Organizational Entry and Transition from Academic Study: Examining a Critical Step in the Professional Development of Young IS Workers

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ABSTRACT

A critical stage in the development of young Information Systems (IS) professionals is when they make the transition from academic study to industrial work. At this stage, the young IS professional must learn about his work requirements, understand work procedures, and develop new skills and knowledge in order to function effectively in the workplace. This study develops a three-phase model of organizational socialization to
analyze this process of organizational boundary crossing and professional development for a group of recent Information Systems graduates. Overall, this exploratory study illustrates that the socialization framework could provide a useful research model for examining the early professional development of young IS workers. The results indicate that the effective preparation of young IS workers involves far more than just a fixed set of academic subjects. The framework is also useful to reveal some specific characteristics of information technology work that could pose particular challenges for the adjustment process of young IS workers in the workplace. The implications of the preliminary findings from this exploratory study for educators, managers, and researchers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The effective development of Information Systems/Services (IS) professionals has been recognized as a priority issue by industry executives (e.g., Dickson et al., 1984; Martin, 1982; Hartog & Herbert, 1986), researchers, and national policy makers (President’s Information Technology Advisory Committee Report to the President, 1999; The National Academies, 1999). A critical stage in the development of young IS professionals is when they make the transition from academic study to industrial work. At this stage, the young IS professional must learn about his work requirements, understand work procedures, and develop new skills and knowledge in order to function effectively in the workplace. Although much has been written by organizational researchers on the entry and socialization of new hires, this important question of how a new graduate transforms into a productive IS worker within an organizational work environment has been largely ignored by IS researchers.

There are several major reasons why this transition phase is vital to the long-term professional development of the IS workforce. First, the transition between academic studies and industrial work represents a particularly difficult challenge for young IS workers because of the blistering rate of technological change in information technologies and systems today. Such rapid changes mean that it is virtually impossible to stay abreast of all new technologies, even within an academic environment. While the primary focus of a university education is to help students develop their conceptual understanding, industrial work requirements are concerned with the accomplishment of specific tasks (Lee, 1989). Researchers have identified significant gaps between what
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