Image building in the information governance discourse: Steps to economies of meaning

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‘The time has come for us to shift from the “T” in IT to the “I.” It’s time to learn the balance if there’s to be information focus. Don’t get me wrong. I’m interested in the technology. I consider myself knowledgeable about it, but compared to my 16-year-old grandson, I am a moron. You know, his generation is very different from the CEOs you have now because they didn’t grow up with making the machinery work.’

Peter Drucker (1997, September 15)

‘As soon as one "proposes" - one proposes a vocabulary, an ideology, which can only have effects of domination. What we have to present are instruments and tools that people might find useful. By forming groups specifically to make these analyses, to wage these struggles, by using these instruments or others: this is how, in the end, possibilities open up. But if the intellectual starts playing once again the role that he has played for a hundred and fifty years - that of prophet in relation to what "must be", to what "must take place" - these effects of domination will return and we shall have other ideologies, functioning in the same way.’

Michel Foucault (1988, p. 197)
Preface

It was my vast intention to start this preface with some interesting philosophical quote; after all, with the many databases available nowadays on the Internet it is rather easy to find one. Then again, I would hide myself behind the thoughts and sayings of others. Of course, the findings and theories of others were the cornerstones for me doing research, but writing this Ph.D. dissertation became gradually very personal. The project provided me reflections, learnings, confrontations, as well as insights, and along the way it became a piece of myself, my baby so to speak.

In fact, such an endeavor starts long before the actual project. Looking back and thinking over it, I recognize that there are certain situational factors in the light of this research that greatly influenced my curiosity about why things work the way they do. One of these factors is the engagements I had with my clients through my employer. I always had a passion in opening the dialogue how technology concepts can add value to, for example, businesses and operations. It is also the people that I have met over the years, who influenced me with new ideas, theories, propositions, but above all, with questions. Eventually, these factors led to the work presented here, so it is worth to mention them.

On the Executive Masters for Information Management (EMIM) program, I got inspired by Rik Maes on the notion of meaningfulness. Back then, I certainly did not realize that I would start writing a dissertation on it, but it was Rik who initiated the curiosity for the concept of meaning making in me. The EMIM Fellows initiative, which ran for seven consecutive years, was another great source of inspiration. Through this program, I met a wealth of interesting speakers and thinkers who introduced me to, sometimes very different, views on concepts. Also, the fellows themselves: a great community that helped me to shape my thinking with the many dialogues and discussions we had. Erik de Vries was also one of those influential factors. Our discussion on the reflective practitioner in Durbuy, I think it was back in 2000, stimulated me to look at my own engagements with clients and how I can learn from that. I started realizing that my work with clients was a great source for inspiration and research. That automatically leads me to mention that my employer, Hewlett-Packard, also had a great influence on this endeavor because it is for me by far the largest provider of work experiences and customer contacts.

All the foregoing converged for me into the prominent question: how can one explain in non-technical language to senior management and policy makers or governors what the products from the information society can do for their organizations? A question that I have tried to answer in this work through the concept of meaning making in the context of innovation. My work with clients often involved workshops and collaborative working sessions; therefore, I aimed the research at a result that potentially could be used in the field.

Every preface on a dissertation contains words of gratitude. Therefore, I like mentioning a number of people whom I want to thank for their contribution in one
form another to my research project. So here go. Of course, I start with Rik Maes, my promotor, who guided me along the way, had the patience reading my drafts and challenging me on the approach and the propositions developed. Time constraints sometimes resulted in meetings with Rik at his home, often combined with a dinner. Therefore, I especially want to thank Simone Maes for her hospitality and the joyful dinners; I love the beautiful conversations we had!

I want to thank Erik de Vries for the subsequent meetings on research approaches, reviewing some early drafts, and confronting me with different viewpoints. The Academy for Information and Management organized a special event on Ph.D. research; an excellent experience. I want to thank the crew for giving me the opportunity to present some parts of my work.

I also want to thank all those who participated in the workshops I organized as part of this research in order to obtain field data. The innovation team from the municipality of Haarlemmermeer, especially Paul Prooij, Christine Groothuis, and Inge Helsloot for thinking about the cases. Gerard Tunteler for supporting this; what a great location for a workshop! The people from Hewlett-Packard for participating in the workshop on the global retailer. Joost van de Vlies and Rene Kok in particular for bringing in the great cases. The board of directors from the Bernardinuscollege for taking the challenge, particularly Jan Vrijland, who was so kind organizing this and bringing in the cases. I also want to thank Erik-Jan van der Linden here for getting me in contact with Jan Vrijland; a truly unique experience this workshop was. The participants for the workshop at I3 groep, where Lucien Callaars and Alex Haage gave me the opportunity to use the workshop for discussing a topic that had a lot of attention in their organization. Finally, the participants of the session in the Big Data Value Centre from Almere Datacapital, where they set the first steps toward a joint venture; particularly Alwin Sixma and Oscar van Dijk, who gave me the opportunity running this workshop. All the participants mentioned here were important to me in completing my research project.

I am grateful to the management of Hewlett-Packard for giving me the opportunity starting this endeavor. A special word of gratitude goes to my colleague Stan Bosch. He had the patience in listening to the final concepts developed during my research, and coming up with prospects for workshops because he recognized its potential value. He seems to have an infinite source of ideas for doing workshops on this subject!

Finally, but most importantly, doing research and writing a dissertation is only possible when one has a safe haven, a place to concentrate, to read and think over all the puzzles one encounters during the journey. Therefore, I am indebted to my loving wife Neel, who created such an environment for me at home and stimulated me in so doing.

Peter Beijer, Vaassen 2014