

Information Systems Frontiers (ISF) CfP – A special issue in memory of Paul Gray (1930-2012). The application of “futures research” to MIS

Dr. Paul Gray, an AIS Fellow passed away in April, 2012. Paul published over 140 articles and a number of books. He was a great thinker and visionary and his research was ahead of its time-- as is evident in the number of “first” papers he authored. While his research covered many topics, one of his passions was the application of “futures research” to MIS. Paul was introduced to futures research when he was at Stanford University in the 1960s.

Paul used to say that “MIS research is like driving through the rear-view mirror.” A majority of our research deals with the post-hoc effect of IS on its environment (people, organizations, teams, etc.) Although futures research methodologies are used in disciplines such as policy analysis, strategy, competitive intelligence, and forecasting, they have rarely been used in IS research. Considering the impact of IT on the direction taken by organizations, society and the global economy, it would be valuable for our discipline to develop technology-driven futures research (Coats et al, 1994).

This call for paper is inspired by an ICIS panel discussion that we (Paul and ourselves) began formulating just before Paul passed on, as well as by the IFIP 8.2 workshop held in Turku, Finland in June, 2011.

Futures Research is an established field with its own methodologies (for summary see Glen and Gordon, 2009), graduate programs worldwide, and journals¹. Some of the methodologies have been used since the 1950s. Today, futurists look at a horizon of 5 to 20 years into the future, for which many statistical predictive and extrapolation models are no longer effective. Futures research is based on the assertion that although the future is uncertain, some predictions can be made as to the effect of certain actions, trends or events on the trajectory the future might take. For example, environmental scanning is often used by strategic managers to identify early change indicators and devise strategies to respond or avert such changes. One way to move from retrospective research to “designing the digital future” is to apply these methodologies as part of our research paradigm.

Sporadic examples of futures research in MIS do exist. Delphi, one of the more common futures methods, has been used in a variety of MIS studies and is described in Linstone and Turroff (1977, 2002) and cited in Crespo, A.G., et al (2010). The use of scenario building was applied in Hovav and Gray (2002) and Gray and Hovav (2007). Additional examples of MIS futures research can be found in Dahlbom (1997), Dahlbom and Mathiassen (1997) and more recently in Chiasson, M. et al. (Eds.) (2011).

In the teaching domain, we know of very few examples in MIS. Paul Gray introduced a Futures class in 1995 and Erran Carmel has been teaching a course in Futures since 2010.

¹ <http://josephcoates.com/resources.html>

In this call for papers, we are looking for technical, empirical, opinion, and conceptual papers that might answers questions such as:

- What type of research questions can be answered using “futures methodologies”?
- What challenges face researchers in using these methods?
- What are the preferred epistemologies to be used in futures research?
- Should we teach futures research to our students? If so, when and to whom?
- What type of evaluation criteria should we apply to futures research articles?
- How can we anticipate the possible futures of Information Systems?
- How do information systems affect the future?
- What social and political constraints restrict the future of IS?
- What is the role of the MIS discipline in producing/influencing such social and political trends?

We are also looking for empirical studies that use futures methods (Delphi, scenarios, environmental scanning, predictions markets, etc.) to investigate the influence of current trends on the future of IS and the influence of IS on future trends.

Potential authors are expected to submit extended abstract (2-3 pages) and proposals for advanced review.

Important dates:

Extended abstract submission is due Dec 15th, 2012

Full paper is due April 19th, 2013

Reviews will be completed by June 17th, 2013

Final version is due November 1st, 2013

Expected publication date is first issue of 2014

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