A Common Information Space in Criminal Courts: Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) Case Management Systems

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Talk Outline

• Study Overview
• Case Management Systems
• Trial Court Information System
• Research Methods
• Key Findings
• Research Implications
• Future Work

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Study Overview

• Case study of adoption of CSCW case management systems used in Los Angeles County Criminal Courts.

• Computer-based systems studied:
  – Case Management Systems
  – Legal Research Digital Libraries

• Ethnography of influence of work culture on IT adoption by judges, court clerks, DDAs, and DPDs.

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Case Management Systems

• Motivation:
  – Courts are important and case management systems are embedded in work of courts
  – Case tracking, automated minute orders, research, case history, global access to court agencies
  – Study of large-scale distributed cooperative work in common information space (Bannon and Bodker, 1997) shared by many.

• Courts spend millions to replace mainframes with large-scale failures:
  – LA County - $21 million lost on ACTS.
  – Arizona - $9.2 million lost of case management.
Trial Court Information System

- TCIS - coordinates all criminal cases
  - PIMS - DAs & staff
  - DMS - PD staff
  - PD Network
  - AJIS - Sheriff
  - Other government agencies
  - Public Web Access
    - In-house court reports

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Research Methods

- Organizational Culture Perspective (Martin, 2000; Trice and Beyer, 1995)
- Qualitative and Quantitative study
  - Interviews: 33 judges, 21 court clerks, 21 DDAs, 25 DPDs, 5 programmers, 5 court administrators
  - Survey: 287 judges (130 back), 287 court clerks (63 back)
  - Participant Observation, Volunteered to teach judges’ computer class, Study of court documents, Enrolling in court computer classes (5 year study).
- Paper presentation – judges and court clerks
- Content Analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of qualitative data

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Key Findings

- **Dichotomy of usage patterns for judges**
  - High-end users (cultural shift, home/work ecology)
  - Low-end users (cultural resistance, delegate to secretaries, court clerks, law clerks)

- **Computers improve efficiency and alter roles**
  - Attorneys more accountable (reduced outstanding cases from 500 to 50 per month).
  - Judges more power to track case loads
  - Court clerks – faster creation of minute orders and access to data for court inquiries (seen as deskilling by some and improved role by others)

- **Research DLs – Improve accuracy, timeliness, and result in competitive edge**

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Research Implications

• Important to consider work culture when designing large-scale CSCW systems.

• Design and implementation of court case management systems need to address unique requirements of court subcultures in institutional settings.

• Legacy DBMS systems embedded in large-scale distributed environments are difficult to replace.

• Better understanding of CIS as cultural artifact.

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Future Work

- Longitudinal study of IT use and cultural change by judges, court clerks, and attorneys.
- Study of TCIS as boundary object for CIS of courtroom, jail, and attorneys.
- Study of new technology:
  - Web-based access to TCIS by public (privacy and security issues)
  - Judicial Digital Library
    - Changes to judges’ usage levels? Does DL improve quality of work and/or alter justice?
- Free/Open Source Software Use in Courts – now or future?