Introduction to the Special Issue: Social Construct Within an Information Society

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Abstract—Managing Information Systems (IS) is increasingly complex, as multiple stakeholders try to communicate, act, and interact for social and business gain. Understanding and managing these complex stakeholder relations and the contingencies of successful communication among culturally diverse stakeholder groups are some of the major challenges for professional communicators in the third millennium. Such challenges have important implications for communication between user and developer groups as training and education of the users becomes more complex. In an effort to connect information system practice with communication theory, this special issue of IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION looks at information systems as social constructs of an information society.

The management of Information Systems (IS) is becoming increasingly complex, as multiple stakeholders, often with diverse and conflicting social interests and agendas need to communicate, act, and interact for social and business gain [1]. As a result, social perspectives associated with information systems and Internet use continue to attract much attention in research and practice. Understanding and managing these complex stakeholder relations and the contingencies of successful communication amongst culturally diverse stakeholder groups are some of the major challenges for professional communicators in the third millennium. For the information systems professional, the challenges in systems design include the need to balance flexibility (creating systems that facilitate customization or support different forms of communication in different languages and settings) with compatibility (allowing for systems to follow standards and be used on different platforms). Each of these challenges has

implications for communication between user and developer groups as training and education of the users becomes more complex, but also between other intra-organizational groups. In particular, systems evaluation should not only be concerned with the usability of systems but also with their effectiveness as a communication enabler [2]. In an effort to connect information system practice with communication theory, this special issue of IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION looks at information systems as social constructs of an information society.

In the first article, Te'eni et al. follow Habermas' theory of Communicative Action [3] and present a model of organizational communication that shows the interrelations between communication inputs, communication process, and communication impact. In doing so, the authors emphasize three relevant constructs: goal-based communication strategies, message form, and medium.

Based on the premise that communication is intentional, the authors demonstrate the application of instrumental, communicative, discursive, and strategic types of intentions in communication acts. They concentrate on three communication strategies: contextualization, affectivity, and involvement. These represent in turn a cognitive perspective, an affective perspective, and a combined perspective. The authors then describe messages in terms of their size, degree of organization (structure), and degree of formality. Finally, the authors consider medium interactivity as a key dimension of text-based communication. After careful consideration of the results from their empirical study, Te'eni et al. encourage professional communicators to carefully weigh the communicative benefits against potential interpersonal communicative costs of new technology.

In the second article, Hartwick and Barki also try to relate theory to practice by extending their previous three-dimensional view of user participation in order to include communication between users and with various stakeholders. The authors propose a fourth dimension, COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY which they define as "activities involving formal or informal exchanges of facts, needs, opinions, visions, and concerns regarding the project among the users and between users and other project stakeholders" [p. 22]. This expanded construct of user participation promises to provide a more complete and accurate picture of user participation. The contribution of this research to the normative literature is to identify key dimensions or categories of activities that need to be taken into account when assessing user participation. Specifically, Hartwick and Barki note that participation reflects what specific behaviors are performed during information system development (ISD), how many of these behaviors are performed, and how often they are performed. Participation was measured according to user responses centering around the frequency and extent to which they have performed specific ISD-related assignments, activities, and behaviors.

The last paper in this special issue (Ruppel and Harrington) presents a study of organizational culture and intranet implementation, the technology upon which many knowledge management systems are built. The rationale for this study is that intranets facilitate the sharing of employee knowledge thus, it is postulated, the organizational culture influences intranet implementation and resulting successes.

The results of this study indicate that intranet implementation is facilitated by a culture that emphasizes an atmosphere of trust and concern for other people (ethical culture), flexibility and innovation (developmental culture), policies, procedures, and information management (hierarchical culture). As a result, the learning issues that management can extrapolate from this research are that they should ensure that the proper values (socio-technical) are in place to optimize intranet implementation and facilitate knowledge-sharing and management. This study makes a contribution to the normative literature as the scope of intranet use moves beyond the traditional posting of manuals and static documents, toward the explicit communication of dynamic knowledge.

Today, evaluations of IS must be concerned not only with usability of systems, but also with their effectiveness as communication enablers [2]. In an effort to connect information system practice with communication theory, this special issue of IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION looks at information systems as social constructs of an information society.

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