



## BOOK REVIEW

# Organizational knowledge and technology

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One might well assume that this book is about the ways in which information technologies can support the acquisition, storage and dissemination of knowledge across organizations. In other words, the business of knowledge management. However, the title is somewhat misleading. There is a good deal of coverage of the nature of knowledge, but not much on how organizations can 'manage knowledge' and little on technology. The sub-title – 'An Action-Oriented Perspective on Organization and Information Systems' – is a more accurate description of the content and of the reasons to read and recommend it. It is mainly about the way in which organizations can attain knowledge and understanding about themselves, and about how the development and deployment of information systems needs to take account of this.

To suggest that this would make a good IS textbook might seem surprising, but it struck me as an excellent source for students to gain an initial insight into the key lines of academic enquiry. Chapters 6 and 7, for example, on IS development and implementation and IS strategy, respectively, offer a good critical summary of the field, and, along with chapters on subjects such as organization theory and strategy, are themed and digestible. While many textbooks provide such a survey, few are so wide-ranging and consistent in their treatment, and often do not provide the critical perspective offered here, for example on Earl's 'Organisational Fit Framework'.

The linkage between the chapters is less clear, despite the 'road map' in the Introduction. The general impression is less of a new approach than a summary of previous and current thinking, reflections on strengths and weaknesses, and thoughts about a new way of looking at how information systems can be most effectively deployed, used and managed. Indeed, the penultimate chapter is entitled 'Notes on IS/IT strategic development'.

The emerging field of complexity theory is proposed as a key to developing a better approach to IS and organizational research, with a stimulating discussion early in the book of 'complexity and the new epistemological foundations of organisation'. However, it is not clear that the later discussion and argument are made distinctive by applying complexity theory concepts. For much of the potential audience, it may seem that much of what follows could have been written without the underpinning of complexity theory.

This should not be taken to imply that there is nothing original. There used to be (perhaps still are) two ways to earn a doctorate: an original contribution to knowledge, or a new (i.e. original) synthesis of previous work that sheds new light on a subject. This book is more of the latter type, with the discussions of current and emerging thinking and its attempts to combine the key insights from various approaches into multi-dimensional syntheses. I would particularly highlight the application of 'organisational context dimensions' to the development of IS/IT strategy and development. To see dimensions such as 'intent' and 'trust' alongside more familiar dimensions should stimulate the thinking and practice of student or practitioner. I suspect that achieving this, rather than forcing readers to adopt some new and rigid system wholesale, would give great satisfaction to the author.