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# UNLEASHING INNOVATION IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH TOGETHER

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# UNLEASHING INNOVATION IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH TOGETHER

## *Panels*

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## **1 Issues and Dilemma**

Many scholars have recently expressed concern regarding the future of the information systems (IS) discipline. Opinions are divided regarding the nature of the IS discipline (Sidorova, Evangelopoulos, Valacich and Ramakrishnan, 2008; Vessey, Ramesh and Glass (2002), what it should encompass (Benbasat and Zmud, 2003), how to relate it to other disciplines (Baskerville and Myers, 2002), and how to construct a distinctive identity that differentiates it from other disciplines (Agarwal and Lucas Jr., 2005). However, there is a general consensus that innovation in the field is at stake. Recently Grover and Lyytinen (2015) argued that the IS discipline is creating norms that enforce the status quo in terms of research topics and methodologies that hold back attempts for innovation (cf. Arvidsson, Holmström and Lyytinen, 2014). In many ways, we are mired in a quag of our own making, yet we are blind to it, producing ever more research that conforms to narrow expectations of the prevailing orthodoxy and consequently making ever fewer innovative contributions relevant to the world's pressing problems. What is holding us (the IS community) back from change and innovation? How we can ensure that the discipline continues to innovate and thrive? The panellists propose that the "enemy is us" and that we should act as a community to address the bottleneck of innovation namely, the peer-review process.

This panel is proposed as a platform to discuss how we, as an academic community, can change and embrace innovation in research in each role we take in the reviewing process whether in editorial, reviewer or author roles. We aim to engage participants to reflect on their own practices and through discussion set the agenda forward regarding opening up to research innovation.

In this panel, we propose that the peer-review process is a bottleneck that hinders research innovation. We discuss different aspects related to how we can improve and move this process forward as editors-in-chief, senior editors, associate editors, reviewers, authors and PhD students. Following Giddens' (1984) structuration theory that the structure is produced and re-produced by people, we argue that the enemy is us and the structure is 'a memory trace' enforced by actions of members of the community in their different capacities. The reviewing process is produced and reproduced through the action of members of the community in their different capacities, whether as authors, reviewers or editors.

While the primary goal of the peer-review process is to guarantee the validity of the knowledge to be disseminated, it carries the implicit assumption that humans are not omniscient beings. The peer-review process is a collective activity. Editors-in-chief, senior editors and associate editors are responsible for a preliminary reading of submissions to verify their suitability; reviewers often do the detailed reading. Their high level of expertise on the topic treated and/or methodology used in the submission makes reviewers the most suitable individuals to give expert comment on the quality of the content. The editorial team has the responsibility to make sure that the reviewers are attuned to a journal's objectives and reach a decision, even when the review reports are inconsistent.

We argue that change and innovation can come from the collective action of the community. The panel will then address the actions that need to be taken by different members of the community serving in different capacities in the peer review process. In summary, the objective of this panel is to provide insights into how to embrace innovation in research through the action of members of the review process. The panellists will debate how to encourage change in this role and the resulting different responsibilities of each role.

The panel members have rich and varied experience in one or more of the mentioned editorial roles. They have lived and been professionally socialised in a wide variety of geographical regions. The panel includes senior scholars who have held and/or are holding key roles as editor-in-chief and scholars who participate in the reviewing process in different capacities as senior editors, associate editors, PhD supervisors, reviewers and authors.

Robert Davison will argue that it is the role of editors and the editorial team to identify, encourage, develop and unleash innovation. This revised role for the editorial team involves many new responsibilities that differ significantly from those normally associated with the role. Robert will set out these new responsibilities and encourage debate about how they can be realised in practice, as well as the changes that will be required in the way editors, reviewers and authors conduct and consider research. In particular, he will focus on: how editors identify and prepare reviewers; when reviewers should disqualify themselves; how all members of the editorial team can be motivated to engage in this search for innovation. Robert will chair the panel.

Gerhard Schwabe will address the role of PhD students and their supervisors in the reviewing process and their responsibilities. Gerhard argues that while PhD students need to be trained as reviewers and authors, it remains the supervisors' responsibility for the submitted re-view. Reviews by PhD students need to be supervised and assessed based on level of study and experience in publishing. Normally, that means that a PhD student should only be involved in reviewing a paper, if s/he has already published at this level. Supervisors should pay particular attention to two biases: 1. "Inexperience bias": Lack of experience and judgement capability may lead to many indecisive evaluations ("paper can go either way") 2. "Impression bias": The PhD student uses the review to demonstrate to his/her supervisor that he has internalised the course "Intro to research methods 101". This may lead to overly strict evaluations of methodology issues. Supervisors should therefore be careful in guiding PhD students and providing the right incentive system for them.

Amany Elbanna will discuss the role of authors and how authors need to overcome prejudices and outdated divides. Amany argues that there is a need for a mind shift in authors' view of the reviewing process so they not only appreciate the work of reviewers but more importantly have a positive orientation towards the process. She invites authors to recognise that "the paradigm is dead" and encourage them to engage with reviewers in a dialogue about the publication rather than just re-enforcing an old hierarchical view. Amany will argue that "the enemy is us" and senior editors and associate editors should allow authors to engage in a dialogue with reviewers.

Antonio Díaz Andrade will discuss the vital role reviewers play and propose alternative arrangements that may modernise the review process. Antonio recognises that sensible, constructive, timely and fair reviews make a significant contribution to the dissemination of legitimate knowledge. However, he argues that the shelter anonymity offers to reviewers has engendered problems: comments, which in many cases are unjustifiably delayed, can be of little or no help for improving authors' work. Antonio will outline the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives to the double-blind review.

## **2 Panel Structure**

The panel is structure into four parts:

1. Introduction to the issues by the chairperson (5 minutes)
2. Panellists presentation (25 minutes)

3. Open engagement (55 minutes)
4. Take away summary by the chairperson (5 minutes)

The panel aims to open up the debate for the community to engage in. Firstly, we provide a brief summary of the issues highlighting the process of peer-reviewing as our focal concern and the possibilities of introducing change. Secondly, each of the panellists will draw on their experience to address what they see as key issues that are holding the reviewing process back and provide some suggestions for change. Thirdly, we intend to engage in an open discussion with the audience about other possibilities and ideas for embracing change and innovation in research. Finally, we will provide a brief take away summary of the key outcomes of the discussion, with the objective of stimulating further discussions and debate.

### 3 Panelists

- **Robert Davison** is a Professor of Information Systems at the City University of Hong Kong. His current research focuses on virtual Knowledge Management and Collaboration in Chinese firms, often informed by an interpretive perspective using intensive methods such as action research. He has published over 200 articles in a variety of journals and conference. Robert is the Editor-in-Chief of the Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries and the Information Systems Journal. Home page: [www.is.cityu.edu.hk/staff/isrobert](http://www.is.cityu.edu.hk/staff/isrobert).
- **Gerhard Schwabe** has been a full professor at the University of Zurich since 2002. His research interests focus on the intersection of collaborative technologies and information management. He has published in computer science conferences (like the ACM conference on CSCW) and well as in major information systems conferences and journals. He has been leading a research group of about 10 PhD students and PostDocs for more than a decade. Home page: [www.ifi.uzh.ch/imrg.html](http://www.ifi.uzh.ch/imrg.html).
- **Amany Elbanna** is a Senior Lecturer in Information Systems at Royal Holloway University of London. Her current research includes systems implementation, development and project management in addition to crowdsourcing and the use of different collaborative technologies for emergency management, volunteering and humanitarian. Her research is published in different IS journals and conferences. She is in the editorial board of JAIS, I&M and other IS journals. Home page: [https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/amany-elbanna\(6da0f038-6bce-4990-b1cf-039232397d44\).html](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/amany-elbanna(6da0f038-6bce-4990-b1cf-039232397d44).html).
- **Antonio Díaz Andrade** is an Associate Professor of Business Information Systems at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. Antonio is actively involved with the information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) research community as an author, presenter, lecturer and reviewer. He has strong research interest in the interplay between the social and the technical, especially in the area of ICT4D, as well as in research methods. Home page: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/profiles/antonio-diaz-andrade>.

### 4 Target Audience

We expect the proposed panel to be of particular interest to:

- Young IS scholars (i.e., PhD students, post docs, and assistant professors) who need to manage the often delicate balance between publishing in top-tier journals (answering research questions) and making an impact with their research (solving real-life problems)
- IS researchers who supervise PhD students and/or mentor early-career scholars

- Deans and faculty members who serve on hiring, tenure-track, and promotion committees
- Editors of IS journals who aim to (further) increase the impact of research published in their journals
- Members of review committees mandated with evaluating the research output of universities, IS departments, etc. (e.g., on behalf of accreditation bodies such as AACSB)

## 5 Suitability to ECIS Audience

Since European scholars actively contribute to the current debates in the information systems field, they would be very much interested in participating in attending this panel.

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## Prior experience of the proposers in panel organisation

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