19 RE-EVALUATING POWER IN INFORMATION RICH ORGANIZATIONS: NEW THEORIES AND APPROACHES

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1. Introduction

The widespread use of innovative approaches to studying information systems in their organizational contexts is increasing our knowledge of the diverse, complex world-building activities of the various actors and stakeholders associated with the system. Unfortunately, in so doing, it is also demonstrating the inadequate nature of many of our

theoretical constructs for understanding and explaining these activities. We have a richer picture of what is going on but are unable to match it with a more sophisticated mechanism for explaining it and so can only draw limited implications for theory and practice.

The aim of this panel is to introduce a range of new perspectives that can help information systems researchers in their tasks, focusing in particular on questions of power. Although the range of perspectives is broad and the individual positions may not be consistent with one another, they share a common theme in that they all draw on recent developments from philosophy and social theory, which the presenters feel provide the richest resources for understanding the role and impact of information and communication technologies in information rich organizations.

2. Format

Each of the presenters will briefly introduce a particular theoretical approach explicitly addressing how their chosen approach addresses questions of understanding power relations and explaining the complex phenomena that arise from the introduction and use of new technologies. They will then discuss the implications for empirical work that arise from the approach, drawing on recent studies that have been undertaken.

It is intended that plenty of time will be set aside for questions and discussion. To support this aim a document containing key readings on the theories presented and publications demonstrating the application of the theories will be made available to participants. A copy of the document will be available online at: http://is.lse.ac.uk/whitley/publications/pdf/powerpanel.pdf.

3. Contributions

Ole Hanseth will talk about Heidegger's notion of *gestell* and will demonstrate how it helps explain the new management structures and shifting power relations that underlie large infrastructure projects.

Leiser Silva will introduce Clegg's Circuits of Power model. He will then show how it can be used to integrate different views of power in the context of a particular information systems case study.

Edgar Whitley will then focus on one of these Circuits and introduce Bruno Latour's ideas about the power of human and non–human stakeholders in the context of socio-technical collectives. He will propose a new mechanism for considering all these stakeholders in the process of systems development.

Finally, Susan Scott will illustrate her study of the changing role of middle managers by drawing on Ulrich Beck's notion of the risk society, which provides a complementary perspective to more traditional notions of power.