

## 5

## Workforce Mobility

*If you are in the private sector in IT and in your forties, you are a dinosaur. In higher education you are a young pup.*

—Brian D. Voss, Indiana University

Information technology (IT) management professions have, until recently, been defined by perennial labor shortages and enjoyed both high pay and prestige. At the height of the dot-com boom, EDUCAUSE primary representatives rated the recruitment and retention of IT professionals among the 10 most pressing issues facing them. The evolution of national job-posting services such as monster.com has made the IT labor market a national and—more recently, with widespread IT outsourcing—even a global market. Large swings in the national economy, particularly in the technology sector, have raised considerable speculation about the nature of the IT labor market in general and about professional mobility for higher education IT practitioners in particular.<sup>1</sup> This chapter looks at workforce mobility and explores our survey data to address respondents'

- ◆ commitment to their institutions and higher education,
- ◆ professional experience and career aspirations, and
- ◆ plans to leave both their positions and higher education, and the effects this might have on IT leadership continuity.

### Key Findings

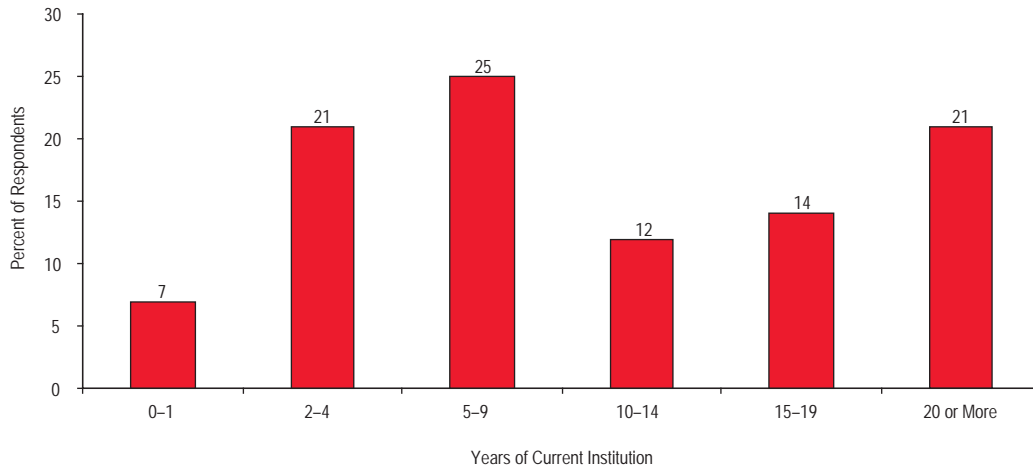
- ◆ A career in higher education is a calling—respondents are loyal to their institutions and to higher education.
- ◆ A career within a college or university offers surprising mobility in occupational roles.
- ◆ The workforce is graying, and a challenge in IT leadership continuity is likely.
- ◆ Fewer female respondents than male respondents aspire to the top leadership position.

### Higher Education Careers as a Calling

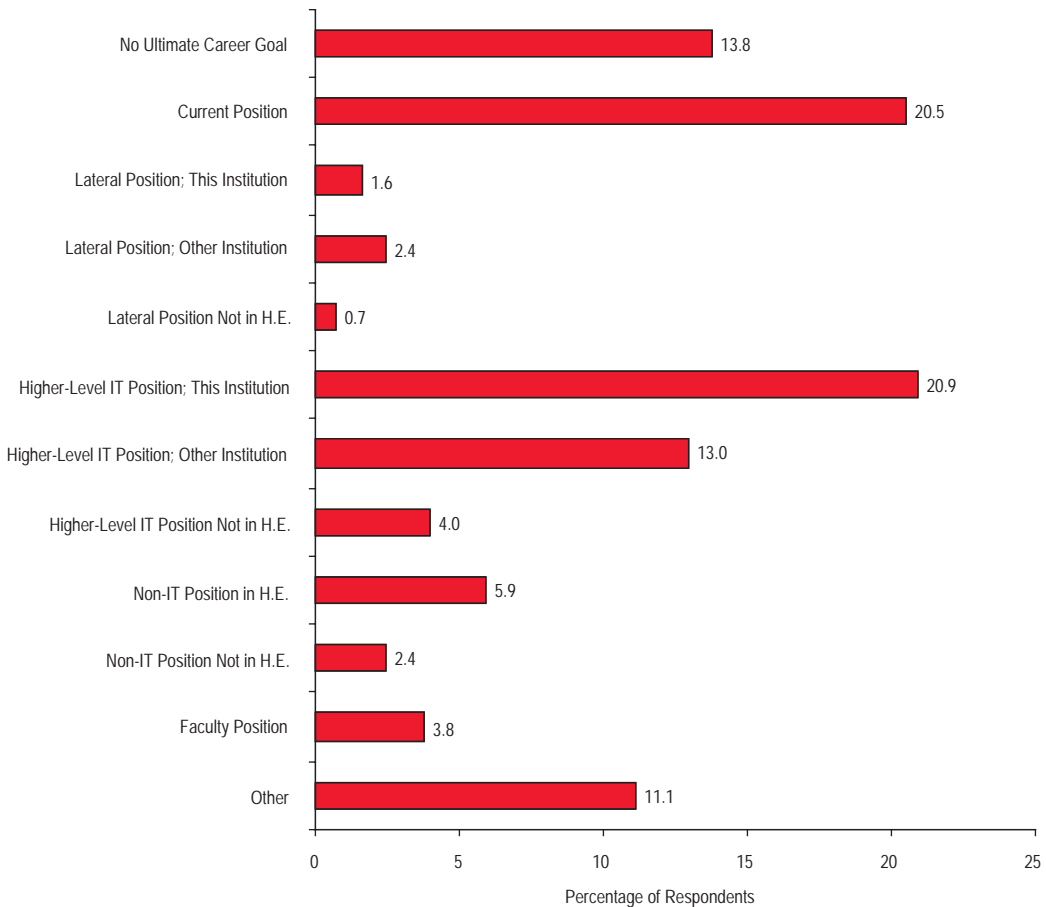
Higher education is an appealing employer, and most members of its IT community think of higher education in career terms. Nearly half (47 percent) of all respondents have worked 10 years or more at their current institution, and 21 percent have worked there for 20 years or more (Figure 5-1).

Looking at respondents' ultimate career goals (Figure 5-2), we see that 68.1 percent intend to remain in higher education and 43 percent intend to remain at their current institution. Many of our interviewees cited their passion for and belief in higher education as a major factor in their career

**Figure 5-1. Years Worked at Current Institution**



**Figure 5-2. Respondents' Ultimate Career Goals**



decisions. As Mary Harrsch, network and information systems manager at the University of Oregon's College of Education, said, "I am not only doing what I enjoy, and making money doing it, but I feel I am contributing to our society as a whole by providing ways to improve education with technology.

Sometimes there are things that are worth more than money."

What roles do respondents planning to stay at their current institutions envision for themselves? Nearly half (47.5 percent) intend to finish out their careers in their current position, slightly more (48.5 percent)

hope to finish their careers in a higher-level IT position, and 4 percent hope to finish their careers in a lateral position at the same institution. In addition, nearly 4 percent (3.8 percent) of all respondents ultimately aspire to a faculty appointment, perhaps at their current institution. Such loyalty to an institution and to an industry is remarkable, and respondents offered many reasons for their allegiance. Eva Swenson, director of student information systems, University of Toronto, said, "The University of Toronto is the largest institution in the country, with the broadest range and scope. It is a premier research uni-

versity. I have everything here. Why should I leave?"

For some, the commitment to a single institution is a two-edged sword for ultimate career plans and goals. One respondent explained, "I'd like to have the [senior-most] position at my current institution, but it is unlikely that my supervisor will leave the institution in the next few years, leaving me with the need to move on [to advance]." Respondents' intentions to remain within higher education don't appear to be associated with Carnegie class, gender, or placement in the organization (see Table 5-1).

**Table 5-1. Percentage of Respondents Planning to Remain in Higher Education 15 Years or More**

<b>By Carnegie Class</b>	
AA	37.4
BA	44.8
MA	44.1
Dr. Int.	43.9
Dr. Ext.	41.1
<b>By Gender</b>	
Male	40.6
Female	42.1
<b>By Organizational Placement</b>	
Central IT	42.5
Administrative Unit	42.4
Academic Unit	46.8
<b>By Leadership Aspiration</b>	
Senior-most IT Leaders	32.9
IT Professionals: Aspirants	58.9
IT Professionals: Other	37.1
<b>By Institution Type</b>	
Private	47.1
Public	37.6

Younger IT professionals responding to the survey also seem committed to higher education. Of respondents under age 40, 61.2 percent plan to remain in higher education at least 15 more years. And those who aspire to CIO positions as an ultimate career goal—independent of age—are particularly committed to higher education: 58.9 percent of CIO aspirants plan to remain in higher education for at least 15 more years, compared with just 37.1 percent of nonaspirants.

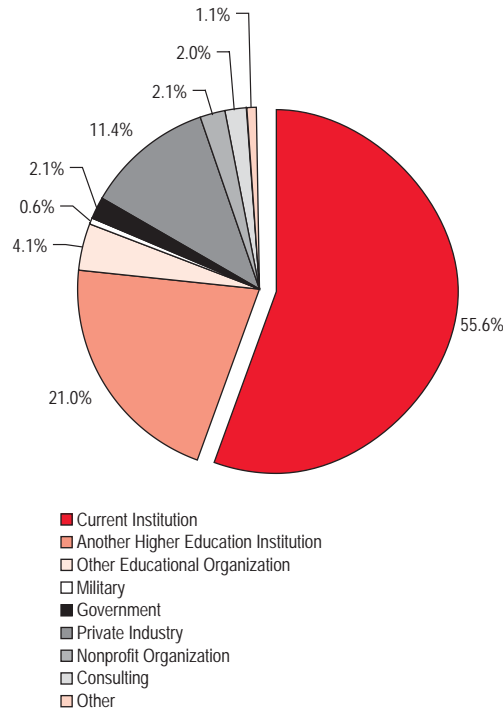
More private college or university respondents (47.1 percent) intend to remain 15 years or more in higher education than their counterparts in public institutions (37.6 percent). This result could be partly due to a higher percentage of younger people responding from private institutions. Of private institution respondents, 65 percent are under 51 years old, compared with 58 percent of their public institution counterparts. Further, 30.2 percent of private college and university respondents are under 40 years of age, compared with fewer than one-quarter (22.1

percent) of public institution respondents.

The story of respondents' professional roots and provenance also supports the idea that a higher education career is appealing. Figure 5-3 shows respondents' recent professional experience and suggests strongly that the past is prologue. More than half (55.6 percent) of respondents held previous positions at their current institution, and 76.6 percent of respondents' previous positions were in higher education. Even those in the senior-most roles are deeply rooted: 40 percent of responding senior-most IT leaders held their last job at their current institution, and another 44 percent moved to their current position from another educational institution.

Compensation alone doesn't likely account for respondents' extraordinary commitment to higher education and to their institutions. Numerous environmental factors might also contribute to employment retention. The survey data can shed some light on these factors, although further research is needed.

**Figure 5-3.**  
Industry of  
Respondents'  
Previous Position



## Belief in the Mission

Researchers such as Charles Garfield suggest that belief in an organization's mission can outweigh other working conditions, including salary, physical environment, and perquisites.<sup>2</sup> More than 70 percent (71.1 percent) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their institution has a clearly articulated vision, mission, and strategy. Not only do members of the higher education IT community generally believe in the mission of higher education, many are also employed at institutions they attended. These respondents are the *products* of the industry they serve. Richard Reeder, CIO, Stony Brook University, is an example. "I have been an employee of Stony Brook for 34 years, including attending school here. I was asked to fill in as interim head of IT in November of 1993. Eventually, Stony Brook's president created the CIO position and appointed me to the position." Or as Joseph Sawasky, interim associate vice president for educational and information technology, University of Toledo, said, "This is my alma mater: I have some personal interest in this institution." As evidence of their commitment to higher education, 61 percent of respondents have earned a master's degree or higher.

## Two-Worker Households

Nearly one in five respondents (18 percent) agree or strongly agree that a spouse's or partner's career limits the respondent's current career mobility. And 23 percent have a spouse or partner currently holding either a faculty or staff position in a higher education institution. Indeed, higher education is often a family affair. As Jean Lacovara, coordinator of information services for the sciences, Bryn Mawr College, plans her career path to an IT leadership position, she is cognizant of her husband's requirements as a faculty member. If she changed positions, she would require

a "sweetheart deal that considers his career as well as mine."

## Employee Programs and Perquisites

On the basis of a 2003 survey of IT workers, Gartner Inc. identified the five employee programs most preferred by employees: education and certification cost reimbursement, casual attire, flexible work options, access to professional conferences and associations, and matching employer contributions to tax-deferred retirement savings plans. Colleges and universities have long been considered leaders in offering these programs and perquisites.

## Respondents' Risk Tolerance and Risk Aversion

Some have described colleges and universities as *adhocracies*,<sup>3</sup> organizations that seek neither to optimize nor satisfy in economic terms, but rather to *satisfice*.<sup>4</sup> Adhocracies and communities of skeptics are typically slow to embrace institution-wide change, instead favoring decisions designed to foster sustainability. Higher education administrators often describe their roles as stewards of perpetual resources. Quite possibly, attitudes and behaviors related to risk tolerance or aversion bind higher education practitioners to the academy. The University of Kansas's Marilu Goodyear, vice provost for information services, said, "I have been tempted to work in industry, but I never have. I don't think it offered the right match with what I wanted to do. I am also a fiscally conservative person in my private life. The risk profile of the corporate world has never been very appealing to me."

While commitment to higher education runs high, community members do not move equally across the segments that constitute higher education. Few IT professionals,

for example, move to community colleges from other types of institutions. However, approximately one-quarter of respondents have moved among BA, MA, and doctoral institutions. In general, however, respondents tend to have specific interests that keep them connected to one type of institution.

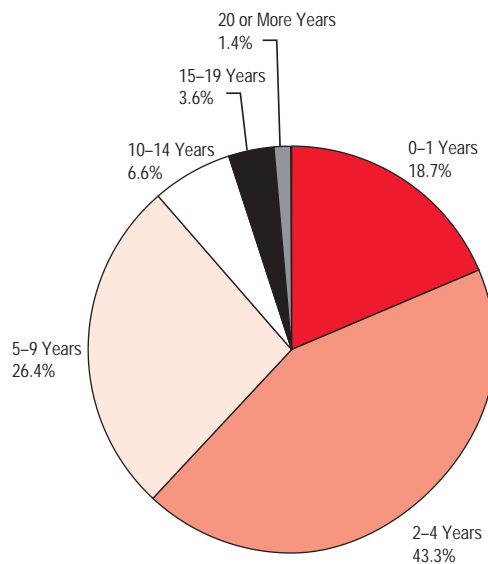
Rodney Harrigan, vice chancellor of information technology and telecommunications/CIO, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, said, "I have worked with a variety of institutions, but I have many reasons to be committed to HBCUs [historically black colleges and universities]. I grew up in Harlem in the streets of New York. I went to an HBCU in Georgia where it was a nurturing environment, and role models enabled me to succeed in school." Susan Metros, deputy CIO, executive director for e-learning, and professor of design technology at The Ohio State University, said, "I have always been in a public institution and at a land-grant institution, and I really like the philosophy." Deborah Gelch, CIO, Lasell University, on the other hand, likes private institutions. "I think the politics are less than at a public institution. The way public

institutions get funding is a little different. And I like a smaller size school, not these big mammoth organizations."

### Careers Offer Surprising Mobility

Although many survey respondents have remained within higher education or their current college or university for numerous years, they report having spent relatively little time in their current positions. Figure 5-4 shows that 62 percent of survey respondents have served in their current roles for four years or less. Not surprisingly, younger respondents have been in their positions for less time, with 50.9 percent of those age 40 and under having been in their positions two years or less, compared with 30.8 percent of those over 40 years of age. These results are consistent across gender and institution type. Even institution size or organizational area within the institution seemed to play little if any role. This most likely reflects IT management's dynamic nature, with roles such as keypunch operator, database administrator, Web designer, content manager, and others coming and going rapidly.

**Figure 5-4.**  
Respondents'  
Years in Current  
Position



Respondents reported changing roles often in their institutions. Swenson moved into different positions over the years before assuming her current position as director of student information systems at the University of Toronto. "I have always moved throughout the university sideways or in a spiral, not straight up." In fact, Swenson was a student services user and always asked for the best possible service from the information systems group. "For many years I was on the opposite end, a user asking for services. When the university offered me the director position, I felt it was an opportunity to put my money where my mouth was."

Others mentioned that changes occurring in universities created opportunities. Mary Jane Casto has worked at Georgia State for 25 years and feels it was like working at different institutions. "When I came to Georgia State initially, it had about 20,000 students and it was almost 100 percent commuter, with a large part-time student population. Now we have about 28,000 students. Nearly 80 percent of the undergraduates and more than half of the graduate students are full-time. This change has exposed me to new experiences."

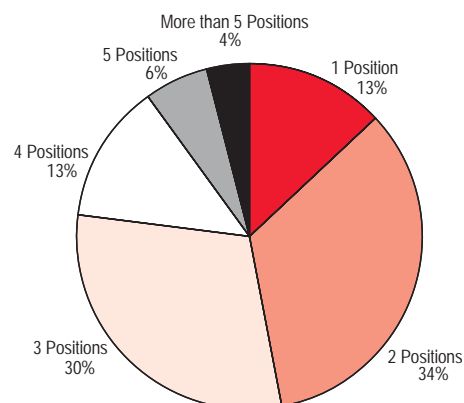
This dynamic environment lets survey respondents enjoy the benefits of occupational stability within an industry and an institution while frequently assuming new responsibilities and roles (see Figure 5-5). More than half of survey respondents (53 percent) reported

holding three or more different jobs in the past 10 years. Again, this varies significantly with age, with older respondents generally having held fewer jobs than younger respondents over this 10-year period. And again this pattern was consistent across institution types and gender.

### A Leadership Continuity Challenge (or Opportunity)

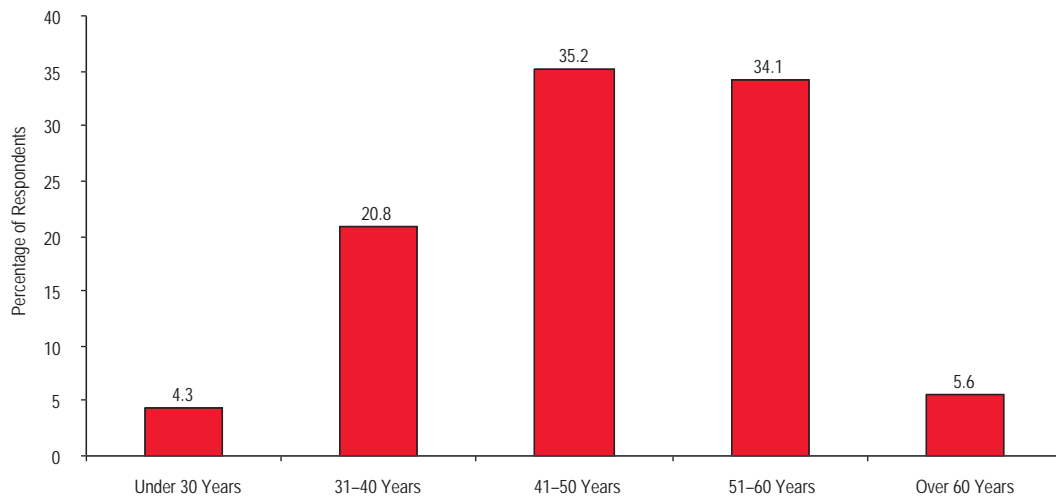
Much attention is focused on the graying of the workforce and its impact on organizations. Indeed, as baby boomers age and move toward retirement, many predict that the professional cadres that make up higher education's workforce—notably faculty—will suffer shortages in fields where there is labor scarcity. Higher education's current generation of IT leaders and professionals will also likely retire within this decade, creating challenges and expense for institutions that wish to preserve corporate memory and experience.

Figure 5-6 shows that 39.7 percent of survey respondents are 51 years or older. Forty-three percent of male respondents are 51 or older. Especially noteworthy, 58 percent of respondents who have overall responsibility for institution-wide IT are 51 years or older, and 25 percent of these senior-most IT leaders are 56 years old or more. Presumably, at this age and greater, retirement planning plays a major role. Our survey data



**Figure 5-5. Number of Positions Held by Respondents in Last 10 Years**

**Figure 5-6. The Graying Workforce**



suggest a large number of vacancies in the near future among all levels of leadership in higher education's IT community because of the number of employees age 51 and older. In fact, retirement was at the forefront of many of our respondents' thoughts. Typical comments were, "I am close to retirement age and wish to cut back rather than gear up," or "I have worked in IT for 35 years and love technology, challenge, change, and people who get excited about working in IT. At this point in my career, it is enjoyment I'm after—not the headaches that come with being at the top."

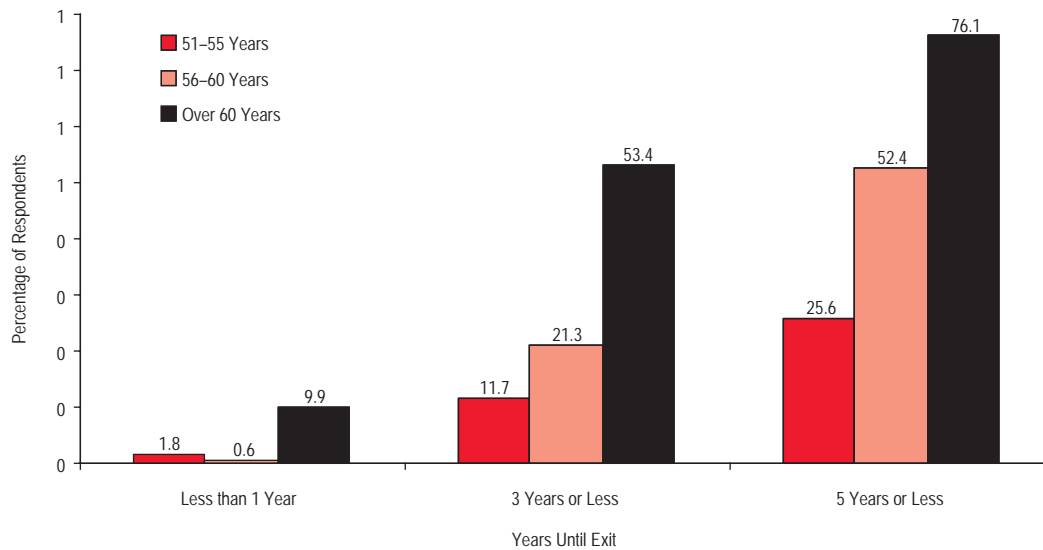
By itself, data about the graying of higher education's IT workforce are interesting. Even more interesting is an analysis of the leadership community's expressed intentions to remain (or not) in their current leadership positions and how this relates to the traditional supply lines of future leaders. This analysis reveals a potential erosion of leadership stability in the community over the next five to 10 years. To explore this question, we first look at the "exit" side of the equation: when do older respondents plan to leave their current positions and higher education?

Figure 5-7 details older respondents' plans to exit from higher education and suggests a significant shift in institutional memory and experience—a hard thing to replace. Richard Reeder of Stony Brook University said, "It

is hard to develop institutional knowledge. Technology tools come fairly easily to most IT workers, but what does not come as easily or quickly are the relationships with your colleagues in the functional areas, knowing the business of the university. Once you have someone with both technical ability and a good functional understanding of the area they support, you want to do everything you can to retain or promote them."

Of the 40 percent of respondents over 50 years of age, 39 percent will be leaving higher education in the next five years. Further, more than one-quarter of all survey respondents expressed intentions to leave higher education in five years or less. These people, including nearly one-quarter of our senior-most leaders (24.7 percent), will exit the industry. Although most of the respondents leaving indicated retirement plans as the predominant reason, some pointed to

- ◆ a preference for the private sector ("academia is too mired in interdepartmental conflicts to produce an overall cost-effective use of technology within the institution");
- ◆ burnout with IT in general ("I have reached a point of burnout and am leaving the IT field to pursue other interests");
- ◆ financial compensation ("the compensation for my position is much higher in industry"); or



**Figure 5-7. Years Until Exit from Higher Education, by Age**

- ◆ the belief that higher degrees are required for promotion to the top job (“I have no desire to acquire a Ph.D., which is often required for a senior executive position at an academic or large research institution”).

Now consider the other side of the equation: what are the career goals of those not leaving higher education in the short term? Figure 5-2 shows all respondents’ ultimate career goals, including those of people who consider themselves in the professional pipeline for future leadership positions.<sup>5</sup> This analysis reveals a relatively small cadre of aspirants for positions of greater responsibility at their current or some other institution. Overall, approximately one-third of respondents stated that they have no ultimate career plans or that they intend to stay in their current position. Many respondents’ comments on this issue were creative, spontaneous, and to the point. They noted the increased time and responsibility demands, the political nature of these jobs, and the undesirability of promotion because “I have a *life*” or “you have to sell your soul” or “I don’t fancy swimming in the shark tank.” Refreshingly, many folks just admitted that they did not have the aptitude, skills, or experience required for higher-level

positions, as in, “the Peter Principle would apply to me.”

Slightly more than a third of respondents do intend to move to a higher-level position in higher education or, if they already occupy senior-most positions, to seek out higher-level senior-most positions at other institutions. Those choosing to continue their upward mobility took a more serious tone with their responses, giving reasons such as, “I believe I could make a significant contribution,” “I look forward to the chance to influence the growth of IT in higher education,” “I think I have the skills and desire to lead an organization strategically,” or, on a lighter note, “Even though I hate to admit it, I am good at the political game and building relationships.”

Of special concern is that only 15.4 percent of survey respondents plan to move to another higher education institution, and more of these are male (17.1 percent) than female (13.1 percent). Given the number of upcoming leadership position openings and the increasing need to recruit outside the institution, these findings sound an alarm. Some respondents spoke to this issue personally. Richard Reeder noted that “it depends on the dynamics of the institution.

As long as you feel that things are continuing to change for the better and you are continuing to be stimulated in your environment, a move may not be advantageous.”

We saw minor differences in this pattern across institution types. Intuitively, the biggest factor is again age (see Figure 5-8). The older population makes up a large portion of the IT leadership community, and they appear to be slowing down in terms of upward mobility.

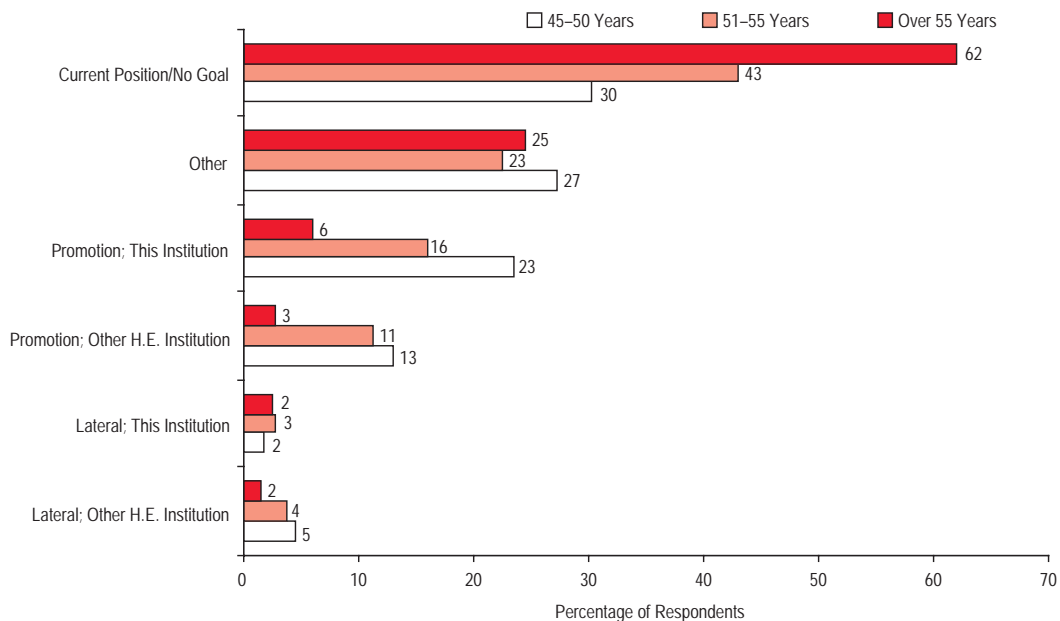
We also looked at the senior-most IT leaders and those who aspire to fill the vacancies that will open in the coming years. Even though nearly 40 percent of responding senior-most IT leaders were drawn from within their current institution, only 25 percent of this group agreed or strongly agreed that their successor would be drawn from within. This suggests that

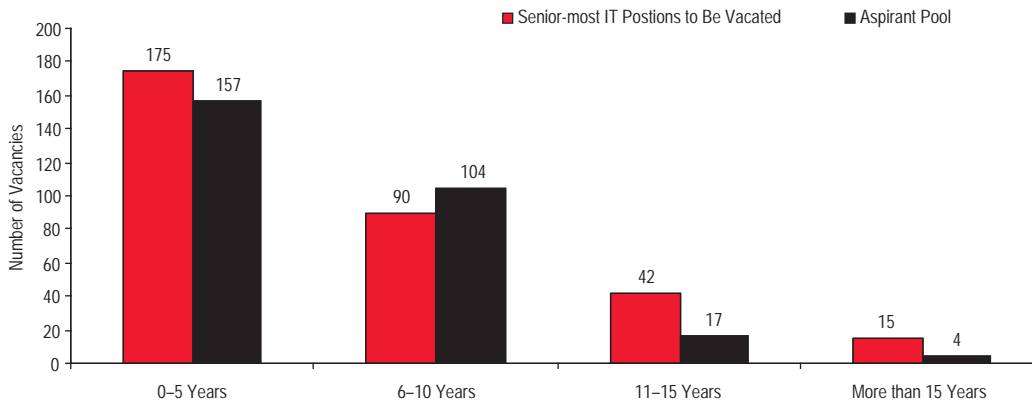
- ◆ most survey respondents are unduly pessimistic about the prospects that internal candidates will fill their positions;
- ◆ external recruitment is becoming a more widespread and entrenched practice; or
- ◆ the cadre of prospects at the next level of management is unable or unwilling to assume those top roles.

Likely, all three of these factors are at work.

We asked aspirants when they thought they would be ready for the senior-most IT position. Figure 5-9 compares their answers with when the senior-most IT leaders will be leaving their current positions. In our sample population, more than half (53 percent) of our senior-most IT leader respondents plan to vacate their current positions in the next five years. Although some do plan a move to another institution's senior-most IT position, most don't plan to stay in this role. Yet only 286 of our sample respondents say they aspire to those positions. And as in any applicant pool, many fewer will actually be qualified and hired. Indeed, the aspirant pool is small relative to the number of positions likely to become available. Georgia State University's Mary Jane Casto sees this as cause for concern: "The industry as a whole should worry about the pipeline. We don't have a next tier coming up that has had broad exposure, understands IT issues in higher education, possesses relationship skills, and understands higher education's decision-making processes."

**Figure 5-8.**  
Respondents' Ultimate Career Goal, by Age





**Figure 5-9. Comparison Between Senior-most IT Positions to Be Vacated and the CIO Aspirant Pool**

Notice also the conundrum that presents itself for those IT professionals who consider themselves in the pipeline for senior-most IT leadership positions. Figure 5-10 shows that as they begin to fill the positions created by vacating senior-most IT leaders, they will have to replace many of their central IT staff members who will be leaving even sooner than the senior-most IT leaders the aspirants are replacing!

We can reasonably conclude that a potential imbalance in the future IT leader pipeline exists. Although nearly a quarter (24.7 percent) of those currently occupying senior-most IT positions plan to leave higher education within the next five years, and incumbents doubt their jobs will be filled from within, relatively few senior-level incumbents

or junior-level aspirants plan ultimately to assume positions of senior responsibility. While the recruitment base is larger at more junior levels, making equilibrium possible, the data suggest that strategies to identify and develop this future leadership cadre are appropriate.

Of course, we could also conclude that nontraditional leadership pipelines such as college and university faculty and libraries may prove increasingly important over time. Higher education will also likely turn to even more radical continuity strategies such as IT outsourcing, shared services, and recruitment of leaders from industry and government. Finally, it's quite possible that this generation of IT leaders will pass the baton to a much younger generation.



**Figure 5-10. Respondents' Plans to Exit Higher Education, by Role**

## Endnotes

1. S. Overby, "The Incredible Shrinking CIO," *CIO Magazine*, 15 Oct. 2003, pp. 66–76.
2. C. Garfield, *Second to None: How Our Smartest Companies Put People First*, Business One Irwin, 1992.
3. M. D. Cohen and J. G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President*, McGraw-Hill, 1974.
4. H. A. Simon, *Models of Man (Continuity in Administrative Science. Ancestral Books in the Management of Organizations)* (Garland Publications, January 1987). Simon pioneered the idea that instead of maximizing their economic utility, people and organizations "satisfice," or seek out outcomes that are "good enough."
5. The question asked was "What is your ultimate career goal?" For those planning to assume higher levels of responsibility within IT, such aspirations might or might not include the position with senior-most responsibility.