

Foreword

This book represents the second phase of a multi-method, multiple study of the 'information systems academic discipline in Australia'. In the first phase, conducted between 2005 and 2006 and drawing on Whitley's theory of scientific change, the study analysed the degree of 'professionalisation' of the information systems (IS) discipline, the overarching research question being, 'To what extent is IS a distinct and mature discipline in Australia?' Completion of the first phase of the study was marked by publication, in December 2006, of a special edition (vol. 14, no. 1) of the *Australasian Journal of Information Systems (AJIS)*.

The second phase of the study, reported in this book, has sought to address several constraints and limitations in the first phase. To begin with, it was felt that the potential long-term significance of this first examination of the IS discipline across Australia warranted a more permanent documentation of its findings to complement the medium of the *AJIS* publication. A main aim of the study is to initiate a continuing, longitudinal evaluation of the state of the IS academic discipline in Australia. The study has, from the outset, been designed and executed with the expectation that it would be extended and repeated over time. A book offers an appropriate form to set down an initial long-term reference.

A book format also offered the opportunity to extend the work. A limitation of the first phase of the study was that—from necessity rather than choice—the theory framework continued to evolve in parallel with the progress of the individual research tasks. Hence, there is some variation among first-phase papers in relation to application of the theoretical framework. The second phase of the study allowed the researchers to further analyse the data in terms of the more complete theoretical framework described in Chapter 3.

In this second phase of the study, it was decided that the history of the progress of IS in the Australian states could be honoured through brief vignettes of a sample of the men and women who had made major contributions to the advancement of IS in those states.

The first phase of the study did not extend to a consolidated analysis across the completed individual sub-studies. In phase two, the editors undertook to examine the individual revised studies, with a view to arriving at an Australia-wide perspective. This analysis sought to evaluate collectively the data from the individual states in relation to the revised framework. The consolidated analysis also sought to highlight more striking Australian characteristics that emerged from the data but that could not be applied readily to the a priori theoretical framework.

All papers in the 'parent' *AJIS* special edition were subject to a rigorous three-tier peer review process: each paper was reviewed initially by the *AJIS* editors, feedback was provided to the authors and revisions were made. Each paper was then sent to one or more local IS experts; the results of this review were conveyed anonymously to the author of the paper for implementation of consequential revisions. Finally, all papers considered for the special edition were sent to two further IS experts for global review, with feedback from the reviewers again being forwarded to authors for revision of their papers.

The *AJIS* special issue was targeted conceptually at IS academics in Australia, being mainly a 'description' of the current state of things. This book—an extension and expansion of that material—includes further evidence, analysis and interpretation, and is crafted to be more accessible to IS and non-IS types within and outside Australia. It includes a glossary, which provides definitions of terms, expressions and acronyms used by chapter authors but warranting explanation for readers from outside Australian IS academia.

The book chapters were submitted to a review process similar to that for the earlier volume, including: editorial review, local reviews and global reviews. A full draft of the book was circulated widely within Australia in order to ensure balance and completeness of content. The full draft book was also circulated internationally to notable IS experts in the Australian diaspora, as well as to several past presidents of the Association for Information Systems (AIS), which sponsored the study and considered replication in other world regions.

The book chapters are structured around three main sections: a) the context of the study; b) the state case studies; and c) Australia-wide evidence and analysis. The book represents a 'check point'—a snapshot at a point in time. As the first in a hoped-for series of such snapshots, it includes a brief history of IS in Australia, bringing us up to the time of this report. As related more carefully in the 'Contextual framework' (Chapter 1), ideas and views represented herein are not intended to be definitive. Neither do views expressed in all chapters reflect the views of the editors. It is acknowledged that ideas presented are sometimes controversial (even among the editors).

The editorial team comprises: 1) Guy Gable, architect and leader; 2) Bob Smyth, project manager; 3) Shirley Gregor, sponsor, host and co-theoretician; 4) Roger Clarke, discipline memory; and 5) Gail Ridley, theoretician. The study—initiated, designed and led throughout by Professor Guy Gable—would not have been possible without the generous support of the IT Professional Services research program (ITPS), Faculty of Information Technology, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), mainly through Gable's extensive involvement and that of Dr Robert Smyth and Ms Karen Stark, Senior ITPS Research Associates.

While QUT has played the lead, The Australian National University (ANU) has been the main support, through the integral roles of Professors Shirley Gregor

and Roger Clarke (thanks are due to the ANU E-Press for production of the final version of this book). Clarke has been involved in the IS discipline in Australia since its inception. His proclivity to hoard discipline-related artefacts and his provocative writing style made him the logical choice to craft the history chapter. The Clarke–Gable collaboration goes back to 1992 when they joined forces to turn Clarke’s then Australasian IS faculty directory into an extended Asia-Pacific directory (sponsored by QUT, the ANU and the National University of Singapore), which after two hard-copy editions was combined with the European and Americas directories into the online directory at <http://www.isfacdir.org/>

Professor Shirley Gregor offered galvanising support for the project from early on, and served as invaluable theory sounding-board for Ridley. Gregor and the ANU hosted several key team workshops and, like all editors, Gregor has been involved closely in meta-analysis across the sub-studies. The ANU also contributed financial support for the copy-editing of the manuscript.

In seeking a theoretician on the evolution of the discipline of IS, Dr Gail Ridley was the obvious choice given her pioneering doctoral studies on IS as a discipline in an Australian context. Though the special issue and book were driven mainly by QUT, the ANU and the University of Tasmania, most universities in Australia have been instrumental in its production by contributing authors, interviewees, in vignettes or as reviewers. We acknowledge particularly the University of Tasmania through the extensive involvement of Ridley as architect of the theory framework chapter, the Tasmanian state case study and the meta-analysis chapter.

We take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed. Finally, we acknowledge seed funding from the AIS—International and from the Australian Computing Society (ACS), the two primary associations for IS academics in Australia (the AAIS being the Australasian chapter of AIS).

