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(AMCIS)

2005

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Manon G. Guillemette

HEC Montreal, manon-ghislaine.guillemette@hec.ca

Guy Pare

HEC Montreal, guy.pare@hec.ca

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Recommended Citation

Guillemette, Manon G. and Pare, Guy, "Understanding the Transformation of the IT Function in Organizations" (2005). *AMCIS 2005 Proceedings*. 63.

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Understanding the Transformation of the IT Function in Organizations

Manon G. Guillemette
HEC Montréal
manon-ghislaine.guillemette@hec.ca

Guy Paré
HEC Montréal
guy.pare@hec.ca

ABSTRACT

Many IT researchers have tried to describe the IT function and to explain its transformation over time. Nevertheless, we observed that existing characterizations are often based on a single dimension, attached to historical periods or built into a normative discourse that calls for an ideal profile. We do not subscribe to these premises, seeing that there might be a series of distinct archetypes for the IT function, and that each archetype may adapt and evolve in response to organizational and environmental parameters. Based on a literature review, we propose a typology of the roles of IT functions, within archetypes that are defined according to four dimensions: the IT function's main activities, the skills of IT professionals, the interface between the IT function and the organization's business units, and the IT function's governance. Next, using the theory of punctuated equilibria as a foundation, we will apply the proposed typology to investigate the process by which IT functions evolve over time. From a methodological standpoint, we will first conduct a series of interviews with IT executives to validate the proposed typology. Second, we will conduct a longitudinal case study in the healthcare sector to explain how and why an IT function transforms over time and discover forces that foster stasis or inspire change. Ultimately, our study will provide a new conceptual and theoretical perspective on the role and transformation of IT functions in organizations.