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PANEL 9

THE NEW SOCIAL PHYSICS: CAN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORM ORGANIZATIONS?

Panel Chair: Kenneth L. Kraemer, University of California, Irvine

Panelists: Kenneth C. Laudon, New York University
Paul Attewell, State University of New York, Stony Brook
John L. King, University of California, Irvine

More than most fields which claim to be sciences, the MIS field originates a steady stream of both utopian fantasies and dystopian nightmares. Currently, the media is filled with hopeful messages: "computers flatten hierarchies," "automation lets lower level workers make decisions," "information technology is doing away with rigid organizations and replacing them with networks of task forces," and, of course, "information technology is now being used for strategic competitive advantage."

These utopian pronouncements, coupled with the occasional dystopian view, e.g., computers deskill workers, have entertained the public for nearly twenty years now. But what is the truth of these statements? What kind of solid empirical evidence is there to support either utopian or dystopian views? Aside from technology, what role does the normal business cycle, tax policy, management fashions, and changing products have on organizational behavior?

This panel discusses these issues with three leading researchers who have recently completed large scale empirical research efforts funded by the National Science Foundation and other sources.

Kenneth C. Laudon, New York University, recently completed an NSF study of the evolution of information systems and organization at the IRS, SSA, and FBI (1935-1990) (with Alan F. Westin of Columbia University).

Paul Attewell, SUNY Stony Brook, recently completed a broadly based survey of the impacts of information technology on work and organization (with James B. Rule of SUNY Stony Brook).

John L. King, UC Irvine, recently completed a study with Kenneth L. Kraemer, also of UC Irvine, which determined the history of computing in six local governments over several decades.

The Panel Chair, Kenneth L. Kraemer, has completed several NSF based on these topics.