The Role of Computer Scientists within Organisations. Technicians or Agents of Change?

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1. Introduction

Today the world around us is undergoing profound economic and social changes. Economically, the globalization of markets is continuing to develop, creating "a completely new, inordinate and instantaneous solidarity between regions and events" (Valéry, 1945). Socially, the effects of this globalization are incalculable since "any action causes a huge mass of repercussions to be felt on all sides [and] immediately generates a chain of events [...] The effects of these effects, which at one time were imperceptible or negligible, are felt almost instantly at a distance" (Valéry, 1945).

These profound changes seem mainly to be the result of the emergence and the spread of new information and communication technologies (notably the networks and their numerous applications). Henceforth, these technologies cannot be separated from the economic strategies of companies (see e.g. Scott-Morton, 1991). At the basis of these new technologies and in particular of information systems, are to be found the computer scientists who willy-nilly have become the key characters of the present time. The aim of this article is answer a two-fold question:

- how do computer scientists perceive their role today? Do computer scientists everywhere have a similar or identical perception of themselves?

- if the case arises is there a relation between the professional role that the computer scientist sees himself as playing and the educational system which trained him? Even more fundamentally is there a relationship between this role and certain aspects of the culture of the country in which the computer scientist works?

To answer these different questions, we shall analyse the potential roles of computer scientists within organisations in section two. Subsequently, on the basis of different observations, we shall examine the roles they do in fact fill. In section four, we shall study the relations which seem to exist between the profes-