

**AUTONOMOUS BUSINESSES, APPLICABLE RESEARCH, AND  
THE SOFTWARE PRODUCT LINE****KEN PEFFERS, Editor-in-chief**

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This issue of *JITTA* consists of a special issue on "Linking IS Research to Application," edited by Andrew Wenn and Stephen Burgess, and two independent research papers.

How can a business operate entirely autonomously, without any human intervention, asks Flor (2005)? An autonomous business is built entirely of software. Examples include Ebay.com, HotOrNot.com (a picture rating service), and YesNoMaybe.com (a teen advice forum). Ebay is considered an autonomous business because, although it does have employees, it could continue to operate and make money, at least for some time, if all of the employees went away.

Flor models the autonomous business as a cognitive system to understand the social practices that underlie the business and the mediation of the online technology that allows them to be used to create an autonomous business. He starts with a functional model for a conventional business, including supply, production, marketing and consumption. Next he models the quite mundane social practices that underpin the autonomous business, YesNoMaybe.com, which was developed by the author. He then shows how these social practices, which cannot easily be used in the ordinary world to extract value, can be mediated with online technology to create value that can be retained by the business.

The special issue on "Linking IS Research to Application" contains a special issue preface and six papers. In putting the issue together, Wenn and Burgess (2005) hark back to the 1997 IFIP WG 8.2 conference in Philadelphia (Lee, Liebenau and DeGross 1997), where participants advocated qualitative research to enhance the applicability of IS research.

Information systems research is generally thought to be an applied research discipline. Since information systems and the organizations in which they are created are both human artifacts, we researchers are more likely to want to study the larger universe and apply that knowledge to IS than the other way around. Thus, the study of IS generally means taking theory and research methodology from disciplines, such as computer science, social science, economics, etc., that we think can say something about the state of the universe and how the universe works, and applying them to the study of information systems. If this research can say something that someone can find useful to describe or predict behavior and events or to prescribe successful behavior about the development or use of IS, then we think of it as applicable research.

Applicable research could, but doesn't need to, be applied by practitioners. The special issue, which is prefaced by the editors elsewhere in this issue, includes papers that run the gamut of a case study that describes

factors that could lead to IS development failure (Beachboard 2005), a holistic study of system development in a laggard organization (Ramiller 2005), a case study involving distributed cognition (Kelder and Turner 2005), an argument about data modeling as a designer psychological model (Veres and Mansson 2005), a study of the use of interactive web-based cases for business IT student learning (Johnson and Stubbs 2005), and an examination of online behavior (Vermaas and Wijngaert 2005). All of these papers are previewed in the special issue preface (Wenn and Burgess 2005).

The final paper in the issue is another independent research paper. Software product line is a method for the development of software, intended to reduce development time and costs, according to Ahmed and Capretz (2005). Firms are adopting the software product line method, but to date the method lacks specific rules or guidelines for implementation and procedures to assess its maturity in the organization. In this paper they aim to provide specific guidelines for use of the method, an assessment approach, and

assessment tools. They demonstrate the results of the assessment tools through four case studies and show them to be reliable.

It's amazing how time flies! It's now been four years since Nava Pliskin and Henk Sol joined our editorial group as senior editors with four year terms. We'd like to thank them for their efforts to support *JITTA*. Since they joined our editorial group, the journal has grown substantially in its maturity, reputation, and the strength of its content. Recently, I notice, that we published an issue with 145 pages of quality work. Without the efforts of people like Henk and Nava it wouldn't have been possible. I hope that they'll continue to participate in contributing to the journal, for example, to review a paper from time to time, to put together a special issue, perhaps, and, of course, to encourage readership and authorship. We'll always consider them to be emeritus members of our editorial group.

With this issue Andrew Wenn (Victoria University) and Mike Metcalfe (University of South Australia) join our editorial group as senior editors. Welcome Andrew and Mike.

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