



Misalignment of employees and employers' career expectations and ways to align them

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Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had significant impacts on economic and workplace wellbeing of the American workforce. Aguinis and Burgi-Tian purported that “the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant talent management challenges including: (a) hiring freezes and layoffs; (b) salary freezes, canceled bonuses, and pay reductions; (c) how work is done (i.e., teleworking); and (d) increased employee stress and burnout” (2021, p. 233).

Described as a *career shock*, Akkermans, Richardson, and Kraimer (2020) suggest that research about the impact of COVID-19 should be conducted in a way that highlights short-term and long-term consequences as well as considers the participants' life and/or career stage to more holistically examine the impact on work outcomes. Moreover, Tenakwah (2021) found that current evidence related to the impact of the pandemic shows that growth of companies continues to be hampered by employee turnover. One suggestion to reduce employee turnover is “listening to concerns or reasons accounting for the exit of employees” (Tenakwah, 2021, p. 1).

In this white paper, we focus on the *misalignment of employees and employers career expectations* in three specific areas: satisfaction with the amount of pay received, opportunities for improving skills, and having advocates and tools to succeed. Data from the 2022 University of Phoenix Career Institute® Career Optimism Index® study is used to answer the research questions and illuminate ways in which employee and employer career expectation might be aligned.

Method

Understanding the method used to obtain the archived data that are used for this research is important. Moreover, given that the data was collected during the second full year of the

COVID-19 pandemic, the findings have implications on employee career expectations as the workforce transitions from remote work back to the workplace. Career Institute's (2022) administration of the study supplies year-over-year data of workers career optimism as well as insights from employers. The focus of this study is to determine the misalignment of employees and employers' career expectations and ways to align them. To address the research focus of the study, Career Institute's (2022) archival data is used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are areas of misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to satisfaction with the amount of pay received?
2. What are the areas of misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to satisfaction with the opportunities for improving skills?
3. What are the areas of misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to having advocates and tools to succeed?

The second wave of the Career Institute's (2022) research study titled the *University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index®* is a self-report survey using a Likert scale. There were 5,000 respondents to the survey representing twenty major metropolitan areas. The data collection was conducted between December 12, 2021, and January 15, 2022. The survey focused on worker challenges, perspectives and expectations of career optimism. Moreover, employer data was collected to determine alignment of employee and employer expectations. Descriptive percentages are used to analyze Career Institute's (2022) archived data to address the study research questions.

To provide context about the participants in the archive data used for this study, the demographics of the participants in the Career Institute's (2022) study are shared in this section

including demographic information, metropolitan areas and numbers of participants. The metropolitan areas and sample size are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

U.S. Major Metropolitan Areas Represented in the Career Optimism Index Study 2022

Metropolita n Area	Sample Size	Margin of Error	Metropolita n Area	Sample Size	Margin of Error
New York City	302	+/- 5.64	Phoenix	302	+/- 5.64
Los Angeles	298	+/- 5.68	Tampa	303	+/- 5.63
Chicago	301	+/- 5.65	Seattle	302	+/- 5.64
Philadelphia	300	+/- 5.66	Detroit	302	+/- 5.64
Dallas	299	+/- 5.6/	Minneapolis	302	+/- 5.64
SF-Oak- San Jose	300	+/- 5.66	Miami	299	+/- 5.67
Washington D.C.	312	+/- 5.55	Denver	301	+/- 5.65
Houston	299	+/- 5.67	Orlando	309	+/- 5.57
Boston	301	+/- 5.65	Cleveland	301	+/- 5.65
Atlanta	303	+/- 5.63	Sacramento	300	+/- 5.66

Of the 5,000 participants, 47% identified as male and 53% identified as female. Twenty-three percent of the participants were in the 25-34 age range. Table 2 presents the age ranges of all the participants in the Career Optimism Index Study 2022.

Table 2

Age ranges of participants in the Career Optimism Index Study 2022

Age Range	Percentage	Age Range	Percentage
18-24	13%	45-54	21%
25-34	23%	55-64	17%
35-44	21%	65+	5%

In terms of race and ethnicity, 61% of participants in the research identified as White. Hispanic participants were 23% of the sample. African American, Asian and others complete the sample with 8%, 4% and 4% respondents, respectively. Most participants (29%) in the survey

had completed some college education. Table 3 provides information about the educational attainment of all the respondents.

Table 3

Educational attainment of participants in the Career Optimism Index Study 2022

Educational Level Attained	Percentage	Educational Level Attained	Percentage
Some high school (Grade 9-11)	3%	Some college	29%
Graduated high school (Grade 12)	26%	Graduated college	24%
Vocational school/Technical school	5%	Post-graduate degree (e.g., MA, MBA, LLD, PhD)	13%

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of respondents were employed full-time. Twenty percent (20%) were employed part-time, Five percent (5%) were in a reduced, furloughed or unemployed situation due to COVID-19, 2% were unemployed prior to COVID -19 and 1 percent was in a contract position. The final five percent included students (2%), homemakers (2%) and others (1%). Salaries reported by respondents are listed below in Table 4. Eighteen percentage of respondents earned \$50,000 - \$74,999 per year followed by 17% of respondents earning Under \$25,000.

Table 4

Income of participants in the Career Optimism Index Study 2022

Income	Percentage	Income	Percentage
Under \$25,000	17%	\$75,000-\$99,999	14%
\$25,000-\$34,999	13%	\$100,000-\$149,999	15%
\$35,000-\$49,999	14%	\$150,000 or more	8%

\$50,000-\$74,999	18%	Prefer not to answer	2%
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Results

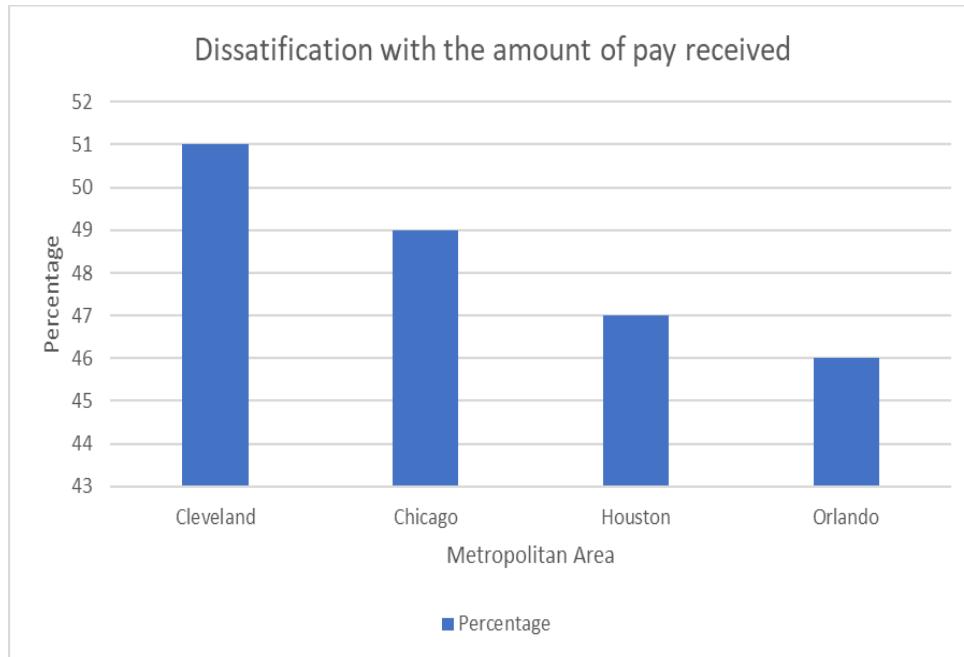
In this section results will be shared related to areas of misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to satisfaction with the amount of pay received, opportunities for improving skills and having advocates and tools to succeed.

Satisfaction with the amount of pay received

The first research question focused on the misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to satisfaction with the amount of pay received. After data analysis, there is a clear disconnect in employer and employee satisfaction with the amount of pay received. The survey reveals that 44% of employees are not satisfied with their current pay, while 14% of employers think employees are not happy with pay. Figure 1 indicates the 4 metropolitan areas with employees that are most dissatisfied.

Figure 1

Dissatisfaction with the amount of pay received

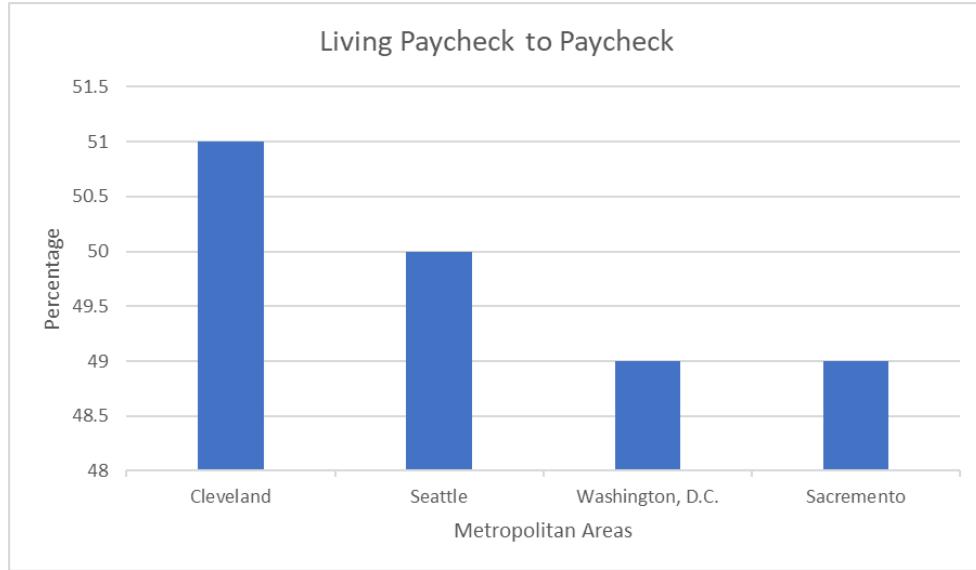


Moreover, 30% of employees believe that they are not paid fairly at their current job as opposed to 8% of employers. All racial and ethnic groups (White, Black Americans, Latinx and Asian) responded similarly that they believe they are paid unfairly.

This research reveals that 56% of respondents were living paycheck to paycheck. Of particular concern in this area are women (61%), Generation Z (66%) and Black Americans (61%). In addition, 34 percent of respondents felt overwhelmed with debt. Vulnerable populations in relation to being overwhelmed by debt include women (42%), Generation Z (45%), Millennials (44%) and Latinx Americans (41%). Figure 2 below includes the four metropolitan areas that have responded the largest percentage of living with financial insecurity.

Figure 2

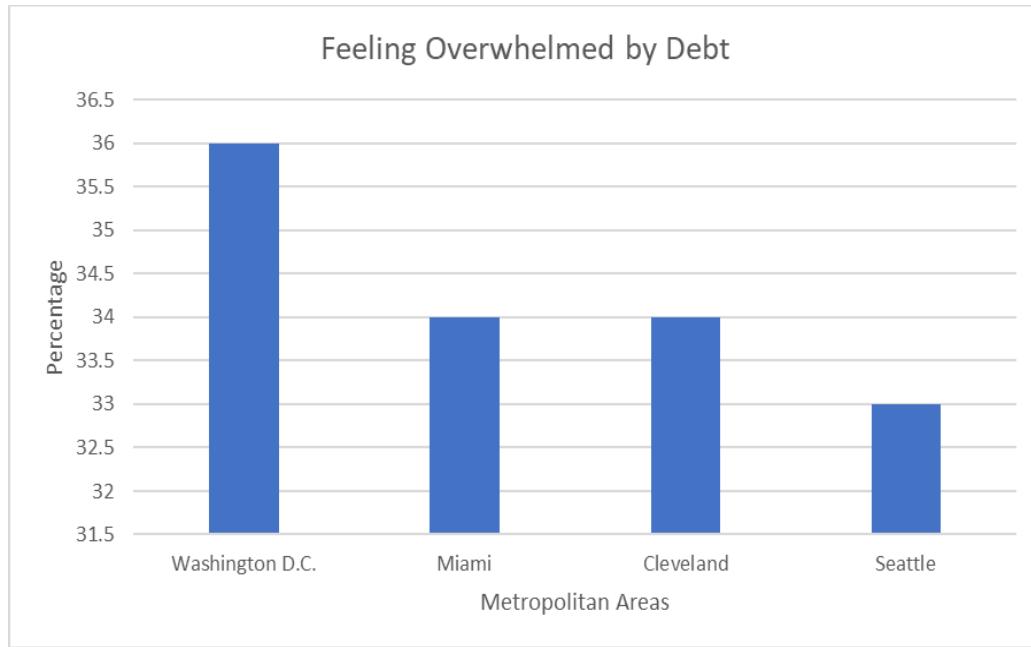
Living Paycheck to Paycheck



Furthermore, 34% of respondents felt overwhelmed with debt. Specific respondents that were more likely to say they were over overwhelmed by debt include Women (42%), Generation Z (45%), Millennials (44%) and Latinx Americans (41%). Figure 2 includes the metropolitan areas that have responded with the largest percentage of respondents living with financial insecurity and overwhelmed by debt.

Figure 3

Feeling overwhelmed by debt

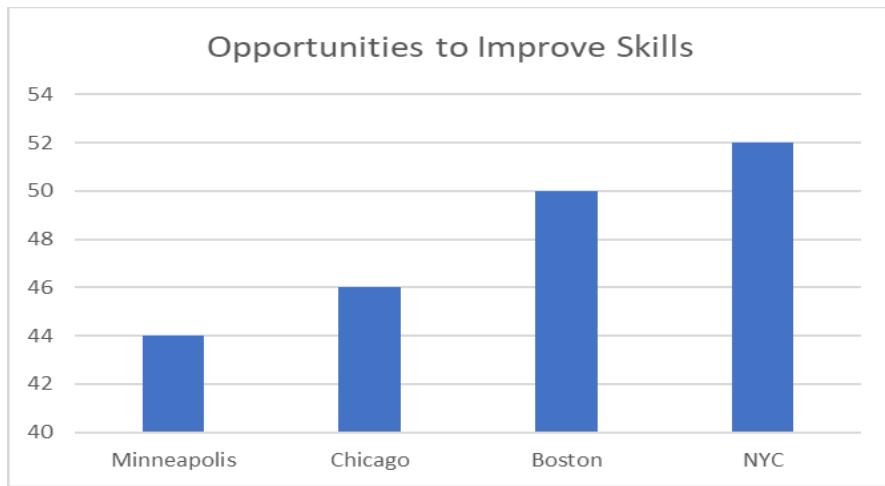


Opportunities with Improving Skills

The second research question focused on the misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to the opportunities for improving skills. Employees envision training and skills development to stay at their current jobs. Disparities exist between employers and employees on the availability of skills improvement. Approximately 89% of employers believe they provide frequent opportunities for employees to improve their skills. However, only 60% of employees believe the opportunities to improve skills exist. Figure 4 displays the top four cities where employees believe they do not have enough opportunities to improve their skills at work.

Figure 4

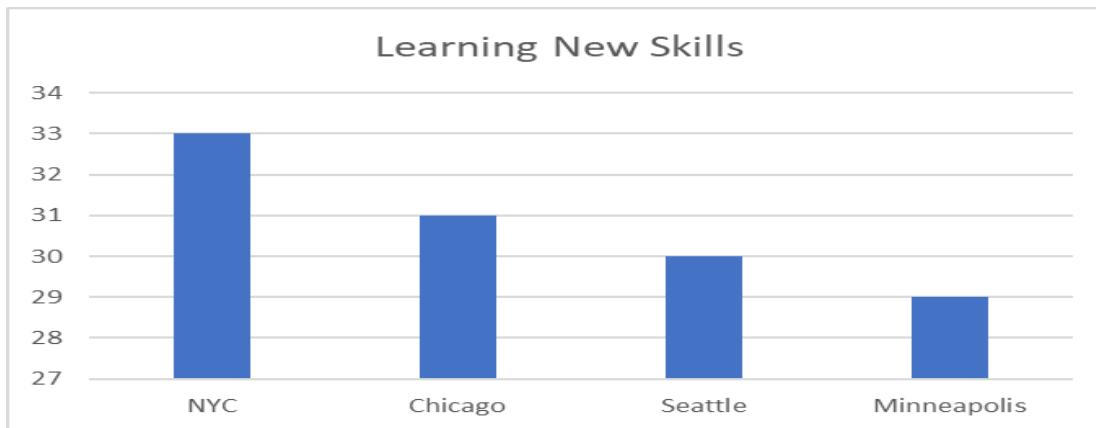
Opportunities to Improve Skills



Individuals with higher incomes \$100-149k (60%) and over \$150k (56%), and lower incomes \$50k-99.9k (50%) and under \$50k (50%), believe they need to acquire new skills within the next year to keep their current jobs. Twenty-nine percent of Americans do not feel optimistic about opportunities for training or learning a new skill in their current careers. Figure 5 displays the top cities where employees do not feel optimistic about training and skills development opportunities in their current careers.

Figure 5

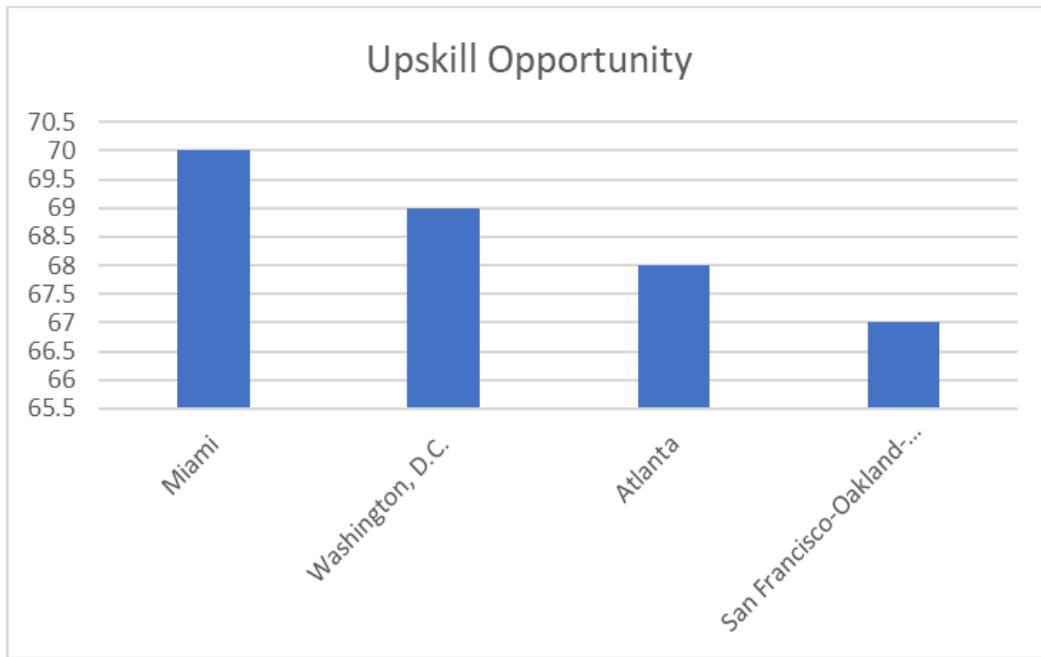
Learning New Skills



About 68% of employees would remain at their current job if upskilling opportunities were available. Figure 6 shows the top cities where employees would remain on the job if upskilling opportunities were available.

Figure 6

UpSkill Opportunity



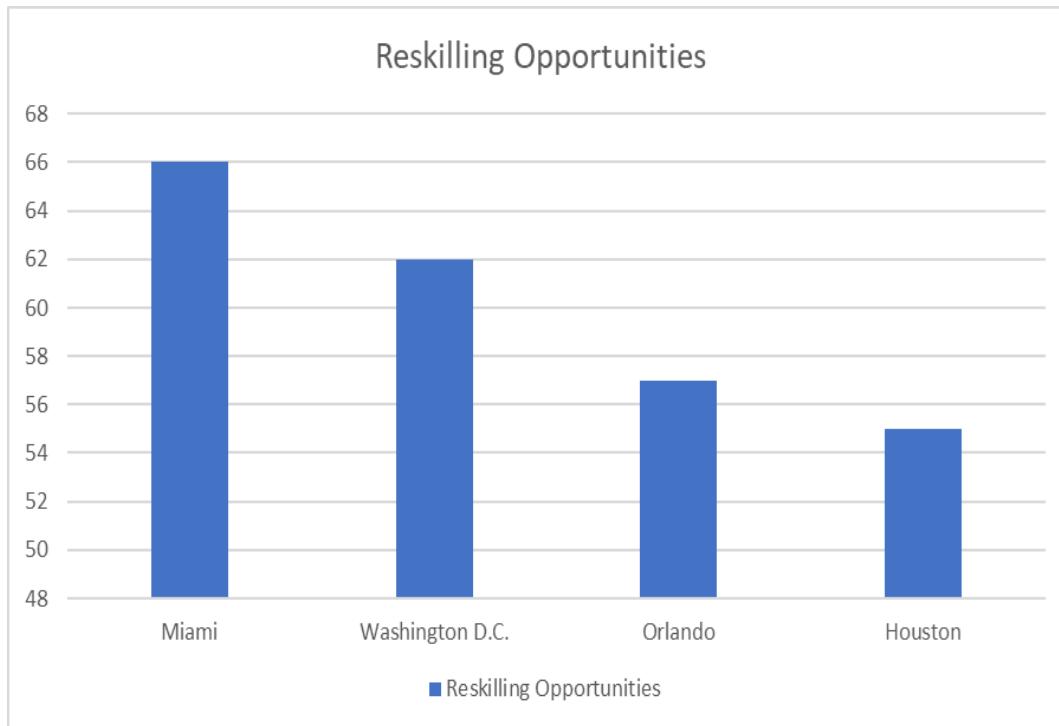
Increasing skills remains a critical issue for employees and some employees have taken action to change careers. Approximately 34% of employees surveyed enrolled in an educational program to increase skills while 44% of employees networked with individuals to change careers. About 27% of employees inquired about informational interviews for new careers.

Reskilling opportunities are also important to employees; however, disparities exist. Approximately 86% of employers believe they provide opportunities for reskilling. Only 57% of employees believe reskilling opportunities exist. Only 56% of employees provide their employees with a positive rating for reskilling opportunities. Among those employees, 65%

make \$149,900 and 61% of those employees make more than \$150,000 annually. Figure 7 provides the top four cities with reskilling opportunities from the employees' perspective.

Figure 7

Reskilling Opportunities



Advocates and Tools to Succeed

The third research question focused on the misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to having advocates and tools to succeed. Approximately 91% of employers believe employees have advocates whereas only 63% of employees believe they have professional advocates. Figure 8 shows the bottom cities where employees believe they have professional advocates.

Figure 8

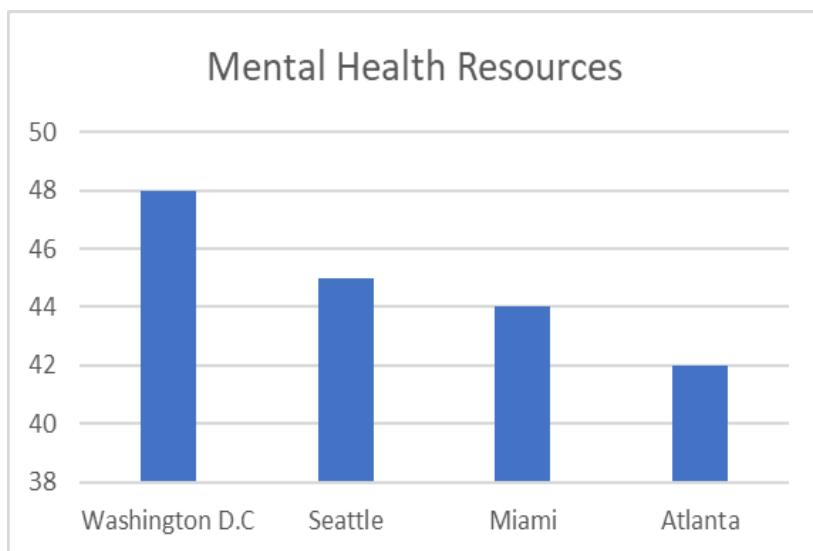
Professional Advocates



One of the tools provided by employers to help employees succeed is mental health support. Over 40% of employees stated they need or have sought mental health resources from their employers. Generation Z (59%) and Millennials (57%) were more likely to search for mental health resources at their current jobs. Figure 9 shows the top cities where workers have become more dependent on receiving mental health resources.

Figure 9

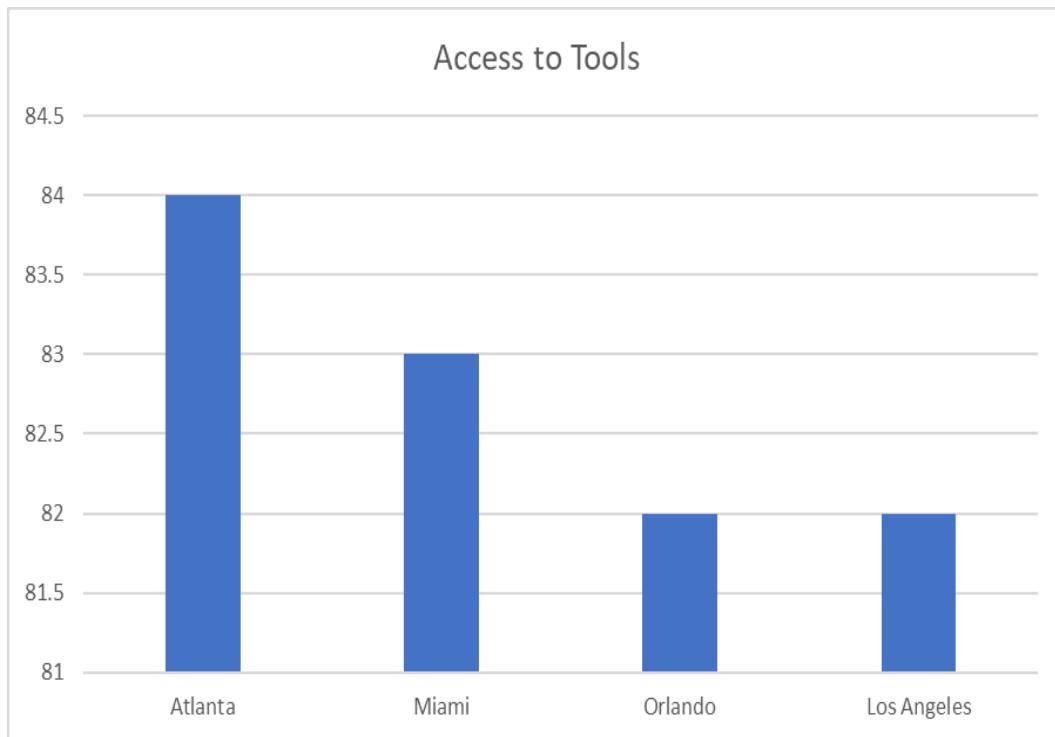
Mental Health Resources



Despite the various disparities, employers and employees agree that employees have access to tools and resources to succeed in their current jobs. Approximately 77% of the employees surveyed believe they have the tools needed to succeed. Figure 10 includes a breakdown of the top four states for employees having access to tools.

Figure 10

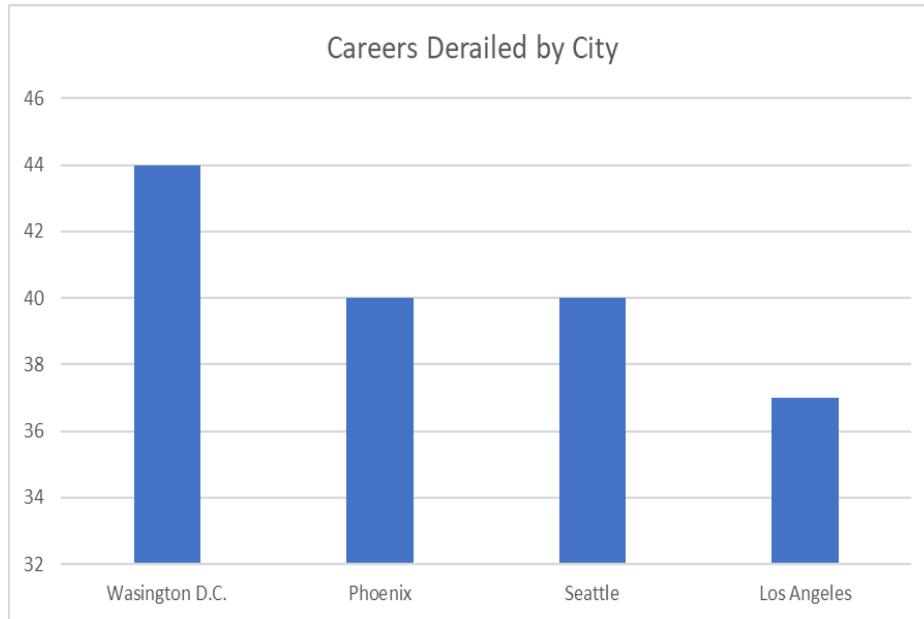
Access to Tools to Succeed



The pandemic has negatively impacted many careers. In 2021, 34% of workers stated COVID -19 has negatively impacted their careers, and in 2022 the percentage of workers experiencing the negative impact increased to 40 percent. Among the Americans surveyed, 50% of Generation Z and 46% of Millennials experienced the impact of COVID-19 on their careers. Figure 11 shows the top four cities where COVID-19 has derailed the careers of Americans.

Figure 11

Careers Derailed

**Discussion**

The focus of this study is to determine the misalignment of employees and employers' career expectations and ways to align them. To address the research focus of the study, *University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index* to answer the following research questions:

1. What are areas of misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to satisfaction with the amount of pay received?
2. What are the areas of misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to satisfaction with the opportunities for improving skills?
3. What are the areas of misalignment of employers and employees' expectations related to having advocates and tools to succeed?

The result of this archival data analysis shows that there is a clear misalignment between employee and employer expectations as it relates to two of the areas different areas; specifically, satisfaction with the amount of pay received, opportunities for improving skills. Although there were some disparities in access to advocates and types of tools available to succeed, employers and employees agreed that employees have access to advocates and tools to succeed. The analysis revealed that the most misaligned and vulnerable employee groups for income and financial insecurity include women, African American, Hispanics and Millennials. Moreover, professional development and reskilling opportunities seem to be more accessible to employees earning \$100,000-\$149,999 and \$150,000 or more annually. Interestingly, employees and employers agree that tools are supplied for employees to be successful. However, even with these tools, employees say that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a barrier to career trajectory.

Awareness of misalignment of employee and employer beliefs is important because it can lead to job insecurity for employees. Survey research shows that job insecurity is a regular occurrence for American's worker, with 52% of employees feeling that they are easily replaceable and 41% in fear of losing their jobs (Career Institute, 2022, p. 4). Elshaer and Azazz (2021) found that employee behavior can be negatively affected when employees are experiencing job insecurity. The impact on organizations can be unethical employee behavior and decreased connectedness to the organizational mission and administrative structure.

One major cause of employee job insecurity is fear. Lippens, Moens, Sterkens, Weytjens, and Baert (2021) found “the fear of negative career impacts due to the COVID-19 crisis to be significant” (p. 14). In addition to being afraid that they will lose positions, employees believe they are missing opportunities for upward mobility. As we found in this research, vulnerable populations have a greater level of negative impacts. Moreover, they found that “More than half

of the respondents indicate attaching more importance to working conditions and work-life balance since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis" (Lippens et. al, 2021, p.14), which has direct impacts on employee expectations. Similarly, Elshaer and Azazz (2021) stated, "when employees feel the risk of future job loss and insecurity, they begin to reconsider their job and their future career path in the company. This causes them to lose association with their supervisors and destruction in the match and alignment between their beliefs and values and those of the organization" (p. 11).

The mental health and wellbeing of employees is also critical within this pandemic. Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) found that" numerous factors negatively affecting the well-being of workers, such as the fear of illness or social isolation, it is becoming extremely important to support healthy relationships at a remote workplace" (p.13).

The literature reveals that employers can affect these misaligned expectations by supporting employees through this time by creating opportunities for professional development and upskilling that are accessible to those employees that really need access to these resources. Moreover, fair compensation for work ultimately reduce organizational expenditures by increasing employee retention. Although it seems that opportunities to access tools to success are available, employers might more intentionally promote resources to support the professional development of employees.

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