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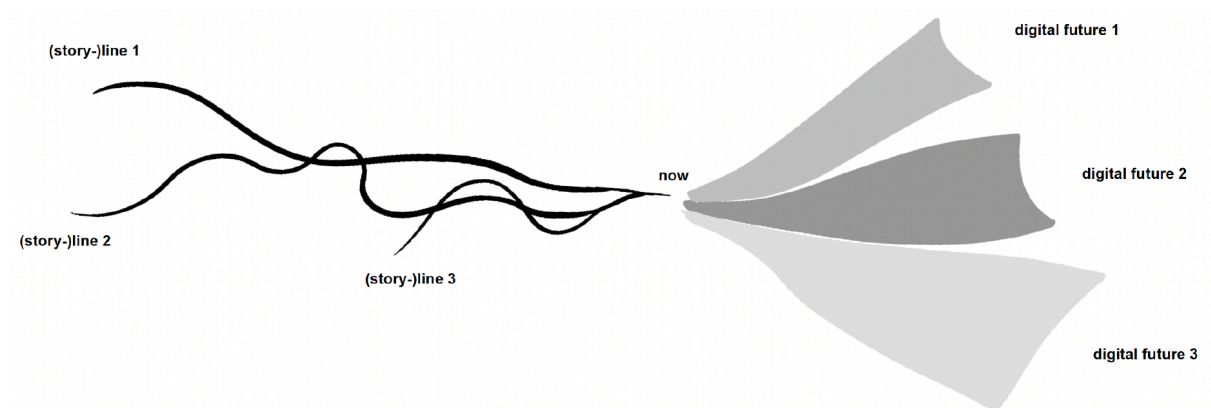
DIGITAL HISTORIES & FUTURES

Syllabus: Digital histories and digital futures: Tracing digital transformation (story-)lines

Summary:

Discussions on digital transformation—be it of individuals, organisations, or society—often yet implicitly follow simplistic, taken-for-granted narratives. In particular, digitalisation is portrayed as an inevitable future, for which bold, deliberate, 'top-down' efforts are supposedly necessary now. In such efforts—that is, in digital transformation projects—speed and efficiency of practices ought to be improved by implementing digital technologies, and this implementation is largely assumed to follow a top-down, almost 'heroic' intervention. Along these narratives of digital transformation as an intentionally and heroically enforced sequence of steps, everything outside of this narrow, predetermined frame is painted as 'resistance' to be overcome. This ideological hegemony regarding the nature of digital transformation is surprising given that the reality of such processes often overflows their simplistic depictions. Not least, we find most digital transformation processes to be tension-laden and, more often than not, ultimately unsuccessful.

This *X-Student Research Group* attempts to challenge taken-for-granted views on digital transformation by exploring its complexity through a focus on **a) the historical (story-)lines that have brought these transformations into being** and **b) the imagined futures that propel them forward**. We will use the interdisciplinary setting of the research tutorial to investigate specific cases of digital transformation of interest to students, such as in healthcare, public administration, and education. Engaging in methods such as archival research and document analysis, this project culminates in the creation of visualisations and e-lectures. Not only will we deepen scholarly understanding of digital transformation, but we will also provide practical guidance for navigating it in its full complexity.

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Modus operandi:

This *X-Student Research Group* combines elements of a 'typical' seminar with elements of a collaborative, interdisciplinary research project. As we will jointly conduct research, this project is inherently open-ended and depends on the active input of students. Participating students are expected to engage in all phases of the research process. This process includes practices such as

1) reading, presenting, and discussing academic papers;
2) researching a digitalisation case of interest by gathering and analysing data (e.g., through archival research and document analysis);
3) visualising and presenting (interim) results; and
4) collaboratively making sense of cases and comparing them.

I will guide students along the entire research process. Participating students will not only gain a deep understanding of the debate on digital transformation and their particular digitalisation case but will also get acquainted with selected research methods and fundamental ideas of process philosophy.

The seminar will be carried out in English, unless all participants speak German. After successful completion, students obtain 6 ECTS. The seminar can be elected as graded or non-graded.

Participating:

As this interdisciplinary *X-Student Research Group* is funded by the Berlin University Alliance, it is open to all students studying at either Freie Universität, Technische Universität, Humboldt-Universität or Charité. I encourage students of all disciplines to apply. It is open to both Bachelor's and Master's students as well as international students, but we will be reading and discussing papers that might be challenging for students without prior experience with academic literature.

There are two particularly simple ways to enrol in this research seminar. This is the case if you are…

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1) a bachelor's student at one of the Berlin universities (Freie Universität, Technische Universität, Humboldt-Universität, Charité): You can elect this course as part of your "überfachlicher Wahlbereich", e.g., "ABV" at Freie Universität. You can find more information here (LINK).
2) a master's student in Information Systems ("Wirtschaftsinformatik") at Freie Universität: Simply enrol via Campus Management.

In all other cases (e.g., if you are a master's student of a different discipline), I can provide you with a certificate of completion ("Schein") after successful participation that you can use to accredit this course as part of your studies. In this case, however, it is your responsibility to make sure that you can get this course accredited; please check beforehand with your study's coordinator.

Agenda and readings

CW	Agenda	Paper to be discussed	Further reading
42	Introduction I: Digital transformation in public and scholarly discourse–An overview	/	
43	Introduction I: Digital transformation in public and scholarly discourse–A workshop exploring contemporary assumptions and vocabulary	Caroll et al. (2023)	Vial (2019) Wessel et al. (2021) Hanelt et al. (2021)
44	Digital histories I: Process philosophy and process thinking in information systems research and beyond	Cecez-Kecmanovic (2023)	Langley & Tsoukas (2017) Abdallah et al. (2019)
45	Digital histories II: Flow-oriented genealogy + initial case selection	Baygi et al. (2021)	Ingold (e.g., 2016; 2021); Hultin et al. (2024)
46	Digital histories III: Flow-oriented genealogy in action–the case of digital transformation in Germany's public health administration (featuring invited researchers)	Mozaffar & Candi (2024)	Hultin et al. (2021); tba

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47	Digital futures I: (Re-)Discovering the future + final case selection	Wenzel et al. (2021)	Meyer 2019; Augustine et al. (2021)
48	Digital futures II: Making the future—case of digital transformation in Germany's public health administration (featuring invited researcher(s))	tba	Comi & Whyte (2018); tba
49	Methods I: Tracing in action—A workshop on gathering and analysing material		
50	Methods II: Tracing in action—A workshop on visualising digital transformation (story-)lines		
51-1	Individual case work		
2	Interim case presentations		
3	Individual case work		
4	Final case presentations		
5	Condensing I: Finding cross-case patterns—Exploring differences and similarities		
6	Condensing II: Finding cross-case patterns—Aligning our (story-)lines and harmonising our visualisations		
7	Final presentation of condensed results in Information Systems Reading Club and Information Systems Research Seminar		

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