The Benefits of Device Choice

Why Higher Education Institutions Are Giving Employees More Say In The Tech They Use

A FORRESTER CONSULTING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PAPER COMMISSIONED BY APPLE, SEPTEMBER 2024

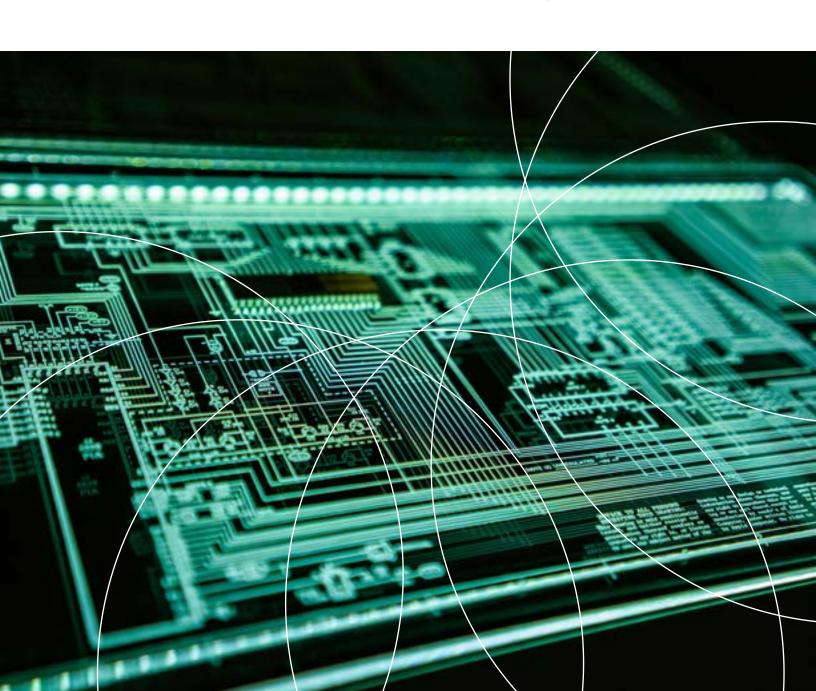


Table Of Contents

- **3** <u>Executive Summary</u>
- **4** Key Findings
- Higher Education Institutions See Choice As A Driver Of Employee Experience
- 7 Device Choice Solves More IT Problems Than It Creates
- 10 <u>Enhanced Choice Unlocks Benefits For IT Teams, Employees,</u> And The Institution
- **13** Key Recommendations
- **15** Appendix

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Executive Summary

According to a 2023 Forrester report, 62% of digital and IT professionals noted that improving their IT capabilities to enhance the digital employee experience was a top priority for IT teams over the next 12 months, up from 59% in 2022.¹ Employees' digital expectations are constantly affected by their experience with using technology in their personal lives — and their personal lives set a high bar for employers.

Higher education institutions are no exception: Many are focusing on enhancing the employee experience by allowing employees to choose their own devices for work. In March 2024, Apple commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate device choice strategies at higher education institutions in the United States.

Forrester conducted an online survey with 1,640 respondents at universities, colleges, and community colleges that offer a choice of device to their staff. In addition, we completed four qualitative interviews to investigate the benefits of device choice strategies and how institutions successfully implement them. After surveying a mix of IT decision-makers and influencers as well as staff members — including administrators, provosts, presidents, deans, and leaders in procurement, HR, development, and accounting — we discovered that higher education institutions have a unique opportunity to improve employee productivity and retention as well as deliver higher job satisfaction by allowing their employees to choose their devices for work.



Key Findings

Those that offer choice are likely to keep it. Some 61% of IT employees at institutions that offer device choice said they plan to expand or upgrade their implementation; critically, only 1% plan to do away with their choice strategy, indicating that employers are seeing success with their current implementations.

Most institutions provide a choice of device type and brand. Seventy-six percent of respondents at institutions that offer device choice allowed their staff to choose a device type, such as a laptop, desktop, or tablet; laptops are the most common device type offered. Staff can typically choose from two to three different brands and two different operating systems.

IT decision-makers identified greater productivity and job satisfaction and cost savings from offering device choice.

Ninety-three percent of IT respondents agreed that staff are more productive when they can work on their preferred device; 91% agreed that this leads to higher job satisfaction. Critically, 85% agreed that institutions benefit from cost savings when staff can choose a familiar device.

Employees are more satisfied and feel more valued when given a choice of device. Employees spend a significant portion of their day working on laptops. When given their choice of device, employees are not only more productive but also feel more valued by their institution: 84% of staff noted they are more likely to stay at their current institution because they can choose their own work device.

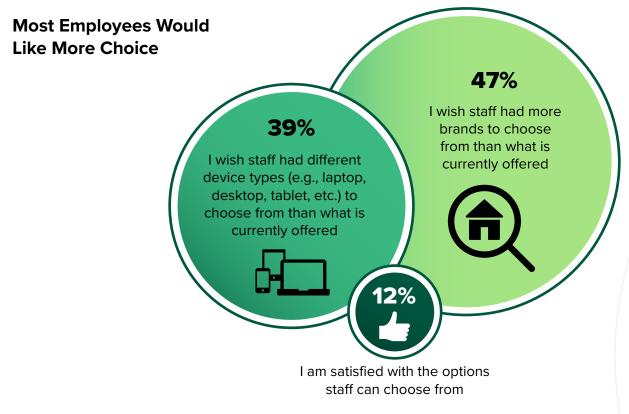
Higher Education Institutions See Choice As A Driver Of Employee Experience

The traditional model of device distribution involved IT giving employees a single model of a single brand of device; they had no choice in the matter. To enable employees to do their best work, higher education institutions have increased their adoption of strategies that make choices — of brand, operating system, device type, and specific model — available to their employees.

- Many institutions that provide a choice of device to their staff allow them to choose the device type and brand. Most commonly, IT decision-makers reported that staff can choose the type of device they work from, such as a laptop, desktop, or tablet. Of those who could choose a device type, 67% were also able to choose the brand. Most employees have strong affinities for the device types and brands that they use in their personal lives, and these preferences carry over into their professional lives. Nine out of 10 IT employees said they are more productive when given the option to choose a device they are familiar with, improving their experience.
- Of institutions that offer employee choice, the majority introduced device choice in the past year. Of the IT respondents who said that their institutions offer their employees the option to choose their device, 59% noted their institution implemented this strategy in the past year, indicating that offering device choice is a newer trend.
- Employees interact with their laptop on a daily basis, and many would like more options. According to Forrester's 2023 Workforce Survey, a third of employees who use a laptop at least weekly for their work remarked that their laptop's poor performance and slow speed affects their productivity.² On average, our survey respondents could choose from two different brands, but often that isn't enough. Nearly half of respondents whose staff can choose their laptop wished that their

institution offered a wider selection of brands. This underscores the need for institutions to continue to invest in their device choice strategies for employees as well as their employees' desire for a greater variety of device and operating system options (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1



Base: 586 US IT professionals at educational institutions (university, college, or community colleges) that offer a choice of device type for laptops

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Apple, March 2024

Device Choice Solves More IT Problems Than It Creates

By offering employees a choice in the device they use for work, institutions create a more complex technology environment to manage. However, research reveals that the benefits of offering choice outweigh the challenges over time. Data from early adopters of device choice indicated that IT departments adjust to managing multiple operating systems while employees benefit from having a device they are familiar with. Ultimately, this results in long-term business benefits like employee retention, as employees are much more likely to stay engaged at work when they feel they have the tools they need to be successful.³ Our research highlighted how misconceptions about offering choice often don't align with reality.

should invest in a device choice strategy,
despite its perceived complexity. According to
our research, improving employee productivity
and experience was a top priority for IT teams
(see Figure 2). Among those whose institutions
have implemented choice strategies, staff
productivity and satisfaction were key metrics
for evaluating the success of hardware
investments, while support costs and total cost
of ownership were somewhat less important.
This suggests that IT teams do not necessarily
implement device choice to reduce costs;
instead, they primarily seek the benefits of an
improved employee experience (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 2

Top IT Priorities For The Next 12 Months



61%

Improve end-user/employee productivity and experience



60%

Focus on security and privacy



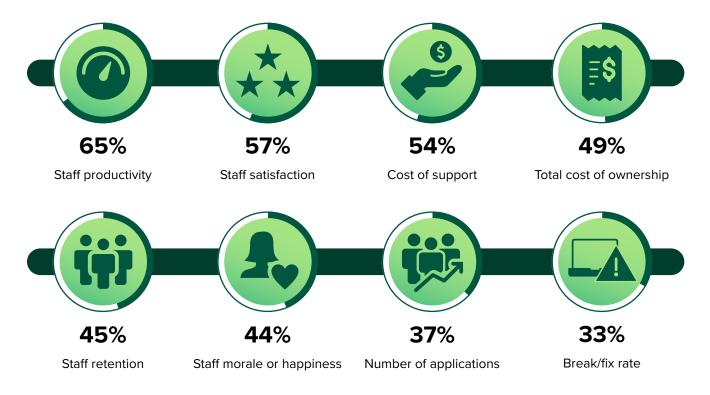
57%

Invest in sustainable and more energy-efficient technology/devices

Base: 794 US IT professionals at educational institutions (university, college, or community colleges) that offer a choice of device Note: The top five responses are shown. Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Apple, March 2024

FIGURE 3

Staff Performance And Cost Are Top Metrics For Tracking The Success Of Hardware Investments



Base: 794 US IT professionals at educational institutions (university, college, or community colleges) that offer a choice of device

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Apple, March 2024

• New procurement models make it easier to offer choice. While device procurement is more complex when institutions introduce choice, device-as-a-service purchasing is making it easier for institutions to offer multiple options to their employees. While 72% of IT professionals reported that their institutions still pay with a lump sum upfront, 52% pointed to financing; leasing was the least common model (40%). Financing models are typically more flexible when offering employees device choice — employees can choose from different form factors, operating systems, and brands within the scope of a single contract. Financing models also enable more predictable buying patterns.

- Implementing choice discourages staff from circumventing security policies. The key challenges that IT respondents reported their institutions faced when first implementing a device choice strategy were an increased number of support tickets (38%), increased security and privacy risk (37%), and higher device costs (35%). However, research shows that when employees have access to their preferred device, they are less likely to circumvent IT security policies. While embracing choice requires some investment in terms of device management, security, and support, it ultimately improves the digital employee experience, as employees don't have to look elsewhere to meet their technology needs. 5
- Higher education institutions can tame complexity with modern approaches to IT operations. Increasing the number of available devices, models, brands, and operating systems requires a period of adjustment. IT departments expect an increase in the number of help desk tickets along with the aforementioned security and privacy risks, initial increase in tech device costs, and added complexity of device management. However, our interviews with IT decision-makers show that those challenges decrease over time. Once the institution goes through the initial adjustment period, these challenges level off and the benefits begin to outweigh the drawbacks. When institutions adopt a modern approach to device management, it makes it easier for IT teams to handle the increased complexity that inevitably comes with greater choice.⁶

Enhanced Choice Unlocks Benefits For IT Teams, Employees, And The Institution

Adopting a strategy with increased choice is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Institutions of different sizes and budgets should focus on their employees' choices and what will lead to the most productive and satisfied employees. To continue to justify the necessary initial investment, IT leadership should carefully track relevant key performance indicators, such as productivity, employee satisfaction, and cost of support. Happy employees produce better work faster, stay at their jobs longer, and recruit other job candidates of equal caliber.⁷

- Allowing employees to choose their devices improves IT morale. Forty-five percent of IT employees noted that they feel an improvement in morale that they can directly attribute to their institution allowing a choice of device. Similarly, 51% of IT workers noted increased engagement in their work. As an associate dean at a large public university noted, "We just don't know a lot of the computing needs, and we don't want to go into that level of granularity with each one of our employees ... each one is really different."
- Employees who are given a choice in work device report increased satisfaction and productivity. Seventy percent of staff members noted that using their preferred device is critical to their success in their role. Of those whose institutions recently implemented a choose-your-own-device strategy, 70% noted that they experienced an increase in job satisfaction and 59% recognized an increase in their own productivity compared with when they had no choice of device.

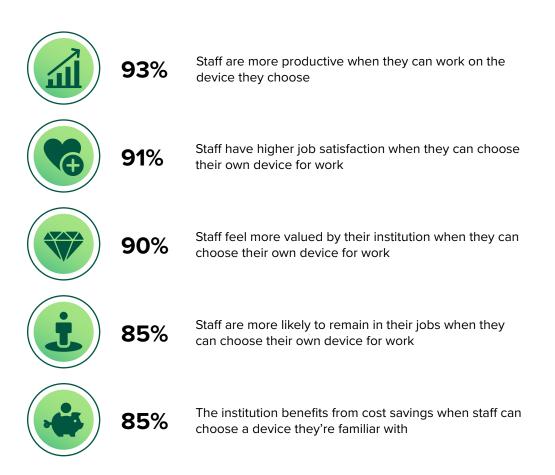
"I'm coming from a place [where we] never had an option to a place where [we] do. I value choice tremendously for myself and my team."

REGISTRAR AT A LARGE STATE UNIVERSITY

Employers also report happier and more productive employees. IT
decision-makers agreed that increasing device choice leads to greater
benefits for employees: 93% agreed that staff are more productive when
they can work on the device they choose, and 91% agreed that staff have
higher job satisfaction when they can choose their own device for work
(see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

Higher Education Institutions See Happier And More Productive Staff When Device Choice Strategies Are In Affect



Base: 794 employees at higher education institutions within the US who are involved in making tech decisions at their organization

Note: Showing responses of agree or strongly agree.

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Apple, March 2024

"The ability to choose removes friction in the workplace."

LIBRARIAN AT A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

Happier employees stay at their institutions longer. Eighty-nine percent of IT employees reported that they feel more valued when their institution gives them the option to choose a device that they know and like to do their work — and 81% noted that they are more likely to stay at their current institution because they had the option to choose their device (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

"Please rate your agreement with the following statements for yourself personally."

I am more productive if I am given the option to choose the device that I like and am familiar with	91%
I feel more valued when my institution gives me an option to choose a device that I know and like to do my work	89%
My job satisfaction improves when I can choose my own device to do my work	89%
If all else were equal, I would be more likely to accept employment at an institution that lets me choose my own device for work	82%
Because of the option of choosing my own work device, I am more likely to stay at my current institution/in my current role	81%

Base: 794 US IT professionals at educational institutions (university, college, or community colleges) that offer a choice of device

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Apple, March 2024

Key Recommendations

Offering employees greater choice in which device they use at work positively impacts the employee experience, improving talent retention and recruitment, employee productivity, and job satisfaction.

Forrester's in-depth survey of higher education decision-makers yielded several important recommendations:

Establish proper governance.

For institutions to enjoy the benefits of offering device choice, IT departments may need to have the final say on the device types, form factors, operating systems, and versions they support. Institutions should consider providing options according to job role and personal preference. Three-quarters of respondents at institutions that provide their staff with a choice in device were allowed to select the type of device (e.g., laptop, desktop, tablet) and to choose between two different types. To minimize complexity while preserving choice, we recommend limiting the number of options to no more than five devices and no more than two operating systems.

Modernize your management, support, and security strategy.

IT departments may want to ensure investment in the latest security management tools to address the increased security complexity that comes with greater device choice. Cloud-based unified endpoint management tools can help institutions overcome this challenge by enabling administrators to apply security policies consistently across all the devices and operating systems in their fleet, rather than having to deploy separate management tools for each operating system.

Focus on the front-end user experience.

Institutions should consider providing more self-service tools for staff so that they can troubleshoot problems instead of having to rely on a manual support system. This means the burden on IT remains manageable, and it enhances staff satisfaction. Only 40% of IT respondents said their institutions have a portal where employees can select their preferred device for use; 62% use IT tickets or direct communication with managers or IT teams, creating a greater burden on IT teams. Rather than using email or ticket forms for device selection, institutions should build a custom self-service portal or integrate device selection with existing service management tools. This enables employees to see the choices available to them and streamlines financing, approvals, and device delivery. A front-end experience can limit the potential choices to only those devices that are already approved.



Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 1,640 employees of higher education institutions that offer device choice to their staff within the US and conducted four in-depth qualitative interviews to study the impact of device choice within their institution. Survey participants included decision-makers involved in device purchasing decisions at their institutions. Respondents were offered a small incentive as a thank-you for time spent on the survey. The study began and was completed in March 2024.

Appendix B: Demographics/Data

INSTITUTION TYPE	
University	49%
College	35%
Community college	17 %

NUMBER OF FULL-TIME STUDENTS	
100 to 499 students	3%
500 to 999 students	11%
1,000 to 4,999 students	17%
5,000 to 19,999 students	52 %
20,000 or more students	18%

NUMBER OF DEVICES PROVIDED	
Less than 1,000	21%
1,001 to 2,500	39%
More than 2,500	40%

DEPARTMENT	
IT	48%
Non-IT	52 %

INSTITUTION CLASSIFICATION	
Public	57 %
Private	43%

INVOLVEMENT IN CHOOSING	
TECHNOLOGY DEVICES MADE	
AVAILABLE TO STAFF	
Somewhat involved	11%
Moderately involved	26%
Very involved	63%

IMPLEMENTATION OF A CHOOSE- YOUR-OWN-DEVICE PROGRAM	
Implemented but not expanding/ upgrading	38%
Expanding or upgrading implementation	61%
Decreasing or removing	1%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Appendix C: Supplemental Material

RELATED FORRESTER RESEARCH

"Design Your EA Organization For Influence And Impact," Forrester Research, Inc., November 17, 2016

Appendix D: Endnotes

- ¹ Source: <u>The Tech Leader's Guide To Digital Employee Experience</u>, Forrester Research, Inc., November 29, 2023.
- ² Source: The Year of the AI PC Is 2025, Forrester Research, Inc., March 28, 2024.
- ³ Source: <u>The Tech Leader's Guide To Digital Employee Experience</u>, Forrester Research, Inc., November 29, 2023.
- ⁴ Source: <u>Modernize Your Approach To Endpoint Governance</u>, Forrester Research, Inc., April 6, 2021.
- ⁵ Source: The Business Of Zero Trust Security, Forrester Research, Inc., July 11, 2023.
- ⁶ Source: The Future Of Endpoint Management, Forrester Research, Inc., June 6, 2022.
- ⁷ Source: <u>The Tech Leader's Guide To Digital Employee Experience</u>, Forrester Research, Inc., November 29, 2023.

