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present

THE WAR *for* TALENT

A RESEARCH REPORT

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CONTENTS

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THE WAR for TALENT

A RESEARCH REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the current economic climate, organizations often face a surplus of applicants for job openings. In short supply, however, are *qualified* applicants: those who possess the right combination of in-demand skills, credentials, and experience.

The IT service and technical support industry is having an especially difficult time finding skilled talent, according to new research by HDI, the leading professional association and certification body for technical service and support professionals, and Robert Half Technology, a leading provider of IT professionals on a project and full-time basis.

Rapidly changing technologies and the need for IT services that can support escalating business demands are putting extreme pressure on IT service leaders to fill roles with skilled candidates—and fast. Their inability to do so is having a negative impact on business. As an example, 63 percent of technology executives recently surveyed by Robert Half Technology said that understaffing in the IT department affects the company's ability to implement innovative or emerging technologies.[1]

These hiring challenges, and their effects, have led to a "war for talent."

Combining Robert Half Technology's staffing perspective with HDI's in-depth knowledge of the IT service and technical support industry, this exclusive study explores the current hiring environment for support center staff and management. It also examines the in-demand skills for these positions. The goals of the study were to:

- ★ Uncover the degree to which organizations are having difficulty finding the right people for open positions
- ★ Identify the skill sets considered most important, as well as the most difficult to find, and uncover the role of and extent to which outsourcing is being used to fill skills gaps
- ★ Identify the benefits and incentives that are most appealing to prospective hires
- ★ Examine current turnover rates and identify factors contributing to turnover and retention
- ★ Identify workplace attributes that lead to highly satisfied employees
- ★ Build a skill set profile for IT service and technical support positions (see below)

The study focused on three specific job groups, which reflect the structure most often found in IT service and technical support centers. They are:

1. Frontline/help desk
2. Levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support
3. Management

The survey data make it clear why a war for talent has erupted in the IT service and technical support industry. First, the majority of respondents (72%) report that they are hiring. Twenty-four percent are currently expanding (creating and filling new positions) and 48 percent are working to fill positions as they become open; only 15 percent of respondents anticipate a hiring freeze and just seven percent expect to cut staff.

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[1] Robert Half Technology, "The CIO Insomnia Project: What's Keeping CIOs Up at Night?" (2011), http://www.roberthalftechnology.com/cioinsomniaproject.

PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE HIRING

CURRENTLY

- 7%
- 24%
- 22%
- 48%
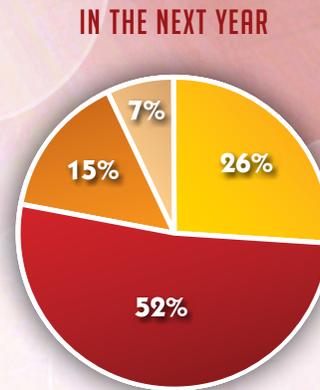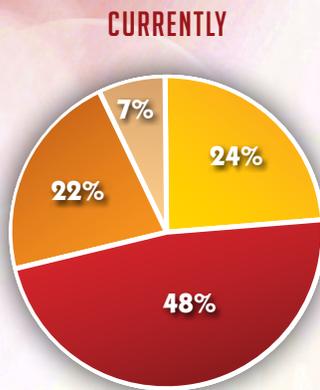
- ● **Expanding**–Creating and filling new positions
- ● **Filling openings**–Filling current positions as they come open
- ● **Frozen**–Not filling open positions
- ● **Cutting**–Staff will be smaller than it is now

IN THE NEXT YEAR

- 7%
- 26%
- 15%
- 52%

- ● **Expand**–Will create and fill new positions
- ● **Fill openings**–Will fill positions as they come open
- ● **Frozen**–Will not fill open positions
- ● **Cut**–Staff will be smaller than it is now

PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE STRUGGLING TO FIND SKILLED PROFESSIONALS

- Frontline/help desk — **47%**
- Levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support — **62%**
- Management — **59%**
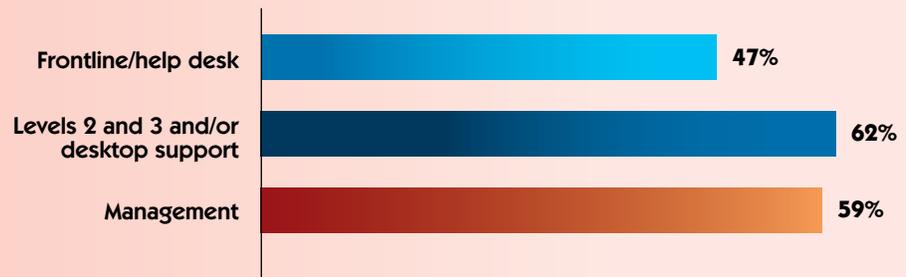
But hiring candidates with the necessary skills is easier said than done. Nearly half (47%) of survey respondents said it's difficult to find skilled professionals for *frontline/help desk* jobs, while almost two-thirds (62%) said they're having trouble locating qualified candidates for *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support* roles. And well over half (59%) said they are unable to find skilled professionals for *management* positions.

Of the three job groups in the survey, *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support* appear to be at the center of the war for talent. Respondents report that candidates for these positions are the most difficult to find. Later in the report, a look at the skill sets needed for these roles points to the reason for this limited talent pool: Qualified candidates must have a blend of skills that include problem-solving and troubleshooting skills, technical skills for specific software, and customer service skills.

According to the survey results, the main reason organizations are having difficulty finding skilled professionals is that there just aren't enough candidates who possess the desired blend of skills and abilities available. Other factors, such as the ability to provide competitive compensation and geographic constraints, add to the recruiting challenge. (See Part 1 for a full list of responses.)

With more organizations expected to increase hiring over the next year, the talent supply-and-demand imbalance is likely to become more pronounced. As a result, it is important to examine how organizations are managing job vacancies.

The survey results indicate a cycle is in motion, in which vacant positions are often left unfilled during the search for skilled talent. In 73 percent of organizations with open positions, the work is then divided among other staff members. This, in turn, may lead to higher stress levels among remaining staff. The research suggests that elevated stress may trigger higher turnover, resulting in a troublesome cycle. Some other top contributors to turnover include:

- ★ Compensation
- ★ Limited opportunities to learn, grow, and/or advance
- ★ Employee morale

The result: vacant positions.

Compensation plays an important role in employee job satisfaction, but it's not the only factor. A closer look at the data surrounding the elements of work culture reveals that respondents who report that their organizations promote a positive corporate culture—providing opportunities to learn, achieve work/life balance, and reach performance goals—also reported lower levels of stress across all three job groups, from *frontline/help desk* to *management*.

Perhaps more significantly, a greater number of these organizations also reported that turnover was *not an issue* than the respondents taken as a whole. In addition, organizations that provide the four most highly valued perks (paid time off, medical insurance, retirement benefits, and flexible work hours, valued in that order) reported being less likely to have turnover issues.

Within the report, the above-mentioned findings are shown in detail, along with data-driven advice and possible solutions to the current war for talent. John Reed, Robert Half Technology's senior executive director, also provides insight and analysis in response to the research presented in the report.

METHODOLOGY

Invitations to participate in this study were sent to technical service and support professionals via email and/or online newsletters by HDI, Robert Half Technology, CompTIA, HDAA, and itSMF Canada in February and March 2012. A total of 1,285 online survey responses are included in the results. The responses included in this report were collected and analyzed by HDI and Robert Half Technology.[2]

Technical service and support organizations from over thirty industries are represented in this report. The majority of the responses were from organizations based in the United States (63%), followed by Canada (21%) and Australia (9%). The remaining responses were from participants representing other countries, including India, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The most frequently reported organization size is between 100 and 499 employees (20%). Seven percent of organizations have more than 50,000 employees, and 13 percent are in the 10,000–50,000 range. Complete demographic data can be found in Appendix A.

[2] Note that where the sum of the percents should total 100 percent, it may be slightly higher or lower due to rounding.

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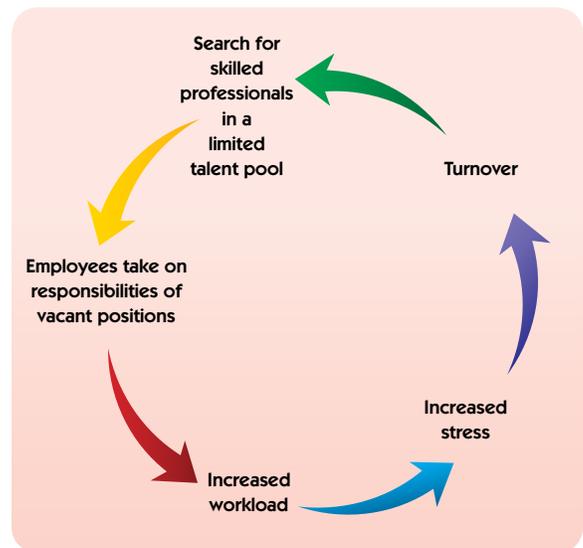
PART 1: THE NEED FOR TALENT

THE CHALLENGE

Research shows that the war for talent is a reality in the technical service and support industry. There is simply not enough skilled talent available to hire. The chart below illustrates some of the reasons for this challenge.

WHY IT'S CHALLENGING TO FIND SKILLED PROFESSIONALS
INCLUDES ONLY ORGANIZATIONS STRUGGLING TO FIND SKILLED PROFESSIONALS IN EACH JOB GROUP

Reason	Frontline/help desk	Levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support	Management
Geographic location of position	26%	26%	27%
Not much interest in this position	25%	10%	7%
Not much interest in working for this company	4%	7%	10%
Limited available talent	69%	74%	66%
Compensation constraints	38%	46%	48%
Other	13%	10%	10%

Percentage of organizations

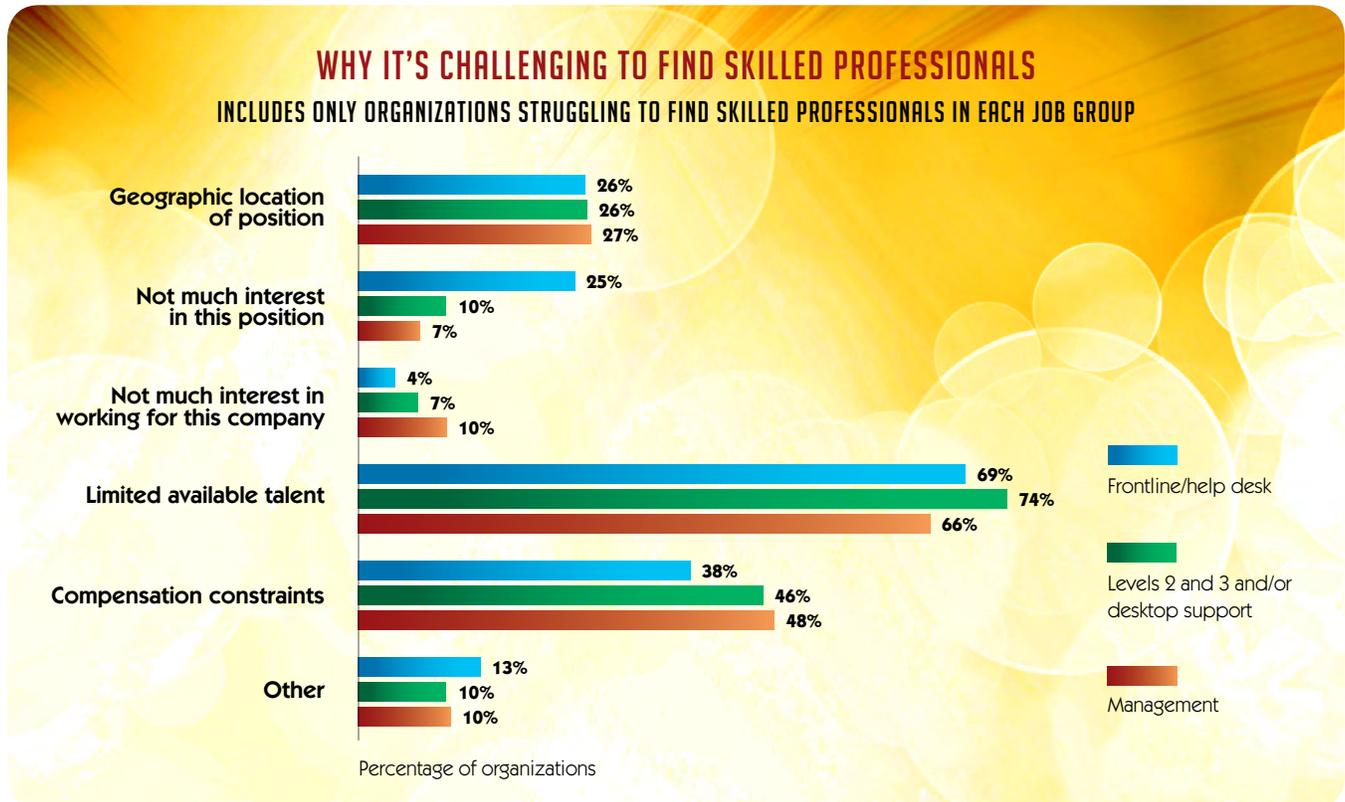Nearly 70 percent of respondents noted a dearth of available talent for both *frontline/help desk* positions and *management* roles. Nearly three-quarters (74%) reported limited available talent for *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support* jobs. *(Note: Respondents were allowed to make multiple selections for each job group.)*

Compensation constraints were cited as the second leading factor for hiring challenges in the IT service and technical support industry. Many organizations are simply not able to offer the compensation levels needed to persuade skilled professionals and managers to join their organizations. More than one-third of respondents said compensation constraints are having a direct impact on hiring for *frontline/help desk* positions, and nearly half said it is undermining their ability to hire managers.

About one-quarter of respondents reported that there appears to be limited interest in *frontline/help desk* roles. Why? One possible reason is that the job of a frontline analyst today is not the same as it was compared to when the role was initially created. And skilled professionals in the job market now may not be interested in pursuing a position they see as being out of date and offering little in the way of challenges or a career path.

In a recent interview, John Reed, Robert Half Technology's senior executive director, talked about why organizations need to keep reinventing job descriptions. "Hiring managers should take a fresh look at the job description and daily responsibilities for a given role to ensure they're still accurate and relevant," he said. "It is particularly important to ensure there is a thorough description of the current role, instead of relying on a dated job description."

Reed added, "I encourage managers to take a fresh approach and examine the most essential skills a person needs to bring to a role to excel in every aspect of that job. This will provide a starting point for assessing the most qualified candidates. In addition, where the most qualified candidate may not meet all of the job requirements, you may be able to identify areas where you're willing to be flexible and perhaps help that candidate develop those skills later through training and development."

For slightly more than one-quarter of the organizations that participated in the survey, the geographic location of the position is a primary reason for their hiring challenges. (This was true across all three job groups.) While it is unlikely these companies will move into areas where there is a larger talent pool, there are other alternatives, such as using a remote or virtual workforce. Internet technologies and Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony make it relatively easy to set up workers at a geographic distance from an organization's physical offices. Results from recent HDI research revealed that 40 percent of support centers have at least some staff working virtually, and an additional ten percent are planning to implement this practice in the next twelve months. This makes for half of the industry.[3] With regards to desktop support, about one-quarter of organizations have technicians currently working from home at least part-time, and an additional five percent are considering adding this option in the next year.[4] Yet when we look at what is being done to address the war for talent, virtual worker programs rank fairly low.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS ARE ADDRESSING THE HIRING CHALLENGE

Category	Percentage
Training for the position internally	36%
Insourcing/contractor	30%
Adjust the job description or requirements	25%
Outsourcing	19%
Virtual worker program (remote staff)	10%
Call off the search	2%
Other	9%
Nothing (continue to search)	26%
I don't know	3%

Percentage of organizations

More than one-third of the organizations surveyed report that they are training current employees to fill job vacancies; more than one-quarter of respondents are simply continuing to search. One-quarter are adjusting the job description or requirements, perhaps bringing the description up to date, as John Reed suggests. Only two percent are calling off the candidate search entirely.

Other organizations, meanwhile, are seeking outside help, either in the form of insourcing (30%) or outsourcing (19%). Contractors can be utilized in multiple ways:

★ Temporarily filling in while the search for permanent employees continues

★ Bringing specific expertise into the organization

★ Working in a "contract-to-hire" capacity

"In many organizations, contract-to-hire is becoming a much bigger and more accepted part of the overall staffing strategy," explained Reed. "There are three primary drivers. First, engaging IT professionals from the outside allows you to bring necessary skills in-house. And , second, because you can evaluate their real-life skills firsthand, if you choose to offer them a full-time role, the likelihood of retaining them when and for as long as you need them is dramatically higher. You've both had the opportunity to work closely together for an extended period, thus increasing the comfort with committing to a full-time employment relationship."

Reed continued, "The third benefit to a contract-to-hire relationship is that you are typically working through a staffing firm, enabling an employer to quickly tap into a hidden resource pool that you wouldn't otherwise be able to access. Many IT professionals choose to work only through a staffing firm because these specialists will screen employment opportunities on their behalf."

[3] Jenny Rains, *2011 HDI Support Center Practices & Salary Report* (2011), p. 68. [4] Jenny Rains, *2012 HDI Desktop Support Practices & Salary Report* (2012), p. 12.

So what happens to the responsibilities of the vacant positions while the search for talent continues? In nearly three-quarters of organizations surveyed, other employees are asked to pick up the slack. Naturally, this increases workloads, as staff members must do their own work plus at least a part of someone else's job.

GETTING THE WORK DONE DURING THE SEARCH

Other positions take on the responsibilities	73%
Consultant/contractor	39%
Nothing (work put on hold)	9%
Other	3%
I don't know	2%

Percentage of organizations
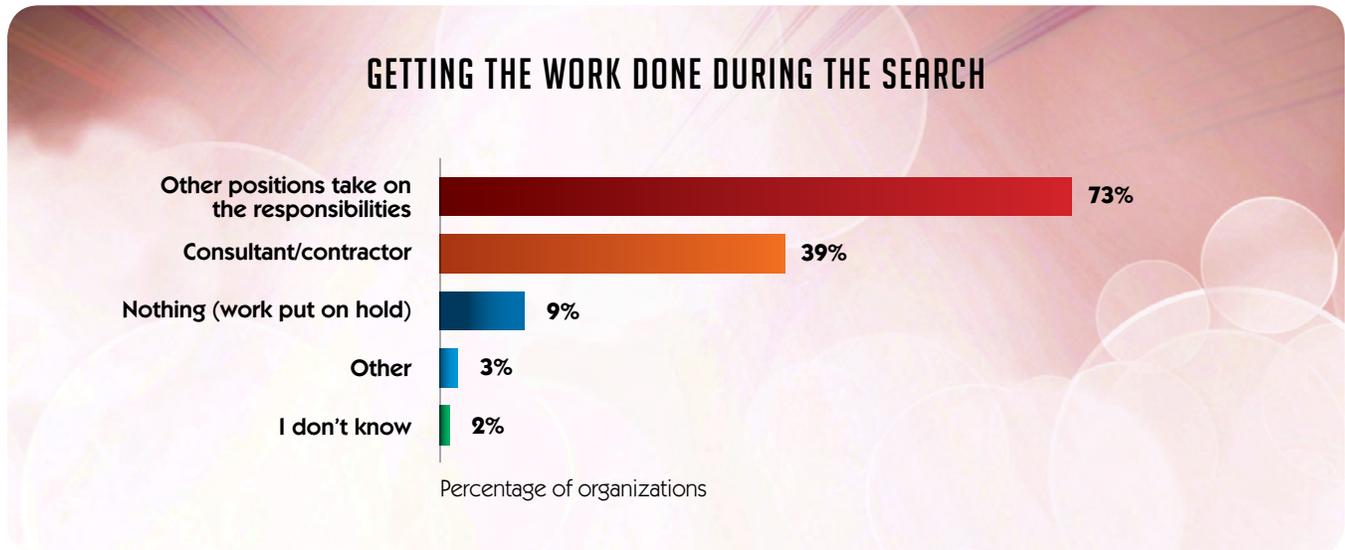
To better understand the effect of this situation on an organization, the study looked at the relationship between stress levels and workloads. It is important to emphasize that the organizations that reported overworked employees were also more likely to report having employees that were "somewhat stressed" to "very stressed." *(Note: Part 3 of this report examines stress as a contributor to turnover.)*

The practice of employees covering for vacant roles—and the associated overwork and stress—becomes even more significant when we look at where the market is heading. Only 12 percent of the industry believes that hiring has become easier in the last twelve months, while 30 percent believe it has become more difficult. These results indicate that there has been no letup in the war for talent—and we should not expect one anytime soon.

CHANGE IN THE AVAILABILITY OF SKILLED PROFESSIONALS

- 12% — **Increased**–Hiring became easier
- 58% — **The same**–Hiring remained about the same
- 30% — **Decreased**–Hiring became more difficult

SOUGHT-AFTER SKILLS

When management has specific information about which skills are needed for which job groups, they can begin to address some factors making it difficult to find qualified professionals. Each of the three featured job groups has its own requirements. The following tables list the top five skills each of the job groups needs to be successful, in descending order of popularity, along with the perceived level of difficulty in finding candidates with those skills. *(Note: The full list of the skills available for survey respondents to select from can be found in Appendix B.)*

Frontline/Help Desk

TOP FIVE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR A FRONTLINE/HELP DESK EMPLOYEE TO BE SUCCESSFUL

	Percent citing this skill	Difficulty finding candidates with this skill (1 = extremely easy ➜ 10 = extremely difficult)
Customer service skills	**66%**	6.09
Problem-solving /troubleshooting skills	54%	6.21
Communication skills	50%	6.16
Ability to learn quickly	45%	5.84
Ability to work under pressure	39%	**6.25**

It is worth noting that technical skills are not among the top five skills for *frontline/help desk* professionals—and, in fact, are ranked much lower on the list. The most frequently named technical skill listed was for specific software(s), which came in at 16 percent.

Levels 2 and 3 and/or Desktop Support

TOP FIVE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR A LEVEL 2/LEVEL 3/DESKTOP SUPPORT EMPLOYEE TO BE SUCCESSFUL

	Percent citing this skill	Difficulty finding candidates with this skill (1 = extremely easy ➜ 10 = extremely difficult)
Problem-solving /troubleshooting skills	**60%**	6.00
Technical skills for specific software(s)	42%	6.17
Technical skills for specific hardware(s)	33%	5.47
Ability to work under pressure	30%	6.04
Customer service skills	30%	**6.52**

In the *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support* job group, we see the value of technical skills come into play, with software and hardware skills ranking second and third. Finding candidates who possess both technical and customer service skills appears to present the greatest difficulty. Many organizations have found that they must hire for one skill set and train for the other(s). Thus, some organizations choose to hire candidates who currently have technical skills, while others are hiring customer service professionals who are then provided technical skill training.

Management

TOP FIVE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR A MANAGEMENT EMPLOYEE TO BE SUCCESSFUL

	Percent citing this skill	Difficulty finding candidates with this skill (1 = extremely easy ➜ 10 = extremely difficult)
Leadership skills	**66%**	6.81
Communication skills	49%	5.91
Strategic thinking skills	48%	**7.14**
Organizational skills	38%	5.91
Ability to handle change	30%	6.16

For the *management* job group, the list is substantially different. The standout here is strategic thinking, which respondents identified as the most difficult skill to find in candidates. In fact, this choice garnered the highest degree of difficulty across all three job groups.

According to John Reed, managers need to "stop and recognize that it is an important part of their role to think both tactically (what are the key functions that my team must execute today, tomorrow, and in the future?) and strategically (what are the strategies my team must implement over the next several months to achieve our organizational goals?)."

"Recruiting managers with proven tactical execution skills as well as strategic thinking abilities is paramount to the success of any organization," he added. "Considering that this combination of skills is difficult to recruit, an effective strategy is to invest in existing staff. The effective use of mentoring programs can be an invaluable way to help professionals develop these critical skills."

The value of having managers who already possess these necessary skill sets becomes especially apparent when considering the challenges reported for this job group. Keeping workloads manageable, the most frequently cited challenge (respondents were allowed to select more than one option), may be further complicated by the need to shift work from vacant positions to other employees (and training those employees) while the talent search continues. Finding employees with the desired skill sets ranks second, a further indication that there is, in fact, an ongoing war for talent.

MANAGEMENT'S TOP CHALLENGES

Challenge	Percentage
Keeping workloads manageable	52%
Finding employees with the needed skill sets	45%
Providing opportunities for growth and advancement	44%
Motivating staff	35%
Keeping employees' skill sets up to date	32%
Retaining staff	22%
Resolving interdepartmental conflicts	11%
Resolving employee conflicts	7%
Other	2%

Percentage selecting each challenge

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⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯ PART 2: FINDING TALENT ⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯

WHERE TO FIND TALENT

When seeking qualified candidates, organizations use a combination of methods, including looking internally, utilizing staffing firms, and posting/searching on job boards (particularly those that are industry-specific). Staffing firms and hiring from within the organization were the two most frequently named resources. There are advantages to each:

- ⭐ Staffing firms allow organizations to tap into a talent pool they otherwise would not be able to reach. They also provide a contract-to-hire approach.

- ⭐ Finding suitable candidates internally cuts out a great deal of the extra work usually associated with hiring, including paperwork, background checks, and orientations. This lowers the cost associated with new hires and streamlines the process of onboarding.

BEST RECRUITING RESOURCES

Resource	Percentage
Staffing firm	45%
Within the organization	45%
Job boards	39%
Professional organizations	28%
Colleges/universities	22%
Online classifieds (e.g., Craigslist)	18%
Social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook)	18%
Other	12%

Percentage selecting each option

EMPLOYEE INCENTIVES

To help identify successful hiring and retention practices, survey respondents were asked which perks they offer to employees and, of the perks listed, which are the most valuable. The top hits are shown here, in descending order of value. *(Note: The full list can be found in Appendix C.)*

TOP FOUR PERKS OFFERED TO EMPLOYEES

	Percentage who selected this perk	Value of this perk 1 = not valuable ➜ 5 = very valuable
Paid time off	75%	**4.57**
Medical insurance	**83%**	4.53
Retirement benefits	62%	4.32
Flexible work hours	51%	4.09

Taking a deeper look at the results by country, the analysis revealed differences in the relative importance of the perks provided by organizations. For example, because the respondents' countries have different healthcare systems, it was not surprising to find that the value of healthcare-related benefits varies the most among countries.[5]

While medical insurance is certainly high on the list—particularly for respondents from the United States—paid time off is the most highly valued. Part of that perceived value may be related to the demands of either parenting or being a caregiver, or simply trying to achieve a better work/life balance. There is evidence that people who have time to "unplug" from work, and who don't work excessive hours, are more productive.[6] Therefore, the ability to take time off may benefit the organization overall.

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[5] Because only those who provide perks were asked to rate their value, there isn't enough data regarding the value of perks at the country level to make further statements about these comparisons.

[6] Elizabeth Scott, "The Importance of Vacations, for Stress Relief, Productivity, and Health" (July 15, 2011), http://stress.about.com/od/workplacestress/a/vacations.htm.

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PART 3: RETAINING TALENT

TURNOVER

When there is a war for talent, retaining qualified employees is especially critical. Turnover is currently an issue for 24 percent of survey respondents, with an additional 21 percent anticipating having a turnover problem in the next twelve months.

PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS WITH TURNOVER ISSUES (NONMANAGEMENT)

- 24% — Currently an issue
- 21% — Anticipate this issue in the next twelve months
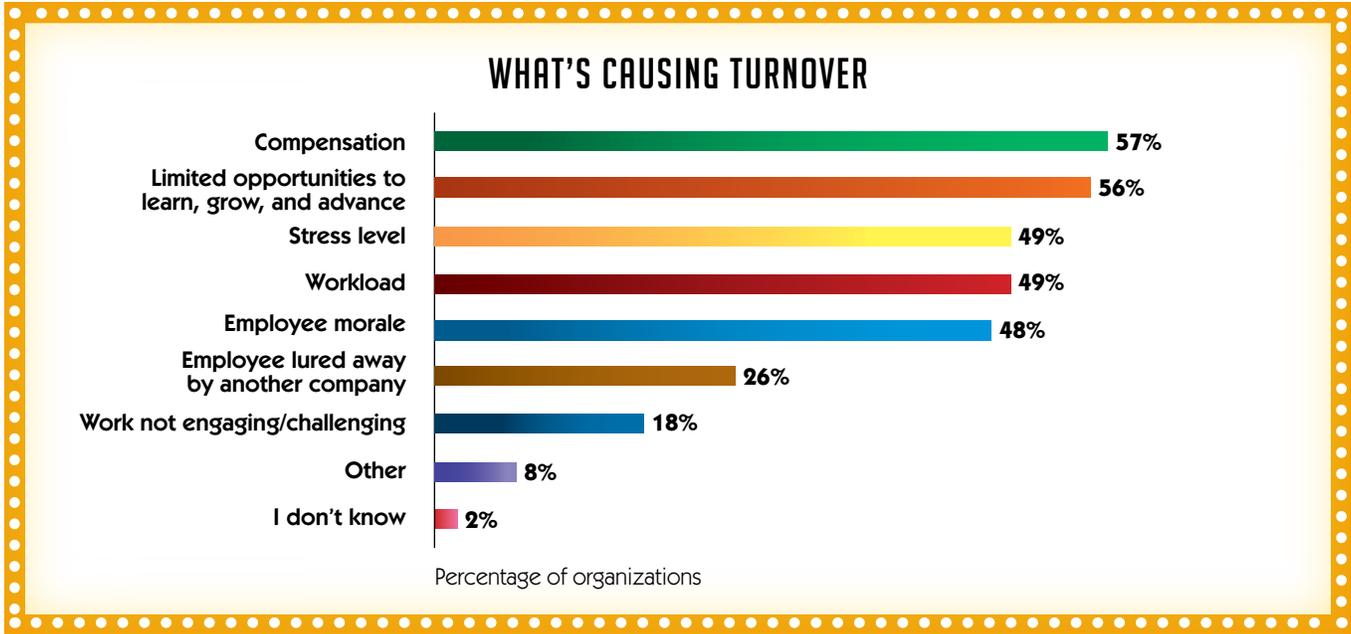- 48% — Not an issue
- 7% — I don't know

Notable differences surfaced when analyzing the survey responses from different countries (Australia, Canada, and the United States had enough responses for independent analysis). Respondents who said that turnover is currently an issue or anticipate that it will be an issue in the next year totaled 40.6 percent for the United States, 51.3 percent for Canada, and 57.3 percent for Australia. Interestingly, unemployment appears to be inversely related to turnover: Australia (4.9%), Canada (7.3%), and the United States (8.1%).[7] In an uncertain job market, employees may feel pressure to hold onto their current positions, meaning turnover might be less likely in areas where unemployment is higher.

TURNOVER ISSUES BY COUNTRY (NONMANAGEMENT)

	US	Canada	Australia
Currently an issue	**20.3%**	**30.3%**	**30.9%**
Anticipate this issue in the next twelve months	**20.3%**	**21.0%**	**26.4%**
Not an issue	53.9%	38.4%	36.4%
I don't know	5.4%	10.3%	6.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Of the organizations that are either currently experiencing turnover or anticipating that it will be an issue in the next twelve months, most identified compensation as the primary reason. Compensation is always high on the list of reasons why employees leave—or, at least, why organizations believe they do. However, it is interesting to note that survey respondents cited limited opportunities to learn, grow, and/or advance as a contributing factor to turnover almost as often as compensation. *(Note: Respondents were allowed to make multiple selections.)*

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[7] Trading Economics (http://www.tradingeconomics.com/).

WHAT'S CAUSING TURNOVER

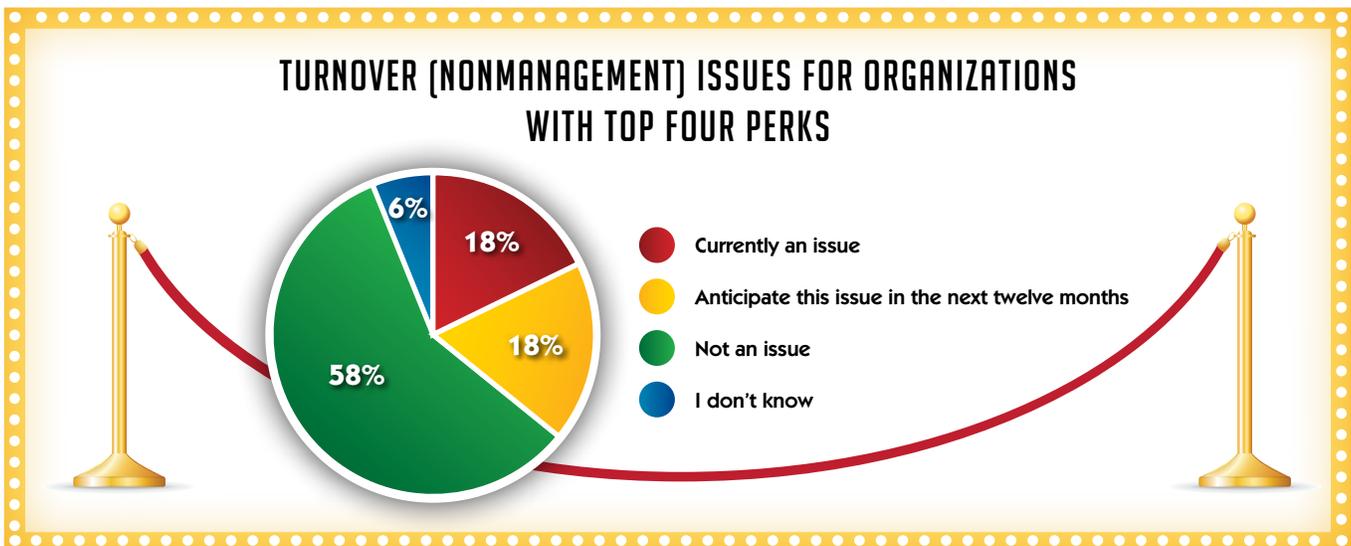| Cause	Percentage
Compensation	57%
Limited opportunities to learn, grow, and advance	56%
Stress level	49%
Workload	49%
Employee morale	48%
Employee lured away by another company	26%
Work not engaging/challenging	18%
Other	8%
I don't know	2%

Percentage of organizations

The current focus on professional development opportunities may be a side effect of the economic downturn. According to John Reed, "When you ask IT leaders, 'So, how did your organization manage through the downturn?' you often hear, 'We cut our training budget. That's the first thing we did.'"

IT professionals know all too well that innovation and change don't stop just because the training budget has been cut. Employees don't want to fall behind and lose either their value to the organization or their marketability. Therefore, when opportunities to learn are limited, they may begin looking elsewhere for employment.

Employee morale also ranks among the leading causes of turnover. However, morale is a fairly broad concept, with countless influences and factors. Many of the other reasons given for turnover may also contribute to lower employee morale.

In a deeper analysis of the survey data, we examined whether turnover is an issue specifically for the 348 respondent organizations that provide the four most highly valued perks (paid time off, medical insurance, retirement benefits, and flexible work hours, ranked in that order). The percentage of organizations for which turnover is *not* an issue is ten percent higher (48% vs. 58%) in the organizations that provide the most valued perks, suggesting that providing valued perks does have impact on employee retention.

TURNOVER (NONMANAGEMENT) ISSUES FOR ORGANIZATIONS WITH TOP FOUR PERKS

Pie chart:
- Currently an issue: 18%
- Anticipate this issue in the next twelve months: 18%
- Not an issue: 58%
- I don't know: 6%

STRESS AND WORKLOAD

Identified as a cause of turnover by nearly half of the survey respondents, stress is expected to be a part of any support position, though to varying degrees.

STRESS LEVEL OF SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS
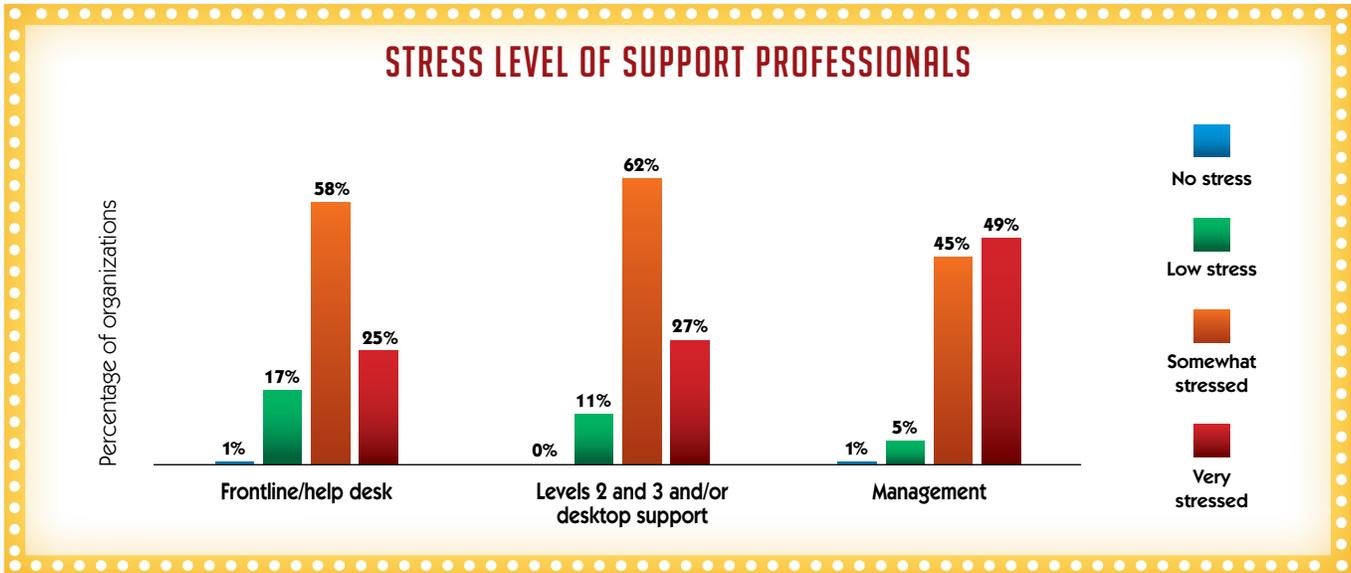
For two of the three job groups featured in this survey *(frontline/help desk, levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support),* stress peaks at the "somewhat stressed" level, while the frequency of reports that *management* is "very stressed" is almost twice as high as in the other job groups. Ninety-four percent of organizations have managers who are, according to the data, either "somewhat stressed" or "very stressed."

STRESS LEVELS WHEN RESPONSIBILITIES OF VACANT POSITIONS ARE TAKEN ON BY OTHER STAFFED POSITIONS
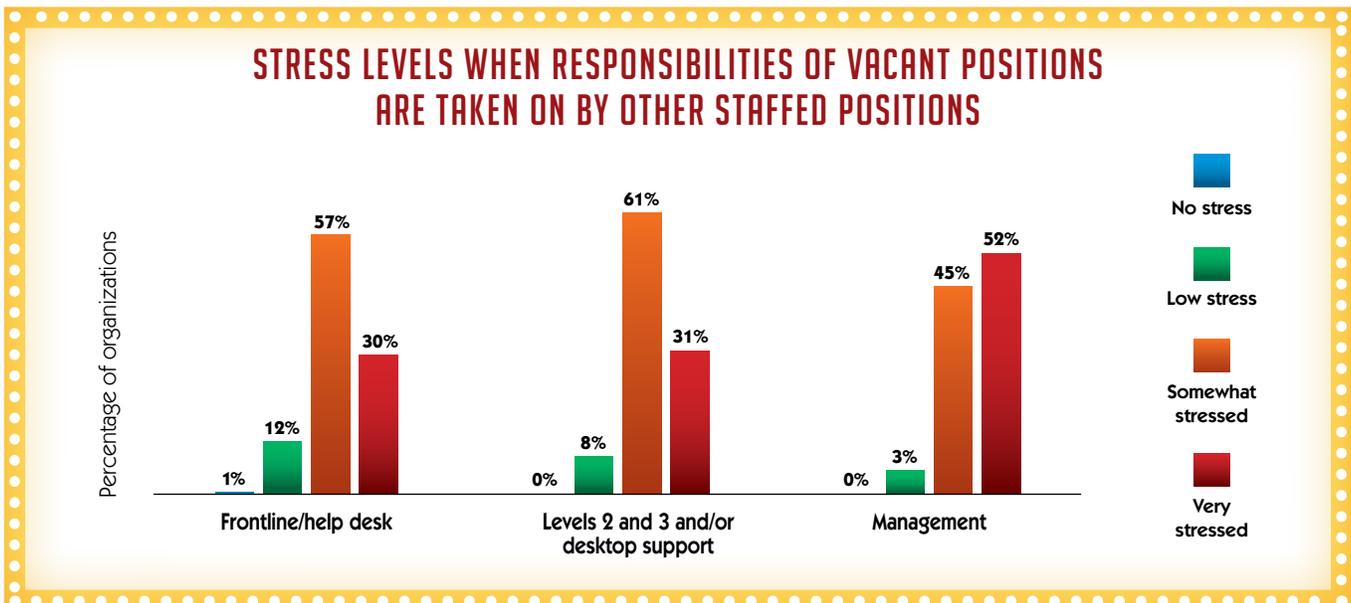
When we examine only those organizations that reallocate responsibilities for vacant positions to other employees, we again see a connection. There is a shift toward the higher ranges of stress, with "very stressed" increasing from 25 percent to 30 percent for the *frontline/help desk* job group, from 27 percent to 31 percent for the *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support* job group, and from 49 percent to 52 percent for *management.*

All job groups are required to take on more than the ideal workload, according to the survey results. Most commonly, *front-line/help desk* staffs are reported to be slightly overworked (42%). What is somewhat concerning, but not surprising, is that at the *frontline/help desk* level, the support industry has nearly as many organizations with frontline/help desk staff who are very overworked (23%) as those organizations whose staff have an ideal workload (29%).

An ideal workload is less common in the *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support* job group (18%), and even lower in the *management* group (13%). Of the three job groups, *management* is the most likely to be very overworked (42%).

CARRYING THE LOAD
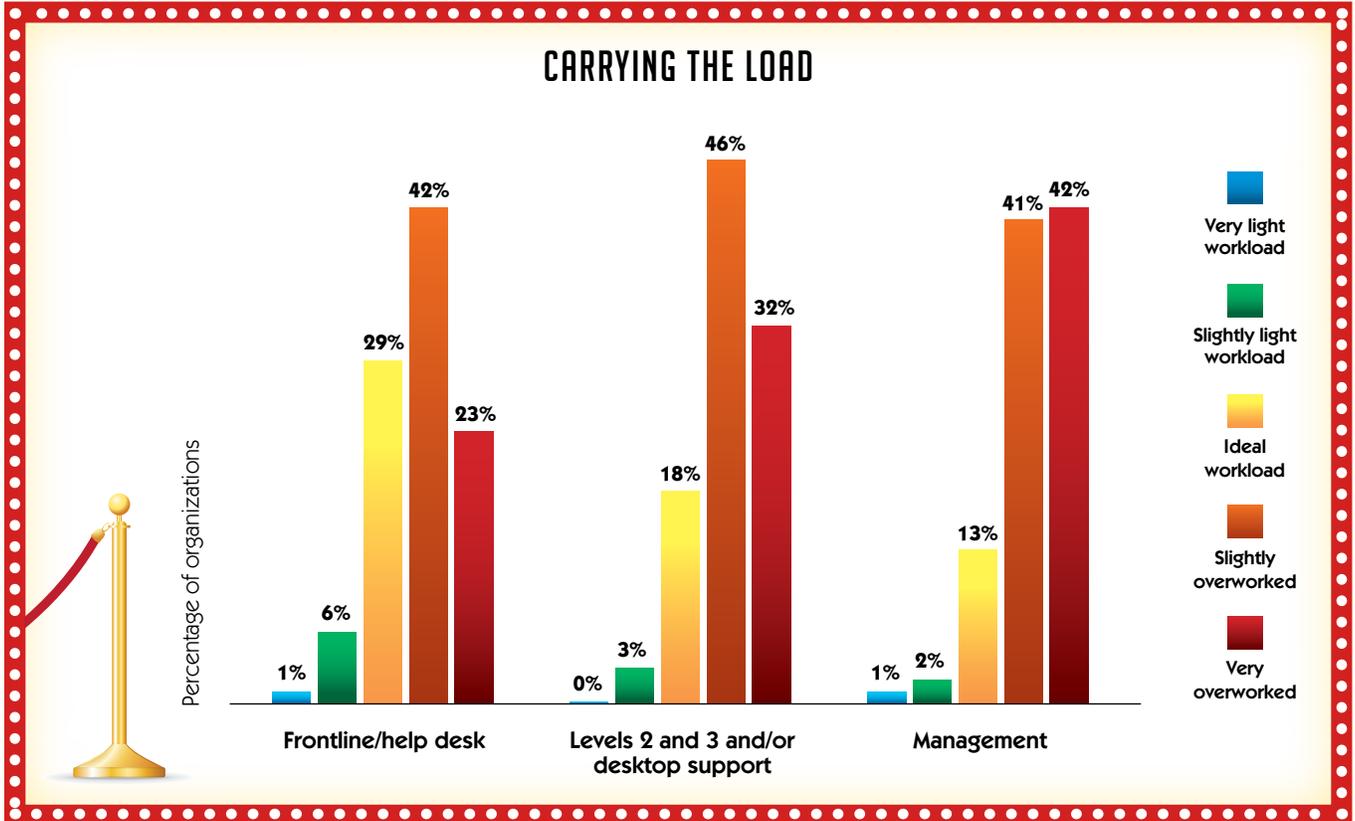
A deeper look at the data reveals that, across all the job groups, there is a clear pattern of overwork related to higher levels of stress. Those with light workloads are most likely to report having no stress, and those who are slightly overworked to very overworked are likely to be somewhat to very stressed.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKLOAD AND STRESS LEVEL

STRESS LEVEL	Very light workload	Slightly light workload	Ideal workload	Slightly overworked	Very overworked
No stress	46%	3%	1%	0%	0%
Low stress	36%	52%	33%	10%	0%
Somewhat stressed	18%	44%	59%	71%	36%
Very stressed	0%	2%	8%	19%	64%

In Part 1 of this report, we learned that the biggest challenge for managers is keeping workloads manageable. Part of that challenge is that employees often take on the duties of other positions when their peers leave the organization. Now we see the resulting overwork and the stress that accompanies it—both of which are related to turnover. These are components of the troublesome cycle created by and contributing to the war for talent in the IT service and technical support industry.

ADVANCEMENT

When we examined the factors contributing to turnover, limited opportunities to learn, grow, and/or advance surfaced as one of the most significant. What can employees in the IT service and technical support industry expect in terms of the actual timeline to advancement?

AVERAGE TENURE BEFORE ADVANCEMENT

Tenure	Management	Levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support	Frontline/help desk
More than 10 years	17%	6%	3%
8–10 years	13%	6%	3%
5–8 years	21%	14%	6%
5 years	18%	17%	9%
4 years	12%	14%	7%
3 years	10%	23%	20%
2 years	7%	16%	35%
1 year	2%	4%	14%
Less than 1 year	1%	1%	3%

Percentage of organizations
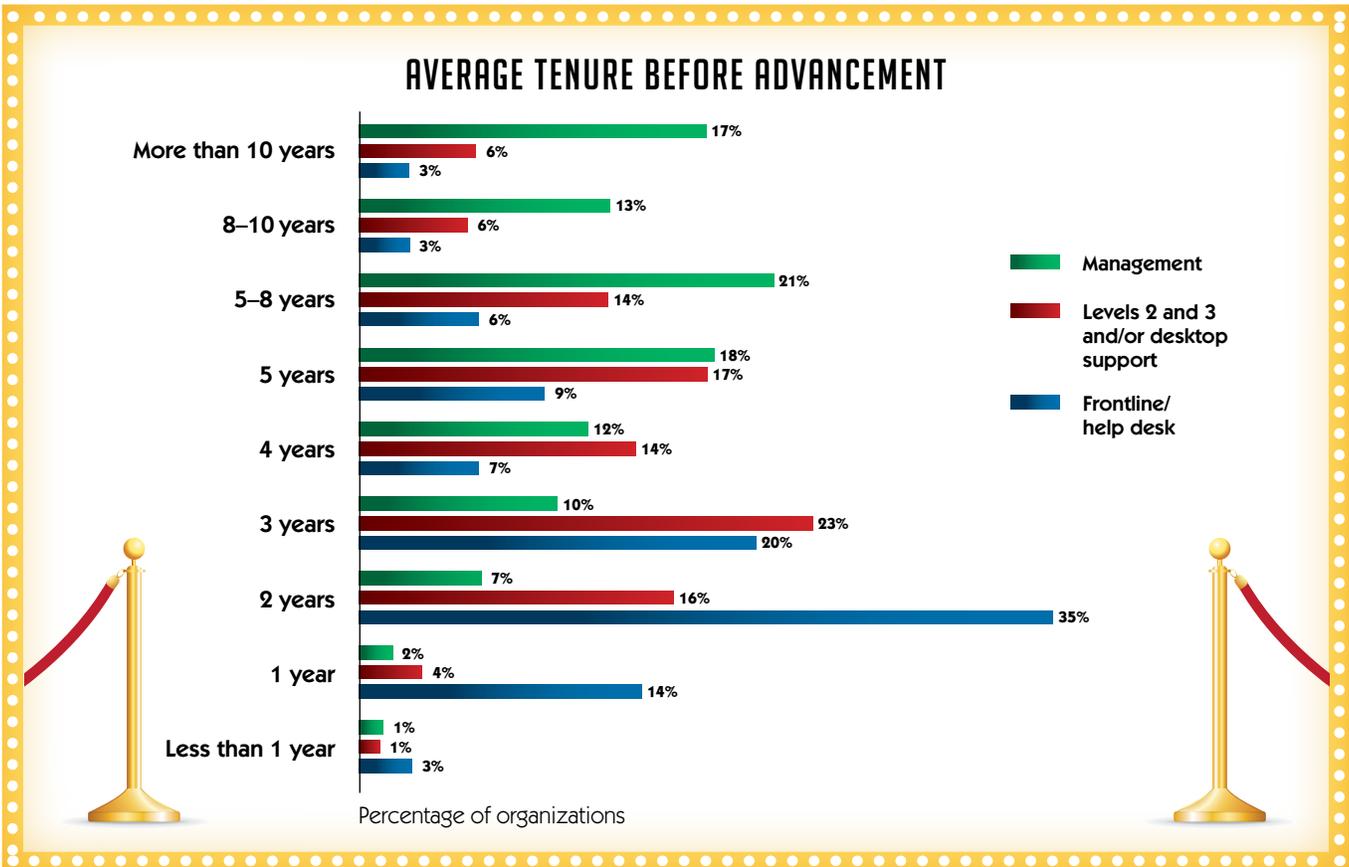
Tenure becomes progressively longer as employees advance to more senior positions, with the most common responses being an average tenure of two years for *frontline/help desk* employees, three years for workers in the *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support* job group, and five to eight years for professionals at the *management* level. Setting realistic expectations for advancement opportunities and timelines can help curb low morale by giving employees a better understanding of the career paths available to them.

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PART 4: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

ASSESSING SATISFACTION

Having established what makes employees unhappy, the next logical step is to learn more about how to make them more content and, therefore, less likely to leave.

More than half (58%) of the organizations surveyed use a periodic employee satisfaction survey. However, more report using one-on-one reviews and team meetings to assess satisfaction. Nearly half use coaching and mentoring. One-tenth report that they do not measure employee satisfaction by any means.

ASSESSING EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

Percentage of organizations

Category	Percentage
One-on-one performance reviews	78%
Team meetings	66%
Periodic (e.g., annual) employee satisfaction surveys	58%
Coaching/mentoring	48%
Peer reviews	19%
Other	2%
Not currently assessed	10%

WORK CULTURE

To get a better picture of what employees value, the survey asked questions about the elements of a successful work culture. Organizations were asked to identify which cultural elements are valued and whether they are successfully providing those elements.

Again, opportunities to learn and access to training and development surfaced as key factors, each being selected as very important by more than three-quarters of the survey respondents. Work/life balance and attainable performance goals were also among the top cultural factors considered to be important in a successful work environment. All of the listed factors were selected by 50 percent or more of the respondents as being very important. Only a very small percentage identified them as not important.

THE ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL WORK CULTURE

Percentage who selected each element

Element	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important
Opportunities to learn	77%	21%	1%
Access to training and development	76%	23%	2%
Work/life balance	74%	24%	2%
Attainable performance goals	72%	26%	2%
Opportunities for advancement	66%	31%	3%
Good working relationship with the boss	64%	34%	2%
Camaraderie with coworkers	62%	35%	3%
Employee empowerment	57%	39%	4%
Reward and recognition program	50%	44%	6%

■ Very important ■ Somewhat important ■ Not important

After determining which factors are important for a successful work culture, the next step was to examine how well organizations are supporting these elements. Note the discrepancies in the two charts. Overall, organizations are doing "an okay job" of providing these cultural elemen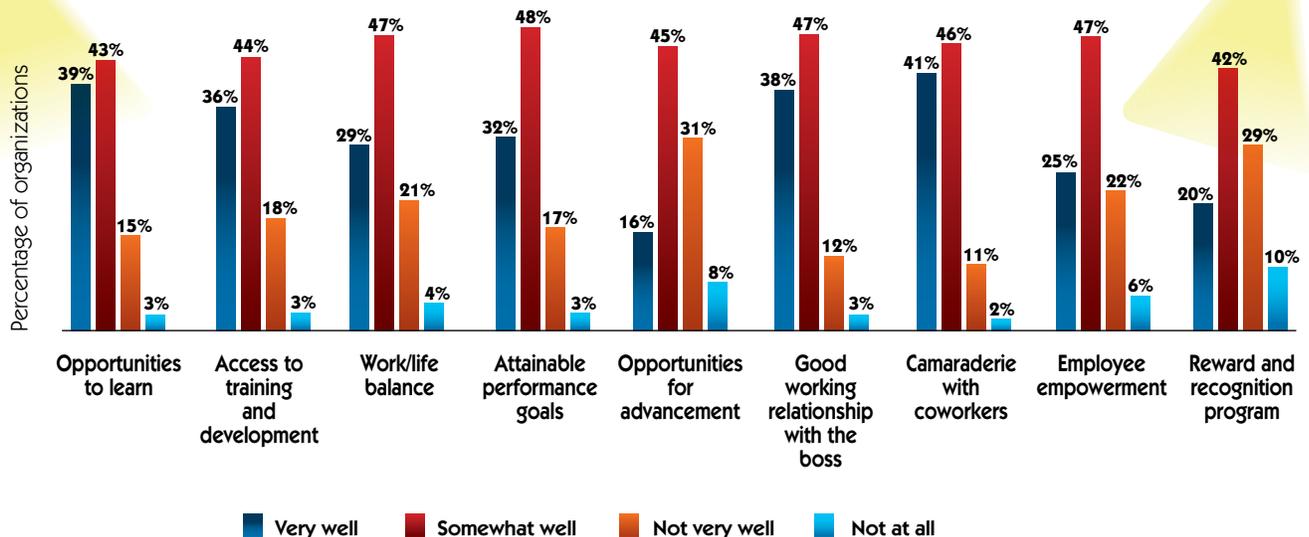ts, supporting them at least somewhat. Opportunities for advancement appear to be less well supported than most other cultural elements, with a low "very well" score and a high "not very well" score.

While not everyone can expect to move up in an organization, these results underscore the need for managers to find creative ways to help their employees learn and grow.

SUPPORTING THE ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL WORK CULTURE

Percentage of organizations

Element	Very well	Somewhat well	Not very well	Not at all
Opportunities to learn	39%	43%	15%	3%
Access to training and development	36%	44%	18%	3%
Work/life balance	29%	47%	21%	4%
Attainable performance goals	32%	48%	17%	3%
Opportunities for advancement	16%	45%	31%	8%
Good working relationship with the boss	38%	47%	12%	3%
Camaraderie with coworkers	41%	46%	11%	2%
Employee empowerment	25%	47%	22%	6%
Reward and recognition program	20%	42%	29%	10%

■ Very well ■ Somewhat well ■ Not very well ■ Not at all

To determine whether or not supporting these cultural elements has an effect on stress levels, we examined how stress levels were reported by organizations that claimed to support *all* cultural elements very well.

Across all three job groups, stress levels are lower when an organization supports all of the elements of a successful work culture. The most dramatic shift is for *management,* which shows a 21 percent decrease in the "very stressed" response and an increase of ten percent in the "low stress" response for organizations that successfully support a positive work culture.[8]

According to John Reed, "Turnover can be costly for your firm. Aside from lost productivity, losing critical IT support and skills just when the organization is ready to expand or embark on critical new technology initiatives can be a difficult setback to recover from," said Reed. "This is why it is important to be proactive about letting talented individuals, whether new hires or longtime employees, know how much they are valued."

STRESS LEVELS IN ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT CULTURAL ELEMENTS

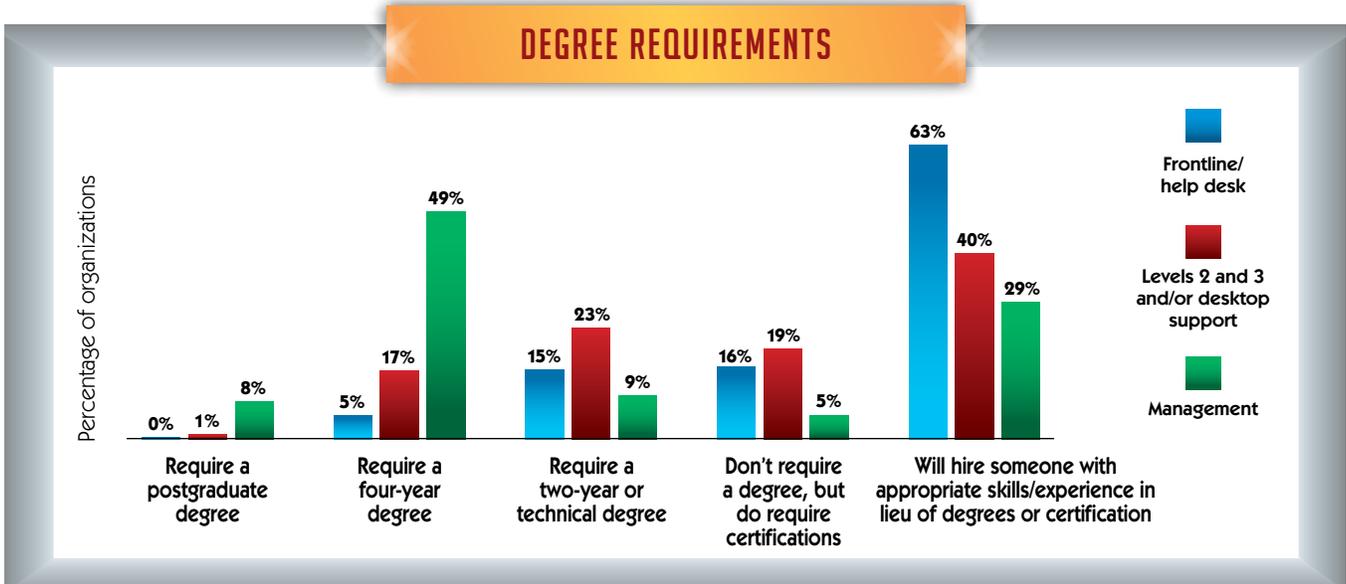|	Frontline/help desk			Levels 2/3 and/or desktop support			Management	
	Strong culture	Overall		Strong culture	Overall		Strong culture	Overall
No stress	7%	1%		4%	0%		2%	1%
Low stress	25%	17%		21%	11%		15%	5%
Somewhat stressed	54%	58%		52%	62%		55%	45%
Very stressed	**14%**	25%		**23%**	27%		**28%**	49%

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[8] Among the responses for the *management* job group, somewhat stressed is more common. However, an examination of the data shows that the decrease from "very stressed" is actually distributed between "somewhat stressed" and "low stress."

•••••••••••••• PART 5: SKILL SET PROFILES ••••••••••••••

TO DEGREE OR NOT TO DEGREE?

You may be surprised to learn that only five percent of respondents require a four-year degree for *frontline/help desk* candidates, and just 18 percent of the organizations surveyed require a four-year degree or higher for *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support*. Equally eye-opening is the fact that only 57 percent require a four-year degree or higher for employees at the *management* level.

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Percentage of organizations

	Require a postgraduate degree	Require a four-year degree	Require a two-year or technical degree	Don't require a degree, but do require certifications	Will hire someone with appropriate skills/experience in lieu of degrees or certification
Frontline/help desk	0%	5%	15%	16%	63%
Levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support	1%	17%	23%	19%	40%
Management	8%	49%	9%	5%	29%

On the other hand, 16 percent of organizations do require certifications for *frontline/help desk* workers. If a college degree is not required for many of these IT service and technical support roles, clearly stating that in job descriptions and in job board posts may help attract skilled professionals who do not have a four-year degree, but otherwise fulfill all of the job requirements and may have desirable certifications.

TIME TO HIRE

Because shifting work to other positions can create retention problems, managers should set realistic expectations about the time it will take to fill positions. The higher the position, the more time it will take to fill that vacant position with a qualified professional. For example, in the IT support industry from the time a vacancy is posted to the time it is filled, it takes nine to ten weeks to fill a *management* vacancy, seven to eight weeks for a position in *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support,* and five to six weeks for *frontline/help desk* roles, according to the research.

On average, *frontline/help desk* positions remain vacant for more than a month; during that time, most organizations task other staff members with those abandoned responsibilities. At the *management* level, the responsibilities of vacant positions are distributed to positions that are either above, below, or at the same level as the vacant position. This occurs for a period of roughly *two and a half months* while recruiting and hiring take place.

NUMBER OF WEEKS TO HIRE

	Number of weeks (avg.)
Management	9.46
Levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support	7.23
Frontline/help desk	5.50

RECRUITING PROFILES

Based on the data gathered by the survey, we can begin to build profiles for each of the job groups.

Frontline/Help Desk

It takes an average of 5.5 weeks to fill a vacant *frontline/help desk* position. In this group, employees are not usually required to have a college degree (two- or four-year degree), though appropriate certifications and/or some experience is desirable. *Frontline/help desk* employees usually have one to three years of tenure before they advance. At this level, employees are slightly overworked and somewhat stressed, and turnover is most often due to compensation constraints, limited opportunities to advance, and low morale. The most sought-after skills are customer service, problem solving, and troubleshooting, while the most difficult skill to find at this level is the ability to work under pressure.

Levels 2 and 3 and/or Desktop Support

It takes an average of 7.23 weeks to fill a vacant position in *levels 2 and 3 and/or desktop support*. In this group, employees are required to have industry certifications and/or a technical or two-year degree, as well as good troubleshooting and technical skills. In addition, they usually have two to five years of tenure before they advance. At this level, employees are slightly overworked and somewhat stressed, and turnover is most often due to compensation constraints, limited opportunities to advance, and low employee morale. The most sought-after skills are problem-solving and troubleshooting skills, and the most difficult skill to find is customer service skills.

Management

It takes an average of 9.46 weeks to fill a vacant *management* position. In this group, employees are likely to have a four-year degree, and they usually have five to eight years of tenure before they advance. At this level, employees are slightly to very overworked and somewhat to very stressed. The most sought-after skills are leadership and communication skills, while the most difficult skill to find is the ability to think strategically.

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CONCLUSION

Competition is fierce for IT service and technical support talent, and it will only intensify as organizations step up the pace of hiring in the months ahead. To improve the likelihood of attracting and retaining top talent, organizations should institute training and development programs, as these are must-haves for many employees. Offering valuable perks, such as paid time off, and supporting the elements of a successful work culture, like work/life balance, are also important.

The survey results show that overwork is a key contributor to stress and turnover for technology professionals, and that vacant positions contribute to overwork. The creative use of staffing alternatives such as insourcing to bring needed expertise in-house and using remote workers to solve geographical challenges, can help organizations stabilize their workforces while they struggle to gain ground in the war for talent.

High Demand – > 70% Hiring

Difficult Combination of Skill Sets

LIMITED TALENT POOL + INCREASED HIRING = WAR FOR TALENT

HOW TO ATTRACT SKILLED PROFESSIONALS AND ADDRESS TURNOVER

– Exemplify good work culture (specifically opportunities for professional development and advancement)

– Provide the most-sought-after benefits/perks

– Improve workload and stress levels

CLOSING THOUGHTS FROM JOHN REED

The findings in this study make it clear that managers need to break the cycle of increased workload, added stress, declining morale, and turnover for existing staff while searching for the right candidate for open positions. If employees feel their managers are not in tune with their needs or don't appreciate their extra efforts, it can lead to frustration.

People don't typically leave a company; they leave their managers. To avoid potential turnover, it's up to managers to head off employee dissatisfaction with open, candid communication as soon as they realize this cycle has begun.

Sit down with your employees and talk with them about their workload and job satisfaction to gauge their level of frustration. It's essential that you demonstrate that you recognize that increased workload is a problem and outline the steps you're taking to correct it.

Next, conduct a job responsibilities and skill set assessment for each employee. Establish priorities and determine whether a task is essential. What you'll likely find is that the employee may be doing things that no longer are necessary. You can then remove those tasks to offset the new responsibilities employees must absorb during the hiring process.

When you're in the hiring cycle, maintain your full-time staff to manage the average daily workload and bring in project professionals to handle peak work cycles. Then, when you fill the positions, or when the workload returns to its baseline, you can release the supplemental staff. This approach facilitates flexible staffing and budget.

These combined strategies can effectively diminish the stress and burnout—well-documented contributing causes of turnover—among your existing staff.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Job Titles of Survey Respondents

C-Level	2%
President	2%
Vice President	3%
Executive	1%
Director	20%
Manager	39%
Supervisor	12%
Staff	18%
Other	4%

Industry

Aerospace	1%	Government - Federal	5%
Automotive	1%	Government - Other	1%
Chemical/Biotechnical	0%	Healthcare	8%
Computers/Hardware	2%	Insurance	4%
Computers/Software	6%	Legal	2%
Construction/Development	1%	Manufacturing (non computer)	6%
Consulting	5%	New Media/Publishing	1%
Consumer Products	1%	Nonprofit or Association	4%
Distribution	2%	Oil/Gas (non retail)	2%
Education - Higher Education	7%	Outsourced Services Provider	3%
Education - Other	3%	Pharmaceutical	1%
Entertainment	1%	Retail	3%
Financial Services - Banking	4%	Telecommunications	3%
Financial Services - Securities	2%	Travel	0%
Food and Beverage	1%	Utilities/Energy	3%
Government - Local	3%	Other	9%
Government - State	5%		

Numbers of Employees
in Company/Organization

Less than 100	15%
100–499	20%
500–999	10%
1,000–1,999	11%
2,000–4,999	13%
5,000–10,000	11%
10,000–50,000	13%
More than 50,000	7%

Primary Location of Company/Organization

	Percent	Count
United States of America	63%	812
Canada	21%	271
Australia	9%	110
United Kingdom	1%	13
India	0%	5
New Zealand	0%	5
South Africa	0%	5
Malaysia	0%	4
Brazil	0%	3
Finland	0%	2
Germany	0%	3
Guatemala	0%	2
Italy	0%	2
Japan	0%	2
Mexico	0%	2
The Netherlands	0%	3
Nigeria	0%	2
Spain	0%	2
Argentina	0%	1
Bolivia	0%	1
Costa Rica	0%	1
Cuba	0%	1
Denmark	0%	1
Ecuador	0%	1
France	0%	1
Greece	0%	1
Iran	0%	1
Jamaica	0%	1
Kenya	0%	1
South Korea	0%	1
Switzerland	0%	1
Turkey	0%	1
Venezuela	0%	1
Other	2%	22

Customers Supported
by Survey Respondents
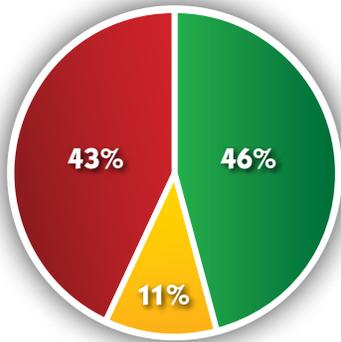
- 🟢 **Internal customers**
  (employees within the company/organization)
- 🟡 **External customers**
- 🔴 **Both internal and external customers**

APPENDIX B: COMPLETE LIST OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Most Important Skills for FRONTLINE/HELP DESK	Percentage of respondents
Customer service skills	66%
Problem-solving/troubleshooting skills	54%
Communications skills	50%
Ability to learn quickly	45%
Ability to work under pressure	39%
Listening skills	36%
Multitasking	23%
Ability to handle change	21%
Team player	18%
Analytical skills	17%
Interpersonal skills	17%
Technical skills for specific software(s)	16%
Verbal skills	13%
Self-starter, independent worker	12%
Questioning skills	9%
Technical skills for network	9%
Organizational skills	8%
Technical skills for specific hardware(s)	7%
Writing skills	5%
Administrative skills	3%
Persistence	3%
Strategic thinking	3%
Leadership skills	2%
Technical skills for securtity	2%
Financial management	0%
Other	2%

Most Important Skills for LEVEL 2/LEVEL 3/DESKTOP SUPPORT	Percentage of respondents
Problem-solving/troubleshooting skills	60%
Technical skills for specific software(s)	42%
Technical skills for specific hardware(s)	33%
Ability to work under pressure	30%
Customer service skills	30%
Analytical skills	29%
Communications skills	27%
Technical skills for network	27%
Multitasking	22%
Ability to learn quickly	21%
Self-starter, independent worker	21%
Team player	16%
Ability to handle change	14%
Interpersonal skills	13%
Listening skills	11%
Technical skills for securtity	11%
Organizational skills	10%
Strategic thinking	9%
Questioning skills	8%
Persistence	7%
Verbal skills	6%
Leadership skills	5%
Writing skills	5%
Administrative skills	3%
Financial management	0%
Other	1%

Most Important Skills for MANAGEMENT	Percentage of respondents		Percentage of respondents
Leadership skills	66%	Customer service skills	10%
Communications skills	49%	Problem-solving/troubleshooting skills	10%
Strategic thinking	48%	Self-starter, independent worker	10%
Organizational skills	38%	Verbal skills	10%
Ability to handle change	30%	Writing skills	10%
Ability to work under pressure	28%	Ability to learn quickly	6%
Interpersonal skills	25%	Questioning skills	5%
Listening skills	22%	Persistence	4%
Administrative skills	17%	Technical skills for network	2%
Multitasking	15%	Technical skills for specific software(s)	2%
Analytical skills	13%	Technical skills for security	1%
Financial management	13%	Technical skills for specific hardware(s)	1%
Team player	13%	Other	1%

APPENDIX C: COMPLETE LIST OF PERKS

	Percentage of respondents	Value (1 - 5 Scale)
Medical insurance	83%	4.53
Dental insurance	79%	3.96
Paid time off	75%	4.57
Life insurance	68%	3.52
Vision insurance	64%	3.60
Retirement benefits	62%	4.32
Flexible work hours	51%	4.09
Subsidized training/education	40%	3.66
On-site cafeteria	33%	2.75
Work-at-home option (full-time or part-time)	31%	3.82
Subsidized gym membership	25%	2.54
Mentoring programs	19%	3.17
Matching gifts program for charitable contributions	16%	2.60
On-site perks such as dry cleaning, fitness center, etc.	15%	2.62
Free/subsidized snacks/lunch	11%	2.94
Subsidized transportation	11%	3.09
Housing or relocation assistance	10%	3.28
Adoption assistance	9%	2.24
Sabbaticals	8%	2.85
On-site childcare	7%	2.98
Other	5%	
None	2%	