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Doing IT Research that Matters to Practice: Perspectives on Propositions

John Mooney
Pepperdine University, john.mooney@pepperdine.edu

Blake Ives
University of Houston - Main, bives@mac.com

Jeanne Ross
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, jross@mit.edu

Vallabh Sambamurthy
Michigan State University, sambamurthy@bus.msu.edu

Leslie Willcocks
London School of Economics and Political Science, L.P.Willcocks@lse.ac.uk

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DOING IT RESEARCH THAT MATTERS TO PRACTICE: PERSPECTIVES ON PROPOSITIONS

Panels

John Mooney
Pepperdine University
Graziadio School of Business and Management
6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045
john.mooney@pepperdine.edu

Blake Ives
University of Houston
CT Bauer College of Business
334 Melcher Hall
Houston, TX 77204-6021, USA
bives@mac.com

Jeanne Ross
MIT
Center for Information Systems Research
5 Cambridge Center, Building NE25
Cambridge, MA 02142, USA
jross@mit.edu

Vallabh Sambamurthy
Michigan State University
College of Business,
East Lansing, MI 48824-1122, USA
sambamurthy@bus.msu.edu

Leslie Willcocks
London School of Economics
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE, UK
L.P.Willcocks@lse.ac.uk

Abstract

The ICIS 2009 Call for Papers states that "[o]ur discipline faces an unprecedented challenge as we struggle for relevancy in the face of changing demographics and world events. More to the point, much of our research is being questioned in terms of impact, both real and potential". Such an assessment, if true, suggests a dangerous situation for the IS field, and significant challenges for its future.

This panel session proposes to bring together a group of highly acclaimed practice-oriented IS researchers to share their reactions to the above assessment, offer their perspectives on a series of provocative propositions about doing IT research that matters to practice, and engage in an animated debate with each other and with the audience on their positions.

Keywords: IS research agenda, Future of IS, IS research frameworks

Panel description

We propose to engage in a highly interactive and hopefully controversial session in which the panelists will share their perspectives on a range of controversial and thought-provoking propositions about doing IT research that matters to practice. The panel moderator will open the panel by describing the panelists' interest in the conference theme ("Doing IT Research that Matters") and the statements above from the Call for Papers. The panel moderator will then introduce the panelists and outline elements of their background and accomplishments that position them well to offer informed perspectives on the panel topic.

Blake Ives will share perspectives based on his roles as Director of the Center for IS Research at the University of Houston, researcher, teacher of executive MBA students, and his previous roles as Director of Research for the Society for Information Management Advanced Practices Council and Editor-in-Chief of MIS Quarterly.

Jeanne Ross will draw on her experiences as Director of MIT CISR, editor-in-chief of MIS Quarterly Executive, teacher of MBA and executive education students, researcher, and co-author of a number of practitioner-oriented books.

V. Sambamurthy will draw from his experiences as Editor-in-Chief of Information Systems Research, recipient of numerous SIM APC research awards, researcher and author.

Leslie Willcocks will offer a Europe and Asia-Pacific perspective drawing from his experiences as a practice-oriented IS researcher, research center director, editor-in-chief of the Journal of Information Technology, co-author of multiple books, and consultant.

Drawing from their extensive and diverse experiences, panelists will in turn be invited to share a brief perspective on one of the following propositions about doing IT research that matters to practice. Other panelists will be invited to offer alternative perspectives or additional thoughts on the initial panelist's statements. The audience will be invited to participate in the debate around each proposition, and may be asked to vote on the "winning" perspective, so that audience participation will be woven through the entire session.

The initial list of propositions to be debated includes:

(i)   Doing IT research that matters to practice is a contact sport that requires social rather than IT networks: get out of the office and immerse yourself.

(ii)   Feel executives' pain: research questions that matter to practice must be developed from the very real issues that IT and business managers face, not from unanswered questions that emerged from prior research.

(iii)   Risk being wrong: too much academic research is positioned such that the researcher can't be wrong (i.e., the findings are ensured by the heavy reliance on prior research and the narrowness of the topic) and that such research is rarely useful to practitioners.

(iv)   Think IS not IT: IS researchers who aspire to doing research that matters to practice, especially those based within business schools, must contextualize their research within the competitive, business, organizational, and human environments within which IT-based systems are conceived, justified, designed, implemented, used, and whose ultimate impact will be significantly influenced by these environmental contexts

(v)   Doing IT research that matters to practice requires us to research the "unresearchable" and measure the "unmeasurable": sometimes we need to bend (but not break) the norms of academic research to get useful answers to important questions.

(vi)   The need for rigor applies equally to research that matters to practice, but the practice of rigor may be different.

(vii)   Don't quit or wander to apparently greener pastures: tough, enduring problems need people to stay focused on them for a long time to continuously shed light on them, to keep peeling back the onion a little further. We can't dabble in research that matters to practice: getting to rich insights and deep understanding requires years of study.

(viii) Fire, aim, ready: Research that matters to practice often applies theory after data collection and analysis, not before.

(ix)   Research that matters to practice can't be published in top journals.

An appropriate mechanism (text messaging, online chat, and/or paper-based) will be used to collect short, provocative questions, comments or additional propositions from the audience for reflection and reaction by the panelists.

Participant Biographies

Blake Ives holds the C.T. Bauer Chair in Business Leadership at the Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston, where he also serves as Director of the Information Systems Research Center. He is Director of Research for the Society for Information Management's Advanced Practice Council, a Past President of the Association for Information Systems, a Fellow of the Association for Information Systems, and a past Editor-in-Chief of the MIS Quarterly.

John Mooney serves as associate dean and associate professor of Information Systems and Technology Management at Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management. Dr. Mooney's current teaching and research interests include business executive responsibilities for IT and information management and IT-enabled business transformation. He was Vice President for Chapters and Affiliated Organizations at the Association for Information Systems (AIS) from 2004-2007. He is a member of the editorial boards of MIS Quarterly Executive, the Journal of Strategic Information Systems and the eService Journal.

Jeanne W. Ross is Director and Principal Research Scientist at the MIT Sloan School's Center for Information Systems Research (CISR) where she lectures, conducts research, and directs executive education courses on IT management practices. Her work has appeared in major practitioner and academic journals, including Sloan Management Review, Harvard Business Review, the Wall Street Journal, MIS Quarterly Executive, MIS Quarterly, the Journal of Management Information Systems, IBM Systems Journal, and CIO Magazine. She has coauthored two books and her third book, IT Savvy: What Top Executives Must Know to Go from Pain to Gain will be published in June 2009 by Harvard Business School Press. Jeanne was a founding senior editor of MIS Quarterly Executive and served as its Editor-in-Chief from 2005 to 2008.

Vallabh Sambamurthy is the Eli Broad Professor of Information Technology and the Executive Director of the Center for Leadership of the Digital Enterprise at the Eli Broad College of Business at Michigan State University. Dr. Sambamurthy's work has been funded by the Financial Executives Research Foundation, the Advanced Practices Council (APC), and the National Science Foundation. His work has been published in journals such as the MIS Quarterly, Information Systems Research, Decision Sciences, Management Science, Organization Science, and the IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management. He has served on the editorial boards of numerous journals, including MIS Quarterly, Information Systems Research, IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, and the Journal of Strategic Information Systems. Currently, he is the editor-in-chief of Information Systems Research.

Leslie Willcocks is Professor of Technology Work and Globalisation and Head of the Information Systems and Innovation Group at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is also Director of The Outsourcing Unit launched there. Dr. Willcocks' research interests include technology in globalization, the strategic use of IT, IT leadership, IT enabled organisational change as well as business process outsourcing and offshoring, organisational behaviour, social theory and philosophy for information systems, and public sector IT Policy. He has published over 180 refereed papers in journals such as Harvard Business Review, Sloan Management Review, California Management Review, MIS Quarterly, MISQ Executive, Journal of Management Studies, Communications of the ACM, and the Journal of Strategic Information Systems. In addition, he has co-authored 29 books on IT practice. He serves on the editorial boards of many journals, and serves as the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Information Technology.