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TUTORIAL 1

HOW STRUCTURATION THEORY CAN INFORM THE SOCIAL STUDY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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In the mid-seventies a new approach to social science was proposed by a British social theorist, Anthony Giddens. Over the past decade, this approach — known as structuration theory — has emerged as a particularly powerful and useful way of studying social phenomena, overcoming some of the serious obstacles posed by other existing approaches. Today, structuration theory is increasingly being drawn on to study many different aspects of social and organizational life. Within the Information Systems community likewise, use of structuration theory appears to be growing.

This tutorial will attempt to convey why structuration theory can be a useful framework for studying the social aspects of information technology, and how it can be applied in particular studies. This is not intended to be an exhaustive or comprehensive treatment of all of structuration theory or the many ways in which it has been and could be applied. Rather, the focus is on elaborating — through the use of a few illustrative studies — why and how a structural framework can inform IS research at the level of theory, research design, analysis, and interpretation of results.

This tutorial will begin with a discussion of the origins and basic premises of structuration theory, and then trace the history of application of structuration theory to studies of organizations and IT. The tutorial will focus largely on examining the use of structuration theory in a few specific research studies of the social aspects of information technology. The tutorial will be concluded with a discussion of the contributions and limitations of this theory to IS research.