

Chapter XVII

Socio-Instrumental Pragmatism in Action

Jonas Sjöström

Uppsala University, Sweden

Göran Goldkuhl

Linköping University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of Socio-Instrumental Pragmatism (SIP) and illustrates how it has been used as an analytic instrument in the process of diagnosing a work practice and co-designing business processes and IT artefacts. A practical inquiry process has been conducted in a project group consisting of a group of Swedish municipalities, currently experiencing a number of administrative problems. SIP has informed the design process, and aided the designers in shaping the design product (a new workflow and a new IT system). Conclusions are drawn regarding SIP as an analytical tool, stating that it has guided the inquirers to focus on actors, actions and relations between actors, and supported the designers in finding design solutions to the major problems experienced in the organization.

I have come to recognize that industry faces numerous problems that are outside of the scope of the traditional analyses of design. In particular, there are management and organizational issues, business concerns, and even corporate culture.

Donald Norman (1996), Design as Practiced, p 1, in Winograd, T (Ed, 1996) Bringing Design to Software. Addison-Wesley.

INTRODUCTION

The social dimensions of information technology are obvious in certain types of IT systems, like chat, email and other groupware applications. For IT systems used for management and operations in organizations, the social dimensions may not be as apparent. We claim that *all* IT systems need to be designed as socio-technical systems, comprising features to promote social interaction. For this we need approaches to IT development which make the social dimensions visible.

This chapter deals with design as a *process* and design as a *product*, with an emphasis on how to make IT artefacts empower human and organizational communication. The focus is a stakeholder-centric design process, and the norms governing those stakeholders. IT system design (both process and product) needs to be informed by a proper understanding of both social and technical aspects of IT systems. One theoretical framework aiming at encompassing the interplay between the social and the technical domains is *socio-instrumental pragmatism* (SIP); see e.g. Goldkuhl (2005) and Goldkuhl & Ågerfalk (2005). SIP is a synthesis of different action-theoretic frameworks, including American pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, language action theories, social phenomenology, ethnomethodology, affordance theory, and activity theory. The SIP framework explains IT artefacts as instruments for human communication in some action context. SIP is however not to be seen as just a theoretical framework. As a *pragmatic* framework, it should also be put into action. It should be used as a conceptual instrument for designing and evaluating socio-technical systems. The aim of this chapter is to present one such application of the SIP framework, including its consequences both for the design process and the design product, and some theoretical reflections which were made as part of the study.

The chapter is structured as follows: We provide an outline of socio-instrumental pragmatism and some additional action theoretical concepts, and the application of these theories in an action research

study. The study has been carried out in the Swedish public sector, where local governments experience administrative problems connected to providing personal assistance to persons with certain functional impairments. The SIP framework has been used as an analytic instrument both for conceptualization and diagnosis of the work practice, and for co-design of business processes and IT artefacts. We present the design product in one section, followed by a section describing the design process. The chapter is concluded with a discussion about the application of SIP, and reflections about the usefulness of the framework. We also discuss some theoretical findings regarding social transparency as a means for business process accountability, which are likely to be valid in a broader public sector context.

SOCIO-INSTRUMENTAL PRAGMATISM

In the discipline of information systems (IS), studies are often informed by the use of external theories from reference disciplines. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and actor-network theory (Latour, 1999) are two examples of this. Socio-instrumental pragmatism (SIP) is another theorizing strategy. It is an action-theoretic synthesis created and adapted to be used for IS research (Goldkuhl, 2005). It is informed by several external action oriented theories coming from different reference disciplines. The two theories mentioned above have given some inspiration, but there are other more important sources like American pragmatism (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Mead, 1938), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), pragmatic sociology (Weber, 1978), and speech act theory (Searle, 1969; Habermas, 1984). Confer Goldkuhl (2005) for more theoretical sources. As being a theoretic synthesis, socio-instrumental pragmatism does not try to make any complete integration of these diverse action theories. It picks different categories from these reference theories and integrates those into a coherent whole, tailored for IS studies (ibid).

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/socio-instrumental-pragmatism-action/21411

Related Content

Unfolding the Diminishing Image Control in Online Self Presentation: An Investigation of Virtual Community

Chien-nai Lin, Yu-Tzu Lin and Ching-Cha Hsieh (2011). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking* (pp. 23-31).

www.irma-international.org/article/unfolding-diminishing-image-control-online/60539

Intelligent Medical Diagnostic System for Diabetes

Jimmy Singla (2019). *Hidden Link Prediction in Stochastic Social Networks* (pp. 188-209).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/intelligent-medical-diagnostic-system-for-diabetes/227204

Facebook as Marketing Tools for Organizations: Knowledge Management Analysis

Siti Farzana Izzati Jaman and Muhammad Anshari (2021). *Research Anthology on Strategies for Using Social Media as a Service and Tool in Business* (pp. 117-131).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/facebook-as-marketing-tools-for-organizations/282968

Expanding Opportunities in a Shrinking World: A Conceptual Model Explicating the Role of Social Networks and Internet-Based Virtual Environments in Social Entrepreneurship

Avimanyu Datta and Len Jessup (2009). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking* (pp. 33-49).

www.irma-international.org/article/expanding-opportunities-shrinking-world/37562

Cyberbullying: Negative Interaction Through Social Media

Michelle F. Wright (2020). *The Psychology and Dynamics Behind Social Media Interactions* (pp. 107-135).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/cyberbullying/232561