

## Editorial

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### Conference reports

In our previous editorial (EJIS, Vol. 4, No. 1) we discussed the problems stemming from the increasing number of academic conferences held every year. We raised the issues of their quality and efficacy, as well as the difficulty for hard pressed, poorly financed academics of choosing which conferences to attend.

Clearly, one way to 'catch up' with 'missed' conferences is to read the conference proceedings. However, even disregarding the irreplaceable social benefits of conferring with fellow researchers from other countries, the proceedings are normally a poor representation of the intellectual content of the conference. This discussion is often very valuable, representing the 'live' interaction of experts debating issues of importance to the discipline. However, often the proceedings just include the conference papers and frequently present them in a different order from that of the conference. Even those that include counter-views to the papers, in terms of discussants' contributions, still miss the 'real' discussion that took place within the conference hall at the time.

Some journals publish occasional conference reports but these are often less than satisfactory. They are typically very bland, representing just an annotated list of the speakers and suggesting that the author did little more than paraphrase the conference programme. Alternatively, and especially in the more newsletter-oriented publications, some reports focus on the (often embarrassing) social 'high jinks' surrounding the conference banquet or comment obsequiously on the appearance of the 'great and the good'. This is normally delivered in a 'chummy' tone that may bring back fond memories for those who attended the conference but does little for those who did not go but would still like a sensible report of what happened.

In this edition of EJIS, we feature a new form of conference report in the shape of the paper by Richard Baskerville and Steve Smithson, entitled 'Information technology and new organizational forms: choosing chaos over panaceas'. This paper reports on the IFIP Working Group 8.2 Working Conference on Information Technology and New Emergent Forms of Organ-

izations, which was held in August 1994 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The paper is not a summary of the conference papers, neither is it a collection of humorous anecdotes nor a 'name check' of worthy academics. Rather, it is a report of the discussions that took place within the conference sessions, set in the context of wider information systems issues and supported by references to the wider information systems literature.

The Baskerville and Smithson paper is necessarily subjective and represents the views and impressions of the two programme chairs of the conference. This is why, as editors, we chose not to send the paper for refereeing but rather to place it in the Comment section of the journal. On the other hand, the paper draws freely on reports of the conference sessions provided by 'session reviewers' who were appointed in advance and given the task of recording the discussion that took place. These reviews have been published in their entirety elsewhere (*ACM SigOIS*, April 1995) and were interpreted by the paper's authors to produce the paper published here. Although it is a subjective view, this interpretation has been approved by the general chair of the conference.

As editors, we must leave it to those readers who did attend the conference to decide whether this interpretation is in accord with their own and whether it is a reasonable reflection of the intellectual content of the discussions. For those readers who did not attend this particular conference, we believe that the paper provides a lasting record of the issues that were discussed and the views that were aired at the time. In addition, it may help to set the context and tone of the conference as a prelude to reading the official proceedings.

We believe that the paper in question represents a worthy new mechanism for disseminating the 'results' of a conference. This does not mean that we are canvassing for such papers from every conference, far from it. However, where conferences discuss relatively new issues which may have a significant impact on mainstream information systems research and practice in the future, which we believe was the case with the Ann Arbor conference, then we feel that such papers are justified. However, as always, we welcome the views of our readers on this issue.