Talent Management in Healthcare: The New Strategic Objective

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In today's rapidly evolving healthcare landscape, effective talent management has become a critical priority for any organization seeking exceptional and safe care, whilst driving a positive outcome and impact in people's lives. This article delves into the intricacies of talent management in healthcare, from an operational standpoint, aiming to capture how the frontline workforce perceives talent management. It is hypothesized that by implementing comprehensive talent management strategies, healthcare institutions would be able to address the current challenges posed by the worldwide workforce shortages. The increasing demand for healthcare services has prompted organizations and governments to proactively approach talent management to attract and retain the right individuals with the right skills to remain competitive and even functional. Employee engagement initiatives, along with a robust culture of continuous learning and phycological safety, where individuals can be at optimal performance and positively impact patient experience and outcome, significantly reduce turnover rates and ensure workforce stability (Dyrbye et al., 2017).

Keywords: talent management, frontline workers, healthcare, career pathing, employee engagement

AIM

The current research project aimed to capture the frontline's healthcare workforce perception of talent management across different countries and its effectiveness in the dimensions surveyed. The intent behind is not only identifying meaningful and effectual solutions, but also understanding differences across the different healthcare systems and potentially learning new strategies to mitigate the current increase in the human capital shortage across different healthcare systems. The current high turnover and talent shortage in the healthcare industry is negatively impacting its operational capability and efficiency, not only in developing, but also, in developed countries. Despite the current strategies and policies to resolve the current shortage, they all seem to fall short on its anticipated impact at an operational level, which also seems consistent across different countries and organizations. Therefore, it has been hypothesized that the current policies are not end-user tailored and the lack of participation of the healthcare frontline workforce in defining the organizational strategic goals is negatively impacting individual performance and talent retention, and ultimately organizational growth and performance. The development and/or improvement of the current human resources models and strategies in the healthcare industry, which appear to be disjointed and departmentalized, is thought to positively impact, not only talent retention but also, operational efficiency across the industry, which ultimately will be reflected, not only at a micro but also macro level.

POPULATION AND METHODS

To attain the current talent management across the different healthcare systems, a multicentric approach was used with a total of 325 frontline workers being surveyed across 11 countries: *Australia*, *Brazil*, *British Virgin Islands*, *Ireland*, *Portugal*, *Saudi Arabia*, *Slovenia*, *Spain*, *Switzerland*, *United Kingdom* and *United States*. The professional roles represented in the sample are *Doctors*, *Nurses*, *HCAs (Healthcare Assistants)*, *HCPCs (Health and Care Professions Council)* and *Professors*, who combine clinical practice with academic duties, as only patient facing roles were considered for the presented study.

The sampling method used was the *snowball*, with the questionnaire being distributed through restricted professional groups on LinkedIn®, Facebook®, private and public healthcare institutions. Sample proportions for role and country of practice were weighed and the most represented countries are Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, and United States. The number of valid surveys obtained was 325, using Yamane's formula findings represents 1750 frontline workers' opinion in talent management.

The Cronbach's score attained was 0.842, meaning that the test used to measure the variable has a high level of internal consistency, however, the reliability test does not include all the variables measured, as some are nominal and cannot be tested by The Cronbach Test®.

The questionnaire had multiple choice answers hence the ability of the test maker to answer those questions was also measured recurring to the Dichotomous Rash Model, with a total score of 0.79, implying that the test used is consistent in measuring the knowledge of the questionnaire taker and can be used to evaluate, not only their ability but also, their level of understanding of the variables measured.

The variables of *Training Relevance*, *Studies Completion* and *Country of Practice* had an Infit or Outfit outside of the recommended interval [0.6 – 1.4] hence were not considered for the purpose of the model, due to its dispersion.

RESULTS

The population's demographics have been categorized in *Role*, *Country of Practice*, *Gender*, *Age*, *Years of Practice*, *Field of Practice* and *Education*, as per Table 1.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICS CATEGORIZATION

Demographics							
Role	Country of Practice	Gender	Age	Years of Practice	Field of Practice		Education
Doctor 77	Australia 3	Female 236	[18-22] 1	[1-5] 28	A&E	17	Doctorate 9
Nurses 218	Brazil 1	Male 87	[22-30] 39	[5-10] 75	Administration	1	Graduate 122
HCPC 20	British Virgin Island 1	Other 1	[30-35] 98	[10-15] 93	Anaesthetics	2	Masters 72
HCA 7	Ireland 1	Prefer Not to Sa 2	[35-45] 102	[15-20] 49	Cardiac	14	Postdoctoral 2
Professor 3	Portugal 96		[45-55] 53	[20-25] 30	Care Home	3	Postgraduate 61
	Saudi Arabia 2		[55-65] 25	[>25] 50	Community	10	Specialist 42
	Slovenia 1		[>60] 6		Critical Care	82	Undergraduate 17
	Spain 53				Education	4	
	Switzerland 2				Management	23	
	United Kindgom 153				Medical	17	
	United States 12				Mental Health	6	
					Occupational Health	2	
					Oncology	12	
					Outpatients	2	
					Paediatrics	9	
					Pharmaceutical Industry	2	
					Recovery	1	
					Rehabilitation	7	
					Research	3	
					Supporting Services	2	
					Surgical	19	
					Theatres	83	
					Trauma/Orthopedics	4	

Amongst all individuals surveyed, 67% were nurses, of which 75.6% female, a trend also observed in the doctor's field, with 62.3% of its workforce being females, which is also consistent in the HCPC and HCA groups, with 80% and 100% respectively. Therefore, there is marked predominance of the female gender, not only across countries but also across roles, which is consistent with the literature, however as

the predominant represented countries are Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, this can be a bias factor as these countries have a slightly higher number of females amongst its population. (ONS, 2020)

Age and years of practice are of relevance in the healthcare industry, as experienced healthcare providers bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their practice, which has a proven positive impact in patient outcome, experience, and mortality, however a balance must be attained, to avoid an aged workforce. (AHRQ, 2018) An aged workforce in the healthcare industry is a concerning point, as it compromises an efficient succession planning, with an impact not only at an organizational level but globally. The results are consistent with the current statistics, with only 12.3% of the individuals surveyed being below 30.

In the dimension of *Recruitment and Selection*, 33.5% of the healthcare workers have applied directly to a job offer with their current organization, and 28.6% were recommended by a colleague, against a 0.6%, who found their current job in a job fair, recruitment agencies only account for 8.6% of the successful candidates, LinkedIn® 3.4% and Social Networks 9.8%. This finding challenges the current strategies used by healthcare organizations who heavily rely on recruitment experts, with poor investment in their internal employee branding and employee value proposition as indirect recruitment channels. Aligning employees' perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours with the organization's brand remains the most impacting recruitment channel in the healthcare industry. External agencies, despite offering a more streamlined and faster process, whilst decreasing the internal burden inherent to the recruitment process, it can lead to a loss of control in talent selection and incur higher costs.

TABLE 2
RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION CHANNELS

Recruitment Channels	
Direct Aplication	109
Linkedin	11
Job Fair	2
Recommended by a colleague	93
Recruitment Company	28
Social Networks	32
Spontaneous Application	50

Leadership is often considered as a crucial dimension in talent management, as well as, in organizational performance, due to its ability to influence others to achieve organizational goals. Effective leadership is essential for the success of any organization, as it sets the pace to create a thriving working environment and motivates employees to achieve the business objectives. Leaders also play a key role in developing and retaining talent within any organization, by identifying potential leaders and providing them with development opportunities, which will be translated into a skilled and motivated internal pool of talented employees. (Goleman, D.,2000)

The variables used were designed to measure frontline workers' perception of their leadership and how it impacts their motivation to actively contribute towards organizational success. When enquired about their *Awareness*, of their organizational strategic objectives (SOs), there was a consistent positive answer across the samples with 80% of the sample responding positively.

Employees' awareness of organizational strategic objectives (SOs) is expected to impact employee's performance by increasing motivation, as individuals perceive their work, not as a merely task, but as a contribution towards the organization's overall success, which was weighed using a Likert Scale, with an average of (4.17)/5. (Armstrong, M., 2021).

The frontline workers willingness to participate in their organizational strategic objective's definition was measured, in line with the hypothetical impression that this would positively impact of sense of

organizational belonginess and employee motivation, and 88% of the participants have answered positively (Yes). In the definition of strategic objectives, the active participation of employees has been identified, in other industries, as crucial for the success of an organization. When employees are involved in setting SOs, they gain a sense of ownership and commitment towards achieving them, which is corroborated by 91% of the surveyed individuals, when asked if their active participation in the definition of the organizational SOs would positively impact their performance. (Huselid, M.A., 1995) Another interesting finding is that only 52% of the healthcare workers surveyed use their best skills all times, whilst performing their roles, which implies that 48% of the individuals surveyed, are not using their talent capability at full capacity and healthcare organizations are failing to efficiently optimise their human capital capability. Zhang and Bartol (2010), in their model based on phycological empowerment and creative process engagement, listed as contributing factors for lower scores, poor empowering culture, limited opportunities, fear of failure, poor work environment and lack of training and support.

TABLE 3
LEADERSHIP

Leadership				
Do you know your organization's strategic objectives?	How important is for you, to know your organization's strategic objectives? Likert Scale	Would you like to have a voice on your organization's strategic objectives?	If you could participate in defining your organization's strategic objectives, would that positively impact your working performance?	How important is your organization's performance, growth and financial stability, for you?
Yes (82%) No (18%)	Not Important (1%) Slightly Important (6%) Important (20%). Fairly Important (33%) Very Important (43%)	Yes (88%) No (12%)	Yes (91%) No (9%)	Not Important (0.3%) Slightly Important (2.15%) Important (10.5%) Fairly Important (37%) Very Important (50.2%)

Employee Engagement is established as a fundamental aspect of talent management, organizations that prioritise employee engagement are more likely to attract and retain top talent. According to Glassdoor (2019), 77% of the employees consider a company's culture before applying for a job, and 56% of employees would turn down a job offer from a company with a bad reputation. This fact is corroborated by the Talent Dimension of Recruitment & Selection findings, where 28.6% of the individuals applied to their current organization following a colleague's recommendation. Employee engagement, is critical for developing and nurturing talent within an organization, as engaged employees are more likely to take ownership of their careers and seek out opportunities for growth and development. (Gallup, 2017) In this dimension, four variables were explored, *Organizational Pride*, *Loyalty*, *Retention*, and *Enablement*. Organizational pride refers to employee's emotional attachment to their organization and their sense of pride in being associated with their enterprise, research shows that organizational pride is positively related to employee engagement, and is influenced by sense of belonging, motivation, loyalty, and a positive work environment. (Choi, S.L. and Kim, K., 2016)

On average, 80% of the participants are proud to work in their organizations and this is consistent across countries, with only Spain scoring slightly lower. *Loyalty* and *Retention*, relate to an organization's ability to keep top-performing employees and maintain competitive advantage by doing so, which does not only impact the organizational operational capability but also its financial health, as constantly recruiting and training new employees is costly and negatively impacts not only its operations but also talent performance, by overloading the existing workforce. According to research, the cost of replacing an employee can range from 16% to 213% of their annual salary. (SHRM, 2021) The scoring for *Loyalty* was 73% and 54% for *Retention*, noting that both variables intersect with other dimensions of talent management, as described by Khan (2018), these two variables are impacted by *employee development* and *job satisfaction*, hence *retention* is further explored in job satisfaction, as a mean to infer if there are significant differences in the scoring. *Trust*, *Commitment*, and *Organizational Culture* also play an important role in addressing *Loyalty* and *Retention*, employees who stay with an organization for an extended period, tend to become more invested in its culture, with loyalty being accomplished when employees feel that their organization is committed to their well-being and values their contributions. (Khan, 2018) The marked difference in the average scoring for *Retention*, is influenced by the healthcare workers working in the United Kingdom, with only 47% saying that they rarely look for another job, even though this workforce accounts for the highest percentage amongst the three groups in *Organizational Pride*. This is a very noteworthy finding as the healthcare industry in the United Kingdom invests more in employees' benefits and well-being and individuals have an average salary higher than Portugal or Spain. The literature is not conclusive or vast in exploring these relationships, therefore further research is required, however market characteristics and cultural factors are hypothesized to play an important role. It is also important to highlight, that out of the 20% who were not proud to work in their organization, 68.18% also stated they will not be working in their organization within two years, making of these two variables a predicting factor, already recognised in the literature, for employee turnover.

Job Satisfaction directly affects employee retention, productivity, and motivation in the workplace, hence its relevance and importance when addressing talent management, with research showing that when employees feel that their skills are being utilized and developed, they are more likely to feel valued and satisfied in their workplaces. (Hameed, J. and Waheed, A., 2011) Five variables were measured in the dimension of Job Satisfaction: *Turnover and Performance*, *Turnover and Motivation*, *Mission Alignment and Retention*, *Most Impacting Factor In Job Satisfaction*, *Organizational Effectiveness*. When asked if having a *"stable team with low turnover, positively impacts their performance"*, 96% of the respondents said (Yes) and when asked if *"having a high turnover negatively impacts their motivation"* measured by a Likert-type, more than 50% replying *"very often"*, as presented in Figure 1. Turnover is a common problem in the healthcare industry, which significantly impacts the workforce's performance and motivation, and a negative impact on the quality of care by reducing the number of experienced clinicians. A study by Rothberg et al, (2005) found that higher levels of nurse turnover were associated with increased patient mortality rates in hospitals. A study by Lerner *et al* (2018) found that higher turnover levels were associated with lower levels of job satisfaction and increased burnout amongst healthcare workers due to increased workloads, which explains the results in these variables, which are also consistent amongst countries.

FIGURE 1
JOB SATISFACTION: "HAVING A HIGH TURNOVER IN THE TEAM, NEGATIVELY IMPACTS MY MOTIVATION AT WORK"
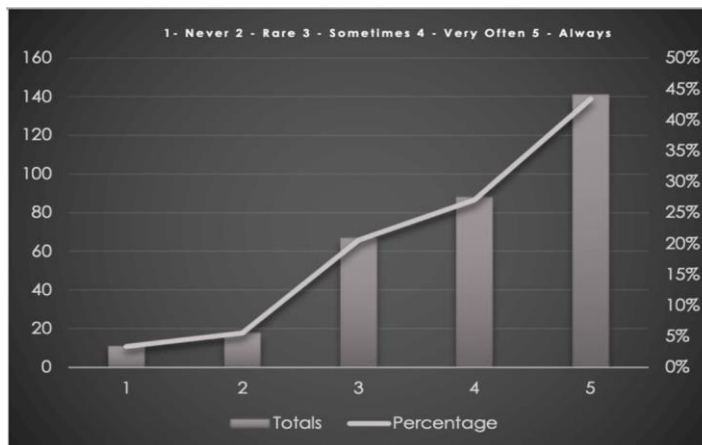
Source: Author

There are the several factors that can impact job satisfaction in healthcare, amongst the most common are turnover, work environment, compensation and workload, however research has shown that the most impacting fact in this dimension is the quality of their relationships with co-workers and leaders. A study by Shanafelt *et al* (2015), found that the quality of relationships with colleagues and leaders was the most important factor in predicting physician job satisfaction. Similarly, a study by Hsu *et al* (2018) found that positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction amongst nurses. The quality of relationships with colleagues and leaders can impact job satisfaction at various levels, positive relationships provide emotional support and create a sense of camaraderie and teamwork, which can reduce stress, improve morale and resilience. It also facilitates communication and collaboration amongst individuals, which impacts performance and provides opportunities for mutual professional growth and development, which will have a marked effect in the end-user experience and outcome. Healthcare workers when asked what impacts most their daily job satisfaction, the results were consistent across countries, with the three most predominant answers being *positive teamwork*, *feeling valued* and *financial compensation*, as presented in Figure 2 . However, when organizational effectiveness in promoting *Job Satisfaction* was explored, by asking *"My organization, within its resources, does everything to increase my satisfaction at work"*, 66% answered (No), with more accentuated negative answers in the Portuguese sample, followed by the Spanish and lastly the English. Despite being an essential factor in promoting job satisfaction, the healthcare workforce does not perceive the current strategies employed positively. A study conducted in a Canadian hospital, found that employee perception of organizational effectiveness was significantly related to job satisfaction, which was subsequently impacted by communication, leadership, and job security, factors identified as the most significant predictors of this variable. (Shields *et al*, 2016) Therefore, we can infer that healthcare organizations, despite the evidence in literature about the impact of effective strategies in promoting job satisfaction, are failing to translate their strategies into meaningful measures to the frontline workers.

FIGURE 2
JOB SATISFACTION: "WHAT IMPACTS MOST MY DAILY JOB SATISFACTION"
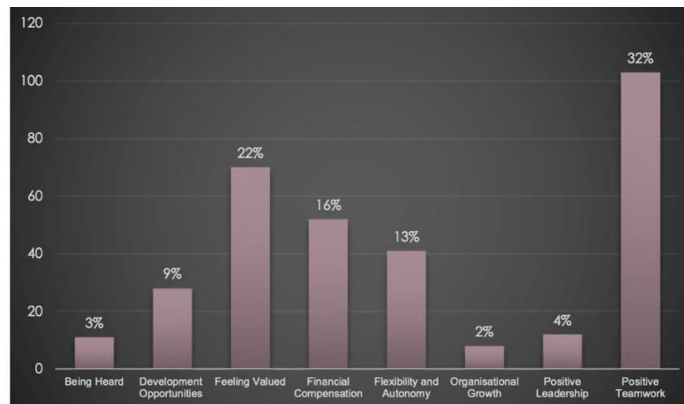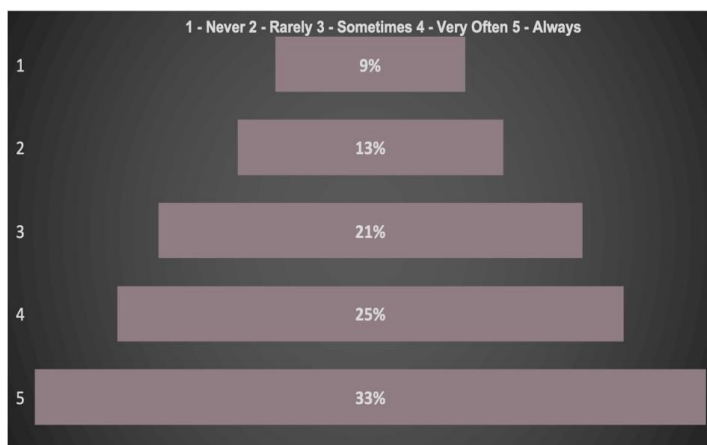

Source: Author

Talent Preservation is another dimension of talent management that plays a vital role, as it involves retaining and developing top-performing employees within an organization. A study by PwC found that, talent retention is one of the top priorities for CEOs, as organizations must recognize the value of retaining top talent to achieve long-term success. The study also found that talent preservation requires a focus on employee development and engagement and a strong leadership culture that supports talent growth and retention. (PwC, 2017) In a study by Deloitte, talent retention was identified as a key challenge for organizations, with 71% of respondents citing it as a top priority with a recognition that organizations need to implement strategies that promote talent development and engagement, and offer competitive compensations and benefits, to retain top-performing employees. (Deloitte, 2020) Moreover, a study by McKinsey & Company found that organizations that prioritise talent preservation and development outperform their peers in terms of financial performance and innovation, this study also emphasized the importance of creating a positive work environment that supports employee growth and development. (McKinsey & Company, 2018)

Despite the relevance of a robust strategy in talent retention for organizational performance, healthcare organizations remain behind on its adequacy, as 70% of the respondents said they do not think their organizations do everything within its resources to retain their talent, noticing that this finding is more accentuated in the Portuguese market, with 80% of the population responding negatively. Leadership plays a fundamental role in empowering and recognizing organizational talent, as well as, in communicating it to their teams, as a mean to promote talent engagement, the SHRM (2021) acknowledges that organizations which successfully implement talent management programs with focus on leadership development and talent recognition will see employee engagement, retention, and organizational performance increase. (SHRM, 2021) Recognizing and preserving talent is another crucial element of an effective organizational strategy, as it ensures that top-performers are retained, and organizations maintain a competitive edge. A study published in the Journal of Business and Psychology found that talent recognition and development were significant predictors of employee retention. (Christian, J.S., Garza, A.S. and Slaughter, J.E., 2011). Another study published by Eisenberger *et al* (1999) found that employee turnover is lower in organizations that recognise and reward their top-performers, and employees who receive recognition from their leaders are more likely to have a positive attitude towards their work, co-workers and organization. However, when healthcare workers are asked if they feel valued for what they do, 52% of the respondents answered negatively (No), which represents a concerning finding for the current healthcare leaders due to its negative impact towards employee retention and despite the current recommendations and efforts from governing and policing bodies in the sector.

Employee Development is also an essential component of talent management, due relation to organization's success and performance, by promoting retention, fostering innovation, and enhancing

employer brand. According to LinkedIn, 94% of employees would stay longer at a company if it invested in their career development, which highlights the importance of employee development in retaining its talent. (LinkedIn, 2018) The SHRM also found that organizations that invest in employee development have a 24% higher profit margin than those who do not, reinforcing that developing employees can lead to a stronger talent pipeline with a positive impact in its financial performance. (SHRM, 2018) Moreover, the Association for Talent Development found that companies who offer comprehensive training programmes have a 218% higher income per employee, suggesting that employee development leads to improved performance and productivity. Deloitte (2019) also suggested that organizations that prioritise employee development and learning are 92% more likely to innovate. Rigoni (2016) has also highlighted that 87% of the millennials consider professional development and career growth opportunities essential when choosing an employer. Henceforth, employee development is essential for the growth and success of any organization, however the training programmes must be significant and adequately structured to ensure that the development pathways are relevant for the organization and tailored to relevant individuals to be reflected in an increased overall performance and operational capability. (SHRM, 2018) As part of a robust career development, is imperative to address *Succession Planning*, as this involves identifying and preparing potential leaders within an organization to fill key roles in the future, which substantially impacts any organizational operational efficiency, capability, and continuity. Succession planning also involves identifying potential successors, by assessing their skills and competencies, and providing them with development opportunities to prepare them for future roles, process that benefits both organizations and employees, as it ensures that the organization is well equipped to handle any changes, whilst providing a clear path for career growth and development. (Rothwell, W.J., 2010) When the following question was asked: *"I see myself working all my life in this profession"*, which was measured with a frequency Likert-type scale, only 58% of the individuals responded *often* or *always*, implying that 42% will not end their career within the sector. The lower scores were more prevalent in healthcare practitioners with 10 to 15 years of experience. This finding is highly relevant as without these professionals, as not only can succession planning be compromised in the near future, but also all their skills and tacit knowledge, along with their vast experience, that will be lost and not transmitted to the younger professionals. The healthcare workforce development is highly dependent on mentoring programmes and clinical exposure, without these practioners to mentor and guide the upcoming generations of healthcare practioners, not only organizations will struggle to develop and upskill their talent but the healthcare system itself due to its snowball effect. The most impacted professional group is nursing, followed by doctors, as represented in Figure 4.

FIGURE 3
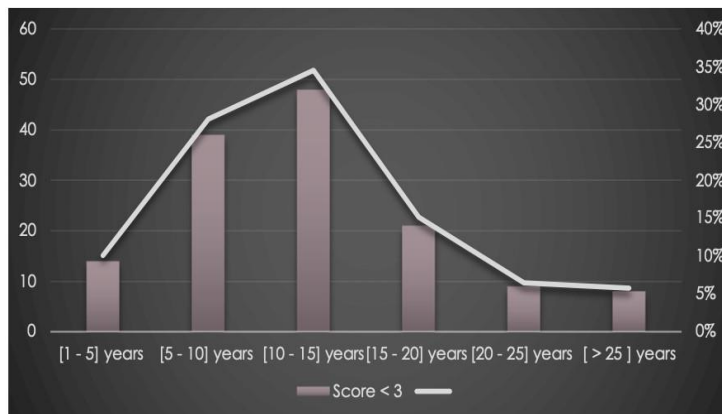**EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT: "I SEE MYSELF WORKING ALL MY LIFE IN THIS PROFESSION"**

Source: Author

FIGURE 4
PROFESSIONAL ROLE REPRESENTATION & SCORE < 3
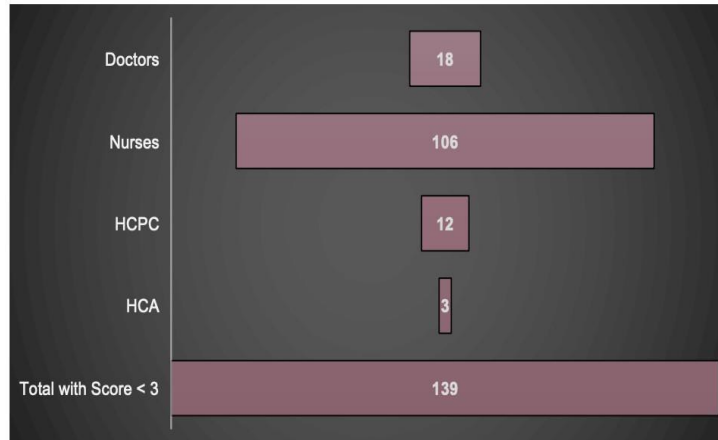
Source: Author

FIGURE 5
EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT: YEARS OF PRACTICE OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS WHO SCORED LESS THAN 4

Source: Author

CONCLUSION

In a fiercely competitive job market, organizations must adopt innovative strategies to attract and retain top talent, with internal branding being acknowledged as a powerful indirect and direct recruiting channel. By fostering a positive corporate culture, which aligns employees' beliefs and values with the organization's mission, organizations are most likely to remain competitive in the talent market. Healthcare organizations can build a magnetic talent strategy focused on attracting, nurturing, and developing top talent through enhanced employee engagement and strong employee value propositions. This will naturally create a stronger competitive advantage and brand position for such organizations in a short and long-term perspective. In the dimension of *Leadership*, the survey showed that healthcare workers have an active interest in participating in the organizational strategic objectives and their participation positively impacts their performance, however, the current Talent Management or Human Resources Management models fail to contemplate the active participation of their employees in the delineation of the Organizational Strategic Objectives, which points out the current disjointed approaches between organizational strategy, human

resources management strategies and the frontline healthcare workforce. In *Talent Preservation*, *Employee Development and Job Satisfaction* the results demonstrate concerning gaps between the current strategies implemented and the frontline workforce perception of such strategies. Healthcare organizations, if willing to remain competitive and well-appointed to face the current demand and challenges surfacing across all healthcare systems, need to rapidly evolve and refine their talent management policies and strategies. The success of any organization is heavily dependent on the skills and expertise of its employees and their ability to use their best skills to contribute to the organization's success and capability to face the current agile and evolving markets, reinforcing the importance of fostering working environments where employees can use their best skills, feel engaged and motivated. (SHRM, 2019) Therefore, a well-crafted, dynamic and sustainable talent management strategy must be the focus of any healthcare organization willing to be marketed as a top desired working environment. Based on the findings and despite the current efforts to promote a "Speak Up" culture as an engine of transformation, it is purposed that unless robust channels follow this to promote a "Listen Up" culture at an executive level, all strategies will fail to meet the end-user needs. A robust open and psychologically safe culture couples with evolving talent management policies are key elements of an organization whose strategy aims to optimise its internal talent capability and efficiency. A proposed combined model that attempts to mitigate the gap between the operational and strategic layers that compound a healthcare organization.

FIGURE 6
TALENT MANAGEMENT HOLISTIC MODEL

Source: Author

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