INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH
Relevant Theory and Informed Practice

IFIP – The International Federation for Information Processing

IFIP was founded in 1960 under the auspices of UNESCO, following the First World Computer Congress held in Paris the previous year. An umbrella organization for societies working in information processing, IFIP's aim is two-fold: to support information processing within its member countries and to encourage technology transfer to developing nations. As its mission statement clearly states,

> *IFIP's mission is to be the leading, truly international, apolitical organization which encourages and assists in the development, exploitation and application of information technology for the benefit of all people.*

IFIP is a non-profitmaking organization, run almost solely by 2500 volunteers. It operates through a number of technical committees, which organize events and publications. IFIP's events range from an international congress to local seminars, but the most important are:

- The IFIP World Computer Congress, held every second year;
- Open conferences;
- Working conferences.

The flagship event is the IFIP World Computer Congress, at which both invited and contributed papers are presented. Contributed papers are rigorously refereed and the rejection rate is high.

As with the Congress, participation in the open conferences is open to all and papers may be invited or submitted. Again, submitted papers are stringently refereed.

The working conferences are structured differently. They are usually run by a working group and attendance is small and by invitation only. Their purpose is to create an atmosphere conducive to innovation and development. Refereeing is less rigorous and papers are subjected to extensive group discussion.

Publications arising from IFIP events vary. The papers presented at the IFIP World Computer Congress and at open conferences are published as conference proceedings, while the results of the working conferences are often published as collections of selected and edited papers.

Any national society whose primary activity is in information may apply to become a full member of IFIP, although full membership is restricted to one society per country. Full members are entitled to vote at the annual General Assembly, National societies preferring a less committed involvement may apply for associate or corresponding membership. Associate members enjoy the same benefits as full members, but without voting rights. Corresponding members are not represented in IFIP bodies. Affiliated membership is open to non-national societies, and individual and honorary membership schemes are also offered.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH

Relevant Theory and Informed Practice

IFIP TC8 / WG8.2 20TH Year Retrospective: Relevant Theory and Informed Practice–Looking Forward from a 20-Year Perspective on IS Research
July 15–17, 2004, Manchester, United Kingdom

Edited by

Bonnie Kaplan
Yale University, USA

Duane P. Truex III
Florida International University, USA
Georgia State University, USA

David Wastell
University of Manchester, United Kingdom

A. Trevor Wood-Harper
University of Manchester, United Kingdom
University of South Australia, Australia

Janice I. DeGross
University of Minnesota, USA

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FOREWORD

We are grateful for the support of the sponsoring and host organizations. Without their involvement, endorsement and financial support, this conference would not have been feasible. We would therefore like to extend our sincere thanks to the following organizations: the International Federation of Information Processing (IFIP), Technical Committee 8 of IFIP and WG 8.2 in particular, the School of Informatics at the University of Manchester, and Salford City Council. We provide a brief introduction to each of these organizations by way of providing historical context and information.

1 ABOUT IFIP

The International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) was established in 1960. It is a multinational federation of professional and technical *organizations* (or national groupings of such organizations) concerned with information processing. In any one country, generally only one such organization—which must be representative of the national activities in the field of information processing—is admitted as a Full Member. On March 25, 2004, 47 countries were represented by Full Member organizations.

The Federation is governed by a General Assembly which meets once every year and consists of one representative from each Member organization. The Federation is organized into the IFIP Council, the Executive Board, and the Technical Assembly. The Technical Assembly is divided into 11 Technical Committees and two Specialist Groups. These committees and groups are in turn divided into Working Groups, of which IFIP WG 8.2 is one (under Technical Committee 8).

1.1 About IFIP Technical Committee Eight (TC8)

IFIP TC8 is the IFIP Technical Committee dedicated to the field of Information Systems. It was established in 1966, and aims to promote and encourage the advancement of research and practice of concepts, methods, techniques, and issues related to information systems in organizations.

The declared scope of TC 8 scope is the planning, analysis, design, construction, modification, implementation, utilization, evaluation, and management of information systems that use information technology to support and coordinate organizational activities including

- effective utilization of information technologies in organizational context

- interdependencies of information technologies and organizational structure, relationships and interaction
- evaluation and management of information systems
- analysis, design, construction, modification and implementation of computer-based information systems for organizations
- management of knowledge, information, and data in organizations
- information systems applications in organizations such as transaction processing, routine data processing, decision support, office support, com -puter-integrated manufacturing, expert support, executive support, and support for strategic advantage plus the coordination and interaction of such applications
- relevant research and practice from associated fields such as computer science, operations management, economics, organization theory, cognitive science, knowledge engineering, and systems theory

1.2 About IFIP Working Group 8.2: The Interaction of Information Systems and the Organization

The International Federation for Information Processing Working Group 8.2 (WG 8.2) was established by IFIP in 1977 as a working group concerned with "the interaction of information systems and the organization." WG 8.2 conducts working conferences, publishes books through IFIP, and publishes a semi-annual newsletter (OASIS). In addition, the working group maintains a listserv, a Web site and holds business meetings.

The aims of the working group are the investigation of the relationships and interactions among four major components: information systems, information technology, organizations, and society. The focus is on the interrelationships, not on the components themselves. Its scope is defined in terms of information systems, organizations, and society as follows:

- *Information systems*: includes information processing, the design of systems, organizational implementation and the economic ramifications of information.
- *Information technology*: includes technological changes such as microcomputers, distributed processing, and new methods of communications.
- *Organizations*: includes the social group, the individual, decision making and the design of organizational structures and processes.
- *Society*: includes the economic systems, society's institutions and values of professional groups.

1.3 How to Join WG 8.2

One can become involved in the working group as a correspondent, a friend or a member. If you would like to be placed on our mailing list, just write to our secretary (preferably by e-mail) and asked to be placed on our mailing list. You will receive newsletters and conference notices. The Web page also has information relating to forthcoming events and conferences. You can also subscribe to our listserv. (Visit the WG 8.2 Web site at http://www.ifipwg82.org/.)

You can become a friend of the group by attending one of our working conferences or business meetings. Working conferences are held about every 12 to 18 months. Business meetings are typically conducted twice yearly, once in conjunction with a working conference, and once in conjunction with the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS).

Typically, a friend who has participated in two out of three consecutive business meetings is eligible for election as a member. By this election process, the members of the group nominate new members, who must then be confirmed by TC8.

2 THE SCHOOL OF INFORMATICS, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Formerly the School was known as the Department of Computation, at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). This summer is marked by a major event in the world of academe in the North West of England—namely, the merger of two illustrious universities based in Manchester: the Victoria University of Manchester (VUMAN) and UMIST. The new institution will be known as the University of Manchester. Two IT-related departments are part of this new milieu: Computer Science (from VUMAN) and Computation (UMIST). The latter will be renamed the School of Informatics and will concentrate on the development of its historical strengths on the applied side of the discipline of Computing. For this reason, it will take up a position in the Humanities Faculty of the new university, alongside Business, Education, Accounting, and other cognate disciplines. Information Systems will be a powerful force within this new Faculty, bringing together a large cadre of well-known scholars within the IS discipline, many of whom have played, and continue to play, a prominent part in the work of WG8.2.

3 SALFORD CITY COUNCIL

The City of Salford is one of the various independent municipalities that make up the conurbation of Greater Manchester, lying on the north west side of the conurbation. There is a long tradition of collaboration between the City and local universities in various areas of research, especially regarding information systems and the application of IT. For nearly 10 years, there has been a particularly close relationship between the IT Services department at the City, and researchers at Salford University, Manchester Business School, and UMIST. Action research on eGovernment has been a strong feature of this collaboration, culminating in national recognition for the City as a pathfinder authority in this field and the establishment of a CRM Academy at Manchester Business School, in partnership with the School of Informatics at UMIST.

PREFACE

This volume includes the papers and panel descriptions refereed for presentation at an International Federation of Information Processing (IFIP) Working Group 8.2 conference entitled "Relevant Theory and Informed Practice: Looking Forward from a 20 Year Perspective on IS Research." The conference was held at the University of Manchester in Manchester, England, on July 15-17, 2004.

It was during the working group business meeting following the IFIP WG 8.2 working conference in 2001 on "Realigning Research and Practice in Information Systems Development" in Boise, Idaho, that a conference call was approved for a new conference dealing with the alignment of research practice and IS development. Those who proposed the conference had been involved with WG 8.2 and other TC 8 working groups over many years. The initial incentive for developing the theme of the conference dates back to 1997 at the Philadelphia conference. It was observed that while some were celebrating the end of the "methods wars" because some types of qualitative work had become acceptable for publication in mainstream journals, the work by others who were exploring questions outside the managerial, organizational, or technological mainstream, or who were employing innovative research approaches, was still being excluded from the discourse. Thus it was concluded that further attention to the question of research approaches was required.

In a real sense, however, the seeds of this conference were sown in 1984 at the first Manchester conference, when in the proceedings introduction Enid Mumford made a declaration that continues to express a concern of the working group.

> The members of the W.G. 8.2 are dedicated to stimulating and maintaining a debate on the interrelationships between information systems, organizations and society; and to influencing IFIP members, and information scientists, teachers, trade unions, and the user of information systems, to think carefully about the organizational and societal consequences of the systems they are developing and using.
>
> One of our areas of interest is research methodology and we have been looking critically at the kinds of research associated up to now with information science, and discussing the need for new approaches.
>
> Our concern that traditional research methods can not adequately investigate social needs and problems...

So, as part of the working group's living tradition, wherein about every six years it makes an assessment of IS research methods, the call for this conference went out. And how the community responded!

1 THE REVIEW PROCESS

The papers in this volume are those that survived a rigorous review and selection process. We were gratified, at times even overwhelmed, by the record number of 113 submissions we received for the conference, with papers in a number of categories: full research papers, practice-oriented papers, and panels. Three of the papers were by authors specifically invited to provide a more panoramic view of the working group's progress and of IS research methods in general. In keeping with WG 8.2 standards, all papers (including the invited papers) were subjected to a rigorous reviewing process involving a minimum of four independent readings, with some manuscripts having double that number. An associate editor (AE) assigned to each paper solicited two independent, blind reviews. The AE reports and recommendations were then considered by the four program cochairs at a meeting in Atlanta in late November 2003, with each cochair taking lead responsibility for an equal allocation of roughly 28 papers. Any borderline or contentious cases were referred to one or more fellow cochairs, and discussed by the group as a whole. The usual care was taken to avoid conflicts of interest in the assignment of associate editors and reviewers. In a few instances, papers were sent out for yet additional review consideration by the general chairs or others with the appropriate topical or methodological expertise.

The whole review process was underpinned and orchestrated using the AIS-ICIS conference software, enabling this complex process to operate smoothly despite severe time-space problems. The Web system allowed authors to submit papers electronically, associate editors and reviewers to be assigned by the cochairs, reviews and reports to be garnered and evaluated, decisions and recommendations to be made and recorded, and accept/reject letters to be dispatched. Although there were moments when we felt (with an acute sense of irony) in the midst of yet another IS failure, in the end all worked very well, and it is doubtful whether a manual system could have supported the process without considerably more blood, sweat, and tears.

We are deeply appreciative of the efforts made by the WG 8.2 community to see through the review process to successful conclusion, and the associate editors, in particular, who were the lynchpins of the whole process. Despite the exacting deadlines (little over a month was available), virtually all of the reviews and reports were received by the time of our Atlanta cochairs congress, enabling us to focus on our main tasks of making the final selection of papers and drawing up the preliminary program structure.

We were gratified that 8.2's reputation for rigorous review produced high quality submissions. Of the 113 submissions received, we accepted 33 full research papers (representing an acceptance rate of 29 percent for full papers) and 6 panel proposals. Outside of this favored selection, there were many other interesting and valuable submissions that we felt could make a very useful contribution to the conference. Rather than limit this conference to a predetermined acceptance rate, we were anxious to

include these as well, in the interests of both building the community and stimulating lively debate. Accordingly, the cochairs decided at their Atlanta meeting to create a new category of position papers, referred to more colloquially as "bright ideas." Authors were invited to submit a 2000 word précis, summarizing their main points in a pithy and provocative fashion; 11 such pieces are featured in the final program.

Considering the final count for all papers, both full (33), position paper (11), and panels (6) yields a more egalitarian overall acceptance rate of 44 percent. This compares interestingly with the three previous research method conferences. According to our best records, the initial gathering from September 1-3,1984, (called a *colloquium* because of sensitivities within IFIP itself, as we are informed by those who were present) had 18 papers and only 44 non-presenting participants. Virtually all papers submitted were presented and published, nearly a 100 percent acceptance rate. It seems the community of radicals in our then-new discipline were few in number. By 1990 and the Copenhagen conference, a total of 23 papers (including 4 invited papers and 2 panels) were presented and published. Since there were 59 papers submitted, the overall acceptance rate had fallen to 42 percent. Interestingly, the conference itself was among the most heavily attended in the working group's history. There were nearly 200 participants, attesting to the interest in the topic. The 1997 Philadelphia conference had 28 pieces, including 2 panels and 2 invited papers, from a field of roughly 60 submissions, yielding approximately a 45 percent acceptance rate.

So, for the present conference, it is with some confidence that we can claim that the quality of the reviewing process, the useful and thoughtful reviews received by authors for both accepted and rejected works, and the rigor of that process, are in keeping with the best traditions of the working group. Moreover, we are told by members of the publishing community that the WG 8.2 conferences hold a much higher standard for acceptance than is the norm for other working group conferences. We are proud to maintain that standard. And for the record, the working group itself now numbers more than 200 acknowledged members, 453 friends, plus correspondents and others who participate via our books and our newsletter, OASIS. Perhaps the cost of being a revolutionary is no longer so high!

2 THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

The organization of such an IFIP working conference can be a daunting process. For starters, given the bylaws and procedures of the parent organization, the working group itself is not allowed to raise funds and maintain accounts, except for very small balances to fund direct operating activities such as publishing newsletters. IFIP working groups are voluntary organizations without paid staff or deep financial pockets. Accordingly, each conference is treated as a relatively independent fiscal entity wherein the conference organizers and book editors are taking on all of the responsibility to fund and manage the event. This insulates IFIP and WG 8.2 and scares the devil out of the organizers. Sponsorship in various forms is both essential and greatly appreciated. In the case of the Manchester 2004 event, our gratitude and thanks go to the following organizations for financial and material support to the conference:

- The School of Informatics, University of Manchester—£10,000 plus moral and administrative assistance.
- The IT Services, Salford City Council—£3,000 that provided the initial seed money to the conference.
- Georgia State University Department of Computer Information Systems for housing members of the conference committee and for hosting the November 2003 meeting of the conference chairs.
- The AIS for providing the use of the on-line reviewing system. Special thanks to Eph McLean and Samantha Spears at the AIS for their assistance.
- The home institutions of the conference chairs for funding the needed travel, administrative support, and indirect costs of managing the conference. Thank you the to Florida International University's Chapman Graduate School of the College of Business Administration, and The School of Informatics at the University of Manchester.

3 ACCOLADES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is customary to thank everyone from our families and teachers to our colleagues and support staffs, parakeets, and other ways of maintaining sanity under pressure. Customary as it may be, we none-the-less truly are grateful. We heartily thank Janice DeGross for her much-needed acerbic dose of keeping us on schedule and her superb work making all the authors' various, and often times tardy, contributions into a book. Thanks also to the local organizing committee led by Peter Kawalek of the University of Manchester for aggressive negotiations and sensitive choice of venues for all of the conference events. Also, we acknowledge Kath Howell at the University of Manchester for stepping in to tidy up a host of problems and last minute crises. We doff our hats to the 8.2 officers, Julie Kendall, Michael Myers, and Nancy Russo, WG 8.2 Webmaster Kevin Crowston, and the Honorary Conference Chairs, Richard Baskerville and Frank Land, for their supportive advice on sensitive matters. Rod Padilla, technical support manager at Georgia State University, kept the reviewing site running at the most critical times and customized it for our use.

Thanks, finally, to the conference chairs of the previous research methods conferences and to the past WG 8.2 chairs. We asked each of them to provide personal remembrances of the research conferences and the history of the working group to help us in framing our own remarks and continuing narrative of the working group's activities, for we see this event as part of a living and evolving intellectual and social history. It is a history in which we are grateful to have had the chance to play a part.

We are most thankful for each other, for our ability to work together, to complement each other's strengths and tolerate one another's foibles. But finally, of course, we really are most thankful to you, the members of the IFIP Working Group 8.2 community, for bringing this all about.

Bonnie Kaplan
Duane Truex
Dave Wastell
Trevor Wood-Harper

CONFERENCE CHAIRS

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Richard Baskerville
Georgia State University

Frank Land
London School of Economics

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Bonnie Kaplan
Yale University

Duane P. Truex, III
Florida International University and
Georgia State University

David Wastell
University of Manchester

A. Trevor Wood-Harper
University of Manchester and
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Peter Kawalek
University of Manchester

Bob Wood
University of Manchester

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Angela Lin, University of Sheffield, UK
Rikard Lindgren, Viktoria Institute, Sweden
Jan Ljungberg, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Cheri Long, Florida International University, USA
Jessica Luo, Case Western Reserve University, USA
Magnus Mähring, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden
Angela Mattia, Virginia Commonwealth University, USA
Donald McDermid, Edith Cowan University, Australia
Tom McMaster, University of Salford, UK
Emmanuel Monod, University de Nantes, France
Ramiro Montealegre, University of Colarado, USA
Eric Monteiro, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Enid Mumford, University of Manchester, UK
Bjorn Munkvold, Agder University College, Norway
Lisa Murphy, University of Alabama IS Group, USA
Alistair Mutch, Nottingham Trent University, UK
Karen Neville, University College, Cork, Ireland
Petter Nielsen, University of Oslo, Norway
Sue Nielsen, Griffith University, Australia
Jacob Nørbjerg, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
Torbjörn Nordström, Umea University, Sweden
Philip O'Reilly, University College, Cork, Ireland
Niki Panteli, University of Bath, UK
Graham Pervan, Curtin University of Technology, Australia
Athanasia Pouloudi, Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece
Philip Powell, University of Bath, UK
Marlei Pozzebon, HEC Montreal, Canada
Sandeep Purao, Pennsylvania State University, USA

Jeria Quesenberry, The Pennsylvania State University, USA
Julie Rennecker, Case Western Reserve University, USA
Helen Richardson, University of Salford, UK
Suzanne Rivard, HEC Montréal, Canada
Knut Rolland, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Duska Rosenberg, Royal Holloway University of London, UK
Matti Rossi, Helsinki School of Economics, Finland
Bruce Rowlands, Griffith University, Australia
Sundeep Sahay, University of Oslo, Norway
David Sammon, University College, Cork, Ireland
Harry Scarborough, Warwick Business School, UK
Rens Scheepers, University of Melbourne, Australia
Ulrike Schultze, Southern Methodist University, USA
Gamila Shoib, School of Management, United Kingdom
Silvia Silas, Florida International University, USA
Rahul Singh, ISOM, USA
Mikael Söderström, Umeä University, Sweden
Carsten Sorensen, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK
Valerie Spitler, University of North Florida, USA
Jan Stage, Aalborg University, Denmark
Andrea Hoplight Tapia, Pennsylvania State University, USA
David Targett, Imperial College London, UK
Mark Thompson, Cambridge University , UK
Virpi Tuunainen, Helsinki School of Economics, Finland
Werner Ulrich, University of Fribourg, Switzerland
Betty Vandenbosch, Case Western Reserve University, USA
Richard Vidgen, University of Bath , UK
Erica Wagner, Cornell University, USA
David Wainwright, University of Northumbria, UK
Jonathan Wareham, Georgia State University, USA
Ulrika Westergren, Umeä University, Sweden
Chris Westrup, University of Manchester, UK
Mikael Wiberg, Umeä University, Sweden
Francis Wilson, University of Salford, UK
Youngjin Yoo, Case Western Reserve University, USA