



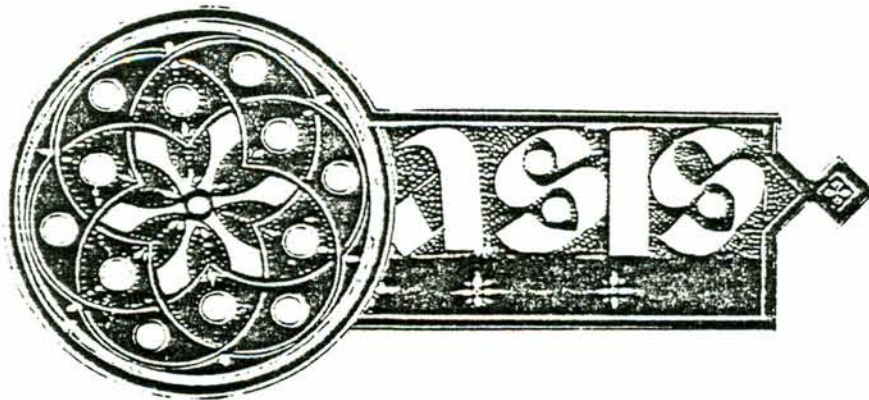
**ORGANIZATIONS  
AND SOCIETY  
and INFORMATION  
SYSTEMS**

**w. g. 8. 2.**



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NEWSLETTER 6

JANUARY 1985

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.  
SIXTH ISSUE, JANUARY 1985

A very happy new year everyone. How time flies, it seems only yesterday that I was typing these words for the newsletter of January, 1984. May I wish all of our members every success in 1985 and hope that we may continue to be successful in our efforts to draw attention to the organizational aspects of information systems. I believe in pressure groups and know that W.G.8.2 is a very successful one. Let us keep the debate going.

THE BOOK OF THE COLLOQUIUM

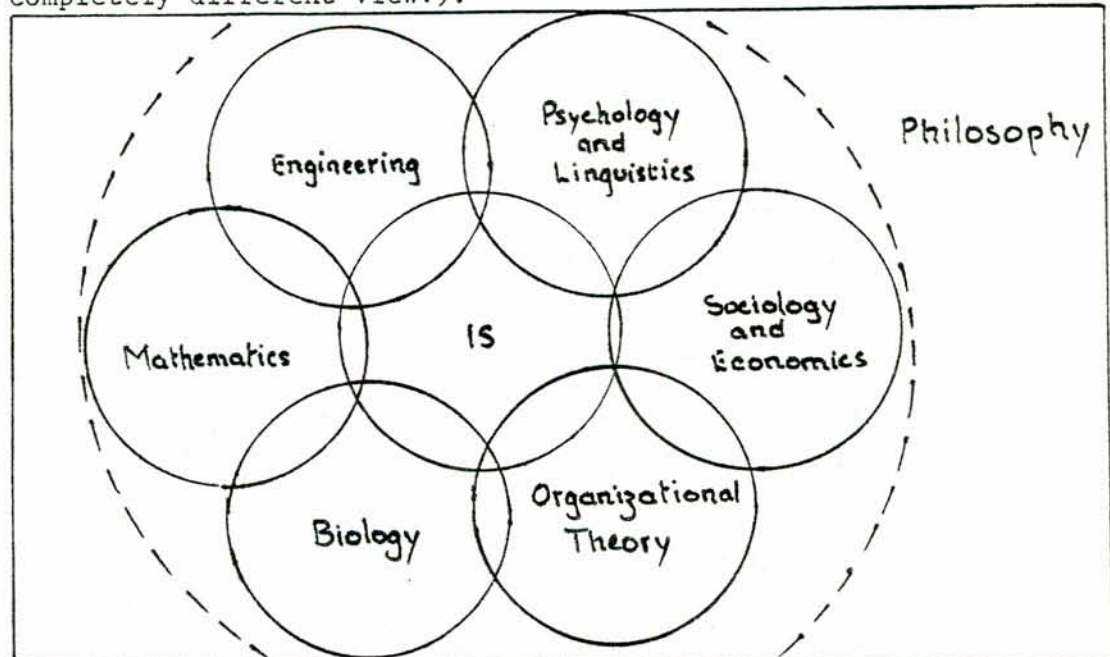
This is going well and we have promised the publishers, North Holland, that all the papers will be with them by the end of March. Our authors have been splendidly cooperative and most of the papers are in already. North Holland have requested that the book be called 'Research Methods In Information Systems' and we have agreed to this. It is not as provocative as I.S. Research - a doubtful science? but it is understandable that North Holland prefers this title.

Theo Bemelmans has very kindly sent us his reactions to the Colloquium and here they are.

Some thoughts about the W.G.8.2. Colloquium in Manchester

A very inspiring colloquium was held by W.G.8.2., in Manchester, from the 1st to the 3rd September, 1984. The subject was I.S. Research and the question asked was 'Is it a doubtful science?' Once again it became clear that the field of I.S. is a multi-disciplinary one,

schematically represented in the next figure (my apologies for drawing IS in the centre. Other scientists will have a completely different view!).



Some people would also draw philosophy as a small circle. In my view, however, philosophy is the embracing science of all the disciplines shown above.

All of these disciplines were discussed at the Colloquium and we agreed that they all present interesting views of the IS field. However we need to make a clear distinction between "interesting things" and "things of interest". To me the major challenge and task of IS research was, and is, not to explain all its multi- -disciplinary aspects but to design and construct effective IS. As Rudi Hirschheim said: "IS research should develop methods, techniques, tools and strategies for the development of IS." Other aspects are interesting but of less 'real interest'. This may be a hard, and black and white, statement, but for our own research and our work in W.G.8.2 it is important to state it in this way.

If we agree with the statement then it seems strange to

deny the 'father and mother' disciplines of IS, namely mathematics (informatics) and engineering. We have all experienced the shortcomings of an isolated mathematical and engineering approach which does not 'see' all the other disciplines shown in the diagram. But, an extreme shift (and hope of a solution) towards philosophy, linguistics, cognitive sciences, social sciences etc. could lead us to a mass of theory, without any ability to develop IS. There is also a second danger in such a shift. IS people are not professionals in all the fields mentioned. In this respect I remember a famous Dutch saying which is 'Shoemaker stay with your last (your job)'. It is necessary to recognize the relevance of other disciplines, but this does not mean that IS scientists should take over these disciplines and aim at the development of an all embracing meta-theory. History (systems theory) shows what can happen when this occurs (with some rare systems theory exceptions). Let me use an analogy to illustrate the above: a scientist looks very much like a traveller: the more a traveller travels round the world, the more he or she will become aware of other countries, cultures, people etc. But, when travelling it is only possible to take one particular route, in spite of the wish of many travellers to see the whole world at one and the same time. Everybody has his or her own 'home'. This means that when organizing a real international (multi-disciplinary) event, only some people can be invited to participate, you cannot invite the whole world.

In short:

1. The IS field is a multi-discipline field. Professionals from other fields than the strict IS field should be invited to join IS research projects so as to enlarge the knowledge and understanding of IS. But IS scientists should bring their own professionalism, by translating the



research results into methodologies, methods, techniques and tools for the development (design, construction and implementation) of IS.

2. Everything is related to everything, but do not try to discover this all at once. Keep on a well defined route, enlarging knowledge step by step in the most systematic way possible.

These thoughts can be viewed as negative, but I found the conference at Manchester most inspiring. I hope that W.G.8.2 is able to organize more of these "excursions" into other disciplines, without losing the perspective of the "home" discipline. This will enable us to reduce the number of our blind spots, shown by Kathy White in her paper 'Perceptions and deceptions'. The paradox here is that by enlarging our knowledge, the horizontal line in "Johari's window" in Kathy's paper will not shift downwards, the window itself will enlarge. Socrates, I believe, said "the more I know, the less I know".

Many thanks to Theo for his words of wisdom. Please let me have your thoughts on what he has said.

#### W.G.8.2. TASK GROUP ON INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH METHODS

Hans-Erik Nissen has now started this group and is seeking views on problems and needs. He is hoping to involve all the members of T.C.s 8 and 9 in the debate. He is trying to find out how people define information systems research, what research criteria they regard as important and what they consider to be good IS research.

FUTURE W.G.8.2 MEETINGS  
AND CONFERENCES

Conference on Information Systems Assessment

W.G.8.2 is organizing a conference on Assessment. It will be held in Amsterdam in 1986 and there will be a preliminary meeting in Aarhus on the 18th August, 1985. The Organising Chairman of the Amsterdam Conference is Theo Bemelmans, the Programme Chairman is Niels Bjorn-Andersen and the General Chairman is Gordon Davis. The Aarhus meeting will be organized by Niels.

Conference on Information Systems For Social Action

The idea for this conference came from a proposal for a workshop on human action put forward by Goran Goldkuhl, Kalle Lyytinen and Heinz Klein. They are anxious to get information scientists thinking about a new intellectual model to replace the social-engineering approach which has dominated information science.

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

Both of these conferences have now been approved by IFIP.

A letter from Burt Swanson reports that these conferences were discussed at the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) in Tucson, held from 28 - 30th



November 1984, at which many of our members were present. Heinz Klein is now working with Dick Welke to coordinate the 8.2 meeting in Indiannapolis. This will be held in conjunction with next years ICIS, scheduled for the 16 - 18th December, 1985. They will be sending out invitations to members and friends.

#### T.C.8. NEWS

W.G.8.1.(Design and Evaluation of Information Systems) are holding a Working Conference on "Theoretical and Formal Aspects of Information Systems 1985" (TFAIS 85) in Sitges, Barcelona from April 15 - 18th, 1985. Anyone interested should contact:

Antoni Olive  
Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya  
Facultat d'Informatica  
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08034 BARCELONA  
CATALONIA

W.G.8.3. (Decision Support Systems) are organizing a conference on 'DSS - A Decade In Perspective' from 16 - 18 June, 1986, in the Congress Centre Leeuwenhorst, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands. Anyone interested please contact:

Henk Sol  
Dept. of Computer Science  
Centre for Information Systems  
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2628 BL Delft  
NETHERLANDS

## NEWS OF OTHER GROUPS

W.G.9.2. has just held a conference on 'Can Information Technology Result in Benevolent Bureaucracies?' in Namur, Belgium from January 3 - 6.

## IFIP NEWS

IFIP's 10th World Computer Congress will be held in Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland from September 1 - 5th, 1986. The four categories of participants will be: computation scientists and engineers, application systems designers, EDP professionals, policy makers and planners.

The four streams of presentations are: components design, systems design, applications, informatics in a developing world.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of IFIP a one day symposium will be held at the Technical University of Munich on March 27th, 1985. Invited lectures are planned on the following subjects.

-History and future of IFIP.	K. Ando
-Assessment of Information Processing.	H.D.Huskey
-Man and Machine.	K. Kitagawa
-Sense and nonsense of information processing	H. Zemanek
-Hardware	G. Amdahl
-Software	H.D. Mills
-Technology and Industry.	B. Gilchrist

Further information can be obtained from the IFIP Secretariat: 3 rue du Marche, CH-1204 Geneva, Switzerland.

#### OTHER NEWS

Bob Galliers writes from the School of Computing and Quantitative Studies, Western Australian Institute of Technology, Kent Street, Bentley, Western Australia 6102, to say that they are proposing to offer a unit in information management in the Master's Programme in Information Systems. He would be grateful to have information on the content of other similar courses, in particular answers to the following questions.

- Do you offer a unit dealing with information management?
- What topics are included?
- How do these topics interface with DP management, information analysis etc.?
- What teaching mode is employed?
- Is the unit offered to students in other disciplines?

A workshop is being organized by the study group 'New Technologies and Work' in Bad Homburg, FRG, April 18 - 20, 1985. Its title is "Changing Work Structures and Work Meanings in the Context of New Technologies". For further information contact:

Professor Bernhard Wilpert  
Institut für Psychologie  
Technische Universität Berlin  
Dovestrasse 1 - 5  
1000 Berlin 10, FRG

Aarhus University, Denmark, in cooperation with the Swedish Centre for Working Life and the University of Oslo, Norway are organizing a conference on the "Development and Use of Computer-Based Systems and Tools". This will be held in Aarhus from 19 - 23 August, 1985. Contact Morten Kyng, Computer Science, Aarhus University.



## DISCUSSION FORUM

At the Colloquium on IS Research - A Doubtful Science?  
there was a comment that there had been no 'feminist'  
contribution. Here is Lyn Antill's reply.

### The Feminist Perspective In Information Systems

After the Manchester Colloquium, Niels expressed surprise that nobody had presented a paper on the feminist perspective in information systems. As a woman who has experienced much overt and explicit discrimination, I suppose I ought to be pleased at such concern; however my reaction was one of unease and even anger. Why should this be? As I was pleased to see a higher than ever proportion of women at the colloquium, and as I know that many of the men are sympathetic, perhaps I can start a debate by trying out a few ideas.

#### 1. The Feminist Perspective

Is it sensible to talk of THE feminist perspective? We have already admitted in IFIP discussions that the perspective of a male manager is going to be very different from that of a male trade unionist, and presumably different again from that of an unemployed male. Women in these categories are likely to have more in common with their male counterparts than with women in other categories. Perhaps it would be more sensible to look for some ideal types of women in different situations in order to study their perspective and to compare it with various male ideal types.

e.g. the professional woman, the woman manager, the secretary, the housewife.

## 2. Man/Woman versus Yin/Yang

After the colloquium there was a feeling that the women who had spoken were trying to do a slightly different thing than the men; in fact we had all been trying to cut through the academic scaffolding to look at real issues underneath. This is not automatically true of a woman's presentation nor is it automatically false of a man's. Yet there are still, and with some reason, seen to be qualities which are 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

Many commentators would contrast  
dominant/supportive  
aggressive/ conciliatory  
rational/intuitive etc.

Looking at that list one could say that the 'feminine' traits were more valuable and therefore the more to be prized. Yet there are obviously dominant women, and, even without going into the philosophy of rationality, men often act intuitively.

Speaking personally, I do not believe that the argument about these traits and their relative values has anything to do with any 'feminist' perspective. Perhaps because I see in myself a preponderance of 'masculine' traits and because the value of 'feminine' traits is so often put forward in a patronising way. By all means let us value support, conciliation, intuition etc., but don't let this have any bearing on our arguments about the aspirations of women.

## 3. Women's Solidarity

Perhaps the one reason why there is, or ought to be, a

feminist perspective on information is that the systems now being implemented are primarily affecting women's jobs. Office automation is extending the effects already seen in data preparation on jobs which have been held by women since the first world war.

- clerical jobs are being cut when often the world would be a better place if the same number of people offered a better service.
- clerical jobs are changing in their nature.
- the office environment is changing and could easily become more like a production line.
- the computer offers the possibility of checking the quantity of work without any reference to its quality or to other influencing factors.

Since women's jobs are threatened in this way, then they need someone to stand up for them. The trade unions in Britain have a dismal record in supporting the interests of women. A recent TUC speaker made pious noises about the fact that only 10% of delegates to the National Congress were women, so a woman suggested the 90% go home and look after their children so their wives could come.

If the unions do not appear to support their women members or to help women to take a full part in union activities, then perhaps it is other women who will have to stand up for them.

Perhaps all you men who come to IFIP conferences should stay at home and let your wives and secretaries come instead. Then we could reach the state where we could tackle the real problem -

the HUMAN perspective



Would some of our WOMEN members like to comment on Lyn's argument. Or how about a reply from Niels.

#### RESEARCH

Thomas Duch

Bob Wood writes:

Much interest was expressed at the Colloquium held at the Manchester Business School in September about the work of the little known, neglected German philosopher Thomas Duch. An inaugural meeting was held in order to promote research into the pioneering work carried out by Duch on the epistemological and hermeneutic aspects of cross-cultural communication and interaction. It is hoped that further meetings of this group will take place at future W.G.8.2. conferences. In the meantime anybody who can contribute information or material about Duch's work should contact:

Bob Wood  
Dept. of Computer Studies  
Bristol Polytechnic  
Coldharbour Lane  
Frenchay  
BRISTOL BS 16 1QY

(In particular I am interested in getting hold of the famous critique of Duch's work, "The Sun: Where Is It?" by B. Glasson and R.D. Galliers, Western Australia Institute of Technology, September, 1984)

Theo Bemelmans has sent members and friends a chapter he has written on 'System user-friendliness in organizations' This appeared in a book called 'Man and Information Technology:toward friendlier systems' ed. J. Van Apeldoorn, Netherlands Study Centre For Technology Trends, Delft University Press, 1983. ISBN 90-6275-1369. Theo would like comments on his chapter.

Kalle Lyytinen has sent a note on the first year of the SAMPO project. The SAMPO participants regard information systems as social systems that are technically implemented. They are formal linguistic systems for communication between people to assist action. The aim of the project is: to develop a set of description methods by which existing and future information systems can be modelled as organizational discourses. These methods will be supported by computer aided tools.

Enid Mumford is still interested in any research into the non-technical aspects of the design of expert systems.

Please let me know what you are doing so that I can report it in OASIS. All our members and friends are interested to hear.

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The following are new friends of WG 8.2

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