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THE NOTION OF LIFEWORLD APPLIED TO INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH

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This paper is dedicated to Heinz Klein, one of our most incisive thinkers whose depth and breadth in IS research is legendary, because it was he who inspired this paper and encouraged me to develop these ideas.

ABSTRACT

Much IS research brings a priori theoretical constructs to its domain of study, and this can generate distorted outcomes. To avoid this danger, IS research should be 'lifeworld-oriented'. Characteristics of the lifeworld are drawn from philosophy and applied to examples of IS research. Surprisingly, both positivist and critical research can be both theorizing and lifeworld-oriented, though in different ways. A proposal is then made for 'lifeworld-oriented IS research', which, by taking into account the lifeworlds of both researcher and researched, can make IS research richer and more relevant.

Keywords Information systems research, lifeworld, diversity and coherence, meaning and norms, background shared knowledge.

1 INTRODUCTION

Geoff Walsham's [2001] work *Making a World of Difference: IT in a Global Context*, provides an insightful discussion of information systems (IS) use, by individuals, groups, organisations and society. He says his whole professional interest may be encapsulated in the question "Are we making a better world with IT?" [p.251]. With a 'basket of conceptual tools', he identifies ways to make a difference.

But in one case study Walsham's analysis becomes uncharacteristically cavalier. ComCo, a company that produced plotters, had a team of engineers to maintain them, but then outsourced the plotter business. The engineers became agents. The company had an IT system, Traveller, to enable them to communicate. Walsham cites stories from three engineers, called Gary, Keith and Neil. Neil saw his job as fixing machines, not answering customers' questions, and subverted the Traveller system. Keith used the system, and ComCo itself, to further his own goals (setting up his own company). Now listen to the story of Gary [p.68-69]:

"Gary thought that his work had been helped a great deal by the use of the remote Traveller system. ... However, because of the limited memory of Traveller, which restricted the data that could be held on it regarding past jobs, Gary kept his own manual log book with details of work done and other comments that he believed might be useful in the future. Gary thought of himself as closely associated with Comco even though he was not an employee any more. ... In some cases, where agents attacked Comco's policies, he took the side of Comco, and he was keen on recommending ways to improve work practices and reduce costs for Comco. Gary regarded customer relations as a key part of his responsibility as a Comco agent. For example, rather than relying on Comco to supply the right parts for all repairs, he kept his own stock of commonly used spare parts in the boot of his car and at his home."

These snippets ring true as 'everyday' experience. But now listen to Walsham's interpretation of this [p.91]:

"Gary was able to draw on his deep knowledge of plotters to leverage power over Comco who placed high value on his expertise."

There is nothing in the entire story, however, to suggest Gary sought to 'leverage power over Comco'. On the contrary, Gary seems to have exhibited a very different attitude, loyalty to both Comco and customers and self-giving generosity. (If the original sources from which this case study is drawn (a Ph.D. thesis and an internal report) were more nuanced in their discussion, Walsham does not say.)

To make the interpretation Walsham used Foucault's notion of power-knowledge as a 'lens' through which to examine this case. It seems this lens has distorted his view. Use of a lens focuses on certain aspects of the situation being studied, and implies "(It is valid to suppose that) life/reality is like this." The very act of focusing can blind the researcher to other aspects that are just as relevant. This often leads to simplistic explanations [Goldkuhl 2002] and, as here, distortion.

The alternative is research oriented to everyday life, or what philosophers call the *lifeworld*. The lifeworld attitude in research takes things "as they give themselves to us" [Husserl 1954/1970,p.156]. Husserl proposed a 'principle of principles', that we should let the lifeworld present itself to us, rather than approaching it with *a priori* theoretical constructs. But what does this mean? It does not mean we can find an 'objective' interpretation; it means we should take a certain attitude in research.

Since Husserl turned a philosophical spotlight on the lifeworld other thinkers have discussed it, sometimes under other names, including 'natural', 'everyday', 'self-evident', 'pre-theoretical' and 'naïve' (without negative connotations). The aim of this article is to examine the notion of lifeworld, use this to evaluate examples of IS research, and propose the notion of lifeworld-oriented IS research (LOISR).

2 LIFEWORLD

The lifeworld and everyday life are closely connected, with the lifeworld being the background knowledge that is employed in everyday life. 'Everyday' includes not only home life but also work and even the activity of scientific research, and here designates an attitude rather than a social role. The lifeworld attitude is one that is open to the 'everyday' in whatever role we are playing, in contrast to what may be called the theorizing attitude, which is not.

2.1 How to Approach Understanding Lifeworld and Everyday Life

One way to understand the lifeworld and how to conduct LOISR might be to find an ontology of the things of everyday life. Goldkuhl [2002] offers one:

- Humans
- Human inner worlds (both individualised and intersubjective)
- Human actions (intervention, interpretation, reflection)
- Symbolic objects (signs)
- Artefacts (artificially made material objects and their processes)
- Natural environment (objects and processes).

Not only is this richer than the comparable ontologies of Hartmann [1952] and Bunge [1979], and more geared to everyday life, but it also allows things to exist in several 'realms' simultaneously. For example a business strategy exists as intersubjective inner world, as symbols, and as human actions. Moreover, Goldkuhl suggests that in addition to making such distinctions, scientific conceptualisation also depends on language, understood as Wittgensteinian language games. That is Goldkuhl's theory of how to provide a scientific conceptualisation of everyday life.

Though Goldkuhl's insights are valuable (they are used below), using them as a starting point smuggles a theorizing attitude into study of the lifeworld. It might distort, because it has no grounds for differentiating, for example, fun, justice, love and faith. This is not what is wanted. Instead of beginning with commitment to an ontology, it is preferable to take a lifeworld attitude to understanding both the lifeworld and theoretical thought. The Dutch philosopher, Dooyeweerd [1955/1984], is one thinker who attempted this and pieces of his thought will be employed, along with that of others, to draw together some characteristics of everyday life and lifeworld. (For a systematic introduction to Dooyeweerd see Clouser [2005] or Basden [2008].) These differentiate a lifeworld or everyday attitude from a theorizing one. This is not necessarily a complete picture; pointers are given to further reading.

2.2 Diversity of Everyday Life and Lifeworld

The first thing that strikes us when we take a lifeworld attitude, Dooyeweerd [1955/1984,I,p.3] suggested, is the diversity of aspects or facets of life that we experience, and that these aspects relate to each other. Gadamer also referred to diversity, as a "wealth of modes" [1977,p.191]. Dooyeweerd suggested these include: quantity, space, movement, energy, life, feeling, distinction, formation, expression, sociality, frugality, harmony and beauty, justice, self-giving and faith, but made clear that such lists are every tentative. In the example above, because Walsham focused on formative aspect of power, he was unable to see that of generosity (self-giving). Gary's story exhibits other aspects too, in the records, resources and loyalty, all interwoven with that of generosity.

Each aspect is a sphere of meaning and law, which is irreducibly different from that of other aspects (e.g. self-giving cannot be reduced to formation). It is this irreducibility that gives everyday life its diversity. Yet the aspects are not wholly independent of each other, for example one often needs to form plans when being generous, and in volume II of [1955/1984], Dooyeweerd discussed at length the relationships each aspect has with others. There is a coherence among the aspects that is important when understanding why theory can be problematic, below.

Reflecting on diversity with a lifeworld attitude involves distinguishing the aspects of what is concretely experienced. This makes ontology important. The lifeworld rejects the nominalist theory, prevalent in much IS research, that ontology can be explained away by epistemology, but it does recognise that ontologies are not 'truth'. Unfortunately, the way ontology has been undertaken over the past 2,000 years (e.g. metaphysics, substance concepts, naïve realism, critical realism, systems theory) all impose prior theories about what the world must be like. The lifeworld attitude is not bound by any of these. Things seem to "give themselves to us" in a multi-levelled manner as Goldkuhl [2002] pointed out: consider a sculpture; it is both a piece of marble and a work of art. Schutz and Luckmann [1973] spoke of 'stratification' of the lifeworld. To take account of such stratification while undertaking research, it can be useful to employ a ready-made ontology, and this is where Goldkuhl's [2002] ontology is useful. We might be cautious however, given its origin in theory of scientific conceptualisation. It might be better to employ an ontology whose origin lies more in the lifeworld itself, such as Maslow's [1943] famous set of needs, especially since it includes strata not found in Goldkuhl. But Maslow omitted some found in Goldkuhl.

Sometimes those being studied have their own ontologies. These should not be obliterated by the researcher's prior ontology, nor should they be accepted uncritically. Critical respect for them is needed and one way to achieve this is to use an ontology based on types of meaning rather than types of thing, such as Dooyeweerd's suite of aspects above. Dooyeweerd's suite is not only more comprehensive than others but it emerged from a lifeworld attitude and allows, like Goldkuhl's, for multi-existing. To say something 'exists' in several realms is constituted in it exhibiting several aspects. The sculpture example above is his; it exhibits at least the physical and aesthetic spheres, as he discussed in depth [1955/1984,III,p.110-127].

2.3 Lifeworld as Background

Heidegger [1927/1962] emphasised that the human being is immersed in the world, 'thrown' into it, and that is the lifeworld attitude. In everyday life we "live within" the world, so the knowledge of it that we make use of and rely on as we do so (viz. the lifeworld) must have a background character. "To live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world" wrote Husserl [1954/1970,p.142]; in everyday living we place reliance on our lifeworld knowledge. To Husserl, the lifeworld is intuitive knowledge, 'pregiven', taken for granted [1954/1970,p.109]. "By this taken-for-grantedness," say Schutz and Luckmann [1973,p.3-4], who developed his thought, "we designate everything which we experience as unquestionable". It has a 'tacit dimension' [Polanyi, 1967].

In a theoretical attitude, by contrast, we adopt a role of detached observers of the world, distancing ourselves from what is known, questioning what is taken for granted and trying to make aspects explicit. As a result, "The lifeworld ... dissolves ... before our eyes as soon as we try to take it up piece by piece," [Habermas, in Honneth, Knodler-Bunte and Windmann 1981,p.16]]. Research involves being an observer and a reflective thinker, but lifeworld-oriented observation and reflection abates the detachment, is sensitive to diversity, and is orientated to action and living rather than pure thinking.

2.4 The Lifeworld, Theory and Critical Stance

What place might theory play in LOISR? Gregor [2006] differentiates five kinds of theory in ISR, used for analysing, explaining, predicting, explaining and predicting, and for design and action. The first, which addresses the question "What is?", is the most basic and is necessary for the development of the other types, because it provides a lens through which they see the world. So LOISR is concerned with the quality of that lens.

If we accept Husserl's 'principle of principles', that we should not come with *a priori* theory, how can we make use of theory as input to research? Dooyeweerd [1955/1984,III,p.31] argued that "Naïve experience may be deepened through ... scientific knowledge, but cannot be *destroyed* by it." Theory may be brought in at the start of research as long as it deepens without narrowing or causing undue distortion.

The challenge is to minimise such distortion and the 'dissolving' of the lifeworld "as we take it up piece by piece". Using transcendental critique, Dooyeweerd [1955/1984] argued) that theoretical thinking necessarily pulls aspects apart, disrupting our view of their mutual interweaving, and Clouser [2005] explains this as high levels of abstraction away from reality, so that we focus exclusively on one aspect and try to ignore its relationship with others. There are two mitigations. One is that the aspects actually remain interwoven even though we do this, so we can always look for inter-*aspect* relationships, especially those of dependency and analogy [Basden 2008,p.71-72]. The other is what Clouser calls lower abstraction, in which we are aware of the distinctions among aspects (e.g. the beauty vs. the cost of a rose) but do not abstract them away from the types of things that exhibit them. Both Dooyeweerd and Clouser argue that the full operation of theorizing involves not just analytical distinctions and language (as Goldkuhl [2002] claims) but also faith commitments to deep presuppositions about the nature of reality. So theory can never be 'objective'.

2.5 Meaning and Normativity

What is it that is taken for granted? Some of our background knowledge is of relational facts (in Walsham's example, Gary is agent of ComCo). A considerable amount of the lifeworld, however, is meaning (for example, what it is to be an agent) and norms (what we conceive as good and bad, for example that the majority of Gary's day-time activity should be devoted to work for ComCo). Husserl's main concern, a 'crisis' in the European sciences, was loss of meaning and of "norms upon

which man relies" [1954/1970, p.6-7]. Habermas [1987] too acknowledged the lifeworld's meaning and normativity, though his concern was apparent loss of meaning in modern life in general.

Modern thinking has fundamental problems with meaning and normativity because Hume and Kant divorced them from existence (or process), and since that time much Western thinking has presupposed that 'facts' may be studied apart from 'values'. Ethics is relegated to something personal and optional. But the lifeworld knows nothing of the supposed divorce. Husserl sought "truths that are destined to be norms" [1954/1970,p.303], for example "the genuine judge, true honor, true courage and justice" - though it is debated whether he found a way to them. Dooyeweerd, however, might have found a way, because he rejected the Kantian-Humean presuppositions and grounded existence in meaning and law [1955/1984,I,p.4], in the way described above: to be a judge, *qua* judge, cannot be divorced from the normative notion of justice. However, he sharply differentiated between deep normativity, which transcends us, and norms that are concrete expressions of this, which are usually socially constructed.

2.6 The Social Aspect of the Lifeworld

The lifeworld is shared with others: when "thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together" [Husserl 1954/1970,p.109], we cannot do so successfully unless what is meaningful and normative to one is so to others in largely the same way. The lifeworld has an important social aspect and a strong (though weakly-understood) link with culture and world-view.

This makes language an important issue, as stressed by Goldkubl [2002] and Hirschhein, Klein & Lyytinen [1996]. Shared meanings enable us to understand what the other is saying, and language enables shared meanings and norms to develop. Habermas [1987] argued that this occurs when we critique the truthfulness, sincerity or appropriateness of each others' statements.

There are "highly different lifeworlds in which highly different things pass as unquestioningly self-evident" [Gadamer 1977,p.189] - e.g. those of engineers and judges, right- and left-wingers, adults and children. A person will live in several lifeworlds (a judge may be a left-winger), and some overlap. Some encompass others, e.g. left- and right-wing are mainly within the lifeworld of the Western world-view.

How can there be understanding across different lifeworlds? This question is important in cross-cultural considerations in the Internet age. If all lifeworld meaning is socially constructed via language, it is possible in principle for there to be two lifeworlds that have almost no meaning or normativity in common. As alluded to above, Dooyeweerd [1955/1984] believed socially constructed norms and meanings to be concrete expressions of more fundamental meaning and normativity that transcends humanity. It is this that makes human living possible, including social construction itself, and of which there are distinct yet interrelated spheres or aspects, and which account for multi-existence. These aspects, therefore, are common to all lifeworlds. Dooyeweerd argued that the kernel meanings of aspects can never be grasped by theoretical thought but may be grasped intuitively (e.g. that of justice). If Dooyeweerd is correct, then there might be two sides to the lifeworld: kernel meanings that are intuitively graspable across cultures, and specific meanings that are socially constructed within specific cultures [Basden & Klein 2008]. There are hints of this in Husserl [1954/1970,p.144] when he differentiated "objects ... as substrates of their properties" from "manners of appearance, or manners of givenness".

3 IS RESEARCH AND THE LIFEWORLD

To illustrate these points, how characteristics of the lifeworld have been recognised (or not) in two examples of IS research will now be examined - one that is positivist, which involves quantitative model-testing, and one that is critical, which recognises social structures around IS. Interpretive research, design research and research into frameworks for understanding a field must be left to

another time. It might be expected that a positivist stance would kill any lifeworld orientation and that research from a critical perspective is more lifeworld oriented, but some surprises are in store.

3.1 Research that Involves Quantitative Model Testing

Robert, Dennis & Ahuja [2008] examined the hypothesis that social capital (of three types: structural, relational and cognitive) assists integration of knowledge in a team, which in turn enhances performance of the team, and that this effect is more marked when lean digital environments (LDE) such as synchronous text messaging are used, than in face-to-face communication. They statistically tested this by asking 46 teams of junior-level business school students in the USA to undertake a task both face-to-face and via LDE. The task was to select applicants for university places. Each member of the team was given some information known only to themselves, and the degree to which this was shared and used by others was measured, to achieve a score for knowledge integration. To give teams the chance to build social capital, they had worked together for 6-9 weeks prior to the task and expected to continue working together for another month afterwards. Social capital was measured by questionnaire just before the task. The statistically significant results were: knowledge integration positively relates to team performance, both relational and cognitive capital enhance knowledge integration, and both structural and cognitive capital have more effect on LDE than on face-to-face working. Implications for both research and practice are discussed.

Since this research exhibits a positivist flavour, it is no surprise to find very little lifeworld orientation in the way it is carried out: abstracting certain variables away from the world, reducing social capital to three of its aspects, and relying too heavily on language-mediated information (questionnaires). Abstraction causes problems when the results are used in everyday life, in that a team manager might read them as saying "For good teamwork, the one thing to get right is knowledge integration" and ignore other contributors to team performance, of which there are many. Whereas researchers might have the background knowledge that other relevant constructs were omitted, the team manager might not.

There is just a little lifeworld-orientation in the execution of the research, in that time is given for social capital (not unlike lifeworld) to build up, though this was only a few weeks. Also, the links between social capital and knowledge integration recognise something of lifeworld diversity, in that nine factors are tested. Sadly, all but one of these come from other theory rather than the lifeworld itself, and their operationalisation as questions deemed precise enough to act as metrics robs them of much of their lifeworld meaning. 'Trust', for example, was reduced to "Given my teammates previous performance I see no reason to doubt their competence and preparation for another team task." Validity of constructs is discussed only in statistical terms and not in terms of their meaningfulness in the domain.

The rest of the paper, however, is more lifeworld oriented. The introduction shows the research to be motivated by a number of lifeworld characteristics, including "larger pools of expertise" (diverse, shared knowledge), "failure to integrate all available information and knowledge" (a concern that presupposes coherence), "knowledge is inherently rooted in ..." (background knowledge). The development of the conceptual apparatus, of what constitutes the three types of social capital, recognises diversity of factors meaningful to teamwork, not only the nine measured but also ones like 'attitude'. (Why were not all measured?) At the end of the paper we find a return to some lifeworld themes, including whether studying students might not be fully representative of real life - though their USA, business school culture is not questioned.

Thus, though the carrying out of the research lacks most lifeworld characteristics, the research itself is situated in the lifeworld. This is not uncommon in better quality positivist research into IS use.

3.2 Critical Social Research

Critical IS research can be more lifeworld-oriented because of its innate normativity. Adam [1998] makes a detailed critical-feminist study of how artificial intelligence (AI) is 'inscribed' with masculinity and asks what a 'feminine' artificial intelligence would look like. Her approach expresses a number of lifeworld concerns. The 'masculine' world view may be characterised as elevating certain aspects of life, especially those of economics, logic and technology. 'Female' thinking is more diverse, she says, focusing instead on bodily, sensitive, caring and even aesthetic aspects. 'Non-Cartesian' ways of knowing including intuition are emphasised. Adam's book is normative, in being a call for reinstatement of these lifeworld characteristics in AI and IS research.

However, Adam et al.'s [2006] paper, which portrays critical-feminist approaches to understanding the place of women in the IT industry, is rather different. Against Husserl's 'principle of principles', the authors [p.1], "draw upon the theoretical constructs of the gender and technology literature to theorize the relationship between gender and technical skill and how this impacts conceptions of gender identity." The conceptual apparatus they employ is constructed from theories: of gender and technology, of power and silence in organisations, of links between masculinity and skill, and that women can take three strategies to working in IT: not to enter, to leave, or to become an 'it'. The bodily, sensitive, caring, aesthetic aspects in Adam [1998] play little part.

In the data collection, however, much more of a lifeworld attitude is found. The interviews gave respondents freedom to express whatever was meaningful to them; in some, "the flood gates opened". Five of the authors had themselves worked in the IT industry and so could engage with the lifeworld of their respondents. To "let ... respondents speak directly" they quoted their words. Despite the quotations having been heavily selected to support the prior theories, a variety of allusions to background issues come through that are meaningful in the lifeworld.

In the interpretation and discussion this lifeworld orientation evaporates. The intention seems to be to show that the research has satisfied five elements of a theory about what critical research is. While there may a place for that kind of discussion, the research has perhaps missed an opportunity that a full lifeworld approach could offer.

Thus critical IS research might exhibit more or fewer lifeworld characteristics. It is not unusual for critical researchers to situate their research, not in the lifeworld of the researched, but in the debates going on in their own community. This might be why the earlier example drawn from Walsham's [2001] work likewise exhibits a lifeworld orientation to data collection that is lost in the interpretation stage.

3.3 Comparison

To say that critical research is more lifeworld-oriented than positivist research is oversimplified. A more nuanced picture is revealed here by comparing the patterns of lifeworld and theorizing attitudes displayed by these two examples. In Robert et al. [2008] (positivist) data collection was theorizing but contextualization exhibits lifeworld characteristics, whereas in Adam et al. [2006] (critical) the pattern was reversed, and data collection was sensitive to the lifeworld but its contextualisation exhibits theorizing attitudes. Though the critical stance acknowledges normativity, there can be a danger that it imposes its own *a priori* norm (emancipation or power) on the situation being researched.

4 LIFEWORLD-ORIENTED INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH

How, then, can we undertake or recognise lifeworld-oriented information systems research (LOISR)? This paper will venture one definition: ISR is lifeworld-oriented to the extent that all relevant

lifeworlds are respected and taken into account. Two lifeworlds will be briefly considered, those of researcher and researched. (Other lifeworlds, such as of research funding bodies, need separate treatment.)

4.1 The Lifeworld of Researcher

Some lifeworld characteristics will be implemented by following good research practice. Things like courtesy to the researched, not misrepresenting what they tell us, not misusing literature, writing clearly, ensuring good argument, and so on are part of the normativity and meaning of research learned during research apprenticeship. It is the meaningfulness of doing research that makes it fulfilling, the diversity that makes it exciting, and the coherence that enables a project's integrity within the wider research context. All such characteristics of good research relate to the lifeworld of the researcher, though often taken for granted.

Research by its nature involves theorizing. So how can this be integrated with a lifeworld attitude? If Dooyeweerd and Clouser are correct that the human process of theorizing involves abstracting an aspect away from its companions, then some integration is possible. Researchers can bring a theory to the research as long as they remember that while it focuses on one aspect there are others that are important and can impinge on it. Also Clouser's [2005] idea of lower abstraction, in which the aspect is linked with the entity that exhibits it, can ensure appropriate interpretation of research. For example Straub, Limayem & Karahanna-Evaristo [1995] seemed to demonstrate the cross-cultural capability of the Technology Acceptance Model by testing it among Japanese, American and Swiss users - but closer inspection reveals that these were all people of one type, sharing one lifeworld: airline employees.

4.2 The Lifeworld of the Researched

The lifeworld of that which is being researched challenges IS research in a number of ways. It often differs markedly from that of the researcher, so different things are meaningful and normative in each. In LOISR the researcher needs to obtain an immanent, sensitive understanding that does justice to the researched's lifeworld. To do so requires attention to each of the characteristics of the lifeworld, including its diversity, its background nature, its meaning and normativity, and its social aspects.

Diversity of the studied domain challenges IS research in at least two ways. First, it extends beyond what the researcher may be looking for and the stated purpose of the research, so the research must be designed to allow flexible response when unexpected issues or aspects are discovered. Glaser & Strauss' [1967] grounded theory approach was motivated by this. Second, it can extend beyond the known purposes of the researched. In business and government for example overt aims of efficiency, profit or accountability might mix with hidden agendas or pressures. LOISR therefore must be sensitively critical of the researched (this is Klein & Myers' [1999] Principle of Suspicion). IS applications in leisure, social networking and the home exacerbate these challenges.

Walsham's [2001] 'basket of tools' can go some way to meeting both challenges, since each tool might disclose a different aspect - but the whole basket should be used, not just Foucault's notion of power! Another approach is to use an ontology like that offered by Goldkuhl [2002], but there are dangers in this. (1) The ontology might be used to justify the researcher's prior choice of issue rather than stimulating self-criticality and ensuring all categories are given their due. (2) The ontology can be imposed on the researched, whose own ontologies (often informal) are suppressed or explained away.

The author of this paper has found aspectual analysis to be the most useful way of meeting the challenges of diversity. This employs a meaning-based ontology like that of Dooyeweerd, because it more naturally avows unexpected variety. There are many variants [Basden 2008], but at root they all rely on providing a set of ways in which things can be meaningful and good or bad, which are

intuitively grasped by researcher and researched alike and which transcend the purposes of both, so that both are stimulated to consider matters often taken for granted.

That we 'live within' the lifeworld means that the context, especially the social and historical context, of the researched must be thoroughly investigated. This is Klein & Myers' [1999] Principle of Contextualization. It also has implications for design research, having been used by Winograd & Flores [1986] to promote a new approach to IS design that aims at what Polanyi [1967] calls a proximal relationship with the IT tool.

The background nature of the lifeworld challenges LOISR to find ways to explicate the tacit and avoid giving undue priority to the easily-explicit. Because of the limitations of language, the researcher should treat carefully anything mediated by language, including questionnaires, statements of purpose made by the researched, explanations and justifications, discussions, written reports, academic papers and the like. 'Reading between the lines' is important in all these, and should be given more priority than it currently is. Knowledge elicitation techniques can be useful because they can probe beneath verbal expressions of knowledge to differentiate understanding (which might be intuitive) from context-dependent knowledge, problem-solving intent and illocutionary intention [Attarwala & Basden 1985, Ngwenyama & Klein 1994, Basden & Klein 2008]. Especially serious is when whole spheres of meaning are overlooked in the interaction between researcher and researched, the spheres of justice, self-giving and faith in particular. Using an ontology based on meaning, such as Dooyeweerd's aspects, as a checklist can help here [Basden 2008], but more sophisticated is Winfield's [2000] multi-aspectual knowledge elicitation (MAKE) technique, which allows the researched to surface aspects in ways that are natural and meaningful to them.

The background nature of the lifeworld also has implications for design research, having been used by Winograd & Flores [1986] to promote a new approach to IS design that aims at what Polanyi [1967] calls a proximal relationship with the IT tool.

The importance of meaning and normativity implies that LOISR will not be content to study entities, structures, processes or causalities, but will give due regard to meaning and normativity. This is recognised in principle by action research, and some insights from it might be useful to LOISR. Critical ISR can be useful because of its normative thrust, but is in danger of imposing its own *a priori* norm of emancipation or empowerment rather than being sensitive to norms of those being researched.

The social nature of the lifeworld implies not only paying attention to the social relationships pertaining to the researched, but also taking account of the social processes of lifeworld formation, as Robert et al. [2008] above did. It can also affect data modelling, as Hirschheim, Klein & Lyytinen [1996] show. Whereas fact-based approaches assume that relationships between entities is sufficient to model all reality, what they call the rule-based approach recognises that aspects of language and sociality are also important, not just to conceptualise the domain (as Goldkuhl [2002] stresses) but in its very constitution. That language and action cannot be divorced led to the Language Action Perspective, the potential of which for ethnographic analysis is discussed by Klein & Huynh [1999]. This begins to recognise the inter-aspect coherence discussed by Dooyeweerd [1955/1984] and if he is correct we must bring other post-social aspects in too, especially those of faith (loyalty, in Gary's case) and self-giving (generosity).

This brings us back to the original challenge of connecting the lifeworlds of researcher and researched. Klein & Myers [1999] warn that the very data is socially constructed through their interaction. If the two lifeworlds are too similar, this fact can be overlooked, so the researcher should always be questioning their own assumptions. Where the lifeworlds differ another problem emerges, that of multiple interpretations. In both cases, the researcher might let the kernel meanings of the entire range of aspects shed light on the researched area and the researcher's assumptions alike. If their kernel meaning and normativity are intuitively-graspable across lifeworlds, they might offer both critique and mutual understanding, whether the background knowledge of concrete things, norms and meanings is similar or different. This approach has yet to be widely explored, but the author has found it offers a

way by which the researcher can immanently understand the lifeworld of the researched whether he agrees with their concrete norms or not.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed a new direction for IS research: lifeworld-oriented IS research (LOISR). It has suggested that a theorizing attitude in IS research can be problematic because it narrows the researcher's view and diverts attention away from issues that may be important in the lifeworld of IS use. LOISR takes full account of the lifeworlds of both researched and researcher (and others). To understand this, characteristics of the lifeworld have been discussed, which LOISR should respect: diversity, background character, meaning, normativity and social aspect. Though a number of these characteristics may be detected in extant research methods, they have not previously been put together in the way outlined here.

LOISR does not preclude theorizing, but rather provides a context in which it takes place. If the role of theorizing is to carve out an aspect to deepen our knowledge, theorizing research might be valid when those working in a field are still exploring its inner structure. When a field moves towards maturity then researchers should increasingly recognise the links with all other aspects, and thus move towards LOISR.

The reader might have noticed the number of references to Dooyeweerd. Whereas Husserl introduced the notion of lifeworld, Dooyeweerd is, arguably, the best philosopher of everyday life to date. He was open to issues in a different way because he held presuppositions very different from those that have informed Western thinking for 2,500 years [Basden 2008 ch. II].

An examination of two examples of IS research surprised us: positivist research can exhibit lifeworld characteristics in its contextualisation while critical research can be theorizing. This implies that each stage of ISR needs separate attention, with different benefits arising in each. A lifeworld-oriented (L-O) motivation for the research can widen its appeal, a L-O set of concepts and issues can be easier for readers to understand and trust, a L-O research method yields richer findings, L-O interpretation generates a more faithful picture of the domain, and a L-O discussion makes the conclusions more robust and more widely applicable.

LOISR might also enhance the experience of those engaged in IS research. Respecting the researched's lifeworld with sensitive explication and treatment can make them more favourable towards the research, even when their knowledge is subjected to critique. Researchers are likely to find the activity of research more rewarding and interesting because it is richer and invites fascination. Referring to intuitively-grasped kernel meanings can help researcher and researched understand each other better.

LOISR is a new idea, so it may be too early to know what its drawbacks might be. It could require more effort, especially in handling a wider range of factors and in explication of tacit knowledge. Unless care is taken, research could become characterized by a broad, shallow collecting of an ill-conceived plethora of pieces of information. Attention to the relationships between aspects might help to avert this danger. A number of questions remain, which deserve further consideration. Are all the insights about the lifeworld equally important? Is the above a complete list? Are the insights consistent, given the variety of philosophers from which they have been drawn? Almost certainly there is much yet to be discovered about the lifeworld.

In Richardson & Howcroft [2006] it is suggested that the researcher should not be seen as a mirror, who reflects reality-as-it-is (the positivist, objectivist assumption), but should be seen as a lens or spotlight, which focuses on one part of it, drawing attention to what others might have overlooked (the critical assumption). But perhaps a more apt metaphor for the lifeworld-oriented researcher is a lamp, which makes many types of thing visible. The colour of the light, and what is looked at, are controlled by the researcher, but the lamp nevertheless allows things to present themselves, not only to the

researcher but to all who care to look, including those who live among them. This is the hope of lifeworld-oriented information systems research.

6 REFERENCES

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