

The Papers

The papers in this book are organised into three sections entitled 'Theory', 'Representation' and 'Reality', reflecting the sub-title of the 2006 Workshop. While convenient, it has to be said that this division is somewhat misleading, since no such hard categorial division can really be made: most if not all of the papers address more than one of these aspects at once. Nevertheless, in most cases an overriding interest in one or other of the three areas can be identified and this has formed the basis for the categorisation we have adopted in this volume.¹ For instance, the lead paper by Gregor and Iivari is primarily theoretical in focus, considering the nature of the information system artifact and even introducing a new term (semizoic artifact) to describe such artifacts. But the purpose of the theoretical discussion as well as the introduction of the new term is not only theoretically motivated but also has a distinctly practical ultimate aim: to help those who grapple with the messy reality of designing and developing information systems to better understand the nature of and achieve better results from their efforts. In a similar way, the papers of Vessey and Davern focus on the theoretical concept of 'fit' in an information systems context. Again, however, the aim of that focus is to identify and clarify ways in which it might be possible to improve the problem solving abilities and performance of both information system developers and users in the real world in which they work. The final paper in the 'Theory' section by Lederman and Johnston is essentially concerned with how the concept 'information system' is to be defined. This may appear to be a distinctly and exclusively theoretical issue, but even here there is crossover into the other categories: the intent of the authors is to contrast our usual understanding of 'information systems' with what they call 'routine manual systems' in order to glean ideas, lessons and implications about how we build information systems from looking at and considering how routine manual systems do their work in the world.

The papers in the 'Representation' section, like those in the 'Theory' section, also exhibit a multi-faceted nature in their concern for both theory and reality in addition to their primary focus. The paper by Recker and colleagues, for example, overtly deals with representational languages and their analysis, but is also concerned with how to integrate notionally different theories within information systems (IS) such as representation theory and the technology acceptance model, thereby providing an exemplar for how such theory integration efforts might be approached in similar domains. Likewise, though the paper by Lamp and Milton is targeted at the very practical problem of representing, through an appropriate categorisation scheme, published research

¹ See the paper 'Indexing Research: An Approach to Grounding Ingarden's Ontological Framework' by John Lamp and Simon Milton, in this volume, which is focused on exactly this issue.

in information systems, the approach is distinctly theoretical, based on the ontological framework of Roman Ingarden as well as grounded theory. In their paper on requirements engineering, Nguyen and Shanks also deal with a representational issue: the 'elicitation, modelling and specification of user requirements'. However, their concern is also theoretical, namely, how to best investigate the process of requirements elicitation (they propose protocol analysis in the paper) so that its effectiveness in the reality of system development can be significantly improved. The final paper in this section by Hart and Warne deals with the vexed issue of IS success and failure, arguing that the representation of a system as one or the other is not as simple as is perhaps usually assumed. It proposes the new theoretical concept of stakeholder 'defining characteristics' that not only drives the distinction between the two but also carries implications for how user requirements gathering in particular is carried out in practice.

The final 'Reality' section of the book contains papers that are concerned with subjects such as: a new, action-based and radical approach to systems analysis and design (Waller et al); how 'conversational technologies' such as Wikis are impacting organisational work (Hasan and Pfaff); project management and its underlying theory viewed from a practice-driven perspective (Reynolds and Yetton); a case study in which grounded theory was applied, unusually if not uniquely in IS, using both quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques (Fernandez et al); and the current state of the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of decision support systems research (Arnott and Pervan). Like the other papers in the book, most of these papers have distinct links to theory and/or representation. Waller and colleagues, for example, promote a unique representation and way of thinking about systems analysis and design; Hasan and Pfaff wonder about the theoretical implications (notably the 'democratisation' of organisational information) of systems such as those they consider; Reynolds and Yetton aim to show how to find the 'theory in the gap' from the 'gap in practice' of project management; Fernandez and colleagues illustrate, from a practical case, a more powerful and comprehensive way in which an increasingly popular research method in IS can be applied; and Arnott and Pervan, through analysis of the current reality of DSS research, throw out a challenge to the IS discipline to broaden and make more relevant the research that is done, the way it is done, and the theory that is developed.

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