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Exercise 11: Write one page summary of the most important things you have learned during this course.

What do I have learnt?

I have learnt that social informatics matters for several reasons. At first it is always valuable to broaden knowledge and know about methods and techniques from outside of the own subject area. It helps to understand that there are different – additional – issues with writing programs than only algorithms and security questions. Moving the user into focus creates an exciting interrogation and requires non-technical ways of thinking about software. Suddenly the system is not a solitary component, but rather a small piece in a huge socio-technical system. Who are the target groups? How do they use software? For what? How does their social context influence them? – Answers to those questions can make a huge difference on how to design user interfaces and features.

Additionally, I heard about the productivity paradox, which honestly was boring and did not excite or attract me at all.

I briefly, unfortunately too less, heard something about different methods to analyze the target group and their behavior. Words like prototyping, inquiry and a lot more (expert survey, participant observation, focus group, ethnography, discourse analysis, etc.) have been mentioned, but no deeper elaboration took place.

Software will always be part of one or even multiple socio-technical systems. Those systems consist of actors and relationships between those. Creating an understanding of those interrelations is the key to build good software. If a certain software is the best may not be analyzed with certainty as social informatics sciences only evaluates how interaction take place and which influence the social context of a group has. Therefore no definite answers, but comparisons and directions may be given. Thus, social informatics answers if a certain technique works well in the context of a certain group, but cannot say if there is no better solution available.

Certain groups within a socio-technical system may reject software for several reasons. Whether this happens depends on technologic (the software / interface is crap, etc.), process (the daily processes have to be changed, etc.) and behavioral characteristics (the user does not like changes, age, etc.) and may not be overcome by providing even better software, but rather requires an understanding of software change impacts within the management. For successfully introducing software support and information may be provided from a very early stage and during the software's complete lifetime. Reactions to software changes may be process-related (refuse to adapt, apply a workaround or accept the change), technology-related (resist to use, workaround new software or accept) or work-related (moral and satisfaction, quitting the work, decreasing or increasing commitment).

Generally software and technology usage at home and at the workplace differs. The process how people adopt to it is called domestication. It describes how technology is integrated into everyday life and how this impacts the user and its environment. Analyzing domestication can help to understand innovations and develop next generations of it.

Within social science and socio-systems analysis multiple layers may be noted allowing focusing studies and deriving methods and tools suitable for analysis. Those layers depend on the framework used and generally cover different granularities of actors and their relations from international layer (nations and transnational companies) to individual layer (appearance and behavior of individuals within social context) and ease the understanding of complex systems.

I have not read Castells so far, so I guess there will be more to learn. But as I did the homework by April 16th that is all I learnt so far.

Some critiques (as the feedback lecture was totally invaluable)

First of all I have learnt that lectures and a lot of homework can be fun and challenging at the same time. Though the lecture itself was not challenging, some of the homework were.

Furthermore I have learnt or rather got confirmed that making a lecture – and this one was really weird and rather useless – for gathering critiques as group work is senseless. A criticism, which was derived after a consensual progress, is the most invaluable, because most uncritical reflection I ever seen. Just for finding a consensus one has to change the own critiques or accept the one of the others, which one does not share at all.

Additionally, and that is the sad part, I don't have the impression anything of the critique is used for improvements. Already at the beginning I asked for slide / page numbers – nothing changed. Not even after I mentioned it a second time as reminder in capital letters on my lecture notes, which we had to provide one day as attendance proof.

Concerning the grading: Even though I had to say during this weird lecture that the marking is not transparent, this is bullshit. I think it is pretty clear (I mostly got what I expected); only the assignment's comments seem to be far away from the actual written text. It was generally hard to figure out which change would have caused a difference in points – from that point of view it would be really cool if the one or two best solutions would be published along with inline comments or a horizon of expectation would be accessible afterwards. On the other hand, though, I doubt this would work along with this odd resubmission rule as I cannot believe that anyone is concerned about the homework result (especially issues with the own homework) three or even more weeks after it was submitted as there have been at least two more homework assignments only for Social Informatics in between.

I really liked the introductory lecture where we negotiated the rules, but it was terrifying how lazy students can be. Since then I had the impression the Cyber Security guys are the laziest students on earth and this did not change until now. As I do not see a way to make my fellow students awake of the benefit of such a negotiation this is just meant to be positive criticism.

What else? I was disappointed about the HCI part of the lecture. None of the HCI techniques was used for making those lectures interactive. As a lot of those techniques are rather (inter)active (paper prototyping, interviews, etc.) those lectures felt much too static. Why not let the students create a paper or video prototype instead of those boring presentations? And what happened to the presentation evaluations? Those should be anonymized and published as I don't see any value of giving you my evaluation without reflection what the final mark is. Another point concerning the presentations: Most of the speakers or groups did not pay attention to the time constraints, which is among the most serious issues when giving a presentation – and you did not care at all. I cannot believe this is no issue in social sciences. If I give a presentation and I fail to be within time ±2 minutes depending on the total presentation's length I would probably not get better than C or D.