

CIOs take note: talent will walk without real training and leadership - cio.com

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the persistent challenge of attracting, developing, and retaining IT talent, with a focus on the Italian market and broader international trends. The author's central argument is that CIOs must assume a more active leadership role in talent management, moving beyond technical and strategic priorities to invest in people development, internal communication, and employee engagement. Key evidence is drawn from two studies: a Gi Group global HR trends report indicating 47% of enterprises struggle with talent sourcing and retention, and a Cegos international barometer showing 53% of Italian IT directors face daily talent attraction difficulties, with only 8% confident in resolving the problem. The article profiles Cecilia Colasanti, CIO of Istat, whose practices — including individual staff interviews, a participatory problem-solving initiative, and a commitment to lifelong learning — are presented as a practical model. The article concludes that leadership visibility, training investment, and employee well-being are foundational retention levers, and that Italian CIOs currently undervalue leadership relative to technical competency.

Key Insights

1. Only 8% of Italian IT directors surveyed by Cegos believe they can solve the IT talent problem, while 53% report it as a daily challenge — indicating widespread pessimism about near-term resolution.
2. Italian IT candidates prioritise salary, hybrid working, work-life balance, low-stress roles, and career advancement — in that order — when selecting employers, according to the Gi Group study.
3. Leadership ranked last among self-identified key qualities of Italian IT directors in the Cegos study, trailing technical expertise, strategic vision, and innovation ability — a gap the article frames as a structural vulnerability in talent retention.

Practical Takeaways

- Colasanti's 'two problems, two solutions' initiative illustrates a participatory mechanism for surfacing staff pain points, with findings communicated transparently through face-to-face meetings — a documented internal engagement practice at Istat.
- Training investment tied to accountability ('the institution invests and the course must give a result') and cross-functional HR collaboration for welfare tools are presented as organisational levers for reducing attrition in resource-constrained environments.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article integrates two independently sourced studies (Gi Group and Cegos) to contextualise the talent retention problem, lending partial empirical grounding. The Istat case provides concrete, named practices that ground the narrative in observable organisational behaviour. **Limitations:** The Cegos barometer is based on 200 directors in Italy alone, limiting generalisability. No methodology details are provided for either study. The article relies heavily on a single CIO's self-reported practices without independent validation or outcome data. **Biases:** Emanuela Pignataro's contribution comes from Cegos Italia — a training and consulting firm — which has a commercial interest in advocating for training investment. This relationship is not disclosed in the article. The framing consistently positions training and leadership presence as solutions without presenting counterarguments or evidence of failure cases.

Organizational Practice

Istat's CIO conducted individual interviews with all 195 IT staff following her appointment, reinstated a voluntary 'two problems, two solutions' staff engagement initiative, and holds regular face-to-face meetings with department heads and service managers. Results of the initiative were processed, shared openly, and used to identify actionable versus structurally constrained issues. Training investment is conditional on demonstrated commitment and measurable outcomes.

Strategic Implications

The article's findings point to a widening gap between the technical self-image of IT leadership and the people-management competencies increasingly associated with retention outcomes. If leadership quality is consistently ranked lowest by CIOs themselves, PMS frameworks that evaluate IT directors primarily on technical delivery metrics may be misaligned with the retention outcomes organisations are seeking. The public-versus-private sector divide in talent mobility also suggests that PMS designs in public sector IT contexts may require differentiated approaches to career pathing and non-monetary recognition, given structural constraints on compensation and hiring flexibility.

Validation Status: passed
