



## Book review

### Information Systems and Global Diversity

By C AVGEROU

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The publication of a book by Chrisanthi Avgerou will inevitably stimulate interest in its contents and will provide a challenging read. Despite being a relatively slim work (267 pages in total), it does not disappoint in this regard. The Introduction provides the background for ideas that will challenge longer established views of information systems in their organisational context, and this is endorsed by the opening sentence of Chapter 1. This first statement provides a null hypothesis for the book: that ICT and organisations are formed by purposeful response to competitive market forces. The emphasis is on a deconstruction of *purpose* in information systems and organisational development in order to identify the vast multiplicity of rationalities that actually bring about that development. In the larger part, it is a detailed exposition of organisational theory with the acceptance of information systems being used as an illustration of its disparate forms in a socio-technical environment.

The book is in two main parts, with chapter subdivisions. Part 1 is entitled Theory, and Part 2 is entitled Insights from Case Studies. In this respect, it would initially appear to have the familiar format of a 'content' section and an 'illustrative cases' section. However, this is not the case since the Theory part provides a rigorous critique of principles that is continued in the Case Studies part, with the cases themselves only offering a context for this uninterrupted discussion. Subsection headings within the cases such as *Information Systems Innovation in an Anarchic Organisational Context* prepare the reader for the sort of

insights that this part of the book offers. The contextual analysis of the internal and external factors affecting individual organisations inevitably leads to a vastly complex discussion of socio-technical forces. The book could be seen as appropriately simplifying this complexity through its themes. Predominant among these is that of the translation of organisational actions towards particular results. These results may be related to an explicit set of organisational goals, but with a heavy emphasis on social and personal interest in their translation. As such the book could never offer a straightforward business analysis, and from the Introduction onwards, it is a demanding task to assimilate both its meaning and the scope of the discussion. In this regard, the cases in Part 2 are useful since the discussion provides a global perspective (the organisations are from various parts of the world), but from the angle of local factors. However, the large number of very long footnotes in both parts of the book distract from the main topic. Their inclusion possibly hints at the impact of final editing of the main text. The secondary sources cited at the end of the chapters include some of the most pertinent works available, although the most current works are drawn from a relatively narrow range of subjects.

It would be impossible to pretend that this book does not require some background in social, economic and even psychological theory, aside from the need to be familiar with recent ICT-based information system research. The language of the discussion reveals this in its complexity. Its use as a source of readily available reference facts about information systems in a globalised economy is also extremely limited. This is not its aim. However, as a stimulating discussion to be read from start to finish, it is a worthwhile purchase.

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