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Editors' Comments

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The Future of Information Systems as a Scholarly Discipline

What is the future of Information Systems as a scholarly discipline? This question has been raised frequently over the last two decades about a field that is barely 55 years old! More recently, a Ph.D. dissertation (Love, Jr., 2014) and other scholarly publications have examined the identity of the Information Systems discipline. As Davis, Massey, and Bjoern-Andersen (2005) noted, "there are reasons to be concerned about the future of the academic discipline or field of Information Systems."

We are optimistic and believe the future of information systems, as a scholarly discipline, will remain promising and evolving. Information Systems/Information Technology (IS/T) will continue to play a significant role in all aspects of our lives and the communities where we live. For example, Information Systems knowledge and skills will remain vital in planning, analytics, decision making, healthcare delivery, management, sustainability efforts, transaction processing, and energy management to name a few areas where Information Systems research and practice is critically important. Similarly, IS/T will continue to play a major role in most aspects of business and organizational processes. That being said, there remains a critical need to expand the body of knowledge already developed related to Information Systems/Information Technology.

Sometimes the future of applied academic disciplines, such as information systems, seems bleak and even inhospitable. Researchers in our field come from varied backgrounds. Some full-time faculty have technical skills, in addition to more traditional research and theory knowledge of Information Systems, while others have little knowledge of programming and database management. Some colleges have not recognized the field of Information Systems as a scholarly discipline. Some Academic Deans view Information Systems as a subject area to staff with adjuncts and temporary faculty. People who have worked with Information Systems contribute much to our field, but they don't advance the science of Information Systems and Information Technology.

Some IS/T researchers conduct design and case study research and engage information systems professionals in the community to learn first-hand about what is happening in the trenches. Some faculty members rely too heavily on textbooks and "canned" knowledge in their teaching, while others can share real experiences and provide an independent view of the subject matter. Some faculty regularly invite IS/T professionals to their classrooms as guest speakers and even involve them in their scholarship. These kinds of individual efforts, along with rigorous and relevant scholarship, related to the functions of IS/T in organizations, will certainly enhance the discipline of Information Systems.

Information technology is a fast moving target and so are the Information Systems built using the technologies. Changes in computing and information technology capabilities forces new learning and re-learning upon the conscientious scholar. Our field seems plagued with new buzzwords, and the "flavor of the day" for research often seems esoteric and only marginally relevant to the "real" or even the "virtual" world. We as scientists need to avoid falling into the "buzzwords" trap.

Scholars in other disciplines often can feel challenged and even inadequate when dealing with information technology and some of them get concerned about creating a new caste of technology "gurus" in the halls of academia. After all, the scientists who deal with computing are computer scientists, not the applied "folks" who examine how information systems function in, around, and between organizations and individuals. We as Information Systems scientists need to do better to inform colleagues and to link people, organizations, and systems together in our scholarship.

Information Systems scholars must continually prove their worth and relevance in the eyes of some colleagues, who know little of what the IS/T field of study encompasses. Some doubt the topic is really important. These same colleagues may bemoan the problems with the information systems they use. Security and privacy are topics everyone wants resolved, but many think the problems are intractable or cannot be "researched." We need to remind

our colleagues that significant growth in the use of information systems in organizations has occurred. Unfortunately, this change is bringing about some short term negative consequences. Behavioral impacts of more information and of Information Systems are noticeable. Many assume the professionals in IT will fix the problems. We need to study the problems to "fix" them. The problems change and some get worse.

Other areas of study in Information Systems, such as decision support, face challenges from managers who do not want to rely on information and systems to support their decision making. The hyperbole of vendors and the failures of new Information Systems only lead to skepticism regarding the scholars and teachers whose research and knowledge will prepare the next generation of users and developers.

These issues, problems, and challenges are real and will not be overcome or resolved easily. JMWAIS is a small player in the academic journal area. We do care about scholarship. We promote meaningful, diverse scholarship. We promote scholarship about information systems; a phenomenon that has been and is changing organizations, people, and social interactions. We hope this publishing endeavor will move our field towards a greater understanding of the phenomenon and help our field move forward. We want to understand information systems in a broad context.

Failing to support information systems scholarship condemns our global society to even greater ignorance about our new environment and the demands and challenges for people and institutions.

Please help us understand our new data-driven world and help us impact the humanizing of information technology. Contribute your research, ideas, and knowledge. We must work together to build a strong, applied discipline of information use and the systems which create, deliver, and maintain our knowledge, financial records, and increasingly, our social and work interactions.

Overview of the contents of this Issue

This issue of our journal includes four papers: a viewpoint article, a tutorial article on personal computing security, a traditional research paper, and a project that focused on teaching undergraduate students project management and leadership skills.

Merhout and O'Toole suggest, given the additional focus on corporate social responsibility in recent years, that Information Technology Governance should include sustainability issues. They have extensively researched Control Objectives for Information and Related Technologies (COBIT 5) and they conclude COBIT 5 does not adequately address specific sustainability factors relevant to organizations. They prescribe specific remedies to correct the deficiencies.

In recent years, information and systems security has received significant attention due to the growth of un-authorized access to systems and, in particular, un-authorized access to personal information. Sagers and Hosack, in their tutorial article, provide a comprehensive and easy-to- understand review of security issues and guidelines to protect systems and personal information in the home and/or a small office environment.

Luse uses the Mplus software package in a structural equation modeling setting and offers an approach for identifying differences at the group-level for each individual group, in comparison with the overall group average. He verifies the proposed method to SAS output.

Finally, Klein, Davis, and Kridli present the International Rube Goldberg Machine Competition as a project for teaching undergraduate students both project management and leadership skills. They empirically demonstrate that as a result of using this task in an instructional setting, students were able to improve in their project management and leadership skills.

References

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Author Biographies

Daniel J. Power is a Professor of Information Systems and Management in the College of Business Administration at the University of Northern Iowa. Power serves as the editor of the Journal of the Midwest Association for Information Systems (JMWAIS), DSSResources.com, PlanningSkills.com, and Decision Support News. His research interests include the design and development of decision support systems and how these systems impact individual and organizational decision behavior.
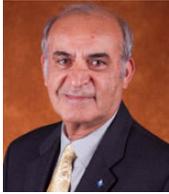
Rassule Hadidi is Professor and Chair of the Management Information Systems Department at the College of Business and Management, University of Illinois Springfield. His current research areas of interest include online and blended teaching and learning pedagogy and its comparison with face-to-face teaching; MIS curriculum development and quality assessment; cloud computing and its applications for small and medium-sized enterprise; and quality of online information. He is the First Hanson Professional Services Faculty Scholar; served as the President as well as the At-Large Director of the Midwest Association for Information Systems and is the founding Managing Editor of the Journal of the Midwest Association for Information Systems.