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Panel: Rigour vs Relevance in IS Research: Perspectives from IS and the Reference Disciplines

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I DESCRIPTION

We in the Information Systems community often describe our discipline as being of an inherently applied nature. Whether one fully accepts this description or not, what is clear is that the academic IS community faces significant pressure from government, commerce and industry to assist to resolve urgent problems which they face “in the real world”.

A community desire for research which might be commercialised is not, of course, restricted to the IS domain—we see similar needs in medicine and engineering, for example. Information Systems is, however, uniquely placed in the following combination of respects:

- Low level of development of fundamental theoretic advances
- Rapid rate of change of the enabling technology
- High relative contribution of the commercial sector to innovations which are similar to those sourced from academe
- Rapidly increasing pervasion of Information Technology (and the consequent pervasion of IS need) within Commerce, Government and Society generally
- High visibility

These characteristics, together with the inherently multidisciplinary nature of Information Systems and the wide range of backgrounds of IS academics have combined to influence the character of research within the discipline.

Although the Chair and Panelists now all perceive themselves as members of the Information Systems Community, their backgrounds are diverse. Three members come directly from an IS/Business Administration background, while the other three founded their careers, variously in Software Engineering, Sociology and Psychology.

Paul Swatman, in his role as the session chair, will briefly introduce the topic and establish the importance of a multi-disciplinary debate. Next, each of the panelists will make a short presentation. The panel members will outline their perspectives on the topic, by reference to their own backgrounds and, where appropriate, by reference to the corresponding debate in their parent discipline. The panelists will illustrate their views with examples and by comparison with the reference disciplines. The diversity of the panelists' backgrounds itself offers a basis for considerable debate although the format allows significant time for interactions with the audience.

II. PANEL MEMBERS

Tanya Castleman, School of Management Information Systems, Deakin University, Melbourne. Tanya is a sociologist by training and education. Prior to taking up the second chair of MIS at Deakin University, she was for a number of years an Associate Professor in the School of Social and Behavioural Science at Swinburne. She has conducted both sociological and information systems research in organisational settings using a variety of research methods.

Robert Galliers, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, England. Bob is the Professor of Information Management and immediate past Dean at Warwick Business School. A widely published IS researcher, Bob's contributions in the literature to the debate on research design and research methodology in Information Systems are of particular interest in the context of this panel.

Rudy Hirschheim, College of Business Administration, University of Houston. Rudy is, inter alia, the Tenneco/Chase International Professor of Information Systems in the College of Business Administration, University of Houston and past Director of the Information Systems Research Center. His research in Information Systems is both extensive and widely published. He is widely recognized within the IS community as a deep thinker about the nature of the discipline.

Helmut Krcmar, Institute for Business Administration, University Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany. Helmut has held a Chair for Information Systems at the Institute for Business Administration, University Hohenheim since 1987. Educated in Germany, Helmut worked as a Postdoctoral Fellow and as a Professor in the US prior to taking up his current position. A widely published IS researcher, he is well known, in particular, for his research into computer aided team work and the application of this research in support of government.

Sue Newell, Nottingham Business School, University of Nottingham, England. Sue, a psychologist by training and education has recently taken up the chair of Innovation and Organisational Analysis at Nottingham Business School.