

Does HR "Get" IT Recruitment? IT Shortage May Be HR's Limitations

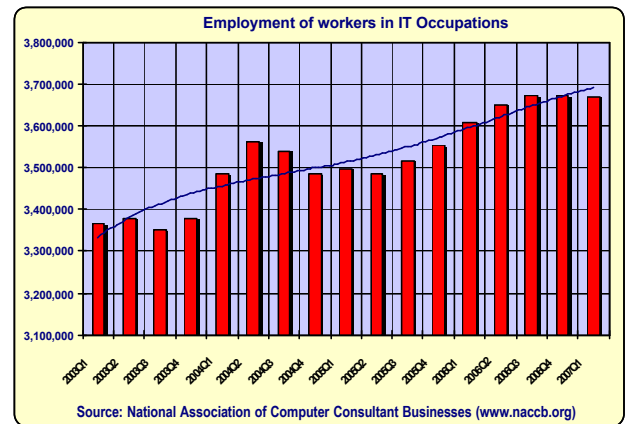
A well-researched article that appeared in the *Financial Times* in mid-March questioned the ability of HR departments to properly assess IT candidates. The article went as far as to question the existence of an IT workforce shortage. The article, referencing a report from a London-based IT recruitment consultancy, stated that "the problem may be more to do with the way businesses approach recruitment than a lack of qualified candidates."

According to the article, 73% of HR professionals acknowledged they were not the best choice for interviewing IT candidates. However, only slightly more than one-third (36%) allowed IT departments to choose the IT candidates to be interviewed. Only about one-quarter (27%) allowed IT departments into the assessment process.

Part of the problem, as reported by the *Financial Times*, could be that HR may not have an understanding of what IT professionals actually do. One frustrated IT worker interviewed for the story described his exasperation during job interviews. He explained that HR does not question him about his skills and rarely gives him the opportunity to meet with a technical manager.

Another criticism of HR departments was that qualified candidates are often overlooked because HR practices focus too narrowly on experience. For example, the IT worker in the story pointed out that job requirements and descriptions often are long, detailed lists asking for knowledge of specific tools and/or programming languages that, when added altogether, very few candidates would likely possess. Perhaps these unrealistic job descriptions are created because HR writes them with little or no input from the IT department and/or technology hiring managers.

Another complaint from IT job seekers is that many companies are stubbornly unwilling to train. Many IT management positions go vacant for months and months because no candidate has the mix of skills and experience required. However, during the months of time looking for the perfectly skilled candidate, several highly talented and smart professionals could have been trained for the job.



One more reason to consider training and bringing on talented candidates with less experience is to build up management ranks. If the majority of businesses refrain from hiring new grads and limit their commitments to skill and management training, there could be a dearth of middle management talent in the relatively near-term future (five to 10 years). Think how tough recruitment will be then!

Unemployment Below 2% for Some Wage Growth Moderates

The current high demand for IT workers is demonstrated by persistent **low unemployment rates**. In the first quarter of 2007, the unemployment rate for some IT occupations was less than 1% (less than 2% for others). **The overall unemployment rate hovered between 4.4% and 4.6%.**

Occupation	1Q2007 Unemployment Rate
Computer and information systems managers	0.9
Computer hardware engineers	9.3
Computer programmers	3.0
Computer scientists and systems analysts	1.9
Computer software engineers	0.9
Computer support specialists	5.0
Network and computer systems administrators	3.2
Database administrators	1.9

Source: Unpublished tabulations of Current Population Survey data furnished by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Although **computer and information systems managers** as well as **computer software engineers are seeing unemployment rates below 1%**, hardware engineers are seeing unemployment rates far above the labor force's unemployment average.

IT industry observers surmise that hardware engineers are experiencing the high unemployment rate of 9.3%, because **much of the production of computer and IT hardware has been moved offshore**. It is likely also due to offshoring that computer support specialists are experiencing an unemployment rate that is slightly higher than that of the overall labor force.

Pay for all workers in private industry rose 4.1% in February 2007 from a year earlier (February 2006). Pay in some computer-related sectors was consistent with that national average while others were more reflective of the law of supply and demand.

Workers in the ISP and Web search portal sector benefited with a rise of 3.0% in hourly wages. Wages were up 3.5% in computer systems design services but up more, 5.0%, in custom computer programming services.

Although not an IT service per se, computer and peripheral equipment manufacturing wages were down 5.4%, a reflection that production of these products is being transferred to lower-wage offshore locations. However, wages in the semiconductors and electronic components sector were up 3.1%, and wages in communications equipment manufacturing sector were up 3.2%.

Investments Are on the Way! *IT Spending to Increase in 2007*

A recent *CIO Insight* survey, which polled more than 400 senior-level IT professionals, reports that IT spending will rise 7.6% in 2007. That figure is significantly higher than the 2.8% to 6.5% rise forecasted by Gartner, Inc., Forrester Research Inc. and IDC.

According to *CIO Insight*, IT executives are "focusing more on growth and improving service than on cost reduction; the current economic expansion has proved resilient; and security worries and regulations require more purchases toward IT protection."

The survey revealed that in the application area, the biggest spending increases will be in business intelligence, analytics and data-mining software.

In the hardware categories, spending on storage equipment and mobile devices will increase the most.

Survey respondents said they will be increasing their spending in all IT services areas with training, organizational and leadership services taking priority and closely followed by security outsourcing.

While one-third of total IT spending will focus on staff costs, nearly three quarters (73%) of IT executives surveyed plan to consolidate their IT infrastructure to save significantly on IT costs. Other cost savings strategies include increased outsourcing (21%) and reducing IT staff (18%).

Clutter Bug versus Neat Freak *Whose Neurosis Is More Efficient?*

A new book jointly authored by a professor of management at Columbia Business School and writing teacher may have you re-thinking your attitudes about people with messy desks. **A Perfect Mess** by Eric Abrahamson and David Freeman, published in January 2007, "is a godsend to anybody who has a cleanliness fanatic for a boss," according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

Subtitled "The Hidden Benefits of Disorder," the authors make the point that disorder really isn't bad. The authors contend that people who keep neat desks "spend an average of 36 percent *more* time looking for things at work than people who keep a fairly messy desk."

If a creative approach to problem solving is called for, as often is the case in resolving IT challenges, the authors assert "that moderately messy systems use resources more efficiently, spur creativity, yield better solutions and are harder to break than neat ones."

Umm, perhaps Einstein's axiom "If a cluttered desk is the sign of a cluttered mind, of what then, is an empty desk?" isn't so off the mark. So get don't be afraid of the mess. It could be a career advantage.