



ISM SEMINAR

Spring 2013

Speaker: Dr Neil Pollock , University of Edinburgh Business School

Title: The Venues of High Tech Prediction: Towards a Sociology of Business Knowledge

Date: 01 February 2013

Venue: B3.19, WBS, Scarman Road

Time: 10.30 – 12.00

Abstract: Understanding technological predictions in business domains is not without problems. The difficulty is in reconciling the seeming paradox that whilst technology predictions – particularly information technology (IT) predictions - often fail to live up to expectation there does not appear to be any fall off in the number of predictions made, the standing of those making them, or the appetite for this kind of knowledge. One difficulty is that we have yet to develop a sophisticated analytical vocabulary to analyse predictions - particularly those that come from within business contexts. One approach might be to analyse predictions much in the same way we analyse other kinds of formal knowledge - such as weather forecasts (Fine 2007). However, business predictions are unlike other bodies of understanding in that they are seldom verified in any recognised sense (Knorr Cetina 2010). Another might be to argue that because there does not appear to be a sustained interest in establishing the accuracy of a prediction, what is important is the space and occasion they create for privileged interaction (Evans 2007). But this would pay rather little attention to the content of prediction work. Combining insights from both these approaches, we propose to study the venues of prediction and argue that these sites provide important insights into the production, consumption and status of predictions. Treating predictions in this way is useful because not only are they presented at 'conferences' but the conference event itself provides important insights into how predictions are produced, communicated and evaluated. In particular, the conference allows these experts not only a space to communicate and interact with the audience but also the possibility to manage the contradictory demands of making predictions. Studying the conference therefore allows insights into the role of individual predictors, their interactions with audiences, and how they handle uncertainty and error. This talk forms part of an ESRC study on the work of 'industry analysts' and 'IT research firms'. From a theoretical point of view, it adds to a better understanding of the various kinds of knowledge circulating within business contexts.

Biography: Neil Pollock is a Reader in Information Systems at the University of Edinburgh where he teaches and researches on the Sociology of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Neil is also Head of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group in the Business School. He has co-authored two books: Putting the University Online (with James Cornford) and Software and Organizations (with Robin Williams). The latter sets out the 'Biography of Artefacts (BoA) approach which is a multi-spatial, multi-temporal framework for studying large-scale information technologies. He is currently working on a further book provisionally entitled Shaping Information Technology Markets and the Sociology of Business Knowledge. His research has appeared in leading journals such as Information Systems Research, Social Studies of Science, Information and Organization, Science, Technology and Human Values, and Accounting, Organizations and Society.

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