AJIS FEATURED THEME:

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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Qualitative research attempts to understand the complexities of the unstructured nature of information systems implementations. This lack of structure is primarily due to the complex interactions between social and technological factors within business. Qualitative research in these areas can provide insights into why information systems implementations have not been as successful as projected and can provide alternative solutions to many issues associated with political, social and gender aspects of organisations. The challenges facing qualitative research are many and varied, from the difficulty in gaining access to organisations to concerns about the validity of the techniques and the generalisability of the results. The series of papers shown here attempt to address some of these concerns.

The five papers in this section of AJIS have been redeveloped from papers presented at the QualIT conference, Griffith University in Brisbane on the 23rd-25th November 2005. The papers were selected for their impact and significance from the thirty-six research papers and seven research-in-progress papers presented at the conference (full conference information is available at www.cit.gu.edu.au/conferences/qualit2005). Each of the papers illustrates how qualitative research helps solve an important practical problem.

The paper ìEvading technological determinism in ERP implementation: towards a consultative social approachî by Clare Archer-Lean, Jo-Anne Clark and Don Kerr provides a welcome critique to enterprise resource planning package implementation. The paper provides an illustration of the technological determinism of these packages and of the particular challenges of implementation in a government owned corporation. A new approach is offered for interpreting the complex clash between the push to use technology to determine the nature of an organisation and the end userís perspective that technology is a tool of an existing and rich culture. The insight of this paper is not only to reject technological determinist approaches but to identify the technologically determinist tendencies in ERP implementation itself.

The paper ìDemystifying a hermeneutic approach to IS researchî by Phyl Webb and Carol Pollard describes how the authors went about defining and justifying a hermeneutical approach for an ongoing study on the prescribed vs. practiced IT governance. Many difficult and complex descriptions of hermeneutics were considered until they gained a level of comfort and confidence in

its applicability and use in the qualitative study in IT governance. Examples are given of how the framework was used in data analysis.

The paper by Kate Crawford and Helen Hasan ì Activity theory as a research framework in ISî shows how Activity Theory can be applied to a variety of information systems studies. The authors discuss the specific challenges of each recent research example (vignettes) and how Activity Theory helps to address those challenges. The paper includes illustrations of how these vignettes can be analysed according to the seven points of the framework.

In their paper ì The evolution of a business process theory - the case of a multi-grounded theoryî the authors Mikael Lind and Gˆran Goldkuhl propose the further development of the empirically driven, inductive grounded theory approach to data analysis by complementing it with a theory driven analysis of a seven year long qualitative study of business processes in what they call a multi-grounded theory. Although the paper provides a nice illustration of the multi-grounded theory it is impossible to replicate the heated discussion it triggered during the conference. The paper certainly made the audience reconsider the very definition of grounded theory and not everyone agreed with the argument adopted in the paper, which is an extension to grounded theory. The paper is also a good example of a theme paper, as after all the QualIT 2005 conference did provide a forum for discussing challenges in qualitative research in the field of information systems.