Instructional Design: A Workforce Perspective for 2023

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Abstract
Instructional design like many fields is experiencing the effects of workforce pressures and struggles to hire, retain, and promote employees. This article looks at several global trends affecting the industry, industry forecasts and trends, and ends with a look at instructional design and recent trends in online learning executive positions.

Like my colleague, Melissa Jones who related being a graduate student and professional in the last Graduate Member Musing (Jones, 2022), I am mid-career with over 15 years in higher education. I've served in many positions such as faculty, adjunct, coordinator, director, and associate dean in the career technical education side of academics bouncing between transfer and workforce development. As I have taken graduate and doctoral courses, I am not looking at how to be an instructional designer; instead, I am looking at how to develop and retain talent in design, technology, and teaching. A few workforce trends affecting all industries including educational technology and instructional design are the Great Resignation, Quiet Quitting, and employee protest over workloads, required overtime, and working conditions.

The Great Resignation was first identified and brought to the public's attention in 2021 as over 47 million employees in the United States (US) quit their jobs (Fuller & Kerr, 2022). However, Fuller and Kerr (2022) noted that overall resignations had been climbing since 2009. In 2009, approximately 1.4% of the US workforce left their jobs, this rate continued to climb over the next decade to approximately 2.3% of the US workforce in 2019 (Fuller & Kerr, 2022, Fig. 1). In 2020, the rate decreased to approximately 2.1% during the first year of COVID-19 and then increased to approximately 2.5% in 2021 (Fuller & Kerr, 2022, Fig. 1). The causes of these declines were attributed to five factors dubbed the "five r's": retirement, relocation, reconsideration, reshuffling, and reluctance (Fuller & Kerr, 2022). Most of these factors are straight-forward in their meaning. The two factors needing clarification are reconsideration and

reshuffling. Reconsideration was the term used by Fuller and Kerr (2022) to include personal reflection during the pandemic on what one values and has led to a possible disconnect between employer demands and employee's tolerances for these demands (Reconsideration section, para. 3). The reconsideration factor played a major role in the greater exits of women and younger age groups (Fuller & Kerr, 2022, Reconsideration section, para 1–2). Reshuffling refers to a worker moving between and among jobs within a given industry (Fuller & Kerr, 2022, Reshuffling section, para. 2).

The advent of employee resistance to employer demands has played out domestically in the US via the unionizing of service workers at Starbucks and Amazon. This has also spread internationally in various fields, like the anti-996 movement in China. 996 refers to a common employer requirement for employees to work from 9am to 9 pm for six days a week (Chappell, 2021). Beginning in 2019 the anti-996 campaign did not show up outside of technology worker forums until 2021(Wang, 2020; Yang, 2019; Huang, 2019). In 2021, Chinese media highlighted the practice of 996 after a young woman died after several long shifts at an e-commerce startup. During the subsequent investigation, her co-workers stated they regularly worked more than 300 h each month despite China's official limit of no more than 36 h of overtime work (Chappell, 2021). Additional worker deaths contributed to protests and the formation of the 996. ICU Github site. 996.ICU refers to the saying "Work by 996, sick in ICU", which Chinese developers coined meaning that if you follow the 996 work schedule, you are risking ending up in the Intensive Care Unit (Github.com, 2022). The 996 practice was not limited to technology companies as many service industries also unofficially implemented to increase productivity, lower costs, and cover for sick workers.

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Education has not been exempted from the effect of the Great Resignation, Quiet Quitting, or staff or student protests over institutional demands. Recently, the University of California recognized graduate student researchers as employees. This allows these researchers to join the United Auto Workers (UAW) 2865 union which supports over 19,000 tutors, readers, graduate student instructors and teaching assistants at the University of California (UAW 2865, 2022). UAW 2865 highlights their work to increase the wages of unionized student-workers by 30% and recapturing over $8 million in back-pay damages and misclassification settlements since their 2018 contract (UAW 2865, 2022).

Instructional Design as a Department of Labor Category

No workforce analysis discussion would be complete without visiting the US Department of Labor (USDL) and the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) for information about the future of the field. O*NET was developed under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration via a grant from the North Carolina Department of Commerce (O*Net, 2022a). Both O*Net and the USDL use Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes to parse out various jobs and industries. Instructional design falls under the SOC code: 25–9031.00 for Instructional Coordinators. This category includes the following job titles: Curriculum and Instruction Director, Curriculum Coordinator, Curriculum Director, Curriculum Specialist, Education Specialist, Instructional Designer, Instructional Systems Specialist, Instructional Technologist, Learning Development Specialist, and Program Administrator (O*NET, 2022b).

Nationally, instructional coordinators earn a median wage of $63,740 annually and represent 205,700 employees (O*Net, 2022b). These positions are mostly concentrated in the following industries: Educational Support Services (7.34% of industry employment); Junior Colleges (1.22% of industry employment); Elementary and Secondary Schools (1.08% of industry employment); Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools (0.99% of industry employment); and State Government, excluding schools and hospitals (0.34% of industry employment) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). This sector is also anticipated to grow up to 7% from 2021 to 2031 (O*Net, 2022b).

O*NET (2022b) found that educational requirements for instructional coordinator positions varied. Sixty percent of their respondents indicated that a master's degree was required, 25% of respondents indicated a bachelor's degree was required, and 11% percent of respondents indicated that a post-master's certificate was required. Additionally, many required over five years of experience in related areas (O*NET, 2022b).

Instructional Design as a Gatekeeper Degree

Another interesting trend that emerged during the pandemic was the Instructional Design degree becoming a required degree in many online learning administrative jobs. Many job descriptions are now listing a master's degree in a field related to Library or Information Science, Instructional Technology, Education, or Instructional Design in their minimum qualifications.

As I close out this musing, I'm left with many questions still unanswered. Is there a parallel between instructional design and information science when it comes to job performance? Do our instructional design programs properly prepare students to take on academic leadership roles such as Deans or Directors of Online Learning? How do we build pathways to help our students gain five years of previous experience required? Is an instructional design degree correlated with being a better online learning administrator? Do our Educational services, colleges, and secondary schools offer growth opportunities for our students once they attain their jobs. I'd love to continue these discussions in AECT.

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