TIETOPALVELUSEURA CONFERENCE ON 5TH SEPTEMBER : LOCAL ACTORS NEED GLOBAL FACTORS

by Evelyne LUCTKENS

SOME BASIC PARADOXES ABOUT INFORMATION SOCIETY

J. VENKULA first stressed the fact that the human factor is often forgotten when considering the information society. Starting from there, she presented some 16 basic paradoxes, amongst which :

- the paradox of knowing and truth : the human being aims at truth, rather than at knowledge… but the information stored in knowledge bases is not necessarily true…

- the paradox of symbols and truth : we take numbers and data (or words) as symbols of the reality, as reality itself. We move to symbols, and have no ability to communicate any more;

- the paradox of scientific reliability and informational unreliability : because of the informational reliability, we have the impression that science cannot be trusted any more, that researchers look for their interest, not for the truth;

- the paradox of media power and the truth : the media are part of the economic power, hence there is less space for independent views. The laws of supply and demand come into play. Faulty information becomes truth when it is repeated. The freedom of speech is no more realised through the press. In the same way, TV channels promote homogeneity;

- the paradox of rapid transmission of information, and slow change of organisation : organisation often prevent innovation;

- the paradox of rapid transmission and slow understanding of information : some tend to confuse the rate of technology with the - very different - speed of understanding of the human mind;

- the paradox of the logic of knowledge and the illogic of the process of knowledge creation : there is the logical order in which scientific knowledge is being transmitted or communicated, but knowledge creation is illogical, not ordered;

- the paradox of developed technology and undeveloped global ideology : the use of modern equipment is guided by those who have only economical interest, but are ignorant as far as ideology is concerned.

Taking into account the different items that are being considered when speaking of information society, J. VENKULA was very successful in making us think in a critical way about the context in which we evolve, in the information that we absorb and produce.

HUMAN ASPECT OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT, by Taina NYBO, Psychologist, Finnish institute of occupational health.

From the remark that the human (slow) understanding cannot cope with the rapid transmission of information, T. NAIBO insisted on the fact that technology changes work and implies new - intellectual - demands for the human brain : current generation faces a huge change in such demands.

After a brief explanation of the way the brain functions, she described the different memory systems and their interconnections : experience, attention, motivation, … If any of those phases does not work well, it affects the whole system. Stress, a too busy life may be the cause of memory problems. On the other hand, ageing is not a problem in itself : education and activity offer the best protective against the negative effects of ageing : use it or lose it was the motto!

To conclude the presentation, some " tips for good information ergonomics " were given :

- attention should be focused on one information entity;
- visual and auditive information should not contradict of be unconnected to each other;
- omit unnecessary information;
- " reading diet ";
- …

VIRTUAL ETHICS, by Reijo AARNIO, Dataprotection Ombudsman.

R. AARNIO first explained that his talk would mainly tackle technology and ethics. Strangely enough, although technology should be a matter of supply and demand, it seems that demand is left behind. Is that the reason why there are now more and more cases related to data processing and the internet? In fact, virtual ethics is all about data processing… Provisions for the protection of private life in the Finnish law were given. They notably relate to private life, honour and domicile of every individual, together with the secrecy of letters, telephone calls and other confidential messages.

In the afternoon, one had the ability to either follow 2 presentations :

- Users interfaces and usability, by Titti KALLIO, Development manager, Sonera OYJ, Mobile Services, Product development

- Working environment in information world by Kivi SOTAMAA, Director, Architectural Firm Ocena Helsinki

or to take part to a workshop :

The future challenges of the information services facing the virtual world - why would end users need information professionals, chaired by Tuula SALO, Merita-Nordbanken OYJ and Irja LAAMANEN, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

Some 20 people joined the workshop. The scene was sketched as follows : in the context of globalisation and mobile world, where information and communication technology imply a change of job contents and a need for new skills, why would end users need information professionals ?

A few answers were suggested : to evaluate external content products, to provide information consulting, education and training, to give tailored, profiled services or value added research, to manage contracts or help with intranet design. The common playground of information professionals and users aims at making business or generating revenues.

The participants were divided into 4 groups, to report on education and training on the one side (how to organise it, what kind); on how to give (self) services to users (with which skills) on the other side. Reports from the groups were as follows:

Education and training is needed :

- to stress ID workers competencies : scientific background, keeping up to date, using technical means;
- to discover the users needs : which users, within which delay, how to specify their request;
- to get feedback : is user satisfied; if not, why not;
- to maintain services, and to maintain those.

As far as users are concerned, they should be trained about information sources rather than about the use of databases : what to find where, on the internet

or the intranet; specific attention should be given to new employees; when making ad hoc searches, remind people that the information is available directly to them.

Quite a number of skills are needed, to provide the users with appropriate services :

- knowing the organisation well, together with its products and its strategy;
- being proactive - and a fair player in a network;
- having marketing skills, creativity and communication/psychological skills;
- having both technical and " legal " know how.

It would enable the ID professional to provide intelligent services, one stop shop and individual mentorship (mainly for newcomers).

Taking into account the information needs vs the resources available, one could have a customer segmentation with both " self service " and profiled services taking into account : time savings, costs, best sources, monitoring of new sources. In order to do that, one has to know his organisation well, and to realise that the intranet is only a tool that has to be updated regularly.

GLOBALISATION by Toivo ÄIJÖ, Ph.D., President, TSA International Business Consulting.

According to T. ÄIJÖ, current globalisation and information revolution are part of a self reinforcing process : the quick dissemination of information enables the faster development of new " discoveries ". Today's pace of change is only a prelude. It is going to accelerate again unless there is a catastrophe.

Some think that technology will solve all problems but there is also a counter trend resulting from globalisation : racism (although travel increases), nationalism, neo nazism (mainly from countries with unemployment), … : those are reactions to too rapid changes.

Globalisation implies increasing economic interdependence - which begun with financial markets : the Asian crisis influenced our economies - and one single state (nor the G7) can act upon this : we have to co-operate.

In the same way as some companies are born to respond to the information glut of companies, consolidation goes on in a global world. In bulk industries, competition is on price hence size matters. Bulk industries will be in few hands (those of the global generalists) while the innovators will be markets specialists, niche companies. The biggest for problem for some companies is the fact that they ignore the competition, very often small and innovative companies.

Another current challenge to businesses is the renaissance of spiritual values. The modern religion of science and progress isn't that successful. Money and education only do not make people happy. In order to be successful, companies have to have cultural values and beliefs - a " corporate soul " - for the longer term.

Social responsibility and ethical behaviour towards employees, customers, … are also an emerging trend. However, in order to be put into effect, there has to be enough market for " social products " - otherwise governments have to take care… but things are not that easy : in some cases, if children are not entitled to work any more, the situation of their family could become worse…

T. ÄIJÖ says that business is changing quickly in different aspects :

1. General and HR (human resources) management : managers cannot know everything hence they have to become coaches rather than controlling information and people.

2. Intellectual capital vs. financial capital : for venture capitalists, the value of an enterprise cannot be assessed, hence they assess the manager. In the same manner, because the nature of work is changing rapidly, there is a tendency

to hire competence and to pay for what is produced rather than for people being present.

3. Strategic planning is being challenged by the virtualisation of business : it's becoming free from limitations of time, space and is electronically handled.

4. Impact of E-business : the digitisation removes the need for human interface; physical location and proximity become irrelevant; networking enables everything to be outsourced or handled through alliances. Knowledge capture or information flow coordination will become a core competence.

5. Digital value networks will define new roles and services, such as :

- collection, dissemination and control of information;
- monitoring the performance of all members;
- …

Education will also change drastically, with more time to be devoted to things where presence is needed… but we are just entering in this period, where a big revolution is needed, the only limitation being creativity.

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