Examining the Effectiveness of Implementing a Stay Interview Process to Impact Retention of Information Technology Staff in Higher Education

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Talent supply and demand is a concern in many key positions in all industries, including higher education. Understanding what attracts and retains IT staff is important for organizations, particularly in a tight labor market. Institutions that experience high turnover in Information Technology (IT) staff positions risk impacting student services, research, and day-to-day administration with the loss of knowledge and experience. Often, institutions are unable to launch major initiatives or meet financial goals due to poor talent management strategies to retain staff.

The focus of this dissertation was to examine the strategy of a stay interview process intervention to better understand why IT staff stay at an institution. A stay interview is a tool used by institutions to gather data from long-term employees to understand what keeps them engaged and provides them the incentive to keep coming back daily. My two guiding questions that led the process of systematic inquiry and exploration of a stay interview included: (1) What is the efficacy of stay interviews in gauging IT employees' job and organizational satisfaction? (2) Does the stay interview process provide specific actions/ideas that IT leaders can implement to strengthen employee engagement and retention in our organization? These inquiry questions played a significant role in my Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle and helped reveal the effectiveness of the stay interview tool to drive positive change in my IT department.

The key findings illustrated that if implemented correctly, stay interviews can provide institutions with ideas for improvement, and show staff their feedback is important, and their

service is valued. This inquiry discovered that a main value gained from the stay interview tool is providing an opportunity for our IT staff to share their perspectives, experiences, and motivations and uncover factors that contribute to increased engagement and retention. However, this process does require time and resources to implement effectively and may be met with resistance from employees and supervisors. By adopting best practices and acting on the feedback received, institutions can successfully implement stay interviews and reap the benefits of employee feedback in improving retention and creating a more satisfied and engaged workforce.

Keywords: Stay Interviews, Retention, Turnover, Information Technology, Trust, Relationships with Supervisor, Flexible Work Arrangements, Benefit Perks

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Preface

This study and related Dissertation in Practice is dedicated to the countless individuals who provided me with support and guidance. To my mom, thank you for setting an example of hard work and dedication. You have always been the most inspiring person in my life. I will never forget as a young girl watching you study nightly to put yourself through nursing school while also raising five children as a single parent. I am forever grateful for the sacrifices you made for me and my siblings. The person I am today is because of you. To my daughters, thanks for your understanding, support, and patience while I balanced work, school, and our family. To my brothers, my sister, aunts, uncles, mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends, thank you for always checking in and asking how everything was going. And most importantly, to my best friend and husband, Shawn, thank you for your patience, support and understanding. I couldn't have completed this program without your encouragement and love.

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partner and brilliant advisor who was instrumental in my academic growth and success. Thank you for believing in me and guiding me along the way.

1.0 Introduction

Repeatedly, employees in many higher education institutions are overlooked, not heard, and made to feel undervalued (Gewin, 2021; Towns, 2019). This experience can leave employees discouraged, often resulting in many exiting their institution. Turnover in higher education is not always bad, but when dedicated talent are disengaged, feel undervalued, and lack trust in leadership, leaving their institution may be inevitable (Gandy et al., 2018; Harter et al., 2002; Juarez, 2018; Martin, 2020).

Employees are the number one asset of any organization (McDonnell, 2011; Sanchez, 2010). Talent supply and demand is a critical concern in many key positions such as information technology (IT) (Figueroa, 2015; Sturges & Guest, 2001; Tull, 2006). The days of posting a job and waiting for the ideal candidate to apply are long gone (Azmy, 2019; Figueroa, 2015; McDonnell, 2011; Velez, 2019). In an increasingly tight labor market, potential candidates are not only looking for good pay and benefits, but want a work environment that values employees, supports growth, and creates an engaging workplace (Bendermache et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2016). In a post-pandemic workplace, employees are rethinking their worth and seeking a job that fits their professional and personal needs (Erickson et al., 2018; Marshall et al., 2016).

The investment higher education institutions make in employees today will benefit them into the future (Tyagi, 2021). Turnover is a challenge that can be costly in not only time but also in recruitment and training cost. The loss of knowledge can create instability, cause a decline in productivity, and increase burnout rate (Gandy et al., 2018). In higher education, more than half of the workforce consists of staff professional or support roles that have a direct interaction with students and research faculty (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006). The impact can be high for hard

to fill positions that lack diverse candidate pools such as information technology (IT) (Echeverri-Carroll, et al., 2018; Lum, 2017; Sanchez, 2010; Velez, 2019). In this chapter, I discuss my problem of practice, change idea, theory of improvement and examine key stakeholders who are affected by IT turnover and would benefit from strategies to retain our staff professionals.

1.1 Problem of Practice

Technology is changing higher education and has the potential to revolutionize the teaching and learning process (Greve & Tan, 2021). Technology is a staple in our everyday lives. Whether it is a laptop, smartphone, or iPad, the average American cannot effectively function without being connected through technology. Outdated systems, paper-based processes and stagnated workflows can stifle progress and will not meet current and prospective students' needs (Greve & Tan, 2021; Pinho & Franco, 2017).

The majority of today's university students have no concept of life without the internet, social media, or smart devices. New and rapidly improving technologies are transforming higher education through enabling research, eliminating accessibility barriers with space and time for students, and providing information for data-driven decision making (Marr, 2018). Investment in technology will keep institutions on the upward trajectory of being a leading research and/or educational institution that continues to attract, retain, and develop exemplary staff and faculty and provide exceptional student experiences (Pinho & Franco, 2017; Watty et al., 2016).

As a service provider, IT is responsible for device support and management of onsite application services and cloud-based systems, infrastructure, data storage, network security, business process review, project management, and reporting/analytics. Attracting and retaining

knowledgeable, top IT talent is critical for institutional success for teaching, student success, and research programs.

The global pandemic changed the landscape of business and how organizations deploy their people resources (Gewin, 2021). Further, remote work changed the landscape for employers when developing talent retention and recruitment strategies (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Gewin; 2021). Organizations have had the opportunity to expand their talent searches since relocation is no longer a requirement in many positions such as IT. Many employers took full advantage of remote work options to court top talent and provide incentives to join their team without the need to relocate. With IT talent pools shrinking and an overabundance of opportunities for candidates to pursue, institutions will need to focus on retention strategies (Echeverri-Carroll et al., 2018; Martin, 2020; Sanchez, 2010; Tyagi, 2021).

Therefore, developing tools managers can deploy to understand their IT staff engagement levels, keep a pulse on morale, and understand why staff leave and stay, are critical for organizational success. A lack of retention strategies can impact an institution's ability to launch projects, research initiatives could suffer with the lost knowledge, which can cause job creep resulting in their burnout, and turnover (Horne et al., 2016; Iqbal et al., 2020; Klotz et al., 2021).

My dissertation in practice explored factors that influence IT staff turnover in higher education such as employee engagement, influence of social support systems, and workforce development strategies. To help understand these factors in my institution, I examined the effectiveness of implementing a stay interview process that aims to gather the voice of the employees within the workplace environment and provide ideas on retention to the direct supervisor. A stay interview is a proactive human resources tool used by organizations to gather

data from long-term employees to understand what keeps them engaged and provides them the incentive to keep coming back daily (Finnegan, 2018).

1.2 Change Idea and Aim

An institution's workforce is arguably the most valuable asset to an organization. Understanding what attracts and retains staff is important, particularly in a tight labor market (Figueroa, 2015; Sturges & Guest, 2001; Tull, 2006). In 2017, while obtaining my Lean Six Sigma greenbelt, my project related to the turnover of new hires with a focus on those who left the university in their first year of employment. Review of data showed that the top reasons that new hires left the university were due to work environment, supervisor, unrealistic preview of jobs, and no opportunities for career progression.

One important human resources metric to monitor is the turnover rate. The monthly turnover rate is calculated by taking the number of separations for the specified month divided by the average number of employees for that same period, multiplied by 100. The annual turnover rate is the sum of all of the monthly turnover rates. Over the previous three years, the University of Pittsburgh's (Pitt) staff voluntary turnover has averaged approximately 14% (see Figure 1) with the current fiscal year 2023 at 12.23% as of May 31. The projected fiscal 2023 turnover, July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, is 13.34%. In my department, University of Pittsburgh Information Technology (Pitt IT), IT staff voluntary turnover over the previous three years was approximately 8% (see Figure 2). Pitt's staff voluntary turnover posted the highest rate in fiscal year 2022 at 16.38% with many employees leaving the organization in their first year of employment. Although Pitt IT's voluntary turnover rate in fiscal year 2022 was lower than Pitt's, we have experienced an

increase in IT staff resignations. For example, in 2021, Pitt IT turnover has increased by more than 4%. The projected fiscal year 2023 turnover rate is 7.03%, a decrease from fiscal year 2022. However, even when turnover is decreasing, monitoring why staff leave can help institutions proactively manage their workforce, identify potential issues, and implement targeted strategies to enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention. Data analytics can provide leaders with valuable information to stay responsive to changing trends and continuously improve their talent management practices.

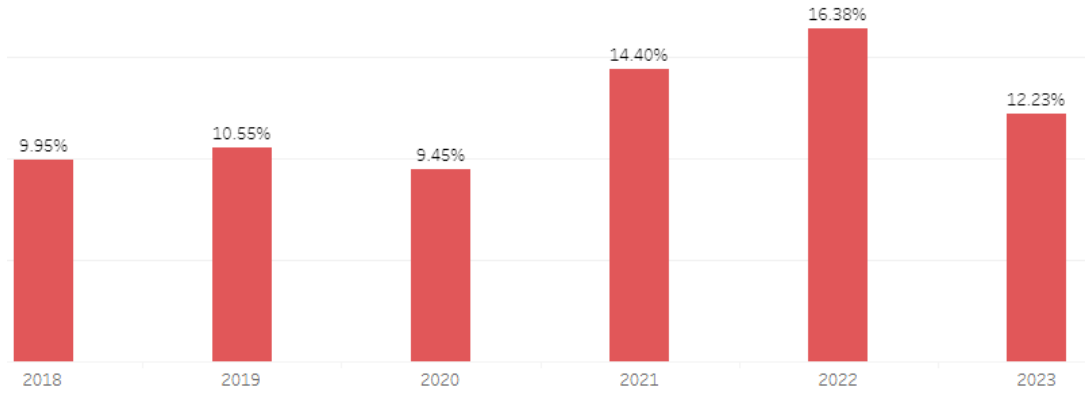

Figure 1 Overall Institutional Turnover by Fiscal Year (July 1-June 30)

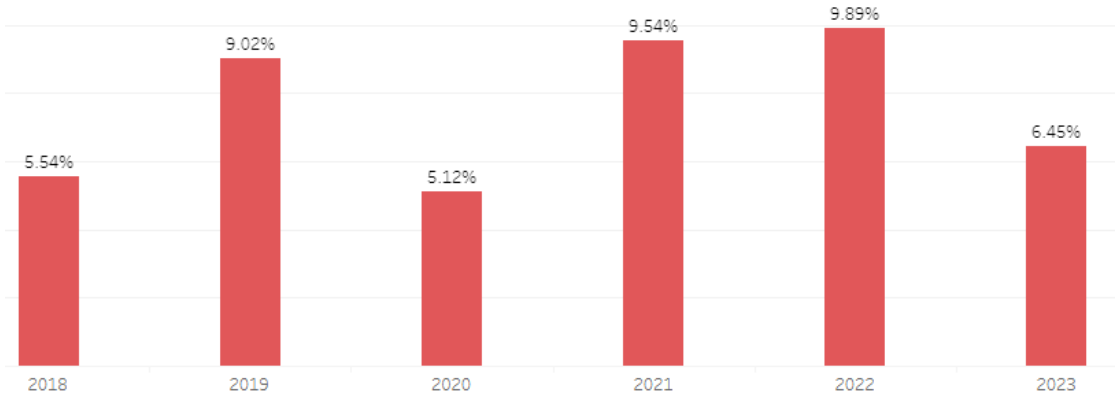

Figure 2 Information Technology Turnover by Fiscal Year (July 1-June 30)

In response to my problem of practice and the review of my supporting literature, the aim of the stay interview process was to deploy retention strategies that our IT staff identify that could assist with keeping our staff engaged and reduce voluntary turnover in fiscal year 2024. Implementing an effective retention strategy could ensure that there is no loss of productivity. Dedicated staff provide the best customer support available as a service to give our students, faculty, and staff the best possible IT experience.

Unexpected turnover and the failure to fill critical staff roles in a timely manner can have a major impact on the students we serve, as well as critical research studies. In higher education institutions, service, or support areas such as business operations, financial services, student support areas, and the IT department consist of staff professionals, which typically make up over half of the approximately 14,000 of Pitt's workforce. These areas provide support for the faculty, students, and research. The administrative functions contribute to academic success by providing oversight and direction to key student and research functions.

1.3 Theory of Improvement

Establishing initiatives designed to capture the perspective of the employee can provide important feedback on staff retention strategies that could increase engagement, foster trust, and decrease turnover. One strategy to gather feedback from staff about the workplace environment is to develop a stay interview process (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017). A stay interview is a tool used by institutions to gather data from long-term employees to understand what keeps them engaged and provides them the incentive to keep coming back daily. Implemented correctly, stay interviews can provide institutions with ideas for improvement, and show staff their feedback is

important and their service to the institution is valued. A stay interview process will provide key data to leadership for evaluation to address retention and turnover issues. With the ever-increasing tight labor market and the great resignation upon us, understanding why staff stay will be important for institutions to meet their strategic goals (McDonnell, 2011; Reina et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2020; Velez, 2019). Engaging with stakeholders or key consumers by gathering and understanding their needs and feedback will result in efforts that could deliver value and happiness. Data can often tell a story and provide factual information that can be important in developing recruitment and retention strategies (Carucci, 2016; Gandy & Gold, 2018).

A robust retention program that can reduce turnover, prevent attrition, increase retention, and foster engagement will benefit our IT department (Kotter & Heskett, 2011). The stay interview process is one initiative that can provide the opportunity to gather feedback and perspective from my Pitt IT colleagues. Understanding why staff stay or leave the IT department at my institution is crucial data to collect and analyze.

My change idea can provide Pitt IT with ideas for improvement, show staff their feedback is important and their service to the institution is valued, and could potentially be used to encourage the employee to stay. In such a tight labor market, potential candidates not only look for good pay and benefits, but they want to work in an organization that values employees, supports growth, and creates an engaging workplace (Bendermache et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2016).

1.4 Information Technology Stakeholders

IT stakeholders are important to our department's retention efforts. Several IT stakeholders such as colleagues, supervisors, and senior leaders have a direct impact on improving morale,

fostering a culture of trust, focusing on the well-being of our IT workforce, and identifying factors that can help reduce turnover. Because our IT department provides direct customer support to our staff, students, and faculty, these stakeholders can be significantly affected by the loss of IT staff. Providing adequate IT support to our stakeholders is critical to student success and research projects. In this section I provide a brief description of our stakeholders.

1.4.1 IT Staff

As professionals, we spend more time at work than we do at home. Relationships are central to everyone's personal and professional life. In the workplace, strong relationships aid staff to "get through" a stressful day (Juarez, 2018; McCurdy, 2014). Co-workers are often the confidant to vent frustrations, a thought partner when struggling for a solution to a critical problem, and the cheerleader we all need at times to provide encouragement. High job satisfaction and commitment to an organization can be attributed to a positive environment and having a friend at work (Brandes et al., 2004; Juarez, 2018). Staff with a strong work ethic can be influential and motivate the team (Gresswell, 2020; Harter et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2020, Klotz et al., 2021, McCurdy, 2014). Creating an environment that fosters positive attitudes through engagement can increase productivity and retention (Azmy, 2019; Bauer, 2000; Figueroa).

1.4.2 IT New Hires

Organizations with high retention rates hire more engaged employees (Gresswell, 2020; Tyagi, 2021; Tull, 2006). Dedicated employees build strong connections by serving their customers, partners, colleagues, and communities with empathy, respect, and courtesy. They create

an attractive environment for new employees through established orientation and training programs, often setting them up for success. A positive work environment can boost morale and support retention (Sanchez, 2010; Sturges & Guest, 2001). Effective employee retention can reduce turnover, attract potential candidates, and positively impact the units we serve (Towns, 2019).

1.4.3 IT Supervisors

It has often been said, employees do not leave jobs, they leave supervisors (Reina et al., 2018). Supervisors have tremendous influence over their employees. This influence can be positive or may have a negative impact. A supervisor's behavior can play a critical role in an employee's career at their institution, impacting productivity and retention (Brandes et al., 2004; Carrucci, 2016). A supervisor oversees the day-to-day performance of employees. Even more than that, a supervisor plays the role of educator, coach, and counselor to their staff (Grissom & Keiser, 2011; McCurdy, 2014). They are responsible for nurturing relationships, building trust, and ensuring a safe, engaging environment (Grissom & Keiser, 2011; Henderson et al., 2020). Employees who build strong relationships with their direct supervisor are more engaged resulting in the retention of talent (McCoy, 2014; Reina et al., 2018). However, relationships are not built overnight. The supervisor is responsible for nurturing relationships and building trust. Supervisors have a direct impact on job satisfaction, engagement, morale, and employee turnover.

1.4.4 IT Senior Leadership

Senior leaders are responsible for setting strategy, leading their organization, and ensuring our IT mission and vision aligns with the institution's strategic goals. They are responsible to pay close attention to employee engagement and deploy initiatives to improve retention. Senior leaders foster a culture of shared beliefs and values that are communicated across their direct reports and in their sphere of responsibility. This culture can shape employee perceptions, behaviors, and engagement(Heifetz et al., 2002; Henderson, 2020). For leaders to have the greatest possible impact on improving employee retention, they need to consistently demonstrate empathy, transparency, and accountability in the workplace, and be proactive in their approach to implementing change (Heifetz et al., 2002; Henderson, 2020, Kotter & Heskett, 2011; O'Day, 2020).

1.4.5 University Staff

Staff members provide administrative support for our students and faculty. They are often the first to interact with current and prospective students. Professional and support staff are one of the most valuable assets to an institution. Technology supports their day-to-day responsibilities in finance, human resources, and student affairs. Therefore, Pitt's staff need reliable and efficient IT systems with access to knowledgeable support at all times (Jo, 2008; Towns, 2019; Tull, 2006).

1.4.6 Students

Student success is mission critical for higher education institutions. At Pitt, our strategic plan has our students at the core (Plan for Pitt, 2021). We are in the business of creating an environment that fosters student success. Technology is fundamental in supporting student success by ensuring system security, reliable internet connectivity, and access to the necessary software applications. In a world where we are surrounded by high tech items daily, providing timely and effective IT support is important. Pitt IT turnover can negatively impact student success resulting in poor customer service because of inexperienced staff responding to service requests (Juarez, 2018; Tyagi, 2021; Wasilowski, 2018).

1.4.7 Faculty

The faculty are a foundational component in higher education. They are responsible for teaching, academic advising, ongoing curriculum evaluation and development, departmental committee work, admissions, and research initiatives. Their hard work and passion for their educational specialties assist with building an institution's reputation. As a research 1 university, our faculty offer highly academic and research programs to our students. High turnover can divert IT resources away from efforts that support teaching and research. This results in Pitt IT services that are less effective since inexperienced staff may be deployed to respond to our faculty needs. Ineffective IT support causes a decrease in productivity with an increase in faculty frustration (Juarez, 2018; Tyagi, 2021; Wasilowski, 2018).

1.5 Conclusion

Louch (2014) said, “that in today’s talent-based economy, the workforce itself is arguably the most important tangible asset of most organizations” (para. 1). Workforce recruitment and retention is not just an issue for senior leadership or human resources alone. Retention of Pitt IT staff is the responsibility at all levels of an institution. Whether you are in a leadership role or a coworker in the department, everyone plays a role to create a positive work environment (Martin, 2020; Sanchez, 2010).

IT staff recruitment and retention strategies are a top priority and important to ensure continued service delivery to the faculty, students, and research we support daily (Martin, 2020; O’Day, 2020). Without knowledgeable and engaged IT talent at all levels, the department runs the risk of poor service delivery. As a service department to the institution, it is imperative that Pitt IT leaders listen, acknowledge, and respond to their staff feedback (Figueroa 2015, Iqbal et al., 2020). The act of listening demonstrates an organization's commitment and investment in its employees and can provide ideas that could reduce turnover and increase engagement (Carucci, 2016; Figueroa, 2015; Iqbal et al., 2020). An engaged workforce understands Pitt’s mission, they have a sense of belonging, and take pride in their daily responsibilities (Iqbal et al. 2020; McCurdy, 2014). Engagement can lead to better decision making, improved student outcomes and positively impacts research (Azmy, 2019;Marshall, et al., 2016; McCoy, 2019).

2.0 Review of Supporting Knowledge

Retention of IT staff professionals is the responsibility at all levels of an institution. Whether a people leader or a coworker in the department, everyone plays a role in creating a positive work environment. The lack of IT staff retention strategies can impact an institution's ability to launch major projects, research initiatives could suffer with the lost knowledge, student support services may decline due to vacancies, which can cause job creep resulting in their burnout, and financial goals may not be achieved since turnover can be costly to the bottom-line (Horne et al., 2016; Iqbal et al, 2020; Klotz et al., 2021; Velez, 2019). Exploring the cause of staff turnover and strategies for retention at all levels of the institution is a top priority (McDonnell, 2011; Sanchez, 2010). My theory of improvement is to explore the retention tool of a stay interview process to assist leaders with identifying ideas to increase engagement and retention (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017). More context on the stay interview process will be included in Chapter 3.

In this review of supporting literature, I focused on understanding workforce needs, fostering engagement, building an employer of choice culture, retaining diverse talent, and supporting internal career progression.

2.1 Employee Engagement

Engaged employees believe in their organization's mission, enjoy their job, receive support from their supervisor, have pride, and believe they are a valuable asset (Azmy, 2019; O'Day, 2020). An engaged workforce supports an increase in productivity and collaboration, which fosters

retention of IT staff (Kotter & Heskett, 2011). On the other hand, a negative working environment can create a stressful and undesirable atmosphere that can result in disengaged employees and low productivity (Bauer, 2000; Coates & Goedegebuure, 2012; Figueroa, 2015). Trust in an employee's institution and supervisor is important to foster a highly collaborative and engaging work environment. Employees are eager to work in an environment that makes them feel valued, where they have high trust in their supervisor, and have strong organizational pride in the mission of their institution (Martin, 2020; O'Day, 2020; Sanchez, 2010). In this section, I discuss factors that can create high levels of engagement and influence retention of Pitt IT staff such as: (a) trust, (b) motivation, and (c) sense of organizational pride.

2.1.1 Trust

Trust is a foundational component in the supervisor/employee relationship (Henderson et al., 2020). Building an environment of high trust that in turn fosters engagement not only can be beneficial to the employees and the organization but can also influence the achievement of an institution's strategic plan and objectives. Employees who have high trust in their department and supervisor often have a high level of engagement and productivity (Towns, 2019; Turner & Kalman, 2014). High engagement in the workplace can lead to better decision making, improved customer support outcomes, and positive impact on research. Institutions with happy and engaged employees can have an advantage and outperform their competition (Marshall, et al., 2016; McCoy, 2019).

2.1.2 Motivation

Motivation is important for an institution's success. Even when the workday is long or the work stressful, motivation is a catalyst to push the staff to go above and beyond. A motived employee has high satisfaction and engagement, which can result in staff retention (McCoy, 2019; O'Day). Supervisors play a critical role in creating a culture that motivates their team. In today's, every-changing workplace, creating an environment that is fun and collaborative and offers challenging work to promote professional development can provide the necessary motivation to assist with retention (McCoy, 2019; O'Day, 2020; Russell et al., 2020; Sturges & Guest, 2001).

2.1.3 Organizational Pride

Organizational pride is the belief employees have for an institution's mission, their values, and services they provide to their consumers (Azmy, 2019; Sanchez, 2010). As a former director of talent acquisition, I was provided the opportunity to interact with a variety of prospective candidates. Almost all discussions or interviews resulted in prospects eager for the opportunity to work for a mission-based organization dedicated to the students we serve and our research mission. This organizational pride and attraction to our mission had many candidates leaving their high-paying jobs to begin a career in higher education. It is well known that higher education cannot compete with corporate salaries. However, the desire to be part of our student and research focused mission plus the benefits total rewards package of compensation, benefits, and perks made leaving the corporate workforce attractive to many (Iqbal et al., 2020; Martin, 2020).

2.2 Influence of Social Support Systems

The social support systems in the workplace can affect how employees perceive their value in their organization (Harter et al., 2002). Workplace social support systems refer to an employee's professional network of staff, faculty and/or supervisors that show genuine concern for an individual's well-being. Social support systems at work can have a significant impact on employee turnover and retention. If an IT staff member believes that their well-being is undervalued, they will inevitably seek another employer with a culture that values employees (Akerlof & Kranton, 2008; Horne et al. 2016).

2.2.1 Supervisors' Role

Supervisors who have strong relationships with their direct reports foster a more engaged workforce (McCoy, 2014; Reina et al., 2018). Supervisors have influence over their employees. This influence can be positive or may have a negative impact. A supervisor's behavior plays a key role in an employee's career at their institution, impacting productivity and retention (Brandes et al., 2004; Carrucci, 2016). A supervisor oversees the day-to-day performance of their staff employees. Even more than that, a supervisor plays the role of educator, coach, and counselor (Grissom & Keiser, 2011; McCurdy, 2014). They are responsible for onboarding of new staff to ensure success, continuous education of policy or procedure changes and must set the expectation of the team through clear communications and leading by example. Supervisors have a direct influence on job satisfaction, engagement, morale, and employee turnover and should be equipped with the tools to lead their staff successfully (Harter et al., 2002; Horne et al., 2016).

Supervisors play a critical role in fostering an engaging workforce and should explore strategies to motivate their teams. An engaged workforce understands the institution mission, they have a sense of belonging, and take pride in their daily responsibilities (Iqbal et al., 2020; Khan & Bhattacharya, 2022; McCurdy, 2014). Engagement leads to better decision making, improved student and research outcomes (Marshall et al., 2016; McCoy, 2019). Managers play a key role in motivating staff in today's ever-changing workplace (Bauer, 2000, 2020; Khan & Bhattacharya, 2020; McCoy, 2019; Reina et al., 2018; Russel et al., 2020). Even when the workday is long or the work stressful, motivation is a catalyst to push the employee to go above and beyond. A motived employee can have high satisfaction, foster good workplace morale, and take pride in their institution, which can result in retention (Martin, 2020).

2.2.2 Job Creep

Job creep is the gradual addition of responsibilities and duties, which eventually becomes unrealistic and overwhelming (Azmy, 2019; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Tull, 2006; Turner & Kalman, 2014). It can affect workplace engagement, motivation, and productivity. Job creep continually requires staff to assume an increasing amount of work relative to the normal requirements of their day-to-day responsibilities (Abele et al., 2012; Findley, 2007; Russell et al., 2020). Supervisors must set expectations to monitor job creep to maintain morale and job satisfaction (Gewin, 2021; McCurdy, 2014; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Tull 2006). Most job descriptions include the phrase "other duties as assigned." This statement can have an adverse impact on the work environment if not monitored closely. Job creep can have an impact on turnover due to burnout. At some point, staff will reach a breaking point, become frustrated if there

is no end in sight with the extra job responsibilities (Figueroa, 2015; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Velez, 2019).

2.2.3 Co-Worker Relationships

Co-workers are often the confidants to vent frustrations, a thought partner when struggling for a solution to a critical problem, and the cheerleader we all need at times to provide encouragement. Relationships are central to everyone's personal and professional life. In the workplace, strong relationships aid staff with "getting through" a stressful day (Juarez, 2018; McCurdy, 2014). High job satisfaction and commitment to an organization can be attributed to a positive environment and having a friend at work (Brandes et al., 2004; Juarez, 2018). Staff with a strong work ethic can be influential and motivate the team (Martin, 2020; McCurdy, 2014). Employers who recognize the importance of workplace relationships can transform an unhappy environment into one that is satisfying (Brandes et al., 2004; Harter et al., 2002; McCoy, 2019).

2.3 Workforce Development Strategies

One of the best strategies to foster staff engagement and retention is to offer programs that support career development (Findley, 2007). Monotony and boredom can set in with a decrease in job motivation, and productivity can suffer when staff perceive there are not programs for career development (Abele et al., 2012; Findley, 2007). As the labor market continues to tighten, organizations must develop internal programs to retain talent. Internal staff understand the institution's culture and environment. The benefits include retention of knowledge and an increase

in productivity. Turnover in higher education is not always bad, but when dedicated talent are not selected for promotional or transfer opportunities the decision can send the wrong message and cause employees to question their worth to the institution resulting in low morale and turnover (Abele et al., 2011; Horne et al., 2016). In this section, I outline workforce development strategies organizations should consider to retention key IT staff. Strategies include (a) strategic workforce planning, (b) professional development, and (c) internal promotion and transfers opportunities (Bichsel et al., 2022; Martin, 2020).

2.3.1 Strategic Workforce Planning

Strategic workforce planning is critical to assist organizations with maintaining adequate staffing. Ensuring that an institution has the right skills in the correct positions can produce a high return on investment in the workforce (Gandy et al., 2018; Horne et al., 2016). Analyzing the skills of current staff provides important insights into future resource gaps in the institution. The analysis should also include a review of the local and national talent pools to attract and recruit external talent. Institutions then need to predict turnover, retirement, and new staffing needs.

A comprehensive review of both internal and external talent will inform the leadership of potential staffing needs and challenges they could face to achieve success and support their overall mission. With the prediction of tight labor markets and competition for talent, investing internally can produce a big pay-off for not only an institution but their staff (Abele et al., 2011; Findley, 2007; Horne et al., 2016).

2.3.2 Professional Development

Professional development, continuing education, and employee training after entering your organization is important for success and engagement (Abele et al., 2012). Providing tools for staff to stay current or upskill can support current and future staffing needs while advancing careers internally (Gandy et al., 2018). Investing in staff professional development can promote confidence, increase productivity, and prepare them for future roles (Turner & Kalman, 2014). Professional development opportunities show that the employees are a valuable asset to the institution and worth the investment.

Professional development offerings can also assist with attracting top talent to your institution, as well as retain top internal talent (Gandy et al, 2018; Iqbal et al., 2020; Sturges & Guest, 2001). Investing internally is a smart business move. Internal staff are a known commodity who have proven their commitment to the institution. Internal support for career development promotes engagement and has a positive impact on morale (McCoy, 2019; Pathak & Srivastava, 2017).

2.3.3 Internal Promotion and Transfer Opportunities

Career stagnation is best described as a time in an employee's career where they feel there is no opportunity to advance or have outgrown their current job. They have somehow managed to "plateau" with no career development or growth in the organization (Abele et al., 2012; Findley, 2007).

There are times when most employees go through a career lull period. Supervisors must be able to notice signs of career stagnation. The signs may include staff no longer feeling challenged,

their performance has plateaued, salary has remained flat, and chances for a promotion are slim (Abele et al., 2012; Bauer, 2000). Employees who feel stagnant may be in the wrong job or simply need a talk to discuss career goals. One approach is scheduling frequent meetings with staff to keep a pulse on engagement, discuss professional development and career aspirations (Wasilowski, 2018). If employees do not have an opportunity to envision positive changes in their careers, they may think key professional skills and abilities will be lost. The longer the career stagnation lasts, the greater the impact. Career stagnation can cause employees to be disengaged, have a negative impact on morale, and lead to resignation (Abele et al., 2012; Lum, 2017).

Internal recruitment is a smart business move that can reduce career stagnation (Abele et al., 2012; Findley, 2007). This strategy can increase morale, engagement, and productivity (Erickson et al., 2018; McDonnell, 2011; Turner & Kalman, 2014). Institutions also save on recruitment and training costs. The staff member has the opportunity for career growth and the chance to learn new skills while building their competencies. For the institution, there is a reduction in turnover. Investing internally demonstrates to all staff that the organization values them. Creating opportunities for internal mobility will in turn create a happy and dedicated workforce (Gandy et al., 2018).

In summary, the loss of internal talent is too costly and risky to ignore anymore. Identifying and understanding why IT staff leave and what an institution should consider for influencing them to stay is critical. As the demand for talent increases and candidate pools decrease, looking within the organization for retention strategies that can assist with building a solid workforce plan is essential for success.

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, by addressing the areas outlined in my supporting literature review, institutions can develop comprehensive strategies to retain IT staff professionals at all levels and mitigate the negative impacts of turnover. Collectively, the elements discussed can create a positive work environment, foster a sense of belonging and loyalty, and provide avenues for growth and advancement. To ensure effective retention plans, it is important for institutions to continuously assess and refine strategies based on staff feedback and changing workforce needs.

3.0 Methodology

Understanding why staff choose to stay or leave Pitt IT was an essential aspect of data collection and analysis. In today's competitive labor market, prospective candidates not only seek competitive compensation and benefits but also desire to be part of an organization that values employees, fosters professional growth, and cultivates an engaging environment (Bendermache et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2016). One strategy explored to gather the perspectives from IT employees about the workplace environment was to develop a stay interview process. A stay interview is a simple tool used by institutions to gather data from long-term employees to understand what keeps them engaged and provides them the incentive to keep coming back daily.

The goal of the stay interview process was to gather specific actions that IT leadership can take to build trust and increase engagement (Echeverri-Carrollet al., 2018; Khan & Bhattacharya, 2022). They are conversations with current employees to understand why they like working for our institution and what they would change. These conversations can help identify and assess key employees who may be at flight risk levels. The aim of the stay interview process was to identify and deploy initiatives that could assist with keeping IT staff engaged and reduce voluntary turnover in fiscal year 2024.

In this chapter, I discuss my inquiry approach, the setting in my place of practice, sample population, and data collect and analysis. I then identify limitations I encountered and describe how I conducted trustworthiness exercises on my data analysis.

3.1 Inquiry Questions

This dissertation in practice included two guiding inquiry questions to help inform what occurred while implementing my change idea:

1. What is the efficacy of stay interviews in gauging IT employees' job and organizational satisfaction?
2. Does the stay interview process provide specific actions/ideas that IT leaders can take to strengthen employee engagement and retention in our organization?

3.2 Inquiry Approach

I followed the improvement science approach of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) to examine my proposed stay interview process. Improvement science is a method of defining a problem, conducting research to understand how systems are contributing to and/or causing the problem, developing change ideas to solve the problem, testing the change ideas and, if successful, implementing process improvements (Byrk et al., 2015; Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The goal was to understand how the system works, where it fails, and what we can implement to improve performance. Improvement science encourages innovation by conducting iterative testing in practice settings to see which changes produce improvements.

For my PDSA cycle for examining a stay interview process, my "plan" was the stay interview intervention process as outlined in Section 3.5; the "do" was to conduct stay interviews with at least 10 Pitt IT staff from units in the university's IT department; the "study" was to determine if the stay interview process was an effective tool to gather information to assist with

retention of staff by conducting a feedback survey on the process with participants (Appendix C). Another component of the "study" portion of the PDSA cycle included a post-interview result presentation with our Pitt IT senior leaders where I shared a summary of the stay interview sessions and the analysis performed. I then gathered their perspective on the effectiveness of the stay interview process and if we should implement the tool for Pitt IT. The "act" step determined if my IT department would implement and use the stay interview as a strategy to increase retention and employee engagement and if necessary, apply modifications for future iterations. Key questions to decide if my IT department should perform stay interviews include, (a) will the process provide insights and ideas for retaining talent? (b) how effective is the stay interview process? and (c) should the stay interview process be an ongoing annual process for our IT department?

3.3 Inquiry Setting

My place of practice is Pitt, a research institution and member of the Association of American Universities. Pitt is a large, decentralized institution with 16 schools and colleges on our main campus, and with four regional campuses. Each school or department functions as a single organization with the deans and department heads responsible for operations, strategic planning, and budgetary decisions. This decentralized structure allows for greater specialization and flexibility within the university, as different schools and departments can focus on their specific areas of expertise and tailor their programs to meet the needs of their students. It also enables efficient management of resources and decision making, as the deans and department heads have the authority to make decisions within their area of responsibility. Pitt employs about 14,000 employees with approximately 7,800 staff in a variety of positions from entry level support,

student services, and administrative to mid-career and high-level leadership in professions such as technology, finance, communications, administration, and research (University of Pittsburgh, *Interactive Fact Book*, 2022).

The Pitt IT Division employs about 300 staff in seven departments that consist of: (a) analytics and project portfolio management office; (b) client services; (c) enterprise applications; (d) finance and administration; (e) information security; (f) network operations; and (g) strategy and innovation. Our organization is led by the chief information officer (CIO) and six senior leaders including the deputy CIO, chief of staff, chief security officer, executive director of enterprise applications, executive director for customer success and service delivery, and executive director for analytics. The deputy CIO oversees the two main support areas of client services and network operations. All senior leaders report to the CIO, as well as the strategy and innovation group.

In fiscal year 2020, Pitt IT voluntary turnover was at its lowest number of 5.12%. The global pandemic was a key contributor to the low turnover percentages (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Gewin, 2021). However, in fiscal years 2021 and 2022, Pitt IT turnover returned to averaging around 9.7% annually. In 2022, Pitt IT voluntary turnover rate was 9.89%, slightly higher than fiscal year 2021 which posted a 9.54% rate. Unexpected turnover and the failure to fill critical staff roles in a timely manner can have a major impact on the students we serve and on research studies. Understanding why staff stay or leave Pitt IT was crucial data to collect and analyze (Horne et al., 2016; Iqbal et al, 2020; Klotz et al., 2021; Velez, 2019).

3.4 Population

Long-term Pitt IT employees have been with the university for an extended period of time, and their tenure brings a wealth of knowledge and skills to their day-to-day responsibilities, resulting in increased productivity. A long-term employee is defined as someone who has worked for an institution for a period of time, usually 5-10 years or more. The long-term employees have experienced organizational changes over their time and understand what has and has not worked. They play a vital role in organizational culture, impacting departmental morale, and new employee onboarding (Horne et al., 2016; Iqbal et al, 2020; Klotz et al., 2021; Velez, 2019). Turnover is a challenge for organizations, which can be costly in not only time, but also money. The loss of knowledge can create instability, cause a decline in productivity, and increase burnout rate (Figueroa, 2015; Gewin, 2021; Harter et al., 2002; McCurdy, 2014; Russell et al., 2020). The impact of turnover can be higher for hard to fill positions that lack a diverse candidate pool (Jo, 2003; McCurdy, 2014; Stephens, et al., 2019). On average, turnover cost is about 20% of the employee's salary (Wasilowski, 2018). This cost includes recruitment and training of replacement personnel (Wasilowski, 2018). Therefore, I conducted stay interview meetings with long-term Pitt IT staff.

To maintain confidentiality of potential stay interview participants, I worked with Pitt's Office of Human Resources to obtain a list of current Pitt IT staff who have been in their role and accustomed to the work environment for at least five years. From this list of Pitt IT staff, I used the random selection function in Microsoft Excel to randomize the IT subjects. My goal was to interview at least 10 Pitt IT staff, but a few staff declined to participate. Therefore, having a full list of IT staff with five plus years of service allowed the ability to run additional randomization if needed to identify potential participants. There were two groups of IT professionals (a) 5-10 years

of service and (b) 10 + years of service. The names and units of the randomly selected Pitt IT staff were kept confidential and not shared with the other participants or senior leaders. In total, 11 Pitt IT staff participated in the stay interview process and completed the post-interview survey. The breakdown of the 11 participants included 6 Pitt IT staff with 5-10 years of service and 5 Pitt IT staff with 10+ years of service. More details about the participants are detailed in Chapter 4.

3.5 Stay Interview Intervention

Institutions seek to establish initiatives designed to capture feedback on staff retention strategies that will increase engagement, foster trust, and decrease turnover. Implemented correctly, stay interviews can provide institutions with ideas for improvement and can show staff their feedback is important and their service to the institution is valued (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017). The stay interview process can provide leadership with key data to address retention and exit issues. Human resource organizations such as the College and University Professional Association (CUPA) and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) provide valuable support, guidance, and best practices on human resource related initiatives. Their insights can inform institutions on the development and implementation of a successful stay interview process. CUPA and SHRM provide up to date research on effective HR practices for retention (Bichsel et al., 2022).

Stay interviews can be an invaluable business driver and a tool to help reduce IT staff turnover. With the ever-increasing tight labor market for IT talent, understanding why staff stay will be important for institutions to meet their strategic goals (Echeverri-Carrollet et al., 2018; Khan & Bhattacharya, 2022).

I began my stay interview intervention by sending a memo (Appendix A) to the identified 10 long-term IT staff explaining my role, the purpose of the stay interview, process, and timeline. I had two groups of IT professions: (a) 5-10 years of service and (b) 10 + years of service. A 60-minute, individual virtual meeting was scheduled with the identified staff members. Because several selected participants declined the interview, I had to perform the random selection several times.

I asked the participants 11 pre-planned questions as a guide to gather information on what is engaging, why they stay, and their change ideas. I asked follow-up questions as needed during the stay interview meeting for any clarification and probed to learn more. I started the conversation with positive questions that sparked discussions then asked about obstacles or opportunities for improvement (Appendix B). I closed out the stay interview portion of the process by asking a single question regarding their feedback on how they felt the stay interview process captured their experience in Pitt IT. This question provided initial insight on the stay interview process. I then gathered additional feedback via a post-stay interview survey participants received after their scheduled interview.

To ensure I focused on the participants and actively listened to their feedback, the virtual meetings were recorded to assist with note taking. My notes were meant to capture key points, emotional words, and important quotes. The recordings were confidential and not shared. The stay interviews were completed in a four-week timeframe.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

I sent out a post-interview survey through Qualtrics to gather participant feedback on the process and effectiveness to gather information to understand why employees stay in our IT department, which can help with retention strategies. This survey included both closed and open-ended questions. My survey asked questions to gather participants' perceptions and satisfaction with the stay interview process, as well as the potential effectiveness of gathering useful information that provided ideas to increase Pitt IT staff engagement and retention. Measuring feelings and satisfaction was a crucial step in assessing the potential process by which employees share their reasons for staying or considering leaving. Gathering participants' perspectives helped gain support and advocacy for the stay interview tool.

Additionally, I scheduled a debriefing presentation session with IT senior leaders. The debriefing session provided an opportunity to summarize my findings and discuss collectively what went well, what did not go well, and whether we should implement a stay interview process in Pitt IT. During this debriefing, I shared a key findings summary that included participants' thoughts on the process and retention ideas and themes from my analysis. After the presentation, I led an open discussion with probing questions to senior leaders (listed in Appendix D). The open discussion provided an opportunity to explore how my senior leaders felt about the key findings and if they believe stay interviews could be effectively rolled out to our supervisors and Pitt IT staff. I recorded the session so I could actively listen and facilitate a robust discussion.

3.7 Analysis

My analysis included the review of both qualitative and quantitative data. The data assisted with answering my two inquiry questions. Qualitative and quantitative analyses were a critical part of this evaluation, and the next section outlines my qualitative and quantitative analysis approach (Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2015; Saldaña, 2021).

3.7.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

To measure the effectiveness of my change idea, I included three forms of qualitative data, (1) open-ended responses from the stay interview sessions, (2) open-ended data gathered via the post-interview Qualtrics survey, and (3) open-ended responses from a debriefing session with IT senior leaders. For the qualitative data collected, I used thematic analysis which is a method for analyzing qualitative data by searching through collected data to identify, analyze and report on recurring patterns for theme creation (Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2015; Saldaña, 2021).

For the stay interview qualitative data analysis, I aimed to identify patterns across the data to derive themes with an inductive approach. Because the stay interview intervention elicits emotional responses, thematic analysis was the best approach because my research gathered participants' perspectives. I transcribed the qualitative data collected from the stay interview sessions. Reading the data gathered provided a more holistic understanding of the feedback. During the interviews, I took notes related to key points to assist with developing themes. The analysis included reading transcripts from the stay interview meetings (Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2015). Qualitative data collected from my stay interview sessions were grouped by theme and category, including quotes from the identified participants. Although the PDSA cycle was

necessary to check the efficacy of the stay process, I was also interested in identifying retention ideas that could improve the Pitt IT staff's experience and reduce attrition triggers in our department.

Another data point for analysis included a review of the open-ended post-interview survey responses. The post-interview survey had quantitative and qualitative questions. For the qualitative data analysis, I followed the same thematic approach described above for the stay interview feedback. I coded the data into themes and looked for recurring patterns. The data gathered from the post-interview survey assisted with evaluating the effectiveness of the stay interview process providing critical information to assist supervisors and Pitt IT senior leaders with retention ideas and strategies.

Finally, the third piece of qualitative data gathered from my research included a review of the meeting transcript from the IT senior leaders debriefing session. During this session, I shared a summary of the deidentified participant stay interview analysis. I did not share any identifiable participant information to maintain confidentiality. I also reviewed the post-interview survey analysis with the Pitt IT senior leaders. The stay interview and post-interview summation analysis prompted my discussion with the IT senior leaders on process effectiveness and determined if we should implement on an annual basis. I coded the feedback data gathered from this focus group session using thematic analysis and grouped into themes. This discussion aligned with my inquiry questions in section 3.1 and informed how the stay interview process can gauge IT employees' job and organizational satisfaction and provided actionable ideas to strengthen employee engagement and retention. Data collected from the senior leader, focus group session included their perspective of the stay interview process and if they found the tool helpful in identifying retention ideas, and the potential ease to implement in Pitt IT (Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2015; Saldaña, 2021).

3.7.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

In my post-interview Qualtrics survey, I had several closed-ended questions asking participants to rate their feelings on a scale from 1-5. Descriptive statistics were used when reviewing the closed-ended questions from Pitt IT staff participants post-stay interview survey and provided statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations (Mertens, 2015).

The 1-5 scale for two of my survey questions was defined as “1” indicates "I do not believe a stay interview process will assist with gathering information” and “5” indicates "I do believe there is a compelling need for a stay interview process.” The third post-interview survey question had a sentiment scale from 1-5 with “1” defined as, “I was dissatisfied with the overall stay interview experience” and”5” indicated a sentiment, "I was satisfied with the stay interview experience.” By analyzing descriptive statistics, I had an opportunity to draw conclusions on satisfaction and effectiveness of the process from my participants.

3.8 Reflexivity

My professional background includes more than 25 years of experience leading teams through design and implementation of strategic human resource solutions for large, complex organizations. For 13 years, I worked at the director level in higher education at Pitt in the central human resources office. I have extensive experience with developing and deploying recruitment and retention strategies. Because of my position, I was cautious that due to my professional experience, bias did not influence my analysis of the gathered data toward a particular conclusion. To assist me through the analysis process, I kept a reflexive journal to log my thoughts,

reflections, and decision making as I made meaning from data. The journal included my thoughts, observations, and reflections on the collected data. More details about the reflexive journal are detailed in Chapter 6.

3.9 Trustworthiness

I addressed trustworthiness of my analysis through peer review and member check-ins. For the peer-review process, I engaged in a brief discussion of my key findings and feedback from the stay interviews with colleagues who are human resources experts and led programs that focus on retention of talent in their organization (Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). This peer review ensured the quality of academic science and ensured that I drew accurate conclusions based on my professionally performed experiments. For member check-ins, I went back to my participant group and shared a brief summary of my findings. This technique allowed the opportunity to confirm accuracy and validation (Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). Then, I met with IT senior leaders to share the analysis summary and discussed the stay interview process.

3.9.1 Outcome of Trustworthiness Process

To address the trustworthiness of my research, I completed the member check-ins with the 11 stay interview participants. I shared a summary of the stay interview and post-interview survey results to confirm accuracy and validity of my data analysis. I received responses from 54% of the participants. Participants who reviewed my data analysis felt the structured nature of the stay

interview provided a framework for reflection and facilitated a deeper understanding of job satisfaction and motivations.

A few participants reiterated the challenge of convincing employees that their responses will be kept confidential. This lack of trust could hinder the honest and candid responses from staff. One suggestion was for the supervisor to continuously emphasize confidentiality measures and create a safe and non-judgmental environment that could help alleviate these concerns and encourage more genuine responses. Another suggestion was to consider a neutral person to conduct the stay interviews. Engaging a neutral professional to conduct the stay interviews could create a safe and confidential environment for staff to express their thoughts and concerns. This approach may help staff feel more secure in sharing their honest feedback openly without fear of potential consequences. One newly discovered item from the member check-in process was a concern about the potential impact of feedback. For example, a few participants were concerned that the feedback could negatively affect others if policies were changed based on the majority opinions gathered from the stay interview tool.

For the peer review, my colleague with over 30 years' experience in the human resources and leadership fields in higher education, found the feedback from the stay interview process valuable and insightful. They felt the summary demonstrated a thorough analysis of the participant feedback and survey results, highlighting key themes that emerged from the data aligned with well-known drivers of employee engagement and satisfaction. This positive feedback from an experienced colleague strengthens the value and impact of my key findings from the stay interview process.

3.10 Limitations

As a human resources practitioner with more than 25 years in the field, my knowledge and experience were instrumental for gaining trust and encouraging participants to openly share feedback in the stay interviews. My subjectivity includes a deep understanding of how organizations function and how employees behave within them. This knowledge is critical to identifying the root causes of human resources problems and designing effective solutions that align with the institution's culture and values. However, I had to have awareness of limitations with my research. The limitations I had to consider include the need to manage expectations regarding implementation of actions based on gathered data, the underrepresentation of diversity in the IT profession, and the potential challenges in gaining supervisor support for the idea of conducting stay interviews.

There were two groups of IT professionals in my study: (a) 5-10 years of service, and (b) 10 + years of service. The 11 long-term staff were key contributors to their department's success and would create a gap if they were to leave the institution. I was clear with my participants on the objective of my study to ensure I was not over promising action to data shared if I identified an issue that may not have a solution. Gathering the participants' feedback on the stay interview process provided them with a voice to influence the decision to potentially implement as an ongoing engagement and retention tool in Pitt IT. This approach was helpful to ensure transparency, foster a sense of ownership and involvement among the participants. It was important to value their feedback and opinions, even if implementing their suggestions may not always be feasible due to practical constraints or other organizational factors. Additionally, as discovered from my interviews, participants may be apprehensive to share for fear of retaliation.

Therefore, building trust and ensuring confidentiality was important to gather open and honest feedback.

Historically, the IT industry has been predominantly male-dominated, which can be traced back to cultural and societal biases that discouraged women from pursuing careers in technology (Echeverri-Carroll, 2018; Grissom & Keiser 2011). Similarly, racial and ethnic minorities may have faced systemic barriers and limited access to educational opportunities, resulting in underrepresentation in the IT field. My IT participant group had limited differences in regard to age, gender, and race. With a lack of diversity among participants, I may have missed a range of perspectives, experiences, and insights. Participants with diverse cultural, gender, ethnic, or professional backgrounds contribute unique viewpoints that enhance research outcomes. Without this diversity, my findings may not capture the full complexity of the stay interview process or potential challenges and solutions.

There could be potential challenges in gaining supervisor support for the idea of conducting stay interviews. The IT supervisor may view this tool as an additional burden on their already extensive list of responsibilities. They may not appreciate the potential impact the feedback gathered could have on employee engagement and retention. Supervisors may be unfamiliar with the concept or its benefits and could be apprehensive about receiving negative feedback and uncomfortable conversations. This lack of support may result in not fully capturing staff perspectives and experiences.

3.11 Summary of Methodology

Stay interviews could be an integral part of an institution's talent strategy and a valuable tool for building a lasting culture of trust, improving retention, and strengthening connections. I will use the improvement science approach to study if the stay interview process can provide valuable information for my IT department leadership. The aim of the stay interview process was to identify and deploy initiatives that could assist with keeping IT professionals engaged and reduce voluntary staff turnover in fiscal year 2024. Analyzing the effectiveness of the stay interview tool was important to ensure the effectiveness of gathering useful and actionable insights from our IT staff.

4.0 Results

I explored the use of a stay interview to gather perspectives from IT employees about their workplace environment and why they "stay" employed at the institution. The study of the stay interview process sought to measure the efficacy in gauging organizational satisfaction, and to determine if the tool would provide specific actions that IT leaders can implement to strengthen engagement and retention. I followed the improvement science approach of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) to examine my proposed stay interview process. My goal was to understand how the stay interview tool works to gather the necessary information, where it may fail, and what we can implement to improve the performance of the interview tool for implementation in my place of practice. I identified two groups of IT professionals: (a) 5-10 years of service and (b) 10 + years of service. A 60-minute, individual virtual stay interview meeting was scheduled with randomly selected IT staff members. A post-interview survey through Qualtrics was sent to gather participant feedback on the process and overall effectiveness to better understand why employees stay in our IT department and assist with retention strategies. This survey included both closed and open-ended questions. A debriefing presentation session with senior IT leaders was held for the purpose of providing a summary of my findings and to discuss collectively what went well, what did not go well, and whether we should consider implementing a stay interview process for Pitt IT. This chapter focuses on an overview of the study participants, key findings from the stay interviews about what leads IT staff to stay at the institution, and key findings based on my inquiry questions.

4.1 Study Participants

The stay interview process involved 11 IT staff who willingly participated and completed the post-interview survey. A randomized selection was conducted from a confidential list provided by human resources. The targeted groups for participation were IT professionals with 5-10 years of service and those with 10+ years of service, with the goal of interviewing at least 5 participants from each group. The initial outreach memo was sent to 26 IT colleagues, of which 2 declined participation and 13 did not respond to repeated requests. Consequently, additional random selections were performed multiple times until a minimum of 10 participants were identified. The final group consisted of 6 IT staff with 5-10 years of service and 5 IT staff with 10+ years of service, all participants completed the post-interview survey. Among the 11 participants, four identified as a woman, and seven identified as a man. Their ages ranged from 21 to 60. Notably, all but one participant identified their race as white. A breakdown of the demographics of the 11 participants is provided in Table 1. To assist with the summary of key findings and to maintain confidentiality of my participants, I assigned pseudonyms listed in Table 2.

Our IT organization is led by the chief information officer (CIO) and 6 senior leaders including the deputy CIO, chief of staff, chief security officer, executive director of enterprise applications, executive director for customer success and service delivery, and executive director for analytics. All senior leaders report to the CIO, as well as the strategy and innovation group. The senior leadership debriefing session included interactions with 5 of the 6 senior leaders and the strategy and innovation group.

Table 1 Description of Stay Interview Participants

Category	*N*	5-10 years	10+ years	%
Participants	11	6	5	100%
Race				
White	10	5	5	90.9%
Asian	1	1	0	9.1%
Gender Identity				
Woman	4	2	2	36.36%
Man	7	4	3	63.64%
Age				
51 – 60 years	2	0	2	18.18%
41 – 50 years	6	5	1	54.55%
31 – 40 years	2	1	1	18.18%
21 – 30 years	1	0	1	9.09%

Table 2 Pseudonym Names

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Years of Service
Ashley	Woman	5-10 Years of Service
Katie	Woman	5-10 Years of Service
Lily	Woman	10+ Years of Service
Taylor	Woman	10+ Years of Service
Emmett	Man	5-10 Years of Service
Fred	Man	10+ Years of Service
Jeff	Man	10+ Years of Service
Joe	Man	5-10 Years of Service
Shawn	Man	5-10 Years of Service
Simon	Man	5-10 Years of Service
Tom	Man	10+ Years of Service

4.2 Key Findings from the Stay Interviews

This section summarizes the stay interview process insights to understand the perspectives of the participants, particularly why they stay employed at our institution. The themes included: (1) the positive impact of flexible work schedules on job satisfaction and retention, (2) the importance of attractive benefit program offerings, and (3) the effect of the supervisor-staff relationship on retention. Each key theme highlights important factors that contribute to employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention in our IT department. I discuss these key themes further below.

4.2.1 The Positive Impact of Flexible Work Schedules on Job Satisfaction and Retention

The COVID-19 global pandemic has redesigned the concept of remote work and flexible schedules. Instantly, unprepared employers were required to implement flexible work options (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Gewin; 2021). Three years later, many employees have become accustomed to flexibility and work-life balance. One key finding from the stay interviews was the positive impact flexible work options have had on the IT staff. Throughout the interviews, remote work and the flexible work schedules proved to be the most popular perks of working in our IT department. Joe, a participant with 5-10 years of service indicated, "Honestly the number one thing that keeps me here is working from home." Ashley, a participant with 5-10 years of service discussed how working from home provides her quiet time to focus on her work. Ashley said, "Working on campus can be a bit disruptive at times with coworkers in and out of the office. I like my quiet time. With remote work I have the opportunity to change my office scenery to a coffee house or I can listen to music."

Several participants shared that if there were changes that took away their flexibility, they would seek other employment options. Flexible work options were more important to many of the participants than salary. Jeff, who has worked at our institution for 10+ years stated, "Of course the work flexibility is amazing." Shawn, a participant with 5-10 years of service said, "Our department is probably not in a good place budget wise, and that leadership have to make up for it in other ways such as flexibility with schedules." The good news is that our IT leaders are strong advocates for flexible work schedules and remote working. They recognize the importance of promoting work-life balance and accommodating individual needs. They actively endorse and encourage flexible work arrangements in our department.

While offering certain benefits, such as flexible work schedules, may not directly address the issue of low wages, implementing flexible work arrangements can improve the overall work experience and potentially offset some of the disadvantages associated with lower wages. The stay interviews revealed that staff who are provided with the opportunity for flexible work options are more productive, have better job satisfaction, and greater morale with higher retention.

4.2.2 The Importance of Attractive Benefit Program Offerings

The benefit programs offered by an institution play a crucial role in attracting and retaining staff. Employees are looking for organizations that offer a total rewards package beyond their annual salary. Benefit programs can be a powerful tool for attracting and retaining top talent. In a competitive job market, candidates may prioritize benefits over salary (Bendermache et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2016). As a result, offering attractive benefit packages such as paid time off, retirement, tuition assistance, and paid leave can help organizations stand out from the competition and attract the best candidates. Institutions that invest in their benefit programs show staff they are valued, which can lead to increased retention and productivity.

A recurring theme from the stay interviews was the rich benefit packages the university offers. Several participants shared the benefit package as a top reason they joined the university and a key driver for staying. The ability to invest up to 20% of their monthly salary with the university funding 12% was mentioned by most of the participants. Shawn, a participant with 5-10 years of service, spoke highly of the benefits. He said, “I think the retirement plan is huge. I have worked at half a dozen different places over my career, and never worked anywhere that matches 12% like our university.” The tuition benefit for the staff to further their skills with bachelors, masters and doctoral level degrees was viewed as a big support for talent development

and gaining skills for career growth. Emmett, who has worked at our institution for 5-10 years shared, “I have a daughter who's 9. I started here when she was like 9 months old, and in my mind, I’m thinking well that tuition benefit becomes more valuable every year.”

In summary, offering attractive benefit programs can have a significant impact on the retention of staff. Benefit programs can increase job satisfaction, improve work-life balance, attract top talent, and reduce costs associated with turnover. Based on this finding, organizations that prioritize employee benefits and offer a rich total rewards package to enhance the annual salary are more likely to have a happy and productive workforce.

4.2.3 The Effect of the Supervisor-Employee Relationship on Retention

An open and transparent relationship between supervisors and employees is essential for building trust and open communication. When employees have a good relationship with their supervisors, they are more likely to feel valued, respected, and supported. Fred talked about the relationships formed in his department with the supervisors and staff. He expanded on how these relationships are a key contributor to job satisfaction for him and others. This job satisfaction helps with the retention of their team. Fred said, “We missed quite a bit with COVID when we couldn’t get together. As a team including our supervisors, we shifted to using remote software applications to chat as needed or just call to catch up. So, we are able to solve pretty much anything because of the strong relationships we built.”

Trust is a fundamental component in the supervisor/staff employee relationship (Henderson et al., 2020). Building an environment of high trust fosters engagement and is beneficial to not only the employees and management but influences the achievement of an institution's strategic plan and financially the bottom-line. Employees who feel unsupported in

their daily responsibilities often experience a lack of trust with their supervisor or become frustrated with insufficient communication. As Katie discussed during our interview, “There is definitely a top-down approach with some managers. This changed when the new CIO first joined, and we were empowered to make decisions but that kind of changed recently, and I feel we are moving backwards which can be disappointing.” IT staff who feel valued by their supervisor have increased job satisfaction, motivation, and engagement, which can translate into higher levels of productivity and better job performance. Staff who feel supported and valued are more likely to remain loyal to the institution and less likely to seek employment elsewhere. However, frustration can turn into disengagement among IT staff when the institution’s employees contemplate leaving without expressing their thoughts for a fear of retaliation (Iqbal et al., 2020).

The feedback provided by Lily highlights the significance of the supervisor/staff employee relationship in the IT department. Lily shared, “I feel there is a lack of leadership sometimes in our department, and it is frustrating whenever you ask for help, because you want to do a good job and you want to serve the customers but feel helpless.” This statement highlights Lily’s frustration regarding the absence of effective leadership, which she believes hampers her ability to excel in providing exceptional service to our students, faculty, and staff. The stay interview process can provide a tool for supervisors to actively listen to staff concerns and address them promptly. Supervisors must remember that building a strong supervisor/staff relationship is an ongoing process that requires consistent effort, open communication, and a genuine commitment to fostering a supportive work environment (Gewin, 2021; McCurdy, 2014; Silver & Jakeman, 2014; Tull 2006). By gathering and addressing the concerns raised by Lily through a stay interview, supervisors could enhance the department's success, productivity, engagement, and overall IT staff retention.

4.2.4 Summary of Key Findings from the Stay Interviews

In summary, stay interviews can be an invaluable tool to gather perspectives and sentiments from staff on important factors that contribute to employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention in our IT department. By understanding and acknowledging these key themes identified through the stay interview process, the institution can make informed decisions and take targeted actions to enhance engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. This may involve expanding flexible work schedules, further improving benefit offerings, and providing training and support for our supervisors to strengthen their relationships with their staff. By conducting these regular conversations, organizations can create a culture of continuous improvement and ensure that the needs of their IT professionals are met.

4.3 Key Findings for Inquiry Questions

My dissertation in practice has two guiding inquiry questions to lead the process of systematic inquiry and exploration, to understand the impact of my change idea to generate insights, and drive improvement efforts.

1. What is the efficacy of stay interviews in gauging IT employees' job and organizational satisfaction?
2. Does the stay interview process provide specific actions/ideas that IT leaders can implement to strengthen employee engagement and retention in our organization?

These inquiry questions played a significant role in my PDSA cycle and helped reveal the effectiveness of the stay interview tool to drive positive change in my IT department. Feedback from participants and senior leaders related to the stay interview process is summarized below.

4.3.1 Inquiry Question 1: What is the Efficacy of Stay Interviews in Gauging IT Employees' Job and Organizational Satisfaction?

This section summarizes key findings on the sentiments from the participants about the stay interview tool and the advantages or reasons why the stay interview process would be a valuable tool to assist with increasing staff satisfaction, engagement, and retention of IT talent. To answer the inquiry question, I relied on three data sources: (1) a reflection question during the stay interview process, (b) Likert scale items on a post-stay interview survey, (c) open-ended questions on a post-stay interview survey. Key findings discussed in this section include: (1) the IT staff felt heard, (2) the questions were thought provoking and pertinent, and (3) the stay interview proved to be a valuable tool for leadership to gather insights.

4.3.1.1 The IT Staff Felt Heard

One key theme from the post-interview survey was the opportunity for our IT staff to be heard. Ashley, a participant with 5-10 years of service, shared what she liked best about the process. Ashley said, "The stay interview process provided an opportunity to give my thoughts on what I like and what I don't like about my job, as well as giving ideas on ways to make it better where applicable." Emmett, a participant with 5-10 years of service stated, "I think the questions that were asked got me to a place where I could accurately describe my experience in our IT department." Joe, participant with 5-10 years of service reflected in the post-interview survey that,

“Personally, it made me think about what is important to me and what some of the challenges are that our department faces when considering employee retention. It also made me feel like there is someone out there listening.” Taylor, a participant with 10+ years of service stated, “I appreciated that there was opportunity to talk about the role and also the organization as a whole.”

Feeling heard is a crucial aspect of the stay interview process as it fosters trust, engagement, and a sense of value among employees. When IT staff members have confidence that their feedback will be genuinely considered and acted upon, it enhances their trust in the organization and their supervisors. This trust creates an environment where employees feel safe to express their thoughts, share challenges, and suggest improvements without fear of negative consequences. This two-way communication not only helps employees feel valued, but it also enables supervisors to gain insights into the challenges employees face, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies to enhance the work environment. Knowing that their opinions, ideas, and concerns are taken seriously helps create a sense of ownership and investment in their roles.

It is important for leaders to recognize the significance of employees feeling heard during the stay interview. Actively listening, acknowledging employee perspectives, and taking appropriate actions based on their feedback demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being and engagement. When IT staff members feel heard, it creates a positive work environment and promotes retention. Engaged staff are more likely to be productive and committed to contributing their best to the institution.

4.3.1.2 The Questions Were Thought Provoking and Pertinent

Thought provoking and pertinent questions played a crucial role in the stay interview process by facilitating meaningful reflection, encouraging open dialogue, addressing key job satisfaction factors, tailoring retention strategies, and demonstrating a commitment to staff well-

being. The participants felt the questions were thought provoking and enhanced the overall effectiveness of the stay interview process, leading to valuable insights and actionable outcomes. The questions promoted meaningful reflection and allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences, motivations, and aspirations in our institution. Simon, an IT staff participant with 5-10 years of service expressed his positive feedback regarding the stay interview process. Simon stated, "The questions were thought provoking and pertinent. I think this would be a great tool to gather feedback in order to make improvements." This feedback from the participants further reinforces the potential value of implementing stay interviews within the IT department. Additionally, Shawn shared that he liked, "The open-ended questions and freedom to say whatever was on my mind. While I was aware I was being recorded, I felt comfortable enough to be open." This feedback from the participants further reinforces the potential value of implementing stay interviews within the IT department. By encouraging introspection, the stay interview questions helped staff gain insights into their own values, career goals, and satisfaction levels. This reflection can lead to a better understanding of their needs and provide valuable information for the supervisor to address concerns or make improvements. One example is the feedback Ashley mentioned in her post-interview survey. She wrote that, "I enjoyed the chance to answer the questions presented to me in the stay interview. Not only did it allow me to provide feedback on my job, but it also forced me to think about things I may not think about normally."

Additionally, thought provoking and pertinent questions help supervisors or HR representatives gather valuable information that can be used to tailor retention strategies for IT staff members. By understanding their motivations, goals, and preferences, the organization can develop customized approaches to enhance job satisfaction, professional development, and overall employee experience. This individualized approach is more likely to resonate with employees and

increase their commitment to the organization. The stay interview questions demonstrated a commitment to staff well-being and a genuine interest in the well-being and success of our IT staff. This commitment to employee well-being fosters trust, engagement, and loyalty, contributing to a positive work culture and higher retention rates.

4.3.1.3 A Valuable Tool for Leadership to Gather Insight

The stay interview process offers leaders a valuable tool for gathering insights, fostering engagement, retaining talent, building relationships, making strategic decisions, and supporting employee development. By actively listening to IT staff feedback and taking appropriate actions based on their input, leaders can create a positive and supportive work environment that drives department and institutional success. Simon, a participant with 5-10 years of service, shared this statement in the post-interview survey, "I think it would be very beneficial to help leaders understand what is working or not and offers the platform for employees to give their unique ideas on improvements that could be made." Emmett, shared, "Yes, they should implement, and it will help the leadership know employee concerns and scope for improvement and employee retention."

The stay interview sessions concluded with a reflection question posed to each participant, soliciting their feedback on how well the stay interview process captured their experiences in our IT department. Initial insights from participants indicated that they found the process to be comprehensive, engaging, and valuable in capturing their perspectives. Joe said, "I think it captured my experiences. The only question is seeing our leaders implement changes versus just gathering ideas. It's nice to say, hey, these things would be great, but some may not be things that could happen anytime soon." His statement emphasized the importance of transparency and acknowledged that some ideas may not be feasible to implement immediately. Lily, on the other hand, said, "I understand there are tools out there to help supervisors understand our jobs better.

This process to me would be a great tool to use ongoing to see what is what and find out if someone is on the brink of leaving. We have lost a lot of great people over the last couple years." She acknowledged the importance of identifying potential departures and expressed concern about the loss of talented staff in recent years.

The post-interview survey conducted with the 11 participants utilized Likert scale and open-ended questions. The first quantitative question was measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with sentiment scores of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree assigned to each response category. Based on participant responses to the quantitative questions, it is evident that there was a positive sentiment towards the effectiveness of the stay interview tool and its potential implementation in our IT department. All of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that they believed a stay interview process could gather valuable information to understand why staff members choose to stay and assist in gathering retention strategies (Figure 3).

The insights gathered from the stay interview process can inform strategic decision making processes within the department. By understanding IT staff feedback, leaders can make informed choices about policies, procedures, and initiatives that align with employee needs and support department goals and the universities strategic plan. The stay interview tool can provide valuable data points that can help leaders identify areas of improvement, prioritize initiatives, and allocate resources effectively.

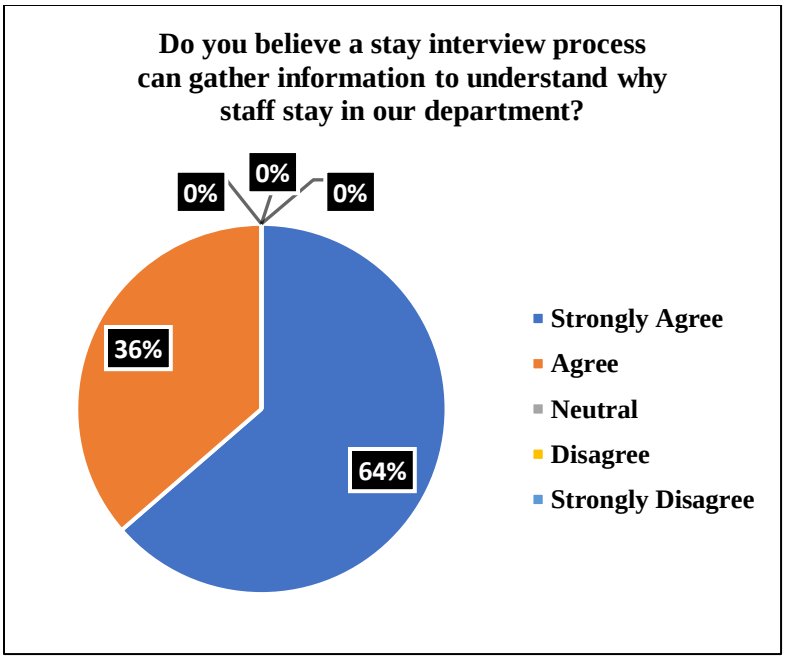

Figure 3 Post Interview Survey Results

The next quantitative question measured satisfaction on a Likert scale from 1-5. I assigned a satisfaction score of (1) very dissatisfied, (2) dissatisfied, (3) neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, (4) satisfied, and (5) very satisfied. All participants expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with the stay interview process in terms of its ability to gather information about why staff members choose to stay and assist with gathering retention ideas and strategies (Figure 4). This unanimous satisfaction among the participants further reinforces the positive perception of the stay interview process and its potential effectiveness in achieving its intended goals. The high level of satisfaction suggests that the stay interview tool was well-received and perceived as a valuable approach to understanding employee motivations and improving retention strategies in our IT department. Emmett shared in his post-interview survey that, “Yes, they should implement it and it'll help the leadership to know employee concerns and scope for improvement and employee retention.”

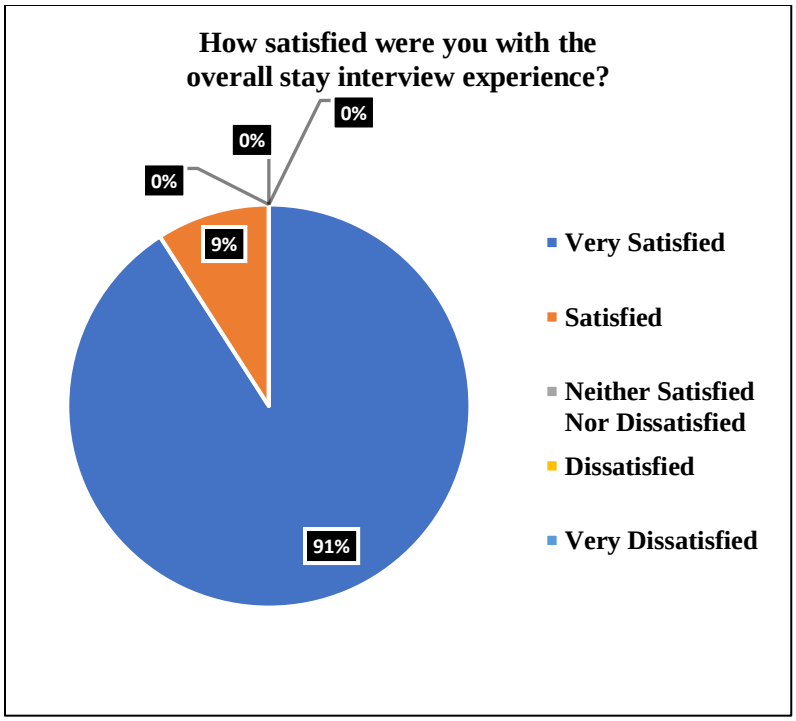

Figure 4 More Post Interview Survey Results

Stay interviews can shed light on the importance of leadership support and effective communication. IT leaders can focus on improving their own leadership skills, providing clear expectations, and offering regular feedback and guidance to their teams. Building strong relationships with employees, being accessible, and actively supporting their professional growth can significantly impact engagement and retention. As an example, Simon stated, "I think this would be a great tool to gather feedback to make improvements. The key would be to make changes because of the feedback and more would be apt to use it and respect the process going into the future." Therefore, it will be important for supervisors to have open communication with their staff regarding the ideas shared and what may or may not be realistic to explore further. If communication issues arise in stay interviews, IT leaders can focus on improving communication channels and ensuring transparency within the organization. This may involve implementing

regular team meetings, enhancing communication tools, or promoting open-door policies where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas, concerns, and feedback.

4.3.1.4 Summary of Key Findings for Inquiry Question 1

Overall, the key findings collectively highlight the positive impact and value of the stay interview process. By providing a platform for employees to be heard, asking thought provoking questions, and offering valuable insights to leadership, the stay interview process can contribute to increasing staff satisfaction, engagement, and retention of IT talent. By engaging in open and meaningful conversations, organizations can address concerns, strengthen employee engagement, and create an environment where IT professionals feel valued and motivated to stay.

4.3.2 Inquiry Question 2: Does the Stay Interview Process Provide Specific Actions/Ideas that IT Leaders can take to Strengthen Employee Engagement and Retention in Our Organization?

In this section, I discuss key findings from the IT senior leader meeting. The senior leadership debriefing session included interactions with 5 of the 6 senior leaders and the strategy and innovation group. During the senior leader meeting, I shared a summary of the stay interview results including direct quotes and themes. The participant feedback gathered during the stay interview identified specific actions and ideas that IT leaders could take to strengthen engagement and retention. The key findings based on the IT senior leader meeting included: (1) feedback on the value of the stay interview tool and department readiness, and (2) suggestions on how to implement in our IT department.

4.3.2.1 Feedback on the Value of the Stay Interview Tool and Department Readiness

Overall, the senior leaders are interested in gathering staff feedback from the stay interview process to improve engagement and retention, although they recognized the need to evaluate certain factors further before implementing a stay interview process. These factors included (1) the value of the stay interview tool to generate retention ideas and (2) our IT department's readiness for the stay interview process. A summary of each is provided below.

During the senior leader meeting, the majority of the leadership team did agree with the value of the stay interview tool generating retention ideas. They felt the interviews provided an opportunity for the staff to share their perspectives, experiences, and motivations and uncovered factors that contributed to their engagement and likelihood of staying in our IT department. The senior leaders recognized that the data gathered from the stay interviews did not specifically identify new retention ideas or actions beyond continuing flexible work schedules, benefit offerings, and the importance of the supervisor/staff relationship. However, the discussion highlighted that offering the staff the opportunity to share their feedback on job satisfaction and their likes and dislikes about their role actively fosters a continuous focus on maintaining a positive work environment with satisfied staff. One senior leader stated, "I see some of the questions as actually being things that supervisors should talk about with their team anyway. Just as the natural course of business, supervisors should make those observations about what really motivates their team, where they want to go, or where is their growth. It's just kind of that interest in them that is important."

Additionally, the senior leaders discussed our department's readiness to implement a stay interview process and if the supervisors are equipped to conduct them. One leader said, "I think that this would certainly work in different areas and from a maturity level, certain teams are ready

for this tool." The leaders further discussed the need for a comprehensive assessment of our department's readiness and the resources available to support the stay interview process. Consequently, providing training will be important for success. Training supervisors on conducting stay interviews ensures that they have the necessary skills, knowledge, and techniques to engage in effective and meaningful conversations with their staff. Through training, a consistent approach across areas can be developed. Consistency helps to maintain fairness and transparency, ensuring that staff receive a similar experience regardless of the supervisor. Implementing standardized training for the stay interview process can establish a reliable and predictable framework. This approach ensures a positive and consistent experience for staff, improves the quality of collected data, and increases the likelihood of addressing concerns and retaining top talent.

4.3.2.2 Suggestions on How to Implement in Our IT Department

The senior leaders discussed various implementation ideas that included, (1) running a pilot program in certain areas to test the effectiveness, (2) randomly selecting IT staff participants, (3) selecting a predetermined number of staff for the stay interview process, (4) replacing a quarterly review with the stay interview, and (5) having a neutral third party conduct. The following provides a summary of each idea.

One senior leader stated, "You could pilot it in an area, you could do an annually or biannually." We discussed how implementing a pilot program in specific divisions in our department could allow the opportunity to assess the effectiveness and feasibility of stay interviews before a full-scale rollout. This approach helps identify potential challenges, fine-tune the process, and gather feedback from a limited sample before expanding to the entire department or institution.

It will be crucial to establish clear objectives and evaluation criteria for the pilot to accurately measure its impact and inform decision making for wider implementation.

The group discussed further about randomly selecting participants for stay interviews could help to ensure diverse employee representation across different roles, departments, and experience levels. They felt this approach provides a broader perspective on staff satisfaction and engagement within our department. However, one leader said, "It is important to consider the logistics of selecting participants randomly and ensuring all staff have an equal opportunity to participate."

Another implementation option discussed was to select a specific number of staff. This approach involves selecting a predetermined number of staff to participate in the stay interviews. It allows for a targeted approach, where you can focus on specific departments, roles, or demographics that are of particular interest to the department. Selecting a specific number of participants also provides more manageable logistics and resources for conducting the interviews. However, it is essential to ensure that the chosen participants are representative of the overall employee population to gather reliable and comprehensive feedback.

One senior staff suggested, "We could integrate the stay interviews into our existing quarterly performance review process. This could streamline the implementation and ensure regular feedback from employees." The leadership team then discussed further that by replacing one of the quarterly reviews with stay interviews, our department could gather valuable insights into employee satisfaction and engagement in a structured and systematic manner. This approach also demonstrates commitment to listening and responding to employee concerns.

There was discussion that in some cases, staff may feel more comfortable providing honest feedback to a neutral third party rather than their immediate supervisors. One concern raised by senior leadership was the willingness of our employees to share feedback with their direct

supervisor. To address this concern, the senior leaders requested that the process include a neutral third party to conduct stay interviews in our IT department. One senior leader said, “I think if we were going to do something anytime in the next couple of years, we really have to determine who is the right person to conduct the interviews.” The senior leaders felt that engaging a neutral professional to conduct the stay interviews could create a safe and confidential environment for staff to express their thoughts and concerns. They additionally shared that a neutral professional, such as human resources, could bring expertise and experience in conducting effective interviews and extracting valuable insights. Ultimately, the decision on whether to involve a third party professional in conducting stay interviews should be based on the institution’s specific needs, resources, and the level of trust and transparency between staff and their supervisors.

When considering these implementation ideas, it is important to evaluate the department or institutional goals, resources, and culture. Selecting the most suitable approach depends on factors such as the institution’s size, budget, available time, and the level of readiness and support from leaders and staff. It may also be beneficial to involve stakeholders from different levels of the organization to gain diverse perspectives and ensure successful implementation.

4.3.2.3 Summary of Key Findings for Inquiry Question 2

In summary, senior leaders view the stay interview process as a valuable tool for leadership to glean insight and provide employees with an opportunity to have their voice heard. They recognized that the stay interview tool provided an opportunity for supervisors to gain a better understanding of staff perspectives, concerns, and motivations. This insight is critical for leadership to make informed decisions, solve problems and implement effective strategies to improve employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

The senior leaders discussed a variety of implementation approaches, including random participate selection, choosing a specific number of employees, substituting one of the quarterly reviews with a stay interview, or conducting a pilot in certain areas to assess its effectiveness. Additionally, there were extensive deliberations on involving a neutral professional to conduct the stay interviews, which they felt would establish a confidential environment and a safe space for staff to openly express their thoughts and concerns.

Overall, the senior leaders all agreed the main value gained from the stay interview tool is providing an opportunity for our IT staff to share their perspectives, experiences, motivations and uncover factors that contribute to increase in engagement and retention.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter aimed to answer the inquiry questions that played a significant role in my PDSA cycle and helped reveal the effectiveness of the stay interview tool to drive positive change in our IT department. Many of the participants found the stay interview process to be a positive experience and a valuable tool for providing feedback to supervisors. Although, the data gathered from the stay interviews did not specifically identify new retention ideas or actions, the senior leaders agree the added value of the stay interview process is the opportunity for the staff to share their perspectives and experiences. One key takeaway is both the participants and senior leaders stated the key to making this process effective is for leadership to act on the feedback.

Additionally, both the senior leaders and IT staff participants expressed concerns about the process being done correctly, ensuring confidentiality, and having follow-up actions based on the

feedback received. An IT staff participant suggested that the same people should not be interviewed every year and that an alternating cadence of stay interviews one year and survey the next could be considered.

The participants appreciated the opportunity to have a candid conversation about their job satisfaction and to discuss ways to improve their work environment that could result in retention of staff. The stay interview process allowed the IT staff to feel heard and understood, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and retention. The process can also provide an opportunity for supervisors to build a relationship and foster trust with their IT staff. The post-survey feedback also indicated that the questions were thought provoking and relevant, which further reinforced the value of the stay interview process.

5.0 Learning and Action

My research confirmed that utilizing a stay interview tool can effectively measure job and organizational satisfaction of staff. It also can provide an opportunity for leaders to engage in open discussions with their staff to strengthen employee engagement and retention in our IT organization.

In an increasingly tight labor market, potential candidates not only have to look for good pay and benefits, but they want to work for an organization that values employees, supports growth, and creates an engaging workplace (Bendermache et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2016). The stay interview tool was evaluated to determine its effectiveness in gathering data from long-term employees to understand what keeps them engaged and provides them the incentive to keep coming back daily (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017).

5.1 Key Findings

Institutions that create a culture of retention do so by implementing strategies to understand their staff levels of job satisfaction and engagement. In this chapter, I reflect on three significant takeaways from my PDSA cycle of the stay interview tool. The takeaways include, (1) consensus from participants and senior leaders for a neutral person to conduct the stay interview, (2) benefits and perks that foster retention beyond pay, and (3) the influence of the global pandemic on the shift in work-life balance perspective.

5.1.1 Key Finding 1: Consensus from Participants and Senior Leaders for Neutral Person to Conduct the Stay Interviews

The literature revealed that the best practices for implementing a stay interview tool is to have the direct supervisor conduct as more of a discussion to build relationships and trust with their staff (Finnegan, 2018). However, a big takeaway from my research is the sentiments that our department is not ready to implement in this manner and a neutral person should be identified to conduct (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017).

While the best practices often suggest that direct supervisors should conduct stay interviews to foster relationships and build trust with their staff (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017), there are circumstances where a neutral person is preferred. As with other recruitment and retention tools, they are not one size fits all. Therefore, modifying to meet an institution's culture will be important. Some reasons for a process modification include situations where trust between staff and supervisors is not yet established or needs improvement, a neutral person can play a vital role in fostering trust in an institution.

Currently, the prevailing viewpoint in my institution is that having a direct supervisor conduct a stay interview may create a power dynamic that could hinder staff from freely expressing their genuine thoughts and concerns. This perspective takes into consideration various factors discussed with senior staff that influence this decision including our organizational culture, the nature of relationships between supervisors and staff, and the overall readiness for open dialogue with their teams. By recognizing the influence of power dynamics, it is important to acknowledge that the presence of a supervisor could create a perceived hierarchy. This dynamic may hinder staff from freely expressing their thoughts and compromise the transparency of the feedback received (McCoy, 2019; O'Day, 2020; Russell et al., 2020; Sturges & Guest, 2001).

5.1.2 Key Finding 2: Benefit and Perks that Foster Retention Beyond Pay

The stay interview process provided an opportunity through a structured approach to uncover the benefits and perks the IT staff want and need. The open discussions prompted by the stay interview tool provided insights into the specific benefits and perks that are meaningful to individual employees. Through open and honest discussions, leaders can gain a better understanding of what motivates their staff, allowing them to tailor benefits packages that align with their preferences and needs. This personalized approach can enhance employee satisfaction and loyalty. Benefits and perks play a crucial role in fostering employee retention beyond pay. While competitive compensation is important, employees are increasingly seeking a comprehensive package that includes additional benefits and perks. The participants and senior leaders both recognize the significance of total rewards and rich benefit packages offered at our university. This was a key theme of the stay interviews as a top reason our staff stay. During the senior leader debrief, they were not surprised by this finding and agreed with the participants sentiment about our university benefits. Enhancing the staff's work-life balance through benefits such as flexible work schedules, remote work options, and generous paid time off can significantly contribute to work-life balance. When employees have the flexibility to manage their personal and professional responsibilities effectively, they experience less stress and are more likely to remain with the institution.

During the stay interviews, one prominent factor discussed by staff as a reason to stay in our department is the availability of flexible work arrangements. The support for flexibility is apparent from our CIO and senior leaders, who actively promote and encourage such arrangements. In fact, our department has established an IT recruitment and retention committee under their guidance, tasked with researching and developing ideas to enhance engagement and

satisfaction. Currently, the committee is exploring the possibility of implementing a compressed four-day work week as an additional flexible arrangement. This proactive approach demonstrates the commitment of our senior leaders to staff retention. When leaders actively support and prioritize such initiatives, it sends a clear message throughout the department that staff well-being and satisfaction are paramount. This support establishes a positive environment where supervisors and staff can actively engage in retention efforts and prioritize the happiness and satisfaction of their teams.

Leaders need to recognize that the stay interview process may not cover every aspect or concern that is important to staff. Some topics such as compensation may be sensitive. Silence on a specific topic does not mean it is not important. Staff may feel uncomfortable discussing certain sensitive subjects or may assume that the topic was not within the scope of the stay interview process. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of staff perspectives, it may be beneficial to explore compensation through other channels such as regular performance review discussions, surveys, or open forums for feedback.

5.1.3 Key Finding 3: The Influence of the Global Pandemic on the Shift in Work-Life Balance Perspective

The modern workforce increasingly values flexibility as work-life integration becomes more important (Botha et al., 2023; McCallon, 2023). The stay interview tool can help employers stay updated on employees' evolving needs, allowing them to adjust policies and practices accordingly. An overall theme from the participants from the stay interviews was the positive impact remote work and flexible work options have had on our IT staff. The workforce changed

significantly during the COVID-19 global pandemic (Botha et al., 2023). Organizations that believed in-person was the only work option were quickly shifted into a new reality. The pandemic prompted individuals to reevaluate their priorities and what truly matters in their lives (Botha et al., 2023). Many have realized the importance of spending quality time with loved ones, pursuing personal passions, and prioritizing self-care (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). This reevaluation has influenced individuals' expectations from their work environments, with a growing desire for workplaces that support work-life balance and overall well-being (McCallon, 2023). The desire to continue their flexible work arrangements post-pandemic emerged as the primary theme among all of the participants. This finding indicates that our staff value and appreciate the flexibility they gained during the pandemic. Our senior leaders support this desire, and our department has continued with the flexible work arrangements. By conducting stay interviews and addressing the influence of the global pandemic had on work-life balance perspectives, leaders can gather valuable data to inform strategies, policies, and practices that promote staff wellbeing, engagement, and satisfaction in a post-pandemic work environment.

Literature reveals that with remote work, the focus has shifted from measuring productivity solely based on hours worked or physical presence to evaluating outcomes and results (McCallon, 2023). This shift has allowed employees to have more control over their schedules, leading to greater flexibility in managing work and personal obligations.

In summary, the global pandemic has brought about a significant shift in the perspective of work-life balance. It has highlighted the importance of remote work and flexibility, increased focus on well-being, integration of personal and professional lives, redefined productivity and boundaries, the significance of employer support, and the reevaluation of priorities. These changes are likely to have a lasting impact on how our IT staff employees and leaders approach work-life

balance in a post-pandemic world. To adapt to these changes and retain talent, implementing a stay interview process is important for our IT leaders. This process allows our leaders to stay attuned to the desires and needs of our staff and make necessary adjustments as needed. The insights gathered from the stay interview process enable our leaders to tailor strategies that align with the new dynamics of work-life balance, positioning our department for success.

5.2 Implications for Practice and Future Research

As research and literature have shown, stay interviews are a powerful tool for institutions for gathering feedback from employees and identifying areas for improvement to increase retention of IT staff (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017). IT leaders must keep in mind the importance of identifying the value add of using the stay interview process and how they demonstrate to staff that their opinions and perspectives are valued by the department. In this section, I discuss three key implications: (1) successful adoption of the stay interview concept and (2) supervisor training on the stay interview process and (3) insight into another stay interview PDSA cycle.

5.2.1 Successful Adoption of the Stay Interview Concept

The feedback gathered through the stay interviews provided valuable insights that can inform our IT department's strategic planning efforts. By actively seeking and attentively listening to staff feedback, we can gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and needs. However, the data also suggest that to ensure widespread support and acceptance of the stay interview process, it is crucial for the staff to feel a stronger sense of engagement and involvement in the

decision making processes. This finding emphasizes the importance of fostering a collaborative environment where IT staff have a voice and are actively included in shaping the future of the department.

To ensure a successful adoption by the IT staff and supervisors, the department should identify a regular schedule for stay interviews, such as conducting them annually or bi-annually, to ensure feedback is consistently gathered and acted upon including creating action plans and timelines to address concerns. The supervisors should avoid leading questions that may influence the responses and opt for open-ended questions to encourage employees to provide detailed and honest feedback. Stay interviews should be conducted in a safe and supportive environment, and employees should not fear repercussions for providing honest feedback. The supervisor must stress that the use of punitive measures because of the feedback received will not happen during the stay interview sessions. Building a trusting work environment will be important to increase motivation, job satisfaction, and a greater commitment to the organization. By understanding the factors that contribute to employee satisfaction and engagement, supervisors can take timely action to address concerns before they escalate, and employees decide to leave. This can help improve employee retention rates and reduce turnover costs for the department.

When implementing a new initiative or process, adoption by employees and leaders can be challenging. Therefore, implementing a change management strategy will be important for the adoption of the stay interview process. Although change is inevitable at work and/or in our personal lives, resistance can be detrimental to any initiative. The key issue is understanding how each person may manage change (Bendermacher et al., 2016; Kotter & Heskett, 2011). Each individual may cycle through the change process differently and could repeat a stage depending on the implementation initiative and/or phase. IT Leaders must always keep their finger on the

pulse of change readiness activities and plan to adjust their implementation strategy of an initiative as needed (Carucci, 2016).

Additionally, measuring the direct impact of stay interviews on retention or job satisfaction can be challenging, particularly if other retention strategies are being implemented concurrently. It is important to establish clear objectives and key performance indicators when implementing stay interviews. Regularly tracking and analyzing retention rates, employee engagement levels, and feedback received can help assess the effectiveness of the stay interview process and identify areas for improvement. It will be important for leaders to approach the stay interview process as a means of gathering insights and suggestions for improving individual employee experiences rather than imposing universal changes. The focus of the stay interview process should be on tailoring strategies and policies to meet the diverse needs of our Pitt IT staff while maintaining flexibility and creating an inclusive environment that respects individual preferences and fosters effective communication and collaboration. By acknowledging these areas for improvement and taking proactive steps to address them, institutions can enhance the effectiveness of the stay interview process and overcome potential challenges. Adapting the process to the specific needs and context of the organization, providing ongoing support and training to supervisors, and continuously evaluating and refining the process can lead to more meaningful outcomes and improvements in employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

5.2.2 Supervisor Training on the Stay Interview Process

Based on the feedback received from the post-interview survey and senior leader debriefing session, interview training for the supervisor will be a critical component for successful adoption and implementation of the stay interview process. When creating supervisor training, the following

should be considered. Begin by explaining the purpose and benefits of the stay interviews. Review interview key components of successful stay interviews such as active listening, open-ended questioning, and creating a safe and non-judgmental space for staff to share their feedback. Ensure supervisors understand the need to maintain confidentiality and reassure staff that their feedback will be treated with respect and discretion. Engage supervisors in role playing exercises to practice their interviewing skills to help them become comfortable and proficient in conducting an effective stay interview. Encourage supervisors to be mindful of their own biases and strive for objectivity in their interactions with their staff. Guide supervisors on how to effectively communicate and address staff concerns and support them in developing action plans to improve employee engagement and retention. Explain to supervisors that there may be perceived power imbalance between underrepresented minorities and themselves. They may fear that their feedback could be used against them or impact their professional growth. Underrepresented minorities may have experienced or witnessed instances of bias, discrimination, or microaggressions, which can erode their trust in supervisors. This lack of trust can make them hesitant to share their true thoughts and concerns. Implementing mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the stay interview process and adjusting as needed will be important for success. By following these steps, supervisors can be well equipped to conduct meaningful and productive stay interviews that can build trust, foster a positive employee experience, and support our department's retention efforts.

Selection of interviewees should include a diverse range of employees, including those in different roles, departments, and seniority levels. Developing the stay interview process to include the sharing of action plans with staff to ensure that they are aware of any changes taken in response to the information shared. IT leaders must be aware that if the feedback gathered is not acted upon, they risk the loss of trust, decreased morale, and employee disengagement. If department leaders

are not confident, they can develop and execute action plans on the feedback, they should strongly consider if the stay interview process is right for their institution at this time or even at all.

Conducting stay interviews effectively requires allocating sufficient time and resources. This can be a challenge for smaller organizations or those with limited supervisory staff. Adequate planning, scheduling, and training can help streamline the process and make it more manageable. It is important for organizations to assess their capacity and determine how to prioritize and allocate resources effectively. Some staff may be resistant to participating in stay interviews due to various reasons. They may fear potential consequences or repercussions of providing negative feedback, lack trust in the confidentiality of the process, or simply be hesitant to share their concerns openly. Building a culture of trust, assuring confidentiality, and effectively communicating the purpose and benefits of stay interviews can help alleviate these concerns and encourage participation.

Stay interviews may provide a limited scope of feedback as employees may not feel comfortable sharing all their concerns or may only focus on immediate issues rather than long-term retention factors. To address this, organizations can consider using multiple channels for gathering employee feedback, such as surveys, focus groups, or anonymous suggestion boxes. This allows employees to provide feedback in a way that suits their comfort level and encourages a broader range of perspectives and insights.

5.2.3 Insight into Another Stay Interview PDSA Cycle

If I were to conduct another stay interview PDSA cycle, I would propose several adjustments to improve the approach. First, I would expand the participate group to other years of service groups. By including employees with different years of service, such as those with 1-2 and

2-5 years, the department could gain insights into their unique needs and concerns. This early identification of concerns can help address issues before they escalate and potentially lead to turnover. By conducting stay interviews across various service ranges, institutions can gather insights specific to each group and provide the opportunity to develop retention strategies accordingly.

Secondly, I would reduce the stay interview questions. Instead of using a structured interview format with twelve questions, I would reduce the number to five core questions. This approach fosters a more conversational and relaxed atmosphere during the stay interview process. By focusing on key questions that address what employees look forward to when coming to work, what they like best and least, and their primary reasons for staying, leaders can uncover crucial insights in a shorter amount of time. This adjustment also makes the process more efficient, as it requires about 20-30 minutes per scheduled meeting rather than 60 minutes.

Finally, I would consider selecting a pilot group of supervisors to conduct the stay interviews. This approach could identify champions who recognize the value of the stay interview process and foster buy-in from other supervisors. It also provides an opportunity to assess and enhance supervisor training based on their experience with the stay interview process.

5.3 Conclusion

This inquiry shows that stay interviews can provide valuable insights into the reasons why employees choose to stay with an institution and what factors contribute to their job satisfaction and engagement. Through my PDSA cycle, I was able to determine that a stay interview process can provide supervisors with the necessary information they need to develop effective retention

strategies that could help improve employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention. However, one key takeaway is ensuring that the supervisors are properly trained on the stay interview tool and act on the feedback that is gathered. Well-trained supervisors can help to ensure that the stay interview process is not only a data gathering exercise but a catalyst for meaningful change, improvement, and retention.

In summary, the stay interview process is an effective tool to gather feedback from staff that could improve retention. However, this process does require time and resources to implement effectively and may be met with resistance from our staff and supervisors. By adopting best practices, such as proper training, addressing concerns, and acting on the feedback received, institutions can successfully implement stay interviews and reap the benefits of employee feedback in improving retention and creating a more satisfied and engaged workforce.

6.0 Reflection

The PDSA cycle is a foundational tool in the field of improvement science, which is focused on improving the quality of processes and outcomes in various fields. With the PDSA cycle, teams can systematically test and implement changes as part of a continuous improvement process (Byrk et al., 2015; Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). I utilized the PDSA methodology to examine the change idea of a stay interview process. In this chapter, I reflect on what I learned as a leader and improver, what I learned about improvement science, and how I will apply improvement science as a scholarly practitioner.

6.1 What I Learned as a Leader and Improver

As a human resources practitioner with more than 25 years' experience, my subjectivity was both a strength and a potential limitation. As a strength, my subjectivity was instrumental for gaining trust and encouraging the participants to openly share their thoughts during the stay interview. One participant mentioned at the end of our interview that they did not plan to openly share feedback, but through our discussion, they felt safe to fully disclose how they feel about their time and role in our IT department. This statement aligns with the sentiments shared by the senior leaders and participants that a neutral person should conduct the stay interview. By introducing a neutral person, our department could mitigate the potential bias and power dynamics that might arise from a direct supervisor. This approach creates a confidential and safe space where

participants feel more comfortable sharing their genuine feedback without concerns of potential repercussions.

Additionally, as a potential limitation, my subjectivity could cause unconscious bias to creep into my research. Therefore, I had to be cautious that due to my professional experience, any preconceived notions did not influence my analysis of the gathered data toward a particular conclusion.

To assist me through the analysis process, I kept a reflexive journal of my thoughts, reflections, and decision making as I made meaning from data. One reflection was that the data gathered from the stay interviews did not specifically identify new retention ideas or actions beyond enhancing flexible work schedules, continuing our rich benefit offerings, and strengthening the supervisor/staff relationship. Additionally, I was surprised by the limited response and the fact that a few staff declined to participate in the stay interview process. This unexpected outcome prompted reflection on potential reasons for reluctance and how to address these challenges in future initiatives. I questioned whether there was a lack of awareness, concerns about confidentiality, or other factors contributing to their decision. This realization highlights the importance of effective communication, trust building, and creating a safe and supportive environment that encourages participation and ensures the success of future data collection efforts.

As both a leader and an improver, I have learned several valuable lessons from this improvement science cycle. First, improvement science emphasizes the importance of using data to make informed decisions and measure the impact of improvement efforts. As a leader, I have learned that relying on intuition or anecdotal evidence is not enough to drive meaningful change. Instead, I prioritized collecting and analyzing data to inform decision making and evaluated the impact of improvement efforts. With the stay interview process, the qualitative data gathered

reinforced the importance of benefits and flexible work schedules for retention, when many leaders assumed that pay would be a top factor in retaining IT talent.

The value of collaboration and engagement. Improvement science emphasizes the importance of engaging stakeholders in the improvement process and collaborating across our department. As a leader, I have learned that creating a culture of engagement and collaboration can generate innovative ideas, build buy-in and support for improvement efforts, and increase the likelihood of sustained change. Having deep, interactive discussions with our IT staff while conducting the stay interviews generated ideas for retention. Such as continuing flexible work options including a 4-day workweek, providing educational/training opportunities, and the importance of workplace comradery.

Improvement science provided a structured approach to problem-solving and improvement that emphasizes continuous learning and iteration. As an improver, I have learned the value of using structured improvement methodologies such as Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles or Lean Six Sigma to guide improvement efforts. These methodologies provided a clear roadmap for identifying, testing, and implementing solutions, while also providing a framework for ongoing evaluation and adjustment.

As a leader, I have learned that providing clear direction, aligning improvement efforts with organizational goals, and dedicating resources and support to improvement projects are essential to driving meaningful change. I have learned that improvement science provides a powerful framework for driving meaningful change, while creating a culture of continuous improvement.

6.2 What I Learned About Improvement Science

Through the process of conducting the PDSA cycle on the stay interview process, I learned the importance of listening. The stay interview process involves having a conversation with employees to understand their perspectives, goals, and concerns. By actively listening to employees, supervisors can identify opportunities for improvement that may have gone unnoticed otherwise. By listening to employees, providing feedback, and taking a proactive approach to retention, organizations can create a culture of continuous improvement and identify ideas to retain their top talent.

The stay interview process confirmed for me the value of gathering feedback from our IT staff. During the stay interview, employees were encouraged to provide feedback on their job, the organization, and their supervisor. This feedback can be used to identify areas of improvement, such as work-life balance, training and development opportunities or changes in management practices. The stay interview tool provided an opportunity to build trusting relationships through conversation. To maintain a trusting relationship, a supervisor must be honest and transparent on the ideas discussed during the stay interview. The supervisor must act on the gathered feedback or if an idea is not possible for the institution, the supervisor needs to openly share why. The literature reveals that when a supervisor actively acts on the feedback received through the stay interview process, it fosters a sense of trust, engagement, and accountability (Finnegan, 2018; Roberts, 2017). The stay interview process is one tool in a larger process of engaging and building trusting relationships with their staff. To improve retention and engagement, it is important for supervisors to have ongoing communication with employees, provide regular feedback or updates, and create a culture of continuous improvement.

Finally, I identified the benefits of using the stay interview process as a proactive approach to improving employee engagement and retention. Implementing a stay interview process provides a method for supervisors to identify potential issues before they become major problems and staff become frustrated and leave the institution.

6.3 How I Will Apply Improvement Science as a Scholarly Practitioner

As a scholarly practitioner, I would apply the improvement science methods to other customer support, technology, and human resource issues in our institution by following a structured approach that emphasizes data-driven decision making, stakeholder engagement, continuous improvement, and learning. As new and improved technologies transform higher education, retaining top IT talent is critical for institutional success for teaching, student success, and research programs. I would work with our leaders to sustain the gains achieved through the improvement science approach by establishing new processes and systems, providing ongoing training and support, and monitoring performance over time. I would champion the need for continuous process improvement. Currently in our IT department, we use Lean Six Sigma approach to streamline business processes in our unit and throughout the university. IT staff have the opportunity to be trained in Lean Six Sigma earning a green or black belt certification. Both improvement science and Lean Six Sigma provide structured frameworks and methodologies to guide improvement efforts. Improvement science employs the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle, while Lean Six Sigma utilizes the DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) or DMADV (Define, Measure, Analyze, Design, Verify) methodologies to drive improvement projects. By using an improvement science approach, I can help my department achieve better

outcomes, improve customer satisfaction, increase IT staff engagement, and drive sustainable growth that can keep pace with ever changing technologies.

6.4 Conclusion

As a human resources professional and leader, my thoughts on why IT employees stay in our institution was confirmed through the improvement science approach to examine a stay interview process. Although I have experience and knowledge of how institutions function and how employees behave within them, this inquiry reinforced my understanding of staff retention and engagement. My review of scholarly literature and the outcome of my PDSA cycle illustrated the significant role that supervisors play in setting the direction and creating a supportive environment that fosters the sharing of ideas, building trust, and fostering engagement to retain IT staff.

I understand that the improvement science process provides a systematic and evidence-based approach to understanding, analyzing, and improving systems and processes. This approach fosters a culture of continuous learning, collaboration, and improvement which can lead to enhanced outcomes and more efficient, effective, and responsive institutions. While improvement science holds promise for higher education, it is important to acknowledge potential challenges, such as the need for dedicated resources, time commitments, and cultural shifts within institutions. However, by embracing the principles of improvement science and creating a culture of continuous learning and improvement, higher education institutions can foster positive change, enhance student outcomes, and adapt to evolving needs and expectations in an ever-changing educational landscape.

Appendix A Participant Memo

Dear [insert colleagues first name],

I hope you are well. I am reaching out to request your help. I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh in the School of Education Doctoral of Education (EdD) program. I am contacting you to request your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting as a part of my dissertation in practice. I am looking to gather data through a stay interview process from long-term IT employees to understand what keeps them engaged and provides them the incentive to keep coming back daily.

The process will involve scheduling a 60-minute stay interview session that I will conduct. I will be recording the session to assist with note taking. Participation is voluntary and the information gathered will be deidentified so participation will be confidential. After the interview, I will request you complete a brief post-interview survey via Qualtrics to gather feedback on the stay interview process. After I have conducted all of the interviews and gathered your feedback on the process, I will share a summary of my findings with all of the participants.

Additionally, I will review the post-interview survey analysis with our IT senior leaders. The stay interview and post-interview summation analysis will prompt my discussion with our IT senior leaders on the process effectiveness and determine if we should implement on an annual basis. Again, all participants will be deidentified and not shared with our IT senior leaders.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to discuss the process.

If you would like to participate, please let me know and I will schedule the meeting. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michelle

Appendix B Stay Interview Intervention Questions

1. What do you look forward to the most when you come to work every day? What do you look forward to least when you come to work every day?

2. What is the best part of your job?

3. What makes you stay here? If you had to select three things, what would they be?

4. When was the last time you thought about leaving us, and what prompted it?

5. Tell me if you feel you are learning new skills on the job? Share more about either what has been a barrier to learning or what has helped you succeed in learning?

6. How would you rate our work-life balance? How could it be improved?

7. How do you like to be recognized for your work? What do you think of the way employees are recognized in our department?

8. Have you created meaningful relationships with colleagues at work? What makes you feel you are part of the team? What makes you feel you are not part of the team?

9. Would you recommend our IT department to job seeking colleagues? Why or why not?

10. Tell me two suggestions our IT leaders should consider to make your job better for you?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share that you did not have an opportunity to discuss?

Conclude the Stay Interview Part of the Process

Process Reflection Question

1. Please share how well you believe this stay interview process captured your experiences in Pitt IT?

Appendix C Participant Post Stay Interview Process Survey

1 *indicates "I do not believe a stay interview process will assist with gathering information."*
5 *indicates "I do believe there is a compelling need for a stay interview process."*

1. On a scale from 1-5, do you believe a stay interview process can assist with gathering information to understand why staff stay in our IT department?

2. On a scale from 1-5, do you believe a stay interview process can assist with gathering retention ideas and strategies?

1 *indicates "I was dissatisfied with the overall stay interview experience".*
5 *indicates "I was satisfied with the stay interview experience".*

3. On a scale from 1-5, how satisfied were you with the overall stay interview experience?

4. What did you like best about the stay interview process?

5. What did you like least about the stay interview process?

6. How do you feel about our IT department implementing a stay interview process annually?

7. Would the stay interview allow participants to be more open with their responses if conducted by a neutral person such as central HR? Please briefly explain.

8. Would implementing a stay interview survey versus conducting an individual interview be received better and potentially increase participation? Please briefly explain.

9. What else would you like to share about your experience with the stay interview process?

Appendix D Debrief Presentation Session with IT Senior Leaders

1. What thoughts come to mind after hearing the key findings from the stay interviews?

2. Share your thoughts on how you think our IT supervisors will embrace this tool for building relationships and gathering ideas for retention in their unit? Can you expand on your rationale?

3. In your opinion, do you believe the staff will openly share their thoughts and concerns with their supervisors? What are two things that could hinder an open discussion?

4. In your opinion, should we implement the stay interview process? Expand on your rationale?

5. If so, how often do you believe we should conduct the stay interviews?

6. If yes to implement, share your thoughts on the training plan prior to implementation?

7. If yes to implement, what are your thoughts on the implementation process? Should we consider having a neutral person such as central HR conduct?

8. Would implementing a stay interview survey versus conducting an individual interview be received better and potentially increase participation? Please briefly explain.

9. Is there anything else you would like to share that you did not have an opportunity to discuss?

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