More on myth, magic and metaphor: Cultural insights into the management of information technology in organizations

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Abstract
Much research on information technology (IT) emphasizes the rational aspects of IT use. However, cultural analyses have considered IT as a symbolic artifact open to social interpretation. This article presents findings from ethnographic studies of two large insurance organizations to illustrate how cultural assumptions about IT are implicated in IT management. We employ the metaphor of magic as an interpretive lens to generate five archetypes of IT culture: the revered, controlled, demystified, integrated, and fearful IT cultures. Each of these archetypal cultural patterns reflects different assumptions about the "magic" of IT and the "wizards" who control its powers. These patterns are similar to social responses to the unknown that have been found in human cultures for hundreds of years. The metaphor itself was drawn from the language of the two organizations. All five archetypes were manifest in both of the companies studied, suggesting that organizations do not necessarily develop unified symbolic meanings of IT. Although separately each archetype invites novel insights into the management of IT in organizations, together they reveal even deeper interpretations consistent with contemporary theories of cultural differentiation and fragmentation.

Keywords
Computer management, Corporate culture, Information technology, Insurance companies, Metaphors

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