

Talent and Employer Branding Opinion Paper:

Fostering Talent Opportunity and Refining a Powerful Employer Brand: From Hype and Image to Connected Leadership Behaviours

(Including excerpts from 2007 articles in *The Strategic Review*, and the *Executive Grapevine*)
(Clayton Glen, HDA – August 2007)



Leading the Organisational Talent Strategy – Where're we at?

Given current global talent shortages, lots of noise is currently being made about the management of organisational talent, and a lot of money is being spent in its name at larger world-class organisations.

Whilst businesses, consultants writers and gurus tell impressive stories and provide inspiring illustrative case studies of sophisticated systems-based talent management strategies and initiatives, and whilst the most sophisticated commentators can prove complex ROI arguments for their talent strategies; the fact is that the *most successful* talent management stories often tell of success in the face of significant commercial, and resource constraints; with success principally attributed to *strong charismatic leadership* overcoming these constraints.

Organisational leaders who take visible ownership of talent nurturing, and who use a combination of personal charisma and example-setting to develop and engage organisational talent at all levels are worth their weight in gold to their organisations. By taking bold and highly visible steps to expend time, money and other resources on the nurturing of organisational talent; and by influencing their direct reports and their direct reports to do the same, *often in the face of difficult business conditions*, (which make their commitment more notable), they prove their commitment to providing opportunity to talented people within their organisations.

Without this highly visible senior leadership commitment 'stretch', and practical leadership-led application of the talent agenda, together with clear leadership behaviours which support the promise; most talent strategies are doomed to remain expensive means to an elusive end – great strategies, structures and stories about applied resources, and great pet projects for senior HR, Resourcing, L&D & specialist Talent professionals but without the final consummation, in the form of excellent and sustainable key talent attraction, engagement and retention. Not a particularly new sentiment in the human capital arena, but one to reiterate up front to frame the rest of this paper.

What about the Talent 'Big Picture'?

The world of work is in flux, and new talent management conventions are rapidly developing. What constitutes key organisational talent is changing ever faster as new technologies and consumption patterns force organisations to re-assess their talent needs to 'future proof' the emerging business. At the same time organisations are recognising that diversity management is an essential strategy for ensuring a strengthened internal talent pool, and no longer a 'nice-to-have' which fulfils a social responsibility obligation.

For much the same reason, international talent pools are increasingly targeted by both states and organisations, as, *'the more countries and companies compete for talent, the better the chances that geniuses will be raked up from obscurity.'* (Wooldridge, 2006, in *The Economist*, print edition, Oct 5th 2006).

Global hunting increasingly makes sense, though new, seemingly bottomless global talent pools are increasingly subjected to stresses and strains – India being the chief case in point at this point, as it increasingly experiences skills shortages, with global demand for Indian talent fast outstripping the capacity for India to build and replenish its vast skilled talent promise.

On the other hand, local talent pools are flexing their new options, (e.g.. shifting to portfolio careers), opting out of the world of traditional work, taking their skills internationally, shifting sector, etc, and finally, key talent pools in the West, e.g.. senior leadership, are aging and nearing retirement, with increasing calls for organisations to develop strategies to avoid significant knowledge capital haemorrhages.

As organisations are increasingly opting for 'buy-in (and discard)' versus 'develop internally' in response to commercial and talent availability realities, it is not surprising that the concepts of organisational succession and organisational career development are increasingly anachronistic.

This trend has obviously impacted at the 'psychological contract' level, and survey results are increasingly indicative of talented people being driven by *personal* objectives vs objectives driven by their organisations.

We are entering a much purer supply-demand situation in the world of work; possibly uncluttered by concepts such as shared values, mutually-beneficial career paths, and so on.

What Remains Unchanged about Organisational Talent?

Although the organisational talent picture is rapidly morphing as developing countries develop their talent, and as the developed countries seek new ways to lay their hands on an ever diverse but always limited pool of (technical and, to a lesser extent, leadership) talent, the same broad rules of attraction apply – *given the opportunity*, truly talented people tend to gravitate towards the best organisations; those most likely to provide them with the leverage and experience they are seeking, Where their choices are initially sub-optimal, they are usually well courted by the head hunting fraternity and can move on quickly; especially those people who understand and apply the principles of sound networking.

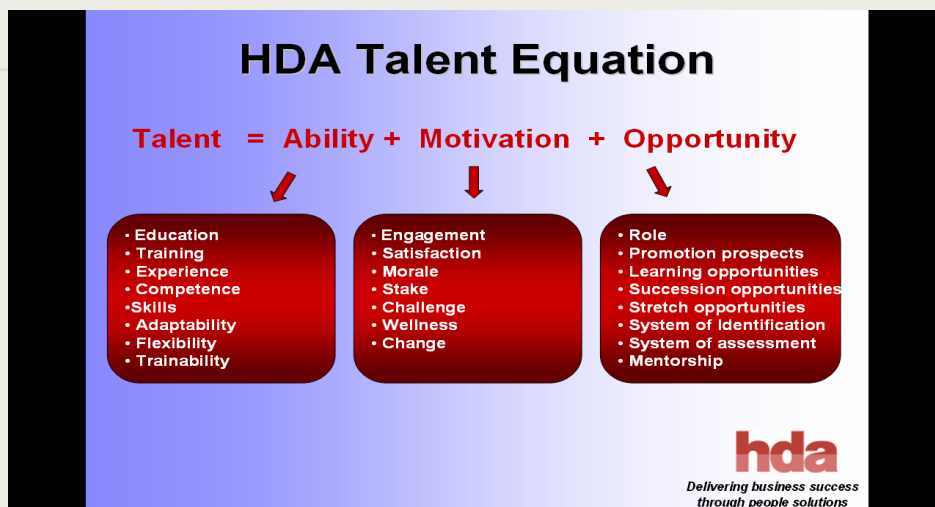
So, although there is room from greater personal discernment on the supply-side, and harder, more rigorous work required on the demand side; the broad principles of attracting, engaging and retaining core talent remain largely *unchanged* – talented people join organisations which they *perceive* to be attractive and leveraging (to themselves), and leave organisations which they *discover* fall short of the mark from leadership behaviours, value-proposition and engagement perspectives. Examples abound amongst the greatest brands in the world, including many of the media space's hot brands which regularly experience 15-20%+ staff attrition rates, including key leadership and technical talent.

What also remains unchanged is that truly talented people often remain *hidden* to their organisations and sectors, in spite of highly sophisticated assessment and development programmes. Very often great assessment is not matched with equally excellent performance management rigour, but, for the most part, talented people are often simply not given the real-world opportunity and space to shine.

On this, whilst few organisations can be indulgent about identifying and fostering talent via open-ended experiential development opportunities; there is certainly much to be learnt from those organisations which recognise that truly effective competency assessment requires a degree of talent nurturing in the real world – even where this is costly, and the benefits to the organisation non-immediate. Without opportunity and space to shine in the real world, any talent assessment process is incomplete.

For this reason, at HDA, we tend to challenge organisations to identify '*opportunity*' as a key element of talent management. This implies investing real money and time into the provision of stretch opportunities, (high quality on-the-job development opportunities, project participation, secondments, international assignments, etc), personal mentorship and coaching; in addition to the typical assessment activities.

Without this investment in talent nurturing opportunities, *talent-potential*, is missed, and opportunity squandered.



The HDA Talent Equation holds that without investment and effort to create *structured opportunities* for talent to identify itself within organisations; talent strategies will ultimately be incomplete and outputs rarely valid. As Kaye Thorne of the Employer Brand Institute (www.employerbrandinstitute.com/) states: *'Talent is not a rare commodity, it is simply rarely released'*

The Role of an Effective Employer Brand as a Talent Management Cornerstone

Talent at any level (senior, technical, high potential, etc) can be attracted by an impressive reputation, by the promise of exceptional career progression, competitive financial rewards, and so on, but ultimately, it is the personal *experience* of the relationship that that person develops within an organisation that determines the longevity and the win-win consummation of the relationship. Image and promise is not enough for highly marketable and talented people. Very often the image/reality disconnect is quickly reached, sometimes in weeks, days or even hours. These people can move on and do where the taste of reality within the organisation does not add up to the external brand reputation.

As a consultant, I see this all the time with great brand names which have had to come to terms with staff turnover rates of 20+% each year, despite their having a business reputation and external brand which attracts excellence. This cycle is most often recognised as being due to haphazard, neglectful inductions and on-boarding support, leadership behaviours and ethics not matching superficial expectations, ethical and professional disappointments, sub-optimal working environments not matching the original promise, structural and process frustrations, and so on.

Well-led organisations are recognising that attracting and engaging external talent early on is enhanced by the conscious adoption of employer branding principles. 'Employer Brand' is an old principle clothed in new labelling, and broadly touches on 'employer of choice', 'employee value proposition' (EVP) and 'unique talent experience' concepts.

Ultimately, it's about external reputation, *increasingly linked to corporate social responsibility* at one level (with focus on external constituencies, including candidates and customers), matched by the quality of the *internal experience* (staff and associates, including key talent).

As articulated by Krishna De in August 2007 in her compelling online blog at <http://www.krishnade.com/blog/>, *'Building a strong employer brand is different to being recognised as a great employer. Those companies who are clear about the talent they are trying to attract and who understand the aspirations and motivations of those communities of potential employees will be more successful in building a magnetic employer brand.'*

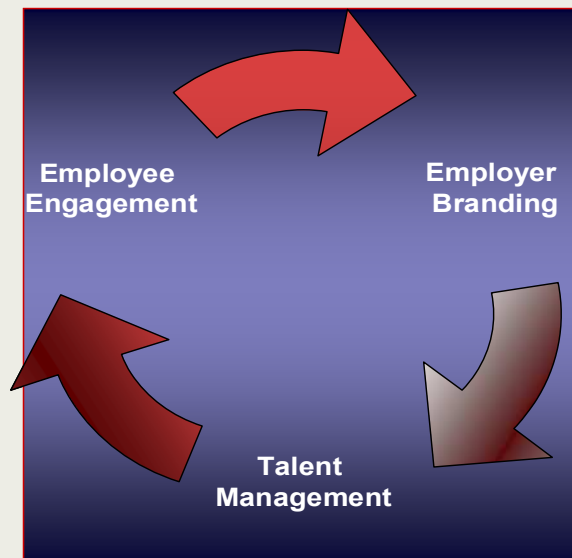
An effective employer brand does not guarantee staff engagement, motivation and performance, but it certainly enhances it. The flipside is that when staff leave the organisation, either voluntarily or via role redundancy, a great employer brand ensures that business reputation is maintained. These days, with online communities with global 'voice' like *Vault.com* (www.vault.com) and so on, the importance of matching external reputation with internal experience is key to seamlessly sound business reputations.

In Conclusion – Developing a Leadership Behaviour-based Employer Brand Strategy

Many organisations get employer branding objectives wrong – many consultancies too, considering the plethora of HR consultancies claiming to be employer brand consultants who tend to limit their focus at the image end – glitzy recruitment websites, colourful advertising campaigns and so on, without the substance of true leadership behaviour change to underpin the employer brand strategy. Image alone does not equal substance.

Those organisations recognising that an effective employer brand is underpinned by outstanding and consistent leadership behaviours rather than by hype and image, are the ones likely to generate greatest success in this area as they drive their talent strategy.

Any effective talent management strategy is clearly underpinned by the ability of the organisation to effectively attract, engage and retain organisational talent. This requires both an aligned infrastructure and compelling leadership behaviours which together enhance the experience of candidates, new employees, established employees, and those transitioning out of the organisation.



Getting this right often depends on close collaboration between organisational leadership, internal communications, HR, L&D and Marketing, and sometimes benefits from external facilitation.

Regarding the *specific* leadership behaviours needed to ensure employer talent management success; these are underpinned by a real interest in the organisation's future talent needs rather than exclusively in its immediate skills requirements; and this requires foresight and a level of interest beyond the immediate pressures of achieving short-term turnover, profitability and direct line-of-sight ROI.

Strong leaders have the ability to look beyond the short-term horizon, and to put real energy and investment into this, both from an employer brand development perspective, and from a broader talent strategy perspective.

These leadership behaviours are sometimes innate, often not, and organisations need to consciously develop them as part of their future sustainability / future proofing strategies, or talent management strategies are likely to follow a stop-start trajectory. Very often, executive coaching and mentorship are excellent routes to developing leaders as champions of the organisational talent and employer brand agendas.

Key Summary Points and Questions to Ask Yourself:

- **As organisations are increasingly opting for 'buy-in (and discard)' versus 'develop internally' in response to commercial and talent availability realities, it is not surprising that the concepts of organisational succession and organisational career development are increasingly anachronistic...We are entering a much purer supply-demand situation in the world of work; possibly uncluttered by concepts such as shared values, mutually-beneficial career paths, and so on.**

Consider how you will apply this argument to your organisation's talent strategy.

- **Organisations are recognising that diversity management is an essential strategy for ensuring a strengthened internal talent pool, and no longer a 'nice-to-have' which fulfils a social responsibility obligation.**

Consider to what degree this statement applies to your organisation.

- **What remains unchanged is that truly talented people often remain *hidden* to their organisations and sectors, in spite of highly sophisticated assessment and development programmes. Very often great assessment is not matched with equally excellent performance management rigour, but, for the most part, talented people are often simply not given the real-world opportunity and space to shine.**

Consider how your organisation squanders opportunities to identify and nurture organisational talent, and consider how you may address this.

- **Well-led organisations are recognising that attracting and engaging external talent early on is enhanced by the conscious adoption of employer branding principles. 'Employer Brand' is an old principle clothed in new labelling, and broadly touches on 'employer of choice', 'employee value proposition' (EVP) and 'unique talent experience' concepts.**

Does your organisation consciously embrace employer brand principles, and does it practically follow these through. If not, why?

- **Those organisations recognising that an effective employer brand is underpinned by outstanding and consistent leadership behaviours rather than by hype and image, are the ones likely to generate greatest success in this area as they drive their talent strategy.**

Identify what's good about your organisation's leadership behaviours, and how these can be incorporated into an effective Employer Brand offering, and what's bad about your organisation's leadership behaviours, and how these should be addressed.

- **Strong leaders have the ability to look beyond the short-term horizon, and to put real energy and investment into this, both from an employer brand development perspective, and from a broader talent strategy perspective. *Specific* leadership behaviours needed to ensure employer talent management success are underpinned by a real interest in the organisation's future talent needs rather than exclusively in its immediate skills requirements; and this requires foresight and a level of interest beyond the immediate pressures of achieving short-term turnover, profitability and direct line-of-sight ROI.**

What is your organisation's leadership horizon? Is it focused on achieving short-term turnover, profitability and direct line-of-sight ROI, or is it insightful, accommodating concerns about the organisation's future talent needs? What can you do to refine / enhance this focus?

More on HDA:

HDA's range of consultancy services support organisations in all sectors (ranging from FTSE/Fortune 100 companies, to SMEs, to public sector organisations), to manage the human aspects of business capability and change.

Our work ranges from closely partnering with client organisations to manage large scale organisational change and restructuring processes, to facilitating behavioural change and leadership development within teams and individuals; both in established and early-stage organisations.

HDA provides consultancy solutions under two key headings:

- A) Talent Management, Development and Engagement and
- B) Career Transition

More on Clayton Glen:



Clayton Glen is Commercial Director with HDA (www.hda.co.uk), a privately-owned human capital consultancy, based in London, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, Swindon and Bournemouth. He has accountability for all commercial activity across the company's business streams.

Clayton has held senior HR and commercial roles in the UK, the USA, continental Europe and in Southern Africa; in a range of industries, including chemicals/fmcg, automotive, e-commerce consulting and mobile technology. He has an MBA from the University of Wales. Prior to joining HDA, he was Head of HR & Finance with a venture capital funded mobile technology start-up (www.shazam.com), where he had accountability for building an international team in London and the USA.

Contact Clayton on:

Tel: +11(0)207 484 5065

e-mail: cxg@hda.co.uk

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/claytonglen>

HDA Global Employer Brand Master Classes – October 2007

HDA has teamed up with Brett Minchington, Employer Brand strategist and author of International best-seller, '[Your Employer Brand attract-engage-retain](#)' to bring a series of Global Employer Brand Master Classes to the UK during October as follows:

10 October 2007 – London

11 October 2007 – Bristol

See more and book at: <http://www.hda.co.uk/HDAMasterclass>

To find out more, contact Sweta Patel at sxp@hda.co.uk , or on 0207 484 5065

For more information on any of the above please contact Sweta Patel, Campaign Manager – HDA, at: ++44(0) 207 484 5065 or alternatively sxp@hda.co.uk. Also see: <http://www.hda.co.uk/>