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IRIS is What We Decide to Call it!

Carsten Sørensen

Risø National Laboratory, Denmark, carsten@risoe.dk

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IRIS is What We Decide to Call it!

Carsten Sørensen

*Risø National Laboratory, Systems Analysis Department
DK-4000 Roskilde, Denmark
carsten@risoe.dk*

I am not going to defend one, and only one, way of organizing the annual IRIS (Information systems Research seminar In Scandinavia) conference. According to my experiences from participating at IRIS 12–18, there has not been a standard way of doing things. The stable elements have, for me, been very good discussions and critique, interesting workshops and panels, and a very good turn-up of a really pleasant crowd of people. At all the seven IRIS conferences I have participated in approximately six hours have been allocated for discussion of papers in the working groups. Each author can decide for her or himself how much

time will be spent presenting the paper, but in general much time has been available for providing the author with critique and suggestions. This is for me a unique feature of IRIS. I do, however, agree with Jacob Nørbjerg that it is a very good idea to discuss the design of future IRIS conferences. There are two possible outcomes of such a discussion. It can raise awareness of the options for future IRIS organizing committees, or it can lead to the community making decisions on the basic principles for future IRIS conferences.

Jacob Nørbjerg raises two important issues. Firstly, he argues that only one category of submissions—research papers conforming to standard IS research quality standards—is an unfortunate development. He does not like the IRIS conference to end up as yet another of the traditional, “Object Oriented Man-

TABLE 1. Distinguishing between, on the one hand, whether submission is optional or mandatory, and on the other hand, whether submissions are divided into one or several categories, we get a more qualified view of the options for future IRIS conferences. A formal review process, introduced at IRIS 17 in Syöte, is a third dimension.

	<i>Optional submission of paper</i>	<i>Mandatory submission of paper</i>
<i>Several categories of submissions</i>	Standard international conference	Jacob Nørbjerg's suggestion for future IRIS conferences
<i>One category of submission</i>	IRIS 18 & 19	"Old" IRIS conferences

agement Strategy Groupware“ conferences. In order to avoid this, he proposes that we, at IRIS conferences introduce several categories for submissions, instead of the only one we have now, which is called “a paper“. Secondly, he argues against the IRIS 18 and 19 policy that senior researchers can participate without submitting.

I would argue that there is an implicit relationship between the introduction of a formal review process and the fact that only one type of submission is considered. No formal review procedure implies that authors may submit papers of any category they choose! Hence, even if only one category existed before, in practice the definition of what this category implied was almost exclusively up to the author. This have, in my experiences lead to a number of confusing discussions in IRIS working groups because of mismatching views of the purpose of some papers.

The introduction of a formal review process at IRIS 17 in Syöte was, as far as I see it, a very positive development. From the perspective of IRIS as a venue for young researchers to learn some of

the tricks of the trade, the review process is highly valuable; they will get experiences with both reviewing and receiving reviews; and the quality of the papers will be much better, hopefully leading to more substantial discussions at the conference. In the following I will, therefore, assume that there will be reviewed and accepted research papers at future IRIS conferences, and I will concentrate on discussing Jacob's two main issues.

In order to separate things a bit, let us take a closer look at the options. We can either decide to maintain the principle of only having one category of submissions, or we can decide to have several categories and thus explicitly accept submission of position statements, research project descriptions etc. Another decision is whether or not submission is mandatory. These options are shown in Figure 1 as a two by two matrix.

We have, for IRIS 18 and 19 (implicitly) decided that there are only one type of submission, and that submission is optional for all except junior researchers (a bit of a rubber concept). Traditionally IRIS conferences have implied mandatory submission within only one category

of submission—although the ones before 1994 could be said to *de facto* having many categories, as argued above. Mainstream international conferences typically have optional submission (if you pay the entrance fee, you can join) within several categories, such as, papers, posters, position papers, practitioner submissions, case descriptions, and research in progress papers. As far as I can assess the argumentation, Jacob Nørbjerg argues for the fourth possibility—mandatory submission within several categories. He does, however, suggest that the organizers can invite senior researchers.

What I would propose is to have a very simple two-string system. One string involves the author to submit a paper which will be subjected to a double-blind review process. The program committee will decide participation, based on the review reports. The other string involves people submitting a request for participation. If the applicants wish, they may attach a short (maximum four pages or 2000 word) research in progress paper, position statement, comment or whatever. These could also be made subject to reviews. The program committee decides who will participate based on informed judgment, i.e., totally subjectively. Anyone can submit research in progress papers or bare requests to participate, but the program committee has the right to decide who of these will be invited. Several criteria will, of course, go into such a decision, e.g.: Has the researcher a substantial experience which would greatly benefit the discussions at the conference? Are the ideas stated in the research-in-progress paper novel, interesting, provoking etc.?

The bottom line for me will always be that you get out of the conference

what you put into it. Since a major part of any IRIS will be discussion of submissions, being there without a paper is for me much less interesting than being there with a paper. You will have six to eight highly qualified people working for you! I, of course, realize that at the end of the day, good ideas and good research results are better than nice text describing boring research. The existing review process does, however, in my view not favor the latter. Risking to mix platitudes: Talk is cheap and everything is in the details. A good discussion of interesting research ideas must have its starting point in, at least, a precise characterization of the problem to be discussed. Time is an extremely scarce resource at a conference, so engaging in too much unstructured discussion of loosely formulated ideas in the working groups is, in my view, not a good way to spend time. Good panel or workshop discussions often come about because the panelists carefully prepare the foundation for the discussion.

The idea of allowing senior researchers to join IRIS, even if they have not submitted a paper is that they can only contribute to the discussions if they show up. Of course, most members of the IRIS community, regardless of number of years of experience, will find it much more interesting to participate in IRIS if they also have a paper to be discussed in the working group.

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