

With the healthcare industry one of the few sectors continuously adding jobs, the competition to recruit and retain skilled professionals will only increase. Those employers that remain flexible and adapt to evolving employee needs will reap the rewards in any economic climate.

The Ever-Changing Portrait of the American Workforce

Many experts believe that, even in a challenging environment, employers will continue to feel the effects of a demographically different and supply-short labor force. However, for healthcare organizations, this environment of high-demand, low-supply workers is nothing new. Healthcare organizations have been struggling with a drastically short supply of workers for many years, finding themselves in a never-ending quest for skilled talent. Only those organizations that can effectively identify and adapt to frequent changes in the landscape of the U.S. workforce will make it to the finish line and claim a big payoff.

The Emerging Workforce Study, commissioned by Spherion and conducted by Harris Interactive, has once again identified the latest changes in workers' mindsets so that companies may make the necessary adjustments to their recruitment and retention of talent. The following article explains a key shift in the attitudes and motivations of U.S. workers, as well as specific findings of healthcare workers to aid healthcare organizations in their profound war for talent.

An *Emergent*SM Workforce

An increasingly abundant segment of workers, first identified by Spherion in 1997, has slowly embraced a new attitude and mindset towards career and the employment contract. Dubbed *emergent* workers by Spherion, these employees have provided a clear and consistent portrait of their workplace expectations based on their answers in Spherion studies published in 1997, 1999, 2003 and 2007. Beliefs about work/life balance, career growth and one's control over their career sets "*emerging*" workers worlds apart from their more "*traditional*" peers.

In previous studies, we've seen substantial growth within the emerging segment of the workforce, those employees whose attitudes fall firmly in the *emergent* camp. As a result, we have projected these increases would remain at a quick pace. However, the most recent findings revealed a slight, but unexpected drop in the number of workers who fall decisively on the *emergent* side of the spectrum. The exception, however, is none other than workers in the healthcare profession.

While the total number of emerging workers declined slightly to 27% from 31% in 2003, the number of emerging workers in the healthcare profession was 39%. So, who are these emerging workers and what distinguishes them from their *traditional* or migrant counterparts?

Emerging Values

Emerging workers can be found in any organization, at any level and in any part of the country. They are not set apart by race, gender, geography or any demographic for that matter. Instead, *emergent* workers differ solely in their attitudes, values and expectations of the workplace.

Distinct *emergent* viewpoints on a variety of workplace values and career management characterize this new breed of worker. They generally believe they should be more in charge of their career, and in fact, are. They are more likely to feel that they should help their organization succeed by continuing to improve their skills, and are therefore intent on working for a company that rewards employees based on performance rather than tenure.

	<i>Emergent</i>	<i>Migrating</i>	<i>Traditional</i>
Education	Highly educated: 48% have college/grad degree	Educated: 21% have college degree	Less educated: 41% Received their high school education or less
Average Age	44.0	40.5	42.4
Gender	M: 54% vs. F: 46%	M: 63% vs. F: 37%	M: 61% vs. F: 39%
Hours Worked	Avg. 45.1 hours/week	Avg. 43.7 hours/week	Avg. 42.9 hours/week
Income	Paid more: 35% make above \$100K	50% make between \$35K & \$99.9K annually	18% make less than \$34.9K annually
Managers	Managers: 47%	Managers: 38%	Managers: 35%
Career Goals	56% have a career goal they are working toward	49% have a career goal they are working toward	41% have a career goal they are working toward
Satisfaction with Career Progress	70% are extremely/very	65% are extremely/very	56% are extremely/very

Traditional Values

On the other hand, *traditional* workers are characterized primarily by their need and desire for safety and security. Comprising 25% of the overall workforce, yet only 19% of healthcare workers, these employees look to their employers to lead the way when it comes to providing a clear career path, and in return, will offer a long-term commitment to the company. Compared with *emergent* workers, they are more concerned with stability and clear direction and define loyalty as someone who is "in it for the long haul."

While both *emergent* and *traditional* workers gravitate towards an environment that encourages creative thinking and finding new and better ways of doing their jobs, *traditional* employees are much more likely to be attracted to an environment with "clear directions on what I need to do from day to day."

This can pose a challenge in many healthcare organizations where workers operate in a high-pressure, fast-paced environment. Many healthcare professionals are relied upon to make quick decisions, act independently and remain confident in how and which services they need to provide. Healthcare companies may feel these workers are an asset, given their traditional mentality towards loyalty and workplace values; however, a staff that requires specific direction and guidance may not yield the best results.

The Migrating Spectrum

Nearly half (48%) of all U.S. workers and 42% of healthcare professionals are currently on the path from *traditional* to *emergent*, according to the study. This group of workers is literally migrating from a traditional mindset towards a more emergent value system. Many of the more *traditional* beliefs of these workers may be due to a lower level of education as compared to their pure *emergent* counterparts. The study findings suggest that a greater need for job security and lower confidence in their abilities may be linked to their lower levels of education, with only 24% receiving a college degree and 12% earning a post-graduate degree.

What Does It All Mean for Healthcare Employers?

The American Hospital Association (AHA) reports that 89% of hospitals cite openings for RNs that are unfilled, and 75% of hospitals are finding it more difficult to recruit nurses than in previous years. While the severe shortage of nursing professionals usually grabs top billing in the media, there exists an overall shortage of healthcare professionals, including pharmacists, allied health workers such as laboratory technicians, and even housekeeping and maintenance staff. As if a sufficient supply wasn't enough, our survey found that nearly half of healthcare workers (45%) are unsatisfied with their jobs.

In the realm of healthcare, a shortage of any one skill group has the potential to negatively impact the delivery of care to patients. Ironically, the dire shortage of healthcare professionals has exacerbated the ability to recruit and retain them. Inadequate staffing levels have a direct correlation to low professional-to-patient ratios, high levels of stress, unsatisfactory working conditions and general dissatisfaction with the profession. All of which contribute to a high turnover rate and a decrease in the number of new entrants into the field.

Needless to say, the ability to more effectively recruit and retain healthcare workers is of critical importance. To do so, healthcare employers must embrace and implement a management style, and recruitment and retention plans, reflective of emergent attitudes. Failing to do so would be equivalent to dismissing a large portion of potential workers from an already depleted resource pool.

Keys to Recruitment and Retention of Healthcare Workers

The Spherion Emerging Workforce Study has identified several emergent practices that healthcare workers are seeking from their employers and that may have a dramatic impact on their willingness to remain with their employer and within the profession.

Higher Pay and Improved Health Coverage

Strides have been made over the last few years to increase salary levels for many healthcare professions. Similarly, according to the Spherion study, 34% of healthcare workers said they are satisfied with their current level of compensation, significantly higher than workers overall (26%).

Despite these improvements, 71% of healthcare workers said they aren't paid what they are worth, as compared to only 60% of workers overall. Furthermore, improving compensation packages is an attractive solution to most healthcare professionals.

Opportunities for Continuing Education and Career Development

Traditional and emergent workers alike feel employees should seek their own career development opportunities wherever they might be, and that in order to keep their jobs, employees should be required to grow and improve their abilities to help the organization succeed. As many healthcare organizations are finding out, if their staff is not receiving the continuing education opportunities they require, they will seek it elsewhere.

Management Climate and Work Environment

Ongoing struggles between healthcare facility management and workers have routinely plagued the sector. Many healthcare workers argue they have no voice on their jobs, and are asking for more input in decisions affecting the workplace. These sentiments are echoed by the Spherion study. When asked to identify top retention drivers, healthcare workers named management climate and culture and work environment as the top two factors (after basic drivers of pay and benefits).

A Plea for Work/Life Balance

Many healthcare professionals are subject to mandatory overtime or long hours to meet the demand for patient care. The shortage of healthcare workers has only worsened the situation. While many healthcare organizations believe increasing workers' hours is an effective way to deliver quality patient care, it is arguably costing employers more in the way of absenteeism, increased turnover and decreased patient safety.

The Spherion study found that most healthcare workers are still not willing to trade in long hours just to get ahead. Three quarters of healthcare workers said they are willing to take a back seat in their career for family, and only 41% said moving up the career ladder is a top priority. A full 90% of healthcare workers agree with the statement "my most important priority when thinking about the next step in my career is to ensure work fulfillment and balance" compared to 88% of workers overall. And nearly half (45%) of healthcare workers would take advantage of better flex-time options if they were available to them.

In fact, nearly all workers (95%), regardless of where they fall on the spectrum, agree that an employer who helps employees meet their family obligations through the use of flex-time, job sharing, telecommuting, etc. is highly attractive.

Employees that are extremely or very satisfied with their work/life balance also rate their satisfaction with key retention and workplace characteristics higher.

Retention

*Employee Satisfaction Rating

Likelihood of staying w/ employer for next 5 years	35% higher
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Workplace Characteristic

*Employee Satisfaction Rating

Overall job satisfaction	48% higher
Satisfaction w/ current compensation level	35% higher
Satisfaction w/ training & career development	30% higher
Satisfaction w/ culture & work environment	42% higher

As we mentioned in the opening of this report, healthcare employers are at the starting line of a long, competitive race in the quest for skilled talent. Through this Emerging Workforce Study, employees are helping these organizations navigate the race route and avoid stumbling blocks and potholes along the way.

Our findings are important because they indicate that although the healthcare professional shortage is dire, it is not unsolvable. These are just a few of the ways organizations can get started towards becoming an *emergent* employer, one of the country's best places to work and a provider of quality care to deserving patients.

For decades, Spherion has been providing valuable insight into workforce motivations and attitudes to help organizations attract and retain world-class talent. We believe it is our responsibility to keep our partners abreast of workforce changes so that you can design or redesign human capital management strategies that will achieve your business goals. For more information, please visit www.spherion.com/emergingworkforce.