

## **ABSTRACT**

Information overload refers to a well recognized situation where there is a mismatch between the amount of information available to an individual and the individual's ability to process the information and having more information than can be processed leads to dysfunctional consequences for the individual. From an organizational perspective this situation amounts to lost productivity with high costs estimated to be as much as 900 billion dollars across organizations in the United States of America in the year 2009 (Spira, 2009). Surveys report that 85 percent of respondents waste time on processing vast amounts of irrelevant information in their work in a frustrated effort to ensure that all of the relevant information has been found (ManageSmarter, 2008) and at Intel Corporation information workers spend up to eight hours each week dealing with information overload (Zeldes et al., 2007).

This study aims to determine personal factors which cause individuals to perceive that they are overloaded with work related information which refers to all forms of data, information, and knowledge from internal and external sources used as part of their work duties. Based on a comprehensive review of previous studies 16 acknowledged personality traits and four socio-demographic variables (Age, Gender, Level of Education, and Income) are identified as potential causes for the perception of overload although it is noted that very few studies have addressed personal factors and especially personality traits as causes of perceptions of overload and certainly no studies of this kind have been conducted with information workers in the context of organizations in Thailand. Data collected by questionnaire from a sample of 594 individuals who process work related information regularly as part of their duties is analyzed and used to test the effects of these 20 personal factors on their perception of overload. Descriptive statistics are used to analyze associations among these 20 factors and structural equation modeling techniques are used to analyze and develop a parsimonious causal model of their effects on perceptions of overload. The findings are interpreted and compared to those from previous studies and theoretical and practical conclusions are presented.

From a theoretical perspective none of the four socio-demographic factors (Age, Gender, Level of Education, and Income) was found to have a significant effect on perceptions of

overload and only four of the 16 personality traits (Imagination, Reserve, Complexity, and Emotionality) were found to have significant effects on perceptions of overload:

**Imagination** – Highly imaginative people have low levels of perception of overload

**Reserve** – An individual who places strong emphases on privacy and quietness has strong perceptions of being overloaded.

**Complexity** – An individual who displays high ability for liberal, analytical, critical, and flexible thinking has strong perceptions of being overloaded.

**Emotionality** – An individual who is easily annoyed, aggravated, and made angry experiences strong perceptions of overload.

Based on significant correlations among the 16 personality traits and the four socio-demographic factors four separate profiles were developed for individuals who are likely to be at more or less risk of feeling the effects of information overload in the workplace. From a practical perspective these four profiles provide human resource personnel, managers, counselors, and therapists with a means of identifying existing employees or screening potential employees who are likely to experience overload. In particular, these individuals are likely to display symptoms such as: limited use of information search and retrieval strategies; seemingly arbitrary approaches to information analysis and organization; and sub-optimal decision making. Furthermore, information overload often causes other personal problems and in such cases the results of this study help to identify and then treat the basic personal causes of overload and not just the symptoms which often present in the form of stress related problems.