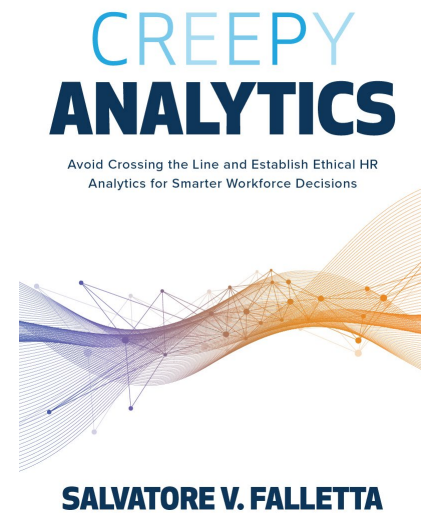# HR Professional's Employee Engagement – Do the Cobbler's Children Have Shoes?

Dr. Salvatore Falletta, Drexel University and HR Intelligence

Salvatore V. Falletta

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- ❑ Distinguished Principal Research Fellow at The Conference Board

- ❑ Former Vice President and CHRO at a Fortune 1000

- ❑ Held senior HR leadership roles at Nortel, Intel, SAP, and Sun Microsystems
  — Head, Global HR Research & Analytics at Intel
  — Led Learning Measurement and Evaluation at Nortel

- ❑ Author (30+ publications including articles, reports, books, and book chapters)
  — *Creepy Analytics – Avoid Crossing the Line and Establish Ethical HR Analytics for Smarter Workforce Decisions (March 1st, 2024, McGraw-Hill)*

CREEPY ANALYTICS
Avoid Crossing the Line and Establish Ethical HR Analytics for Smarter Workforce Decisions

SALVATORE V. FALLETTA

Purpose of the Study

- The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the **primary drivers** (i.e., factors, variables, value propositions, and resources) that affect **employee engagement** among **HR professionals**.

- A corollary purpose of this research is to examine how these **engagement drivers** vary by **workforce segment** and other **demographic variables** and to determine the extent to which organizations implement **talent management** for HR professionals.

Research Design and Sample

❑ The sample population for this study was drawn from a *HR Certification Institute's* membership

❑ An email invitation with an embedded URL to a web-based survey was sent to HR professionals worldwide

❑ Snowball sampling was also performed via various HR *LinkedIn* Groups (SHRM, ATD) and other HR professional associations

❑ In total, **2032** HR professionals completed the survey

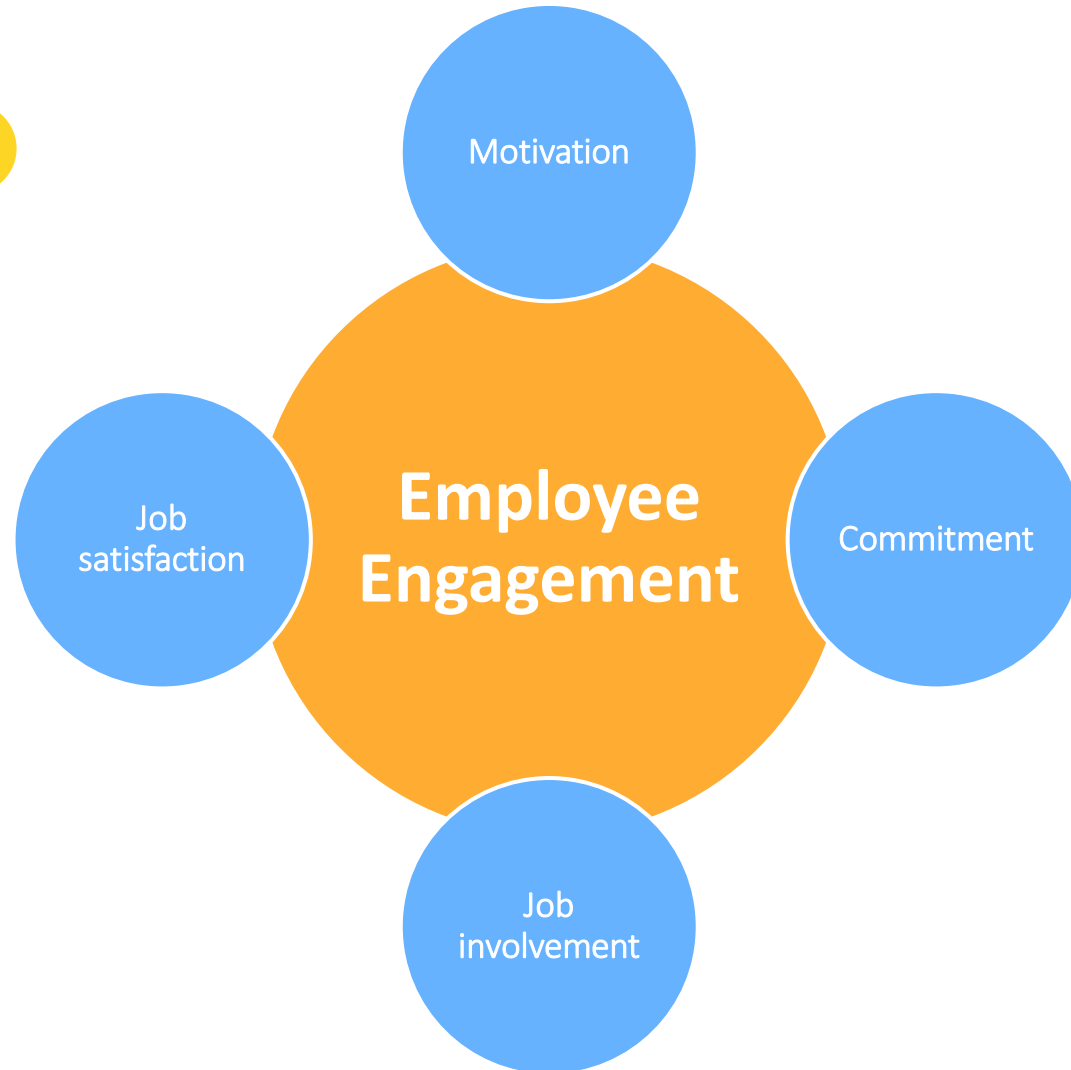# The Meaning and Madness of Employee Engagement
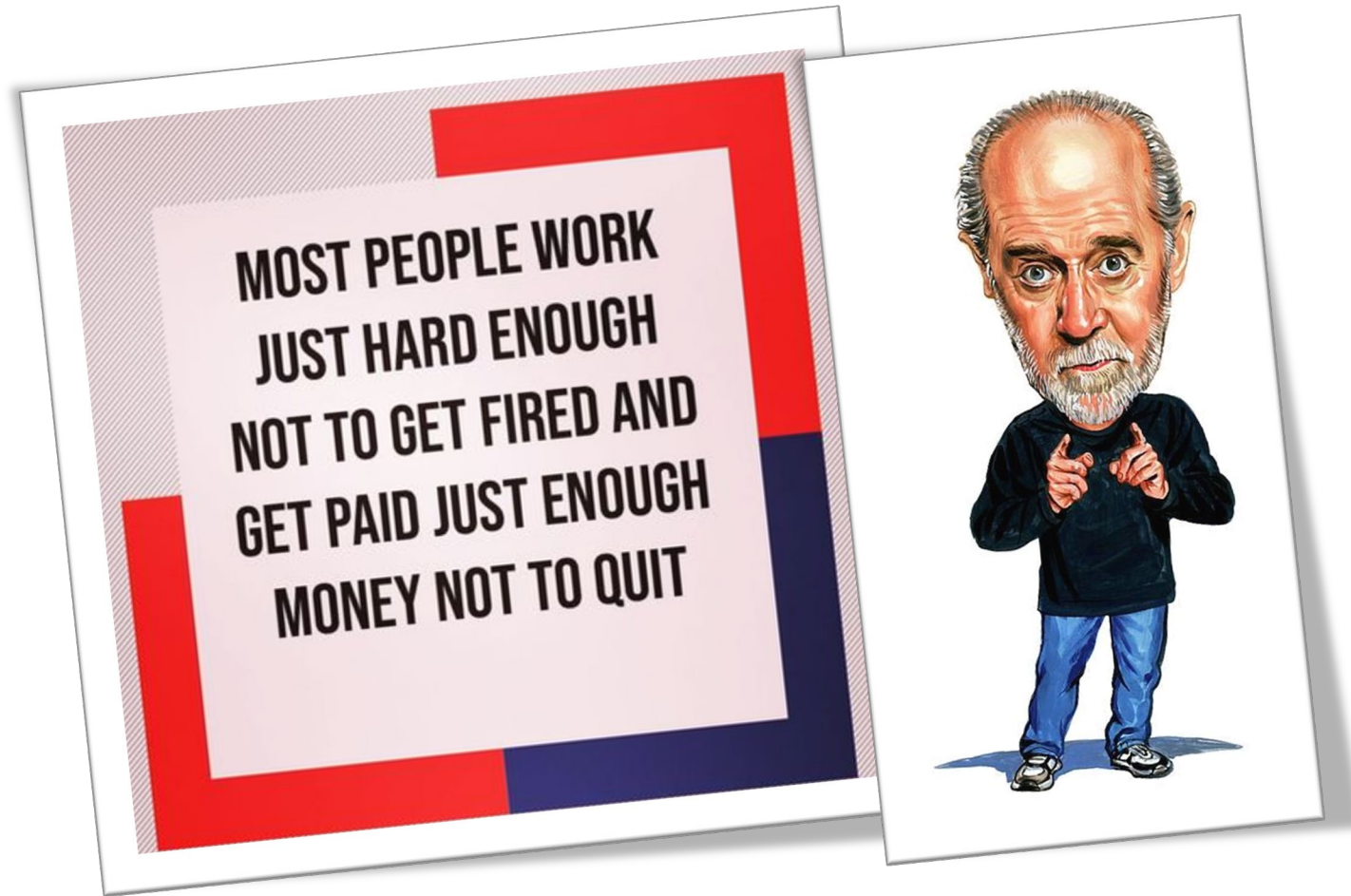
The Concept of Employee Engagement

THE JANGLE FALLACY... ?

- Macy & Schneider, 2008
- Pugh, Dietz, Brief, & Wiley, 2008
- Newman, Joseph, Sparkman, & Carpenter, 2011

Motivation

Employee Engagement

Job satisfaction

Commitment

Job involvement

A Promising Concept

FURTHER RESEARCH IS NEEDED

- Kahn, 1990
- Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011
- Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011;
- Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi & Nimon, 2012

Some Madness

Confusing and Competing Definitions of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement involves the <u>cognitive</u>, <u>emotional</u> and <u>behavioral</u> relationship employees have with their jobs, co-workers, and organizations, and the effort and enthusiasm they put into their daily work (i.e., the extent to which employees contribute their discretionary energy and effort on behalf of the organizations they serve) (Falletta, 2008).

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
A Multidimensional Concept

THINK

FEEL

ACT
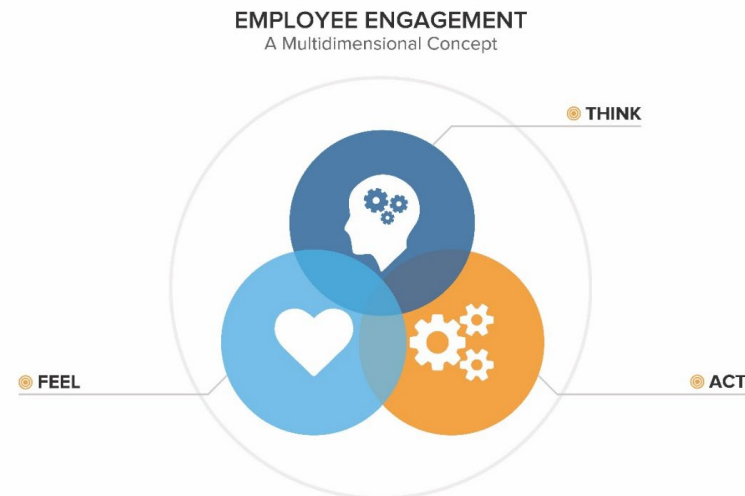
Employee engagement as a positive, active, work-related psychological state operationalized by the maintenance, intensity, and direction of <u>cognitive</u>, <u>emotional</u>, and <u>behavioral</u> energy (Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2017).

CONTRIBUTING TO THE MADNESS

IS THE BELIEF THAT WE NEED A NEWER, SEXIER LABEL OR AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT PROXY MEASURE…

Employee Engagement [1] → Employee Passion [2] → Employee Fulfillment [3] → Employee Thriving [4] → 'Employee Ecstasy'
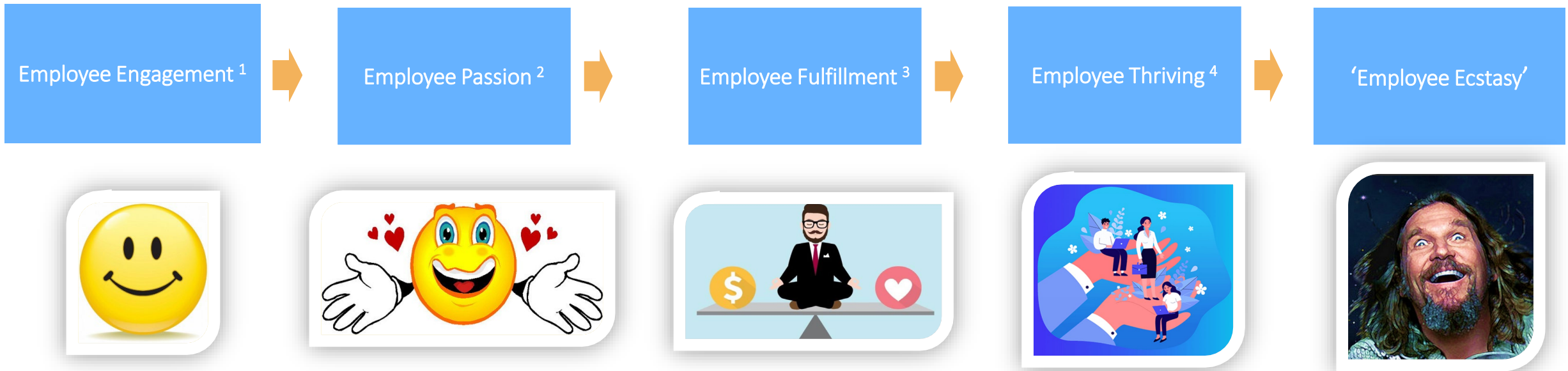
1. Kahn, W. A. (1990) Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal.* 33 (4), 692-724

2. Zigarmi, D., Nimon, K., Houson, D., Witt, D., & Diel, J. (2011). Beyond engagement: Toward a framework and operational definition for employee work passion. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 8 (3),* 300–326 (This research was conducted largely by and for The Ken Blanchard Company).

3. Schiemann, W. (2018). Beyond engagement: Fulfillment as a competitive advantage. *People & Strategy*. https://www.shrm.org/executive/resources/people-strategy-journal/fall-2018/pages/beyond-engagement.aspx.

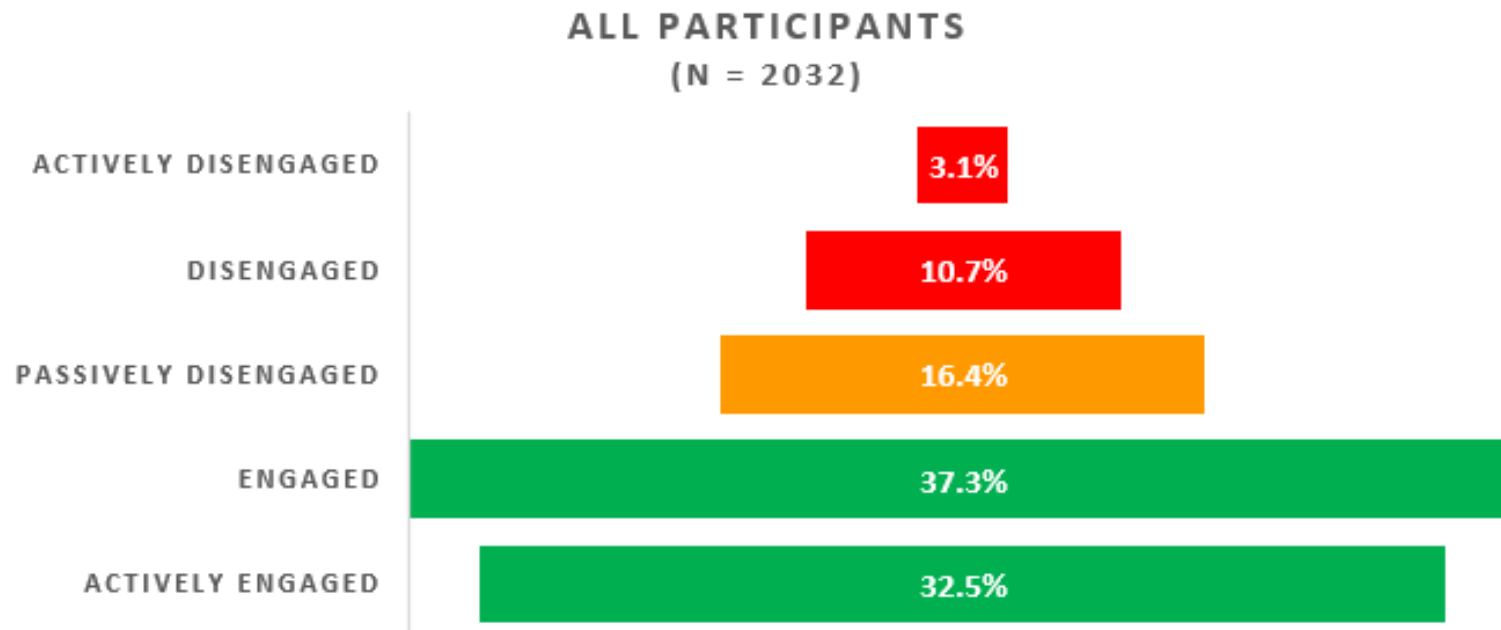4. Klinghoffer, D., & McCune, E. (2022). Why Microsoft measures employee thriving, not engagement, *Harvard Business Review*, June 24, 2022, https://hbr.org/2022/06/why-microsoft-measures-employee-thriving-not-engagement.

Study Results

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.[13]

Overall, HR professionals reported moderate to high levels of engagement. The total average engagement score for all respondents was **3.86** (refer to the Table).

Overall Engagement – All HR Participants (N = 2032)

ALL PARTICIPANTS
(N = 2032)

ACTIVELY DISENGAGED	3.1%
DISENGAGED	10.7%
PASSIVELY DISENGAGED	16.4%
ENGAGED	37.3%
ACTIVELY ENGAGED	32.5%

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"

Engagement by Job Level

ENGAGEMENT BY JOB LEVEL

→ % Engaged   → % Disengaged

	INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR	MANAGER/ SUPERVISORS	DIRECTOR	VP	EVP/SVP	CHRO	CEO/PRESIDENT
% Engaged	76.2%	60.6%	59.7%	84.1%	91.0%	87.6%	90.4%
% Disengaged	10.0%	22.3%	14.5%	6.4%	1.4%	5.1%	6.4%
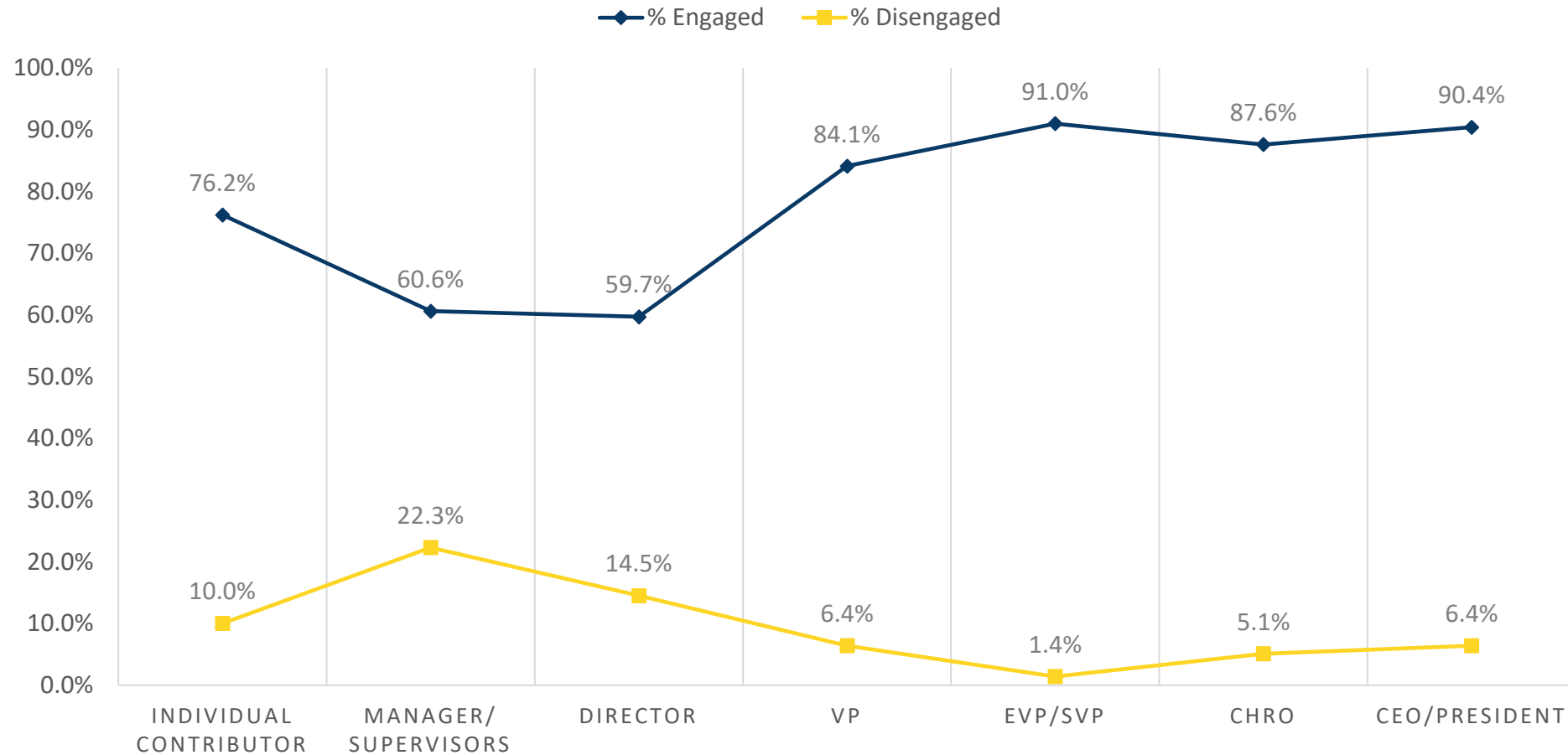
Engagement by Job Function

1. External consultant: 84.2% (n = 100)

2. Equal employment opportunity/HR compliance: 78.0% (n = 22)

3. Human resource planning/strategy: 74.9% (n = 147)

4. Staffing including talent acquisition/recruitment: 74.8% (n = 134)

5. HR/people/workforce/talent analytics: 73.0% (n = 81)

6. HRD, learning, talent development, and/or organization development: 72.6% (n = 174)

7. Employee and labor relations: 71.5% (n = 149)

8. Performance management and appraisal systems: 71.2% (n = 18)

9. Compensation and benefits/total rewards: 70.5% (n = 137)

10. HR business partner/generalist: 69.7% (n = 977)

11. Human capital technology, digital HR, and/or HRIS: 68.7% (n = 33)

12. Health, safety, security, and risk management: 66.6% (n = 15)

13. HR operations, services, and administration: 61.6% (n = 43)

14. DEI and belonging: 16% (n = 2)

Measuring Employee Engagement Alone is Not Enough
The Drivers Matter

The Conference Board
(Ray, et al, 2012)

- 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

Glint
(Kitto, 2020)

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

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

A Big List of Engagement Drivers*

Access to Budget/Fiscal Resources	Health Benefits	Pride About the Organization
Access to Information/Sharing Information	Immediate Manager/Supervisor Quality (including your manager's talent, competencies, behaviors, and effectiveness)	Recognition
Advancement & Promotion Opportunities	Intrapreneurship Opportunities (opportunities to launch a new business, product, or service within your organization)	Relationship with Immediate Manager/Leader
Clarity Between Job/Role, Individual Goals, and Organizational Strategy	Job Fit (the job fits your skills, interest, preferences, and personality)	Relationships with Coworkers/Team Members
Coaching and Mentoring Opportunities	Job Security	Remote Work/Flexible Arrangements
Compassionate Leader/Manager Behavior (leaders/managers exhibit empathy, integrity, presence, authenticity)	Job Title (EVP, VP, Director)	Retirement Benefits (e.g., 401K/403B, Pension Plan, Retirement Program)
Core Values of the Organization	Learning and Development Opportunities	Senior Leadership Quality (including their talent, competencies, behaviors, and effectiveness)
Coworker/Team Member Quality (including their talent, competencies, behaviors, and effectiveness)	Location (e.g., organization is in a desirable location/city/town or major career hub)	Start-Up/Entrepreneurship Opportunities/Be Your Own Boss
Creativity and Innovation	Meaningful Work/Job Significance	Status (the prestige, respect, and esteem that you have in the eyes of others)
Cutting-Edge/State-of the Art Tools & Technologies	Meritocracy (rewards are based on individual talent and achievement; pay for performance)	Stock Ownership Plan (e.g., Equity, Stock Options, Preferred Stock)
Decision Making Authority/Decision Rights	Mindfulness Practices and Interventions	Supervisor/Immediate Manager Feedback
Direct Reports Quality (the talent, competencies, behaviors, and effectiveness of those who report to you)	Organizational Culture and Climate	Team Climate
Directly Leading and Managing People	Organizational Image/Reputation/Prestige/Brand	Total Compensation/Enumeration (Base Pay, Bonuses, Commission)
Diversity & Inclusion	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)	Trust & Integrity in the Leadership
Employer of Choice/Great Place to Work	Organizational Performance/Effectiveness/Success	Vacation/Personal Time Off
Ethical Workplace/Work Environment	Personal Brand Opportunity (opportunity to leverage your personal brand externally through organization/company affiliation as a thought leader or recognized expert in one's industry or profession)	Wellness and Well-being Programs/Intervention
Executive Visibility	Personal Influence	Work/Job/Task Variety
Fair and Accurate Performance Appraisal/Evaluation System	Physical Work Environment/Space	Work–Life Balance
Family Support	Positional Authority (the amount of authority you have in your role)	Your Organization's Structure (how your organization is designed, levels, roles, span of control)

*There are literally 100s of engagement drivers

What Matters Most for 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

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

What Matters Most for Senior HR Leaders
CHROs, EVPs, SVPs, VPs

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

Primary Drivers (ranks 1–7)

Secondary Drivers (ranks 8–15)

What Matters Most for "Aspiring HR Leaders"

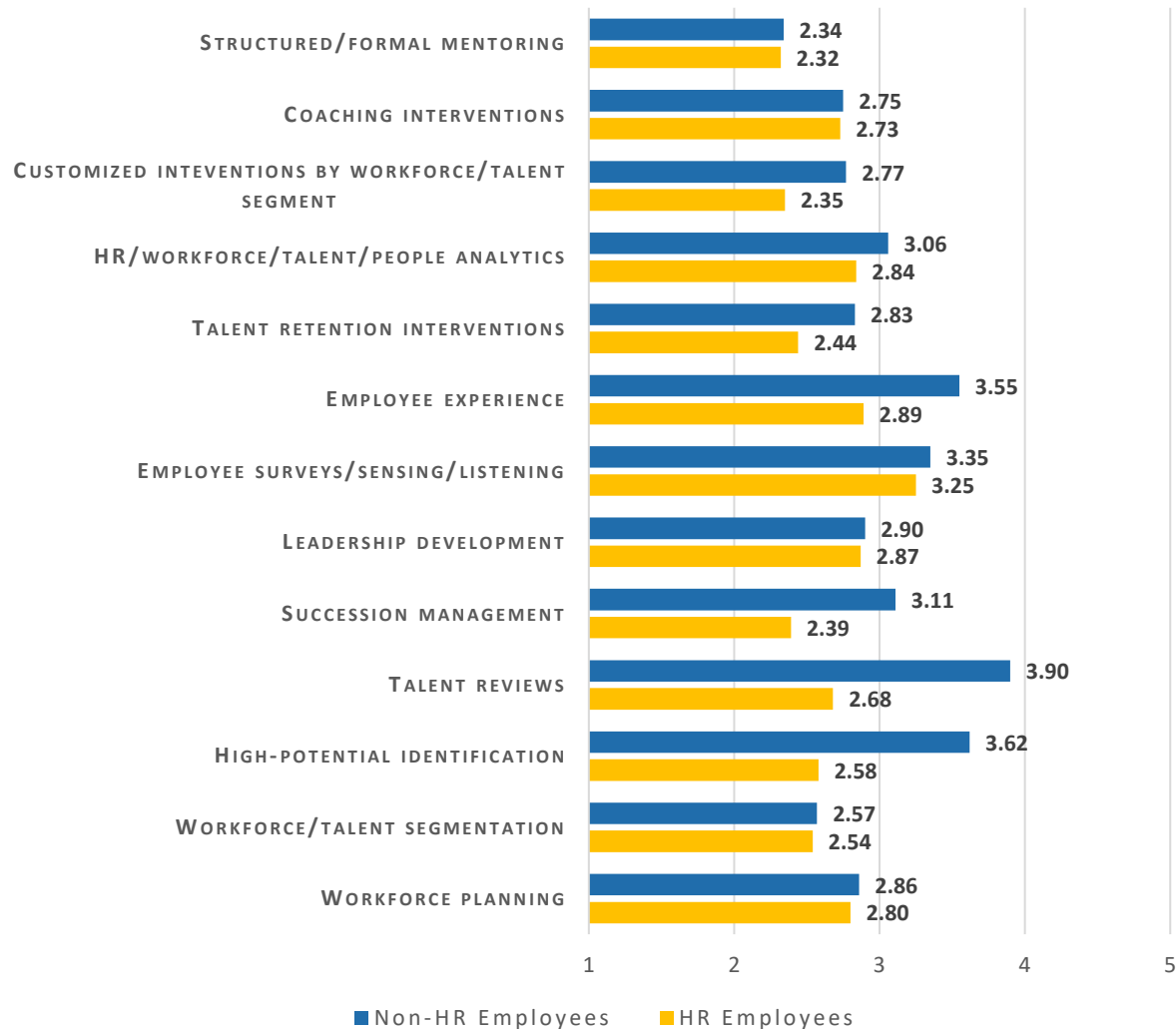*Those with C-suite aspirations and high achievement/ambition orientation*

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

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 Cobblers Children Have Shoes?

TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

(N = 2032)

Practice	Non-HR Employees	HR Employees
Structured/formal mentoring	2.34	2.32
Coaching interventions	2.75	2.73
Customized inteventions by workforce/talent segment	2.77	2.35
HR/workforce/talent/people analytics	3.06	2.84
Talent retention interventions	2.83	2.44
Employee experience	3.55	2.89
Employee surveys/sensing/listening	3.35	3.25
Leadership development	2.90	2.87
Succession management	3.11	2.39
Talent reviews	3.90	2.68
High-potential identification	3.62	2.58
Workforce/talent segmentation	2.57	2.54
Workforce planning	2.86	2.80

■ Non-HR Employees ■ HR Employees

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

(5) overall employee experience, and

(6) customized interventions/EVPs by critical talent segment.

"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*

Too Much YAP about Workplace Culture and Employee Experience

- The notion of workplace culture, and more recently, employee experience are vague and nebulous concepts that frequently let organizations off the hook because they lack specificity

- Ask yourself, for whom are you creating a great place to work and amazing workplace culture and employee experience for?
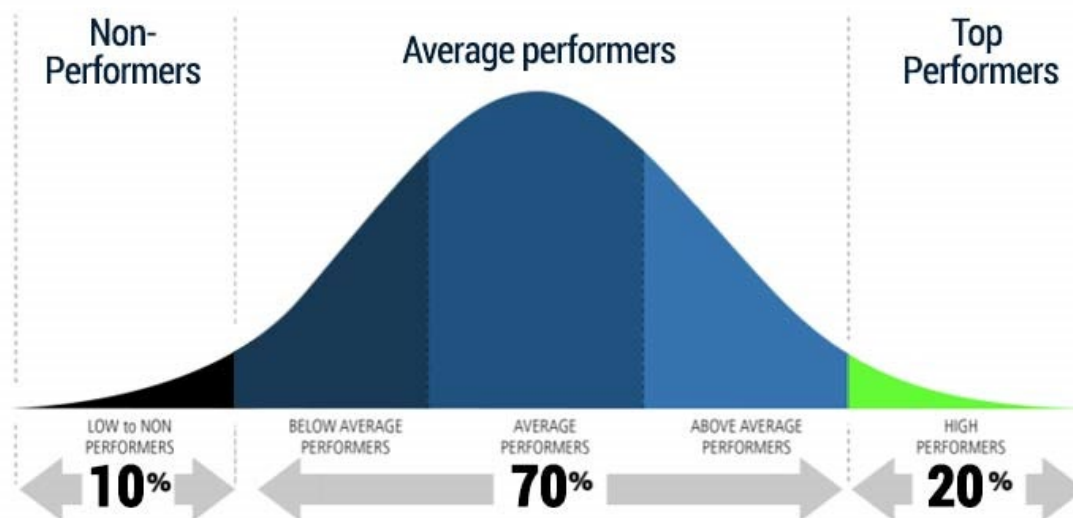
The Devil is in the Details and Drivers

❑ The **usual suspects** do indeed influence employee engagement (**as a whole**)

  ▪ BUT – they tend to miss the mark in terms of what matters most for **critical talent segments** (e.g., high-potential employees, senior leaders, aspiring leaders, and those with any modicum of ambition)

  ▪ It is fashionable and self-serving to claim that **"people leave managers not companies"** (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p. 33)

❑ Many organizations tend to adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach in their efforts to boost employee engagement. They often rely on the "usual suspects" and cite **financial, cultural, political, or structural** constraints as reasons for not implementing a more customized workforce and employee engagement strategy."

The Devil is in the Details and Drivers

❑ Organizations have curiously shifted the narrative away from **engagement drivers and EVPs** to broad and opaque concepts such as **workplace culture** and **employee experience** – to avoid implementing a differentiated workforce and employee engagement strategy tailored to distinct talent segments

❑ More recently, the introduction of new concepts like **employee fulfillment** and **employee thriving** may suggest that organizations can sidestep the responsibility of providing certain drivers or EVPs that the C-suite doesn't agree with simply by creating a new desired outcome

❑ It is crucial that we **customized engagement drivers** that matter most by **various talent segments** and **avoid a "one-size-fits-all"** approach

Employee Listening and Sensing Tools and Toys

Big Data, Big Brother, and Black Boxes

The people/HR analytics movement is calling for less reliance on **traditional web-based employee/organizational survey** data for measuring and monitoring employee engagement and employee behaviors – which lacks transparency and is a little creepy in my opinion.

These tools are efficient, perhaps, for measuring engagement levels and sentiment – but are limited in terms of pinpointing the **specific drivers** that **matter most by various talent segments.**

Hence, traditional employee/organizational surveys are still useful to gather new data on strategic issues and to identify the drivers of engagement.

- Employee Listening Platforms (24/7/365)

- Socio Metrics and Surveillance tools (RF badges and sensors that track employee productivity, collaboration, and whereabouts)

- Natural Language Processing (known as NLP) – an AI that looks at communication and sentiment

- Emerging AI and Machine Learning tools that scrape unstructured data sources (e.g., public LinkedIn profile, Facebook, Instagram)

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