

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to look in-depth at the “other” reasons PAs left their employer to create more refined quantitative categories.

## Background

Healthcare employee resignation correlates with burnout and poor patient experiences and places a financial burden on employers. One study found that 40% of PAs had quit a job due to stress and another 13% intended to. PAs report turnover rates similar to or higher than those of physicians; replacing PAs can cost 100-200% of their annual salary. Research indicates that compensation and work hours are associated with PAs' intent to leave their jobs, but additional data are limited. In 2017, over 15% of PAs who left their employer indicated it was for “other” reasons.

Survey developers can offset the impact of inexact multiple choice options by providing the option to write in an open-ended comment with the “other” options. These free text responses provide insights that are not otherwise available via multiple choice questions. Too often, however, researcher do not qualitatively code this data and miss out on the ability to more accurately describe the populations examined and enhance conclusions.

With the addition of new answer choices in the 2019 survey, the number of respondents who selected “other” as the reason for employer change decreased from 12.8% (2017) and 14.6% (2018) to 5.9% in 2019.

### Initial Coding of Other

2017 AAPA Salary Survey asked PAs if they changed their employer in the prior year (2016) and if yes, why. PAs indicated the reason why by selected 1 of 9 options or to select “other” with a write in description.

### Confirming the Framework

3 researchers, including 2 PAs serving as subject matter experts, independently recoded a subset of free text responses to the initial thematic framework. Areas of incongruence were identified and categories were refined.

### Final Framework

The final framework was used to inform the 2019 AAPA Salary Survey on employer in the prior year (2018) and if yes, why. PAs indicated the reason why by selected 1 of 15 options or to select “other” with a write in description.



### Original Thematic Framework

An initial thematic framework was developed to by a healthcare workforce expert. This framework was developed based on existing data as well as other research on healthcare turnover.

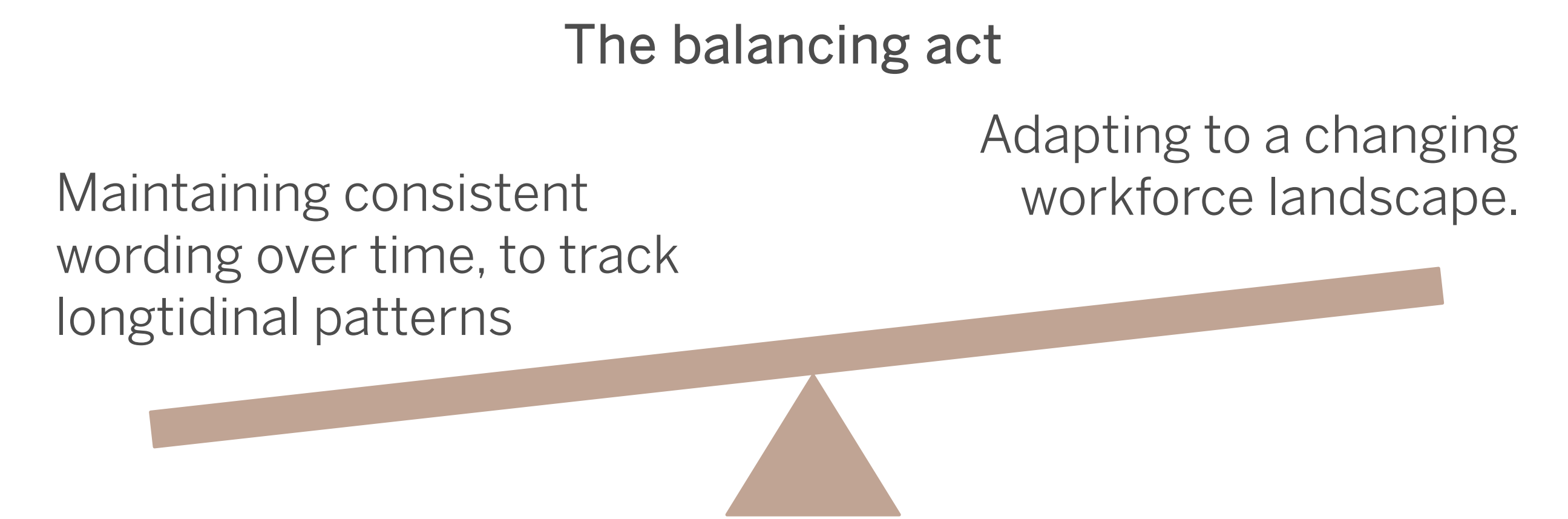
### Creating Consensus

The same 3 researchers met to address any discrepancies between the coding of the qualitative responses and the refined thematic categories. Any inconsistencies in final thematic categories were resolved by majority consensus.

Survey information is only actionable when it accurately reflects the content being measured. Improving the specificity of data, by refining existing survey tools can have a significant impact on the overall findings.

## Discussion

New information regarding PA turnover is now available after having researchers and subject matter experts review, revise, and redefine how we measure reasons for changing jobs.



## Implications

Given the high costs associated with employee turnover, healthcare organizations have an incentive to understand and act on the reasons PAs leave their jobs. In 2019 we learned that 13.6% of PAs were leaving their employer due to factors within an organizations control: Management or environment related to a toxic work environment. While there were two other areas with higher endorsement (work-life balance and moving), this is a factor that employers can act on. Employers can identify additional opportunities to reduce workplace toxicity and therefore reduce turnover of their whole healthcare team. The financial upside of employee retention means that additional effort in refining survey methods and addressing the findings of workforce research offers a high return on investment.

## Surveys and Participants

### 2017 AAPA Salary Survey

Distributed in February 2017 to all PAs in the US with a valid email address and who have not opted out of surveys. 70,846 PAs were contacted, 7,225 responded due to emails or marketing via social media and other marketing campaigns.

### 2018 AAPA Salary Survey

Distributed in February 2018 to all PAs in the US with a valid email address and who have not opted out of surveys. 78,244 PAs were contacted, 9,140 responded due to emails or marketing via social media and other marketing campaigns.

### 2019 AAPA Salary Survey

Distributed in February 2019 to all PAs in the US with a valid email address and who have not opted out of surveys. 123,124 PAs were contacted, 13,088 responded due to emails or marketing via social media and other marketing campaigns.

## Reasons for Changing Employer

	2019	2018	2017
	Percent (%)		
Better compensation/benefits	11.9	17	16.9
Better professional/clinical opportunities	6.6	10.7	10.9
Better work/life balance	16.8	23.4	24.7
Better commute	2.3	3.7	3.1
Opportunity to switch to a new clinical focus/specialty	5.6	6.2	8.2
Moved	16.7	14.8	16.6
Completed education or postgraduate program	5.3	4.2	2.9
<b>Subtotal: Re-entered workforce following extended leave (e.g., unemployment, sabbatical, extended leave)</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>3.9</b>
Was unemployed	n/a	3.9	2.7
Re-enter the workforce following sabbatical or extended leave	n/a	1.5	1.2
<b>Subtotal: Other</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>12.8</b>
Other	5.9	14.6	12.8
Better management/leadership/environment (reasons related to toxic/abusive environment)	13.6	n/a	n/a
Better management/leadership/environment (reasons unrelated to toxic/abusive environment)	3.1	n/a	n/a
Corporate or external factors forced job change (i.e., closed, lost contract, restructuring, company failing)	5.8	n/a	n/a
Personal reasons/life change	4.4	n/a	n/a
Left workforce to retire or take extended leave of absence	0.6	n/a	n/a
Left or joined military	0.6	n/a	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,246</b>	<b>980</b>	<b>586</b>

•n/a: this question was not asked in this year.

## References

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