Communications of the Association for Information Systems

COMMUNICATION IN THE IS COMMUNITY: A CALL FOR RESEARCH AND DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Many in the IS community are aware of the importance of communication practices in building a sustainable community. Yet, surprisingly, little is known about the practices and perceptions of communication within our field. In this study, members of the ISWorld listserv were surveyed for their patterns of use and involvement, their opinions on the roles and management of the listserv, and their recommendations for design. A complementary archival analysis, which includes an analysis of the 9-11 aftermath and an analysis of how people respond to requests for information, corroborated some of the survey results. The survey results suggest that members are generally satisfied with the listserv but much more can still be done to improve its conduct and design. Moreover, more research can and should be conducted on the listserv and on other forms of communication within the IS community. We enumerate several research topics that emerged from this study.

Keywords: communication in the is community, isworld, communication design

I. INTRODUCTION

This article is a call for research on all forms of computer-supported communication within the Information Systems (IS) community. While researchers in our community produced impressive design implications that are applied in industry and academia, the long list of readings produced by our community about computer-mediated communication [e.g., Hiltz and Turoff, 1978; Markus, 1987; Sproull and Kiesler, 1991; Sudweeks, McLaughlin and Rafaeli, 1998], are largely ignored in building our own forms of communication within the IS community. Our expertise in computer support for communication, for collaboration, for office work, for knowledge management and for much more, stands in contrast to the rather standard tools common to many other less sophisticated (technologically) professional communities. Moreover, the recent debates about the status of the IS field pointed at the potential impact of more directed knowledge sharing and the

need to promote a sustainable community of practice that offers informal as well as formal forms of communication (in particular, DeSanctis, [2003]). In response to these debates, this paper explores the current state of affairs of communication within our community, with a view of raising design issues that can be informed by the community's current and future research.

The community's most widely used forms of communication (the IS World listserv) serves as the starting point for our investigation of the communication within the community. This year, the IS World listserv marks its tenth year of operation, and serves over 3,000 members across the globe. We believe that it is time to reflect on the practice and mission of the IS World listserv, using both organizational and technological lenses.

In this article, we will specifically examine four main issues (mission, participation, design, and participation), but raise more issues and possible research contributions. Our motivations are two fold:

1. to learn about our community's communication and knowledge sharing
2. to capitalize on the results to improve our tools of communication.

The paper is structured as following. First, we discuss the background of the IS World listserv (Section II). After defining the context of the paper, we present our four research questions (Section III). We then explore each research question, presenting the results of our survey with the members of the IS World listserv and complementary archival studies examining the patterns of interaction within the IS World listserv (Section IV). We conclude by offering suggestions for the future of the IS World listserv and issuing a call for further research on the communication patterns within our community (Section V).

II. THE ISWORLD LISTSERV

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE IS WORLD LISTSERV

In November 2004, the IS World listserv will be 10 years old. Drawing from an amalgamation of the ICIS-L list (maintained by Rick Watson) and the CIS-L list (maintained by Al Bento), John Mooney founded the IS World list in November, 1994 and hosted the list at University College, Dublin. By December 1994, 1,384 people subscribed to the IS World listserv across 32 countries. John Mooney managed the list from 1994 until 1999, before turning it over to Gabe Piccoli (Cornell University), who was in charge until 2002, building the list to a membership roll of over 2,000 members. In April 2002, Andrew Schwarz (Louisiana State University) became the list administrator and assisted in the move of the listserv from University College to a commercial provider. At the time that this research was conducted (2003), the list served 3,082 members. In April 2004, the list administrator duties were passed to Rick Taylor (University of Houston).

OWNERSHIP OF THE IS WORLD LISTSERV

During the past 10 years, the IS World listserv morphed from an independent list run by volunteers to a member service offered by the Association for Information Systems. The move was formalized with the establishment of a governance arrangement - IS World listserv Manager now reports to the AIS Vice President of Communications.

While sharing a name between the IS World listserv and the IS World web presence (http://www.isworld.org/), historically, little synergy existed between them. The exception to this separation is the IS World structured archives, founded by Ron Weber and now managed by Sophie Cockroft and Nena Lim (all of the University of Queensland). Technically, however, the list was housed out of Dublin, while the website was distributed globally. However, in April 2003 the IS World site was completely redesigned and the IS World listserv and the web presence were brought under a common technical and administrative umbrella. Efforts were made to integrate and to deepen the relationship between the IS World website and the IS World listserv.

Indeed, one of the triggers for this survey was to explore ways of integrating the IS World listserv into the larger context of the variety of communication forms within the community.

While the governance of the IS World listserv changed substantially, the format of the IS World listserv changed only minimally. The only exception was in 2001 (after 9-11), when a new protocol was enacted that defined conditions, policies, and intended usage of the IS World listserv (available online at: http://lyris.isworld.org/isworldlist.htm). We expand further upon this incident in Section IV and the implications of the policies.

III. RESEARCH ISSUES

The remainder of this paper is framed around the following four issues, each with its associated questions posed to the community in the online survey:

- Issue #1: Mission.

  How do members view the current role of the IS World listserv within the community?

- Issue #2: Participation.

  What are the actual patterns of participation in IS World listserv activities and how is participation perceived as community involvement?

- Issue #3: Design and Participation.

  How do current design options affect participation?

- Issue #4: Design.

  What are members' views and recommendations for design of the IS World listserv?

We now discuss each of these issues in turn.

ISSUE 1: MISSION

How do members view the current role of the IS World listserv within the community?

The first area we chose to investigate was the role that the IS World listserv plays within our community. Prior research on public discourse suggests that two types of forums are ideal [Lee, 2003]

- the deliberative reader forum and
- the libertarian speaker forum.

Deliberate Reader Forum. The deliberative reader forum emphasizes the 'right to hear', constrains space for discourse, and imposes tight management of both content and process. It is expected to promote quality deliberation leading to better action, often at the expense of excluding opinions and in danger of managerial misuse.

The Libertarian Speaker Forum. The libertarian speaker forum emphasizes the 'right to be heard', hardly constrains space for discourse, and imposes little management, relying more on members' adherence to basic laws of order. It is expected to maintain a condition of openness, often at the expense of poor quality opinions and in danger of not being heard.

For the purpose of this paper, we renamed these two ideal types as the views of the 'community forum**'** and the 'members forum**'**, respectively.

Table 1 adapts Lee's arguments as they apply to our discussion of the IS World listserv. As the two forums are ideal and not mutually exclusive, some activities appear in both forums, e.g., information exchange. However, the perspective can be assumed to be primarily from a community point of view or a member's point of view, depending on the forum characterized. Differences in practice between the forums may surface as the activities become less structured and involve relational aspects, e.g., knowledge (in comparison to information) sharing will usually be seen to require more control and processing on behalf of a listserv manager in order to maintain effective learning. A community forum may result in more intervention in knowledge exchange than would be desired by the members forum. Using Lee [2003] as our theoretical lens, we examine the role of the IS World listserv within our community.

Table 1. Ideal Types of Communication Forms

	The Community Forum	**The Members Forum**
Perspective	The right to hear	The right to be heard
Goals	Support professional goals of the community, sustain the community of practice	Support professional and social interaction with others in the community
Participation	Open to all in principle but not in reality	Equal access to all
Design – organizational	High control of content and interaction processes	Minimal control over process and no censorship
Design - technological	Controlled, asynchronous communication platforms; filtering and knowledge management.	Free, flexible and personalized synchronous platforms; knowledge management techniques for social and expert interactions; personal support.

ISSUE 2: PARTICIPATION.

What are the actual patterns of participation in IS World listserv activities and how is participation perceived as community involvement?

Following our introductory notes and the notion of a IS World listserv as a means for building and sustaining a community of practice, we are interested in how and why people choose to participate in the IS World listserv. Indeed, one of the most interesting research questions in general research on virtual communities is why people enlist, participate, and contribute to listservs such as IS World. A recent study on listservs indicates that, on the average, people spend around 4 hours a week on a listserv [Butler et al., 2003]. A typical distribution of their time, based on the computed averages in the study, is the following: 50% reading messages, 20% posting messages publicly, 20% communicating to a list member privately, and 10% managing activities related to the list. On the face of it, these statistics may be more reflective of the 'community forum' rather than the 'members forum', even though it would seem that the underlying concern of why to participate emerged from the latter perspective. This duality of perspectives, the community and the members, prevails throughout this paper.

People invest their time and energy in a listserv for four reasons: information, social, visibility and altruism [Butler et al., 2003]. Benefits associated with visibility and social ties were found to correlate significantly (r=0.49). The relative importance to the users differs according to the role the member plays in the listserv: leaders, active users and silent users (i.e., users who do not post or respond on the listserv publicly). The overwhelming majority is the silent member. In their study, Butler et al. found that over a period of 130 days, only 15% of the listed members posted a message (there were on average 163 members per list and 1.6 messages per day on a list). For silent members, benefits associated with receiving information were clearly the most important, altruistic benefits were not at all important, and both visibility and social benefits were not important. For active members, social benefits were claimed to be most important, information benefits somewhat important and visibility less important. One might say that the silent member reflects more closely the members forum, while the active member reflects more closely the

community forum. Jones and Rafaeli [1999] cite similar percentages of active versus non-active members but claim the reason for the observed difference is not only the 'social loafing' phenomenon but also the limited cognitive resources of group members. Yet another explanation of participation on the net builds on the concept of social identity to explain why people participate [Moon, 2004]. All in all, the question of why and how people participate is still open and intriguing.

Another, related, side to participation that is, perhaps, less rational than the picture described above, which was dubbed as the 'Internet Regression' [Holland, 1996]. Others used similar analogies, e.g., 'non adult communication' [Wagner et al., 2003]. Internet behavior often exhibits three symptoms of more primitive (unchecked) behavior that would hardly be found by the same people interacting face to face.

> 1. 'Flaming', which is a seemingly uncontrollable sequence of growing rage in message content and style.
>
> 2. The second, which seems to us to be irrelevant to the IS World listserv, is sexual harassment.
>
> 3. The third, which in contrast to the first two may be considered a welcomed change, is a display of extraordinary generosity that is exemplified by people ready to devote time and effort rarely found in the physical world. For example, virtual communities often rely on extraordinary responsiveness to requests for help, admittedly though by a relatively small proportion of the total membership (the active members).

With respect to the IS World listserv, we were intrigued about the motivation for responding to multiple requests for information posed on the listserv by people most of us do not know.

ISSUE 3: DESIGN AND PARTICIPATION.

How do current design options affect participation?

We assume here that design can impact participation, although exactly how is still unclear. In the current configuration of the IS World listserv, the only source of variance in design options that can readily be tested is the mode message delivery (immediate versus delayed), which each member can determine. Immediate messages are delivered by email upon their posting (this is the option we call 'Mail'), while delayed messages are grouped together and delivered after the end of the day (several variations exist, all of which we call 'Digest'). The default is currently set to 'Mail'. We were therefore interested to see how modes of message delivery affect the response rate. (For this particular question we conducted, in addition to questions in the main survey, a secondary study described below).

Several researchers argue that the ease of producing and delivering a message is key to the propensity to engage in computer-mediated communication (e.g., [Te'eni, 2001]). Moreover, Hill and Monk [2000] found that the relative effort in replying to a request communicated by printed mail versus e-mail can completely explain the response frequencies. As a colleague rephrased this finding: it's a matter of usability not sociability.

ISSUE 4: DESIGN.

What are members' views and recommendations for design of the IS World listserv?

Having discussed the mission of the IS World listserv and the objective of membership participation in the IS World listserv, we ask how the IS World listserv should be designed both technologically and organizationally. Indeed, it should be clear that different objectives dictate different designs. Figallo [1998] for example, demonstrates how different needs and interactive styles in a community call for different platforms for supporting its discussion, such as, chat rooms and instant messaging for social presence and asynchronous forums for relatively long postings and more informative responses. Virtual communities placing different emphases on

relationships, shared interests or transactions appear to use different technologies, such as, respectively, chat-rooms, bulletin boards and web based document managers [Chaudhury and Kuilboer, 2001]. Put more abstractly, design may well depend on the ideal type of forum desired (the community or the members), as suggested in Table 1. Other central design questions involve the role of the IS World listserv manager, the issue of anonymity, the codes of discourse and more. We decided not to ask direct questions about any of these issues but rather to take note of any references to them made by the community. We expand on these issues in our discussion of the suggestions raised by our members (in Section IV) and in our discussion of future research topics (in Section VI).

IV. OBSERVING AND LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY ON THE IS WORLD LISTSERV

We sought the opinions of the community members on the four issues posed above through two complementary methods of data collection: a direct survey and archival research. The primary method was an online survey of all members of the IS World listserv, which addressed all four issues. This survey was complemented with a focused analysis of responses to information requests that appeared on the IS World listserv archive to examine the possible impact of mode of message delivery (Issue 3) and an archival analysis of managing the IS World listserv (Issue 4), concentrating on the case of the 9-11 aftermath.

METHOD OF SURVEY

In seeking to comprehend the view of the IS World listserv, we created a survey to solicit feedback on the current role of the list within the community[1]. The survey was announced on the IS World listserv in October 2003 and kept open for responses for 15 days. We received 188 responses from a potential IS World listserv population of 3082, generating a 6% response rate. This response rate is above average, when compared with other online surveys of communities online [Andrews et al., 2003]. It is worth noting that only one call was made to participate (going by IS World listserv policy), thus eliminating one the most effective means of increasing response rates.

In any event, we must determine if there is a non-response bias – i.e. are the people who answered this questionnaire more or less active than the entire population of the listserv? To answer the question, we analyzed the 14,605 messages currently within the IS World listserv archive. In analyzing the messages, we found that:

- 1% of the members account for 14% of the total number of messages
- 5% of the members account for 33% of the total number of messages
- 10% of the members account for 45% of the total number of messages

This finding reinforces Butler's taxonomy that there are three types of members – leaders, active users, and silent users. However, the proportion of messages sent by a small minority of the membership list also suggests that, within the category of active users are two types – heavy active users, and light active users.

As part of our survey, we asked a background question of how many responses to information to which the individual had responded. Of the 188 responses, 21% had not responded to any (i.e. silent users) and 74% had responded to less than 5 messages (i.e. light active users). This background information allowed us to conclude that we had reached light active users and silent users, but did not fully address the issues of leaders and heavy active users. To ensure that we had reached all of the types of list members, we identified the top 10 contributors to the IS World

[1] The complete survey questionnaire is shown in Appendix I.

listserv and 7 leaders that were instrumental in formulating the policies and governance of the list. These 17 individuals were contacted and phone surveys were conducted with those willing to participate (n=5). Specific quotations from these individual surveys will be included in the text below. These steps were taken to ensure that we addressed all of the issues faced by the different types of members on the IS World list.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Our first step is to identify the demographics of the survey respondents (Table 2).

Table 2. Survey Respondents Demographics

Position	Count	%
Doctoral Student	54	29
Assistant Professor	65	35
Associate	34	18
Full/ Endowed	35	18

Message Delivery	Count	%
Digest/ mime/ index (delayed messages)	50	27
Mail (immediate message)	138	73

Table 3 compares the samples with the IS World listserv in terms of the mode of message delivery. In both the survey sample (second column) and the sample of information requests from the archive (third column), it appears that the sample is biased towards those who receive immediate rather than delayed messages.

Table 3. Survey Demographics versus the IS World Listserv Demographics

	Survey (N= 188, response rate = 6.2%) October 2003	Analysis of Information requests (N= 212) August 2002
Immediate – Delayed (percentage of recipients by immediate Mail vs. Digest)	73%	77%
IS World listserv at the time of the study/survey – Mail percentage of immediate Mail and total N for comparison	63% (N=3025)	68% (N=2289)

For the open ended questions in the survey, the respondents answered in free form without limitation on space or content. Both authors coded the responses by first constructing a set of categories for each free form question in the questionnaire and then classifying the 188 responses for each question.

To code the responses from the questions, we used the following heuristic:

Step 1 – Initial Analysis of Responses. One author sampled 25 to 30 of the responses to each question, generating an initial set of concepts. He then provided the second author with the set of concepts, who in turn, reviewed an independent set of responses to determine if the framework was reasonable for the responses. If there was agreement, the second author affirmed the categorization.

Step 2 – Formal Interpretation of Responses**.** During this step, one of the authors used the framework generated in Step 1 in a structured fashion to analyze all of the responses. When the responses were coded, the second author affirmed the specific interpretation of the responses.

Step 3 - Analysis of the Formal Responses. Finally, frequency counts were generated for each category and each question. The authors collaborated on the analysis as it is presented.

Furthermore, we selected telling citations of matters that concerned the four issues, which we felt should be addressed beyond the analysis of categories. With a discussion of the methodology complete, we now turn to a presentation of the research results.

ISSUE 1: MISSION

The first issue is how members view the current role of the IS World listserv within the community. Members of the list revealed that they see five roles of the listserv –

- information dissemination,
- knowledge exchange,
- community building and social binding,
- discussion, and
- collaboration.

The frequency of the responses is summarized below in Table 4. We also examined this distribution according to the type of interaction (immediate mail messages or delayed digest) and according to status (student, assistant professor, associate professor and full professor). While there was no significant difference in the type of interaction, the extreme status groups (students and full professors) clearly look for different things in the listserv (the difference was significant at .09). Most students want only distribution of information and transfer of knowledge while the professors wanted mainly the community and social function.

Table 4. Members' View of the Current Role of IS World Today

Category	Count (N=188)	% (non exclusive)
Information dissemination (notices on conferences, journals, etc.)	155	82
Knowledge exchange (sharing expertise, topical summaries, etc.)	125	66
Community building and social binding	99	53
Discussion (dialog by several members)	17	9
Collaboration (use of the IS World listserv to generate and foster collaboration)	4	2

In analyzing the members' view of the mission, the most frequently mentioned role of the IS World listserv is the dissemination of information, with 82% of respondents noting this role. The perception that the IS World listserv serves mainly one-directional format of communication is reinforced by the finding that only 9% of respondents viewed the role of the IS World listserv for discussion, or two-directional communication and that only 2% see the IS World listserv as an opportunity for collaboration. Despite the perception that the communication is only one-directional, slightly over half of the respondents view the IS World listserv as aiding in community building.

Another contrast is in the view of information versus knowledge, roles that ranked #1 and #2 in the survey. Members of the IS World listserv made the distinction clear, noting a duality – the IS World listserv is used both for distributing basic factual information and for sharing expertise and research summaries. The inclusion of both information and knowledge roles is evidenced in the

specific responses to the survey. Some examples of typical responses to the question of the current role of the IS World listserv within the community include:

> *Keep information flowing among the community, get info from colleagues, announce papers/conferences/journals/CFPs/etc., share all relevant information for the pursuit of the discipline and our careers.*
>
> *I think it plays a key role in sharing ideas with each other, so we can avoid duplication of effort. In this way, the occasional queries about a topic serve a nice role. It also plays an important role in communicating what is going on in conferences, jobs, and new things. It probably plays some role in making the IS scholarly community more cohesive by allowing us to communicate ideas, respond to them, and thus come to a consensus on certain issues. The listserv rules, of course, limit this role. But such a discussion can at least be initiated on the listserv. It has a social psychological function--it keeps us from feeling we're alone out there--knowing there are others like us and with similar interests is important. Finally, it plays a role to keep us in touch with others whom we don't know but whom we ought to know because we have similar interests.*
>
> *Role 1. Be a fast communication mean for IS academic world community. Role 2. Being a communication means to support: a) Announcement of academics events (Calls for ..., Faculty positions vacancies). b) Announcement of academics outcomes (new books and journals or research centers). c) Learning on research and scholastic IS topics between peers. d) Discussion list of conflictive IS topics (rival theories, models or paradigms). e) Building of a robust academic IS community.*
>
> *1. The list provides a place for exchanging of information, including announcements of conferences, journals, CPFs, and discussions of research ideas. 2. It also builds a web-based community of scholars. People on this list tend to look on themselves as a community and perceive the social cognition of their positions.. 3. What's more, it is a very important part of the ISWorld web site, together with other parts, e.g. elist(AIS* had envisioned multiple electronic lists similar to *ISWorld*), *CAIS, and JAIS. The list can be viewed as the sub-level of ISWorld web site; the relation between these two are reciprocal. The more people going to the web site, the more people tend to register on the list; the more people register on the list would also lead to more usage of the web site.*

While the first three quotations stress the duality of functional and social roles, the last quotation also refers to the need for an integrated view of different forms of communication, each complementing the others by enabling different objectives. Using Lee [2003] as a theoretical lens, members are saying that the goal of the IS World listserv is a blend of supporting the goals of the community (i.e. strengthening the communication practices) and supporting the needs of the individual, both professional and social interaction (i.e. community building and social binding). As such, the members are saying that the goal of the IS World listserv reflects a mixture of a community forum and a members forum.

ISSUE 2: PARTICIPATION

We explored participation in two ways

- What are the patterns of actual participation for the IS World listserv?
- What is the role of participation in the IS World listserv for perceptions of academic community involvement?

Patterns of Participation

As we found within issue #1, the second most frequently mentioned role of the IS World listserv is to exchange information. So, we asked respondents to discuss their reasons for responding to

knowledge requests posted on the IS World listserv. The findings are summarized in Table 5. Comparing these responses between those who receive messages as digest versus mail, there were no significant differences.

Table 5. Members' Reasons for Responding to Knowledge Exchange Requests

Category	Count (N=188)	% (non exclusive)
I'm knowledgeable about the topic	122	65
It's an interesting topic or relevant to my activities	65	34
Easy and not time consuming to answer	41	22
It's expected of us or alternatively it's not appropriate	16	8
Frequent combinations of categories:		
Knowledgeable and easy to answer	29	15
Knowledgeable and interesting	27	14

Nearly two-thirds of respondents mentioned that their own personal knowledge about a subject motivated them to respond to knowledge exchange requests. The next two most cited categories for responding to requests were personal – that it is interesting to the member's activities and that it is easy. The last category was a perception of subjective norm – that someone expected it of the member.

Some examples of responses to the question of why members respond to calls include:

> *1. Whether or not I feel I can make a meaningful contribution... 2. How much time is required to respond... 3. How much time I have available to respond.*
>
> *If I feel I can have something to contribute, I usually do, even if it is inconvenient to me. I feel it is the least I can do to show my appreciation for the free list serve.*
>
> *Two factors: first is whether I have some unique capability to respond. If I am not an expert, I probably won't respond... Second is time. Sometimes I have expertise but don't have time... If the query is not well formulated or the answer could have been found in the literature by a simple search, then I don't feel inclined to respond.*
>
> *If it is in my field… If I have information immediately to hand which I think will help.. If it is of particular interest... I am particularly inclined to help doctoral students as I remember how others helped me at that stage.*

These responses, plus others like them reveal some of the reasons that Butler, et al [2003] suggests for why individuals participate – to provide information (i.e. I'm knowledgeable), for visibility (i.e. it's an interesting topic) and for altruism (i.e. to help a doctoral student out). This is in contrast to examples of reasons why members choose <u>not</u> to respond:

> *Whether I am interested in the topic, whether it is a good question…. Bad questions include graduate students asking for reading lists they should be getting from their professors. On the other hand, an excellent question came from a student asking whether standards formation was an IS topic; his advisors had rejected. He got a great response! This was activism and a good bibliography rolled into one.*
>
> *I plan to respond to requests in the future. I was a doctoral candidate, and my advisor discouraged me from communicating over ISWorld. I was intimidated, so I just lurked. (Response from Assistant Professor)*

These reasons reflect the social reason, but in reverse. Instead of participating for social reasons, these responses indicate that some members feel that the exposure that derives from a posting to the IS World listserv can be a detriment and reflect poorly on the individual posting the

response – i.e. a bad question from a graduate student or intimidation. This view shows the duality of the social dimension – a posting can either demonstrate ignorance or generate activism. Thus, the social dimension of Butler et al. is manifested in multiple ways within the IS World listserv.

Level of Involvement in the IS Academic Community

We sought the answer to this question to understand the specific role of the IS World listserv within the broader community. The first question was to ask the respondents to rate their own level of involvement within the community from 1 to 10, with the higher numbers meaning more involvement. The average scores are summarized below in Table 6.

Table 6. Members' Assessment of their Current Level of Involvement

Position	Average Level	I would prefer to be…[2]		
		Less Involved	Same Amount	More Involved
Doctoral Student	4.1	0%	27%	73%
Assistant Professor	5.1	0%	32%	68%
Associate Professor	6.2	0%	75%	25%
Professor/Endowed	6.6	0%	62%	38%

Clearly, the members earlier in their careers (doctoral students and assistant professors) consider their involvement to be relatively low and would like to get more involved while most of the more senior members are relatively content with their level of involvement. As a follow up, we next asked the members why they gave their assessment of their level of involvement – the results are shown in Table 7..Members again view the IS World listserv as part of a portfolio of communication forms and participation on the IS World listserv should be taken in the context of involvement in the field in general and represent one facet of involvement.

Table 7. Members' Reasons for Assessing their Level of Involvement

Category	Count (from 188 responses)	% (non exclusive)
Conference attendance	76	40
Reading and/or responding to the IS World listserv messages	60	32
Amount of collaboration with others	51	27
Publication activities	42	22
General perception (no specific reason)	39	21
Reviewing	31	16
Professional service (editing journals/conferences)	26	14
Participating in scholarly discussions (not necessarily on the IS World listserv)	16	9
Contributions to ISWorld site	4	2

The results on members' reasons for assessing their level of involvement indicate the relatively high weight they assign to ISWorld activities, particularly reading and/or responding to messages on the IS World listserv. Nearly one in four members claimed that they have a general perception of how involved they feel, which ranked higher in responses than reviewing, editing journals and conferences, and participating in scholarly discussions.

Central concepts found in the previous analysis (Table 4) surfaced in this question again – comments such as collaboration, knowledge exchange, and community building (through

[2] Among those indicating a preference.

conferences) were themes also prevalent in this question. Further, when asked why they were not involved more, members noted similar overlaps between a lack of response and a lack of involvement in the broader community – these are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Members' Reasons for Why they are or are not Involved More

Category	Count (from 188 responses)	% (non exclusive)
Cost of time	27	14
Networking	20	11
To build knowledge through exchange of ideas	13	7
Enjoyable	12	6
Desire to learn more	8	4
Sense of community	8	4
Feeling of obligation to the community	7	4
Career need/visibility	6	3
To publish more research	5	3
Interest in IS	3	2
Try new things	1	1
No reason given	94	50

The underlying theme common to most categories in Table 8 is a cost-benefit approach taken by the individuals and very little altruism (such as 'feeling of obligation to the community').

No central reason was found for why members are not involved more in the community. However, questions of time, enjoyment, expectation (e.g. obligation), and interest were noted. These themes overlap those of the lack of responses to knowledge exchanges, but in the opposite direction.

Some of the comments alluded to a sense of inequality or "poor democracy". For example, one member complained that "A few Gods rule the IS World listserv" (We decided to omit the names mentioned as the Gods). This is both informative and disturbing. One reason why this complaint has not been voiced on the IS World listserv may be because of lack of anonymity. In any event, this feeling is certainly not something to be ignored.

The findings about the participation in the IS World listserv reveal a perception that participation, while being open to all, is perceived as occurring among a small set of individuals. This perception does not match reality (i.e. all members can and should participate). Indeed, the perception is that of a community forum, while the reality is a members forum.

ISSUE 3: DESIGN AND PARTICIPATION

The current design of the IS World listserv is as a listserv. A listserv is an a-synchronous medium of communication restricted to registered members of the list. Each member can broadcast a message to the whole list with no a-priori censorship and receive broadcasted messages. A listserv has a manager with additional privileges such as authorizing membership, terminating membership, and closing the listserv.

When joining the IS World listserv, individuals have a choice – to receive postings immediately (i.e. mail) or in a delayed format (i.e. digest or index). The first area that we addressed within the context of the design of the list is to understand members' reasons for choosing a particular mode of message delivery. The results are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Members' Reasons for Choosing a Particular Mode of Message Delivery

Category	Count - delayed	Count- immediate	Absolute difference
Easier to organize and retrieve messages	11	34	23
I feel in touch, connected	2	18	16
I didn't know about alternative	1	17	16
Enables immediate action (immediate response)	1	14	13
Easier to read/understand	5	18	13
Minimize number of messages in the inbox	18	5	13
It's default	0	7	7
I don't miss important messages	1	6	5
Disruptive of other work/action	7	3	4
Convenient for other reasons	6	4	2
Too much information contained in one message/ format constraints	0	2	2
Save time spending on reading and responding mails	6	5	1

When asked why members chose a particular mode of message delivery, the biggest difference between those that chose an immediate form of delivery (i.e. index) versus those that have a delayed form (i.e. digest, mime, or index) is that those who chose immediate did so to feel connected, for ease of organization, and to have the ability to interact instantly. Those who favored a delayed form preferred to minimize their disruptions and to organize themselves better. In both cases, the respondents selected their format for the ease of organization, however, this particular reason had the greatest absolute difference between the members.

When examining the issue of design, we next wanted to understand how design impacted the interactions on the list. Specifically, we were interested in investigating the mechanisms of requesting, responding, and sharing knowledge on the IS World listserv. To do this, we conducted a complementary analysis, focused on requests for information[3], to analyze the patterns of responses to requests of research-related information[4]. Our main research question was how does the mode of message delivery (immediate versus delayed) affect the response rate? A secondary research question was whether response is primarily due to self-promotion rather than a willingness to help and share knowledge.

One of the most interesting phenomena in the ISWorld is the tradition of posting a compiled list of responses to queries. In fact, the 'Conditions of Use of the ISWorld listserv' (http://lyris.isworld.org/isworldlist.htm) specified that "individuals using ISWorld to solicit information … agree to provide the community with a summary of the responses …." While we found several critical comments about how this mechanism is used (some say abused), many members of the community participate in this form of knowledge sharing. In this archival study we looked at the response rate to these queries.

Three hundred and twenty responses to requests that appeared on the IS World listserv in the last three years were examined to see whether in the response there was any mention of a self reference or self promotion. In addition, the mode of message delivery for the responder was determined and recorded. Before looking at the results, it should be noted that there is a bias in the set of messages analyzed.

Of 320 responses to requests, 257 were made by members who receive messages by immediate mail; only 53 responses were made by members who receive the digest.

[3] The archival study is presented after the survey for better flow but in reality it was completed beforehand.
[4] Yael Fisher and Sigal Lin collected and coded this information.

If we combine these numbers with the ratio of immediate to digest on the ISWorld at the time (1565 - immediate and 623 - digest), we note that the probability of a response from immediate receivers (257/1565=0.164) is higher than from a digest receiver (53/623=0.085). Moreover, there was very little self promotion in the messages and it could not, in any significant way, explain the response (participation) pattern. In other words, people usually help on the IS World listserv because they want to help not because they self promote. This finding substantiates the analysis of the survey response, i.e., the easier it is to respond, the higher the propensity to respond.

ISSUE 4: DESIGN SUGGESTIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY

The final issue that we examine is design suggestions from the community. The last question asked of the respondents was for suggestions on how the IS World listserv could be better. Members offered detailed and useful suggestions:

We see three themes emerging from these suggestions:

1. opportunities for a re-organization of the IS World listserv according to function or content,

2. ideas for a re-design of the technological aspects of the system that supports the IS World listserv, and

3. options for managing the IS World listserv differently.

We now elaborate on each of these areas.

ORGANIZING BY FUNCTION/CONTENT

The first theme suggestion by members is to organize the IS World listserv around specific topic areas. These suggestions include organizing the IS World listserv by:

- The message type (e.g. announcements, jobs, CFP's, etc)
- The specific content of the message (i.e. research areas)
- The intended audience (doctoral students, others with similar research areas, non-English speakers, practitioners)

While we are not advocating a specific approach to answer these suggestions, the emergence of this theme indicates that the members of the IS World listserv desire the type of list that a members forum would present (i.e. a platform that is flexible and able to be personalized synchronous platforms). How (and if) this approach would be implemented depends upon the emergence of a champion within the community to advocate this functionality.

TECHNOLOGICAL DESIGN

The second theme that emerged from the members is technical in nature. These suggestions include:

- The inclusion of a brief header with tags so that a reader can decide to delete or keep a message
- Intelligent archives that connect previous messages and information on AIS/IS World sites with a search mechanism
- Real time messaging
- "Richer" messages with HTML and embedded audio and video

- Indexing of requests for information on the IS World site
- Anonymous forums where participants can ask questions w/o revealing their identity

Again, while we are not advocating a specific approach to answer these suggestions, the emergence of this theme indicates that the members of the IS World listserv desire a more technologically advanced list.

MANAGING THE IS WORLD LISTSERV

On the whole, people did not complain about the current management of the IS World listserv. However, suggestions were made about how to manage the IS World listserv better, including:

- Make participation more bidirectional (more encouragement to reply to requests and to share request results)
- Encourage fewer cliques and more participation from the entire community
- Encourage more spirited debates on worthwhile scholarly issues - have the list manager or pioneers in the field present questions once a month to discuss
- Section to allow for updates of where people have moved - new positions, etc
- Less doctoral students asking for others to do their literature searches for them

Whether through policy or intervention, these suggestions are opportunities for the list's management to facilitate more interaction. Nonetheless, a delicate balance must be met between policy and freedom – this equilibrium must be managed without overstepping the role of the IS World listserv Manager. Fortunately, during the past 10 years, there have been very few incidents of severe managerial intervention[5]. We recall only two such incidents: one had to do with the aftermath of 9-11 and the other with the debate about ICIS in Jerusalem.

The first significant intervention that impacted the list that we analyze was the discussions that took place on the list in the aftermath of 9-11.[6] We must immediately acknowledge the special circumstances of this case – it is a combination of tragedy and danger that obviously affects communication behavior [Schudson, 2002]. Yet, the record of our communication in this extreme situation highlights with unusual intensity several issues of ongoing concern. It also reveals the emotional attachment many of us feel towards the IS World listserv.

The record of postings on September 11, 2001 began with a posting of condolence, about nine hours after the attack: "To all our friends in America: Our hearts are with you. May God be with you" and ends two days later on September 14 with a posting by the AIS President (Blake Ives) suspending the IS World listserv: "… I began to understand how badly the content of some of the postings had deteriorated … I have, acting in my position as AIS President asked … to temporarily suspend the list immediately …"[7].

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[5] We should mention that there have been minor violations of IS World listserv policy. These violations were handled by the VP of Communications and were not broadcasted to the entire IS World listserv. Examples include doctoral students requesting roommates for conferences, multiple broadcasts of CFP's, and self-promotion.

[6] Unfortunately, because of the transitions between servers, archival information is incomplete. We had access to records of the postings of the 9-11 according to their sequence of appearance on the IS World listserv, without however time stamps. Thus are analysis is limited but nevertheless demonstrative of managerial action in face of deterioration in user behavior.

[7] For fair disclosure we should state that first message was posted by the first author.

We traced 50 messages on the IS World listserv (September 12-14) and include another message reopening the IS World listserv on September 18 along with the messages commenting about this decision. The 9-11 aftermath on the IS World listserv began with three messages of condolences from outside the USA – Israel, Kuwait and the Netherlands, continued with concerns about international students on American campuses and then deteriorated to angry accusations, along with petitions to stop this 'flaming'.

We classified each of the 50 messages into one of the three following categories: condolences, accusation (including counter accusation) and control (including counter control). Condolence is a message addressing sentiments about the tragedy and empathy with Americans, including concerns about the social impact on say international students. Accusation is any message directly accusing people or nations, countering accusations and warning against generalizations, and talking against terrorism. A message was categorized as accusation even if only a few words were about blame or hatred. Finally, control is a message about controlling or managing the IS World listserv but also arguing against control. We realize these are very broad categories (for example, counter control could be separated from control) but it is sufficient to present the general sequence of events. Figure 1 depicts the chain of communication events.

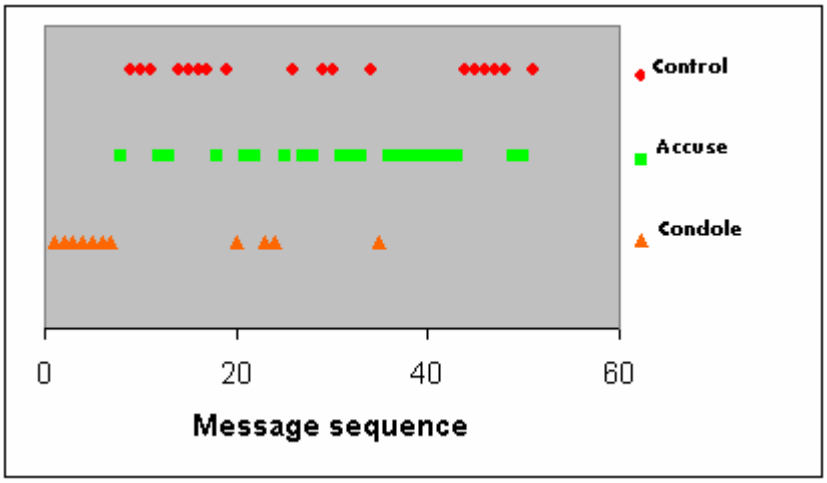

Figure 1 Chain of Communication Events in the 9-11 Debate

The fifty messages analyzed were sent by 38 members (only a few members sent two messages). Of these members, only one member did not identify himself by name (although later another member revealed his identity). This anonymous message was perhaps the one that most enraged some of the other members. Most of the messages can be grouped into four threads. Some of these threads are evident by the reply ('Re:') but others were identified by the option to comment to a particular sender or by the content (reply is sometimes used to save time without actually addressing at all the sender's message). The anonymous message triggered one of the four threads. Anonymity and flaming are indeed related.

From the eight message there began a sequence of flaming, with a corresponding sequence of members calling for (or arguing against) more control. The thread that began with the anonymous message stirred the longest 'flaming' thread. Flaming was not affected by the calls and pleas of other members and was aborted only when AIS President closed the IS World listserv. The President's comment on September 18 reflects the accepted mission of the IS World listserv:

> *Please also keep in mind that ISWorld is primarily a broadcast rather than discussion list. While this incident again highlights the need by some for a forum for discussion, this is not, and has never been the intention of ISWorld*

An important lesson to note is that much of the communication among members occurs in private direct correspondence side by side with, and as a result of, the public communication on the IS World listserv. As the AIS President notes, he received 70 emails about his decision directly sent to him (partially this was also due to the inaccessibility of the IS World listserv) and the first author can also attest to scores of messages he received about his message of condolences, when in fact the IS World listserv was still active. Of course, this phenomenon occurs in normal times too but at a lower intensity. This multi-channel yet inter-related communication is a practice that may require more technological support than is currently provided. Again this is an aspect of considering the entire set of communication modes in tandem.

From a management perspective, the list was taken offline for a few days and returned in "moderated" mode – the AIS President and managers of the list examined postings and approved those with no political or religious connotations. Following this incident, a policy committee began examining whether or not AIS would have financial or legal liability of discussions on the IS World list, given the arrangement between the association and the service. As a result, the committee formulated a set of policies that were adopted and required of every member to agree with before joining. While the postings occurred in September 2001 and the policies were drafted during the remainder of Fall 2001, list members were not formally required to agree to the new policies until the transition occurred in April 2002.

The 9-11 incident highlights an insight into the management of the list – the unmoderated, free-flowing debate forum, through institutionalization with AIS, had become a moderated, structured discussion forum where norms were formalized in "appropriate" usage conditions. Whether or not this type of communication is the one that our community desires, is subject to debate and was an issue that respondents to our survey raised.

V. DISCUSSION

CALL FOR DESIGN

The analysis of the survey results leads us to issue a call for design of our communication means within the community. While we will not attempt to prescribe how our communications ought to be structured, the evidence of the survey and anecdotal stories from our colleagues suggests that there are opportunities for our community to embrace new approaches that are consistent with the mission of the IS World listserv. We would like to see our colleagues who specialize in communication design research use this research as a trigger to share their best practices and suggest alternative designs for the IS World listserv and the community's patterns of communication. Yet, not only did opportunities for the implementation of new features emerge from this study, research themes also emerged. .In particular, we found a need to take a broad and comprehensive view of the communication requirements of the community. Such a comprehensive view can lead to a set of distinct yet integrated communication channels to allow maximum flexibility and easy travel between channels. The different channels serve different communication goals (see Table 1) but should be linked because they may all be used by the same individual. Such a comprehensive view of communication forms within a field is difficult but can be done. Grudin [2004] attempted such a view of the human-computer interaction field, concentrating on journals and conferences. We could embark on a more ambitious project that includes other forums such as the IS World listserv and lists of AIS special interest groups, knowledge repositories such as CAIS, JAIS, AIS eLibrary and eMISQ, and people management such as the AIS faculty directory.

CALL FOR RESEARCH

The preceding discussion of the survey results raised several research questions that can be grouped around the four issues we explored in this study: mission, participation (behavior), design, and the interactions among these aspects of the IS World listserv. We offer these research questions as a tentative and incomplete unordered list of possible research ideas. Of course this list is not, by any stretch of imagination, a framework for research but rather a list of the main issues that emerged in this study and the associations that we experienced when reading the comments. This section therefore merely demonstrates the potential areas of research and is biased towards applied research that is associated with the design of the IS World listserv (the context of the survey). More comprehensive treatments of research on listservs can be found in the publications noted throughout this paper.

We therefore issue a call for research into the IS World listserv. In Table 10, we summarize the areas that we believe our salient in the minds of the IS World listserv members. The table is organized by the overarching issue, then the sub-issue. For each sub-issue, we outline a series of research questions and related these questions to specific findings of the survey.

VI. CONCLUSION

This year, the IS World listserv, a primary medium of communication within the IS community, marks its tenth year of operation. With its anniversary approaching, we believe that it is time to reflect on the practice and mission of the IS World listserv, using both organizational and technological lens. This paper, which includes a call for design and research, marks a first attempt at reflecting upon a major form of communication within our community, with the hope that broader and more comprehensive research will follow.

As researchers interested in organizational phenomena, we cannot help but stop and reflect upon the mission of the IS World listserv. Our study highlights the tension between communication serving both socialization processes and exchange of information and knowledge processes. We believe this issue is an important one to debate. The implications of the stated mission for the IS World listserv are profound because they drive the remaining technical and organizational challenges. We believe therefore that the role of the IS World listserv needs to be debated by the community as we move beyond its 10-year anniversary. However, such a debate should be conducted within a broad and comprehensive view of communication within the community. The IS World listserv is a hyperlink on the AIS homepage but is not really linked to it. Other existing forms of communication such as the AIS journals (CAIS, JAIS), special interest groups and e-Libraries need to be linked to the listserv. Only a broad view of the communication goals and the respective forms of support and an integrated view of these distinct yet complementary tools will provide us a truly effective infrastructure for communication.

As researchers interested in technical phenomena, we were intrigued by the design challenges of communicating with a globally dispersed community of practice. Although the community is well aware of the impact of design on use and communication, it engaged in little innovation in the institutional communication support systems. Consider a small design issue, namely immediate versus delayed communication. In his account of the 9-11 events on the ISWorld listserv, the President of AIS said he realized the deteriorated state of the debates about 9-11 rather late because he received the IS World listserv in digest form. Whether or not a delayed mechanism of communication is an appropriate design for our community, or for certain roles in the community, or under certain conditions are all relevant design questions that can be discussed within a framework such as the one in Table 1. But this is just a single and limited issue. Additional technologies forms of communication such as professional synchronous chat rooms and collaborative design mechanisms will impact on our communication significantly. When designed to integrate with the existing forms of communication they will have even greater impact. Finally, researchers interested in new technologies for communication that are already being tested in

Table 10. Applied-Oriented Research Issues Triggered by the Survey

Issue	Sub-Issue	Research Questions	Elements found in the survey
Mission	The role of the IS World listserv	What are and should be the roles of the IS World listserv?	The tension between information/task related goals and socialization/relationship goals suggests that we should research the role of the IS World listserv within our community
	The roles of the IS World listserv within the broader portfolio of communication means	How can the IS World listserv complement and be complemented by other forms?	The finding that the IS World listserv is just one technical solution suggests that we should research how the IS World listserv does and does not do things other means do better, e.g., CAIS or chat rooms
	Efficiency	Is the IS World listserv useable and what can be done to improve usability?	The perspective that retrieving information from other IS World listserv members is too difficult suggests that research can help to understand the usability of the list
	Effectiveness	How effective is the call for information and compilation of responses?	Several negative comments on this practice suggest that there may be an alternative way to share knowledge
Participation	Democracy	• Is the IS World listserv truly democratic in terms of participation, impact? • How does this compare with other listservs? • What are the determinants of participation?	• The view that a few gods rule the IS World listserv and • The very small percentage of participators in initial contributions and responses Reveals that the democratic nature of the IS World listserv needs to be investigated (See [Kling et al., 1999] for more information). See also Moon [2004], Jones and Rafaeli [1999].
	Codes of behavior	• What is considered appropriate on society's list server? • How does this vary between societies?	Several strong statements against self-promotion implies that research is needed in to how behavior should be controlled within a free and open democratic list
Design	Management/governance of organization	• What roles should management, if any, play? • Who should appoint and oversee management?	The feeling that the list, while it stops inappropriate discussions, may also be preventing academic debate [See [Bulter et al. 2003] for more information) suggests that research can reveal if the governance of the IS World listserv is appropriate for our needs
	Technical integration of communication	How can the IS World listserv be integrated with other tools of communication and knowledge sharing?	The comments on the need for a better integration with other ISWorld "properties" means that research can seek to understand technical integration [Butler, et al, 2003 suggests that building relationship online works if it supplements offline efforts)
	Education	How should people be educated to become members to communicate within a community of practice?	The feeling that a member does not contain enough information to share suggests that research can help to understand and increase participation among an educated community of practice [See Wagner et al. 2003 on the need to become more open to others and to qualify opinions)

research laboratories should be encouraged to involve the community, e.g., through special interest groups.

Research and design go hand in hand. This paper took the view that design should follow research about the community needs and resulting mission of the communication support. Table 1 shows how different communication will dictate different designs. Furthermore, we believe that more research about communication practices and about the potential technologies is needed to inform design and achieve a better fit between the technology and the user. But design can also lead research. We believe the AIS community should support and even experiment with new designs of communication support systems in order to effect new and important streams of research that will ultimately enrich our own and others' community life.

The IS community possesses the combined organizational and technical expertise that few other academic community posses. Hence, this call for design and research to our community. In our call for research, we stressed the applied research that seems to be promising for the design of our communication. However, this bias is due to the practical interests of the community and research interests of the authors and should not in any way detract from the importance of other types of research. The readings cited in this paper cover research topics that go well beyond the relatively narrow scope delineated here. Perhaps, most important is the need for research on communication among members of the community over time in order to understand the discipline as it is reflected by its social life [DeSanctis, 2003]. It is our hope that this paper is just the first in a series of studies about the communication within the IS community.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following reference list contains the address of World Wide Web pages. Readers who can access the Web directly from their computer or are reading the paper on the Web can gain direct access to these references. Readers are warned, however, that

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APPENDIX I. SHORT SURVEY ON IS WORLD[8]

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to complete this study. This survey is being administered by Dov Te'eni (Tel Aviv University) and Andrew Schwarz (Louisiana State University). We appreciate your willingness to participate.

We are interested in finding out about your views of the ISWorld listserv and includes questions on your participation with the list and your views about the role of the list in the IS academic community. This survey is completely anonymous and we do not track your identity in any way.

Once you are done with the survey, please click on "Submit" and you will receive a confirmation that your answers have been received. Thank you again for your participation.

Your Views of the ISWorld list

First, for how long have you been a member of the ISWorld list?

_____ Months

_____ Year(s)

Now, what do you see as the role of the ISWorld list in our community now (e.g. is it for announcements, to build a community of scholars, to support colleagues in need of information, or are there other roles)?

How do you currently subscribe to ISWorld?

So, why did you choose to subscribe to ISWorld in this mode?

From time-to-time, requests for information appear on ISWorld. Not including a request to fill out a survey, about how many messages have you personally replied to in the past year?

_____ Responses

What makes you decide whether or not to reply to a request for information?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very involved, how would you rate your personal level of involvement with the global community of IS academics?

I would rate my level of involvement as: _____

What was your criterion for assessing your level of involvement?

Would you prefer to be more or less involved in the community? Why?

[8] This appendix present the text of the short Internet survey used for this research.

So, if it were up to you, what should the ISWorld list be used for in the future - i.e. what should its' role be and how it should be designed (or what functions to add) to promote this role?

Finally, what is your current position?

Thank you again for your perspectives on the ISWorld list. Please click on Submit now to complete the survey!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dov Te'eni is a member of the faculty of management at Tel-Aviv University, Israel. He is also the chairman of Israel's Higher Education E-learning center. Dov studies several related areas of information systems: human-computer interaction, computer support for decision-making and communication, systems design and non-profit organizations. His research usually combines model building, laboratory experiments and development of prototypes like Spider and kMail. He is currently writing a book on Human-Computer Interaction for Information Systems with Jane Carey and Ping Zhang. His publications appear in such journals as *Management Science, MISQ, Organization Science*, and in more specific journals devoted to HCI such as *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, Behaviour and Information Technology, Computers in Human Behavior and IEEE Transactions.*

Andrew Henry Schwarz joined the faculty of the E.J. Ouroso college of Business Administration at Louisiana State University, after obtaining his doctorate from the University of Houston in 2003. Andy served until recently as ISWorld administrator. His research interests include acceptance of new technology, IT-Business alignment, IT governance, IT boundary choice, and emerging technologies. His publications on these topics appear in the *Journal of Strategic Information Systems* and the *European Journal of Information Systems*, among others.

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