

Place-Making: Rethinking Technology Adoption in the Face of Disruptive Technology

Abstract:

The topic of this talk is the introduction of new technologies into organisations. While orthodox theories of technology acceptance and implementation, based on individual rational choice models, might suitably capture the introduction of incremental technologies into task systems, I will argue that such theories fail to adequately explain the adoption of disruptive technologies. Orthodox theories assume that technologies are introduced to enhance and automate well-understood tasks. Adoption then becomes a matter of individual perceived usefulness and usability of a new tool that corresponds with the task in question. Increasingly however, businesses are confronted with technologies whose purpose and business significance is not initially clear, that do not correspond with existing tasks and whose usefulness is only gradually discovered through active experimentation, learning and negotiation within particular user communities. Against this background I will introduce a different theoretical conception of technology adoption, built over a practice theoretical understanding of IT in use. On this view, technology goes from being an alien object when first encountered by a user group, to becoming a normal part of a social practice. I will show that the necessary transformation that occurs in this process is an active accomplishment of the social group adopting the technology, which we term termed place-making. Place-making captures the process whereby the technology is accommodated within the existing practice among existing tools, practical logics and social identities, creating new meaning and understandings in the process. I will illustrate our theory with a rich case study of the adoption of a social media technology into a knowledge-intensive workplace environment. The talk contributes a more nuanced theory of the simultaneous transformation of technology and practices occurring in technology introduction of novel, transformational technologies. It has practical relevance because it theorises a phenomenon that is very familiar to practitioners yet not captured in current IS theory.