AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NORTH AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN MIS RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The information age has facilitated knowledge sharing among different parts of the world. Research ideas and methodologies are shared through conferences and publications by MIS researchers in Europe and in North America. However, there has been little movement toward a more uniform research paradigm on the two continents. One reason may be the difference in research tradition, which is strongly influenced by the analytic tradition of logical positivism in North America and by interpretivism in Europe.

Diversity, whether in terms of research methodologies or reference disciplines, enriches and benefits a field of research. If, however, this diversity inhibits sharing of research and knowledge between communities with different intellectual heritages, loss of synergy and research opportunities for both communities may result.

The implications of these differences can be examined by referring to sociological paradigms. Kuhn (1970) defines sociological paradigm as “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community” (p. 175). These shared values are used to judge theories, predictions, and methodologies.

Given the predominantly positivist research tradition in North America and interpretive research tradition in Europe, it seems reasonable to presume two different sociological paradigms. If indeed North American and European researchers belong to two different sociological paradigms, this could pose problems in terms of reviewing and publishing in MIS journals and conferences as well as in sharing knowledge across research traditions. Publishing, for instance, is influenced by “the accumulated paradigms, values, standards, and biases typically reflected in the editorial policies and practices of leading journals” (Jenkins 1984, p. 107). For example, North American reviewers differed from non-North Americans in their evaluation of MIS research, ranking criteria such as logical rigor and replicability of research more highly, whereas non-North Americans valued contribution to knowledge and topic selection more highly (Evaristo, Ang and Straub 1992).

The objective of this paper is to identify differences between North American and European research in terms of reference disciplines and research methodologies. To achieve this objective, this research empirically classifies and compares doctoral dissertation research in the two continents for 1985 and 1990. In addition, the five-year interval between allows for trend comparisons both within continents over time and between continents.

Preliminary results for 1985 indicate the predominance of non-empirical research in Europe and empirical research in North America. Significant differences were also found in reference disciplines. Computer science underlies proportionally more research in Europe than in North America, whereas decision science, psychology, and information theory are proportionally more common in North America than in Europe.

REFERENCES
