

THE BIRTH OF NEW GENERATION

Managements should be cautious while handling software professionals who are considered very sensitive to their work atmosphere.

Over the years as consultants we have been helping organizations to understand their culture. We also got to work with quite a few software companies in enabling them to understand their culture. During our interactions with the software engineers, we soon realized that they were different from the engineers working in other industries. Hence, we decided to probe them and understand their likes, dislikes, attitudes etc. What emerged as result of this effort was - *the profile of a software professional*. The mind of the software professional is one of the most important raw materials. An understanding of the software professionals mind can help a software organization to draw appropriate HR systems and other initiatives so as to increase their job satisfaction, which possibly could reduce employee turnover in these organizations.

The contents of the profile are insights into the needs, attitudes, feeling components and work perspectives of the software professionals. This is a collection of opinions shared by the professionals themselves and minimum editing has been done to retain originality.

I. Needs of the software professionals:

One of the foremost needs is the need for recognition and feeling of importance. Sharing of the vision/mission of the organization is an important need since any ambiguity makes them think of alternatives. Scope for entertainment/ relaxation is needed to sustain their creative energy. Scope for creativity, knowledge sharing are also important. Last, but not the least is the fulfillment of the dream to be in US and for some people "somehow"!

II. Attitudes:

They feel they are the privileged lot, got lot of growth, are luckier than others, and so its fine to have high ego, feel confident and some even throw their weight around. They have high self-respect, are avid learners but the weakness is they think, "they know". They acknowledge themselves as creators since every program is like giving birth to a child. One of the important beliefs is that life at US is easy and they want to work there, for which they will do whatever needed (which is seen from the way they behave in the organization). They do not like to be told; think they are "cut above the rest", and are doing something of value and would not become obsolete soon.

They think, being indispensable and in high demand, they should get whatever they ask, actually, a subtle way of threatening. The requisite is 'somehow the man who leads should know more than the team'. They think they are superiors to their equals, sometimes crazy; greedy believing their logic is right. They rarely maintain low profile.

III. What hurts them:

They seem to be vulnerable people and get hurt very easily. Some sensitive issues regarding work are: when something is done to their output (i.e. programs); when appreciation does not come where justified; when commitment is not kept; when one is working on a low market value project; when required infrastructure support /facility is not made available (specially when solving a bug); when idle time increases. The other sensitive personal issues are: when one is questioned for what he/she considers as silly; when disturbed while seriously working; when less talented/knowledgeable guy bosses over them; when put down by superiors who is considered less knowledgeable; when a learning opportunity is denied (especially restricted by a colleague who is not considered equal); when there is frequent comparison between/ within the group; when their expertise is questioned and not trusted; when his/her team or boss does not even have time to take a look at his/her output; and finally when it becomes difficult to find time for oneself.

IV. On utilization of idle time:

Idle time is a dangerous in a software industry if not utilized properly. It becomes a breeding time for all virus which affects the culture, and software professionals start looking at alternatives and anxieties start multiplying. Some suggestions given for utilization of idle time by the software professionals are, to use this time for learning - may be some creative work or on a new learning project, with freedom being given to the professional to learn what he/she wants; some in-house training on attitudes, review mechanisms or project management. It could also be a time to write articles for journals or to teach other youngsters in the organisation. Reading was termed as a bad option since reading without a need is not effective and it cannot be done the whole day.

V. What motivates them:

The triggers which motivates the software professional to move further are: when they have the feeling of doing something creative; when they discover something new; when there is praise/recognition/appreciation for their contributions made; small facilities provided at the right time; while on quality work with high complexity and challenge loaded in it; working with superiors who give good guidance; when learning new technology and of course in recent times, money, the best of the perks/package of the industry. The most important discovery was that each of these professionals have a child alive in them and so one mechanisms developed to satisfy that child will go a long way in keeping the software professional happy.

VI. What matters to them most:

Creativity, patience, as an ingredient quality; the kind of work one does; experience; money; recognition; good working environment; overseas assignment; being able to be independent; opportunity to learn new things; expectation that their interest is taken care of while assigning the job; expect people to demand things out of them; given time to concentrate on learning a new language fully and be able to shift to others once they loose interest.

VII. What the non-computer professionals think of the software professionals:

The adjectives which emerged were: arrogant; headweight; jokers; highly knowledgeable; introverts; not very sociable; suspicious -neither believing in themselves or others; only love their computers and others mean less; are addicted to work and lastly the belief is, 'they can pull the legs of the layman, so beware'!!!.

While all that has been presented above does not necessarily give you the complete understanding of the "software engineer", it definitely gives you some insights on the direction in which their mind works. Many a time the efforts made to deal with the "software engineer" seems to be like the way the writer dealt with the kids of the neighbourhood while working on a project.

A writer was trying to concentrate on writing when some school-age children started up a hilarious, noisy game below his window. He asked them to leave. Since he was breaking up what clearly seemed a delightful scene, he paid them each a quarter for doing so. The next day they came back and caused the same annoyance; again, he paid them to leave. This routine continued for over a week, until one day my friend found he was out of quarters, and he suffered through the racket as best he could. He discovered that he could work despite the disturbance, and thence he gave no more quarters. The children stopped coming. Two weeks later he ran into one of them at the market and asked why he and his friends no longer came around. The child replied, "What do you think, we're going to come for nothing?"

Rewarding behaviour often has just this effect: over justifying the behaviour so that its intrinsic value is overlooked. The children came at first because it was fun for them. After being paid, they kept coming for the reward. Even play can lose its intrinsic value if it is done with another goal in mind. (from "The Power of Mindful Learning" by Ellen J. Langer)

We are sure there are many more ways in which the software engineers can be excited and made to feel the need to contribute his/her best. Our purpose of sharing this article with you is to let you understand the software engineer and see as a manager in a software company, how you could manage the software engineer differently.

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Arpitha Associates Pvt. Ltd.
"Avenues" Deccan Herald, Friday, September 25, 1998