

Communications of the Association for Information Systems

Volume 6

Article 12

March 2001

Making Academic IS Research More Relevant to Industry Via Open-Architecture Models for Career Paths in Academia

Tsipi Heart

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, heart@bgu.ac.il

Nava Pliskin

Ben-Gurion Univerisyt of the Negev, pliskinn@bgumail.bgu.ac.il

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais>

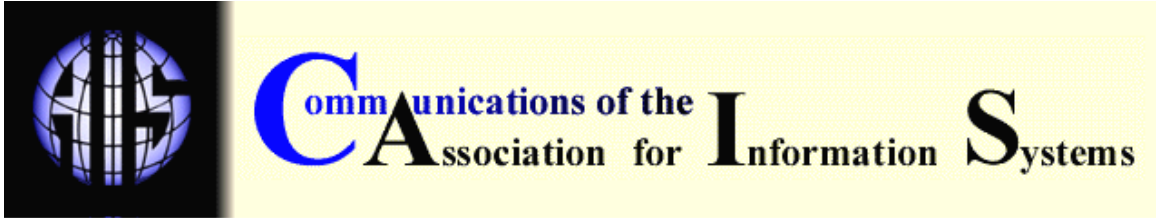
Recommended Citation

Heart, Tsipi and Pliskin, Nava (2001) "Making Academic IS Research More Relevant to Industry Via Open-Architecture Models for Career Paths in Academia," *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*: Vol. 6 , Article 12.

DOI: 10.17705/1CAIS.00612

Available at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol6/iss1/12>

This material is brought to you by the AIS Journals at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in Communications of the Association for Information Systems by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.



MAKING ACADEMIC IS RESEARCH MORE RELEVANT TO INDUSTRY VIA OPEN-ARCHITECTURE MODELS FOR CAREER PATHS IN ACADEMIA

Tsipi Heart and Nava Pliskin

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

theart@netvision.net.il

ABSTRACT

Until the debate regarding relevance of IS research to practice is resolved, it is instructive to learn from more established disciplines where previous practical experience is accounted for and valued. In teaching hospitals, academia and practice are interrelated and co-exist. Retired high-ranked military officers are sought for top positions, in business, politics, and academia. Promotion and tenure committees for academic IS departments, wishing to encourage interaction with IS practice, ought not only to recognize practical experience and publications in trade magazines, but also to design open-architecture career paths for smooth transition of IS personnel between industry and academia.

"We need to be more relevant to meet the increasing needs of our students, the organizations that hire them, and the larger society" [Westfall, 1999].

The debate about how relevant academic IS research is to actual IS practice is often viewed as a symptom of a relatively young discipline which is not yet well defined, and still looking for best-practice models. On the other hand, many IS researchers argue that the question is not only irrelevant but also short-term. They view research contributions as long-term in nature.

In our opinion, a necessary condition for relevance of IS research is that it must be well attached to practice. We believe, like McMaster (2/14/2001)¹ that "there is a place for pure theory / philosophy, just as there is a place for practice alone (without theory), however each is undoubtedly impoverished without the other". Since transition of IS knowledge between practice and academia is needed for much more than just teaching, academics who are informed of current business trends and issues are better equipped for both practical and pure research. We thus agree with those who argue, like Rajiv Kohli (2/9/2001) that "the larger issue is 'interaction' between academia and practice." Unfortunately, as shown by Straub (2/10/2001), the current level of interaction is rather low and "there is empirical evidence, in fact, that academics and practitioners have a different worldviews and, are, therefore, different 'audiences.'"

If one accepts the premise that there is not enough interaction between academia and practice, even though such an interaction is essential to making IS research more relevant, then the question is whether the IS career paths in academia can be redesigned to enhance interaction. Jennex (2/12/2001), based on his own experience, notes interaction inhibition by academia, recalling job interviews "where if you were a practitioner and didn't want to do the A journal research you would be offered the 'Lecturer' positions, which do not have tenure and thus, are second class." The basic career model in academia thus prevents transfer of personnel between

the practical and academic worlds by signaling to practitioners that practical experience is not valued for academic positions.

The same is true in the other direction. Williams (2/9/2001) of Sun Microsystems Inc. pointed out that his staff "avoids academic conferences", including those staff with a Ph.D. degree. A survey of academics posted by Press [2001] shows that 82% of the respondents use academic journals for their research and, at the same time, more than 83% use practical publications for teaching purposes. Thus, while researchers prefer to publish in academic journals, such as MISQ and JAIS for their research, and participate in academic conventions, such as ICIS and AMCIS, they are aware of the need to be up-to-date through practical publications for their teaching. Practitioners, on the other hand, prefer other, more practical publications and conventions.

Clearly, if practitioners and researchers keep apart in terms of reading and life-long learning, they end up in two separate worlds. Unfortunately, the current model of career paths in academia fuels this separation, thus inhibiting the relevance of IS research. In most cases, young doctoral students are required to dedicate most of their time to the academic pursuit, thus detaching themselves from the IS industry early in their career. This early detachment of those who eventually join the academic staff of colleges and universities inevitably opens an unwarranted gap in the IS field between industry and academia. Only in rare cases, which are the exception, do people leave the IS industry and join the academic ranks. Too often, top IS practitioners, who wish to bring their industrial experience to academia, have to start relatively low on the academic ladder in terms of status, power, and pay. The existing career-path model is rather rigid and does not encourage transition of practitioners into the academia since practical achievements are usually not valued in academia.

Because the IS discipline is still young, it might be worthwhile to learn by analogy from other, more established disciplines that have perfected interaction between practice and academia over hundreds of years. In the case of medical and military practitioners, for example previous practical experience is accounted for and valued. In medicine, academia and practice are interrelated and co-exist. In teaching hospitals, professionals are encouraged to devote time to both practice and research. Involvement in practical medicine is not an obstacle, but a requirement! High-rank military officers, in the US and elsewhere, after retiring at a relatively young age, are sought for top positions, in business, in politics, and even in academia. Unlike IS practitioners who wish to enter academia, physician in teaching hospitals move in parallel practical and academic tracks while retired army officers can enter industry or politics at the top and need not re-start from the bottom of the career ladder.

Academic IS departments wishing to encourage interaction with IS practice, might attract personnel from the IS industry by recognizing practical experience as relevant for an academic rank at the level of associate or, in exceptional cases, Full Professor. Where a doctorate degree is required, it might be possible to grant a Pr.D. (Practical Doctorate) rather than a Ph.D., prior to such recruiting. Such an approach will open the doors of academia to practitioners seeking a second career in the academia, helping to close the gap between the two worlds. To improve the interaction between the IS research community and IS industry further, it is important to reduce the reluctance of academic promotion and tenure committees to recognize trade publications as a legitimate publication outlets for researchers.

Just as the IS industry turned away from legacy proprietary systems toward open architectures, we propose that academic and research organization ought to consider adopting open-architecture models for career paths. Such a model should enable smooth transition of personnel, in both directions, between IS industry and academia. We believe that open-architecture models of the kind offered to medical and military practitioners are essential to bringing the practical and academic worlds closer together and are bound to make IS research more relevant to industry.

END NOTES

¹ Dates refer to the dates of the e-mails sent to IS World.

REFERENCES

- Press, Larry (2000) IS Research Survey Results - Latest Figures
<http://www.commerce.uq.edu.au/isworld/research/msg.23-02-2001-1.html>,
Westfall, R., "An IS Research Relevancy Manifesto", CAIS 1999, Volume 2 Article 14.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tsipi Heart is a Ph. D. student at Ben-Gurion University in Israel. Her MBA is from Tel-Aviv University. After serving as CIO at a local hotel chain and an international hotel chain operating a number of hotels in Israel, Ms. Heart has worked as a consultant on IT implementation and usage in the hospitality industry. She presented papers at the *11th Industrial Engineering & Management Conference in Israel* (May 2000) and in the *International Conference on Advances in Infrastructure for Electronic Business, Science and Education on the Internet* (By invitation only, August 2000, Italy).

Nava Pliskin, a Professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management of Ben-Gurion University in Israel, was previously a Thomas Henry Carroll Ford Foundation Visiting Associate Professor at the Harvard Business School and a Visiting Faculty Member at Suffolk University, Babson College, and Boston University. Her Ph.D. is from Harvard University. Her research on longitudinal analysis of Information-Technology impacts at the global, national, organizational, and individual levels, is published in such journals as *ACM Transactions on Information Systems*, *Communications of the ACM*, *Database*, *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, *Information & Management*, *Information & Software Technology*, and *The Information Society*

Copyright © 2001 by the Association for Information Systems. Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and full citation on the first page. Copyright for components of this work owned by others than the Association for Information Systems must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists requires prior specific permission and/or fee. Request permission to publish from: AIS Administrative Office, P.O. Box 2712 Atlanta, GA, 30301-2712 Attn: Reprints or via e-mail from ais@gsu.edu .



Communications of the Association for Information Systems

ISSN: 1529-3181

EDITOR
Paul Gray
Claremont Graduate University

CAIS SENIOR EDITORIAL BOARD

Henry C. Lucas, Jr. Editor-in-Chief New York University	Paul Gray Editor, CAIS Claremont Graduate University	Phillip Ein-Dor Editor, JAIS Tel-Aviv University
Edward A. Stohr Editor-at-Large New York University	Blake Ives Editor, Electronic Publications Louisiana State University	Reagan Ramsower Editor, ISWorld Net Baylor University

CAIS ADVISORY BOARD

Gordon Davis University of Minnesota	Ken Kraemer University of California at Irvine	Richard Mason Southern Methodist University
Jay Nunamaker University of Arizona	Henk Sol Delft University	Ralph Sprague University of Hawaii

CAIS EDITORIAL BOARD

Steve Alter University of San Francisco	Tung Bui University of Hawaii	Christer Carlsson Abo Academy, Finland	H. Michael Chung California State University
Omar El Sawy University of Southern California	Jane Fedorowicz Bentley College	Brent Gallupe Queens University, Canada	Sy Goodman University of Arizona
Ruth Guthrie California State University	Chris Holland Manchester Business School, UK	Jaak Jurison Fordham University	George Kasper Virginia Commonwealth University
Jerry Luftman Stevens Institute of Technology	Munir Mandviwalla Temple University	M.Lynne Markus Claremont Graduate University	Don McCubbrey University of Denver
Michael Myers University of Auckland, New Zealand	Seev Neumann Tel Aviv University, Israel	Hung Kook Park Sangmyung University, Korea	Dan Power University of Northern Iowa
Maung Sein Agder College, Norway	Margaret Tan National University of Singapore, Singapore	Robert E. Umbaugh Carlisle Consulting Group	Doug Vogel City University of Hong Kong, China
Hugh Watson University of Georgia	Dick Welke Georgia State University	Rolf Wigand Syracuse University	Phil Yetton University of New South Wales, Australia

ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL

Eph McLean AIS, Executive Director Georgia State University	Jennifer Davis Subscriptions Manager Georgia State University	Reagan Ramsower Publisher, CAIS Baylor University
---	---	---