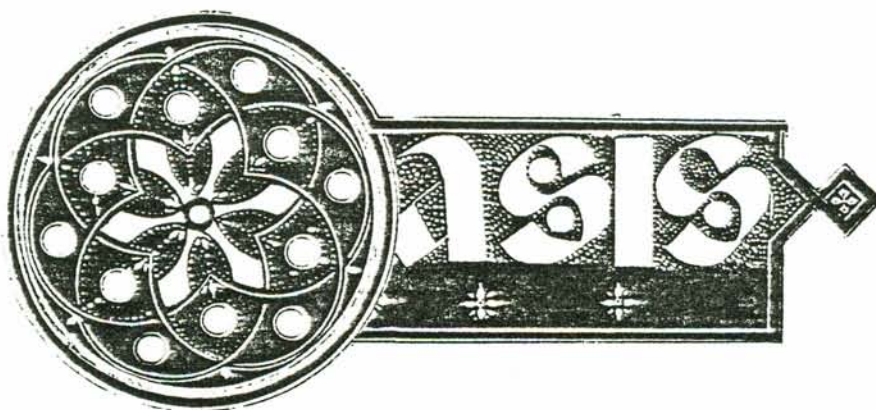




**ORGANIZATIONS
AND SOCIETY
and INFORMATION
SYSTEMS**

w. g. 8. 2.



NEWSLETTER 5,

SEPTEMBER 1984.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF W.G. 8.2

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OASIS



ORGANIZATION AND SOCIETY AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

THE NEWSLETTER OF IFIP WORKING GROUP 8.2

FIFTH ISSUE, SEPTEMBER 1984

To all those who came to our colloquium 'Thank you for coming, we hope you enjoyed it and found it useful'. To those who were not able to make it this time 'We missed you and hope to see you at the next one'. The great advantage of conferences and colloquiums is that people are able to meet each other face-to-face. They can discuss, debate and argue, make friends and sometimes enemies, in an open and easy way. A newsletter is a poor substitute for this kind of communication. Nevertheless it is all we have between our meetings. Please do send in news of your research and papers, raise issues that you feel are important and ask for help if you require this. The members of W.G.8.2 have a wealth of knowledge and expertise which can be of great value to us all.

Information Systems Research - a doubtful science?

Here is a summary of what was discussed at our colloquium. A full account will appear in the proceedings which are to be published by North Holland.

Hans-Erik Nissen got the debate off to a splendid start by providing a critique of traditional 'scientific' method. He described the complexity of real world information systems and stressed the fact that people are a major source of this complexity. New methods are therefore required.

Andrew Pettigrew came next and stressed the importance of history in interpreting research. We need to note the

different social influences affecting developments over time. Andy did not approve of 'in and out' research. He believed that the researcher should spend time in the research situation and really get to understand it. He also saw research as a craft, a point of view that caused some debate and disagreement.

Ake Sandberg, who spoke after Andy, provided two extremely interesting points of view on research. He viewed it from a trade union perspective and criticised some of the design solutions provided by the social sciences, in particular socio-technical design.

On the morning of the second day of the colloquium Milt Jenkins provided a nice breakdown of the research methodologies that are presently used in information science and discussed how the student could choose between these. His view was conservative rather than revolutionary

Milt was followed by Julie and Kenneth Kendall who, like Andy, stressed the importance of context. They, however, were particularly concerned with the physical context in which behaviour took place. They collected their research data with the help of a camera, photographing the environment and using the photographs as an aid to explaining attitudes and behaviour.

Heinz Klein took up the thread started by Hans-Erik Nissen and gave a powerful and dramatic presentation of the problems and limitations of using scientific method. He argued that because this was based on an engineering view of the world, it was bound to fail. It could not tackle crucial research issues. New paradigms were urgently required if research was to make progress.

Trevor Wood-Harper discussed both old and new approaches to research in information science and described and classified these. He also described the methods used by his own research group and discussed how these had developed and the rationale behind their use.

Dick Boland provided us with another example of a new approach in his description of what he called 'phenomenology'. Phenomenology digs deep and seeks to uncover the meaning of our experience. It is concerned with interpretation and finding out what things are. This is in contrast to traditional science which views the world as a set of objects to be manipulated. Dick suggested that phenomenology was particularly appropriate for research in information science because organizations are essentially systems of communication.

Lyn Antill was the last speaker of the day and she provided an overview of research methods for information processing. I.S. research cannot easily be fitted into the traditional scientific method paradigm because repeatable experiments are not possible in real world situations. Lyn pointed out that there are a large number of different research methods that can be used in different circumstances. The researcher must choose the one that best fits the problem that is being studied and the circumstances of the researcher.

The final morning of the colloquium began with a paper by Kalle Lyytinen which suggested that another useful paradigm for I.S. research could be derived from the work of Habermas. Habermas has developed what he calls 'critical social theory'. He suggests that people's behaviour is influenced by their view of the world. This view is derived from their 'knowledge interests'. These knowledge interests can be classified into three categories. Technical knowledge interest which is concerned with explanation, prediction and control; practical knowledge interest which is concerned with communication and relationships, and emancipatory knowledge interest which is concerned with emancipation, freedom and consensus. Kalle believes that I.S. development should be directed at assisting the last of these.

Kathy Brittain-White spoke about research 'perceptions and deceptions'. Researchers are not usually rational intellectuals but very subjective human beings who interpret what they see in terms of their own values and interests. Therefore it is essential for the researcher to understand herself or himself and to have a clear picture of personal biases, interests and prejudices. We need to understand our own 'inner worlds' before we can interpret those of the groups we study.

Our final speaker was Nicholas Vitalari who added to the range of new research approaches by describing longitudinal research. He argued that social change could not be understood by examining at a single moment in time. Instead a longer term approach was required with the researcher returning to the research situation at regular intervals in order to see how the situation has altered. Nicholas has been applying this approach to the use of computers in the home.

In addition to our distinguished speakers we also had three excellent discussants. David Cooper analysed and criticised the papers of Hans-Erik Nissen, Andrew Pettigrew and Ake Sandberg; Tony Lowe did the same for Milt Jenkins, Kenneth and Julie Kendall and Heinz Klein; Rudi Hirscheim discussed the papers of Trevor Wood-Harper, Dick Boland and Lyn Antill, and Raul Espejo discussed those of Kalle Lyytinen, Kathy Brittain-White and Nicholas Vitalari.

We should like to thank speakers and discussants most sincerely for the magnificent way in which they stimulated and advanced our ideas about research methodology. Many of us, including myself, left the colloquium determined to look very closely and, if possible, objectively at the way in which we were doing research.

The debate is to continue in the task group chaired by Hans Erik Nissen which is described later in this newsletter.

W.G.8.2 Business Meeting

A business Meeting was held on the morning of Saturday, 1st September, and this continued on the evening of Sunday, 2nd September. The following reports were given and matters discussed.

Sydney T.C.8 Conference (Report by Niels Bjorn-Andersen)

This conference, held in the Spring of 1984 in Sydney Australia, had been most successful and had attracted 300 paying participants. There had been a T.C.8 meeting there which both Gordon Davis and Niels Bjorn-Andersen had attended. Niels reported to our business meeting that T.C.8 now had two task groups: one on information systems engineering, the other an ongoing CRIS activity. The various working groups within T.C.8 were organising a large number of conferences. 8.3 has held a meeting in Durham recently on 'knowledge representation for decision support systems'. They are now arranging a 1986 conference on decision support systems. T.C.8.1 is arranging conferences in Barcelona, Bretton Woods and the Netherlands (CRIS 3). In January 1985 there will be a conference on office systems which will take place in Finland. There will also be a conference on the design of office automation systems which will be held in Pisa, Italy. The proposed W.G.8.4 on office automation had not yet come into being but there is still considerable interest in creating such a group. There is also some interest in creating a working group to cover 'information systems in developing countries'.

T.C.8 is hoping that the working groups within it will set up task groups to study particular I.S. issues. It is possible for a new group to obtain finance from IFIP to assist the starting up process. This money is to pay for the hire of meeting rooms, etc. but is not for travel.

Gordon Davis reported to W.G.8.3 that he had discussed the progress of his register of Information Science teachers at the T.C.8 meeting. He has completed his register of teachers in the

United States and Canada and is now underway with an international edition.

IFIP Curriculum (Report by Rudi Hirscheim)

Rudi told the W.G.8.2 members that the curriculum was now nearing completion. He is hoping to publish it as a two volume book, with the first volume containing details of what I.S. courses should include and the second volume containing comments and criticisms of the proposals. He would welcome papers for volume two.

T.C.8. Topics of Interest

The Sydney Conference had discussed topics of interest to T.C.8 members. These are listed in volume four of OASIS. Since then our Chairman, Giampio Bracchi, had written to all the working groups asking if we could add any topics. W.G.8.2 decided that all the topics were of interest to us and that we should not add any more. We shall try and cover them in our meetings.

Future W.G.8.2. Meetings and Conferences

Conference on Information Systems Assessment

After much discussion it was decided that W.G.8.2. should organise a conference on Assessment. It will be held in 1986 in Amsterdam and there will be a preliminary meeting at Aarhus on the 18th August, 1985. The Organising Chairman of the Amsterdam Conference will be Theo Bemelmans, The Programme Chairman is Niels Bjorn-Andersen and the General Chairman is Gordon Davis. The Aarhus meeting will be organised by Niels.

It was agreed that the term 'assessment' should be defined very broadly. It would cover an evaluation of social and organizational factors, as well as technical, and methods for this kind of assessment.

Conference on Information Systems for Social Progress

The idea for this conference came from a proposal for a workshop on human action submitted by Goran Goldkuhl, Kalle Lyytinen and Heinz Klein. They are anxious to get information scientists thinking about a new intellectual model to replace the old social-engineering approach that seems to have dominated information science. They are particularly interested in theories and models of social action. That is, in obtaining an understanding of the forces that influence and shape human behaviour.

It was agreed that this would be a most interesting subject for a conference, but there was some doubt if the phrase 'human action' would be generally understood. It was decided to replace this with the term 'social progress'. Papers covering the following subject areas would be sought.

- philosophical issues
- the role of information systems in organizational behaviour
- information systems development as a social change process
- information systems and organizational power
- information systems and human values
- bargaining and social exchange in IS development and use
- the impact of IS on the human condition

This conference will be held in 1987, either in Toronto or Waterloo, Canada. A preliminary meeting will be held in Indianapolis in December, 1985. The Organizing Chairman of the Canadian Conference is Kumar Kuldeep, the Programme Chairman is Heinz Klein and the General Chairman is Niels Bjorn-Andersen. The organisers of the Indianapolis meeting are Heinz Klein and Niels Bjorn-Andersen.

Those W.G.8.2 members attending the conference in Tucson, Arizona, at the end of November this year will also hold a meeting to discuss these future activities. Burt Swanson will let us have a report for OASIS.

Conference on Participation

W.G.8.2. members had hoped to participate in the conference on Participation that W.G.8.1. were proposing to hold. We have been told that this has been postponed.

Task Group on Research Methods

Hans-Erik Nissen proposed that we should create a task group on research methods so that the discussions of the 'I.S. Research - A Doubtful Science?' Conference could be continued. This suggestion was greatly welcomed by the meeting. A proposal for such a task group will be submitted to the meeting of T.C.8 which is to be held in London on the 7th September. This proposal is set out below.

The Task.

To continue through 1985 the debate on I.S. research methods started in the colloquium in Manchester 1-3rd September 1984.

An attempt will be made to involve people from other parts of the IFIP family. The objective is to present the state of the art of this debate in the middle of 1986 in the form of a "poly-graph" (monograph will probably not be an adequate description in view of the divergent points of view which we may end up with). The preliminary publishing date is the end of 1986

The Organization

H.E.Nissen will function in the role of coordinator

The Finance Required from IFIP

2500 Sw.fr in 1985

2500 Sw.fr in 1986

It was suggested that the new task group should contain at least 5 members from W.G.8.2.

Other Task Groups

IFIP was keen for more task groups to be set up. Other subjects that W.G.8.2. might be interested are: developing countries, office automation and public administration.

If anyone is interested in the creation of any of these groups will they let Niels Bjorn-Andersen know.

New Members

A number of participants said that they would like to have their names submitted to T.C.8 for consideration as a member. They had attended two consecutive group meetings and were anxious to be active participants. The Chairman said that she would put their names forward.

New Friends

A considerable number of participants asked to be join the group as friends and a list of these is attached. If anyone's name is not there would they let Enid Mumford know.

T.C.8 Meeting on 7th September, 1984

Enid Mumford attended this meeting which was held in the offices of the British Computer Society, London.

The following items on the Agenda are of particular interest to W.G.8.2 members.

T.C.8 Address Lists

It was decided to put all the working group address lists together on a computer. Mailing lists for conferences would then be very easy to obtain and members with particular interests could be identified. Peter Lockemann offered to do this.

Travel

It was pointed out that although IFIP will not pay the travel costs for national representatives, they will pay these for members of task groups if circumstances make this necessary.

Task Group on I.S. Research Methods

T.C.8 approved the setting up of this task group. It was felt that the request for 2,500 swiss francs for 1985 was excessive, however, and 1,500 was offered and accepted.

W.G.8.2 Future Working Conferences

Formal written applications were submitted for the conferences on Information Systems Assessment and Information Systems for Social Progress. IFIP has already given permission for the first of these and the Chairman, Giampio Bracchi, said that he would ask for permission for the second. Members of the meeting suggested that this permission would be more likely to be given if this conference was held in association with a

T.C.9 working group. Giampio said that he would approach Hal Sackman, the Chairman of T.C.9 to see if he would welcome this collaboration.

Policy for Planning and Organising

Working Conferences

There is already a document called IFIP Policy on Working Conferences. A second document has now been created specifically for members of the T.C.8 Community. It is entitled T.C.8 Policy for Planning and Organising Working Conferences. It describes the steps to be taken, and the rules that have to be observed, in planning and organizing T.C.8. working conferences. It also contains examples of the forms that have to be completed to make a submission to IFIP and when a budget is being drawn up. These policy documents can be obtained either from Gampio or from Enid.

Working Conferences Planned by

Other T.C.8 Working Groups

These include:

Office Systems. Finland, February 1985 (W.G.8.3 and Finnish D.P.Society)

Theories and Formal Aspects of Information Systems. Barcelona, Spain, 16-18 April 1985 (W.G.8.1)

Environments to Support Systems Design Methodologies. Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA. 4-6 September 1985 (W.G.8.1)

CRIS 86 Improving the Practice. Noordwijkerhout, Netherlands. 5-7 May, 1986 (W.G.8.1)

DSS. A Decade in Perspective. Noordwijkerhout, Netherlands, 16-18 June, 1986 (W.G.8.3)

Design of Office Information Systems. Pisa, Italy, 8-10 October, 1986 (T.C.8)

IFIP 86 Congress will be held in Dublin, 1-5 September, 1986.

New Working Groups

Niels Bjorn-Andersen proposed that IFIP should be asked to approve a new T.C.8 working group on 'Information Systems in Developing Countries'. This group would have the following objectives.

1. To identify information systems issues and concerns specific to the organizational and social context of developing countries
2. To develop a common awareness of issues, problems and solutions, within the scholastic and educational communities of these nations.
3. To establish formal and informal lines of communication in order to facilitate the exchange of research, training and education between IFIP, TC8 and TC9 and the scholars of developing countries.

If any one is interested in this group they should contact Niels or Kuldeep Kumar.

Members of W.G.8.2.

The following have been accepted by IFIP as members of W.G.8.2.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Heinz Klein | - State University of New York
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The following have become friends of W.G.8.2.

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