Stress Among Information System Professionals

In their work environment, information system professionals (ISPs) may face high levels of stress, and this may lead to managerial issues, such as excessive employee turnover. Managers of ISPs may be able to confront the problem of employee stress if they can understand the sources of such stress. A study by Sethi, King, & Quick (SKQ) may help managers to recognize these sources.

From a series of studies, SKQ had the following findings, among others:

1. “…in-depth interviews…using an open-ended questionnaire…resulted in a list of 33 stressors cited as most common. We categorized the stressors based on their association with one of seven factors…[training; deadlines; coworkers; performance evaluations; job security; career development; and user demands]…” [pp. 99-100]

2. “The pressure to meet specific deadlines was rated as the single most important factor associated with stress, closely followed by user demands” [p. 100]

3. “…[questionnaire items for the 33 stressors] were combined into a single scale, referred to as the Stress Measurement and Determination Inventory (SMDI)” [p.100]

4. “We also found SMDI scores to be higher in female employees. These higher scores appear to be mediated by stressors involving coworkers and adequacy of training…” [p.100]

5. “Respondents employed at their current jobs for more than 11 years had significantly higher stress scores [SMDI scores] in the area of job security than those employed for shorter periods. In general, as the number of years in their current employment and their number of years in IS increased, respondents became increasingly concerned about job security, evaluations, coworkers, and user demands. Upper level employees were more likely to express job security concerns than employees working at lower hierarchical levels. Increasing age was also associated with stress over job security, as well as career development stress” [p.100]

6. [Their analysis tested for] “correlation between SMDI (and its components) and burnout, job satisfaction, and intention-to-quit. All of the [correlation] coefficients were as expected with the exception of those between satisfaction and user demands and between deadlines and intention-to-quit…” [p.101]

The study has relevance to managers in both public and private sectors. Private sector managers can apply such information to improve their ISP staffing situations. Public sector managers, who must compete with the private sector for the same talent, may use awareness of these stressors as aids to recruit new ISPs or to retain currently employed ones.

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Additional abstracts of research can be viewed at our website at:

[Abstract by Willard Hor, Director, Research & Planning Unit, System Office, California Community Colleges, 4/18/05]