1986

Panel 10: Back to The Future: Will There be an ICiS in 1996?

Mary J. Culnan
Kogod College of Business Administration The American University

Sid Huff
University of Western Ontario

Follow this and additional works at: http://aisel.aisnet.org/icis1986

PANEL 10

Back to The Future: Will There be an ICIS in 1996?

Co-Chairs: Mary J. Culnan
Kogod College of Business Administration
The American University

Sid Huff
School of Business Administration
University of Western Ontario

Some business schools have consciously chosen not to establish information systems (IS) programs. Often the argument used is that IS has no significant body of underlying theory to call its own. Other business schools without IS programs have just begun to allocate resources to the IS area.

Further, within the community of IS academics, some individuals have argued strongly that IS as a distinct academic specialty is, like the dinosaurs, heading blindly toward extinction. One of the reasons frequently cited is that the "distinctive competence" of IS academics (e.g., computer literacy, basic systems design, etc.) are being absorbed and taught by faculty in other functional areas such as finance, marketing and organizational behavior.

This session will examine the future viability of information systems as an academic discipline. The panelists will represent a variety of perspectives around this debate. Time will be provided for audience participation.

Rock and Roll Will Never Die

John Leslie King
University of California-Irvine

The controversy over whether MIS will survive as a viable and independent area within business schools is both inevitable and healthy. There is no reason the more established groups within these schools should permit the creation of new groups; they consume resources and dilute the power base. The old order always has lots of good scientific, pedagogical, and humanitarian reasons for keeping the upstarts down. MIS will have truly joined the club when MIS people join the others to keep out the next new wave group. The tension over whether to admit MIS to the fold of "real business school disciplines" is an important test of the MIS field. I believe those of us in the MIS area will survive this test and will influence the field of management education in very important ways. It is even possible that MIS, as such, will survive, but in a sense, this is irrelevant. I'll draw on some observations I have made as a department chair in a computer science department (a field that used to ask itself the same question) to support these sentiments and possibly even tie my sentiments to the history of Rock and Roll.

F. Warren McFarlan
Graduate School of Business Administration
Harvard University

The role of information systems in a business school has been a continuously evolving one. The dividing line between its materials and those of the functional areas covered in other parts of the curriculum is both evolving and blurry. There are several reasons at this business school why a strong information systems faculty is needed.

1. The applications issues in the field are changing so fast that it requires the full time attention of a group of specialists. One part of their job is to understand the issues, and another part is to educate the functional areas. If the activity was decentralized to other areas, we would lose sight of a very important transforming element of business architecture.

2. There is a hard technical kernel of ideas on database structure, telecommunications, software, development, etc., which must be mastered if a firm is to effectively use this technology. A critical role of the MIS group is to take those students who are interested in the area and help equip them to be effective professionals. Another role is to ensure that appropriate research and perspective are brought to the functional areas.

3. Without such a home, we would be unable to attract these professorial skills to our faculty or to help them develop in a challenged fashion.

The cluster of these issues makes me comfortable that there is a very important agenda for an information systems faculty to execute over the next decade. My crystal ball is no better than anyone else's beyond that period of time. I can, however, in looking over the past five years, see that without the existence of such a group, our School's programs would be considerably different and would not be as effective in serving the needs of our student body.

Arie Y. Lewin
Management and Decision Sciences
National Science Foundation
and
Fuqua School of Business
Duke University

The presentation on the future of information systems will be motivated by three perspectives: (1) as a departmental editor of *Management Science* having nurtured for many years IS research within the journal, (2) as Program Director for Decision and Management Sciences at NSF, and (3) as a faculty member of the Fuqua School at Duke University, which has chosen not to establish an IS area.

The presentation will contrast two opposing strategies for teaching and research in IS within business schools, review the intellectual foundations of the field of IS, consider some fundamental areas of research as they relate to organizational decision making and organization design, and discuss the proposal for launching a TIMS sponsored journal in IS.

A Tale of Two Cities...or Three...or Four

Robert Zmud
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The question isn't "Will IS survive over the next 10 years?" but rather "How will each of the 'faces' of IS fare over the next 10 years and how much influence will IS faculty members have within their institutions?" IS will survive. Whether or not it will be fun to be an IS faculty member is another matter. This issue will be explored by, first, distinguishing between the *very real* short-term and long-term teaching and short-term and long-term research missions of IS faculty and, then, examining the continued 'health' of these four missions. As with organizational life in general, those departments and individuals emphasizing short-term may find that they do not fare as well as those stressing long-term missions.