



# Career Engagement Benchmarking

03.19 EDITION



**A best-in-class model — raising the bar  
on talent management practices**



**career  
LABS**  
THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

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# 01. Introduction

## RAISING THE BAR ON TALENT MANAGEMENT

We believe the 2020 workplace will be an environment that facilitates and enables people to use and express their full complement of talents. By allowing employees to bring more of their talents to work and align their purpose and values, organizations will meet employees' career needs while delivering value to shareholders, customers, the community and other stakeholders.

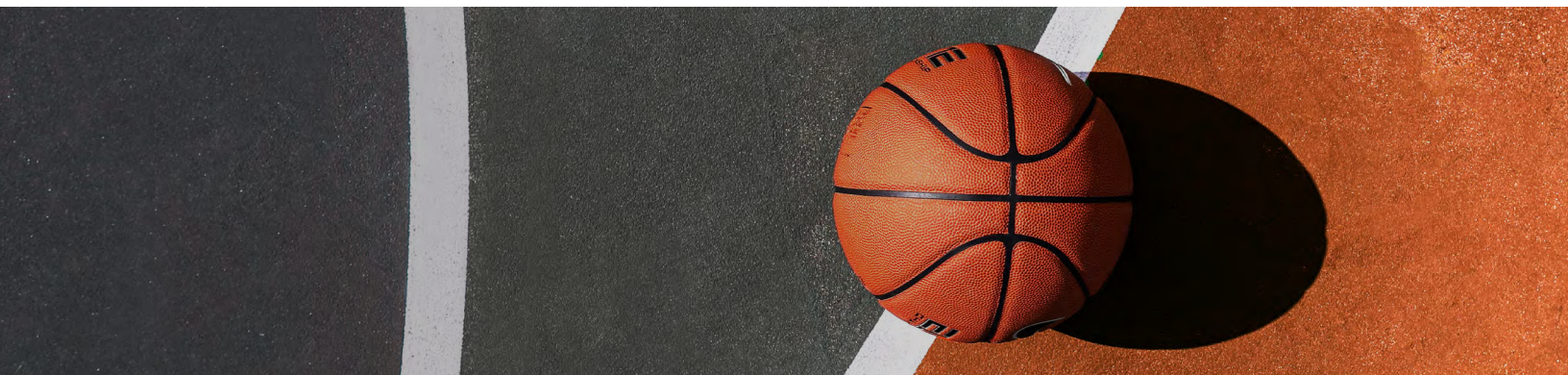
Independent research has now demonstrated a concrete impact of talent management practices on overall business performance. In fact, these studies suggest that approximately half of the difference in financial performance between organizations is determined by internal management and HR practices, as opposed to external market conditions. Prominent among the practices is the ability to attract key performers and develop an internal talent pool through career development Opportunities<sup>1</sup>. This, combined with global turnover trends

showing that the talent wars have now returned in earnest, places the ability to retain and attract mission critical skills and talent firmly at the core of sustainable corporate advantage<sup>2</sup>.

Although improved HR processes can increase revenue growth by up to 2.5 percent<sup>3</sup>, quality research demonstrating exactly how to achieve these outcomes remains scarce. The present research paper, conducted among a sample of over 100 global organizations directly addresses this issue by investigating the state of current talent management and career pathing practices across the globe. It outlines the Best in Class Career Engagement Model, which based on current psychological and management research, demonstrates the effectiveness of these practices as a means to improve bottom line financial outcomes, including overall HR performance, revenue growth per employee, and overall business revenue growth.

**Growing your people is the best way to grow your business.**

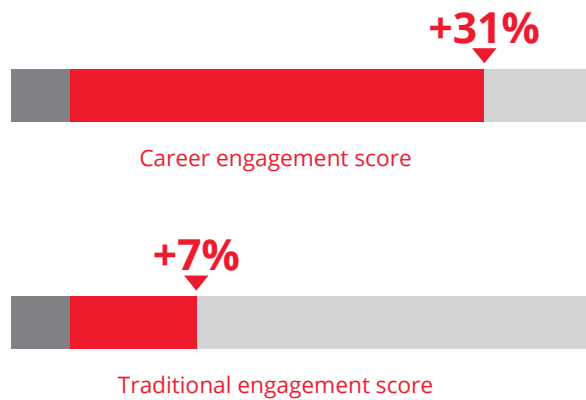
After all, what is an organization if not a collection of people united in pursuit of common goals?



## CAREER DEVELOPMENT IS A POWERFUL DRIVER OF BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

### THE TWO PREDICTORS OF REVENUE GROWTH

The difference between career engagement as opposed to traditional engagement measures as statistical predictors of business revenue growth:

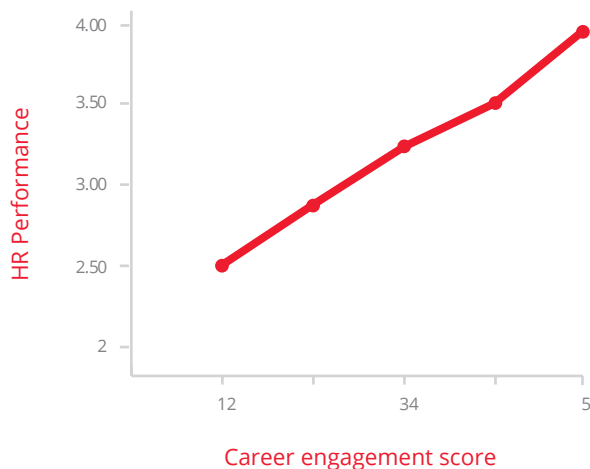


These statistics represent standardized Beta scores of regression analyses.  
 \*\* relationship is significant at a confidence level of .001

Results confirm that career development practices are a key driver of employee engagement, with 73% of responding organizations reporting that this was identified as a key driver of engagement in their organization. Furthermore, career engagement proved a stronger predictor of HR and overall business performance compared to traditional engagement scores.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE ON KEY HR KPIS

The relationship between Career Engagement Score and HR Performance:



Career Engagement Benchmark score was a significant predictor of overall revenue growth and revenue growth per employee, as well as being strongly associated with improvement on a range of key HR performance metrics including reduced attrition, reduced absenteeism and lower overall recruiting costs.

## 02. Career Engagement

### A BEST-IN-CLASS CAREER ENGAGEMENT MODEL

#### WHAT IS CAREER ENGAGEMENT?

Career Engagement is the practice of increasing engagement through effective talent management processes. We define engagement as 'a sustainable positive work-related attitude, characterized by high levels of energy, emotional commitment, and satisfaction derived from the work itself', based on scientifically validated research conducted largely at the University of Utrecht<sup>4</sup>.

Discretionary effort, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which are often confused with engagement, are actually consequences of employees becoming engaged<sup>5</sup>. Although factors in the organizational environment can make it easier for employees to become engaged, they are not engagement itself. Engagement is an attitude, an emotional state.

In short, it's about **loving your work**.

#### INCREASING CAREER ENGAGEMENT

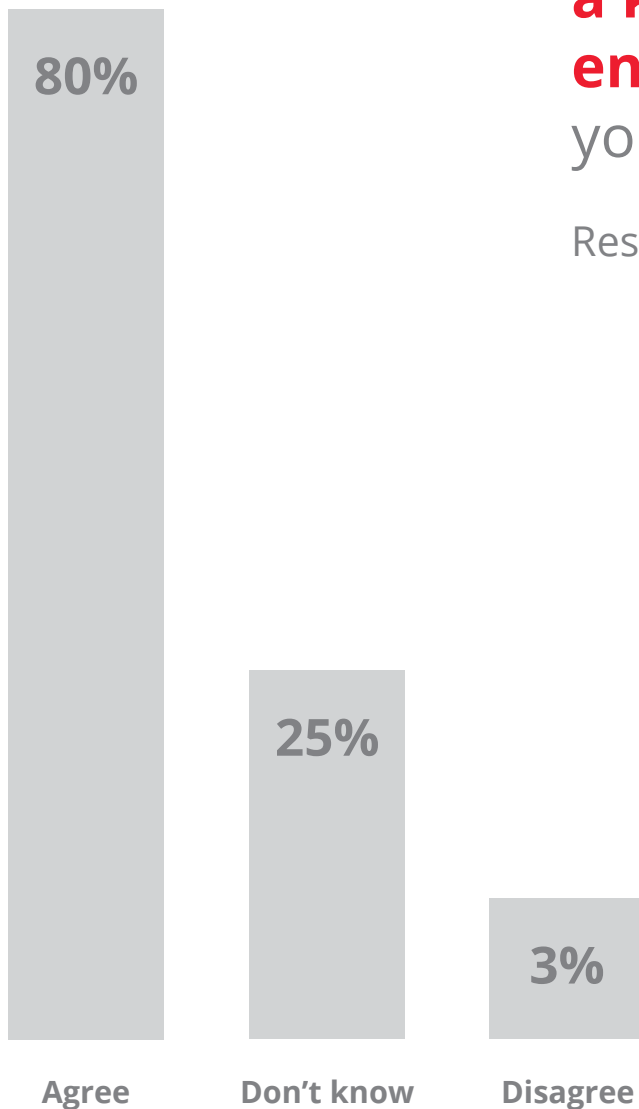
Employees become engaged when the number of positive events at work outweighs negative events, allowing them to thrive<sup>6</sup>. This is more likely to happen when we are able to bring our authentic selves to work, and are engrossed in meaningful tasks that play to our unique talents and abilities<sup>7</sup>. Although engagement occurs in the here and now as a result of finding

satisfaction in one's current role, it is maximized when employees see how performing well in their present job contributes to achieving future success<sup>8</sup>. The only person capable of becoming engaged is the employee themselves, but it is up to the organization, and in particular, to the manager, to provide a climate in which this can occur.

**The only person capable of becoming engaged is the employee** themselves, but it is up to the organization, and in particular, to the manager, to provide a climate in which this can occur.

Has career development been identified as **a key driver of engagement** in your organization?

Respondents: 117



## THE THREE LEVELS OF A CAREER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

We have developed a model of career engagement that benefits organizations across three levels. Employees are empowered to take control of their own careers, while managers are enabled to craft individualized work proposals by gaining insight into the hidden talents, preferences and motivational drivers of their team members<sup>9</sup>. At an organizational level, increased visibility of talent across functions

facilitates strategic talent management, while targeted developmental initiatives increase engagement, reduce attrition to ensure an agile and readily deployable internal talent pool<sup>10</sup>. This is achieved via a series of concrete practices that work in synchronicity to increase alignment between individual career ambitions and overarching business strategy.



**Employee Empowerment:** Enabling your employees to understand key career drivers, create a motivating career pathway linked to their current role and goals that are aligned to their values and aspirations.



**Leader Enablement:** Supporting your leaders to have simple but powerful career conversations with their people that are delivered across 3 levels of career engagement coaching.



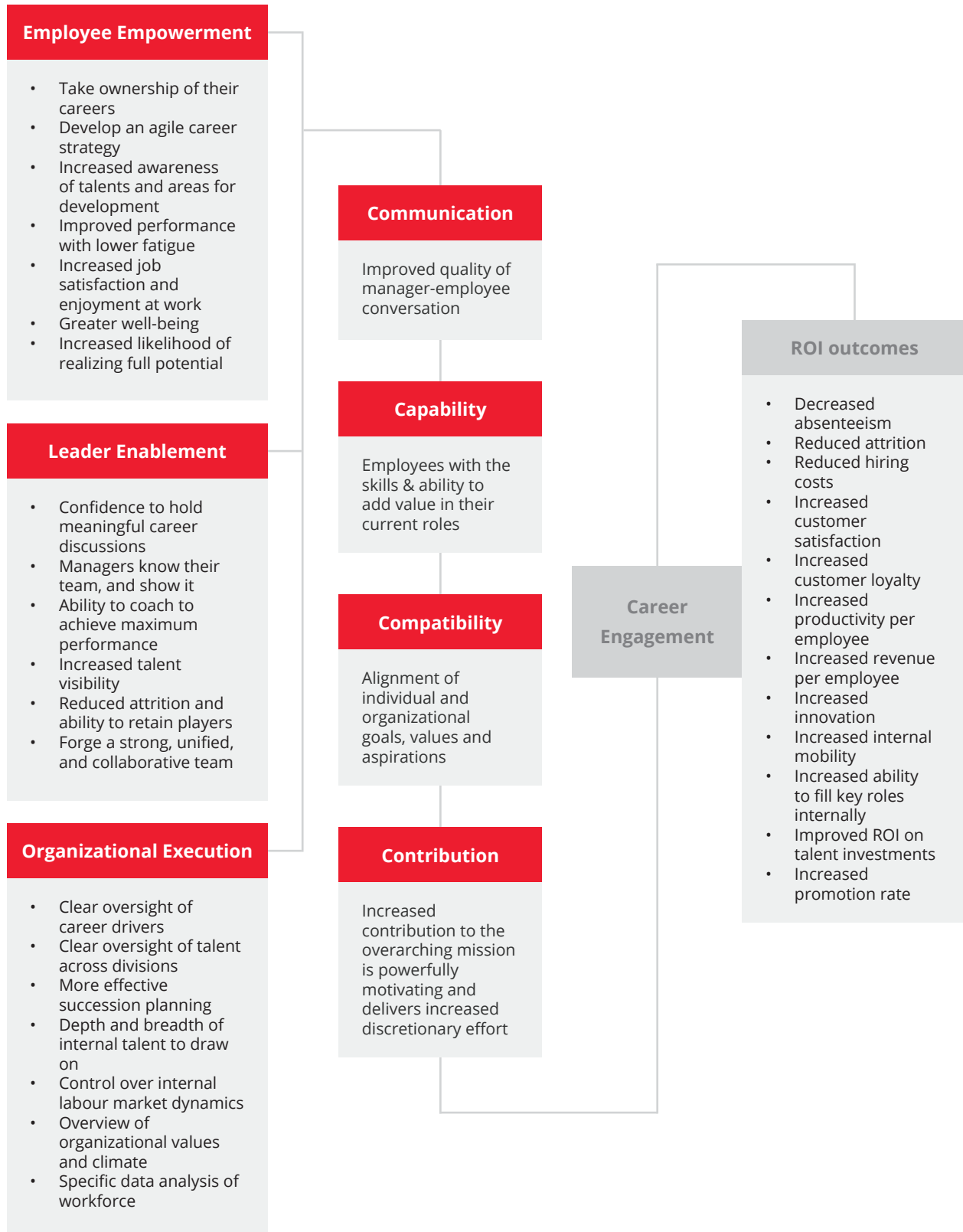
**Organizational Execution:** Enabling your HR, OD and leaders to have a clear line of sight to staff career drivers, succession risk areas and engagement levers, to support strategic people initiatives and business success.

## THE FOUR C'S OF CAREER ENGAGEMENT — COMMUNICATION, COMPATIBILITY, CAPABILITY AND CONTRIBUTION

Effective career engagement begins with improved communication. The Fuel50 career development processes that we have developed, based on sound psychology<sup>11</sup>, act as a springboard for quality conversations between the employee and their manager, who becomes a career coach<sup>12</sup>. Because Fuel50 exercises relate to satisfaction with current role as well as desired career future, the ensuing conversations maximise compatibility between

the employee and their organization across a number of levels. Employees sculpt their roles so that their best talents are fully leveraged, which increases their capability to exceed performance expectations<sup>13</sup>. This means that they are able to contribute in a personally meaningful way, resulting in positive feedback and a sense of belonging that further increases engagement in a positive spiral<sup>14</sup>.

## A BEST IN CLASS CAREER ENGAGEMENT MODEL



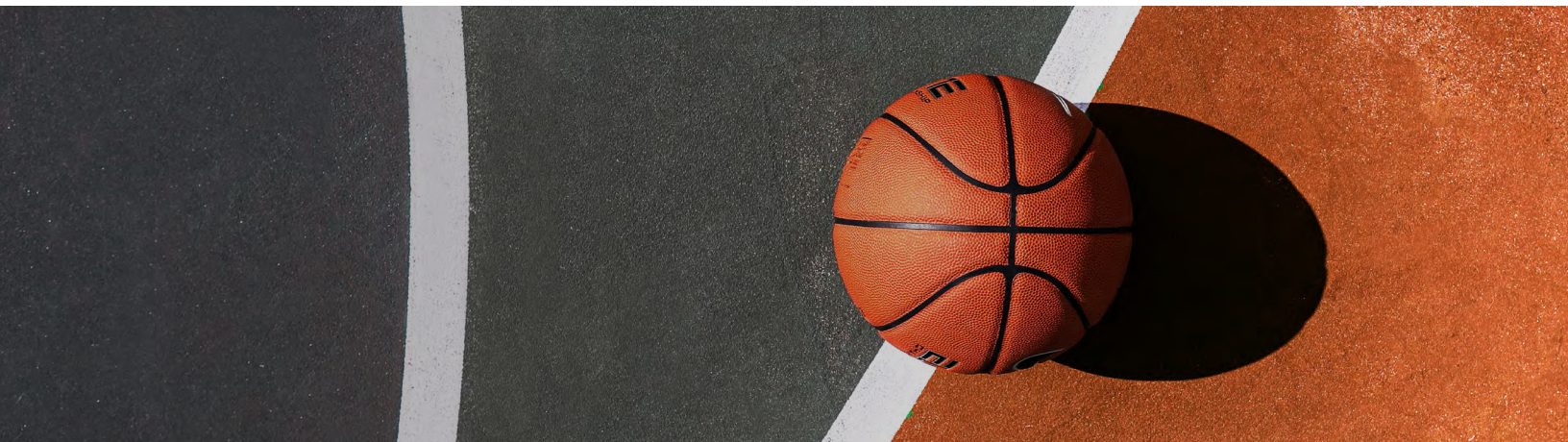
## 03. Benchmarking

### OUR BEST PRACTICES BENCHMARK SURVEY

Based on our model of career engagement, shown on the next page, we created a best practices benchmark survey that tracks the impact of concrete career pathing and development processes on business outcomes. This survey allows organizations to compare their own best practices to sector leaders, identify key areas for improvement, and track their progress across time. The survey was structured around practices relating to the three pillars of individual empowerment, leader enablement and organizational effectiveness, and has been completed by 119 organizations

across the globe. Respondents also rated their ability to achieve critical KPIs over the last financial year, allowing us to distinguish between top performing organizations and the rest and to identify the most critical practices for overall business success.

For the purposes of this study, 'best-in-class' organizations were those who reported financial performance in the top one standard deviation, while 'laggards' were those whose financial performance was in the lowest standard deviation from the mean.

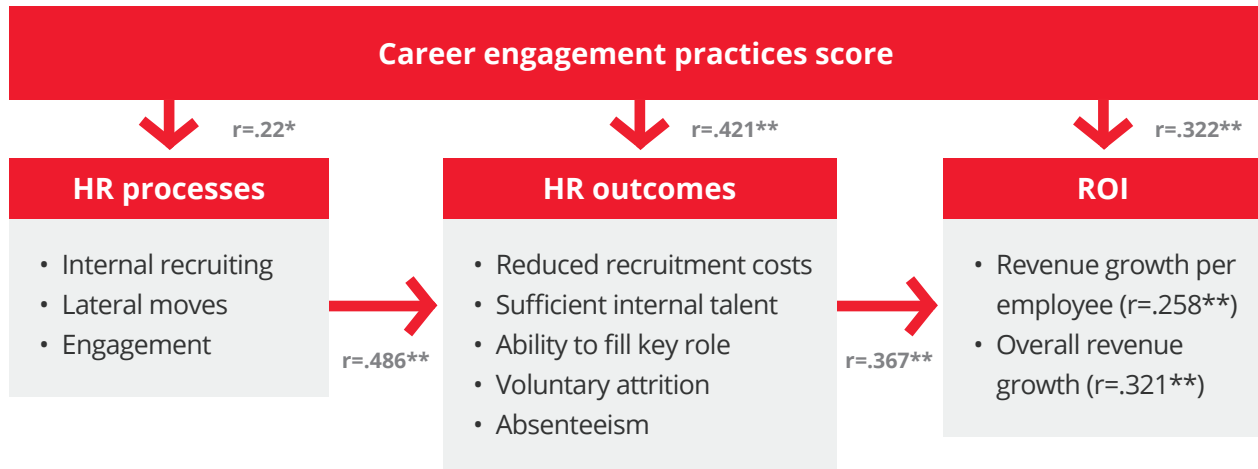


## 04. Results and Insights

### RESULTS AND CAREER ENGAGEMENT INSIGHTS

Results show that best in class career pathing and development practices are connected to improved HR functions and better business performance at large. Organizations who scored higher on the best in class benchmarking survey reported greater overall revenue growth during

the last financial year, and it appears that this improvement was directly linked to improved performance of the HR function. The diagram on the next page illustrates these relationships, showing exactly how our career engagement practices connect to improved business results.



\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .05

\*\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .01

Career engagement practices were directly related to greater overall revenue growth both directly, and via the increased effectiveness of the HR function. Furthermore, **career engagement score was related to greater revenue growth per employee, suggesting that this was due to the benefits of increased engagement.**

## UNDERSTANDING THESE RESULTS

'r' refers to the strength of the correlation between these factors, and can range from 0 to 1. An r value off 0 means that there is no correlation between two factors at all, while an r value of 1 means that a 100% increase in one factor corresponds to a 100% increase in the other. In general, any correlation above .2 is considered large enough to be of

practical relevance<sup>15</sup>. The asterisks show that all correlations are statistically significant, meaning that we can be confident that these relationships reflect real performance differences that were not simply due to chance. See Appendix for a full table of the relationships between these factors.

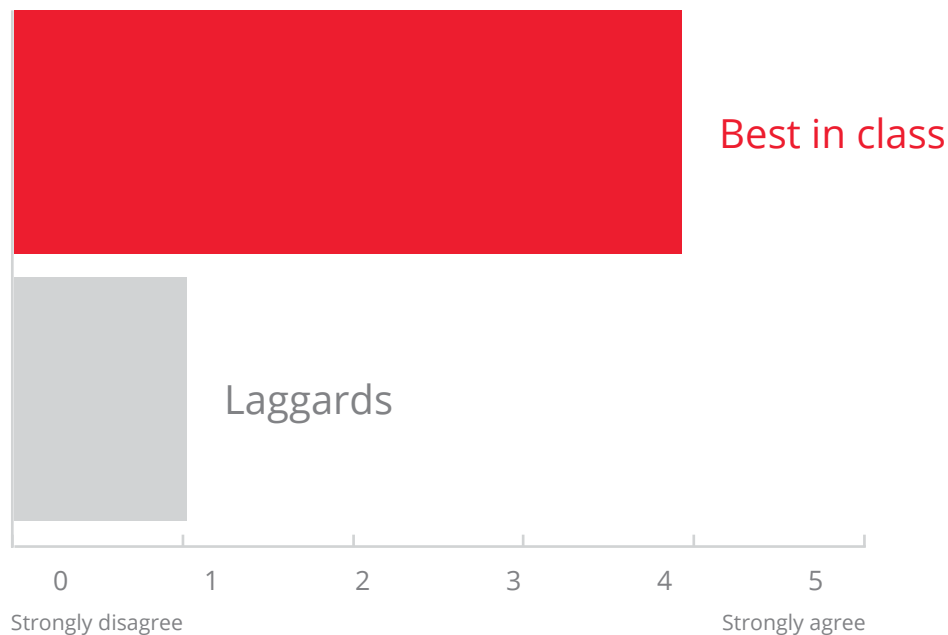
## INVESTING IN TALENT MOBILITY

A closer drill down into these relationships shows that career engagement practices lead to business return primarily by building internal talent bench strength. Top performing organizations built a broad and diversified internal talent pool, which provided them with sufficient internal talent to address strategic challenges. In fact, there was a whopping

66% correlation between having sufficient talent to meet strategic needs and overall HR performance. Sufficient internal talent allowed best practice organizations to fill key leadership roles internally, as well as corresponding to increased internal recruitment and reduced overall recruitment costs.

### We have sufficient internal talent to achieve our strategic objectives

Respondents: 115



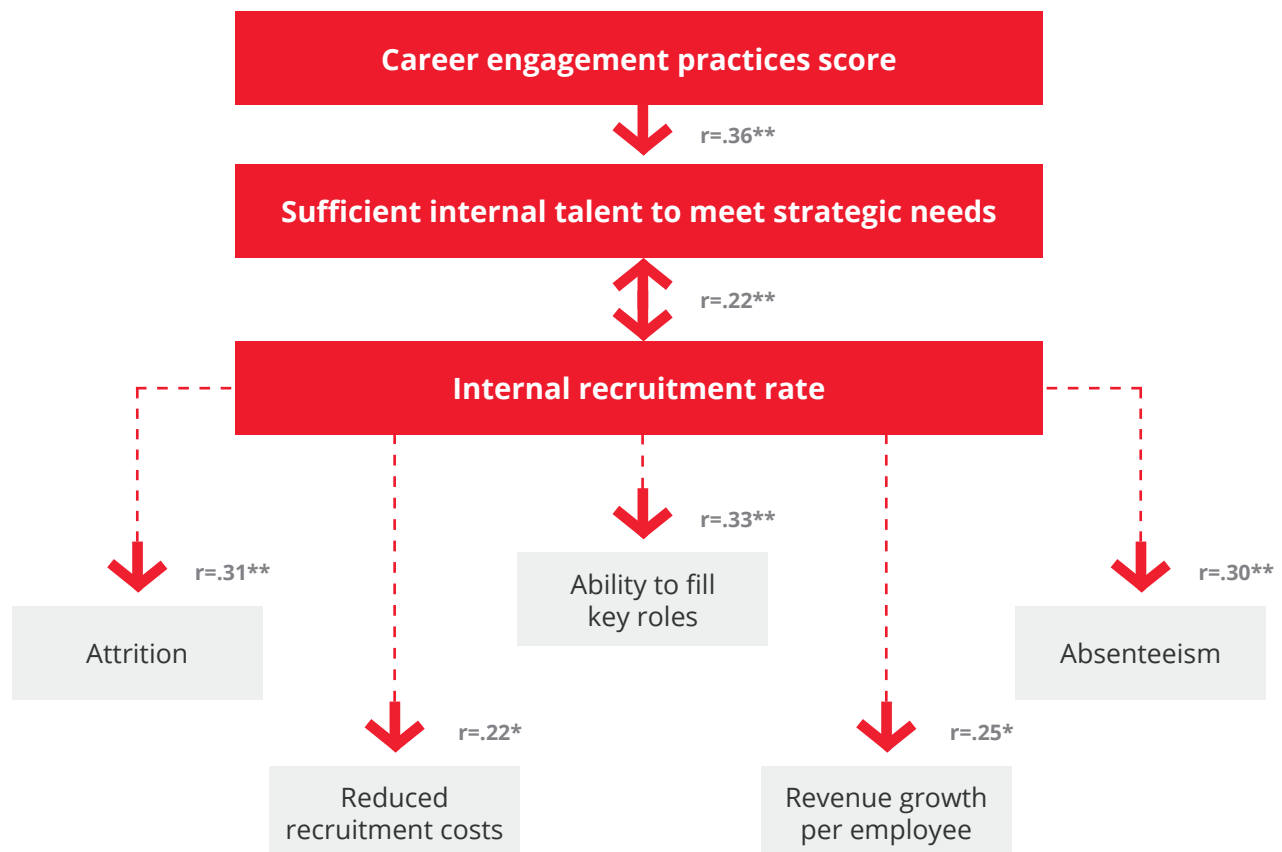
Organizations who had **better career management practices were more than twice as likely to have sufficient talent** to meet their strategic objectives.

## INVESTING IN TALENT MOBILITY DRIVES A POSITIVE GAIN CYCLE

The internal talent surplus generated by career engagement practices was significantly linked to increased internal hiring. Internal recruitment appeared to benefit businesses by reducing attrition and absenteeism, and increasing engagement. Not surprisingly, a higher level of internal recruiting was connected to the ability to fill key senior leadership roles internally, as

well as overall HR performance and revenue growth. This suggests that career engagement practices set a virtuous cycle in motion, in which more opportunities for internal career development increases engagement, and improves the financial bottom line (+30% correlation).

### The internal recruiting gain spiral — correlations between career engagement practices, internal recruiting and business outcomes



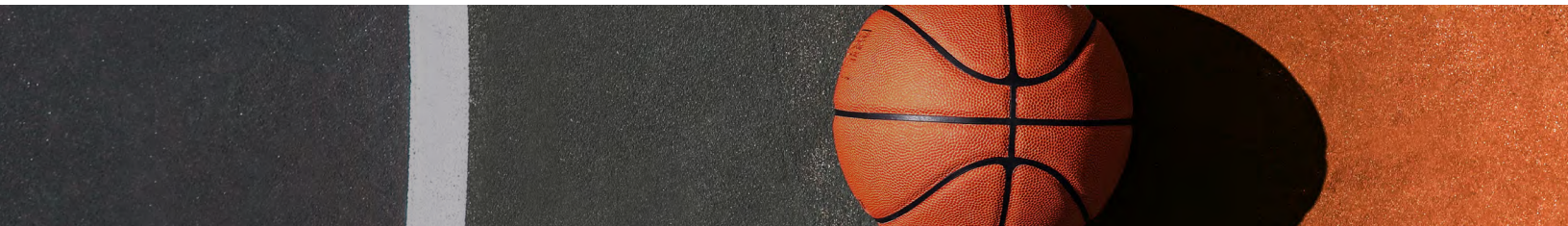
\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .05

\*\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .01

## BUILD AN AGILE CAREER DEVELOPMENT MINDSET

Meaningful development experiences that allow employees to build their skills base in a personalized way emerged as the most important driver of the career engagement spiral. Organizations that developed their people through lateral placements had greater internal talent, and higher internal recruitment. Lateral moves are a powerful development tool because they provide 'on the job' learning experiences and foster learning agility<sup>16</sup>. These learning opportunities are most effective when combined with coaching and mentoring activities that provide feedback,

encourage insight and provoke reflection, highlighting the interconnected nature of career development practices<sup>17</sup>. Lattice organizations in which lateral moves were more common were more able to fill senior leader roles internally ( $r = .25$ ), and reported lower attrition ( $r = .26$ ) and absenteeism ( $r = .20$ ), attesting to the power of talent mobility practices to increase engagement. Without question, there is significant business benefit in building a career-growth mindset where lateral moves are encouraged across the organization.



## 05. Enable Careers

### ENABLE CAREERS AT ALL LEVELS

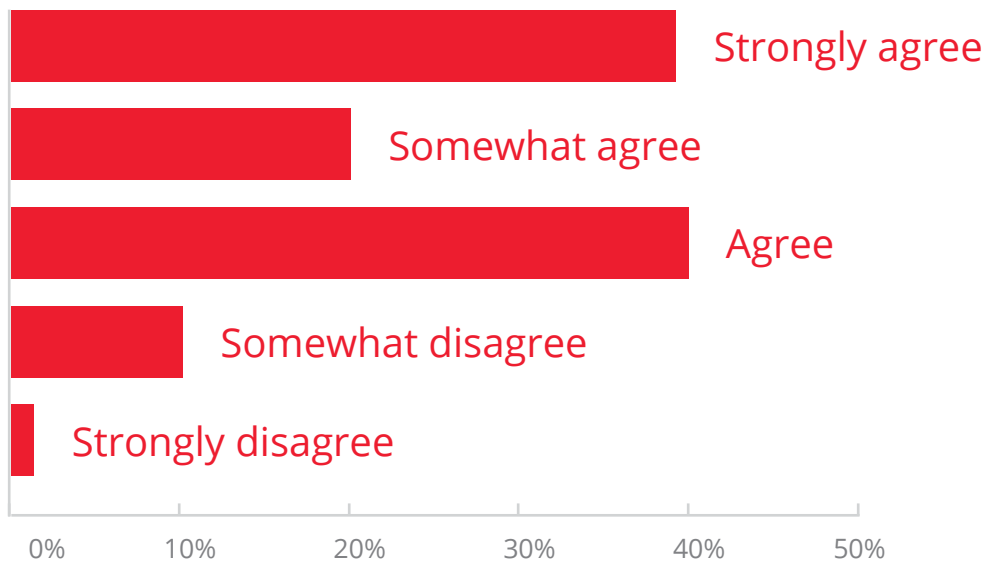
Although 87% of organizations preferred to recruit internally where possible, it appeared that many were struggling to translate this objective into practice. Internal recruitment was vastly lower than external recruitment in the majority of organizations, and was lower than 25% for the largest portion of respondents. Despite such low internal recruitment, 50% of

all senior leadership roles were filled internally. This suggests that while talent management processes are functioning effectively at the upper echelons, they need to be extended to the broader employee base in order to really improve business metrics on internal talent mobility.

Although 37% of organizations limit career conversations to top performers, **it is critical to engage your broader employee base** to impact significantly on business outcomes.

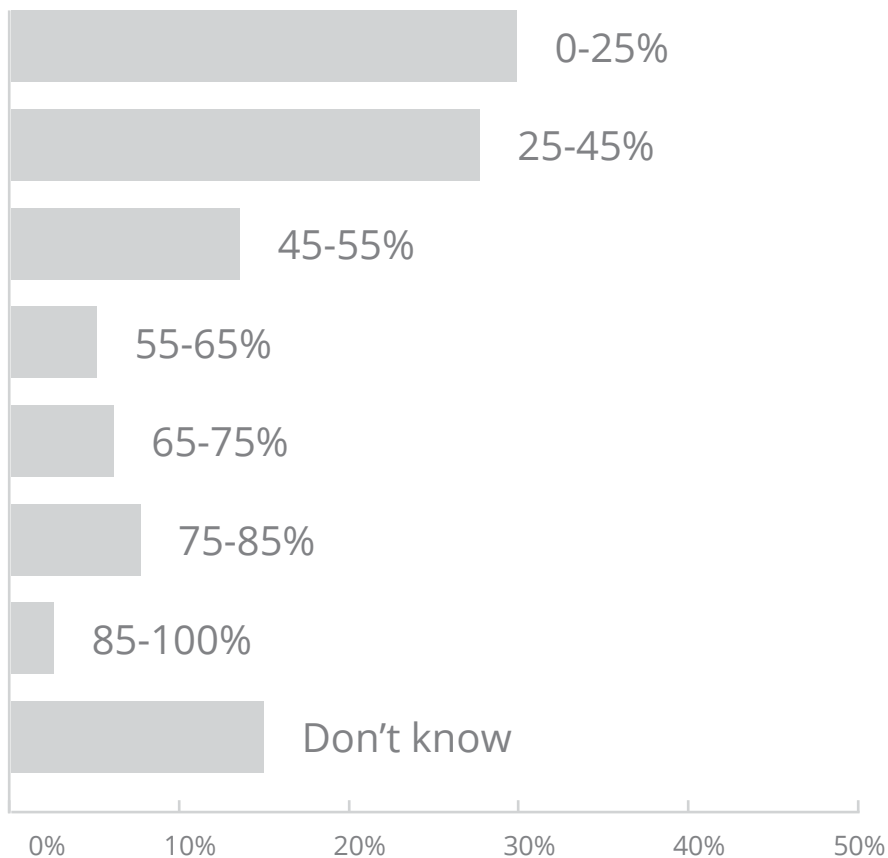
### We recruit internally where possible

Respondents: 115



### Internal hires are in the following range (when compared to external recruitment)

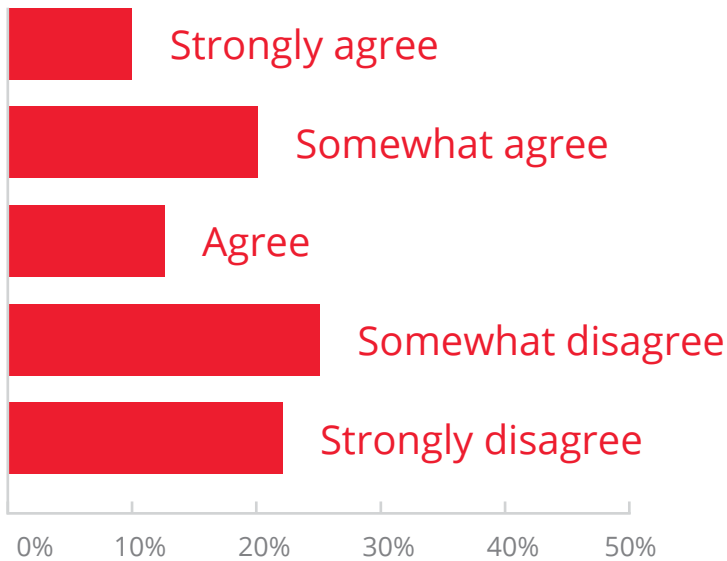
Respondents: 117



Although the majority of organizations offered some form of career coaching to all employees, significantly fewer believed that these conversations were actually being delivered to all team members. It appears that this was largely due to a breakdown of career management delivery at the manager level.

### We offer career coaching to all employees

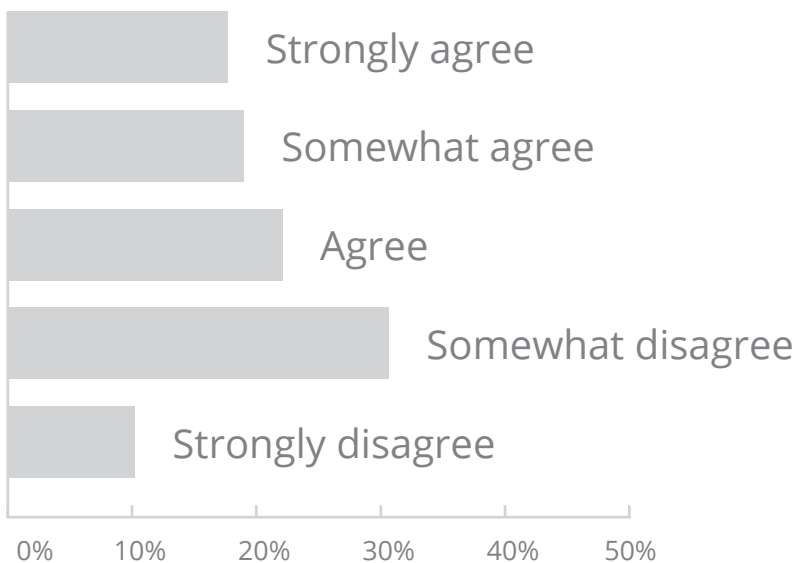
Respondents: 115



**42% of organizations reported** that managers did not hold career conversations with all team members

### Managers hold career conversations with all team members

Respondents: 105



**Only an elite 8% of respondents could say with confidence** that managers held career conversations at least four times a year

# 06. Career Champions

## EMPOWER MANAGERS TO BECOME CAREER CHAMPIONS

Effective career management hinges upon the ability of managers as the critical touch point between employees and their organization. Although most managers were aware at least to some extent of the career ambitions of their team, it was the ability to take this one step further by connecting individual ambitions to overarching strategy, and offering development opportunities at a departmental level that really separated top performers from the rest. Further statistical analysis of individual career management practices confirmed that managers' understanding of the talents within their team and ability to build rapport were the key mechanisms by which the career engagement model improved organizational

financial performance.

These results support the notion of the leader as a career champion, who understands the needs of the team and promotes their interests within the broader organization. In this manner, the career champion manager pulls their team towards career actualization and the realization of their full potential. In contrast, laggard organizations were characterized by higher levels of ineffective 'laissez-faire leadership', with managers appearing to act as 'talent trappers', or, worse still, as 'talent blockers'.

A sure fire recipe for disengagement according to our research!

### Correlations between the three E's of engagement, HR, and organizational performance

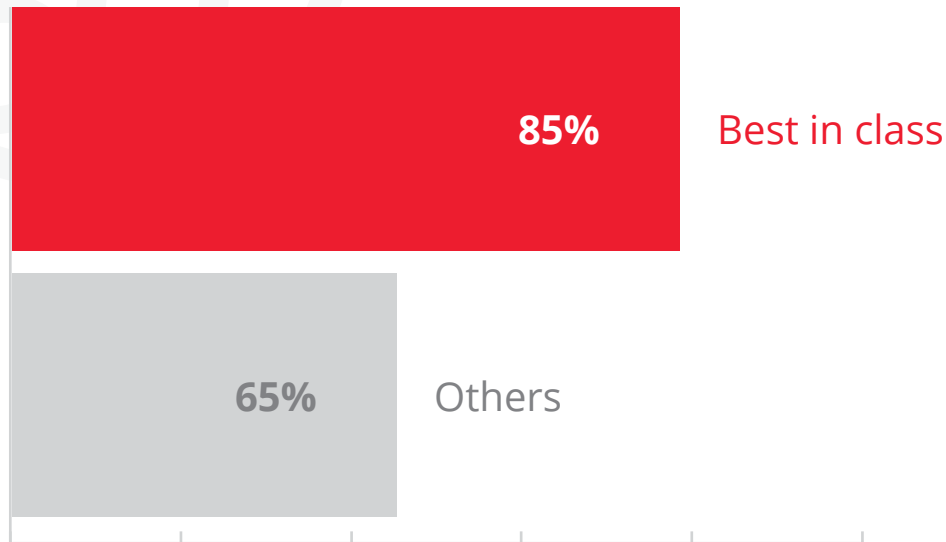
	Organizational effectiveness	Leader enablement	Individual empowerment	HR processes	HR outcomes	Business performance
Leader enablement	.715**	-				
Individual empowerment	.615**	.814**	-			
HR processes	.383**	.333**	.353**	-		
HR outcomes	.381**	.313*	.382**	.486**	-	
Business performance	.299**	.349**	.207	.292**	.567**	-

\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .05

\*\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .01

## Managers are aware of how the career ambitions of their reports align with organizational strategy

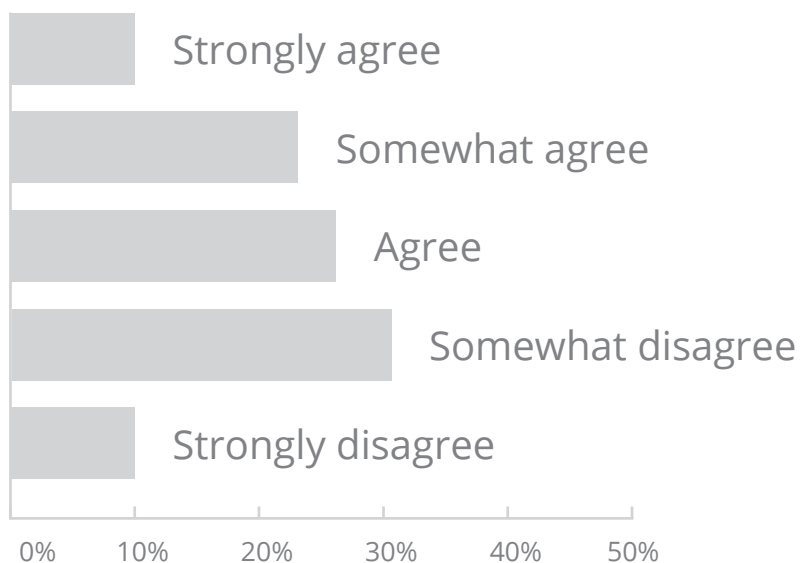
Respondents: 103



83% of top performing organizations believed that **managers had mapped the career ambitions of their reports onto organizational strategy**, compared to 40% of average performers, and 0% of laggards.

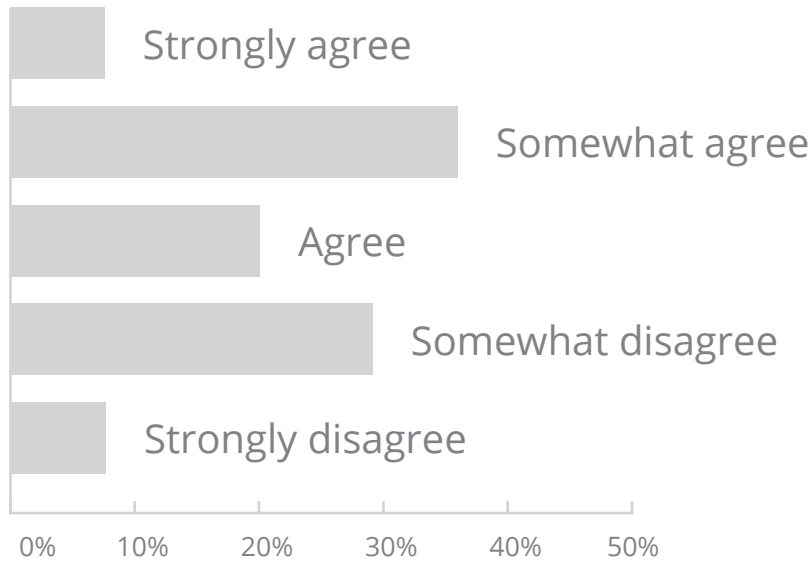
## Managers draw relevant internal opportunities to the attention of their team

Respondents: 102



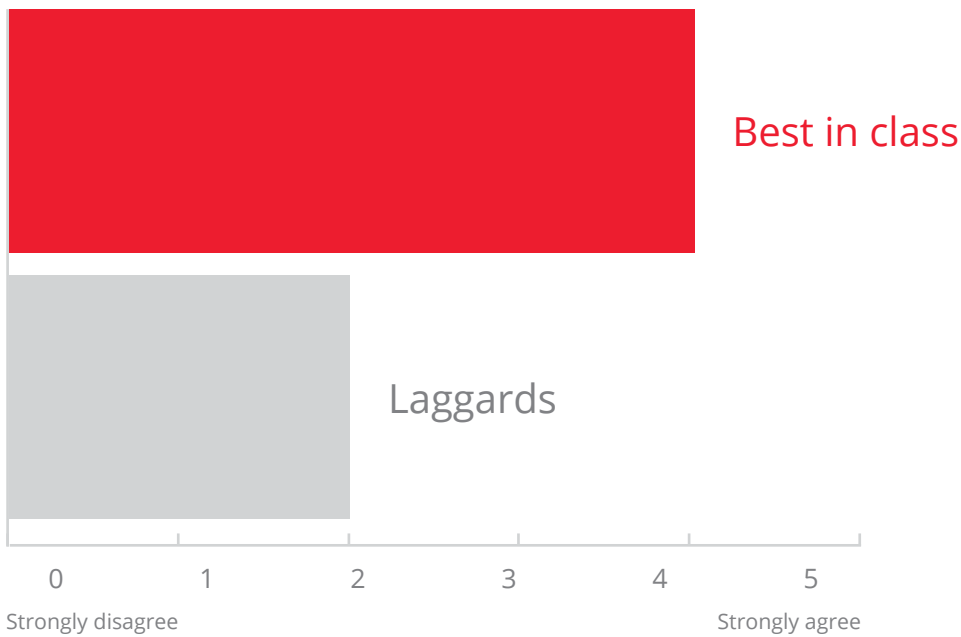
**Managers provide stretch assignments that allow team members to grow their strengths**

Respondents: 106



**Managers have identified appropriate ways to address the developmental needs of their team**

Respondents: 107



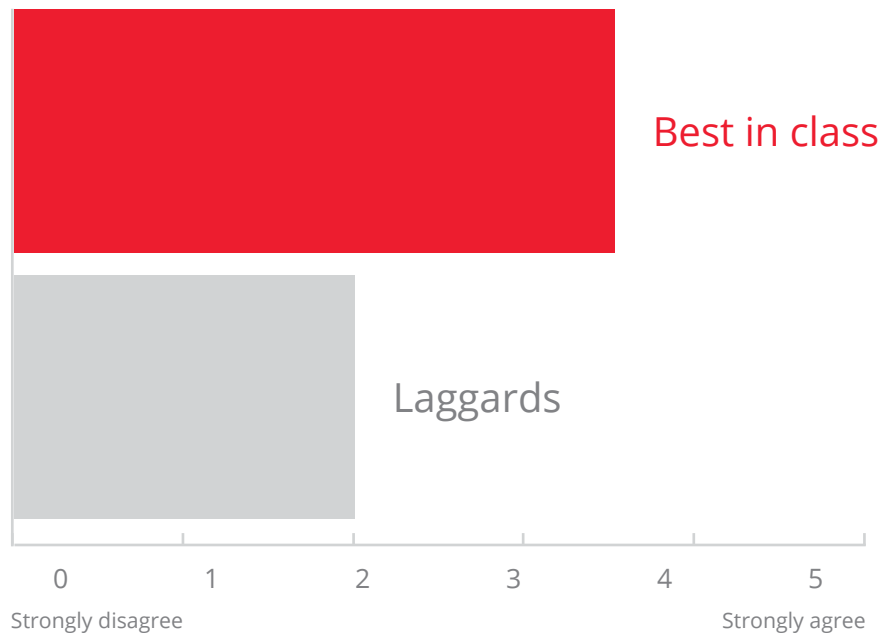
## INCREASE VISIBILITY OF TALENTS AND CAREER PATHS THROUGH CLEAR COMMUNICATION

The principal barriers to the leader enablement pillar of career engagement could be traced to a communication gap between senior management and leaders, as well as between leaders and their team. Our survey shows that in most organizations, managers did not draw internal opportunities to the attention of their reports, and team members were not aware of potential career paths within their

organizations. It appears that this is due at least in part to lack of time and resources, as the majority of leaders did not have sufficient time to dedicate to provide career development support to their employees. In fact, having sufficient opportunity to express career preferences to their manager was the third most critical practice for determining overall career engagement success.

### Managers have the necessary time to support the career growth of their team

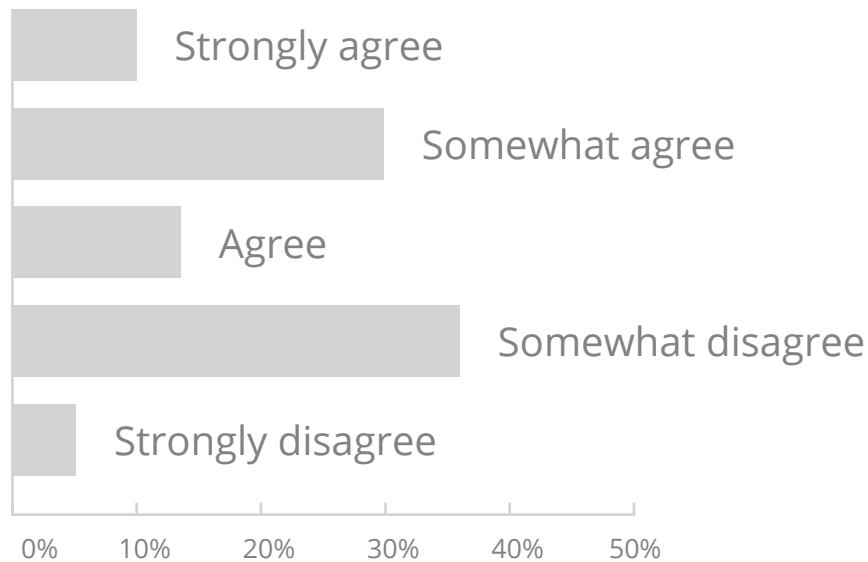
Respondents: 105



**Technology enablers that deliver insight into the career motivators of employees add significant benefit to the quality and efficiency of the career conversation.** Data-driven insights save time and increase the quality of the conversation.

**Managers are aware of how the career ambitions of their team align with organizational strategy**

Respondents: 105



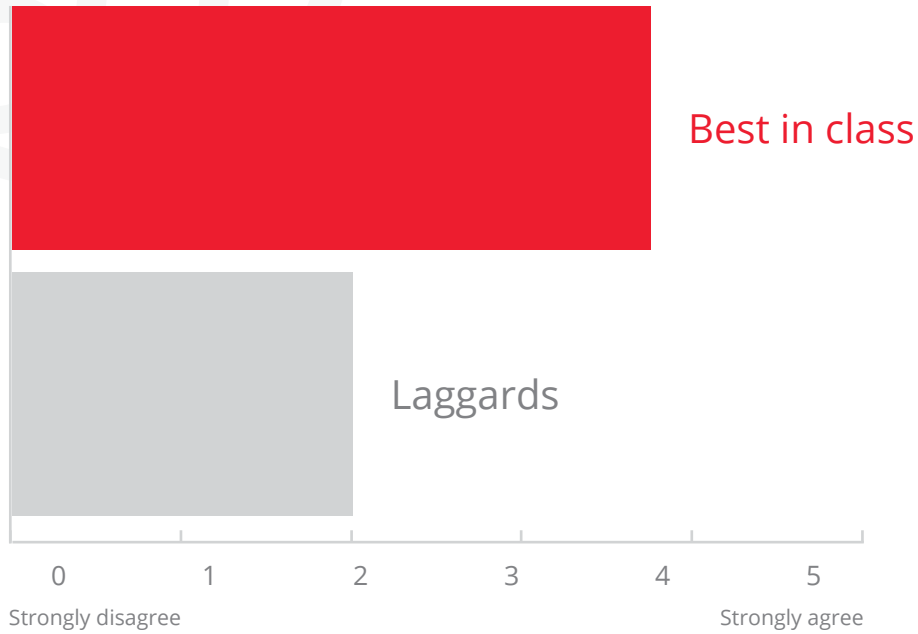
**BUILD LEADER COACHING CAPABILITY**

Lack of time was compounded by the fact managers appear to find career coaching conversations difficult. Despite the fact that 60% of respondents formally invest in training their managers to have more effective career conversations, many felt that their managers lacked confidence in their coaching abilities. This, combined with the fact that 86% did not include career management as a criterion for leader evaluation, means that career conversations are not being given sufficient priority by managers. Only top scoring

organizations could say with confidence that managers held career conversations with all employees four times a year, and, even where these conversations were happening, most organizations believed their leaders were not effective as they could be in asking quality coaching questions that provoked insight and encouraged reflection. These results suggest that formal training alone is not sufficient to ensure the quality of manager-driven career management practices.

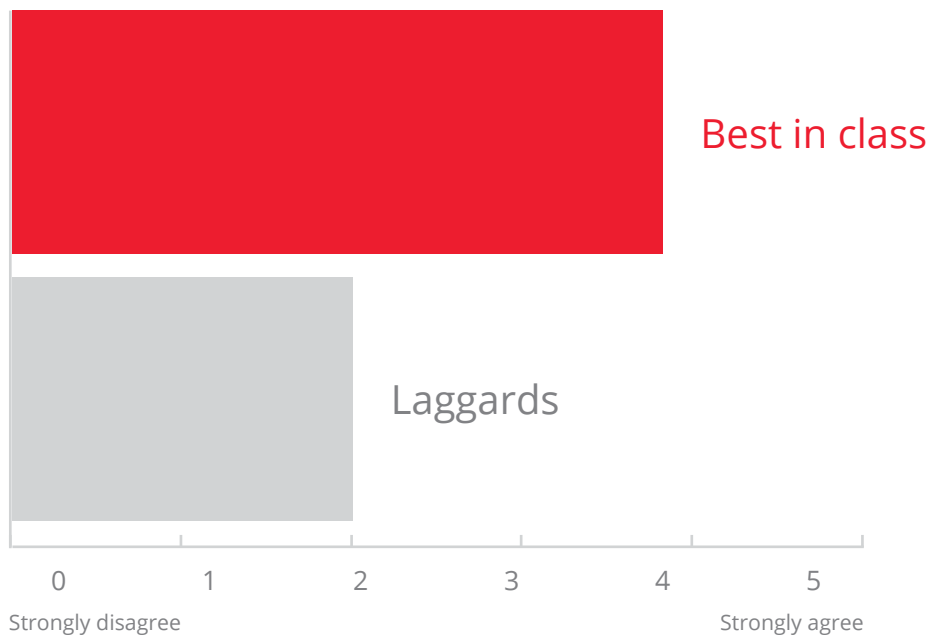
### Managers are effective in asking quality coaching questions that provide insight and encourage reflection

Respondents: 107



### Managers are confident in their coaching skills

Respondents: 107



## EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY — QUALITY CONVERSATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE CAREER ENGAGEMENT

Amidst a workplace increasingly colored by flexible practices that often involve working remotely, our research attests that quality conversation as critical for effective career engagement. ‘My manager shows an interest in my career experience and well-being’ was the single most important determinant of the career engagement effectiveness score according to an item analysis of our benchmark survey. This was closely followed by practices relating to improved clarity around career

and work life priorities for all parties. The importance of career conversations as a means to build understanding and rapport links to transformational and visionary leadership research, which show that the most effective leaders show an interest in the well-being of their team members that goes beyond their ability to complete functions, as well as inspiring them with a positive vision of their future with the organization<sup>18</sup>.

**Conversation is the most effective and valuable commodity that managers have to offer**, and managers need to take the time to schedule quality discussions with their people. Insights as to the career needs of employees help managers deliver better quality conversations.

## IGNITING THE PASSION — CAREER ENGAGEMENT SOFTWARE AT THE WHEEL

The Fuel50 Best Practice Benchmarking survey shows that **internal career development opportunities create a positive spiral in which growing your people from within drives business growth**. However, as we have seen, the principal barrier preventing the majority of organizations from tapping into the career engagement cycle is poor communication and lack of resources at a managerial level. Managers lack the time to dedicate to developing their team members, and are not confident in their ability to do so. This means they are not effective in connecting individual ambitions to overall strategy and providing concrete development opportunities. New wave career path software can really

help to address these challenges by ensuring that individuals are well prepared for career conversations, meaning that they become more efficient and of better quality, and deliver a clear line of sight to career opportunities in a simple, meaningful and visible way. Personalized career reports also help managers to conduct meaningful and thought provoking discussions, and to bring issues that might otherwise remain unaddressed into the open. A solid report on which to base discussions increases leader confidence and makes them highly effective coaches. At a senior management level, this translates into increased talent visibility, as well as an agile and highly engaged workforce feeding into a well-oiled talent pipeline.

The top drivers of career engagement according to our best practices research:

- Leaders show an interest in the career experience/well-being of their direct reports  
( $r = .813$ )\*
- Leaders are aware of how the career ambitions of their reports align with organizational strategy  
( $r = .78$ )\*
- Reports have adequate opportunity to express career preferences to their manager  
( $r = .78$ )\*
- Leaders are aware of the career ambitions of their direct reports  
( $r = .766$ )\*



# 07. Career Engagement Practices

## BEST-IN-CLASS CAREER ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

Our data show that career practices work in synchrony to improve career engagement and business performance at a pan-organizational level, primarily via increased talent mobility and internal recruiting. Six key areas of higher-order best practices emerged, which allowed organizations to grow both their people and their revenue simultaneously by tapping into a powerful positive gain spiral. Our six best in class career engagement practices are as follows:

- 1 CAREER ENABLEMENT AT ALL LEVELS**  
Best in class organizations understood the importance of tapping the potential of all team members. They offered career coaching and personalized developmental plans to all employees, regardless of their performance record or position in the organizational hierarchy, as a way to achieve meaningful lifts in their overall HR and business metrics.
- 2 INCREASE VISIBILITY OF TALENTS AND POTENTIAL CAREER PATHS**  
The primary barrier to career engagement was poor communication flow and visibility of career information. Communicate talent gaps and strategic needs to managers and assist them to map this against the current talent within their team.
- 3 INVEST IN TALENT MOBILITY**  
Top performing organizations were harnessing the power of career engagement practices to generate sufficient internal talent to meet strategic objectives. This improved performance on key HR KPIs.
- 4 BUILD AN AGILE CAREER DEVELOPMENT MINDSET**  
Create diversified athletes through personalized developmental experiences: stretch assignments and lateral moves were key drivers of the career engagement spiral, and were strongly linked to improved HR outcomes, including reduced attrition, absenteeism and increased revenue per employee.
- 5 ENABLE LEADERS TO BECOME CAREER CHAMPIONS**  
Results attest to the pivotal role of the manager as the touch point between the organization and their team. Managers emerged as the architects of team career engagement, although most are failing to deliver on career engagement due to lack of resources and poor communication.
- 6 BUILD LEADER COACHING CAPABILITY**  
Invest in resources to help your leaders become better career coaches and conduct more meaningful and better quality conversations with their team.

# 08. Top Fifteen Actions

## GETTING TO BEST-IN-CLASS CAREER ENGAGEMENT

### Individual empowerment

- 1 Provide line of sight.** Provide employees a line of sight to research desired career paths within your organization.
- 2 Support quality career reflection.** Provide tools and resources that enable your people to reflect on their talents and career priorities.
- 3 Promote conversation.** Ensure everyone is given adequate opportunity to discuss their aspirations with their manager, as a bare minimum on an annual basis. Best-in-class are doing this more frequently.
- 4 Enable gap analysis and individual ownership of the action plan.** Enable employees to identify their own competency and skill gaps and support them to link to their career action planning.
- 5 Create realistic expectations.** Provide frequent honest feedback and set realistic expectations regarding the requisites for career progression.

### Leader enablement

- 6 Provide leaders with tools.** Ensure leaders have the necessary resources, time and support so they can develop their team.
- 7 Provide coaching skills training.** Invest in improving the interpersonal skills and coaching abilities of leaders.
- 8 Flip the focus from performance to growth.** Integrate or substitute formal performance appraisals with structured 'career conversations' held with all team members four times each year.
- 9 Support leaders to become effective talent agents.** Communicate strategic talent needs clearly to line managers and assist them in mapping this against the current talent within in their team.
- 10 Focus on closing skill gaps.** Use this analysis to identify talent 'gaps' and formulate strategies to address these in collaboration with team members themselves and in-house HRM specialists.

## Organizational execution

- 11 **Create a career engagement road map that delivers a powerful talent pipe.** Prioritise internal recruiting at all levels of the organizational hierarchy.
- 12 **Promote lateral mobility.** Create the infrastructure to support regular lateral moves.
- 13 **Think whole of business for career engagement, don't just limit to 'high performers'.** Provide career coaching and development opportunities for all employees not just to performers.
- 14 **Facilitate flexible work practices where possible.** Empower managers to negotiate flexible working arrangements and ensure these are fully integrated within the organizational culture. Our research shows micro-changes in working hours or conditions can have macro impact on engagement.
- 15 **Support with a career enablement communications strategy.** Use enablers to create a career path proposition for all, and enable employees to take ownership. Our research has identified the need for technology enablers that save time and improve conversation quality as an important means to support leaders in effective career management delivery.



**Any move towards increasing communication, compatibility, and capability will allow every employee to make a greater contribution, driving engagement to fuel sustainable growth in a synergistic manner.**

While our research shows that enabling managers to do a better job of career conversations is an absolutely critical determinant of the desired business outcomes, not leaving it to chance by ensuring there is a multi-level approach to career management with Career Ownership for employees, experts and champions layered through out the business to support and be ensuring there is reach and visibility of your career management solution with resources for employees, leaders and HR practitioners.

To benchmark your own organization's Career Engagement Practices please contact [tim@fuel50.com](mailto:tim@fuel50.com) or call +1 212 235 1470.



# 09. Appendix

## Correlations between career engagement practices, HR outcomes, and overall organizational performance

	CE score	Internal recruiting	Lateral moves	Engagement	Sufficient talent	Ability to fill key leadership roles	Recruitment costs	Attrition	Absenteeism	HR performance outcomes	Revenue growth	Revenue growth per employee
Internal recruiting	.225**	-										
Lateral moves	.153	.438**	-									
Engagement	.1	.216*	.15	-								
Sufficient talent	.358**	.222*	.123	.12	-							
Ability to fill key leadership roles	.124	.253**	.068	.01	.328**	-						
Recruitment costs	.258*	.008	-.022	.03	.221*	.000	-					
Attrition	.447**	.307**	.225*	.23*	.065	.130	-.038	-				
Absenteeism	.433**	.302**	.201*	.376**	.132	.124	-.054	.298**	-			
HR performance outcomes	.473**	.322**	.053	.212*	.656**		.454**	.473**	.578**	-		
Revenue growth	.312**	.212*	.250**	.07	.004	.027	.119	.241*	.369**	.233	-	
Revenue growth per employee	.258*	.300*	.223*	.175	.250	.168	.138	.224	.120	.235*	.394**	-

\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .05

\*\*correlation is significant at a confidence level of .01

# 10. Notes

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