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Career Assessments Deter Prospective IS Students

The Missing Socio-Technical Perspective

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Students in secondary and post-secondary schools often face the following challenge: what do they want to do when they grow up? Many of these institutions provide students with career assessments aimed at assisting the student. These career assessments proclaim to match the strengths and interests of the student with an associated career cluster and related major. For example, both Holland's Model of Personality Types (Holland Code), which includes realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional, as well as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which includes introvert-extrovert, thinker-feeler, sensor-intuitive, and judger-perceiver, produce results that map to career clusters to assist students in selecting secondary school courses and post-secondary majors. What if an entire cluster is stereotypically defined resulting in erroneous mappings? What if these erroneous mappings result in a significant lack of awareness of the Information Systems (IS) career clusters and the related IS major? What if this lack of awareness contributes to the global shortage of IS professionals?

Many studies explore the common-misconceptions and stereotypes of computer-related courses and careers. These stereotypes include physical appearance, asocial behavior, competitive focus, and typically male. These stereotypes negatively influence student interest, especially from women, in pursuing any technology-related courses or careers. In other words, students who enjoy math, problem solving, and logical investigation typically already know about computer science classes in secondary school. These students see a path into post-secondary education as they typically pursue computer science. What happens to all of the other students who do not enjoy math, problem solving, and logical investigation? How will these students learn about the opportunities that information systems training and education would afford?

Recker (2005) notes that "Information Systems lies at the intersection of two of the most exciting and dynamic fields today: *Business* and *Information Technology*" (p.1). IS seeks students and employees who exhibit the following skills: like to work with people, enjoy collaboration, have excellent verbal and written communication, interested in bridging the gap between technology and business, and can think strategically about business.

Career assessments that attempt to link interests and strengths to career alternatives, such as Holland Code and MBTI, fail to distinguish the critical differences between computer science and information systems. For example, at my own university, we link majors with a Holland Code: IRC (Investigative, Realistic, Conventional) and MBTI: INJT (introvert, intuitive, judger, thinker) to both the information systems major and the computer science major. Yet these two disciplines are vastly different. Stereotyping and a lack of understanding of the rapidly changing technology and business context may contribute to these erroneous mappings.

A social-technical perspective may offer a way forward. IS represents a continuum of careers that span very social roles through very technical roles. By inclusion of this social-technical perspective of IS, career assessment tools can change to remove the current stereotype and match students with a wide-variety of necessary skills to the IS domain. These students can explore all of the aspects of the IS career clusters and the related IS major. Finally, these new IS students will reduce the global shortage of IS professionals.

References

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