Research Methods and Applications in Organizational Systems Research

Introduction to the Minitrack

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Research methods and applications in organizational systems research are important as they enable many challenges to be addressed. An understanding of organizational systems may be achieved through the use of appropriate research methods and theories that describe organizational systems. At the same time it is also important to be able to isolate those key factors that affect the success of organizational systems. This minitrack presents six unique papers that address salient aspects of research in organizational systems and technology. They cover the spectrum from qualitative research methods that describe and explore organizational systems to quantitative research methods that enable theory to be tested and operationalized into measurable constructs.

The first two papers in this minitrack address key questions: are we studying the right thing? And are we studying it right? The first paper by Steven Alter entitled “Pervasive Real-Time IT as a Disruptive Technology for the Current IS Field” provides a compelling argument to move away from the “IT-Artifact” and study information systems as “work systems”. This timely paper suggests that the commonplace application of IT to automate work practices or support and control them in real time is causing the overlap between information systems and the work systems they support to increase, leading to a situation in which studying just the information system but not the work system it supports will have less and less significance. The discussion progresses towards IS research paradigms in Deepak Khazanchi’s and Bjørn Erik Munkvold’s paper entitled: “On the Rhetoric and Relevance of IS Research Paradigms: A Conceptual Framework and Some Propositions”. This persuasive paper tackles the debates plaguing IS researchers and is provocative in its understanding of the concept of relevance as suggested by IS research paradigms.

Innovative uses of research methods provide new insight into the nature of phenomena being investigated and open up new possibilities for organizational systems research. In their paper entitled “Using Narrative Inquiry in a Study of Information Systems Professionals” Felix Tan and Gordon Hunter move away from paradigms to the innovative use of narrative inquiry. They conduct “Long Interviews” to elicit contextually rich and temporally bound data. Their questions are guided by résumé’s of the IS Professionals that they interview. In their paper entitled “Towards a Strategy for Sense-making of Empirical Knowledge Management Perceptions – The TFL Methodology”, David Yuh Foong Law and Joo Eng Lee-Partridge formalize an approach for social cognitive analysis they call the “Theme Based Methodology” (TFL). Using the TFL methodology to make sense of a range of perceptions elicited from senior executives, managers, consultants and academicians engaged in the information systems (IS) and human resource (HR) management functions respectively, Law and Lee-Partridge unearthed a range of empirical issues and concerns which have important implications for KM research and practice.

Conducting research in organizational systems often means that researchers are faced with environments in which a multitude of often contradictory data become available. This may mean that researchers have an opportunity to combine qualitative and quantitative research to shed light on the topic under investigation. Kai Larsen’s paper entitled “Development of the Information Systems Implementation Research Method” develops a new research method. The Information Systems Implementation Research Method (ISI-RM) integrates quantitative and qualitative research on IS implementation and builds on an empirical taxonomy of antecedents to implementation success. Following an extensive literature review, Somasundaram Ramanathan and Jeremy Rose study the historical development of the IS field and describe its evolution in a stage model in their paper entitled “Rationalizing, Probing, Understanding: the Evolution of the Inter-Organizational Systems Adoption Field”. They conclude that widely-accepted IOS adoption theory has still to emerge, there is a cumulative widening of knowledge, but, many inconsistencies, differences of standpoint and contradictions still remain.

The papers in this minitrack provide fresh insight into various research methods and approaches. We commend the papers to you as they promise to stimulate animated discussion and inspire future research efforts.