Consensus and Diversity in IS Research: Theoretical Foundations of Empirical Studies of IOS

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ABSTRACT

Over recent years, two sides of a debate have formed concerning the identity of the information systems (IS) field. On one side, arguments have been presented for establishing a clearer identity by developing a distinct, core paradigm to guide IS research. On the other side of the debate, arguments have been made for increased diversity. Although this debate continues, the actual consequences of consensus and diversity for knowledge production remain unclear. This paper focuses on one aspect of diversity: the theoretical approaches underlying empirical research. Drawing from a review of the empirical literature on interorganizational information systems (IOS) published between 1990 and 2003, we identify both “tight” and “loose” areas of theory in the IOS literature. In the two tight areas (the economic theory approach and the diffusion of innovations approach), studies generally reinforce theorized relationships and establish robust findings. However, close examination also reveals areas of diversity within these tight areas. In the loose area (social systems approach), a wider variety of theories has been used, generating a larger number of empirical relationships that are less robust. We conclude that the IOS literature
exhibits both consensus and diversity, suggesting that IS is a heterogeneous field in which both loose and tight areas of theory contribute.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Daniel Robey is Professor and John B. Zellars Chair of Information Systems at Georgia State University, holding a joint appointment in the Departments of Computer Information Systems and Management. Professor Robey is Editor-in-Chief of *Information and Organization* and serves on the editorial boards of *Organization Science, Academy of Management Review*, and *Technology & People*. He has authored numerous articles in journals that include *Management Science, Organization Science, Information Systems Research, MIS Quarterly, Journal of Management Information Systems, Academy of Management Review*, and *Academy of Management Journal*. His research includes empirical examinations of the effects of a wide range of technologies on organizations and the development of theoretical approaches to explaining the consequences of information technology in organizations. For more information, see Dr. Robey’s web site at [http://www.cis.gsu.edu/~drobey/](http://www.cis.gsu.edu/~drobey/).