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1986

Panel 1: The Use of Qualitative Methods in MIS Research

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Recommended Citation

Goldstein, David K. and Bjom-Andersen, Niels, "Panel 1: The Use of Qualitative Methods in MIS Research" (1986). *ICIS 1986 Proceedings*. 20.
<http://aisel.aisnet.org/icis1986/20>

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PANEL 1

The Use of Qualitative Methods in MIS Research

Chair: David K. Goldstein
Harvard Business School

The objective of this panel is to discuss how qualitative research methods, such as case studies, ethnography, and action research, can be effectively used in the study of MIS. While there has been a call for greater reliance on qualitative methods in both the social sciences and in management (see, for example, the 1979 issue of *Administrative Science Quarterly* devoted to qualitative methods), there has simultaneously been a shift away from these methods in MIS. Laboratory studies and surveys are seen with increasing frequency in journals such as *MIS Quarterly*. Qualitative methods, however, when properly applied, can provide a great deal of information for MIS researchers who are posing research questions in which organizational context and depth of knowledge are important.

This panel will explore both areas of information systems research in which qualitative methods have been successfully used and areas in which they could be applied in the future. The moderator will first present a framework for analyzing the role of qualitative methods in MIS research. The framework will be based on a paper entitled "The Case Research Strategy in IS Research" currently being written by Benbasat, Goldstein, and Mead. The three panelists will each discuss some research in which qualitative techniques were recently employed or will be employed in the near future. Each researcher will present a different technique - case, research, ethnography, and action research. They will focus on why these methods were appropriate for the specific problem they studied. In addition, the researchers will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the method they used and any difficulties they had in applying the method to an IS research problem. Following this, the discussant will integrate the presentations and critique the methods used by the researchers.

Action Research on the Impact of IS on Clerical Workers

Niels Bjorn-Andersen
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Copenhagen Business School

Qualitative research sponsored by an employee organization (trade union) will be presented. The research examines how the introduction of an archiving information system affected the work carried out by government filing clerks. The researcher monitored discussion groups of the clerks over a one year period. The strengths and weaknesses of this type of approach in writing up research and in getting proper measures implemented will be discussed. Possible suggestions for other applications of action research will be presented.