

# HRD

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# BLUEPRINT

“THERE’S A FAST-CHANGING AGENDA BEYOND PAY AND REWARD, THAT REACHES OUT TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT”

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## PUSH - AND - PULL

*As employers square up to talent shortages and rising demand for new skills, employees and candidates are demanding more than ever. They have a far bigger appetite for a good workplace environment, with a focus on wellbeing, balance and hybrid working. For employers, this means the pressure is on to satisfy all needs - or risk missing new talent, plummeting engagement and increasing employee turnover. These shifts in expectations, values and demands cannot be ignored in existing employees or prospective candidates.*

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ARTICLE BY CATHY ACRAPULO, MANAGING DIRECTOR - LACE PARTNERS

As we move through this disrupted and changeable era, conducting a thorough review of what employees and candidates need - and comparing that to what is currently on offer - is a fundamental first stage to gathering evidence to build best-practice EVP strategies. But knee-jerk reactions or 'trying to keep up with the Joneses' is to be avoided. Increasing wages and offering unsustainable bonuses creates a vicious cycle, leading to people moving from one employer to another. Pay increases may generate short-term satisfaction but, unless the broader employee experience matches up, long-term engagement, motivation and retention are at risk. Asking difficult questions about what the organisation needs to do differently with its EVP, may feel like opening a can of worms, but it is an essential foundation to gain the benefits the C-suite will no doubt be demanding on turnover, as well as engagement levels. Notably, it is a holistic approach that finds true meaning and focus needs to be long-term employee experience, as opposed to the short-term gains wanted by talent acquisition teams. It needs to centre on finding out what people really want, how this is changing and then deciding on how to flex the 'deal', or EVP, to address the priority gaps.

Start by actively listening, because it is vital to understand employee needs and how they are changing. This may require a review of how employees are listened to, ensuring the tools used are robust enough to understand nuances. Part of a good starting point is to review engagement surveys and base-level engagement data, as this should provide a clear picture of employee experience, satisfaction and likely turnover rates. With this information, it's possible to more clearly recognise what employees think about the organisation and what's most important to them. Of course, this process relies on up-to-date, well-rounded data. With the current pace of change in talent markets, engagement data from past surveys - even just a few months old is already likely to be outdated - so real-time data is the gold standard in such fast-changing times and relying upon annual engagement surveys carries the risk of always being way behind

the curve. Therefore, going forward will require more focused on regular pulse surveys. Consider too whether previous engagement survey questions are going to provide the information needed. Today's issues and expectations are drastically different from those in 2020/21 and may not go to the heart of current employee thoughts, feelings and fears. Questions need to hone-in on opinions and emotions relating to hybrid working, wellbeing, social issues and skills development, to understand today's workforce and develop a well-rounded judgement on what needs to change.

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As good as the new engagement survey tools are, there is nothing like hearing information first-hand. Focus groups provide a more quantitative, rounded understanding of how and why employees feel the way they do, and what outcomes they expect. With both engagement surveys and focus groups, segmenting and surveying the organisation is important to gain a clear sight of critical issues and how these vary. For instance, what matters most to sales versus manufacturing versus customer services people, could be very different. The more segmentation, the more meaningful and representative the outcomes, allowing a focus on creating an EVP that serves people's needs, not least in difficult-to-recruit or critical-to-success roles. Gaining a clear understanding of the employer market and actions of competitor firms is also necessary for a holistic strategy and, in addition, seeking out the views from alumni - those who have joined recently or those who

turned roles down - can be very revealing. Understanding too, how the business is positioned against competitors on flexible working, health and wellbeing benefits, learning support and pay - helps to keep a new EVP aligned to organisational needs and remain competitive.

With the information gathered and analysed, the strategy build should set out what needs to change, in terms of the employee experience offered and what this means for HR policies, practices and services. For the external marketplace, this includes creating an employer brand that really matches up with what a candidate will experience once they join. Woolly promises, linked to an aspirational corporate brand and undeliverable expectations, don't help anyone and can result in a drop in engagement and an increase in turnover as people start to see empty promises. Indeed, the employer brand needs to be informed by the EVP which sets out the tangible, practical 'deal'. In light of the information gleaned and the direction set, HR leaders will need to question how the HR function needs to change to deliver results in the long term. For example, do new requirements align with the HR team's capabilities, what skills or tools are needed and what resources are available to ensure the EVP is delivered? The business needs to align too because, while HR can define the EVP, it is leadership and management that must align to deliver the employee experience day-to-day. If managers don't follow through on the 'deal' and organisational behaviour doesn't meet expectations, employee engagement and retention are likely to be damaged. Ultimately, there needs to be a flexibility and willingness to change in the business, depending on what is heard. Active listening is essential and what must follow is an active response to ensure employees see that change is happening quickly, the difference it will make to their lives and understand how it will improve their own experience at work.

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