



DEFINING YOUR COMPANY'S DNA

Your EVP is useful for more than just attracting and sourcing talent. In fact, a well-defined EVP can provide the building blocks for organisational success, as **Iain Hopkins** discovers

Deoxyribonucleic acid (more commonly referred to as DNA) is a molecule that encodes the genetic instructions used in the development and functioning of all known living organisms. It is literally the building block of every organism on Earth.

Taking that concept into the corporate world – it wouldn't be the first time an organisation has been likened to a living organism – the DNA of your organisation is the Employee Value Proposition (EVP). An EVP influences engagement, and employee engagement is linked to profit, revenue, labour productivity, share price, customer satisfaction, happiness and wellbeing. It truly is the building block of any organisation.

Since it was first isolated by the Swiss physician Friedrich Miescher in 1869, scientists and geneticists have devoted their energy towards discovering more about DNA. In the same way, corporate leaders have devoted resources towards identifying and building their employment brands around their EVP. Yet much like the saying 'The journey is just as important as the destination', there's much to be gained from the process of evaluating an EVP.

"The important element is not necessarily the end line or end piece of communication; it's the fact that everyone from leadership down agrees that this is the DNA of the organisation: this is what we stand for, this is what we can deliver, and this is what makes us unique," says Mike Beeley, CEO, ReAgent Employer Marketing.

Beeley, who recommends that all companies go through this vital step of evaluating (or re-evaluating) their EVP, notes that very few companies are fortunate to have clearly articulated purposes and

values, or single-minded charismatic leaders who continue to drive everyone towards a point in the distance. "Far more common is a slightly confused, dazed workforce who by accident tend to meet their goals. It's not due to good management or encouragement," he says.

Providing guidance is the EVP, which has a very powerful ability to unite and direct human endeavour. Done well, done sympathetically and ideally done in a unique way so it doesn't look like you're copying someone else, you can capture the imagination of talent and steer them along a single-minded, clear path to an end goal.

To use another analogy, the EVP can act as the steering wheel for your employer brand. Employer brands can be good or bad. Jihadist rebel group ISIS is a brand, in as much as it's an organisation that most people have a clear perception of. However, the EVP can turn a poor employer brand into a great employer brand. "It gives you the ability to steer that employer brand in the direction you know you need to take it," Beeley says.

However, it's only once you've done an EVP evaluation that you realise how powerful it is – and how many applications it can have.

WHY IS IT NEEDED?

There is a misconception that the EVP is only important when undertaking recruitment. In fact, it impacts on all aspects of an employee's lifecycle – and indeed it is critical through all the vagaries of the business environment, in good times and bad.

"A brilliant EVP can prove its value most during times of corporate stress," says Mark MacWhite, group design director at eBrands. "It can unite

EVP FOR BUSINESS

Source: ReAgent Employer Marketing

TIME FOR A REVIEW?

An EVP evaluation can galvanise and encourage introspection. Constant tweaking of the core is not recommended; however, key changes within the business will make EVP review necessary. These include:

- Leadership changes
- Core strategy changes
- Major changes to services or portfolios
- M&As
- Fast growth
- Times of crisis
- New business creation
- Globalisation – for example, if it's necessary to craft a local employment brand with a global EVP

factions, functions, products and portfolios. The EVP can help a company that dislocates to feel whole again.”

Beeley adds that a nasty side effect of downturns or times of corporate crisis is that the good people working at the company lose faith and leave. Clear focus and communication around the EVP can minimise the fallout.

Using one example of corporate trauma (see boxout above for more), an M&A is when ‘all hands on deck’ applies, especially when it comes to retaining good talent. “This period of time is rife with rumour and innuendos that can only be countered with transparency,” says MacWhite.

Once change happens – such as during M&A

activity – it is important to set up shop and show everyone who you are, what you have changed, how you have grown, what the future looks like, and what is important to you. Anyone who is going to experience any brand touchpoints needs to know how change has been affected. They are asking the questions, such as: Has the organisation changed? Am I still important to it? Do they still care about me and all the plans my business/people have vested in them?

THE IMPORTANCE OF ‘CORPORATE MEMORY’

It seems that modern-day organisations have a bad case of amnesia – but unfortunately it’s amnesia that never lifts; they simply forget things, including certain capabilities they may have. With any significant exodus of staff, knowledge of ‘the way things are done around here’ walks out the door with them. “There is usually no such thing as a corporate memory,” says Beeley. “The ability to withdraw or extract information at will is pretty limited.”

This is not necessarily an IT issue; it could be due to management stability or any number of factors. “Often when organisations go through a massive change – of ownership, of management, of CEO – all the good stuff goes out the window,” Beeley adds.

A carefully documented EVP, however, can maintain the character or personality of the organisation in a common area where everyone can access it. “Having a corporate memory is simply the ability to remember who the hell we are,” says Beeley.

EVALUATING THE EVP

MacWhite concedes that it’s not unusual to come across businesses that don’t understand what an EVP is. Often this is a lack of understanding that extends to how closely the EVP is tied to a business’s core reason for being, and understanding how developing an EVP correctly can create a valuable asset.

“Initially they are trying to understand it to put a value on it,” he says. “They want to know how to better engage their workforce. They want to know how long it takes, how much work is required, and, critically, how they can achieve stakeholder buy-in.”

eBrands provides clients with a road map of a journey that helps the business define itself; from what it is now, to what it wants to become.

“It’s a collaborative process that initially looks confronting, but is actually necessary and enjoyable,” says MacWhite.

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What the client should arrive at is an EVP that is simple, truthful, emotive and inclusive.

“As clients look for help to create alignment between the anticipated and actual employment experience, our job is to get under the skin of the client to make that happen,” MacWhite adds.

Here are four tips to help to make this road map something concrete:

➔ **1. Understand your strength as HR:** As a HRD, it's critical you understand your advisory position within the leadership team. Beeley suggests the EVP is one thing that HR as a group can provide to leadership that they can't do themselves. “Leadership teams struggle with engagement, of connecting with employees. So how do you set up the messaging, how do you create a set of values, and then behaviours that reinforce those values? That's something HR can play a unique part in.”

➔ **2. Sell it to your executive colleagues.** “Leadership buy-in is essential,” says Beeley. “It's up to you to demonstrate to them how powerful this can be and how much influence the leadership team can have through this EVP. On a broad basis, the EVP is a communication platform for informing and influencing many people at once.”

➔ **3. Secure a budget – and get external help.** “You cannot do a proper EVP analysis on the smell of an oily rag,” Beeley says. “It's also difficult to do it on your own. The people you are talking to probably won't be honest with you. Having HR in focus groups is a bit like having your parents in the room when you're talking to your mates. As the child, you are fearful that what you reveal might hurt you down the track. It's imperative to have an unbiased external research team undertaking the research so you capture the truth rather than what you'd like to think the truth is.”

➔ **4. Research, research, research.** “If we haven't got that research piece nailed down, without fault or gaps, what tends to happen is we go back to the leadership team and ask for changes to be made to the EVP, and one of the first questions to be asked is ‘How do we know this is true?’ This is where the robustness and

RISE OF THE SEGMENTED EVP?

It's true that marketers love to segment and neatly categorise their efforts. Is the EVP next on the list? The Graduate Value Proposition (GVP) has already gained traction. Will employers be forced to introduce tailored and specific EVP messaging for other segments of the workforce? Mums returning to work or Indigenous workers, perhaps?



MacWhite thinks it's unlikely. “The EVP is the essence of the employment brand – it doesn't change based on your talent needs at the time; segmentation is achieved through the use of tactical brand tools that appeal directly to the target without altering the core of the brand.

“Anything that alters the core of the employment brand – the EVP – simply creates distortion and confusion. An organisation does not have 10 EVPs flying around; it has one, perhaps with 10 great executions.”

rigour around the process comes into play. If there are any chinks in that armour – if you haven't talked to one segment of the workforce who is particularly influential or you've only talked to certain segments – it's very easy for leadership to say, ‘This can't be true’. They can dismiss it and the whole process can fall apart.”

A UNIQUE JUNCTURE

HR is at a unique juncture in its evolution. For too long perceived as tactical ‘firefighters’ or ‘policemen’ in the workplace, effective HR strategies can now have a tangible impact on business operations. Formulation of a robust EVP is part of this.

Beeley suggests HR is in a similar position to where the ‘sales’ function was post-World War II when they struggled to answer the fundamental question: ‘How do we sell more stuff?’ The answer, of course, was by understanding the needs of the customer better and undertaking research about where they were, who they were, and what they wanted.

“All of a sudden sales became marketing,” Beeley says. “HR can do this too, and some are already there. They've broken away from the policeman role and become market-driven. They understand who their core customers – their people – are and are looking forward rather than sideways or backwards.” **HRD**