

CAREER DEVELOPMENT TODAY

WHAT PEOPLE REALLY WANT – 2025

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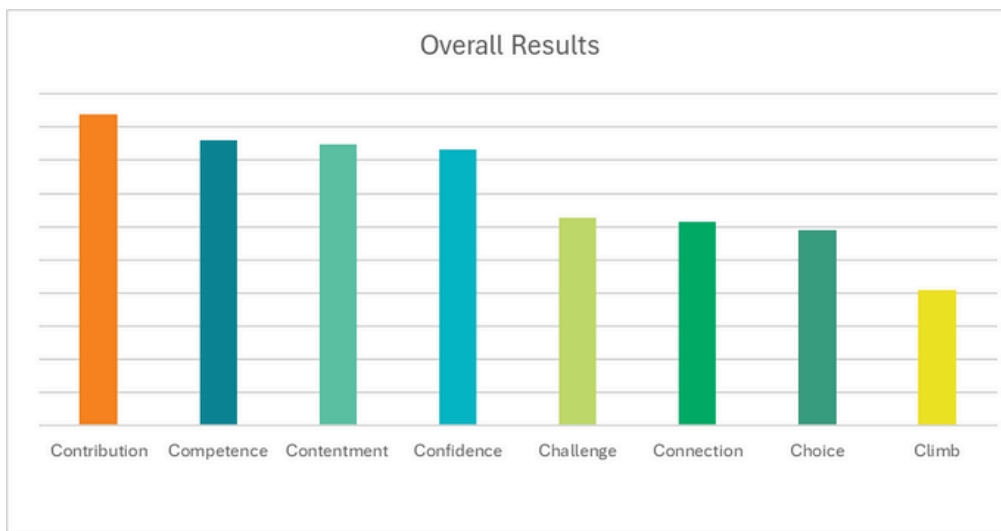


Updated January 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research summary offers a snapshot of how employees really want to grow. Updating a previous study with additional data and deeper analysis, it's clear that the traditional and limited definition of career development as promotions and moves is less interesting to people than previously thought.

Based upon the January to December 2025 analysis of data collected from nearly 3000 survey respondents, we have again confirmed that the alternative development dimensions of Contribution, Competence, Contentment, Confidence, Challenge, Connection, and Choice are all more interesting to employees than the Climb up the corporate ladder.

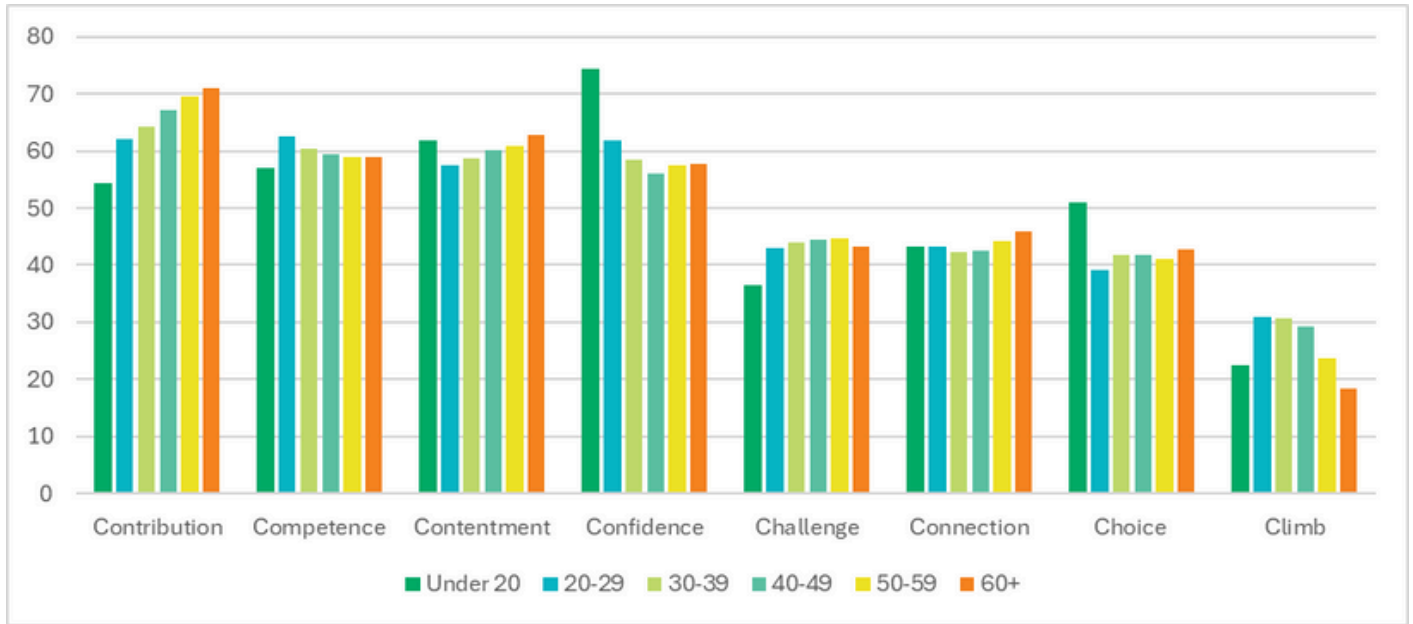


This study updates research conducted for the writing of *Promotions Are SO Yesterday*. Swapping out a simple ranking task for the more discerning maximum differentiation methodology, survey respondents digitally reviewed 24 sets of statements, choosing which were most and least interesting. Statements mapped to each dimension, yielding individual and ultimately the composite interest scores shown here.

These results offer a hopeful and helpful message to leaders and organizations. They reveal new opportunities for leaders to support engagement and results by growing and leveraging the needs and talents of their people.

The following pages offer more detail broken out by age, gender, level, and industry. Interestingly, you'll find greater similarities than differences among demographic groupings.

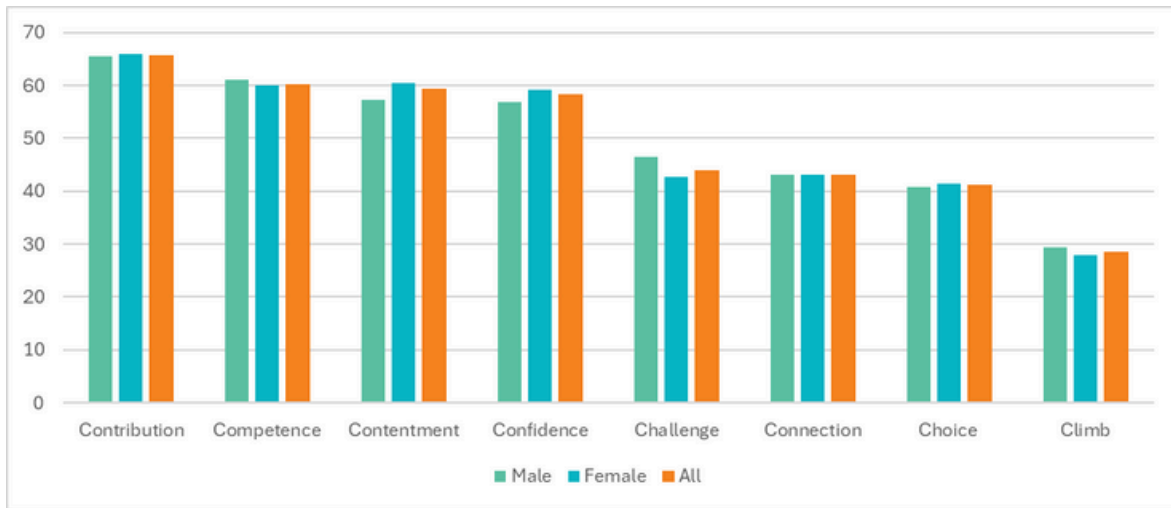
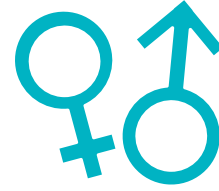
ANALYSIS BY AGE



DIMENSIONS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT: INTEREST BY AGE GROUP

Rank	Under 20 (n=22)	20-29 (n=556)	30-39 (n=908)	40-49 (n=772)	50-59 (n=458)	60+ (n=138)	All Respondents (n=2856)
1	Confidence	Competence	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution
2	Contentment	Contribution	Competence	Contentment	Contentment	Contentment	Competence
3	Competence	Confidence	Contentment	Competence	Competence	Competence	Contentment
4	Contribution	Contentment	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence
5	Choice	Connection	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Connection	Challenge
6	Connection	Choice	Connection	Connection	Connection	Challenge	Connection
7	Challenge	Challenge	Choice	Choice	Choice	Choice	Choice
8	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb

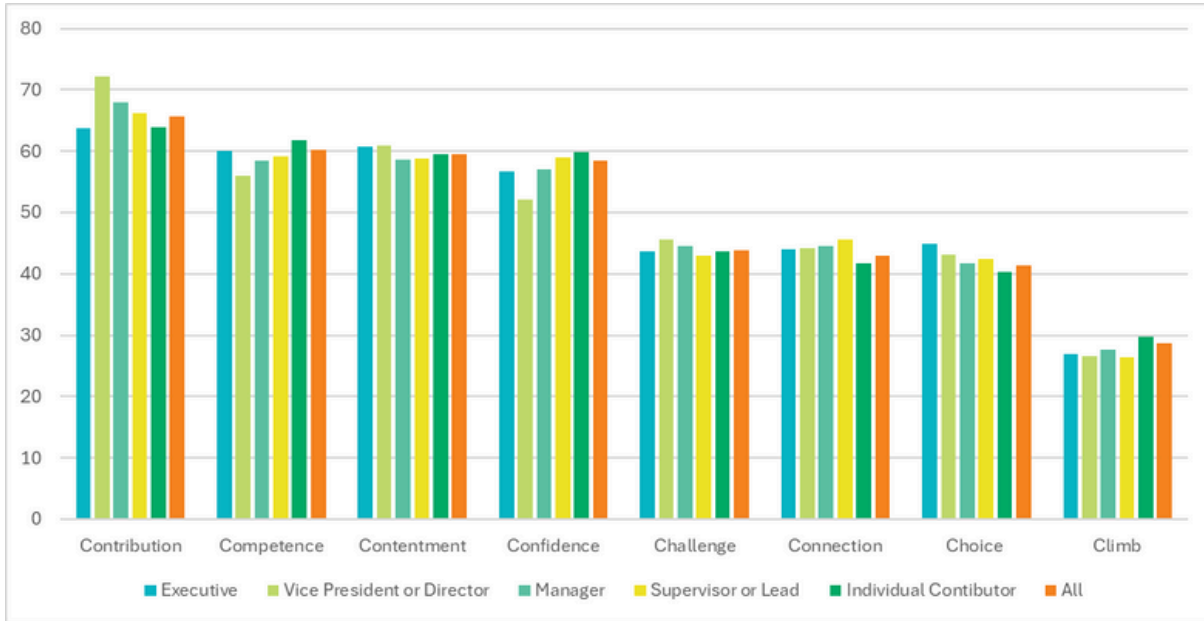
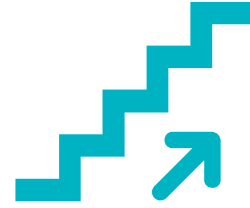
ANALYSIS BY GENDER



DIMENSIONS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT: INTEREST BY GENDER

Rank	Male (n=944)	Female (n=1841)	All Respondents (n=2856)
1	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution
2	Competence	Contentment	Competence
3	Contentment	Competence	Contentment
4	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence
5	Challenge	Connection	Challenge
6	Connection	Challenge	Connection
7	Choice	Choice	Choice
8	Climb	Climb	Climb

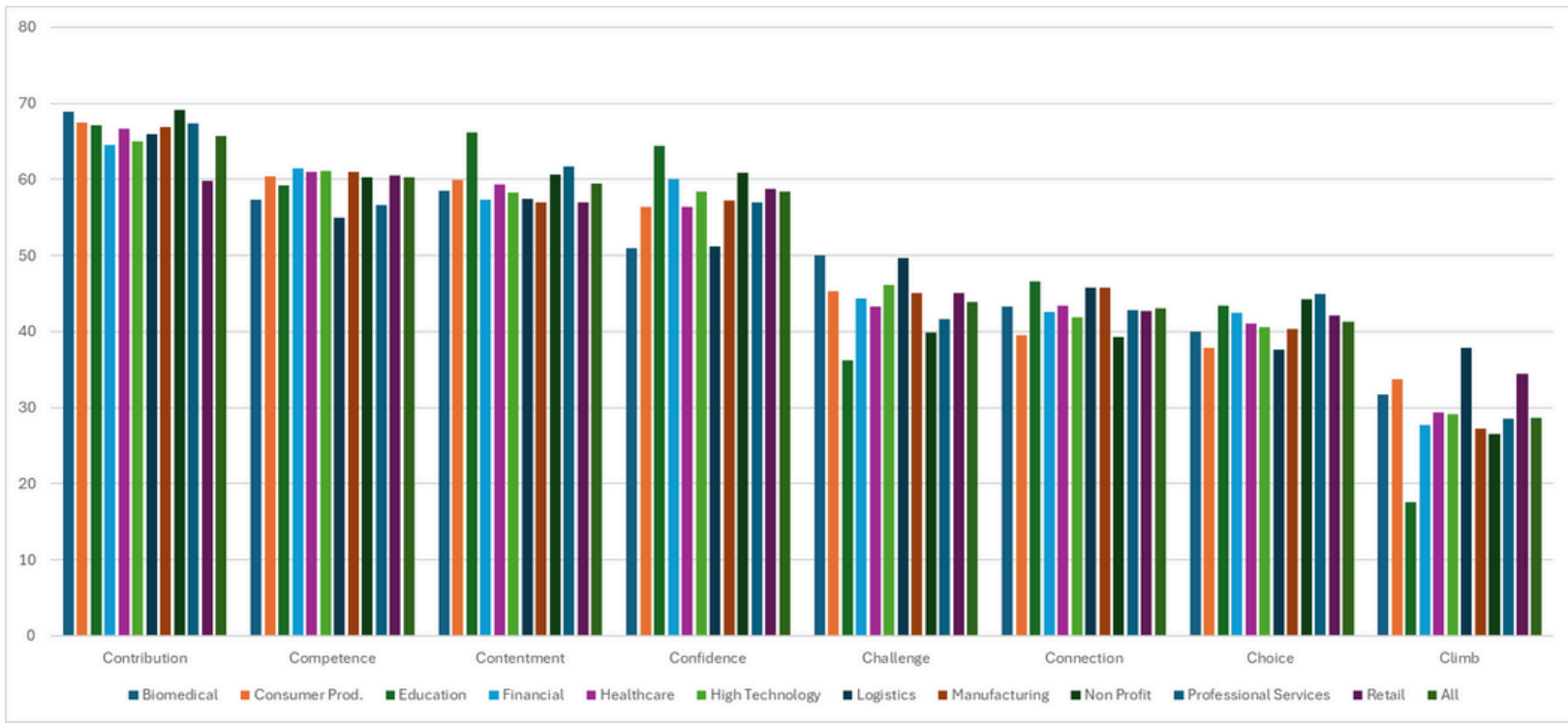
ANALYSIS BY LEVEL WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION



DIMENSIONS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT: INTEREST BY ORGANIZATION LEVEL

Rank	Executive (n=84)	Vice President or Director (n=258)	Manager (n=586)	Supervisor or Lead (n=330)	Individual Contributor (n=1598)	All Respondents (n=2856)
1	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution
2	Contentment	Contentment	Contentment	Competence	Competence	Competence
3	Competence	Competence	Competence	Confidence	Confidence	Contentment
4	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	Contentment	Contentment	Confidence
5	Choice	Challenge	Connection (tied for 5th)	Connection	Challenge	Challenge
6	Connection	Connection	Challenge (tied for 5th)	Challenge	Connection	Connection
7	Challenge	Choice	Choice	Choice	Choice	Choice
8	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb

ANALYSIS BY INDUSTRY



DIMENSIONS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT: INTEREST BY INDUSTRY

Rank	Biomedical (n=144)	Consumer Products (n=117)	Education (n=170)	Financial (n=496)	Healthcare (n=506)	High Technology (n=337)	Logistics (n=92)	Manufacturing (n=70)	Non Profit (n=76)	Professional Services (n=169)	Retail (n=122)	All Respondents (n=2856)
1	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Competence	Contribution
2	Contentment	Competence	Contentment	Competence	Competence	Competence	Contentment	Competence	Confidence	Contentment	Contribution	Competence
3	Competence	Contentment	Confidence	Confidence	Contentment	Confidence	Competence	Confidence	Contentment	Confidence	Confidence	Contentment
4	Confidence	Confidence	Competence	Contentment	Confidence	Contentment	Confidence	Contentment	Competence	Competence	Contentment	Confidence
5	Challenge	Challenge	Connection	Challenge	Connection	Challenge	Challenge	Connection	Choice	Choice	Challenge	Challenge
6	Connection	Connection	Choice	Connection	Challenge	Connection	Connection	Challenge	Challenge	Connection	Connection	Connection
7	Choice	Choice	Challenge	Choice	Choice	Choice	Climb	Choice	Connection	Challenge	Choice	Choice
8	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Choice	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb	Climb

THANK YOU

Want to learn more? Read **Promotions Are SO Yesterday: Redefine Career Development. Help Employees Thrive.** We also offer keynote speeches, live and virtual workshops, and consulting to help put these ideas into powerful practice.



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