

## Foreword

The relationship between technological change and business organisations has long fascinated scholars in management and related sciences. However, advancing our understanding of this relationship has remained as elusive as any problem in the field of management. Do new technologies have specific requirements to which business and other organisations have to adapt in order to survive? If so, what are the implications of this for business strategy, organisational design and human resources? Or is it more the case that new technologies are shaped by the context of their use, where it is prevailing norms, values, cultures and so forth, that have a decisive role in determining how particular technologies are deployed and implemented? If so, why is it that some organisational/institutional contexts are able to use the enabling features of new technologies to transform them, whilst others seem more adept at appropriating new technologies to shore up existing systems, processes and practices, or provide significant barriers and resistance to change? Another approach is to ‘question the questions’ and ask if the explanations we are seeking are best framed in terms of a competing proposition that either the requirements of a technology or the social context of its use shapes the outcomes of technological change? Is it more meaningful, for example, to consider dynamics of the interaction between the technical and the social as more symbiotic, rather than see them as separate and distinct entities acting on each other in some way? The papers in this collection provide an attempt to come to terms with some of these issues in the context of the ‘new technology’ of our time, the Internet. Of course, what is ‘new’ about the Internet needs to be carefully dissected as do claims about its capacity for the transformation of the way we do business or deliver public services. At the same time, we need to be careful about our assumptions with regard to the capacity of different types of organisations and sectors to appropriate these new technologies and what we really mean when we talk of ‘barriers’ or ‘resistance’ to change. Moreover, we also need to do more than just stand back and analyse these issues but also use these insights to provide practical guidance to the managers, professionals, public officials and many others who are wrestling with these challenges in their daily work lives. However, as the various contributors to this informative volume show, things are not always as they at first seem. Indeed, we may have to re-examine some of our fundamental assumptions in areas such as system development, business models and strategy, and the management of organisational change, if we really are to be able to ‘transform’ business and government.

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