

10-2-2008

## Introduction to the Special Issue of JAIS in Honor of the Scholarship of Gerry DeSanctis

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### Recommended Citation

Poole, Marshall Scott and Cummings, Jonathon N. (2008) "Introduction to the Special Issue of JAIS in Honor of the Scholarship of Gerry DeSanctis," *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 9(10), .  
DOI: 10.17705/1jais.00178  
Available at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/jais/vol9/iss10/7>

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# Journal of the Association for Information Systems

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Special Issue

## Introduction to the Special Issue of JAIS in Honor of the Scholarship of Gerry DeSanctis \*

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Volume 9, Issue10/11, Article1, pp. 547-550, Special Issue 2008

## Introduction to the Special Issue of JAIS in Honor of the Scholarship of Gerry DeSanctis

The late Gerardine DeSanctis was an internationally recognized Information Systems scholar. Her scholarship spanned a wide range of topics including the structuration of IS, group support systems, virtual teams, the impact of advanced information technologies on organizations, new organizational forms, and online communities.

Her career as a scholar and educator spanned 23 years, 12 at the University of Minnesota and 11 at Duke University, where she was Thomas F. Keller Professor in the Fuqua School of Business. Gerry served as visiting professor or scholar at Queen's University, Erasmus University, Nanyang Technological University, and INSEAD.

In the mid-1980s, Gerry defined a conceptual framework for research on group decision support systems. Her seminal article with Brent Gallupe, "A Foundation for Research on Group Decision Support Systems," has been cited almost 500 times. The influence of this article on scholarship can be seen quite clearly in the secondary citation network of the 97 most cited papers from the original list of 500. This secondary citation network is composed of 2645 articles that cite the 97.<sup>1</sup>

The DeSanctis and Gallupe article was a cornerstone for the Minnesota GDSS Research Project, which produced over a hundred publications and helped launch the careers of several prominent IS scholars. Gerry was author or co-author on 47 of these publications.

During this period Gerry was instrumental in the development of Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST). AST explains adoption and use of IS in terms of social construction via members' appropriation of the technology. The theory attempts to stretch the boundaries of social science by combining social constructionism with rigorous empirical research. Its goal is to transcend the "either-or" thinking that often characterizes the relationship between post-positivist and interpretive/critical inquiry. As a result, AST research has employed a wide variety of approaches, including case studies, critical analysis, survey research, and laboratory experiments. This openness was characteristic of Gerry, who welcomed open discussion of ideas from many perspectives.

Adaptive Structuration Theory has been influential in a variety of fields. The 1994 article in *Organization Science* that explicated AST has been cited 300 times by scholars in the disciplines of Information Systems, Organization Studies, Management, Communication, Psychology, and Geography, among others. Research grounded in AST continues to evolve in these and other fields.

In the 1990s, Gerry's scholarship shifted to focus on new organizational forms and the ways in which IT shapes organizational structure. As co-editor of special issues of *Organization Science* on new organizational forms and on communication in networked organizations, and the book *Shaping Organization Form: Communication, Connection, and Community*, Gerry made important contributions to our understanding of the revolutionary changes occurring in organizations due to advanced information technologies. These included studies of the role of technology in team-based organizations, how information systems evolve over time as organizations move to networked forms, and how research and development units relate to other units in new organizational forms.

Gerry also developed a strong interest in online communities and virtual teams, and the last stream of her work focused on these. Her research included studies of learning in online communities, the social construction of online communities, and communication practices within virtual teams.

Gerry DeSanctis's scholarship was not only broad and far-reaching, it also reflected her strong belief in the value of collaboration as a means of advancing research. Her legacy includes the colleagues whose careers she enriched through collaborative research, the many graduate students she mentored, and countless others whose work she cultivated as an editor and whom she counseled and encouraged. She will be greatly missed by our field and by her many colleagues and friends.

To recognize Gerry's impact, the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University hosted a conference March 3-5, 2006. Over 60 people, including graduate students and junior faculty supported by a NSF conference grant (SES-0616923), attended a series of paper presentations that built on and extended her contributions. Submissions to the conference helped initiate the process of creating a special

issue of JAIS in honor of the scholarship of Gerry DeSanctis.

The special issue leads off with an article summarizing twenty years of work by Gerry and her colleagues from the Minnesota GDSS Research Project. Gerry and the first editor began work on this before she passed, and the first editor, Ilze Zigurs and the associated authors completed the article for the special issue.

Markus and Silver's "A Foundation for the Study of IT Effects: A New Look at DeSanctis and Poole's Concepts of Features and Spirit" is an ambitious effort to refine and reconceptualize two key concepts from AST. It offers a rigorously developed theory with clear links to practice.

"Extending the Contextual and Organizational Elements of Adaptive Structuration Theory in GSS Research" by Niederman, Briggs, de Vreede, and Kolfshoten, specifies a model of structuring tactics that operate at three levels, the meeting level, the activity level, and microlevel interaction. This model extends AST by specifically considering meta-structuring that occurs in and between group meetings.

George, Marret, and Giordano's "Deception: Towards an Individualistic View of Group Support Systems" examines negative behaviors in the context of GDSS, namely interpersonal deception. Along with demonstrating that it is often difficult to detect deception in electronic groups, the authors show that increasing the complexity of the task can make detection (and subsequent task performance) even more difficult.

"Kiosks, Clubs, and Neighborhoods: The Language Games of Online Forums" by Fayard and DeSanctis, analyzes discursive practices that constitute online forums. This study breaks new ground by analyzing the microlevel language games that give various types of forums their unique character. This article also has important practical implications for those who organize or manage forums.

Kudarvalli and Faraj's "The Structure of Collaboration in Electronic Networks" focuses on collaboration effectiveness in a task-oriented electronic network. By distinguishing between initiating dialogue and sustaining dialogue in the online community, the authors show that 'how' members interact with one another can have a stronger impact on effectiveness than simply 'who' the individuals are in the network.

Publications representative of Gerry's work include:

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DeSanctis, G., & Poole, M. S. (1994). Capturing the complexity in advanced technology use: adaptive structuration theory. *Organization Science*, 5(2), 121-147.

DeSanctis, G., & Jackson, B. M. (1994). Coordination of information technology management: team-based structures and computer-based communication systems. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 10(4), 85-110.

Fulk, J., & DeSanctis, G. (1995). Electronic communication and changing organizational forms. *Organization Science*, 6(4), 1-13.

DeSanctis, G., & Monge, P. (1999). Communication processes for virtual organizations. *Organization Science*, 10(6), 693-703.

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DeSanctis, G., Poole, M. S., & Dickson, G. W. (2000). Teams and technology: Interactions over time. In Neale, M.A., Mannix, E.A., & Griffith, T.L. (Eds.) *Research on managing groups and teams: Technology* (Vol. 3, pp. 1-27). JAI Press: Stamford, CT.

DeSanctis, G., Wright, M., & Jiang, L. (2001). Building a global learning community. *Communications of the ACM*, 44 (12), 80-82.

DeSanctis, G., Glass, J. T., & Ensing, I.M. (2002). Organizational designs for R&D. *Academy of Management Executive*, 16(3), 55-66.

DeSanctis, G., Fayard, A-L, Roach, M., & Jiang, L. (2003). Learning in online forums. *European Journal of Management*, 21(5), 565-577.

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<sup>i</sup> We would like to express our appreciation to Janet Fulk of the University of Southern California, Noshir Contractor of Northwestern University, and Roberto Dandi of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign who conducted this citation analysis.