Editorial

Creating a journal for the 21st century

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W elcome to a revitalised Journal of Information Technology. The new cover on this, our re-launch, issue, signals the commitment of the Editors and our new publisher, Palgrave Macmillan, to create a journal that reflects the needs of our readers and authors in the 21st Century.

We pride ourselves as editors on our accessibility to authors and readers. So here is some detail about us, and how to contact us through e-mail, whether a reader, flagging a potential paper or subject, making suggestions for a theme issue, or an author discussing a paper. Leslie is on willcockslp@aol.com, and Chris is on chris.sauer@templeton.oxford.ac.uk.

Leslie Willcocks has been Editor-in-Chief for the last 14 years. He is Professor of Information Management and e-Business at premier research-rated Warwick University's Business School, and was previously Reader at Templeton and Said Business School, Oxford. His principal interests include IT-enabled change, outsourcing, core capabilities, strategic IT, evaluation, e-business, social theory in IS. He has published in journals ranging from MISQ, MISQ Executive, through to CACM, Journal of Management Studies, Sloan and California Management Reviews and Harvard Business Review. His present research is into business process outsourcing and Michel Foucault and IS.

Chris Sauer joined Leslie as joint Editor-in-Chief in 1999. He is a member of the Faculty of Management at Oxford University and is Fellow in Information Management at Templeton College, Oxford's centre for executive education. His principal interests are Organisational Architecture, the management of IT-enabled change, and the management of projects. He has published in journals ranging from Sloan Management Review to IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering. His most recent research conducted in 2002–2003 has been a broad-based survey of IT project management in the UK conducted in collaboration with Computer Weekly.

Chris and Leslie have also worked together on studying e-Business and Infrastructure – they produced Building The e-Business Infrastructure (Business Intelligence, 2000) and Moving To e-Business (Random House, 2000) and more recently Evolution of The Organizational Architect for Sloan Management Review in 2002, with follow-up articles in 2003/4.

Making a journal valuable

Our ambition is to publish work that is truly valuable to readers. And to service authors constructively and swiftly, with a receipt to publication time of 8 months. Typically our acceptance rate for papers is around 15%, but we let you know quickly if your paper is a serious contender, and, if it is, work hard to get it to the best publishable quality.

What do we think our readers will value? In our experience, every reader, whether academic, research student or practitioner, is time-poor. Our objective therefore is to provide resources to assist. Few of us have time to keep fully abreast of the research in more than one or two topics. Often we are called upon to teach topics on which we are not expert. We will therefore be publishing state-of-the-art articles by field leaders.

Another resource that we have found to be highly valued is the teaching case. They are the most frequently hit articles on our website. We also believe passionately in the value of converting good research into, among other outlets, teaching material. Indeed, together we launched the first refereed Teaching Case stream at ICIS back in 1997, and it is good to see that this tradition has continued at this premier IS conference. So, we shall be publishing up-to-date cases to enable our readers to offer their classes contemporary cases for discussion.

We also want the Journal to set the agenda for the future. With this in mind, we shall encourage and promote discussion and debate through our Debates and Perspectives section. Here, we shall offer readers new directions through articles in which leading thinkers re-frame the issues of the day. Interest and insight will be paramount. The Journal will feature articles on new technologies and how they will change the agenda for management. Technical developments will be covered by leading specialists in the field.

But, we are not abandoning our roots. These new initiatives will be in addition to the research articles and guest edited theme issues. And of course our core area of interest in the management of information technology remains unchanged. We cannot emphasise too strongly our continuing focus on, as our sub-title says, Organisation, Management, Information and Systems.

So what will this look like in the coming year? We kick off Issue 1 with a lead article by Lynne Markus in which she lays out the key practical issues associated with what she calls Technochange – that special kind of change in which IT plays a substantial part. Lynne is known to everyone in the academic IS community as a pioneer of organisational studies of IS including change, and as a writer who is committed to rigour but has never lost sight of the importance of relevance. In this article, her focus on practice shines through. For everyone teaching practitioners or seriously trying to prepare students for practice, this article will contain a structure for understanding Technochange, practical insights and illustrative examples.

Our first Perspectives and Debates article has been written by Igor Aleksander the co-founder and first Editor of the Journal. He is Emeritus Professor of Neural Systems Engineering at Imperial College and now holds a Leverhulme Research Fellowship. He is a leading thinker in the field of conscious machines, Artifical Intelligence (AI) and Robotics. In this article, he revisits some of the lows and highs of AI and puts forward a personal view of the ways in which it has contributed to today's taken-for-granted technologies, and how, as the wheel turns, AI may once again come to offer a new direction for the application of IT in organisations.

This personal view is accompanied by a further article from Bill Dutton, Professor and Director of Oxford University's newly founded, Oxford Internet Institute. He and his colleagues, Sharon Eisner Gillett, Lee McKnight and Malcolm Peltu, report on a range of perspectives offered at a recent forum on Broadband Internet. After our special issue on Mobile and Broadband in December 2003, this article reinforces the importance of researchers coming to grips with all aspects of these rapidly diffusing technologies. Specifically, they focus on how the new technologies affect the distribution of communicative power and argue the case for co-evolution of outcomes through the interplay of people, institutions and technology.

And, then we have our mainstream Research Articles. These include one by Wendy Currie, Bhavini Desai and Naureen Khan on Application Service Providers (ASPs). Here, they offer empirical data on the customer view of ASPs to demonstrate what ASPs need to do to successfully add value.

In the second article, Lesley Willcoxson and Robina Chatham offer detailed evidence of the issues that are important for business and IT managers and highlight specific areas of difference. A particular strength of the article is the size of its sample and its longitudinal nature.

The third research article features Joe Cunningham and Pat Finnegan on the relationship between process improvement programmes and information systems (IS). Interestingly, they find that while IS are not expected to be integral to process improvement, in fact a relationship does exist mediated by the new information needs consequent upon changes in roles and responsibilities arising from process improvement.

Our final paper, by Melanie Wilson, makes a contribution to the growing body of research interest in gender in IS. The author combines theorising from four different areas of gender studies to provide a more comprehensive set of principles for use in analysis. She then uses examples from her intensive studies of IS in nursing to illustrate her framework and develops a series of questions for further research.

Getting published in the JIT

For authors, it is useful to understand the process leading to publication. One of the Editors-in-Chief screens each paper on arrival and makes a rapid decision as to whether to send it for review. We look for relevance and rigour, of course, but they are not sufficient. We look too for readability, interest value, informed expert views and contexts as well as forward perspectives that can lead future research agendas.

Does the research say something worth our readers' time to read? Well-conducted research can be rejected if it fails this test. We ask the reader's question – what has changed as a result of this work? Those that survive the screening are sent to one of our four Regional Editors to manage the review process. So, as an author you will interact not just with the Leslie and Chris but also with Mary Lacity in the USA, Thomas Kern in Europe, Graham Pervan in Asia-Pacific, or Catherine Griffiths who has global and technology responsibilities. They will send your manuscript to at least two reviewers including wherever appropriate one member of our Editorial Board.

Our attitude to a manuscript under review is that we have adopted it with a view to working collaboratively with the authors to strengthen it sufficiently for publication. Obviously, the responsibility for achieving the required standard remains with the authors. But while review is not a guarantee of publication, our attitude is completely constructive – we will do all we can to assist the authors in getting the best paper possible. It is in everyone's interests – readers, authors, journal staff – that we do so.

We focus on rapid turnaround for two reasons. First, all of us as authors prefer the certainty of a rapid response and hopefully a rapid turnaround. As authors ourselves we have been on the wrong end of two-plus year reviews with endless re-writes, and have experienced those 'lost in space' publication missions! We are therefore committed to giving our authors the service they deserve. Second, editors and reviewers prefer it too. We gain a similar satisfaction at completing efficiently a review process. Obviously, authors' cooperation is essential when revisions are required. When there are other competing pressures for your time, it is easy to forget that reviewers respond better to quickly turned around manuscripts because they need to spend less time re-familiarising themselves with the article. So, if we all work together, we all end up more satisfied.

Clearly, impact is important for authors and we are delighted to announce a significant rise in our impact rating this year. We now rank as 15th out of 77 journals in Journal Citation Reports listing for Computer Science and Information Systems.

All our articles are currently referenced in the following abstracting and indexing services:

Emerald Management Reviews
International Bibliography of Periodical Literature
Social Sciences Citation Index
Research Alert
SciSearch
Social SciSearch
Current Contents: Social and Behavioral Sciences
Current Contents: Engineering, Computing and Technology
Compumath Citation Index

In addition to their work being abstracted and indexed as above, published authors receive a copy of the journal issue in which their article is published plus a supply of off-prints for distribution to colleagues. In addition to print publication, all articles appear simultaneously in the electronic version available to all subscribers. Importantly, JIT is a cited journal for Research Assessment Exercises and recognised publication listings.

Along with the Regional Editors and Editorial Board, we aim to develop the Journal over the coming years. Our current re-launch simply signals a new phase in the Journal's journey. One example of further initiatives in the development process is the creation of a Reviews section under the leadership of Steve Sawyer. A further focus of our attention will be to gain greater recognition of the Journal and its quality in the best schools around the world. To that end, we shall be seeking to extend the range of citation and abstracting services in which the Journal currently appears. And, we shall be seeking press coverage for the latest research we publish.

Finally, then, we would like to welcome three new members of the Editorial Board, Chrisanthi Avgerou, now Professor of Information Systems at London School of Economics, UK, Debra Howcroft who has moved recently to University of Manchester from Salford University, and Peter Reynolds who is Chief Technology Architect for Commonwealth Banks of Australia. They join a committed team whose voluntary contributions to all aspects of the Journal have helped to keep moving us forward. We thank them and the many academics and practitioners who contribute to the final quality of the papers they review.

We hope you enjoy the new-look Journal of Information Technology. We will welcome any comments and suggestion you may have.

Leslie Willcocks
Chris Sauer
March 2004