**Communications of the Association for Information Systems**

Volume 20 Article 3

July 2007

# Gary Dickson Exemplar: Applying IRSS Psychology Discourse

Fay Cobb Payton
*North Carolina State University*, fay_payton@ncsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais

Recommended Citation
Payton, Fay Cobb (2007) "Gary Dickson Exemplar: Applying IRSS Psychology Discourse," *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*: Vol. 20 , Article 3.
DOI: 10.17705/1CAIS.02003
Available at: https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol20/iss1/3

This material is brought to you by the AIS Journals at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in Communications of the Association for Information Systems by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

Communications of the Association for Information Systems

# GARY DICKSON EXEMPLAR: APPLYING IRSS PSYCHOLOGY DISCOURSE

Fay Cobb Payton
College of Management
North Carolina State University
fay_payton@ncsu.edu

**ABSTRACT**

In a recent *Decision Sciences Journal on Innovative Education* article, my colleagues and I used Involvement-Regimen-Self Management-Social (IRSS) network theory as defined by Boice [1992] to assess mentor and mentee experiences among under-represented Information Systems (IS) doctoral students and faculty [Payton, White and Mbarika 2005]. IRSS is defined as Involvement-Regimen-Self Management-Social activities intended to delineate and advise newly-minted doctorates into the professoriate. Boice's framework fosters the establishment of professional support initiatives warranted for career progression and is critical as neophytes to the field attempt to balance the three pillars often characterizing academic life: teaching, research, and service. Though Boice [1992] centers his research in the context of actions and behaviors of newly-minted doctorates and others [Payton et al. 2005] examined those forthcoming to the professoriate, this article focuses on how Gary W. Dickson influenced my thinking about and applying IRSS in my academic career.

**Keywords**: IRSS Theory, Gary W. Dickson, new faculty, mentoring

## I. INTRODUCTION

Clinical psychologist and organizational development theorist Robert Boice [1992, 1999] has worked extensively in the area of new and emerging academics' success, establishing support initiatives and exploring career progression. Boice [1992] offers the four-prong IRSS theory (Involvement, Regimen, Self-Management, and Social Networks, often called IRSS) to propose actions and behaviors that should be practiced by new and emerging academics along with elucidating their professional experiences.

*Involvement* is stressed as a major step for new and emerging academics to take part in multiple dimensions of university activities. This step provides academics with formal and informal "connections" throughout the university hierarchy. Moreover, Astin's [1985] theory of involvement recommends that new scholars must engross themselves in university activities. Such immersion results in social networks that enable membership inclusion and active participation. The greater challenge, however, is striking a balance between social and professional activities.

*Regimen* involves issues such as time management and balancing teaching, research, and service activities - three vital components in most academic institutions. That is, time management and balancing among teaching, research and service is best served when new and emerging academics exercise temperance and efficiency. Excessive attention to any one component saddles career advancement, and Boice [1992] reported that teaching tends to be the

primary hurdle characterized by an over-compensation in preparation time and perpetual course development.

*Self Management* points to unanticipated, emerging academic roadblocks that tend to lead one to focus on wrong or unproductive activities. These activities involve an over-commitment of service and neglecting research which is most essential in obtaining a doctoral degree and/or promotion within the faculty ranks. Limited and/or unfocused research writing time tended to confront new faculty who often fall into the "next semester will be better" mindset. Further, Boice [1992] found that new faculty are typically overly optimistic that summer breaks lead to increased research productivity. Unfortunately, these expectations are routinely met with incongruent productivity outcomes.

On the other hand, *Social Networks* involves the building of informal relationships via socialization with other colleagues and university administrators. Oftentimes, "informal" relationships emerge and can largely influence scholarly success internal to one's department or college, along with external implications to the university and broader field. These networks imply mentoring or sponsorship associations between junior and senior faculty. Though simple in definition, mentoring relationships are not naturally fluid and require some degree of mutual understanding between the mentor and mentee [Payton et al. 2005], namely knowledge of the department, college and university structure and culture; cultural backgrounds of the mentee and mentor; and the unwritten rules that impact career succession.

As discussed and addressed in Payton et al. [2005], the Boice [1992] framework is well defined and points to the importance of addressing these four factors through the early academic careers of new and emerging academics. He does not speak to the depth of how these dimensions can be applied on a practical basis and, even more so, how they could be applied in the case of up-and-coming under-represented minority academicians. Senior faculty, however, are just as critical to developing junior faculty and can reverse engineer the IRSS model with active involvement in mentoring [Payton and Jackson 1999]. Such involvement can influence departmental direction, and assessment of research productivity among junior faculty.

With the above IRSS structure, I will provide anecdotal examples how my interactions with Gary W. Dickson enabled me to apply the principles defining IRSS. This is followed by lessons learned in the process and implications for career development.

## II. CONTEXT AND SPECIFICS

### DICKSON ON INVOLVEMENT

During my initial years in the academy, Dickson advocated active engagement in essential departmental activities, such as curriculum and search committees. He viewed these activities as important, particularly in the context of multidisciplinary departments that might lack a critical mass of IS professors. Dickson would often reference this involvement as "good citizenship" internal to the department and college. He, however, consistently encouraged active contribution in the broader field via conference attendance and submissions and taking on conference roles (for instance, reviewing or being a panel member). To this end, he engaged me in the 1999 International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS), and he tasked me with serving as a moderator and junior faculty panelist during the doctoral student consortium. From this 1999 ICIS event, I was able to establish new relationships with others in the field, and these connections have been sustained over the years to engender support for social networks, an additional pillar of the IRSS model, as well as further participation in the field.

### DICKSON ON REGIMEN

Early on, Dickson articulated the need to manage effectively one's research, teaching, and service requirements. He espoused a regimen that included teaching and course development that integrated my research interests. With regard to research, Dickson provided advice regarding

research productivity particularly in the area of journal prestige which was and continues to serve as a measure of the quality of one's publications. In cases of multidisciplinary departments, he attempted to provide clarity to journal-ranking perceptions among faculty while being actively engaged in discussions with regard to areas within departments, across disciplines and at the college level. Throughout these discussions, Dickson provided me with feedback and departmental perspectives regarding journal impact on tenure and promotion. Finally, he informed me of the service requirements for junior faculty at my school and frequently noted I should be careful not to permit these obligations from diverting me from research and teaching which recurrently account more heavily in the tenure process.

### DICKSON ON SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-management implies the avoidance of unnecessary or over-commitment of tasks that veers one off the tenure path. Dickson frequently offered to assist in the process by serving as a pre-screener or reader of my working papers and provided international connections to those with comparable research interests. During these times, he would reiterate the significance of co-authors and teaming. As a result of one such connection, I published a book chapter in *Lost and Found in Virtual Reality: Women and Information Technology* with my colleague, Eleni Berki. Similar to Boice [1992], these interactions are but one method that I use to facilitate balancing the workload, fostering scholarly relationships and establishing future research initiatives.

### DICKSON ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

The concept of social networks focuses on building and sustaining relationships, be they prescribed or informal. Dickson enhanced my social networks as a new assistant professor via an invite to a social function of colleagues internal and external to the institution. This event created a forum to connect with people with diverse research interests, share personal experiences and heighten my understanding of the departmental, college and university cultures, which can each be distinctive. For me, these social networks emerged as facilitators in my involvement in internal and external activities that tend to shape one's experience in the profession. Finally, while these formal events were a part of the social network's mosaic, informal contacts, such as brown-bag lunches, were opportunities to discuss research ideas, trends in the field and journal outlets.

## III. IMPLICATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Boice authored *The New Faculty Member* [1992], a reference in which he extended the IRSS framework and reported findings from 200 newly academicians. For most new faculty in that study, the first year was cited as being the time with the most unforeseen events, with voids in collegial support, disproportionate preparation time among teaching, research, and service, and less-than-average student ratings. Boice regards faculty who can acclimatize and be agile in the academy as "quick starters," or new faculty who adapted more readily than others. Quicker starters are faculty who learn rapidly to effectively and efficiently deliver in the classroom while integrating their teaching with their other scholarly activities.

In the context of Boice's [1992, 1999] framework and his focus on getting new faculty to be more proactive, Dickson influenced me in thinking about and applying the IRSS framework in my academic career. As such, I have adopted several principles offered by Boice and continuously work to model success behavior in the profession by:

- maintaining a positive attitudes about students;
- actively seeking advice about teaching; and
- dedicating time to scholarly journal and grant writing.

Despite these vignettes and implementation of the IRSS model in a practical context, I espouse that mentoring, whether formal or informal, is valuable in one's professional career. Mentoring,

however, raises implications with respect to the plurality of academic stakeholders, including new and senior faculty, department chairs, deans, and university-level administrators. As articulated in Payton and Jackson [1999] and Payton, et al., [2005], mentoring is often a missing factor in the earlier careers of junior faculty, in general, and under-represented groups, in particular, who often experience feelings of social and professional isolation. Accordingly, Boice [1992] concluded that mentoring should not just be a single chance, ad hoc meeting to ask and answer questions. Rather, mentoring is a process entailing regular communications to assist *all* new faculty to sense being part of the group. Beyond the desirable linkage of teaching and scholarship, I have learned mechanisms to incorporate service activities into my research agenda as well. Gary Dickson helped to provide a myriad of interactions to enable me to discern the culture and nuances of academics while simultaneously applying IRSS theory to my own career.

## REFERENCES

Astin, A. W. (1985). *Achieving Academic Excellence: A Critical Assessment of Priorities and Practices in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Boice, R. (1992). *The New Faculty Member*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Boice, R. (1999). *Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Payton, F. C. and C. Jackson. (1999). "Ethnic Diversity in IS: What Are Current Ph.D. Students Saying*?" Computer Personnel – A Journal of the ACM*.

Payton, F. C., S. D. White, and V. Mbarika. (2005). "A Re-Examination of RacioEthnic Imbalance of IS Doctorates: Changing the Face of the IS Classroom," *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*. (6)1, pp. 37-51.

Payton, F. C., S. D. White, and V. Mbarika. (2006). "Using IRSS Psychology Theory to Understand the Experiences of Under-represented Faculty in the IS/IT Domain," *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*. (4):2, pp. 191-213.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Fay Cobb Payton** is associate professor of Information Systems at North Carolina State University. Her Ph.D. in Information and Decision Systems is from Case Western Reserve University. She was recently named the first SAS Faculty Fellow and works extensively with The PhD Project. Her research interests include healthcare, data management and social exclusion. Her publications appear in the *Journal of the AIS*, *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce, The Information Society, IEEE Transactions, Health Care Management Review, Information and Management,* and others.

Copyright © 2007 by the Association for Information Systems. Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and full citation on the first page. Copyright for components of this work owned by others than the Association for Information Systems must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists requires prior specific permission and/or fee. Request permission to publish from: AIS Administrative Office, P.O. Box 2712 Atlanta, GA, 30301-2712 Attn: Reprints or via e-mail from ais@aisnet.org

Communications of the Association for Information Systems

ISSN: 1529-3181

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**
Joey F. George
Florida State University

**AIS SENIOR EDITORIAL BOARD**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jane Webster<br>Vice President Publications<br>Queen's University | Joey F. George<br>Editor, CAIS<br>Florida State University | Kalle Lyytinen<br>Editor, JAIS<br>Case Western Reserve University |
| Edward A. Stohr<br>Editor-at-Large<br>Stevens Inst. of Technology | Blake Ives<br>Editor, Electronic Publications<br>University of Houston | Paul Gray<br>Founding Editor, CAIS<br>Claremont Graduate University |

**CAIS ADVISORY BOARD**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gordon Davis<br>University of Minnesota | Ken Kraemer<br>Univ. of Calif. at Irvine | M. Lynne Markus<br>Bentley College | Richard Mason<br>Southern Methodist Univ. |
| Jay Nunamaker<br>University of Arizona | Henk Sol<br>Delft University | Ralph Sprague<br>University of Hawaii | Hugh J. Watson<br>University of Georgia |

**CAIS SENIOR EDITORS**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Steve Alter<br>U. of San Francisco | Jane Fedorowicz<br>Bentley College | Chris Holland<br>Manchester Bus. School | Jerry Luftman<br>Stevens Inst. of Tech. |

**CAIS EDITORIAL BOARD**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Michel Avital<br>Univ of Amsterdam | Erran Carmel<br>American University | Fred Davis<br>Uof Arkansas, Fayetteville | Gurpreet Dhillon<br>Virginia Commonwealth U |
| Evan Duggan<br>Univ of the West Indies | Ali Farhoomand<br>University of Hong Kong | Robert L. Glass<br>Computing Trends | Sy Goodman<br>Ga. Inst. of Technology |
| Ake Gronlund<br>University of Umea | Ruth Guthrie<br>California State Univ. | Alan Hevner<br>Univ. of South Florida | Juhani Iivari<br>Univ. of Oulu |
| K.D. Joshi<br>Washington St Univ. | Michel Kalika<br>U. of Paris Dauphine | Jae-Nam Lee<br>Korea University | Claudia Loebbecke<br>University of Cologne |
| Paul Benjamin Lowry<br>Brigham Young Univ. | Sal March<br>Vanderbilt University | Don McCubbrey<br>University of Denver | Michael Myers<br>University of Auckland |
| Fred Niederman<br>St. Louis University | Shan Ling Pan<br>Natl. U. of Singapore | Kelley Rainer<br>Auburn University | Paul Tallon<br>Boston College |
| Thompson Teo<br>Natl. U. of Singapore | Craig Tyran<br>W Washington Univ. | Chelley Vician<br>Michigan Tech Univ. | Rolf Wigand<br>U. Arkansas, Little Rock |
| Vance Wilson<br>University of Toledo | Peter Wolcott<br>U. of Nebraska-Omaha | Ping Zhang<br>Syracuse University | |

**DEPARTMENTS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Global Diffusion of the Internet.<br>Editors: Peter Wolcott and Sy Goodman | Information Technology and Systems.<br>Editors: Alan Hevner and Sal March |
| Papers in French<br>Editor: Michel Kalika | Information Systems and Healthcare<br>Editor: Vance Wilson |

**ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Eph McLean<br>AIS, Executive Director<br>Georgia State University | Chris Furner<br>CAIS Managing Editor<br>Florida State Univ. | Copyediting by Carlisle<br>Publishing Services |