Chapter 7
The Value of Information and Information Services in Knowledge Society

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ABSTRACT
The objective of this chapter is to analyze the concept of information value in terms of quality indicators of services and organizations in the 21st century. Based on the analysis of the evolution of the concept of inherent quality (internal, objective, or absolute) into perceived quality (external, subjective, or contingent), the authors argue that the quality of information depends very much on the concept of value, while individual judgment is analyzed in relation with use. They move from a system-oriented approach to a user-oriented approach and develop an analysis of the concept of value from a revisitation of Adam Smith’s economic theory. Thus, the authors conclude that the bad or the good quality of information will be determined on the basis of its (in)ability to support useful decisions for the development of human beings and social organizations.

1. THE SOCIETY OF POST-MODERNITY
The change in century brings the appearance of doubts, restlessness, questionings, uncertainties, fears… It seems the end of human life and the need to make balances, to justify the lost time and craving for more time to develop new projects, to (re)live…

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It was like that in the year one thousand², it is like so in the year 2000 and possibly it will be like so in the beginning of the next millennium. Hence the pertinence of the reflection about this passage and, mostly, about the challenges that rise to the new lives that generate, throughout the several stages of growth, in particular in the stage of adulthood–privileged moment for the consolidation of new ideas, or for the revisiting of so many others, in the meanwhile forgotten by
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The erosion of time or, perhaps, by the little value that had been, or has been being, given.

To the quest of the new, so far unknown, the devotion to modernity that blocked the installed routines, it is imposed the quest for happiness, perchance fainted, that is particular to the human being, constituting *per se* a unique and distinctive feature regarding all other species, that allows him to keep, or increase, dominance over the Nature that surrounds him.

However, *nature overflows of unexpected and creates, in each moment, its own reality* (Rifkin, 2001, p.233), making substantially difficult the conquest of this emotional status, or categorical imperative to the survival of the human race and transforming the quest for happiness in a difficult, if not impossible, mission.

The constant threats to the wellbeing of the individuals, particularly originated by the cyclic changes in the ecosystems, making impossible a continuous evolution towards progress and install chaos and destruction in all that, so far, was taken for granted and unchangeable or, at least, from the majority of ideas, of beliefs, of values, that kept the balance and assured the creation, the development and the sustainability of life.

The end of a day, of a week, of a year, of a decade, of a century, carries the apocalyptical idea of the end of the world whether by the intensity of light, whether by the calendar, it always translates a change which, as thin as it is, always implies renovation or, in last instance, a destruction of the ruling *status quo*.

A synoptic approach of the recent past of human kind allows us to evidence the great conjuncture changes that were verified, in their majority, in the period that goes between the end and/or the beginning of a century: Industrial Revolution (1730-1850); French Revolution (1789); 1st World War (1914-1918); Great Depression (1929); 2nd World War (1939-1945); Coup d’état in the former USSR (1991); Financial Crisis (2008-).

These facts, and according to their nature, were followed by social behaviours of optimism, hope, growth, wealth and prosperity, in alternation with moments of pessimism, dismay, recession, mistrust, instability, poverty, etc.

By looking, in retrospective, to the whole 20th century, one verifies it is an era of high complexity and social turbulence, fruitful in the alternation of these several environments and states of soul.

The turbulent and regressive period of the great wars seemed to have been compensated, in particular from the last decade of the last century onwards, by the optimism and trust generated by the so called Revolution of the New Economy or Technological Revolution.

The collapse of communism, the end of the cold war, the statement of democracy, the appearance of New Information Technologies and Communication (ITC) that recover the 15th century concept of globalization lead, although apparently, and only in the so called first world to the triumph of capitalism and to the instauration of an environment of economical, political, social and cultural well-being.

The expansionist stage that began in the 1990s seemed to announce to human kind an auspicious millennium, full of peace, stability, prosperity and wealth.

According to a technocratic vision of the world—an electronic paradise, of incalculable value to human kind, due to being settled *in concepts, in ideas, in images, and not in things anymore* (Rifkin, 2001, p. 17)—the technological progress, in particular the World Wide Web (WWW), would lead to an approximation between the peoples and the creation of the so called global village.

The consubstantiation of the theory of relativity of time and space opens a new cosmogony: the world is now smaller, more interconnected, more united, happier, more sympathetic, more inclusive and less unequal.
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