Talent Management Plan for Schoolcraft College Information Technology

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Introduction and Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to create a talent management plan for the Information Technology Division of Schoolcraft College as part of the Doctorate in Community College Leadership "Leveraging Human Resources" (IDSL 865) course. The plan presented strategically adds five board approved positions to the Schoolcraft College IT division to address expanding technology needs. The plan discusses recruiting, training, developing, evaluating, and retaining the new employees in a highly competitive environment and developing a succession planning strategy. Unique challenges related to a culture of trust, classroom technology, automation of HR and Finance systems are a few Schoolcraft College's Information Technology Division is facing.

Setting and Justification for Five Strategic Hires in Schoolcraft's IT Division/Department

Patrick R. Turner currently serves as the College's Vice President and Chief Information Officer, reporting to the President, Dr. Conway Jeffress, serving on his Cabinet and has been with the College since January of 2014. The Schoolcraft College IT division has over sixty highly skilled staff members who serve five hundred faculty and staff, and over ten thousand students each term, equating to over thirty thousand traditional and continuing education students annually. The staff's roles vary greatly according to their responsibility and the IT division is responsible for all information technology across the entire college including all business and classroom technology. These services include all of the following: computing (i.e., Server, storage, networking, telephony, information security, internet), desktop services and support, external colocation hosting, media, research and analytics, and all administrative and academic software services. IT provides and supports approximately one thousand software applications, including mission-critical apps such as: enterprise email, the Ellucian® Colleague™ Student Information

System, and the Black Board™ Learning Management System. The CIO is responsible for the mission, vision, values, strategy, and tactics used by the IT division which flow from the strategic objectives handed down from Schoolcraft College's Board of Trustees, to the President of the College, and subsequently to the Cabinet (Schoolcraft College Strategic Plan, 2019). Each Cabinet position (Academics, Student Services, Business and Finance, and Human Resources) uses those objectives to create a subset for the executives in their respective departments/divisions, becoming the basis for employee performance evaluation planning.

The Schoolcraft College Strategic Plan consists of four pillars, each containing a number of strategic objectives. The 2019-2020 Strategic Pillars include: 1.) Students, Stakeholders and Community/Economic Development, 2.) Resource Optimization, 3.) Internal Processes and Systems, and 4.) Innovation, Value, Improvement, and Growth. The proposed position hires align with many needs defined in objectives from all pillars, a few include: 1.) Increase student/customer relationships with best-in-class service while, enhancing teaching and learning spaces to strengthen student engagement. 2.) Provide College stakeholders with the technological tools and applications necessary to address the College's mission. 3.) Provides state-of-the art learning opportunities, and 4.) Build a culture of continuous improvement (Schoolcraft College Strategic Plan, 2019). This is how the mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives of Schoolcraft College filter down into the Information Technology division (Schoolcraft College, 2019).

Translating the institutional mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives to their divisional counterparts requires building a culture of trust (Bassett, n.d.) which depends on many variables; the most challenging being dealing with history. Specifically, the history between departments, between employees/faculty, and with college leadership. Upon arrival at Schoolcraft College six years ago, the relationship between IT and the college at-large was similar to the early

recurring SNL skit of the IT guy blatantly and impatiently denigrating the employee in the use of their computer; whose only desire was to get their job done. To transform these relationships into a culture of trust, a dramatic change was needed. First, a mantra or divisional mission of "We Enable Work" was created along with a working strategy of "We do not deploy successful technology, we deploy successful end users." IT staff were trained to understand the transformational ideal that when they walk into anyone's office or cubicle, that person was already having a bad day. So, IT could focus on helping and making them feel better, or feel worse through denigration. Transforming *all* staff to be supportive and understanding was imperative. The enemy of this initiative was, and is, workload. An IT staff member's patience and empathy diminish greatly when they have too many things to do. Leading to a focus on fixing the issue and getting to the next problem; not considering the person involved. The answer to this is staffing and resources. The five new strategic hires will help to relieve the burden and workload of the over sixty IT staff members, allowing them more time to serve the person and not just the technology.

A recent study by the South Eastern Michigan Counsel Of Governments (SEMCOG) entitled, *Future skills: Preparing for the changing world of work,* performed research and made recommendations regarding preparing the population for jobs projected through 2045. The report confirms shrinking/aging work-force demographics into 2045. Furthermore, the findings confirm
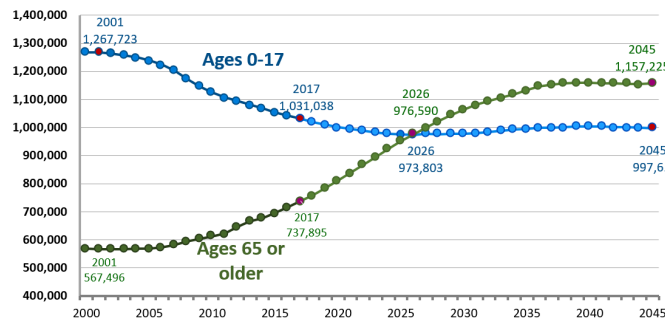

Figure 1: Children out-numbered by seniors in 2026. Diminished labor force (SEMCOG, 2019, p. 9).

that workers must be better prepared to meet new technological job needs. Figure 2 shows that

knowledge-based technology jobs will be the largest growing major sector through 2045 while

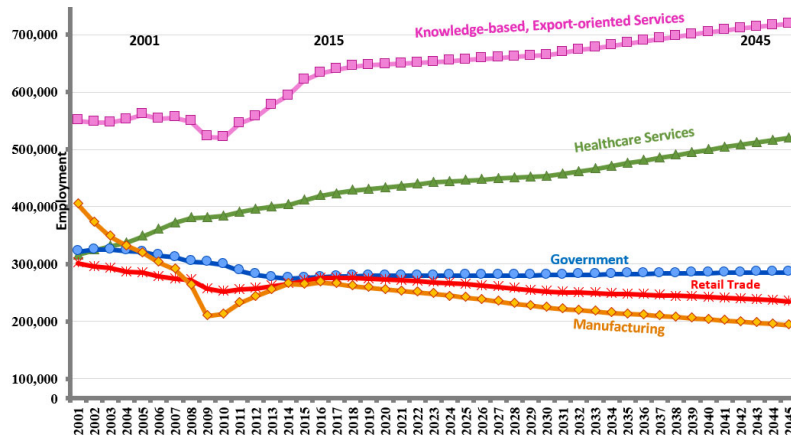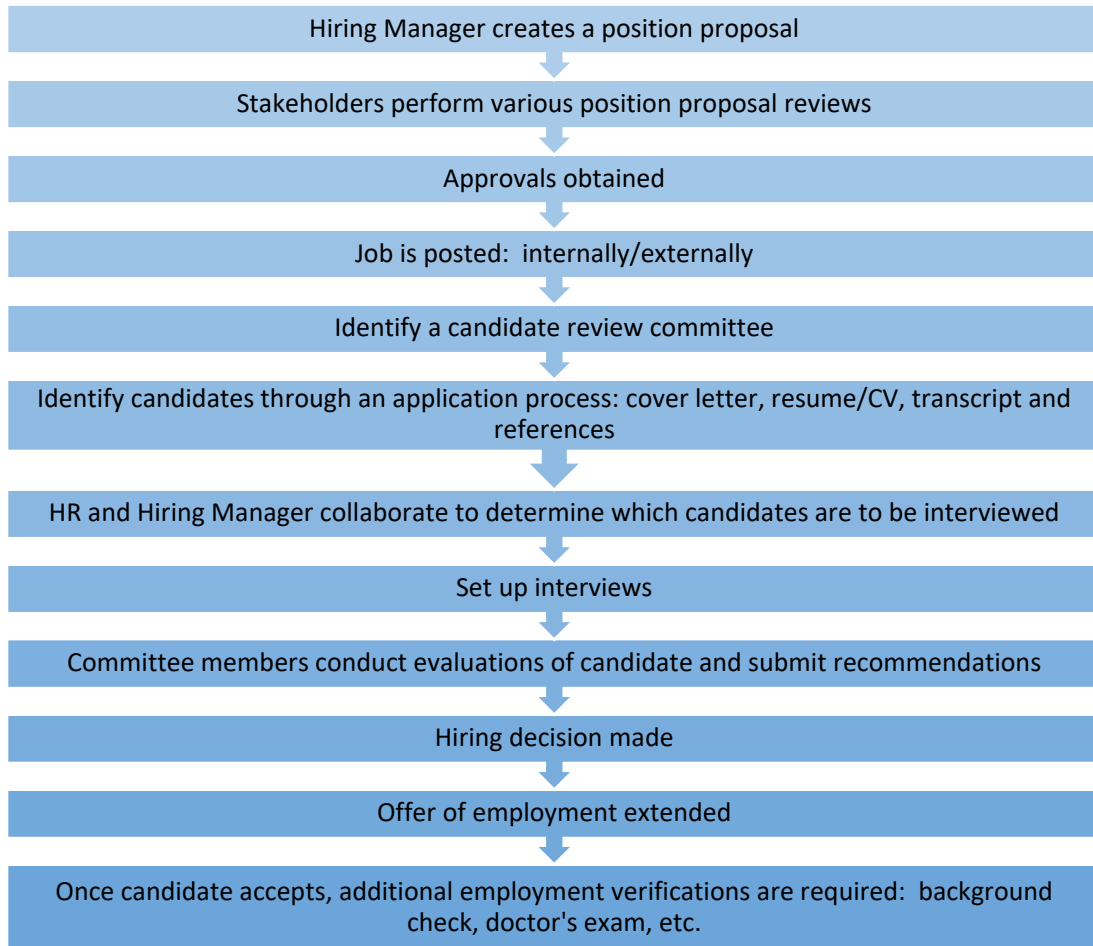government will be flat and retail and manufacturing will decline (SEMCOG, 2019, p. 16).

Figure 2: South Eastern Michigan – Employment trends by major sector (SEMCOG, 2019, p. 16).

These results show that IT is a rapidly growing and highly competitive job market.

Schoolcraft's recent experience in hiring IT candidates across the IT spectrum have suffered in

that candidates appear in the job market and are hired/gone very quickly. Therefore, one must be

prepared to select, interview, and hire quickly when candidates are identified. This is especially

true for Schoolcraft's IT Administrative Systems, creating a unique challenge. The skill set for this

technology is rare and few candidates come on the market to support the Colleague™ SIS system.

Envision™ programming skills are near impossible to find and candidates are hired very quickly.

Recruitment

Schoolcraft College has a very prescriptive recruiting process, consisting of the following:

Hiring Manager creates a position proposal

Stakeholders perform various position proposal reviews

Approvals obtained

Job is posted: internally/externally

Identify a candidate review committee

Identify candidates through an application process: cover letter, resume/CV, transcript and references

HR and Hiring Manager collaborate to determine which candidates are to be interviewed

Set up interviews

Committee members conduct evaluations of candidate and submit recommendations

Hiring decision made

Offer of employment extended

Once candidate accepts, additional employment verifications are required: background check, doctor's exam, etc.

The position proposal process includes creation of what will become the job description and other justification items like timing, budget, employment category (Full time, part time, shift, etc.) and classifications (hourly, classified, administrative, and position level or grade). This information is input into a workforce development system called People Admin – Select Suite™ which provides the structure and a seven-step automated review and approval workflow. The position and job description includes required and desired experience, general competencies and job duties. For each specific job description certain skills and even certifications may be required including experience with certain software system, like Colleague™, Blackboard™, and Microsoft systems. Certifications may include Cisco® Networking (CCNA, CCNP), VMware®, and others.

Posting of the job is done both internally and externally because Schoolcraft is a public institution and, as such, posting only internally could cause legal/public relation issues. However, posting internally for a week or two prior to external posting to give internal candidates a slight advantage is common. Posting is done first, in some cases, on the College website only, and when posted externally, will also include social media, standard job websites like Monster, Indeed, Michigan Talent Bank, etc. HR and/or the hiring manager can also decide to engage local or national search/recruiting/placement firms, and in some cases, ones that specialize in segments of IT; sometimes highly specialized as in networking, security, or specific to the Colleague™ SIS.

To attract candidates, Schoolcraft monitors various employment research databases and publications, and also inquires with other cooperating Colleges to make sure compensation is competitive. Schoolcraft also provides attractive benefits and retirement plans compared to industry. Not to mention, Schoolcraft's reputation is an attraction to candidates in, and of itself.

Employee On-Boarding/Development/Retention

Employee On-Boarding

The onboarding of every employee begins in HR where they are provided with a binder of information that can be loosely described as the Schoolcraft College Bible. The binder includes information on: new employee tours, campus food services, campus and surrounding area maps, personalized safety and labor training schedule via the Safe College™ LMS, fitness center information, college answer center information, and a list of online resources. The binder provided also has tabs labeled: HR Contact Info, Employee Handbook, Emergency Procedures, Incidents & Claims, … Personnel Directory, …, a personalized Job Description/Posting, …, a Benefits Summary, and Retirement Guidelines. This information is reviewed with each new employee by

the Benefits Manager in HR the first day they report to work. Also, a $10 food voucher for Schoolcraft's Henry's Food Court is provided, so an employee's first lunch in on the College.

HR provides each hiring manager with an Employee On-boarding checklist – to make doubly sure that each employee is fully acclimated to working and being at Schoolcraft College including a photo taken by the Media department to be used by the College President to introduce the new employee at the next campus Welcome Back breakfast. The hiring manager assures that the new employee is provisioned with a phone, computer, name plate, business cards, and more.

The IT division supports an automated, employee technology, onboarding workflow system used by HR and the hiring manager to outfit an employee with all of their technology needs. This system lives in the Schoolcraft IT ticketing system called Service Pro™ that provides the capability of creating automated workflows. This special onboarding "help ticket" is initiated by HR and kicks off a series of emails and requests used by those who administer various IT systems to collect information and provision technologies needed by each specific new employee. The automated workflow creates reminder emails, work orders, equipment requisitions, and more, all completed prior to a new employee's arrival.

Employee Development

Each employee works with their manager to set professional development goals and objectives annually based on job duties and department objectives that then become part of their annual performance evaluation for that year. Job specific professional development is not managed by Human Resources, rather, it is the responsibility of individual departments and varies widely from no mandated training, to video courses, to extensive sessions/seminars. The IT organization uses a subscription service, called CBT Nuggets (Computer Based Training), that focus on IT technology from the Microsoft Office Suite to VMware® virtualization technology and Cisco®

Networking Technology training. IT management also encourages department members to attend approved and appropriate lunch-and-learns sponsored by technology vendors and manufacturers, select vendor whiteboard sessions, and about six annual conferences (Ellucian eLive, Blackboard World, VMworld, Cisco Live, and Microsoft's Ignite). Moreover, the IT department sponsors instructor-led training for new technology being implemented or as a pre-cursor to major upgrades to our primary systems. Such training is funded either from departmental budgets or incorporated into major project bill-of-materials. All major IT implementation projects incorporate vendor supplied knowledge-transfer for all new technology executed in the form of the watch one, practice one, do one model as a proven way to get staff confidently, quickly, and efficiently up to speed.

Schoolcraft further provides tuition reimbursement for certain levels of employees for advanced degrees. Moreover, the College provides on-campus professional development courses, like critical communication, and MS Office products like Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and other office tools. The College provides free tuition to employees for all Schoolcraft taught courses minus the cost of fees and books.

Schoolcraft provides an extensive video library of mandatory training called "Safe College" through an LMS. The training provides quizzing for compliance on regulatory subjects such as Title IX, EEOC, sexual harassment, discrimination, ADA and others like, ethics, state policy compliance, cyber security awareness, hazardous materials, etc.

Employee Retention

Jackie Bassett's publication, "How Leaders Can Build a Culture of Trust…," espouses that an organization can build a culture of trust when it operates on the belief that people are fundamentally good, want to do a good job, strive to make good decisions, and want to put in a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Bassett states that trusting employees pays big dividends in

employee engagement and organizational performance (Bassett, 2015, para. 2) as well as employee retention. Keeping the best employees also depends on dealing with the minority of employees who are negative, waste time, and refuse to cooperate with others. To avoid this can be a morale buster, create jealousy, and decrease overall productivity and quality by being a distracting influence. Bassett (2015) states, "Occasionally, even good people do bad things, and when that happens, organizational leaders must address the bad behavior and let the employee know it won't be tolerated. If bad behavior is serious or continues, the employee may need to be fired" (para. 13).

Retaining employees by creating this culture of trust requires application of motivational theories like the ones presented in Robbins and Judge (2019). Specifically, Goal Setting and Reinforcement theories seem to be the most successful in bringing groups together while increasing productivity and predicting quality/quantity of work, persistence of effort, and more. Given the history of animosity between Schoolcraft IT and other divisions/department, these theories are particularly applicable. Setting difficult goals and reinforcing employees who take desired actions can be accomplished by applying Operant Condition Theory (The root of Reinforcement Theory) where people learn behavior to get things they want, and avoid other things they don't, by following stimuli. This theory assumes learned behavior is a result of consequences (p. 218). Setting these difficult goals and reinforcing them at Schoolcraft starts with strategic goal setting discussed earlier in this paper that results in the stimuli and consequences of continual feedback though status reports, staff meetings, and communication. One such ongoing objective at Schoolcraft is to make IT a competitive advantage, using the latest technology, giving employees the opportunity to grow technically and professionally in the pursuit of this objective.

Further assuring employee retention through building a culture of trust is accomplished by creating an environment of employee empowerment. Forbes Coaches Council (2016) speaks to

psychological safety which I believe is at the center of empowerment leading to motivation. Psychological safety creates an environment where there is no fear of speaking one's own mind for fear of rejection, ridicule, or retaliation. Employees feel empowered when a psychologically safe atmosphere promotes trust, energy for success, and ability to be vulnerable (para. 9). Unbiased listening and a sincere attempt to understand and apply concepts heard, if appropriate, is the goal. This is enabled in Schoolcraft College IT in many ways, a specific example is a process called Helps, Hinders, Needs. Since 2016, IT leadership has implemented a mandatory survey that asks three questions: 1) What has the Schoolcraft College CIO/IT done that helps me succeed? 2) What has the Schoolcraft College CIO/IT done that has hindered me from being successful? and 3) What do I need most from the Schoolcraft College CIO/IT to be successful? Each IT staff member is asked to submit their top three to five answers to those questions. The answers are collected, collated, compared, and combined into general categories. The CIO takes the results and makes a firm commitment to apply his time, staff, and budgets to address the top three hinder and needs items over the following year, and has done so since 2016. The interesting result is that the top three have remained similar each year and are: communication, training, and resources (project management) and even more peculiar is that two, communication and training, are also listed in the top three helps! The CIO's response to the training hinder/need is addressed in the previous section on Employee Development. The divisional project manager was hired 1 ½ years ago and the position is once again open now. The communication help/hinder/need is, and remains tricky to address. A study by Sequeira & Dhriti's (2015) emphasizes the need for understanding employee relation practices, its underlying factors, issues, and its impact on employee performance (p. 1). The study's results find that providing ample company resources has a direct impact on employee completion of work on time, efficiency, and performance. Critical success factors were found to

be: *effective communication*; motivation by recognition; fair management policies and practices; feedback and guidance by superiors; and job satisfaction via salary. All of which encourage employee opinion, growth opportunities, and quality of work environment (p. 16). Considering these points, we next discuss how *effective communication* is implemented by Schoolcraft IT.

Following a review of the annual IT Satisfaction Scorecard survey results administered in 2017 (by the College's Research and Analytics department), several action items were implemented to improve IT service communication to college stakeholders. A number of IT newsletters were created, highlighting different aspects and resources within the IT Division. These include the Learning Management System--Blackboard®, Student Information System--Ellucian® Colleague™, and the IT New Technology Alert publication.

To enhance employee communication further, in the last year, we have implemented "Listening Sessions." Throughout the year, faculty and staff were invited to participate in a short series of presentations addressing recent IT developments and improvements across campus. These sessions have been well received, and the division is planning to continue to expand their function in an effort to improve the IT Satisfaction Scorecard communication ratings, and create brand equity and loyalty to be examined and shaped by the "what business are we in?" perspective.

Another facet of employee retention is that Schoolcraft College has a rich benefits packages compared to corporate norms. Schoolcraft tends to be on par or above par/averages on salaries as well. The working environment is also one that attracts people to Schoolcraft and the College's reputation attracts people and retains them. We have a large population of employees that have been at the College for 20+ years.

Finally, employee retention is enhanced through extrinsic and intrinsic recognition, some of which is accomplished via the methods discussed previously, like the IT Satisfaction Scoreboard

and Helps, Hinders, Needs processes. Other intrinsic methods include providing paths for upward mobility, mentoring, and cross training to add value to employees individually. Listening sessions related to the Employee Survey, communications at the quarterly IT All Staff Meeting further acknowledge individual and group achievements. Themed cakes, divisional "IT at the Movies" & Taco Bar, IT Staff Barbeques, and the IT Staff Holiday Party all add team building and a sense of belonging that enhances employee retention.

Evaluation

Each new employee automatically is put on a one-year probationary period with a formal six month and one-year developmental performance appraisals (based on the job description and strategic objective setting process describe previously). College strategic objectives become divisional objectives, become individual executive objectives, cascading to annual individual objectives for every employee. The weighted competencies, job duties, and objectives, are combined with professional development objectives and, in total, become an individual's performance evaluation plan. The plan exists formally in the College's People Admin Select Suite™ system and is the basis of regular progress reviews and the formal annual performance appraisal. The evaluation process starts at the beginning of each annual evaluation period and aligns with the College's fiscal year. The plan is created and approved by management and acknowledged by the employee. The process is completed at the end of the evaluation period where each item is scored and commented-on by the employee's direct supervisor via a one-to-five point scale for classified employees and a zero-to-three point scale for administrators. The appraisal is approved by the supervisor's manager. An appraisal meeting is set-up between the employee and supervisor. Afterwards, the employ acknowledges the evaluation happened with

opportunity to provide optional formal comments, and the final appraisal is sent to HR. The resulting appraisal score leads to a performance-based pay increase tied to appraisal system scores.

Succession Planning

Of the five new board approved hires, a subset has been identified as needing a succession plan. Their roles in the organization are recognized as being of a strategic nature because they will require a deep understanding of the detailed IT needs of the entire enterprise and the intricate cross-divisional interdependencies that involves. Other positions, due to required unique and rare skill sets, require succession planning to cast long term vision and direction for the technical structure of the Colleague™ ERP environment. The succession plan will require a passing on of intellectual knowledge and a detailed documentation of the rationale for strategic and operational decisions along with implementation tactics and challenges. The succession plan for these positions should be made up of a cross-functional search team that includes the CIO, each of the four IT executive directors, as well as the VPs (or their designees) from Instruction and Student Services to represent the long-term vision of those divisions. Representation from HR and Finance (Controllers Office and Purchasing) should provide input as well (Turner, 2020). Caldren (n.d.), Ceplenski (2013), and Flanagan (2018) all agree that a succession planning team must *keep it all about the work and not personalities* and must include best practices like getting buy-in from executives, identifying key roles, defining desired role competencies and motivational profiles, identifying those ready for more responsibilities, supporting development for identified candidates, cast performance appraisals in a leadership development format, showcasing candidates that are currently ready, and clearly identifying feeder positions within Schoolcraft college (Coldren, n.d., 2020). Obviously, a job description, position strategic plans and objectives, and IT divisional milestones will already exist and need only to be kept up-to date through the tenure of the next person in the target position.

In any case, these new staff members must have the characteristics of an effective leader, which includes being honest, forward looking, inspiring, competent, intelligent, broad-minded, dependable, supportive, and fair-minded (Koch, C. & Schaink, D., 2018, p. 136) suggesting one of many candidate assessment tools, such as Clifton's (2012) StrengthFinder™ should be used to assure proper temperament and fit.

Conclusion

To summarize, Schoolcraft College is strategically responding to the changing climate in higher education related to rapidly expanding technology needs. The issue of declining enrollment and revenues require efforts to make sure HR issues, unions, professional development, and employee relations do not get in the way of optimizing the critical success factors of enrollment strategy, student retention/success, and ultimately student completion. In this context, the College will make considerable gains through strategic hiring in the Information Technology Division, complementing recent restructuring of IT infrastructure, organization, and processes, to bring a culture of trust and best practices to Schoolcraft (CCCSE, 2013 & Turner, 2018). Areas for continued improvement include automated IT systems for HR in position control, benefits management, and workforce development, as well as in Finance for budget creation and management. Current faculty union contract negotiations need to address meeting students on a level playing field regarding classroom technology with IT's help. An effective employee/labor relations plan, built upon employee trust, will create a balance between the employer and employee to the betterment of the students. Collective-bargaining negotiations must be a good faith process where management and employees work toward an agreement for the betterment of employees' and customers (Pynes, 2013, pp. 342). Addressing unique challenges facing Schoolcraft College's IT Division requires strategic human talent management as discussed.

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