

ENHANCING CORPORATE REPUTATION AND ENGAGEMENT VIA CAREER SELF-OWNERSHIP

Clayton Glen, Director – HDA Associates

The first part of the first decade of the 21st century has been characterised by prosperous, hopeful years, manifesting in career self-sufficiency, leading to alternative careers, portfolio careers, virtual careers, E-Bay entrepreneurs, and the bed-and-breakfast fraternity seeking independence and something more from their lives. To this mix has been added the Generation Y media and technology-space twenty-somethings who may have experienced redundancy two or three times, are seeking to be engaged by what they do, and have moved on a few times already by the age of twenty five.

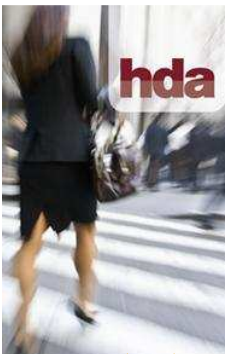
It seems naïve these days to even mention a special closeness of bond or psychological contract between employers and their employees, (which had led to 40-year/single employer careers in the second half of the 20th Century).

In a world reeling from the very personal impact of recession, instability across the world's largest and formidable organisations, (Fannie Mae/ Freddie Mac, GM, RBS, Lehman's...), high volume redundancies at all levels, and black holes in pension fund balance sheets; this sense is strengthened. People have a growing sense that they need to own their futures, and, by definition, the direction of their careers. For a dwindling group this is alarming, and for a growing group, this is reality.

According to Clayton Glen, Director at HDA Associates, 'the implications of this breakdown from an employer's perspective is that employers need to work harder at maintaining relationships with key talent, work harder at enhancing levels of morale, engagement and hence performance, and work harder at maintaining their corporate reputation; in particular the employer brand, which impacts the quality of key talent attracted to and retained within the organisation. All of these are long-term strategic business continuity imperatives for organisations with long-term survival and/or growth aspirations; in particular given the impact of globalisation.'

HDA Associates, is a specialist career transition and talent management consultancy which has worked across all sectors in the UK and internationally for 30 years, delivering large scale outplacement and redeployment projects, 'survivor management' initiatives, executive-level career transition support, leadership coaching and employee engagement consultancy.

According to Glen; HDA's experience over the past 30 years has been that larger employers have traditionally set aside significant budgets to fund outplacement support for managers and staff at all levels who have been made redundant, in order to mitigate the risk of unfair dismissal claims, to create 'optimal retention' – retaining skills currently required in the short-term, but expected to disappear at a pre-determined point in the future – via a promise of future career transition support, to arguably improve levels of trust and motivation for the 'survivors' of restructuring, to enhance the reputation or 'employer brand' of the organisation for future key talent attraction and broader CSR objectives, and to benefit from tax exemptions, subject to certain conditions being met.



Notwithstanding increasing budget limitations, the growing challenges of ensuring engagement, morale, performance and corporate reputation are now leading organisations to approach HDA for advice on diverting a component of their outplacement spend towards increased spending on internal career development support for those who are likely to remain in the organisation, and/or those whose roles are at potential risk of redundancy, but who will benefit from having the organisation shift its focus to leveraging their careers whilst they remain with the organisation. This rising class of internal career leverage initiative includes eg.:

1. **Redeployment empowerment initiatives** – internal interview/assessment preparedness coaching, together, in cases with the provision of vocational training support aimed at increasing the competitiveness of internal candidates for internal roles and hence reducing external recruitment and onboarding costs – albeit that the organisation remains a meritocracy).
2. **In-house career centres** which recognise that much is to be gained from engaging all staff in honest confidential personal career leverage conversations, including one-to-one career coaching, group networking and facilitated career development events, assessment and 360 degree feedback tools, and a range of online personal career development resources. The logic here is that the more prepared people are now to manage their careers, the less support they may need in the future, in the event that their roles no longer fit. This adds efficiency when any redundancies are announced in the future, removes the stigma of job loss, and improves employer reputation and the employer branding.
3. **Survivor support initiatives**, supporting those who have been indirectly impacted by change and the redundancies of peers, to deal with their indirect experience of the change that has occurred around them, and to re-focus them onto their post-change career development needs, and any new opportunities available within the organisation.

The opportunity with this type of initiative must be for the employee to utilise the service provided by their employer to develop conscious personal career ownership; to identify personal strengths and weaknesses, to create personal accountability for specific career growth objectives, to develop an understanding of the opportunity costs of alternative routes of personal career development, and to identify internal career growth resources and constraints within the organisation

Setting expectations of long-term internal career development and succession is an increasingly out of touch activity from the perspective of the majority of people in most organisations. Any internal career advisory service should be underpinned by the realistic expectation that there will not always be a direct match between the organisation's need for talent, and the current availability of that talent. Redundancy is not a new thing, it affects an increasing number of people at some point, and it is often a valuable career development step.

For this reason, an open-cards approach, which recognises career development as a continuum, is the most mature and honest approach for any organisation to take.

Simply put, says Glen; ***'organisations which improve the marketability and career prospects of their staff are likely to hold onto them longer, and when they release them, they do so with their reputation enhanced. Everybody wins.'***

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