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Integrating research methods, theories, literatures, and technologies: Research opportunities in GSS

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On conducting GSS research

For a variety of reasons, the use of computer-based information systems to support collaborative work processes in organizations has been found to be beneficial. One such technology, the Group Support System (GSS), has recently grown in popularity and use. Similarly, the research literature on GSS has grown considerably. Interest in conducting GSS research continues to grow, as evidenced by the large and increasing number of dissertations in the information systems field that are devoted to GSS and related topics.

For the prospective GSS researcher, deciding what to research is not an easy task. To answer the question, "What should I study?" leads the researcher to a number of other difficult questions? What should I read? What literatures are relevant? Should I read research on GSS, on group dynamics, on decision making, on telecommunications, or all of it? Have I left something out? Further, one must ask: What are the relevant theories for GSS research and where do they come from? What are the important issues and unanswered questions?

Once the GSS researcher decides what to study, s/he must decide on how to study it? What research method will I use? Should I conduct a laboratory experiment, a field study, interviews, or a survey? What explicit technology will I use? Should I use desktop personal computers, or should I use portable computers that are "mobile?" What GSS software should I choose? How should I configure the GSS facility, or should I take the GSS to the users in the field? Should I incorporate desktop computer/video conferencing, or will I have strayed too far from traditional GSS? How do I gather the necessary funds and equipment? Where do I begin?

The need for a tutorial on GSS research

This tutorial is designed to provide an overview of empirical research on Group Support Systems (GSS). We believe that this tutorial will be useful for a variety of reasons. First, the area of GSS research is inherently complex. GSS research draws on multiple and diverse research methods, a variety of useful theory bases, several relevant literatures, and involves many different technologies. Our tutorial will help to tie together the various methods, theories, literatures, and technologies necessary in conducting effective GSS research. Second, GSS research is relatively new. There is a need for a tutorial which can

introduce prospective researchers to the GSS research literature and point them toward useful research streams and important research questions. Third, GSS research is becoming increasingly popular. We suspect that there is a need for this type of tutorial.

This tutorial will be most valuable to faculty, graduate students, and industry researchers who wish to learn more about conducting research in the GSS area. In addition, we believe that this tutorial will also be useful for individuals who plan for, design, develop, manage, acquire, implement, use, and/or evaluate GSS, or for individuals interested in learning more about the pedagogical aspects of GSS. A brief outline of our proposed GSS tutorial is provided below.

Part 1: Theories for GSS Research.
Presented by Joseph S. Valacich, Indiana University.

Professor Valacich will review and explain the various relevant theories and paradigms that are used in GSS research. He will address the strengths and weaknesses of each theory base and show how each is useful for answering particular research questions.

Part 2: GSS Research and Resources.
Presented by Alan Dennis, University of Georgia.

Professor Dennis will review the current body of GSS research, point out research opportunities, and provide resources and information for GSS researchers. He will also describe the "groupware central" project, which is designed to become an Internet repository for GSS resources for research and practice. The World Wide Web home page for Groupware Central can be found at:
http://www.cba.uga.edu/groupware/groupware.html

Part 3: GSS Research Equipment and Facilities.
Presented by Leonard M. Jessup, Indiana University.

Professor Jessup will discuss how one must necessarily balance a variety of uses of a GSS (e.g., research, teaching, service), and he will address the implications that has for conducting GSS research. He will take the participants through decisions on what a GSS facility looks like and how it functions and show how these design decisions can either enable or constrain various forms of GSS research.

Part 4: Open Discussion.
Facilitated by Jessup, Valacich, and Dennis.

The tutorial will end with an open discussion period during which participants will be invited to ask and answer questions about conducting GSS research.

Discovering research opportunities in GSS

We hope that our tutorial will help others to appreciate the breadth of research methods, theories, literatures, and technologies that comprise GSS research. Further, we hope that we can help them to integrate these aspects of GSS research and discover workable, fundable, interesting, important GSS research opportunities.

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