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## Theorizing digitization: Going beyond digital transformation to the digital phenomena

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## Theorizing digitization

Going beyond digital transformation to the digital phenomena

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As Weick (1974) argues, drawing on Bateson's (1972) work on cybernetics and Mannheim's (1936) introduction to the sociology of knowledge, using nouns to describe and define the phenomenon of interest can be obscuring. Coupled with Weick's (1995) proposal to focus on theorizing rather than on theories, using verbs will also allow researchers to theorize about rapidly changing technology-related phenomena that IS research is known for. By not imposing names (nouns) on particular phenomena, researchers will not be tied or limited by existing assumptions and theories that fail to address the constantly changing and emerging flux of events that take place mediated or infused by various technologies. Nouns such as equilibrium, control and feedback are commonly used to describe these rapidly-changing phenomena. By focusing on these nouns, the researcher may reify or overgeneralize their impacts. Using verbs instead, the researcher will be more likely to discover limiting conditions, changing levels, loss of control and interrupted feedback that will explain many outcomes that were previously unexplained. Such is the case especially with socio-technical phenomena that involve human psychology and behavior, which distinguishes IS research from the natural sciences. Socio-technical systems will perform or behave differently from purely technical or physical mechanisms which contain states that are mutually exclusive (e.g. a signal either exists in a system or does not exist; information however, can exist in different forms simultaneously in someone's consciousness).

Digitization in its essence is a process and as a process, we can expect that it takes the shape of events that are linked together in lock-step within some container (organization), location or within certain time frames. Events can be grammatically described in terms of verbs, which are more suited and able to describe the actual phenomena. Instead of describing digital transformation in terms of dynamic capabilities, strategies, disruptions, value propositions, structural changes, business models and ambidexterity, we describe digital transformation in terms of verbs that take place leading up to events, such as automate, informate, coordinate, reengineer, renew, enact, and systematize. And since digitization is essentially a process, each of these leads to events that can be studied using existing process analysis methods.

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