The Impact of Stress and the Working Environment on Job Satisfaction and Decision-Making among Women Entrepreneurs in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

The world is changing and these changes have deeply affected the status of women as entrepreneurs; women's working force is growing by the day along with their entrepreneurship, forcing women to find a balance between their jobs and their personal lives. This research analyses the degree of the impact of stress and the working environment on women entrepreneurs' efficient decision-making and job satisfaction. An empirical investigation is carry out in four states in the Mexican Republic. It is using multiple regression analyses in SPSS. Results show that working environment impacts positively on women entrepreneurs' efficient decision-making. This means that by having a good working environment, women entrepreneurs are able to have good relationships with workers in order to face decision.

Keywords: women entrepreneurs, stress, working environment, decision-making, job satisfaction

1. Introduction

Working environments pose adaptational or stressing complications for many women entrepreneurs due to the demands of their fields. There are also women who, aside from being mothers and wives, are setting up or have started businesses that allow them financial and decision-making independence.

Women entrepreneurs are key players in the economic development of many countries (Ndemo and Maina 2007) by creating jobs, innovation, and overall well-being, and by frequently focusing on small businesses that contribute to developing new products and services. According to the International Labour Office (ILO 2008), women's economic involvement is central for sustainable societies. However, women's economic activity has been undermined by multiple tasks, both within the family and the business, which, directly and indirectly impact their performances at work (Rika, Aziz, and Ibrahim2008).

Notwithstanding that the government has established state and federal programmes to offer financial and managerial resources to women entrepreneurs, these programmes have been insufficient because of an increasing demand and lack of information about or promotion of them among some of the interested parties. The International Labour Office (ILO) proposes as a strategy to concentrate specifically on women entrepreneurs whose businesses show potential for growth, which in turn appears to be a strategic way to create sustainable jobs and promote decent work. However, as Perry (2002) found, women have shown more entrepreneurship and become more *aggressive* when starting small businesses, and according to Morrison (1999), women entrepreneurs strive to get acknowledgement, autonomy, power, and good payment.

Frequently adding to this is the fact that women are at a disadvantage in terms of their proportion in vulnerable employment settings such as unremunerated work within the family, and self-employment (ILO 2009). Another weighing consideration is the demand to balance women's remunerated jobs with the roles attributed to them by nature (reproduction) and society (caring for and tending to the family—meaning husband, children, and in

many cases their parents or their parents in law). Also, the working or entrepreneurial environment in which women are involved presents them with complex situations borne of the field's demands, contributing to result in little effective decision-making.

In this sense, the working environment and stress become part of the day to day lives of these women who show great interest in advancing themselves. The diverse reasons motivating these women range from being the sole providers for their families, working along their husbands for family and business progress, having a wish to survive or grow in the market, earning their own income, or achieving self-actualisation, including in this reason creating jobs and tending to third parties. According to Daeren (2000), women entrepreneurs' reasons foster their generation of entrepreneurial strategies, satisfaction with their jobs, and better decision-making, but they also bring about difficulties to be faced either because of a lack of sufficient entrepreneurial experience, or deficient or inexistent information about the economic, managerial, and financial aspects of the job.

In this context, the objective of this research is to analyse the impact of stress and the working environment on efficient decision-making and perceived job satisfaction among women entrepreneurs. The exploratory study took place in four Mexican states: Estado de Mexico, Jalisco, Sonora, and Tamaulipas. In order to fulfil the objective, a research model was evaluated and pilot-tested in 469 small and medium-sized(SME) enterprises in the service, commercial and industrial sectors of economy. The empirical study consisted of a statistical multiple regression analysis.

This paper outlines a review of literature about the independent and dependent variables, a summary of the field work undertaken (administration of the survey, statistical analysis of data, and analysis of findings), and a presentation of the conclusions highlighting the main contributions to knowledge derived from this research.

2. Review of Literature

Stress

Since long ago, Selye (1956) has conceptualized stress as the sum of non-specific changes caused by function or damage or the rate of wear and tear in the body, including what could be considered reaction, stimulus, and interaction. Cano (2002) defined stress as the process started when a set of environmental demands is received by an individual who understands that an adequate response must be given triggering his confrontational resources.

Stress produces several effects that have an impact on people's jobs. For example, a feeling of fatigue could be an effect of stress, which is attributed with causing absenteeism, low productivity, depression, and emotional exhaustion. Stress also increases the risk of accidents inside or outside the job, in turn increasing the cost of social security (Stewart, 1990), which provokes poor organizational performance (Fisher 1992), and according to Stewart (1990), results in a loss of 16 working days per employee per year. Moreover, stress provokes ill-health and lack of concentration, leading to wrong decision-making. This state produces a lack of oxygen flow to the brain, which results in a stressed person using only between 20 to 40 % of his intellectual capacity (Syed and Farah 2009). When doing every day activities, being upset impedes an adequate development since performance levels are not up to the person's full capacity; thus, a task that could take 10 minutes to complete in a relaxed state can take up to one hour while stressed.

From a psychological perspective, when the demands of the working, social, or family environments exceed the resources the individual possesses to confront them, a series of adaptational reactions of resource mobilisation are developed, implying a physiological activation (Cano 2002). In fact, a state of stress involves a series of negative emotional reactions; however, this symptom of stress should not be avoided but rather managed since the absence of stress means death (Selye 1956).

Research on stress management has derived in studies aimed at implementing strategic feasible solutions such as the one by Karim, Mir and Bingi (2005), where there is an analysis of entrepreneurial leaders' attitudes towards the implementation of and results obtained from these management systems. In addition, Vasumathi, Govindarajalu, Anuratha and Amudha (2003) found that stress becomes an unavoidable psychological phenomenon because of the changes in life models due to industrialisation, urbanisation, population growth, cultural transformation and multiplicity of roles that people ought to take. At the same time, the personal and

working behaviour of the female entrepreneur could be impacted by the stress by the responsibility implicit in her entrepreneurial character that weighs work load, common good, and feelings of isolation, confrontation, values, ethical conflicts, and even some meaningless activities (Maslach and Leiter 2005).

These circumstances could be associated to women entrepreneurs' preference for keeping control of every aspect of the job, and their less tolerant of risk attitudes, which result in an application of fewer resources (Gómez, Molina and Ramírez 2007). On the other hand, each woman entrepreneur's experience and the business's establishment in the sector have to be considered. It could be mentioned that some women feel pressure because of the work load, the requirements of control, and the rewards (Maslach and Leiter 2005), apart from the fact that women exhibit a higher level of job stress than men (Burke 2002).

In other words, the need of women entrepreneurs to attend to and balance their work and family lives, their entrepreneurial expectations, their wishes and ambitions becomes highly stressing (Vasumathi et al. 2003). Contrastingly, stress in the family provokes conflicted feelings in married women, but not in the family as a whole (Morrison 1999). Again, this could be derived from women's high sense of responsibility, feelings of being overloaded with and lacking influence at work, feelings of lacking job satisfaction and being isolated from coworkers because of their participation in the company's management and decision-making; these feelings could lead a woman entrepreneur to burn-out. However, it is important to point out that many stressors derive from the economic context of the company, such as government changes, globalisation policy, liberalization and privatization. These factors especially affect the owners of small businesses as well as novice women entrepreneurs (Vasumathi et al. 2003).

Without a doubt, stress is an illness of the knowledge society and women entrepreneurs are not excluded from this context. Unfortunately, there are few studies about the impact of stress on women entrepreneurs in Mexico, which is the reason why this investigation intends to become a starting point for future lines of research in this area.

The Women Working Environment

It is well known that it is a necessity and even a duty to promote an agreeable working environment in the company, one that fosters performances that assist in attaining organizational objectives while at the same time achieving the personal objectives of employees and owners alike.

There is a body of research about the working environment as well as causes for and consequences of stress (e.g. burn-out), according to Maslach and Leiter (2005) the main factors impacting on behaviour at work and personal behaviour are: workload, control, rewards, common good, impartiality, and values. Several variables have been analysed for each of these factors (Karim et al. 2005; Syed and Farah 2009):

- Workload: excessive work and insufficient resources.
- Control: micromanagement, lack of influence, and responsibility without authority.
- Rewards: insufficient payment and lack of recognition or satisfaction.
- Common good: isolation and conflict at work, and disrespect.
- Impartiality: favouritism and discrimination.
- Values: ethical conflict and meaningless activities.

The social elements present in the working environment are also factors impacting on the employees' behaviour and performance; however, the social contexts in which these elements have developed have to be considered. Thus, the analysis of attitudinal, affective, and behavioural responses has occurred with consideration to the working environment in which these responses are present. As an example, consider *organizational justice*, which refers to the employees' perception of the concepts of justice or injustice within the company (Colquitt 2001), and to the interference of dominant cultural patterns, that is, each individual's values affecting his perception about justice, and which affect the attitudinal and behavioural variables embedded in the context of each organization (Omar 2006).

Apart from the concepts above, leadership styles need to be analysed; for instance, a study by Gómez et al. (2007) concluded that women exhibit a different leadership style to that exhibited by men, and that the projects in which women lead show a lower propensity to risk, which implies the investment of fewer resources than those used in projects led by men. However, the study assessed that profits were similar in projects led by

women or men. Moreover, De Cremer (2006) sustains that the affective bonds within the company are strengthen by the transformational behaviour of the leader, in this case, the female owner of the company. This transformational leadership would also create low stress in the workplace since they perceive high organizational justice because of their closeness to the female owner.

Highly transformational leadership behaviours exhibited by women entrepreneurs that project a sense of security to their employees, reinforce the thesis that women conceive business as a network for cooperation that includes other vital objectives beyond those of a purely economic profit centre (Gómez et al. 2007). Such a transformational leadership style creates a perception of fairness and a positive feeling from having a say in the company and in the exercise of values while at the same time, it generates acceptance of the micromanagement decisions among employees (Karim et al. 2005; Syed and Farah 2009). Transformational leadership could also be a factor in creating a reasonable balance in communication with employees (Campbell 2002) and fostering agreeable working environments conducive to effective decision-making and job satisfaction within the organization.

An agreeable working environment that meets the characteristics described above would strengthen the concepts of common good, impartiality, and values proposed by Maslach and Leiter (2005); there would be a feeling of closeness supporting the *organizational justice* of the company (De Cremer 2006), as well as a feeling of *interpersonal justice* (Colquitt 2001). Such a working environment would confirm that women entrepreneurs pay closer attention to different vital issues beyond the purely entrepreneurial or professional objectives (Gómez et al. 2007).

Decision-Making

Decision-making is defined as the choice of one course of action among several options. A decision has to be connected to other activities (Koontz and Weihrich 2006) such as a reasonable generation, assessment and selection of solutions. Following the systems approach within the organization, people have to be sensitive to the policy and programmes of other organizational units (especially those directly relevant to their own) and of the whole company.

The review of literature determines that there are three main types of decision-making processes:

- Structured (programmed): decisions for which there are objective correct responses. These apply to routine problems that can be solved through the application of rules, policy or simple numerical calculations (and do not require intuition or judgement).
- Not-structured (not programmed): new, novel and complex decisions for which there are no proved responses; in other words, their nature is non recurrent.
- Semi-structured: decisions that are guided in part by routine and intuition.

After presenting these definitions of decision-making and types of decisions, it is relevant to point out that the chapter about strategic objectives and actions in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the United Nations' Division for the Advancement of Women (United Nations 1995) established in paragraph 51 that "women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process" (p. 19). However, in developed countries it is possible to notice benefits obtained through strategic decisions made by women (Ndemo and Maina 2007). According to Valentine and Rittenburg (2007), some studies have determined that there are no differences in ethical decision-making between men and women. However, many men believe that the idea of equality of conditions for decision-making by men and women is not very practical (Rika et al. 2008). Moreover, Hunt and Vitell (1986) point out that this process is impacted by the culture of the context where they occur and other factors that influence the level of decision-making, which according to Ndemo and Maina (2007) include education and poverty.

Education is a basic need for women (Rika et al. 2008), but due to the high costs of education, it is a resource on which it is not always possible to invest. Education can also lead to women's autonomy in turn increasing life satisfaction (Banerjee and Esther 2004). Education further allows women to get better understanding of their environments so that they can assess different courses of action possible; unfortunately, as indicated by the National Foundation for Women Business Owners (NFWBO), women process information instinctively and their decision-making processes are influenced by a *gut feeling* (NFWBO 1994).

Besides, members of the family commonly influence one another (Finkenauer, Engles, Branje and Meeus 2004) and lack of resources makes women dependent on their husbands, limiting their decision-making capacity, also women believe their businesses would improve if they were independent in their decision-making (Ndemo and Maina 2007). Added to this, the capital invested by women comes from their personal resources and from the support of family and friends (Colemanand Carsky 1996) because women usually struggle to obtain investing capital from financial institutions (Coleman 2002). However, as contradictory as it sounds, when women make decisions they have to consider the financial aspects of the business.

After reviewing some literature about the independent variables and one dependent variable in this investigation, it is pertinent to state our working hypotheses.

Hypotheses:

H₁. Women entrepreneurs' stress is positively correlated to better decision-making for the business.

 H_2 . The working environment in the business is positively correlated to women entrepreneurs' better decision-making.

Job Satisfaction

Women entrepreneurs have been characterised and distinguished by being orderly, encouraging of participation from the people around them, persistent, and having good reading habits. However, they have also been known for not being accustomed to maintaining good entrepreneurial relationships mainly because of their multiple roles in society as mothers, wives, sisters, housewives, teachers, friends, etc., and then as entrepreneurs. These roles cannot be denied, they are important elements in the business world, but it is also necessary to maintain a balance between the personal and entrepreneurial lives.

Job satisfaction is generally defined as an employee's pleasure or the positive emotional state resulting from evaluating of one's job experiences (Locke 1976). Considering the workers who conduct their activities to a high level of performance contribute much more to the organization while at the same time they achieve greater status within in (Morrison 1999).

In a competitive market where optimal performance is expected, the job satisfaction of workers becomes a critical issue against which managers are fighting. However, there are several social and cultural factors, such as gender roles, that contribute to the scarcity of women among the higher levels of management. Equally to men, women grow up with defined ideas about their expected roles in society and more particularly in a country such as Mexico with socio-behavioural patterns from which its citizens have not been able to break away.

Diverse studies have shown that women at executive levels have greater job satisfaction than women at directive (or professional) level, especially because of promotion opportunities (Morrison 1999). Executive women have a better balance in their lives between job satisfaction and family life satisfaction, and less stress than professional women (Burke 2002). Also, significant predictors for their career satisfaction are a perception of organizational support and what they do at work (Armstrong-Stassen and Cameron 2005).

Job satisfaction among women can be due to different reasons; some of the main ones are:

- Fewer overloads from their multiple roles (Pearson 2008).
- Higher academic level (Zgheib, Zgheib and Usta 2006).
- When their work is valued (Mansour 2008).

Contrarily, among the list of factors diminishing job satisfaction we find:

- Number of children at home (Pearson 2008).
- Lack of promotion and reward systems in their jobs (Mansour 2008).
- Or for instance, younger women are more satisfied at work than older women (Morrison 1999).

Job satisfaction as a variable is a construct that has been studied in many areas of knowledge (e.g. management, computer, etc.); however, there is not a clear definition of job satisfaction because it is based on perceptions and it depends on a person's mood to declare satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

These are our hypotheses for this dependent variable:

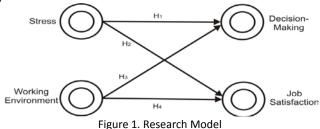
H₃. Women entrepreneurs' stress is positively correlated to job satisfaction.

 H_4 . The working environment is positively correlated to women entrepreneurs' job satisfaction.

3. Method

The objective of this research is to assess the impact of stress and the working environment of the business on women entrepreneurs' decision-making and job satisfaction. The process followed started with a review of literature about the variables under study. This review supported the design of a Research Model (Figure 1) that shows the relationships (correlations) among the hypotheses to be tested. Independent and dependent variables were operationalised as follows:

- Independent variables: Stress (emotional affliction, work is stressing, fatigue, no personal time available); Working Environment (relations with workers, control, celebration of achievements, business traditions).
- Dependent variables: Decision-making (participation of workers, judgement, experience, consultation with
 external sources, information of the company); Job Satisfaction (passion for the business, pride, adaptation,
 overall satisfaction).



A survey was designed and administered as a pilot study to women entrepreneurs in Estado de Mexico, Sonora, and Tamaulipas; the outcome of the pilot identified the need to delete unclear items or items with low statistic significance. The final survey consisted of 86 items mostly in a six-point Likert scale format(Never...Always). This survey instrument was divided into two sections: first, a socio-demographic section containing items such as age, marital status, number of children, starting capital, and number of workers; second, items pertaining the independent and dependent variables as described in the literature review.

After the survey was validated, the researchers approached the women entrepreneurs' associations (AME in Spanish) and entrepreneurial councils (e.g. COPARMEX) in each of the states participating in this study and requested their assistance in administering the questionnaire. The administration process lasted approximately a month and yielded 469 valid questionnaires (n=469) of women entrepreneurs from businesses in the service, commercial, and industrial sectors of economy. In most of the cases, the participants' responses were directly entered onto an electronic form of the questionnaire on a computer; for a minority, a printed form of the questionnaire was used. In order to ensure the similarity of the organizations' characteristics, the survey included only women entrepreneurs who owned a SME, measured by a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 100 workers. Another important sampling factor was that the women entrepreneurs were in full-time employment (working at least 30 hours per week) at the time of the survey.

The data gathered permitted to make a general description and an inferential analysis through multiple regression conducted on SPSS (v. 17) to test the working hypotheses. Last but not least, conclusions were drawn from these analyses. It is precise to indicate that minimum acceptable values used to assess item reliability were Cronbach's Alpha equal or higher than 0.7 (Nunnally 1978), R (Correlation) representing the *path coefficients*, which in order to be considered statistically significant, must be at least 0.2 and preferably well above 0.3, and R² (variance explained by the variable within the Model) must be equal or higher than 0.1 since lower values even though statistically significant, provide little information (Chin 1998).

It is important to point out that the review of literature did not identify other studies located in the four states in this sample or in Mexico, which investigated the same variables, that is, job satisfaction about the new roles they were taking and the influence of stress due to the excessive workload that takes up most of their days.

Results

This section summarises the results from the survey administered to women entrepreneurs: the proportion of surveys responded (n=469) was balanced across states: Jalisco=27%, Tamaulipas=26%, Estado de Mexico=22%,

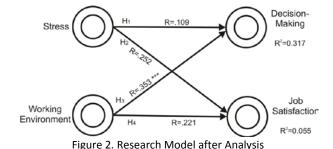
and Sonora=25%. Ages categories are from: less than 30 years old (14%), 31 to 35 years old (20%), 36 to 40 years old (21%), 41 to 50 years old (28%), and over 50 years old (17%). In terms of family settings, the marital status item revealed that the majority were married women (62%), single women represented 21%, and the rest of the sample (17%) consisted of divorcees, widows, or women who lived with a partner; about offspring, 84% of the women entrepreneurs with children had an average of 2.5 children. Educational backgrounds revealed similarities with international contexts such as the ones in the review of literature: in this study, women entrepreneurs possessed a medium level of education: 31% had a bachelor's degree while 7% had a postgraduate degree; however, 12% had only finished primary education in part (sixth grade in Mexico), while 24% had finished up to ninth grade (the top end of the primary education sequence in the country). Completing this description, 26% of the women entrepreneurs in the sample had finished secondary education. The number of workers employed was usually small: 82% of the women entrepreneurs hired a maximum of 10 workers while the rest of the sample (18%) indicated employing between 11 and 100 workers.

This section summarises the main output from the inferential analyses conducted. Table 1 shows reliability scores for each variable (all Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7), and the overall Cronbach's Alpha value for the survey ($\alpha = 0.808$). Table 1 also shows the variance explained (R^2) by the dependent variables.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Variance (R^2) for the Variables under study

Variable	α	R ²
Stress	0.750	
Working Environment	0.707	
Decision-Making	0.786	0.317
Job Satisfaction	0.905	0.055
Overall Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.808$)		

Figure 2 displays the Research Model tested including the values for the correlations (R) for each of the hypotheses, the variance explained, and the level of confidence or statistic significance (***=.001), which is supposed to be at most five per cent (*=0.05) to indicate that a hypothesis is accepted.



Assessing Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 is rejected (R=.109, not statistically significant). This result suggested that daily work overload provoked physical and emotional tiredness among women entrepreneurs, who did not have time for personal endeavours and felt stressed. In turn, stress prevented that women entrepreneurs made efficient decisions for their businesses, their workers and themselves. Considering that some decisions are based on the woman's judgement and experience, those decisions are not wholly correct.

Hypothesis 2 is also rejected (R=.252, not statistically significant). Even though this hypothesis showed a minimum acceptable correlation (\(\mathbb{R} \) 0.2), this relationship was not statistically significant. Hence, Hypothesis 2 means that stress derived from task management of the business does not produce full job satisfaction, resulting in women feeling dispassionate about their companies, not fully accepting their lifestyles and thus, feeling incapable of achieving a psychological state of bliss.

Hypothesis 3 is accepted (R=.353, statistically significant p<0.001 = ***). The working relations between women entrepreneurs and their workers, the control exerted by owners, the celebration of achievements and a developed culture, have allowed women entrepreneurs to empathise with their workers when making decisions

that affect them, the company, and the entrepreneur alike. In other words, an agreeable working environment is being created so as to foster efficient decision-making.

Hypothesis 4 is rejected (R=.221, not statistically significant). Unfortunately just as the literature review identified, the working environment created in women-owned companies is not totally ideal; despite the fact that women entrepreneurs are greatly responsible for that environment, they do not feel a satisfaction that allows them to co-exist in constant harmony with their workers and with their day to day activities.

Figure 2 also shows that Decision-Making is the dependent variable with the highest impact and influence since its variance is the highest (R^2 =0.317) and it is above the minimum recommended. This finding indicates that stress and working environment impact this variable more strongly either positively or negatively as was pointed out in the hypothesis testing.

4. Conclusions

The number of women entrepreneurs has increased around the world and this situation also occurs in Mexico. Women entrepreneurs have improved their humanistic and financial skills. These women exhibit a strong impetus for entrepreneurship, which is important not only because of symbolic or political reasons, but also because their drive contributes directly to the economic growth of their families and communities, to the creation of jobs, to fostering social well-being and reduction of poverty, and to the empowerment of women, creating a virtuous circle.

This study has made clear those women entrepreneurs in Estado de Mexico, Jalisco, Sonora, and Tamaulipas are concerned not only with creating jobs, but also with encouraging agreeable working environments in their companies. Their highly transformational leadership behaviours have sustained the perception among their workers of being treated with respect and valuing their dignity as subordinates. This working environment supports realistic decision-making where the convenience of all parties involved clearly leads towards the efficient performance of the organization.

On the other hand, the stress that women entrepreneurs suffer has an impact on them. Even though it is possible to perceive that the internal aspects of the job are under control by the entrepreneur, there is a perpetual concern about improvement, enterprising, and advancement together with a need to balance family life that can provoke internal conflicts deriving in severe problems for the business and the family if these conflicts are not identified in time. Also, despite projecting passion and pride for the business, and beliefs in their solid permanence in the company, this study revealed that women entrepreneurs do not feel such fulfilment in the job that adds to their happiness and these feelings—provoked by accumulated stress, affect the women's psyche. On a different note, the assessment of job satisfaction identified some confusion among women participants, about what is currently measured with this expression, which suggests a necessity to conduct more in depth research about this aspect.

Focusing again on the general objective of this investigation, even though women entrepreneurs suffer stress, but with the good prevailing working environments, decision-making is the variable that impacts the highest. Hence, women entrepreneurs must concentrate their efforts and *know-how* to face every day challenges with a firm attitude so as to improve the performance of the organization, their workers, and their own.

The challenge is there, but it depends on Mexican women entrepreneurs to set their intrinsic experiential, cultural, and emotional mechanisms to work together with their knowledge, wisdom and feelings to continue showing their great courage and contributions to society. Thus, some recommendations about stress management: take time to relax, look for specialised advice, exercise regularly, be assertive, laugh frequently, do deep breathing exercises, accept that stress is part of life, have aromatherapy sessions, listen to soft music, among others.

This research has been both enlightening and enriching; future investigations could focus on the advancement of the women entrepreneurs who participated in this study, include other types of companies or women managers or women who serve at the corporative level in large companies.

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