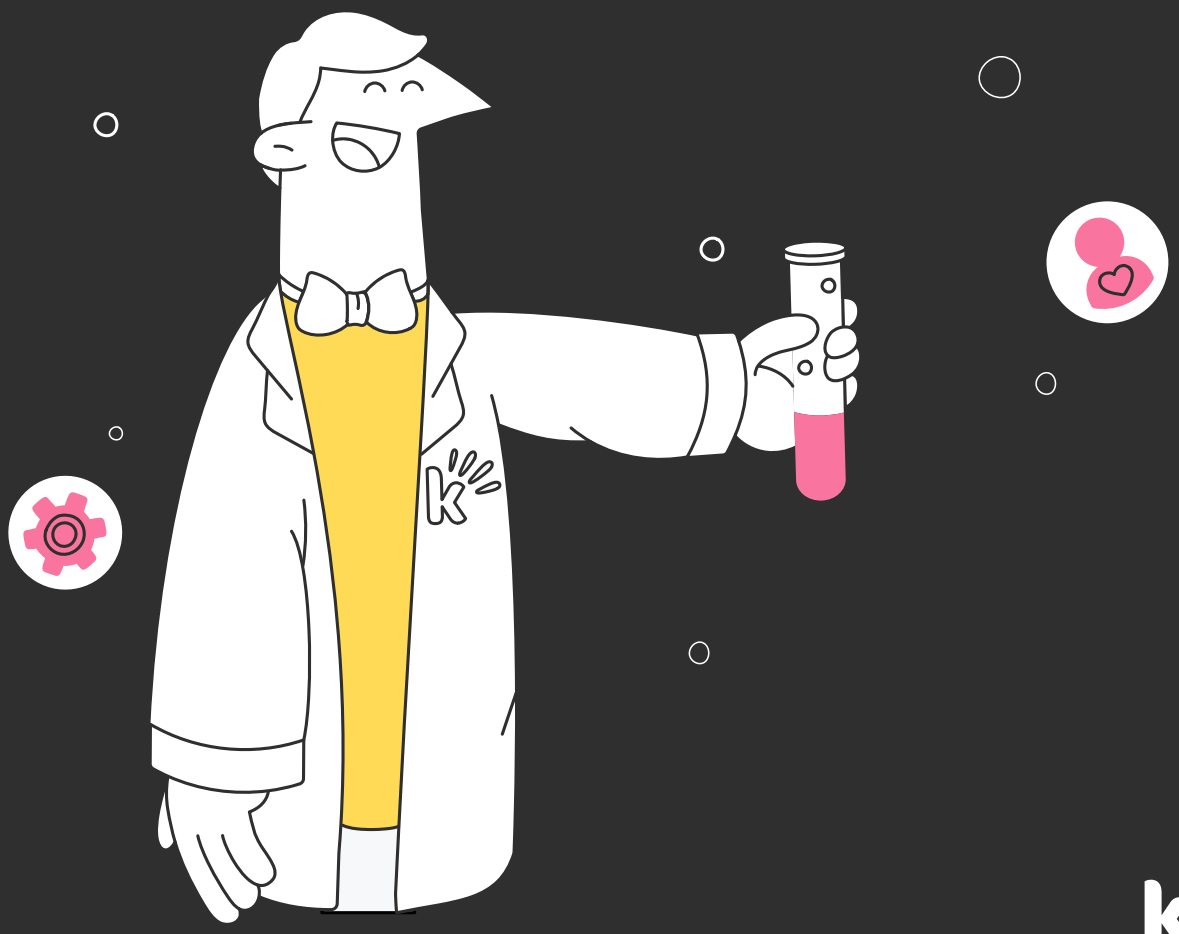
HR katalyst

HRs as Change Agents 2023

A New Avenue for Organizational Growth



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Contents

HR Katalyst highlights 3

Executive summary 7

Methodology 11

Technology

Numbers Don't Lie: People analytics CEOs, investors can bank on 14

AI to the Aid: A new frontier in HR practices 19

Strategic HR

Retention Tension: Paying more isn't enough 25

Get Down to Business: Honing acumen of HR leaders 28

Layoff Play-off: Who is to blame for mass layoffs 32

Workplace

Safety First: Creating a psychologically safe workplace 39

Connecting the Dots: Going beyond the fun Friday 43

Mind the Gap: Valuing HRs more for greater impact 48

Finding Purpose: How to make work not suck 52

Give Me a Break: Bouncing back from HR burnout, stronger 55

Join Hands: How to trust people you don't like 70

HR Katalyst highlights

Keka organized a two-day virtual summit - **HR Katalyst** in June, 2023. The summit featured **17 sessions** as panel discussions, fireside chats and workshops. They covered emerging trends in the human resources space with insights from experts and the audience. The summit also led knowledge exchange through speed networking and social lounges.

Total Attendees



4,221

The Event Featured

3 Booths, With

1,687 Visits

Booth Partners

IDfy | Qlearsite | LinkedIn Talent Solutions

Session Joiners



3,787

Average time spent by attendees



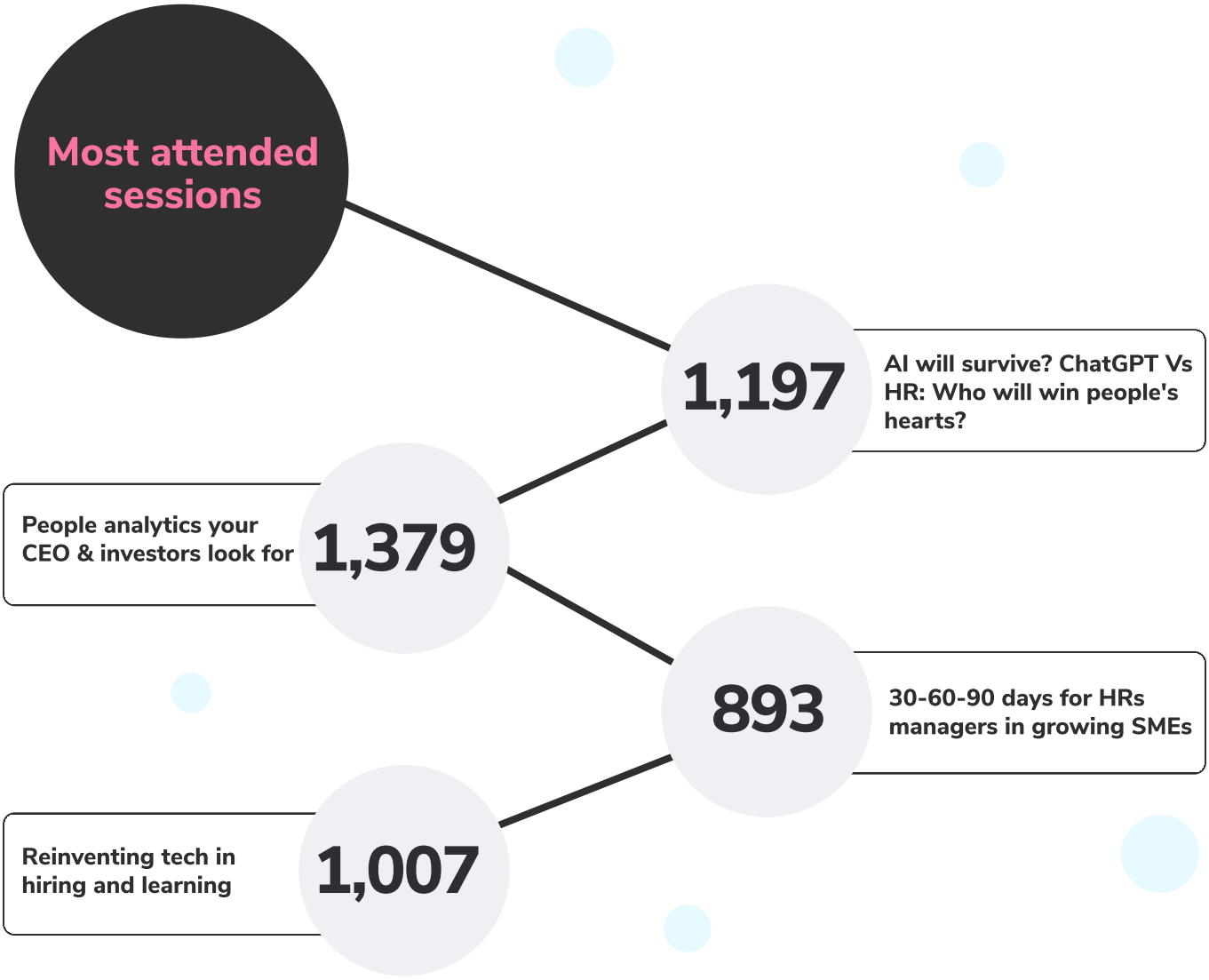
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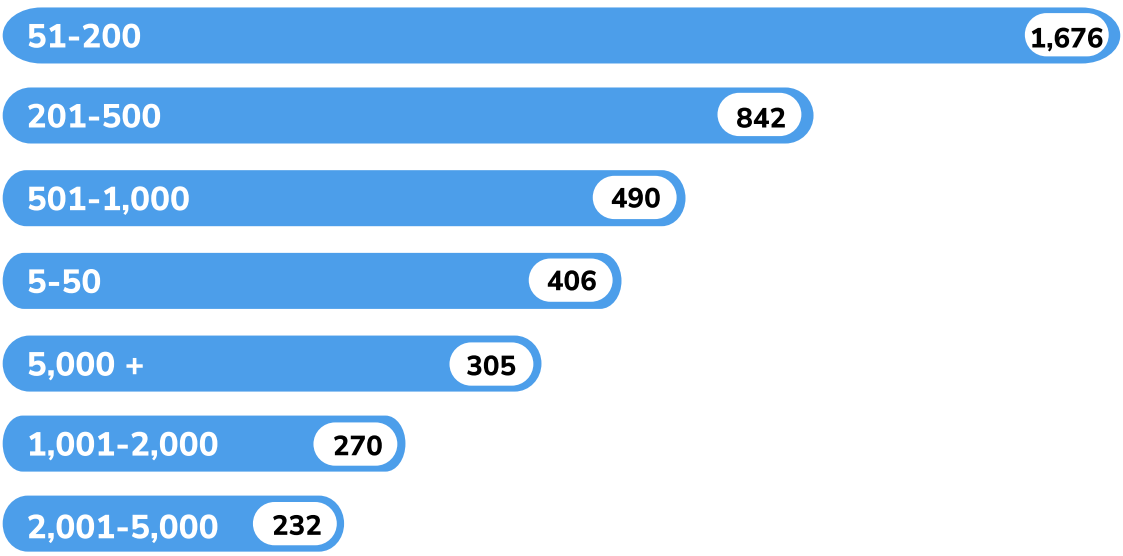


62,892

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Participation in terms of organization size



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Speakers at HR Katalyst



Vijay Yalamanchili
First Employee
Keka HR



Kanika Khurana
Chief of Staff - COO's Office
Chargebee



Ruchee Anand
Senior Director - Talent, Learning and Engagement Solutions
Linkedin



Shikha Gangwar
India Head of HR
AGDATA, LP



Amit Sahoo
Vice President, Global Head of Human Resources
Narwal



Roma Bindroo
Chief Human Resources Officer
Zepto



Anish Aravind
Human Resources Director
SS Consulting



Yashika Kaushal
Director - Global Head Talent, Learning & DEI
OpSec Security



Rishi Gaurav Bhatnagar
Founder's office - Product & Design
Atlan



Dr. Anjali Desai
Head of Human Resources
Fourth Partner Energy



Gurpreet Singh
Director - Human resources
Tata 1mg



Dheeraj Pandey
Vice President of Sales
Keka



Deepti Moolya
Group Head, People Practice America
Happiest Minds Technologies



Nishith Parikh
Head HR
Inventyv Software Services



Janani Prakaash
Head HR
Quantela



Roopa K.S.
Head of HR, Legal & Compliance
Velocis Systems Pvt. Ltd.



Jaimit Doshi
Chief Technology, Digital and Marketing Officer - Driving Transformation
Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance



Barun Mallick
First Believer
Keka



Bala Vummidi
Head HR & Vice President
SRM Technologies



Harjeet Khanduja
Senior Vice President Human Resources
Reliance Jio



Atma Godara
Manager, Human Resources



Dr. S. Anand Reddy
Head L&OD
Hetero



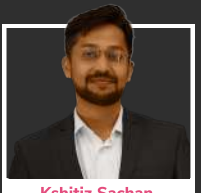
Udayan Walvekar
Founder
GrowthX



Radhika Viswanathan
Head Human Resources
Ozonetel



Dr. G.P. Rao
Founder
GPR HR Consulting LLP



Kshitiz Sachan
Process Coach – Performance Management
Keka



Alex Peter
Cofounder
The Talent Deck



Seema Singh
Lead HR & Talent Acquisition
Euro Exim Bank



Antra Virmani
Head of People Experience
Thoughtworks



Dinesh Menon
Founder's Office
Onsurity

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Rachna Cherian
Sr. Director - People & Culture
HighRadius



George Mathew
CEO & Founder
HumLog



Jitender Panihar
CHRO
Fitelo



Alex Borekull
Co-founder and CEO
Qlearsite



Gary Hazel
VP Talent Development
Injazat



Vishwanadh Raju
Head Talent Acquisition Operations
ANSR



Mukul Mathur
Ex-Head HR
CJ Darcl Logistics Ltd.



Santosh D'Souza
Head of Sales - Senior Manager, Talent Solutions
LinkedIn



Jayati Pardhy
Head of Human Resources
Keka



Bhakti Dharod
Head of HR
IDfy



Sufiyan Sait
Director - People Success and Community
Toplyne



Cireesha Mailavarapu
HR Operations Head- South India
Sodexo



Ashish Mittal
Group Chief Human Resources Officer
Sreenidhi Educational Group



Richa Singh
VP HR
Max Life Insurance



Esraa Gamal
Global HR Manager
TechMantra Global



Vivek Rao
HR Leader - Product development
Mahindra Group



Ganesh Iyer
Senior Director Human Resources
ADP



Rushad Shah
AVP HR
Cygnet Infotech

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Executive summary

For a long time, organizations had kept HR management strapped to the fringe of strategy. Workforce planning was divorced from business planning.

But then, situating people at the center of strategy offered answers to tough business questions. Organizations could now tide over economic downturns, backed by people management in a large measure.

And at last, HRs were eagerly looking outside in: bringing expectations of external stakeholders closer to company strategies. All good? All good.

Then, the covid-19 pandemic struck. Businesses scrambled to stay afloat. The way people work- the way work is defined - changed. Many lost jobs.

And lately, artificial intelligence has gripped our imagination, even fueling paranoia around replacing human workers.

Change agents are here

To embrace this new reality and turn uncertain times into avenues for growth, traditional modes of managing people are not enough.

HR, the catalyst, is the need of the hour. Not just as a change manager, but as a change agent.

Signaling the next stage in the evolution of the HR function, the HR catalyst can prove decisive for organizations battling uncertainties. **They are proactive activists, empowering companies to adapt, evolve and thrive during challenging times.**

As reliable partners, HR catalysts remain unflappable amid destabilizing changes and are the bulwarks of organizational strength. Their resilience is now helping redefine business success.



Customer experience + ***Employee experience*** = ***10x growth***

No more is it only about profits. **Sustainable progress, fused with stellar customer and employee experience, is setting companies apart and onward.**

This is offering organizations a competitive differentiator, which can enhance their longevity while fueling growth. HRs here play a crucial role, of nurturing and embedding the differentiators in the organizational DNA. In the process, they help redefine their own value proposition too: **from strategic leaders to change champions.**

HRs must ready themselves: recognize emerging hurdles, technological disruptions and business contexts to be agents of change. The 'HRs as Change Agents' report captures this landscape of opportunities.

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Key findings



AI is ally

HRs view artificial intelligence as an ally rather than a threat. AI tools may be deployed to automate processes and free up the professionals, who may focus more on strategic tasks. Upskilling in AI is crucial to harnessing its potential.

HR matters

Being valued less in organizations is causing burnout among HRs. Leaders must identify early signs of it and act. They should prioritize quality of outcomes over quantity of work. Delegating tasks and promoting self-care can help curb negative effects.



Informed pitch please

A lack of clear understanding among HRs of people analytics is undermining their pitch to leaders. People analytics can be best used for improving employee productivity and performance.



Honing business sense a task

Even today, HRs are barely able to take part in business decisions. While honing business acumen is an imperative today, HRs find it difficult to master.



All for safety

Growth stems from a place of safety. But lack of open channels, low awareness levels and fear of retaliation are obstructing psychological safety at the workplace. All employees must take the reins collectively and champion it.



Show growth path to retain

Retention is the biggest people challenge for organizations today. Lack of career development and growth opportunities is nudging more employees to quit.

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Multiplier effect

The HR is now a highly skilled, conscious goalkeeper of the organization and not a gatekeeper. They must work towards becoming top talent themselves. Valuing and paying them more can enrich customer experience and fuel business success.



Value lens

Providing growth opportunities can make work fulfilling and exciting for employees. Leaders must institutionalize purpose at work and cascade it to all levels. Let your employees see clearly how their work creates value.



Strike a balance

Engagement initiatives must balance core values and business numbers. Organizations are increasingly using employee feedback to improve engagement.

No, don't blame the HR

The blame for layoffs doesn't lie squarely with HRs. There are several causes. But HRs can help mitigate layoffs by advocating for alternatives and communicating reasons to those affected clearly.

Methodology

The report draws on surveys conducted during the two-day **'HR Katalyst', an online summit organized by Keka in June, 2023**. Organizers asked questions to speakers and audience members during 10 of the sessions that took up emerging trends in the HR space. The sessions are represented as chapters in the report.

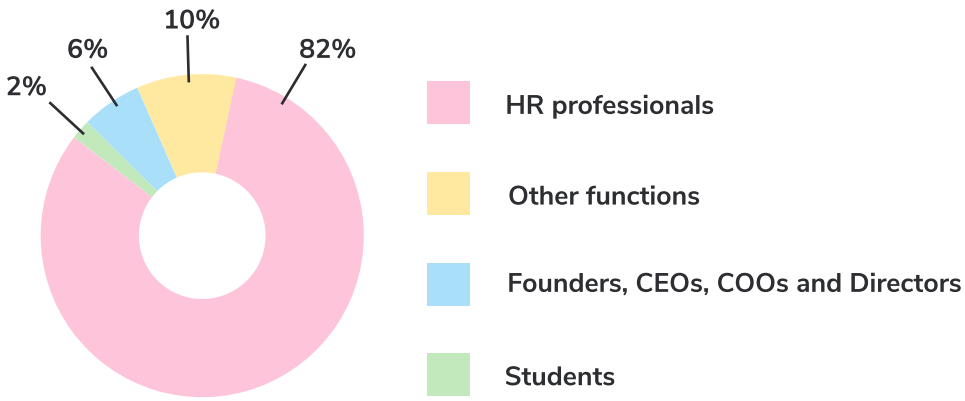
The report is based on the responses of 1,969 unique participants, who attended at least one of the sessions.

The responses, based on the quantitative surveys, are supported by qualitative insights of speakers and the audience collected during the session.

The report is divided along three themes - **'Technology', 'Strategic HR' and 'Workplace'**, to indicate focus areas for HRs to be change agents, or catalysts, for their organizations. The themes are divided into chapters.

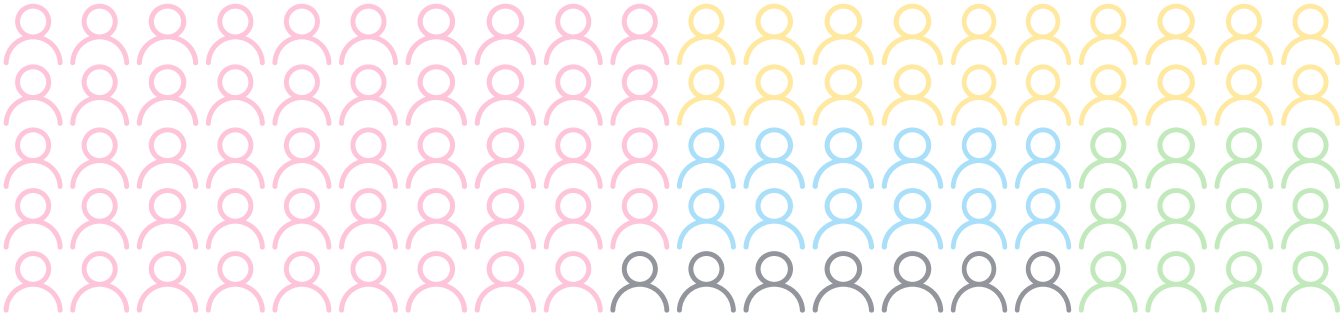
- Around **92% of the respondents are from India**, and the rest from other countries including the UAE, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Nigeria, Singapore and Egypt.
- Close to **80% of the respondents are actively working as human resources professionals, of which 30% are HR managers and 20% HR heads**. Remaining respondents include founders, CEOs, directors and other business professionals. Even students took part.
- **Half the respondents belong to small and medium companies** having an employee strength of 5-200. Whereas, 32% of the participants have a strength of 201-1,000 employees at their organizations.

Professional backgrounds of the survey participants



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Participation in the surveys in terms of organization size



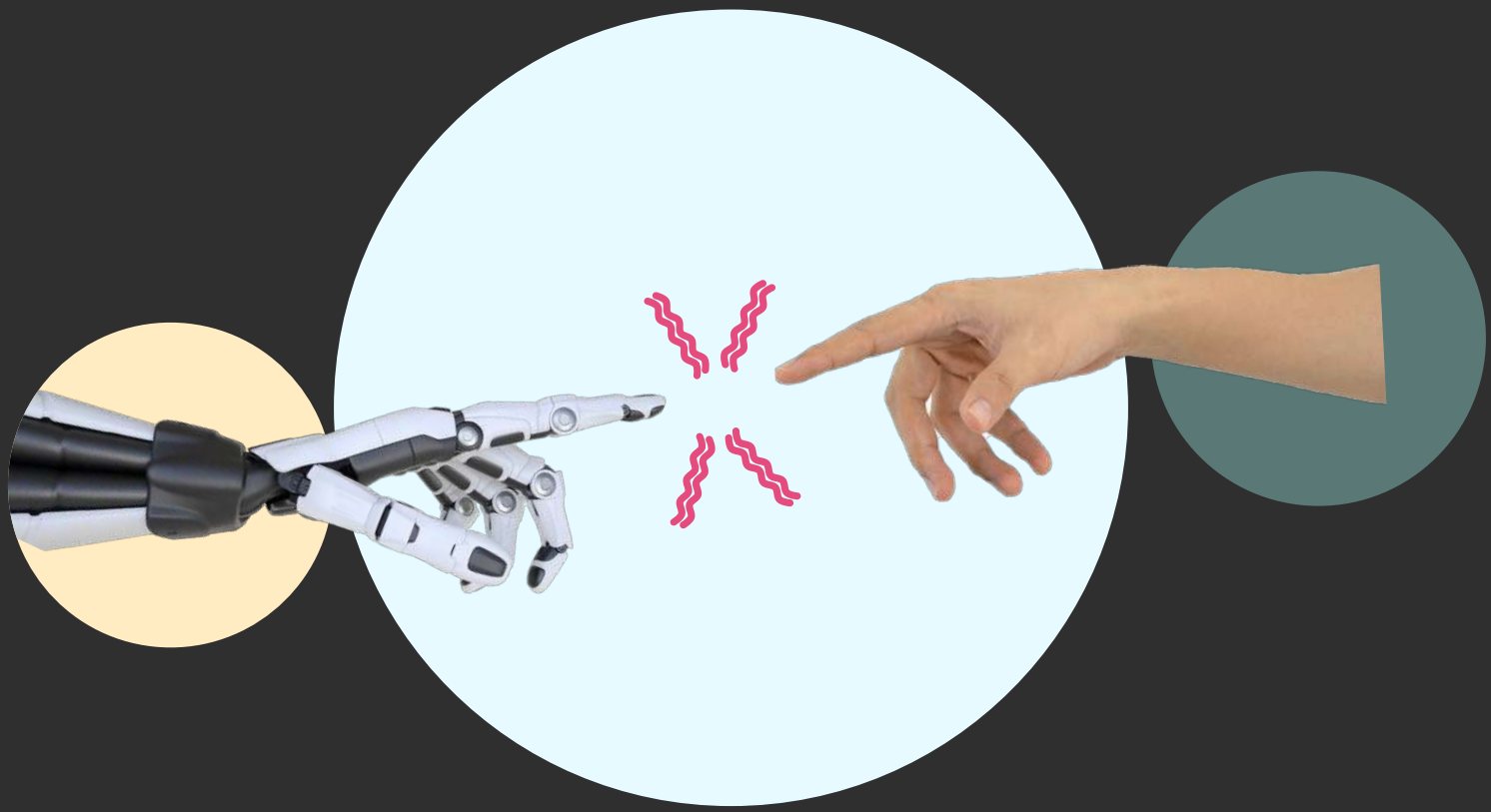
5-200	201-500	501-1,000	1,001-5,000	5,000+
49%	20%	12%	12%	7%

Participation rates of HR Katalyst attendees in the surveys

Numbers Don't Lie: People analytics CEO, investors can bank on	**56%**
AI to the Aid: A new frontier in HR practices	**65%**
Retention Tension: Paying more isn't enough	**62%**
Get Down to Business: Honing acumen of HR leaders	**53%**
Layoff Play-off: Who is to blame for mass layoffs	**53%**
Safety First: Creating a psychologically safe workplace	**63%**
Connecting the Dots: Going beyond the fun Friday	**68%**
Mind the Gap: Valuing HRs more for greater impact	**55%**
Finding Purpose: How to make work not suck	**62%**
Give Me a Break: Bouncing back from HR burnout, stronger	**60%**

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Technology



Rapid advances in AI and analytics present fresh opportunities. Organizations are forging the people-business link by taking more informed decisions. Insights extracted from data, more potent and compelling, are driving this change.

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Numbers Don't Lie: People analytics CEOs, investors can bank on



Kanika Khurana
Chief of Staff - COO's Office
Chargebee



Ruchee Anand
Senior Director - Talent, Learning and Engagement Solutions
LinkedIn



Alex Peter
Cofounder
The Talent Deck

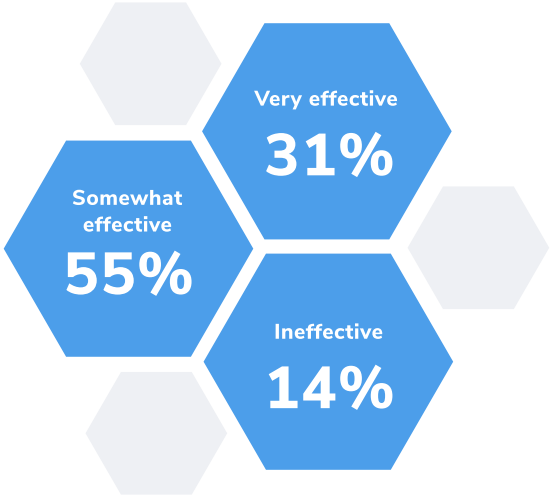


Dinesh Menon
Founder's Office
Onsurity

Generating a welter of data is easy. Making sense of it isn't. In fact, it is simple, only if the right tools are deployed and insights (actionable) extracted. But what after that? Organizations, from small to big, today are firing to harness people data to make informed decisions. The challenge is to link data and insights with business goals.

The task of bringing the CEO and investors on board for people analytics, the kind that fuels their vision, induces anxiety among HRs. **Almost 32% of business professionals believe it is HRs' lack of understanding of people analytics and its potential that undermines their pitch to leaders in the first place.**

How effective are people analytics efforts across organizations



Next, concerns about the cost and return on investment (28%) inhibit HRs in convincing leaders. Also, one in five respondents point to the perception that people analytics is irrelevant to organization's goals as a challenge.

At the start, it is essential that organizations frame the right question, on what they are solving for using people analytics, suggests **Ruchee Anand, Senior Director - Talent and Learning Solutions at LinkedIn.**

Investors are betting on people today, reminds **Dinesh Menon who is at the Founder's Office at Onsurity**, a health technology and employee benefits organization.

"After the covid-19 pandemic, investors are looking at the output teams produce," he adds.

Which functions do organizations use people analytics for? Most respondents, at 25%, use them for recruitments, while 21% each deploy them for employee engagement and performance management. But, around 8% say they don't use people analytics at all.

In addition, 55% rate the effectiveness of their people analytics efforts as 'somewhat effective', while 31% rate them as 'very effective' and the remaining 14% as 'ineffective'.

Gauging sentiment

Illustrating the effective implementation of people analytics, **Kanika Khurana, Chief of Staff - COO's Office at Chargebee**, a revenue growth management platform, says her organization uses them to identify well-performing parts of the organization as well as opportunities.

"We conduct annual surveys to understand sentiments within the organization, down to the team-level. This helps in creating action plans, driving positive change and upholding accountability," she explains. "The metrics thus extracted point to the organization's health."

However, a multitude of people analytics implementation challenges stare at organizations. The most significant being data quality issues (23%).

This is followed by a lack of understanding of how to use people analytics effectively (21%) and limited budget for analytics tools and software (18%). Finding the right tool that fits people needs is the least significant roadblock at 11 %.

> *Don't force fit metrics in places they don't belong.*



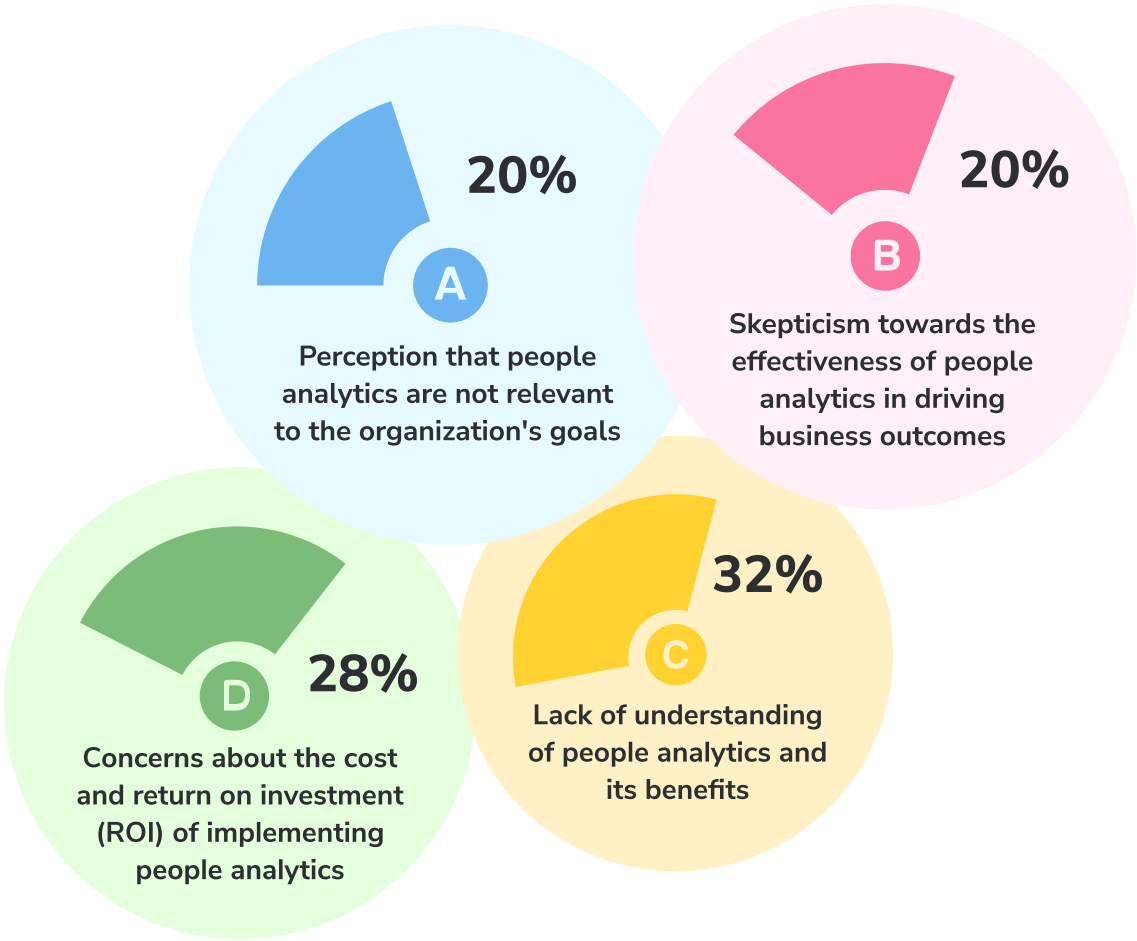
Alex Peter
Cofounder, The Talent Deck

"It is wise to start small, in a pilot way," says Ms. Khurana, "There is a need of creating an environment of iterative learning."

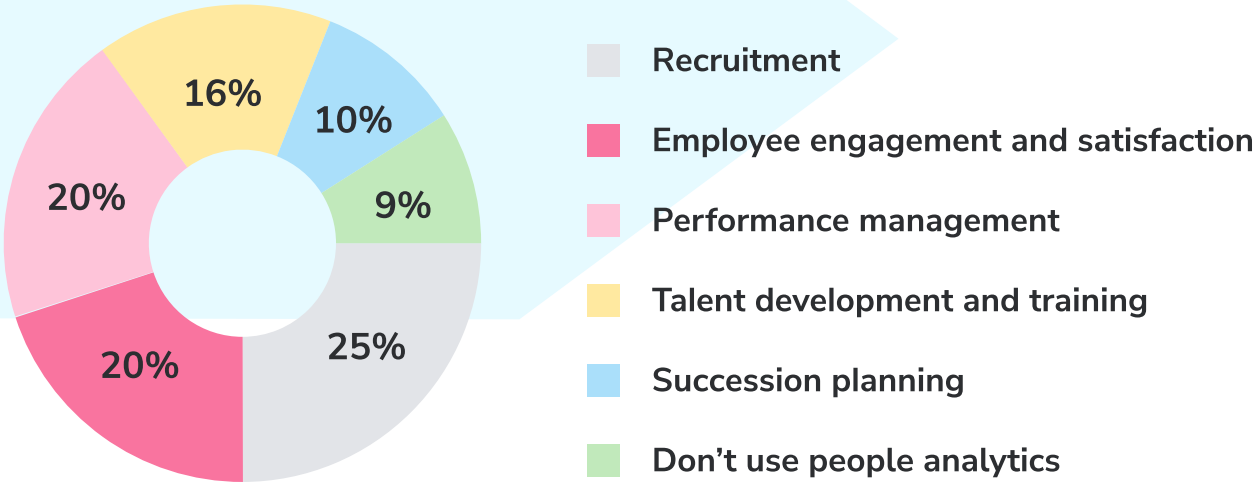
When deployed optimally, organizations can best use people analytics for improving employee productivity and performance, and aid HRs in decision-making and talent management. People analytics can also help reduce employee turnover and boost retention, believe 13% of the respondents.

The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Harsha Ram Seshu, Solution Strategist, Keka

Challenges faced by HRs in bringing CEOs and investors on board for people analytics



Areas of HR where organizations use people analytics



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Challenges in implementing people analytics across organizations





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Areas of HR where people analytics could have the most significant impact in the future



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AI to the Aid:
A new frontier in HR practices



Vivek Rao
HR Leader - Product development
Mahindra Group



Gurpreet Singh
Director - Human resources
Tata 1mg



Yashika Kaushal
Director - Global Head Talent, Learning & DEI
OpSec Security



Ashish Mittal
Group Chief Human Resources Officer
Sreenidhi Educational Group

The application of artificial intelligence in HR management, though still being explored, has opened new avenues for businesses. HR professionals are beginning to embrace AI as an ally rather than an adversary. They feel more empowered at the possibility of being relieved of administrative tasks.

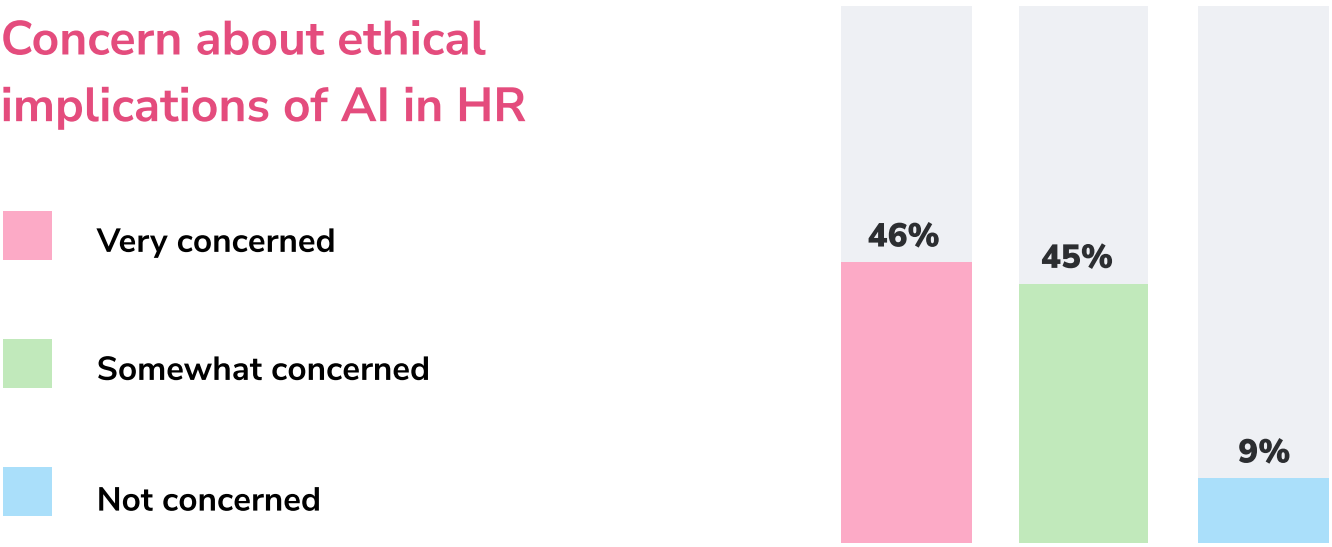
Backing this, **every three out of four business professionals believe AI and the HR function will coexist.** They assert that AI may even complement and empower the HR function.

Experts too attest to this. “Human errors are common in HR processes,” claims **Ashish Mittal, Group Chief Human Resources Officer, Sreenidhi Institute of Science and Technology**.

Mr. Mittal adds that AI can deliver consistent answers. “It doesn’t take leaves.” Where does this leave HR, the human professional? **“If routine tasks are taken over by AI, HRs can focus more on strategic concerns,”** he says.

It is not AI that must be feared. But the person with AI know-how can threaten your job if you don’t upskill, says **Deepika Mehrotra, Manager HR, Indpro**.

Concern about ethical implications of AI in HR



However, every fifth respondent also feels the debate is far from settled. They say it's too early to comment on the role of AI in HR as it is still being explored. Drawing conclusions at this point may be premature at best.

Pointing to the potential application of AI in HR, **Director - Global Head Talent, Learning & DEI at OpSec Security, Yashika Kaushal**, clarifies that **automation and AI can help more in enabling transactions. "This can allow HRs to focus on driving transformations,"** she adds.

> *We need to be clear about the areas and skills we want AI to work on.*



Yashika Kaushal
Global Head Talent, Learning & DEI, OpSec Security

Ethical fears galore

Similarly, **Gurpreet Singh, Director of Human Resources at Tata 1mg**, a consumer health platform, stresses that **HRs can spend more time on 'personalization' and 'contexts' when AI is in operation.**

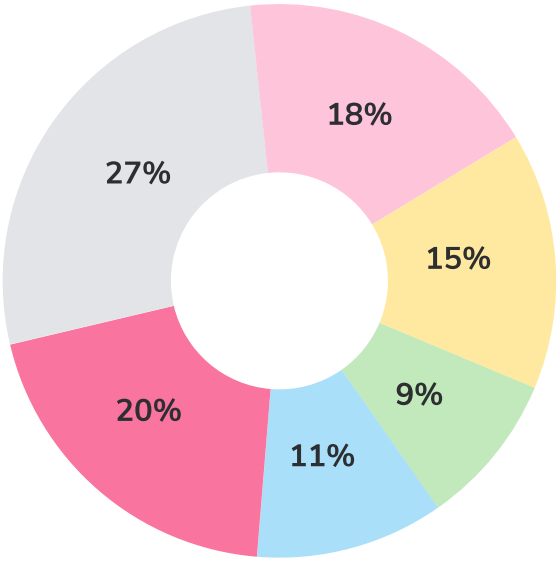
As for the future use of AI in HR, most respondents (27%) would prioritize AI implementation in automating administrative tasks, followed by improving candidate sourcing and screening (20%). Then comes having a virtual assistant or helpdesk at 18%.

But a new challenge is fast surfacing: ethical implications of AI in HR.

More than 90% of the respondents are very concerned or somewhat concerned about this, including issues of privacy and bias.

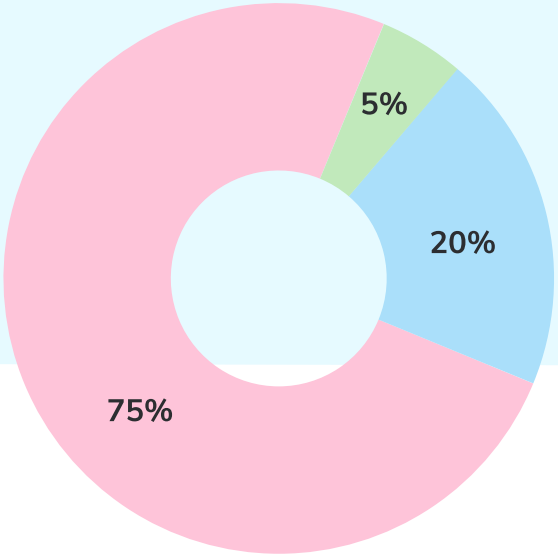
The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Abhishek Dey, Partner Success Manager, Keka

Priority areas for future use of AI in HR management



- Automating administrative tasks
- Improving candidate sourcing, screening
- Enhancing employee training, development programs
- Personalizing employee experience
- Optimizing performance management
- Virtual assistant or helpdesk

Perceptions about the role of AI in HR management



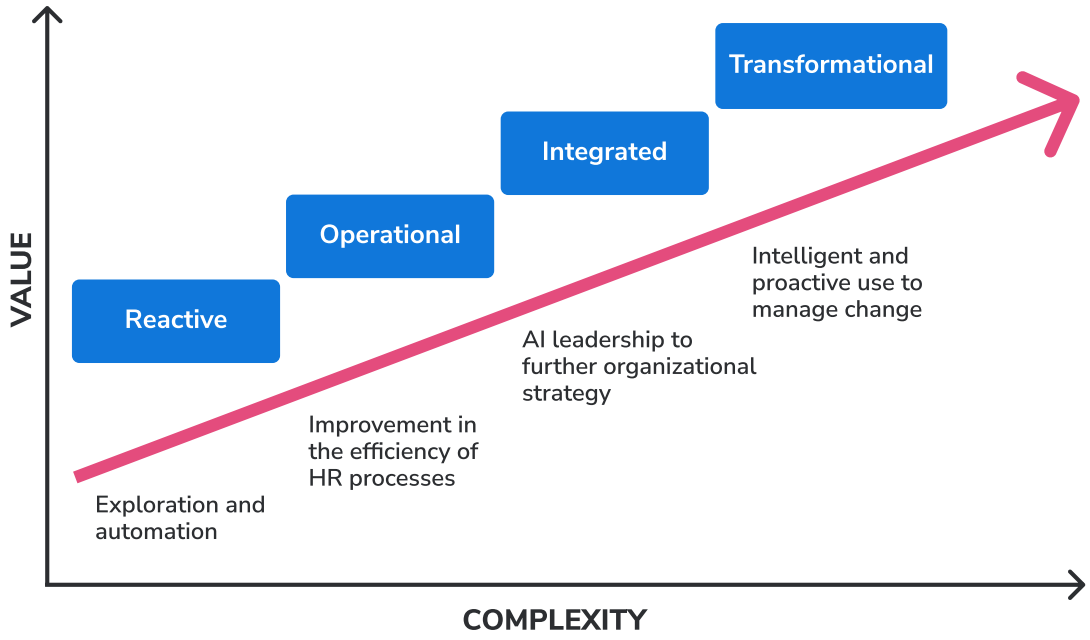
- It may threaten the jobs of HRs, potentially replace them
- Both will coexist, AI may empower the HR function
- AI's role in HR is still being explored

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Keka editorial take

AI in HR Maturity Model

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka



The AI in HR maturity model can be deployed by teams and organizations to **assess their progress towards artificial intelligence implementation in HR management.**

We found that most organizations lie in the 'reactive' stage, while some in the 'operational' stage. The transformational stage, the highest, represents a proactive system that aids change management. It is a blend of operational excellence with strategic oversight.

Stages progress with uniqueness in the focus, stakeholders involved, capabilities required and the complexity of technologies used.

Stage 1: Reactive

Organizations use AI to **respond to immediate HR needs and automate tasks.** This represents an exploratory approach. It may include AI use in chatbots, applicant tracking systems and basic data analytics to report on HR metrics. **The benefits include reduced costs and increased efficiency.** This stage requires HR professionals as operators of tools with IT teams providing support. Operators require basic data analysis skills and HR processes expertise as capabilities. Here, off-the-shelf AI solutions are mostly deployed including those powered by natural language processing.

Stage 2: Operational

The thrust is on **improving efficiency of HR processes**. It may include automated resume screenings, sentiment analysis and AI-led performance management. **Organizations may benefit from improved decision-making and productivity**. At this stage, even employees and managers are involved in tools implementation. Operators require advanced reporting skills. Tools are based on natural language processing.

Stage 3: Integrated

Organizations embed **AI in HR management to power the broader organizational strategy and improve the employee journey**. AI deployment is to improve employee engagement and workforce planning. Predictive analysis may be used to cut attrition. **This stage can strengthen the alignment of HR processes with business goals and boost organizational agility**. **The organizational leadership actively promotes AI use here with 'strategic AI leadership'**. Stakeholders engage in cross-functional collaboration while exhibiting superior data science expertise. Tools are based on predictive analytics and machine learning.

Stage 4: Transformational

AI use in HR is geared towards **organizational transformation through proactive strategy and intelligence**. Here, the focus on innovative HR practices help organizations overcome uncertainties and evolve with emergent trends. AI may be harnessed for succession planning or devising newer practices that reinforce organizational culture.

Organizations also exhibit intelligent generative capabilities to build their own tools, suiting workforce and business imperatives. At this stage, formal systems of external advisory are created to channel expertise of researchers and auditors in creating new tools. Even customer and partner view is sought. AI technologies are backed by machine learning. The application of quantum computing to power AI-led solutions is also explored.

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Strategic HR



Retention. Layoffs. The pressing need to hone business sense. The covid-19 pandemic has left behind many questions. The business table remains divided, even elusive for most HRs. Yet by stepping up now, HRs can spearhead strategy to pull companies out of uncertainty.

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Retention Tension:
Paying more isn't enough



Alex Borekull
Co-founder and CEO
Qlearsite



Jitender Panihar
CHRO
Fitelo



Gary Hazel
VP Talent Development
Injazat

Organizations are mulling new retention strategies. The Great Resignation has jolted workplaces even as job-hopping sends jitters across. Certainly, better monetary benefits is not the only attraction anymore. For the workforce, a redefined value proposition, which companies are desperately trying to crack, is informing job selections. What can make employees stay put?

The retention conundrum remains the biggest people challenge for organizations at 33%. Even before employee engagement, which is a hurdle for 29% of them.

Life has changed post the covid-19 pandemic, points out **Jitender Panihar, Chief Human Resources Officer, Fitelo**, a fitness application. "Organizations sensitive to the needs of employees in a remote environment will sail much better not just in terms of retention but for attracting talent," he adds.

Individual needs

Organizations operate in a diverse set of contexts. "So, finding the right balance between pay and other retention strategies should be unique to organizations. The first step is to capture individual needs of employees," says **Alex Borekull, CEO of Qlearsite.**

For most business professionals (31%), offering competitive compensation and benefits remains the thorniest challenge to retaining employees, other factors are emerging quickly.

Every one in four professionals believes lack of career development and growth opportunities mitigate against retention. And 18% maintain that engaging employees and creating a positive organizational culture are the tallest hurdles. Around 13% believe it's recognizing performance, while 11% point to the lack of work-life balance and flexibility.

Stressing the need for learning and development initiatives, **Josephine Groom, Chief Operating Officer at Qlearsite**, says, "People want to be earning and learning at the same time, but may sacrifice one for the other only for a short period of time."

Further, in smaller organizations proactive leadership and good expectations management for roles are the key, she adds. “Purpose and values matter too. People care about meaningful work. Plus, managers should support employee well-being.”

Make impact measurable

Another aspect employees look for is a clear career path, suggests **Padma Priya P, Associate Director - Human Resources, Blaize Inc,** Hyderabad. “This may help them progress alongside learning and development initiatives,” she advises.

But quite often, getting a buy-in from the leadership for an initiative can be difficult. **“Top tip, make the impact of taking action concrete and measurable. Without this, it is hard to prioritize actions against all the million things going on in an organization,”** suggests **David Stobs-Stobart, Chief Product Officer at Qlearsite.**

> *You can't (and shouldn't) prevent anyone from looking for other opportunities. The key is to make sure everyone understands why it is important to stay.*

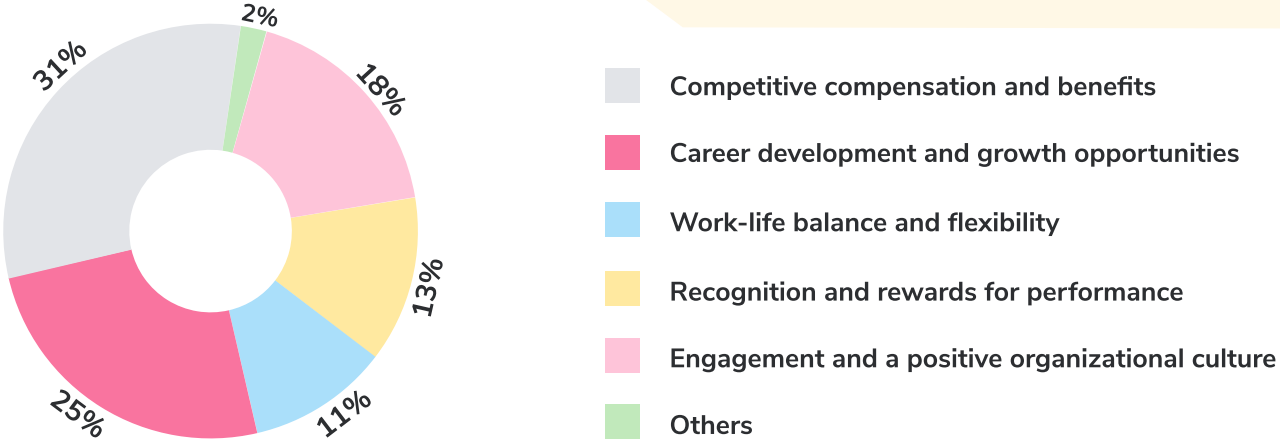


David Stobs
Chief Product Officer, Qlearsite

So, redefining people strategies can propel meaningful change. Half the professionals believe their leadership finds it to be the key to organizational success. Whereas, 26% of them claim their leadership doesn’t engage with people strategy. Instead, they focus more on other functions.

The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Lucky Sankhla, Channel Sales Associate, Keka

Major challenges in retaining employees

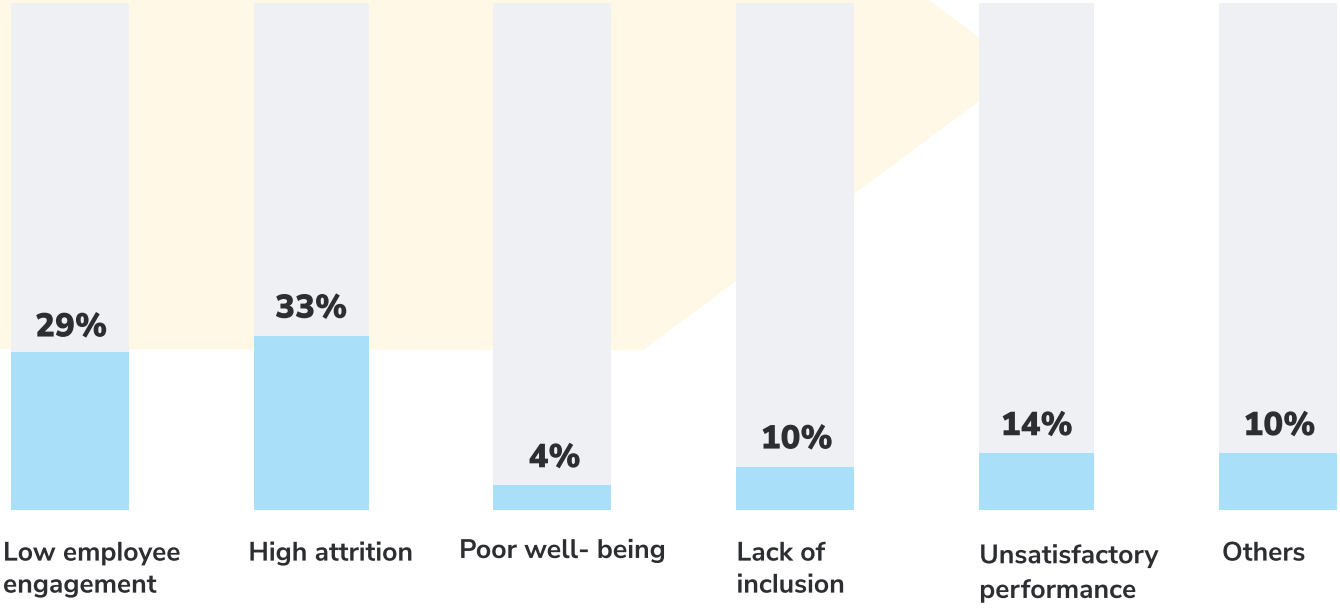


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What do your leaders think about people strategy?

They believe it is key to organizational success	50%
They focus on survey scores and whether they are up or down	16%
They don't really engage with it, spend more time with other departments	26%
Others	8%

People challenges across organizations



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Get Down to Business: Honing acumen of HR leaders



Udayan Walvekar
Founder
GrowthX

HR leaders are asserting themselves as business partners across organizations. For them to be heard and make informed decisions, a deeper understanding of business levers is the key. Still a daunting challenge for many, cultivating business sense is in fact empowering the HR function. Slowly, and more forcefully, the HR's voice is reaching boardrooms and driving outcomes.

"HRs are a goldmine of insights. People function has the most valuable insights. So, they can have a profound impact on the business," believes **Udayan Walvekar, founder of GrowthX**. These are operational, customer, market and strategic insights.

At present, just 30% of the business professionals feel HRs have an active involvement in business discussions and decisions.

But 42% feel the involvement is moderate. **Acquiring business acumen is not that easy for HRs. Around 75% of respondents find it difficult.**

In a bid to define business acumen, Mr. Walvekar says it's the profound understanding of an organization's operational mechanisms, including its financial structure, market position, strategic direction, competitive landscape and regulatory environment.

He adds, "It also means synthesizing this multidimensional understanding into judicious decisions, foster ideation and orchestrate stratagems that propel organizational advancement and augment market robustness."

Mind the toes

Among factors essential for building business acumen, every second business professional thinks strategic thinking and aligning HR with business goals and vision is the most important.

Moreover, 25% of the respondents believe it is industry research, knowledge of external market conditions and customers.

While attempting to be involved in business discussions with leaders of other functions, avoid stepping on their toes, Mr. Walvekar advises HR professionals.

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Mastering Business Acumen = Insights + Involvement + Impact

"Align your efforts with objectives and key results (OKR) of the functional head you're dealing with. Sync ups should add value. Essentially, your action items should cater to the needs of both the stakeholders," suggests Mr. Walvekar.

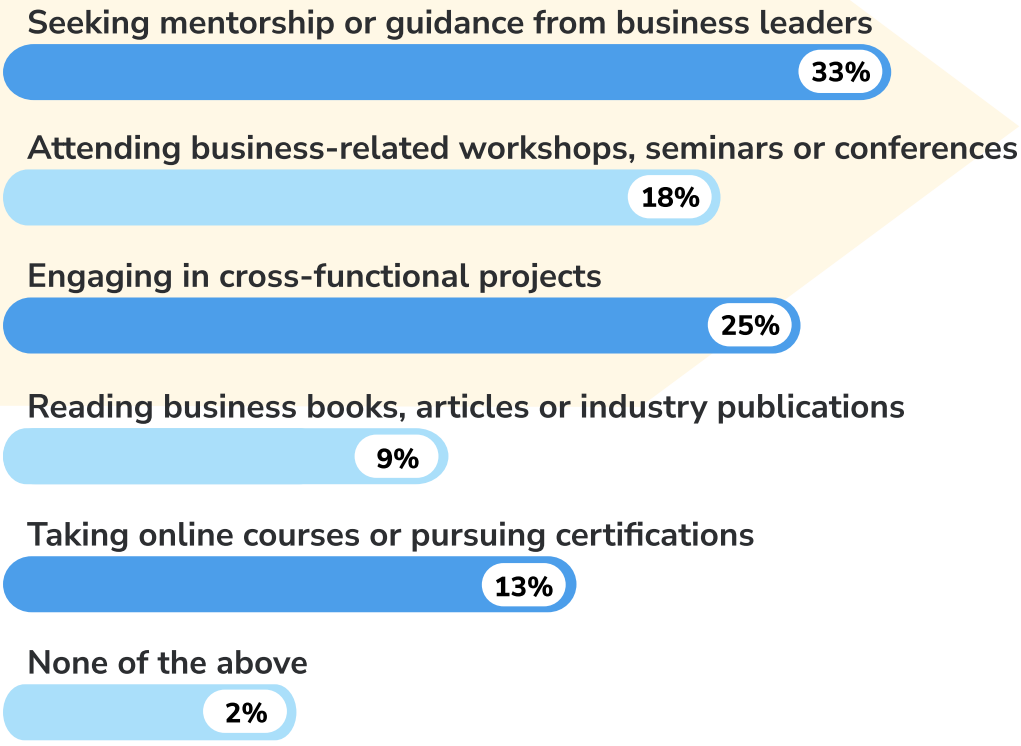
Share wins

And to influence and have an impact on the organization, keep employees aligned around one document, reiterate the focus on OKRs and share metrics and wins weekly, says Mr. Walvekar.

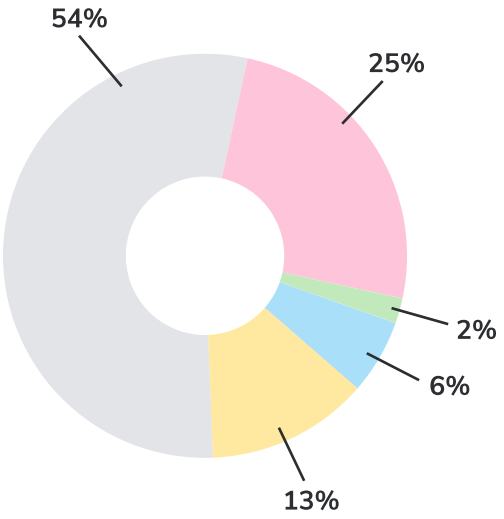
Currently, various channels aid HR professionals in developing the acumen. As many as 33% seek guidance of business leaders for it, while 25% rely on cross functional projects.

Explaining the evolving role of HR, **Josephine Groom, COO of Qlearsite,** believes the role is more data-centric now. "At the same time, organizations need to be more people-centric. Soft measures like engagement need to be linked to hard metrics like retention. It costs!" she exclaims.

How HR professionals hone business acumen

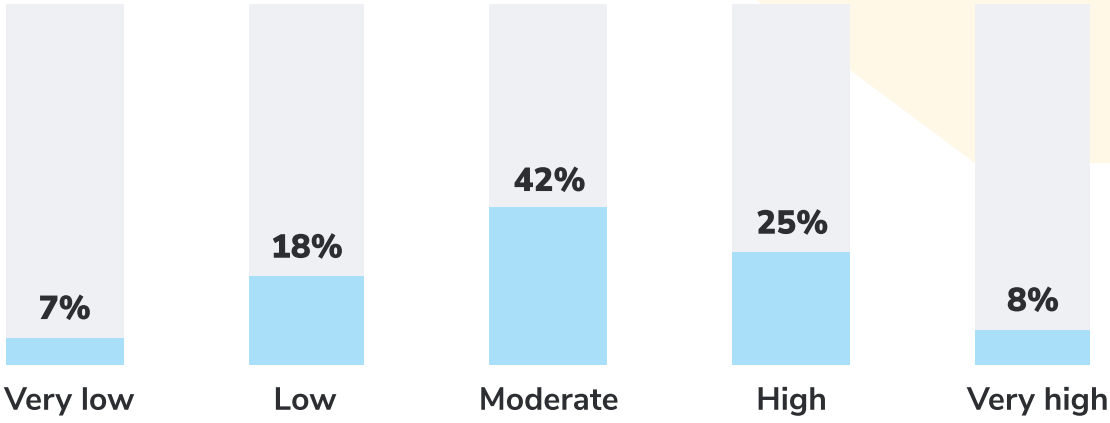


Which areas must HRs focus on to build business acumen?



- Understanding financial concepts
- Industry research, knowledge of external market and customers
- Strategic thinking, aligning HRM with business goals
- Collaboration with, knowledge of other functions
- Budgeting and resource allocation expertise

Involvement levels of HRs in business conversations



How difficult is it for HRs to cultivate business acumen



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Keka editorial take

HR Acumen Fabrics for Business Imprint

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka



Cultivating business acumen among HRs is a combination of elements that forms the 'HR acumen fabrics'. By focusing on the elements, in no defined order, HRs may prepare the fabric of business sense for themselves and their teams. This may secure HRs the strategic insight critical to resolving organizational challenges.

Practitioners may don the 'HR acumen fabrics' and operationalize it by integrating or weaving business sense into various steps of implementing initiatives. Workforce management could thus be aligned with organizational priorities. And HRs may make a larger 'imprint on the business'.

Elements of 'HR acumen fabrics'

F - Financial literacy and data skills

A - Awareness of market and competitors

B - Business knowledge

R - Regulatory awareness

I - Insight into customers

C - Contextual foresight

S - Strategic thinking

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Layoff Play-off: Who is to blame for mass layoffs



Dr. Anjali Desai
Head of Human Resources
Fourth Partner Energy



George Mathew
CEO & Founder
HumLog



Barun Mallick
First Believer
Keka



Seema Singh
Lead HR & Talent Acquisition
Euro Exim Bank

Mass layoffs continue unabated, battering the IT sector the hardest. And on most occasions, the buck stops with the HR. They don the bulletproof jacket for leaders to convey the 'unfortunate news' and also deal with the fallout. Those let go charge them as being heartless and unscrupulous. But are they really to blame?

Pinning the accountability on other business leaders and not HRs, **George Mathew, Founder of HumLog**, a human capital logistics firm, reasons, "If the HR doesn't have a role in the business decision of hiring, they cannot be held responsible for layoffs."

Around 26% business professionals believe that the leadership, including executive-level managers or the board of directors, are to blame. Another 25% think external economic conditions make layoffs inevitable.

Further, 7 % think laid off employees are responsible for their own fate. Plus, 3% think technical advancements rendering some jobs redundant is causing layoffs.

However, just 2% lay the blame squarely on HRs. Still, most respondents, at 37%, assert layoffs are a result of the combined effect of the causes stated above.

Lamenting that many organizations view HRs as mere coordinators and not decision-makers, **Anjali Desai, HR Head at Fourth Partner Energy**, a renewable energy firm, advises, "HRs must do their homework well in layoff situations so they don't suffer burnout."

Transparency counts

Yet when layoffs become inevitable, being transparent is of paramount importance, believes **Seema Singh, Lead HR and Talent Acquisition at Euro Exim Bank**.

"We must convey to those affected that it is the need of the hour and there's nothing personal about such a decision. **The reasons for layoffs must be communicated clearly.** This can also protect the brand image," she explains. **Further, more than half the respondents believe HR professionals can help mitigate layoffs.**

Companies can even pursue alternatives. As many as 40% of the respondents think reducing non-essential expenses and discretionary spends can prove most effective. Next, every fourth business professional believes implementing remote work and flexible schedules can be useful.

Still, others believe enforcing temporary salary reductions or freezes (13%) and implementing job sharing or reduced work hours (11%) can help avert downsizing.

HRs are not employees

Exhorting HRs to assume accountability for layoffs, **Barun Mallick, First Believer at Keka,** says, "HRs are now business partners. CEOs and head HRs today have an almost equal say in decision-making. HRs should discuss alternatives with CEOs before layoff decisions are taken."

> *In many small and medium enterprises, forget HRs having a seat at the table, they don't even have an HR.*

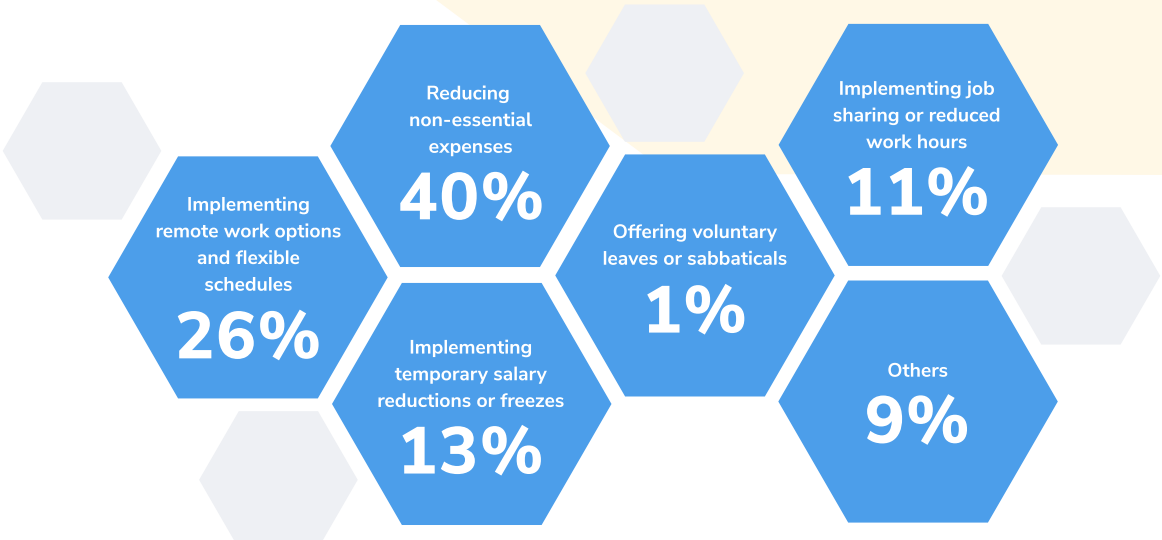


Seema Singh
Lead HR and Talent Acquisition,
Euro Exim Bank

HRs are not employees, Mr. Mallick avows. "Instead, they are there for employees. Thus, HRs hold an important and responsible position in organizations."

The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Sidharth Yadav, Content Research Analyst, Keka

Strategies that could prove most effective in avoiding layoffs

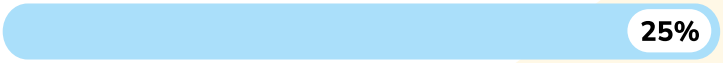


Probable factors causing mass layoffs

All



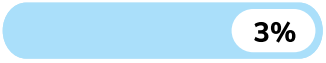
External economic conditions



Decisions of leadership including executive-level managers or the board of directors



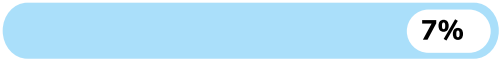
Technological advancements rendering some jobs redundant



Decisions of HR professionals



'Underperformance' of laid-off employees



Can HR professionals mitigate layoffs?



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Keka editorial take

HRs as Guardians

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka

HRs are the 'guardians' of both employee well-being and organizational health, especially during testing moments like layoffs. As proactive agents, they must first work towards **'mindful hiring'**, a conservative approach which links a business rationale to every recruitment decision. This can prove crucial during mass hiring decisions - often knee-jerk responses to economic trends - that may cause layoffs later.

Next, HRs must pull all stops at the business table to avert layoffs by pursuing alternative approaches. But when inevitable, they must **manage layoffs with strategic prudence.** Viewing 'HRs as guardians' can empower them to focus on employee well-being, sustaining a positive culture and preserving organizational reputation.

Each element of the 'GUARDIAN' view suggests specific strategies and actions for HRs so they could help steer organizations before and during layoff scenarios.

G - Guide leadership in managing crisis
U - Uphold employee welfare and well-being
A - Anticipate trends
R - Redefine roles for sustenance
D - Drive innovation for adaptability
I - Inspire confidence for action
A - Advocate for diversity
N - Navigate uncertainty with strategic insight



- **Guiding leadership in managing crisis**

This includes empowering leaders to make informed decisions with people analytics and ensuring the response is in tune with the organizational values and vision. Here, HRs can push for alternatives such as furloughs, salary reductions, job-sharing or cross-training.

- **Upholding employee welfare**

Even in tumult, HRs as credible activists must safeguard employee well-being and security. This includes providing emotional support, offering transparency in decisions and investing in reskilling and training to maintain job security. Communication channels must be kept open and accessible, with employees being able to express concerns freely and fearlessly.

- **Anticipating change and evolving trends**

As agents of change, HRs must grasp the organizational context to anticipate economic shifts, industry trends or technological advancements. By staying ahead of the changes, they can alert leaders and help organizations adapt, evolve and turn disruptions into levers of growth. Projections must be based on predictive models and industry analysis.

- **Redefine roles for sustenance**

With evolving economic trends and organizational needs, HRs must team up with departments to redefine roles and responsibilities. This can enable role relevancy for organizational goals and sustain performance levels. Obsolescence of roles can be avoided.

- **Driving innovation for adaptability**

Creative approaches must be promoted by fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability. This may include diversification of revenue streams and a reduced dependency on layoffs as a cost-cutting measure.

- **Inspiring confidence in challenging times**

While traversing through uncertainties, HRs must inspire confidence among customers, leadership and employees. They must adopt the role of communication champions, providing constant support and reassurance. This can aid proactive problem-solving and reduce anxiety. In the aftermath of layoffs, inspiring confidence among the remaining employees can help avert the 'survivor's syndrome', a major cause of turnovers after layoffs.

- **Advocating for diversity and inclusion**

A diverse workforce is more resilient to disruptions. HRs must harness diversity to sustain organizations. Diverse perspectives bring in creative and unconventional solutions. They also offer a holistic view of uncertainties, and this may facilitate informed decision-making.

- **Navigating uncertainty with strategic insight**

As business leaders, HRs must develop strategic plans that account for different future scenarios, potential challenges and contingency plans. This can shift HR practices from reactive measures like layoffs to proactive planning and action.

Workplace



The contours of the workplace are shifting. There is thrust on the hybrid format and a ripening of the freelance economy. Organizations are working out newer ways to delight employees - locating ‘meaningful work’ at the center of efforts.

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Safety First: Creating a psychologically safe workplace



Jaimit Doshi
Chief Technology, Digital and Marketing Officer - Driving Transformation
Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance



Rishi Gaurav Bhatnagar
Founder's office - Product & Design
Atlan



Richa Singh
VP HR
Max Life Insurance



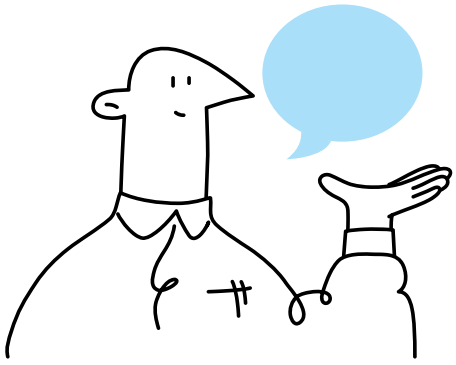
Amit Sahoo
Vice President, Global Head of Human Resources
Narwal

The need for creating workplaces where people can speak up without fear is being felt more strongly now. A greater stress on diversity and inclusion, the right to be heard and fair processes is driving this. And today, businesses are more confident of a link between psychological safety and high performance.

For an individual, there are few questions that characterize psychological safety, believes **Rishi Gaurav Bhatnagar at the Founder's office - Product & Design, Atlan.**

These are:

- Can I make mistakes with my team having my back?
- Am I working *with* my teammates or *against* them?
- Is there stress about defeating the competition and growing as an individual or about keeping my place in the company?



Similarly, organizations must ask themselves: Are we driven by fear, or motivation and creativity?

"All growth comes from a place of safety as in the case of plants. The moment there is stress on a plant, it dies. Fear does that for humans," adds Mr. Bhatnagar.

Open conversations

Business professionals believe the biggest challenge in creating a psychologically safe workplace is the lack of open and honest communication channels (35%). Whereas, 29% of them believe it is the lack of awareness about the safety.

"When employees see leaders take part in open conversations around psychological safety, the levels of safety improve," argues **Arshi Dutta, Manager-HR, SmartShift Technologies**.

But, who is primarily responsible for driving psychological safety at the workplace? Every second respondent feels it is all employees collectively rather than the leadership (32%) or the HR department (17%) alone.

Further, gauging safety levels and measuring interventions remain a challenge. **Close to 68% of the respondents claim their organizations lack a mechanism to measure psychological safety.**

Measurement matters

According to **Amit Sahoo, Vice President, Global Head of Human Resources, Narwal,** a firm that supports digitization of companies, there are several ways to assess the safety.

Roll out surveys at least twice a year and keep them anonymous, he advises. Organizations may also deploy artificial intelligence-based chatbots that engage employees. “You may also set up channels facilitating confessions within the organization,” he adds.

As for assessing your own safety levels, Mr. Bhatnagar suggests: “Pay attention to what you feel like when a message from a peer lands in the inbox. Are you viewing the message from a place of curiosity or fear?”

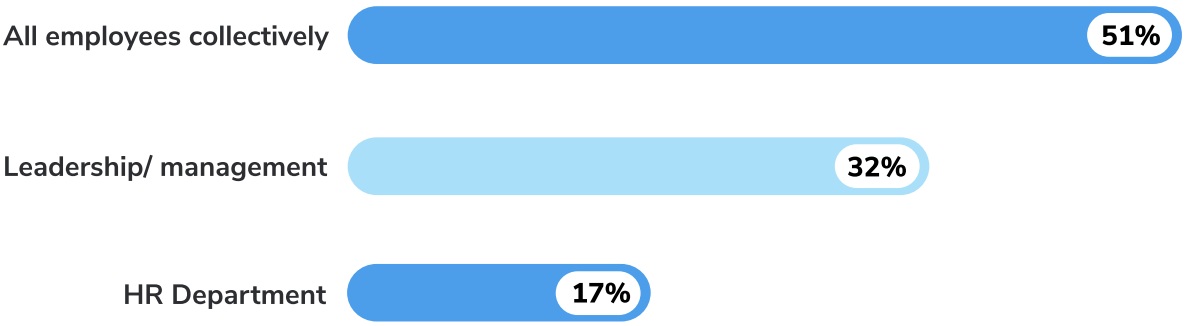
> *Organizations are not run by an army of robots. There are real people involved. They have emotions and pressures.*



Jaimit Doshi
Chief Technology, Digital and Marketing Officer - Driving Transformation, Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance

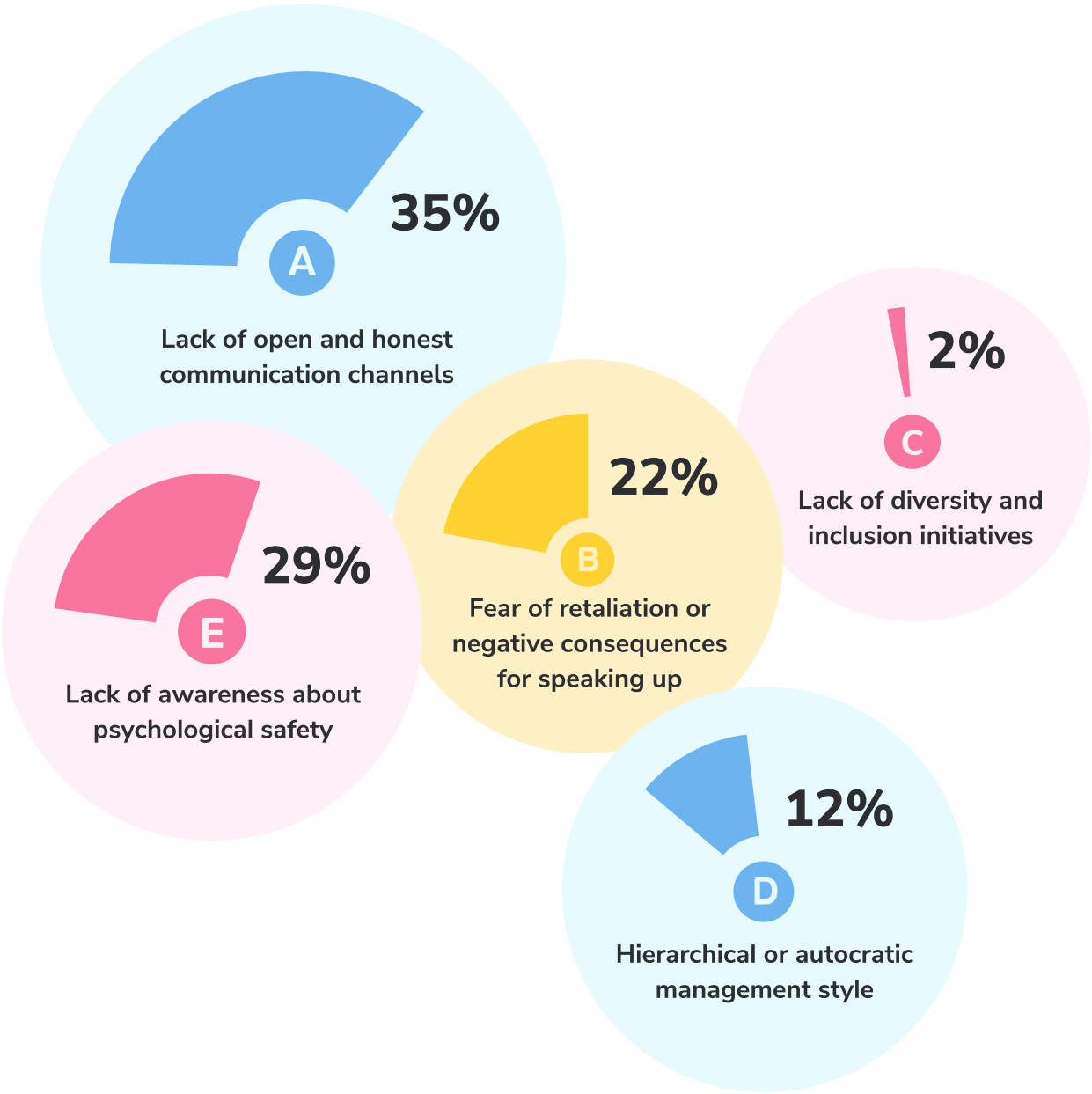
The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Richa Singh, VP HR, Max Life Insurance

Who is responsible for driving psychological safety



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Challenges in creating a psychologically safe workplace



Do organizations measure psychological safety?



Yes= 32%



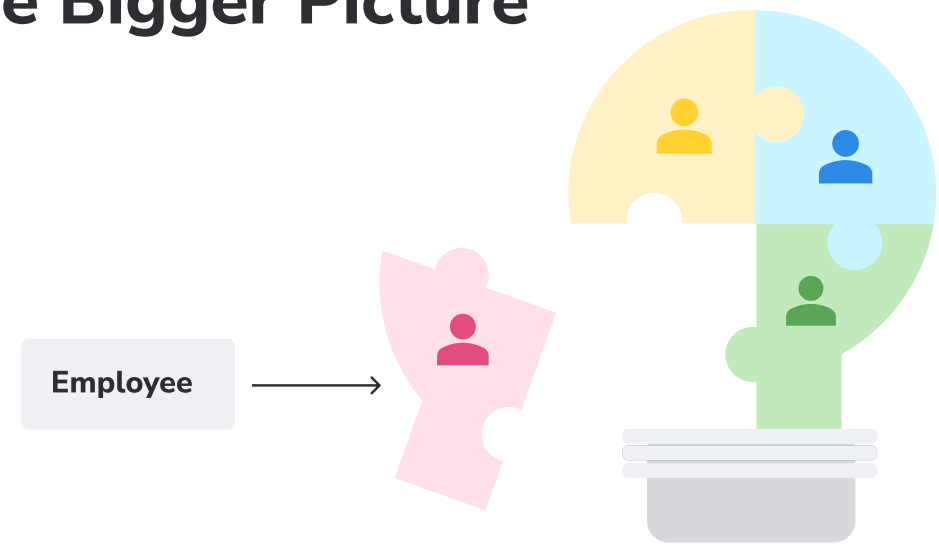
No= 68%

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Keka editorial take

Look at the Bigger Picture

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka



Imagine employees as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. **Just as each piece has a unique shape, each employee carries distinct skills, experiences and behaviors**. And only when organizations celebrate and reinforce the uniqueness each employee brings to the workplace can they excel.

It's about creating psychological safety at the workplace by keeping in mind the bigger picture, at all times: the company purpose and vision.

This bigger picture is complete only when individual puzzle pieces come together, forming a cohesive whole. With even a single piece missing, the bigger picture is incomplete.

So, valuing each employee for who they are - as indispensable carriers of talents and value - is essential to achieving the vision.

When employees feel valued and their voices are heard without the fear of retribution, they are likely to be more engaged, satisfied and productive. **When leaders 'look at the bigger picture', they refrain from categorizing employee expression as a threat. Rather, they celebrate the expression of diversity, and picture an opportunity in it for organizational growth.**

For the uniqueness employees exhibit, leaders must view them uniquely too. Puzzle enthusiasts examine pieces from all angles, focusing on how they fit the bigger picture and try to locate the right place for them. **Similarly, managers must evaluate employee strengths, weaknesses and behaviors to find the right place for them in the organizational fabric.**

Researchers at Keka have discovered that once leaders keep the bigger picture in mind, they start encouraging openness, inclusivity and safety at the workplace. And this bears positively on business outcomes.

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Connecting the Dots: Going beyond the fun Friday



Ganesh Iyer
Senior Director, Human Resources
ADP



Esraa Gamal
Global HR Manager
TechMantra Global



Dr. Anand Reddy
Head L&OD
Hetero

Employee engagement has been a strategic staple for retaining employees, boosting productivity and fostering teamwork. But relying solely on episodic, activity-based approaches may not yield desired outcomes today. The wider scope for boosting engagement is yet to be fully explored. As the war for talent rages, only recently have organizations set out to discover fresh means to bolster the employee-work link. Culture occupies the center of this approach.

Newer forms of engagement must be based on a balance between values and numbers, suggests **S. Anand Reddy, Head of Leadership and Organization Development at Hetero**.

"Organizations looking at short term goals focus on metrics only, while sustainable ones focus on values too," he claims.

Frequency of organizations using employee feedback to improve engagement



Similarly, business owners may give greater credence to metrics. "HRs should strive for a balance between values and numbers," says Mr. Reddy.

Further, shared values are important for the company culture, suggests **Esraa Gamal, Global HR Manager, TechMantra Global,** the United Arab Emirates.

Involve employees

"The first step to nurturing a desirable culture is to involve leaders and employees in creating the company vision, the mission and the values."

Yes, organizational culture must be geared towards business goals. "But it should go beyond that. **We should aid people in achieving personal goals through organizational goals**," added Ms. Gamal.

Thus the need for personalized learning. “Training can only bridge the gap in existing skills set. But learning is future-oriented,” explains Mr. Reddy. **“HRs must not think outside the box, they should break it.”**

In addition, **Harshita Kalra, Director - People and Culture at Grizmo Labs Private Limited**, Bengaluru, emphasizes the need for the management’s participation in organizational events.

Remote challenge

She asks: **“Is it not crucial for the management to participate alongside employees in activities across different levels? This can foster approachability and trust, while also creating an enjoyable and interactive space.”**

Only a few organizations today assess employee engagement regularly. Around 37% organizations conduct such assessments quarterly, but close to 30% hold them irregularly or as needed. In addition, 20% organizations hold the assessments annually.

In a bid to deal with new work formats, Ms. Gamal stresses achievement of objectives to keep employees engaged. “We have to teach remote employees how to communicate with virtual tools. **And it shouldn’t be about working hours alone. Focus should be on reaching objectives too.”**

Highlighting the need for newer engagement modes, **Medha Chikhalikar, who manages HR and Operations at Ignite Solutions India Pvt Ltd** in Pune, admits it is a challenge to conduct remote engagement activities.

> *Fun activities are important, yes. But building a strong culture goes beyond that. It requires a strategic approach.*



Esraa Gamal
Global HR Manager,
TechMantra Global

Also, fostering a suitable culture may sometimes require change. And there may be resistance. “We first need to understand concerns behind such resistance,”says Ms. Gamal.

“And then communicate the positive aspects of the changes. You also need to involve employees in the process. This way, you can convert resistors of change to enablers of it,” she adds.

The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Ganesh Iyer, Senior Director of HR, ADP

How frequently do organizations measure engagement



Annually	Biannually	Quarterly	Irregularly	Never
20%	7%	37%	29%	7%

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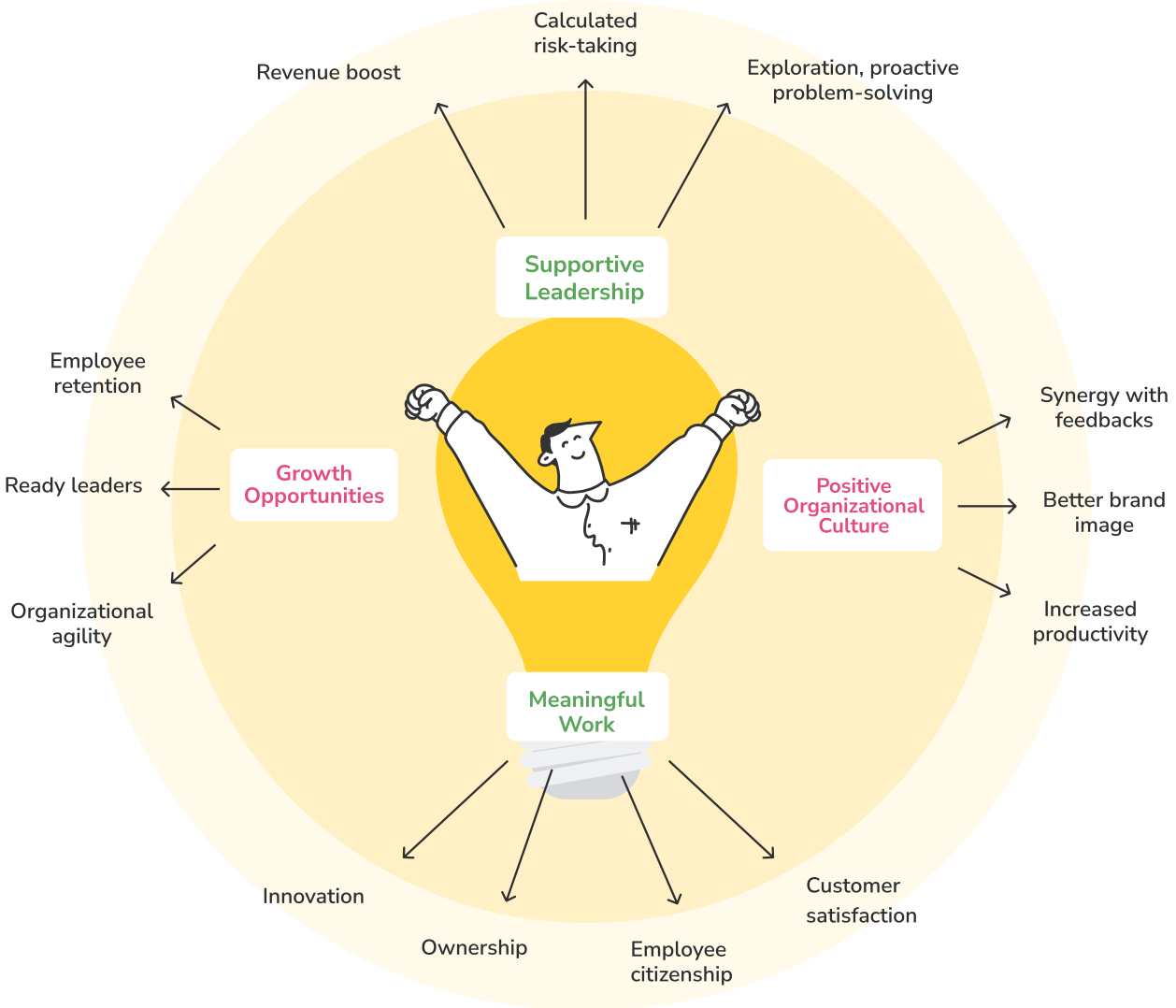
Keka editorial take

Glow to Grow

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka

Locating employees at the center of engagement strategies can benefit organizations on multiple fronts. **Engagement interventions may let employees 'glow', boosting their motivation, productivity and engagement levels. The 'glowing employee' may then deliver their incandescence to different organizational locales, thus illuminating various 'growth factors'.**

There are four 'glow switches', or critical engagement factors, surrounding employees that, when switched on simultaneously, make them 'glow' or become **'radiantly engaged'**. These proposed switches are based on the survey results from the HR Katalyst summit.



The four 'glow switches' are supportive leadership, positive organizational culture, meaningful work and growth opportunities. When these are 'switched on', that is operationalized through interventions, employees may experience a greater connection to their work.

But two of the 'glow switches' can be key differentiators for organizations in their desire to creating attractive workplaces. These are fostering a positive organizational culture and providing growth opportunities.

The radiantly engaged employee 'illuminates', or activates, various organizational 'growth factors'. These factors, when combined, may help organizations 'grow' and acquire a sustainable competitive edge.

Switching on 'Glow Switches'

1. Glow switch: Supportive leadership

Growth factors

- Revenue boost
- Calculated risk-taking
- Exploration and proactive problem-solving

2. Glow switch: Positive organizational culture

Growth factors

- Synergy and collaboration with other functions with feedback mechanisms in place
- Better brand image
- Increased productivity

3. Glow switch: Meaningful work

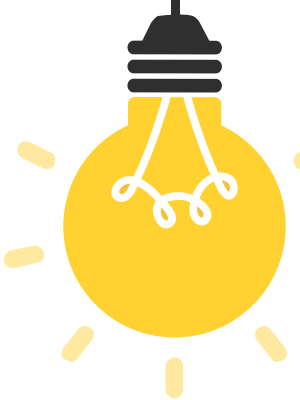
Growth factors

- Innovation and creativity
- Employee citizenship
- Customer satisfaction
- Ownership of tasks and accountability

4. Glow switch: Growth opportunities

Growth factors

- Employee retention
- Ready leaders
- Organizational agility



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Mind the Gap:
Valuing HRs more for greater impact



Atma Godara
Manager, Human Resources



Radhika Viswanathan
Head of Human Resources
Ozonetel



Roma Bindroo
Chief Human Resources Officer
Zepto

The HR function continues to be among the lowest valued and paid. This is true especially in small and medium firms. But recognizing and rewarding HRs more can yield many benefits, beyond individuals and organizations.

The HR is benchmarked as a semi-skilled function in comparison to similar grades in other functions, claims **Radhika Viswanathan, head of the Human Resources department at Ozonetel Communications**, a cloud telephony solution provider.

"The HR is considered a support function, easily dispensable. It is paid 50% lower than other skilled functions in the same organization," adds Ms. Viswanathan.

Still, most respondents at 54% claim there is pay parity between the HR and other functions at their organizations. Whereas, 41% admit to a pay gap favoring other functions at their companies.



Conscious goalkeeper

Over the years, the HR role has undergone a transformation, suggests Ms. Viswanathan. She asserts the role is now a highly-skilled, conscious goalkeeper of the organization from an unskilled/semiskilled gatekeeper earlier. "Does this reflect in the way HR is treated across organizations, industries or markets?" she asks.

Further, **Roma Bindroo, Chief Human Resources Officer at Zepto,** an e-grocery company, avows that **HRs should work on becoming the top talent themselves first**. "HRs don't peg themselves high enough. Before someone else cancels us out, we do it ourselves. We need to move ahead more strategically," she advises.

As regards the impact of paying HRs more, around 85% of the business professionals believe this can significantly help improve business outcomes.

In addition, **HRs must align values and work around business goals**, says **Sumalya Tumkunta, Manager-Human Resources, Xelpmoc Design and Tech Limited**, Hyderabad. “We must show how our work can help enhance decision-making of the leadership in critical aspects.”

Echoing the sentiment, Ms. Bindroo states: “How we measure the impact we create is important.”

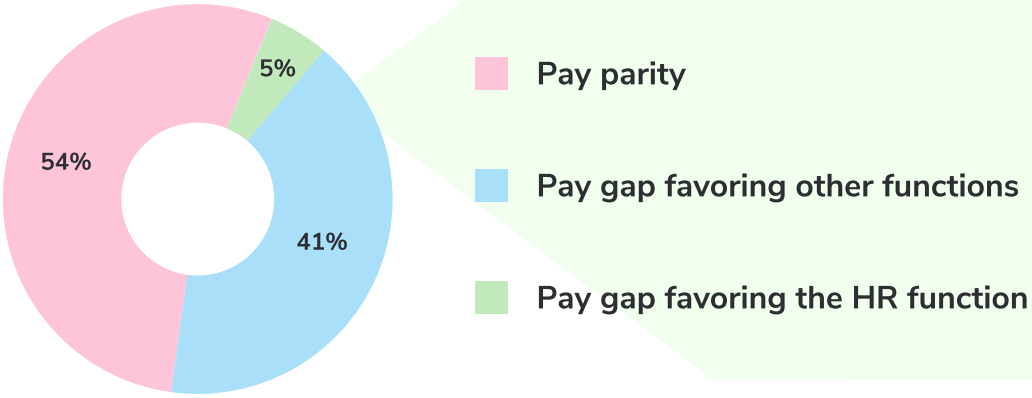
> *We have been playing the second fiddle for a long time. Claim your seat at the table, now!*



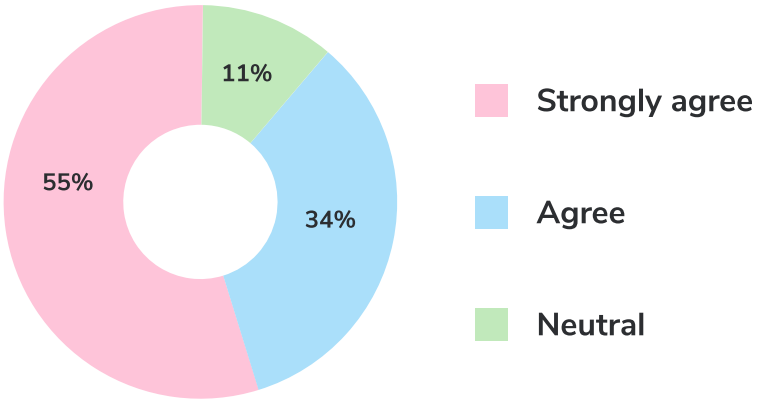
Radhika Viswanathan
HR Head at Ozonetel Communications

The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Ahmed Z.D., Assistant Manager, Content Strategy PMM, Keka

Pay parity levels between the HR function and others



Can compensating HRs well improve business outcomes?



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Keka editorial take

Multiplier effect: It's not just about HRs

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka

Valuing HRs more is not just about them. **Elevating their value proposition and compensating them more positively impacts individuals, organizations, businesses and customers**. This multiplier effect is a low-cost high-return model that can transform organizations.

Individual

Well-compensated employees, including HRs, experience higher job satisfaction, motivation and morale. **They are more engaged and committed to their work, and show improved productivity. In addition, they are more likely to invest in professional development to improve capabilities**. Higher compensation also acts as a means for recognizing HRs, the lack of which may cause burnout among them. A higher compensation is also a factor to attract talent.



Organization

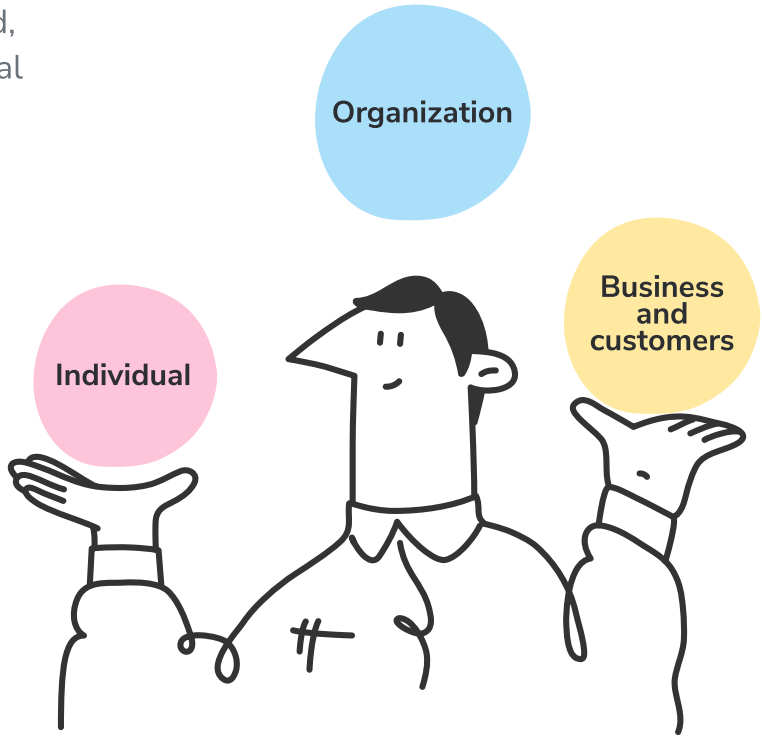
Valuing and compensating HRs more can have a positive multiplier effect across the organization and beyond. **A well-compensated HR is likely to innovate practices to enhance the overall employee experience.** This brings several benefits:

1. Better employee relations and grievance management
2. Initiative to take up a strategic role
3. Improved employee engagement
4. Effective change management and agility
5. Improved learning and development initiatives
6. A sturdy talent pipeline
7. Reduced attrition
8. Efficient benefits administration
9. Greater cross-functional collaboration
10. Better recruitment outcomes
11. Effective conflict management

Business and customers

When HRs feel empowered and valued, they also positively affect key contextual factors. **Thus organizations become better equipped to manage uncertainties while sustaining revenues and a positive brand image. The several benefits are:**

1. Increased revenue
2. Improved customer satisfaction
3. Sustainable competitive edge
4. Cost efficiency
5. Market responsiveness
6. Organizational resilience through uncertainties
7. Congruence between external conditions and internal strategies
8. Better brand image and reputation



Finding Purpose: How to make work not suck



Dr. G.P. Rao
Founder
GPR HR Consulting LLP



Anish Aravind
Human Resources Director
SS Consulting

Often, work becomes unexciting, draining even. To infuse life in work and make it more meaningful, organizations are going back to purpose. This could be derived from individual or company values or an intersection of the two. All this to let employees answer: Why am I here?

Stressing the importance of purpose, **G. P. Rao, founder and Managing Partner at GPR HR Consulting LLP,** suggests that purpose should be institutionalized. "It should trickle from the top to the bottom. People should be integrated with it," he says.

Further, he highlights a workable model at an electronics firm, where "every employee" feels they have contributed directly to the organization. **"When individual goals are set, employees can include personality development goals too. As a result, individuals are able to align their own objectives with those of the organization."** Thus, employees are clearly see their contribution to the organization.

Cascading purpose

But, just 46% respondents say their organizations cascade company values and purpose to employees. And 54% claim they measure whether employees resonate with the values and the purpose.

As for factors that contribute to making work fulfilling, most professionals (31%) believe opportunities for growth and advancement are the most important.

Inclusive cultures

Whereas, 18% each believes having supportive and inclusive workplace cultures, and work-life balance initiatives can make working exciting. Still, 15% of the respondents yearn for challenging and meaningful tasks.



Feedback mechanisms are essential to gauging how much people find work exciting, suggests **Manoj Nair, AVP - Client Services at cFIRST Background Checks,** Ahmedabad. "Flexible working options work great too," he exclaims. He adds that many top performers quit well-paying or meaningful jobs due to burnout or lack of alignment with the organization's vision.

Creating a positive employee experience can help lend meaning to work. Around 98% of the respondents feel work fulfillment and positive employee experience are related.

"People come to work for *daam* (pay), *naam* (recognition) and *kaam* (work). These should exist simultaneously at an organization to make work exciting," says Mr. Rao.

In view of a greater number of millennials entering the workforce, Mr. Rao feels flexible work options and job clarity can help.

> *Work must mean something more than a deadline. It should be an enjoyable project - a play for employees.*



Anish Aravind
Human Resources Director
SS Consulting

"**Millennials don't like ambiguity. They also expect to be treated respectfully**. The fear of losing job is less prominent among them. You should engage in a continuous *samvad* (dialogue) with them to understand their needs," he suggests.

Organizations where there is a system that:



46%

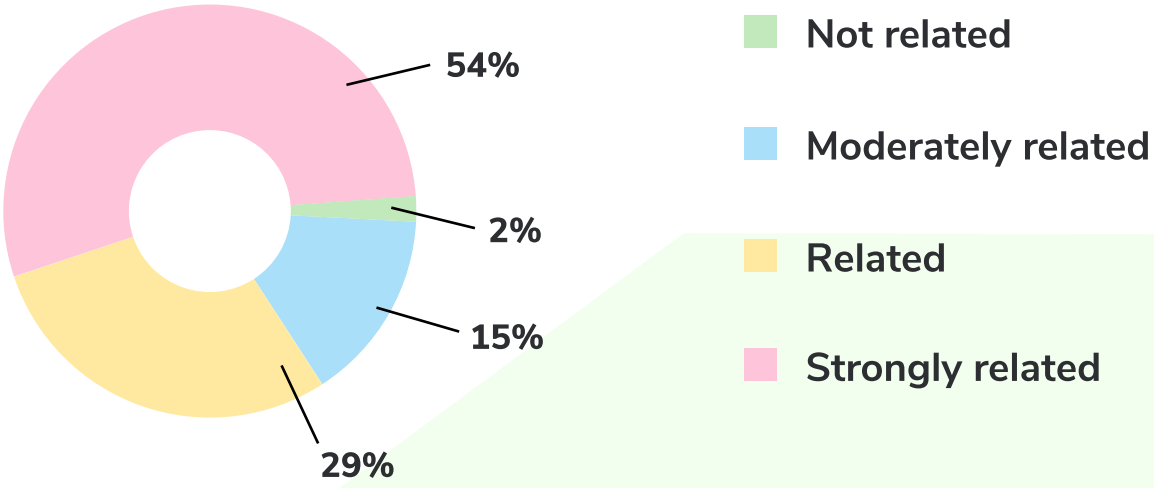
Cascades company values and purpose to employees



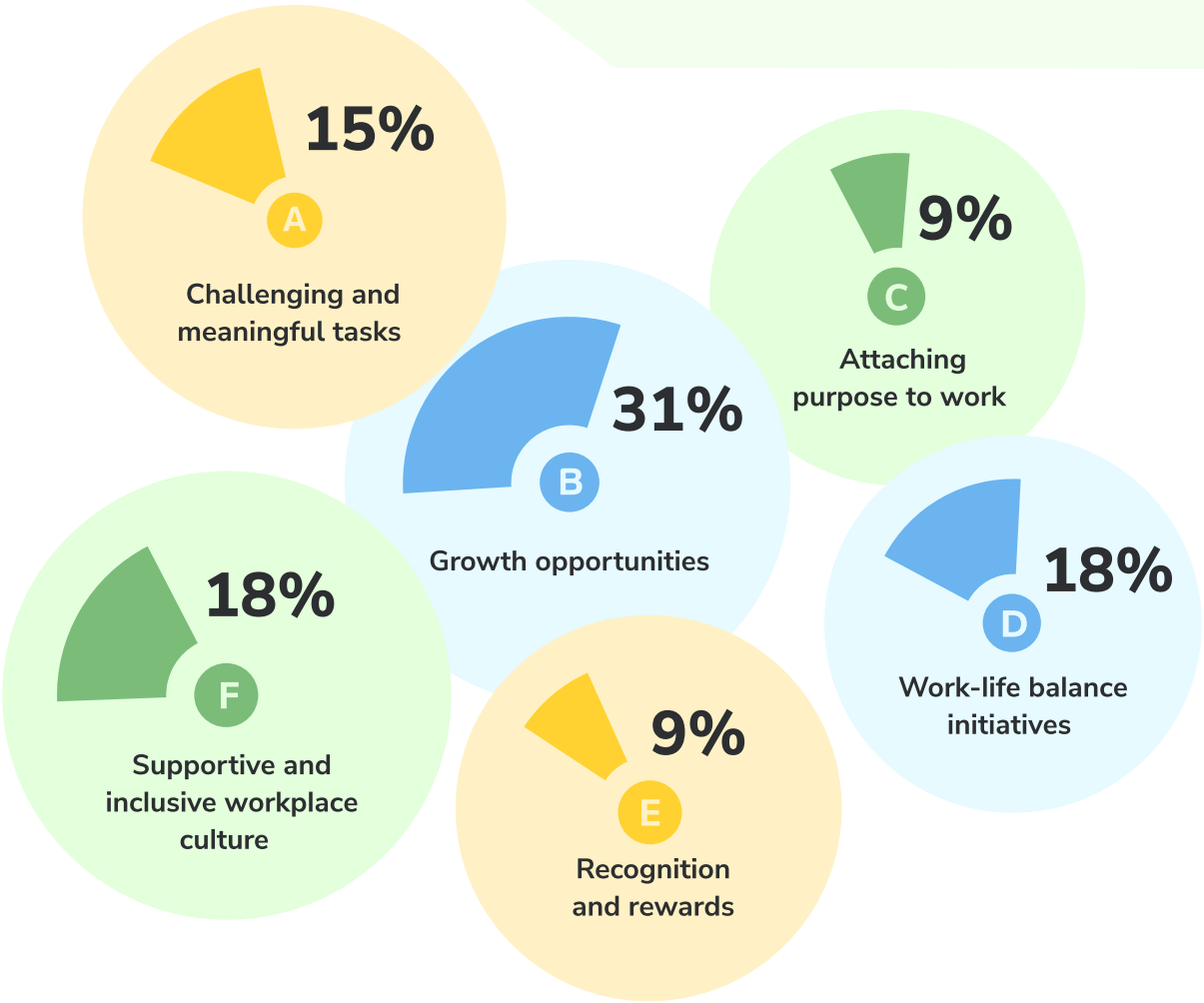
54%

Measures whether employees connect with the company purpose

How strongly are positive employee experience and work fulfillment related



Factors contributing to work fulfilment and excitement



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Give me a break: Bouncing back from HR burnout, stronger



Nishith Parikh
Head HR
Inventyv Software Services



Bala Vummidi
Head HR & Vice President
SRM Technologies



Rushad Shah
AVP HR
Cygnet Infotech



Mukul Mathur
former Head HR
CJ Darcl Logistics Ltd.

Today, burnout among HRs is more palpable as they take on a wider role. They are tasked with steadying flailing companies and steering them through economic uncertainties, while situating people at the center of strategy. The costs of burnout for businesses – and people – are huge, but not easy to capture in a hybrid work environment. How much stretching is too much stretching?

To address the burnout, **Mukul Mathur, former Head HR at CJ Darcl Logistics Ltd.**, believes it is essential for leaders to look out for early signs.

"Focus on deliverables, on the quality of work over quantity. Delivery of outcomes should be the priority for organizations, not the amount of time someone spends at their desk," adds Mr. Mathur.

Emotional baggage

What leads to burnout among HRs in the first place? Most business professionals (39%) feel that not being valued enough in the organization is the most significant cause.

Further, emotional exhaustion from dealing with employee issues (22%) and heavy workload and time pressures (18%) also fuel it.

Meghavi Mehta, HR Manager at Ansi ByteCode LLP, Ahmedabad, seconds this. "Being HRs, we carry the emotions of employees on our shoulders. Dealing with multiple emotions at once can cause burnout," she says.

Breaking targets into smaller ones can mitigate the pressure, advises **Bala Vummidi, Head HR and Vice President at SRM Technologies**. He implores HR professionals to focus on self-care. "In fact, it should be a goal for them," he says. As for the fallout of HR burnout, 84% of the respondents view it as having more severe consequences for an organization than the burnout of any other employee.

Delegate tasks and seek support without hesitation to relieve stress, says **Sumalya Tumkunta, Manager-Human Resources, Xelpmoc Design and Tech Limited**, Hyderabad.

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"HR management is a team effort, and sharing responsibilities can help alleviate the pressure. Communicate with your team members or superiors about workload distribution,"she suggests.

But, be vigilant about signs of burnout. These could be increased absenteeism, decreased productivity, emotional exhaustion, disengagement, cynicism, interpersonal conflicts or changes in behavior and mood, lists Ms. Tumkunta.

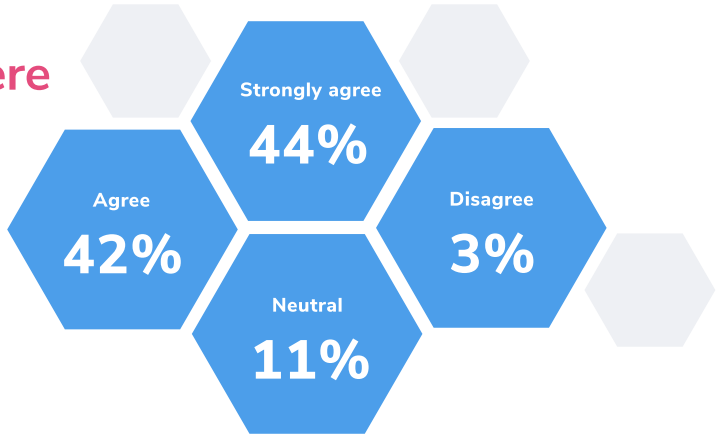
> *HR people are thanked less. Business leaders and HRs need to support each other in equal measure.*



Nishith Parikh
HR at Inventyv Software Services

The session at HR Katalyst was moderated by Tushar Berlia, Sales Enablement Manager, Keka

HR burnout has a more severe impact on organizations than burnout of any other employee



Probable causes of burnout among HR professionals

9%
Doing tasks that could be automated

12%
Managing pandemic-induced changes

18%
Heavy workload, time pressure

22%
Emotional exhaustion from dealing with employee issues

39%
Not valued enough

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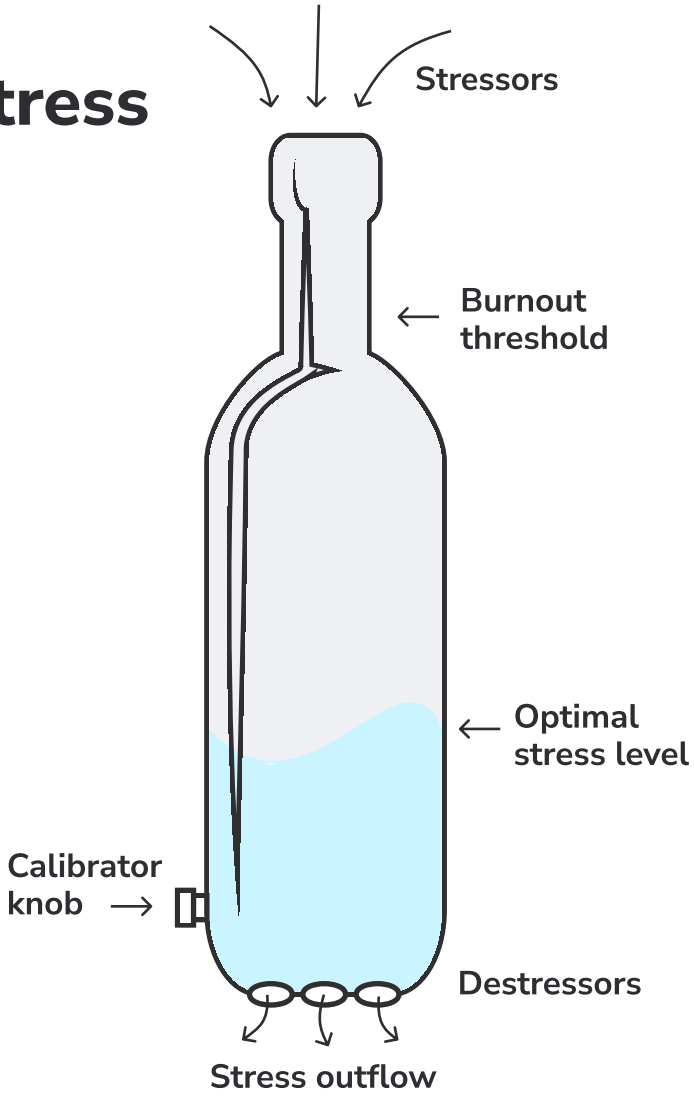
Keka editorial take

Bottle Down to Destress

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka

Imagine HR professionals as water bottles, with the amount of water inside representing stress levels. The more the water in the bottle, the greater the stress levels.

When HRs 'bottle up' stress, it can gradually raise the stress levels to cause burnout. Worse, the stress may spill over (full burnout) to impact others, damage work relationships and affect organizational health.



The 'Bottle Down' framework can help destress HRs and avert burnout. Stress can be managed by calibrating organizational destressors to let out stress depending on the intensity of stressors.

The top of the bottle represents the entry point for organizational 'stressors'. These could be aggressive targets and unrealistic expectations, emotional labor and exhaustion, lack of recognition and change management.

At the bottom of the bottle, outlets serve as mechanisms for HR professionals to destress. There are a variety of destressors that may be deployed as outlets for specific individuals and teams.

The intensity of the destressors can be calibrated based on the flow of stressors. **In other words, when stressors' intensity is high, HRs may need more intensive or frequent access to destressors.**

This is to maintain an optimal range of stress, necessary to function as an HR professional. **This healthy range may fuel motivation and productivity. It may challenge HRs without overwhelming them**. This is the ideal water level in the bottle. **To maintain this, destressors must always be present and not be deployed reactively.**

HRs and their leaders must regularly monitor stress levels through observable behaviors and performance metrics.

The critical stressors have been derived from the surveys conducted during the HR Katalyst summit. These are accompanied by suggested destressors.

Stressor: Aggressive targets and unrealistic expectations

Destressors:

1. Resource reallocation and workload management: Redistribution or redelegation of tasks among team members based on their strengths and expertise. Regular check-ins for target achievement status. Redefining individual targets and goals to let off steam and reduce stress
2. Well-being interventions: Employee assistance and stress reductions programs
3. Clear and open communication channels to encourage signaling of burnout signs and delegation and distribution of responsibilities. This may prevent silent suffering due to burnout or quiet quitting
4. Role-modeling behaviors by leaders
5. Flexible work arrangements
6. Cross functional support including employees, resources and skills
7. Engagement by HR leaders with senior management to ensure targets are aligned with available resources. They must seek the business case for each requisition raised.

Stressor: Managing change

Destressors:

1. Resilience building exercises through workshops and training
2. Cultivating business acumen and data management skills
3. Redefining roles and expectations during uncertainties
4. Fostering a supportive culture backed by a proactive leadership
5. Resource allocation and reallocation

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Stressor: Exhaustion due to emotional labor (compassion fatigue)

Destressors:

1. Intensifying rotational assignments
2. Promoting emotionally intelligent leadership: open communication channels, empathy and active listening among team members
3. Debriefing avenues to destress: by an expert or a senior colleague (peer review panels) or by setting an emotional support hotline
4. Emotional resilience training
5. Flexible scheduling during crisis

Stressor: Lack of recognition

Destressors:

1. Diversifying recognition channels: peer committees, personalized recognition and acknowledgment in company communication channels
2. Increasing recognition frequency and promoting cross-functional recognition based on collaboration
3. Operationalizing the multiplier effect of valuing and compensating HRs more
4. Leadership-led recognition initiatives and praises
5. Redefining growth paths of HR professionals to bring clarity in expectations, provide direction and predictability, and make them feel valued
6. Goals redefinition to align individual goals with team and organizational goals.
7. Strengthening HR business partner role and providing space for strategic decision-making. HRs should be ‘seen as involved’ in major decisions.

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Keka editorial take

HR Burnout Alert System

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka

The HR Burnout Alert System warns organizations against three levels of burnout among HR professionals and recommends actions. The levels indicate progressive burnout stages **- 'yellow', 'orange' and 'red'.**

The system helps identify burnout levels based on certain observable behaviors among HR professionals. The behaviors are only indicative and don't point to a burnout level with certainty. Final assessment must be based on organizational priorities and contextual conditions. The suggested remedies may help organizations mitigate effects of burnout triggers.

Yellow

Signs

1. Less initiative

Behaviors

- Reduced proactiveness in solving problems, including employee concerns
- Overdependence on supervision
- Reluctance to take on new or challenging projects
- Avoidance of cross-functional collaboration
- Resistance to change, including introduction of new practices or technologies
- Limited follow-through

2. Productivity slump

Behaviors

- Missed deadlines and frequent overtime
- Drop in the quality of work
- Poor time management
- Drop in output
- Frequent errors
- Excessive time spent on unproductive tasks
- Lack of clear goals and prioritization

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3. Reduced engagement

Behaviors

- Minimal collaboration
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Lower attendance and punctuality
- Ineffective communication
- Lack of feedback and suggestions
- Reactive problem-solving



HR Burnout Alert System

	Yellow	Orange	Red
Signs	Less initiative	Withdrawal	Destructive attitude
	Productivity decline	Apathy	Complete disengagement
	Reduced engagement	Performance dip	Hostility and aggression
Remedies	Flexibility	Open communication	Individualized support plans
	Task variety	Purpose reinforcement	Structured reintegration
	Autonomous job crafting	Feedback and coaching	Conflict resolution

Remedies

1. Flexibility

Offering flexible work hours can help. Greater stress must be placed on ownership, autonomy and accountability rather than command and control. There should be open and accessible communication channels that promote collaboration and innovation.

2. Task variety

Encourage job rotation and promote cross-functional projects. Also invest in skills expansion to improve capabilities. Job enrichment can also help with a balance of both repetitive and novel assignments. Variety must be promoted in exploring newer approaches and solutions to complex tasks.

3. Autonomous job crafting

Encourage self-reflection among employees about their job responsibilities and how they align with their skills and interests. Help them define their personal and professional goals as well as values. Create channels for HRs to identify tasks likely causing burnout. Allow individuals to discuss their growth paths openly with managers, to bring meaning, clarity and direction to work. Also discuss competencies and situations necessary for them to thrive on this path.

Orange

Signs

1. Withdrawal/Isolation

Behaviors

- Avoiding interaction with coworkers
- Spatial isolation to stay away from others. Working from isolated spaces.
- Decline in contributions in projects and meetings
- Increased absenteeism
- Neglect of professional development
- Lack of transparency



2. Apathy

Behaviors

- Emotional withdrawal by showing indifference and detachment
- Uncooperative attitude in collaborative projects
- Unwillingness to engage in employee citizenship behaviors
- Lack of interest in new opportunities
- Lack of interest in goal setting

3. Performance dip

Behaviors

- Neglecting key result areas and responsibilities
- Reduced output and poor outcomes
- Reduced productivity
- Increased errors
- Avoidance of challenging work
- Lack of initiative

Remedies

3. Open communication channels

Hold regular one-on-one meetings and check-in sessions with a focus on assessing well-being levels. Set up anonymous feedback mechanisms. Communication channels must be free of bias and prejudice and should be decentralized to improve accessibility.

3. Purpose reinforcement

Reiterate team or department purpose and values and show how they align with organizational goals. Cascading goals to the individual-level, with company-wide transparency of individual goals, can help. It is important that each HR professional is clear about their role expectations. They must be able to view clearly how their tasks help achieve the company objectives.

3. Feedback and coaching

Embed a positive feedback ethos in culture. Make sure the feedback is acted upon and communicate progress on them to employees. Goals and task allocation should be routinely reviewed. And feedback on work progress efficiency should be taken regularly. Facilitate peer coaching and support groups to encourage self-reliant engagement teams. Personalize coaching as much as possible, basing it on organizational priorities.

Red

Signs

1. Destructive attitude

Behaviors

- Neglecting feedback and unwillingness to act on it
- Willful disregard for managers or supervisors
- Long working hours and neglecting breaks
- Absconding from work
- Dishonesty and unethical work
- Micromanaging colleagues
- Undermining team work
- Disregard for organizational goals

2. Complete disengagement

Behaviors

- Evading accountability and oversight
- Extended periods of inactivity
- Total withdrawal from meetings
- Decision paralysis resulting in tasks stalling
- Bringing interactions with colleagues to bare minimum levels or ghosting colleagues
- Avoiding leadership roles

3. Hostility and aggression

Behaviors

- Aggressive communication
- Sabotaging work relationships
- Showing lack of empathy and understanding of others
- Complaints by others indicating aggression
- Frequent outbursts
- Disregard for department and company policies

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Remedies

1. Individualized support plans

Managers should tailor support plans to the needs of individuals facing the worst form of burnout. **It must begin with the diagnosis of causes and their impact on aspects of well-being - emotional, mental, social and physical**. Then, stakeholders including managers and peers must lead support initiatives. Plans may include job redesign and role clarity; emotional and social wellness programs; and coaching.

2. Structured reintegration

There should be phased reintegration of professionals facing burnout into the organizational fabric. Start with reduced work loads and role expectations, gradually scaling them based on assessments and feedback. Peer networks and open communication channels should support reintegration.

3. Conflict resolution

Help professionals resolve both internal and external conflict through support mechanisms. This can be done through conflict mapping, identifying causes and patterns of conflicts. Promote targeted interventions. Mediation of external conflicts can also help.

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Keka editorial take

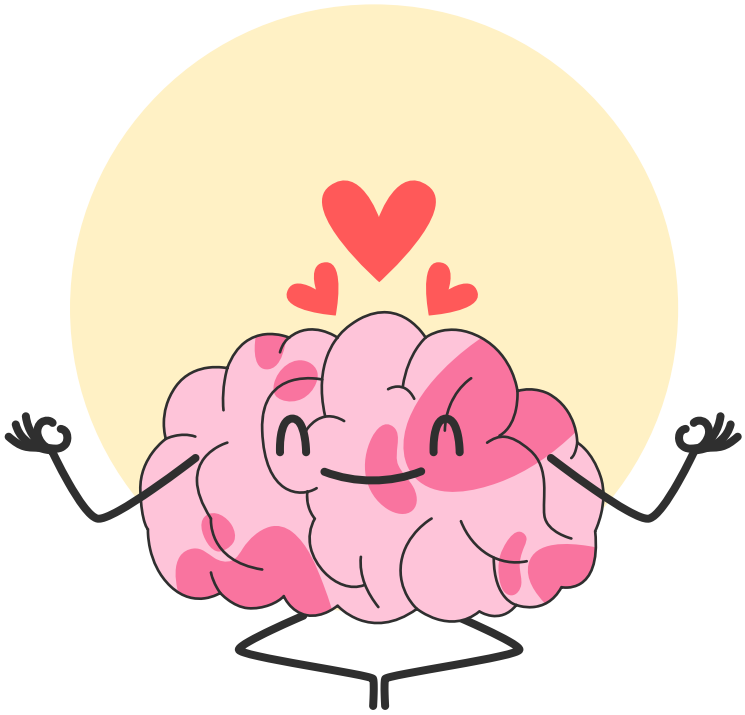
People Well-being Compass

Sidharth Yadav,
Content Research Analyst
Keka

A self-assessment tool called 'People Well-being Compass' can help gauge employee well-being levels along four spheres of the well-being: emotional, social, mental and physical.

The tool can help identify those aspects of well-being that fare poorly and require urgent attention and those showing healthy levels. The assessment can be taken by individual employees on their own or be administered by an organization or a team to their employees. **No specialist is needed to administer the tool**.

The compass is an assessment tool only and can be used to generate descriptive data. However, well-being interventions, prompted by the results, must be specific to contexts of industry, workforce size, organizational goals, geography and economy.



Compass description

The compass features four employee **'well-being directions'** corresponding to the cardinal directions - (E) Emotional, (S) Social, (P) Physical and (M) Mental.

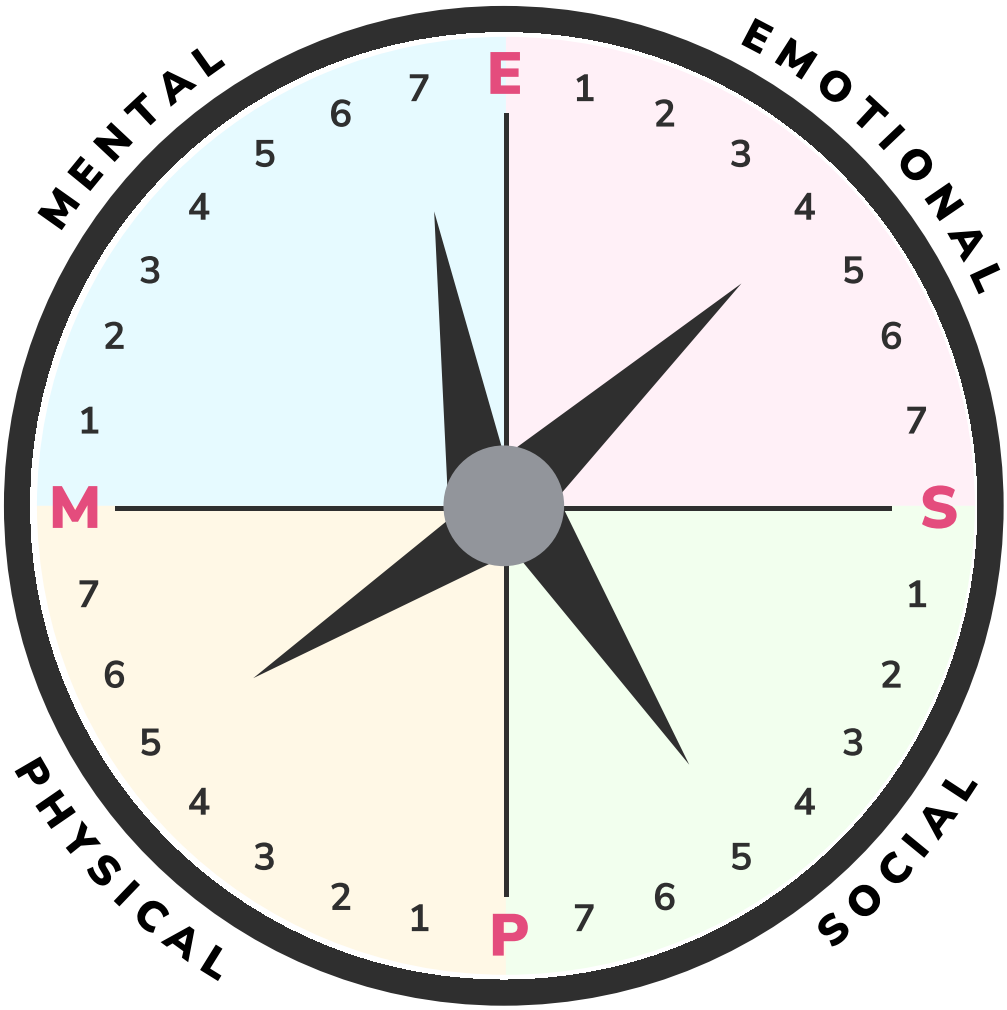
From one direction to the next, clockwise, each quadrant represents a **'well-being sphere'** which contains a **'well-being needle'** each. Each sphere is marked clockwise from 1 to 7.

When the needle is positioned at '1' in a well-being sphere, it is the closest to the corresponding well-being direction and indicates the least unhealthiest level possible for a well-being sphere. Whereas, '7' represents the unhealthiest level possible for a well-being sphere.

How to operate the People Well-being Compass

1. Acquire the People Well-being Compass and well-being statements. An assurance of honest responses must be taken from respondents, while administrators should promise confidentiality.
2. Administer the statements to respondents. Ask them to indicate the number of statements they agree with in each sphere, without revealing which of those they agree with.
3. After receiving the responses, move the needle in each sphere of the compass to the number of statements agreed with.
4. The sphere with the most number of agreed upon statements needs the most urgent attention. This indicates relatively unhealthy levels of well-being in that sphere.

People Well-being Compass



Well-being statements

Emotional well-being

1. I've been suppressing my emotions rather than addressing them
2. I find it difficult to find joy or enthusiasm in tasks that used to interest me
3. In the past six months, I've had an emotional outburst that I now regret
4. I've become more sensitive to criticism or feedback from colleagues
5. I find negative attitude of others towards me mostly unreasonable
6. I keep my emotions detached from work responsibilities
7. It is taking me longer than usual to recover from emotionally tense situations

Social well-being

1. I've been avoiding opportunities to collaborate and work in teams
2. I've been avoiding social gatherings or team events due to feelings of discomfort
3. I feel disconnected with the company's culture and community
4. I find it difficult to ask questions or seek clarifications from colleagues during meetings
5. I miss a space where I feel included and my opinions are valued
6. I find it challenging to balance professional boundaries and building rapport with colleagues
7. I've been avoiding sharing personal anecdotes or experiences during workplace interactions

Physical well-being

1. I find it challenging to incorporate regular exercise in my routine
2. Despite good sleep and nutrition, I feel drained of energy on some days
3. I've begun making unhealthy food choices
4. I've noticed an increase in my reliance on caffeine or energy drinks to stay alert
5. I've noticed a decline in immunity, leading to more frequent illnesses
6. I have noticed increasing tension in muscles and body (such as back or neck ache)
7. I find it difficult to take breaks during work

Mental well-being

1. I find it challenging to disconnect from work-related thoughts even during personal time
2. I've noticed a decline in my problem-solving skills and cognitive abilities
3. I am not coming across enough mentally stimulating tasks
4. I am finding it a challenge to learn new things and retain information
5. In the past month, I have questioned at least once the value and impact of my contributions at work
6. I've noticed an increase in mental clutter or racing thoughts
7. I frequently catch myself zoning out during meetings or conversations

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Join Hands: How to trust people you don't like



Harjeet Khanduja
Senior Vice President
Human Resources
Reliance Jio

"Trust is built to be broken," quips **Harjeet Khanduja, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Reliance Jio.**

"Accepting this will make life much easier. If it is built to be broken, then why have it in the first place?" he asks.

Dwelling on the importance of trust, Mr. Khanduja says it helps lower stress levels. He cites research by neuroeconomist Paul Zak which posits that organizations that build trust have 74% lower stress levels and 50% higher productivity.

Agility stems from trust

"Organizations also build agility based on trust," he adds. "When you trust someone, the speed of execution increases. You don't have to indulge in too much due diligence."

Next, Mr. Khanduja lists two kinds of trust:

1. **Rational trust** - cognition-based wherein trust is build on rational assessment
2. **Emotional trust** - Driven primarily by emotions and not competence

In a bid to explain the reasons for people not liking each other, Mr. Khanduja suggests the acronym - 'Invest'.

This comprises interest clash, nature mismatch, value system mismatch, expectation mismatch, social perceptions (preconceived notions) and trust break. But, how to trust people you don't like? Mr. Khanduja has some suggestions:

1. **Detoxify** - You trust someone and then the trust is broken. So you rebuild it. "Human anatomy is such that we are built to trust."

Why people dislike each other

I - Interest clash
N - Nature mismatch
V - Value system mismatch
E - Expectation mismatch
S - Social perceptions
T - Trust break

2. **Rethink of the cause -** Think about the cause rather than the person. “If you focus on the cause, you’ll be able to work with that person relatively easier,” says Mr. Khanduja. It is not about overcoming your emotions. “Rather, if you try to rationalize emotions, you will find merit in working with others.”

3. **Explore options** - If you are looking for a particular competence in a person, see if there are others with the same competence.

4. **Assess passion -** Suppose you dislike someone for their underperformance or not meeting expectations, “look at the person for their passion to prove themselves.” Mr. Khanduja adds: “Give that person another chance. The person’s passion may serve the purpose you need them for.”



5. **Give a mindful chance** - “All the people who’ve made it big have trusted people they don’t like,” believes Mr. Khanduja. If you are in a raft in a stream, it doesn’t matter if you don’t like the person beside you. “You have to focus on yourself; you have to keep your raft afloat,” he adds.

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the talent deck.

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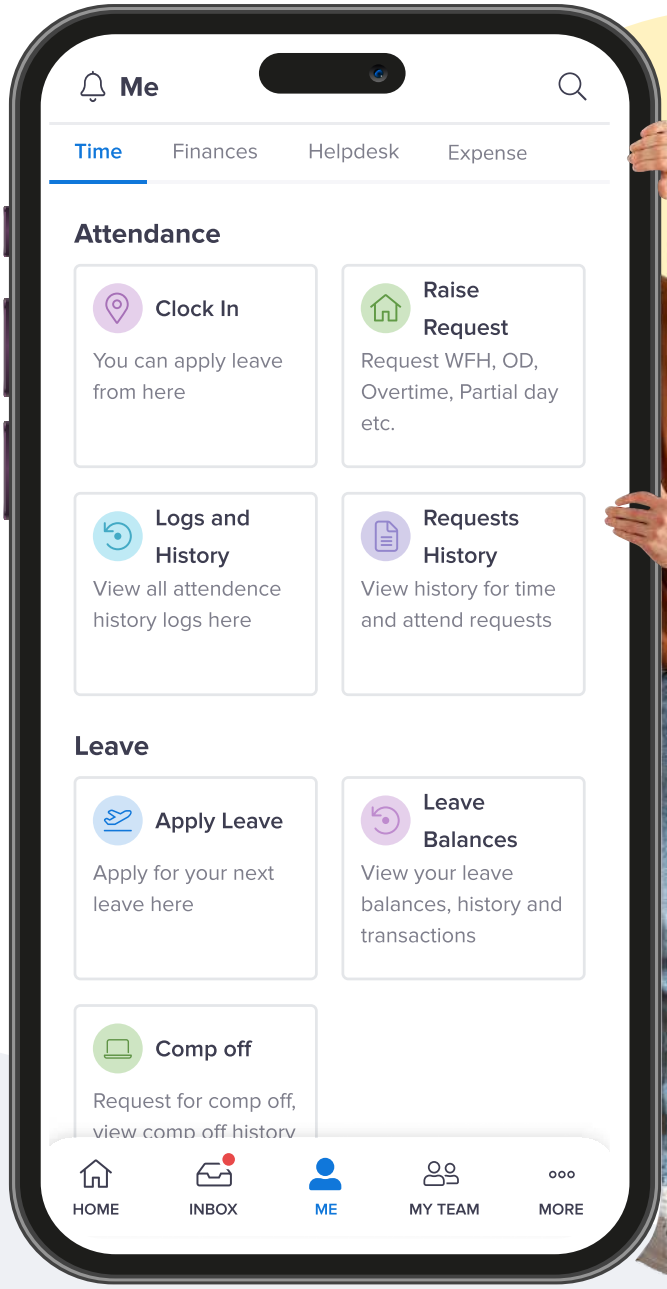
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- Soumya Rani, Sr. Marketing Operations Specialist
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