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## What Do We Like About the IS Field?

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# Communications of the Association for Information Systems

CAIS 

## What Do We Like About the IS Field?

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### Abstract:

What do we like about the IS field? This article is based on a panel discussion at the 2009 International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) held in Phoenix, Arizona. The panel was sponsored by the Senior Scholars' Consortium. Given the recent enrolment downturn in IS programs and concerns expressed by some about the strength of the field, this article sets out the views of some senior scholars who describe what they like about the IS field.

**Keywords:** IS discipline, IS practice, IS history

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The IS field appears to be in a perpetual state of anxiety. The recent downturn in enrolments has only exacerbated this anxiety, with some expressing a concern about the discipline's viability; e.g., see the recent debate about the IS informing crisis and IS fashions [Gill and Bhattacharjee, 2009; Myers and Baskerville, 2009]. However, some of us have been in the information systems field for a long time. We have seen many ups and downs over the years, but we still count ourselves as IS scholars. Therefore, we think it is an appropriate time to ask ourselves: What do we like about the IS field? [Grover et al., 2009]. We think the field of information systems is distinctive, perhaps with respect to subject, methods, and a certain way of thinking [Baskerville and Myers, 2002; Benbasat and Zmud, 2003; Sidorova et al., 2008]. Assuming we are not simply drowned in cognitive dissonance, there are important reasons for us to believe in this field and for us to hope that it prospers. We might or might not have a clear and common message about the distinctive nature of the field, but we can at least present the views of some senior scholars who are both smart enough to have jumped ship if they had wanted, and committed enough to see it through.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to present our answer to the question: What do we like about the IS field? This article is based on a panel discussion at the 2009 International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) held in Phoenix, Arizona. The panel was sponsored by the AIS Senior Scholars' Consortium.

### II. ORGANIZATION OF THE PANEL

The panel was jointly organized by John King and Michael Myers, who were the Co-chairs of the AIS Senior Scholars Consortium in 2009. By definition, all the presenters were members of the Senior Scholars Consortium. The membership of the Senior Scholars' Consortium currently includes all LEO and AIS Fellow Award Winners, all AIS Presidents, all previous Program Co-chairs of ICIS, and the Editors-in-Chief of all six journals listed in the AIS basket of journals (plus the Editors-in-Chief of the Journal of Strategic Information Systems and the Journal of Information Technology).

The panel was introduced and moderated by Michael Myers. This was then followed by three presentations. The presenters were (in order of their presentations): Suzanne Rivard, Carol Saunders and Ron Weber. All three presenters provided their answers to the question: What do we like about the information systems field? An edited version of their presentations is provided below. Following these presentations, John King summarized the discussion and suggested some key points for debate (see Section IV below). The conclusion incorporates comments and suggestions that emerged in the discussions with the audience and closes with a brief synthesis of our views on this topic.

### III. WHAT WE LIKE ABOUT THE IS FIELD—THREE PERSPECTIVES

#### Suzanne Rivard

To answer the question of "What do we like about the information systems field?" I will use three conjugations of the verb *like*. Using the past tense, I will comment on what I liked about the field when I first discovered it as a Ph.D. student and as a participant in the 1981 ICIS Doctoral Consortium. Using the present tense, I will then focus on what I like about how the information systems field has matured. Finally, using the conditional I will express my wishes about what would make me like the field even more in the future.

#### What I liked about the information systems field—the little village in ancient Gaul.

The first image that comes to mind when I think about information systems in the early 1980s through the early 1990s is that of a little village in ancient Gaul, the setting for *The Adventures of Asterix*.<sup>1</sup> Every one of the thirty-four books in the series begins with the image of a small, isolated village, with the following caption: *Near a blue sea and a lush forest lies the Gaulish Village that holds out against the might which is Rome*. The inhabitants of the village were renowned for their fortitude. This was my image of the members of the information systems field at the time.

<sup>1</sup> *The Adventures of Asterix* is a series of French comic books written by René Goscinny and illustrated by Albert Uderzo. The series has been translated into 100 languages.

Indeed, the members of the field were striving to circumscribe the domain of information systems research [Ives et al., 1980; Mason and Mitroff, 1973] and demonstrate its legitimacy as an academic field. They were also concerned about the future of the field [Dickson et al., 1982]. Some were advocating for a unifying paradigm, while others were analyzing the field's evolution from a philosophy of science perspective [Banville and Landry, 1989]. Yet, as much as the inhabitants of the little village in Gaul were united against their common enemy, Rome, they were also often engaged in fraternal fights. So were the information systems scholars, and this was also something to be liked about the field. There were indeed many debates and topics for debate among information systems scholars. One was the need for a cumulative research tradition [Keen, 1980]. Another was which reference discipline would prove most appropriate for IS research [Bariff and Ginzberg, 1982; Keen, 1980; Kriebel and Moore, 1982]. And there was also the debate on the need to move beyond the dominant positivist perspective and embrace other perspectives—the interpretive and the critical—that could better “inform studies of the relationships between information technology, people, and organizations” [Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991].

#### What I like about information systems now—you've come a long way, baby!

Although information systems researchers are still debating the future of the field [Nunamaker et al., 2009], it has dramatically changed over the past three decades. Indeed, when I compare our field as it stands today with what it was thirty years ago, the image of the “Virginia Slim” woman comes to my mind. Some will remember the advertising campaign that the cigarette manufacturer ran, featuring a picture of a liberated young woman overtly smoking a cigarette. In the background was her ancestor, who had to hide—sometimes in the laundry room—to smoke her cigarettes. The caption read: “You've come a long way, baby!” In my view, like this young liberated woman, the information systems field has indeed come a long way.

There are many signs of our accomplishments. First, our field has several first-tier journals. This is very different from the situation thirty years ago, when Peter Keen described the lack of publication outlets for information systems research as “a major, discouraging problem.” He commented that the outlets receptive to information systems research lacked prestige and readership, and remarked that *MIS Quarterly* could not even be found on the shelves of the libraries of major MIS universities [Keen, 1980]. Today the situation is quite different, with several IS journals having high impact factors—as reported by the ISI Web of Knowledge's Journal Citations Report—with *MIS Quarterly* at the very top of the list in both the management and information science categories. Second, while the information systems research conducted during the 1980s was often qualified as a-theoretical, a vast majority of the studies that are published today have strong theoretical foundations. Indeed, it appears that information systems researchers took Peter Keen's plea seriously and turned to reference disciplines for theoretical bases and methodology. This is reflected in the Association for Information Systems' “Theories used in IS Research Wiki,” which summarizes over seventy theories used by information systems researchers. Third, our field is characterized by harmonious pluralism, with a truly international body of researchers who espouse a variety of epistemological stances and employ a wide array of research methods. Finally, information systems research is moving toward building a cumulative tradition and informing work in other disciplines [Grover et al., 2006].

#### What would make me like information systems still more—to boldly go where no one has gone before

Although she was liberated, the young “Virginia Slims” woman had a nicotine addiction! What is our field's addiction? Because my topic is what I like about information systems, I will not talk about addictions here. Rather, I will talk about an institutionalized practice, that of testing the theories that we borrow from our reference disciplines. Prior to becoming institutionalized, a given practice is devised as a response to a particular problem faced by actors on the basis of the technical and economic feasibility of the practice; actors adopt the practice because of its efficiency and effectiveness [Tolbert and Zucker, 1996]. Indeed, in the early 1980s and 1990s, when information systems research was nascent, relying on reference disciplines for theoretical support was one way to address the problem of poor theoretical foundations. Later, once a consensus has been reached about the value of a practice and when that practice is considered a norm, it is enacted for legitimacy motives [Tolbert and Zucker, 1996]. I believe that relying on the theories developed within our reference disciplines and testing them in an information systems setting has indeed become an institutionalized practice in our field.

Although this practice has merit, it can—much like other institutions—become an iron cage [Weber, 1930]. Indeed, only a handful of the seventy-plus theories summarized in the Theories Used in IS Research Wiki<sup>2</sup> were developed in our field. I believe that the field is now mature enough for us to take more risks. Here, the image that comes to my mind is that of the Star Trek *Enterprise* and the introductory text relating its mission, told in many episodes of the series: “To boldly go where no one has gone before.” Indeed, I believe that information systems researchers should engage in more theory building. How can this be achieved? I see two preferred avenues.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.fsc.yorku.ca/york/istheory/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://www.fsc.yorku.ca/york/istheory/wiki/index.php/Main_Page).

One is for the top information systems journals to welcome contributions of this nature. Some of the leading journals have explicitly invited the community to make this type of contribution. For instance, past MISQ Editors in Chief have invited authors to propose this type of manuscript [Weber, 2003; Zmud, 1998], and a few years ago, the journal created the MISQ Theory and Review Department. Also, the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* has a clear editorial policy of welcoming the submission of theory development pieces [Grover et al., 2008] and has held theory development workshops as an ICIS ancillary meeting since 2002. The other avenue is to ensure that our Ph.D. graduates are trained in theory building. It appears, from the very incomplete data set that I have in my possession, that we do not do much in terms of teaching theory building. Indeed, none of the fifteen or so colleagues who responded to an informal survey I conducted was teaching theory development. Indeed, from the responses I received, if our graduates get any training on theory building, it is from courses that they take in other disciplines, such as organizational theory, strategy or organizational behavior. One colleague even commented that in the information systems research methods courses he teaches, theory building is not covered. He does cover it, however, in a seminar that he teaches for the organizational behavior department of his university!

This observation gives me one more reason to like the information systems field so very much: there is so much work to do, and so many contributions yet to be made!

### Carol Saunders

I will use the approach outlined by Suzanne Rivard above to frame my comments.

#### What I liked about Management Information Systems

There is a popular American television series called *Madmen* which takes place in an advertising agency in Manhattan during the early sixties. The professionals, with one exception, are all men and in every case the contributions of the women employees are undervalued. I entered the job market at the end of that same decade and found a similar view of women as professionals. Many prospective employers were more interested in my typing skills than they were in my dual bachelor degrees in Mathematics and German. In this environment, Management Information Systems (MIS) offered women a whole new set of challenging options.

I had taken all of the computer-related courses that I could take as an undergraduate. That is, I took a grand total of five computer-related courses (Autocoder, Fortran, COBOL, systems analysis and design, and numerical analysis). Upon graduation I had a number of job offers to be a programmer ... and I chose the most exciting one. I accepted a job with IBM as a programmer writing code for the space program. I was in the backup mission control room in Clear Lake (Houston), Texas, when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Being involved with putting a man on the moon was exhilarating, and MIS played (and continues to play) an important role in the space program. In the following decades our dynamic discipline has continued to excite me. I started working in the space program when it was focused on landing a man on the moon, and I am now exploring virtual worlds.

#### What I like about Management Information Systems

I would like to use Suzanne Rivard's battle scene depiction to talk about what I like about MIS. I refer to this depiction because I personally feel that MIS is in the midst of a battle. At my university, the University of Central Florida, MIS came under siege and was vanquished. The administration of the third largest university in the United States decided last June that my department was not central to the mission of the university. It was one of four departments that was eliminated. All MIS faculty were given layoff letters.

John King notes that he does not understand the reason for anxiety within the discipline. However, I experienced extreme anxiety when my department was eliminated and I was laid off. Being laid off is rated as one of the top ten life stressors. My reaction was predictable.

One of the things that I like about the MIS discipline is that many of my MIS colleagues are very caring. They e-mailed and called to convey their concern, and a number sought to create a position for me at their university, or helped in my job search. Thus, I like the supportive MIS community.

#### What I would like to see in the future

Like St. Augustine, I view the present as a knife edge between the past and future. Thus, I choose not to linger on the present, but rather to focus on what I would like to see in the future for MIS. To position my view of where I would like to see MIS in the future, I'd first like to share with you how I perceive the evolving environment of higher education. It is becoming more global, high-tech, and cost-conscious. We have also moved from the century of the individual that celebrated Nash and Einstein to an environment that is more team-oriented. For example, social scientists wrote 17.5 percent of their papers in teams in 1955; by 2000 they wrote 51.5 percent of their papers in teams. Further, since 1955, team sizes in the sciences grew from an average of 1.9 to 3.5 authors per paper

[Wuchty et al., 2007]. Finally, our traditional institutions of higher learning are increasingly being challenged not only by corporations with their own training programs, but also by proprietary universities such as the University of Phoenix which has 420,700 undergraduate students and 78,000 graduate students in its 200 worldwide campuses as of August 2009 [*The Almanac of Higher Education*, 2009].

Within this current higher education environment, I believe there are two major models or paradigms<sup>3</sup> of departments in terms of financial contribution to the university: the history-model and the computer science-model. History departments seldom receive external funding. However, as budgets become tighter and tighter, they can offer large classes taught by tenured faculty teaching at relatively low pay, or use adjuncts or instructors. Computer science departments, on the other hand, typically bring in large amounts of external funding, which helps support the university through the overhead built into the grants.

Which model do MIS department tend to most resemble? Relatively few MIS researchers have won external funding, even though such funding is becoming increasingly available. So, although the topic area may be similar to that of computer science, our contribution to the university through external grants is not. I would argue that most MIS departments resemble the history department when it comes to their financial contribution to the university.

Many relatively well-paid tenured MIS faculty are being replaced by more affordable adjuncts and instructors. Further, MIS departments are increasingly offering ever-larger core courses, often taught by instructors and adjuncts. For example, in my university, an instructor teaches our online MIS business core class with almost a thousand students spread over multiple campuses each semester. But in my university, even these mega-classes were not enough to offset the cost of relatively high research faculty salaries. And, in the Board of Trustees meeting that was convened to consider the elimination of the MIS and three other high-tech departments, the provost was quick to point out that our department had never brought in any external funding.

My bifurcated categorization scheme may be rather simplistic, but I hope it will motivate you to start thinking about the contribution MIS is making to the academy. In the future I would like to see more MIS departments working with businesses on funded projects and winning external funding from governmental agencies. And in doing so, I would like them to leverage one of our discipline's strengths: MIS is interdisciplinary.

Since MIS is interdisciplinary, it can inform the research of many other disciplines. This is an especially good thing at a time when funding agencies such as NSF, NIH, the National Cancer Institute and others are soliciting interdisciplinary, if not cross-disciplinary, research and are encouraging "team science." Team science is concerned about developing strategies for making interdisciplinary teams more effective. MIS researchers can not only work well in the interdisciplinary environment, but they can also use their research on virtual teams, collaborative technologies and information processing support to help inform the research on team science.

We need to recognize that our interdisciplinary nature is a strength. Instead of being concerned that we reference the work of other disciplines in the published research in IS journals, we need to recognize that doing so only makes our journals more interdisciplinary in a world that values being interdisciplinary. Because of our interdisciplinary roots we can partner with other disciplines not only in the conduct of research, but in educating students to be better able to deal with our increasingly complex world. For example, we could work with health care, accounting or finance departments to offer MIS courses that would be especially designed to be helpful to their majors. By partnering in research and academic programs we can better weather the downturns that cyclically buffet our young discipline.

### A Parting Thought

In our systems analysis and design classes we ask our students not to use acronyms that are unfamiliar to system users. However, many of us use an acronym that is unfamiliar to many of the people who ask what subject we teach. To make my point, consider the reaction you get when you respond "MIS" to that question. I typically get quizzical looks when I try to give a one-sentence description describing our discipline. A new descriptive phrase describing our discipline could symbolize a new direction for our field. I am not sure what that phrase would be (e.g., information management, technology application, business analysis, etc.). Minimally, we need to stop using the acronym and start saying "Management Information Systems" instead.

<sup>3</sup> My view of these two models is strongly influenced by a discussion I had with Brian Butler.

## Ron Weber

As I have reflected on what I like about the information systems (IS) field, I have found it useful to think about the field in terms of three dimensions: (a) *phenomena*—the sorts of phenomena that command the attention of colleagues within the field; (b) *people*—the qualities of many colleagues who work within the field; and (c) *place*—the characteristics of the “space” in which the field operates. In the paragraphs below, I offer some observations in relation to each of these dimensions.

### Phenomena

Paradoxically, the phenomena that command the attention of colleagues who work within the IS field are both dynamic and constant. New information technologies frequently appear. Inherently, some are exciting. Some also evoke fascinating changes in the communities that use them. In recent years, witness, for example, the technologies that have been developed to support online auctions, virtual worlds, and social networking. Witness, also, the interesting behaviors the technologies have motivated among their user communities.

When one looks below the “surface” of the technologies and the changes associated with them, however, often some enduring themes can be detected. For instance, there is ongoing disquiet about how information technologies might privilege some people and disadvantage others, and there are concerns about how users appropriate the technologies (sometimes in unexpected and controversial ways). Over some forty years, many talented colleagues in the field have studied these enduring themes. Nonetheless, some remain an enigma and a source of inspiration for ongoing research.

In short, there is something for everyone in the field. Those colleagues who need change to provide the stimulation for their research should be easily satiated. Those colleagues who prefer to work on enduring themes should also be content. Thankfully, the field is also inherently interesting for many people. As a result, it continues to attract a good share of new, talented entrants to the field.

### People

I finished my Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota in December 1976. Over the ensuing years, I have had the privilege and pleasure of working in various capacities with many outstanding colleagues. Much of what I like about the IS field is associated with the impact that these colleagues have had on my professional life and often my personal life and the effects that I observe they have had on other colleagues. I have learned much from them.

I have encountered many colleagues within the IS field who have manifested some admirable qualities. I believe these qualities are fundamental to the long-term sustainability of any academic field, especially one such as IS that is often subjected to substantial turbulence. Below are some that I value highly:

- *Fidelity*: Many colleagues have remained committed to advancing the IS field, even when I am sure they have been sorely tempted to enter other fields where academic legitimacy and progress seems an easier path. They have not jumped ship, however; instead, they have worked hard to establish a sound intellectual base for the field.
- *Renewal*: Information technology is a hard taskmaster because it is in constant flux. I remain in awe of the many colleagues who throughout long careers have had the energy to continue to come to grips with new technologies, to think creatively about the phenomena these technologies evoke, and to renew themselves in the face of constant change.
- *Generosity*: During my career, I have had the privilege of holding several significant professional and editorial roles. For me, perhaps the most-difficult aspect of these roles was the fact that constantly I had to impose on colleagues with requests for various kinds of work to be completed. I discovered many quiet, unsung heroes in the discipline—colleagues who were ever generous in their support of others.
- *Creativity*: The rich array of topics that are the subject of research within the IS field are testament to the creativity of many colleagues within the field. I continue to be amazed by the ways in which new topics are conceived and explored. While I remain concerned about the extent to which the field’s progress is rooted in ideas borrowed extensively from other disciplines, nonetheless I can only admire the creative ways in which this is done.
- *Resourcefulness*: Many colleagues in the IS field are resourceful. They are quick to seize opportunities when they arise, and they are not deterred by adversity. Perhaps because of the path I have travelled in my career, I have seen this resourcefulness most evident in the research that colleagues undertake. Opportunities to undertake empirical research will be exploited quickly, and I have seen many examples where empirical research has been done in the face of extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

- *Enthusiasm*: The tremendous enthusiasm of many colleagues within the IS field is manifested in a multitude of ways. For example, often there is a raft of colleagues who are willing to take on onerous service roles, many colleagues will actively embrace an opportunity to participate in a doctoral consortium, and the field has its share of zealots when new technologies appear. The field has always had a number of passionate, sometimes colourful, individuals.
- *Egalitarianism*: Early in my career, I learned that senior colleagues (the “stars” of the field) most often were humble individuals. It was clear that they had a strong belief in egalitarianism and the importance of their assisting others to develop their careers. As with any field, a hierarchy of sorts exists within the IS field, but for the most part I believe it is a benign hierarchy. It exists so the work of the field can progress rather than to support the power aspirations of some within the field.
- *Resilience*: The fall-out from the dot-com crash in the early 2000s has demonstrated the resilience of many colleagues in the IS field. In spite of loss of job opportunities, sometimes-painful downsizing of schools and departments, and lack of funding for research and conference attendance, the field has remained vibrant. Many colleagues have used a difficult context as a motivation to reflect on and renew curriculum and an opportunity to refocus their research agendas.

In a nutshell, the IS field is fortunate to have some outstanding role models—colleagues who show through the qualities they exhibit the sorts of behaviours that I believe are necessary for the long-term survival and prosperity of the field.

### Place

I am strongly committed to internationalism. To the extent we experience one another’s culture and engage with one another (preferably from time to time on a face-to-face basis), we develop a better appreciation of our similarities and differences. Moreover, we are better able to accept, value, and exploit our differences.

Early work in the IS field was confined primarily to a few locations in Europe and the U.S. A few pioneers spearheaded efforts to develop the field, and a small group of like-minded colleagues and students gathered around them. The mix of delegates at the early International Conferences on Information Systems reflected this situation. Most delegates were from North America (primarily the U.S.) with a few notable representatives from other countries (mostly Europe and, interestingly, my own country of Australia).

Nonetheless, I greatly admire the way in which the IS field quickly became a truly international field. Some leaders from outside the U.S. gave early impetus to internationalization of the field through hosting the International Conference on Information Systems in their own country. They encouraged colleagues who historically had not attended the conference to engage with it. As a result, new cohorts of loyal delegates arose, and ensuing conferences had a more-diverse mix of delegates.

In my view, however, the major catalyst for internationalization of the IS field was the formation of the Association for Information Systems. Early leaders within the Association clearly were committed to ensuring it represented the interests of IS scholars around the world. They enacted policies and procedures that gave force to this commitment—for instance, having the presidency of the Association rotate around its three international regions, and ensuring that each region had delegates on the Association’s Council to represent its interests. As the Association’s history has unfolded, an even stronger commitment to internationalism has been evident. For instance, witness the recent decision by the Association’s Council to have the International Conference on Information Systems regularly rotate around the Association’s three international regions.

For the most part, the IS field has also been a wonderfully democratic place. Many leaders in the field have strived to ensure that all colleagues have had and continue to have an opportunity to have their voices heard. Indeed, at times there has been a cacophony of voices! In any event, power elites have not emerged, and healthy debate and a relatively high level of openness and transparency have characterized the field instead. In this context, many colleagues have been encouraged to engage in different ways with the field—for instance, volunteer for service roles or undertake new publishing initiatives. I believe the field has progressed faster and been stronger as a result.

### Conclusions

From time to time, a number of colleagues within the IS field have argued the field is too inwardly focused and too preoccupied with the limitations of its teaching and research efforts. I hold a different view. I believe the field continues to be robust because, for the most part, it is realistic about its progress and reflective about new ways forward that potentially will be beneficial. Moreover, as I have tried to illustrate in my comments above, I believe the field has much to celebrate.

#### IV. DISCUSSION—JOHN KING

Here is what I took away from the comments by Suzanne, Carol and Ron: We are fighting Rome, and when we are not fighting Rome, we are fighting each other. We need more theory but at least we are pretty relevant to the world. There is a lot of serendipity in this business: we tend to be at the right place at the right time. There is always a lot happening in the field: new technology, new phenomena arising from that technology's presence. There is a great deal of diversity too. We became "international" early in our field history. There is something for everyone in the IS field, including some people who do not think there is something for everyone. The IS field can be characterized as "harmonious pluralism"—when we are not fighting each other, that is.

So, what can I say about the IS field that I like given all this? A field with these conditions is going to be perpetually off-balance. This has several great features. Unlike many fields that remain relatively static, and hence make and drink their own Kool-Aid constantly, we move on so fast that we never drink our own Kool-Aid. And thus we do not drink much poisoned Kool-Aid, either. It has been this way from the start. I was there at the beginning. We needed to get together because none of us could explain to our colleagues what we were. When we did get together, none of us could explain to each other what we are, either. We complain about a lack of identity, but really, how could a field like this, driven by constant change and challenged by pluralism, avoid an identity crisis? It is built-in; it is part of who we are.

We have always been on the *Titanic*. We know it. We like the *Titanic*. Living is risky, and the IS field is very much alive. We accept the risk because we are risk-takers, and we like being around other risk-takers. Higher education is entering a period of dramatic change. People in all fields are anxious. Hey, we were anxious before it was fashionable! Forty years on and we are still here. We made the IS field; it did not make us. That is the way we like it, and that is the way we will keep it.

#### V. CONCLUSION

This article has set out the views of a few senior scholars who have described what they like about the IS field. These views were presented during a panel session at the 2009 International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS).

Although the focus of the panel was the positive one of elaborating our reasons for liking the IS field, it is interesting to see how quickly the discussion shifted to several concerns that were raised by session participants. The perennial "problem" of the lack of relevance of much IS research was mentioned, along with the apparent divide between IS practitioners and academics. Some in the audience suggested various solutions to these apparent problems: for example, it was suggested that we should make our research more accessible, and/or that we should improve our curriculum and the education of IS professionals. Others argued, however, that the "practitioner problem" was "not our problem," rather, it was the fault of IS practitioners themselves for wanting a "complex world to be made simple."

The ensuing debate to our panel presentations thus suggests that we did not succeed in allaying the various concerns that continue to be raised about the strength of the IS field. As senior scholars, we like the IS field and we continue to believe in it, but perhaps many of us also like being anxious and perpetually off-balance.

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