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Systems development is a traditional activity of the MIS research community. MIS researchers have proposed and constructed architectures for numerous systems, including decision support systems, expert systems, and model management systems. In spite of the systems development heritage, however, the role and the legitimacy of system development as a MIS research method (i.e., building computer programs) has been questioned (see Nunamaker 1992; Nunamaker, Chen and Purdin 1991).

What are the roles of the systems development research method? Is it a legitimate method of scientific inquiry? What are the desirable characteristics of an investigation that uses the construction of programs as the primary research method? One of the basic premises of the systems development research method is that building systems leads to insights into system development processes and architectures that can be used in practice. This panel will discuss the above questions by analyzing and debating this premise.

The discussion will center on two fundamental issues. First, has the system development research method produced knowledge used in practice? There is reason to doubt that it has made an impact. Academics, insulated from the challenges of industry, may not formulate important problems. In addition, systems built at a university tend to be small and unmaintained. This difference may make discoveries concerning architectures and the development process irrelevant. In fact, MIS researchers are frequently identified as technology and methodology followers rather than leaders. How can researchers using the systems development method lead?

The second issue addresses the credibility of systems development as a method of inquiry. Even if the method addresses relevant problems, what assures that findings of the research are generalizable and credible? On the surface, most systems development research does not meet scientific method criteria for objectivity and falsifiability. At worst, the method suffers from the "Look, no hands" mentality. The credibility of the method could be enhanced by identifying criteria for good research. This panel will help identify this criteria, suggest roles for systems development research, and discuss how systems development research can make an impact on industry.

REFERENCES

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