Identifying the Enablers and Barriers of IT Personnel Transition

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ABSTRACT
This chapter presents the initial findings from a National Science Foundation-supported study of IT personnel transition. We used the revealed causal mapping method (Narayanan & Fahey, 1990) to elicit barriers, enablers, and examples of IT personnel transition. The chapter reveals new knowledge and insight into factors that enable and prevent IT personnel transition as organizations evolve. The data is presented in the form of interpretation of revealed causal maps from 84 respondents. The results are the first steps toward developing a theory of IT personnel transition that is distinct from general transition theories.

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INTRODUCTION

Information technology (IT) organizations within companies are experiencing a great deal of change. In-house IT organizations are transitioning from legacy system technology to distributed and client server technologies. Work practices that were ad hoc are being redefined with software engineering discipline. IT professionals who once produced products and services that were “thrown over the fence” to in-house customers are now expected to be full business partners. The implication is that the IT professional is not simply writing code, but is also expected to understand and translate business processes into a technology solution (Markus & Benjamin, 1996; Nelson & Cooprider, 1996).

All of these organizational changes require individual IT professionals to make significant personal transitions. Since IT personnel are key components in implementing new technology, it is imperative that they value change and choose to actively participate in the transition (Nelson, 1990). The study of IT personnel as a separate occupational group has been motivated by the need to further understand IT workers and their work (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1989). The ongoing shortage of skilled IT workers also makes research on the transition and retention of IT workers a timely and important topic (Agarwal & Ferratt, 2000; Igbaria et al., 1991; Igbaria & Seigel, 1992). This study focuses on the factors that cause IT personnel to transition during their professional career, and how organizations can best support and retain IT workers through these transitions. We present the interpretation of enablers and barriers of IT personnel transition through revealed causal maps.

THEORY AND METHOD

While the characteristics of IT personnel are well documented in the IS literature, no theory exists that specifies the relationships among these characteristics in the context of IT personnel transition. Prior work in the IT personnel area has focused on attitudes and motivation (Baroudi, 1985; Cougar et al., 1979; Agarwal & Ferratt, 2000), required skills (Cheney & Lyons, 1980; Nelson, 1991), and career issues (Crepeau et al., 1992; Igbaria et al., 1991; Smits et al., 1993; Reich & Kaarst-Brown, 1999). Many constructs related to transition have emerged from this literature, but no attempt has been made to understand the relationships between these variables and their impact on transition. Additionally, some theories of personnel transition from the manage-