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Editorial

In March of 2021, the University of Phoenix launched the [University of Phoenix Career Institute®](#), a newly established department within the University's College of Doctoral Studies focused on studying American workforce dynamics to inform societal solutions that spur career growth. With the launch of the Institute, the [first annual Career Optimism Index®](#) was also released. This report found that despite the many challenges almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, hope existed, and Americans were optimistic for the future. They believed they were resilient and prepared, and while Americans define themselves by their careers, many didn't see a clear path forward to develop skills and advance in their careers for the long-term. American workers needed additional support and resources to translate their optimism into future career outcomes.

In March of this year, the [second annual Career Optimism Index®](#), expanded to also include employer data, was released. The 2022 Career Optimism Index® found that while optimism remains stable, Americans weren't confident in their current skills, think employers aren't doing enough to help them upskill/reskill and, therefore, felt replaceable. The disconnect between workers and employers is significant in some areas.

Each index contains a treasure trove of data, and University of Phoenix researchers set upon studying this data and looking for deeper insights. This edition of the Phoenix Scholar contains a collection of 20 white papers that were released by the Institute following the initial release of the Career Optimism Index. Topics addressed are manifold and include the relationship of career perception to various other factors, women, minorities, and the gender wage gap, stress management, happiness, the status of education and the “new



normal” due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the multigenerational workforce, and upskilling and career management.

This Phoenix Scholar™ is only the first collection of such papers. The University intends to continue to release the Career Optimism Index on an annual basis, and future special editions of the Phoenix Scholar™ housing additional collections of white papers will follow.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hinrich Eylers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hinrich Eylers, Ph.D., P.E.

Vice Provost

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Managing the Stress Arc: Using Evidence Based Cognitive Strategies for Training Employees in Industry to Deal with Large Scale Disaster and Rapid Change



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Executive Summary

To date, the United States alongside other countries, have struggled with the scope of pernicious disaster phenomena that affects the psychological and physical lives and well-being of most people. Most recently this comes in the form of natural disasters and weather, such as the recent winter freeze that effected much of the United States and many Texas residents without. Add to this the COVID-19 pandemic which began last year and has become the agitator for much of the psychological destabilization in America today and you have the makings of a complicated psychological storm, where human lethality potentials increases for many effects like suicide, family violence, divorce rates and deaths (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020).

With the recent impact of weather in Texas, many hospital staff who have not only been dealing with the COVID-19 issues had to also endure the ominous prospects of rolling power surges and operating with alternative strategies for water outages. Grocery stores and fast-food restaurants also attempted to find ways to help circumvent the impact and deal with the surging issues of this most recent natural disaster in Texas. These leaders and workers, most notably in healthcare, have had to deal with the most tenacious aspects of stressors affecting their industry and lives as a result. But how are employees, most

primarily in healthcare, trained to endure and deal with the enormous magnitude and psychological gravity of what they have been exposed to over the past year? As well, what preventative programming has this industry learned to do well to maintain focus, to challenge the erratic and most often spontaneous nature of issues which have struck hospitals recently and how can other industry leaders learn from this group to train their staff to learn to use such strategies to navigate their own industries with the same potency as healthcare?

This white paper will cover the psychological and functional implications of impacts felt around the country, including the most recent in Texas, moving to an introduction to the stress arc, examining psychological adaptability and strategy for managing the stress arc and finally, how industry leaders outside of healthcare can utilize these system dynamics in renegotiating strategy and helping their employees in times of rapid onset of change due to crisis events.

How Should this Information Be Used by Leaders

This white paper and its integral tactical capacities may be used by industry as a “provisioning” guide to help leaders not only understand the compounding elements of stress and its challenges to employees

during crisis, but also as a means to developing and fostering better preventative programming optics that inform strategies for their unique industry positions. By utilizing this white paper’s key psychological insights, leadership in the various industries can augment the resiliency and lives of their crucial human capital by better supporting employees in the face of demands incurred as a result of rapid onset of change (ROC) events that influence the vital core of the mind’s executive functioning potentials of focus, logic and decision-making strategy. These guiding principles can be used for a variety of industries from grocery stores to restaurants to education including teachers and other paraprofessionals, as well as for student resourcing.

This white paper defines two core solutions areas:

- Knowledge management
- Preventative programming measures for leaders in industry outside of healthcare

Taking a mindful approach for understanding our complex psychology and general physiognomy is more of an imperative than it has ever been, as we begin to, as a country, struggle for ways to renegotiate the challenges of living daily for healthier outcomes in tandem with a current confluence of life challenges. Internal to this white paper is a brief technical overview of the psychological underpinnings of engaging adaptational strategies to help foster better emotional regulation techniques for many workers, staff and even students currently experiencing “diminished” emotional regulation capacity, stress impacts and fear-based reactive symptomology.

As well, the key components of evidenced-based psychological tools for strategical and tactical provisioning that can be used immediately to help educate and broker cognitive resources amidst the continuity of social impacts which began their onset in 2020 and currently continue into 2021. Written by Dr. Rodney Luster, a practicing psychologist and licensed counselor trained at Johns Hopkins in Trauma and Disaster Preparedness, with insights from real-time strategic engagement and tactical practices utilized by healthcare experts and psychologists from industry who have studied current phenomena, this paper can be utilized to produce and foster new adaptive ways of engaging stressful events.

By engaging psychological pragmatics utilized during rapid onset of change as a result of rapid impact

phenomena such as destructive weather, disaster relief, emergency situations and unintended social incursions, leaders can learn to help their employees lead a better quality of life on and off the job.

Introduction

To date, the evidence of compromised mental health and well-being and the consequences of durated exposure to a variety of lethal phenomena have begun to take its toll on the general populace. The unbridled tenacity of social incursions experienced in the past year have become unprecedented, and the burden to the psyche has not been without costs. An example based on data obtained from the University of Phoenix Career Institute’s Career Optimism index that surveyed 5,000 nationally represented adults with oversamples of 300 adults in the top 20 metropolitan regions of the United States, reflects the information found in Figure 1 (Edelman 2021).



Figure 1

What Do We Know about how Stress Is Affecting Workers in Various Industries?

Stressors can be brought on by a variety of social and natural incursions such as divorce, life balance, mental illness, work conflicts, familial issues, traumata experienced and a host of natural elements such as inclement and dangerous shifts in weather, earthquakes, fires and health challenges. With recent urgent trends that have compounded matters such as COVID-19 and extremes in weather alongside social issues, American workers are feeling the pronounced effects in mental health.

Notable conclusions drawn from the “Attitudes in the American Workplace VII,” survey poll by The Marlin Company are that a staggering 80% of workers feel stress on the job, in addition to nearly half that report the need for assistance and the need for help in learning how to negotiate stress. Another 42% reported they feel their coworkers could benefit from assistance (The American Institute of Stress 2000).

In 2021, the burden of stressors has accumulated, impacting how people functionally deliver their job given social distancing and the pandemic. Results from a study by Oracle and Workplace Intelligence, where more than 12,000 employees, managers, HR leaders, and C-level executives across 11 countries were surveyed, revealed some disturbingly compelling effects. Overall, the survey outcomes reported that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic increased workplace stress, anxiety, and burnout for the majority of people globally, where 70% said “they were more stressed and anxious at work than ever before” (Oracle and Workplace Intelligence 2020).

In addition, researchers at Texas A & M utilized a professional quality of life survey to engage students and faculty about their mental health during the COVID-19 crisis and found that “all participants scored at the 80% chance of incurring a major health breakdown within the next two years” (Research @ Texas A&M 2020). Also, the vicarious traumatic reactivity and nature of the situation was also underscored and captured in the survey where these same participants also related evidence of scoring “high in compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress” (Research @ Texas A&M 2020).

One of the most compelling events on workers has been the exhaustion of the Texas freezing snowstorm in February that has seen over 47 deaths and counting as of the date of the white paper. A photo that went viral on the internet, captured in San Antonio, Texas at a local Domino’s Pizza, displays the exhaustion of two workers after a four hour frenzy of customers seeking food that dwindled down a volume of supplies that should have lasted for days, within a matter of hours. The stress and exhaustion of employees was captured in a now moving photo of the impact to the workers.

Introducing the “Stress Arc”

As of late, the inclusion of rapid change conditions in the lives of many has become the norm. Amidst great

social unrest, a pandemic of monolithic proportions, disastrous weather changes, and circumstances that continue to perpetuate economic instability, society at large has struggled with “adaptability” on this scale and magnitude (American Institute of Stress 2000). A large aspect of being human is that our bodies work on balancing complex homeostasis while also being continuously confronted by other factors occurring externally. Just as change occurs, our body responds and reacts to change. When change happens swiftly, the body also responds rapidly to keep pace, where internal nitrosative states that attempt to balance conditions are suddenly thrown into an activation sequence, thus ratcheting up the stress response (Chen et al. 2014). Also, stress habituation, or the consistent exposure to stress-inducing potentials, predominates as of late, as we are exposed to the many social variables creating stressful experience (Bennett et al. 2018).

However, one of the best resources for understanding how we meet stress is captured in the following stress arc developed by Dr. Rodney Luster. How to manage the stress arc is understood best by looking into that segment of society that must handle aggressive change daily in their work lives and note, for these purposes, their preventative maintenance strategies. There is much to learn from an industry like healthcare, whose workers must continuously refine their preparedness and practice for the unknown circumstances they might face daily. Healthcare does some phenomenal preventative programming that helps blunt the prospects of unintended impacts within the landscape of their inherent working processes. The stress arc [see Figure 2] can help clearly distinguish the tools that help these industries emerge successful even during enormous challenges. This may allow the other industries to learn from and integrate such tools into daily practice.



Figure 2

Each of the areas depicted in the stress arc provides insight into components that can assist us in our unique daily engagement of life. These five areas make up the stress arc and are the core components of successfully handling the rapid onset of change based on the working environments of Healthcare as an industry leader in this process.

What generally makes healthcare an industry that is more successful at negotiating rapid change conditions? If we look closely, it is truly governed by their strength in “adaptational processing.” Healthcare has demonstrated their ability to work in the wake of the most challenging anomalies as expansive as the phenomenon of the coronavirus pandemic to technical migration emergencies, adverse weather impacts, and more. Let’s begin by looking at the first component of the stress arc for navigating socio-environmental challenges.

Analysis of the Impact Agents of Change

Most of the research available on disaster preparedness reveals the extent to which society at large is sorely lacking when it comes to a variety of emergencies that could affect working and living conditions. Texas currently has become a beleaguered state dealing with the catastrophic potentials brought on by the unanticipated effects of a winter storm. The result left power grids down, water outages and food supplies cut. Workers in this industry moved swiftly in mindset to adapt quickly.

Many healthcare workers in Texas exemplified their ability to work under such extreme conditions. As reported from the Houston chronicle, “Saldana said at least half of his staff’s nursing homes were affected by the storm, and some were unable to commute throughout the week. But he said they never felt particularly overwhelmed – the challenges posed by COVID-19 over the last year have forced staff to become more agile and they’re now used to working in unprecedented conditions” (Downen 2021). Healthcare, and another industry like IT, have both worked hard to develop their upfront analysis and assessment of situations. Both industries typically address egress “route-selection” strategies to engage the various ways in which to quickly route and process emergencies (Musharraf et al. 2020).

There has been a substantial amount of research

conducted to understand the behavior of humans in hazardous situations, which has helped inform those industries by understanding and refining their responses to rapid change effects. “Healthcare and IT often implement some form of egress training to help identify weak flanks in performance; such as simulating crisis environments to train workers how to negotiate stressors to successfully egress, allowing each of these industries to help modify their pedagogical approaches to crises” (Musharraf et al. 2020).

More often than not, how the general populace alongside other industries unfamiliar with such extremes evaluates crisis is typically from an “emotional” response primarily. Emotional reasoning can feel a lot like logic, but it is not. It is a limbic response propped up by emotion. Learning to analyze rapid change requires us to move to our executive functioning, removing emotion by engaging logic immediately. This is a huge advantage that forces our brain out of its emotional center, which takes up a huge amount of cortical real estate, and allows focus to begin to set in on the situation at hand.

Initial analysis requires we not engage forecasting, emotionalizing events or immediately reacting out of panic. It only takes a moment to assess, but it requires an awareness that the mind be directed toward moving the moment, not necessarily solving the entire gravity of the problem. Emotional schema therapy developed by psychologist Robert Leahy, explains that in order for us to understand our thoughts about what we are feeling, we must learn to “temporize” the immediate moment (Leahy 2015). This is understanding the moment of greatest intensity will pass if we understand that all situations are temporary, which allows us to bypass the limbic-emotional reactivity state and put emotions occurring in the moment in their proper place. By bypassing this, we are down regulating emotion so that we can focus on the task at hand.

Self-Efficacy and Response-Efficacy

One of the essential components to current healthcare worker’s management of anxiety and stress alongside their ability to handle rapid change has to do with self-efficacy. Self-efficacy allows us the opportunity to believe in ourselves, the idea that we can execute

on things, and have the potential for success in our responses to events that occur. Moreover, this concept can be leveraged by an organization, operating on self-efficacy as a tool for managing crises and change.

Leadership from organizations like the Red Cross, who must respond rapidly to conditions, understand self-efficacy from their unique institutional lens as well. Taking stock of this component of efficacy can greatly enhance our self-regulatory mechanisms, ultimately strengthening how we respond to events and translating the unmanageable into what “could be” manageable. In a study on self-efficacy and disaster preparedness, researchers Wirtz and Rohrbeck found that the greater one’s predisposition with self-efficacy, the greater their likelihood to prepare for and handle challenging situations (Khalique & Singh 2019). Additionally, the researchers also found that the complementary factor to self-efficacy known as response-efficacy, or the idea that one’s belief of success of a chosen response, was a strong predictor of outcome behaviors in stressful situations (Wirtz & Rohrbeck 2017).

In other words, having self-efficacy influenced confidence in response-efficacy or decisions rendered. Industry leaders who manage employees need to help upgrade this potential by further training on emergency preparedness processes that simulate situations allowing for “stretch zones.” This allows room for mistakes while building confidence rather than employees learning the hard way in “panic zones,” according to Khalique and Singh (Khalique & Singh 2019). When employees are given these kinds of “safe” situations, they can learn, address solution processes and allow their own internal authority to grow as a result.

Bolstering Resilience with Employees

Our understanding of resilience has significantly increased over the past 10 years. Whereas resilience was once considered more of a recognized “inherited” characteristic, recent research suggests that resilience is learnable and can be molded into one’s skillset (Smith et al. 2018). Resilience is our ability to bend with the stressors of life, to reconstitute, to learn from events and to thrive despite social ingressions.

Additionally, in a study on stress, epigenetics, and

brain plasticity by BS McEwen, the idea becomes more apparent that the brain has tremendous potential for resilience during times of stress. He posits that this can occur when there is the accompaniment of “interventions designed to open windows of plasticity” or tools we might engage to help redirect the brain’s function toward better health (McEwen 2016).

People in business are seeing the potentials in mental training practices for employees that increase mindfulness dispositions. Neuroscientists Malinkowski and Moore have studied mindfulness and found that such practice increases cognitive flexibility or the potential for one to engage greater flexibility and internal authority over thinking processes (Armas et al. 2017). In addition, mindfulness training leads to the potential for better judgment practices, more accuracy in decision making and enhanced problem-solving capability (Fernandez 2016). What has also been learned is that resilience can be created and nurtured with some key components such as optimism; engaging balance in the ability to manage any surge of strong emotional content; having a feeling of safety; and a good system of support. The opportunity for any organization is to adopt a structured approach to mindfulness training. For businesses, adding “mindfulness” training as a core skillset to teach employees as well as seeking it out as a core talent potential raises the prospect of better engagement of critical change and reduction in mass employee stress and burnout.

Locus of Control for Affecting Confidence States

The potential that underlies the positivity of understanding the “controllability” factor, in any event, helps us also understand how we can then affect those impacts caused by environmental changes when they happen quickly. Situations of rapid change attempt to undermine an individual’s perception of treatability because often individuals are caught off guard (Armas et al. 2017).

Locus of control is the strength of belief a person has in the control they have over events.¹⁸ This is the person’s internal belief of control and for those with a low locus of control, the diminutive state can lead to system breakdown or failure to act in crisis situations successfully. For an organization, leadership must bring this to the table through their own effective

modeling of what strong locus of control looks like in such situations.

So, when locus of control moves externally, we have given up the possibility of helping ourselves. Instead, we hand over control to external forces. How we are challenged by events is unique to every one of us. Exercising a locus of control ultimately comes through how we decide to view our situation. The IT industry prepares for events by assuming rapid response plans that help maintain the stability of locus of control by staying prepared and addressing variables. In the healthcare industry, first responders move through a checklist of important priorities taking control of their environment immediately as a form of control over factors in a situation.

A shining example of positive reactive behavior occurred inside of the Texas winter storm outage that effected more than 4 million Texans, where one local H.E.B. grocery outlet's leaders reacted well. On Feb. 16th, the power went out in a Leander, Texas, H.E.B. store with hundreds of shoppers inside. Leaders did not allow frustrations, concerns, and fears to engage, and they instructed cashiers to allow people to simply take their groceries free of charge (Knowles 2021).

The story has gone viral since. What did this behavior do for everyone? For the people, the store's selfless act on behalf of its constituents demonstrated kindness and has built loyalty along with an unforgettable moment in the minds of its customers. They ensured safety by not creating clogged social distance issues in the store, they empowered employees to act altruistically, they went above and beyond in a situation where there could have been a multitude of other decisions rendered as less effective over this one, and they ensured their place in the public's mind as a community leader. The store leaders assumed a locus of control that was internally manifested and based on what was within their reasonable potentials for control, and what offered the best optics for everyone from customers to employees, and it worked incredibly well.

In our daily lives, ensuring that we can apply a solid analytical appraisal and focus on events as they arise can help us engage more of that prospect for locus of control which may also help instill confidence that as individuals or business leaders, we can handle a situation and offer better approximations on better than average outcomes. Maintaining a locus of control is essential to successfully navigate situations that

arise and is something that businesses can help foster.

Adaptability and Mental Agility Can Define the Circumstance

Thomas Theorem, a theory affiliated with sociologist William Isaac states that reality in its initial stages is malleable, but hard-set in its consequences (Oxford Reference 2021). In other terms, how we define our circumstances defines its outcomes. This kind of mental acuity provides the opportunity for growing better outcomes for people, employees and leaders. This however requires some mental flexibility in adaptation to situations and events. Learning to adapt and become mentally agile is no small task.

Our lens of being able to adapt can be assessed in response to the recent challenges in 2020 and 2021, where the move to ensure safety (as a result of COVID-19) brought many educational systems online. It was swift, and many teachers were hard pressed to become quick adapters of a system they may have never had any intention of engaging.

In such circumstances, those who resist the change, the event or situation become less agile almost immediately. They begin to see control outside of themselves and often recede back into fear and panic or frustration. In my experience as an administrator who has supervised thousands of educators over the years, I have noticed that teachers who are highly dogmatic and structured were, more often than not, challenged when discrepant or impromptu events presented themselves in their teaching situations. These same educators would become quickly stressed due to a perceived "lack of control" due to a change that forced the classroom environment into a different direction. Those who were not highly structured, but adopted a more "flexible" demeanor or teaching style, were more readily able to roll with the sudden change.

This adaptation has had a year's journey to saturate and mesh with industry and struggles still ensue in the education community. However, there are success stories amidst this situation as well. But for those who have met the reality of change begrudgingly, their road has been fraught with issues where teachers feel woefully unready or supported by administrators and where resistance to adapt has been an ongoing issue for certain institutions attempting to "ride-out" the storm of a pandemic.

Teachers or institutions that have become used to the tried-and-true version of education and in person instruction are having a hard time acclimating to the online environment. For those who have seen success in teaching, they have engaged adaptability and used it as innovation in many circumstances. Adaptability is influenced by our internal processes.

In a study on parents whose children were dealing with adjustment difficulties in Hong Kong, insights revealed how those particular parents and their children who migrated to Hong Kong from non-native environments relied on both problem-focused strategies and emotional-focused strategies to help mitigate the stressors brought on by dropping into a new and foreign environment (Lam 2014).

Problem-focused coping is concentrated on effectively addressing and dealing with a problem using problem solving and supportive measures to help confront and resolve issues (Lam 2014). Much of this can be seen in the readiness of IT as a vigilant industry that must respond to and plan daily for issues that can hijack their infrastructures such as cyber-attacks or emergency disasters. In emotion-focused coping, the strategy is to reinterpret a situation or event such as accepting responsibility and addressing the possibility of positive reappraisal (Riolli et al. 2010).

Perhaps we can also look to industries such as BOSH Infosystems who in the onset of the pandemic, quickly reappraised their strengths in the wake of COVID-19 and moved to 3-D printing capabilities to manufacture thousands of face shields rapidly in order to contribute to healthcare worker's immediate safety needs. This kind of adept flexibility in adapting to situations is important to a person and organization's stability, otherwise, it becomes a house of cards and the ability to endure is compromised. People and organizations can learn to adopt problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies that allow for better reappraisal of situations and the chance to move through events and situations optimally.

Adaptive Bridging

Part of modifying how we react to any rapid onset of change event is to meet our circumstances with the correct situation appraisal. Too often in the practice of psychology and dealing with clients who have weakened appraisal systems, counselors oftentimes witness patients engage an anxiety spiral by locking into "catastrophic thinking" patterns reinforced by a

lack of appraisal where processes like fortune telling (predicting outcomes), catastrophizing, and other cognitive distortions take root.

We know that how we perceive a situation makes the biggest difference. In a study on cognitions and moods of U.S. soldiers enduring traumatic events during wartime situations concluded that "resilient persons are neither Pollyannaish nor delusional; rather, they can recognize that dire circumstances are not permanent, that they are not personally responsible for the pain and suffering they see, and that change for the better is very likely" (Riolli et al. 2010).

Then we are able to use such reflective evidence, rather than erroneous unactual fear, to make better judgements and actions. This means seeing things as they are, distinctly, minus the distractions of aberrations and negative conjecture or false beliefs. As a result, the experience can help foster "bridging" or creating of new neural pathways, alternatives for any situation that rely on an evidence-based, facts-only, kind of processing.

An example of irrational thinking took place earlier in 2020, as the pandemic grabbed hold of public perception, igniting an insidious reactive-state in the general populace surrounding the potential scarcity of goods. The fear-based reactions of many probably sounded a lot like the following, "if I don't find these things, I need, there will be no more." However, what if a cross-examination of that same thought process were to occur, based on facts, then it may have looked more like this, "how do I know this to be true?" and "have the manufacturing plants stopped altogether or are they simply attempting to meet demand thus moving a bit slower right now?"

As a result of such fear-based reactive thinking, many grocery chains had to keep reassuring people that eventually, things would return on the shelves and emphasizing people to buy sensibly and not more than they needed, but that did not equate well for those processing in fear, and as result, limits on items were enforced to help protect the overall replenishment process. When people and organizations are hit with rapid change due to unforeseen circumstances, pulling back the veil of irrationalities can help illuminate the truth of a situation and lend clarity in ways that help inform a situation correctly over succumbing to fear-based reactions. Staying rooted in a function like adaptive bridging can help achieve a more realistically grounded mental space.

Leaders can Teach Employees to Renegotiate Positional Self-Agency for Psychological Empowerment

In psychology, we can borrow from Albert Bandura's expression of agency as the opportunity to influence one's self and functions through one's own actions (Klein & Ballon 2018). This expression of "self-agency" is important because it means that if we understand that we each have the potential for things like self-efficacy (or, in other words, our inherent potential within) then it is feasible that we can influence and even change the course of our reactions by renegotiating our self-agency.

Moving towards psychological empowerment during crisis moments is a benefit for leaders in organizations whose staff need to feel supported and capable. In this, we must teach people to address old, cemented ways of thinking, with more positive and flexibly adaptive modes of thinking that are objective and under conscious control. Leaders can also help staff to re-orient their focus, by practicing "managed concern." By this, an altruistic approach that imagines the need to take care of one's self, but not to ignore ways to help others in crisis as well. Managed concern was demonstrated earlier in the year when many operational staff working call centers for companies like ATT were also expressing sympathy and support during phone calls where people may have been having internet issues.

Training and teaching to this aspect of managed concern can produce powerful intrinsic feelings for people engaging those who are scared in such situations. Knowing that a kind word can go a long way can empower staff to feel better and more invested in their own workplaces. Taking stock of those around you and finding ways to ensure their comfort by asking them questions regarding things they may need, addressing small adjustments to their situation, are empowering tools during a crisis with a strong return for the helper. As well, teaching employees to extend that same managed concern for themselves by showing them how to practice self-care, engage focused thinking, and decentering stress can lead to reducing the potential for burnout.

There is great potential in the use of psychological tools to defy circumstances that challenge the lives of people, companies and leaders. Taking any of the

tools mentioned in this white paper and applying them to yourself as an individual, to your staff if you are a leader, can help cut through irrational pretense that oftentimes governs emergency situations and move to more positive outcomes. When we inspire our own mental hygiene, there can be valuable growth and alternatives that are more productive in any kind of situation.

About the Author

Dr. Luster holds a Masters in Sociology and Psychology and a Doctorate in Counseling with a specialization in Trauma. He is also a licensed practicing counselor in Austin, Texas, a researcher, writer and author. He has spoken around the country regarding trauma and has received trained under noted Psychologist Peter Levine in somatic-trauma counseling. Dr. Luster currently is University Research Chair for the Center for Leadership Studies and Organizational Research for the College of Doctoral Studies and is also a Director of Research Communications for the school.

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American Workers' Reasons for Switching Jobs

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Executives are looking internally to address capability gaps; over 50% advocate building skills of existing employees, ahead of hiring, talent redeployment, and contracting in skilled workers.

- McKinsey, 2022

The 2022 Career Optimism Index was created to determine the impact of another challenging year on Americans' career perceptions and to gauge their level of optimism in their own careers. The Index was expanded to explore new topics related to job and career shifting and needs for reskilling and upskilling (Edelman, 2022). The Index provides a current snapshot of career optimism in the United States and the 20 largest metropolitan areas; the 20-minute online survey was distributed to the following:

- 5,000 United States (U.S.) nationally representative adults, age 18+ who either currently work or wish to be working.
- 500 U.S. employers who are influencers or play a critical role in hiring and workplace decisions within a range of departments, company sizes, and industries.

Results indicate 69% of employees would consider staying at their current job “if they thought things could change” and 76% of employers are “concerned” about turnover (Edelman, 2022). Data represent opportunities for employees, employers, educators, and policymakers:

- Employees can embrace “lifelong employability” as a “mind-set of continuous skill improvement” (Davies et al., 2019) and participate in learning, training, and education programs.

- Employers can create “career pathways with upward mobility” (Lund et al., 2021, p. 100) and proactively launch upskilling initiatives (Carnevale et al., 2020) to reduce turnover
- Educators can reimagine education and adult training to synthesize foundational attitudes and skills (DELTAs) linked to positive outcomes in employment, income, and job satisfaction (Dondi et al., 2021).
- Policymakers can support employee transition by expanding the digital infrastructure, providing tax incentives to encourage employers to offer and employees to utilize job retraining, and adopting skills-centric approaches to navigate job transition (Lund et al., 2021).

This white paper describes factors contributing to employee turnover, employer initiatives to reduce turnover, and an ecosystem approach to removing silos between employers, employees, educators, and policymakers.

Why Employees Leave

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicate over 4.3 million people voluntarily quit their jobs in December 2021 (De Smet et al., 2022), with 10.9 million current job openings exceeding the 6.3 million new hires.

With 52% of Americans either actively looking for a job or expecting to look for one in the next six months (Edelman, 2022), factors contributing to employee turnover range from suboptimal compensation, lack of opportunity for upward career mobility, desire to balance work and life priorities, and interest in working flexible hours to lengthy commutes and misalignment of corporate and individual values.

MOST WORKERS ARE AFTER HIGHER PAY, BUT THE REALITY IS THERE ARE A MYRIAD OF REASONS PEOPLE ARE JOB-SEEKING

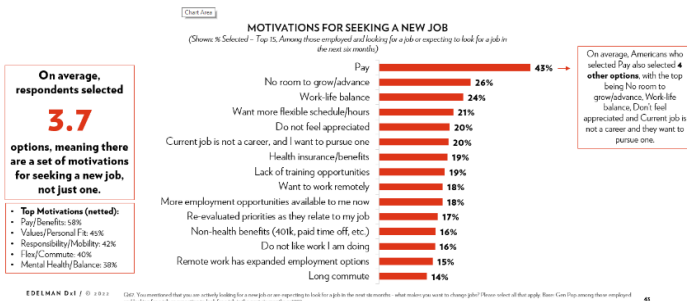


Table 1 | Most workers are after higher pay.¹

Compensation issues represent key drivers in employee turnover: The 44% of Americans who are not satisfied with their salaries cite lack of raises, impact of inflation on the economy, and being underpaid despite skill level and work effort (Edelman, 2022; Mahan et al., 2019). Dissatisfaction with compensation is complemented by issues associated with career development, work-life balance, manager behavior, well-being, job characteristics, work environment, relocation, involuntary turnover, and retirement (Tenakwah, 2021; Work Institute, 2020). The 42% of American workers who see themselves in “dead end” jobs (Filomena & Picchio, 2021) are unable to see a clear path for career advancement because they believe technology has outdated their job skills (Edelman, 2022). Of the 17.1 million U.S. employees potentially needing to change jobs in the post-COVID-19 environment, 14.9 million may need to find work in different occupational categories (Lund et al., 2021, p. 85).

Why Employees Would Stay

In addition to seeking higher compensation,

1 From “The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index, Dxl, Research Findings-National Data and DMHA Findings,” slide 45, by Edelman Dxl, 2022, University of Phoenix.

employee expectations now encompass professional development, workplace flexibility, meaningful work, support for mental and physical health, and inclusive culture (De Smet et al., 2022). Of the 69% of employees who report willingness to remain in their present position throughout their career “if things could change at my job,” 68% expect upskilling and 65% expect reskilling (Edelman, 2022).

MOST SAY THEY WOULD CONSIDER STAYING AT THEIR CURRENT JOB IF THEY THOUGHT THINGS COULD CHANGE; THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EMPLOYERS TO ADDRESS EMPLOYEE NEEDS

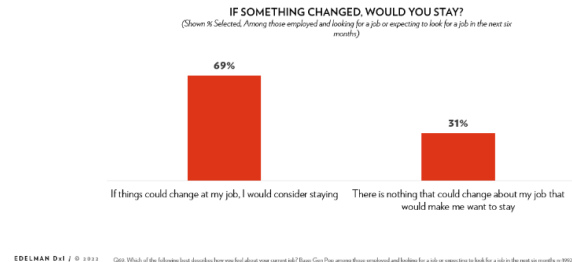


Table 2 | Most employees would consider staying.²

Developing employees’ digital competencies is a priority, with 94% of business leaders expecting workers to learn new skills on the job, 40% of which will require retraining within six months (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2020; Gouda, 2022). Research indicates 87% of millennials prefer to work for companies that provide professional career development opportunities and Fortune 500 companies such as PWC have initiated upskilling and reskilling about 50,000 U.S. employees (Tenakwah, 2021). Since technical skills require regular updates, employer-based reskilling and upskilling can significantly improve retention.

What Employers Can Do

Data suggest 78% of global turnover could have been prevented (Work Institute, 2020) and employers have a wide range of opportunities to improve retention:

- Robust onboarding processes with mentoring, team building, coaching, and socialization (Tenakwah, 2021).

2 From “The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index, Dxl, Research Findings-National Data and DMHA Findings,” slide 44, by Edelman Dxl, 2022, University of Phoenix.

- Flexible work schedules: companies such as Facebook, Okta, Zillow, Slack, Coinbase, Shopify offer remote work as an option (Tenakwah, 2021).
- Reskilling and upskilling employees: 53% of executives advocate building skills of existing employees as the most useful way to address capability gaps, ahead of hiring, talent redeployment, and contracting in skilled workers (Benedet & Nikolov, 2022).
- Attractive benefits program: one in three employees switched jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic to obtain a more competitive benefits package, defined as tuition assistance or related educational programs (Tenakwah, 2021).
- Inclusive leadership: demonstrating accountability, allyship, and humility increases employee retention (Tenakwah, 2021).

WHILE EMPLOYERS HAVE TAKEN SOME STEPS TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES, MANY CITE A WIDE RANGE OF BARRIERS TO INVESTING IN EMPLOYEE RETENTION

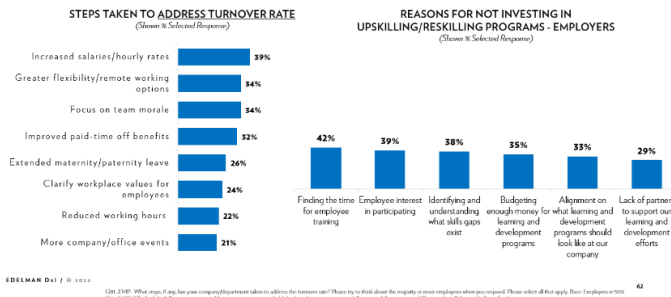


Table 3 | What employers can do.³

The good news? Employers can reach out to the 69% of employees who would consider staying at their current job “if things could change” and potentially influence the 31% of employees who are not currently willing to stay at their job (Edelman, 2022) by reframing challenge as opportunity.

Design thinking and reframing facilitate viewing challenge as opportunity (Coutu, 2002; Sotile & Sotile, 2002) by seeing “things in a new way” (Kolko, 2010, p. 23). Challenges are crafted in the conceptual context of a “frame” (Schön, 1984). Reframing “recasts” the original research design (the “frame”) in new perspectives (Kolko, 2010, p. 23). Employers can

3 From “The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index, Dxl, Research Findings-National Data and DMHA Findings,” slide 62, by Edelman Dxl, 2022, University of Phoenix.

reframe challenges (Edelman, 2022) as opportunities:

| Challenge | Opportunity |
|---|---|
| 82% of employers say they offer full or partial support for additional education or training; 44% of employees are aware that employers offer support for additional education or training. | Target the 56% of employees who are not aware that employers offer support for additional education or training with details on available resources. |
| Finding the time for employee training. | Reclaim time from recruitment and onboarding and train existing employees. |
| Employee interest in participating. | Generate employee interest in “lifelong employability” by modeling attitudes and skills associated with positive outcomes in employment, income, and job satisfaction. |
| Budgeting enough money for learning and development programs. | Reclaim funds from recruitment and onboarding and direct toward learning and development programs for existing employees. |
| Alignment on what learning and development programs should look like at the company. | Partner with educators and policymakers to identify organization-specific skills gaps. |
| Lack of partners to support our learning and development program. | Communicate with employers, employees, educators, and policymakers about “lifelong employability” to help people continually and successfully adapt as the economy evolves. |

Table 4 | Reframe challenge as opportunity.⁴

Recognizing that skill building is foundational to successful skill transformations (Billing et al., 2021), as McKinsey states, employers are “looking inward, not outward” and:

More companies are building talent internally rather than externally. Over 50 percent of executives believe that developing the skills of their existing workforce is the most useful approach to address capability gaps—rather than hiring new workers, redeploying talent, and contracting in skilled workers. (McKinsey, 2022, February 25, para. 1)

4 Adapted from “The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index, Dxl, Research Findings-National Data and DMHA Findings,” slide 62, by Edelman Dxl, 2022, University of Phoenix.

Top action to close the capability gaps in the next year, % of respondents (n = 868)

- 53% Building skills
- 21% External hiring
- 20% Redeploying people
- 6% Contracting workers

Table 5 | Closing the capability gaps.⁵

What Educators Can Do

A 2019 survey of 18,000 people in 15 countries identified skills citizens may need in the future world of work and strategies to optimize curricula and learning strategies (Dondi et al., 2021). Researchers identified specific DELTAs, defined as a mix of skills and attitudes, associated with better outcomes for employment, high income, and job satisfaction:

| Challenge | Opportunity |
|---|---|
| 82% of employers say they offer full or partial support for additional education or training; 44% of employees are aware that employers offer support for additional education or training. | Target the 56% of employees who are not aware that employers offer support for additional education or training with details on available resources. |
| Finding the time for employee training. | Reclaim time from recruitment and onboarding and train existing employees. |
| Employee interest in participating. | Generate employee interest in “lifelong employability” by modeling attitudes and skills associated with positive outcomes in employment, income, and job satisfaction. |
| Budgeting enough money for learning and development programs. | Reclaim funds from recruitment and onboarding and direct toward learning and development programs for existing employees. |
| Alignment on what learning and development programs should look like at the company. | Partner with educators and policymakers to identify organization-specific skills gaps. |
| Lack of partners to support our learning and development program. | Communicate with employers, employees, educators, and policymakers about “lifelong employability” to help people continually and successfully adapt as the economy evolves. |

Table 6 | DELTAs associated with better outcomes.⁶

⁵ Adapted from “Look Inward, Not Outward,” para. 1, by McKinsey, February 25, 2022.

⁶ Adapted from “Defining the Skills Citizens will Need in the Future World of Work,” Exhibit 5, by Dondi et al., June 25, 2021, McKinsey.

Educators can reimagine education and adult training to synthesize foundational attitudes and skills (DELTA) linked to positive outcomes (Dondi et al., 2021). Employers and educators can collaboratively reframe human-capital development to integrate foundational DELTAs, encompassing early childhood, primary, secondary curricula, postsecondary, and adult learning (Dondi et al., 2020). Partnerships with policymakers can promote research and innovation in education to “future-proof” citizens’ ability to work (Dondi et al., 2020, p. 1).

Employers’ demand for social and emotional skills, defined as interpersonal skills and empathy, negotiation, leadership, and initiative taking, could increase 25% in the post-COVID-19 environment because such tasks are not easily automated. Educators can contribute by strengthening individuals’ capacity for the adaptability and continuous learning associated with mastering new skills as technology evolves. To illustrate, Lumina Foundation (2022) partners with employers, educators, and policymakers interested in redefining work and learning:

When systems of work and learning are coordinated, a job is never a dead end. Nearly any job can become a pathway to further skill-building, greater employability, and increased opportunity. The benefits to workers are clear: a life of continued intellectual growth, skill-building, and upward mobility. Businesses and other employers also gain by cultivating skilled personnel who have specialized knowledge, the ability to do work more productively, and higher morale. (Lumina, 2022, para 2-3)

Partnerships between educators and employers in developing curricula can enhance students’ understanding of the professional workplace and capacity to communicate, be empathetic, and solve problems (Dingli & Azzopardi, 2021)

Ecosystem Approach to Removing Silos

Addressing post-COVID-19 workforce challenges mandates coordination and cooperation between employers, employees, educators, and policymakers; silos have no place. “Social dialogue has a key role to play in promoting skills development by ensuring the collaboration of key stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation processes” (International Labour Organization, 2021, p. 39).

Employer and educator partnerships can be mutually beneficial to “learn about learning” (Davies et al., 2019, p. 2) informed by neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and pedagogy in general and adult learning. Evidence suggests microlearning, defined as conveying information in short, 15- to 30-minute bursts, is more effective than longer sessions; digital technologies and virtual reality can help (Davies et al., 2019). Flexible learning options, including self-directed asynchronous online learning and artificial intelligence, can help employees process new information (Davies et al., 2019). Big data can optimize learning and development through targeted, program-specific, customized experiential content (Davies et al., 2019).

Expanding digital infrastructure could involve private and public funding and improve information, communication, and services to marginalized communities (Lund et al., 2021). Providing income support to mid-career workers being retrained to change occupations could encourage employees to capitalize on opportunities to gain new skills. Policymakers can also strengthen employees’ ability to navigate job transition processes by developing skills-centric approaches to identifying new employment opportunities (Lund et al., 2021).

Consider the HSBC Malta Foundation’s Human Capital Research Project as an ecosystem: Supported by the Ministry of Education, the Malta Chamber of Commerce, the Malta Business Bureau, the University of Malta, and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, the Human Capital Research Project is designed to achieve “a more cohesive approach . . . this is not about academia vs industry but more about the leading players working together to solve the shared problems which our country will face in the coming decades” (Dingli & Azzopardi, 2021, final para.). McKinsey Global Institute (Lund et al., 2021) is succinct:

An ecosystem approach that brings together businesses, policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders might prove more effective than isolated efforts at addressing workforce challenges, based on past experience. Company initiatives to reskill workers are more robust when supported by educational institutions. The work of educators and social enterprises to train workers in more sought-after skills is most effective when coordinated with efforts by government agencies aligned to company needs. (Lund et al., 2021, p. 99)

Conclusion

While employees are leaving or switching jobs in record numbers in the post-COVID-19 environment, the 2022 Career Optimism Index identifies opportunities for employers to address employee needs and create a win/win scenario: Employers win. Employees win. The key to success? Communication between employers and employees to ensure 100% of employees know what resources their employer provides. Communication between employers, employees, educators, and policymakers about “lifelong employability” to help people continually and successfully adapt as the economy evolves.

Embracing the idea of lifelong employability will help workers remain relevant and ensure that employers have the flow of skilled workers they need and could even improve retention by exciting employees about their career prospects and potential. (Davies et al., 2019)

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Belonging: A New Era in Diversity Management Strategy

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Introduction

According to the Society of Human Resources Management, companies spend billions of dollars annually to support diversity and inclusion initiatives (Agovino, 2020). Yet, there is an ever-present gap in both academic literature and practitioner knowledge within the understanding of how many of these initiatives truly impact employees and, ultimately, lead to a sense of true belonging for many employees. Demographic diversification in the workplace has prompted the continued need for organizations to infuse diversity management into both human resources practices and organizational strategies.

As societal demographics shift, there is the imperative need for organizations to consider this shift, especially in areas of leadership, human resources, and management. A recent United States (U.S.) Census Bureau report provided an in-depth analysis of the population across age, race, gender, Hispanic origin, and nativity. According to the report, Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060, the U.S. population is projected to become more diverse by 2044 (Colby & Ortman, 2016), which will likely lead to an even greater diversified workforce in the future.

Human capital is considered one of the most valuable resources found in modern organizations. Within this collection, a wealth of knowledge, experiences, and backgrounds contribute to the overall success of organizations in today's economy. Fisk, Silvera, and Haun (2019) note that, when considering a comprehensive definition of diversity, there is a need to include a recognition of both the numerous similarities and differences within demographic representations and affiliations within cultures. Through the diversity found within collections of personnel, companies benefit in various ways from the many contributions that diversity brings to organizational cultures. Hill, Tedards, Swan, and Balsamini (2021) stress the importance of recognizing and utilizing the diversity found within organizations to reduce turnover and attract the best personnel, increase creativity and problem solving, improve organizational marketing and visibility, attract more diverse customers, and remain competitive in their respective fields. Additionally, several studies support the positive aspects of diverse group formation in the workplace, such as findings that suggest groups with multi-demographical groups are more creative in decision-making tasks (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996) and have more constructive types of conflicts

that produce new ideas beneficial to organizations (Lovelace, Shipira, & Weingart, 2001).

Antiquated organizational practices reference the presence of diversity through the numeration of categorical representations of race and gender within its structures. However, contemporary organizations recognize both the benefits and the complexities of utilizing a broader lens when considering the representations and utilizations of its human capital. Thus, companies that recognize the value of a diversified collection of employees and are willing to invest the time, effort, and resources necessary to support this collection are likely to make diversity management a topmost strategic priority.

Defining Diversity Management

Diversity management within organizations is represented through various systems and practices. Although there is little consensus on one comprehensive definition of diversity management, fundamentally, diversity management uses research, theories, and proven best practices to inform strategic decision making, organizational change, and sustainable processes and practices that positively and affirmingly support the existence of all within an organization; seeks to find and eliminate underrepresentation in all areas of the organization, and actively works to eliminate barriers in order to improve the health and effectiveness of organizations, while affirming the values of respect for human differences so that all stakeholders feel a sense of belonging.

As research strongly asserts the importance of diversity management as an avenue for providing a competitive advantage for organizations (Mousa, 2018), companies have focused resources to create better human resources departments, hire personnel dedicated to managing diversity initiatives, and create strategic plans focused on the recruitment and inclusion of future and current employees. Although diversity management has previously been viewed as a way to keep organizations out of legal trouble, many organizational perceptions have shifted to those seeking the advantageous benefits of diversity. Sharma (2016) notes, historically, “a firm with a diverse workforce could argue that they were not guilty of discrimination because of the prima facie case based on their workforce demographics representing the

demographics of the local community” (p. 73).

However, today’s perception of diversity has changed to one as advantageous to the workplace as a whole. Further, creating a clear distinction between diversity and inclusion provides clearer understanding of the necessary components of diversity management initiatives, with diversity being the characteristics, culture, memberships, intellectual capacity, and beliefs which employees bring into the organization; and inclusion being the actions necessary to ensure fairness and the presence of diversity (with these voices being heard and utilized) at various levels of an organization. To harness the full strength of diverse workforces, organizations must seek a systematic and planned way to increase representation of diverse individuals throughout the organizational hierarchy, attend to the social processes that emerge once diversity is present and foster an organizational climate that supports the full inclusion of diverse individuals.

Diversity management is a rather new model, with a historical span of only three decades. Although difficult to pinpoint, the emergence of diversity management within organizations is often traced to the 1960s, which included numerous social movements and enacted legislations, which prohibited workplace discrimination, aimed at specific demographics. However, in the late 1980’s, a broad adoption of diversity management ideals spawned from widely postulated predictions within the Hudson Institute’s landmark study, *Workforce 2000*. This landmark document instantaneously captured the attention of many within the United States workforce, as Hudson forecasted major changes in the diversity found in United States workplaces, specifically noting a prediction of increased representation of women and ethnic minorities in the workforce and the need for organizations to consider how to strategically manage these changes (Johnston & Packer, 1987). To many, these predictions suggested an economic imperative (“business case”) for diversification resulting in many organizations adopting a “valuing diversity” stance. This ideology allowed for the collective movement away from the historic utilization of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity principles as the defining delineation of how organizations welcomed diversity into their various systems and opened the floodgates for many diversity-related movements that explored various tenets under the wide umbrella of diversity management, including valuing diversity,

multiculturalism, and managing and valuing diversity.

As companies began advancements to create diverse organizational cultures, they encountered mixed results through their efforts. Studies showed that successful diversity management had been related to a number of successful outcomes, including employee satisfaction (Allen, 2006; Badal & Harter, 2014), decreased turnover (David et al., 2015; McMillan-Capehart, 2005), and creating a positive impact on an organization's "bottom line" (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013; Mannix & Neale, 2005). However, studies also showed that while many organizations strategically plan for and support the implementation of various diversity management tactics; these efforts have produced mixed results within the assessment of overall outcomes effectiveness (Allen, 2006; David et al., 2015). These variegated outcomes established the need for the systemic approach for managing the various aspects of having and effectively maintaining diversity within the workforce.

Today, diversity management comprises strategies and initiatives that develop and support a diverse and inclusive workplace (Madera, 2017). Diversity trainings, employee mentoring programs, employee resource and affinity groups, mission statement and strategic plan developments, and new employee orientations are often developed and utilized within collective planning under the umbrella of diversity management. Although they may vary in topic and approach, the overall objectives are often the same: to provide the resources and support needed to recruit, retain and develop employees for organizational growth and access to opportunities while meeting the needs of the organization. Unfortunately, organizations dedicate large amounts of financial resources and labor toward diversity efforts; however, those efforts often result in very little change to the organization (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013). For example, Allen (2006), David et al. (2015), and Underwood (2021) note while many organizations strategically plan for and support the implementation of various diversity management tactics, these efforts have produced mixed results within the assessment of overall outcomes effectiveness. Additionally, many organizations do not know the effectiveness of these initiatives, as few take the time or make the effort to evaluate the long-term impact of these initiatives. As such, this leads to an important question, how do organizations know these efforts to create inclusion truly lead to a sense of belonging for all within their

structures? The mere existence of diversity and diversity programs and initiatives can no longer drive diversity management. Today, this missing piece, belonging, has rightfully emerged as the central focus of diversity management.

Belonging within Diversity Management

According to Maslow (1954), a sense of belonging is one of the five basic, innate human needs. Belongingness encompasses intimate relationships, friendships, trust, respect, and affiliating with a group. In his groundbreaking work on organizational belonging, Strayhorn posits:

- Sense of belonging matters and it is sufficient to drive human behavior;
- Sense of belonging is vital to our existence and optimal human functioning; thus, we constantly monitor for social cues that signal our belonging status;
- Experiences of alienation or social isolation can cause cognitive dissonance expressed in observable ways; and

A sense of belonging leads to positive outcomes and organizational success. (2018)

Given this level of importance, one would assume organizations would make belongingness a high-level priority and all leaders proactively work to ensure their respective employees feel that they belong within organizations. Unfortunately, belonging has only recently emerged as a strategic outcome for many organizations. Specifically, the tumultuous social events of the past two years have underscored the imperative that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) present to society as a whole, and especially to businesses (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on underrepresented groups, and the protests following the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor highlighted the entrenched inequalities that continue to afflict and limit American society and workforce. Unambiguously, the concept of belonging emerged in the workplace through the persistent societal and political questions of who "belongs," how belongingness is currently experienced by various groups, and in what context should specific demographical groups experience belongingness.

"The Great Resignation" is a term coined by

organizational psychologist, Anthony Klotz, who posited that the Covid-19 pandemic would have an impact on the workforce that would include mass resignations and retirements due to many American workers using this time to reevaluate their lives and making career defining changes (Cohen, 2021). Following this early 2021 prediction, we did indeed see millions of American workers make career changes at record highs. According to the 2022 Career Optimism Index, over 50% of employers say turnover is higher than in previous years and 28% of employees note they would consider quitting their careers, even without having another one lined up.

A recent McKinsey study notes a sense of belonging as one of the most important factors an employee considers when contemplating leaving their organizations, with over half of participants noting they did not feel a sense of belonging at work (McKinsey, 2021). Moreover, this study also sheds light on the continued inequities many employees of color face within the workforce, stating those who identified as non-white or multiracial were more likely than their white counterparts to leave an organization because the lack of inclusivity and belongingness. Further, the 2022 Career Optimism Index notes, while 91% of employers believe their employees feel empowered in their jobs, 52% of American workers see themselves as replaceable.

Exclusion is a common practice that remains detrimental to the goal of supporting organizational belongingness. Unfortunately, almost half of the U.S. workforce say they feel isolated at work. These feelings of isolation often lead to the lack of commitment to the organization and a lack of engagement in the day-to-day work. In a recent study on exclusion, Reece, Baumeister, and Kellerman (2021) note that exclusion in the workplace can adversely impact productivity, job satisfaction and employee well-being.

Conclusion

As organizations continue to rely on diversity as a critical factor in fostering organizational growth and competitiveness in a global economy, diversity management remains a critical area for overall success and longevity. Although diversity management has a rich history of both theoretical and practical development within its foundation, it is still a field positioned within its infancy stage of development. This presents numerous opportunities

for continued exploration of emerging philosophies and development of new research around this vital area of strategy within organizations, especially in the area of workplace belonging. However, below are some recommendations for all leaders within organizations:

Create Inclusive Norms

Leaders have the responsibility and opportunity to create inclusivity within their teams. Inclusive behaviors help to support a sense of belong for many organizational stakeholders. Therefore, in addition to modeling inclusive behavior in the workplace, leaders should set clear expectations around desired behaviors and hold all members accountable to these expectations. The role of the conductor within an orchestra is to ensure all musicians are playing in harmony. The same goes for organizational leaders.

Highlight Collaborative Teamwork

When leaders highlight collaborative teamwork, this provides an opportunity to spotlight team members willing to work together and serves as a blueprint for other team members to follow in the future. It is easy to be a cheerleader for collaboration, but without clear expectations, it can be a challenge for some employees to understand its importance to the immediate team and the organization as a whole.

Encourage Courageous Conversations

Some conversations are difficult, especially when they are focused on some component of diversity management. When discussing belonging in the workplace, it can be difficult (and sometimes impossible) to understand employees' experiences and feelings of belonging or exclusion when one does not experience the workplace (and society) through the same or similar lens. If a leader has not had a specific experience in the workplace, it does not mean that that experience does not exist for others. Leaders should create a safe space for these types of conversations and be willing to act upon them, as needed.

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Collaborative and Strategic Planning to Meet the Needs of a Multigenerational Workforce and the Organization

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Currently, there are five generations within the workplace: Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Their summarized generational needs as employees, managers, leaders, and organizations are diverse. Organizational leaders are continually learning how to address each generation's specific needs to enhance their recruitment, satisfaction, teamwork, productivity, retention, and preparing working in the future. Societal trends, economic upswings and downturns, and organizational culture continue to challenge multigenerational employees and organizational growth. Each generation wants to succeed in the workplace and in life.

Introduction

We are at a unique time in the history of the American workforce. Five generations of employees are engaged in the workplace. Each generation's interests are different yet there are some commonalities among

them. Some of the commonalities include that each generation has experienced societal issues such as racial injustice, expansive income gaps, rising healthcare needs and costs, voting right suppression, and hunger and food insecurities. The societal issues also focus on addressing rising and affordable healthcare, securing educational attainment, equitable employment, securing equitable pay, eliminating gender biases, responding to political uprisings, reducing poverty, and eliminating systemic racism and class structuring. We also experience a challenged economy, increased cost of living, increasing personal and national debt, consumer spending, remote and virtual learning and working, climate change, gun control, and personal safety.

The aim of this white paper is to describe the workplace generations and share the historical values and beliefs of each generation. We will also identify the career needs of each generation and show how these needs impact organizations. We will demonstrate

how organizational leaders may seize opportunities to collaborate with each generation and develop strategies that will enhance the career trajectory of each generation. Finally, we will demonstrate how this information contributes to future organizational strategic planning (Lighthouse, 2020; SHRM Foundation, 2017). For this paper, we will discover how organizations as well as each individual generation idealistically determine their success and add their value to society. Learning how to grow the organization through the collective efforts of each generation will impart invaluable lessons for each generation and businesses at all levels. More than anything, societal trends have influenced workplace behaviors and economic trends for the multi-generational employees. Emphasis is placed on creating and sustaining new strategies and methods in managing generational cohorts in the workplace post COVID-19, establishing accountability and opening communications between and within the generations of workers and with organizational leaders.

Characteristics Impacting Multigeneration Workers

To facilitate growth, it is imperative to broadly define each generation, understand their historical experiences and assess how their experiences cultivate their career aspirations and development. We begin with the Greatest Generation born between 1901 – 1924. The number of workers in this generation is no longer significant due to their age, retirement, and rate of mortality. American history that defines their engagement in the workforce and worldviews are marked by World War 1 and the Great Depression when securing employment was extremely challenging due to the economy and war effort. We also have the Traditionalists also known as the Silent Generation; employees born between 1925-1945 who represent 2% of the current workforce (Lighthouse, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2015; Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017). Some of these individuals are still within the workforce for a variety of reasons; however, their numbers are also minimal primarily due to retirements and skill needs within the workforce. The Great Depression, World War II and the popularity of radios and movies reflect their career mindsets, beliefs, and values. They are known as tactful, committed, and loyal workers, who focus on respect for organizational leaders and principles

(Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017). Their communication style portrays the personal touch in relating to people as well as organizational policies. They value having a good relationship with their peers and work many years for the same organization (Lighthouse, 2020).

Baby Boomers are the generation currently leaving the workforce for retirement and includes workers born between 1946 and 1964. This generation represents 25% of the workforce (Lighthouse, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2015; Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017). This generation is now retiring in higher numbers than in previous years and or reaching retirement age (10,000 daily). There were multiple national events that shaped their perspectives and values. These events are characterized by the Civil Rights Movement, assassination of key leaders such as former President John F. Kennedy and Medgar Evers. This was also the generation wherein the American Dream was promoted as a real possibility to people of color. Americans experienced the moon landing, the Vietnam War and political challenges such as Watergate. This generation of workers are motivated by loyalty from leaders and other employees. They focus on team work to make the dream work. They prefer efficient communication either face to face and by telephone. They perceive paying your dues to the organization as the key to success.

Generation X workers also known as Baby Busters were born during the period 1965 – 1980 and represent 33% of the workforce (Lighthouse, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2015; Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017). Their worldview experiences are marked by witnessing the fall and destruction of the Berlin Wall coming down, The Selma to Montgomery March, higher rates of divorce, more women entering the work force, the Aids epidemic, increased civil rights activism, musical explosions such as MTV's introduction and the boom in technology – the dot.com evolution. This generation witnessed additional political and social unrest with the assassinations of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, Malcom X, Fed Hampton, Alberta Williams King and John Lennon (TimeToast, n.d.). They are inspired by diversity, and work-life balance with revealed a shift on how they cared for themselves. There was also a shift on how they responded to organizational cultures that were non-accepting and did not consider their value. This generation demonstrated their flexibility, welcomed change, were skeptical of organizations

and societal views. They are redefining retirement age because of their desire for better health.

The Millennials also known as Generation Y are currently the largest workforce group represented within our work culture. This generation of workers were born between 1981 and 1996 and represent 35% of the work force (Lighthouse, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2015; Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017). They experienced the 9-11 attacks, massive school shootings to include Columbine, exponential social media growth with the age of technology and the internet. The communication style is driven by the expansive personal and professional use of technology in the form of instant messages, texts, and emails. This generation of work is characterized as being competitive, civically responsible, and achievement driven. They have already surpassed their growth in numbers and represent the largest group of workers in the current workplace (SHRM Foundation, 2017). They have collectively demonstrated for social change throughout society and in the workplace. They want leaders who acknowledge their worth, challenge them, prepare them for growth opportunities and commit to change. They are more likely to change jobs if their needs are not met. There needs include being an integral part of organizations seeing their social role, organizations committing to the growth and success of its employees, organizations that are collaborative and support creative innovations. Millennials also need organizations that promote flexible and remote work schedules along with organizations that promote a healthy work-life balance. Surprisingly, 15% of working millennials live at home with their parents (Purdue University Global, 2021).

The iGen Generation, also known as Generation Z, represents workers born from 1997 – 2010 and constitute 5% of the workforce (Lighthouse, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2015; Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017). They also witnessed the Great Recession, life after the 9-11 terrorist attack in America, the insurrection of Americans on the nation's Capital in Washington D.C. in January 2021 based on political incitement, technological expansions throughout the world, increased terrorism both domestically and foreign, political leadership upheavals, pronounced racial disparities throughout the country, a global pandemic of 2019 throughout the world which resulted in the deaths of nearly 600,000 in America and over three million

people around the world (CDC, 2021). These events continue to impact their career choices, societal views, and economic stability. made significant changes in how they work. They are experiencing virtual learning, demonstrations, and the upsurge of activism of their generation. This generation is characterized by its global worldview. It was born in the technology age and view technological innovations as a way of improvement. It is known for its desire for diversity and individuality; however, they value their independence. They prefer working with millennial managers and anything generating new technologies. Like the millennials, they prefer to communicate using technology. Generation Z possesses the entrepreneurial challenge and the opportunity to try and do something different to generate income (SHRM Foundation, 2017).

Finally, the Alpha Generation is the youngest generation, and members of this generation have not yet entered the workforce. It is important to note what they will have knowledge of what each generation has encountered as a part of their collective experiences. Their future will focus on addressing the issues of the pandemic that impacts the long-term health concerns and wealth of the society. They will also be leaders in resolving the diversity, equity and inclusion problems that have plagued the nation. They will also be in positions to help improve the legal challenges presented in creating legislation to ensure equal pay and higher minimum wage. They will be serving in careers that have yet to be developed. We know they will have strong technology skills and will be able work remotely from anywhere in the world.

All generations currently in the workforce saw the pandemic change the way businesses are managed in response to the number of Americans succumbing to the virus and the impact this has on organizational culture (Ahmad et al., 2021). Across the generational spectrum, each generation experienced either their coworkers, leaders, friends, and family die or become ill during the coronavirus. The death rates are highest among people of color and those over the age of 85 years old, the Traditionalist and the lowest death rates have been among people 15 years old or younger, Gen Z and Alpha Generation (Ahmad et al., 2021). The gender most decimated were males 85 years and over. The current generations in the workforce saw many businesses close due to a devastated and locked down economy and social distancing. The virus required each generation to take stock of what

was most important to them and govern themselves accordingly by learning how to manage life and their careers differently. During President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris' administration, and their first 100 days in office, nearly 200 million Americans have received the coronavirus vaccinations. Some multi-generational workers are now deciding if they will take vaccinations to minimize the effects of the virus. Skepticism of the vaccinations is presented by some members of each generation and only time will tell the outcome of their delay. Organizations are also deciding their future policies in relationship to employees not taking the vaccine. Again, societal trends are impacting the economy and the workplace. Multi-generations within the workplace have pivoted and this is reflective in their world view and workplace engagement. Many received stimulus checks from the government to help with their survival as well as stimulate the economy as many awaited new jobs. A period of uncertainty exists during this time. As the economy opens, generational workers desire to experiences success in their careers and in their retirement stage.

Generational Needs

While we note that millennials are the largest group of generational workers within the workforce, other generations have made indelible marks in moving through their careers and adapting to the times in which they were living that impact the social views and values. Each generation desires to continuously improve during their working years. To manage this, organizations as well as employee must align their goals and be open to the resulting changes during to societal and world trends. Generation X has the highest consumer spending of all the generations for food, alcohol purchases, housing, apparel and services, transportation, entertainment, personal care products and services and finally personal insurance and pensions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; SHRM Foundation, 2017). The generation spending the most on healthcare is the silent generation. The pandemic has shifted world and societal views. Generations within the workforce sought and continue to seek a variety of benefits to help them through this period. Each generation has indicated positive personal and career perceptions for themselves in the workforce.

Organizations are strengthening their efforts to be inclusive within the organization's culture. All stakeholders in the workplace are communicating their concerns. During a time of change and regaining economic stability, the working generations want to secure positions that will support them and their families. Being employed adds value to their lives and the future of their organizations. Each generation wants opportunities to show what they can accomplish with support from organizational leaders. The challenge comes when bringing the generations together and encouraging team effort as needed and showing mutual respect for leadership and the employees. They all have similar concerns regarding the security of their jobs and careers, fears generated by the activities of the pandemic.

Research indicates the multigenerational employees have identified their needs within the workplace (Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017). Managers and leaders are now focusing on the old and emerging needs of employees that also align with their organizational culture and goals. Employees want respect for the work they do; They want to use the skills, knowledge, and abilities they have and be in position to learn and do more based on the organization's needs. Technology innovations are constantly emerging. The generations who are not technologically savvy may fear technology; however, must be guided into learning. The nation and world were grateful for technology advancements during the pandemic as technology platforms were used to work from home, provide educational services for their children, and allowed them to connect with family, work, and friends due to mandated lockdowns and social distancing guidelines throughout the world. Members of each generation want all or some of the following considerations: fair and equitable pay, increasing minimum wage in some cases, opportunities for promotions and supervisory skills, personal and professional development, recognition for the work they complete, mentoring and coaching, a seat at the table in deciding what is best for them, having a say in their career advancement, timely and appropriate training and feedback, and a host of other opportunities for advancement within the workplace (Paychex Work, 2019). After experiencing the remote working, many appreciate this flexible opportunity to work from home and help to keep an eye on their family. This time is like no other in American history.

Organizational Needs

Organizations must stay relevant to survive in today's economy. They must meet their goals to provide goods or services as a business and keep an eye on their profits and losses. This means becoming aware of the needs and taking into consideration the needs and differences of their employees from each generation (Lighthouse, 2020; SHRM Foundation, 2017).

Becoming aware of the specific needs and nuances for each generation will help them to cater to those specific needs and align them with the organization's needs. As they determine their organizational priorities and goals, they should collaborate to build a stronger and productive organization and work culture. They will subsequently and frequently implement realistic strategies to support the good of the cause within the workplace which helps with productivity, retention, teamwork, recruitment, training, succession, and other factors influencing their employees' perceptions and business growth. Getting multigenerational employees on the same path may not always be an easy task; however, it is a necessary task. Transactional and Transformative leadership styles and skills may provide the additional momentum to encourage growth throughout the organization as new employees are onboarded and new leaders are trained and allowed to lead in an ethical work environment where values and standards are clearly presented (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns 1978). Transformational leaders are results driven; however, they support employee development and creativity to help strategize future successes. This is a shift in mindset for many organizations. The former ways of doing business may not work as well with each generation of employees based upon their worldview, goals, values, beliefs, and trust of the organizational leaders (Lighthouse, 2020; Purdue University Global, 2021; SHRM Foundation, 2017).

Introduction

Organizational leaders are recognizing the need to for coaching and mentoring throughout the ranks to increase employee satisfaction and ensure the employees are thoroughly trained to meet the organizations' mission and provide related services (Lighthouse, 2020; Purdue University Global, 2021). Many organizations recognize and can accommodate

some of their staff working remotely. Some organizations have decided to close their brick-and-mortar physical builds and operate solely on online platforms. They know that they need innovative and technologically strong skilled employees as well as those who know how to work together as a team. They are learning and many know how to bring the generations together to build a strong employee and strong organization. They recognize the positive interpersonal skills are valued within the organization with each generation (SHRM Foundation, 2017). When collaborating with employees and other agencies, they demonstrate the employees' value to the organization. They recognize they must pay fair and competitive wages to recruit good talent and train employees to enhance their effectiveness. This means allowing space for creativity and innovations within the organizations. They must invest in and train new leaders to exercise leadership and supervision skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, creativity skills, problem-solving skills, decision making skills, planning and organizational skills, technological skills, and adaptability skills to name a few that will have a residual influence and dynamic growth for the multigenerational workforce and the organization and industry. These actions may help to build employee loyalty and opportunities for growth within organizations.

Conclusion

In our ever-changing society, the multigenerational workforce is here to stay, grow and collaborate with organizational leaders to help develop strategic plans to grow professional and enhance organizational growth. The five active generations currently within the workplace have a wealth of experiences in skills, knowledge, and abilities to be harnessed by organizational leaders who are forward thinking. The multigenerational workforce's summarized needs as employees, managers, leaders, and organizations are diverse yet manageable in terms of setting goals, meeting objectives, establishing accountability and planning for the future. The research compels organizational leaders to continually learn how to address each generation's specific needs to enhance their recruitment, satisfaction, teamwork, productivity, retention, succession, and future opportunities. Societal trends, economic upswings and downturns, and organizational culture continue to challenge

multigenerational employees and organizational growth; however, leaders are now aware of the needs and may focus their energies in bring the generations together to weather the challenges and opportunities presented in society and the economy. Technology, communications, and relationships must be leveraged in addressing the needs of the employees as well as the needs of the organization. The possibilities are endless when compared to the career options available. There are careers that being created to support changing workforce of the future. Job recovery is taking place. Multigenerational employees are optimistic about what the future holds for them. Organizations are also optimistic about their future and providing opportunities for the workforce to grow and grow their organizations with new and innovative ideas.

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Paychecks and the Pandemic: Perceptions by Income Level

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Technology Research



Executive Summary

The Coronavirus pandemic impacted individuals across all demographics. This paper summarizes perceptions American individuals have towards their job and/or career due to the impact of the recent coronavirus pandemic and the Great Lockdown of 2020. This paper offers a summary of perceptions from American households distinguishable by income level.

With a barrage of recent studies measuring the impact of the pandemic on the American workforce, evidence supports the concerns that American workers and their families are reeling from changes in their professional and personal lives and will continue to do so for some time. More American workers are living paycheck-to-paycheck than pre-pandemic times across all income levels. More Americans are feeling overwhelmed by debt than pre-pandemic times across all income levels. While across all income levels concerns are echoed about job security, it is loudest from those reporting household incomes less than \$50,000/year. This includes apprehension about being replaced at one's job, fear and doubt that one will move forward in a career, and absence of opportunity to resources are all felt higher as income levels drop.

This data also indicates that those same individuals believe that with access to convenient, career-related educational opportunities, such as networking, training, and enhancing job skills, an increase in career optimism, career trajectory, and ultimately income can occur for American workers post-

pandemic.

Essential and Frontline Workers

During the coronavirus pandemic, essential and frontline became popularized terms, referring to individuals that continued to serve during the Great Lockdown of 2020. A large and varied group of the American workforce, essential workers are vital for societal and economic core functions (Blau, Koebe, & Meyerhofer, 2020). Approximately 60% of these workers make up a subcategory called frontline workers, with less than 30% of this group working remotely, but most physically at the frontline. Healthcare workers, protective service workers (police and EMTs, for example), production and food processing workers, janitors and maintenance workers, agricultural workers, cashiers in grocery and general merchandise stores, and truck drivers comprise many frontline workers (Blau, Koebe, & Meyerhofer, 2020). Essential and frontline workers are more likely to be less educated, receive lower wages, and represent a higher percentage of minorities (Blau, Koebe, & Meyerhofer, 2020).

In a study by the Edelman Data x Intelligence Research Group (2021), for the Career Institute for the University of Phoenix, data confirmed that the lower the income of an individual, the more likely that person was a frontline worker. This data also supported the likelihood that the lower the household income, the less likely one could work from home or remotely. Those with lower income are more likely

to be subjected to commuting by mass transit and/or working in closer proximity to others, increasing exposure to the very cause of the global pandemic (Tirachini & Cats, 2020).

Paycheck-to-Paycheck

Edelman's research of 11,000+ participants showed that one year into the pandemic and 43% of Americans admitted living paycheck-to-paycheck. People living paycheck-to-paycheck are less likely to be saving money, paying off debt, and become increasingly unable to pay monthly bills and thereby, feel less likely to get ahead. Once referred to as the working poor, the Edelman study showed that due to the pandemic, living paycheck-to-paycheck increased across all household income levels but did more so as income levels decreased. Women, minorities, and those without a college degree are more likely to be living paycheck-to-paycheck and to reach poverty levels (Iacurci & Nova, 2020). Living paycheck-to-paycheck is unlikely to provide more opportunity to increasing one's income but rather less without intervention.

Career Outlook

The Edelman study explored multiple aspects of career outlook, including: career stress/anxiety, feelings of being replaced, feelings about losing one's job, perceptions that one's career track was derailed, and having the tools and/or resources to achieve career goals.

Since 2 out of every 3 Americans feel that their career is a part of their identity and/or self-worth (Morgan, 2021), it is no wonder that stress and anxiety increased due to changes and challenges that arose due to the pandemic (Edelman, 2021). While 1 in every 4 Americans felt stressed about their careers, the percentage of study participants whose household income was higher than \$150,000 was 18% while percentages reached 29% for those with household incomes less than \$50,000 a year.

While 42% of those with household incomes over \$150,000/year felt easily replaced at their job, this percentage rose to 62% of those with incomes under \$50,000/year that felt easily replaced. While 30% of those with household incomes over \$150,000/year worried about losing their jobs, this percentage rose to 55% of those with household incomes under \$50,000/

year that worried.

While 1 in 3 Americans felt that their career was derailed or off-track from what they had expected due to the pandemic, 42% of those with household incomes less than \$50,000 a year felt their career was derailed as opposed to only 25% of study participants that reported income higher than \$150,000 (Edelman, 2021).

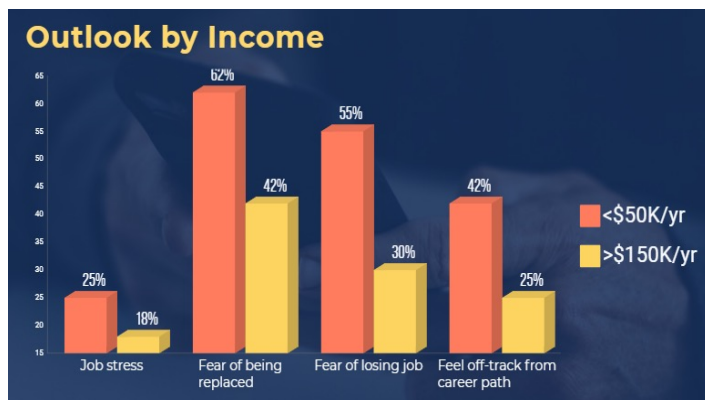


Table 1 | Outlook by income.

These perceptions reverberate time and time again when one asks, based on income level, who feels easily replaced at their job? Who worries about losing their job? Who cannot see a clear path for advancing their career? Who feels they lack tools and resources to advance? Every time, the percentage of respondents who answered, "me" increased as income decreased (Edelman, 2021). Therefore, it can be deduced that individuals with lower income are more fearful, more doubtful, less confident, feel less valued, and feel less prepared for advancing themselves in career and income level.

Skills and Resources

Fortunately, the majority of Americans (78%) that completed the Edelman study reported feeling hope about the future of their careers, that as individuals they were resilient, could adapt, and were prepared to look for a better job. The percentages of those who believed in hope decreased as income level decreased. While 56% of the respondents reported that the right skillset is what is needed to successfully change careers, almost half of the study respondents reported that they didn't know how to enhance their skillset. A third of respondents felt they did not have access to the opportunities to advance their skillset. A third to a half of participants believed that gathering new skills as well as engaging in training and educational programs

were avenues to career change.

The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index proclaims people want support and access to more tools and resources to better their skillsets. Among these the most prevalent requests were for networking, including mentor connections and support; programs that train or educate; and improved job skills including help for with resumes, job posts, and interviews. For individuals within the lower household income levels, there also existed a request for resources that could help with stress (Edelman, 2021).



Table 2 | Hope about the future.

Conclusion

Without intervention, living paycheck-to-paycheck is unlikely to provide more opportunity to increasing one's income, but rather less. Providing opportunities to resources and tools, including mentoring (network building), programs (educational/training) and job skills (resume, job posts, interview) are what is needed to connect hope and desire with action and advancement.

Therefore, institutes that offer educational training in-person, online, traditional as well as innovative micro-credentialling while providing support services through access to mentors, networking, and opportunities to further develop job-acquiring skills, will have the greatest impact on helping the American workforce continue upward and onward. This may especially benefit those whose household incomes are under \$50,000/year, many of those being the frontline workers who we depended on to get us all through the recent Coronavirus pandemic.

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Career Perception of American Workers and Their Emotional States

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Employee engagement needs to be part and parcel of the business DNA in any success story.

Anosa, 2021

In 2021, the University of Phoenix Career Institute’s Career Optimism index surveyed 5,000 nationally represented adults with oversamples of 300 adults in the top 20 metropolitan regions of the United States. Results indicate 43% of respondents “hate” or “don’t think too much about” their job (Edelman, 2021). These actionable data are opportunities for educator/ employer partnerships to reclaim this 43%, using workforce dynamics to catalyze career growth and employee engagement (Mani & Mishra, 2021).

Research correlates organizational productivity with employee engagement and validates training and development as intrinsic to the “business DNA” (Anosa, 2021, p. 50) of workplace culture, policy, procedure, and practice. In a competitive global marketplace, stagnant productivity augurs income disparity and organizational demise, while motivated, engaged employees ignite organizational innovation (Ivanov & Usheva, 2021). The call to action is clear: “Employee engagement drives performance by improving retention, customer loyalty, productivity, safety, and ultimately, profitability. Engaged employees care about their organization and work to contribute towards its success” (Anosa, 2021, p. 49). This white paper covers the magnitude and ramifications and magnitude of employee engagement on local, national, and global economies and demonstrates how educator/ employer partnerships can utilize workforce dynamics to inform self-efficacy and career growth.

Strengthening Employee Engagement

Productivity declines attributed to disengaged employees approximate \$550 billion per year in the United States (Gallup, 2013). Corporate investments (Mani & Mishra, 2021) in employee engagement initiatives have produced lackluster results, with national cultural dimensions of engagement resisting minimalist “one size fits all” strategies (Li et al., 2021; Srinivas, 2021). With more than 70% of Millennials either not engaged or actively disengaged (Center for Creative Leadership, 2019), root cause analysis (Paulsen, 2021) is warranted to incent multi-generational workforces. Evidence-based contributors to U.S. employee engagement include age, income, and values (Edelman, 2021).

Age

Boomers, defined as ages 54-72, are more likely to love their job than Millennials, defined as ages 22-37, and Gen X, defined as ages 38-53 (Edelman, 2021):

| Category | Age | Love My Job |
|------------|-------|-------------|
| Boomer | 54-72 | 63% |
| Millennial | 22-37 | 52% |
| Gen X | 38-53 | 57% |

Income

Higher income is associated with individuals' tendencies to love their job (Edelman, 2021):

| Income | Love My Job |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Over \$150,000 | 67% |
| \$100,000-\$149,000 | 59% |
| \$50,000-\$99,000 | 57% |
| Under \$50,000 | 50% |

Values

Americans define themselves by their careers: “2 in 3 employed Americans say that their job/career is part of their identity” (Edelman Q7, 2021). Aligning individual and organizational values promotes employee engagement, with organizations deploying transparency, value congruence, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as recruitment incentives and retention strategies (Clack, 2021; Low & Spong, 2021; Matenga, 2021; Srinivas, 2021; Yadav & Chaudhari, 2020). Contribution to institutional goals perceived as ethical, purposeful, meaningful, and worthwhile strengthen employee loyalty and organizational citizenship conduct (Carlini & Grace, 2021; Srinivas, 2021). Other potential motivators include teamwork, support, and family friendliness (Srinivas, 2021), social aspects, defined as open, friendly work atmosphere (Ivanov & Usheva1, 2021), and servant, ethical, and transactional leadership style (Li et al., 2021).

Micro-level CSR practices are defined as organizational initiatives focused on physical and psychological well-being of individual employees. The following micro-level CSR practices can strengthen employee engagement by 68.6% (Low & Spong, 2021):

Micro-level CSR Practices

- Employment stability
- Health and safety
- Human rights
- Training and development
- Work diversity
- Work-life balance

Educators Role

“As educators, we have the opportunity to produce experiential-ready, practice ready, and career-ready practitioners. Student attitudes and values influence how learned knowledge and skills will be enacted, and

therefore are key determinants of career-readiness” (Portillo & Gallimore, 2020, p. 251). Academicians, educators, and administrators of post-secondary educational institutions promote synthesis of content, competency, and professional growth conducive to self-efficacy and educational relevance.

What Employees Want

Data obtained from the University of Phoenix Career Institute's Career Optimism index reflect the following:

ELEMENTS NEEDED TO SUCCESSFULLY CHANGE CAREERS - Q23

- The right skillset
- Adaptability
- Flexibility
- Optimism
- Additional training
- Resiliency
- Additional education
- A strong professional network
- Financial support
- A strong social support system
- Support with childcare

ACTIONS TAKEN TO SUCCESSFULLY CHANGE CAREERS - Q 24

- Seek out opportunities to build skills
- Talk/connect with people in the field they want to be in
- Learn new skills and expertise to be competitive in the digital age
- Enroll in a training program
- Talk/connect with people they personally know
- Go back to school /enroll in an education program
- Attend networking events
- Use job apps and tools like LinkedIn and Indeed
- Attend job fairs
- Seek out assistance from a reputable career resource
- Spend time job-shadowing
- Reach out for informational interviews
- Volunteer in a new field
- Meet with human resources

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN MOVING FORWARD IN CAREERS - Q 17

- Not having enough education
- Lack of opportunities for upskilling/

development
 Lack of required skills
 Lack of time/schedule flexibility
 Financial problems
 Lack of mentorship/advocacy

Leadership 67.8%
 Technical skills 67.8%
 Flexibility/adaptability 65.9%
 Strong work ethic 65.4%

CAREER ACTIVITIES WHERE SUPPORT IS NEEDED - Q25

Connecting with others in my field/desired field
 Finding a mentor/advocate
 Seeking out training programs
 Creating /updating resume
 Seeking out education programs
 Interviewing for job
 Finding job postings
 Creating/updating LinkedIn profile
 Applying for a job

ACTIONS TAKEN FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT - Q 19

Prioritizing my work-life balance
 Managing my mental health/wellness
 Becoming a specialist in an area of my industry
 Connecting with others in my field/desired field
 Seeking skill development opportunities/certifications
 Researching resources to improve my employability
 Talking with my manager/boss about what I need to do to succeed
 Taking courses/classes to improve my employability
 Advocating for financial rewards for myself
 Seeking/engaging mentors/advocates

What Employers Want

Closing the gap between graduates’ competencies and employers’ requirements is a recurring mantra, with educators tasked to promote hard and soft skills related to actual “doing” (David et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021). The National Association of Colleges and Employers delineates the following key attributes employers seek (NACE, 2021):

Ability to work in a team 81.0%
 Problem-solving skills 79.0%
 Analytical/quantitative skills 76.1%
 Communication skills (verbal) 73.2%
 Communication skills (written) 72.7%
 Initiative 67.8%

Educator/Employer Partnerships

Collaboration between educators and employers builds upon existing momentum to align curricula and credentials, including degrees, diplomas, and industry certifications, with workplace competencies (Carter et al., 2020; Decker, 2021). Expanding experiential learning, including case studies, on-the-job internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and fellowships, enhances academic relevance and promotes “soft skill” development (Stewart et al., 2020).

Organizations seeking to reskill and upskill employees through education are partnering with external university, college, and technical schools (Volzer et al., 2021). Educator/employer partnerships can breakdown barriers to career advancement, help American workers accelerate their careers, and reclaim the 43% who “hate” or “don’t think too much about” their job (Edelman, 2021).

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Rethinking Occupational Stress as It Relates to the Future of Work

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Stress is a significant variable impacting the health of our current labor population. According to the 2022 Career Optimism Index, approximately 25 percent of American workers are stressed about their job and 41 percent are worried about losing their job (University of Phoenix, 2022). The concept of stress as a term was first introduced in 1936 by theorist Hans Selye; it was characterized as the body's undefined response to change (Selye, 1950). However, the definition was later updated to reflect stress as a syndrome – specifically the general adaptation syndrome. According to Selye, the syndrome details hormonal autonomic response changes that are triggered by stress and how those changes negatively impact the body by causing adverse reactions in the body such as high blood pressure (Balasch & Tort, 2019; Granier, 2022). Throughout the years, the definition of stress has evolved and yet the definition remains an abstract concept observable only on its non-specific features (Pal & Bhardwaj, 2016). The elusive nature of stress as a definition has

been well integrated into the theoretical concepts of occupational stress as it relates to the demands of the work environment. Occupational stress can be understood in terms of person-environment fit where there is an on-going relationship between the worker and the work environment (Bhui et al, 2016). For the purpose of this paper stress, occupational stress, and individual stress are used interchangeably.

There are two prevalent theories related to occupational stress. The conservation of resources theory and the cognitive activation theory of stress. The conservation of resources theory assimilates the basic constructs of stress, such as the body's undefined response to change, with social psychological and cognitive models of stress. The conservation of resources theory is focused on the process by which individuals respond to stress where the individual's ability to self-regulate is finite and dependent on resources as a form of strength. The theory is widely accepted as a leading approach to

understanding occupational stress because it moves past the basic analysis of the interaction between the individual and the environment to an analysis of the degree of interaction between the demands of the environment and the individual's ability to meet those demands (Folkman, 2011). The cognitive activation theory of stress differs from other general stress theories because it highlights the significance of a relationship (person and environment) as well as individual perception. It is the environment that determines the extent of stress felt by an individual and it is individual personality factors that drive the perception of stress and subsequently the experience of stress. Relationships can be positive, negative, or simply interactive responses (Meurs & Perrewe, 2011). Theory provides the foundation for understanding individual and occupational stress in the workplace.

Work related stress occurs when individuals are presented with work demands that do not match knowledge, skills, or abilities or when individuals have an overall inability to cope with excessive demand or change (Cooper, 2005). Understanding the origin of stress is key to reducing stress. For example, there are two primary sources of workplace stress for women: discrimination and challenges associated with work-family balance. For women, working in a male-dominated culture is a cause for stress because the male-dominated culture is uniquely different from traditional female norms, values, and expectations. Additionally, as primary care-givers of children and older parents, women are likely to have greater responsibilities beyond their male counterparts adding to excessive workload and with it, excessive stress (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). Individual stress falls into four basic categories: cognitive, physiological, emotional, and behavioral (Jacoby et al., 2021). Factors such as long-term job insecurity, a lack of social support, technological advance, and inadequate resources (such as limited mental health resources) lead to occupational stress (University of Phoenix, 2022). From a broader perspective, occupational stress impacts individual relationships, such as family and friends, as well as organizations, the government, and society. For example, absenteeism, health insurance costs and diminished productivity cost the United States on average \$300 billion every year. Flexibility allows an individual to adapt to changing environments however, stress can significantly influence an individual's flexibility by impacting resources and strategies individuals use to cope

through difficult times. Organizations can help!

Though stress is an individual experience, there are strategies organizations can put in place to modify or eliminate stress inherent in the workplace. For example, the construct of person-organization fit is based on fitting an individual to an environment where the burden of change and conformity rests primarily with the individual. Person-organization fit is achieved between the individual and the organization when one (either the individual or organization) provides what the other needs. However, instead of adapting a person to the environment, the focus should be on adapting the environment to the person in a mutually beneficial relationship where both the individual and the organization find congruence and fulfillment. While the strategy of adapting the environment to the person may seem complex and challenging, there are simple actions organizations can take to support individual's wellbeing at work - starting with recognizing the central role emotion plays in the experience of stress. Leaders with the ability to understand and manage the emotions of self and others will be able to more effectively recognize and respond to occupational stress in the workplace. Also important is recognizing that reactions to change and adverse events vary between men and women; specifically, cognitive processing of information as stressful or threatening differs between men and women (Dumont et al., 2020). Safety is another factor affecting the work environment. Telework and job insecurity may be here to stay. If so, leaders and employees must figure out how to navigate both without the safety and security of a traditional organizational structure. Prevention strategies to reduce workplace stress also include fair employment practices, social support and feedback, task and work environment redesign, flexible work schedules, and sincere efforts to support employees in their career development (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Self-awareness training and stress management training are both effective in improving the adaptability of an individual. If stress recovery is needed, treatment and rehabilitation serve as effective tools to help employees navigate a serious illness brought on by excessive stress (Cooper, 2006; Hirschi et al., 2022).

Identity also plays a role in how individuals conform to their work environment, manage stress, and exercise individual wellbeing. The scientific community continues to build new theory and scholarship related to identity (Clair, et al., 2019; Sawyer et al.,

2021). Individual identity has become more complex where individuals increasingly see themselves in ways that do not conform to the norms and values of an organization. Leaders must consider how assumptions about individuals drive human capital management, job crafting, and practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion frameworks (Clair, et al., 2019). The pandemic has highlighted individual needs and desires to explore new skills and to claim new professional identities not currently available in existing jobs. Employees are becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the status quo of traditional work environments and work relationships. Side-hustle work (income-generating work outside of a full-time job) is on the rise as individuals seek not only to supplement their income, but to explore new identities and areas of work. Additionally, side-hustle work provides individuals the opportunity to operate outside of organizational boundaries where strict formalized systems and supervisor control may exist. Side-hustle work also allows for more freedom in decision making; when, where and how work is done; as well as the type of work. Individuals are able to define their identity by the performance of work itself with access to task feedback and clarity about performance during and at the conclusion of work. Work complexity and autonomy in work are integrated into an individual's motivation to complete work which plays a significant role in the psychological state (e.g., state of empowerment) of an individual (Sessions, et al., 2021). As we move toward the accelerated changing nature of work (MIT, 2021), it is important to remember that individuals have multiple identities and that those identities are interrelated where changes to one identity may have consequences for the others. For individuals with multiple valued identities, authenticity at work means creating cognitive and social space for multiple versions of oneself that may change or evolve overtime (Caza et al., 2018).

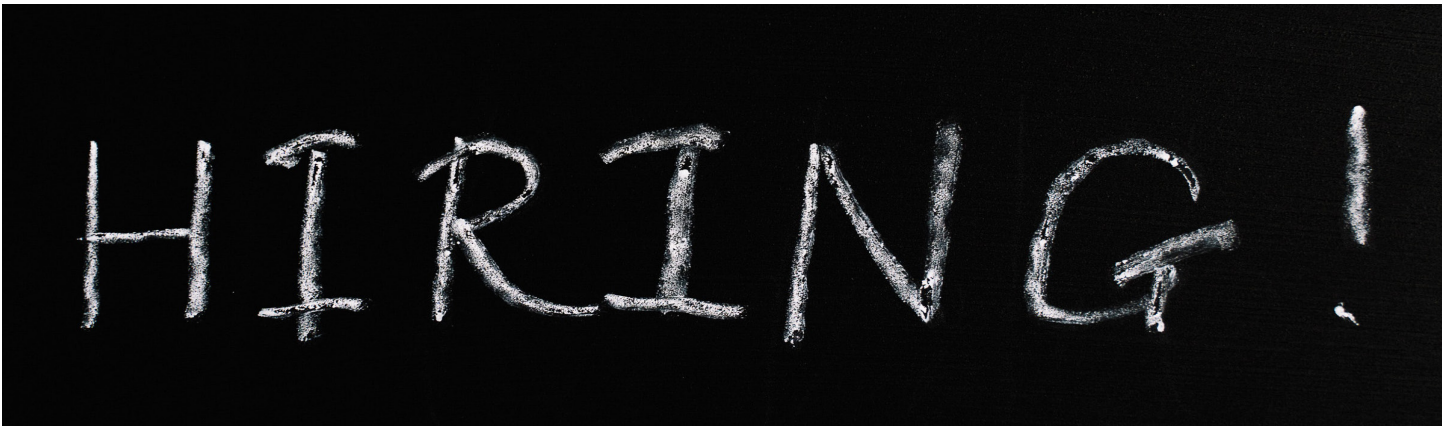
The future of work is changing – becoming more flexible and mobile (Kaupin, 2021). The introduction of technology, enterprise resource planning tools, and improved decision-making using predictive analytics have improved the way of doing work. Factors driving the future of work also include working conditions, wage growth, social protections, job crafting, and the changing makeup of the labor force (Kaupins, 2021). With change comes varying levels of stress. Understanding theory and models related to occupational stress allows for a

better understanding of how individuals navigate opportunities and threats of the work environment. Though stress is an individual experience, there are strategies organizations can put in place to modify or eliminate stress inherent in the workplace, such as fair employment practices, social support and feedback, task and work environment redesign, flexible work schedules, and sincere efforts to support employees in their career development (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Employers can manage stress in the workplace by taking an active role in recognizing and reducing workplace stress. Additionally, understanding the concept of identity and its role in how individuals perform will be beneficial in allowing employees to exploit their talent and abilities. Individuals can manage stress by taking a more active role in their personal development and work-life balance in order to maintain balance between work and family. Both employers and individuals can arm themselves with the right skills, attitudes, and opportunities in order to drive manage occupational stress and drive personal and professional development (Cooper, 2005).

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The COVID-19 Pandemic’s Impact on the Job Market Across U.S. Major Metropolitan Areas: American Workers’ Perceptions

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The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many aspects of American workers’ lives disproportionately; including geographical locations, demographics, mental and physical health statuses, socioeconomics, and type of industries. In this paper, we focused on examining the pandemic impact on American workers and the job market and how the impact was different in various geographical locations. Specifically, the purpose of this paper was to explore (a) the impacts of pandemic on American careers in major metropolitan areas, (b) the barriers to American Career advancement, (c) American perspectives toward the future of their careers, and (d) the resources and support that Americans need to advance their career. To fulfill the purpose of this study, percentages were used to analyze the archived data collected by Edelman marketing firm for the University of Phoenix. Edelman firm conducted a survey study using 5-point Likert scale questions to explore career perceptions of 5,000 American workers who participated from 20 major metropolitan areas in the U.S. in Jan 2021.

Background: The COVID-19 Pandemic’s Broad Impact

The impact of COVID-19 on the global economy

started with China’s economic plight and continued as the pandemic spread throughout the globe in 2020. China’s economy was devastated in the first quarter of 2020. Specifically, China’s manufacturing, exports, and disruption of manufacturing supply chains were affected which in turn affected manufacturing in other countries (Açikgöz & Günay, 2020). As the economic effects on China spread to other countries, global effects emerged; including loss of jobs, stock market drops, and governments’ endeavors to counteract the economic, health, and social impacts of COVID-19.

The economic shock of COVID-19 is already larger than the 2008 global financial crisis (Açikgöz & Günay, 2020). One aspect of the economic impact relates to labor market shock. The COVID-19 labor market shock occurred more abruptly and deeply than prior market shocks (Botha et al., 2021; Groshen, 2020). The prior recessions built up over longer periods of time. For instance, by April of 2020, 15% of the job market was gone as compared to 6% during the Great Recession. The economic recovery has also been faster than previous recoveries, as restrictions were lifted in early summer of 2020. However, the recovery was not complete as only about 52% of lost jobs returned and the pace of recovery slowed July through September 2020. COVID-19 cases dramatically increased during

the fall of 2020 requiring additional closures and restrictions, further enhancing the labor market shock.

The disproportional economic impact of COVID-19 on various geographical regions depends on the type of the industries located in the regions. Some industries like leisure and hospitality, retail trade, professional and business services, and healthcare and social services were affected more strongly (Groshen, 2020). American workers and job earnings were differentially impacted by the pandemic depending on location within the United States (Dey & Loewenstein, 2020). To examine the career status of American workers, six of the most exposed industries have been proposed including (a) restaurants and bars, (b) travel and transportation, (c) entertainment such as casinos and amusement parks, (d) personal services such as daycare providers and barbers, (e) sensitive retail like department stores, and (f) sensitive manufacturing like aircraft and car manufacturing (Vavra, 2020). Applying these 6 most-impacted sectors to employment statistics reveals that while the largest number of workers impacted came from large firms, firms in the most exposed areas tended to be smaller with fewer workers (Dey & Loewenstein, 2020). The states of Nevada, Hawaii, Florida, and South Carolina all had more than 23% of their employment in highly exposed areas, largely due to the number of employees working in the travel and transportation sectors (Dey & Loewenstein, 2020, p. 5). On the other side of the spectrum were the Midwestern states (esp. Nebraska, Iowa, Arkansas, and Minnesota) focused on agriculture, which had less employment in the most exposed sectors (with the 4 states mentioned all having less than 18% of employment in highly exposed sectors). Washington D.C. also reported low percentage (12.9%) within the most exposed sectors, which was due to the presence of the federal government. American workers who work in the lowest paid jobs were often working in the shutdown and most exposed sectors, impacting those with lower incomes more than those with higher incomes (Dey & Loewenstein, 2020).

Method

While several studies have identified geographical, sociological, and economic factors influenced by COVID-19, there remains much to be learned from individuals themselves living through the pandemic. Edelman’s (2021) targeted several main research

objectives, including the measurement of people’s career optimism and geographic, psychographic, and firmographic data. Thus, in this paper, Edelman’s archived data was used to address the following research questions:

1. What are the impacts of pandemic on American careers in major metropolitan areas?
2. What are the barriers to American Career advancement?
3. What are American perspectives toward the future of their careers?
4. What are the resources and support that American need to advance their career?

Edelman’s (2021) study conducted a self-report survey study using 5-point Likert Scale questions with 5,000 participants from 20 major metropolitan areas in Jan 2021 and explored American workers’ perspectives, expectations, and emotions toward their career statuses. Edelman’s (2021) report is provided for the University of Phoenix with the title of “The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index.” We have used descriptive percentage to analyze Edelman’s (2021) archived data and address the above research questions.

Demographics

To better learn about the nature of the archived data used in this study, the participant metropolitan areas, number of participants, and demographics of participants of the Edelman’s (2021) study are provided in this section. The metropolitan areas that participated in Edelman’s study (2021) are presented in Table 1. Demographics of the Edelman study participants are presented in Table 2.

| Metropolitan areas | n | Metropolitan areas | n | Metropolitan areas | n |
|--------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| New York City | 300 | Minneapolis | 301 | Houston | 301 |
| Los Angeles | 301 | Miami | 305 | Boston | 302 |
| Chicago | 300 | Denver | 301 | Atlanta | 304 |
| Philadelphia | 300 | Orlando | 300 | Phoenix | 301 |
| Dallas | 302 | Cleveland | 300 | Tampa | 304 |
| SF-Oak-San Jose | 302 | Sacramento | 301 | Seattle | 300 |
| Detroit | 301 | Washington D.C. | 304 | | |
| Total N = 5000 | | | | | |

Table 1 | Major Metropolitan Areas of the US that Participated in the Edelman Study (2021)..

| Demographic factors | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|----------------------|
| Race | Employment Status | Household Income | Gender | Region & Environment |
| White | 61% | Employed full-time | 65% | 12% |
| African or African descent | 6% | Employed part-time | 16% | 8% |
| Strikethrough | 5% | Employed part-time or with reduced hours/pay due to COVID-19 | 2% | 11% |
| American or Asian | 2% | Temporarily unemployed | 1% | 17% |
| Mixed race | 1% | furloughed (paid) due to COVID-19 | 3% | 18% |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 0% | Temporarily unemployed (unpaid) due to COVID-19 | 5% | 53% |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 0% | Unemployed prior to COVID-19 | 0% | 47% |
| Middle Eastern | | Retired | \$149,999 or more | |
| | | Student | | |
| | | | Male | |
| | | | Female | |
| Age | Education | Region & Environment | | |
| 18-24 | 13% | Some high school (Grade 9-11) | 2% | South |
| 25-34 | 23% | Graduated high school (Grade 12) | 7% | West |
| 35-44 | 21% | Vocational/Technical school | 33% | Midwest |
| 45-54 | 21% | Some college | 21% | Northeast |
| 55-64 | 17% | Graduated college | 14% | Suburban |
| 65+ | 5% | Post-graduate degree | 19% | Urban |
| | | | | Rural |

Table 2 | Demographics of participants in the Edelman Study (2021).

Results: The COVID-19 Impact on American Workers' Careers Across Major Metropolitan Areas

It is very valuable to develop a deeper insight about American workers' perceptions in each of the major metropolitan areas. The descriptive analysis of the Edelman's (2021) data has shed light on how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced American workers' careers across major metropolitan areas in the U.S. and addressed the four research questions in the following perspectives:

- The strained landscape of American careers,
- Emotional and structural barriers to American career advancement,
- The American perspectives toward their future careers, and
- Resources and supports needed for American career advancement resources and supports.

The Strained Career Landscape across the Metropolitan Areas

The pandemic strained the American workforce in

various metropolitan areas differently in terms of work environment, career derailed, work-life balance, and job replacement fearfulness.

Work Environment

About 68% of the American workers participating in this study stated that they worked from home as a result of COVID-19; however, some metropolitan areas were impacted deeper. More workers were impacted in Detroit and Cleveland (both 83%), Washington D.C. (82%), and Miami and Philadelphia (both 81%) than in other areas as shown in Figure 1.

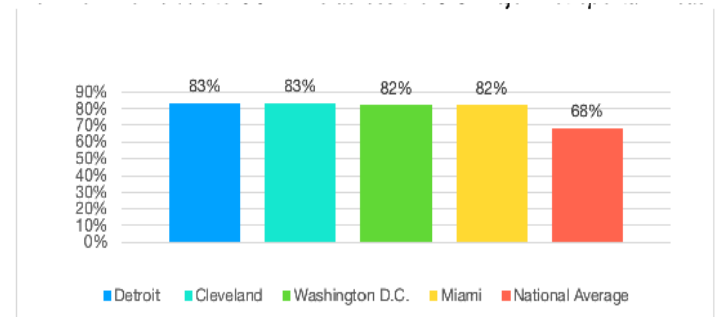


Figure 1 | Work from home due to COVID-19 across the U.S. Major Metropolitan Areas.

Careers Derailed

About 34% of American workers shared that their careers were derailed as a result of COVID-19. While workers in the San Francisco Bay Area (41%) and Miami (40%) felt their careers were most impacted, workers in Tampa (29%), Atlanta and Cleveland (both 28%), and Minneapolis (27%) felt least impacted by the pandemic in terms of reporting that their careers were derailed, as shown in Figure 2.

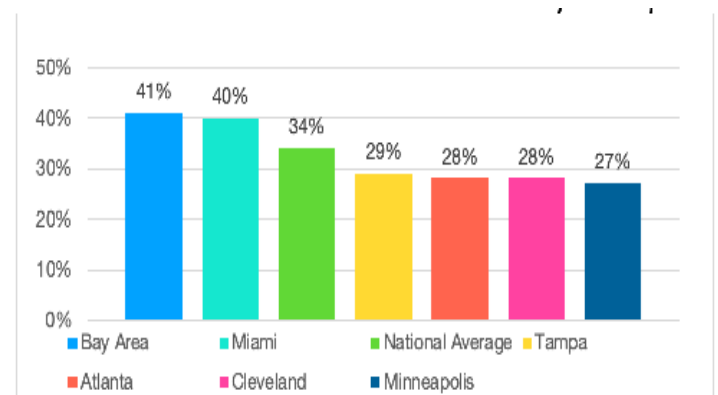


Figure 2 | Careers derailed due to COVID-19 across the U.S. major metropolitan areas.

Work-Life Balance

The pandemic disrupted American workers' work-life balance in various metropolitan areas differently. More

than half (51%) believed that the pandemic negatively affected their work-life balance. The metropolitan areas where workers' work-life balance was impacted the most were Miami (63%), New York City (61%), Houston (60%), and San Francisco and San Jose (59%), while the least impacted metropolitan areas were Tampa (50%) and Chicago (49%).

Career Replacement Fearfulness

The participants in the study were fearful to various degrees about their jobs being replaced with technology, depending on the various metropolitan areas. About 22% of workers nationally believed their job became automated as a result of the pandemic while the participants in some metropolitan areas were more concerned about this, including in Washington D.C. and Miami (both 30%), Orlando (28%), Houston (26%), Atlanta, Los Angeles and New York City (all 24%).

Emotional and Structural Barriers to American Career Advancement

Workers in the study shared that they struggled with emotional and structural barriers for advancing their careers during the pandemic.

The Emotional Barriers

The findings indicated that about 1 in 4 participants (25%) experience emotional barriers to career advancement such as low self-confidence and fear of change. Workers in Washington D.C. were most affected in terms of low confidence for career advancement (34%) and other emotional barriers than the general population, as shown in Table 3. Workers in Dallas, Houston, and Sacramento (all 29%) experienced the highest percentage of fear of change as an emotional barrier to career advancement.

| Emotional Barriers | General Population | Metropolitan areas |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Low self confidence | 25% | Washington, D.C. (34%) |
| Fear of change | 25% | Dallas, Houston, and Sacramento (29%) |
| Not knowing what to do in their career | 24% | Washington, D.C. (33%) |
| Low focus/motivation | 23% | Washington, D.C. (32%) |
| Feelings of hopelessness | 20% | Washington, D.C. (30%) |
| Mental Health | 19% | Washington, D.C. (24%) |

Table 3 | Emotional barriers to career advancement across major U.S. metropolitan areas.

Structural Barriers

The findings indicated that about 1 in 4 (24%) participants in the metropolitan areas do not have enough education and lack opportunities to upskill themselves to advance their careers. Sacramento and Dallas (both 30%) indicated the highest percentage for these barriers. Table 4 shows all barriers and metropolitan areas where workers reported the highest percentages of these barriers.

| Structural Barriers | General Population | Metropolitan areas |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Not having enough education | 24% | Sacramento (26%) |
| Lack of opportunities for upskilling | 24% | Dallas and Sacramento (30%) |
| Lack of required skills | 22% | Seattle and Sacramento (24%) |
| Lack of time/schedule flexibility | 21% | Washington, D.C. (27%) |
| Financial Problems | 21% | Miami (27%) |
| Lack of mentorship/advocacy | 20% | Sacramento (32%) |

Table 4 | Structural career advancement barriers across the U.S. major metropolitan areas.

The American Career Future Perspective

About 78% of the participants were hopeful about the future of their careers. Workers in Los Angeles, Seattle, Atlanta, Houston (all 82%) have the highest hope while workers in Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago (all 75%) have the lowest hope for their future careers. The American workers shared their essential needs and types of support necessary to achieve their career goals.

The Need for New Skill Development and Support

About 35% of participants in all metropolitan areas shared that they don't have access to opportunities to develop new skills. Sacramento (37%) shows the highest percentage of lack of access to resources for new skill development as shown in Figure 3.

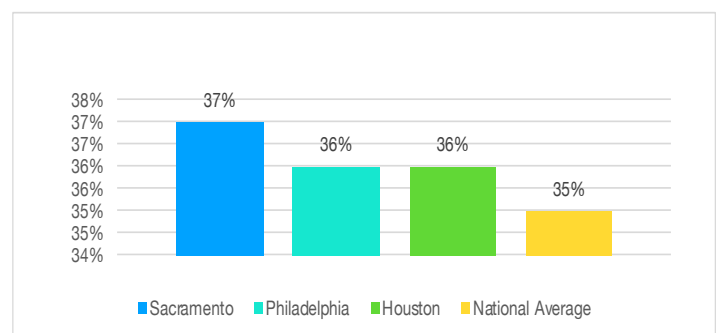


Figure 3 | Lack of access to opportunities to develop new skills across the U.S. major metropolitan areas.

Additionally, in some metropolitan areas, American workers are more interested in expanding their skills to advance their careers such as Dallas (86%), Orlando and Sacramento (both 85%), while the national average is 80% as shown in Figure 4.

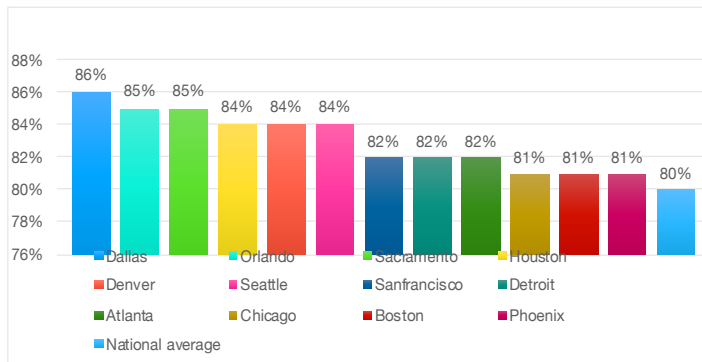


Figure 4 | Interest for developing new skills across the major U.S. metropolitan areas.

The Need for Resources to Achieve Career Goals

About 27% of participants indicated that they don't have access to the right resources to achieve their career goals. Phoenix (32%) has the highest need along with Philadelphia, Detroit, San Francisco, San Jose, and Orlando (all 27%) while Atlanta (18%) has the lowest need as shown in Figure 5.

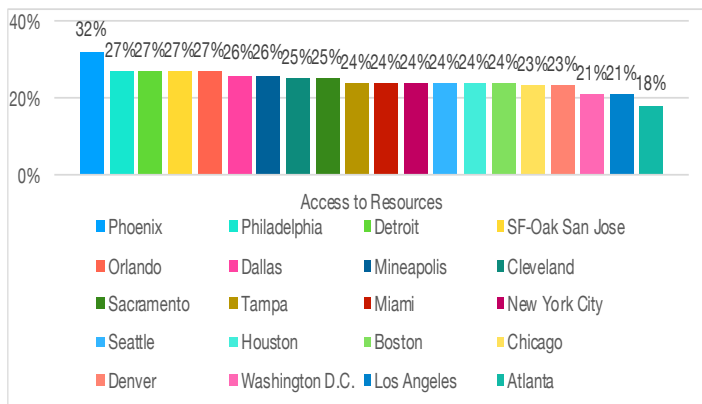


Figure 5 | Need to access career development resources across the U.S. major metropolitan areas.

Types of Career Support Needed

The needed career supports that more than 50% of participants selected include (a) connecting with others in desired field (55%), (b) finding a mentor/advocate (54%), (c) seeking out training programs (52%) which increased +44pt since the last year, and (d) creating/updating resume (50%). Washington D.C. has the highest need in all these four types of supports as shown in Table 5.

| Type of Support | General Population | Metropolitan area |
|---|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Connecting with others in my field/desire field | 55% | Washington, D.C. (66%) |
| Finding a mentor/advocate | 54% | Washington, D.C. (63%) |
| Seeking out training programs | 52% | Washington, D.C. (60%) |
| Creating/updating resume | 50% | Washington, D.C., Chicago (56%) |
| Seeking out education programs | 49% | Sacramento (51%) |
| Interviewing for job | 48% | Washington, D.C. (57%) |
| Finding job postings | 42% | Washington, D.C., Orlando (45%) |
| Creating/updating LinkedIn profile | 40% | Washington, D.C., Chicago (47%) |
| Applying for a job | 38% | Washington, D.C. (48%) |

Table 5 | Career supports and the U.S. major metropolitan areas.

Summary and Conclusion

In the aftermath of the pandemic, higher education institutions and specifically practitioner oriented higher institutions should carefully examine the current status of American careers and modify their programs to support American workers in overcoming these challenges. The purpose of this paper was to shed light on the current status of American workers' careers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resources needed to support American workers to rise above the current challenges. Accordingly, the summarized findings for addressing the main four research questions of this paper are provided below.

The Career Landscape of American Workers

The pandemic strained American workers' career and life in various U.S. metropolitan areas differently. The work environment of about 68% of American workers switched to home while in Detroit and Cleveland (83%) the impact is higher. This calls for providing remote working support and training for the impacted workers. In the Bay Area (41%) and Miami (40%) participants reported that their careers were derailed the most as compared to the national average of 34% of the population who experiences career derailment, which calls for additional support for these metropolitan areas. Work and life balance of more than half of the participating American workers (51%) were disturbed by the pandemic while Miami, New York City, Houston, and Bay area had higher work-life balance disruption.

Career Barriers Faced by American Workers

The findings revealed emotional and structural barriers to career advancement in the American workforce. The structural barriers in the order of participants' selection include (a) not having enough education, (b) lack of opportunities, lack of required skills, (c) lack of time/schedule flexibility, (d) financial problems, and (e) lack of mentorship/advocacy. The emotional barriers in the order of participants' selection include (a) low self-confidence, (b) fear of change, (c) not knowing what to do in their career, (d) low focus/motivation, (e) feelings of hopelessness, and (f) mental health. About 1 in 4 American workers struggled with these career barriers. Low-confidence and fear of change were the highest reported emotional barriers. Workers in Washington D.C. (30-34%) shared a higher percentage of these barriers. The top two structural barriers were lack of enough education and lack of opportunities for upskilling. Workers in Sacramento and Dallas (both 30%) had the highest percentage of these two structural barriers as well as the emotional barrier of fear of career change. These findings require providing training opportunities for all workers but specifically for the metropolitan areas where higher numbers of workers reported barriers.

Career Trajectories of American Workers

Despite all the barriers, the majority of American workers (78%) were hopeful and shared a positive perspective toward their future careers. Workers in Los Angeles, Seattle, Atlanta, and Houston (all 82%) reported the highest rates of hopefulness regarding their future career trajectories.

How American Workers Rise: Essential Support and Resources

A critical purpose of reviewing these findings was to understand how higher education institutions can help American workers overcome their career barriers by learning about their needs and providing supports. While the majority of American workers (80%) are interested in expanding new skills, about 35% do not have access to opportunities for upskilling. Workers in Sacramento are in higher need (37%) than the national average in this regard. Additionally, more than 1 in 4 American workers indicated that they do not have access to resources to achieve their careers. A higher percentage of workers in Phoenix indicated that they have this problem.

The type of resources needed that the majority of the participants suggested include: (a) connecting with others in desired field (55%), (b) finding a mentor/advocate (54%), (c) seeking out training programs (52%), and (d) creating/updating resume (50%). Washington D.C. has a higher percentage of need for all these requested resources. Trainings and supports corresponding with these requested resources can be provided to address workers' needs and help them rise above their current career challenges. It is critical to provide short-length trainings that support workers in enhancing new marketable skills quickly. The trainings and supports should be adjusted based on the metropolitan areas' needs discussed in this paper.

It is hoped that the analysis of findings and discussion provide deeper insights into American workers' career status, challenges, and needs so that U.S. higher education institutions can more effectively support them.

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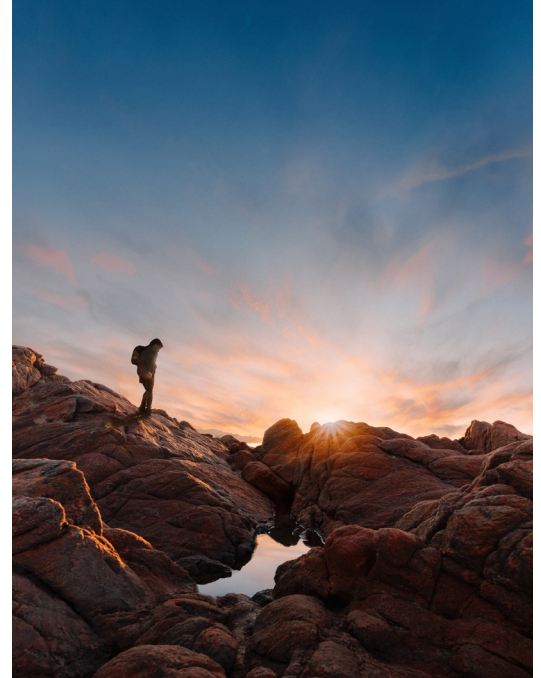
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Reconnecting with Self and Outside Activities Add to Career Enjoyment, Happiness Levels

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Executive Summary

Many people involved in their career may describe it in different ways. Satisfaction with career may also relate strongly with one's perceived expectations of meaning associated with their career. The variants for how we come to understand how we feel about what we do are wide ranging. These are turbulent times. The pandemic, civil unrest, and an economy splintered due to shelter in place and social distancing requirements have taken a heavy toll. But many college students feel they are stuck in the middle. They are weighing dreams of a satisfying career with a less than optimistic future. And while balance helps many to endure their unique journey every single day, so to can this balance and compromise set expectations of career aspirations to unreasonable levels. An example of this story arc can be extracted from the University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index® in Figure 1 (Edelman, 2021).

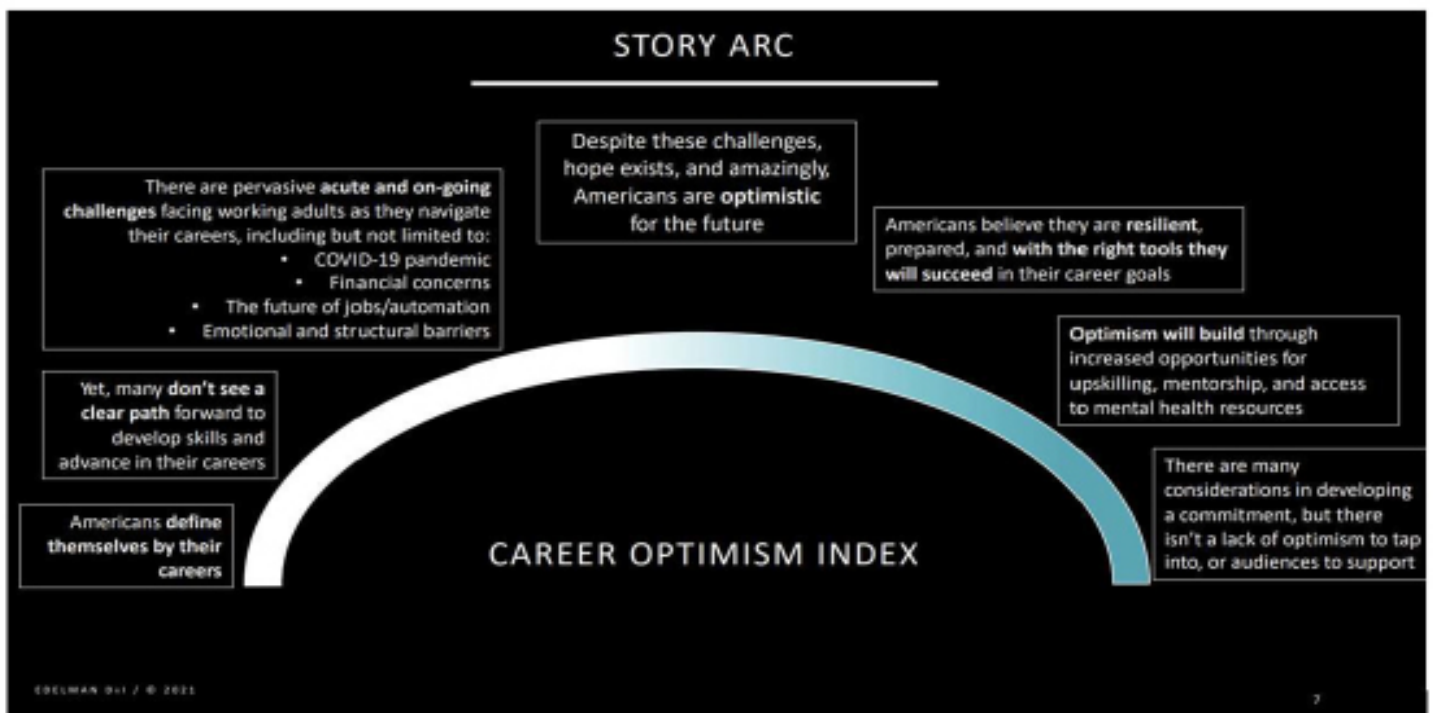


Figure 1 | University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index (Edelman, 2021).

According to the University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index® and outcomes furnished, “those in our nation’s capital are struggling the most with emotional barriers such as low self-confidence, low motivation, hopelessness, and mental health and they also feel that a lack of time/schedule flexibility is holding them back” (Edelman, 2021, p. 9). But what goes on during any given day on the job is not necessarily the last word on happiness and contentment. Reassessing your personality, vying for awards, and joining associations add to happiness levels no single job can necessarily offer, thus strengthening one’s career identity. This article will cover the implications of impact variants and how they may serve as disruptors for achieving the essential “balance” needed in maintaining and enhancing work related quality of life. Understanding perspective alongside working disposition is critical in fostering one’s prospects for happiness as equated to career.

How This Information Should Be Used by Leaders

The following information can be engaged by leaders who oversee and manage others as a preventative-programming measure to ensure the quality of work-life for their constituents.

This article should be used for:

- Knowledge management
- Preventative programming measures for leaders in industry

Introduction

These are turbulent times. The pandemic, civil unrest, and an economy splintered due to shelter in place and social distancing requirements have taken a heavy toll. No one wants to go to work and perform duties he or she doesn’t like to do. However, we all know that even the best jobs, (i.e. doctors, lawyers, police officers, and teachers, to name a few), have various administrative tasks that are truly less than desirable. Some have also discovered that working for one traditional employer for a lifetime may not be ideal for their career trajectory and happiness. Despite all of this, many of these individuals report feeling “optimistic” and “engaged” on the job because they understand how critical *balance* and *compromise* are particularly during these turbulent and pandemic times.

What have these workers learned?

Despite challenges incurred by many jobs, something interesting has set in with many of these same workers in coming to understand their roles. What many have discovered is the imperative for “balance” as key to a qualified emotional work-life. Even amongst those who will stay and leave a role, satisfaction can still be achieved through focused perspective of maintaining work-life balance.

They also understand that life is not a linear process, meaning that many evaluate what they like and do not like several times within their career and understand they may end up working for two or three employers simultaneously while still feeling a sense of pride because research shows one’s career reflects who they are intellectually and behaviorally.

What is important to remember is that what goes on during any given day on the job is not necessarily the last word on happiness and contentment. Reassessing your personality, vying for awards, and joining associations add to happiness levels no single job can necessarily offer, thus strengthening one’s career identity.

“Color Code” as a Useful Assessment for Career

No matter where you currently stand in the job market, employed, unemployed, feeling secure, insecure, or waiting to get into the workforce or continue with a better job, recent studies reveal Americans define themselves based on their career. And these feelings seem to carry across all income levels, high school or college educated, frontline workers, prospective students, the various generations (such as: Boomers, Gen X, Gen Z, Millennials), all races, nationalities, and genders. But it can be confusing to know one’s next move. There are a variety of tools to help people assess their personality in relation to their careers whether they are starting out, or whether they are in mid-career and ready for a change. Over the years one tool that many claim to adequately summarize their traits in relation to various work roles (such as leader, follower, subordinate, team member, and independent contributor) is the Color Code Personality Assessment. For nearly twenty years, Color Code has offered a free

assessment that helps to pinpoint one's personality color and compares it to the categories of employment in a matter of minutes. You will need to furnish an email address and you must take the test briskly and provide true answers (not what you think that will make you look good). The questions are challenging. No matter their complexity, the results can pinpoint your unique color and what it means in terms of your personality and the people you tend to attract or detract for that matter.

From assessed "red" who are driven by technology to assessed "blues" who strive for high integrity to assessed "whites" seeking acceptance and assessed "yellows" who enjoy social interactions, your color is compared to each category. After all, one cannot always choose who they work with, let alone the role they will have on a team of strangers that must work in harmony with one another. So, the Color Code gives you a sense of where your personality stands and categorizes it to help determine your level of comfort, level of need, and what makes you tick.

Awards and Job Satisfaction = Getting Involved

Regardless of your results, know that it is just a snapshot in time. It may hold true year after year, or it may change as you grow and blossom. But flexibility appears to help many feel more confident knowing that they can strive to draw from multiple sources of income or find satisfaction in other areas that run congruently to their profession outside of work. For example, a creative individual can apply to the call for public creative contests that may include notoriety or accolades in their field regardless of their current employment position. Such awards may offer monetary incentives, or other award mechanisms that can provide job satisfaction when one's current job status cannot provide such accolades. According to Edelman, flexibility appears to help many feel more confident knowing that they can strive to draw from multiple sources of income or find satisfaction in other areas that run congruently to their profession outside of work.

Are you a photographer, writer, videographer? Then search the Web using terms like writing, contests, poetry, contests, video contests. Try including the year so you can vie for contests who might be open currently. If you should apply and win at any level,

that is a feather in your career cap, particularly if the output is professional or runs along the discipline in one's profession. The result can be a resume builder since the listing of the winners are often shown on websites for months or years, and/or winners are sent commendations and certificates validating their entries.

The good news is that you do not need anyone's permission to apply. The only permission you need is your own to search, enter, and try. Many times these contests do not receive enough entries. If this should happen, you might win more by default. No matter how you place, the goal is to build a resume accolade that can set you apart from the competition. Even if you do not wish to build your resume this all goes back to balance and rewards. Rewards you can develop even if you are not able to get them from your current employer, a reflection of who you are and what you do.

Professional Associations and Enhancing Well-Being

As we have discovered, maintaining happiness levels is not just related to one's job but also what one does outside of work. A great area to continue networking and building other success stories is through association affiliations. There are literally hundreds of professional career-oriented associations out there, these are examples of high profile associations more amenable to those in education or those who are looking to bolster their leadership skills. Each of these has the potential to boost happiness levels based on participation and the track record of those who have contributed to local chapters, in presentations or in other activities that help communities, for example:

- The Association for the Advancement of Computers in Education (ACE),
- The American Marketing Association,
- Online Learning Consortium (OLC), and
- The International Leadership Association (ILA).

Most associations need affiliates to serve in many capacities, including chairing conference presentations or serving on their boards. While some of these board positions are elected, some are not. Many other associations exist that are practitioner focused.

Practitioner focused associations include hundreds

of groups whose subject matter expertise lend itself to for-profit and non-profit endeavors. Groups with excellent track records that are related to many of University of Phoenix degree offerings and that have an excellent networking opportunities include the American Management Association, American Business Association, and the American Marketing Association. Serving on their boards, committees, and sub committees allows you to shape policy and develop new discipline standards or measurements while propelling your brand as a leader in the field.

Conclusions

In sum, being happy is also about being productive and assessing what you like to do, and knowing that one company is not necessarily going to lead to complete on the job happiness. Indeed, what one does outside of work can significantly lead to a better job identity and provide avenues for visibility and networking opportunities never imagined.

It's time to look at job happiness a new way. It's time to keep moving forward no matter the obstacles (such as the pandemic, the economy, and your current employment situation). It's time to reassess who you are and how you can obtain the types of accolades that reflect your career contributions, and to continue networking to yield more opportunities and job satisfaction than you can ever imagine.

Keep moving forward!

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Women of Color: A Summary of Higher Education and Career Experiences

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Introduction

This paper emerged from a need to know how women of color viewed the value of their higher education degrees and ultimately how their status impacts their environment academically, economically in the workplace. There is extensive literature reflecting the status of women of color in higher education, how they persist in obtaining an education, the cost of their pursuit to improve their lives and the impact of their role in the workplace after obtaining their degrees. They continue to seek opportunities for growth, pave the way for others behind them, improve their socio-economic conditions and use their voice to resolve long standing disparities and overcome challenges and barriers to success. Their limited academic readiness, preparation and level of mentoring may contribute to barriers influencing their success in higher learning institutions.

The data acknowledges the challenges of women who seek more and do more as a result of their aspirations to obtain higher learning and assume positions of leadership in areas where they are underrepresented and often ignored as they approach and break through many of the proverbial glass ceilings. Through relevant research and a recent study conducted by the University of Phoenix's Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research (CWDIR), this report highlights the numbers, conditions, values, and experiences that

impact women of color in higher education and their presence in today's workforce.

Women of Color in Higher Education

Students of color in higher education make up 45.2% percent of the undergraduate student population and 32.0% percent in of the graduate students of colorpopulation (American Council on Education, 2019; 2020). Approximately 45% of undergraduate students are students of color: Hispanic/Latino: 20%; Black/African American: 14%; and Asian/Pacific: 7% (Brown, 2019). Yet, the Hispanic/Latino population is seeking levels of higher education at an increase of 13%, whereas Black/African American students are less likely to enroll in college shortly after graduating high school with an increased rate of 1.1 percent (American Council on Education, 2019; 2020).

Overall, 43% of Americans believe they are not receiving fair compensation (UOPX, 2021). Further, women of color often encounter increased disparities in this area. The number of Black/African American (21%) and Latinx (20%) women earning an associate's or bachelor's degree by age 29 is lower than their white women peers (39%) (AAUW, n.d.). The percentage of women of color earning a four-year degree within six years is 55% of Hispanic/Latino students and 39.8%

of Black/African American students in comparison to 64% of white students (AAUW, n.d.).

The credential or degree earned by women of color impacts their earning power and life opportunities. Yet, when considering degrees likely leading to high earning potential, there is a stark underrepresentation of women of color in engineering, computer and information science, business, management and marketing, social sciences, biological and biomedical sciences, visual and performing arts and history (Libassi, 2018).

According to the American Council on Education's 2019 and 2020 supplemental reports, higher education underserves and underrepresents students of color in multiple areas to include student enrollment, persistence, completion rates, borrowing, debt and unemployment after graduation. The educational indicators presented in the Council's report reflect the pervasive systemic barriers the Black/African American community encounters in higher education which overwhelmingly impact their educational outcomes. Their academic preparation, readiness, mentoring and debt counseling for higher education impact their current status. Students of color academic preparation and readiness for higher education begins while in high school for many students. Some secondary schools and some higher education institutions provide formal programs to enhance student readiness and preparation for the rigors of college and university life (McKee & Delgado, 2020). Additionally, learning institutions are being challenged to provide curriculum and departmental support specifically recognizing and addressing the disparities impacting women of color at graduate and undergraduate levels (McKee & Delgado, 2020). In addition to the economic and health challenges presented during the Coronavirus pandemic, social justice and racial disparities have been at the forefront of the sustainability of students of color in higher education.

The Advancement of Women of Color in the Workplace

According to the University of Phoenix's Career Optimism Index, there are pervasive challenges facing working adults as they navigate their careers and women of color are not immune from these. There is significant disparity between the percentage of women of color within the U.S. population (18%) and the number that are represented among four-year

degree holders (9%). This disparity is especially clear considering that white women represent only 31% of the U.S. population but comprise 41% of four-year degree holders (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

By disproportionately occupying lower-paid positions, overall pay of women of color within administration is reduced resulting in them being paid less than 90 cents on the dollar across all levels including staff, professional, or administration, causing them to experience the intersection of two challenges—gender and race (Bischel & McChesney, 2017).

Bias directed at women in the workplace is well documented as are the biases faced by people of color. Both areas are typically analyzed separately. To fully appreciate the level of difficulty women of color encounter, it is necessary to look at this from another perspective.

In some professions, women of color find they may be the only woman of color within their working groups. Being the 'only' in nearly any workplace automatically generates curiosity from colleagues and supervisors. People who describe themselves as being an 'Only' also say they feel more microaggressions in the workplace and often believe their decisions are questioned or challenged than white counterparts. According to a survey by Hunter-Gadsden (2018), 51% of 'Women Onlys' said they need to provide more evidence of their competence than others do during the normal course of business. By contrast, just 13% of men felt that way.

Further, women of color are far less likely than white colleagues to say they have allies at work (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Likewise, they are less likely than women of other races to say their supervisor advocates for them when new opportunities arise at work. Women of color report having fewer interactions with senior leadership, adding to their perception of not having an equal opportunity to advance at work.

How Does a College Degree Contribute to Career Entry and Progression of Women of Color in the Workplace?

Our Study

A university self-study was conducted to examine how women of color, who obtained a bachelor's degree from the University of Phoenix from 2014-2018, (1)

utilize their degree and (2) determine value from their bachelor's degree conferred by the University of Phoenix. The self-study was conducted in two phases: Phase one utilized a quantitative, online survey to collect responses from 921 respondents. Phase two utilized qualitative interviews to collect more in-depth data from 32 female graduates of color.

Notable Findings

- Female graduates of color value their degrees in a variety of ways. Of note, 93% of the women of color surveyed reported a personal sense of accomplishment from achieving their degree. Additionally, 83% of the respondents saw themselves a role model in their communities and workplaces.
- The ability to challenge societal perceptions (stereotypes) about women of color and role modeling were emerging themes across most qualitative interviews. For example, the majority of participants discussed scenarios detailing how they believed they were perceived by colleagues and managers before obtaining their bachelor's degree and how they believed the degree allowed them to challenge negative stereotypes of women of color in the workplace and society.
- Many of the participants agreed that the positive value they noted most as a result of earning their degree was an enhanced sense of self-worth and the opportunity to advance their career. Thirty six percent of respondents mentioned receiving a promotion and 56% started a new job since graduation.
- Earning Potential/Job Stability/Employment Benefits were major reasons for returning to school and participants noted an actual impact in these areas after receiving a degree. Forty eight percent noted a positive impact of socioeconomic status. Over 10% of respondents have been seeking employment for 4-5 years.
- Fifty-four percent of respondents moved on to graduate studies after earning their bachelor's degree.

Sample Qualitative Responses

- I feel like for women of color to be

knowledgeable and, and to be educated it just brings a lot more enhancement to their life both personally and professionally.

- I don't think that any amount of experience would've gotten me in the door without a degree. I think it kind of allowed me to be involved in conversations that I wouldn't typically be involved in as starting topics and things like that. And my degree also put me in certain rooms that non-white people are rarely able to get in into.
- When he found out that I had a degree, it put slightly more value to me, as not just a person, but as a potential coworker.

Conclusion

The evidence is overwhelming. More than a conversation at the table is needed to address the challenges faced by women of color in higher education and the workforce. Strategic actions are needed to help address the many disparities noted by all researchers on the value and status of Women of Color in higher education. Strategic actions by schools, colleges, universities, businesses, the government, and all stakeholders are being challenged to create new ways to respond to the needs of Women of Color.

Mindsets must pivot to afford women of color the same opportunities that others sometimes take for granted as privileges. We are at the grassroots of making changes that impact the future for women of color and the nation. While 48% of prospective students may not see a clear path forward in their careers when entering higher education (UOPX, 2021), this study highlights various areas of value associated with obtaining a bachelor's degree. In addition to the suggestions presented in our discussion, it is imperative that our priority must also shift to make this a matter of national importance.

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U.S. vs Italy's Single-Payer Health System

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In recent times in the United States (US) debate over the merits of single payer types of health care systems and universal coverage (which have the government in control of health care services and payments) has increased (Scheinker et al., 2021; Oberlander, 2019). There are wide discrepancies in the public's understanding and the health care providers perspective on these topics. The term "Medicare for All" has grown in popularity, often being mistaken for free universal health care. This can lead to unintended consequences for new policies (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2019).

The US Health System, ranked 37th by the World Health Organization (2000), has often been criticized for its high cost yet unresolved issues relating to universal access and poor health outcomes relative to other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d.) nations. Comparisons of the US health care system are often made to the single payer Canadian Health System (ranked 30th) and the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom (ranked 18th). However, fewer comparisons have been published with the world's second ranked Italian Health System, which is a single-payer system modeled after the NHS. A closer look at the US and the world's highest ranked single payer health system in Italy in areas relating to cost and coverage, services and resources, and health outcomes may advance the debate on options for the American healthcare system.

The Italian Health System

The current Italian Health System, known as the Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN), was established in 1978 under the guiding principles of universal coverage, human dignity, and health needs (The Commonwealth Fund, 2020). Services are provided to all citizens and foreigners. Italy spends about 9 percent of GDP and about \$3,400 per capita on health care services. Approximately 75 percent is publicly funded through a value-added tax, plus a corporate tax, and more than 20 percent is funded out-of-pocket by consumers. The central government determines annual SSN funding and controls the allocation of resources to each of the 19 regions and two autonomous provinces that provide required services known as the Essential Levels of Assistance (LEA) including pharmaceuticals, inpatient hospital care, outpatient specialists, prevention, home care, primary, and hospice (The Commonwealth Fund, 2020). The 19 regions and two provinces can provide more services but must pay for them through taxation and patient co-payments. Not covered are services such as cosmetic care, orthodontics, and laser eye surgery. Pharmaceuticals are grouped into three tiers corresponding for life-saving or chronic care, in-hospital treatments, and all other treatments. Primary care is provided by physicians that enroll a list of clients up to a maximum number of 1,500 for

general practitioners and 800 clients for pediatricians. Physicians receive a capitated fee or an amount per patient that is based on the number of patients on their list (The Commonwealth Fund, 2020). Specialists are often reimbursed on a fee-for-service basis. Many physicians work in both the public and private system. Private insurance accounts for about one percent of spending and covers about 6 million residents (approximately 10% of the population). Private insurance usually provides higher levels of comfort (such as private rooms) when receiving care and services not otherwise covered. In addition, a system of private hospitals exists that are accessible to those whose private insurance covers the costs or can pay out-of-pocket (The Commonwealth Fund, 2020). One characteristic of the Italian health care system is the extensive waiting time to see a physician, particularly a specialist for elective procedures, which in some cases can approach or exceed one year.

The U.S. Health System

A frequent topic of debate at the federal and state levels; discussion of the US Health System often involves issues of high cost, lack of universal coverage, and fragmentation of services (The Commonwealth Fund, 2020). The US health spending is over \$3.8 trillion or \$11,582 per capita (American Medical Association, 2021). Total public spending accounts for about half of health care spending, private insurance provides about 40 percent, and the remaining 10 percent is out-of-pocket spending from consumers (American Medical Association, 2019). The Federal government operates Medicare (mainly for citizens 65 years and older) and works in partnership with the States to administer Medicaid (mainly for lower-income citizens) and the Children Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) (mainly for the children of low-income citizens). While Medicare is standardized across the country, Medicaid and CHIP vary by state. In 2015, more than 60 percent of US residents were covered by private health insurance, most commonly received through their place of employment. Medicare covers about 17 percent of the population and Medicaid about 20 percent (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2022). In 2019, about 27 million Americans or approximately 9 percent, were uninsured. The passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is often credited with reducing the number of uninsured from over 40 million to its current levels – although it does not cover

undocumented residents (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2019). The ACA requires 10 essential services be provided that includes ambulatory care, emergency department, hospitalization, maternal/newborn, mental health/substance abuse, prescription drugs, rehabilitation, laboratory, prevention, chronic care, pediatrics (Healthcare.gov, 2022). The ACA allows the individual states to determine the level of these services provided.

Approximately one-third of physicians work in primary care in private practice or a hospital system and can be reimbursed in several ways, including fee-for-service and capitation (The Commonwealth Fund, 2022). The remaining two-thirds of physicians are specialists that work in either private practice, group practice, or a hospital system (Association of American Medical Colleges, 2022). After-hours care is often provided in hospital emergency departments. Of the country's more than 5000 hospitals, 70% are private not-for-profit, 15% are for-profit businesses, and 15% are public or government operated (American Hospital Association, 2022).

Methodology

Descriptive analysis based on secondary data that are publicly available was conducted comparing selected indicators of the US and Italian health care systems. Data from 2019 were utilized when available to enable the comparison of health system performance prior to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data reviewed were in three domains. 1) Health care spending included percent of GDP (gross domestic product) spending, per capita health care cost in US dollars, out-of-pocket spending in US dollar, and percent of the population with health insurance (Table 1). 2) Selected health care resources included hospital beds per 1,000 population, physicians per 1,000 population, physician visits per year, nurses per 1,000 population and hospital nurses per bed (Table 2). 3) Selected population and health indicators are provided to provide insight on the characteristics of the people of the two countries and included total population, percent of the population 65 years and older, life expectancy, infant mortality rate, obesity percentage, and diabetes percentage (Table 3).

Analysis

The analysis will provide a comparison of the US and

Italian health care systems in three areas: health care spending, selected health care resources, and selected population and health indicators.

Health Care Spending

Health care spending in the United States is considerably higher than in Italy (see Table 1). As a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the US spends about twice the amount as Italy. This amount is approaching one-fifth of the US economy, while in Italy spending is restricted to about nine percent of GDP. The US also spends substantially more per capita on health care (\$11,582 versus \$3,482). Although citizens of both countries have out-of-pocket expenditures not covered by insurance, the amount in the US is higher (\$1,122 versus \$791). The percent of the population with health insurance in Italy is higher with every resident covered compared to the US that has 91.4% of the population covered.

| Category | US | Italy |
|-----------------------------------|----------|---------|
| Percent GDP | 17.7 | 9.0 |
| Per Capita Health Care Cost (USD) | \$11,582 | \$3,428 |
| Out-of-pocket spending (USD) | \$1,122 | \$791 |
| Percent with health insurance | 91.4 | 100 |

Table 1 | Health care spending (source: OECD).

Selected Health Care Resources

Italy has more health care resources in terms of hospitals and physicians while the US has more nurses (Table 2). Italy has about 15 percent more hospital beds per 1,000 population than in the US (3.2 versus 2.8). Italy also has approximately 50 percent more physicians per 1,000 population (4.0 versus 2.6) and the average Italian resident goes to the physicians about 70% more per year (6.8 physician visits per year) than in the US (4.0 visits per year). The supply of nurses is much greater in the US, having nearly three times the number of nurses in Italy per 1,000 population. Also, the US has more nurses working in hospitals with the average number of nurses per hospital bed in the US are twice that of Italy.

| Health Resource | US | Italy |
|------------------------------------|------|-------|
| Hospital Beds per 1,000 population | 2.8 | 3.2 |
| Physicians per 1,000 population | 2.6 | 4.0 |
| Physicians Visits per year | 4.0 | 6.8 |
| Nurses per 1,000 population | 15.7 | 5.9 |
| Hospital nurses per bed | 2.84 | 1.4 |

Table 2 | Selected health care resources (source: Kaiser Family Foundation and Statista).

Selected Population and Health Indicators

Selected population and health indicators for the two countries are provided in Table 3. Italy and the US are in different parts of the world with different cultures that may impact the health of the population. The US population greatly exceeds that of Italy by more than six-fold. Italy has a much greater proportion of its population 65 years and older when compared to the US (23.3% versus 16.0%). Life expectancy is greater in Italy with the average Italian living more than four years longer than the average US resident. The infant mortality rate in Italy is less than one-half of the US rate (2.7 versus 5.6). The obesity percentage of the population (Body Mass Index greater than 30) in the US is four times the Italian percentage (40.0% versus 10.8%). Also, the percentage of diabetes in the US is more than twice the rate in Italy (10.8% versus 5.0%).

| Indicator | US | Italy |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Total Population (millions) | 329.5 | 59.5 |
| Percent population 65+ | 16.0 | 23.3 |
| Life Expectancy | 78.8 | 83.2 |
| Infant Mortality Rate | 5.6 | 2.7 |
| Obesity Percentage (BMI >30) | 40.0 | 10.8 |
| Diabetes Percentage | 10.8 | 5.0 |

Table 3 | Selected population and health indicators (source: Kaiser U.S. Bureau of Census, Statista, CDC, The Commonwealth Fund).

Discussion/Conclusion

A review of the Italian health care system provides some valuable insight to the benefits of a single payer health care system. Lessons learned from Italy include that all residents can have insurance coverage, that health care costs can be lower than in the US, and that the population can enjoy a relatively higher level of health. The Italians accomplish this with a much higher proportion of the population over the age of 65, who are known to have higher health care costs. The Italians also have more hospital beds per capita, more physicians per capita, and their residents have more physician visits per year than in the US. The higher number of physicians and the willingness of the population to seek care more often may lead to early detection reducing health care costs and enhancing health. Culture, lifestyle, and diet may account for at least some of the four plus years of life expectancy the Italians experience over the US residents.

Some modifications would be needed to the US system to achieve the level of health care resources in Italy. The hospital bed supply would need to be expanded by nearly 15% from the current level of 2.8 beds per 1,000 population to equal the 3.2 beds per 1,000 population in Italy. Even more challenging would be increasing the supply of physicians from the US level of 2.6 per 1,000 population to equal Italy's 4.0 physicians per 1,000 population, an increase of more than 50%, or approximately a half of a million physicians. In addition, the number of patient visits to physicians would need to increase by 70% to have the current US rate of 4 physician visits per year to equal the Italian rate of 6.8 visits per year.

It seems highly unlikely that the US could adopt an Italian style single health care system. Significant investment to address increasing the physician supply and number of hospital beds would be required. Although it is common for Italian residents to wait an extended period of time for health care services, it also seems unlikely that US residents will be willing to wait similar extended periods of time for health care services. The US may benefit more in the intermediate time frame by focusing on policies that improve the health of the population, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

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Reskilling and Upskilling: Ways to Prepare and Rehire American Workers in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic created a very challenging time for the United States workforce. The purpose of this paper is to identify American workers' career statuses, skill development needs, and employee requirements in the post-pandemic context based on the Career Optimism Index. Effective practices for enhancing American workers' skills were recommended for the three major stakeholders of American workers, employees, and higher education institutions who are responsible for closing Americans' skills gap. The clearer recognition of American workers' career needs, employees' requirements, and the effective practices for skill development contribute to a) closing Americans' skills gap, b) making higher education institutions more relevant, and c) improving the labor market in the post-pandemic era.

Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic deeply impacted the American labor market and workers' lives and careers. Two years into the pandemic the influence of the pandemic on American careers and employers is still increasing. The purpose of the current paper is to identify American employers' and workers' career statuses, needs, and effective practices for skill development in the context of post-pandemic. The American career statuses and needs are explored based on the results of the Edelman Survey conducted for the University of Phoenix Career Institute. The

effective practices for upskilling and reskilling are discussed based on reviewing the latest literature and reports.

The Edelman survey was conducted to measure and track people's sense of their career in the context of the workplace and the need for upskilling and reskilling. The Career Optimism Index was generated to measure how optimistic people feel about their careers on a scale of 0-100 in terms of five pillars (Career Optimism Index, 2022):

- Job security: employability and job retention
- Financial security: satisfaction with pay, economic concerns, and debt
- Skill development: confidence in critical skills opportunities for development
- Mental health: emotional, psychological, and physical well-being as it is related to careers
- Career trajectory: beliefs about the future of their careers

To collect data and generate the Career Optimism Index, an online 20-minute survey was used. The data was collected between Dec 21, 2021 – January 6, 2022, from participants in the major metropolitan areas in the United States. The survey participants included 5000 general population nationally representative adults aged 18+ who either worked or seek jobs. Additionally, 500 American employers, who were influencers in hiring or workplace decision-making participated in the survey. A similar survey was conducted only with the general population, not

employers, in 2021. A comparison of the American general population's sense of careers in 2021 versus 2022 is provided in this paper. The demographics of the participants are provided in Table 1.

| Gender | Education | | Region | Age | | | |
|--------|-----------|----------------------|--------|-----------|-----|-------|-----|
| Male | 53% | College-educated | 37% | Northeast | 18% | 18-24 | 13% |
| Female | 47% | Not college educated | 63% | Midwest | 21% | 25-34 | 23% |
| | | | | South | 37% | 35-44 | 21% |
| | | | | West | 24% | 45-54 | 21% |
| | | | | | | 55-64 | 17% |
| | | | | | 65+ | 5% | |

Table 1 | Demographics of the general population participants (n=5000).

American Career Status in the Post-Pandemic Era

The pandemic created a very challenging time for the United States workforce. In 2022, 53% of American workers reported that the pandemic has negatively impacted their work-life balance and 40% shared that their careers have been derailed because of the pandemic. Americans who live paycheck by paycheck and are overwhelmed by debt have increased 13pts and 10 pts respectively from 2021 to 2022 (Career Optimism Index, 2022). Despite all these difficulties, American workers are optimistic as 81% are hopeful about the future of their careers and actively exploring new opportunities. While 52% of Americans are either actively looking for a new job or expecting to look for one in the next 6 months as shown in Figure 1.

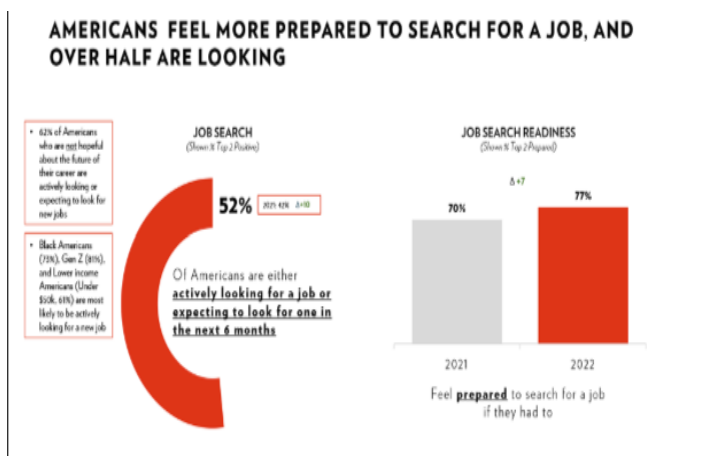


Figure 1 | Americans' job search status.

Least Optimistic about Skill Development

American workers continue being optimistic about their careers with an overall score of 64 out of 100 based on 5 pillars of job security, mental health, career trajectory, financial security, and skill development. However, they are most optimistic about job security and least about skill development. Interestingly, the skill development score has decreased 5 points from 58 in 2021 to 53 in 2022. Employers shared similar views about workers' careers with an overall optimism index score of 66. They are the most optimistic about job security with a score of 82 and the least optimistic about skill development with a score of 42 as shown in Figure 2. Americans' main skill development concerns are where to begin and how to find opportunities to develop the skills they need to advance their careers.

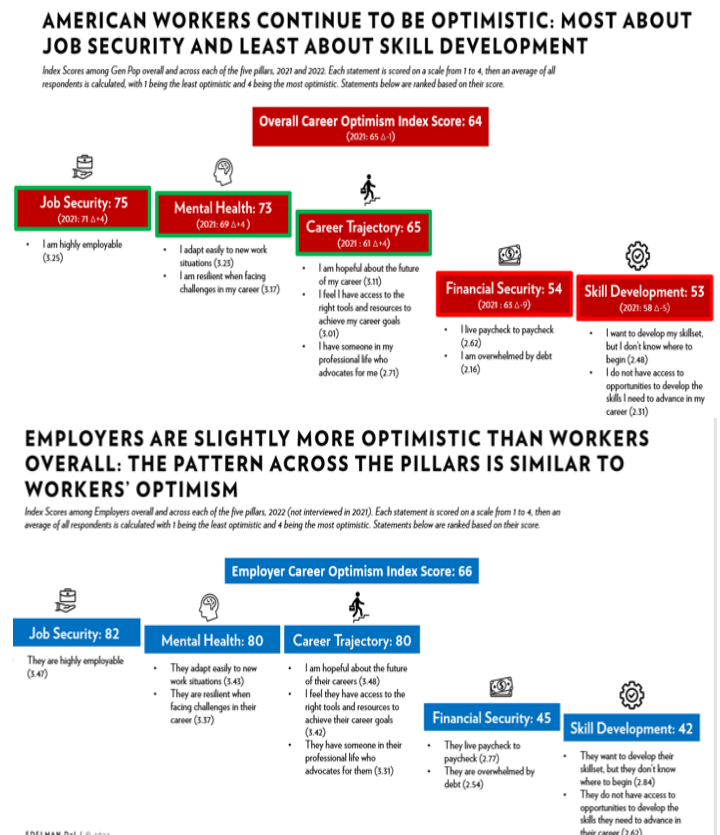


Figure 2 | American workers and employers' career optimism and skill development.

Lack of Career Path

Even though there is such a desire for a new beginning there is still an opportunity for employers to address employees' needs and retain them as 69% of workers reported that they would consider staying in their current jobs if their needs were addressed. The main concern is the lack of a clear career path for

employees. About 4 in 10 (43%) Americans do not see a clear path to advancing their careers. Whereas, a higher percentage of employers, about 54%, are concerned about the lack of a clear path for employees as shown in Figure 3.

4 IN 10 AMERICANS DO NOT SEE A CLEAR PATH TO ADVANCE THEIR CAREER – EMPLOYERS ALIGNED THAT PATHING IS LACKING

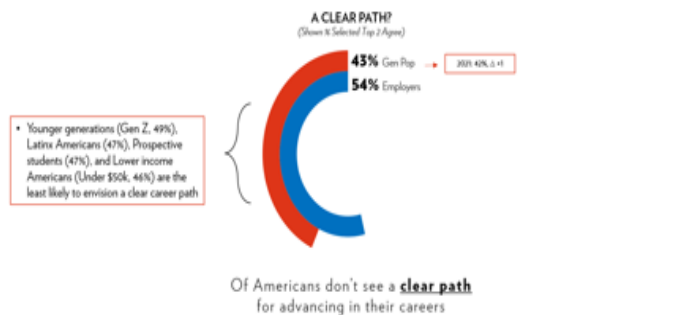


Figure 3 | Americans' views on their career paths.

Importance of Upskilling and Reskilling

Digitalization and automation created the skills gap before the pandemic. However, the pandemic widened the gap and highlighted the need for offering opportunities to close the gap. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic career disruption, the Career Optimism Index (2022) showed an ever-increasing need for skill development opportunities that would benefit both employees and employers. Such results are in alignment with other studies. In 2018, organizations were warned to offer to reskill and upskill opportunities to stay relevant (The Council of Economics, 2018). Those organizations that ignored the warning appear to struggle with the pandemic hit (Cawood, 2020; Rogers et al., 2021).

Upskilling and reskilling are two ways to advance employees' professional lives. Both approaches are involved in advancing skills, but each has a different goal. Upskilling refers to learning additional skills within the same occupational field to advance to a more responsible position in the same line of work. Whereas reskilling refers to learning a new set of skills to shift to a new position in a separate field (Monear, 2020).

Enhancing new skills is considered a critical approach for career development by Americans. A quarter of workers and 35% of employers reported that employees feel that they are held back in their careers because of a lack of opportunities for upskilling. Workers think learning and building skills are key for

enhancing and changing their careers and know they need to keep learning to advance their professional lives. About 52% of employed Americans reported that they need to upskill or learn new skills within the next year to continue their job. And 47% reported that they seek to reskill or build skills to successfully change their careers. Additionally, 45% emphasize learning new skills to be able to be competitive in the digital age. Other activities with the highest impact on the participants' career development are also related to skill development such as enrolment in a training program (41%) or going back to school (34%) as shown in Figure 4.

WORKERS THINK LEARNING AND BUILDING SKILLS ARE KEY TO CHANGING CAREERS AND KNOW THEY NEED TO KEEP LEARNING TO ADVANCE

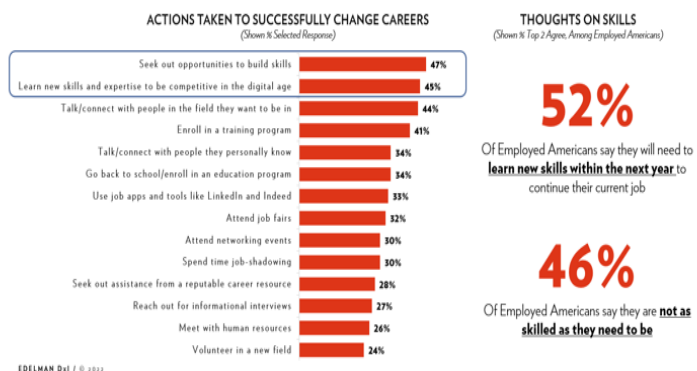


Figure 4 | American workers' views on the role of skill development for their career advancement.

Employers and Employees' Views on Skill Development

Employers and employees agree on the importance of upskilling and reskilling with slightly different views. Over three quarters (79%) of employed Americans reported the importance of upskilling and 74% the importance of reskilling, while 88% of employers reported prioritizing employees with upskilling and 82% for reskilling. However, there is a disparity between employers' and employees' perceptions of support for upskilling and reskilling. About 89% of employers think they are providing opportunities for upskilling, but 61% of employees agree. Similarly, 86% of employers think they are providing opportunities for upskilling, but 57% of employees agree as shown in Figure 5. Such a misalignment indicates that organizations should revise their approaches to skill development to better address their employees' needs.

EMPLOYERS THINK THEY ARE PROVIDING FREQUENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPSKILLING - BUT EMPLOYEES DON'T SEE IT THIS WAY



A SIMILAR PATTERN EMERGES FOR RESKILLING

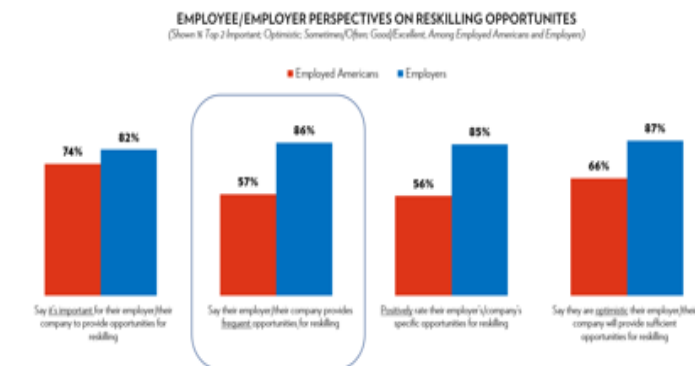


Figure 5 | Employees versus employers' views on upskilling and reskilling.

Americans Need Support for Skill Development

The results from the Career Optimism Index (2022) highlighted the need for more opportunities for skill development. A third of Americans don't feel optimistic about opportunities for learning new skills in their careers. Lack of time, financial support, and proper training within organizations are referred to as barriers to new skill development as shown in Figure 6.

A FULL THIRD OF AMERICANS DON'T FEEL OPTIMISTIC ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING/UPSILLING/LEARNING NEW SKILLS IN THEIR CAREERS



Figure 6 | American's views about skill development opportunities.

Career Optimism Index (2022) participants shared that they need more support to expand their skillsets and their employers know it as shown in Figure 7. In 2022, 49% of Americans reported that they need to develop their skills but don't know where to begin. There is a 6-point increase from 2021 to 2022. While 66% of the participated employees agreed with such needs. Furthermore, 41% of Americans shared that they do not have access to opportunities for skill development, with a 6 points increase from 2021 to 2022, and 54% of employers agreed.

AMERICAN WORKERS NEED MORE SUPPORT AND THEIR EMPLOYERS KNOW IT

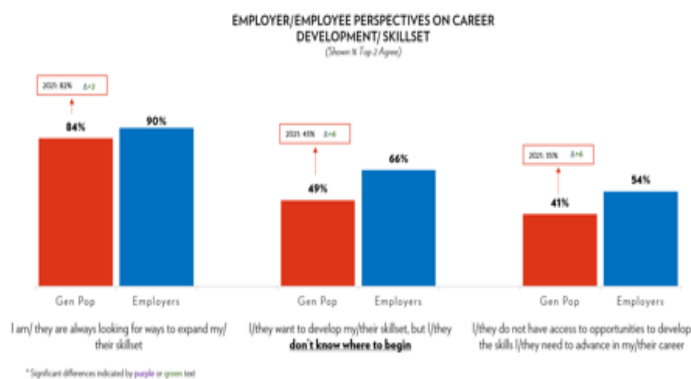


Figure 7 | Americans' views on skill development support.

Nurturing Career Skill Development

The results of the Career Optimism Index (2022) underscore the importance of skill development for the American career advancement and labor market. Various stakeholders are involved in upskilling and reskilling American workers and closing their skills gap. American workers may focus on enhancing their skills by using available resources. Employers may invest in the skill development of their employees based on their organizations' needs and goals. Higher education institutions may support both American workers to advance their skills and employers to improve their employees' skills.

American's Roles

Americans may use public resources to further build up their career skills, earn credentials, and seek jobs. Open Educational Resources (OER) are free and open-source materials that are available to the public, and support overcoming equity barriers. The resources include textbooks, videos, and tests and are available at [OER Commons](#), a public digital library. The learning

materials cover subjects such as applied science, business, physical science, career, and technical education. The education levels are from preschool to graduate, and professional and adult education.

Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) are free courses that aim to democratize higher education. MOOCs provide an affordable and flexible way to learn a new skill and advance career development. Many courses in a variety of subjects along with certifications are offered through MOOCs providers such as [edX](#), [Coursera](#), and [Udacity](#). An affordable fee is applied for certification. Next-generation of digital tools supports Americans to expand their skills and sharing them with employers more effectively. Micro-credentials help workers gain digital skills and show their skills. Micro-credentials are short, focused credentials designed to provide in-demand skills. [Digital Promise](#), for example, collaborated with Facebook to support job seekers gain digital skills and sharing their expertise.

Employers' Roles

Organizations may adopt effective approaches both in their business processes and mindsets to successfully reskill and upskill their employees. Conducting strategic planning, improving training, and creating a strong lifetime learning culture are recommended as the principles of successful skill development within organizations (Allas et al., 2020).

For improving training organizations may adopt the following approaches (Holoubek & Hibbard, 2020).

- Employ modular -bite-size training
- Measure impact on employee performance and return to investment
- Tailor training to the type of skills and the kind of gap
- Offer on-the-job reskilling, since employees don't have time for formal training, employers benefit by incorporating on-demand training on the job
- Partner with higher education institutions to establish new certificates and degrees
- Offer apprenticeship and work-based learning
- Include boot camps and coding schools

Higher Education Institutions' Roles

Higher education institutions play a critical role in closing Americans' skills gap by offering accessible

post-secondary education and adopting the following approaches.

- **Keep college affordable to make it more accessible.** Affordability is among the main barriers to accessing higher education during the pandemic. It is especially important for low-income students. Providing financial assistance will help mitigate students' financial burdens and reliance on loans (Kwakye et al., 2020).
- **Invest in high-quality online education.** Online learning affects students' retention and completion. Effective practices such as live Q&A, breakout groups during the class, interactive, and collaborative approaches among students increase student satisfaction. Adopting online communications among students beyond class time is vital to keep them engaged. Additionally, students prefer instructors who send personal messages to students to check-in and give feedback, use real-time examples to clarify course content, allow students to reflect on their learning, break up class activities into shorter pieces than in an in-person course, and have students work on group projects separately from the course meetings and provide frequent quizzes or other assessments (Means et al., 2020). Furthermore, using professional development for faculty to support quality online instruction is critical (Mann, 2020)
- **Provide students with holistic support.** Supporting students such as data-driven advising, coaching, resources for basic needs, childcare, housing, and financial assistance, and increasing communication between faculty and students are proven to improve students' satisfaction (O'Donoghue & Ratledge, 2020).
- **Align curriculum with industry needs.** Connecting the post-secondary curricula to industry needs is becoming increasingly critical to provide a clear career pathway to college graduates, fulfill the skill gap required by employers, and balance the labor market. Educators, workers, and employers have different descriptions of the skills taught, gained, and valued in the labor market (Lumina Foundation, 2016). Data analysis should be done to build a directory of required

competencies based on employers' and industry experts' feedback to develop college curricula (Carnevale et al., 2017). For example, the Center for Employability Outcomes in Texas created the [Skills Outcomes Analysis](#) in 2014 to help colleges match their curricula with work performed in the industry using an analytical tool. The tool created 3000 skills based on 1400 Texas employers' suggestions and validated by 4000 subject matter experts. Overall, 26 Texas colleges used the tool to align 1300 courses and 83 post-secondary credentials (Student Outcomes Alignment, 2014).

- **Apply next-generation assessments such as micro-credentials and stackable credentials.** By organizing programs along a series of certificates build on top of each and aligned to industry certifications, community colleges offer incremental milestones on the path to associate degrees (Center for Occupational Research and Development in Partnership with Social Policy Research Associates, 2018). This is a practical way to support students' progress along with their education while earning their credentials with labor market value.
- **Partner with industries.** Community colleges collaborate with giant tech companies such as Amazon and Google to establish apprenticeship and degree programs (Mims, 2018).
- **Offer programs to alumni for returning and taking refreshing courses years after earning their degrees.** For example, Stanford University and the University of Michigan offer such special programs to their alumni.
- **Provide skills-based training based on employers' needs.** For example, [Trilogy Education](#) is a workforce accelerator that partners with universities to develop skill-based training.

Conclusion

The pandemic created a very challenging time for the United States workforce. Digitalization and automation created a skills gap before the pandemic. However, Career Optimism Index and other reports indicated that the pandemic expanded the skills gap and underscored the ever-increasing need for enhancing American workers' skills to close the gap. Although

Americans remain optimistic about the future of their careers, they are least optimistic about their skill development. They are not sure where to begin and how to find opportunities for skill development. Furthermore, Americans don't have a clear career path. In such a context upskilling and reskilling are critical approaches to enhancing Americans' skills. Both American employees and employers agree on the importance of skill development, however, they do not agree on the available skill development opportunities. Such a misalignment indicates that organizations should revise their approaches to skill development to better address their employees' needs.

The results of the Career Optimism Index emphasized the necessity of nurturing career skill development to close Americans' skills gap, address employers' needs, and balance the labor market. American workers, employees, and higher education institutions are involved in upskilling and reskilling American workers. American workers may focus on enhancing their skills by using available resources such as Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs). Furthermore, they may use the next generation of digital tools such as micro-credentials to promote their gained skills and seek jobs. Employers may invest in the skill development of their employees based on their organizations' needs and goals. Conducting strategic planning, improving training, and creating a strong lifetime learning culture are recommended as the principles of successful skill development within organizations. Higher education institutions may support both American workers to advance their skills and employers to improve their employees' skills. The effective practices to make higher education more accessible and relevant for supporting career skill development are:

- Keep college affordable to make it more accessible
- Invest in high-quality online education
- Provide students with holistic support
- Align curriculum with industry needs
- Apply next-generation assessments such as micro-credentials and stackable credentials
- Partner with industries
- Offer programs to alumni for returning and taking refreshing courses years after earning their degrees

- Provide skills-based training based on employers' needs

This paper identified American workers' career statuses and skill development needs in the post-pandemic context based on the Career Optimism index (2022). Effective practices for enhancing American workers' skills are recommended for the three major stakeholders of American workers, employees, and higher education institutions who are responsible for closing Americans' skill gap. It is hoped that the issues discussed in this paper enhance understanding of American workers' career needs and employees' requirements and increase skill development support by organizations. Implementing the recommended effective practices promotes the required skill development and contributes to a) closing Americans' skills gap, b) making higher education institutions more relevant, and c) improving the labor market in the post-pandemic era.

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The Impact of a Phenomenon: Women and Minorities in the Workforce and the Gender Wage Gap

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During the 20th century, women's contribution to the labor force and pursued higher education in larger numbers. Advanced technical skills and higher levels of education were driving women's earnings closer to their male counterparts. Despite this progression, there is still an undeniable wedge, especially with the most recent results observed. This white paper opens the questions and reasons for what is happening with these marginalized groups utilizing the University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index and more to highlight aspects of an enduring phenomenon.

Executive Summary

Most describe a phenomenon as an exceptional or unexpected occurrence or thing. Three such occurrences involving women, minorities and younger members of industry workforce are considered herein. First, the gender wage gap is inclusive of all women and establishes the starting point for this paper. Of the remaining two one resulted in positive changes for women and the other has resulted in devastatingly negative outcomes. Women have worked more hours and pursued higher education in larger

numbers. Advanced technical skills and higher levels of education are driving women's earnings closer to their male counterparts, but other considerations contribute to an undeniable wedge. Despite this progression, noteworthy wage gaps between men and women continue.

This white paper will cover the implications to women and minorities, providing some of the defining variables that highlight the disparities between most especially, women and men in the workplace. Utilizing research insights alongside some compelling statistical insights drawn from various texts and measured outcomes, this paper will also lend itself to industry leaders as a way to continue to open the potentials for elevating awareness and utilizing such insights as a resourcing mechanism for helping future business reassess these disparities.

How this Information Should be Used By Leaders

This white paper can be used by leaders in business as a tool for information brokering, understanding and utilizing an informed approach when examining and

self-reflecting on the potentials to not only understand this disparity phenomenon, but to also look at contributive factors that have helped propagate and endure along this chasm of inequality.

This white paper should be used for:

- Knowledge management
- Preventative programming measures for leaders in industry and HR Representatives

Introduction

Most describe a phenomenon as an exceptional or unexpected occurrence or thing. Two such occurrences involving women, minorities and the younger members of the workforce are considered.

First the gender wage gap includes all women and establishes the starting point for discussion. Of the remaining two one resulted in positive changes for women and the other has resulted in devastatingly negative outcomes. The occurrence that yielded positive results is the drive by women to seek higher education coupled with obtaining advanced technology skills and training.

Second is COVID-19 and the economic ramifications for women, minorities and generation z. As a barometer of women's standing in the workplace an examination of wages is explored. During the 20th century, women's contribution to the labor force grew considerably. Women have worked more hours and pursued higher education in larger numbers. Advanced technical skills and higher levels of education are driving women's earnings closer to their male counterparts, but other considerations contribute to an undeniable wedge. Despite this progression, noteworthy wage gaps between men and women continue.

What is the Gender Wage-Gap?

What is the gender wage gap? The gender wage gap indicates the variance in wages between women and men. Although this gap has been calculated in numerous ways the result is consistent, women earn less than men. In 2017, more women 3.8 million than men 3.1 million were included in the working poor (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) the working poor is a term used to describe people who work regularly but make

a wage that falls below the national poverty level. In the same survey the overall working-poor rate was 5.3 percent for women and 3.8 percent for men while working-poor rates for Black women was 10 percent and Hispanic women 9.1 percent, which is more than twice those of White women at 4.5 percent.

A review of the most recent published Census Bureau data from 2018, revealed women of all races earned, on average, 82 cents for every \$1 earned by men of all races. When addressing the wage gap for women, it is imperative to emphasize that there are significant differences by race and ethnicity. The wage gap is larger for most women of color. The 2018 data indicated that 55 percent of black children live in households headed by single women, 38 percent live below the poverty level while 20 percent of white children live in households headed by women with 32 percent living in poverty.

What Causes a Wage Gap?

Wage gaps can be attributed to many causes such as differences in career industries and job roles. There are jobs that are traditionally based on gender norms or expectations such as caregivers and or child-care workers. These jobs are often lower paying and might have limitations on hours. Another consideration is variations in years of experience and hours worked. Typically, in a two-person household, women leave the workforce to accommodate caregiving for parents or children and tend to work less hours for the same reasons. Reduced hours coupled with less experience equals lower pay wages. In 2019 women earned \$545.7 billion less than men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). Hiring and compensation decision are often based on previous salary history putting women at deficit upon hiring. All of this can be viewed as long standing institutional gender-based bias against women.

This fiscal handicap is cyclic and limits economic progress. Many factors such as discrimination, poverty, and social determinants of health are systemic, contribute to the gap and help to create challenges or barriers to wealth generation. Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks (U.S. Department of health and human services 2021).

The US Department of Health and Human Services indicates that SDOH include but are not limited to secure housing, transportation, and communities; racism, discrimination and violence; education, job opportunities and income. Sustained exposure to any one of these adverse conditions could be harmful to progress but coupled with one or multiple others is in essence a blueprint to negative outcomes. Think of it in this way a child who goes to a poor school will receive a poor education leading to a low paying job as an adult. That child now an adult with a low paying job still lives in a poor neighborhood with limited services and access to financial resources raises a family in the same poor or inferior conditions and the cycle continues.

The Career Optimism Index and Working Mothers

The University of Phoenix (UOP) Career Optimism Index revealed that working dads are more satisfied than working moms. Seventy eight percent of working dads as compared to sixty seven percent of working moms believe they are being compensated fairly (Edelman 2021). The UOP Index data established that sixty- four percent of dads that work, as opposed to forty-six percent of moms that work, are satisfied with the amount of money they currently make.

WORKING DADS MORE FULFILLED AND SATISFIED THAN WORKING MOMS

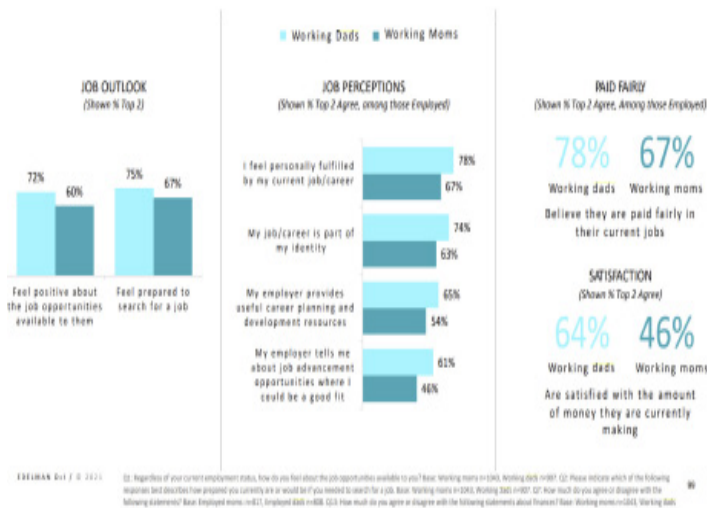


Figure 1

The stark difference in satisfaction further demonstrates that economic growth must be inclusive. Inclusive growth is advancing gender and race equity by cementing it into the economic growth process, systems and structure (Noel et al. 2019). In essence, inclusive growth is the opportunity for progression of equity that benefits all families, businesses and communities.

Educational Achievement / Technology Training

The second phenomenon is the shift towards higher education. The educational achievement of women 25 to 64 years of age in the workforce has grown substantively over the past fifty years (Blau & Kahn 2016). The National Bureau of Economic research documented in 2016 women in this age group with college degrees has quadrupled where that of men has doubled. In 2018, 44 percent of women in this age range had a bachelor’s degree and higher, as compared to 11 percent in 1970 (Frye 2020). This trend has helped to decrease the wage divide but has not yet evened the playing field.

In the 2021 research Edelman found that even with the recent increase of technology skills for women eighty five percent of Americans believe that technology has caused a change in how people approach their jobs and many are concerned about the impact of technology on their careers or question what jobs will be eliminated or if humans will be replaced with robots or artificial intelligence.

Technology has influenced the job environment, virtually everyone has a computer with email and technologies continue to increase, requiring more training, and education that do not necessarily result in higher pay especially for women and minorities in the workforce. For example, the Eldeman 2021 findings support concern related to 1 in 5 jobs becoming recently automated. Despite the consideration of training and technology advancement, Covid-19 adds an additional phenomenon, as unemployment rises and more jobs were automated.

COVID-19

The third most significant and widespread phenomenon is the coronavirus pandemic, that

has clearly illuminated the interconnectivity and interdependence of the SDOH on the financial success and well-being of minority populations. These determinants become important when investigating the extent and ways in which the events of 2020 interrupted normalcy and disrupted livelihoods in the United States and across the globe. COVID-19 has unmasked many economic or job-related inequities, barriers, and stressors for women, minorities and Generation Z among the current work force.

The labor force participation rate of all women with children 6 to 17 years old, was 76.5 percent March 2018 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Many women left their jobs during the pandemic to take care of young children and supervise online learning for school-age children when in-person learning ceased, and daycare closed.

Based on reports from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics the unemployment rate for women varied by race and ethnicity but the rate for women was 3.8 percent as compared to 3.9 percent for men in 2018. Since 2020 unemployment rates for Black people and other minorities are nearly double those of White workers (Due et al. 2021). The pandemic has caused the largest female-to-male gap in unemployment rates since 2000 (Kurtz 2021). Recent reports indicate almost 450,000 more women than men have been displaced from employment.

The Acute Effect

Job losses have disproportionately affected minorities, women, younger workers,

and workers with lower educational attainment or income, as evidenced by the UOP Career Optimism Index and the US Census Current Population Survey (CPS). The index data revealed households with an annual income below \$30,000 realized double the unemployment rates of households with higher income and approximately 56 percent of job market exits, as a result of the pandemic, were women even though women only represent 48 percent of workforce. Improved socioeconomic structures could elevate the economic health of individuals, families and organizations.

Women and Minority Optimism According to the UOPX Career Optimism Index

There are extensive acute and on-going challenges facing working adults. In spite of this the Career Optimism Index indicates most Americans 70 percent are generally optimistic about their careers. However, women, younger generations and those with lower incomes do not share this high level of optimism.

THESE CHALLENGES HAVE LEFT MANY AMERICANS FEELING STRESSED ABOUT THEIR CAREERS – ESPECIALLY WOMEN, YOUNGER GENERATIONS AND THOSE WITH LOWER INCOMES

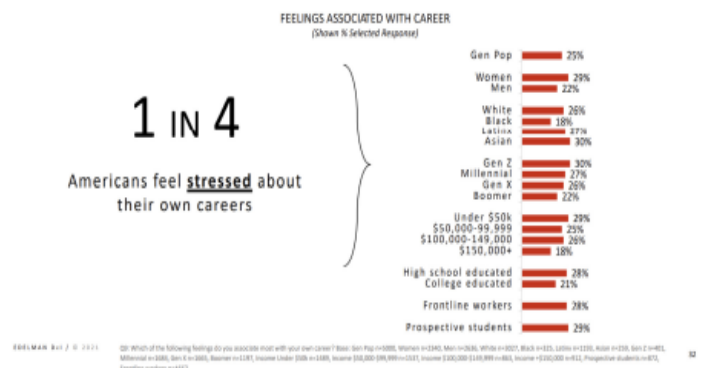


Figure 2

Based on the UOP Index findings many do not see a clear path to career advancement in their current jobs or believe they have access to the tools needed for professional development. For example, forty three percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, 51 percent of women and 36 percent of men. Additionally, survey respondents report feeling underemployed, easily replaceable and 40 percent worry about losing their jobs due to the pandemic.

The UOP Career Optimism Index illuminated workforce challenges of Black and other minority families concentrated in states that have unfavorable economic and social conditions and are overrepresented in nine of the ten lowest-wage jobs considered high-contact and essential services. The Index shows Black workers are more likely than white workers to be in support roles, which are slower growing and lower-paying than directive roles. Support roles have a much higher risk of automation, which increases black workers' relative risk of automation.

The Trifecta of the Gender Wage Gap, Education and Training, and COVID-19

The trifecta of the gender wage gap, education and training, and COVID-19, influence women and minorities in the workforce in substantial ways. Continuing research in this area will develop more on what is already known about the wage gap for women and minorities at a time when employment is influenced by a pandemic. As a result of multiple ongoing phenomenon these populations continue to face concern about the future of employment and economic equality in the workforce.

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Embracing the New Normal: Recruiting and Retaining K-12 Teachers Post-Pandemic

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Introduction

As potential future educators have grappled with turmoil across the country due to districts requiring teachers to move between in-person, online and hybrid instructional models, there are health concerns and job effectiveness issues which weigh heavily on their minds. The unprecedented disruptions to education during the pandemic are turning people away from a profession that was already struggling to attract new recruits (Goldberg, 2021).

The idea of entering the teaching field amid the pandemic causes fear that the role of teacher now brings increased risks, especially when instruction is delivered in person. These added health risks are compounded in the minds of potential educators when combined with the already stressful burden of low pay, long work hours and insufficient support from state and local leaders in the areas of mental wellness and professional development. On the other hand, teaching remotely also presents a range of challenges for educators as they strive to engage students via a Zoom screen. In most cases, the sudden onset of the pandemic forced teachers to pivot from face-to-face

instruction to online with mere days of preparation.

With the sudden onset of Covid-19, K-12 systems had to pivot to digital instruction for which most systems were ill prepared. One in four Americans feel stressed about their own careers (UOPX, 2021). Additionally, experienced teachers report it was not sustainable in the long term for them to suddenly pivot to online teaching from their homes. Many found themselves trying to teach from their living room while simultaneously attending to the needs of family members who were forced to quarantine at home with them (Cerullo, 2021).

The impact of COVID-19 has changed the landscape of work, and a full third of Americans feel their career has been derailed (UOPX, 2021). In what might be considered one of the few recession proof professions, K-12 teachers are rethinking their career options and questioning if the risks outweigh the benefits. This white paper seeks to outline the concerns that resonate with current and future educators as teachers transition back to the classroom full-time. The paper will also investigate what educators need from school leaders to meet their physical and socio-emotional needs in the new “normal.”

Recruitment and Retention of K-12 Teachers Post-Pandemic

There are pervasive, acute, and on-going challenges facing working adults as they navigate their careers, including but not limited to Covid-19 pandemic, the future of jobs, emotional and structural barriers (UOPX, 2021). About 44% of teachers who left voluntarily pre-retirement during the Covid-19 shutdown cited the pandemic as the primary reason for their exit and teachers younger than 40 who left early due to the pandemic were more likely to attribute the move to their pay not justifying the stress and the risks involved in remaining in the profession (Jagannathan, 2021).

Career trajectory is a likely concern for educators. Of those educators surveyed, nearly half (42%) do not see a clear path for advancing in their careers. Likewise, 48% of prospective students share this concern regarding career trajectory as an educator and having access to the opportunities they need to develop. A full 42% of educators stated they were worried that their job skills will become outdated because of advancements in technology (UOPX, 2021). This further emphasizes the need for a clear and comprehensive plan of action to address the evolving professional development needs of current K-12 teachers and realignment of teacher preparation programs in order to meet these challenges moving forward.

The number of students enrolling in teacher education programs has fallen over the past decade for a variety of reasons including low salaries, difficult working conditions, and a lack of career pathway opportunities (Carmen, Partelow & Brown, 2015). So, what are we to make of this decline? Since 2010, total enrollment nationwide in teacher preparation programs has decreased by more than one-third equating to a loss of 340,000 students (Partelow, 2019). When the 2016 – 2017 school year is compared to 2008 -2009, this equates to a 28% decline overall (Partelow, 2019).

As we all look forward to a time when the U.S. will be considered “post-pandemic,” it is important to bear in mind that while some pandemic-related issues may dissipate, that still leaves the persistent structural problems associated with teaching: long hours, low pay, and poor working conditions for some teachers. These problems will persist well beyond the pandemic

if local, state, and national leaders fail to make significant and impactful changes to the teaching profession as a whole (Jagannathan, 2021).

While parents, teachers and students seek to understand what the new normal for schools will entail; university students are pondering their options as well. According to the UOPX Career Index, 50% of educators who chose to leave early were open to returning if conditions were right – specifically, seeing most students and staff vaccinated against the virus. The reality is that our education system was not built to adequately support educators and students during such a pivotal time as this. Meeting the needs of teachers by providing mental health resources, implementing safety protocols such as masks, sanitizers, and social distancing in addition to ongoing socio-emotional supports must be a priority (LaHayne, 2021).

Preparing for the Future

For years, educational leaders across the nation have proposed the need to rethink how we will educate future generations. In a post-pandemic world where knowledge is a mouse-click away, the role of the educator must change. The majority of students in today’s educational institutions are from Generation Z (ages 18-21) and are likely to be reflecting on their education as a result of a truly global pandemic, with many recently facing cancelled exams, sporting events, and even graduations (Lanthra, 2020). According to Dell Technologies (2017), 85% of jobs potentially filled by Generation Zs in 2030 have not yet been invented. The World Economic Forum (2016) reported that 65% of the jobs filled by Generation Alphas (currently preschoolers) have not been invented yet. Therefore, it is incumbent on educational institutions and educators to better prepare learners for what the future might hold.

Mental health has negatively impacted work performance for 34% of respondents during the pandemic. This is particularly true for the younger generations including 55% of Gen Zs, 45% of prospective students and 31% of educators. Despite this high level of impact, when presented with open-end responses asking why they have not thought about changing their career path, participants who intend to stay in their current careers reported that they have not thought about changing their career path because

they love what they do or plan to retire in 2-3 years. Americans believe they are resilient, prepared, and with the right tools will succeed in their goals. There are many elements to what it takes to be successful in your career, but hard work, a positive attitude, and the ability to flex are viewed as essential qualities (UOPX, 2021).

One positive outcome of the pandemic has been the renewed sense of respect parents and caregivers express towards teachers for the critical work they accomplish every day in their classrooms. Breeze (2021) proposes suggestions school leaders should bear in mind as teachers return to the classroom, each of which emphasizes the importance of being strategic and well planned in delivery to enhance teacher success. Teachers want to know how they will be evaluated. This indicates a need to provide clear guidance in what the teaching standards are and how to meet them. Just as students and parents have been emotionally impacted by the pandemic, so have teachers. Therefore, leaders must strategically agree that protecting the emotional well-being of teachers is important and then keep it a priority through ongoing support from personal mentors. Lastly, professional development will need to be specific and targeted to meet the individual needs of novice teachers, experienced teachers, and those teachers just years away from retirement (Breeze, 2021).

Helping Teachers Return Safely

Since March 2020, 63 million teachers have been impacted by Covid-19 (Breeze, 2021). Initially charged with providing ongoing instruction to students during the pandemic, those same teachers are now tasked with making sure that the reopening of schools goes smoothly. The International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, UNESCO, and International Labor Organization (2020) compiled guidelines for policymakers to consider as they develop back-to-school procedures. The Teacher Task Force (TTF) put forth a series of recommendations that can be used as a guide to help stakeholders make informed decisions for a successful return to in-person learning (Teacher Task Force & UNESCO, 2020). These recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- Include key stakeholders in the planning process by involving authorities, teacher representatives, parents, local community

leaders and students.

- Guarantee that the school environment is safe for learners and school staff by adopting available guidelines and protocols provided by public health agencies.
- Protect the psychological, social, and emotional well-being of teachers and students by addressing the stress and trauma associated with the pandemic.
- Help teachers adapt to the new normal by providing adequate support and resources to resume life in the classroom including remedial teaching if necessary.
- Make sure there are sufficient teachers while maintaining or increasing financial resources.
- Develop progress monitoring tools which allow teachers to inform instruction and provide timely assessment of student progress (TTF, 2020).

Recruiting Prospective Educator

For some university students previously intent on becoming educators, the pandemic has caused them to have doubts about the wisdom of entering the teaching work force. School leaders are hopeful that enrollment will return to pre-pandemic levels as more people receive vaccines and schools resume in-person learning. Unfortunately, the challenges in teacher recruitment and retention are more complex than that (Goldberg, 2021). Administrators of teacher preparation programs report that the new anxieties were most likely deterring some potential applicants as people weigh whether it makes sense to go to a classroom when there are safer alternatives available. Likewise, concerns about remote teaching are abundant. The disconnect that happens while providing instruction on a screen does not align with what teachers envision the learning environment to be. Although applications may increase as schools return to in-person learning, the challenges will not magically dissipate, as recruitment into the teaching profession was problematic long before Covid arrived.

As many schools reduce class sizes by adding more teachers to ensure compliance with Covid-19 safety protocols, there is a need to incentivize prospective students. While some programs have experienced decreases that is not the case with California State

University in Long Beach where enrollment increased by 15% in 2021. This is attributed to an initiative which temporarily relaxed entry requirements by allowing candidates to enter preparation programs without meeting basic skill requirements (Goldberg, 2021).

Conclusions

Moving forward, the right skillset, adaptability, flexibility, and optimism are needed to pivot from traditional delivery models to the new normal (UOPX, 2021). As decisions are made regarding return to school, the role of teachers is critical. Local, state, and national decision-makers would be wise to listen to teachers, protect their safety, and sense of well-being. These safeguards are needed to address the concerns of prospective students, as well. It is incumbent on school leaders to provide guidance and support to teacher as they learn to adapt their approaches to teaching and learning. This sustained support provides the best opportunity for success as teachers return to school after the COVID crisis.

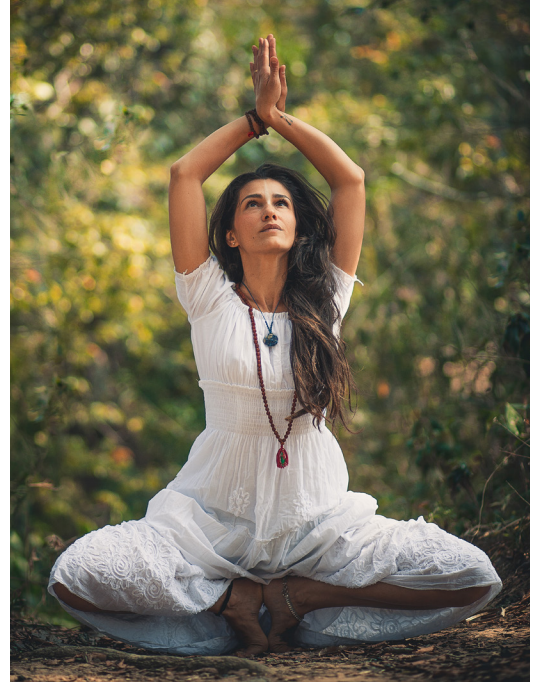
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Reconnecting with Self and Outside Activities Add to Career Enjoyment, Happiness Levels

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Executive Summary

Many people involved in their career may describe it in different ways. Satisfaction with career may also relate strongly with one's perceived expectations of meaning associated with their career. The variants for how we come to understand how we feel about what we do are wide ranging. These are turbulent times.

The pandemic, civil unrest, and an economy splintered due to shelter in place and social distancing requirements have taken a heavy toll. But many college students feel they are stuck in the middle. They are weighing dreams of a satisfying career with a less than optimistic future. And while balance helps many to endure their unique journey every single day, so to can this balance and compromise set expectations of career aspirations to reasonable levels.

An example of this story arc can be extracted from the University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index.



Figure 1 | University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index (Edelman, 2021).

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How This Information Should Be Used By Leaders

The following information can be engaged by leaders who oversee and manage others as a preventative-programming measure to ensure the quality of work-life for their constituents. This white paper should be used for:

- Knowledge management
- Preventative programming measures for leaders in industry

Introduction

These are turbulent times. The pandemic, civil unrest, and an economy splintered due to shelter in place and social distancing requirements have taken a heavy toll. No one wants to go to work and perform duties he or she doesn't like to do. However, we all know that even the best jobs, (i.e. doctors, lawyers, police officers, and teachers, to name a few), have various administrative tasks that are truly less than desirable. Some have also discovered that working for one traditional employer for a lifetime may not be ideal for their career trajectory and happiness. Despite all of this, many of these individuals report feeling "optimistic" and "engaged" on the job because they understand how critical *balance* and *compromise* are particularly during these turbulent and pandemic times.

What Have These Workers Learned?

Despite challenges incurred by many jobs, something interesting has set in with many of these same workers in coming to understand their roles. What many have discovered is the imperative for "balance" as key to a qualified emotional work-life. Even amongst those who will stay and leave a role, satisfaction can still be achieved through focused perspective of maintaining work-life balance.

They also understand that life is not a linear process, meaning that many evaluate what they like and do not like several times within their career and understand they may end up working for two or three employers simultaneously while still feeling a sense of pride because research shows one's career reflects who they are intellectually and behaviorally.

What is important to remember is that what goes on during any given day on the job is not necessarily the last word on happiness and contentment. Reassessing your personality, vying for awards, and joining associations add to happiness levels no single job can necessarily offer, thus strengthening one's career identity.

"Color Code" as a Useful Assessment for Career

No matter where you currently stand in the job market, employed, unemployed, feeling secure, insecure, or waiting to get into the workforce or continue with a better job, recent studies reveal Americans define themselves based on their career. And these feelings seem to carry across all income levels, high school or college educated, frontline workers, prospective students, the various generations (such as: Boomers, Gen X, Gen Z, Millennials), all races, nationalities, and genders. But it can be confusing to know one's next move. There are a variety of tools to help people assess their personality in relation to their careers whether they are starting out, or whether they are in mid-career and ready for a change. Over the years one tool that many claim to adequately summarize their traits in relation to various work roles (such as leader, follower, subordinate, team member, and independent contributor) is the Color Code Personality Assessment.

For nearly twenty years, Color Code has offered a free assessment that helps to pinpoint one's personality

color and compares it to the categories of employment in a matter of minutes. You will need to furnish an email address and you must take the test briskly and provide true answers (not what you think that will make you look good). The questions are challenging. They sometimes ask you to choose between the lesser of two evils. No matter their complexity, the results can pinpoint your unique color and what it means in terms of your personality and the people you tend to attract or detract for that matter.

From assessed “red” who are driven by technology to assessed “blues” who strive for high integrity to assessed “whites” seeking acceptance and assessed “yellows” who enjoy social interactions, your color is compared to each category. After all, one cannot always choose who he or she works with let alone the role he or she will have on a team of strangers that must work in harmony with one another. So, the Color Code gives you a sense of where your personality stands and categorizes it to help determine your level of comfort, level of need, and what makes you tick.

Awards and Job Satisfaction = Getting Involved

Regardless of your color, know that it is just a snapshot in time. It may hold true year after year, or it may change as you grow and blossom. But flexibility appears to help many feel more confident knowing that they can strive to draw from multiple sources of income or find satisfaction in other areas that run congruently to their profession outside of work. For example, a creative individual can apply to the call for public creative contests that may include notoriety or accolades in their field regardless of their current employment position. Such awards may offer monetary incentives, or other award mechanisms that can provide job satisfaction when one’s current job status cannot provide such accolades. According to Edelman, flexibility appears to help many feel more confident knowing that they can strive to draw from multiple sources of income or find satisfaction in other areas that run congruently to their profession outside of work.

Are you a photographer, writer, videographer? Then search the Web using terms like writing, contests, poetry, contests, video contests. Try including the year so you can vie for contests who might be open currently. If you should apply and win at any level,

that is a feather in your career cap, particularly if the output is professional or runs along the discipline in one’s profession. The result can be quite a resume builder since the listing of the winners are often shown on websites for months or years, and/or winners are sent commendations and certificates validating their entries.

The good news is that you do not need anyone’s permission to apply. You do not need your supervisor’s permission (unless there is a conflict of interest), your parent’s permission, nor a teacher’s permission. The only permission you need is your own to search, enter, and try. Many times these contests do not receive enough entries. If this should happen, you might win more by default. No matter how you place, the goal is to build a resume accolade that can set you apart from the competition. Even if you do not wish to build your resume this all goes back to balance and rewards. Rewards you can develop even if you are not able to get them from your current employer, a reflection of who you are and what you do.

Professional Associations and Enhancing Well-Being

As we have discovered, maintaining happiness levels is not just related to one’s job but also what one does outside of work. A great area to continue networking and building other success stories is through association affiliations. There are literally hundreds of professional career oriented associations out there, these are examples of high profile associations more amenable to those in education or those who are looking to bolster their leadership skills. Each of these has the potential to boost happiness levels based on participation and the track record of those who have contributed to local chapters, in presentations or in other activities that help communities, for example:

- The Association for the Advancement of Computers in Education (AACE),
- the American Marketing Association,
- Online Learning Consortium (OLC), and
- the International Leadership Association (ILA).

Most associations need affiliates to serve in many capacities, including chairing conference presentations or serving on their boards. While some of these board positions are elected, some are not.

Many other associations exist that are practitioner focused.

Practitioner focused associations include hundreds of groups whose subject matter expertise lend itself to for-profit and non-profit endeavors. Groups with excellent track records that are related to many of University of Phoenix degree offerings and that have an excellent networking opportunities include the American Management Association, American Business Association, and the American Marketing Association. Serving on their boards, committees, and sub committees allows you to shape policy and develop new discipline standards or measurements while propelling your brand as a leader in the field.

Conclusions

In sum, being happy is also about being productive and assessing what you like to do, and knowing that one company is not necessarily going to lead to complete on the job happiness. Indeed, what one does outside of work can significantly lead to a better job identity and provide avenues for visibility and networking opportunities never imagined.

It's time to look at job happiness a new way. It's time to keep moving forward no matter the obstacles (such as the pandemic, the economy, and your current employment situation). It's time to reassess who you are and how you can obtain the types of accolades that reflect your career contributions, and to continue networking to yield more opportunities and job satisfaction than you can ever imagine. Keep moving forward!

About the Author

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Online Education and American Workers' Perceptions

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Abstract

American workers, despite the desire and a variety of opportunities present for reskilling or upskilling, have challenges with an online format for professional development. A brief history of technology-mediated education is reviewed, along with current modes of online instruction. The benefits and disadvantages of online education for employees and employers are explored, as well as the barriers for employees in participation and skill attainment.

A recent national study of employment established the importance of reskilling and upskilling to both employers and workers (Career Optimism Index, 2022). At the top of the list of actions (top 34% or above) that workers take when considering a career change are seeking out opportunities to build skills, learning new skills and expertise to be competitive in the digital age, enrolling in a training program, and enrolling in an education program. Fifty-two percent of employees believe that they will need to learn new skills to continue at their current job. When considering the diversity factor, more Black, Asian, and Latino workers reported this factor than their White counterparts. This same worker group felt less optimistic about their opportunities for learning new skills, at only 29% overall, and less so for Black

workers (31%) and Baby Boomers (34%). So, it is established that learning new skills is important to workers.

In this same study, employees reported that they are provided ample opportunities for online education (Career Optimism Index, 2022) which matched employer reports of providing courses through an online education platform (43% of workers and 44% of employers). The availability of an option of using an app for access to anywhere/anytime online learning was cited by 33% of workers and 37% of employers. While these figures are encouraging, it also suggests that, of those responding to the survey, 57% of workers reported that they do not have an employer provided online education platform in which to access learning programs for reskilling or upskilling. This finding

suggests that those employers who are not providing such a platform are limiting worker opportunities for reskilling and upskilling.

Is online education a viable method for worker skill development? Online education comes in many forms, so definitions are provided for clarity. At one mid-Atlantic state college, five forms of instruction were described on their website, four of which are technology-mediated in some way (College of Southern Maryland, 2022). They offer web-based courses, which are completely virtual and have no set time or schedule; real time technology, which are video sessions held by the instructor and attended by class members via a video platform; hybrid, which are a combination of web-based and meeting in person (some in-person meetings and some web-based activities); and HyFlex, which combine web-based and meeting in person, but unlike hybrid, students may choose which form they wish to attend and have the option to switch back and forth to meet their needs. Online training modalities may also fit these models: web-based, real-time technology, and perhaps some combinations.

Next, let's consider the nature of online education, as it may possess clues towards the relationship between online learning and worker education. The notion that one can learn on one's own time and space is not new to the American public. The promise of technology facilitating learning at a distance from an instructor or learning space for America began with broadcast radio in the mid-1920s and later with the advent of television in the 1950s (Baum & McPherson, 2019). These forms facilitate one way transmission of knowledge but lack interaction. Actively engaging with the information shared by the instructor has been found to improve retention and understanding (Baum & McPherson, 2019). Even with the Internet, computers, and learning systems now providing the environment for online education, at least at the undergraduate level, the lecture mode of instruction online still predominates. It is not known how this corresponds to online education provided by employers, but from the perspective of the cost of delivery, utilizing systems that deliver pre-recorded instruction (along with checks on knowledge retention by answering and scoring questions based on the material), is certainly more cost-effective than live instructors. Online training programs have proven their ability to save millions of dollars yearly (Bartley & Golek, 2004). The elimination of travel costs to a

central site for training as well as the cost of time spent in a travel status contributes to those savings. Another saving is that content recorded for reuse results in employing less trainers. Other benefits of online training are that the training is learner-centered, allowing the student to dictate the pace and schedule; is scalable and provides for a consistent, quickly disseminated message to all workers (Bartley & Golek, 2004).

In one study (Cueva, K., Cueva, M., Revels, L. Hensel, M., & Dignan, M., 2021), cancer education delivered via synchronous webinars (real time technology) were provided to Alaska's rural tribal health workers. As a result of the webinars, these health care workers planned to change their own behavior to reduce cancer risk, as well as to communicate with their patients more often about cancer prevention strategies such as screenings, physical activity, tobacco cessation, and healthy eating. While the webinars addressed the desire for participants to participate in synchronous sessions, and therefore have opportunities for dialog, far fewer unique learners participated in the webinars than the team's asynchronous (virtual) cancer education modules. Therefore, from a knowledge transfer perspective, asynchronous forms of training reach a broader audience and, in this sense, are more effective.

If online education is more cost-effective for the organization and more convenient for the learner, what barriers exist for achieving the learning outcomes expected by both employee and employer? Given the emphasis of online education for worker reskilling and upskilling, it is helpful to understand the factors that explain participation in these activities and whether or not the factors that explain participation are different from those that explain participation in other types of employee training. In a study of 275 organizations and 557 employees, factors that influence participation are identified (Garavan, Carbery, O'Malley, & O'Donnell, 2010). The research discerned individual and situational factors which have an influence on worker participation in online training to include motivation to learn, e-learning task specific self-efficacy, and content quality. The self-efficacy relates to one's belief that they are capable of participation and have the related skills to conduct themselves in an online platform. With regards to motivation, those employees who consider online training as worthwhile, enjoyable, and leads to desired outcomes will have the greatest motivation to complete the learning activity.

In conclusion, American workers seek out educational opportunities for reskilling and upskilling. Online education is attractive for employers due to cost containment and the flexibility it provides. Employees, too, find online formats desirable due to their convenience. However, barriers for participation should be considered in the design of online educational programs to ensure a high quality of content, that workers have the necessary skills to perform online learning tasks and possess the motivation to learn in an online format.

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Women and Lifelong Employability

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The economic consequences of the global pandemic have greatly impacted employability in the United States, especially for those with limited means and protections such as health insurance and sick leave. The pandemic has exposed existing vulnerabilities and inequalities in our economic system. Women have been particularly impacted by job and income loss. Many women who worked through the pandemic found themselves on the front line providing essential services while taking on the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted the problem of unpaid care and domestic work where women have experienced a disproportionate burden compared to their male counterparts (Impact, 2020). As we move out of the global pandemic and into recovery, labor composition, workplace values, and employment rules of engagement are once again changing. Events such as the transformation of capitalism, globalization, and the pandemic have put an end to full employment as we know it and subsequently has led to new career models (Insa et al.,

2016). Technology has moved society beyond a single workspace and into environments where flexibility, agility, and lifelong learning are needed to maintain longevity in the workforce. To keep pace and succeed in the labor market, lifelong employability should be viewed as an investment that is managed with mindfulness and purpose (Murray, 2015). Additionally, employability is greatly influenced by career attitudes and skills (Santos et al., 2019). For example, Dalton et al. (2018) posit women value skills that foster connections across people, contexts and knowledge while male's value skills that foster being heard and standing out. Understanding both perspectives will allow women to better strategize employment opportunities and move beyond psychological and social barriers to employment. While there are many constructs of employability, for the purpose of this paper employability constructs will be limited to reinvention, resilience, reframing, and resolve.

Reinvention is the ability to acquire both hard and soft skills needed for employment (Murray, 2015).

Hard skills are technical and measurable; they are built through education and job training. Soft skills are more personality based and are learned through engagement with others and reflection. Identity also plays an important role in reinvention where our identity can be viewed as a struggle where we come to terms with our past, present, and future. Through reflection, our identity informs us of how we are shaped by the past but it also gives us a vantage point to shape the present and future (Ruškus et al., 2004; Weiner, 1999). Job crafting is one way to reinvent work. Job crafting is the process of physically or cognitively modifying responsibilities and relationships at work to align with personal values and strengths. It is a method that allows an individual to foster a more positive identity and to satisfy psychological needs that promote well-being. For example, an outcome of job crafting is flow at work - an intense moment of short duration where immersion in the moment, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation collide, time is distorted, and in the moment, there is a loss of self (Devotto et al., 2020). Eudaimonic well-being, where individuals experience moments of worthwhileness and flow, leads to more positive emotions, feelings of pleasure, a more positive outlook on work and enhanced performance (Soriano et al., 2020). Like job crafting, lifelong learning is key to employability (Jackson, 2003; Murray, 2015) but this approach necessitates planning and strategy. Many working women are trapped in a cycle of lifelong earning making just enough to get by but never enough to escape market forces constructed in inequalities that support patriarchal capitalism (Jackson, 2003). Reinvention means taking another look at the division of labor in the home and at work. Proactively figuring out what works and does not work. Drawing boundaries, setting aside time for learning opportunities, and most importantly recognizing you are worth it. The payoff is greater professional competitiveness and more successful employability (Ruškus et al., 2004).

Resilience in the context of this paper refers to the ability to learn, adapt and overcome a lifetime of obstacles while aging in the workplace. As a leadership skill, resilience is becoming increasingly important. As an individual skill, building resilience takes time and deliberate practice (Trujillo-Villa, 2021). Women in general experience gender barriers and economic disadvantages throughout their lifetime of employment however as women age, they also experience health, social, and cultural disadvantages.

Resilience is a useful tool when used to confront the reality of obstacles and to redefine success in terms of individual capacity. Women can practice resilience while aging by learning to change the meaning of stressful events and by reducing immediate negative reactions (Huyck, 2017). However, women often carry a burden of shame in the workplace. As a psycho-social-cultural construct, shame is focused on the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of women (Brown, 2006). The social element of shame relates to an interpersonal framework that ties directly to relationship and connections (Brown, 2006; Dalton et al., 2018). The cultural component focuses on cultural expectations and the shame involved with not meeting those expectations. Without mindful and purposeful reinvention women can feel trapped, powerless, and isolated. Building shame resilience takes practice. It starts with the ability to recognize and accept personal vulnerability. As women we must learn to give ourselves grace. Women must also think critically about the social and cultural expectations placed on women and how media and other shaming mechanisms drive standards. Relationship building among women will allow for supportive networks and empathic relationships. Learning to talk about shame, conceptualizing it and deconstructing it will allow women to put shame into perspective and then move beyond it (Brown, 2016). As women mindfully and purposefully practice resilience, their ability to do so grows more robust and present (Tabassum et al., 2018).

Reframing definitions vary among sources. For this paper, reframing refers to cognitive reframing as a concept of analysis. It's about leaving little room for negative emotions in order to think critically about distress management or needed change. Cognitive reframing is about changing the conceptual viewpoint of an event in relation to how the event is received and processed. A change in behavior is the goal of cognitive reframing and the outcome is improved well-being. But to make it work, women must exercise a sense of personal control. The goal of cognitive reframing is to alter perceptions of distorted or self-defeating beliefs and to convert those beliefs into something positive and supportive (Robson & Troutman-Jordan, 2014). A common stereotype is that women are more likely to display emotion than men. Research shows both men and women express emotion in the workplace however, those emotions are interpreted as originating from different traits and in the context of broader

gender stereotypes. Male emotion is a sign of agency, motivation, and strength while female emotion is a sign of communality, gentility, and expressiveness (MacGill, 2018; Mohn, 2020; Wolf et al., 2016). Understanding the difference provides women with an understanding of differences in emotional regulation and in the context of work, the ability to discern when change is needed. Reframing is important for establishing boundaries and as a decision tool when recognizing you no longer have the capacity to keep yourself in a negative work environment or under the supervision of a leader who does not value your identity or self-worth.

Resolve refers to self-determination as a principle of practice at a personal level and professional level. From a personal perspective, many women have been and are now in a relationship where they do the nurturing, supporting and empowering but are not given the same in return. Many women find themselves in this situation because we live in a society that encourages women to opt for connection without consideration of consequences. The consequences include, but are not limited to, a loss of self-esteem and an underdevelopment of a full range of personal and professional capacities. As women we must recognize that we live in a society that distorts or takes advantage of women's strengths (Rubenstein & Lawler, 1990). As we build our identity during the course of our working life, women must be vigilant to reinvent themselves when necessary. Resilience and reframing will allow women to establish boundaries and to determine what is acceptable as it relates to presence in the workplace, identity, and well-being. From a professional perspective, self-determination is the ability to choose one's behavior and to make decisions and respond appropriately to our circumstances. In the context of self-determination, resolve is the ability to think about Self, to be aware of our presence, to know the kind of person we desire to be, to have a sense of our self-worth, and to protect these "knowing" abilities at all cost (Deci & Ryan, 2007; Sprague & Hayes, 2000).

The importance of thinking critically about reinvention, resilience, reframing, and resolve as they relate to employability cannot be overstated. Empowerment for women in the workplace is about having control over life decisions, having a strategic road map with goals and objectives that lay a path for work. Empowerment is about perceived agency, job satisfaction, well-being, and bargaining power when

needed (Abrar ul Haq et al., 2019). The long-term lock down in response to COVID-19 provided a unique opportunity to reevaluate the changing nature of work, the importance of empowerment, and well-being (Jenkins et al., 2021) as it relates to employability. Events such as the transformation of capitalism, globalization, and the pandemic have put an end to full employment as we know it and subsequently has led to new career models (Insa et al., 2016). As women continue to navigate the changing landscape of employability, self-reflection will play an important role in the perceptions of work, self-worth, and well-being.

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COVID-19 Effects on Work-Life Balance for Working Parents, Military Workers, and Veterans

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Executive Summary

The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index highlighted concerns about important issues affecting Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes to home and work life due to shelter in place mandates and quarantines, school and daycare closures, and job losses affected many Americans. One in two Americans reported that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted their work-life balance. Work-life balance consists of overall well-being in five areas: career, social, community, health, and financial. Who were some of the groups negatively impacted by societal changes during the COVID-19 pandemic? How can employers help workers create positive and lasting changes to work-life balance?

This white paper will cover the implications of COVID-19 pandemic impacts felt by American working parents with children under 18 years old, military workers, military reserve workers, and veterans by examining five areas of overall well-being, reported needs, and concerns shown in the University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index. Then this paper will show how industry leaders and employers can utilize this information to support work-life balance for American workers.

How Leaders Should Use This Information

The information in this white paper can be used by industry as a guide to developing an understanding

of the specific needs of working parents, working mothers, military workers, and veterans in order to inform reflection and changes to leadership practices and encourage policy support for employee flex and health needs, and for employees seeking career advancement opportunities.

Utilizing This White Paper

This white paper should be used for:

- Knowledge management
- Programming measures for industry leaders

Recent research has highlighted concerns about important work-life balance issues affecting Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Important concerns about work-life balance were shared by working parents, working veterans, and military workers. These groups needed employer support to achieve a balance between their work and home responsibilities and address career growth concerns.

Understanding the need for work-life balance is vital for American workers as an imbalance between work obligations, family responsibilities, and personal time negatively affects health. Though some stress can be positive, helping us problem-solve, accomplish tasks, and enhance performance, chronic or long-term stress can interfere with daily life resulting in physical and mental health symptoms such as a weakened immune response, increased risk of heart attack, and increased depression and anxiety (American Psychological Association 2018). United States workers ranked highest for daily stress levels during the COVID-19

pandemic indicating issues balancing life elements (Gallup 2021). When balance is attained between work and home pursuits, the results are happier and more productive workers. Though many American workers tried to prioritize their work-life balance, over half of employed Americans say that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted their work-life balance.

| Working Americans | General population | Working parents (children under 18) | Military workers | Reserve workers | Veterans |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|
| The pandemic has negatively impacted my work-life balance. (Somewhat agree or Strongly agree) | 51% | 61% | 68% | 63% | 52% |

Table 1 | Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance (Edelman 2021).

Workers need to understand career opportunities in order to support their work-life balance through career development and advancement that can lead to financial gains and promotions. Recent studies showed that American working parents, working veterans, and military workers have concerns with available career development opportunities. Though understanding career growth needs have always been an area of concern, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted specific worker needs. Concerns about job stability and automation, technological advances, and pandemic-related work stress left many American workers confused about how to develop job skills and advance their careers.

What is Work-Life Balance?

Work-life balance includes career responsibilities, family needs, and personal time. Finding a balance between career needs and home life does not mean that equal amounts of time are spent in each area, rather it is about finding the right balance for each person or family based on needs and preferences (Kohil 2018).

Historically, working long hours may have seemed good for workers and companies. Deep focus on work can help workers achieve positive results such as following personal ambition, proving their importance, and achieving financial success. However, the negative impacts such as guilt and anxiety can be destructive for both workers and companies as overwork does not increase output but does increase mistakes,

absenteeism, and employee turnover (Carmichael 2015). A lack of balance between work time and personal time leads to diminishing returns so work-life balance today is about overall well-being.

Well-being needs to include many different aspects of life. Career, social, community, health, and financial well-being are all vital to overall well-being so that workers like what they do and where they live, can manage their money and energy, and can have meaningful relationships (Witters 2021).

COVID-19 Impact

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, modern workers struggled with work-life balance as increased digital connectivity and the rush to compete in a global economy extended work hours. The COVID-19 pandemic changed how people felt about their work and home lives once work moved into the home environment, workers were classified as frontline, schools and child care centers were closed sending children to learn from home, and social distancing and shelter-in-place mandates kept people from leaving home. Changes to work and home life increased worry and stress and decreased employee engagement. Globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, half of workers received less money, stopped working temporarily, or worked fewer hours, and a third of workers reported losing their job or business completely (Barroso & Horowitz 2021).

Working parents struggled with extra pressures to juggle work, financial needs, supervision of children and their virtual learning needs, and household chores. An imbalance in work responsibilities and family or personal time is of particular concern to working parents, veterans, and military service members. These groups of workers raised concerns about career issues and potential job loss as well as additional family support needs and mental health concerns brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Concerns of Working Parents and Working Mothers

Career Well-Being

Working parents, especially working mothers, struggled to balance career expectations and family needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though one in four working parents reported having a lot of child care duties while working from home, working

mothers were twice as likely to feel burdened with child care responsibility and reported difficulties handling virtual schooling, child care needs, and work tasks (Karageorge 2020). Mothers provide 60% of child care in couples where both parents were working.8 Caregiving expectations and overrepresentation in industries disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic left working mothers 68% more likely to have to leave their jobs (Heggeness & Fields 2020). Working mothers also experienced notable job losses due to working in industries hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic and fewer jobs that allowed remote work.

Social Well-Being

Feelings of social isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic brought new struggles for American workers. Many experienced increased social isolation and the resulting deteriorating mental health effects. Though work and family relationships helped with social needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, working parents reported feeling that lack of support, mentoring, and advocacy held them back in their careers and requested additional support from employers to connect with mentors and colleagues.

Community Well-Being

Community well-being includes social health determinants such as food, housing, transportation, physical and mental health, education, employment, social support, and safety needs (American Hospital Association 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, communities came together to support work-life balance and provide health and community services for those in need. Many people chose to volunteer, share helpful information online, or build their career and social networks during shelter in place mandates and quarantines to counteract feelings of social isolation. Despite these efforts, additional support was needed to reduce difficulties stemming from government restrictions in communities (Marston, Renedo, & Miles 2020).

Health Well-Being

Physical inactivity was already a major health concern worldwide costing billions of dollars in lost productivity for workers (Hall et al. 2021). Then, COVID-19 pandemic shelter in place mandates forced many American workers to change their exercise habits to in-home or neighborhood options. Additionally, changes in work hours, social distancing needs, and remote working left workers struggling

with sedentary behaviors, a lack of physical activity, and variable sleep patterns brought on by changed schedules and stress. Many workers struggled to maintain or improve stress levels and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial Well-Being

Financial insecurity places an additional burden on mental health and can lead to chronic stress issues for workers. Many working parents worry about finances due to job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. Half of working mothers had to reduce their work hours leading to increased financial hardships for families (Igielnik 2021). Poorer households and women are more strongly affected by ongoing financial issues such as low paying jobs, job loss, increased debt, and child care needs.

The Career Optimism Index and Working Parents

The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index showed that American workers were struggling at work, and many felt their career had been derailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two in five working parents did not see a clear path forward in their career. One in four working parents felt that lack of upskilling and development opportunities held them back in their career.

| Working Americans | General population | Working parents (children under 18) | Working mothers (children under 18) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| I do not have access to opportunities to develop the skills I need to advance in my career. (Somewhat agree or Strongly agree) | 35% | 38% | 38% |
| I want to develop my skillset, but don't know where to begin. (Somewhat agree or Strongly agree) | 43% | 48% | 50% |
| I live paycheck to <u>paycheck</u> . (Somewhat agree or Strongly agree) | 43% | 52% | 54% |
| I am concerned about maintaining my overall health and fitness. (Somewhat agree or Strongly agree) | 64% | 78% | 70% |
| My mental health has impacted my work performance. (Yes, this holds me back in my career) | 34% | 44% | 42% |
| I need support to connect with others in my field or desired field. (I need some <u>support</u> or I need a lot of support) | 55% | 61% | 61% |

Table 2 | Needs of working parents and working mothers in career, financial, health, and social well-being (Edelman 2021).

The concerns with career, social, community, health, and financial well-being for working parents highlight issues present with work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Support needs beyond those of the general population could help working parents toward career, financial, health and social well-being. Working parents specifically shared that a lack of time and schedule concerns kept their careers from moving forward.

Work-Life Balance Concerns of Military Workers and Veterans

Career Well-Being

Finding balance for military workers can be challenging, and both military workers and veterans suffered from changes to their work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2020 survey of military families showed that time away from family was a top concern (Blue Star Families 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic brought new struggles to attain work-life balance in the military with a lack of child care, distance education and support needs for children, and the unpredictable schedules and extended deployment times of military workers. Work duties of military workers go further than the hours of a traditional career, heavily impacting spouses and children with work separations or relocations, unpredictable schedules, and safety concerns.

Social Well-Being

Isolation from physical or social distancing, shelter in place orders, and distance learning needs affected military workers and their families. Reduced social opportunities and unpredictability from the COVID-19 pandemic brought on boredom, loneliness, and worries about the future for American military workers. Social support can combat the effects of chronic stress by providing a support network, effective leadership, and healthy relationships (CHAMP Human Performance Resources March 2, 2020). Commitment to others, a sense of group unity, and unit cohesion are integral to military life and support the needed courage and resilience for military workers and veterans. However, veterans suffer from mental and behavioral health issues from previous trauma exposure which can leave them without needed social support networks (Gerber 2020).

Community Well-Being

Community engagement helps military workers and veterans feel connected to others and find

needed support in their area. Community activities, civic action, connecting through organizations, and collective action for community improvement support military workers and their families. Military community events and opportunities create a sense of shared purpose, social support, and an awareness of community resources for military workers, veterans, and military families (CHAPM Human Performance Resources November 23, 2020). This community support was especially important to combat the isolation brought on by COVID-19 pandemic shelter in place restrictions and quarantines.

Health Well-Being

Military workers are concerned with keeping up their mental and physical health. A lack of emotional energy or task switching from drills and orders to family time can also make military workers feel drained at home (CHAPM Human Performance Resources July 24, 2020). Difficulties with work-life balance can lead to negative health effects and increased stress for military workers and veterans. Six out of ten military workers reported that their overall happiness was worse or much worse due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kassraie 2021). Veterans especially suffered from mental health and trauma issues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial Well-Being

Financial security is a concern to many American workers burdened by credit card, medical, and student debt as well as auto loans and mortgages. The economic insecurities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated financial issues for military workers and veterans. Job loss affected Americans working in industries such as mining and extraction, transportation and warehousing, employment services, travel, and leisure and hospitality more than other industries. Though emergency financial assistance was available, organizations working with veterans reported that 61% of veterans needed financial assistance and only 22% of veterans had their needs completely met with available resources (Ramchand et al. 2020).

The Career Optimism Index and Military Workers

The University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index showcased the career, social, financial, and health issues of military workers and veterans intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over half of military

and reserve military workers do not see a clear path for career advancement and many feel held back in their career by the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of opportunities for upskilling and development, lack of career feedback or communication on their performance, mental health needs, and financial problems. Over half of military veterans did not feel that their employer-provided useful career development and planning resources or shared job advancement opportunities.

| Working Americans | General population | Military workers | Reserve workers | Veterans |
|--|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|
| I do not have access to opportunities to develop the skills I need to advance my career (somewhat agree or strongly agree) | 35% | 52% | 61% | 32% |
| I want to develop my skill set, but don't know where to begin (somewhat agree or strongly agree) | 43% | 62% | 61% | 30% |
| I need support to connect with others in my field or desired field (I need some support or I need a lot of support) | 55% | 76% | 70% | 50% |
| I have looked for mental health resources to help me manage work-related stress (somewhat agree or strongly agree) | 33% | 69% | 67% | 30% |
| I am concerned about maintaining my overall health and fitness (somewhat agree or strongly agree) | 64% | 72% | 65% | 64% |
| I live paycheck to paycheck (somewhat agree or strongly agree) | 43% | 63% | 71% | 35% |
| I am overwhelmed by debt (somewhat agree or strongly agree) | 28% | 79% | 77% | 24% |

Table 3 | Needs of military workers, military reserve workers, and military veterans in areas of career, financial, health, and social well-being (Edelman 2021).

Supporting Work-Life Balance

Despite many concerns stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, many American workers view their work-life balance as a priority when advancing their careers. This balance can be supported by employers and communities moving forward.

Employers can provide more opportunities for workers to understand potential career opportunities and areas of growth. This can take the form of job shadowing, training sessions, and mentoring to recognize gaps and improve foundational skills and future requirements. Family supportive work cultures increase employee retention and job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, reduce work anxiety and isolation and build trust, peer support, and teamwork in workers (Vroman 2020). Supportive work cultures

can include remote work options, flexible work times, parental leave, individualized managerial support, and an overall workplace culture of work-life balance.

Communities can provide physical and mental health resources and offer support to those in need. Supporting others is still vital for communities despite physical distancing limitations. Helping others reduces the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impacts on mental health (Gordon 2021).

Workers should ask for flexibility at work when needed and take breaks to reduce stress. Setting manageable goals and using time management strategies supports feelings of control and accomplishment at work to help balance time (Mental Health America ND). Volunteering to support others within your community helps with a healthy work-life balance by increasing social connectedness.

Work-life balance includes many facets of life. Incorporating career, social, community, health, and financial well-being into businesses and community support offerings helps workers and employers by decreasing the negative outcomes associated with work-life imbalance.

About the Author

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The Importance of Collaboration Between a City Manager and Chief of Police in Today's Society

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Introduction

Public trust of governmental institutions and government officials at the local, state, and national level is low (Pew Research Center, 2021). Compounding the general mistrust between community members and local government officials is the tension between the police and the public related to aggressive policing, which has resulted in increased calls for police accountability and transparency. In most local governmental structures, the chief of police reports to the city manager. In order to rebuild public trust, the city manager and chief of police must develop a productive collaborative relationship. In effort to build a mutually collaborative relationship, these executive leaders need to understand each other's role and the challenges each face. There are steps that each can take to ensure that a collaborative partnership is established and maintained to achieve both community safety and organizational goals.

The City Manager

A top priority of a city manager is to be a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars. Research has shown that the fiscal condition of the city may be tied to city manager turnover (Lee & Lee, 2021). Cities across the United States vary in populations, economies, crime, and other specific needs. In spite of community differences, there are commonalities in the basic services most residents expect their local government to provide, such as police and fire services, parks and recreation, planning and zoning, and public works. All of the aforementioned services are important to the vitality of a community. Yet, revenues are rarely robust enough to fully staff and equip each department. City managers must balance competing personnel and department needs with shrinking local revenues, decreased support for increasing local taxes, and a public demand to do more with less.

Determining budgets is not just a matter of figures and spreadsheets. A wise city manager should also understand how local social issues affects city operations and community relationships. Today's societal issues are plentiful, and often reflect neglected resources for mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, and other basic needs. This absence of community safety-net resources has resulted in policing agencies serving in a variety of human services roles, often without proper training and funding (Serpas, 2021). Regardless of perspectives on policing, law enforcement agencies have historically had one priority: public safety. Successfully taking on traditional social safety-net services requires more human and budget capacity at a time when many

cities are trying to balance community desires to reduce police funding. In today's environment, law enforcement agencies across the nation are under a microscope, and often deservedly. City managers, city councils, and chiefs cannot ignore the national civil unrest related to racism within policing, and the calls for police reform. For all of the aforementioned reasons and more, the relationship between the chief of police and city manager necessitates deep collaboration and trust.

The City Manager and Collaboration

A collaborative city manager and chief of police relationship is one of mutual benefit. City managers are generalist requiring knowledge about everything from policing to public works. As such, the city manager must be able to rely on the chief of police to be an expert in policing practices and trusted to provide an honest assessment of police staffing, budgetary needs, and community relationships. To achieve full transparency and honest disclosure, the city manager should be trustworthy, emotionally intelligent, and prepared to ardently review facts from multiple perspectives (Berman & West, 2008). It is the city manager's job to act on community expectations and to navigate the barriers intrinsic in policing. A successful city manager strives to build and maintain healthy communications with the chief of police and is able to identify when accountability and correction is needed, coupled with being supportive of the men and women tasked with ensuring public safety.

The Chief of Police

The collaborative and professional relationship between a city manager and chief of police is very important to the success of delivering an optimal level of quality of life in a community. As Gould (2016) stated, "local government managers and assistants must ensure their relations with chiefs of police are strong, respectful, and mutually, supportive." Each municipal executive has the responsibility to make sure that the community is a safe and productive place for citizens to live and enjoy their families. If not, then conflict will occur, and this can produce discord between the city manager and chief of police. This may result in the police department experiencing a change in executive leadership. This change in leadership may redirect the police department in mission and vision,

which can create morale issues within the police department and a decline in service to the public.

Responsibilities

The chief of police is responsible for planning, organizing, controlling, and leading the police department. The police department in many cities is the largest portion of the operating budget. This is just one of many obligations that creates a significant amount of accountability on the chief of police. Monitoring the police department budget concerning expenditures and meeting budget projections are a daily activity. Police department expenditures can fluctuate depending upon many factors, such as unexpected civil litigation, community needs, department/officer equipment needs, fuel price increases, line of duty death, line of duty injuries, officer retirements, officer overtime, recruitment needs for sworn and non-sworn personnel, staffing requirements both sworn and non-sworn personnel, technology repair/upgrades, training needs, and vehicle repair/replacement needs. Depending upon the size of the police department the chief may delegate some of the budget oversight, however, the chief is accountable for budget stewardship. It is imperative that the chief of police educate the city manager concerning public service demands that impact the budget and efforts to stay ahead of the crime rate, along with other needed police department resources. Gould (2016) suggested that managers and chiefs of police must share similar visions and values for their police departments. The city manager plays an important role in generating collaborative working relationships. This also assists when cities are faced with external recruitment for the chief of police position or when there is an internal promotion to the new role of chief of police. This understanding will assist in communication between both leaders when unexpected community incidents arise. The city manager and chief of police must be seen as a "team" by city officials, business leaders, civic groups, media, police department employees, and special interest groups.

The Chief of Police and Collaboration

The chief of police must have a clear understanding

of the importance of cultivating and sustaining a collaborative working relationship with the city manager. Gould (2016) stated, these two highest ranking executives must understand each other's perspectives and support one another. The chief must gain the trust and confidence not only of the city manager but also the community. This can be achieved by staying as transparent as possible, champion community involvement, maintain a consistent policy of communication, and be dedicated to not only the safety of their community, but also to implementing a robust Community Policing philosophy throughout the police department and community.

Understanding the importance of collaboration, the chief of police should share with the city manager the Six Pillars of "Building Trust and Legitimacy" recommended by the final report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (COPS, 2015). Following the Six Pillars must become part of the shared vision and mission of both the city manager and chief of police. The first pillar is Pillar One: Building Trust and Legitimacy. As we have witnessed in today's society "trust" of the police and city government has become nationally debated topics. Regaining community trust can begin by instituting Pillar One which can commence by working closely with the city management. According to the President's Task Force (2015) law enforcement culture should embrace a guardian, rather than a warrior mindset to build trust and legitimacy both with agencies and with the public. To make this transition the city manager must be open to supporting the chief with needed resources to begin the transformation to a true Community Policing philosophy within the police department. This should begin at the hiring process by ensuring that the police department reflects the community of which it serves and institute new training initiatives concerning Community Policing.

The chief of police and city manager should be in collaboration establishing Pillar Two: Policy and Oversight. One of the functions of the chief of police is establishing control by implementing and improving Policies and Procedures. All policies and aggregate data should be made publicly available to ensure transparency (COPS, p.2, 2015). To go further, law enforcement agencies should have clear and comprehensive policies on the use of force, mass demonstrations, consent before searches, gender identification, racial profiling, and performance measures among others such as external and

independent investigations and prosecutions of officer-involved shootings and other use of force situations, and in-custody deaths (COPS, p.2, 2015). The city manager and chief must work together in a collaborative fashion to accomplish Pillar Two.

In today's ever-changing world of technology, a chief of police must collaborate with the city manager to ensure that the police department stays current. This includes computers, mobile data terminals, radio and communication systems, and using social media as a way to connect with the community. Pillar Three: Technology and Social Media suggests that the use of technology can improve policing practices and build community trust and legitimacy, but its implementation must be built on a defined policy framework with its purpose and goals clearly delineated (COPS, p.2, 2015). Implementing new technologies can give police departments an opportunity to fully engage and educate communities in a dialogue about their expectations for transparency, accountability, and privacy (COPS, p.3, 2015). The use of social media can assist a chief in the implementation of Community Policing within their community. It will aid the chief in communicating with citizens, business leaders, media, and special interest groups concerning various topics, such as police officer recruitment.

With recent civil unrest and mistrust of police the need for police departments to embrace a robust Community Policing philosophy is incredibly important. This action will support building trust and crime reduction within communities. According to Pillar Four: Community Policing and Crime Reduction, focuses on the importance of Community Policing as a guiding philosophy for all stakeholders (COPS, p.3, 2015). Law enforcement agencies should work with community residents to identify problems and collaborate on implementing solutions that produce meaningful results for the community (COPS, p.3, 2015). The chief of police and city manager should collaborate to ensure that resources are available to implement and maintain a robust Community Policing philosophy within the community and police department.

The city manager and chief of police must be in agreement and dedicated to quality training and professional development for both non-sworn and sworn personnel. Pillar Five: Training and Education, as our nation becomes more pluralistic and the scope

of law enforcement's responsibilities expands, the need for expanded and more effective training has become critical (COPS, p.3, 2015). Today's line officers and leaders must be trained and capable to address a wide variety of challenges including international terrorism, evolving technologies, rising immigration, changing laws, new cultural mores, and a growing mental health crisis (COPS, p.3, 2015). The resources to ensure that police officers receive quality and updated training and education must be championed by both the city manager and chief of police.

Recently, not only the country but also the law enforcement community have felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has become an additional challenge for both the city manager and chief of police to address concerning officer wellness and safety. Pillar Six: Officer Wellness and Safety, emphasizes the support and proper implementation of officer wellness and safety as a multi-partner effort (COPS, 2015). The wellness and safety of law enforcement officers is critical not only for officers, their colleagues, and other agencies but also to public safety (COPS, p. 4, 2015).

The city manager and chief of police must work collaboratively to ensure that resources are available to develop, administer, and maintain a quality wellness and safety program. Officers should be provided with equipment to protect them from COVID-19, issued properly fitted ballistic vests, provided with properly working and safe police department equipment, safety equipment in vehicles, and the appropriate training to stay safe and improve wellness.

Conclusion

The importance of positive collaboration between the city manager and the chief of police is incredibly important to the safety of the community and well-being of police department personnel. They must work towards a shared mission and vision for public safety. Each executive leader must be dedicated to maintaining transparency with each other and to always work as a team for the benefit of all stakeholders.

About the Authors

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Dr. Munday is a retired law enforcement officer with

over 23 years of experience eventually attaining the rank of Chief of Police. During his years in law enforcement, he was assigned to units such as Patrol, Crime Prevention, CSID Team, Bunco/Larceny, Exploited and Missing Child Unit, Fatal Accident Investigation, Vice/Organized Crime, Planning/Research, Community Policing, and Training/Recruitment. Dr. Munday has been a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Fraternal Order of the Police Lodge#5. During his public service he received numerous police department commendations including the Bronze Wreath of Valor, Bronze Wreath of Meritorious Service (2), Community Service Award, and the Distinguished Service Award. Dr. Munday received the Devore Foundation "Excellent in Public Service" award, and a school district "Golden Apple" award for his community service.

Dr. Munday currently is a faculty member in the ACCESS Program for the College of Doctoral Studies at the University of Phoenix. Prior to this position he served as a Dean of Assessment for the College of Criminal Justice and Security, and a College Chair for the Criminal Justice program at a local campus. Dr. Munday has been teaching Ethics, Leadership/Management, and Criminal Justice courses in university settings for over thirty years. He has authored Criminal Justice Bachelor of Science programs of study for two private universities. Dr. Munday has been a presenter at conferences concerning the topics of Adult Learning Strategies, Programmatic Assessment, Implementation of the Community Policing Philosophy, and First Responder PTSD. He is a contributing author to a recent Criminal Investigation textbook. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Human Resource Management, a Master of Science Degree in Management from Friends University, and an EdD in Occupational and Adult Education from Oklahoma State University.

Marie Peoples, Ph.D.

Dr. Peoples has 20+ years of experience in local and state government. She currently serves as City Manager of Webster Groves, Missouri; an inner-ring City in St. Louis. Previously, she served as Deputy County Manager for Coconino County, the second largest County in the nation, and was responsible for leading justice and human service-related departments. Her career began within Missouri's correctional system. In addition, she has worked for

the Missouri Supreme Court, Missouri Department of Mental Health, and served as the Health Director for the Cole County Health Department. Dr. Peoples has successfully led many large initiatives and always strives to provide visionary leadership and to develop innovative and collaborative approaches to issues.

Dr. Peoples holds a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice Administration, a Master's Degree in Sociology and Criminal Justice, a Master's Degree in Public Health, and a PhD in Public Health Epidemiology. Dr. Peoples is also a graduate of the Senior Executives in State and Local Government at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

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Career Perception of American Workers: Career Statuses During the Pandemic

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Executive Summary

The onset of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic in early 2020 has fundamentally changed many businesses, politics, and even personal practices. People and organizations experienced a culture shock. A survey of over 11,000 people was conducted across the United States. The survey consisted of 48 questions, as well as extensive demographic questions. One question that was asked was whether the pandemic had made a difference in how people view their careers. Understanding what factors are involved in career path decision making could be of value to both individual employees as well as leaders.

This white paper will examine the differences between those who have considered changing their careers and those who have not. This study will examine the implications of their current career based on job-title and time in that position. Are those who are more senior more optimistic compared to those at lower levels. This paper will also be used to evaluate the

potential impact of financial support for education or personal development on participants consideration of a career change.

Introduction

The purpose of this white paper is to examine individuals' perceptions of their career paths during the COVID-19 pandemic. Did some individuals consider changing their careers? Was a consideration of a change in career more relevant to some more than others, based on their current job position? Were they more optimistic about their careers if they were most senior in their position? Last, did it make any difference if their company or organization offered any type of financial assistance towards their education or professional development? This last perspective could be especially useful to companies who are considering the pros and cons of providing educational assistance to employees.

“Have you ever thought about changing your career? By changing your career, we mean moving from one industry or field to a totally different industry or field.” This is the first question under consideration in this whitepaper. The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic caught everyone by surprise. The size and universal scope of the pandemic was something not experienced by most of those living today. Buys et al. (2020) posited that the COVID-19 pandemic is the worst worldwide catastrophe since World War Two (WWII).

For the purposes of this white paper, the focus is on those individuals who could be suffering from career shock, and who might have considered a change in careers as the effects of the pandemic closed or significantly modified businesses around the country. Akkermans et al. (2018) described career shock as “a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual’s control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one’s career” (p. 4). The COVID-19 pandemic fits those criteria.

A survey of 11032 individuals was conducted (Edelman, 2021). One question on the survey was a yes/no question as to whether they had considered a career change, 48.48% (N=5348) said “yes,” and 51.52% (N=5684) said “no.” To understand this almost even split, the data was then evaluated based on gender, ethnic background, age, and education.

Demographics of Participants

Gender

Participants were given four options as to the best option that described their gender.

- 1=Female
- 2=Male
- 3=Non-binary
- 4=Prefer not to answer

Out of 11032 participants, all responded to choices 1-3

| | | |
|------------|------|--------|
| Male | 4749 | 43.05% |
| Female | 6246 | 56.62% |
| Non-binary | 37 | 0.34% |

Ethnic Background

The survey offered nine choices for ethnic background. The responses were as follows.

| Ethnic Background | Percent of Survey Population |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| White | 65.5% |
| African or African descent | 6.0% |
| Hispanic/Spanish American/Latino | 20.3% |
| Asian-American or Asian | 5.2% |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 0.2% |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 0.5% |
| Middle Eastern | 0.2% |
| Other | 0.6% |
| Mixed race | 1.5% |

Table 1 | Ethnic background of participants.

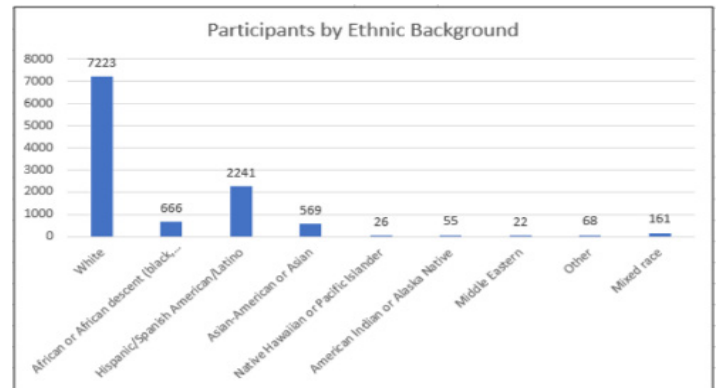


Figure 1 | Bar chart of the ethnic background of the participants.

Age Groups

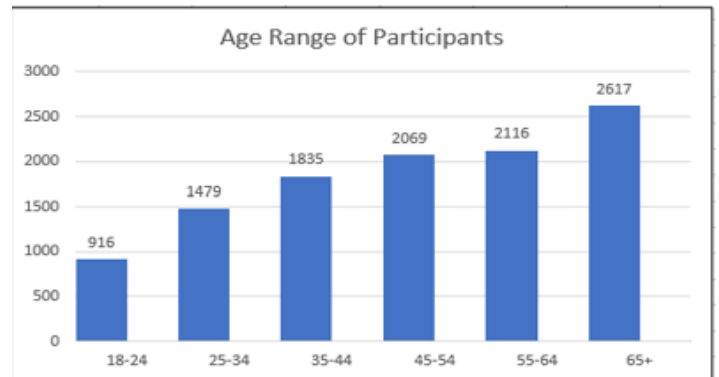


Figure 2 | Ages of participants by group.

Participants by Education

| Level of Education | Responses | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Grade school or less (Grade 1-8) | 22 | 0.20% |
| Some high school (Grade 9-11) | 145 | 1.31% |
| Graduated high school (Grade 12) | 1522 | 13.80% |
| Vocational school/Technical school | 599 | 5.43% |
| Some college | 2497 | 22.63% |
| Graduated college | 3804 | 34.48% |
| Post-graduate degree (e.g., MA, MBA, LLD, PhD) | 2443 | 22.14% |

Table 2 | Participants had seven categories for consideration of their education

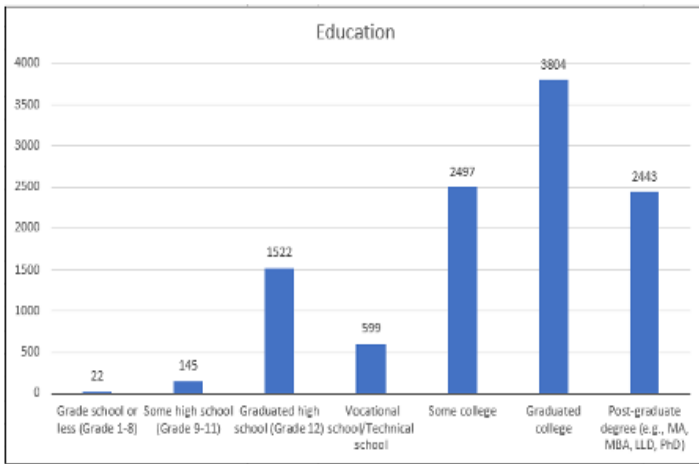


Figure 3 | Graphic representation of the spread of educational levels.

Decision to Change Careers Based on Demographic Data

The number of people who had considered a career change was almost the same as those who had not. There is research based on the demographic profiles considered in this paper, so questions as to age (Holly Slay et al., 2018) and gender (Ali et al., 2018) and how those issues might moderate a decision to make a career change could be important. Using data from the University of Phoenix Career Optimism index survey, correlational studies were run to see if there was a significant association between the demographic factors mentioned and the consideration of changing careers. Four correlational analyses were run as shown below:

1. Pearson's r between having considered a career change and gender = 0.0522.
2. Pearson's r between having considered a career change and ethnic background = -0.0609.
3. Pearson's r between having considered a career change age = 0.2299
4. Pearson's r between having considered a career change and education = 0.05170

The results of the study indicate that within this population, there were no significant correlations between gender, age, ethnic background and education in terms of consideration of a career change. There was a weak positive, but non-significant correlation to age.

“Are people more optimistic the more college senior they are in a company?” The literature is sparse in this area.

The question of career optimism, however, is robust. Eva et al. (2020) reported on an extensive review on career optimism. The authors listed six antecedents to career optimism including individual personality traits, their beliefs, and career goals. However, job title does not appear to be a good indicator of career optimism. This appears to be supported by statistical analysis.

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| 1=C-Suite | 4=Vice President | 7=Mid-level employee | 10=Don't know |
| 2=President | 5=Director | 8=Entry-level employee | |
| 3=Executive VP | 6=Manager/Supervisor | 9=Other | |

Table 3 | Participants had 10 choices for various job titles which were used as an indicator of seniority within their company.

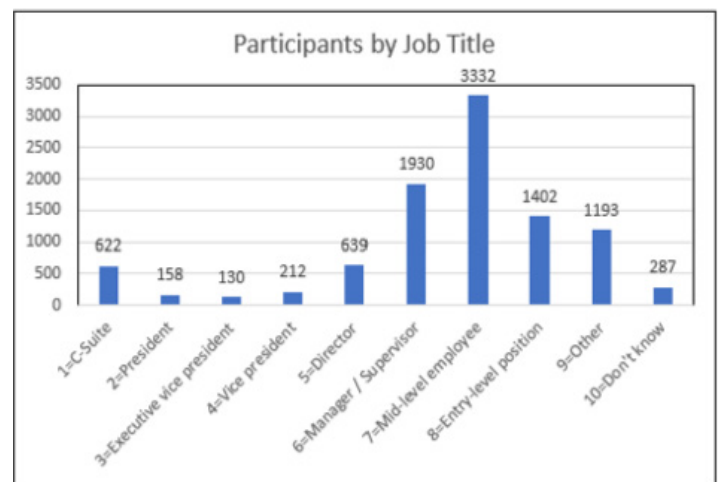


Figure 4 | Distribution of participants by job title. 9905 participants responded.

A correlational analysis was run between the first question and the second question. The assumption is that those who were more secure might be less likely to consider a career change. The correlation between job title and whether the participant had considered a career change was not significant with a Pearson's r of 0.000451.

If employees were more optimistic and secure the more senior they were in their current position, would they be more likely to remain in that position? An analysis of the average time they reported having held the current position is indicated in Table 4. Based on the information as noted in the University of Phoenix Career Optimism index survey (Edelman, 2021) below, there is very little variation in the time in position and job title.

| Job Title | Years in Position | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|------|
| C--Suite Average time in position | 3.58 | | |
| President Average time in position | 3.42 | | |
| Exec VP Average time in position | 3.14 | Mean | 3.34 |
| VP Average time in position | 3.32 | Standard Error | 0.10 |
| Director Average time in position | 3.44 | Median | 3.42 |
| Manager/Supervisor Average time in position | 3.49 | Standard Deviation | 0.29 |
| Mid-Level employee Average time in position | 3.41 | Confidence Level(95.0%) | 0.22 |
| Entry-level employee Average time in position | 2.66 | | |
| Other Average time in position | 3.60 | | |
| Don't know Average time in position | 3.08 | | |

Table 4 | Job title and years in position.

The amount of time in their current position was very consistent across all 10 job titles. The lowest number of years in a position was entry-level.

For question three, participants had four responses to the question, “Does your employer offer financial support for additional education or training?”

- 1 = Yes, full financial support is offered
- 2 = Yes, partial financial support is offered
- 3 = No, my employer does not offer any financial support
- 4 = I don't know

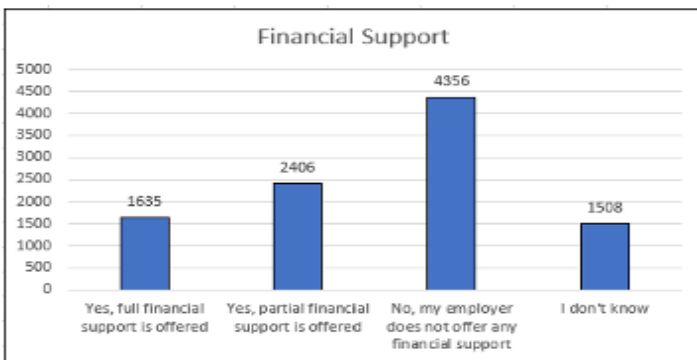


Figure 5 | Distribution of responses related to financial support for education or training.

The question as to whether financial support for education such as tuition reimbursement has been a question for many years. The literature is mixed. In a study by Messersmith et al. (2018), they found that financial assistance to employees did not offer a benefit to the organization and could drain needed funds. In another study by Lee et al. (2018), the topic of financial support was discussed as a tool in helping employees forced to leave due to downsizing. There have been other studies related to healthcare and younger generational employees, but the information is mixed. In a focused study of one company with high

turnover (Sutton, 2020), tuition reimbursement did make a positive difference in retaining and recruiting.

In the University of Phoenix Career Optimism index survey, 9905 participants responded to the question about whether their organization offered any sort of financial assistance for education or training. The results of how the four possible responses to the question are shown in Figure 5. The question, however, is whether this information was relevant to participants in terms of whether they had considered changing careers. The answer is that there does not appear to be any association between considering a career change and financial support from the employer. A statistical correlation gave a Pearson's $r = -0.0002$.

Summary

The University of Phoenix Career Optimism index survey was an extensive survey of over 11,000 participants from all parts of the United States and all levels of employment. Some were unemployed while others were corporate leaders. This whitepaper addresses three questions that were part of the University of Phoenix Career Optimism index survey. Had individuals considered a career change, were they more optimistic if they were more senior, and did financial support from their employers make a difference?

The results indicated that about half the population had considered a career change, but there is no data to suggest that this increased or decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As far as seniority and a sense of optimism, the topic is too complex to say it is associated only with job title. As indicated previously, there are multiple antecedents affecting career optimism and job title may not be one of those. The last question regarding financial support has been one that has been argued for decades. Some employees actively provide 100% financial support for education and personal development while the majority offer little or none.

What are the implications for leadership? Most organizational leaders are very aware of turnover within their own organizations. Most organizational leaders will only remain in their current position, on average, less than four years. Replacing an employee, especially C-level employees, can be very expensive and take a long time, yet the reality is that while

companies continue to seek ways to retain talented staff, titles and financial reimbursement may not be effective tools to retain those individuals.

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Career Pathways: Engineering Your Career to Last Decades

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Career pathways are the blueprint for how an individual can create a career of their lifetime by synthesizing personal passion with the pursuit of academic credentials integrated with on-the-job professional development. This white paper explores the genesis of the career pathway concept and provides insight into how one can empower themselves to engineer a fulfilling career.

Opening a Path

Imagine wanting to pursue advancement in a high growth, high demand industry like healthcare, business, or cybersecurity. There is increasing demand for workers who can fill skilled occupations within these fields, but many Americans today don't know how or where to get the education, training, and experience to move forward with such a career.

The solution lies within a cooperative initiative called career pathways that are presently being developed through collaborative initiatives between institutions of higher education, industry training providers and employers.

A career pathway integrates credentials, knowledge and experience into a dynamic blueprint that helps an individual create a career of their lifetime.

If an individual identifies their personal passion and then combines it with the pursuit of recommended academic credentials integrated with on-the-job professional development, a life-long professional journey can begin!

By utilizing a career pathway, an individual can transition their personal perspective away from working at a job to a paradigm of integrating a complex network of professional roles, responsibilities, and credentials that help one grow within their selected industry. This white paper explores the concept of a career pathway and provides insight into how one can empower themselves to engineer a fulfilling career.

What Is a Career Pathway?

A career path showcases a life-long progression of education, training, and jobs that form a sequence outlining short- and long-term career goals one can expect in a specific industry.

Career paths typically refer to either a path through an industry or, on a smaller scale, one's path through a specific organization. In its simplest iteration, the career pathway approach targets occupations with a lot of job openings and works with employers to grow a pipeline of skilled workers. For example, if a worker's goal is to become a principal, a typical career path would first identify the education and credentials one would need to obtain a teaching job. As one gained experience in the classroom, an effective career pathway tool could potentially outline administrative credentials one would need to acquire in order to move to the next milestone position. The pathway would then repeat its information as it outlines the steps to follow between subsequent milestone positions until the ultimate role – in this case a school principal – was achieved.

Guided by practical career milestones, the effective and well-designed career pathway will approach its goal by connecting progressive levels of education, training, support services, and credentials. It is common to find career pathways across different industries to be diverse and unique, showcasing unique needs of the industry they represent. However, there are some commonalities among many including three essential features of most career pathways, which often feature:

1. Multiple entry points, so that individuals can begin their career path at the most appropriate skill level and not necessarily always at “entry level,”
2. Multiple exit points so that individuals have several options to re-enter the workforce at various milestones and easily return to further their education when they're ready—either between jobs or simultaneously while they are working,
3. Well-connected and transparent education, training, credentialing, and support services to facilitate progress along the pathway and ensure participants can get credit for their education and experience in the future (Clarkson University, 2020).

In addition to these three common characteristics, many well designed career pathways will also integrate these following four key functions that are made available to anyone utilizing the pathway:

1. Quality education and training leading to

- credentials which can be recorded as objective and measurable gains in relevant skill,
2. Consistent and non-duplicative assessments of participants assets and needs,
3. Support services and career navigation assistance, and
4. Employment services and work experiences.

A career path showcases industry-specific jobs a worker will need to secure in order to achieve one's ultimate career goals within the discipline, but this movement doesn't always have to happen in a straight line or linear fashion.

Career paths traditionally imply vertical growth or advancement to higher-level positions, but they can also include lateral (sideways) movement within or across industries. There's simply no universal blueprint or timetable for climbing the career ladder. It is dependent on a variety of things. This is where perhaps many people may become frustrated.

Even though on paper a career pathway often invokes the notion of a linear flow from milestone to milestone, in practice movement a worker may find themselves potentially skipping levels based on market demand, moving laterally due to employer dynamics, or even moving backwards along the pathway in certain situations. Professionals who have achieved the top job on one career pathway may be able to leverage transferable skills or networking strength to transition to the middle or top of another career pathway as well.

When properly designed, career pathways are a collaborative undertaking among community leaders, industry, institutions of higher education and training providers. K-12 school systems can also be involved depending on how early a community determines to begin engaging potential workers. For example, certain cybersecurity roles require Department of Defense clearances which can take a significant amount of time to obtain and only if the applying worker does not have any criminal offenses (such as underage alcohol possession). In this case, it makes sense for a career pathway to be integrated into a K-12 curriculum and begin preparing students with an interest in this field.

From a collaborative partnership of community, industry and education leaders, career pathways for key industries are designed showcasing milestone jobs that – with the proper accumulation of credentials, training, and experience – lead to higher paying milestone jobs. It is critical that the pathway is

sufficiently developed so as to support individuals along the way, coordinating with employers, and providing crucial guidance. Each step allows the participant to gain a marketable skillset and credential, preparing them for the next job on the career path (Clarkson University, 2020).

Why Use a Career Pathway?

Why would any working adult benefit from investing the time to prepare a career pathway? For one, it can support advancement in both one's career and in higher education. There are lots of options for individuals to follow in the modern workplace, so identifying the optimal array of education, training, certification, and employment can take some effort. A career pathway is a blueprint that helps align all the opportunities that are available to support an individual in reaching his or her goals.

The rapid diffusion of disruptive technology during the past ten years has resulted in a professional environment that depends on a skill development system that is poorly aligned to provide adequate training and support for anyone looking to enter a skilled occupation.

The fact is most of the skill development systems that are utilized today were designed for a time before two-thirds of jobs required at least some education and training beyond high school. Combine this with a working population that lack access to career guidance results in significant confusion about how training, employment and the wide array of postsecondary options fit together. It's important to also not forget that working adults who seek professional advancement often have to also maintain their current employment while simultaneously raising a family.

Demystifying how an individual can move from an entry level to more skilled position within an industry is the true benefit of a well-designed career pathway. Simply put, career pathways link your college education to industry needs leading to jobs that are in-demand while offering pathways for advancement. A career pathway does not feature current position openings like a job board. Rather, they showcase a map of options broken down into phases. Each phase showcases education, training and credentials one needs to achieve in order to successfully gain economic mobility and opportunities within an

industry. In addition, a career pathway will highlight employment common in each phase as a milestone within one's journey along the pathway.

Using Career Pathways to Re-Career

A Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of baby boomers found that they had an average of 12.3 jobs from ages 18 to 52.2 Changing jobs is expected, and sometimes those changes will involve different types of positions in various industries. Some career paths have a few ups and downs, and some people even plan a move down the career ladder (2020).

In addition, expectations surrounding work and work-related opportunities continue to change as well. According to Anne Fulton, author of *The Career Engagement Game* and founder of Fuel 50, there has been a fundamental shift in power between workers and organizations as a result of talent shortage in skilled professions. This power shift means that works have more authority in designing their own professional environments. There has been a significant impact for employers: up to 86% of employees leave a job due to a lack of forward momentum in career development.

As one looks to younger workers the situation only becomes more significant. According to McKinsey research, a full two-thirds of millennials are expecting more career-development opportunities that are more effective and extensive than what previous generations received. In addition, 70 percent of workers are currently working in jobs that have been fundamentally transformed by automation. Up to 375 million workers globally are forecast to be displaced from their present position by 2030 due to automation.

The implications of this are clear. Employers and employees alike need effective collaborative partnerships to be initiated and sustained among institutions of higher education, training providers and industry. The best way to future-proof both sides of the employment equation are for the worker and the employer to tap into talent pipelines established by the utilization of effective career pathways that outline industry specific professional trajectories (O'Brien, 2018).

All Pathways Are Not Created Equal

A well-designed pathway is a true collaboration between a community, industry, and providers of training and education. The tool itself needs to be unique and reflect the specific requirements for the industry that it is supporting, and this can make some career pathways longer than others. They also need to be flexible enough to accommodate the needs of a large population of potential workers seeking to follow the recommended paths. Not all workers move through their career at the same rate or in the same direction. Some people have deliberate, well-planned career paths. Others take things one job at a time, adjusting as their goals and preferences change. Either approach (or a combination of the two) can be successful and a career-pathway has to be malleable enough to accommodate both.

The responsibility for success isn't all on the pathway, though. A worker utilizing a career pathway must maintain some basic paradigms of thinking that exist beyond just the securing of a job. The worker must expand their canvas of professional development to exist across the decades that they will be working. To achieve this, here are a few common mindsets for workers to adopt as they integrate career pathways into their professional development:

- Always be willing to learn: The speed that the modern job market moves at is quick and today's workers have to be willing to learn and add to their skillsets. Workers also need to continually monitor what is trending for desirable skills and credentials.
- Always be willing to network: Connecting with your peers and leaders can help a worker identify new opportunities within the career pathway, even if a worker you're not immediately interested or ready to transition to a new role.
- Always be willing to be flexible: Workers should have a firm vision of their end goal, but the interim steps to achieve it should not be as tightly held. Workers must stay open to opportunities and align professional development with personal interests while still remaining within the scope of the career plan.
- Always keep your own needs front and center: A career path is a general tool designed for

everyone but individual strengths and skillsets vary so while one worker may elect to pursue a specific position to gain a specific proficiency, another worker may elect to follow a different path more aligned with her unique skills and talents.

- Always be willing to move laterally: Workers should embrace opportunities for lateral moves if it positions them to be noticed by leaders in the organization or the industry. Sometimes one division is simply more visible or critical from a leadership perspective. A lateral move may also help a worker develop different skills or networking connections from their present position that will be valuable for upward mobility along the career pathway at a later date (Obrien, 2018).

As with any other tool, a career pathway is just a construct that depends on its user for effective deployment. However, it represents a synthesis of leadership from various elements that are responsible for developing the skills, education and experience of a community's workforce so – when developed and executed properly – can really provide structure and insight for individuals seeking opportunities to expand their own professional achievement and credentials. As of late, the inclusion of rapid change conditions in the lives of many has become component of the stress arc for navigating socio-environmental challenges.

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Navigating the Workplace During Covid

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The COVID-19 pandemic prompted significant employment shifts worldwide. Millions of workers experienced sudden and unexpected job loss, while millions more struggled to adapt to the isolation of working remotely. In addition to risking their health, essential workers faced the psychological burden of distancing from others, wearing protective gear, fearing personal exposure, and the trauma of treating the critically sick and dying with few resources. Although COVID-19's impact varies, a large majority of workers have and will likely experience drastic changes and potential consequences to their financial, emotional, and professional lives, especially as new variants of the virus emerge.

The Financial Pandemic

The financial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy and job market are significant. According to the World Bank (2020), global growth weakened by almost 5% in 2020, representing the largest economic crisis since the Great Depression. At the start of the pandemic consumer spending drastically declined, predominantly in recreation and retail. By April 2020, people stopped eating in restaurants and going to malls, museums, and movie theaters. By December, the airlines canceled almost 15 million flights. According to Richter (2020) due to the pandemic and resultant shutdowns 114 million people lost their jobs. Lost working hours totaled the equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs and \$3.7 trillion in lost wages. As a consequence of job loss one in four adults couldn't pay their bills, one third had to access savings or retirement accounts, and one in six

borrowed from family or for the first time, received food from a food bank. The financial consequences of the pandemic evoked an increase in mental health conditions among the general public and in the workplace.

The Psychological Pandemic

Mental health issues are a national epidemic. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2020), pre-pandemic one in five Americans, or 47.6 million people, suffered from at least one mental health condition. Since the onset of COVID-19, the number of adults reporting anxiety or depression from pandemic stress increased from 36.4% to 41.5%, and individuals reporting untreated mental health issues increased from 9.2 to 11.7%. Social distancing, shutdowns, fear of contracting the virus, and long periods of quarantine and isolation were primary in evoking feelings of depression and anxiety among the general public.

Pappa et al. (2020) noted that the workplace represents an especially vulnerable target for developing mental health issues. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened employee job stress, increasing the prevalence of symptomology in the workplace and degrading the psychological condition at work. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (2020) reported an increase in employee post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation due to pandemic stress. Essential workers who encounter a greater risk of contracting the virus reported greater symptoms of

anxiety and depression (42% vs. 30%), substance abuse (25% vs. 11%), and suicidal thoughts (22% vs. 8%) compared to non-essential workers during the pandemic.

Career Disruption

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), in addition to the rise in mental illness the pandemic created career disruption for a vast number of people, particularly for four subsets of workers: essential workers struggling to protect themselves and their families from contracting the virus, healthcare workers coping with post-traumatic stress disorder, remote workers adapting to working and communicating virtually, and unemployed or underemployed workers seeking career development and job search support. This disruption prompted approximately five million people to voluntarily leave the workforce since the pandemic began. It is unclear whether their decision to leave is permanent or temporary, but employers struggle to retain existing employees and to hire workers to fill vacant positions. Instead of looking for new jobs immediately, a vast number of people are postponing re-entry into the workforce and contemplating their next career move. Compensation, work-life balance, few growth opportunities and lack of training most fueled workers' motivation to leave their jobs.

Despite vast unemployment and vacant job openings, the pandemic prompted new job creation. According to Mauer (2020), the pandemic shocked the labor market and initiated new jobs requiring new skill sets. The public health crises prompted new jobs necessary to mitigate the virus and increase the general public's confidence. Because COVID-19 has changed how people think about work, and how companies safeguard their employees and customers, more companies focus on safety and stricter health protocols prompting new jobs in cleaning and sanitization, health monitoring, decontamination, contract tracing, and space re-configuration to modify workplace layouts for social distancing. While the demand for these jobs has steadily increased and may be expected to grow, many will disappear after more people are vaccinated and the virus becomes less threatening. It is important for leaders to be able to assist these workers to reskill as their jobs become obsolete.

Advice for Leaders

Post pandemic, workforce planning and strategy will change, and leaders should begin to prepare. Because people are voluntarily leaving their jobs, leaders should focus their effort and attention on building workplace support systems that encourage people to actively engage and thrive. Typically, organizations invest effort during the hiring process to select applicants who are a good cultural fit with skills that match job requirements. Few, if any, organizations assess fit over time. Follmer et al. (2018) noted that employees' perceptions of fit change especially during transitions such as job change, change in leadership, process changes, etc., and often terminate their positions as a result of these changes. The COVID-19 pandemic has provoked various workplace changes, motivating employees to re-assess their fit and future with their organizations. To encourage retention and reduce turnover, employers should focus on keeping employees engaged. Offering individualized, custom packages employees could not find elsewhere increases fit, reinforces the employee's value to the organization, and encourages retention. Examples of individualized packages include customizing work schedules to meet employees' individual needs, offering cafeteria-style benefit plans, paying employees for performance, and offering increased learning and development. According to Spar and Dye (2018), employees value learning opportunities to enable career growth and development. To increase enthusiasm about staying with the organization, companies can offer employees stretch assignments and specialized training, and communicate transparently about career growth and compensation.

To meet the demand to fill vacant roles, employers should not postpone identifying the skills and talents required to fill these positions. Follmer et al. (2018) noted when managing turnover, companies often backfill positions with the same skills. Since COVID-19 has changed the skill requirements for many jobs, employers must conduct thorough job analyses to determine new skill requirements and encourage new skill development through reskilling and upskilling.

Many organizations have transitioned to virtual or hybrid work environments where employees can work either 100% remotely or both virtually and onsite. This new workplace model has prompted a novel freedom for employees to choose where and how they

work, increasing the number of distributed teams. For organizations to successfully adapt to this new model they must become virtually competent.

In addition to implementing technology to enable virtual work, leaders must be able to effectively manage, evaluate and train employees remotely. Face time in the office is no longer the sole criteria for evaluating employee work (Follmer et al., 2018). Pappa et al. (2020) noted that to address mental health concerns, organizational leaders must address the “psychological pandemic” and provide mental health resources especially for high-risk groups and for individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions particularly vulnerable to pandemic stress. Possible interventions to moderate the pandemic’s effect on workers’ mental health include improving workplace infrastructures, implementing anti-contagion practices such as providing masks and protective gear, offering counseling services, and implementing safety and resilience training programs especially for individuals in leadership and management positions

Advice for Employees

Although the labor market has improved since the start of the pandemic, job seekers will experience competition due to the influx of candidates seeking new jobs. According to Julia Pollak, a labor economist at ZipRecruiter, highly trained and experienced applicants will be competing with recent college graduates for the same jobs, creating an extremely competitive job market. People who have lost their jobs or will be re-entering the workforce after an absence might consider the following:

Resume Refresh

Employees who lost jobs due to coronavirus should tailor their resumes to the job they want. Since large companies use applicant tracking systems to scan for keywords, candidates should carefully read the job description and edit their resumes to match. Candidates should include in their resumes significant projects and accomplishments achieved before a COVID-19 related layoff to highlight their achievements and skills. Since many companies have transitioned to virtual work, it is important for job applicants to learn communication tools – such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams – and add these skills to their resumes.

Virtual Networking

Networking is the most effective way to find meaningful employment and to attain job satisfaction and career success. According to Wanberg et al. (2019), 70% of jobs are never published, and 85% of people find jobs through networking. Many unpublished jobs are either created for existing employees or for people recruiters met through networking. Every online conference, zoom meeting, online lecture, remote meeting, or event provides the chance to meet people, increase credibility, and expand relationships. People who network and build relationships during the pandemic will likely be in a better position to find a job when companies begin hiring. Joining professional online groups on Facebook and LinkedIn, and actively posting and commenting in the threads is an effective way to increase visibility, make contacts, and learn about job opportunities.

Conduct Research

The global pandemic provides an opportunity for job seekers to observe different company cultures and business strengths. Researching different companies and how organizational leaders are managing the crisis and treating employees is one way to decide if the company is an appropriate fit. Prospective applicants should take time to conduct online research about organizations of interest. How long the company has been in business, how the company’s products or services have changed especially during the pandemic, and the name and reputation of the CEO are just a few key areas of research to pursue.

Prepare for Virtual Interviews

Since job interviews usually occur in person it is important to develop virtual interviewing skills. Before the interview, it is crucial to test technology including internet connection and verify that the camera and microphone are working. Proper preparation is the foundation for a successful virtual interview from ensuring working technology to conducting research before the meeting.

Improve Remote Work Skills

Since transitioning to remote work, some companies have realized the benefits and have made the transition to a remote work environment permanent. New hires who ultimately will be office-based may begin their jobs working virtually. It is important that candidates demonstrate technical competence and the

ability to work virtually on their resumes. Managing dispersed teams or working from home in the past are important competencies that demonstrate this ability.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way business operates and how employees work, and it has disrupted many individuals' personal, financial, and work lives. Yet, during this unprecedented time organizations and employees can adapt by embracing new skills and developing new behaviors. Businesses can use the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to reshape hiring practices and to recruit and retain top talent and employees. Job seekers can use this time to reflect on their next career move. There is no doubt the future of work has changed, perhaps with positive outcomes.

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Aligning Employer and Employee Perspectives on Successful and Sustainable Work and Life Balance

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Work-life balance perceptions vary between what employers believe they offer and what employees believe they receive. Work-life balance strategies continue to evolve to support employer engagement and possible retention, commitment, and contributions to the organizational culture. Organizational leaders must employ strategies to harness the influence of workers to promote organizational growth and development. Innovations to growth and to remain competitive are linked to aligning the perceptions by stakeholders. Being flexible to employee needs contributes to the level of organizational competitiveness. While employers desire to retain the best and the brightest employees to support organizational growth, they also want to ensure they are meeting the employees' needs with their work and life balance. The transformational journey begins with a mindset of providing workers what they need to experience success and value within the organization. Within post pandemic organizations, employers are being challenged to encourage and provide opportunities for greater work-life balance for employees. Employees are weighing the options

and benefits they are provided as they adjust to new policies, procedures, and benefits packages.

Introduction

The Career Optimism Index 2022 data support initiatives that are desired by employees but are not always being met by employers; however, employers believe that providing more than what employees acknowledge they receive. With over 4 million people walking away from their jobs monthly without having a job to transition into, employers are pursuing innovative ways to align the needs of employees with those of the organization to give them a compelling reason to remain with their organization (SHRM Conference, 2022). Adding value to the employee workforce contributes to the organizations' sustainability. Leaders have learned that people are their most significant asset and not their monetary profits or status. Genuine concerns about the employees serve as a reflection on how the employers are concerned about the organization. The process of employers helping to provide work-life balance gains

momentum when the organization becomes known for its concerns and value adding actions to attract, retain and spearhead the performance of employees. Positive responses from employees and industry increases the organizations' brand.

Employees desire to see the proof and be recognized for identifying what they need now versus later in their careers. The employees value more time with family, remote working, upskilling and cross skilling to meet the demands of the evolving global workforce, and safely responding to world events. The heightened sense of awareness is attributed the world's reactions to COVID-19. Work-life balance has different meanings. Clarifying how employers and employees respond to the meaning may enhance awareness of the needs and possibilities to manage time and benefits more effectively from both viewpoints (Turliuc & Buliga, 2014). Work-life balance trends continue to emerge industry-wide. The lack of balance impacts the life of the organization and the life of the employees. Everyone has the same number of hours in each day; however, their levels of responsibility and life activities may differ between employers and employees. Creating life-work balance takes time, energy, planning and opportunity to execute. Organizations cannot afford to not respond to emerging employee needs for work-life balance. Workplace stress and burnout prior to the pandemic cost the exceeded \$500 billion dollars annually and 550 million lost workdays (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2021).

What Organizations Offer Employees

Notably, there is no one way to manage people and organizations. Human resources managers of organizations generally oversee the areas of employee well-being and work-life balance. Work-life balance for employees is reflected in the integration of managing the demands of work or career initiatives and personal life activities. Employers may contribute to this phenomenon. Within the organization, employers may intentionally and positively provide actions or resources to reduce stress for employees, monitor the demands and responsibilities of employees' work environment, and ensure the employees roles are clearly defined. These actions may help employees to experience flexibility in their daily life to balance work and personal life choices. Some employers

involve their employees in the decision-making process to ensure each understands the other's needs. Some organizational leaders rely upon the experts in human resources to show them the most accepted and effective options to consider as an organization. Employers are under the impression they do more than what the employees say they do. The chasm can widen levels of distrust. The boundaries require redefining and clarification. Flexible workplaces are being offered to support the employees' work schedules and opportunities to minimize and eliminate the imbalances in perceived benefits and high absenteeism and employee turnover. Employers are more focused on retention due to the mass exodus of employees leaving their jobs monthly. Seeing the services and benefits the organization provides as being appreciated and utilized is important to organizations.

What Employees Want from Organizations

Employees indicate they need employer support in helping them to make decisions to commit to stay with organizations based upon the employer's concern for their welfare beyond the working environment. Career Optimism Index 2022 indicated that although employers believe they are providing sufficient mental health services, the employees do not maximize the use of those services for reasons that may not be positive to the employers. Employees want to be a part of the planning process on matters that impact them directly. According to the results of the Career Optimism Index 2022, employees also want employers to improve their position on the areas of compensation, training, advocacy, mental health, and job security. Expressing their needs is detrimental to the success of any program and benefits presented by employers. Self-care is sought after by employers to support personal growth outside of the organization and to maintain the employer's wellbeing. Employees anticipate the employers responding to the need for diversity, equity, inclusion, a sense of belonging, and their general well-fare (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2021). When work-life balance is achieved within an organization, the employees stay with the organization longer and generate buy-in of the expectations and visions of the organization. They are engaged in the organization's culture and contribute to its growth. The employees must also prioritize benefits that are

most crucial to receive. Receiving services that are needed, accessible and cost effective are important to employers.

Perspectives Matter

Aligned perspectives impact the bottom lines within the organization in support of organizational growth and employee development. The following areas may result in misalignment of perceptions: profits and losses by the organization, sustainability, competitiveness with other organizations, retention of the best qualified employees, work-life balance for employees, vertical and horizontal trust, job satisfaction, employee productivity, a pipeline of skilled and trained workers, and social responsibility. When organizations offer benefits and services the employees do not see as a benefit or enough of a benefit to influence the employees' work or life balance, this becomes problematic. Employees do not see the upskilling opportunities as the same level as employers says are offered. When there is a problem, some employees leave the organization and take their chances finding other employment without having career positions available to them when they leave (Career Optimism Index, 2022; SHRM Conference, 2022). Some employees stay with the organization; however, they look for opportunities to leave. Some employees will stay even if there is a problem for several reasons to include the problems are the same universally. When employees receive what they need, they commit to remaining with an organization. The nature of work has evolved worldwide, just as people have evolved. What mattered five years ago may no longer have relevance in today's economy and environment.

Alignment of Perspectives

The greatest opportunity to align perspectives is manifested when the employers give employees the opportunity to share their insight into the problem and possible solutions. This requires active listening and responding by the employers and employees. Employers also want the opportunity to be heard and to see their organizations grow with the support of trained employees who also care about the organizations' success and sustainability. They are looking for commitment and consistency. Organizational leaders and managers should have the

appropriate training to help them develop policies, procedures and plans to support the diverse needs of the employees. Leaders have an obligation to reflect the values of the organization and how the employees are valued within the organization. Understandably, organizational needs differ. The employees have different needs, and one size does not fit them all. When there is alignment between the majority of the needs and how they may be managed, there is a meeting of the minds. Speaking the same or similar language increases awareness of the problems and provides opportunities to begin to resolve issues and create more acceptable benefits packages and solutions to work-life balance. Patience becomes a prized virtue for both the leaders and the employees.

Conclusion

The organization has a level of social responsibility that must be met to promote the growth of the employee and the organization. The policies are created and implemented to help employees have work-life balance aligned with the expectations. Work-life balance requires routine review and reflection by all stakeholders. The needs may vary at different life stages of the employee and organizational stages of the employer. Considerations should be given by both the employer and the employee on what is most important to sustain and retain employees to complete the mission of the organization. Time should be spent defining the areas where there is a significant divide in understanding between the employer and employee in the areas of opportunities for upskilling, tools for growth, mental health support, career stressors, reskilling and other pertinent work-life balance areas. Prioritizing the needs of both should be presented and upheld. Showing value of employees presents an opportunity for the organization to establish employee assistance groups or affinity groups to present the employees' needs in open discussion to managers. Employees should also be open to dialogue to contribute to the growth of the organization. It becomes a give and take between the two stakeholders. Topics that are growing in acceptance and expectations of meeting employee needs post pandemic include flexible schedules, remote working, or hybrids to this idea, cost effective and full health care for employees and their family, upskilling, cross skilling, optimizing productivity, and effective mental health services that are nonjudgmental (SHRM

Conference, 2022), to name a few. The follow-up to listening to each other, is taking action.

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