



# Revenue Cycle Staff Engagement

*An Analysis of Engagement Levels and Impact Drivers among Revenue Cycle Staff*

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**PUBLISHED BY**

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**BEST FOR**

Revenue Cycle Leaders

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# Executive Summary

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- 1) A continued focus on margin health means that the revenue cycle has emerged as a critical strategic asset. Revenue cycle leaders are being asked to do more with less, and in this environment, highly motivated staff are essential.
- 2) Engaged employees are more productive and committed than their content counterparts; most importantly, they produce better business outcomes.
- 3) Good news: revenue cycle staff are slightly more engaged than all hospital staff. There is still opportunity for improvement- while 45% are engaged, 38% are merely content.
- 4) Revenue cycle staff are more motivated by “Mission and Values” than all hospital staff. They also attribute greater importance to job security.
- 5) Deeper analysis of survey results reveals meaningful differences in engagement drivers (i.e., factors that impact engagement) between Patient Access, Midcycle, and Business office staff. Three unique engagement profiles emerge from this analysis.
- 6) Patient Access staff are highly motivated by mission, but overall engagement levels are negatively impacted by dissatisfaction with staffing and pay. Despite a lack of baseline resources, they display higher engagement than all hospital staff– this points to a great opportunity to improve engagement within this group. Use career ladders and professional growth opportunities to bolster patient access staff.
- 7) Midcycle staff are largely satisfied with their work environment, but are not particularly motivated towards professional growth. It’s likely that the midcycle attracts those who prioritize flexibility over advancement. Midcycle staff do not require immediate attention, though data suggests engagement could be improved by providing more regular feedback from managers.
- 8) Business Office staff feel stressed by lack of appropriate technology and training. Without these resources, the workload has become unmanageable. Re-engage business office staff by investing in the equipment and knowledge they need to get the job done.
- 9) Patient Access and Business Office staff are the two groups that require immediate attention from leaders. Midcycle does not seem to require investment at this time.
- 10) For revenue cycle leaders looking to increase engagement, adjusting pay and staffing levels are two levers that are sure to have a noticeable impact. These two areas saw the lowest levels of satisfaction for all three groups, and are also among the top three drivers of engagement. For leaders that cannot invest in pay and staffing levels, or those seeking additional engagement strategies, best practices include: keeping mission top-of-mind, creating opportunities for growth, surveying staff regularly, and acting upon identified areas of improvement.

Source: Advisory Board Survey Solutions National Engagement Database; Revenue Cycle Advancement Center Research & Analysis; Gallup, “State of the American Workplace”, 2017. [https://news.gallup.com/reports/1999617.aspx?utm\\_source=SOAW&utm\\_campaign=StateofAmericanWorkplace&utm\\_medium=2013SOAWreport](https://news.gallup.com/reports/1999617.aspx?utm_source=SOAW&utm_campaign=StateofAmericanWorkplace&utm_medium=2013SOAWreport)

# Introduction

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## *Why Staff Engagement Matters*

As hospitals and health systems continue to focus on margin health, the revenue cycle has emerged as a critical strategic asset. Revenue cycle leaders and staff are being asked to do more with less— from increasing patient revenue, to battling denials— all the while ensuring productivity amid rapid change. In this challenging environment, highly-skilled and motivated staff are critical.

To properly grasp the significance of staff engagement, it's important to first **understand the distinction between staff engagement and staff satisfaction**. Satisfied or content employees are happy with their jobs and fulfill basic work requirements; at the end of the day, they are focused what they are *getting from* the organization.

In contrast, engaged employees are energized and passionate about their work. They make active efforts to *contribute to* the organization. These employees are committed to their organizations, which they endorse in discussions with friends and acquaintances. They are far less likely to leave their jobs, perform at much higher levels, and generate higher patient satisfaction scores. Simply put, when compared to content employees, **engaged employees produce better business outcomes**.

The Advisory Board's *Employee Engagement Initiative Survey*— administered to nearly two million employees across hundreds of health care facilities— provides insight into engagement levels and drivers for staff at the nation's hospitals and health systems. Although employees across departments share common engagement drivers, many segments— including revenue cycle staff— have unique engagement characteristics. The following research reveals levels and drivers of engagement for roughly 20,000 individuals employed across the revenue cycle at hospitals and health systems around the country.

Source: Gallup, "State of the American Workplace: The Competitive Advantage of Engaging Employees," 2017.  
[https://news.gallup.com/reports/199961/7.aspx?utm\\_source=SOAW&utm\\_campaign=StateofAmericanWorkplace&utm\\_medium=2013SOAWreport](https://news.gallup.com/reports/199961/7.aspx?utm_source=SOAW&utm_campaign=StateofAmericanWorkplace&utm_medium=2013SOAWreport);  
Advisory Board Survey Solutions National Engagement Database;  
Revenue Cycle Advancement Center Research & Analysis

# Engagement Methodology

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## *Employee Engagement Initiative Survey Definitions*

A robust measure of engagement starts with understanding the characteristics of an engaged employee and isolating those characteristics from the drivers of engagement. To that end, the Advisory Board has developed a stringent definition of engagement, based on responses to four survey questions:

- 1) *This organization inspires me to perform my best*
- 2) *I am willing to put a great deal of effort in order to help this organization succeed*
- 3) *I would recommend this organization to friends as a great place to work*
- 4) *I am likely to be working for this organization three years from now*

The first two engagement items assess employees' willingness to expend discretionary effort to drive organizational performance; the bottom two measure emotional commitment and loyalty to the organization. Participants respond to these statements on a six-point Likert scale which ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." To be classified as *engaged*, participants must "strongly agree" with at least two of the statements, and no less than "agree" with *all four* of the above statements.

# Understanding Categories of Engagement Drivers

In understanding employee engagement, the broader field of human motivation provides a useful guidepost— Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed that healthy human beings have a certain number of needs, and that these needs are arranged in a hierarchy, represented by a pyramid. At the bottom are physiological needs such as food and shelter, followed by desires such as belonging, purpose, and ultimately, self-actualization. Higher needs come into focus only once lower, more basic needs are met.

In many ways, the continuum of employee engagement is analogous to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. In order to reach the peak of engagement, first basic “survival” needs must be met. The Advisory Board’s workplace engagement survey categorizes these “survival needs” as “Baseline Satisfiers” and “Employee Support”. They include things such as fair pay, adequate staffing, and manageable workload. Much like baseline human needs for food and shelter, the drivers in these categories do not necessarily *increase* levels of engagement when fulfilled, but have a negative impact when neglected. An employee is unlikely to go above and beyond simply because he is paid fairly, however fair pay forms a strong foundation for engagement. To illustrate, below is a graphic mapping each of The Advisory Board’s engagement survey categories and drivers to a pyramid of “engagement needs”.

**Engagement Drivers Mapped to Engagement Category Hierarchy**

Driver Categories	Drivers of Engagement
<b>Mission &amp; Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My organization gives back to the community</li> <li>• The actions of executives in my organization reflect our mission and values</li> <li>• I understand how my daily work contributes to the organization's mission</li> </ul>
<b>Teamwork</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicts are resolved fairly in my unit/department</li> <li>• My coworkers do a good job</li> <li>• Abusive behavior is not tolerated at my organization</li> <li>• I have good personal relationships with coworkers</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback &amp; Recognition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know what is required to perform well in my job</li> <li>• My organization recognizes employees for excellent work</li> </ul>
<b>Communication &amp; Input</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My manager is open and responsive to staff input</li> <li>• My ideas and suggestions are valued by my organization</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My current job is a good match for my skills</li> <li>• My manager helps me learn new skills</li> <li>• If I wanted to explore other jobs within the organization, my manager would help me do that</li> <li>• I receive effective on the job training</li> </ul>
<b>Employee Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My manager helps me balance my job and personal life</li> <li>• My organization helps me deal with stress and burnout</li> </ul>
<b>Baseline Satisfiers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My organization pays me fairly for my job</li> <li>• My organization supports employee safety</li> <li>• The benefits provided by my organization (such as health care, retirement savings, etc.) meet my needs</li> </ul>

Source: Advisory Board Survey Solutions National Engagement Database; Revenue Cycle Advancement Center Research & Analysis

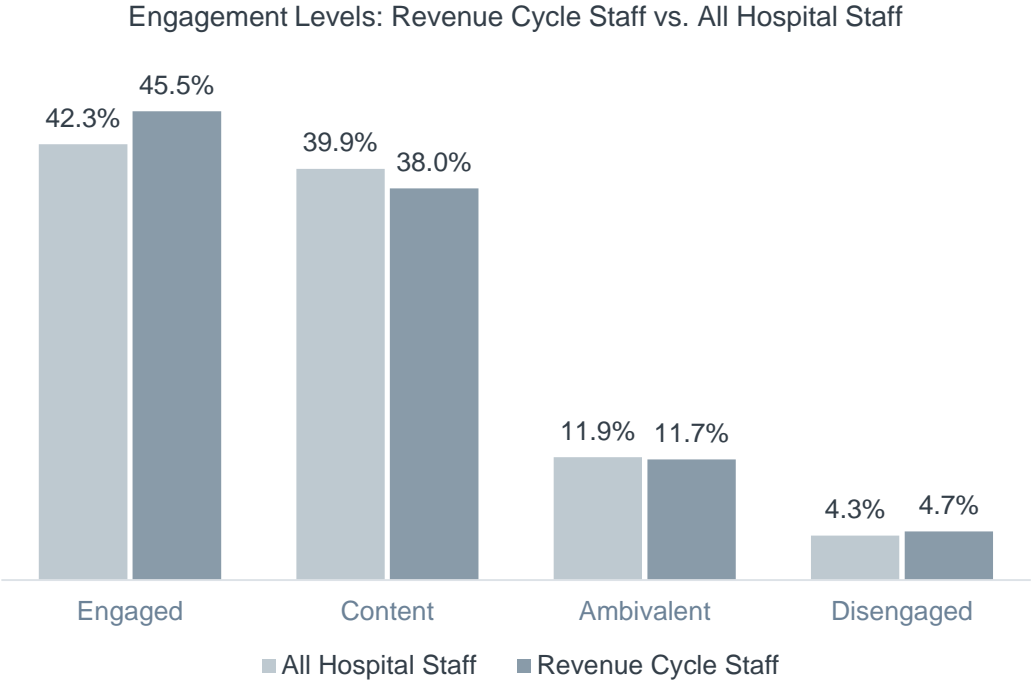
# Summary of Engagement Analysis

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A statistical analysis of these survey results yielded three key findings. First the good news— revenue cycle staff is slightly more engaged than all hospital staff. Further, revenue cycle staff display unique engagement characteristics when compared with all hospital staff-- that is, the top drivers of engagement for revenue cycle staff differ from hospital staff. Finally, engagement drivers and levels vary according to role within the revenue cycle. In other words, Patient Access Staff is motivated by different factors and to differing degrees than Midcycle or Business Office staff; this holds equally true for each group. Each of these findings is discussed in greater detail in the pages that follow.

# Revenue Cycle Staff More Engaged Than All Hospital Staff

The chart below reflects levels of engagement for the nearly 20,000 revenue cycle staff surveyed. These results show that, while revenue cycle departments are performing well overall, there is still opportunity for improvement. 45% of revenue cycle employees are engaged in their work, but 38% are content – this indicates room to increase engagement among a substantial population of staff.



Source: Advisory Board Survey Solutions National Engagement Database; Revenue Cycle Advancement Center Research & Analysis

# Top Engagement Drivers Differ

**Top 10 Drivers for Revenue Cycle Staff vs. All Hospital Staff**

Driver Category	Driver	Revenue Cycle Staff Rank	All Hospital Staff Rank
Mission & Values	I believe in my organization's mission	1	1
Mission & Values	I understand how my daily work contributes to the organization's mission	2	5
Professional Growth	My current job is a good match for my skills	3	2
Mission & Values	My organization provides excellent care to patients	4	3
Baseline Satisfiers	<b>I have job security</b>	5	12
Mission & Values	<b>My organization provides excellent customer service to patients</b>	6	11
Mission & Values	<b>My organization gives back to the community</b>	7	18
Mission & Values	The actions of executives in my organization reflect our mission and values	8	4
Baseline Satisfiers	<b>My organization pays me fairly for my job</b>	9	13
Baseline Satisfiers	<b>My organization supports employee safety</b>	10	17

Statistical analysis reveals that the primary drivers of engagement for revenue cycle staff differ somewhat from those for all hospital staff. The chart above shows the top determinants of engagement identified through a multivariate regression. While all 42 drivers have an impact on engagement, a top impact driver is one of the 10 drivers proven to have an outsized impact in driving engagement. Focusing on improving a top impact driver is likely to give you a bigger “bang for your buck” when trying to increase engagement.

## Mission & Values

For both groups, engagement levels are highly correlated to the following four variables within the “Mission & Values” category:

- 1) *I believe in my organization’s mission*
- 2) *I understand how my daily work contributes to the organization’s mission*
- 3) *My current job is a good match for my skills*
- 4) *My organization provides excellent care to patients*

In other words, revenue cycle staff are not likely to be engaged unless they buy into the organization’s mission, understand how their work ties to that mission, feel skilled at their job, and believe their organization provides excellent care. This is equally true for all employees.

That said, in comparing the top 10 drivers for revenue cycle staff to the overall workforce, it’s clear that revenue cycle has an even greater focus on “Mission and Values”. Six of revenue cycle’s top 10 drivers were in the area of mission and values, versus four for all hospital staff. Statements such as “*My organization provides excellent customer service to patients*” (#6 for revenue cycle, #11 for all staff) and “*My organization gives back to the community*” (#7 for revenue cycle, vs. #18 for staff overall) were *far* more important to revenue cycle staff than the overall workforce. Revenue cycle staff are often the key players at the front lines of customer service, so it’s fitting that customer service and a connection to the community are highly influential to their engagement on the job.



# Top Engagement Drivers Differ (Continued)

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## *Baseline Satisfiers*

Supporting the idea that unmet needs tend to take center stage, a handful of “Baseline Satisfiers” with low levels of agreement—such as fair pay, and job security— also appeared in the top 10 drivers for revenue cycle staff. The following engagement drivers are critical for revenue cycle staff but less important for employees as a whole:

- 1) *I have job security*
- 2) *My organization pays me fairly for my job*
- 3) *My organization supports employee safety*

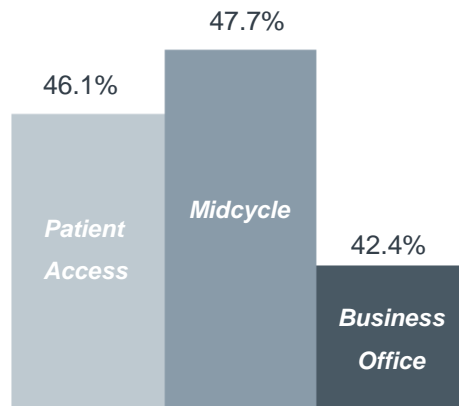
It’s possible that the increasingly challenging revenue cycle environment has led to a greater desire for security in the job itself, thus making security a higher priority for revenue cycle staff than overall staff. Additionally, other hospital staff roles likely benefit from greater transferability of skills; for example, nurses may feel they can work in a large variety of departments or even other organizations and thus feel less concern over job security. In regards to fair pay, many revenue cycle leaders admit that their patient access staff specifically receive lower levels of compensation than they would prefer. Finally, it makes intuitive sense that front office staff, who directly interact with patients, have greater concern over personal safety— they are the most vulnerable to external parties and unknown factors.

# Engagement Varies By Role

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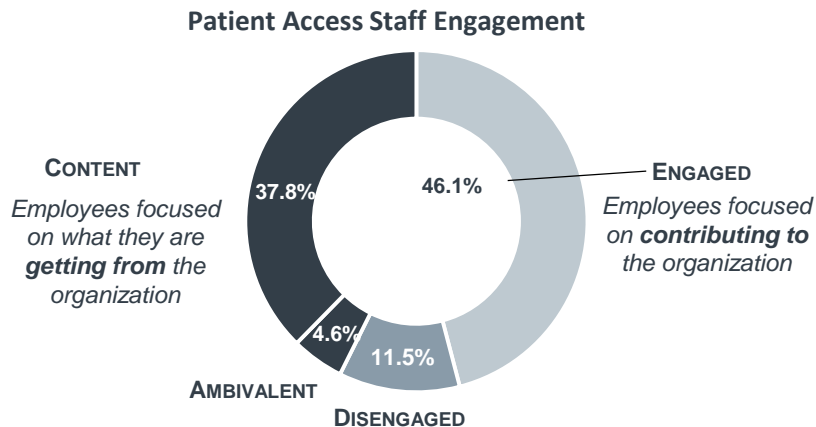
## Revenue Cycle Staff Engagement By Role

*Percentage Engaged by Role*



While aggregate engagement levels within revenue cycle staff differ only slightly from all hospital staff, when revenue cycle staff are grouped according to role, interesting differences emerge. Midcycle staff showed the highest engagement levels at 47.7%, followed closely by patient access staff at 46.1%. Finally, business office staff lag behind the other two groups with 42.4% engaged. Drawing useful insights from these differences requires deeper analysis of the way unique engagement drivers factored into overall engagement scores. Three unique profiles emerge from this role-based analysis of drivers, profiles that may help revenue cycle leaders prioritize their investments in employee engagement.

## Focused on Mission, Limited by Resources



Engagement survey data for patient access staff supports much of what is heard anecdotally on the state of the front office worker. That is, they comprise a motivated frontline that is held back by a lack of basic resources. Patient access roles have arguably seen the greatest change in recent years—increasing patient obligations and expectations of service have meant these staff are required to ask for payment, and do so in a customer service-oriented manner.

Given the additional responsibilities, it's not surprising that these staff feel understaffed, overwhelmed, and unfairly compensated for their work. While patient access staff are feeling strained, there are tangible ways to meet their needs.

### *Engagement Lifters: What Increases Engagement?*

There is a degree of clarity in a customer-facing role that is absent in roles with less human interactions. A customer service representative gets immediate feedback from the customer as to how well they are performing. This may be why patient access staff's highest agreement was with the driver: *"I know what is required to perform well in my job"*.

Aligned with this theme of clarity, patient access staff also had high levels of agreement with the top three drivers:

- 1) *I believe in my organization's mission (89.1%)*
- 2) *I understand how my daily work contributes to the organization's mission (90.6%)*
- 3) *My current job is a good match for my skills (77.9%)*

### *Engagement Limiters: What Decreases Engagement?*

Of all groups, patient access staff had the lowest levels of agreement with the statement *"My unit/department has enough staff"*. Only 38% of patient access staff agreed with this statement. This is 20% less than mid-cycle staff and 8% less than business office staff. While it is common for staffing to be an area of low satisfaction—mid-cycle was the only group where a majority felt they had sufficient staff—38% is an uncommonly low rate of agreement across any engagement metric. The silver lining here is that patient access staff has not allowed this fact to get in the way of doing their job—they are still the second highest group in terms of overall engagement. This points to a great opportunity. A group that can maintain relatively high engagement despite low staffing is a group that is likely to be even more engaged once this baseline need is met.

Finally, patient access staff do not feel they are paid fairly for their job. Research in this area notes that patient access staff duties are vastly underestimated. One study noted that front office medical staff typically interact with 70+ people a day, and are called upon to quickly and consistently shift tone according to the patient's state. It would not be an exaggeration to compare patient access duties to that of a therapist or mediator, and yet their pay does not reflect the significance of their impact.

## Finding Opportunities for Growth

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Finally, of all groups, patient access staff had the highest rate of agreement with the statement *“I am interested in promotion opportunities”*. By contrast, they had the lowest agreement with the following two statements

- 1) *“My current job is a good match for my skills”*
- 2) *“I have helpful discussions with my manager about my career”*

Put together, these three data points paint the picture of an individual who feels they could do more and wants to take their skills to the next level, but often is not supported by the organizational infrastructure to do so.

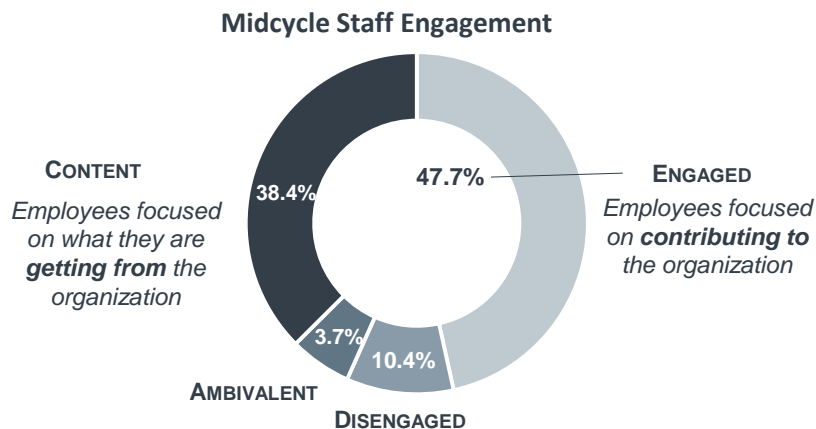


### IDEAS FOR ACTION

- Patient access staff craves opportunities for professional growth and mobility. Find ways to make them feel empowered through professional development and increased autonomy.
- Career ladders are an effective best practice in roles such as patient access, where leadership opportunities may be limited.

*Wish you could find benchmarking data about patient access staff? You can help! Our Patient Access Benchmarking Survey will be coming out in February, and your input is critical to building a meaningful profile of this population. For more information, contact us at [rcac@advisory.com](mailto:rcac@advisory.com).*

# Flexibility, Autonomy Drive Midcycle Engagement



Midcycle is the group that is most well-resourced in terms of having their baseline needs met. Yet, despite having a significantly higher rate of agreement on almost every engagement driver, midcycle staff do not show proportionally higher levels of engagement. This aligns with the principle that baseline satisfiers *prevent* dissatisfaction, but do not necessarily increase engagement. Midcycle staff are happy with what they are getting now, and don't appear particularly interested in moving to the next level.

### Engagement Lifters: What Increases Engagement?

Several factors may be contributing to midcycle staff's relatively high engagement levels. First, due to recent industry updates such as ICD-10, and full EMR implementation, a lot of investment has been made in terms of technology that may aid mid-cycle staff more than other revenue cycle staff. Further, midcycle staff are more likely to have a great deal of autonomy in terms of their work environment. They are typically able to work flexible hours from a location of their choice. This is consistent with the findings of a Gallup study which shows that the benefits and perks that employees truly care about are those that offer them "greater flexibility, autonomy and the ability to lead a better life". Midcycle staff have the highest rate of agreement with the top 3 drivers.

### Engagement Limiters: What Decreases Engagement?

A deep look at the data suggests that this type of role attracts workers who prioritize flexibility over advancement. To illustrate, some areas of notably low agreement for midcycle were "*I'm interested in promotion opportunities*", and "*I get helpful feedback on my performance*". If a large portion of mid-cycle professionals are in flexible/remote work arrangements then it makes intuitive sense that they would not be seeking out promotion opportunities and may not have as much interaction with their manager as other groups.

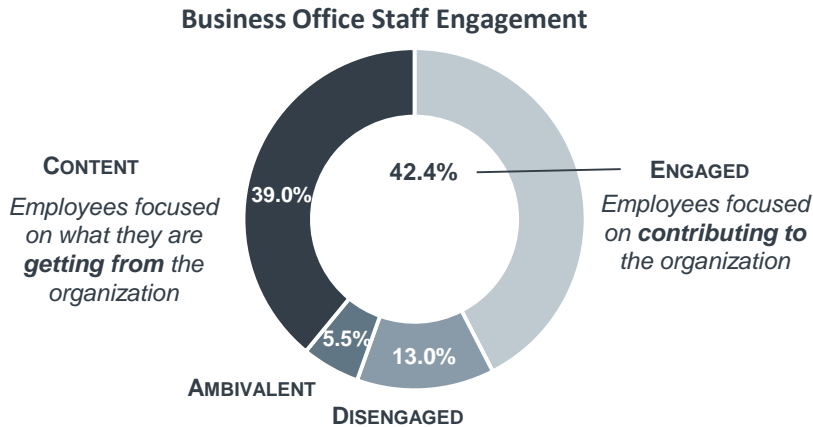
Even in areas where engagement is less than stellar, midcycle staff are outperforming other revenue cycle staff. In short, we believe that of all of the groups, mid-cycle staff has the smallest gap between where they are and where they want to be. If there is any area of the revenue cycle where the current state is working well, it is mid-cycle.



### IDEAS FOR ACTION

- Bolster midcycle engagement by offering feedback on a more regular basis.
- Proactively communicate professional development opportunities available to midcycle.

# Business Office Feels Stressed and Ill-Equipped



### Engagement Lifters: What Increases Engagement?

Although business office staff kept pace with other groups on many of the drivers, there is only one driver where business office had a higher level of agreement than all other groups:

*“The benefits provided by my organization (such as health care, retirement savings, etc.) meet my needs.”*

While business office staff’s level of agreement with this statement (68.8%) was not significantly different from mid-cycle staff (67.7%), it is notably higher than patient access staff (65.6%). While both patient access staff and business office staff operate in high stress environments with limited resources, business office staff tends to be better compensated, and it is likely that this compensation extends to benefits.

### Engagement Limiters: What Decreases Engagement?

Of all groups, business office staff had the lowest rate of agreement with the following statements:

- 1) *“My organization supports me with appropriate technology”*
- 2) *“I receive effective on the job training”*
- 3) *“I have a manageable workload”*

Put simply, business office staff does not feel properly equipped to do their job. Denials have increased dramatically in recent years, overwhelming many back offices, while processes and technology may not be able to keep up. Perhaps another symptom of the rapidly changing business office landscape is the low levels of agreement that they receive effective on the job training. Finally, it is not surprising that business office staff also had the lowest levels of agreement with *“I have a manageable workload”*. If one is not properly equipped or trained to perform his job, it follows that the workload feels unmanageable.

Gallup research indicates that “a person not having the materials and equipment to do their work well is the strongest indicator of job stress”. And yet, this points to an encouraging fact: people want to do their jobs well. To capitalize on this, effective leaders should prioritize giving staff the resources, training, and support they need.



## IDEAS FOR ACTION

- For business office staff, investments in technology and training are most urgent.
- For those unable to invest financially, here are a few ways managers can address frustration with a lack of resources:
  - Ask for and listen to employees’ needs, advocate for them and communicate transparently about what can and cannot be provided.
  - Be resourceful- when employee requests can’t be funded find ways to leverage what you have. Carve out time to learn from free educational resources, or asked the best performers to create guides for others

Source: Advisory Board Survey Solutions National Engagement Database; Revenue Cycle Advancement Center Research & Analysis; Gallup “State of the American Workplace”, 2017. [https://news.gallup.com/reports/199961/7.aspx?utm\\_source=SOAW&utm\\_campaign=StateofAmericanWorkplace&utm\\_medium=2013SOAWreport](https://news.gallup.com/reports/199961/7.aspx?utm_source=SOAW&utm_campaign=StateofAmericanWorkplace&utm_medium=2013SOAWreport)

# Implications for Revenue Cycle Leaders

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## *Taking Action to Bolster Staff Engagement*

Several clear directives emerge from the engagement survey results. Across all three groups, the lowest rate of agreement was with the following two statements, which also are among the top 3 drivers of engagement:

- 1) *“My unit department has enough staff”*
- 2) *“My organization pays me fairly for my job”*

For revenue cycle leaders looking to increase engagement, adjusting pay and staffing levels are two levers that, while challenging to implement, are sure to have a noticeable impact.

The following are action steps your organization may take to boost and maintain engagement levels among revenue cycle staff as whole:

**Ensure that the organization’s mission is reinforced regularly**, with input from employees. Revenue cycle staff are more likely to be engaged if they recognize how their work fits into the overall mission of the organization. Employees are motivated by leaders that demonstrate similar commitment. Leaders should work to promote the organization’s mission throughout the department, highlighting how revenue cycle functions fit into the overall picture of patient care. For example, leaders can post the mission statement in a highly visible location, and regularly discuss it in team meetings. Invite employees to share stories and mission moments.

**Keep engagement drivers in mind in communications and day-to-day interactions with staff.** In light of revenue cycle employees’ unique engagement drivers, make sure you regularly communicate and express appreciation for the work your department is doing. Stress the connection between their day-to-day work and the ability of the health system to execute its mission.

**Survey your employees.** If you have not already done so, conduct an engagement survey of your workforce. An effective survey will allow your department to celebrate its strengths, and will surface areas where for improvement. Regular surveys will also allow you to identify trends and benchmark progress over time.

**Identify and act upon discrete areas of improvement.** For areas of identified weakness, come up with discrete action steps and assign responsibility for improving engagement. Tie these action steps to the feedback received from the survey in all communications to staff so they know their opinion is heard and valued, and being used to drive the strategic direction of the department. These efforts should be transparent: employees will appreciate good-faith efforts to improve the work environment.

**Create opportunities for career growth.** Revenue cycle staff are motivated when provided with a clear path for advancement. This can be a challenge in areas with far fewer management and leadership roles available, but implementing career ladders is a successful best practice we have seen employed at a number of organizations.

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The best  
practices are  
the ones that  
work for **you.**<sup>SM</sup>

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