

Culture & EVP -  
transformational  
soul mates driving  
organisational change

“Culture is how you  
feel about work on a  
Sunday evening - are  
you looking forward  
to it or dreading it?”

CAPITALISE

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The following white paper is a collaboration between Joss Sargent and Neil Harrison, taking the cultural expertise of the former and the EVP experience of the latter, in order to better understand the relationship between and potential offered by these two key business entities. Over the course of the last three months, we have conducted a number of in-depth interviews with experienced talent acquisition, human resources and culture specialists. Such sessions have created a series of fascinating and actionable insights into how culture can and should influence the Employee Value Proposition and, just as important, vice versa.

We have spoken with professionals across a number of different sectors including finance, higher education, fmcg, law, health insurance, construction and media. We couldn't be more appreciative of the time and knowledge provided by our interview participants.

The main section of this white paper focuses on the key thoughts and themes that such interviews have thrown up. Towards the end of the document, we have suggested a number of recommendations for organisations which find themselves challenged with either cultural and talent acquisition issues or, in all probability, both.

**“I came to see in my time at IBM that culture isn't just one aspect of the game, it is the game.”**

LOU GERSTNER, FORMER CEO, IBM

**“86% of people would not apply for or continue to work for an organisation that has a bad reputation with former employees or the general public.”**

OMNIPULSE SURVEY,  
NOW RANDSTAD 2018

**“A third (34%) of British workers quit due to bad workplace culture.”**

THE CULTURE ECONOMY  
REPORT, BREATHEHR, 2018

# Our participating contributors

## JENNIFER CANDEE

Global Head of Talent Acquisition & Employer Brand, Mondelez International

## ROWENA COOPER

Head of Talent Attraction

## DEAN CORBETT

Chief People Officer, Avado

## JAMES DOWLING

Senior Director, Talent Acquisition, Publicis Sapient

## ROB FARACE

Head of Recruitment & Progression, Imperial College

## LIZZY FIRMIN

HR Director, Waddington Brown

## GUY FRANKLIN

Head of Talent Acquisition, Graphcore

## BEN GLEDHILL

Then of Yodel, now Head of Resourcing Transformation, Thames Water

## SARAH LANGTON

Global Head of Recruitment, Clifford Chance

## KIERAN MANDER

HR Director, Travelopia

## DES MARTIN

Senior HR Business Manager, Cigna

## DONNA MILLER

European HR Director, Enterprise Rent-A-Car

## MAX MUKHIN

Employee Experience, Nationwide

## ADELE SWIFT

Head of Recruitment, HandePay

## SAM TRIGG

Head of Coaching & Team Development, Ogilvy

## JULIAN WARD

Group Head of Talent Attraction, StickyEyes

## CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Head of Culture & Leadership Development, The Co-operative Bank

## MARK WILLIAMS

Recruitment Specialist - Talent Attraction, University of Nottingham

“In today's transparent job market, employer brand and employee engagement have become synonymous.”

JOSH BERSIN,  
BERSIN BY DELOITTE





# Key emerging points

- Regardless of questions around ownership and measurement, there was complete unanimity that an effective and effectively communicated culture is increasingly critical to organisational success.
- For constructs attracting increasing corporate interest, both culture and EVP can feel intangible and ephemeral - this is often due to the fact that we measure both inconsistently and, in some cases, not at all.
- If we are measuring culture, this is often through the parallel but not identical lens of engagement.
- Unless we are applying regular metrics reporting, we can miss the sorts of unhealthy patterns, sentiment or non-alignment that needs quick and decisive action.
- Compiling a robust, integrated Culture and EVP business case, which includes the delivery of relevant, actionable metrics, will create C-suite buy-in and on-going sponsorship and investment.
- Organisations become aware of culture only when something has gone wrong, often very wrong.
- Organisations are increasingly valued externally through intangibles - internal intangibles such as EVP and culture have an increasingly similar value.
- Similarly, there seems just the vaguest notion of cultural ownership - that something with so much potential can have either no stakeholders responsible for it - or indeed too many - impacts its capacity to influence.
- Leaders need to enthusiastically and authentically live and champion the culture in order for it to be real and embedded - without this feeling a too 'top down' construct.
- Do the owners of EVP and culture engage with each other - do the constructs float around without an obvious relationship with each other?
- There can be a lack of democratisation around culture - knowledge about it and metrics relating to it can be kept within certain areas or hierarchies - rather than cascaded down to the parts of the business where data can be actioned.
- Culture, cultural messaging and EVP have to be approached and rolled out with trust to all employee pools, as they will be delivered, more often than not, to stakeholder audiences a long way away from corporate head offices.
- Similarly, culture and EVP have increasingly to make sense through people's personal lens - workplace culture has to make its case increasingly outside of the workplace.
- Do we understand cultural signifiers and EVP through the lens of an increasingly diverse workforce?
- Employees newer to the workplace appear to want to have a more proactive and contributory relationship with culture.
- There can also be a tendency to over complicate both EVP and culture - how accessible, how liveable are both constructs?

- There is a clear and entirely authentic link between EVP and culture - the former welcomes new talent into your organisation on the basis of the culture they see. Such new talent can also act as change agents, helping to evolve the culture within your organisation.
- Relatively few organisations feel their key attraction shop windows demonstrate a topical sense of culture or EVP. Aligning your EVP and culture needs to be done through authentic and meaningful narrative and people stories.
- Are we simply doing this wrong in many cases? By measuring culture and EVP on an annual, biennial or even less regular basis, have we missed the boat? Has our organisation moved on? Are EVP and cultural signifiers pointing backwards rather than forwards?
- Do we need to adopt a much more nimble and intuitive relationship with cultural and EVP development?
- If organisations can struggle to articulate a topical and compelling EVP externally, then this is multiplied internally - it can be much easier sensing that culture has gone awry than portraying it in working order.
- Ask yourself whether your EVP is pointing forwards or backwards. If it feels like the latter, then your EVP is neither reflective of your present culture nor influencing its future direction.





For a construct so firmly and increasingly in the mind's eye of the corporate world, culture can still attract a number of often varying definitions.

We might sense it, we certainly know when something is amiss with culture, but pinning it down feels less straightforward, however it can be the glue that binds an organisation together.

But often this glue is invisible. It can be the sense of belonging that inspires effort and initiative. It, very simply, can be 'the way we do things around here'. For some organisations, culture is about the how, rather than the what. It can be the very tangible communication and reinforcement that what people do around the organisation, whatever they do, they are making a contribution.

**“It’s how you set out to achieve what you want to achieve.”**

JENNIFER CANDEE,  
MONDELEZ INTERNATIONAL

How do  
we define  
culture?



# Culture Change

The theme of culture definition was extrapolated to touch on both the fluidity of culture and its reach. For some organisations - despite operating within very competitive market sectors - their culture was perceived not to have changed for decades. Often this can be influenced by a continuity of leadership and/or a successful business model. Or perhaps an absence of disruptive competitors or technology. This contrasted with organisations going through change and disruption. In such cases, their very future depended on a significant re-engineering of their organisation, with often the emergence of a new culture being critical to its success.

For other organisations which have been actively addressing culture for some time, their challenge is about re-evaluating and re-setting cultural behaviours, particularly those that are perceived as blockers to the overall business direction. For Co-operative Bank's Claire Williams, there has, for example, been an organisational shift towards an absolute focus on co-operation and collaboration across the Bank to create more pace and momentum.

**“We are evolving from being collegiate to collaborative, focusing on having the right people in the right rooms, making the right decisions.”**

CLAIRE WILLIAMS,  
THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK

We would add here that when culture is approached as a whole system change - integrated, embedded and threaded throughout the organisation - this provides the framework to not only bring together an organisation, but also to enhance company reputation. There was a clear consensus of our interviewees citing that it was their purpose, vision and values that formed a key part of their cohesive, pan-enterprise cultural make-up, helping facilitate a compelling and aspirational company narrative, and impetus for action. This was not only motivating for colleagues, but used to attract top talent from outside in the face of a UK labour market that is more competitive than at any point in the last 40 years.

This is backed up by the Edelman Trust Barometer 2019 results. Three-quarters of people believe that how a business treats its employees is a key indicator of trustworthiness. The ability of business to positively engage employees, and, in turn, how such employees perceive their business leadership, has a direct impact on trust from consumers and the wider public. This sense of trust is at the centre of successful organisational culture, as well as the relative attractiveness of such businesses as actual or potential employers.

Culture, then, does not operate in its own bubble. Its success, or otherwise, has a clear relationship with how organisations are perceived by key stakeholders, such as consumers and investors, but perhaps more relevant, by both employees and candidates.

**“It’s how we consciously operate to give our people a true sense of belonging, purpose and meaning, which in turn impacts on the way our stakeholders experience us.”**

DEAN CORBETT, AVADO



For Julian Ward at StickyEyes, a key element of culture is an organisation's enthusiasm about letting its people know just how important and recognised they are. But reflecting such appreciation in meaningful ways. It has been far too easy to assume that ping-pong or pool tables and an office dog is the solution to cultural challenges, whilst understanding what might be the true causes of such issues.

**“For some organisations, a ping-pong table, a slide or an office dog have effectively become the culture by default - it feels to the people, not of the people.”**

JULIAN WARD, STICKYEYES

In some ways, culture might best be tested under duress. Rob Farace from Imperial College witnessed a significant communications and engagement initiative immediately after the 2016 EU Referendum results were announced. The university wanted to emphasise to its many overseas employees just how much they were valued and recognised - that they played a key role in university life, in its culture, regardless of the result of the referendum.

For organisations in their infancy, there is a key question around culture. Should it be shaped from day one or simply allowed to evolve organically? And, for Graphcore's Guy Franklin, at what point should there be an element of taking an active hand in moulding this culture?

**“The more we grow and the further we expand, the more pressure there is on shaping a consistent culture.”**

GUY FRANKLIN, GRAPHCORE



# How do we measure culture?

There appears complete consensus that culture is of critical importance to the direction and trajectory of an organisation. However, how an organisation might measure and apply metrics to such culture feels much less clear and unanimous. Without measurement, it can be challenging to understand what is happening to culture - does it continue to be perceived in a positive light or does work need to be done? How successful is quarterly progress?

Without measurement, can a culture change programme be taken seriously? When we've worked with a lot of big transformational change programmes in the past, culture has been seen as 'fluffy' and due to its intangible essence and a lack of key success metrics in driving good outcomes against identified business imperatives, it can be the first element to be discarded.

If things are not being measured, are they being managed? For some of the organisations we spoke with, an annual or even biennial engagement survey is as close to the pulse of their workforce as they are currently able to reach.

Supporting such a view is the statistic from i4cp - '90% of organisations that were unsuccessful in transforming their cultures did not set clear success measures up front'. Robust measurement and reporting are essential in terms of gaining senior leadership backing and on-going visibility.

Avado stood out as an organisation that is taking cultural measurement seriously. Data is captured regularly around a number of both internal and external touchpoints, and these outputs are analysed to inform the business of what is working, and what needs to be addressed, tweaked and honed. Because Avado goes out of its way - and tangibly so - to understand employee sentiment, their people feel they are hugely valued and, as a result, over the last 18 months, employee turnover has dropped by 50%. Again, instinctively, it feels as though there is a clear link between reasons to join and reasons to stay.

Pleasingly, more and more organisations are adopting a much more nimble, topical and intuitive approach to understanding the hearts and minds of their people. They are making use of pulse surveys which are delivered to their people perhaps every three months. Whilst the findings of such surveys are important, perhaps more so is the direction of these results. In which way is the graph pointing? Do they indicate that people remain engaged, enthused and aligned to where the organisation is going, or are they experiencing bumps in the road? But the rigorous application of metrics to culture feels like the direction of travel, rather than something arrived at - for Lizzy Firmin at Waddington Brown, culture is implicit, rather than explicit. Their challenge is around bottling or articulating such culture. In other words, bringing this to life via an Employee Value Proposition.



How do we bring culture or cultural aspirations and expectations to life? How do organisations make it clear what counts as exemplary behaviour and what falls short, without this sounding patronising?

It is perhaps surprising how little, today, people metrics are made use of, particularly as they relate to business performance. We instinctively assume that employees who are disengaged and are feeling distanced by the culture they find themselves working within will be unlikely to deliver a stellar level of customer service. But do we measure this? Do we act on this?

There's a fascinating online interview with Kasper Basse, CEO and founder of the Joe and the Juice food chain and Goldman Sachs currently attracting much focus. In the interview, Mr Basse talks about both business and people metrics. His point is that by the time his EBITDA numbers are available, indicating a problem or under-performance at a particular site or region, it's too late. Underlying issues may have been going on for several months and will now take several more to sort out - during which time his business and his brand are suffering.

Instead, for Basse, he attaches more reliance on people metrics - the extent to which his employees are engaged, enthused, passionate and motivated. If such people metrics are declining, then the business knows they have a problem - theirs is a very service-oriented offering.

Its people and their ability to provide exceptional customer experiences are why such customers come back. In 17 years, there has not been one example of an under-performing store that was not the result of either a team not working well together or individuals whose engagement and enthusiasm had nose-dived. And, in all likelihood, both.

Because Joe and the Juice takes the time not only to measure such people metrics but also to analyse such data and identify the patterns, then they stay much further ahead of their business, rather than relying on lag indicators. Very simply, if engagement and cultural alignment scores are declining, then they have both a business and a people problem. There is a clear and measurable link between the culture within the organisation and business success or otherwise.

Interestingly, there can be a feeling that organisations only really take notice of their cultural pulse when something has gone wrong, often disastrously so. A culture rarely becomes toxic overnight, rather this is an incremental process. A process that can be addressed and reversed if only organisations are closely monitoring its progress.

# Engagement survey = culture survey?

What is apparent speaking with so many organisations is the non-existence of a consistent standard of cultural monitoring. In the absence of a specific tool aimed at monitoring and reporting on cultural progress, then, typically, the engagement survey becomes the measurement of choice. However, the engagement survey is different from a culture survey.

The former focuses on the feelings of individuals and their first-person experience. The latter explores the collective experience of the behaviour of the organisation and the prevalent patterns of behaviour, in response to an 'Organisation's Operating System', i.e. the unique structures, processes and communication methods every organisation creates that send signals to employees around how they should behave, in order to be accepted in the organisation.

Both work hand-in-hand together, but organisations should realise they are two quite different tools with potentially different outcomes. An engagement survey can be a blunt tool in trying to gauge internal cultural alignment.

When you consider the number of engagement survey offerings there are, is it surprising that there are so few culture survey offerings that can give a company a sector baseline measurement?

Company cultures are unique and represent a key (potential) differentiator in a competitive world. Different cultures, with very different espoused values, can still be healthy and high-performing. With this in mind, along with the reality that internal and external factors can impact on the results and differ across the sector, it's perhaps not surprising that there exists no standardised cultural metrics against which to measure 'good' culture.

(Interestingly though, the Banking Standards Board (BSB), established in 2015 to promote high standards and behaviours across the UK banking and building society sector, has an assessment that evaluates companies against their framework of nine characteristics and is able to benchmark results for its members. The BSB understand that you can't assess against a template of what a 'good' culture looks like, but they perceive that a firm strongly exhibiting their chosen nine characteristics is more likely to better service their customers, members and clients.

The measurement tools we use are tailored to the relevant organisation, taking on board the uniqueness of the culture. These tools allow for the culture not just to be visible, but measurable, and enables a company to map the underlying causal factors that promote or inhibit performance, as seen through the collective view of colleagues.



# How EVP and culture evolves

A fascinating point to emerge from our interviews touched on the pace of change of both EVP and culture. Should organisations see their EVP and culture as fixed entities or something more organic and evolving? Definitely in the minority were those employers who had seen little change in terms of the culture or why an individual should wish to join the business. The how and the why, if you like.

For others, universities facing competition and the impact of Brexit, organisations in fast changing, competitive sectors, perhaps those embracing the challenges of digital disruption, then they do not have such a luxury. Instead, both their EVP and the culture it describes and predicates have to have at least one eye on the future. They have the capability to be agents of change, pointing at new behaviours, new expectations, a new workplace. For Yodel's Ben Gledhill, his EVP was delivered at pace in the knowledge that it would not last forever, that it would be in part responsible for reinvigorating their organisation. Its relationship to and contribution towards corporate strategy is very clear.

**“Culture and EVP should be natural, organic entities, not something fixed or static.”**

BEN GLEDHILL

For Ben, he and Yodel were not looking for an EVP process that was time consuming and reflective, they wanted something that summarised their changing organisation then and there. And Yodel are clearly not the only organisations experiencing both business and industry change, impacted by both competitor and regulatory activity. Portraying the organisation has, in this case, to be done nimbly and intuitively. Because in the not too far distant future, Yodel's business, its challenges, its culture and its EVP will not look or feel the same.

If neither your culture nor your EVP have been measured, addressed or analysed within the last couple of years, how confident are you that they are both still able to point your people and your business in the right direction? Are they looking back or looking forwards? “You can't expect the perfect culture and EVP today and expect it to be perfect tomorrow. I don't believe there's a perfect version of either. They're contextual and evolutionary, and getting them both right requires a deliberate and on-going effort from the whole organisation,” says Dean Corbett of Avado.

# Who owns culture?

Perhaps one of the key themes to emerge from our series of interviews touched on ownership. Who owns culture within an organisation? Whilst there are certain similarities as regards an EVP and who owns this construct, perhaps there is more broad agreement that the latter is within the gift of talent acquisition.

**“Who owns culture?  
Very simply, everyone.”**

JAMES DOWLING, PUBLICIS SAPIENT

**“There is cultural ownership  
right at the top of the  
organisation - this is how  
important it is considered.”**

SARAH LANGTON, CLIFFORD CHANCE

These two quotes summarise the responses to the question around ownership. There is an immediate feeling that for culture to flourish, everyone should own it. On the other hand, if it is not seen to be owned and demonstrated by those at the top of an organisation, what incentive or role model exists for others to follow suit? And are we putting too much responsibility on new joiners, potentially graduates or apprentices, to own or certainly demonstrate such culture from day one?



There was broad consensus amongst our group that people leaders are absolutely critical in driving the right culture and consistency of role-modelling, communicating, recognising and championing. In fact, our experience has shown, that culture can change quickly - more often for the worse - if a new-to-role, influential leader has conflicting values and behaviours to those of the organisation they have joined.

**“We have set up a specific leadership group made up of influencers and business leaders who drive the bank and its desired culture forward. They have a key remit to role-model and champion the culture, and meet on quarterly basis formally.”**

CLAIRE WILLIAMS,  
THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK

Whilst our respondents were clear that leaders are pivotal in terms of successfully embedding and personifying a culture, the full answer is perhaps more nuanced.

**“It’s great for an individual to take ownership for culture, but there has to be consistency with the overall business - people cannot go rogue on culture.”**

ROWENA COOPER

One of the key challenges impacting on culture is often distance and location. Gauging, measuring and owning culture are all more straightforward if an organisation operates out of one site. If an organisation is based out of different continents, offices and jurisdictions, with the vast majority of the workforce having no line of sight of senior leaders, from where and from whom do such people take their cultural leanings? Particularly when different societies and geographies may approach key issues such as gender, sexuality and race from wholly different lenses.

**“Employee experience and customer experience - wherever in our world they take place - are so closely linked. You don’t get one without the other.”**

DONNA MILLER, ENTERPRISE RENT-A-CAR

With such organisations as Enterprise, then the autonomy and the trust to deliver a consistent culture, a consistent employee experience and, through this, a consistent customer experience, wherever this is taking place, is critical. They trust their people to own their culture and, in doing so, their customer interactions, thousands of miles away from head offices and CEOs.

Having multiple brands, spanning multiple geographies often at different stages of their culture life cycle, presents challenges to a number of the organisations with whom we engaged. What is the thread that can bring all brands together without damaging the essence of local empowerment? What is the optimum balance between consistency and flexibility?

Kieran Mander, from Travelopia, feels it's about bringing to life the benefits of the brands' association with the parent company, whilst also defining the common purpose, the golden thread. Once again, this sense of organisational glue.

**“At Travelopia, different brands go about things differently, but the why or the purpose behind this, is the same - that’s the part we need to capture and bring to life across all brands.”**

KIERAN MANDER, TRAVELOPIA

And should we think more in terms of empowerment than ownership? There was a clear view emerging that people metrics need to exist in greater proximity to those people themselves. Rather than them being centrally located within an organisation, they become more actionable and relevant when they are devolved. If local managers have greater line of sight of cultural issues, then they have more opportunity to shape change. The metrics become more meaningful, more real, more relevant. In contrast to the experiences of Joe and the Juice, indications of cultural challenges often either do not cascade or do so too slowly to the relevant parts of an organisation. This is unfortunate as local teams can be both the source and the solution to such issues.

Ironically, to make such metrics more meaningful and more personal, organisations have to invest in the technology, the processes and the empowerment to get closer to the people generating such metrics.

**“We are de-centralising cultural metrics, giving line managers a faster, more intuitive line of sight of the hearts and minds of their people.”**

HEAD OF TALENT ACQUISITION'

For some organisations, often embracing technology, we are seeing a greater democratisation of culture. Culture is not the sole concern of leadership, rather it is shaped and lived by everyone. Metrics and trajectory of culture are not, then, annual surprises but something that an organisation's people - all of them - have a stake in and an influence on.

The more democratic culture is within an organisation, the more it can help drive and encourage diversity. That culture relates and belongs to everyone within an organisation enhances the construct of an inclusivity glue, binding everyone together. The more inclusive a culture, the more attractive such an organisation appears to both external candidates and internal employees - of all backgrounds.

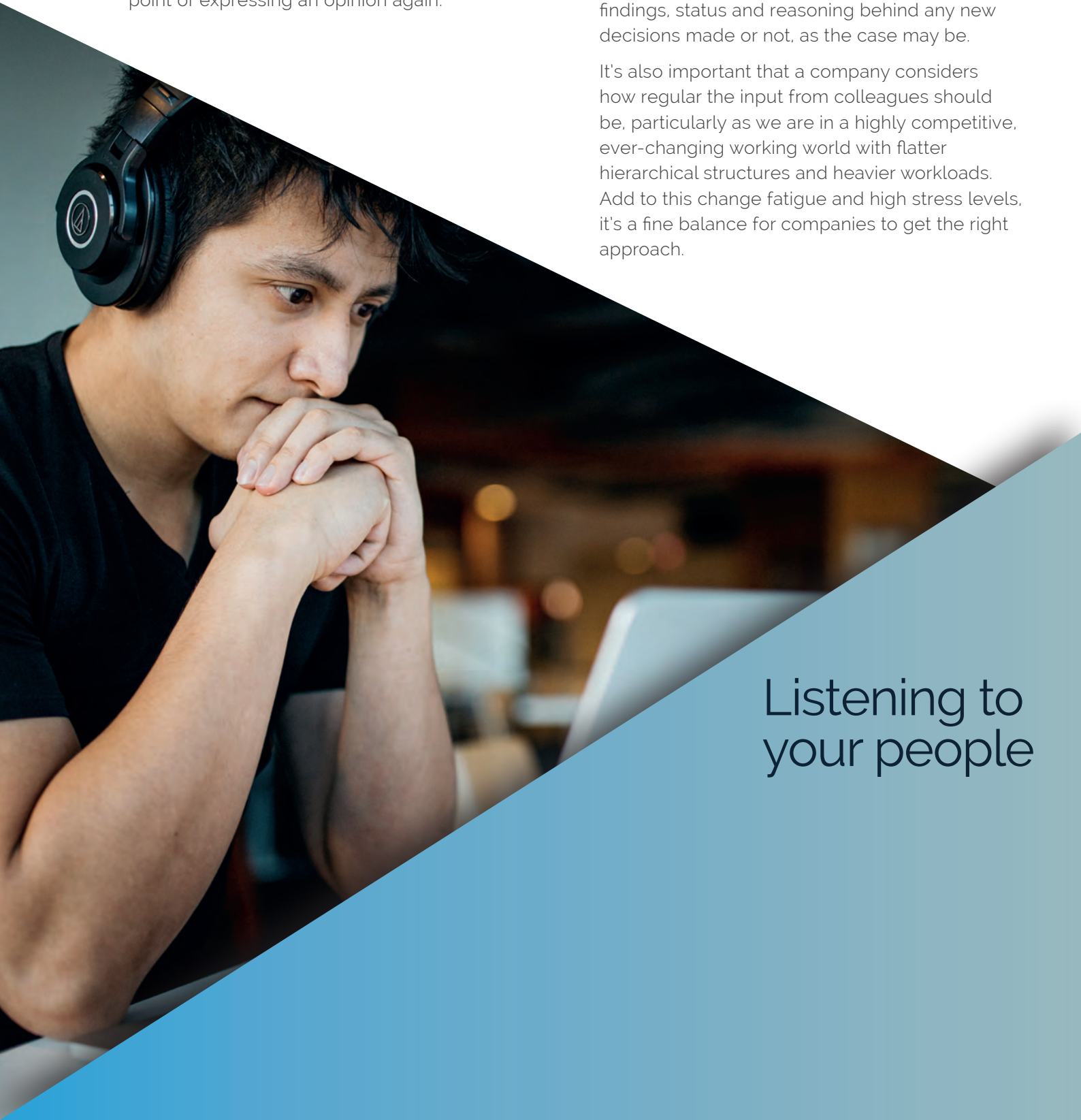


Engaging on a regular basis with employees offers both opportunity and potential threat. Generally, an employee base will welcome the opportunity to provide their views and opinions. Whether through surveys or focus groups, employees want to feel as though they have a voice and a voice that is listened to. However, this has to be a two-way relationship. Expectations are raised through such interventions and if they are not delivered to, and seen to be delivered to, then people will question their validity and the point of expressing an opinion again.

There is also a sense of recognition - if people have bothered to express an opinion and this opinion has not been acted on, then they feel without a voice, unempowered and that their opinion does not matter. The link between what they are doing, saying and contributing and the overall success and direction of the organisation breaks down.

Communication is key to extinguishing this potential threat, with thoughtful positioning of the interventions and follow up messages to clarify findings, status and reasoning behind any new decisions made or not, as the case may be.

It's also important that a company considers how regular the input from colleagues should be, particularly as we are in a highly competitive, ever-changing working world with flatter hierarchical structures and heavier workloads. Add to this change fatigue and high stress levels, it's a fine balance for companies to get the right approach.



Listening to  
your people

# How EVP can help shape culture

It feels clear, engaging with our panel, that one strong indicator of cultural challenge is excessive labour turnover. People, they conclude, are more likely to be leaving a business in which they are unhappy, than one in which they feel engaged and aligned. However, there is perhaps another side to this. Desired cultural change can often be made more challenging because of the people who remain. Lifers can be part of the problem, rather than be contributing to the solution. They are far too comfortable in the culture as it was and have little motivation in helping to shape what it will be.

Therefore, the relationship between EVP and culture becomes clearer and more synergetic. Throughout our conversations, our interviewees felt passionately that an EVP has to be imbued with an authentic sense of the culture of an organisation. The golden thread has to run through both culture and EVP. However, at the same time, the people brought into the organisation as a result of the EVP should be seen as change agents, helping to evolve the culture in response to new markets, new technology, new competitors. Whereas the culture has influenced their move to an organisation, part of this attraction, part of this message, is that they will play a role in evolving such culture.

**“Our culture has definitely built the foundations of our EVP - and we intend that the EVP will in turn influence our culture moving forward.”**

ADELE SWIFT, HANDEPAY

Once again, the construct of an organisation moving forward constantly is clear. The EVP is the external indicator to talent audiences that such organisational and cultural change is taking place and that they could be part of such change. That they could play an active role in such change. (As always, a compelling and authentic EVP should seek to attract those people who can contribute culturally and politely put off those who would not be suited to such an environment). At the same time, the EVP messaging signals clearly to internal people that the organisation they have known will not necessarily remain the same. Different things will be asked of them, and they have to make the decision as to whether this continues to be the right working environment for them.



“An EVP that has meaning and substance and is delivered within the workplace will help drive positive cultural change.”

ROB FARACE, IMPERIAL COLLEGE

Given that an organisation may well be on a cultural journey, is it both wise and feasible to articulate this via a fixed and static EVP? Or is the solution to portray the journey as the attraction rather than the current destination? With organisations experiencing such change and potential upheaval, a key part of their EVP to new joiners is the chance to help shape this journey - in the clear knowledge that this will bring challenge and confrontation.

“Culture is the environment which exists in the organisation. EVP is taking that culture and defining it, articulating it.”

JAMES DOWLING, PUBLICIS SAPIENT

James makes a fascinating point in that it can feel as though an EVP is the one and only means of tangibly articulating and illustrating culture, as well as purpose and values, within (and without) an organisation.





# How close can culture and EVP become?

If the EVP represents the external signpost for talent to choose one employer over another, are all organisations making the most of such a link? There are some clear variations, it would be fair to say.

For professional services organisations, their people - their behaviours and interactions - are their product, their offering. There is a clear realisation across sectors such as law and business services that candidates need to have as early and as authentic a view of the culture as possible. If the what is relatively constant across one particular sector, in this case law, the how - or the culture - certainly isn't.

This is the environment in which they will be operating - often for long periods of time. At Clifford Chance, Sarah Langton is keen to demonstrate the firm's culture through exposing would-be joiners to as many of the organisation's current staff as possible. Their people are the culture. She, then, wants to immerse candidates in such a culture as soon as possible - the culture, therefore, serves as the EVP. The firm is keen too not to assume but to quantitatively and qualitatively understand that new joiners feel they have made the right decision, that the cultural story they were promised, has indeed materialised.

In regularly listening to their people, particularly early on in an employee's tenure, in order to gauge their happiness and engagement with the culture, this attentiveness and interest in itself further contributes to the culture.

**“Employers should be aware of how much culture is communicated by candidates waiting in, for example, reception, seeing people interact, understanding how formal this interaction is.”**

GUY FRANKLIN, GRAPHCORE

What the firm does differs not hugely from one similar organisation to the next - how they do it and go about it, then those differences emerge. When she is asked for the Clifford Chance why, Sarah's answer is the workforce, the colleagues with whom a candidate will be working with. This is about authenticity, about being clear what a joiner is walking into.

**“It's about telling your story in a more effective and genuine way, aligning your journey with what great talent can expect when they walk through our doors.”**

MARK WILLIAMS,  
UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM



**“The more human-centric an organisation is, the closer to its people it can get, then the more natural should be the evolution of its EVP.”**

MAX MUKHIN, NATIONWIDE

Firms cannot afford the actual impact and negative publicity of premature departures and the subsequent fallout this is likely to have on social media. The firm that people walk into has to be exactly the cultural environment they expected to encounter. For Clifford Chance, their culture is an absolutely integral part of the EVP - even the EVP itself - and new people coming on board. as a result of such an EVP, help to build on such a culture.

**“Substance and authenticity are key to aligning EVP and culture.”**

BEN GLEDHILL

**“Your EVP must reflect the current culture and where you’re heading. If not, your people will call you out and new joiners will be, at best, disappointed.”**

CLAIRE WILLIAMS,  
THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK






There is a clear balance to be achieved in terms of an EVP which is anticipating cultural progression and one that feels entirely inauthentic as regards the current culture. One that accordingly feels too much of a reach or a stretch. There has been something of an arms race for some employers to portray their workplace and culture in the most shiny, perfect terms possible. This largely bears little or no relationship with what a new joiner will encounter and is undoubtedly the source of both internal scepticism and premature labour turnover. This typically will create a downward spiral - internal frustration and new joiners leaving the business irritated and confused that cultural reality is some distance from that portrayed and then expressing those views on social media.

However, although there was clear agreement amongst all of our interviewees that there should be absolute alignment between EVP and culture, this link can, in some cases, feel theoretical rather than physical. For many, the joining up of internal culture and external messaging is, at worst, broken and, at best, non-existent. The external EVP, the route to new hires, new talent, new inspiration, has little clear relationship with the cultural reality or direction that such new joiners are about to walk into.

EVP looking around and looking forward at culture





# Does the window into your culture need cleaning?

Very simply, their careers website, predicated and influenced by their EVP does not act as an accurate indicator of culture.

It can feel as though many organisations have a transactional, process-driven relationship with resourcing collateral and messages. The EVP and the messaging it influences is to be addressed perhaps every three years, regardless of what might be happening to the business, its strategy and direction. This doesn't feel as intuitive or organic as the organisations, market places and competition that such EVPs have to reflect and address.

Just as we are becoming more nimble about the way we measure culture and engagement, shouldn't we adopt similar fleet-footedness to the way we ensure our EVP remains forward facing? Just as clunky biennial engagement surveys increasingly feel unfit for purpose, a process towards an EVP which lasts up to a year and is not reviewed or measured for perhaps another half decade feels increasingly anachronistic.

Your EVP is the window into your organisation, your opportunities, your future and your culture - how clear, today, is that window to those with their noses potentially pushed up against the glass?

And perhaps the easiest way of going about this? Making use of an employer's talent to demonstrate culture. Making use of up-to-date videos to portray (and implicitly reward) talent telling their own stories of what their organisation's culture means to them, what it enables, what it inspires. Done well (and this option is becoming speedier, cheaper and more straightforward) and it reinforces cultural successes and direction to internal employee audiences and provides an honest, authentic lens for potential new joiners. Such stories can be rotated at pace in order to reflect new events, new successes, new challenges.

**“You come across our EVP internally all the time - in simple interactions with people, leadership updates, real life examples - it does come to life.”**

DEAN CORBETT, AVADO

Do they like what they hear and see? Then, great. And if they don't? Equally, great - this isn't for them, perhaps forever, perhaps just now. But they are able to make such a decision with insight and knowledge, not guesswork and intuition.

**“Right now, our careers site is factual and needs work. It doesn't reference culture.”**

SENIOR TALENT ACQUISITION  
PROFESSIONAL

# The cultural and EVP challenges of a shifting workforce

The evolution of both the workforce and the workplace, however, further challenges cultural alignment and EVP articulation.

People's relationship with work and the workplace is changing in front of us. In May last year, the ONS reported a quarterly 90,000 increase in the number of self-employed workers - the largest jump for some three years. And even if people are permanently employed, the propensity for them to be working flexible hours, often from home, potentially sharing their job with another, is growing exponentially - APSCo reported late last year that this number had increased by a factor of five over the last two decades. According to the TUC - the number of people working from home has increased 27% in the last ten years.

There is the clear sense that an EVP and an organisation's culture are seen increasingly through the lens of, for example, the family, the home or a partner. People are working at an organisation not because of professional development or challenge, but because the job fits in amongst other commitments. It is logistically convenient.

People are attracted to a job because of the time they are not working, rather than the time they are working there.

We are spending less and less physical time at and with our employer. We have a more distant and diluted cultural relationship with our employer. We have less and less line of sight of cultural role models and exemplars. And there are more and more people who have an increasingly transactional relationship with not one employer, but any number of organisations, contacts, side hustles and networks.

The challenge, then, for organisations is to embed expected cultural behaviours clearly, consistently and via channels which are transparent and accessible. Talented gig workers and consultants have choice - clearly, their per diem rate will be a factor in where they choose to work - but so too will be the extent to which they enjoy a client's organisation, its people and, yes, its culture. Home workers have chosen this approach to fit in with other commitments and callings - they do, however, want to have a sense of belonging with their employer. Indeed, they are likely to crave belonging and connection to a greater extent than employees with more office face-time. And in the future, both gig workers and those employees working from home may want such a working relationship to change. How they perceive the culture of their employer will influence such decisions significantly.

Workforce dilution will bring more rather than less challenge to constructing and communicating a cohesive culture for all employers. Bonds between employer and employee will be influenced by workers' commitments to family, partners and outside interests - but the rewards for those organisations that succeed will be tangible competitive advantage. Welcoming gig workers into a happy, empathetic culture and extending a sense of shared purpose to home workers is an on-going challenge, but one likely to deliver in terms of commitment, productivity and tenure.

If culture does not succeed in reaching out intuitively to all levels and all generations and those working remotely, it will only exist in pockets. Accordingly, it will divide rather than unite.

Organisations have to increasingly succeed in demonstrating workplace culture and workplace belonging outside of that workplace.





## How different generations respond to culture

Whilst it can feel all too easy to apply lazy generational stereotypes and behaviours across the workplace, an interesting theme emerged from our conversations. Whatever label we wish to attach to them, employees relatively new to the workforce appear to want to have a more active relationship with culture than those with more experience.

**“Millennials have a more collaborative relationship with culture - they will question to a much greater degree.”**

ROWENA COOPER

Such newcomers appear less and less comfortable with simply adopting a culture that appears handed down from on high. Clearly, leaders should walk the talk in terms of demonstrating culture, however employees, particularly younger ones want to feel they are contributing much more actively to such culture.

**“Gen Z wants a more active relationship with culture - they want more sense of shaping such culture, not being shaped by it.”**

JENNIFER CANDEE,  
MONDELEZ INTERNATIONAL

When asked about the one thing they would change about their culture and EVP, a number of our interviewees said less is more and that a lens of simplicity is required. This has never been so important in a world where people are bombarded by messages and, in many cases, overwhelmed with workload. Whatever our relationship with the respective protagonists, the two most recent UK and US elections were won by parties with a very clear, very simple and very much repeated message - Make America Great Again and Get Brexit Done. The simple, the clear, the repeatable tend to cut through.

Organisations have the opportunity of creating a clear golden thread that reaches from EVP through to culture. They both influence each other - or the opportunity exists for that to happen. All agreed that culture and EVP should be much more aligned and there was a big opportunity to create a more unified, authentic story that could powerfully connect from the inside-out; whilst creating a sense of pride and belonging to those from within.

**“The reality must reflect the promise and vice versa. If we are truthful and authentic and understand ourselves, our EVP will do exactly what it says on the tin.”**

SAM TRIGG, OGILVY.



**Simplify,  
unify and  
clarify**

# About us



I've worked across the field of EVP analysis, construction, creation and delivery for more than 20 years, and have been fortunate enough to partner a huge variety of organisations - from multi-nationals through to relative start-ups, from the commercial sector, through to local government and universities. Listening to internal employee communities, setting their stories against the context of the external labour market - with all its noise and competition - is inspiring.

I've recently delivered university lectures on the subject and train organisations around EVP creation and delivery. I firmly believe in the inside-out nature of the EVP - that what an organisation presents to the outside world, in terms of candidate attraction, has to be born out of the internal employee experience and prevailing culture.

If you'd like to find out more about how I might enhance your EVP, please contact me.

T. 07834 312148

E. [neilharrison237@gmail.com](mailto:neilharrison237@gmail.com)

W. <https://employerbrandingadvantage.wordpress.com>

I'm passionate about using my collective experience and skills to help businesses, leaders and teams develop inclusive, healthy, high-performing cultures that deliver tangible results.

I've been lucky to have worked globally for a wide variety of organisations, from SMEs to multi-nationals, where I've used my combined expertise of culture, strategic communication, engagement and coaching, to help deliver transitional and transformational change.

I've worked on numerous complex change programmes and use my post-grad certificate in the Psychology of Organisational Development and Change, and training as a Barrett Culture Transformation Tools Practitioner, to approach culture change systematically, holistically and in a measurable way.

I believe that culture and EVP are both real game changers for companies, and particularly if there is a clear relationship between them, are critical to organisational success.

If you'd like to find out more about how I might enhance your culture, please contact me.

T. 07816 368678

E. [joss@capitalisepformance.com](mailto:joss@capitalisepformance.com)

W. [www.capitalisepformance.com](http://www.capitalisepformance.com)





# Recommendations

(There's a lot to discuss in terms of the relationship between culture and EVP. We've touched on a fair amount but realise there is so much more to cover. In terms of what you might do post this white paper, we have suggested a very finite number of recommendations. It's not that we ran out of room, more that each organisation will have its own set of challenges as well as potential in terms of bringing the thought and execution processes of culture and EVP closer together. It's a dialogue and one that we'd be delighted to be involved in).

- Formalise the relationship between those people with ownership or responsibility for your organisation's culture and your EVP. We feel there's so much more that could be realised by bringing these areas together.
- How are you currently measuring your cultural and EVP progress? We wouldn't recommend you tried to combine one set of metrics for both areas, but, again, greater cohesion from what one area could learn from the other can have real impact.
- Perhaps more important is the need to apply increasingly more regular metrics reporting. Unless we have a very topical idea of the internal feelings and sentiment, we can miss the sorts of unhealthy patterns or non-alignment that needs quick and decisive action.
- What sort of messaging is currently delivering your culture narrative and your EVP? Take a look at them together - what sort of DNA do they share? Could they, should they have a closer relationship?
- What sort of relationship do your people have with your culture, your EVP and the messaging that carries them both? Do they feel part of such a process or apart from it?
- In basing culture and EVP on often clunky readings and outdated insights, is the messaging carrying them both outdated and retrospective? Do we, indeed, need a much more nimble and intuitive approach to shaping and landing both culture and EVP?

**Culture and EVP are transformational soulmates that can drive organisational change. A deliberate, systematic and unified approach and effort is required, which will positively impact performance, reputation and your bottom line.**