Practice Perspectives on Information Infrastructures

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The Panel

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• Séamas Kelly (Dublin)
• Stefan Klein (Muenster)
• Kalle Lyytinen (Cleveland)
• Joan Rodón Mòdol (Barcelona)
• Volker Wulf (Siegen)
• Moderation: Kai Reimers (Aachen)
Panel Format

- Brief motivation
- Synopsis of panellists’ positions
- Responses
- Panel questions

- Recording
Practice Theory

• Practice as **basic unit of analysis**
  => no attempt to predict individual action

• Technology as **material complement** of the human body
  => technology not the theoretical object (artefact) of rational calculus

• **Continual reproduction** of practices
  => persistence not seen as a default outcome of social action
Practice Theory and Information Infrastructures (II)

• II do not have to be seen as resulting from individual decisions and actions
• II development typically not seen to occur in stages or phases (like traditional IS implementation) but as evolutionary
• Practices too small a unit for capturing II?
• Role of management and design in II development?
Joan

- Focus on installed base
- Emphasis on the link between (and thus separability of) the technical and social spheres
- II development is about the dynamics of re-configuration (creating and breaking up links)
- The latter is a major source of conflict
Séamas

• II as institutionalized sociomaterial practices underpinned by systems of classification and standards
• Irreducibly and insidiously political
• ANT and neo-institutionalism as variants of practice theory
• Performativity, temporality, embodiment, and mood are brought to the fore through practice theory
Volker

- Appropriability in practice as important element in IS/II design
- Practice theory provides **useful concepts** for II development, such as transparency/ background, break-down, etc.
- Develops **tools and methods** inspired by practice theory that help improve corporate infrastructures
- **Design case study** method
Kalle

- II are a new category of IT (openness, dynamism, connectedness, scale, longevity, background/foreground dialectics)
- Practice theory important because II are socially embedded
- Challenges: design principles, evolution, control, policy
- Not all of these can be addressed by practice theory
Ole

- Deleuze’s (DeLanda’s) **assemblage theory** – as a form of practice theory – powerful in analyzing II
- Aims to prescribe **II governance** (right mix of stabilizing and destabilizing processes)
- II governance **as a practice** (including tools for II governance)
Johno

- When one looks at II as material things, then II is seen as an installed base.
- However, when II is seen through a practice lens, it is seen as an installed base of practices.
- Installed base of practices is the background in a Heideggerian sense that makes practices in the foreground possible.
Questions and Issues

• Scope of the phenomenon: from ERP to the Internet
• Appropriate level of analysis?

• Sociomateriality vs. socio-technical links
• II as technical installed base vs. base practices
• Decentering of the subject vs. II controllability and accountability
• Conflict resolution vs. conflict-driven evolution
• Engineering vs. evolution
Workshop Questions

• How can practice theory contribute to the study of II development?
• What are the drawbacks of applying practice theory to the study of II?
• To what extent can II be designed/managed as seen from a practice-theoretical perspective?
• How do industry-level practices interact with company-level practices in processes of II development?