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Materiality, Rules and Regulation

New Trends in Management and Organization Studies

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Foreword: Material Rules

Gordon Moore proclaimed Moore’s Law in 1965, and it has ruled for the last half century. It says that the number of transistors on integrated circuit chips will double every year and a half or so. Since 1965, the number has increased by a factor of roughly a million, and by now there are about four and a half billion transistors on a central processing unit (CPU). This is by far the most intricate human shaping of matter in history. It is so minute and complex as to defy illustration and comparison, and it deserves awe and admiration.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is based on computer chips, and it has transformed the world. How are we to take the measure of this transformation? There are familiar moral norms to judge it by. It shines when measured by the standards of liberation and enrichment. Darker sides come into view when it is judged by standards of equality and privacy. Necessary as these standards are, they fail to capture the moral force of today’s material culture. They have been elaborated by ethical theories, but as such they hover immaterially above the flavour and texture of contemporary culture.

As an illustration of the attenuated force of traditional norms, consider a virtue of ancient Greek philosophy and Christianity – temperance or self-control. Aristotle defined it as the mean between the extreme of self-indulgence and the extreme of insensitivity to the pleasures of life. The latter extreme is rarely a problem; the former often is, and its Christian version, gluttony, is one of the seven deadly sins. Is there a need for temperance today? Is gluttony a problem? To raise these questions is to see the mismatch between traditional norms and contemporary reality. In traditional terms, gluttony, evident in overweight, is massive and getting worse all over the globe, having overtaken two-thirds of the population in the United States and increasing in many other countries. How did this happen? Has there been a failure of preaching temperance? Anyone who has been close to ‘gluttony’ knows that preaching temperance rarely works and most of the time makes matters worse. The ‘gluttonous’ person, when preached at, feels guilty or resentful in addition to feeling helpless.

A more helpful answer to the question why ‘gluttony’ rules the lives of so many people today starts with the recognition that ‘gluttony’ began to rise in the United States in the mid-1970s. Among the causes of that development were changes in agricultural policy and advances in food engineering. These factors transformed the material circumstances of eating, and the preachments of temperance, oblivious to these circumstances, are powerless if not powerful in the wrong way. Here is an important clue to the ways in which to
measure the cultural force of ICT. It does not rule our lives by way of explicit moral standards, nor is it in crucial respects susceptible to the rule of traditional codified moral norms. Like food today, it rules our conduct through the inducements that are built into the tangible circumstances of life. To be clear, there are traditional norms and concerns that continue to be essential to the integrity of ICT – security, privacy, equality. Nor are the inducements that ICT has installed in the material environment irresistible. Responses range from sheer helplessness to nearly total immunity, depending on a person’s genetics and environment. But no one remains entirely unaffected.

To get a grip on the distinctive material inducements through which ICT rules our lives (though to varying degrees), consider the way people have in the past complied with certain moral injunctions: (1) Be physically active! (2) Eat in moderation and on a regular schedule! (3) Gather your thoughts and weigh your words when communicating with distant persons! (4) Acquire and exercise a variety of skills! (5) See to it that you understand your world deeply and widely!

Let the past be some rural setting two hundred years ago. What you realize quickly is that basic compliance with those norms was enforced by the things and practices of the time: (1) Life on a farm was necessarily active from dawn till dusk. (2) Food was available, but not abundant. You had breakfast after the morning chores, and you had to show up for dinner if you wanted to eat in the evening. (3) The only communication with your distant beloved was by letter. There was only so much space on a page, and what your mother could hope to receive once a week or once a month would have to be the essentials of your life. You had to recall and articulate them. (4) Though there was a division of responsibilities, every woman and man had to be able to do many demanding tasks to keep the farm a going concern. (5) Those same skills, mastered or observed from close quarters, taught you how the world worked. Religious instruction, certainly in form, if not necessarily in content, gave our ancestors a sense of how the world as a whole hung together.

Those were the circumstances of life, and people acted well or poorly within them, but whether one or the other, their actions had a common cast that can serve as a backdrop for the deep structure of the ICT culture. Consider how our responses to those five moral injunctions have changed due to ICT: (1) Be physically active! Do I have to be? Why should I go after things when everything answers my beck and call or has even anticipated my very desires and fulfilled them before I could ask? (2) Eat in moderation and on a regular schedule! Why should I wait for dinner when I feel that restless emptiness now, which this latte and those doughnuts will dispel? All I have to do is summon them on my smartphone. (3) Gather your thoughts and weigh your words when communicating with distant persons! Distant persons? Leslie is as near as my screen, and the gall to question my advice! F*** you, Leslie! Get out of my life! (4) Acquire
and exercise a variety of skills! Good riddance to the times when Levine and Baroudi had to teach Dummies how to work the Internet. When I got my first iPad a few years ago, it took me all of half an hour to get the hang of it. And why should I learn to fix my car when it is so reliable? In fact how could I learn to fix it when it is thick with impenetrable computers? (5) See to it that you understand your world deeply and widely! Understanding deeply – what am I supposed to do, open up my iPhone, take it apart and put it back together again the way my grandfather disassembled and reassembled clocks and radios? And as for understanding widely, I know what the President tweeted last night, what my favorite star had for breakfast, who is dating my favorite athlete, ... There is too much to know.

Is this a fair representation of how people respond to the world of ICT? Technology as a cultural force does not transform everything from the ground up. It is more like a pattern that imposes itself ever more strongly on the traditional world with its still-enduring manifestations of decency in everyday life and competence in work. But all of us feel the imprint of ICT and are subject to its inducements and to the tendencies I have outlined above. How did these inducements come to be built into the material structure of our world? By way of ICT we have inserted ever more numerous and powerful sensors, chips and effectors into our surroundings. These insertions have cast an invisible spell on reality. The powerful agents of change, the microchips, are invisible and inscrutable to us. Airplanes, houses, cars, streets and people look much the same as they have looked 50 years ago. Only the portals of power, the screens, are more numerous and prominent, and reality is more and more yielding to our control.

Again, the softening of reality varies from person to person and place to place. The person who has lost employment or a loved one who has cancer is hard up against reality. And every morning when we get up to go to work, we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders. Still, the dematerialization of reality infects everything. In the short term at least it will expand its rule under the banner of ‘the Internet of things’. It will eat away at the residues of our competence in house-holding and make the workings of the world yet more opaque and incomprehensible. It will disable us even more physically and ever more dissociate us personally from one another. Note how immaterial are the norms of equality, privacy and security in guiding us out of self-absorption and aimlessness – immaterial in the sense of being both abstract and insig-nificant. Securing equal access to ICT, protecting privacy and protecting the Internet from criminals will by themselves only entrench ennui and inability. Neither, of course, would forcible curtailment or reckless endangerment of ICT cure our malaise.

But all of us feel the tendencies that I have outlined above. Competence and comprehension in work are being narrowed, and everyday self-confidence is
weakening. There are many a rueful confession from chroniclers and critics – reports of writers’ inability to resist the distractions of social media or of parents’ helplessness when they try to pass on norms of attention and respect to their children. Such laments are often haunted by the puzzling coincidence of apparent omnipotence and actual helplessness. Now that ICT has put the world at our fingertips, why do we feel ruled by forces we can neither understand nor embrace? ICT is liberating us from the rules of necessity and exertion. As the rules are evaporating, reality is changing from a demanding partner to an obedient servant, and in obliging our laziness, desire and impatience, the compliant world is threatening to enslave us in turn and rule our lives. It’s a rule that is difficult to recognize – its power resides intangibly in the tangible world, and its rule comes in the guise of submissiveness.

What kind of rules, then, will point us to the good life? We need two kinds of rules, one kind for the invisibly mediating substructure of ICT and another for the visible world of immediate reality. There is already a struggle about the rules of the first kind. It pits the party of greater convenience and consumption against the party of security, equality and privacy. Broadly put, business constitutes the first party and civil society the second with government the ultimate arbiter. But it would be an error to brand the first party as greedy capitalists. Business represents our consumerist desires and employs the rhetoric of choice and autonomy as well as civil society does. So the challenge for civil society is not just to fight for net neutrality and privacy protections, but to ask us, the people, whether we want to fall deeper into our consumerist sleepwalking or whether we want to reaffirm our civic rights and take responsibility for the substructure of our lives.

The rules of the second kind, the rules that are guides to the good life in a world of ICT, are not rules that we can make up. One thing that obesity and overweight should have taught us is that humans do not possess free will in the sense that they can do individually whatever they decide to do. The truth is that to act is to respond. To be sure, there is free will. It’s the ability to respond to the right things in the right way. Whether that ability comes to actual fruition is a matter of luck if you are secular and of grace if you are religious and in either case the result of genetics and circumstances and of the way their effects have fused in your mind to make you a resourceful causal agent. In the midst of helpless consumers there are inspiring examples of right responders – hedge fund managers who turn to organic farming, medical researchers who join Doctors without Borders, marketing professionals who take up teaching, artisans who stick to their craft, bicycle enthusiasts who link places with paths, planners who make cities walkable and more. These people respond to a world of commanding presence. They know themselves to be ruled by something they love. Such rules are subtle compared with the forcible rules of the traditional environment, but they are no less compelling. If we allow ourselves to
be ruled by the world of commanding presence, the world of ICT will naturally assume its role as the indispensable background of the good life.

From these first-order rules we can collectively draw second-order rules to guide us in making the world more favorable to the things and practices of the first order:

1. Make the world physically more engaging.
2. Tax bad food and subsidize good food.
3. Make cities favourable to direct social encounters of all sorts.
4. Encourage or require the acquisition of manual skills.
5. Enlarge the depth and width of comprehension through general education.

These rules don’t have intrinsic moral authority, even if backed by legislation as they should be. Ethically speaking we should see the second-order rules as reminders and aids of the concrete first-order cases from which they draw their animating power.

We may hope that with greater competence and comprehension people will come to see and take on the epochal challenges that are now so often concealed by the screens of the ICT culture – global justice and global warming.

Albert Borgmann
*University of Montana*
Series Preface

We launched this series in 2006 to provide policy makers, workers, managers, academics and students with a deeper understanding of the complex interlinks and influences among technological developments, including in information and communication technologies (ICT), work, organizations and globalization. We have always felt that technology is all too often positioned as the welcome driver of globalization. The popular press neatly packages technology’s influence on globalization with snappy sound bites, such as, ‘Any work that can be digitized will be globally sourced.’ Cover stories report Indians doing US tax returns, Moroccans developing software for the French, Filipinos answering UK customer service calls, and the Chinese doing everything for everybody. Most glossy cover stories assume that all globalization is progressive, seamless, intractable, and leads to unmitigated good. But what we are experiencing in the twenty-first century in terms of the interrelationships between technology, work and globalization is both profound and highly complex.

The mission of this series is to disseminate rich knowledge based on deep research about relevant issues surrounding the globalization of work that is spawned by technology. To us, substantial research on globalization considers multiple perspectives and levels of analyses. We seek to publish research based on in-depth study of developments in technology, work and globalization and their impacts on and relationships with individuals, organizations, industries and countries. We welcome perspectives from business, economics, sociology, public policy, cultural studies, law and other disciplines that contemplate both larger trends and micro-developments from Asian, African, Australia and Latin American, as well as North American and European viewpoints.

As of this writing, we have 14 books published or under contract. These books are introduced below:

1. Global Sourcing of Business and IT Services by Leslie P. Willcocks and Mary C. Lacity is the first book in the series. The book is based on more than 1,000 interviews with clients, suppliers and advisers and 15 years of study. The specific focus is on developments in outsourcing, offshoring and mixed sourcing practices from client and supplier perspectives in a globalizing world. We found many organizations struggling. We also found some organizations adeptly creating global sourcing networks that are agile, effective and cost-efficient. But they did so only after a tremendous amount of trial and error and close attention to details. All our participant organizations
acted in a context of fast moving technology, rapid development of supply-side offerings and ever changing economic conditions.

2. Knowledge Processes in Globally Distributed Contexts by Julia Kotlarsky, Ilan Oshri and Paul C. van Fenema examines the management of knowledge processes of global knowledge workers. Based on substantial case studies and interviews, the authors – along with their network of co-authors – provide frameworks, practices and tools that consider how to develop, coordinate and manage knowledge processes in order to create synergetic value in globally distributed contexts. Chapters address knowledge sharing, social ties, transactive memory, imperative learning, work division and many other social and organizational practices to ensure successful collaboration in globally distributed teams.

3. Offshore Outsourcing of IT Work by Mary C. Lacity and Joseph W. Rottman explores the practices for successfully outsourcing IT work from Western clients to offshore suppliers. Based on more than 200 interviews with 26 Western clients and their offshore suppliers in India, China and Canada, the book details client-side roles of chief information officers, program management officers and project managers and identifies project characteristics that differentiated successful from unsuccessful projects. The authors examine ten engagement models for moving IT work offshore and describe proven practices to ensure that offshore outsourcing is successful for both client and supplier organizations.

4. Exploring Virtuality Within and Beyond Organizations by Niki Panteli and Mike Chiasson argues that there has been a limited conceptualization of virtuality and its implications on the management of organizations. Based on illustrative cases, empirical studies and theorizing on virtuality, this book goes beyond the simple comparison between the virtual and the traditional to explore the different types, dimensions and perspectives of virtuality. Almost all organizations are virtual, but they differ theoretically and substantively in their virtuality. By exploring and understanding these differences, researchers and practitioners gain a deeper understanding of the past, present and future possibilities of virtuality. The collection is designed to be indicative of current thinking and approaches, and provides a rich basis for further research and reflection in this important area of management and information systems research and practice.

5. ICT and Innovation in the Public Sector by Francesco Contini and Giovan Francesco Lanzara examines the theoretical and practical issues of implementing innovative ICT solutions in the public sector. The book is based on a major research project sponsored and funded by the Italian government (Ministry of University and Research) and coordinated by Italy’s National Research Council and the University of Bologna during 2002–2006. The authors, along with a number of co-authors, explore the complex interplay
between technology and institutions, drawing on multiple theoretical traditions such as institutional analysis, actor network theory, social systems theory, organization theory and transaction costs economics. Detailed case studies offer realistic and rich lessons. These cases studies include e-justice in Italy and Finland, e-bureaucracy in Austria, and Money Claim Online in England and Wales.

6. *Outsourcing Global Services: Knowledge, Innovation, and Social Capital* edited by Ilan Oshri, Julia Kotlarsky and Leslie P. Willcocks assembles the best work from the active participants in the *Information Systems Workshop on Global Sourcing* which began in 2007 in Val d’Isere, France. Because the quality of the contributions was exceptional, we invited the programme chairs to edit a book based on the best papers at the conference. The collection provides in-depth insights into the practices that lead to success in outsourcing global services. Written by internationally acclaimed academics, it covers best practices on IT outsourcing, business process outsourcing and netsourcing.

7. *Global Challenges for Identity Policies* by Edgar Whitley and Ian Hosein provides a perfect fit for the series in that the authors examine identity policies for modern societies in terms of the political, technical and managerial issues needed to prevent identity fraud and theft. The scale of the problem exceeds political boundaries, and the authors cover national identity policies in Europe and the rest of the world. Much of the book provides in-depth discussion and analysis of the United Kingdom’s National Identity Scheme. The authors provide recommendations for identity and technical policies.

8. *E-Governance for Development* by Shirin Madon examines the rapid proliferation of e-Governance projects aimed at introducing ICT to improve systems of governance and thereby to promote development. In this book, the author unpacks the theoretical concepts of development and governance in order to propose an alternative conceptual framework, which encourages a deeper understanding of macro- and micro-level political, social and administrative processes within which e-Governance projects are implemented. The book draws on more than 15 years of research in India during which time many changes have occurred in terms of the country’s development ideology, governance reform strategy and ICT deployment.

9. *Bricolage, Care and Information Systems: Claudio Ciborra’s Legacy in Information Systems Research*, edited by Chrisanthi Averou, Giovan Francesco Lanzara and Leslie P. Willcocks, celebrates one of the most innovative thinkers in the field of information systems. He was one of the first scholars who introduced institutional economics in the study of IS; he elaborated new concepts, such as ‘the platform organization’ and ‘formative contexts’; and he contributed to the development of a new perspective altogether through Heideggerian phenomenology. This book contains the most seminal work of Claudio Ciborra and work of other authors who were inspired by his work and built upon it.
10. *China’s Emerging Outsourcing Capabilities*, edited by Mary C. Lacity, Leslie P. Willcocks and Yingqin Zheng, marks the tenth book in the series. The Chinese government has assigned a high priority to science and technology as its future growth sectors. China has a national plan to expand the information technology outsourcing (ITO) and business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors. Beyond the hopes of its leaders, is China ready to compete in the global ITO and BPO markets? Western companies are increasingly interested in extending their global network of ITO and BPO services beyond India and want to learn more about China’s ITO and BPO capabilities. In this book, we accumulate the findings of the best research on China’s ITO and BPO sector by the top scholars in the field of information systems.

11. *The Outsourcing Enterprise: From Cost Management to Collaborative Innovation* is by Leslie P. Willcocks, Sara Cullen, and Andrew Craig. The central question answered in this book is, ‘How does an organization leverage the ever growing external services market to gain operational, business, and strategic advantage?’ The book covers the foundations of mature outsourcing enterprises that have moved outsourcing to the strategic agenda by building the relationship advantage, selecting and leveraging suppliers, keeping control through core retained capabilities and collaborating to innovate. The book provides proven practices used by mature outsourcing enterprises to govern, design, and measure outsourcing. The final chapter presents practices on how mature outsourcing enterprises prepare for the next generation of outsourcing.

12. *Governing through Technology* by Jannis Kallinikos is thoughtful scholarship that examines the relationships among information, technology and social practices. The author discusses the regulative regime of technology, and issues of human agency control and complexity in a connected world. He provides a valuable counter perspective to show that social practices are, in part, unmistakeably products of technologies; that technologies are, through historical processes, embedded in the social fabric; and that, if technological determinism is naive, the notion of the regulative regime of technology remains alive and well into the Internet age.

13. *Enterprise Mobility: Tiny Technology with Global Impact on Information Work* by Carsten Sørensen explores how mobile technologies are radically changing the way work is done in organizations. The author defines enterprise mobility as the deployment of mobile information technology for organizational purposes. The author contrasts how large technology projects in organizations, such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementations, will increasingly be managed differently because of mobile technology. The introduction of mobile technology supporting organizational information work will often be driven by individuals,
small teams, or as part of departmental facilitation of general communication services.

14. *Collaboration in Outsourcing: A Journey to Quality* edited by Sjaak Brinkkemper and Slinger Jansen is based on an integrated program of outsourcing research at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. The book is written for practitioners based on interviews and case studies in many global outsourcing firms including Cisco, IBM, Deloitte, Infosys, Logica and Partni – to name a few. The 16 chapters are short, tight and written to communicate best practices quickly. The chapters cover the topics of governance, knowledge management, relationship management and new trends in software development outsourcing.

15. *Advanced Outsourcing Practice: Rethinking ITO, BPO and Cloud Services* by Mary C. Lacity and Leslie P. Willcocks is based on insights from a research program covering over 2,200 sourcing arrangements. The book provides an overview of robust practices gleaned from over 20 years of research in the outsourcing field. It covers advanced areas of study, including what providers say about establishing and managing outsourced services, shared services, the changing role of client project management, best-of-breed versus bundled services, rural and impact sourcing, and shifting to cloud services.

16. *Sustainable Global Outsourcing: Achieving Social and Environmental Responsibility in Global IT and Business Process Outsourcing* by Ron Babin and Brian Nicholson examines, through a series of case studies and surveys, current sustainability trends. The book recommends how providers should prepare for increasing buyer demands in this area, suggesting that buyers and providers can work together to build successful outsourcing relationships through collaborative sustainability projects.

17. *Managing Change in IT Outsourcing: Towards a Dynamic Fit Model* by Albert Plugge examines three provider organizations and explores how they have to deal with major fit issues, including strategy, capabilities and organizational structures, in meeting changing buyer requirements. The book finds that a lack of fit and adaptive behaviour on the part of providers helps explain the lack of sustained service performance as a recurring problem in outsourcing arrangements. The author uses evidence to highlight the links between sourcing capabilities, organization structure and positive sourcing outcomes. Providers who are able to adapt to changing client circumstances, while establishing a fit on these critical factors, tend to succeed in achieving sustainable superior performance.

18. *Materiality and Space: Organizations, Artefacts and Practices*, edited by François-Xavier de Vaujany and Nathalie Mitev, focuses on how organizations and managing are bound with the material forms and spaces through which humans act and interact at work. Developing theoretical insights
along the way, the book concentrates on three separate domains in organizational practices: sociomateriality, sociology of space and social studies of technology. The contributors examine these domains with respect to collaborative workspaces, media work, urban management, e-learning environments, managerial control, mobile lives, institutional routines and professional identity.

19. *South Africa’s BPO Service Advantage: Becoming Strategic in the Global Marketplace* by Leslie P. Willcocks, Mary C. Lacity and Andrew Craig examines South Africa’s growing business services sector and its maturing capability, moving from voice to non-voice and complex business process outsourcing (BPO) services. The study uses survey and case study data to provide an overview of BPO global trends, explore the location attractiveness of ten comparator countries and assess in detail the performance and prospects for South Africa’s BPO industry. The book also provides seven detailed case studies covering voice, non-voice, legal services, shared services, captives and offshore outsourcing practices, giving insight and lessons, and assessing future policy directions.


In addition to the books already published and under contract, we have several other manuscripts under review but always need more. We encourage other researchers to submit proposals to the series, as we envision a protracted need for scholars to deeply and richly analyse and conceptualize the complex relationships among technology, work and globalization. Please follow the submissions guidelines on the Palgrave website (www.palgrave-usa.com/Info/Submissions.aspx). Stephen Rutt (email: s.rutt@palgrave.com) is the publishing director for the series.

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