

## WHAT MATTERS TO HR PRACTITIONERS?

**A**n HR professional weighs up many issues when evaluating career opportunities. While some of these are subject to an individual's needs and preferences, others are more consistent across the wider HR population.

Some of the wider criteria that HR professionals weigh up when making career decisions were evaluated in a national research project conducted by The Next Step in our HR Viewpoint Survey. The survey of almost 2,000 HR professionals was conducted at all levels from all sectors, across Australia.

This month we look at some of this criteria as well as some general preferences. The results indicate that there are several views that are shared across the HR profession.

### Is there a preferred type of organisation?

The ownership structure of an organisation can make a huge difference to the short-term versus long-term thinking behind a company and its impact on its people orientation. The HR market has become aware of this fact over the years.

When HR professionals were asked to rank their preferences, the results were stark: 35.3% of HR professionals indicated that they would prefer to work for a large publically-listed company; (21.6% preferred Australian-listed; and 13.7% preferred overseas owned.)

At the other end of the spectrum, the HR community spoke with a clear voice. They indicated that a number of ownership structures were not preferred, as follows:

- Private equity firms 0.9%
- Professional partnerships 2.4%
- Not for profit 2.9%
- Public sector 3.2%

While there has been a lot of anecdotal evidence over the years in relation to the difficulty of attracting HR professionals to some organisations in these sectors, the results of the survey clearly demonstrate that some areas have an image issue when it comes to the HR community.

### What business cycle suits HR professionals?

The business cycle of an organisation can be a key indicator of what work HR will be called upon to undertake to support the organisation. This, therefore, is a key focus for many people.

When asked in the survey what business cycle suits, most HR professionals identified with environments that are very dynamic. A combined 50% of respondents favoured growth and restructuring environments, (24% and 26% respectively). They recognise that their biggest impact can be delivered when the business is going through a substantial transition.

Interestingly, only 8% of HR professionals were interested in an organisation going through M&A activity. While the business community is in love with M&A activity, clearly the HR community is not.

Also of note, 21% of HR professionals said that they were more interested in working for a stable organisation where HR can plan and deliver programs, before the organisation completely changes shape.

### What do HR professionals look for?

In the survey, HR professionals were also asked to rank some miscellaneous priorities that they considered when they weighed up different organisations and opportunities.

There was some validation of a long held belief that the leader of the organisation is the key to HR success. Therefore, there was no surprise that over 17% of HR professionals look for an organisation that is led by a CEO and management team that embraces HR as a value add to the business.

The other key things that HR professionals look for included the following:

- Image of the organisation 12.4%
- Ability to make local decisions 11.2%
- A culture embracing professional development 11.1%
- The company supports flexibility 10.1%

There is, of course, an expectation that good companies would have ticks against most of the above, but it is still interesting to have the HR community validate that they do value these forward thinking approaches.

### The wrap up

While there will always be individual organisations that offer HR practitioners the right mix to suit their personal preferences, it is still interesting to note the overall 'turn-ons' and 'turn-offs' in the market.

Clearly, there are some industries that have a lot of work to do on their HR brand. Organisations in some of these industries would do well to distance themselves from the general perceptions when recruiting HR professionals.

It is also good to quantify the priority that HR professionals place on working for an organisation that is led by a strong HR-oriented management team, with a strong brand, and the ability to make local decisions. The survey definitely indicates that if a local public company displays these three factors, then they clearly have a competitive advantage in recruiting HR talent.

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