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Uncovering the Not So Hidden Threat to Your Business: Your People

To maintain reputation in a volatile market, you've got to neutralize the potential saboteur. New data reveals who that's likeliest to be—and how to go about it.

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What's worse than disgruntled employees who up and quit?

Disgruntled employees who don't.

In a volatile market, organizational resilience matters more than ever. Because left untended, unhappy employees can toxify their teams, poison organizational culture and curb ability to perform. Ultimately, by taking their issues (both founded and unfounded) online to social followers and prospective hires, they can taint the brand itself, affecting its ability to compete.

And no organization is immune to the risk that disgruntled employees present. Our recent public opinion data shows **that 34% of employees have spoken out internally** and **31% have spoken out externally** - including on social media - in opposition to a position or action the company took.

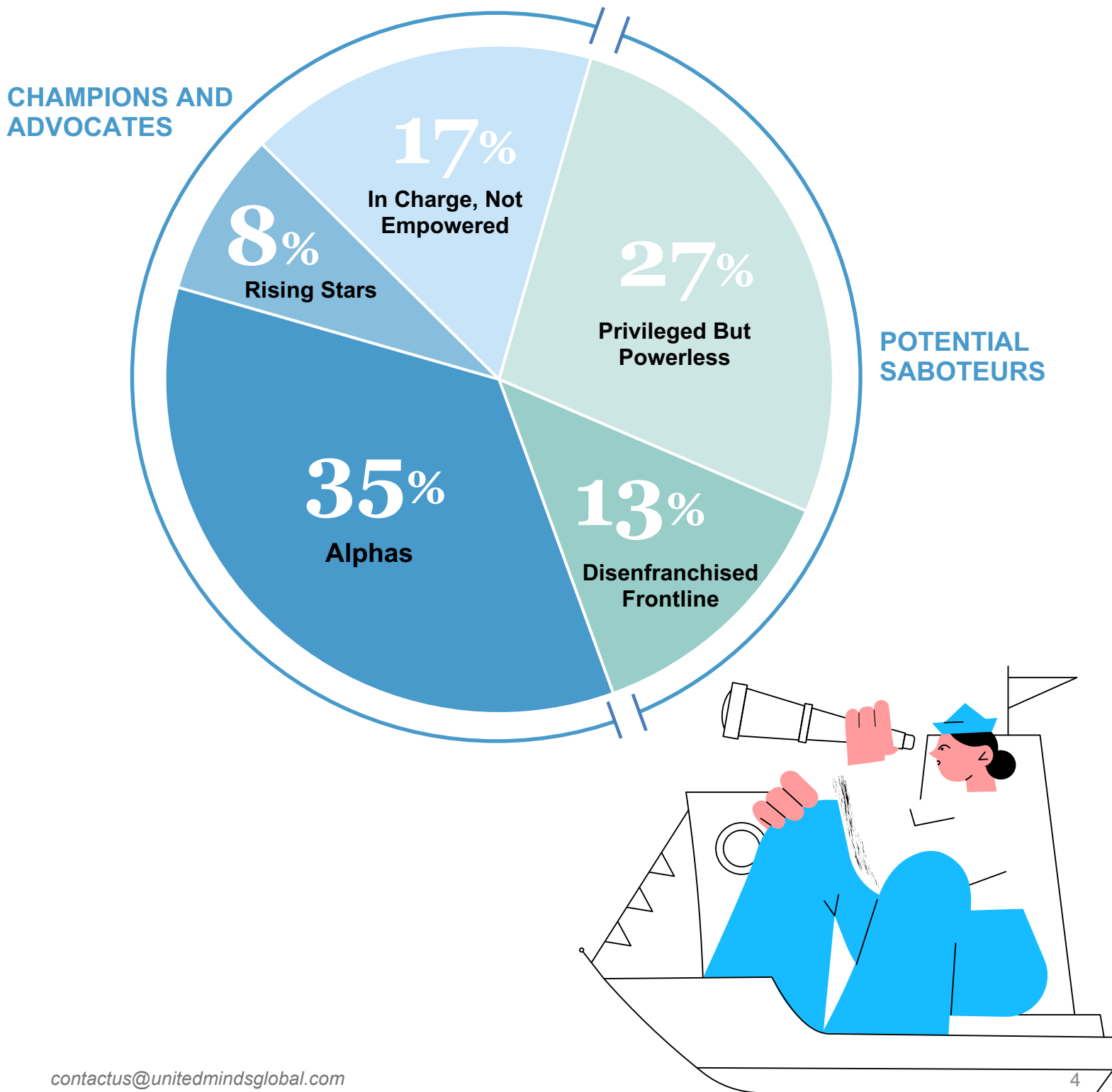### But who poses the most risk?

And what can leaders do to address their dissatisfaction?

To find out, we looked at the data from our study of 1,527 full-time employees which gauges satisfaction with organizational DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) efforts. We found that DEI satisfaction – unsurprisingly - highly correlates to feelings of safety and belonging and ultimately to satisfaction with the organization overall.

We asked over 100 questions to understand more about employees' perceptions of DEI within their organizations, covering psychological safety, cultural norms, mindsets and behaviors (of teams, managers, and leaders), growth and advancement opportunities, organizational commitment to DEI, and incident prevalence and response. This data helped us to create a DEI Index on which we completed a mix of multivariate techniques to segment participants into five archetypes recognizable at almost every organization - each defined by the similarity of respondents' psychographics (e.g., attitudes), behaviors and demographics.

The five employee archetypes reveal not just who is most likely to pose a threat to the organization but also, crucially, *why.*

CHAMPIONS AND ADVOCATES

POTENTIAL SABOTEURS

17%
In Charge, Not Empowered

8%
Rising Stars

27%
Privileged But Powerless

35%
Alphas

13%
Disenfranchised Frontline

The good news: nearly six in 10 employees can be considered advocates for their organization.

1. Alphas │ 84 DEI Index Score

Disproportionately male (61%) and white (80%), Alphas are the least likely to report experiencing harassment, discrimination, or unfair treatment. Most (93%) feel valued by their team and comfortable having candid conversations with their manager (97%). That's not surprising, given that 62% are themselves managers or leaders.

2. Rising Stars │ 76 DEI Index Score

Like Alphas, Stars are predominantly white (89%) and in positions of authority (60%). Yet Stars are younger—71% are Millennials vs. 46% of Alphas, and more than twice as likely (33% vs.15%) to report having experienced harassment or discrimination. Of all five employee archetypes, Stars are the best educated, most likely to identify a disability (77%), most likely to identify as LGBTQ+ (35%) and most likely to participate in an employee resource group (42%).

3. In Charge, Not Empowered │ 68 DEI Index Score

Comprising 17% of the workforce, In Charge is the most diverse archetype. Nearly a third identify as Hispanic (32%), 29% as Asian, 23% as Black, and 4% as Indigenous. Nearly one in five (19%) is an immigrant or member of a cultural/religious minority. In Charge is second behind Stars in ERG membership (29%), and about half (52%) identify as managers or leaders. Even so, about half have been offended by colleagues' actions (52%) or language (48%).

The bad news: another four in 10 employees are dissatisfied, and not afraid to say it.

4. Privileged But Powerless | 67 DEI Index Score

In many respects, these employees resemble Alphas. They're overwhelmingly white (90%); very few have experienced harassment (7%) nor discrimination (14%); and a majority say it's important to work for an organization with zero tolerance. But in three key respects they differ: they're older (70% are over 40, making them the oldest group); less educated; and nearly twice as likely as Alphas to be non-salaried employees working in service or trade industries. And while they score similar to the In Charge cohort, sub-scores reveal concerning areas of dissatisfaction: (45%) believe their perspectives are included in decision making and just one in four strongly agrees they're able to contribute their point of view.

5. Disenfranchised Frontline | 42 DEI Index Score

The Disenfranchised are most likely to work in trade, industrial, or store settings, typically as individual contributors (65%) and on an hourly basis (60%). Like the Powerless, they skew older, with 63% over the age of 40. They're the most likely to report having experienced discrimination or unfair treatment on the job (79%) and to feel despondent about their prospects: 81% say they do not receive constructive feedback and 63% lack opportunities to learn, grow, and advance. About half don't feel accepted for who they are (50%) and that leadership doesn't care (51%). Fewer than one in ten feel they can voice an opposing view or argument (8%) or belong to an ERG (7%). The least likely of any group to see themselves staying at their organization for at least the next year, a majority—72%—do not see a future for themselves at their organization despite 51% having been on the job for more than 11 years.

The Biggest Predictor of Dissatisfaction?

Feeling Isolated and Unheard.

That Alphas—largely white men with authority—are the least likely employee archetype to harbor a grudge, let alone go public with it, isn't at all surprising. But we were surprised to find that neither disability, sexual orientation, race, nor ethnicity is particularly predictive of dissatisfaction.
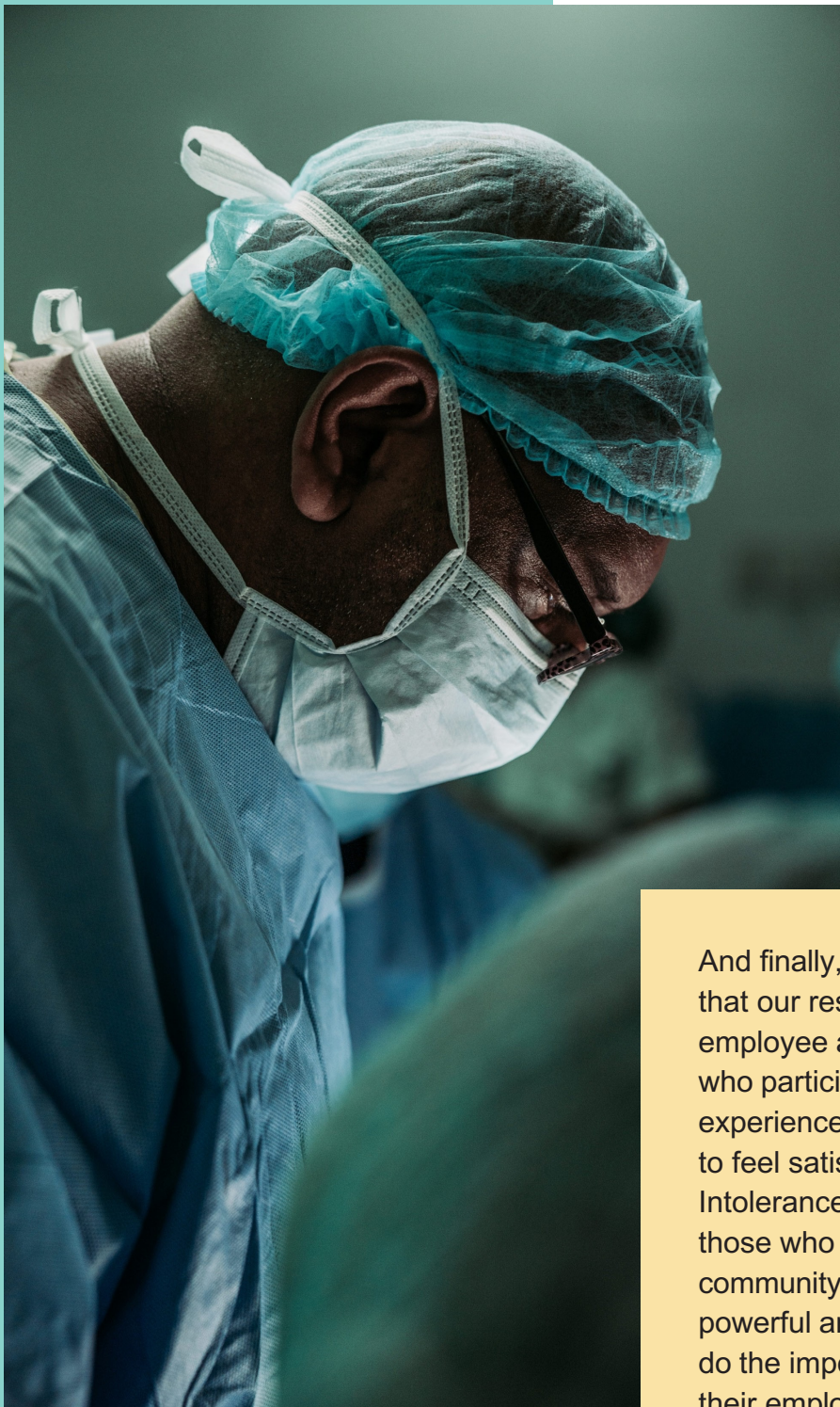
In fact, what our segmentation surfaces is the remarkable impact that inclusion exerts on employee attitudes and behaviors. The least satisfied feel, overwhelmingly, neither heard nor seen. They're the most likely to feel either shut out of interactions with co-workers; uncomfortable conversing with their manager; or that they are operating outside of the culture. They're the most likely to perceive leadership as indifferent to workplace dynamics, unwilling to entertain views different from their own, and not invested in making the organization more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Creating Connection:
A Shared Opportunity.

Clearly, making individual contributors—both the Disenfranchised and the Powerless—feel integral to the community would go far to neutralize their disillusionment. But while HR has a role in bringing this about, inclusion requires the commitment and involvement of employees across all segments.

Here are a few actions that leaders can take to encourage each employee segment to take to maximize everyone's satisfaction—and minimize risk to the brand:

Archetype:	Priority for Engaging:	What This Looks Like:
ALPHAS	Foster a "speak-up" culture	Create spaces for all employees to share— regularly and safely— suggestions on how to improve the organization's culture and business. Communicate actions taken as a result of that collective input. Consider incentivizing engagement with innovation competitions that carry rewards such as an audience with leadership, public recognition, or a high-visibility assignment. Enable a shift from Alpha to Empath by teaching and rewarding open conversation and active listening.
RISING STARS	Sponsor talent that doesn't look like you.	Minority status does predict who is likeliest to feel stalled. Diversify the leadership pipeline by helping mobilize more representative management. Give stretch assignments, provide the support needed to succeed at them, and get the visibility earned for doing so.
IN CHARGE, NOT EMPOWERED	Open a dialogue with individual contributors.	Signal interest in views other than your own. Seize opportunities to convey how and why each person's contribution matters to the mission. Look for ways to connect subordinates to the resources that will help them contribute their best work. Meet regularly to provide the constructive feedback that will enable continuous learning and growth.
PRIVILEGED BUT POWERLESS	Listen and learn.	Longer tenures and more direct engagement with customers and/or products can make this oft- untapped group of frontline workers a wealth of knowledge and ideas. Increase engagement AND insight by incorporating ways to actively solicit input into regular business strategy and planning processes, including surveys, focus groups and interviews. Capture and share back key learnings, as well as impact from these conversations.
DISEN-FRANCHISED FRONTLINE	Create more connection points to collect and engage.	From break-room announcements to social-media postings, find ways for co-workers, customers, vendors, managers, leaders, and members of the wider community to connect and to recognize coworkers for their contributions.

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And finally, there is one powerful panacea that our research turned up. Across all five employee archetypes, we find that those who participate in ERGs, while more likely to experience mistreatment, are also more likely to feel satisfied overall with their organization. Intolerance must always be goal, but for those who have had a negative experience, community, it would appear, can provide a powerful antidote. While organizations need to do the important, ongoing work of improving their employees' experience, facilitating the belonging, visibility, and voice conferred by membership in a workplace community is a proven first step.

Methodology: United Minds partnered with KRC Research to conduct a survey of 1,527 full-time employees at large companies across three countries—Canada, United States and United Kingdom. The final sample was weighted within each country to be demographically representative of the working population. This survey provides robust benchmarking data for the overall workforce across each of the three countries, across all industries, as well as industry-level benchmarks for the Technology, Healthcare and Financial Services sectors.

The segmentation of the DEI Index was developed by KRC Research using multivariate techniques. It comprises the 30 questions that proved most predictive of DEI satisfaction and which align to four domains: individual experience, culture and interactions, manager tone and behavior, and leadership and organizational commitment. This DEI Index can be used to benchmark organizational performance based on employee perceptions.