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Meet the Editors: Worldviews in Editorial Missions and Practice

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PROFESSIONAL PANEL

MEET THE EDITORS: WORLDVIEWS IN EDITORIAL MISSIONS AND PRACTICE

Panellists:

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Issues:

Specialized academic journals, such as the ones represented in the panel, distinguish themselves by defining an editorial policy that determines the journal's scope and operation. They then apply the policy of dissemination and gate keeping through the reviewing process that is controlled by the editorial board. Scope is usually defined by such parameters as bodies of knowledge, types of work or research methods (conceptual, empirical, cases etc.) but also other issues such as, rigor versus relevance, local versus global emphasis, preferred authors and more.

Examining five leading yet culturally diverse IS journals, the panelist compare and contrast the declared and practiced editorial policies, as well as desired changes, by asking how **open** are these journals on the parameters of scope noted above. Here are three (related) examples:

Involving practitioners in the journal. Should (and is) the journal open to articles written by practitioners? Does a theory versus practice department in the same journal dilute academic quality? Can practitioners be on the board? How do they become active readers (the French experience)? Can/should the journal article be written or rewritten in practitioners' language or should we best publish the practical version in a separate journal (e.g., *MISQ Executive*)?

Regional/national/cultural IS journals?! In prevailing globalization of IS, is there any place for segregated journals? What's the value of local research about local issues to a local audience? How open is the journal to foreigners writing in the local language or translated from a foreign language? Is translation feasible (the *CAIS* experience)? What about research by foreigners using perspective originated locally (the *SJIS)*? How does the regional/cultural distinction affect research quality and diversity?

Disseminate or dissemble? One of the main objectives of any journal is purported to be to facilitate dissemination of the subject. But reading the journals, the text often appears to be intent on dissembling rather than disseminating. One argument for this might be that the frontiers of knowledge are shrouded in mist. A counter view held by at least some of the editors is that if something is well understood it can be expressed simply and if it cannot be expressed simply it is not well understood. Does this imply that editors are allowing authors to publish what they do not understand? Contrary, if a paper were easily read and understood, would it be felt to be too trivial for a journal? Is the community guilty of being followers of the Hide'emDeeper Philosophy of Obscurantism?

Presentations:

The panel is intended to invite strong audience participation. First, each panellist will address those aspects that are especially distinct or interesting in his journal. The panel will then initiate a debate around the topics above and audience will be invited to participate and share their perceptions of the journal policy and practice as well as their recommendations. Each editor will attempt in the last 10 minutes to summarize what we have learnt.

Karlheinz Kautz will begin with an overview of The Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems, which was established in 1989 to create a window from and for Scandinavian researchers to IS researchers in other parts of the world. It aims at publishing studies of IT development and use. The journal acknowledges the interdisciplinary nature of such studies and draws on the Scandinavian research traditions emphasizing engagement with the field and studying information systems in context. Methodological and theoretical pluralism is welcomed by the journal. The journal's goal is to bring out research contributions of high, international quality from various research traditions. Although work published in the journal should represent, reflect upon or relate to Scandinavia, this kind of scholarly work is not confined by geographical boundaries. Hence, the term "Scandinavian" in the title of the journal should be interpreted metaphorically rather than literally. Karl will discuss the journal's effort to fulfil its objectives, as a platform for Scandinavian researchers and values, but also with regard to its pursuit of attracting researchers from outside of Scandinavia to submit to and to use material from the journal. He will also relate his argument to the struggle of Scandinavian researchers to publish their work in a language – English – foreign to all of them and to make their work known through publications in international, mainly Anglo-American journals based on even different research and language traditions.

Wolfgang Koenig will comment on engaging practitioners in the journal WIRTSCHAFTSINFORMATIK. Since its foundation almost 50 years ago (then called "Angewandte Informatik" – Applied Computer Science), the journal's policy is to properly incorporate practitioners into the editorial work. Basically, we can distinguish two development phases of the IS discipline in German speaking countries – and accordingly two phases in the development of the journal: The first phase – probably until the end of the 80s – was characterized by establishing Information Systems as an acknowledged discipline in Universities and Fachhochschulen (which nowadays often call themselves Universities of Applied Sciences). In those days, it were the multi-fold requirements from practice that helped build the IS discipline –

against numerous odds that were set-up by members of the traditional sciences. After an intermediate period, the second phase – probably starting in the mid 90s – is characterized by securing and "solidifying" the stand that the IS discipline has reached. One particular means is to maintain both rigor and relevance in each contribution – and relevance may be easily judged by people actually being in charge in field works. Nowadays, the WIRTSCHAFTSINFORMATIK enjoys ten top-rank practitioners in its editorial board (a third), and runs a format that roughly half of an issue is devoted to so-called research articles and the other 50% are covered by a set "departments" like "opinion/dialogue", "book reviews", "surfed for you" etc.

Ray J. Paul will comment on disseminate or dissemble from two perspectives. First, as the supervisor of 44 successful PhD students, it is clear that reading the literature usually convinces the student that good academic writing is obscure, unnecessarily lengthy and written for the writer not the reader. Second as a journal editor, most of what I read matches my students' perceptions. A large part of the literature consists of what I call 'castle confections built on sand'. In the latest editorial in the European Journal of Information Systems I offer these three questions to guide authors:

- What story are you trying to tell the reader?
- What will the reader know after reading your paper that was not known before?
- Why should anyone believe you?

Who is to blame? No matter, the remedy lies in the hands of us all. Write simply and coherently and then reading will be easier, more useful and therefore more popular.

Frantz Rowe will address the issue of the institutional value of IS journals in France and that of *Systemes d'Information et Management* in particular throughout some various changes. In France a turn was taken in 2003 when the CNRS (equivalent to the NSF) decided to promote publications in top international journals ranking them higher than others. *Systemes d'Information et Management* was ranked best in the national category, but lower than ISR or MISQ for instance. This type of signaling can have different effects and was not welcomed by several CNRS scientists who consider that it favors the globalization and can harm original research done in France. Over the last ten years *Systemes d'Information et Management* has also changed from a journal now accepting to some extent papers written in English from foreign colleagues. These moves toward internationalization have had mixed effects on the recognition of the journal in France. The institutional value is also linked to the recognition and to the participation of practitioners. This participation has developed in France through the organization of a best article prize awarded by the practitioners.

Dov Te'eni will comment on several attempts to engage practitioners in MISQ. The dilemma between one outlet serving for academic dialog as wells as academic-practitioner dialog and separate outlets for the two different dialogs involves the content and the language of publications and even the organization and procedures of editorial boards. The idea of providing two departments, one for papers describing research and another for those describing practice, was abolished in favor of one department entitled research articles. But in contrast to what may appear as moving away from a practitioner's voice is the pronounced editorial "thrust at better imbuing rigorous research with the element of relevance to managers, consultants, and other practitioners" (Editorial 1999). Two additional developments, nearly in parallel, were the initiation of MISQ Executive, which is now a separate outlet that publishes

materials that are not only relevant to practitioners but are also written in a style fit for practitioners, and the initiation of MISQ Review, which is devoted to theory development, and though initially intended as a separate outlet became a department within MISQ. SIM (the society of information management) moved its involvement from MISQ to MISQ Executive. Dov believes these developments will prove to be effective in enabling two different dialogs with different purposes to be conducted each in its appropriate form and language, as long as we find mechanisms to bridge the separate the two.

About the Panelists:

Karlheinz Kautz, Dr philos is professor in Systems Development at Department of Informatics at the Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. His research interests are in system development practice and methodologies, knowledge management in the IT industry, software process improvement and the diffusion and adoption of information technology innovations. He is the chairman of the IFIP TC 8 WG 8.6 on Adoption and Diffusion of IT. He has published in these areas in journals like Information and Software Technology, Information, Technology & People, the Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems, Software Process: Improvement and Practice, IEEE Software, Journal of Knowledge Management. Karl has been involved in the European Conference of Information Systems in various roles since 1998.

Wolfgang Koenig is Professor of Information Systems at Frankfurt University, Germany (www.is-frankfurt.de). He received his Diploma degree on Business Administration as well as his Ph.D degree from Frankfurt University. In the last 20 years he spent almost two years in research programs in the US, at the IBM Research Labs in San Jose and Yorktown Heights as well as at the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University, Chicago/Evanston, the Haas Business School at the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He is chairman of the E-Finance Lab (www.efinancelab.com), a public-private research partnership which supports finance service companies on its transition towards industrialization. Since fall 2004 he serves as Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Frankfurt University. And since 1998 he is editor-in-chief of the leading Information Systems journal WIRTSCHAFTSINFORMATIK in the German speaking countries (www.wirtschaftsinformatik.de).

Ray J Paul is an Emeritus Professor in the School of Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics at Brunel University, and Visiting Professor in the Department of Information Systems at the London School of Economics. Ray taught Operational Research and Information Systems at LSE for 21 years, then joined Brunel 12 years ago before retiring early on the grounds of permanent ill-health – he has Parkinsonism. Ray has over 400 refereed publications and 3 books. He is co-editor of the European Journal of Information Systems, which he co-founded in 1990. He is one of the Editors of the Journal of Computing and Information Technology. Ray's research interests are in business modelling, particularly simulation, and information systems development. He has held over £1.5m in U.K. government grants in the last few years and collaborates with a vast array of international talent too numerous to mention, exemplified by his holding an Honorary Professorship in

Community Medicine at Hong Kong University a few years ago. When not called upon to discombobulate, Ray writes his seven-book autobiography.

Frantz Rowe is Professor of Information Systems at the University of Nantes, France. His major research areas pertain to information and communication systems use and their effects on organizations, and to IS project dynamics and change. He has recently directed several research projects: on change management of ERP projects, on the structure (including shared or virtual) of call centers and their performance and on electronic marketplaces. He is the Editor in Chief of Systemes d'Information et Management which he founded in 1996, http://revuesim.free.fr. He received his M.Engineering from ENTPE, his M.Sc. from UC Berkeley, his M.A. in Economics from the University of Lyon, and PhD. from Paris University.

Dov Te'eni is Professor of Information Systems at Tel-Aviv University, Israel. He is also the chairman of Meital - Israel's Higher Education E-learning center. Dov studies several related areas of information systems: human-computer interaction, computer support for communication, knowledge management, systems design and non-profit organizations. His research usually combines model building, laboratory experiments and development of prototypes such as Spider and kMail. He received his B.Sc. from University College London, and his M.Sc. and PhD. From Tel-Aviv University.