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How Information Technology Matters in Societal Change: An Affordance-Based Institutional Logics Perspective

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Abstract

While there has been much work on the relationship between information technology (IT) and organizational change, there has been limited research that theorizes the relationship between IT and societal change. This paper draws on institutional theory, in particular institutional logics, to develop a model of IT and societal change, which we argue is critical in an era of large-scale digital transformation. Our approach is based on a view of society as an interinstitutional system, reflecting the multiplicity of logics at the societal level. We conceptualize societal change as shifts in the multiplicity of logics, with a focus on changes in the levels of centrality and compatibility. Our model relates these changes to the materiality of technology through the concept of IT affordances. We propose three mechanisms, namely sensegiving, translating, and decoupling, through which IT affordances become elements of societal change. We identify three corresponding carriers through which IT affordances gain scale and stability, namely objects, networks, and platforms. We discuss implications of our theoretical developments for future research on IT and societal change.

Keywords: Information technology, societal change, institutional theory, institutional logics, IT affordances, IT innovation, societal challenges, digital transformation