Chapter VII

Organizational Impacts and Social Shaping of Web Management Practice

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INTRODUCTION

The extraordinary growth of individual and organizational use of the Internet, particularly the Web, during the past decade has led scholars to question the social impacts of this incredible technology diffusion. In this chapter, I discuss a currently under-explored aspect of the social impacts of Web usage—the impacts of ongoing Web information system management (Web management) on the organizations and employees that maintain commercial Web sites (Web managers).

This chapter is organized in the following manner. In the first section, I describe how this chapter supports the book’s theme. I then introduce key principles of social informatics and my general research approach and discuss the objectives of the study. In the second section, I define key constructs, review relevant literature, introduce the study’s theoretical framework, and summarize the methodology. In the third section, I describe the research results. In the fourth section, I draw on the data to present a summary model of Web management, suggest specific improvements to Web management practice, and discuss future impacts of Web information systems (Web IS) and trends in Web management. I conclude the chapter with sections on future research and final comments.

Relation to the Book’s Theme

In this chapter, I investigate the collection’s theme—the impact of Web usage—in terms of the consequences to organizations of providing ongoing management and maintenance of Web IS in the years following the systems’ initial implementation. Generally, the information systems research community acknowledges that the Web “will likely bring turmoil to the information management function in organizations” (Jarvenpaa & Ives, 1996, p. 96). Nevertheless, currently there is only a small (but growing) empirical understanding of long-term organizational impacts of post-implementation Web IS (Lamb, 1999; Lamb & Davidson, 2000, Scheepers, 1999; Bieber et al., 1998).

The Social Informatics Approach

I use a social informatics approach to investigate the consequences of ongoing Web management. Social informatics refers to cross-disciplinary work that recognizes and focuses on the reciprocal shaping relationship between technology and its social context (Sawyer & Eschenfelder, 2001; Kling 1999, 2000).

This study draws heavily on two principles of social informatics. The first principle is that technology is conceived, developed, configured, used, maintained, and reconfigured within a social context. Theorists have conceptualized this context as patterns of interaction mediated by, embedded in, or embedding technologies, and occurring within and between organizations and within and between societies (Davidson and Lamb, 2000). They have conceptualized these interactions as interdependent and multilevel systems of nodes and “socio-technical” links (Castells, 1991; Lamb & Kling, forthcoming). Socio-technical links are both social and technological because humans use technology to construct and enforce views of reality through symbolic and material bonds (Strum & Latour, 1999; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999).

The second principle is that technology and its contexts are in a constant process of reciprocal shaping (Kling, 1999; Kling, McKim, Fortuna & King 2001; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; Bijker, 1995). That is, technology has certain impacts on its context, and a technology’s context shapes the technology’s development, use, management, and reconfiguration (Sawyer and Eschenfelder, 2001).

In this chapter I describe Web IS and Web management practice as situated in a context composed of socio-technical links. I describe both the organizational impacts of ongoing Web management (i.e., the impact of the technology management practice on the organizational context) and how organizational context shapes ongoing management practice.