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Editors' Introduction

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Editors' Introduction

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The University of Maribor provides a meeting-point for researchers, professionals and executives, from throughout the world, who are interested in all aspects of electronic technologies applied to economic, administrative and social purposes. This Special Section exploits the substantial corpus of papers published in Bled eConference Proceedings since 1988 – over 1,000 in all, 773 of them fully-refereed.

An Invitation was distributed to Bled community members in September 2011 (copy attached). It sought papers that reflect on, and build on, the content of the first 24 Bled conferences, that focus on a theme that has persisted across multiple conferences, and that are future-oriented. The Call for Paper attracted 27 expressions of interest. A total of 9 contributions survived the review process, 5 by sole authors and 4 by teams ranging in size from 2 to 8 people. The 21 authors' affiliations are in 8 countries, in alphabetical order – Australia, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK, the USA and Vietnam.

Each paper was reviewed by at least two referees, all of them senior in the IS discipline. Most of the papers had the advantage of two rounds of review, and substantial improvements were made as a result of the comments provided to authors.

A double-open procedure was used. Reviewer blindness to paper authorship is often only nominal, and there are even cases where authors can guess the reviewers' identities as well. Worse, process and product quality using double-blind procedures are often actually lower than they would be if participants were aware of one another's identities.

The Bled community comprises hundreds of researchers, but the authors of many of the papers would have been reasonably apparent in any case, from the topic, the approach adopted and the content. It would therefore have been particularly inappropriate to use pseudo-blind procedures for this Special Section.

The papers published in this Special Section fit naturally into four categories.

1 Meta-Analyses of the Bled Conference (2 Papers)

Themes and topics that have been addressed by authors at Bled Conferences were assessed by two authors, but using very different approaches.

1.1 'Bled eConference Themes and Impacts' – Clarke

Clarke's approach involves extraction and manual analysis of content, specifically the declared themes of conferences 1988-2011, and the titles and abstracts of all 773 refereed papers from 1995 to 2011.

The data shows that the dominant concerns were initially:

- EDI 1988-1996, then
- eCommerce 1994-2005, and then
- eBusiness 1997-2007.

Interest in the Internet specifically, peaked 1997-2002, in the Web fleetingly in 2000-02, and in Mobile technologies and applications in 2003-08.

Almost 60% of all keyword-mentions were categories of eBusiness, and a further 20% were specifically what the author terms 'corporate perspectives'. The perspectives of users, and social rather than economic dimensions, have not been a major concern, although recent years have seen some adjustment in that direction.

The impact of the Conference was also assessed. using a number of measures. Between 11 and 23 countries have been represented on the program each year – 49 countries in all – with 16% of papers featuring authors from more than one country.

Of the 773 papers, 50 were further developed into journal articles in Special Sections arising from the Bled eConference, and many others also later appeared in journals. Bled papers have generated thousands of citations, and tens of thousands of downloads. In addition, a great deal of international collaboration has been spawned beside Lake Bled, generating both research grant applications and many papers and journal articles in other venues as well as in subsequent years' Bled eConferences.

1.2 'Automatic Semantic Trend Analysis' – Dreher

Dreher also seeks an appreciation of the history of Bled themes, but using primarily automated means. He performed an experimental application of a semantic analysis tool to the full-text of each set of refereed proceedings in the period 2001-2011. Using his Rubrico tool, he generated measures of the occurrence of ConceptKeywords, within each year, and across the period.

The approach holds considerable promise as a means for detecting areas of emphasis within each conference. In addition, it enables the detection and detailed analysis of changing emphases, such as the patterns of references to people as users, participants, employees, team-members and objects. It also provides a basis for comparison and contrast with informal coding approaches, such as that used in the previous paper.

In the Clarke paper, Exhibit 6 clustered the topics addressed by Bled papers 1995-2011 into 34 keyword-clusters, within three major groups. The remaining 7 papers in the Special Section provide assessments of Bled authors' contributions in all three of those major groups.

2 Categories of eBusiness (2 Papers)

The Clarke paper found that almost 60% of all keyword-occurrences were primarily concerned with applications of eTechnologies to meet business needs. Rather than attempting broad-sweep reviews of the vast fields of EDI, eCommerce or eGovernment, two papers considered specific sub-fields of applications to economic and social needs.

2.1 'eRegions' – Zimmerman

ICT has been considered in many Bled events as a means to further regional economic development and to overcome barriers created by national borders. The paper analyses 18 refereed papers 1995-2011 and 40 events in the Business Track 2001-11.

Zimmerman identifies several somewhat different interpretations of the term 'eRegion', and different emphases adopted in different contexts. For example, the cross-border theme occurs in most papers and events that focus on European contexts, whereas development in large and thinly-populated rural areas have been of greater concern to Australian researchers.

The paper also notes the considerable contributions that the many meetings, panels and workshops have made to regional and international collaborations in South-Eastern Europe. These are ongoing, and Zimmerman recommends that researchers invest more effort into this area, through systematic study of initiatives and of success and failure factors.

2.2 'Mobile Commerce, Mobile Value Services' – Carlsson & Walden

Carlsson & Walden review the 68 papers that were published on mobile themes in the proceedings between 2000 and 2011. They focus in particular on a series of panels that they have run at a number of Bled eConferences in the same period, in which speakers from both industry and academe addressed forward-looking themes. The panels have provided good roadmaps on researchable issues during the early stages of research in the area.

They draw attention to the 2001 vision that services would quickly become aware of the location of the client, and of the server, and of the identities of other clients in the vicinity. They also note the marked differences in adoption of mobile services either side of the Atlantic, and the lateness (but rapidity) of adoption in the USA. They consider the slowness of take-up, particularly of the more advanced services.

The authors trace developments through from messaging, via data services and transaction services, and on to mobile value services, and identify the next phase as being knowledge mobilisation. These categorisations enable them to identify critical design factors that have underpinned successful product launches in the past, and to postulate further and more refined design factors for the next round of products.

3 Corporate Perspectives (4 Papers)

Almost one-quarter of keyword-occurrences focussed primarily on the interests of organisations in applying eTechnologies to support their business processes and contribute to

the performance of their functions. Three teams and one sole-author tackled four of these corporate perspectives, giving rise to some interesting cross-currents among them.

3.1 'Business Models' – Bouwman et al.

Business models have been an important focus of the Bled eConference for many years. Indeed, two of the 13 winners of the Outstanding Paper Award have been in the area, and the 2nd, 3rd and 5th most highly-cited Bled Conference papers were as well.

The team led by Bouwman briefly reviews the changes over the years in the flavour of papers relating to business models. It then addresses the specific topic of tools to support the preparation of business models. These include road-mapping to cope with transitions, stress-testing, agile engineering, and support for financial decision-making.

The threads of previous lines of development in business modelling theory weave through the history of the Bled eConference, and the paper suggests that this is likely to be the case in future Bled conference programs as well.

3.2 'Project Management' – Cameron

The field of view of the Cameron paper is the many aspects of project management. This resulted in a substantial meta-analysis of 284 papers - which constitutes 30% of the Bled corpus, and was easily the most ambitious of the analyses in this Special Section.

The primary classification adopted is into the three groups of Factor Research (including CSF), the Engineering tradition (including tools and life-cycle notions), and the Social Science tradition (emphasising organisational structures and processes). The papers are examined across three eras of Bled identified by Cameron: 1988-97 (EDI and IOS), 1998-2001 (a transitional phase) and 2002-11 (Internet-based, incl. B2B, B2C, eGovernment and mobile commerce).

The results highlight the disappointingly slow adaptation of eTechnology project management techniques, from their origins in intra-organisational systems, to the much more challenging contexts of inter-organisational information systems (IOIS) and extra-organisational systems (EOS).

Evident in the data are a decreasing emphasis on the engineering tradition (project management tools), and increasing attention to the social and organizational factors that primarily determine project outcomes. Cameron concludes that even more emphasis is needed on multiple levels of analysis and on multi-disciplinary research.

3.3 'IOIS and Information Infrastructure' – Klein et al.

The team led by Klein focusses not on published papers, but on an influential series of panel sessions that have been conducted at the Bled eConference, in the area of Inter-Organisational Information Systems (IOIS).

The paper notes the progressive shift in focus in IOIS research, and its gravitation towards an information infrastructure (II) perspective. One way of depicting the change is that the unit of study has been migrating from the individual organisation, via the set of collaborating organisations, to the integral collaborative whole, or infrastructure.

There are intersections between some of the findings and those of Cameron, in particular in relation to the need for greater use of insights from socio-technical system theory, and a stronger focus on catering for the interests of all stakeholders.

In addition to identifying specific, substantive contributions in relation to IOIS theory and practice, this paper underlines the value of the Bled eConference not only as a locus for informal meetings but also for disciplined face-to-face discussion, theory criticism and extension, and the conception of research projects.

3.4 'Procedural Controls to Facilitate Trade' – Bons et al.

This paper considers the role of control in the absence of trust, in B2B contexts. It first provides a review and classification of the 60 papers that have been published in Bled Proceedings that directly addressed trust by participants in multi-party electronic activities.

In the preceding paper, a segment of the discussion that focusses on information infrastructure for international trade has a preoccupation with controls. The Bons et al. paper addresses that topic in depth, focussing on controls as a means of achieving – or of avoiding the need for – trust in international trade procedures. The paper reviews and updates contributions made by the authorial team in this area, a number of which were Bled papers.

The 'deontic' approach adopted by the team enables the formal modelling of the means of identifying and implementing the necessary controls, such as evidence of permissions, rights, obligations, prohibitions and waivers.

4 Research Topics (1 Paper)

Almost 20% of keyword-occurrences were primarily concerned with specific issues that arise in the application of eTechnologies, most commonly adoption and impediments, and trust and reputation. One author focussed on a topic of this kind.

4.1 'User Acceptance' – van der Heijden

The Bons et al. paper considers the role of trust from a corporate perspective, and in B2B contexts. Trust also looms large in van der Heijden's paper. He identifies Bled papers that have focussed on User Acceptance of Technology, that had an empirical and quantitative component, and that tested theories rather than being merely descriptive. For many years, most such papers applied, directly or indirectly, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

During the period to 2001, the conference's focus was found to be on B2B applications, and user acceptance was given little consideration. During the next decade, there were 27 relevant papers, which van der Heijden sees as falling into three phases. During 2001-2003, existing theories were applied. During the second (notionally 2004-2007), existing theories were extended, particularly in the trust and privacy areas. In the third phase (2008-2011), Bled delegates have recognised the limitations of the traditional models, moved beyond them, and adopted alternative theoretical approaches.

Like others in this Special Issue, van der Heijden's paper points to the future, anticipating fewer surveys of what people say they do, and more observation of what people actually do, including use of experimental method in order to achieve more control, and improved insights. More effective contributions to progress in the application of electronic technologies are in prospect.

5 Concluding Comments

The nine papers in this Special Section reflect the diversity of topics and the diversity of approaches that have been hallmarks of the Bled Conference since its inception 25 years ago. Some of the papers highlight maturation, variously of the application and management of eTechnologies, and of research work in the area. Many also highlight the rapid change in the phenomena that lie within the Conference's scope. Technologies, and user perceptions, capabilities and expectations quickly mutate, and sometimes shift sideways – with inevitably disruptive effects, variously economic, organisational and social.

A theme common to several papers was dissatisfaction with the old world of research that is only concerned with describing past realities. Empiricism is valuable, because it forces interpretations to be based on observations. But empiricism is backwards-looking. It has to wait for phenomena to stabilise before it can deliver any information of value. The subject-matter of the Bled eConference is dynamic. For contributions to be design-oriented, and to point towards actionable interventions, authors have to carefully consider the level of academic rigour that can be achieved while ensuring relevance to the present and the immediate future. Quality is a much more complex notion than simple-minded research theorists would like us to believe, and quality assurance much more challenging.

The papers in this Special Issue have demonstrated the benefits of a conference series that has a focus, but also has the capacity to adapt as eTechnologies change, and as the capabilities of private sector organisations, government agencies, society and individuals mature, and their perspectives expand to accommodate the opportunities and threats that eTechnologies give rise to.

The perturbations resulting from rapid change in eTechnologies, organisations and people have created a rich field for researchers during the last 25 years, and will do the same during the next quarter-century as well.

Roger Clarke, Andreja Pucihar and Jože Gričar
Editors

4 May 2012

**'The First 25 Years of the Bled eConference'
INVITATION TO PROPOSE REFEREED PAPERS**

v.2 of 15 September 2011
Roger Clarke, Andreja Pucihar and Joze Gricar

Introduction

The Bled eConference turns 25 in June 2012, and a Volume is being prepared to celebrate the event. The Volume is to include a Special Section containing refereed papers. Reviewers will be selected from both within and beyond the Bled community.

It is intended that it be published on CD, on the Bled eConference site, and in the AIS eLibrary.

The Nature of Papers Sought for the Special Section

The Bled eConference has matured from its origins in the EDI area, via eCommerce, then eBusiness and eGovernment, to encompass all aspects of electronic economies and societies. To develop the ideal paper for the Special Section, you should do the following:

(1) reflect on, and build on, the content of the 24 Bled conferences held to date

The Proceedings of many of the previous events are accessible on the Web, and their contents can be searched. Use this facility to access them:
<http://www.rogerclarke.com/EC/BSP.html>

(2) focus on a theme that has persisted across multiple conferences

Examples include impediments to EDI, SME adoption of IT generally, inter-governmental collaborations, EDI in International Trade, IT in Central Europe / Silk Route / Adria, ..., social media. Many further possibilities are listed on page 2

(3) be future-oriented, i.e. identify the lessons from the Conference's rich history

Proposals

In the first instance, provide a Proposal of 100-250 words, explaining the topic that you intend to address, the approach you intend to adopt, and the likely team of authors.

Please submit your Proposal in .rtf or .doc format, not in .docx.

Critical Dates

Submission of Proposals	30 September 2011
Provision of Editorial Feedback	15 October 2011
Submission of Review Draft	1 January 2012
Provision of Reviewer Feedback	31 January 2012
Submission of Revised Draft	29 February 2012
Provision of Editor Feedback	15 March 2012
Final Submission	31 March 2012
Publication	17 June 2012

Submissions to: Lead Editor – Roger.Clarke@xamax.com.au – Ph.: +61 2 6288 6916

Attachment: Potential Themes

B2B eCommerce / eTrading, including:

EDI, EDIFACT, X12, EDI Diffusion/Adoption, EDI Gateways, Open-EDI, XML, eBXML
Marketspaces, incl. Catalogues, Directories
IOS/IOIS, Supply Chains, Channels
International Trade
SMEs
Adoption and Impediments, incl. Security, Trust, Authentication

B2C eCommerce / eTrading, including:

Web-Site Design, Backend Integration
eAdvertising, eMarketing, Loyalty Programs, Personalisation, CRM
Trust incl. Security, Reputation, Brands, Authentication, Consent, Consumer Rights, Privacy
MCommerce
Adoption and Impediments

C2C eCommerce / eTrading, incl. eBay

eBusiness (other than trading)

ePayments, incl. eBanking, digital cash, smartcard-based payment systems

ePublishing, incl. Content Management

eGovernment, incl. Customs, procurement, G2B, G2G, G2C, entry points / portals,
emergency/disaster response

eDemocracy, incl. Voting

eEducation, eLearning

eHealth

eCollaboration, incl. decision support, CSCW

eCommunity

Social Media, incl. Messaging, Online Communities, Virtual Communities, User-Generated Content,
Blogging, Microblogging, Virtual Worlds, Social Networking Services, Crowdsourcing, Games

Information Infrastructure, incl. VANs, Broadband, Software Agents, Intranets, PDAs, Smartcards,
RFID, P2P, Web 2.0, Mobile Technologies, Location Technologies, Data Archival, Outsourcing, ASP,
Cloudsourcing

Application Design and Development, Usability, Web Services, SOA, Living Labs, Modelling

Business Models and Industry Structure, incl. Strategy, Alignment, Competition aspects,
Intermediaries, Virtual Organisations, Ambient Organisation, Transformation

Corporate Processes, incl. Requirements Definition, BPR, Workflow, ERP, Business Intelligence,
CSF, Risk Assessment, Risk Management, Business Continuity, Change Management,
Entrepreneurship, Innovation

Social Processes

Regional Aspects, incl. Developing Nations

Legal Aspects

Social Aspects, incl. Accessibility, Digital Divide

Economic Aspects

Research Methods, incl. cases studies, surveys, modelling, prototyping