

Preface

This volume contains the papers presented at the Information Systems Foundations Workshop, 30 September – 1 October 2010. This workshop was the fifth in The Australian National University (ANU) series of biennial workshops that was originally inspired by one held in 1999 by Kit Dampney at Macquarie University, and that focuses on the theoretical foundations of the discipline of information systems (IS).

The theme of the 2010 workshop was ‘Theory Building in Information Systems’ and it once again allowed researchers and practitioners in the field of information systems to come together to discuss some of the fundamental issues relating to our discipline.

Information systems is still a relatively young field of study that, perhaps uniquely, is a peculiar juxtaposition of the technological, in the form of computing and communication technology, and the non-technological, in the form of the humans and organisations that design, implement and use systems built with that technology. It is, indeed, this juxtaposition of artefacts and phenomena from what are often termed the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ ends of the spectrum that makes the development of useful and robust theory in the field such a challenge. The sciences that underlie and deal with technologically oriented fields such as computing and related areas generally result in theories that fit within the ‘covering law’ model—that is, are assumed and believed to have universal applicability and explanatory and predictive power. And, typically, such theories exhibit a deterministic character as well. By contrast, theories in the human sciences are generally much more circumscribed in the phenomena with which they deal and the domains in which they are applicable, and are much more conditional, contextual, tentative and open to exceptions. Trying, therefore, to build successful theory in a discipline like information systems in which phenomena from both the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ coexist is a bit like trying to mix together immiscible fluids such as oil and water: it doesn’t matter how much you stir it all up, what you wind up with is still just a conglomeration of little blobs of oil and other separate little blobs of water! It was, therefore, with this kind of problem in mind that the 2010 workshop was held.

Typically the information systems foundations workshops give authors an opportunity to present papers and get feedback on ideas that might be regarded as too new or risky for publication in conventional outlets. There have been some good outcomes from this approach, with revised papers going on to find a wider audience in mainstream journals. As the workshop is deliberately

kept small, and there is only one stream of papers, all paper presentations are typically attended by all participants, which often leads to ongoing and vigorous discussion.

The papers presented here were accepted after a double-blind review process and we thank our program committee and reviewers for their assistance. We also acknowledge and thank the sponsors of the workshop: the National Centre for Information Systems Research (NCISR), the Australian Research Council (ARC) Enterprise Information Infrastructure (EII) network and the School of Accounting and Business Information Systems at ANU.

Finally, we would like to thank the keynote speakers at the workshop—Mike Morris, Viswanath Venkatesh and Ron Weber—whose presence, expertise and participation added greatly to the value of the event for all concerned. All in all, therefore, the workshop provided a stimulating and productive as well as an enjoyable couple of days for both the authors and the attendees, and we hope that the papers that form this volume will provide similar stimulation, provoke similar productive outcomes and perhaps provide some enjoyable reading as well, for a wider audience than those who were able to attend the workshop itself.

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