

: How can managers hire and retain information technology talent?

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Our information technologies continue to change and improve. With developments like Cloud computing, mobile devices, and the Internet of Things (IoT) the demand for talented programmers and developers who can adapt legacy applications and create new applications continues to grow rapidly. Demand for creative information technology experts is much higher than the supply and this is an ongoing problem (BLS, 2015; Freeman and Aspray, 1999; NRC, 2008). Shortages of programmers, data analysts and data scientists, applications analysts and developers, security experts, Web and e-commerce specialists, network designers, and other technologists continue to be a problem for managers. The task of recruiting technology talent becomes a challenge of assessing more than that person's expertise or potential, but also assessing the fit with the culture and fit with management processes and systems. Once hired, managers must actively pay attention to retention activities.

This column explores the IT talent hiring and retention "problem" in general terms with short vignettes. Once the problem dimensions are explored then we more systematically discuss hiring decision making criteria and processes for Information Technology jobs, the possibilities for compensation packages, and strategies for retaining talent in a market of scarcity. Because it is unlikely that one approach or solution will fix this turnover problem for every situation in every organization, we address alternative approaches that can be tailored to a specific situation and organization. Finally, we conclude with some recommendations.

Hiring and Retention Horror Stories

Hiring IT talent might seem like Halloween is a year long event. The programmer zombies are increasing in some organizations. The IT warlocks are in full splendor in the job market. The tech goblins are ready to jump out and say "I quit!" The new programmer is naively hoping for a life-long career at one firm, but is bitten by a wizened IT version of Count Dracula or the IT Werewolf. The cast of characters is diverse. The following vignettes are disguised stories of hiring and retention woes.

Hiring IT Talent

Recruiters both internal and external can identify prospects, but the pool of qualified prospects may be small and personal contact and relationships will likely be very important in attracting top talent to

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a position. Relying on personal relationships creates it's own problems.

Compensation Strategies

There are multiple possibilities for how an organization can manage employee pay and benefits. In some organizations, the compensation strategy emphasizes secrecy and pay and benefits are subject to manager discretion so managers can offer personalized incentives. Other organizations have more firm and rigid compensation policies. What compensation strategy works best for hiring IT talent? Also, what other strategies help managers recruit and retain top talent?

Strategies for Retaining IT Talent

A strategic performance and reward system is one of the ways to retain IT talent, but only part of a sophisticated retention strategy.

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