

Call for Papers
Special Issue of the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*

Envisioning Digital Transformation: Advancing Theoretical Diversity

Special Issue Co-Editors

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Important Dates

October 1, 2020: Deadline for Extended Abstract Submission to the Workshop

October 10, 2020: Notification of Acceptance to the Workshop

January 5, 2021: Workshop at HICSS in Kauai, Hawaii

September 1, 2021: Deadline for Paper Submissions to the Special Issue

Motivation for the Special Issue

Everything about theory is contested in our field today. First, there's the *role of theory* in IS research. Is it necessary for research publications to make a theoretical contribution? What is a theoretical contribution? Should we devote more effort to building theory or to testing theory? Can you test theory with qualitative data? Is theory even relevant if one is doing research with analytic or machine learning methods? Second, there's the issue of *how to build theory*. Can you build theory with quantitative data? Do you need empirical data to build theory? How important is the literature review (and what type of review) in theory building papers (Leidner 2018)? What is the role of "disciplined imagination" (Weick 1989) in IS theorizing? Is "armchair theorizing" permissible, and, if so, when? Third, there's the issue of what *theory looks like*. Is a good theory a boxes-and-arrows diagram followed by the more-X-the-more-Y type propositions? Or are there other persuasive ways to present theories? One possibility might be events, conditions and mechanisms. Another might be narratives of how things happen. And, perhaps most important of all, how do we as a field cope with multiple, overlapping, possibly inconsistent, theories of the same phenomenon?

This special issue is a bold venture designed to shed light on some of these questions, and particularly on the third issue. Unlike traditional special issues on theory where the phenomena of interest may vary, or traditional special issues on a phenomenon where the role of theory may vary (e.g., theory building, theorizing, theory testing, theory extending etc), this special issue focuses on a single topic area (digital transformation) and a single role of theory (theorizing). The aim of our special issue is to explore the potential value of diversity in theorizing and theory presentation in our field by inviting loosely-constrained theoretical contributions on the broad and emerging topic area of digital transformation. What will we learn about IS theory if we invite theory papers from all quarters, but only on one broad and unsettled topic? What will we learn about IS theory if we focus exclusively on the product of theorizing, excluding from evaluation the sources and mechanics of theory construction? This special issue will find out.

What We Seek for the Special Issue

We seek exciting conceptual papers addressing important aspects of digital transformation (a concept that might include specific phenomena such as robotic process automation or the Internet of Things). The concept of digital transformation has been widely embraced in society at large, but is difficult to define (Vial 2019), and it often appears to be a meaningless buzzword. For the purposes of the special issue, we leave open the definitions of digital transformation, because we aim to provoke productive debate. Does this concept refer to technical systems and their evolution and/or to social dynamics of organizations or society at large? What is transformation (or digitalization or automation, etc.), and how does it make a difference? Is it significantly different from change (Besson and Rowe 2012)? What is the process of digital transformation? What causes or contributes to digital transformation? What are the effects of digital transformation? These are just a few of the many questions that might be addressed through conceptual analysis and theory-building that draws on a variety of sources (e.g., experience, literature, empirical data, and thought-experiments). While Design Science Research has emerged as a leading problem solving paradigm building useful artifacts, we are also interested in design theory and its presentation.

We **are** interested in plausible and well-crafted **statements** of theory about digital transformation. We are interested in theoretical statements consistent with any established philosophical tradition or interpretation of causality (Markus and Rowe 2018). In particular, we are open to submissions that move beyond the organizational level of analysis (where most of the literature on digital transformation now focuses). We particularly invite contributions at the ecosystem and societal levels.

We **are not** interested in papers that discuss how to build theory about digital transformation. Nor are we interested in research essays about theory presentation. We do not welcome papers that provide extensive evidence (whether prior literature, qualitative data, or quantitative data) or details about the analysis involved in theory construction.

Accepted papers are likely to conform roughly to this template:

- We expect that accepted papers will exhibit clear relevance to the topic area of digital transformation.
- We expect that accepted papers will describe briefly the traditions and sources of inspiration that they build upon.
- We expect that accepted papers will present/elaborate theoretical statements, whether they were deductively, inductively, or abductively derived.
- We expect that accepted papers will justify the statements as the authors see fit. Justifications can refer to data, literature, or whatever, but the main evaluation criterion is the **quality of the theoretical arguments presented**, not the quality or quantity of evidence used to justify them.
- We expect that accepted papers will offer insightful implications of the theoretical statements, whether for theory, for practice, or for teaching.

The special issue will include both invited and open call papers. Both short papers (e.g., focusing on specific concepts) and regular-length papers are invited.

Again, we emphasize that this call for papers is floated as a bold new venture to see what we can learn from the diversity of theoretical contributions on a broad and emerging research topic. We do not know what will come of this venture, but if we did, it would be doctrine, not research!

Special Issue Editorial Board

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Process and Timelines

The deadlines for this Special Issue are extended with the aim of attracting new work not already in progress. Submissions to the Special Issue will open in June 2021 and close on September 1st 2021. Two optional paper workshops are planned: 1) at HICSS January 2021 for prospective authors and 2) at ICIS December 2021 for authors of papers that have advanced beyond the first round of reviews.

Date	Event
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October 1, 2020	Deadline for a 5-page (max) statements of interest in attending the HICSS paper workshop, covering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus of the theoretical statement and relevance to digital transformation • Sources of inspiration or intellectual traditions drawn on Early thoughts on form of theory presentation
Jan 5, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper workshop at HICSS in Kauai, Hawaii
September 1, 2021	Deadline for paper submissions
Mid-November, 2021	First-round review decisions
December, 2021	Workshop at ICIS in Austin, Texas
March 1, 2022	Deadline for submission of revised papers
Mid-June, 2022	Provisional decision and final round of comments
August 1, 2022	Deadline for submission of revised papers
September 2, 2022	Notification of final decisions

If you have questions, please email MLMarkus@bentley.edu and Frantz.Rowe@univ-nantes.fr

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