



The State of Engagement Among HR Professionals
Do the Cobbler's Children Have Shoes?

INTRODUCTION

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Great Resignation*, and media-driven pseudo-psychology concept of “quiet quitting” – there has been a marked decline in employee engagement. In a recent article, Gallup estimates the decline began in 2020 and has been precipitously trending down ever since. For example, Gallup reports that 34% of workers described themselves as engaged in their jobs in 2021, down from 36% in 2020 — the first decline in over a decade (Harter, 2022). Such trends are troubling when you consider the current talent crisis and widespread attrition cited by organizational leaders and HR professionals in a joint survey conducted by *Fortune* and the *Institute of Corporate Productivity (i4CP)* (Brekken, Oakes, Martin, 2022).

What is even more troubling is senior leadership tends to employ a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach when it comes to moving the needle on employee engagement. Adding to the confusion are a myriad of *LinkedIn Influencers* and thought leaders continually shifting the target by extolling the value of newfangled and nebulous concepts such as – employee experience, employee fulfillment, employee thriving, and the like. Measuring employee engagement alone, or any other desired outcome, is not enough. It is critical that organizations identify the underlying factors, resources, characteristics, conditions, or employee value propositions that matter most for various talent segments (Falletta & Combs, 2018; Lee, Rocco, & Shuck, 2020).

In recent years, the HR profession has become more evidence-based and data driven. Leading organizations are developing advanced people analytics capabilities that include strategies for measuring and managing employee engagement, generating critical insights on the workforce and various talent segments (e.g., high-potentials, high performers), data visualization and storying telling, and more (Falletta & Combs, 2021). Despite the data science revolution that is underway, little is known about the employee engagement of HR professionals and the extent to which organizations engage in talent management for HR professionals as a critical talent segment. After all, HR professionals play a leading role in designing and delivering talent management practices within their organizations. Yet, talent management does not always apply to HR professionals. HR professionals are either the last to participate in such programs and practices or forgotten all together.

The past few years have taken a toll on HR professional in terms of stress and burnout since they serve on the frontline of the global talent crisis (Ladika, 2022; Wicker, 2022). A recent study concluded that being an HR professional is harder than ever and that a talent war is underway for high caliber HR talent (GoCo, 2021). In short, these trends suggest that HR professionals are a talent segment worthy of attention.



PURPOSE & METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the primary drivers (i.e., factors, resources, and employee value propositions) that affect employee engagement among HR professionals. A corollary purpose of this research was to examine how these engagement drivers might differ by various talent segments and other demographic variables, and to determine the extent to which organizations implement talent management practices for HR professionals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the underlying drivers of employee engagement for HR professionals?
2. How do these engagement drivers differ by various talent segments and demographics within HR?
3. To what extent do organizations engage in talent management practices for HR professionals?

DESIGN AND METHOD

The present study employed a non-experimental cross-sectional design. The population for the study was drawn from HRCI®'s database of HR professionals. An email invitation with an embedded URL to the survey was sent to a broad cross section of HR professionals representing organizations in a variety of sectors and industries.

The survey included a six-item scale that measured cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Shuck, 2017) on a five-point Likert-type "agreement" scale. In addition, a comprehensive list of potential factors, resources, employee value propositions known to drive employee engagement (i.e., what matters most to HR professionals) were included on the survey. The survey also included customized questions pertaining to integrated talent management practices. In addition, questions about the career goals and aspirations of participants were included on the survey along with select demographic questions (e.g., HR function, job level, gender, ethnicity/race, generational cohort).

A snowball sampling approach was used to promote and generate interest in the survey. The survey was shared across the global HR community through numerous *LinkedIn* groups. The survey remained open for four weeks, and three email reminders were sent to increase participation. In total, 2032 HR professionals completed the survey.

KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

Overall HR Professionals are Engaged and Exhibiting Their Discretionary Energy and Effort

- On average – nearly 70% of all HR professionals are “engaged” whereas approximately 30% are “disengaged”.
- Most HR professionals are exhibiting their discretionary energy and effort on behalf of the organizations they serve.

Engagement Levels Do Not Vary by Generational Cohort and Gender, But Do by Race/Ethnicity

- Overall engagement levels for HR professionals did not significantly vary by generational cohort and gender. In terms of race and ethnicity, Black or African American HR professionals are the least engaged group as compared to Caucasian HR professionals (72% engaged) – a 10 percentage point difference.

Mid-Level Managers are the Least Engaged Segment of HR Professionals

- Mid-level managers (i.e., managers/supervisors and directors) are the least engaged group in terms of job level as compared to individual contributors and executives (i.e., VP and above). These results should not be surprising when you consider that mid-level managers are frequently overworked and literally caught in the middle. Studies have shown that the so called “disillusioned middle” is a real phenomenon.

HR Business Partners/Generalists are the Largest Group of Respondents and Barometer of Engagement

- HR business partners/generalists represented approximately 48% of all respondents and are by far the largest HR functional area in this study. Over 69% of HR business partners/generalists are engaged and nearly 31% are disengaged. These results are consistent with the engagement levels across all respondents and serves as an overall barometer of employee engagement for HR professionals in this study.

Top Engagement Drivers for All HR Professionals – ‘The Usual Suspects’

Overall, ethics, trust, integrity, compassionate leadership, and meaningful work top the list for all HR professionals. The remaining drivers represent the ‘usual suspects’ which are consistent with previous research on what matters most to employees as a whole.

1. Ethical Workplace/Work Environment
2. Trust & Integrity in the Leadership
3. Compassionate Leader/Manager Behavior
4. Meaningful Work
5. Immediate Manager/Supervisor Quality
6. Workplace Culture
7. Work–Life Balance
8. Coworker/Team Member Quality
9. Wellness and Well-being Programs/Interventions
10. Relationship with Immediate Manager/Leader

Top Engagement Drivers for Senior HR Leaders – ‘The Strategic Factors That Matter Most’

The strategic factors that matter most to senior HR leaders include decision making latitude, access to fiscal resources, and the organizational structure in terms of strategic alignment and influence.

1. Trust & Integrity in the Leadership
2. Ethical Workplace/Work Environment
3. Decision Making Authority/Decision Rights
4. Access to Budget/Fiscal Resources
5. Organizational Structure
6. Senior Leadership Quality
7. Meaningful Work
8. Compassionate Leader/Manager Behavior
9. Workplace Culture
10. Immediate Manager/Supervisor Quality

Top Engagement Drivers for Aspiring Leaders – ‘Ambition Can’t Wait’

Aspiring leaders are those who possess high ambition and achievement orientation and have C-suite aspirations. What matters most for this talent segment are advancement and promotion opportunities, job-title, decision rights, and total compensation as well as a mix of the usual suspects.

1. Advancement & Promotion Opportunities
2. Ethical Workplace/Work Environment
3. Trust & Integrity in the Leadership
4. Job Title (EVP, VP, Director)
5. Decision Making Authority/Decision Rights
6. Meaningful Work
7. Compassionate Leader/Manager Behavior
8. Wellness and Well-being Programs/Interventions
9. Total Compensation/Enumeration
10. Workplace Culture

The Cobbler’s Children Have No Shoes

- HR professionals were asked to rate the extent to which their organization engages in talent management practices for non-HR employees as well as HR employees.
- Although HR professionals are receiving growth and development opportunities and participating in select organizational-wide practices (e.g., people analytics, employee surveys), they are being left out of the most important talent management practices – namely (1) talent reviews, (2) high-potential identification, (3) succession management, (4) talent retention interventions, and (5) overall employee experience.
- These results suggest that the “cobbler’s children have no shoes” when it comes to managing top HR talent.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

EXHIBIT 1: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS: GENERATIONAL COHORT, GENDER, AND RACE/ETHNICITY

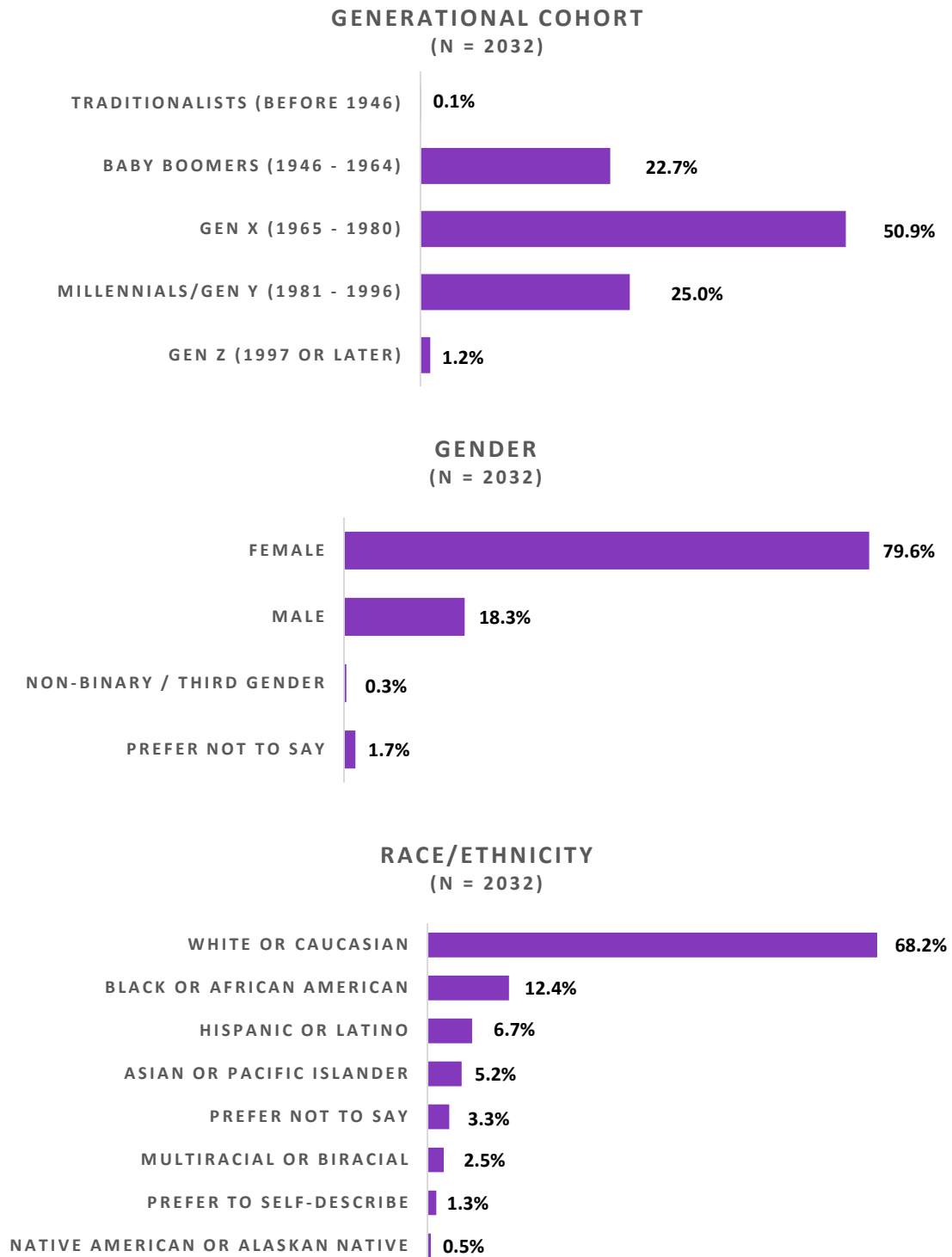


EXHIBIT 2: ORGANIZATIONAL TYPE/SECTOR

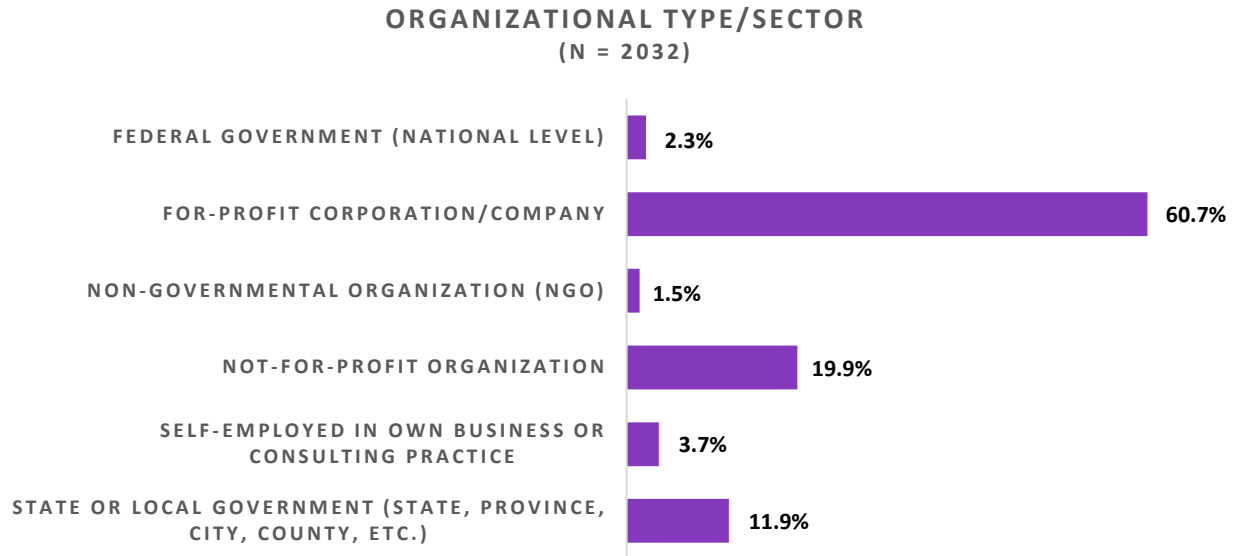


EXHIBIT 3: ORGANIZATIONAL SIZE – EMPLOYEE HEADCOUNT

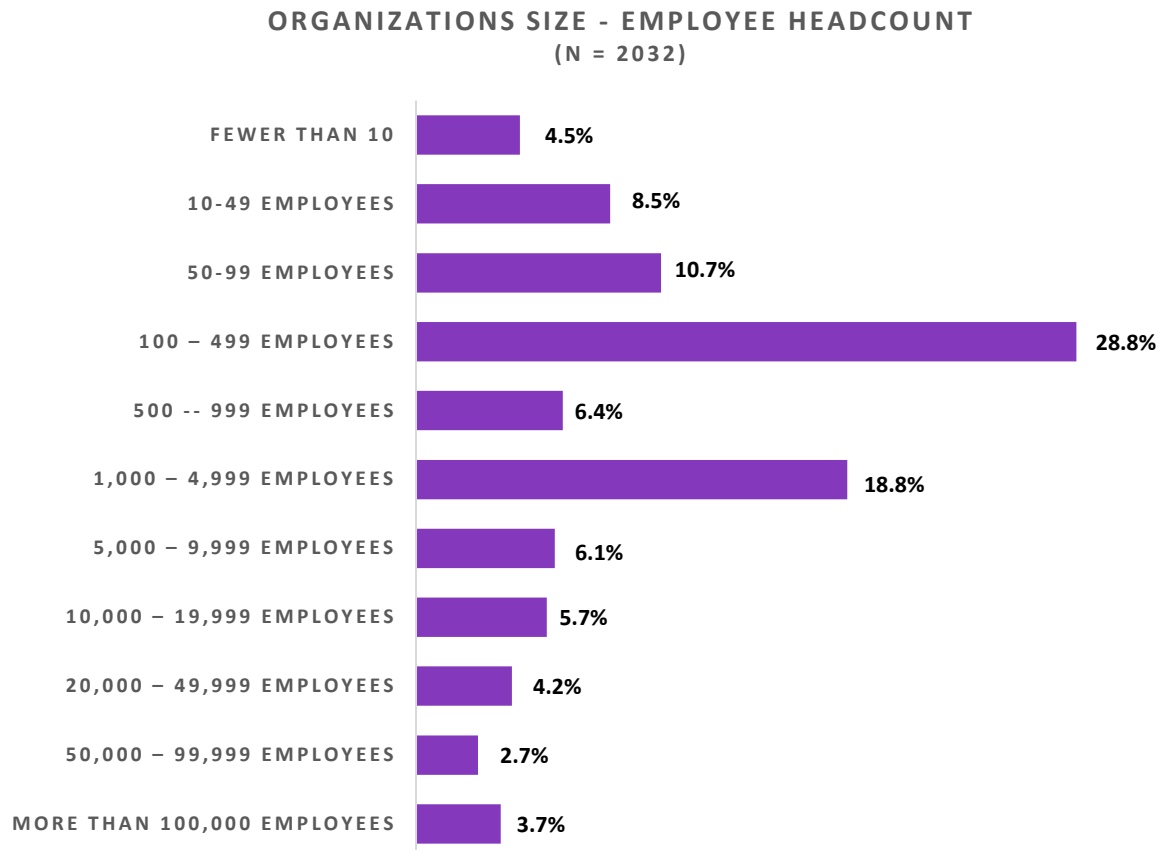


EXHIBIT 4: JOB LEVEL OF PARTICIPANTS

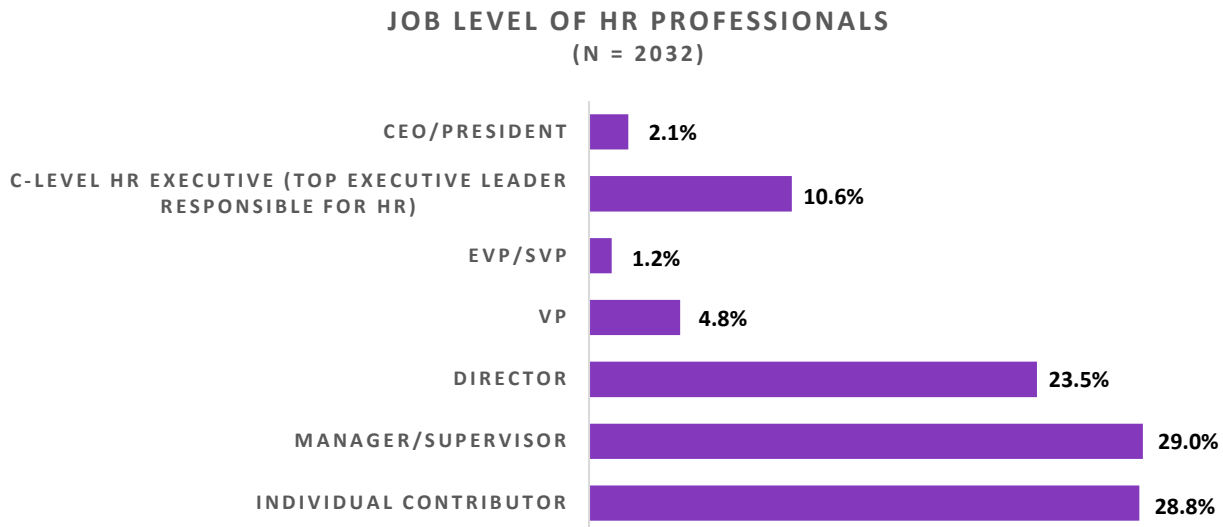


EXHIBIT 5: PRIMARY HR FUNCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

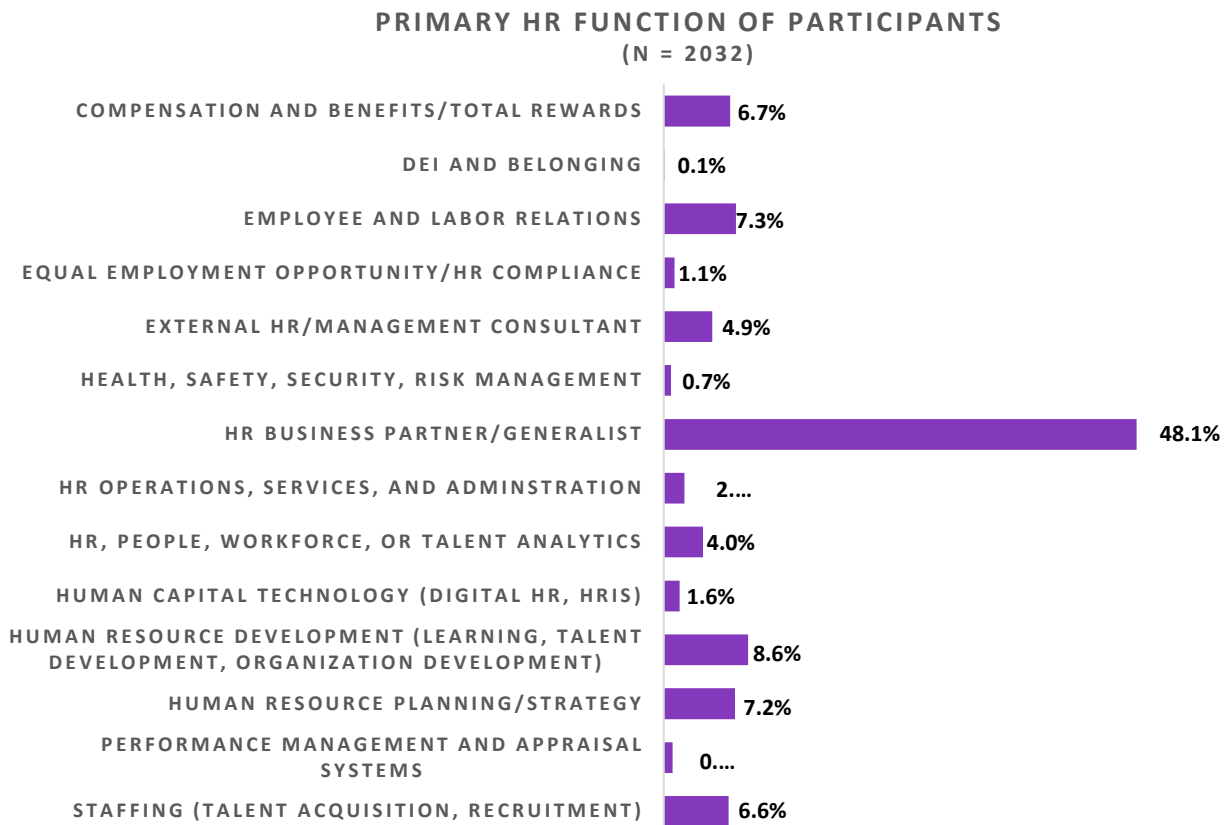


EXHIBIT 6: GEO-STRUCTURE OF PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATIONS

GEO STRUCTURE OF PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATIONS (N = 2032)

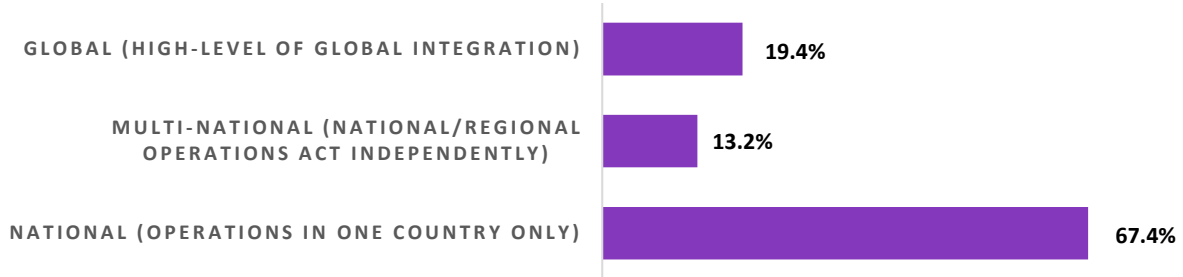


TABLE 1: GEO-REGIONAL LOCATION OF PARTICIPANTS

GEO-REGION	DISTINCT COUNTRIES	%	N
AFRICA	15	4.6%	93
ASIA	24	3.4%	70
CARIBBEAN	7	0.9%	18
CENTRAL AMERICA	1	0.1%	1
EUROPE	10	0.6%	12
NORTH AMERICA	3	90.2%	1832
OCEANIA	1	0.1%	1
SOUTH AMERICA	4	0.3%	5
TOTAL	65	100%	2032



RESULTS

HR professionals were asked to rate their own individual engagement level on a six-item instrument – namely *The Employee Engagement Scale*. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. The scale was developed by Dr. Brad Shuck, Professor of Human Resources and Organization Development at the University of Louisville and Co-Founder and Chief Data Officer at [OrgVitals](#) – a leading SaaS-based platform that measures employee engagement, workplace culture, and more. Shuck and his colleagues (2017, p. 954) define:

“Employee engagement as a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the maintenance, intensity, and direction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy.”

Overall, HR professionals reported moderate to high levels of engagement. The total average engagement score for all respondents was 3.86 (refer to Table 2). For descriptive purposes and the sake of simplicity, participants providing a rating of 4 or 5 are considered “engaged” whereas participants providing a rating of 1, 2, or 3 are considered “disengaged”

On average, nearly 70% of all HR professionals are “engaged” whereas approximately 30% are “disengaged” (see Exhibit 7). All things considered, these results are relatively favorable given the downward trend reported by *Gallup* in terms of the workforce as a whole (Harter, 2022). As a result, the majority of HR professionals are exhibiting their discretionary energy and effort on behalf of the organizations they serve.

TABLE 2: THE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SCALE

THE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SCALE©	
1. I am very focused when I am working at my job.	3.88
2. I give my job responsibilities a lot of attention.	4.23
3. Working at my job has a great deal of personal meaning to me.	3.83
4. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my workplace.	3.46
5. I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me at my job.	3.86
6. I work harder than expected to help my company be successful.	3.88
OVERALL MEAN SCORE	3.86

Source: Shuck, B. (1-7762123109). *The Employee Engagement Scale (6 questions)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Copyright Office.

Employee Engagement
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EXHIBIT 7: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – ALL PARTICIPANTS

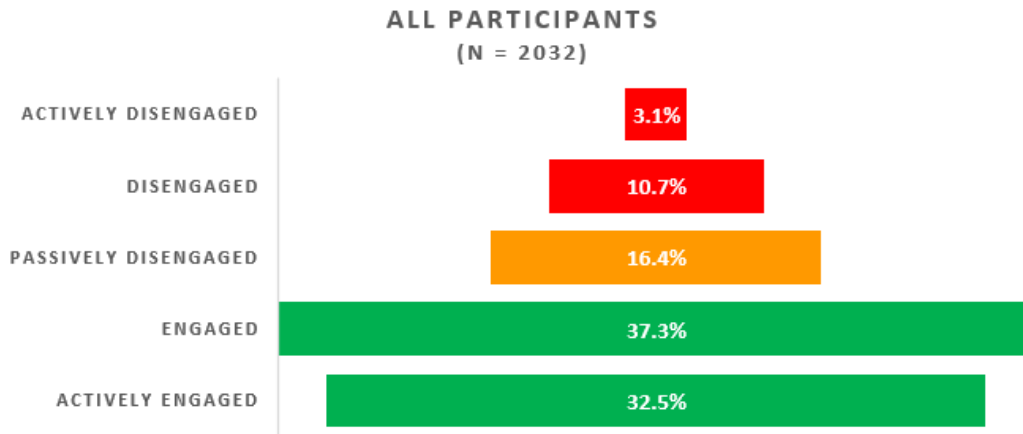


EXHIBIT 8: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – GENERATIONAL COHORT

Amid countless generational stereotypes, overall engagement levels for HR professionals did not significantly vary by generational cohort (refer to exhibit 8 here and on the following page).

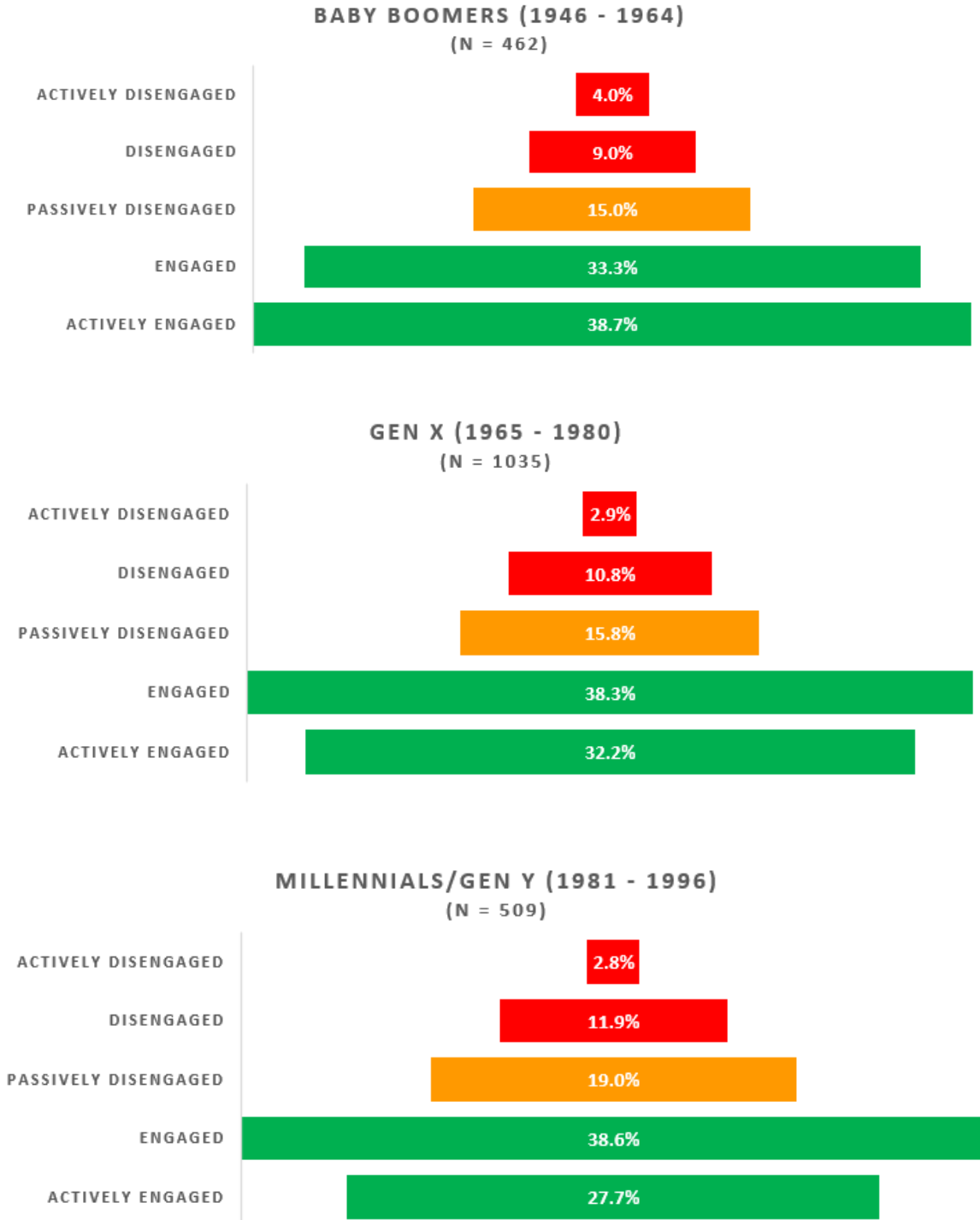


EXHIBIT 8: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – GENERATIONAL COHORT (CONT.)

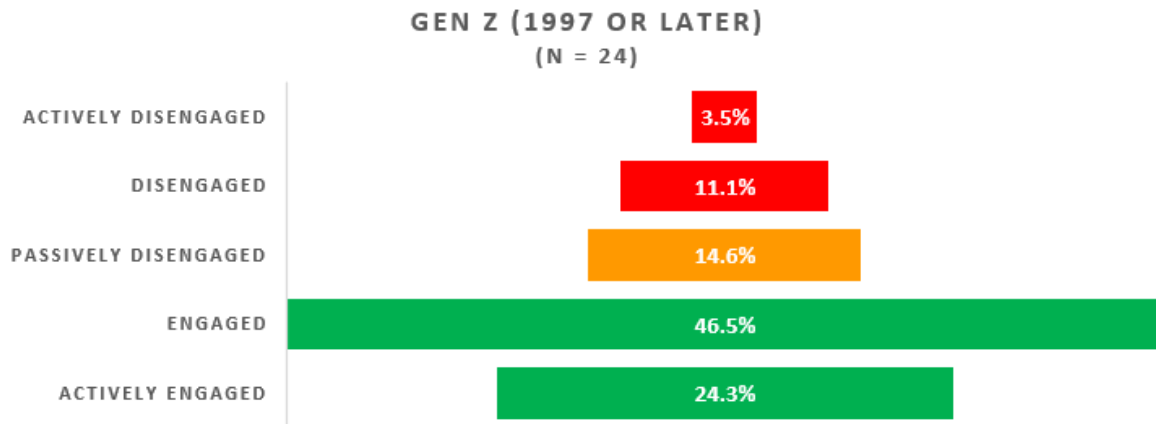


EXHIBIT 9: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – GENDER

Overall engagement levels among female and male HR professionals did not significantly differ. However, non-binary/third gender respondents (N = 7) were less engaged in comparison (refer to Exhibit 9) – although the number of respondents in this category is too small to make any meaningful conclusions.

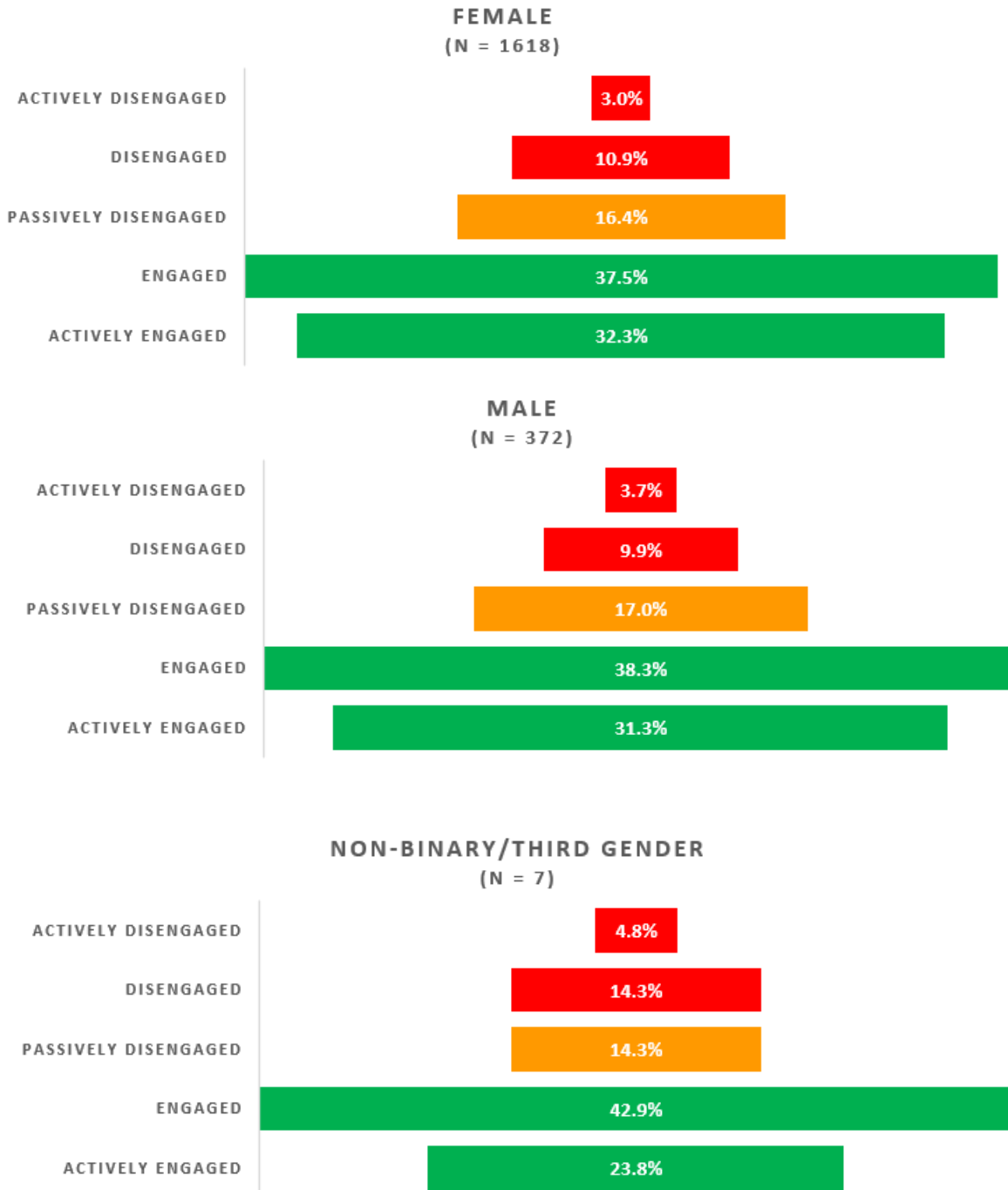


EXHIBIT 10: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – RACE/ETHNICITY

In terms of race and ethnicity, Black or African American HR professionals (62% engaged) are less engaged compared to Caucasian HR professionals (72% engaged) – a 10 percentage point difference. Differences among other racial or ethnic groups were not significant (refer to Exhibit 10 on here and on the following page).

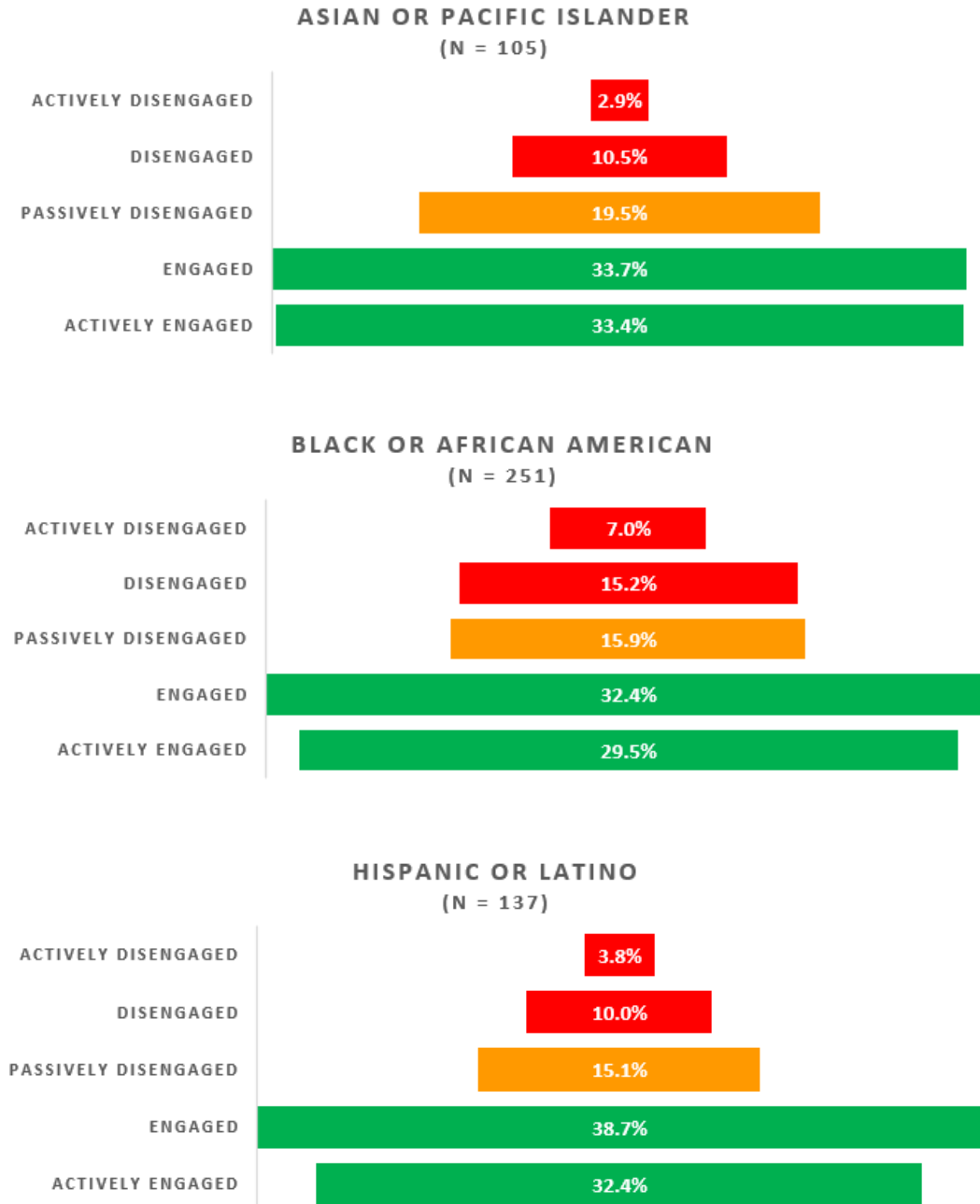


EXHIBIT 10: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – RACE/ETHNICITY (CONT.)

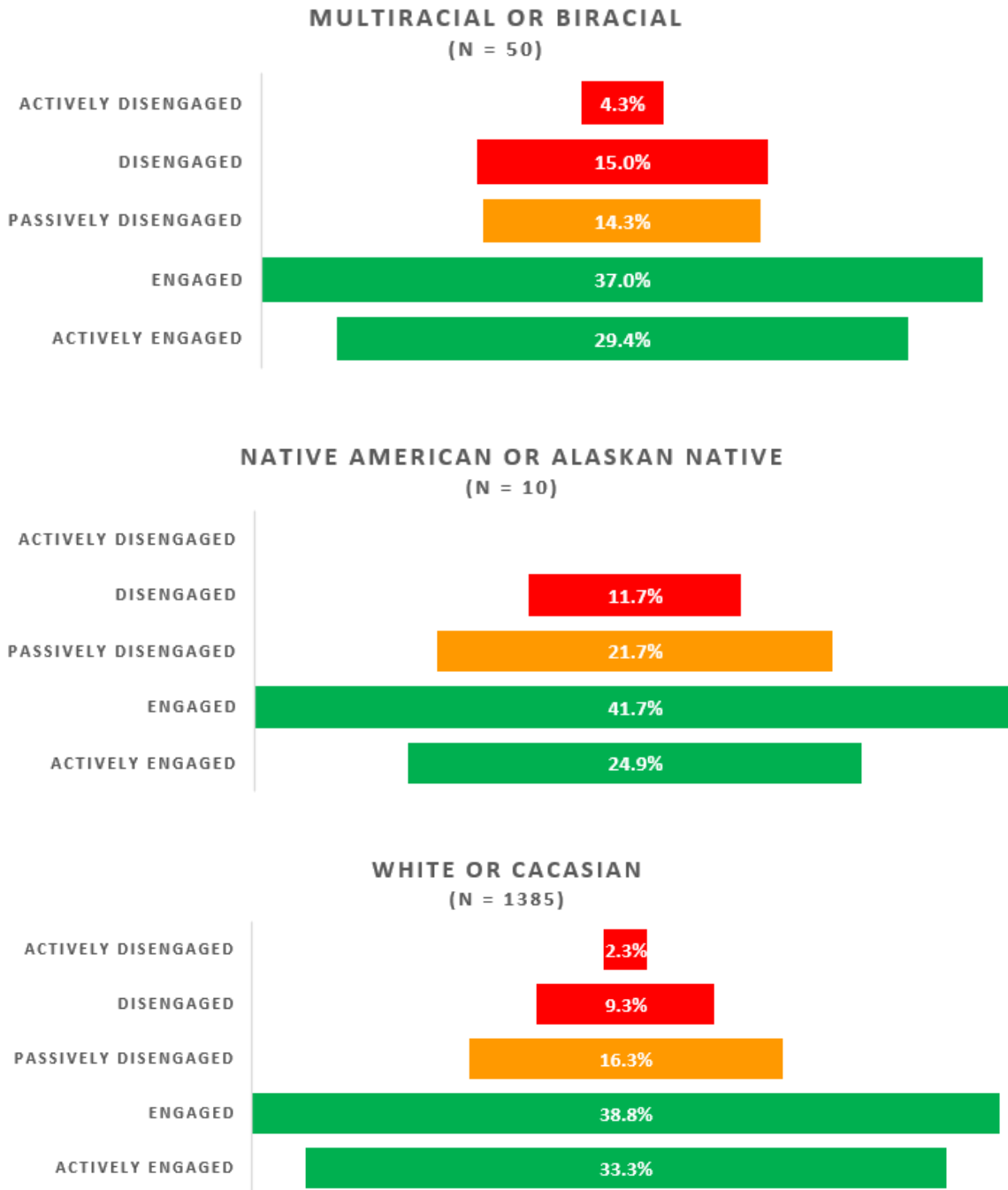


TABLE 3: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – JOB LEVEL

Mid-level managers are the least engaged group as compared to individual contributors and executives (i.e., VP and above) (refer to Table 3 and Exhibit 11). These results are not too surprising when you consider that mid-level managers are frequently overworked and literally caught in the middle. Studies have shown that the “disillusioned middle” is a real phenomenon. For example, mid-career professionals (Cook, 2021) and mid-level managers (Gallup, 2015; Harter, 2019) are the least engaged talent segments in general. In this study, CEO/Presidents are either the most senior executive for a consulting firm or those who identified themselves as self-employed and working as an external HR and/or management consultant.

	ACTIVELY DISENGAGED	DISENGAGED	PASSIVELY DISENGAGED	ENGAGED	ACTIVELY ENGAGED
CEO/PRESIDENT (N = 42)	5.2%	1.2%	3.2%	27.3%	63.1%
CHRO (N = 216)	2.1%	3.0%	7.3%	34.8%	52.8%
EVP/SVP (N = 24)	0.0%	1.4%	7.6%	42.4%	48.6%
VP (N = 97)	2.4%	4.0%	9.5%	37.1%	47.0%
DIRECTOR (N = 477)	3.6%	10.9%	25.8%	29.5%	30.2%
MANAGER/ SUPERVISOR (N = 590)	3.8%	18.5%	17.1%	39.4%	21.2%
INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR (N = 586)	2.4%	7.6%	13.8%	43.1%	33.1%

EXHIBIT 11: ENGAGEMENT BY JOB LEVEL

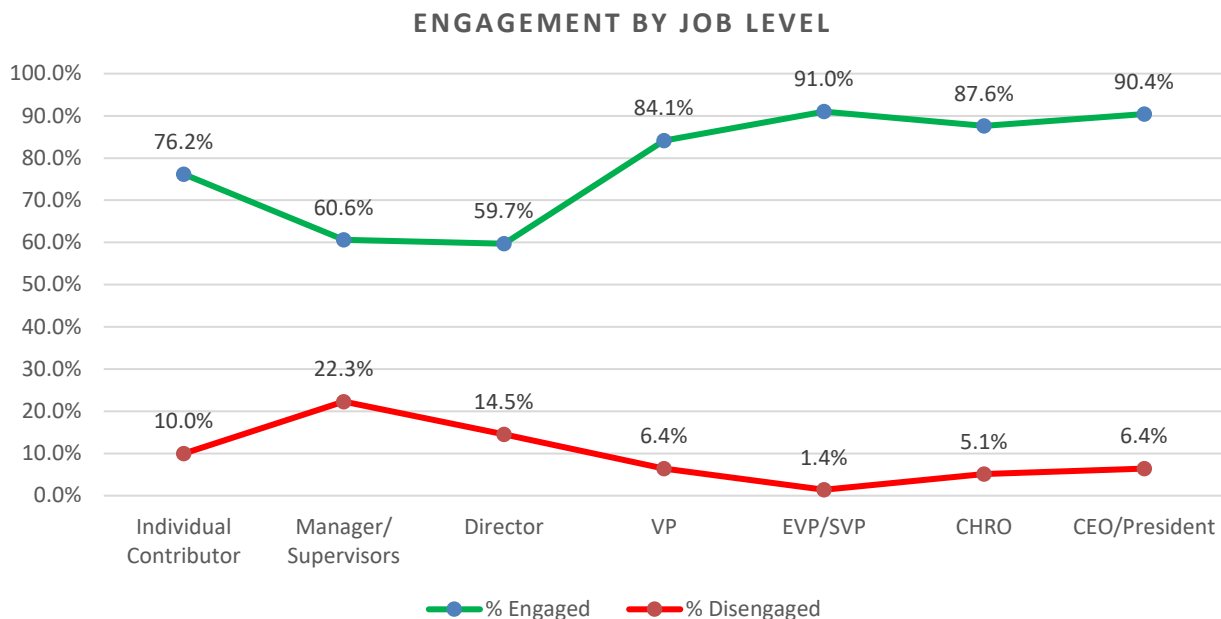


TABLE 4: OVERALL ENGAGEMENT – HR FUNCTIONAL AREA

	ACTIVELY DISENGAGED	DISENGAGED	PASSIVELY DISENGAGED	ENGAGED	ACTIVELY ENGAGED
EXTERNAL CONSULTANT (N = 100)	2.8%	4.5%	8.5%	32.3%	51.9%
EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY/HR COMPLIANCE (N = 22)	0.0%	9.1%	12.9%	35.7%	42.3%
HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING/STRATEGY (N = 147)	2.2%	7.2%	15.7%	33.4%	41.5%
STAFFING (TALENT ACQUISITION/ RECRUITMENT) (N = 134)	3.4%	9.8%	12.0%	37.1%	37.7%
HR/PEOPLE/ WORKFORCE/TALENT ANALYTICS (N = 81)	2.9%	9.7%	14.4%	37.2%	35.8%
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (LEARNING, TALENT DEVELOPMENT, ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT) (N = 147)	3.4%	9.4%	14.6%	35.4%	37.2%
EMPLOYEE AND LABOR RELATIONS (N = 149)	1.4%	9.5%	17.6%	37.8%	33.7%
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND APPRAISAL SYSTEMS (N = 18)	1.9%	12.1%	14.8%	45.4%	25.8%
COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS/ TOTAL REWARDS (N=137)	3.3%	9.6%	16.6%	39.8%	30.7%
HR BUSINESS PARTNER/GENERALIST (N = 977)	3.1%	10.6%	16.6%	35.8%	33.9%
HUMAN CAPITAL TECHNOLOGY (DIGITAL HR/HRIS) (N = 33)	4.5%	10.1%	16.7%	40.4%	28.3%
HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY, AND RISK MANAGEMENT (N = 15)	15.6%	5.6%	12.2%	40.0%	26.6%
HR OPERATIONS, SERVICES, AND ADMINISTRATION (N = 43)	5.4%	12.4%	20.6%	39.2%	22.4%
DEI AND BELONGING (N = 2)	0.0%	41.7%	41.7%	16.6%	0.0%

In terms of HR functional area, external consultants are the most engaged group, followed by equal employment opportunity/HR compliance, human resource planning/strategy, staffing including talent acquisition/recruitment, and HR/people/workforce/talent analytics (see Table 4).

Participants who identified themselves as DEI and belonging professionals are the least engaged functional area. However, this group is only comprised of two respondents (N = 2) and therefore, no meaningful conclusions can be made. HR operations, services, and administration and health, safety, security, and risks management had relatively lower engagement levels than other HR functional areas (refer to Table 4).

HR business partners/generalists represented approximately 48% of all respondents in this study and are by far the largest HR functional area (N = 977) in this study. Over 69% of HR business partners/generalists reported being “engaged” and nearly 31% reported being “disengaged” which is consistent with the engagement levels for all respondents overall.

HR business partners/generalists wear many hats and do not always have the luxury to leverage help from a center of expertise (COE) or shared service function – particularly at small to mid-sized organizations. This group represents the heart and soul of the HR profession and serves as an overall barometer for employee engagement among all HR professionals in this study. Today, HR professionals are working harder than ever, and stress and burnout are on the rise.



ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS: THE USUAL SUSPECTS

There are countless factors, resources, and employee value propositions that drive employee engagement. *The Conference Board* conducted a meta-analytic study that identified the most common engagement drivers in the research literature (Ray, Powers, & Stathatos, 2012).

As a result of their study, these 11 drivers are considered the most common and impactful across all studies examined:

- Trust and integrity
- Nature of the job
- Line of sight between individual performance and company performance
- Career growth opportunities
- Pride about the company
- Coworker/team members
- Employee development
- Personal relationship with one's manager
- Pay fairness
- Personal influence
- Well-being



These drivers represent the 'usual suspects' and tend to miss the mark for critical talent segments – e.g., high performers, high potentials, current leaders, aspiring leaders.

More recently, *Glint* identified the following seven factors that enable people to do their best work (Kitto, 2020):

- Meaningful work
- Career growth
- Empowerment
- Belonging
- Recognition
- Leadership
- Fulfilling work relationships

The present study included a comprehensive list of 57 drivers from the employee engagement literature (e.g., Lee, Rocco, & Shuck, 2020). Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each driver has an impact on their own engagement (i.e., what matters most for HR professionals). The top 25 drivers (in rank order) for all respondents are presented in the tables that follow. While the usual suspects are evident for all individual respondents as a whole – the mix of drivers differ significantly by talent segment (e.g., see Table 5, 6, and 7 respectively).

TABLE 5: ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS – ALL RESPONDENTS

HR professionals were asked to rate the drivers that have the biggest impact on their own engagement. The top 25 drivers (in rank order) for all respondents shown below. Ethics, trust, and integrity topped the list for all HR professionals.

RANK	WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR HR PROFESSIONALS (N = 2032)	MEAN
1	Ethical Workplace/Work Environment	4.54
2	Trust & Integrity in the Leadership	4.51
3	Compassionate Leader/Manager Behavior	4.35
4	Meaningful Work	4.32
5	Immediate Manager/Supervisor Quality	4.29
6	Workplace Culture	4.29
7	Work–Life Balance	4.26
8	Coworker/Team Member Quality	4.23
9	Wellness and Well-being Programs/Interventions	4.22
10	Relationship with Immediate Manager/Leader	4.21
11	Job Fit	4.17
12	Access to Information/Sharing Information	4.17
13	Total Compensation/Enumeration	4.17
14	Vacation/Personal Time Off	4.16
15	Senior Leadership Quality	4.15
16	Remote Work/Flexible Arrangements	4.14
17	Decision Making Authority/Decision Rights	4.09
18	Relationships with Coworkers/Team Members	4.07
19	Job Security	4.05
20	Fair and Accurate Performance Appraisal/Evaluation System	4.05
21	Organizational Performance/Effectiveness/Success	4.05
22	Pride About the Organization	4.02
23	Learning and Development Opportunities	4.01
24	Advancement & Promotion Opportunities	3.98
25	Team Climate	3.96

TABLE 6: ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS – SENIOR HR LEADERS (CHRO, EVP, SVP, VP)

While the usual suspects do matter to senior HR leaders – they appear to serve as secondary drivers for this talent segment. The factors that matter most to senior HR leaders include ethics, trust, and integrity as well as decision making authority/decision rights, access to budget/resources, and organizational structure. Such factors represent the primary drivers of engagement and make intuitive sense for senior leaders. After all, having a fair amount of decision-making latitude and ample fiscal resources are critical success factors for any senior leader. Additionally, how a senior HR leader is positioned in the organizational hierarchy matters in terms of strategic alignment, influence, and legitimacy. For example, senior HR leaders generally prefer to have a direct reporting relationship to the CEO or C-suite. In short, the primary drivers that matter most for senior HR leaders extend beyond the popular notion that it is all about the quality and effectiveness of the immediate manager (Clifton & Harter, 2019).

RANK	WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR SENIOR HR LEADERS (N = 337)	MEAN
1	Trust & Integrity in the Leadership	4.68
2	Ethical Workplace/Work Environment	4.60
3	Decision Making Authority/Decision Rights	4.49
4	Access to Budget/Fiscal Resources	4.45
5	Organizational Structure	4.43
6	Senior Leadership Quality	4.41
7	Meaningful Work	4.40
8	Compassionate Leader/Manager Behavior	4.38
9	Workplace Culture	4.38
10	Immediate Manager/Supervisor Quality	4.38
11	Relationship with Immediate Manager/Leader	4.35
12	Coworker/Team Member Quality	4.32
13	Job Fit	4.26
14	Positional Authority	4.26
15	Access to Information/Sharing Information	4.24
16	Organizational Leadership Opportunities (opportunities to lead a business unit, function, or department with significant mission and charter ownership, human resource responsibility, fiscal/budgetary accountability, and decision rights)	4.23
17	Direct Reports Quality	4.23
18	Wellness and Well-being Programs/Interventions	4.19
19	Pride About the Organization	4.18
20	Organizational Performance/Effectiveness/Success	4.16
21	Directly Leading and Managing People	4.16
22	Team Climate	4.14
23	Relationships with Coworkers/Team Members	4.12
24	Executive Visibility	4.12
25	Personal Influence	4.10

TABLE 7: ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS – “ASPIRING HR LEADERS”

Participants were asked whether they aspire to assume a senior executive or C-level position in their HR career. They were also asked to complete a brief, 5-item *Achievement/Ambition Scale* that was developed by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). The data were analyzed to identify respondents with both C-level aspirations and a high ambition and achievement orientation (N = 648). As expected, this group of HR professionals identified a unique set of engagement drivers such as advancement and promotion opportunities, job title, decision-making authority/decision rights, organizational leadership opportunities, executive visibility, and total compensation/enumeration. The usual suspects are also evident although they take a backseat to what matters most for HR professionals on the fast track to the executive suite.

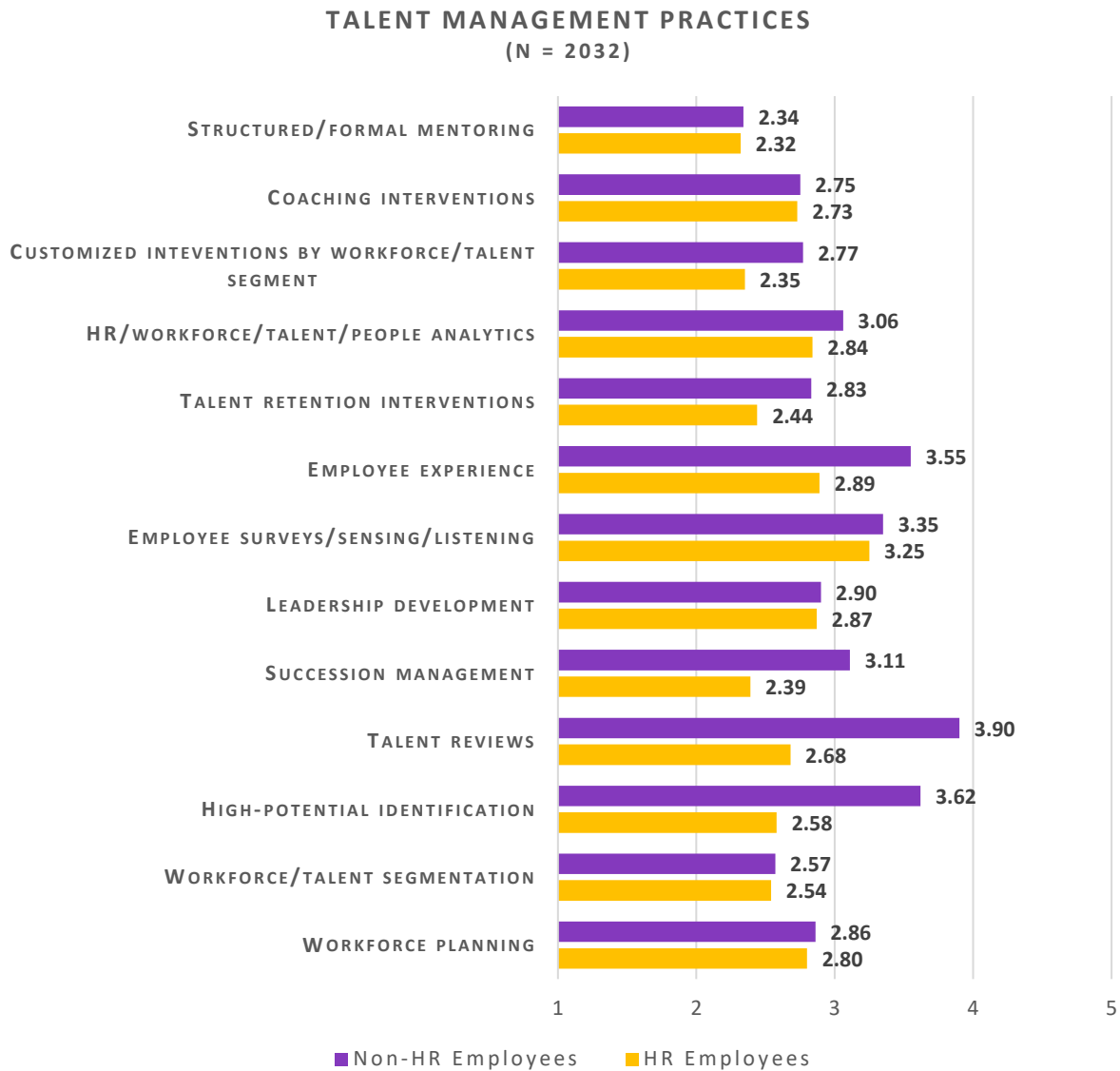
RANK	WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR “ASPIRING HR LEADERS” (N = 648)	MEAN
1	Advancement & Promotion Opportunities	4.71
2	Ethical Workplace/Work Environment	4.52
3	Trust & Integrity in the Leadership	4.49
4	Job Title (EVP, VP, Director)	4.43
5	Decision Making Authority/Decision Rights	4.42
6	Meaningful Work	4.41
7	Compassionate Leader/Manager Behavior	4.38
8	Wellness and Well-being Programs/Interventions	4.37
9	Total Compensation/Enumeration	4.35
10	Workplace Culture	4.34
11	Work–Life Balance	4.31
12	Organizational Leadership Opportunities (opportunities to lead a business unit, function, or department with significant mission and charter ownership, human resource responsibility, fiscal/budgetary accountability, and decision rights)	4.29
13	Executive Visibility	4.27
14	Coworker/Team Member Quality	4.26
15	Job Fit	4.26
16	Senior Leadership Quality	4.21
17	Vacation/Personal Time Off	4.21
18	Remote Work/Flexible Arrangements	4.20
19	Access to Information/Sharing Information	4.20
20	Learning and Development Opportunities	4.19
21	Fair and Accurate Performance Appraisal/Evaluation System	4.14
22	Immediate Manager/Supervisor Quality	4.13
23	Organizational Performance/Effectiveness/Success	4.10
24	Pride About the Organization	4.09
25	Relationships with Coworkers/Team Members	4.06

Note: there is no way of knowing whether any of the individual respondents in this group are considered high-performers and/or high-potentials at their organizations. Nonetheless, the results demonstrate that engagement drivers are likely to differ by various talent segments who share similar characteristics, values, preferences, and career goals and aspirations.

DO THE COBBLER’S CHILDREN HAVE SHOES?

HR professionals were asked to rate the extent to which their organization engages in talent management practices for non-HR employees as well as HR employees. Overall, HR professionals reported that their organizations are implementing talent management practices “to a moderate extent” (refer to Exhibit 11). Of the 13 talent management practices included in this study, there is general equivalence between non-HR employees and HR employees across eight talent management practice areas including leadership development, structured mentoring, and coaching in terms of growth and development. Other areas in which there was parity include people analytics, workforce planning, workforce segmentation, and employee surveys and sensing.

EXHIBIT 11: TALENT MANAGEMENT – HR AND NON-HR EMPLOYEES



However, respondents reported significant differences when it comes to critical talent management practices – namely (1) talent reviews, (2) high-potential identification, (3) succession management, (4) talent retention interventions, and (5) overall employee experience. Although HR professionals are receiving growth and development opportunities and participating in some organizational-wide practices (e.g., people analytics, employee surveys), they are arguably left out of the most important talent management practices related to career advancement and leadership succession. These results suggest that the “cobbler’s children have no shoes” when it comes to managing top HR talent.

A survey respondent shared the following comments that sums up the perplexing and problematic consensus and sentiment on talent management for HR professionals.

“Our company implemented an integrated talent management program about six years ago. The HR business partner team works closely with the Talent Enablement COE to facilitate an annual talent review process for each business division and function. Since I’ve been with the company, we have not held a single talent review process for the HR organization... When I asked about this, I was told that talent management is for the business – not HR.”

- Director, Human Resources @ Mid-Size Bio-Technology Firm



CLOSING THOUGHTS

Measuring employee engagement alone is not enough – unless we can identify what matters most to employees by various talent segments – including HR professionals. In their groundbreaking book, *Workforce of One – Revolutionizing Talent Management Through Customization*, Susan Cantrell and David Smith argue that companies serious about talent management need to replace generic, one-size-fits-all practices with strategies tailored to each person’s unique strengths, motivations, career aspirations and values (Cantrell & Smith, 2010).

For the past decade however, it has been fashionable to contend that the drivers of employee engagement are all about the manager. More recently, there is a growing trend to ignore talent segmentation and engagement drivers altogether with a greater focus on the notion of employee experience and workplace culture or newfangled concepts such as employee fulfillment and employee thriving (e.g., Klinghoffer & McCune, 2022). Indeed, all crucial areas of focus. However, a sole strategy around employee experience or workplace culture, arguably lets the C-suite off the hook in terms of employing a differentiated talent management and employee engagement strategy by various talent segments and lends itself to a one-size-fits-all approach. Such as strategy begs the question: For whom are we designing an employee experience and workplace culture? What might be an awesome employee experience and workplace culture for employees as a whole, might miss the mark or alienate an organization’s best and brightest and lead to disengagement and undesired attrition.

As HR professionals, we can do better and we have an obligation to raise the bar by offering a flexible, yet targeted set of employee value propositions (EVPs) to various talent segments. Creating a positive employee experience and workplace culture are important, but it is unlikely to retain high-potentials, aspiring leaders, or anyone else with a modicum of career ambition – unless organizations design and deliver the right mix of rewards and resources that matter most to critical talent segments. Recent i4CP research confirmed that burnout was the top reason employees were giving for leaving their organizations followed by a lack of advancement opportunities, compensation, and requiring remote employees to return to the workplace (Lykins, 2021). Yet, organizations curiously ignore unpopular or inconvenient factors and continue to offer the usual suspects when it comes to designing their EVPs.

This research, while focused on HR professionals, provides support for a differentiated talent management and employee engagement strategy while avoiding a one-size-fits all approach. It also provides a business case for talent segmentation and measuring engagement on a regular cadence to pinpoint the underlying drivers that matter most to critical talent segments. Further, this research elucidates the current state of engagement of HR professionals. Nearly 70% of HR professionals in this study are engaged, but stress and burnout are on the rise which jeopardizes the extent to which these engagement levels can be sustained in the long run. Lastly, this research identified clear gaps when it comes to HR professionals’ participation in critical talent management activities. While HR professionals play a leading role in the design and delivery of integrated talent management in the workplace, they are rarely on the receiving end, which is perplexing and problematic. HR professionals play a vital role in delivering business value and cultivating a positive employee experience and workplace culture within their organizations and are therefore, worthy and deserving of the same.

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This study was conducted in partnership with Drexel University, a top 100 Carnegie Research I institution and global leader in experiential education. The sample population for the study was drawn from a proprietary email distribution list from HRCI®. A snowball sampling approach was used. The information and commentary in this report reflect the research and studied opinions of the principal researcher and author – Dr. Salvatore Falletta, GPHR, Professor and Director, Human Resource Development, Leadership, and Organization Studies at Drexel University. For specific questions about the study findings and results, please contact Dr. Salvatore Falletta at salvatore.falletta@drexel.edu.

