

SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE MAINFRAME SKILLS GAP



Mainframe managers are worried – they are staring at a significant skills shortfall that will hit them in the next few years if it isn't already presenting problems. The experienced technical personnel who

manage and maintain the Mainframe and keep our critical business functions running 24 x 7 are getting older and retiring. While this happens in every industry, it can be challenging to replace them in the Mainframe space. Unlike other businesses with succession planning and a next generation of workers to take the reins, there seems to be an added level of difficulty.

The staffing and skills concern has risen in the ranks of top priorities for Mainframe professionals in our 12th [Annual Mainframe Survey](#) as well. This issue is tied for second place this year. Obviously this is a pressing concern and we, as business leaders, need to address it strategically. You might consider cross-training younger IT professionals on the Mainframe or hiring university talent into a well-structured training program as part of their first 6+ months on the job. A tactic that also seems to work is to hire young talent in groups so that they might find themselves a cohort to learn the Mainframe together with and they can support and encourage each other. They will likely stay longer if they can see people like themselves flourishing and enjoying the work.

We also need to focus more on a truly digital workplace that meets the high standards this generation has for tools inside and outside of work. The iPhone generation will not tolerate awkwardness in anything that they use, including UIs where they spend most of their days. They expect intelligence, seamlessness, and automation. The more you can improve this, the more you improve their overall experience and tear down barriers for their growth in this part of the industry. Also, you might remind them that there are incredible career opportunities on the horizon as the more senior professionals retire.

I'd also like to share with you additional data points that we've gathered from the [Survey](#) that may give you some encouragement. Trends we're seeing include:

- **Millennials are working with the Mainframe** – 53% of Mainframe professionals are under 50. Now that might not seem like an overwhelmingly young workforce to many of you, but it does debunk a popular perception that all Mainframe professionals are grey around the temples.
- **Experience level is higher than it seems** - Young professionals are rising in the ranks of the Mainframe space. Our survey data shows that 43% of respondents aged 30-49 are reaching leadership positions, management, and above. That likely means that younger professionals are seeing a lot of growth and career opportunity in the Mainframe space.
- **Women are rising in the ranks** – 20% of our respondents were women and 44% of them hold executive roles (vs 36% of males). One can conclude that women professionals are enjoying healthy careers and growing their expertise on the Mainframe.
- **Workers are coming to the Mainframe.** When we asked, *“How many years’ experience do you have working in a mainframe environment (in any capacity)?”* the results were more balanced than one might expect. 45% of respondents had 10 years or less experience showing us that the mainframe has attracted new talent in that time. You won't necessarily need to hire talent straight out of University and invest years and years of training to get them up to speed. You may want to, but you won't have to.

There is a wealth of information in this year's survey that debunks several myths about the Mainframe space. Please spend time with it and look through the results yourselves. You'll be surprised what you might find. I am encouraged that we will be able to address the skills gap issue effectively with some strategic planning and creativity.