

IT peer advice may diminish the management labor pool

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It is only natural that when students consider career options, they ask friends, family, and colleagues in their prospective fields for advice. They may hear about job opportunities, wage expectations, career paths,

hiring processes, and more. In the end, that information may inspire and excite, or it may turn students off from the field entirely.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Nishtha Langer, Ph.D., associate professor of business analytics at the Lally School of Management, has investigated how peers in [information technology](#) (IT) influence management students' choices to pursue careers in the IT industry. Her research, conducted with the help of Tarun Jain of the Indian Institute of Management, yielded surprising results.

"Analyzing students at a leading business school in India, we find that having peers who have worked in IT reduces the likelihood of receiving and accepting an offer in the IT industry," Langer said. "If a student has no IT experience, however, IT peers ameliorate this effect to a certain degree."

The findings are significant, given the necessity of IT for firms in terms of productivity, [cost savings](#), and adding value, combined with firms' struggles with IT management talent recruitment. IT managers play critical roles in firms' strategies, marketing and sales, and project management.

"We usually expect that peers with experience in a certain industry would encourage business school students to enter that industry, but instead, our research points to the opposite effect," Langer said. "So, managers who want to use peer-to-peer learning to train workers should be aware that negative messages could be transmitted along with positive ones."

On the other hand, Langer and Jain found that the [students](#) most likely to receive positive messaging and pursue careers in IT happen to be women without IT experience.

"If [tech companies](#) are listening, they should note that the spillover effect of equitable policies may reap more diverse managers because women listen to other women's experiences," Langer said.

"The findings of Dr. Langer and Dr. Jain are valuable for firms as they strategize around IT management talent recruitment and [workforce development](#)," said Chanaka Edirisinghe, acting dean of Rensselaer's Lally School of Management. "It is also important to note that different strategies may be more effective among different demographics."

More information: Nishtha Langer et al, Peer Influence and IT Career Choice, *Information Systems Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1287/isre.2019.0416](#)

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