A Study on Services Motivating Computing Professional Association Membership

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate computing professionals’ perspectives on services offered by a professional association. A conceptual framework was developed based on a review of relevant literatures to explore the motivations of professionals to join and maintain professional association membership. A survey instrument was developed based on the conceptual framework, and was subsequently deployed within the Association of Information Technology Professionals (AITP). The analyses (N = 220) include descriptive analyses, exploratory factor analysis, and internal consistency reliability analyses. The results suggest that members' needs and motivations are multidimensional, involving ten distinct and internally consistent underlying constructs. This paper contributes by providing a reliable measurement system for computing professional association leadership to make informed decisions and provides substantive recommendations for offering targeted services. The findings suggest that important aspects of computing professional membership are networking with local professionals, professional development programs, and promoting their concerns.

Keywords: Conceptual Framework, Instrument Development, IT Professionals, Membership, Professional Associations

INTRODUCTION

Computing and information technology professionals (hence forth named computing professionals) work under demanding conditions, and face a constant threat of their skill sets becoming rapidly obsolete because of today’s fast changing technological and business landscapes (Guzman, Stam, & Stanton, 2008). To be equipped with relevant skills necessary to meet current and future needs, computing professional must engage in professional development as a lifelong activity. Professional associations play an important role with facilitating the development of an individual by offering a variety of services to its members. One of the main objectives of professional associations is to ensure professionals’ competencies are up-to-date by providing them access to tutorials, training

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workshops, and industry certifications (Denning, 2001; Newell, Swan, & Galliers, 2000).

Professional associations help assure that the profession progresses towards maturity by offering a variety of services to its members (Ford & Gibbs, 1996). Computing professional association leadership could benefit from the systematic study to better understand what motivates people to join and maintain membership. Such examination would provide better insights for leadership to provide targeted services to its members. The objectives addressed by this research, thus, are three-fold: (1) develop and validate an instrument to measure factors pertaining to individuals joining and maintaining membership in computing professional associations, (2) examine the relationships between these factors and other relevant demographic criteria, and (3) provide suggestions for computing professional association leadership. The overarching goal of this research is to better understand what expectations and motives an individual has in computing professional association membership in an effort to inform decision-making by the professional association leadership.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we provide a review of literatures relevant to computing professional associations. We develop a conceptual framework for investigating which services motivate members to maintain professional association membership. Then, we discuss the research methodology used for this study and the results of the survey developed using the conceptual framework. Finally, we provide discussion on the findings and recommendations to computing professional associations.

**Literature Review**

Despite the important role played by professional associations, there are very limited prior literatures on the topic. Dalton and Dignam (2007) conducted a survey involving 18 different membership associations and 16,944 respondents to identify factors that influence individuals to join a particular association. Their survey indicated that professional development, information dissemination, and networking are the most important factors (Dalton & Dignam, 2007). The study conducted by Dalton and Dignam (2007) considered a wide range of professional associations, but none specifically related to the field of computing. As described earlier, computing professionals have unique needs and concerns in comparison to other professionals, therefore, we cannot solely rely on this study. Thus, we need studies focusing specifically on computing professionals’ views.

There have been very few studies on computing professional associations. Ball and Harris studied the Society for Management Information Systems (SIMS) [now the Association of Information Systems (AIS)] basic demographics of membership, overall satisfaction with the association, and some issues that the field might address in the following decade (Ball & Harris, 1982). Oz investigated the role of various computing professional associations in establishing the standards of conduct to guide ethical behaviors of computing professionals (Oz, 1992). Andrews and others surveyed members of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) on their needs for electronic access to products and services (Andrews, Shein, & Holst, 1998). Swan and others investigated the role of professional associations in technology diffusion (Swan, Newell, & Robertson, 2000). Sandy and others conducted a comprehensive literature analysis to identify leadership areas where computing professional associations can promote and support ethical conduct (Sandy, Hall, & Bellucci, 2007). Yu and others explored how cultural and economic factors affect online collaboration among members of AIS (Yu, Kumar, & Lang, 2007). The literatures addressed issues that are tangential to computing professional associations but none addressed the motivations and needs of its individual members. This is a critical gap in the literature, because understanding what individual members want is a necessity for professional associations to make informed decisions on offering services and allocating their resources in order to cultivate higher levels.
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