Chapter IX

Effect of Tasks, Salaries, and Shocks on Job Satisfaction Among MIS Professionals

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ABSTRACT

This chapter contrasts attitudes and attributes of current and former positions of IT professionals who have changed jobs within the IT field. It also examines relationships among key variables of tasks performed, salary, job satisfaction, and external influences or "shocks" that may have precipitated turnover. Survey data were collected from 169 MIS professionals. Results showed significant changes in task, salary, and job satisfaction between former and current jobs. Detailed examinations show significant increases in project management and business analysis and decrease in 3GL and maintenance programming as well as differences in the amount of change for different elements of job satisfaction. A number of significant relationships among variables between some tasks and salary, some tasks and job satisfaction, and low former job satisfaction and response to particular "shocks" relative to turnover emerged from the data.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, investigators have studied IT professionals and job satisfaction largely in relation to workforce shortages as well as to employee turnover. Much evidence has been collected in recent years regarding the existence of an IT worker shortage (West & Bogumil, 2001), although not without some dissenting views also being voiced (Matloff, 1997). Much of the discussion regarding IT workforce shortages focuses on the ability of universities to produce enough computer science and MIS graduates; but another stream of discussion focuses on issues such as attrition from the field and job stress (Moore, 2000), difficulties for older workers (e.g., Cowley, 2001) and unequal gender presence in the field, particularly in the most technical and highest wage areas (ITAA, 2000). Goman (2000), in her discussion of high tech personnel based on wide ranging interviews with leading HR staff at high tech firms, repeatedly mentions the goal of recruiting younger employees. Fraser (2001) is even more explicit in describing incidents of alleged age discrimination among white-collar workers particularly in high-tech firms.

Information technology (IT) employee turnover has been a problem since the 1970s (Bartol, 1983) and has been studied regularly ever since. More recently, Jiang and Klein (1999-2000) report a 25%-35% turnover rate for IS employees in Fortune 500 firms and Shellenbarger (1996) provides a conservative estimate of 15%-20% turnover for IT workers. However, research on employee turnover has largely focused on individual attitudes that lead to organizational commitment and job satisfaction which in turn are viewed as leading to intention to remain on the job. In light of the many issues pertaining to the nature of IT work and the composition of the IT workforce overall, it may be time to broaden the discussion of employee turnover.

Employee turnover is an important issue both to high tech firms and to traditional firms that also need IT personnel for development of new systems and maintenance of their information infrastructure. Turnover is generally expensive and disruptive to employers. As noted by Reichheld (1996), even changes in 1% or 2% of turnover can make a significant difference in firm profitability. This is due to the accumulation of direct costs of hiring new personnel with the indirect costs of lost productivity if there is a gap between an employee leaving and finding a replacement as well as time for the new employee to descend the learning curve for technical and organizational knowledge. In spite of the common view that turnover is expensive and to be avoided, some information technology firms are comfortable with and even encourage high levels of turnover (Agarwal & Ferratt, 2001; Fraser, 2001).

Studies of IT personnel typically take a snap shot of employees of a number of firms or of members of an MIS/computer science society at a point in time (e.g., Baroudi & Igbaria, 1994-1995; Guimaraes & Igbaria, 1992). These types of studies generally test a set of attitudinal variables aimed at showing the

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