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PANEL 8 DEVELOPING GLOBAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS

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PANEL 8

DEVELOPING GLOBAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS

Panel Chair: Blake Ives, Southern Methodist University, USA

Panelists: Sirkka Jarvenpaa, University of Texas, Austin, USA
Alex Mayall, Index Group, England
Edward Roche, University of Arizona, USA
John Shepherd, Air Products Europe, England

Global information technology applications are increasingly the backbone, even the motivation, for the efforts of many firms to coordinate on a global scale and to compete in world markets. Global Information Technology (GIT) refers to the development and use of common information and communications technology by a multinational organization in its home and foreign offices. Although GIT can produce rich rewards for firms which seek global preeminence, GIT presents a steep learning curve for firms who seek to exploit its benefits.

The development of global information systems presents a multitude of management challenges. The integration of systems across national boundaries substantially increases project risk and cost. The usual international problems of dealing with language, culture, time zone, and currency differences are compounded by variations in business practices, national legal and technology standards, technological sophistication, and hardware and software cost and availability. The home country unit probably uses different vendor platforms than its subsidiaries, who often use technology platforms provided by national vendors. Communications costs vary considerably from country to country. For example, in the United States, where communication costs are relatively low, an application may run on a large IBM mainframe from a single data center. In Europe, where communications costs may be four times as high, the same application may best run on minicomputers located at each plant site. Local management, with profit and loss responsibility, may be unexcited about sharing the cost for a common system that they believe will eventually remove some of their local autonomy. Local systems personnel may be equally uncooperative in helping to determine the specifications for a common system that may take away their job. Additionally, hardware or software limitations may hamper global sharing.

The panel, a mix of individuals from industry and academia, will explore these challenges and discuss the need for integrative solutions. Panelists will take an organizational perspective, although each is encouraged to distinguish among those benefits that accrue to the company as a whole, those that accrue to headquarters only, and those that accrue to the foreign subsidiaries. The two researchers, Sirkka Jarvenpaa and Edward Roche, will present findings from research studies they have recently conducted on the development of GIT in large multinational companies. The two practitioners, John Shepherd, Director of IT at Air Products Europe, and Alex Mayall of Index Group in London, will provide an industry perspective concerning the management of global IT development and implementation.

After short presentations by panelists regarding some of the above challenges, the audience will be encouraged to participate in a discussion of the challenges of GIT and the solutions required from future research efforts.