

Executive Summary

The rising importance of Asian Pacific Americans in the United States, driven by their increasing population, wealth, confidence, and leadership, makes them a crucial demographic that cannot be ignored. This is particularly the case in Corporate America. While Asian Pacific Americans have made tremendous strides in the workplace, much work still needs to be done. The 2012 Asian Pacific Americans Corporate Survey shows that the lynchpin for APA employee engagement and satisfaction remains the Professional Growth and Development dimension. However, interlocking relationships between all the dimensions, as well as the complexities within the APA population itself, require a multi-faceted approach.

Key Findings

- ▶ **Companies need to do more to draw on the expertise and knowledge of their APA employees**, which represent untapped potential for companies as they seek to understand both the APA market and Asian markets. According to the 2010 U.S. Census the APA market has grown by 44 percent between 2000 and 2010. Well under half (41 percent) of APAs agree that their company draws on APA employees when engaging APA customers, with only a slightly higher percentage (42 percent) believing so when working with customers from Asia.
- ▶ **Growth and development can be addressed in many ways**, for example, through focusing on the dimensions of Commitment to the APA Community Internally and Externally and Leadership and Company Image. APA employees recognize and appreciate the support for employee resource groups. However, they indicate that activities with the larger APA community externally could be more business relevant, which would enable them to better put their skills and expertise to work.
- ▶ **Despite great loyalty, APA employees do not feel a sense of belonging at their companies**. This feeling of not belonging can be attributed to many concrete factors, such as the lack of APA role models and mentors, low APA representation in the company's leadership ranks, and feelings that companies do not value their skills and experience as Asian Pacific Americans in the context of conducting business.
- ▶ **The longer APAs are in the U.S. the greater the decline in positive responses across virtually every workplace dimension**. APAs who came here as children, and thus have more of an American identity, view their companies less favorably than those who came to the U.S. later in life.

- ▶ **There is a dynamic of decreasing engagement at the critical career juncture between middle and senior management.** Lack of professional growth opportunities leads to APA attrition, which exacerbates the lack of APA mentors and role models, leading to even less engagement. From 30 to 59 years old, most professionals make the transition from middle to senior management. This is also the time when the decline in APA employee job satisfaction begins to take hold.
- ▶ **Companies must ensure APA employees feel valued.** The focus of Best in Class companies on issues of mentoring and sponsorship highlights the connection between having these relationships and employee engagement.

Certain aspects of the 2012 findings merit a deeper dive as they further illuminate the matrix of needs, desires and engagement drivers at work within the APA employee population.

Implications of APAs' American Identity

The 2011 survey revealed that Time in the U.S. for APA employees is one of the most determinative demographics for their engagement and satisfaction. This year, not only is the finding still applicable, but an additional nuance has been added—Age of Arrival in the U.S.

Though not as consistent as the Time in the U.S. results, there is a similar decline in favorability, with those who arrived in the U.S. as children having favorability scores that were essentially the same as native-born APAs. They differed in statistically significant ways from those in the “Teen” or “Adult” groups, whose scores were broadly similar to each other.

Respondents who have been in the U.S. for similar periods of time exhibit differences in satisfaction according to the Age of Arrival. The decline in favorability is not a simple factor of longevity in this country.

APAs with a strong American identity share the same job and career expectations as their non-APA counterparts and are thus more aware of workplace inequities that ultimately impact them. The result is an overall erosion in the optimism and enthusiasm they had at the start of their career.

APAs with less time in the U.S., or who moved to the U.S. later in life, have higher satisfaction due to both different priorities and less awareness or focus on the inequities they encounter.

Need to Leverage APA Employees to Increase Company Understanding of the Asian and APA Consumer Markets

The 2012 survey further distinguished companies' efforts to better understand both APA and Asian consumer markets.

Within the survey's Leadership and Company Image dimension, APA employees indicate that there is a measurable difference between their company's understanding of the APA market and the Asian markets. Although a clear majority of APAs (61 percent) believe their senior executives understand Asian markets, only a slim majority (53 percent) credit their company's leadership with the same knowledge of the APA market.

These results indicate that companies can potentially increase their knowledge of and insights into the APA market by applying to it the same strategic efforts and focus that they bring to understanding the Asian markets. In the process, companies can not only expand their business in one of the world's most dynamic markets, but also make significant strides in taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the APA market itself.

It should be noted that in this area, differences in company focus are paramount. Participating companies range from those with extensive Asian operations to those that are almost exclusively domestically focused. However, for both types of companies, an internal strategy that includes more actively seeking the counsel of APA employees and promoting awareness of their expertise across leadership and management levels could be important employee engagement strategies. Survey results support the need for additional proactive efforts—only 41 to 42 percent of APA employees agree that their companies draw on their knowledge and experience to engage either market. This represents an untapped employee engagement opportunity.

Strategic Action Steps

The complex and closely connected interactions between all the dimensions studied in the survey, indicate that companies can focus their efforts on any one of them, in order to increase overall APA engagement and satisfaction. The salient question is thus: Which dimensions provide the most practical strategic action steps?

Following are action steps for a number of the dimensions under study. By breaking down these topline steps into ever more granular actions, companies can determine their unique path to addressing engagement and satisfaction of their APA employees.

Professional Growth and Development

Strategic Action Steps:

- ▶ Offer career growth and development opportunities to APA employees.
- ▶ Support APAs' participation in leadership skills-building activities.
- ▶ Create a clear presence of APA employees in senior leadership positions.

Commitment to APA Community Internally and Externally

Strategic Action Steps:

- ▶ Establish and maintain strong ties with the APA community.
- ▶ Support APA Employee Resource Groups.
- ▶ Offer business-relevant activities with the APA community, which extend beyond holiday and festival celebrations.

Leadership and Company Image

Strategic Action Steps:

- ▶ Build a positive image in the APA community.
- ▶ Ensure that company leaders understand the APA market.
- ▶ Ensure that company leaders understand Asian markets.