The Organizing Vision in Information Systems Innovation

E. Burton Swanson
Neil C. Ramiller

Abstract

We offer a revised institutional view of how new technology for information systems (IS) comes to be applied and diffused among organizations. Previous research argues that early adoption of a technological innovation is based on local, rational organizational choice, while later adoption is institutionalized and taken for granted. We suggest that institutional processes are engaged from the beginning. Specifically, a diverse interorganizational community creates and employs an *organizing vision* of an IS innovation that is central to its early, as well as later, diffusion. This vision serves key functions in interpretation, legitimation, and the organization and mobilization of economic roles and exchanges. The development and influence of an organizing vision is determined by a variety of institutional forces. Among these forces, the community's discourse serves as the developmental engine. Other factors—business commerce, the IS practitioners' world view, the motivating business problematic, the core technology, and material processes of adoption and diffusion—provide the discourse with its content, structure, motivation, and direction. Primary development of the organizing vision takes place during the innovation's earliest diffusion. The hesitant early majority among the prospective adopters relies on this development in its efforts to make sense of the innovation. Where the organizing vision remains underdeveloped after early adoption, later diffusion and institutionalization of the innovation is likely to be retarded.