

Managing with a Click. Turning Fantasy into Practice, the Example of ERPs

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Recent research attests that ERPs are flexible and malleable tools enacted by users in singular and context specific ways (Quattrone et al. 2005; Quattrone et al. 2006; Segrestin 2003; Segrestin 2004a; Segrestin 2004b). This article aims at enriching this seminal research stream by focusing on the role played by users' hopes and beliefs about ERPs on their actual managing and organising practices. More precisely, it argues that visual illustrations of ideal management practices with ERPs, as well as the very design of ERPs interfaces, frame managers' actions and knowledge. Empirical evidence is inferred from a passage of a video, available on the SAP website. It conveys how current expectations about ERPs are "fantasies" that do not picture reality but suggests to managers ways to impose order and give meaning to their work environment that are performative. Watching the "SAP xRPM demo," the managerial myth of "being in control at a distance" appears more accessible than ever and exemplifies ideal notions of managing and organising "with a click". I argue that this phenomenon encourages managers to privilege abstract representations over subjective experience to gain knowledge and control of complex organizations. Moreover, in addition to the diffusion of flattering illustrations about SAP's potential for ordering social interactions, the video shows how SAP simplifies reality. It also relays economic objectives and deadlines, urging managers to go on with their work relying on indirect communication channels and mediated action. Doing so, they legitimate practices of organising and managing that turn unique opportunities for innovation and learning into mere intermediary steps towards achieving a utopia - abstract management.