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AMCIS 2000

Information Systems Evaluation

Mini-track Introduction
Mini-Track Chairs:

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Information Systems Evaluation

The problems associated with the evaluation of information systems are ubiquitous, and as a result a wealth of research and discussion has taken place. The design and development of information systems can be a lengthy process, time consuming, complex and costly to implement. In addition, information systems have to be maintained, which again requires capital expenditure and management. As a result, issues associated with their evaluation would presumably assume great importance however, this is often *not* the case.

The need for flexibility, competitiveness, and improved performance has meant that many businesses continue to adopt information systems without rigorous evaluation. In fact, many businesses have become so reliant on their information systems for *strategic, tactical and operational* benefits that they

overlook the importance of evaluating such investments, and instead favor for a more *ad-hoc* strategy that is often nothing more than an 'act of faith' (Byrd and Marshall 1997; Ezingard *et al.*, 1999; Irani, 1999).

However, the increasing capital expenditure on information systems and the use of new technology to support core businesses functions, as well as the disappointed expectations centered around the impact of new technology, have all served to raise the profile of *how* information systems investments *can* and *should* be effectively evaluated. As a result, once again placing evaluation on management's agenda. According to Willcocks (1992), '*Information systems evaluation is not only an under-developed but also an under-managed area which organizations can increasingly ill-afford to neglect*'. The increased complexity of information systems combined with the uncertainty and unpredictability associated with

information systems benefits and costs clearly point to the need for improved evaluation procedures.

The magnitude and importance of information systems investments has shifted the attention of many information systems researchers to developing methods and techniques for assessing the contribution of information systems to their host organizations or, in other words, to *evaluating* investments in information systems (Farbey *et al.*, 1993). Information system specialists and business managers alike have historically expressed increasing concerns regarding their ability to evaluate their investments in information systems prior to committing organizational resources during development and implementation (Raymond *et al.*, 1995). In a recent comprehensive review, Smithson and Hirschheim (1998) concluded that '*IS evaluation clearly remains a thorny problem*'.

Information systems evaluation has *not* been an explicit topic of any recent AMCIS mini-track, although isolated papers on information systems evaluation have appeared in several AMCIS proceedings. These papers have been presented while spanning across different mini-tracks, thereby *not* allowing the information systems evaluation community and interested researchers to readily follow developments in this dynamic field. We [mini-track chairs] believe that this specific mini-track on '*Information Systems Evaluation*' will be highly beneficial to both AMCIS and the information systems evaluation community.

In doing so, it will enable new and different insights of information systems evaluation to be viewed in a more holistic and integrated manner.

The idea for organizing a mini-track on information systems evaluation at AMCIS, originated from a lack of comprehensive forum to debate the issues associated with information systems evaluation outside Europe - [Incidentally, a mini-track chair - DR Zahir Irani, guest edited a special issue journal on

information systems evaluation - Guest editor of the *Journal of Logistics Information Management: Special Issue on Investment Decision Making of IT/IS*, **12**(1-2): 1-195, 1999].

There is also a dedicated European conference on the theme of information systems evaluation, although this area of research remains focused in Europe, with the mini-track chair [Dr Zahir Irani] having Co-chaired the 1999 conference at Brunel University, UK. Incidentally, there was a significant international flavor to the conference with over 80 paper having being generated from 15 countries. Regardless, many researchers feel the frustration of having to look through many conference programmes [including those of AMCIS] in order to find papers that relate to the information systems evaluation area of research.

This mini-track deals with evaluating and measuring effectiveness of information systems. There are two closely interrelated issues that the accepted papers span:

- evaluating instruments in information systems/technology; and,
- managing the effectiveness and scope of technologies.

In addressing these issues, both themes deal with the evaluation and measurement of effectiveness of emerging technologies and its implication of the evaluation process. As a result, the purpose of this mini-track is to generate a stream of research oriented toward the study of measuring effectiveness and impacts of information systems. Specifically, in areas where theoretical models may need to be borrowed from referent disciplines, or were models and associated operationalizations have been proposed, or not yet tested [conceptual].

Information Systems Evaluation: Purpose

The information systems evaluation mini-track will help researchers and practitioners understand the processes involved in the decision making of adopting technology in contemporary organizations.

Articles that address the justification process necessary to evaluate information systems deployments by identifying the constructs associated with investment decision-making are presented. Emphasis was placed on investment decision-making in the context of business process change and effective capital budgeting. Strategic frameworks, conceptual and analytical models, and case studies of information systems evaluation were encouraged and form the genesis of the mini-track.

It is hoped that the mini-track will encourage the latest thinking and research in information systems evaluation to be presented to a forum of leading information systems professionals and business executives. The mini-track will provide a potpourri of ideas, models, and case studies, which will be stimulating and useful.

One final thought, “*The prologues are over. It is time to choose.*” – Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) from *Asides on the Oboe* (1942).

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