Chapter IV

A Framework for Understanding Human Use of Computers

“I know how to use it, and it’s easy to use—but what the heck do I use it for?” Uttered by the manager cited in Vignette 2 in the Preface, this epitomises the difference between ease of use and usefulness and, in doing so, can serve to begin opening up the issue of the human use of computers. This chapter seeks to open it up further and explore how Dooyeweerd’s philosophy can be used to understand human use of computers (HUC) by exposing some of the challenges and issues therein and enable us to formulate a framework for understanding it. The framework developed aims to be sensitive to everyday issues as they present themselves to us as users in both research and practice (see §2.4.2).

In this first exploration of a Dooyeweerdian framework, the framework will be developed step-by-step. After drawing out some issues from a few example cases, Dooyeweerd’s notion of multi-aspectual human functioning (§3.4.1) is employed to ensure a broad, integrated focus on the everyday life of HUC. This reveals a number of such multi-aspectual functionings, three of which are distinguished:
• Human-computer interaction (HCI)
• Engagement with represented content (ERC)
• Human living with computers (HLC)

The structure of each is explored with the aid of Dooyeweerd’s non-Cartesian notions of subject-object relationship and qualifying aspect. The normativity of each is explored by reference to the innate normativity of the aspects and, for HLC especially, this suggests a new way of understanding its complexity. A number of practical devices suggested by a Dooyeweerdian approach are presented, and the chapter ends by showing briefly how the Dooyeweerdian approach can engage with, underpin, and enrich other frameworks for understanding HUC. The framework for understanding HUC developed is not necessarily the only framework that could be developed, or even the best, but it seems to be a reasonable one. The validity of the framework is merely explained and illustrated, rather than proved.

### 4.1 Toward an Everyday Understanding of IS Use

In order to indicate the kinds of characteristics a framework for understanding HUC should have, four cases of IS in use will be examined.

#### 4.1.1 A Major IS Failure

Mitev (1996, 2001) discussed the failure that was the early SNCF (the French national railways) Socrate rail ticketing system. The following paragraph from (2001) summarises her findings succinctly:

> Technical malfunctions, political pressure, poor management, unions and user resistance led to an inadequate and to some extent chaotic implementation. Staff training was inadequate and did not prepare salespeople to face tariff inconsistencies and ticketing problems. The user interface was designed using the airlines logic and was not user-friendly. The new ticket proved unacceptable to customers. Public relations failed to prepare the public to such a dramatic change. The inadequate database information on timetable and routes of trains, inaccurate fare information, and unavailability of ticket exchange capabilities caused major problems for the SNCF sales force and customers alike. Impossible reservations on some trains, inappropriate prices and wrong train connections led to large queues of irate customers in all major stations. Booked tickets were for non-existent trains whilst other