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Should I stay or should I go?

Global insights into employees' decisions to leave their jobs

Haiyan Zhang, Ph.D. and Sheri Feinzig, Ph.D.

Attracting and keeping great talent are perennial challenges for organizations. But what causes people to want to leave? What might entice seemingly happy employees away? The IBM Smarter Workforce Institute conducted in-depth research among more than 22,000 employees to find some evidence-based answers.

The research presented in this paper provides insights into how organizations can reach new talent and sheds light on what could be driving talent away. Armed with these insights, organizations can create more effective attraction and retention strategies.

Key findings

Our analyses reveal:

The potential talent pool is large

- One in six employees (16 percent) are actively looking for a new job, and almost half (46 percent) would consider a better job opportunity even if they weren't actively looking.
- Twice as many Millennials as Baby Boomers are looking to leave their job for a new one (19 percent vs. 8 percent). And half of Millennials (51 percent) would consider a good job opportunity even if they weren't actively looking.
- Reaching passive candidates is not yet the sole domain of social media. Of those who changed jobs because of unsolicited job offers, just 15 percent were attracted by social media recruitment techniques. Forty-two percent came via friends or family referral and another 30 percent through a recruiter.

Job attractors can vary

- High potentials are more likely than other workers to be attracted to new jobs by opportunities to learn new skills (71 percent vs. 60 percent), for more job responsibilities (69 percent vs. 52 percent) and to try something new (59 percent vs. 45 percent).
- Top job attractors are consistent across generations, however, compared to later career workers, early and mid-career workers are more likely to be attracted to a new job by:
  - Better career development opportunities, mentioned by 74 percent of Millennials, 68 percent of Generation Xers and just 54 percent of Baby Boomers

- Great employer brands, mentioned by 69 percent of Millennials, 63 percent of Generation Xers and 53 percent of Baby Boomers
- Flexibility at work, mentioned by 64 percent of Minnennials, 56 percent of Generation Xers and 44 percent of Baby Boomers

Managers are not the reason most people leave

- Contrary to many media reports, only 14 percent of people left their last job because they were unhappy with their managers.
- The biggest work-related reason (cited by 40 percent of respondents) for leaving is because employees are not happy with their jobs.
- Almost as many people (39 percent) left their last job for personal reasons such as spouse relocation, child care or health issues.
- One in five (20 percent) workers left because they were not happy with their organization.
- Eighteen percent left due to organizational changes which had caused a great deal of uncertainty.

Positive employee experiences and high engagement are linked to fewer new job searches

- Employees with the most positive experiences at work are three times less likely to be searching for a new job (9 percent vs. 31 percent).
- Employees who are most engaged with their organizations are five times less likely to be searching for a new job (6 percent vs. 33 percent).
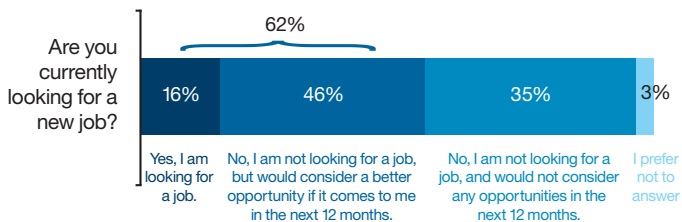
About the analyses

Analyses on talent attraction presented in this white paper are based on the responses of more than 22,000 employees from the IBM WorkTrends™ survey. Analyses on retention are based on a subset of responses from over 17,000 employees who left their previous organizations voluntarily. The survey was administered by the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute in 2016 in 45 countries and territories, in a cross-section of industries, thousands of different organizations and all major job families.

Insights into talent attraction

For those recruiting, the bigger the potential talent pool the better. And while around one in six employees (16 percent) are actively looking, a further 46 percent would consider a better opportunity if it came their way (Figure 1). Overall, this means that 62 percent of employees could be tempted to take a new job.

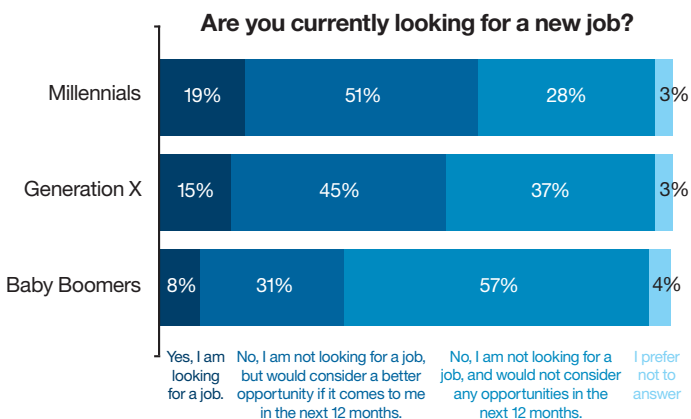*Figure 1.* A large percentage of employees could be attracted to a new job

Are you currently looking for a new job?

| 62% |
| 16% | 46% | 35% | 3% |

Yes, I am looking for a job. — No, I am not looking for a job, but would consider a better opportunity if it comes to me in the next 12 months. — No, I am not looking for a job, and would not consider any opportunities in the next 12 months. — I prefer not to answer

Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 global survey (n=22,466).

Millennials are more open to new jobs

Not surprisingly, of all the generations who currently have a job, Millennials are most likely to be open to new job opportunities. Nearly one in five (19 percent) Millennials are currently looking for a new job and half (51 percent) are willing to consider a better opportunity even if they're not actively looking. Furthermore, Millennials are 80 percent more likely than Baby Boomers to be open to new job opportunities, even if they're not currently looking (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Millennials are more open to new job opportunities

Are you currently looking for a new job?

Millennials	19%	51%	28%	3%
Generation X	15%	45%	37%	3%
Baby Boomers	8%	31%	57%	4%

Yes, I am looking for a job. — No, I am not looking for a job, but would consider a better opportunity if it comes to me in the next 12 months. — No, I am not looking for a job, and would not consider any opportunities in the next 12 months. — I prefer not to answer

Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 global survey (n=22,449)
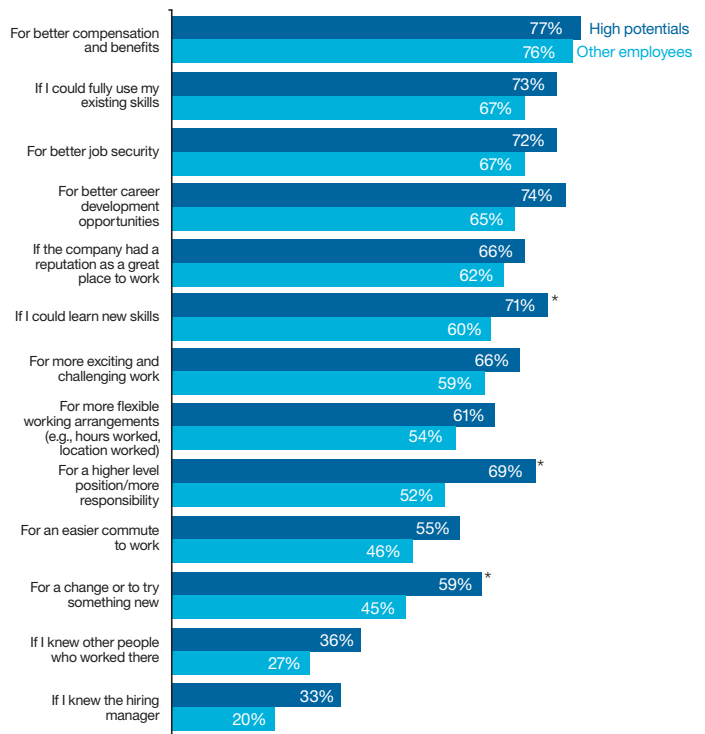
Growth-related job attractors are more important for high potentials

Organizations looking to reach workers who are open to new job opportunities may want to consider what factors are most likely to attract them to apply. Our research reveals that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the top attractor relates to pay (Figure 3 and Table 1).

However, when it comes to high-potential employees, some differences in job attractors emerge. High potentials, who significantly outperform their peers and demonstrate a stronger capacity to succeed are, understandably, sought after talent.[1,2] Our research reveals that high potentials are much more likely than others to be attracted by opportunities to:

- Learn new skills (71 percent vs. 60 percent)
- Have more job responsibilities (69 percent vs. 52 percent)
- Try something new (59 percent vs. 45 percent)

Figure 3. Pull factors are amplified for high potentials

High potentials / Other employees

For better compensation and benefits	77% / 76%
If I could fully use my existing skills	73% / 67%
For better job security	72% / 67%
For better career development opportunities	74% / 65%
If the company had a reputation as a great place to work	66% / 62%
If I could learn new skills	71%* / 60%
For more exciting and challenging work	66% / 59%
For more flexible working arrangements (e.g., hours worked, location worked)	61% / 54%
For a higher level position/more responsibility	69%* / 52%
For an easier commute to work	55% / 46%
For a change or to try something new	59%* / 45%
If I knew other people who worked there	36% / 27%
If I knew the hiring manager	33% / 20%

Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 global survey (excluding respondents who were unable to say whether they were high potential or not, n=17,370.)

Note: The survey asked "What would make you leave your current organization for a new job?" The chart shows the percentages of employees who reported the job attractors were very important or extremely important to them. The asterisks mark the three largest differences between the responses of high potentials and others.

All generations are attracted by pay, but other attractors vary in importance by generation

Despite differences in levels of openness to new job opportunities between the generations (Figure 2), many similar factors attract people to new jobs across the generations. In Table 1, pay is the fairly predictable top reason to take a new job. Furthermore, better job security and the full use of existing skills were job attractors in the top four for all generations. This implies that there may be less need to tailor the content of recruitment campaigns to different generations, but it could be worthwhile tailoring to the high-potential attractors identified in the previous section. A look down the rest of the table reveals some differences between the generations. For example, Millennials and Generation Xers are more likely to mention better career development opportunities (74 percent and 68 percent respectively)

Table 1. The importance of job attractors by generation

Millennial		Generation X		Baby Boomer	
For better compensation and benefits	77%	For better compensation and benefits	78%	For better compensation and benefits	70%
For better career development opportunities	74%	For better job security	70%	For better job security	69%
If I could fully use my existing skills	70%	If I could fully use my existing skills	70%	If I could fully use my existing skills	64%
For better job security	69%	For better career development opportunities	68%	If I could learn new skills	63%
If the company had a reputation as a great place to work	69%	If I could learn new skills	64%	For more exciting and challenging work	57%
If I could learn new skills	64%	If the company had a reputation as a great place to work	63%	For better career development opportunities	54%
For more flexible working arrangements (e.g., hours worked, location worked)	64%	For more exciting and challenging work	61%	If the company had a reputation as a great place to work	53%
For more exciting and challenging work	63%	For more flexible working arrangements (e.g., hours worked, location worked)	56%	For a higher level position/more responsibility	45%
For a higher level position/more responsibility	60%	For a higher level position/more responsibility	56%	For more flexible working arrangements (e.g., hours worked, location worked)	44%
For an easier commute to work	54%	For an easier commute to work	49%	For an easier commute to work	40%
For a change or to try something new	52%	For a change or to try something new	49%	For a change or to try something new	39%
If I knew other people who worked there	31%	If I knew other people who worked there	30%	If I knew other people who worked there	26%
If I knew the hiring manager	26%	If I knew the hiring manager	24%	If I knew the hiring manager	17%

Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 global survey (n=22,449)
Note: The survey asked "What would make you leave your current organization for a new job?" The chart shows the percentages of employees who reported whether the job attractors were very important or extremely important to them.

compared to Baby Boomers (54 percent). Furthermore, a great employer brand is a more important job attractor for Millennials (69 percent) and Generation Xers (63 percent) than it is for Baby Boomers (53 percent).

Table 1 also shows that flexibility at work (e.g., hours worked, work location) is an important job attractor for Millennials (64 percent) and Generation Xers (56 percent), but less than half (44 percent) of Baby Boomers report that flexibility is an important job attractor.

While variations exist in the full list of job attractors by generation, the top attractors remain remarkably consistent. Given this insight, positioning job opportunities that maximize the interest of high potentials could be more worthwhile than focusing on generations.

Passive candidates are more likely to find jobs through friends and family
As shown in Figure 1, almost half (46 percent) of employees are passive candidates who are not actively looking but would

consider a better job opportunity if it came their way. Passive candidates rarely check out job openings, so how can organizations reach them?

Given its increasing popularity, organizations may assume that social media would be the best way to connect with passive candidates. However, our study reveals that although social media (e.g. job advertisements on social media, emails through social media) found some passive candidates, traditional recruitment techniques (e.g. friends or family referral, recruiters reaching out) are much more common.

Figure 4 shows that one in five employees (21 percent) voluntarily left their previous organization because of unsolicited job offers they received when they were not actively looking. Among those who had received unexpected job opportunities, just 15 percent were attracted by social media recruitment techniques. In contrast, a much larger percentage were attracted by traditional approaches such as friends or family referral (42 percent) or a recruiter reaching out to them (30 percent).

Figure 4. Passive candidates more influenced by traditional recruiting techniques than social media

Why people voluntarily left their previous organization

Which of the following best describes your experience?

- A friend/family member recommended the job to me.
- I was contacted by a recruiter/hiring manager/head-hunter.
- Other (e.g. job ads in the newspaper or internal job posting, co-worker/supervisor referal, promotion).
- I was attracted by job advertisements on social media.
- Emails from other social media (not LinkedIn) about potential jobs attracted my attention.
- LinkedIn emails about potential jobs attracted my attention.

Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 global survey (n=17,445).
Note: The doughnut chart was based on responses from people who had left their previous organizations voluntarily.
The bar chart was based on the subset of responses from those who those who received an unsolicited job offer.

Insights into talent retention

Organizations are trying hard to attract talent, but what about keeping the great talent you have? The following section explores what could drive your talent away.

People don't leave managers

A popular belief is people leave when they are unhappy with their managers. However, our study reveals that managers are not the main reason why people leave. Rather, job satisfaction (mentioned by 40 percent of respondents) and personal reasons (mentioned by 39 percent of respondents) are the top two factors driving the desire to leave. Only 14 percent of recent job changers left because of their managers. See Figure 5.

It is also interesting to note that the organization itself appears to play a part in causing some people to explore new job opportunities. One in five employees (20 percent) say they left their last job because they were not happy with their organization (e.g., culture, leadership) and almost as many (18 percent) say they left because of recent organizational changes (e.g., acquisition, restructure, leadership changes) which had caused a great deal of uncertainty.

Figure 5. Job dissatisfaction and personal reasons are top two drivers of voluntary turnover

Source: WorkTrends™ 2016 global survey (n=17,370).

Note: The survey asked those who voluntarily left their previous organization the question, "Why did you leave your last organization?" Survey participants have the option to select all that apply.

It is also noteworthy that jarring events at home and in the workplace are causing a number of employees to want to leave. As Figure 5 shows, personal reasons, organizational acquisition and missed promotion all feature significantly in the reasons for leaving. Workforce researchers sometimes refer to these events that lead individuals to think about their current position and to voluntarily quit their job as "shocks".[3] It is important for organizations to recognize these shocks as one of the reasons that cause people to leave, because they may be able to take actions to mitigate the effects of the shocks on their employees. For example, an organization could offer remote working to retain employees who need to relocate for family reasons.

Positive experiences and high engagement can minimize talent loss

Losing talent can be costly. Organizations that can successfully retain talent not only save money but also protect their intellectual capital.[4] Two areas could be key to retaining talent. Firstly, employees who are most positive about their experiences at work are less likely to leave.[5] Secondly, employees who are highly engaged with their organizations are also less likely to say they want to leave.[6]
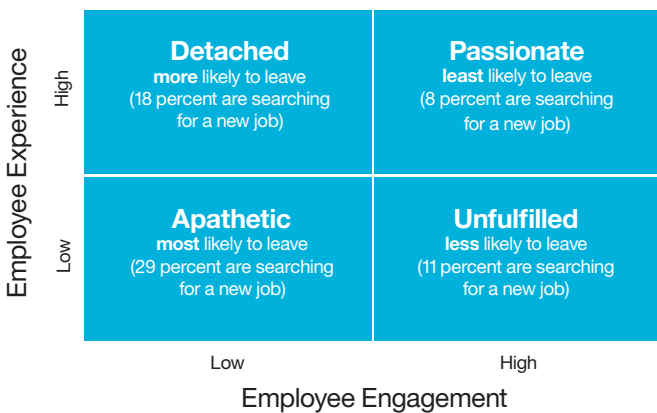
Employee Experience Index

IBM and Globoforce define employee experience as "A set of perceptions that employees have about their experiences at work in response to their interactions with the organization."[7] It is measured with the five dimensions of the Employee Experience Index:

- **Belonging** – feeling part of a team, group or organization
- **Purpose** – understanding why one's work matters
- **Achievement** – a sense of accomplishment in the work that is done
- **Happiness** – the pleasant feeling arising in and around work
- **Vigor** – the presence of energy, enthusiasm, and excitement at work

Previous research from the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute and Globoforce's WorkHuman Research Institute reveals that employee experience and engagement go hand in hand to reflect employees' states at work. As shown in Figure 6, when employees are positive about their experience at work and high in engagement, they are passionate about what they are doing; when employees are negative about their experience and low in engagement, they appear apathetic.

This study takes a closer look at the responses of employees in the four different states of employee experience and engagement to the question, "Are you currently looking for a new job?" The results reveal that passionate employees are least likely to say they are looking to leave (8 percent), while apathetic employees are most likely to say so (29 percent). In fact, apathetic employees are nearly four times more likely to be searching for a new job than passionate employees. To complete the picture, our research shows that around one in 10 (11 percent) unfulfilled employees say they are seeking a new job, while 18 percent of detached employees say they are looking for a new job. See Figure 6.

Figure 6. Passionate employees are least likely to quit while apathetic employees are most likely to leave

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest organizations wanting to attract and retain talent would be advised to consider the following recommendations.

Attract candidates

- **Manage the employer brand and encourage employee referral.** Happy employees who are willing to advocate for the organization can be highly effective recruitment ambassadors. This research has highlighted the importance of family and friend referrals for passive candidates and organizations can take steps to encourage and reward referral behaviors. Social media could also be important here as employees may use it to talk to their contacts about your organization as a great place to work and thereby enhance your employer brand.

- **Pay attention to job attractors for high potentials.** As this research has identified, there are some differences in the importance of new job attractors for high-potential employees. Focusing on these job attractors in your recruitment activities could help to ensure you attract that top talent.

Retain talent

- **Listen regularly to the voice of employees.** It is important to understand employees' individual needs and be aware of the factors that may trigger an employee's voluntary departure. For example, job dissatisfaction and personal reasons emerged as the top two factors as to why people to leave. Listening to the employee voice can help organizations better recognize the sources of negative job attitudes and jarring events at home or in the workplace. With these insights, organizations could develop more effective retention strategies.

- **Use the right assessment to increase person-job fit and person-organization fit during hiring.** To address the further reasons identified by this research as to why people may seek to leave, organizations should consider using validated assessment tools that reliably match a person's skills to jobs, and an individual's values to organizational culture. These can be used during the recruitment process and should enhance retention for newly hired employees.

- **Enhance employee experience and engagement.** Our research reveals that passionate employees (high employee experience and high engagement) are much less likely to be looking for a new job. Organizations can take more proactive steps to create workplace practices and design work such that employee experience and engagement are enhanced. For instance, organizations may offer employees opportunities to participate in decision-making. Employees who feel their ideas and suggestions matter are more than twice as likely to report a positive employee experience.[8] This will likely reduce employees' intention to leave.

IBM Smarter Workforce Institute

The IBM Smarter Workforce Institute produces rigorous, global, innovative research spanning a wide range of workforce topics. The Institute's team of experienced researchers applies depth and breadth of content and analytical expertise to generate reports, white papers and insights that advance the collective understanding of work and organizations. This white paper is part of IBM's on-going commitment to provide highly credible, leading edge research findings that help organizations realize value through their people. To learn more about IBM Smarter Workforce Institute, please contact us at ibmswi@us. ibm.com. Follow @IBMSmtWorkforce on Twitter or visit our website: http://www-01.ibm.com/software/smarterworkforce/institute/

How IBM can help

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About the Authors

Dr. Haiyan Zhang

Dr. Haiyan Zhang is an industrial-organizational psychologist with the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute. Her areas of expertise include qualitative and quantitative methods, talent acquisition and retention, employee experience, and cross-cultural research. She is particularly interested in how research evidence can be used to inform HR practices. Her current research focuses on the impacts of HR technology on employee attraction and engagement. She has presented and published research findings at various conferences and peer-reviewed journals. She has also served as a reviewer for a number of conferences and journals, and is a member of Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP). Haiyan received her Ph.D. in Human Resource Management from the DeGroote School of Business at McMaster University, Canada.

Dr. Sheri Feinzig

Dr. Sheri Feinzig is the Director, Kenexa Consulting and Smarter Workforce Institute and has over 20 years' experience in human resources research, organizational change management and business transformation. Sheri has applied her analytical and methodological expertise to many research-

based projects on topics such as employee retention, employee engagement, job design and organizational culture. She has also led several global, multi-year sales transformation initiatives designed to optimize seller territories and quota allocation. Additional areas of expertise include social network analysis, performance feedback and knowledge management. Sheri received her Ph.D. in Industrial-Organizational Psychology from the University at Albany, State University of New York. She has presented on numerous occasions at national conferences and has co-authored a number of manuscripts, publications and technical reports. She has served as an adjunct professor in the Psychology departments of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York and the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, Illinois, where she taught doctoral, masters and undergraduate courses on performance appraisal, tests and measures. Sheri is also co-author of the book *The Power of People: Learn How Successful Organizations Use Workforce Analytics To Improve Business Performance* (Pearson, 2017).

Contributors

Louise Raisbeck

Louise Raisbeck is Editor-in-Chief for the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute. She has worked in the field of workforce research for more than 10 years and is responsible for turning research insights into engaging, thought-provoking and practical white papers, reports, blogs and media materials. Louise is a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and a former director of a top 10 PR consultancy in the UK.

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