Higher Education Information Technology Talent Retention:

Changes, Challenges, and Opportunities

MIDWESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION COMPACT

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May 2023

Technologies Community,

It is with pleasure that we share the Technologies Community whitepaper on *Higher Education Information Technology Talent Retention*.

The seed for this paper was planted a year ago, as many institutions were discussing a wide range of issues, ideas, and challenges related to information technology (IT) talent. Your Tech Executive Committee was eager to tackle a project that would be meaningful to the community and that would be aligned with MHEC's strategic plan - and this was an area that was a good fit.

In June 2022, those conversations were distilled down into a simple concept - what if the community shared their ideas that were specific to IT talent retention and then collaboratively gather those thoughts and ideas into a single document that could be used as a resource? Could we inform, raise awareness, and make leadership aware of the serious concerns of regional higher education information technology (HE IT) leaders? With approval from MHEC leadership, the project was a go!

From there, the concept took off. A list of articles, research, and organizations was created and shared with the community. New friends were made in non-technology areas, such as CUPA-HR. Your Executive Committee began framing the incoming information into specific focus areas. The content in those focus areas began to be crafted for ***YOU*** and those things that you might need or find useful as you have conversations or briefings with your HR office, your administration, your board members, or other potential stakeholders.

Finally, the paper went through several editorial reviews and the overall concepts were presented at the community's February 2023 annual convening. The concepts served as a foundation for engaging breakout conversations on this issue. The community provided additional feedback through April.

We hope your find value in this paper and the information it contains. It was truly energizing to do such meaningful work on behalf of the Midwest region.

Deb Kidwell
Director of Technology Initiatives
Midwestern Higher Education Compact

Dirk Huggett
Chair, Technologies Community
& Assistant CIO, North Dakota University System

105 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 450
Minneapolis, MN 55401
612-677-2777 or 855-767-MHEC
MHEC.ORG | mhec@mhec.org

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Special thanks to the collective input of
MHEC's Technologies Executive Committee.

MHEC TECHNOLOGIES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ross Berndt, Minnesota State
Andrew Buker, University of Nebraska System
John Dunning, University of Wisconsin-Platteville (Ex Officio)
David Hansen, South Dakota Board of Regents
Dirk Huggett, North Dakota University System
Aric Kirkland, Eastern Michigan University
Marty Mark, University of Northern Iowa
Angela Neria, Pittsburg State University (KS)
John Rathje, Kent State University (OH)
Al Stadler, Crowder College (MO)
Chet Strebe, Northcentral Technical College (WI)

MHEC CONTRIBUTORS/EDITORS:

Debra Kidwell, Director of Technology Initiatives
Jenny Parks, Vice President, Policy & Research
Leah Reinert, Policy and Research Manager

Introduction

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact's Technologies Executive Committee is comprised of higher education information technology leaders in the Midwest. One of the biggest challenges facing this group is recruiting and retaining talent in an age when information technology workers are in high demand.

Historically, higher education (HE) has been able to recruit based on offering excellent benefits and working for a mission-driven organization centered upon the value of education. However, such inducements have decreased in relative value and no longer provide an advantage. Today, applicant pools are small, and HE information technology (IT) positions exist in a "candidates' market" in which there is steep competition with private-sector employers and HE peers across the country. In fact, current HE IT workers who are not even looking for a new job are targeted every day by aggressive recruiters with enticing offers.

The committee identified several key factors impacting the IT talent retention struggle.

KEY QUESTIONS

How can HE IT leaders recruit talent?

What are IT workers looking for?

How can working at a public institution be made enticing?

What changes will help retain current employees?

KEY FACTORS IMPACTING THE IT TALENT RETENTION STRUGGLE

- **Expectations** of HE IT departments and workforces have changed. IT is now considered to be both strategic and essential to all areas of an institution's success.
- **Leadership** matters. The relationships between presidents and CIOs, supervisors, and employees, as well as the cohesion of an IT team, can all impact retention.
- **Job descriptions** must demonstrate the values sought by today's worker, including features such as a clear path for career growth and advancement.
- **Innovation** will be important. Change is here – institutions that succeed will be those that embrace change and adapt to evolving expectations and capabilities.

STRUCTURE OF PAPER

To understand the factors impacting higher education IT talent recruitment and retention, one must first understand today's IT department. The first section of this paper will provide that background.

The paper will then delve more deeply into each of the four noted above .In each section.

- Key points will be identified.
- Fundamental challenges facing HE IT will be discussed.
- Opportunities for institutions and stakeholders will be presented.

Background Information: Information Technology Departments and Their Workforces

KEY POINTS

- Information Technology (IT) is a strategic operation necessary to the success of a higher education institution, including areas such as student recruitment and retention.
- An IT workforce is increasingly difficult to build and maintain. Adequate funding is a significant issue, and a separate pool of funds might be needed for IT operations, or IT operations should be indexed to the market differently than other pools of funding.
- The impact of legislation can impact HE IT talent retention, even more so than other departments.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENTS

Before delving into talent retention, it is important to have a basic understanding of what today's HE IT departments look like. Although the skill sets needed in a HE IT department are the same as those needed for an IT department in the private sector, expectations for HE IT departments come from a particular and wide set of stakeholder perspectives. These include students, faculty, staff, parents, administration, legislators, and the community.

Institutions rely on their IT departments to ensure their network of computers functions properly and connects well to the Internet and internal systems. The HE IT department has three major areas of concern:

1. Governance of the institution's technological systems;
2. Maintenance of the IT infrastructure; and
3. Maintenance of the functionality of systems overall.

In addition, IT professionals manage and maintain computer software and hardware for students, faculty, and staff to help achieve the institution's mission.

CHALLENGES FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WORKFORCES

The Cost of IT Staff is Increasing at a Rate Higher than Inflation and Other Employees

As HE IT departments engage in essential activities, they suffer from the impact of inflation on their workforce. The cost of all employees is skyrocketing, but this is particularly the case for IT employees, as shown in Figure 1.

The Cost of Maintaining IT Systems and Services is Increasing

The costs of maintaining systems and services required to operate a HE IT department are also increasing. Many CIOs (Chief Information Officers) in HE must make a choice between critical updates to institutional IT systems or maintaining adequate levels of staffing, as they often have no access to the funding needed to maintain both.

Figure 1
Actual Figures for a Midwestern Institution's Software Developer Example: Labor/Salary Challenge

Role	Departure Date	Salary at Departure	Reported Salary at New Job	Dollar Increase	Percent Increase
Software Developer	9/2022	$56,500	$112,000	$55,500	98%
Software Developer	1/2022	$59,365	$94,000	$34,635	58%
Software Developer	10/2021	$$56,000	$83,000	$27,000	48%
Software Developer	6/2021	$73,382	$130,000	$56,618	77%

Source. A Midwest public institution. Note. This does not include declined offers or interviews. Example: Potential software developers are declining roles or interviews because they're already making $30k-40k over the offered pay for the position.

State Funding Formulas and Tuition-Caps do not Account for the Particularities of IT Staffing and Services

Institutions dependent upon state funding are especially hamstrung when they must manage budgets constrained by state-mandated tuition caps. Funding formulas and tuition caps do not account for the fact that the market for IT products, services, and staff does not follow the same rules as the markets for other products, services, and staff required to run an institution. Quite simply, most faculty members don't have other employment opportunities except at other similarly funded institutions; however, IT staff have abundant opportunities to work for myriad organizations and to do so at a premium.

The IT department's workforce, like the workforce in general, is in a transitory stage. Talent is at the top of a CIO's list of concerns as it impacts hiring, forecasting, costs, pricing, and staffing levels.

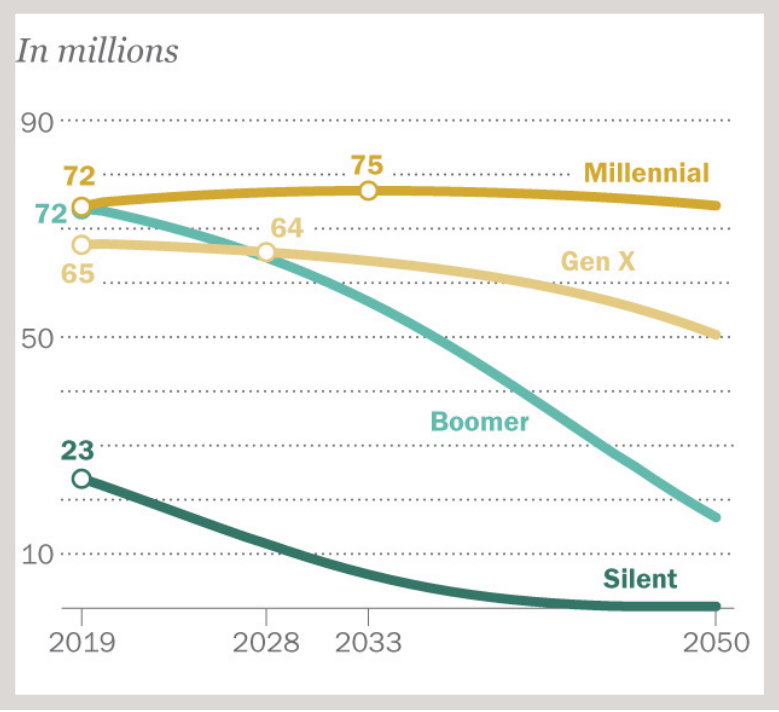
Generational Shifts and Workplace Expectations

IT leaders are keenly aware of the generational transition affecting all aspects of society, including recruitment and retention. As baby boomers retire, leaders must recognize and adapt to the reduction

of available workers. Gen X and Millennials will take over leadership positions within the workforce, and workplaces will have to evolve to meet the needs and expectations of a new workforce comprised of Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z workers.

The following chart (Figure 2) shows how generations are changing, which will impact the workforce. As Millennials, and soon Gen Z, take over the workforce, employees' expectations will change. Gen Z is the country's most racially and ethnically diverse generation and will comprise 30% of the workforce by 2030. They are the first generation to have always had access to the Internet. They interact with technology in a seamless way unlike previous generations. Gen Z is accustomed to working, studying, socializing, and interacting with the world digitally, from anywhere, at all times of the day. Will they be the generation that abolishes the traditional 40-hour work week which was created in the early 20th century (Ward & Lebowitz, 2023)?

Figure 2
Projected Population by Generation



Source. Tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau population estimates released April 2020 and population projections released December 2017. Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (April 28, 2020) https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/28/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers-as-americas-largest-generation/ft_20-04-27_generationsize_1/
Note. Millennials refer to the population ages 23 to 38 as of 2019..

Legislation and Practices that Support Remote Workers

CIOs also have concerns about potential legislation and the impact such legislation may have on their ability to recruit and retain workers remotely. For example, many states have proposed legislation intended to boost the state's economy by encouraging employers to hire locally. Such legislation has many benefits, but CIOs fear it will reduce or eliminate their access to remote pools of talent. When talking with Rob Shomaker, Senior Vice President at the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR), we asked, "What would you want a legislator to know today about retaining talent?" His answer reflected the tensions in employee/employer relationships across the nation and which are shared by IT leaders (CUPA-HR Advocacy Positions, 2022). To summarize his response:

- Employees' concerns for their work-life balance, desires for flexibility in their schedules, and preferences to work remotely are all here to stay. Unfortunately, many state and institutional leaders are not yet comfortable with these alternative work arrangements. If employers and institutions want to recruit and retain talent, they need to soften their rigidity and meet employees where they are.
- Employers need to make clear to employees the benefits and value proposition for **employment** at their institutions.
  - As an example, we're prioritizing doing all we can to meet **students** where they are and to meet their needs both inside and outside of the classroom itself. At the same time, we ask **employees** to come to the office in-person, whether they wish to or not, and then we charge them a fee to park. How does this make sense?
  - We need to revisit and redefine the employment benefit/value proposition.
- Localism/Isolationism hinders IT's ability to serve their institutions.
  - We need the ability to recruit from a broader pool of talent and need relief from state and local hiring regulations that limit remote applicants.
  - We need legislation that offers national tax relief and removes barriers for employees who work in one state and live in another.
  - We need to understand joint employer laws and how they

may impact talent in future years (Coalition for a Democratic Workplace, 2019). Options such as outsourcing are being explored as an option to meet current and future needs, and joint employer laws can and will impact such the success of such initiatives.

- We need to facilitate collaboration related to IT issues. Small institutions will not have the luxury of dedicated cybersecurity specialists or chief data officers. Large institutions cannot maintain the line IT staff needed support IT infrastructure. By working together to share resources, the impact of these experience gaps can be mitigated.

Innovative Recruiting and Retention Strategies Needed

Traditional job descriptions no longer appeal to top tech talent, nor do traditional job posting methodologies reach markets where IT talent can be found. The competition for employees is no longer solely within the higher education marketplace but takes place within the broader IT marketplace, which includes private sector employers. HE IT leaders must work with their human resources departments and their leadership to develop innovative strategies that will bring talent to the institution. This may include things such as new job description templates, articulating staff development plans (both vertical and horizontal), and tailoring both to each employee's needs. Recruiting IT talent will require new outreach strategies and tapping into new markets for talent such as recent retirees. Institutions must also implement process improvements to remove perceived application and hiring barriers and add adjacent values, such as pet insurance, to employee benefits.

STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT FOR IT DEPARTMENTS

The information above will provide stakeholders with basic information about the complex issues facing the HE IT community. As stakeholders are asked to provide information or to advise on initiatives, policies, legislation, and/or funding that might impact HE IT talent retention, they can support not only themselves but other institutions in the region.

Initiatives such as the National Association of State CIOs' (NASCIO) concerns about the future of the cybersecurity workforce are another source of excellent information related to the issue of IT talent and may be well worth the investment of time to monitor and share (Freed, 2023).

Leadership Development

KEY POINTS

- Leadership skills are needed for the entire IT team.
- Institutions must have a culture that values leadership capabilities within staff.
- A trusted environment for the development of broader leadership perspectives and skills.

Tackling these challenges head on requires a clear vision for the future, a strong and resilient institutional culture, and the ability to support students and faculty, even in the face of (un) expected headwinds. more importantly, it also requires bold and proactive leadership. unfortunately, many institutions aren't giving enough attention to developing staff leadership capabilities, making it even harder to navigate these rough waters.

(CUPA-HR, 2022)

CHALLENGES IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The linkage between leadership development and IT talent retention is clear. We've all heard the saying "People Quit Their Bosses, Not Their Jobs." It makes sense to ensure that the "bosses" have the skills they need to lead their teams. But the boss isn't the only one working on projects. The entire IT team works on projects and works with a variety of university teams every day. Regardless of job titles, all IT staffers NEED leadership skills to best serve their institutions.

Institutions face multiple challenges, including those in enrollment, financial needs, and social issues such as racism and discrimination. When an institution has a revolving door of talent, how can it sustain a consistent approach to addressing such concerns? Developing leadership capabilities among staff is one strategy institutions can use to retain talent and support the success of institutional projects. In IT in particular, such skills are a necessity. How many of you have a "favorite" IT person who is your chosen IT contact because they understand what YOU do? That's the person who possesses leadership, communication, and project skills. As IT staff increasingly engage with other institutional representatives on a wide variety of needs, leadership skills are needed and are more likely to produce successful outcomes.

So why isn't across the board leadership training a given?

- Leadership development is often left to individual staff professional development choices (not highly structured or mentored).
- Leadership development may be perceived as only appropriate for those on a promotion track. Leadership development can and should happen at all staffing level and without always being tied to a promotion structure.
- The distinction between formal and informal leadership is not always appreciated. There is a cultural bias toward acknowledging only leaders who hold certain titles when, in fact, a leader can be anyone in any position at any time.

So, what can we do to recruit and retain more IT talent in higher education?

Be Transparent. Transparency provides a broader perspective to all staff, including those creating technological solutions. Transparency creates a deeper understanding of institutional needs. Such understanding results in the implementation of optimal solutions. Some current questions on areas in which transparency is needed include:

- How does the institution visualize the new normal way of doing business post-COVID?
- How do challenges such as the enrollment cliff (drop in the college-age population beginning in 2025) affect the institution's decisions, processes, and priorities?
- How does leadership perceive Digital Transformation (the implementation of new technologies, talent, and processes to improve business operations and satisfy customers), and what level of interest and support will leadership devote to it (Boulton, 2021)?

Focus on Leadership Development. Intentionally create opportunities for leadership development in areas particularly relevant to IT, including:

1. Higher education leadership: general leadership skills applicable to most industries and a basic understanding of education as a business.
2. Higher Ed IT leadership: leadership skills needed to address specific trends in HE IT, such as the digital transformation or service/value management.
3. Remote/hybrid team leadership: emerging managerial skills and techniques to lead and align teams that are working remotely.

Promote Learning and Growth. Within the IT workforce, IT staff may not be interested in moving into managerial or administrative roles, but it is still important to them to learn and grow. Tactics might include the development of new skills, transitioning to emerging areas of IT such as the emerging data officer role, or simply taking on new project challenges. Some of the training available to address these staff needs might be:

- Leadership principles.
- Project Management.
- Individualized leadership development plans.
  - New skills.
  - Job progression.
  - Succession planning.
  - Mentoring.

CHALLENGES IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Be transparent.

Focus on leadership development.

Promote learning and growth.

INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Institutions, whether at the department or the institutional level, can choose to make leadership development a key part of their talent management plans.

- Create a culture that values staff leadership capabilities.
- Create opportunities to learn about new topics or to develop new skills.
- Create job paths so staff see opportunities in their future.
- Establish mentoring programs.

STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Technologies Community is in a unique position to provide an intimate environment in which community members often feel more comfortable and willing to expose their vulnerabilities and concerns. The Community can build on this trust and intimacy by:

- Aggregating individual participants into minimum-sized cohorts and creating opportunities for cohorts to discuss their challenges and concerns.
  - Use grant funding to fund cohort activities.
  - Use partnerships to provide leadership development sessions.
    - Vendors.
    - Regional Compacts.
    - EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit association whose mission is to advance higher education through the use of information technology (EDUCAUSE, n.d.).
- Creating experiences around specific topics or groups.
  - Sharing best practices and other lessons learned from experience, such as best practices in hiring remote workers.
  - Weekly/Monthly seminars for underrepresented groups, such as women in IT.

Job Market and Job Descriptions

KEY POINTS

- We need to do what higher education does best—research, solve, and innovate.
- Institutions must "market" themselves to their employees.
- It is essential to challenge traditional assumptions: Are HE IT job descriptions and models of work the best fit for today's market?

2023 TALENT DEMAND IN HIGHER EDUCATION

103,671
jobs at

2,315
institutions

1,221
new jobs today

Source. Higheredjobs.com. Figures as of January 31, 2023.

CHALLENGES IN THE JOB MARKET AND RECRUITING

The IT sector of the labor market, on its own, has been tumultuous, even before the pandemic. It is difficult to retain HE IT talent when competing for employees with Fortune 100 companies like Amazon and Google. Such competition has resulted in constant turnover, as well as a decrease in the number and quality of available applicants.

Simply said, the demand for talent in higher education greatly exceeds the supply of available talent.

Higheredjobs.com is a website focused solely on available positions in higher education. Pre-Covid, there were typically 35,000 job openings listed daily. In 2022, there were 105,000 daily postings. At the end of January, there were 103,671 jobs posted, demonstrating the continuing high demand for workers in higher education.

Why are there so many openings?

Workers want remote and hybrid positions, especially since the pandemic

As workers shifted to remote work, they developed new work/life balance rules. They re-examined the work they did and how they did it. The "status quo" dissolved in fundamental ways. As the pandemic has eased, workers wish to keep much of the work/life balance achieved during lockdown. Some workers prefer a hybrid approach to the balance, working some days in the office and other days working from home. Some employers have embraced these changes; others have not.

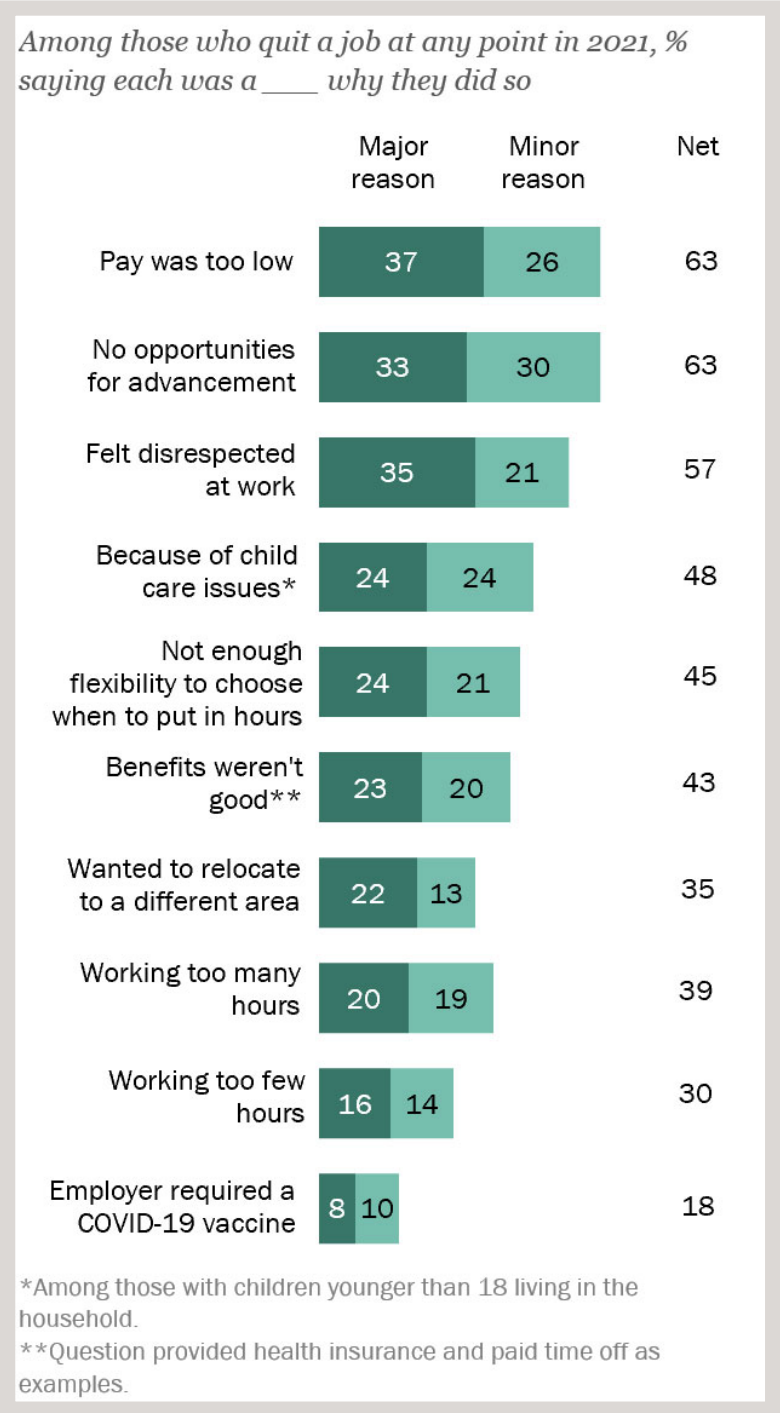
For IT workers, remote work was already an option in limited use when the pandemic hit. Many IT workers feel that when they are "in the office" there is little difference from when they work from home, as they sit in their own small workspace without much coworker interaction. Thus, they truly feel they can perform their work just as well from home as at the office.

Large numbers of workers left the workforce during and since the height of COVID

According to a study performed by McKinsey & Company, two out of five workers (40%) planned to leave their jobs in 2022. This was the same percentage as in 2021.

De Smet et al. (2022) noted some nuances to this trend, with workers reshuffling, reinventing, or reassessing their jobs. Reshuffling is movement from one industry to another, reinvention is engaging in non-traditional employment such as gig work, consulting, or self-employment, and reassessing is simply reviewing one's work-life balance with many choosing life over work.

Figure 3
Top Reasons Why U.S. Workers Left a Job in 2021: Low pay, no advancement opportunities



Source. Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 7-13, 2022. Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (March 9, 2022) https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/
Note. Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.

Returning workers are not returning to the public and nonprofit sectors

The public sector has been disproportionately affected by the Great Resignation. Of those who left the public and nonprofit sectors and are now returning to the workforce, 28% are **not returning to the public or nonprofit sector.** Parallel percentages for technology and education are 45% and 46%, respectively. This amounts to a mass exodus from the pool of candidates seeking employment at institutions in general and an ever-dwindling pool of IT workers from which institutions can recruit new talent.

CHALLENGES IN EMPLOYEE RETENTION

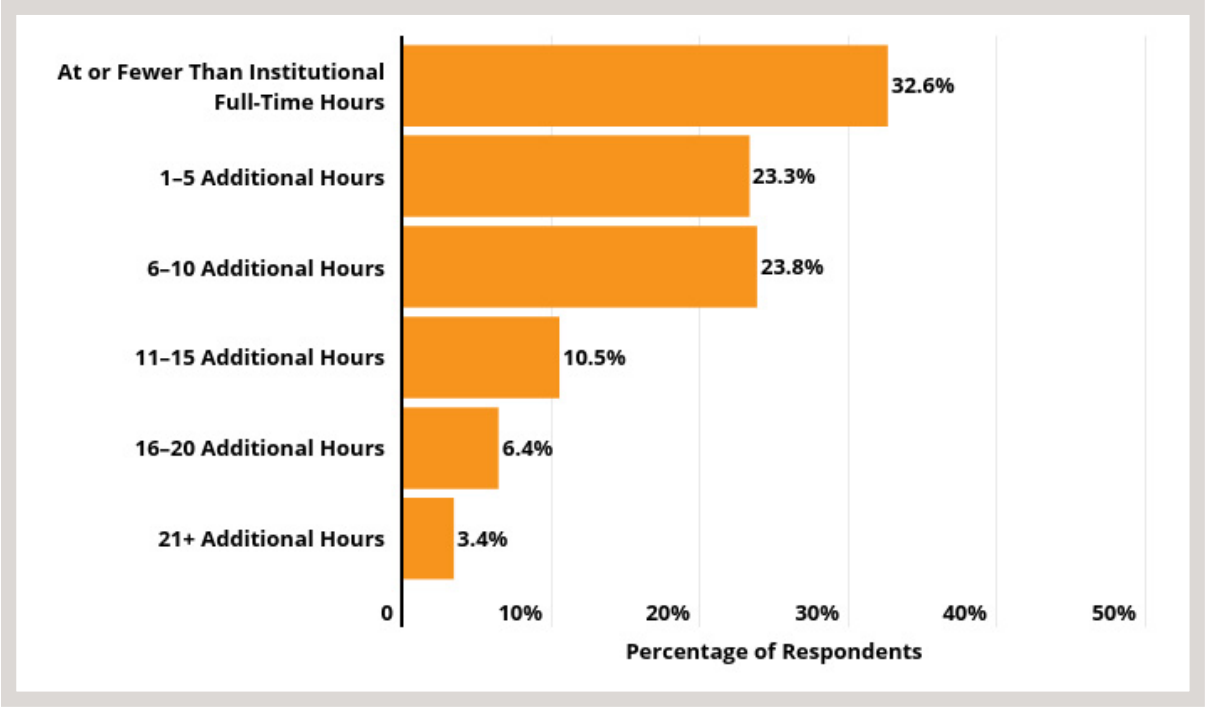
With the instability of the job market, retaining staff becomes paramount. Yet institutions find themselves with significant challenges in doing so.

Existing staff work long hours (see Figure 4; Bichsel, 2022). Organizations forced to downsize during the pandemic placed additional pressure on their remaining staff. Many organizations have not yet relieved that pressure. Staff at such institutions routinely work more than 40 hours per week. Even when funding is available to rehire staff, the tight talent market means employers are often unable to fill open positions or must settle for hiring individuals with little or no experience and train them from scratch. When this happens, the productivity of the entire team is impacted, as they must add training new staff to their lengthy to-do lists while waiting for new hires to learn the skills needed to perform tasks independently.

Pay is a crucial factor in retention as well. Industries that can adjust consumer pricing to cover increased wage costs can often offer a 50-100% pay increase over what most institutions can pay. With pressures to keep the cost of a degree affordable, colleges and universities cannot keep up with the cost of the IT labor market. This pressure is felt especially hard in the public sector where pay increases often do not keep up with normal inflationary increases, let alone the significant inflationary pressures of the past two years. Rob Shomaker (2022), Senior Vice President from CUPA-HR, noted if we do not find the money to increase employee pay now, it will cost institutions much more in the long run.

Another retention challenge is the institutional model of work. Despite having shown that remote work can be successful, especially in the IT area, many institutions force all staff to return to the physical workplace.

Figure 4
Distribution of Weekly Additional Hours Worked



Source. *The CUPA-HR 2022 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey: Initial Results.* CUPA-HR. Bichsel, J., Fuesting, M., Schneider, J., & Tubbs, D. (July 2022) https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/research-briefs/higher-ed-employee-retention-survey-findings-july-2022

Shomaker (2022) noted, "the 40-hour workweek model is based on manufacturing mentality. We haven't adapted to the technological age." He didn't believe we have seen the full effect of the transition to remote/flex work but felt that organizational inflexibility, when it comes to the work model, drives employees to look at other options.

Even if institutions are open to flexible work arrangements, there are additional challenges. One pain point is payroll taxes. Depending upon where an employee lives and works, institutions must determine state taxes and sometimes local, county, and municipality taxes. Keeping up with this can be a nightmare for payroll staff, and some institutions have decided to outsource all remote staff to a third party. When jobs are outsourced this way, remote employees no longer receive institutional benefits, which are often the sole reason an employee decides to work for a public institution. Beyond the institutional level, legislators in many states advocate to require public employees to be domiciled locally. Such mandates will further exacerbate the shortage of IT resources, especially in MHEC's less populous states.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ENGAGE STAFF

1 ***Are there ways to help stabilize the gap in pay?***

2 ***Can we find one-time funding for a retention bonus?***

3 ***Can we offer additional paid time off? Time is the most finite resource we have.***

4 ***Can we bump people up one level in leave accumulation?***

5 ***Can we stop charging employees for parking and similar fees? Consider finding sponsors to make up for revenue loss.***

INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOB DESCRIPTIONS

There are many decisions within the institutional and IT leadership's control that can help ease the challenges we face. "There is an opportunity. We can innovate with our workforce, to revise the why/value statement. This is what higher education does - research, solve, innovate" (Shomaker, 2022).

First, understand your employee's needs. The top five reasons staff leave are low pay, lack of opportunity for advancement, disrespect, childcare issues, and lack of flexibility on work times. Each employee is going to be different. What might incentivize one may disincentivize another. Talking with staff is the first step to identifying how we can change things. This may also start addressing any feelings of disrespect, assuming we can address the issues concerning our employees.

Second, provide new and additional opportunities for employee advancement. Do we have clear job tiers within teams, with guidelines for each advancement? Have we identified opportunities to transfer between teams? Do we offer the ability for a staff member to "intern" with another team to learn new skills and potentially open a future opportunity? Have we done a good job advertising these opportunities?

Third, childcare issues and flexible work schedules often go hand-in-hand. We need to rethink how we approach our work. What value is provided by having someone sit in a cubicle from 8am to 5pm? How can we become more flexible? If a staff member must step away for an hour to pick their kids up from school, bring them home, and fix them a snack, can the job accommodate that? This type of flexibility could save the family thousands of dollars in childcare. Perhaps they will make up the time early in the morning or later in the evening after the kids are in bed. One thing is for sure, the grateful parent will appreciate and feel loyalty to an employer who offers this type of flexibility.

We need to rethink the way we work. How can we ensure we maintain productivity, innovation, and team relationships and yet provide the flexibility staff desire? Can we establish "core hours" where employees are generally available, such as 9-12 and 1-3? Can we offer hybrid work schedules where teams are in the office a couple of days a week or every other week? Can we offer alternate workdays where staff can alternate days in the office?

Fourth, interwoven into all of this is mental health. Long hours, child and adult care issues, and feelings that no one at your job cares about you are all related to employee mental health. While many organizations

offer some sort of Employee Assistance Program that includes mental health services, these programs often have limits on how many sessions are available, after which it becomes the employee's responsibility to pay the significant on-going costs of mental health and other support services. We need to figure out how to provide additional and effective support services for our employees.

Finally, we need to do a better job of talking about the benefits of working for an institution and the total compensation packages offered to staff. **Most institutions have marketing teams engaged to recruit students to apply, but have we done the same for staff?** Public institutions need to revitalize the message of public service. Everyone can talk about being part of the campus community and the values proposition of higher education. "We are changing lives for the better with education" (Shomaker, 2022). This needs to be at the front and center of our recruitment page and activities. Every interview needs to start with how this job allows you to be part of something much bigger than just a paycheck.

Shomaker (2022) said employers that help employees grow will likely do well in the long term. We need to lose rigidity and meet staff where they are. The employers who come alongside their staff are the ones who will win. (Shomaker, 2022)

STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT FOR JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND JOB MARKETS

MHEC might be able to assist institutions in the Midwest as they recruit and retain IT staff. One suggestion was offered that MHEC consider facilitating the development of a job description database for IT positions, providing a starting point for institutions that want to develop or update their job tracks. There could be two stages to this effort: gathering job track descriptions from MHEC members and our sister compacts, and developing a system that would store, organize, and provide institutions with access to the information. This is only one example of how the community could potentially collaborate regionally.

MHEC could consider expanding its offerings related to mental health. MHEC's innovative solutions to support student mental health services on campuses (https://www.mhec.org/mhecare) could be considered for expansion into solutions that address faculty and staff mental health needs.

Institutional HR staff could be key partners in this type of work, as could non-profit organizations supporting HR work.

Adjacent Values

KEY POINTS

- Adjacent values (things that are adjacent to the employment relationship and may be offered as an incentive) are a way public HE can try to compete against the private sector and differentiate themselves from their peers.
- Many values were created as a response to pandemic conditions; institutions need to identify which will stand the test of time.
- The exact mix of adjacent values will be highly dependent on the specific institution/department.

CHALLENGES WITH ADJACENT VALUES

As public and private not-for-profit institutions cannot compete with the private sector on salary alone, it becomes critical to look at values of employment at educational institutions that are not direct benefits, but which are adjacent to the employer/employee relationship. It is helpful for the institution to be open to change and to new ways of thinking about the employment relationship. Some of these values might apply to an entire institution, while others might be tailored specifically to a single department where there are unique challenges and needs, such as IT.

A scan of private institutions identified some adjacent values against which HE must compete:

- Fiscal
  - Profit-sharing IN ADDITION to 401K match.
    - 401K match increased.
    - Eliminated or revised profit-sharing targets.
  - Reduced cost of monthly medical premiums.
  - Wellness Benefits Enhancements.
- Culture
  - Culture building: hold employees accountable (end-of-year performance) based on what "behavior" or "how we go about getting work done."
  - Increased level of Executive Leadership Team communication.
  - Transparency.
  - Emphasis on what we call I&D (Inclusion and Diversity).
  - More awareness around employee resource groups (ERG's).
  - Wellbeing incentives, pensions, and more.
  - Professional development: time to learn, test, and explore.
  - New dress code policy that includes casual dress.
- Vacation
  - Increased vacation: new hires went from 2 to 3 weeks' vacation.
  - Unlimited vacation.
- Flexible work models
  - Implemented a flexible work model which includes 1 remote day per week, of the employee's choice.

- Work from home FT with some exceptions (team meetings, face-to-face collaboration, etc.).

- Other
  - Emergency childcare through a 3rd party.
  - Pet insurance.

INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES WITH ADJACENT VALUES

The list of adjacent values above is merely a sampling of possibilities. Institutions must begin discussions to identify potential adjacent values that fit with their culture and understand the return on this type of investment in their employees. National organizations such as NACUBO (2022; Supporting and Maintaining the Workforce), EDUCAUSE (2023; Workforce: Evolve or Become Extinct) and CUPA-HR (2022; Employee Retention Survey) are also recognizing the need to innovate in this area as part of an overall strategy to recruit and retain talent, offering many resources on this topic.

Human resource departments, in particular, can lead discussions about culture (the 40-hour work week, job descriptions), hiring (cluster hiring; Burt, 2021), and retention (leadership development) as innovative ways to recruit and retain institutional talent. Human resource specialists can work to develop talent strategies for departments, such as IT, that reflect the specific needs and challenges of that department (on-premises or remote, location of pool of targeted talent, etc.).

Institutions can focus on employee retention, as much or more than recruitment. Administrators need to carefully craft things like remote work policies for what is to come and resist the urge to simply revert to what was. Administrators can focus on issues that impact talent retention in all areas of the institution, such as culture, campus community, learning or advancement paths, mental health, individual wellbeing, pay equity, policies and procedures, and current societal issues.

STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT FOR ADJACENT VALUES

Over time, the value of adjacent values will become clearer. Some may last, while others may not. Raising awareness of adjacent values and their potential benefit to talent recruitment and retention is something that all stakeholders should consider.

Conclusion

The IT sector transitioned from a traditional, 40-hour work model to a hybrid or remote work model out of necessity and talent demand. While the COVID pandemic hastened this transition, it was not the cause. The "most coveted people are those working in IT, digital, and sales jobs, followed closely by those in hospitality and transport and logistics" (Baier et al., 2023). This talent demand is causing HE IT to develop and implement new strategies to recruit and retain IT talent, regardless of whether HE HR has implemented institutional policies for this type of work environment.

It is the Technologies Community's belief that HE IT, and in fact HE in general, must adapt and implement new strategies to be successful in obtaining and retaining needed talent going forward. Such strategies may be needed in the areas of::

- Leadership development.
- Flexibility in work models: innovative job metrics, job descriptions, talent market pools, non-traditional transcripts (Gaetano, 2023), process improvements.
- Adjacent values.
- Investment in IT (funding).

Further, we believe institutional and legislative support is NECESSARY to support new models of work to enable IT departments to meet current and future demands. Stakeholders need to be cognizant of the demands placed on IT, how proposed legislation can impact IT, and unintended consequences arising from state-centric legislation.

Some legislation that is currently being considered that will be impactful includes:

- Workforce Shortages.
- Non-compete (FTC, 2023).
- Tax implications.
- Work local clauses.
- Investment in IT (funding).

Stakeholders can provide forums for sharing information about many of the talent retention issues facing Midwestern IT leaders.

- Provide opportunities for Midwest IT leaders to network and compare notes in a safe, trusted environment.
- Raise awareness of the depth of the talent issues facing HE IT, and how legislative decisions impact the same.
- Seek opportunities to collaborate with other national or regional organizations on this issue.

The Technologies Executive Committee hopes that this paper has informed, raised awareness, and made stakeholders aware of the serious concerns of HE IT leaders in the Midwest region. **Higher Education can be a leader in redefining the IT workforce**, as HE's strength is developing innovative solutions. With support from stakeholders at our institutions, the legislatures, and other supportive organizations, Higher Education Information Technology can help lead the way to new work models for the success of future generations.

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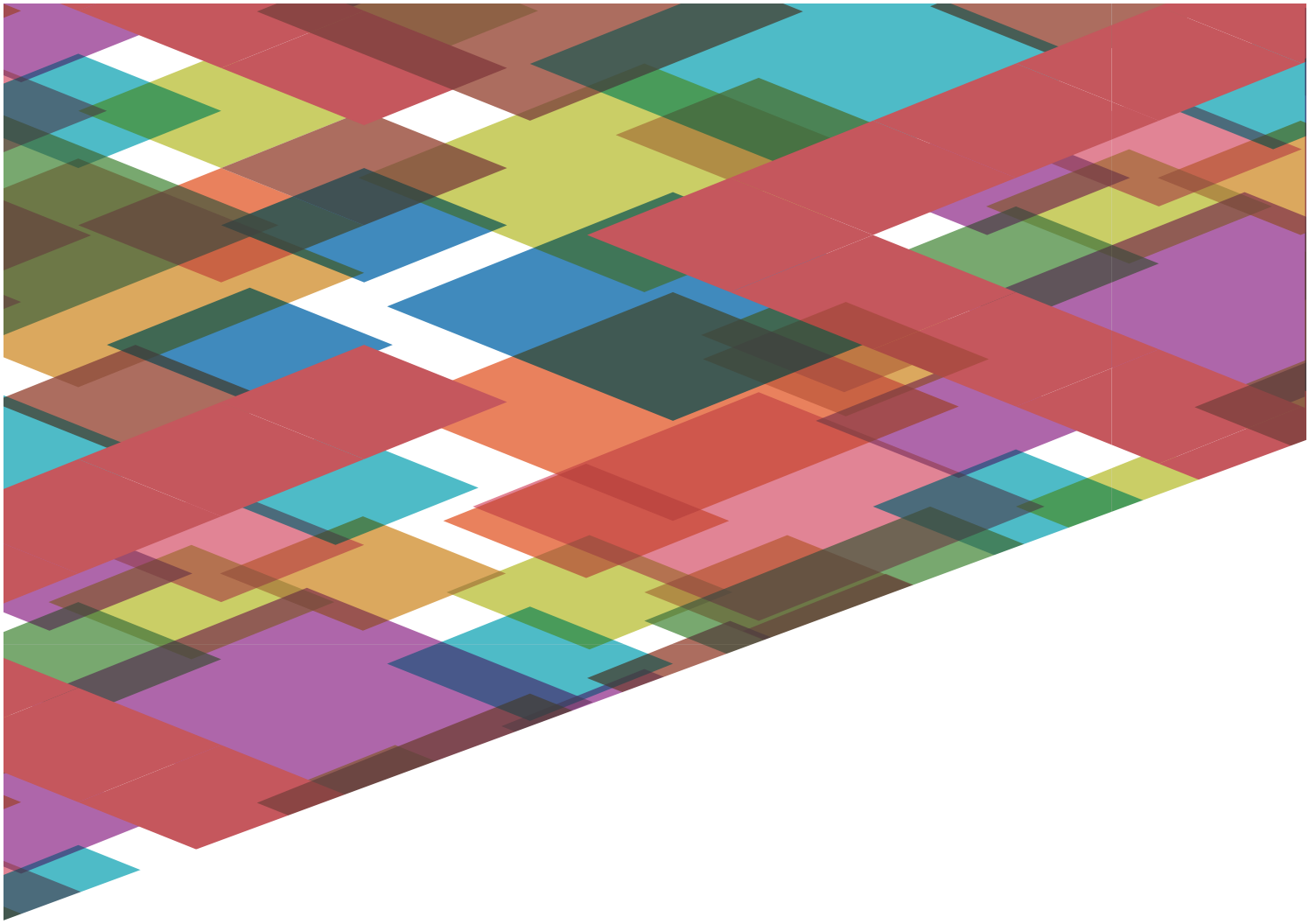

MIDWESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION COMPACT

105 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 450
Minneapolis, MN 55401
612-677-2777 or 855-767-MHEC
MHEC.ORG | mhec@mhec.org