

Activity as the Focus of Information Systems Research

Transformation Tools:
Second in an occasional series

edited by
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Knowledge Creation Press

First published 2005
by Knowledge Creation Press Pty Ltd

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Cover designed by
Printed by the Central Queensland University Printery

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data

Activity as the focus of information systems research.
ISBN 1 921047 07 0.

1. Information technology - Social aspects. 2. Management information systems - Research. 3. Knowledge management - Australia. I. Whymark, Gregory Kemp. II. Hasan, Helen. III. Title. (Series : Transformational tools ; no. 2).

658.4038

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Overview

This book is about certain challenging areas of contemporary Information Systems research. These areas have to do with socio-technical systems situated in real-world environments where change and complexity are overriding factors.

The contributing authors come from a variety of backgrounds related to information systems research (ISR), many are practising academics at Australian universities, and most are either working in the information technology and communications (ITC) industry or have spent much of their working lives doing so. Therefore it is not surprising that common to all contributions are two components of ISR,

relevance and an awareness that ITC can not be studied without consideration of its social aspects and impact.

The key concept of this book is that of activity as understood within the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. Accordingly, human activity is viewed as a dialectic relationship between subject and object and this relationship is mediated by the tools used and the community within which the activity occurs. Information Systems takes the view that the people and processes being supported by the technology form an integral part of any system. As editors of this volume we see a strong synergy between Information Systems and Activity Theory.

Any review of ISR literature shows that activity has long been of central interest in information systems research. The sixteen authors contributing to this volume all offer a unique view on how to problem solve in ISR by acknowledging the central role of the activity in ISR.

Activity shapes and is shaped by the tools used, the community context in which it occurs, the division of labour among the community members and the community rules, expectations and roles. For this reason Activity Theory provides a valuable framework for researching, diagnosing and designing systems of that involve human activity and learning.

In Section I of this book the authors explore the use of activity theory to develop theoretical frameworks to study real world problems. In Section II a number of real world problems are studied using the lens of activity theory. In Section III, this is continued looking at situated learning activities in particular.

This book is not the end of the story. It does, however, demonstrate that Activity Theory can and does provide a useful and rigorous conceptual framework with which to study, explain and predict the application of information systems to our society. The collective chapters of the book contribute to the study of transformational tools in the twenty first century, and show how this approach can be used to understand, develop and use innovative ITC tools in the complex and changing environments that we currently face.

In this story, activity is central.