. And over the last four years the quickest way to do that was cut cost, cut cost, cut costs. Now it's about becoming more performance driven. So now it's about how do we change the culture to become more performance driven. Yeah. And to your point about getting under the skin of the organisation, I think a lot of organisations don't know where they're at in that performance scale. I think some of them are A too nice, some of them are too cutthroat, but they don't really know where they sit and they don't know where they want to be either.

Sasha Scott (26:59)

Okay, so that's a fundamental problem if you don't know where you want to go. And also it's that age old problem. If we're going to more performance, and I see this with our clients too, you know, we're really we're hammering down on performance, Sasha. What we're having is a real problem in managers delivering tough messages. Yep. And I think and we you and I have discussed this before. You know, if you are in a senior position in organisation, ask yourself this very fundamental loop.

Put my teeth in. It was Stuart that went to the dentist, not me. Ask yourself this fundamental question. Do I want to be liked or do I want to be respected? I mean, you know, what do you think of that, Stuart? Do you want to be liked or respected? I think you want to be What do you want to be remembered for? Yeah. If you at work if you're like at like

Stuart Elliott (27:44)

You want to be respect, don't you at work? I think I think I think the likes approach, you're taking the David Brent approach to recruit to work, aren't you? You're taking the comedian everyone's

Sasha Scott (27:57)

Everyone's mate.

Stuart Elliott (27:58)

friend and not deliver the messages. And I'm going back there and some of our listeners may or may not have watched The Office, but I think there's that great scene where he's supposed to let people go and he hasn't and he can't bring himself to do it. And I don't think you wanna go down that road. I think you have to be respected first and foremost. And look, you might get liked as a result of that.

Sasha Scott (28:22)

Exactly. They don't have to be completely polar opposites, but it's you know, I it's centering the respect. I wanna be respected and I hope I can also be like, but sometimes I'm gonna tell you things that you do not wanna hear. So how do I deliver that message in a sensitive way, but is also firm. It's firm but fair. It's like parenting, right?

Stuart Elliott (28:44)

It it's like parenting, it's just good management. I was actually listening to a podcast this morning talking to someone was talking to Wayne Mooney and they were talking about when he was being managed by Jose Mourinho. Yeah. And he openly said he didn't like him. He said he respected him because he told him where he stood. Yeah. He said, "This is what I want to get from you. You're no longer gonna be part of the first team. However, this is what I will expect from you". And at the end of the season you can then go.

Sasha Scott (29:08)

Yeah, absolutely.

Stuart Elliott (29:09)

And he said he respects him for that 'cause he stuck to his word, he was good with it, and he knew what he wanted from him.

Sasha Scott (29:15)

Yeah, absolutely. And I have the privilege of doing a lot of coaching in my role now. I'd probably say about sixty percent of my day job is coaching individuals. And one of those big areas is are you a direct speaker? You know, are you direct with people? Because if you're direct, you're clear. And your story that you've just told me is about clarity. I think when you're being led by somebody or if you're just peer to peer, ambiguity in the conversations. People don't know where they stand. It's like in relationships. Is there's an ambiguity? It makes us insecure. You know, does this person like me or not? Whatever. I suppose I it might be like in dating when someone is ghosted, you never know what is going on in their head because there is no clarity. All I know is they're not reading my messages. But clarity and being direct, I think are very linked to being respected.

Stuart Elliott (30:14)

I agree. I want to touch on you mentioned the intergenerational piece, intergenerational inclusion as well. Like, I suppose I feel like as years go up go on, we get ever more different generations. Z, X, Y, Boomers, you name it. How do you avoid stereotypes? Because I think with all of those that I've just mentioned, there's a stereotype. There is.

Sasha Scott (30:41)

There is. well, it's a choice. It's a choice. Because when we think about the ways our brain operates, stereotypes help us make sense of the world. So initially they're you know, from an instinctive level, they're pretty helpful because they enable us to categorise people, to put people into groups, yeah, to make very quick decisions about situations. what if we want to really focus on inclusion in a multi-generational workplace, we have to move away. We have to educate ourselves to relearn because the tropes and the stereotypes are frankly unhelpful. There is guidance around every generation's going to be affected by the things that happen to them with the backdrops, history, economics.

etc. Of course that's going to affect you and you're a different you know generation to me and me and the other people in this room. So that's a that that's a given. But we have to make a choice to say, sure there are stereotypes about Gen Y and you know Gen X and Boomers et al, but I'm going to choose to get to know people as individuals. Because only when you get to know people as individuals

Can our brain get away from those stereotypes and indeed the biases that actually can be so negative?

Stuart Elliott (32:10)

Yeah, but they exist for a reason. Yeah. So stereotypes exist normally for a reason. So is there

Sasha Scott (32:17)

I mean, there's some truth in stereotypes, but just not on an absolutely everyone on an individual level. But yeah, it must be a truism that's you know, many generations quite like on a Thursday night after work to go to BrewDog or wherever other bars are available and have a beer. And there'll be another generation that says, no, I'm going to go and play Scrabble with a group of people my age, because apparently we're like board games are in, so there's a truism there, but what we're seeing is organisations are doing work around what we call intergenerational inclusion. And that's education. And one of the fundamental takeaways from that is whomever you are in a team, the best way that you can connect with others is to get to know people as individuals and to focus on the attributes and the skills that people bring to the table rather than their age or those kind of defining areas. And what's interesting about this big buzz at the moment on intergenerational inclusion is it's apolitical and it's relatable. Like everyone's got an age and you know there are sensitivities around age as we hit benchmarks.

And I feel there's a disenfranchisement as a disenfranchise. I don't know if that's the right word. But suddenly I'm seeing people of my peer group, so we're just hitting sixty, feeling really vulnerable. Feeling I some I was talking to someone the other day who's a CEO who said I'm really beginning to feel irrelevant. and I'm not sure I am irrelevant or I've just got massive imposter syndrome. And I thought, okay, super interesting and very honest the irrelevance and the invisibility.

Stuart Elliott (34:10)

Yeah. I but I also think there's so much that everyone can learn from each other. I feel like there's learning in terms of technology and how that works and AI for sort of maybe the boomers and Gen Young. Yeah. And then I feel like there's the other side of that coin where I feel like I keep reading now that the value people are gonna add in the workplace isn't around your admin and sitting behind your laptop. It's your interpersonal skills which I would say that Gen X or Gen Ys are probably been better at over the years.

Sasha Scott (34:44)

Different learning platform, right?

Stuart Elliott (34:45)

They were thrown into that environment. They were forced to sort of go out and do that and they had to do it. Now it feels like I suppose there's an element that I think Gen Z could learn a lot from those other generations, but that must be hard to try and get people to talk and learn from each other.

Sasha Scott (35:01)

Particularly if people are working out their bedrooms.

Stuart Elliott (35:03)

Yeah, yeah.

Sasha Scott (35:04)

And I feel it's super tough for younger generations because of the way in which work is structured. Yep. And I'm not surprised that there are real confidence issues around interpersonal communication. And that is something we see a lot of come and talk to people about what it is to be a professional. Yeah. And I love that kind of work because I'm in a room with people thirty years younger than me.

And wow, have they got a lot to give. However, there is also very high levels of anxiety at times about certain issues. And I really worry about that and I worry about the loneliness factor because you know, so many people have been onboarded in a time where you know the offices were closed, yeah. And might for geographic reasons now live so far away that's actually very prohibitively expensive to get into offices. And when they are there, there aren't other people. I mean, I think it's incredibly tough for people that have started work in the last ten years.

Stuart Elliott (36:15)

Also I think they end up doing their degree probably at home half the time. So they weren't percent. So actually at home now.

Sasha Scott (36:21)

Yeah, yeah. Exactly, exactly. So when we're looking at intergenerational inclusion, we're also looking at the whole where am I working from conversation. And there's a lot of obviously been a lot of high profile people across financial services and broader in the corporate space who have been very loud about you need to come back in the office. Like, I mean, Stuart, you must see this a lot with your clients.

Stuart Elliott (36:47)

We absolutely do. I was just gonna say, I I was gonna ask yourself, have you seen the change on that then in terms of people being back in the office more?

Sasha Scott (36:54)

Much more encouraged to go back in, exactly. And learn by osmosis.

Stuart Elliott (36:57)

We see it. We yeah, we see now it's minimum three days a week. Most are four, some are five. Yeah. And that's pretty standard now across the board. Like we don't see too many that differ from that. There'll be the odd company here or there. nine times out of ten that's due to them possibly bit not being in, say like at London.

Sasha Scott (37:19)

Exactly. It's normal. I'm seeing that out of London more than in London.

Stuart Elliott (37:23)

You're based in trying to pick on a pick on a location. Let's say you're headquartered in I don't know, Peterborough or somewhere, yeah, you're more likely to have a much more sort of fluid hybrid workforce just because it's difficult to get to that location the whole time. Whereas London, I do think, or even Birmingham or Manchester, a lot of people like, Well, we've got the office space to come in.

Sasha Scott (37:45)

Yeah, absolutely. Something that we see as a consistent seam of work actually, and I think it's important from what we're talking about from a workplace perspective globally, is cross-cultural understanding and intelligence. You know, if I'm managing a team yeah in various parts of the world, that's a challenging situation because the economics aren't helpful in that I can't necessarily go and see people as much as I would have in the past. And how do we get these you know, cross-border operational teams to work well and cohesively? And that again boils down to getting away from some stereotypes, but understanding how different cultures tend to work. But then also so yes, the stereotypes are helpful, but also connecting, forgiving, understanding and trying to under trying to learn more about individuals in my team. And it's up to the leader to co make that that cohesive. Yeah. And to give people the time and space to do that in environments where you're in different time zones. But that is a real issue from an operational perspective.

Stuart Elliott (38:55)

Well, I'm gonna add to that. I think even if I think globally now about a lot of organisations, I think that there is definitely less travel than there used to be internally. Yeah. and there's less global mobility. So there's less people moving to locations to experience a lifestyle or a way of living. even for a year or two, whether that's down to cost or you've returned home after COVID and therefore you don't wanna you don't wanna leave. Like I definitely think we've seen, yeah, less people now that move around the world than say at its peak between what, two thousand seven and two thousand fifteen almost.

Sasha Scott (39:37)

Yeah. So that creates a disconnect in understanding people, does it?

Stuart Elliott (39:40)

A lack of culture, a lack of understanding of culture, yeah. A lack of understanding of what someone's day to day looks like on the other side of the world, like yeah,

Sasha Scott (39:48)

And their personality.

Stuart Elliott (39:50)

All of those sorts of things that I think are really are really difficult. but they're only gonna get harder. I don't see this changing anytime soon.

Sasha Scott (39:58)

Yeah. Yeah, not with air traffic control as it currently.

Stuart Elliott (40:00)

Yes. Well that's not from the UK, absolutely not. But again, do you do you see do you see that as well? 'Cause I that's what we see from a recruitment perspective.

Sasha Scott (40:09)

Yes, I we absolutely see a significant fall in travel and yeah, I've seen it myself. there was a couple of years I did twenty-three countries in a year. people are not putting me on planes, much to my sadness. And I know that's controversial. and so reaching people is harder in terms of you're doing consultancy and you gotta reach people through Teams and Zoom and conducting the cultural audits is more challenging because there is a dynamic relationship that exists in real life. So I'm in this recording studio with you. Yeah, there's an energy. And it's really hard to recreate the energy when you're yeah doing, you know, I don't know, an inclusion session with twenty people from all over the world, etc.

Stuart Elliott (40:59)

Same doing a webinar versus in person. And I I'm guessing a session where you're in a room with a client is much more powerful than

Sasha Scott (41:06)

Much more powerful. And you asked me a question earlier around what actually makes behaviour change. And you know, training absolutely in it in and of itself doesn't. You can drop some key messages in there. But one of the things that used to be super powerful was in person development sessions where there is kind of visceral moment, where there's this light bulb moment, there's something clicks and I just see a much less of that stuff because that ha can help stick a behaviour change. It can. I mean, I had one myself when I was working in banking and I was sent to New York to go on a sales course on what appeared to be how to weirdly, irony, pick up a phone and do sales calls. And I remember sitting in that going, I can do that job. I know I can do that job. So that was a quite a visceral moment for me because it shaped the rest of my career. And you just you know, I feel through all the screens we lose so much energy and so much creativity.

Stuart Elliott (42:16)

Yeah, I I definitely think I think technology brilliant in the terms of you can see people more now, it's great from that angle. But that means you have a surface level relationship versus a deep rooted relationship. And I think that's the bit for me that is really, really missing from a lot of from a lot of people that I talk to because you're not seeing them in person as much. The ease or the tendency is to do the easy thing, which is talk on teams. Yeah.

Sasha Scott (42:46)

Absolutely. Absolutely. And this is why there is this demarcation within workplaces on this different levels between those people that are in the office, let's say, you know, we all work together and we're all together in the office on Tuesday to Thursday. you know, there's a connection, there's a proximity. But if there are people in our team that don't come in on those days and we're doing, you know, Teams calls and they're on the call and we're in the room, you know, you just get this different level of belonging and connection. And so inclusion as a descriptor has been really fragmented by these kinds of changes because people are often going to feel less than because I'm not party to, you know, the conversations that we're having, because we're we have, you know, the proximity of being near each other and going out buying some sweets and having a laugh about X, Y, or Z that you know, you zap someone in on the team's cool, different environment.

Stuart Elliott (43:50)

To tot I couldn't agree more with you on that. So as we sort of sign off a little bit here, what are we thinking about from a sort of a cultural behavioural perspective for 2027? So what should organisations be preparing for now? Yeah.

Sasha Scott (44:03)

So, well, first of all, there's a whole slew, the next phase of employment regulations coming into the UK. so that's going to preoccupy a lot of functions. And I think that when we're horizon scanning into 2027, I think it's really important that organisations ensure that the recent regulatory changes actually start to translate into everyday behaviour. So there's that that's about responsibility, that's about the osmosis, that's about leadership, and that's about accountability. But you know, the change is coming hugely and has already come within legal and finance, but it's actually what's the follow through. Yeah. I think there's a huge responsibility on organisations, and this is where the risk function comes in to spot problems early ensure that the culture is that that it's safe for people to speak up. So for that, we need the psychological safety, we need the processes that people genuinely are going to use to speak up early, and that reduces risk. And then we also, as I've always been saying, but more so now than ever, we need to give managers the confidence to handle difficult conversations and to apply standards fairly, so the apples do not slip through the net. Yep.

Stuart Elliott (45:28)

Yeah, I think I think there's a lot coming in that that's not just the that's not just the UK though, is it's coming globally, these sorts of standards now as well. Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that's fair. what look Sasha, always a pleasure. I like the fact that we are looking at all the questions and actually we dive we digressed a lot from the straightforward questions. It is always, always lovely. for our audience, if they want to contact you, little plug for you, well how should they get a hold of you?

Sasha Scott (45:53)

Just drop me an email. Which is? sasha@inclusivegroup.co.uk That's a nice plug. Yeah.

Stuart Elliott (46:01)

Yeah, gotta give you a plug and if anybody needs that and wants to contact me first, I can always forward you on or give a direct introduction.

Sasha Scott (46:08)

Well you can creep around and found find me on social media. yeah, hanging around on LinkedIn quite a lot. I've just put actually a beautiful photograph because I walked here today from Temple and I walked across the bridge, over the Thames and I captured the Thames and London in its glory. So, you know, thanks for that. But yeah, I'd love for anyone get in touch. that'd be really interesting. I'm I always like connecting and listening to what's going on with other people.

Stuart Elliott (46:37)

Perfect. Thank you again. Thank you. Cheers.

Stuart Elliott (46:41)

Thank you so much for listening. Sasha, big thank you. It's great to have you back on HR Insights. If anybody has any questions, you would have heard it. Sasha's got her email address there, or you can contact me at se@elliottscotthr.com. But I really hope you enjoy the show. Thanks ever so much.