



## Academic Seminar

### How does technology affect workplace relationships and value creation? Evidence from KMS implementation in a corporate law firm

Professor Forrest Briscoe spoke recently at an academic seminar hosted by Cass Business School and the Centre for Professional Service Firms, on 13 September 2012.



At the seminar, Forrest presented his research on how technology affects workplace relationships, using evidence of KMS implementation in a corporate law firm.

*“How are new Knowledge Management Systems affecting workplace relations and the creation of value in professional service firms? Costly KMS systems are being implemented across many professional service firms, and yet their impacts—intended and otherwise—are not understood.”*

Forrest discussed the optimistic “machine view”, suggesting technology can effectively substitute for interpersonal relationships in the execution of knowledge work and the creation of value, while the “socialized view” argues that technology is more limited because knowledge can never be effectively dis-embedded from social relations.

Using client billings and personnel records from the period of KMS implementation in a large law firm, Briscoe’s study examined the effect of KMS use on the formation of new workplace ties and the creation of value.

The preliminary findings suggest that individuals enact the machine view: after downloading a distant person’s knowledge, the focal person becomes *less* likely to form a tie. Yet this behaviour does not seem to create value; indeed, downloading distant people’s knowledge is also associated with a *reduction* in subsequent value creation. The latter finding appears more consistent with the socialized view, as do other findings that pre-existing social capital remains the best predictor of new tie formation, and pre-existing social capital also provides the best basis for using the KMS to create value.

In concluding his presentation, Forrest related these effects to overall changes observed after KMS implementation, and considered implications for research on use of information technology and social capital processes in organizations.

**Professor Forrest Briscoe** is an Associate Professor of Management at Penn State Smeal College of Business. His research is in the area of Organization Theory. His work is concerned with how new organizational practices become institutionalized and widely diffused across organizations, including instances where contention and social movements are involved. In one project, Forrest Briscoe examined the surprisingly rapid adoption of domestic partner health care benefits across large U.S. corporations. Another current project is aimed at understanding the spread of differing approaches to revision of retiree health benefits across large firms. Through this research, he is interested in understanding the social and political mechanisms through which organizations are persuaded to break from the old status quo and participate in these changes.