Editorial:

E-Business and Information Systems Research - Towards a common research agenda

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Abstract

This special issue was born from a Workshop organized by the e-Business & e-Government Special Interest Group of the British Academy of Management (BAM), held on the 3rd-4th May at Brunel University Business School in London. The central theme of the workshop was on the relationship between e-Business and Information Systems (IS) research.

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EDITORIAL

This special issue was born from a Workshop organized by the e-Business & e-Government Special Interest Group of the British Academy of Management (BAM), held on the 3rd-4th May at Brunel University Business School in London. The central theme of the workshop was on the relationship between e-Business and Information Systems (IS) research. Over 40 participants from all over the UK gathered at the event to present, discuss and debate relevant issues concerning the common research agenda between these two overlapping but increasingly distinctive fields of inquiries.

Over the last 10 years or so, e-Business and e-Government research has evolved and expanded considerably, and it has now become firmly established as a field of inquiry with growing academic, practical and policy interests. This raises serious issues with regard to its relationships with IS research, especially in terms of their focuses, boundaries, target audiences, as well as key research questions, as rapidly evolving disciplines.

Back in the 1990s, there were intense debates about the nature and scope of IS as a discipline. The UKAIS defined information systems as the means by which 'people and organisations, utilising technologies, gather, process, store, use and disseminate information'. The domain involves 'the study of theories and practices related to the social and technological phenomena, which determine the development, use and effects of information systems in organisations and society'. Such a broad perspective was echoed by international IS organizations, such as the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP), especially its working group 8.2, which focuses on the interactions between information systems and organization. The debate generated rapid theoretical and methodological developments in the 1990s with increased the profile of the researchers involved. However, by the late-1990s, the IS community was so concerned with the nature of the discipline and the various conceptual and methodological issues involved that many other important aspects of the IS domain were increasingly side-lined. The shift was clearly reflected in the focus of IS conferences and journals, which somehow helped to alienate many IS researchers who were primarily concerned with the applications and business impacts of information systems, as well as the practice communities that IS was supposed to serve and inform.

Also during this period, the Internet was opened up for commercial exploitation, and e-Commerce and e-Business increasingly captured the attention of people from many different domains. Different from IS research which focuses on the means by which 'people and organisations, utilising technologies, gather, process, store, use and disseminate information', E-Business and e-Commerce research focuses on using electronic means to facilitate new ways of buying and selling, servicing customers, collaborating with business partners, and conducting transactions within an organisation. In particular, research and applications were extended rapidly from the initial focus on dot.coms and Internet only companies and buying and selling via electronic channels, to wider issues including transforming existing businesses through the Internet and related technologies; integration within and between organisations and breaking down organisational barriers and boundaries; and enabling new ways of doing things that were not possible in the past via Internet and related technologies. The interest was so strong that even the dot.com crash of 2001 failed to dampen enthusiasm for very long, and by 2005 there were already talks of a 'Second Internet Boom', characterised by the rapid developments of social networking, SOA, Web2.0, Skype, Youtube, iTune, mobile devices, RFID, and MMORPGs, to name but a few. New technologies, applications, ideas and new companies are constantly emerging which helped to sustain the enthusiasm.

Today, both e-Business and information systems research are doing well, but perhaps for different reasons, and in subtly different ways. Despite the apparent common ground between them, the divergence – and the gap between them - is also growing rapidly. It is important for us to reflect on the nature and scope of our work and coordinate our efforts more effectively. At the Brunel workshop, all the participants agreed that there were many mutually beneficial opportunities for collaborations in research and publications and in influencing practice, policy and public perceptions. The presentations and debates at the workshop highlighted some of the key issues, explored common interests and identified a number of ways forward. In particular, new opportunities for collaboration between e-Business and e-Government researchers and IS specialists have been identified, as well as the need for stronger links between the e-Business and e-Government SIG with various IS communities, such as the UK academy for Information Systems (UKAIS).

This special issue of the International Journal of Business Science and Applied Management is dedicated to continuing and sustaining our discussions and debate of the relationship between e-Business & e-Government and information systems research. We hope it will help contribute to the development of a common agenda. After the Brunel workshop, all participants were encouraged to submit their papers to this special issue and an open call for papers was also released. Many papers

were received, and each of them was double blind reviewed. This special issue will only publish three papers that have successfully gone through the review process in time. Several further promising papers are currently being revised by the authors and some of them will appear in future regular issues of this journal. We hope this special issue will serve to stimulate further debates, and your ideas, comments, suggestions and criticisms are most welcome. I can be reached by email at Feng.li@ncl.ac.uk

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