BOOK REVIEW

Exploring Virtuality Within and Beyond Organization: Social, Global and Local Dimensions (Technology, Work and Globalization)

Reviewed by Andrew Grice, University of Central Lancashire, UK

Niki Panteli and Mike Chiasson
Exploring Virtuality Within and Beyond Organizations: Social, Global and Local Dimensions (Technology, Work and Globalization)
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320 pages
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There are many academics, governments and managers that laud the evolution and advancement opportunities in information systems and communications technology (ICT). Their interest in ICT has predominately focused attention on development, and the ICT enabled organizational and social practices, of teams, groups and communities. While there is merit in advancing development and use of ICT, judgments on its value have been based on systems created in traditional environments, without differentiating virtuality. The authors (Panteli & Chiasson) of Exploring Virtuality within and beyond organization: Social, Global and Local Dimensions (Technology, Work and Globalization) have brought together new, established and prominent researchers that explore virtuality.

Willcocks and Lacity begin with a preface that contextualizes this book in a series, the collective mission of the series is to provide discourse and dissemination of research on globalization, ICT and work, aimed at policy makers, workers, managers, academics and students. While a well-served summary of five books establishes their unique position within the series; a quick perusal reveals there are seven books in the series. Two further books are planned, which establishes the series as progressive, and the breadth and depth of research activity emerging in the field as continuous and well supported.

In chapter one, Rethinking virtuality, Panteli and Chaisson utilize a collection of sub-titles to guide the reader. It commences with the simplis-
tic, Why a study on the nature of virtuality, their explanation for debunking traditional thinking and extending research into virtuality, and its implication for organization and management; these are written in an accessible yet scholarly style. While the initial literary forage is useful in steering those unfamiliar in the tenets of virtuality and the summary of subsequent chapters serves as a helpful reference guide; the substantive research contributed for the book starts in Part One.

Part One, Virtuality within organizations, Panteli and Chiaisson embrace the reader with seven chapters of research with an organizational context, which provides insight into virtuality. It illustrates a summary of the transition of research focus, and the nature and variety of virtuality, within and across organizations over the last decade. The initial chapter provides a well-served foundation discussion on proximity, difficulties in coordinating globally dispersed teams and the supportive use of ICT in the acquisition and reacquisition knowledge.

The subsequent chapters of Part One maintain powerful arguments that extend understanding of virtuality beyond its foundation discussion on proximity. They examine boundaries beyond space and time, management tactics, different levels of virtuality represented by organizational design, organizational identity changes relations in virtual organizations, variations and judgments of virtuality and the complexity of discontinuities. In each the focus of research retains an internal organizational view of virtuality.

While this part of the book contains rich insights and a wealth of recommendations for future research, the authors rely heavily on descriptive illustrations of virtuality. This predominant focus on the perceptions and observations of teams, managers and individuals, the lack of a measureable economic implication for organizations and not having universal framework, serves as this parts greatest-weakness. In retaining a dominant method, it discusses critical and meaningful issues relevant to organizations.

Part two, Virtuality beyond organizations, contains two research chapters and three literature reviews. The two research chapters cover interactions of individuals in online communities; the development of online identities and achieving shared understanding. The disparity in research between Part One and Part Two and established researchers not contributing, represents weakness in this section and of the theory. While these weaknesses are apparent, they are not cataclysmic. The discourse in the literature reviews adds value to the book beyond ICT, philosophically and through the examination of disciplines.

In the epilogue, Is everything virtuality? Exploring the boundaries of the topics, the authors discuss current research, areas for future research and limitations. The discussions that explore current research identify seven topics associated within the organization and three beyond the organization. In defining the nature of virtuality the book places organizations or consumers as either passive or active participants within ICT enabled environments.

The authors address the organization-to-customer relationship and development of the theory of virtuality, offering a number of approaches for future studies within and beyond ICT. They remain resolute that virtuality is the reproduction of proximity when people are not physically proximate and ICT is an inhibitor to progressing reproduction of proximity.

The recurring theme throughout the book is a clarion call for collaborative research, which aims at extending the theoretical limits imposed by the managerial and information systems perspectives of virtuality. Panteli’s and Chaisson’s managerial and information systems perspective in Exploring Virtuality within and beyond organization: Social, Global and Local Dimensions (Technology, Work and Globalization) maintain the central metaphor that “virtuality is real”. While this is obvious to those interested in virtuality; the book they created represents a much-needed facilitator to progress the discussion of researchers and research.
beyond the inherent dangers of heterogeneous studies of organizations and ICT, and perhaps a move toward a theory of virtuality that has a transdisciplinary axiology and nomenclature of human life within and beyond ICT.

As a point of reference, I highly recommend this book to students, academics and managers interested in understanding the nature of virtuality, its existence within and beyond organization, and perceptions on where future research lies.

Andrew Grice is a PhD candidate at University of Central Lancashire where he has been teaching Information Systems and Decision Analysis since 2007. He teaches using face-to-face, blended learning and fully online. His research focuses on digital resources and how those resources contribute to organisational competitive advantage and value.