

MISQ Archivist

Transfiguration Work and the System of Transfiguration: How Employees Present and Misrepresent Their Work

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Abstract

The quality of an organization's decisions depends on the quality of the data in its information systems. When technology records employees' work automatically, information quality is ensured by algorithms that produce electronic representations of work. What happens when employees report their own work? We show that the quality of this self-reported information depends on how managers direct their employees to report their work in their organization's information systems. We refer to constructing this representation as transfiguration work. We draw on a 15-month ethnography to specify the process of transfiguration work along with the characteristics of the system of transfiguration that supports it.

Our specification of transfiguration work supplements the model of representation implicit in research on management information systems. We show how managers can take over information technology in enforcing the practices that employees follow to report their work. By doing so, we theorize a broader role for agency in the representation of work.

We conclude that organizations can improve the quality of data in their information systems by shaping how managers enforce transfiguration work, rather than by changing the information systems where employees report their work.

Keywords: Transfiguration work, informing, representation theory, CRM, IT appropriation, ethnography