Chapter IX

Increasing the Effectiveness of IT Management through Psychological Awareness

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Abstract

Largely because of the potential for Internet connectivity, the area of electronic commerce has been proliferating since the start of the century. In this context, IT professionals are being counted on to provide central and impactful systems with a capacity for competitive advantage. In other areas of intense IT usage, we have also seen increasing emphasis on systems with critical impact. There is a need to be original and creative, yet precise and timely. The more IT workers produce, the more is demanded of them. A number of sources are highlighting the reality of impending and widespread IT burnout. Thus, IT management is faced with the imperative of eliciting high-quality work from an overburdened workforce. To aid in this endeavor, it is here suggested that development of multi-dimensional psychological awareness among those managing and those managed be given serious consideration.
This chapter outlines three main areas of psychological awareness: (1) personality type, (2) cognitive style, and (3) the deep inner self (leading to “emotional intelligence”). It points out how such awareness could contribute positively and significantly to IT management.

Involvement of Psychological Factors

“Efficiency” and “effectiveness,” common management terms, are becoming undeniable imperatives in the work of an IT professional in the 21st century. At times, such imperatives are mandated by IT management seemingly “at any cost.” This brute-force approach may lead to short-term gain, but will inevitably result in considerable, perhaps largely unanticipated long-term pain for all involved. Is there another way to motivate and to succeed?

Albert Einstein is credited with asserting that a problem cannot be solved effectively at the same level of awareness at which the problem was created. Growth in awareness is necessary. What might this mean to the overburdened IT worker and his impatient, and often perplexed manager?

Over twenty years ago, U.S. researchers Couger and Zawacki (1980) reported that, while IS professionals (systems analysts and programmers) had the lowest needs for social interaction on the job, they reported much higher “growth needs” than the other professionals surveyed. While, at the time, growth needs were largely understood as greater development of professional competencies, might the IT profession now be ready for a more holistic approach to growth?

Just as an Olympic athlete might assimilate useful insights from nutrition, biochemistry, kinesiology, psychology, and philosophy to deliver an optimum performance, so might the modern IT professional examine the possible impact of different dimensions of psychological awareness on his or her daily work. Recent IT textbooks have confirmed the view that IT (and IS development in particular) is a socio-technical field and have promoted the development of “soft skills.” Yet the profession as a whole, as well as its academic MIS counterpart, has, at best, “scratched the surface” of applying psychological awareness comprehensively and purposefully in the course of IT work.

At best (with notable exceptions), one or two personality type workshops have typically been arranged by IT management for their subordinates, leaving the participants to “sort it out for themselves” as to if and how they would use the gained insight in the course of their daily work. Little concerted effort has expended on relating, for example, specific personality and cognition dimensions to specific tasks in system development (e.g., data modeling, GUI design).
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