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Richard T. Watson
Terry College of Business, University of Georgia, rwatson@uga.edu

Emannuel Monod
UNiversity of Nantes and Georgia State University, emmanuel.monod@sc-eco.univ-nantes.fr

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AIS COUNCIL WHITE PAPER: TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR AIS STRATEGIC PLANNING

RICHARD T. WATSON
Terry College of Business
University of Georgia
rwatson@terry.uga.edu
EMMANUEL MONOD
University of Nantes and
Georgia State University

ABSTRACT

AIS went through and will continue to undergo evolution and revolution as it grows. This article analyzes the current state of AIS and concludes that it is in, or approaching, a crisis of priorities. Planning is the recommended path for solving this crisis. Four planning methods are proposed: stakeholder analysis, service matrix analysis, missions matrix analysis, and a four-year budget cycle.

Keywords: AIS, planning, planning methods, priority setting, stakeholder analysis, service matrix analysis, missions matrix analysis, budget cycle

FOREWORD

This white paper was presented at the AIS Council meeting in June 2003 at Naples, Italy. We prepared this paper because we felt it was time for the Association to implement a more extensive and formalized system of planning. Based on this document, the following motions were approved by Council:

1. AIS Council establishes a system for determining and setting priorities.
2. A Planning Committee composed of the Past-President (chair), President-elect, VP of Communications, Executive Director, and the three outgoing regional representatives is responsible for providing priority setting information to AIS Council.
3. The Planning Committee is responsible for preparing, or ensuring the preparation of, a stakeholder analysis, service matrix analyses, missions matrix analysis, four-year budget, and other reports it deems necessary for effective priority setting by AIS Council.
4. The AIS office annually updates a service matrix analysis.
5. The AIS Treasurer maintains a four-year budget.

The Planning Committee was established and will make its first report to the next Council meeting at Seattle in December 2003. Phillip Ein-Dor, the current Past-President, heads the Committee.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nearing the end of the first decade of its existence, the Association for Information Systems (AIS) is now established in the academic community as the premier global organization for IS academics. In 2003, membership passed 3,000, with more than 50 countries represented on the membership roll. AIS is recognized by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

(AACSB) as an official voice for IS academics. A report [Ives et al., 2002] prepared on behalf of AIS members influenced AACSB's accreditation standards (AACSB 2002). Nearly all organizations undergo evolution and revolution as they grow [Greiner, 1972]. It would be surprising to find AIS exempt from such a pattern. Thus it is worth analyzing the development of AIS.

CREATIVITY (PHASE 1)

Greiner proposes (Figure 1) that *creativity* is the first phase of organizational growth, when the emphasis is on creating services and a market. In the case of AIS, the services and markets existed prior to its creation. The IS academic community created a high quality journal, *MIS Quarterly,* in 1977, and a major conference, the International Conference in Information Systems (ICIS), in 1980. By the early 1990s, a vigorous and active community existed with a range of general and special-purpose IS conferences and journals, but the field was missing a professional organization [Dickson et al., 1993]. In Greiner's terms, IS faced a crisis of leadership. The community needed to organize itself and pull together its disparate pieces.

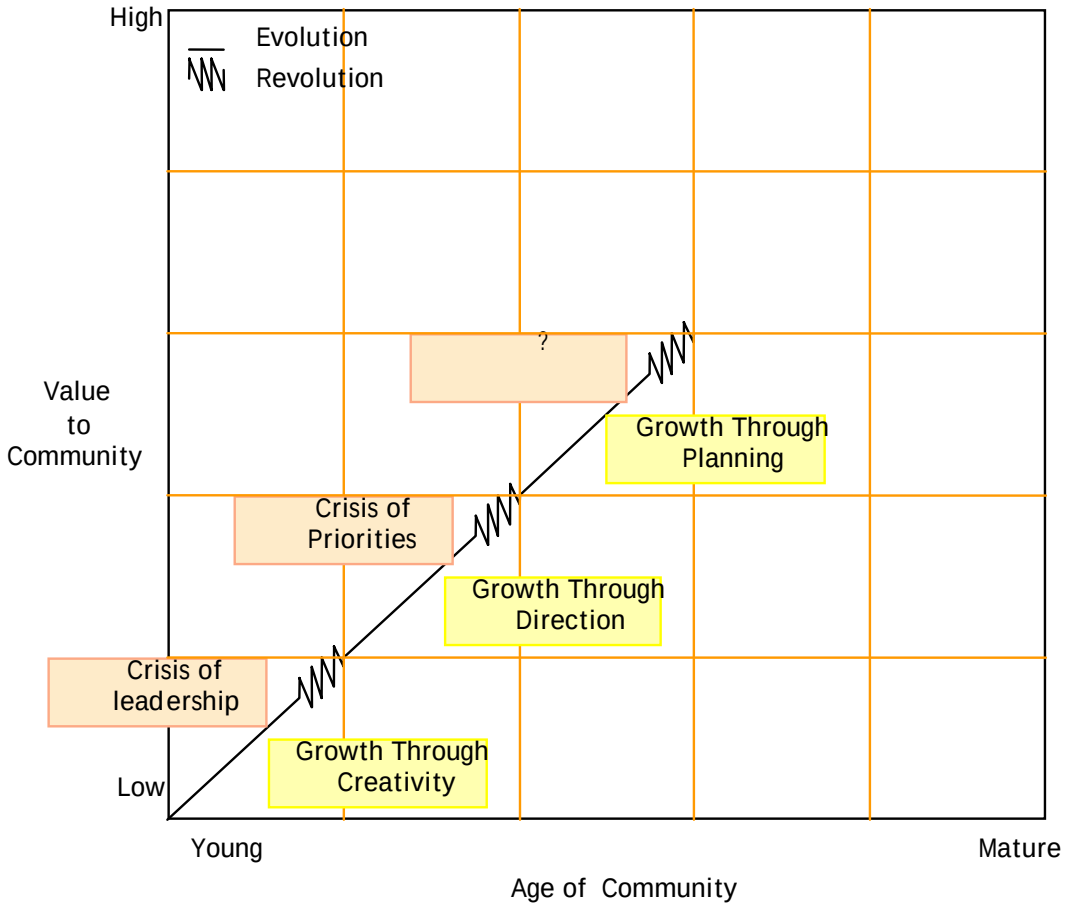

Figure 1: Phases of Growth of the Information Systems Community

DIRECTION (PHASE 2)

With the founding of AIS in 1995, the IS community entered the *direction* phase. Structures, such as the AIS Council and office, were put in place to provide a level of management and direction that was absent. As a result, we now have established systems for conference management, for publication, and an amalgamation of resources under a single management system (e.g., the merging of AIS and ICIS and the alliance with *MIS Quarterly*).

PLANNING (PHASE 3)

While Greiner proposes that the direction phase culminates in a crisis of autonomy, we suggest that the crisis that AIS is likely to face, and perhaps in this case it is rather an exaggeration to call it a crisis, is one of *priorities*. Academic communities are a blend of individuals with diverse goals and at various stages in their academic life. The services sought by a full professor in the final stages of teaching career could be quite different from those valued by an untenured assistant professor in the early years at a research school. Without some formal mechanism for determining the needs of its various stakeholder communities and setting appropriate priorities, AIS could well dilute its value to its members. We believe it is time for AIS to apply some formal planning procedures for establishing its direction and determining the central issues on which it should focus attention and resources. In the remainder of this article, we discuss how AIS might approach strategic planning.

II. THE CONTEXT

While many tools and techniques are available for strategic planning, some are not suitable for the AIS environment. The following are particular aspects of the AIS setting that must be considered:

- AIS Council members are volunteers who have busy careers;
- AIS Council meets face-to-face twice per year for at most 1.5 days
- The AIS Executive Director is a volunteer;
- The AIS office staff is small (three at the time of writing);
- The AIS President serves for one-year.

This context implies that AIS should select a small and relatively simple set of strategic planning tools that can be learned and deployed quickly. These tools should ensure that AIS Council is aware of the environment in which it operates, AIS offers a balanced portfolio of services for members, and the Association remains financially viable. With these criteria in mind, we recommend the following tools:

- Stakeholder analysis (Section III)
- Service matrix analysis (Section IV)
- Missions matrix analysis (Section V)
- Four-year budget cycle (Section VI)

III. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Stakeholders determine the future of an organization [Freeman, 1984]. Thus it is important for AIS periodically and systematically to review its stakeholders and assumptions about each of them. AIS decisions are implicitly based on assumptions about key stakeholders, but if they are not made explicit, it is likely that Council members will operate with a potentially diverse and conflicting set of assumptions.

We propose that AIS Council adopt a simplified version of stakeholder analysis and assumption servicing and testing [Rowe et al., 1986]. We recommend the following actions to establish a stakeholder analysis:

- A standing committee of Council (the Planning Committee), representing a diverse set of constituencies, should identify the key AIS stakeholders;
- For each identified stakeholder, the major assumptions should be stated;
- For each major assumption, the Planning Committee should clarify whether or not it supports the goals of AIS;
- The report is presented to Council.

Once the initial stakeholder analysis is completed, it should be reviewed on a yearly basis, updated as required, and be an addendum to all AIS Council agendas. We expect the analysis to be rather stable, and an annual review should not be too time-consuming.

IV. SERVICE MATRIX ANALYSIS

The service matrix (Table 1) is a simple tool for classifying all the services (e.g., the e-library) provided by AIS to its members. As a starting point, services should be classed as to whether they are mandatory, desirable, or optional services for members. For example, a conference registration system is probably mandatory, but a service to support conference hotel room sharing is likely to be optional. Also, to initiate the analysis, we suggest that the three major divisions of duties for many academics identify service categories: research, service, and teaching. For each service, its annual cost and percentage of members likely to use the service should be estimated.

Table 1. Matrix for AIS Service X

	Mandatory	Desirable	Optional
Research			
Service			
Teaching			

A service matrix can serve two key planning purposes:

- First, it can alert AIS Council as to the full range of activities of AIS and the costs associated with each of its current services. This analysis is particularly important as most Council members serve for a short period (two to three years) and meetings are semi-annual.
- Second, each proposed service should be presented in terms of its placement in a planned services matrix so that AIS Council can assess its relevance and impact on the overall balance of service offerings (e.g., the ratio between research and teaching).

We propose that current and planned service matrices be prepared and maintained by the AIS office and be part of the agenda for all Council meetings.

IV. MISSIONS MATRIX ANALYSIS

Many organizational transformation methods are based on process analysis. Some design new processes, such as Business Process Reengineering (BPR), in a perspective of radical change, rather than incremental transformation and are usually based on the application of IS [Kettinger and Teng, 1997]. Others focus more on mapping existing processes, such as Total Quality Management (TQM), in a perspective of incremental improvement, usually participative and independent from IS. However, Socio-Technical Systems (STS) shows that organizational transformation might be either incremental or radical and always participative and may include IS [Manz and Stewart, 1997].

The Missions matrix is inspired more by STS than the other two sources. Many STS approaches are presented in IS [Hirschheim and Klein, 1984], but few include stakeholders in the vein of Multiview [Avison and Wood-Harper, 1990] or provide a clear view of change management [Huy, 2001, Markus and Benjamin, 1996].

The word “mission” is not especially used by the transformation methods that usually use “objectives” or “goals.” Customers and shareholders are usually the source of objectives of BPR. TQM and STS try to include a third stakeholder, employees. However, others stakeholders such as governments or local communities should be considered for inclusion. The idea of “mission” is precisely that it is supposed to include all stakeholders [Coff, 1999, Schneider, 2002]. It has often assumed that “vision” comes only from the mind of the leader. The “mission” is, however, not designed by one mind but given by society to the organization. Mission statement development

includes consideration of internal and external stakeholders [Monod et al., 2002], the hyper-competitive environment [Thomas, 1996], and co-evolution [Lewin et al., 1999].

The word "process" is not especially relevant for a non-profit organization [Crowston, 1997]. It is usually replaced by the more general word "activity" in this context. One important principle is that, as processes are independent from the functions and departments (because they are supposed to be "horizontal" or "cross-sectional"), activities should be different from the existing services or responsibilities of the vice-presidents of the existing structure [Manz and Stewart, 1997].

The missions matrix starts with the identification of the main missions. The principle is to organize the different purposes and goals around a limited set of missions, ideally three. A bottom up approach is recommended, especially if it is possible to start from existing surveys or, better, from the presence of the representatives of the different stakeholders.

The current and possible actions are identified and gathered under more general activities (Table 2). The analysis is then activities-driven (as is) and missions-driven (to be). The "as-is" analysis is conducted through questions such as: "*if we consider one by one each of the current activities, what is its contributions to the mission?* The "to be" analysis raises questions similar to: *"In order to fulfil the missions, what could be the most relevant activities (independent from the existing ones)?"*. Therefore, if the current actions might be in the "cells" during the "as is" analysis, the "to be" analysis purpose is to suggest new services. These actions may or may not be services.

Table 2. Missions Matrix

	Mission 1	Mission 2	Mission 3
Activity 1	*Action A* *Action B* *Action C*		
Activity 2			
Activity 3			

An example of the use of this method is provided in Appendix A.

V. FOUR-YEAR BUDGET CYCLE

The two major sources of AIS revenue are (1) members subscriptions and (2) conference surpluses. Membership revenue can be estimated fairly accurately on a yearly basis, but conferences fluctuate in profitability because of the varying attractiveness of locations. For example, past experience suggests that ICIS conferences held in North American cities are more profitable that those held elsewhere. Thus, it makes sense for the AIS budget to consider future conference income. Because AMCIS and ICIS conference site decisions are made four years in advance, the budget should also operate on a four-year forecast.

Moving beyond the current one-year forecast will also give AIS Council a better estimate of the costs AIS will incur for projects that span more than one year. Some Council development projects, for example, were awarded multi-year funding but are not reflected in yearly budgets.

Furthermore, given the fluctuations in conference surpluses, Council must be able to monitor current operations carefully. Thus, the current year budget should be broken down by quarter and by fund to facilitate quarterly comparisons of budget versus actual revenue and expenses. Applying fund accounting to segment the different AIS programs will support closer analysis of each activity.

VI. CONCLUSION

AIS, a growing organization, can be expected to evolve and transform with time. Its non-profit nature and academic connections do not make it immune from the issues facing all organizations. Thus, we believe it is important for AIS Council to remain aware of the current state of AIS and the transformations it will undergo as it makes the passage from one stage of growth to another.

Our analysis suggests that it is now time for AIS to establish formal procedures for determining and setting priorities so AIS Council can more effectively plan a future that creates greater value for its members.

Editor's Note: This article was received on July 17, 2003 and was published on July 28, 2003

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APPENDIX I. EXAMPLE OF A MISSIONS MATRIX ANALYSIS

This example of a mission matrix analysis was constructed for AIM, the French speaking affiliate of AIS. The original matrix has been translated from French to English to enable members of AIS to discern the nature of the analysis.

Missions

Academic	International	Members
	Conferences	
Research conference		
Multi-year planning (2 to 4 years) Publication of proceedings	Sessions in English Announcements on IS World Use of AIS reviewing system	Benchmark against international conferences in other disciplines PhD supervisors' seminars Poster sessions for PhD students
Education meeting		
Multi-year planning (2 to 4 years) Partnership with AIS SIGED:IAIM	Sessions in English Announcements on IS World	Education seminars within the research conference Pre-conference education meeting
Executive meeting		
Multi-year planning (2 to 4 years)	Benchmarking with international IS conferences	Partnerships with international IS conferences
Presence in other conferences		
Increase presence as conference committee members and track chairs in relevant conferences	Attend other IS conferences Presence in PhD consortia at ICIS, AMCIS, and ECIS	Conference reviewing Participate in AIS SIGs Create SIGs
	Publications	
Academic journal		
Seek submission of quality papers from international conferences	Online access from many Web sites	Discounts for publications of other academic associations
Newsletter		
Sharing with other associations	Translation into other languages	Downloading from the Web site
Web site		
Access to past conference proceedings	ISWorld country pages for Francophone countries	Content management system to support communication
Public relations		
Announcement of key events in IS media	Comparison of our vision to other associations' visions	"Vision of IS future" for the media
	External relationships	
Academic associations		
Joint events with academic management associations	Participation in Academy of Management conferences	Submit papers to other academic conferences
Colleges of business		
Participation in curricula development	Partnerships with electronic journals	Online educational material exchanges
Professional associations		
Awards in partnership with other professional associations	Comparison with SIM	Participation in meetings of professional associations
Government and European Union		
Respond to call for proposals	Respond to call for proposals	Certification of IS consultants

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Richard T. Watson is the J. Rex Fuqua Distinguished Chair for Internet Strategy and Director of the Center for Information Systems Leadership in the Terry College of Business, the University of Georgia. His publications appear in leading journals in several fields and he is the author of books on data management and electronic commerce. He has presented invited seminars in nearly 20 countries. He is President-elect of AIS, a Visiting Professor at Agder University College, Norway, and a consulting editor to John Wiley & Sons.

Emmanuel Monod is Visiting Associate Professor at Georgia State University and Associate Professor at University of Nantes (France), where he is the Director of the Master in Management specializing in MIS. His research focuses on the organizational impact of IS, systems analysis and design, e-commerce, culture and power analysis, and epistemology and philosophy of IS research. He is currently Vice-President for Communications of AIS and Vice-President of AIM (AIS affiliated organization for the French speaking world). He is the joint Editor-in-Chief of the electronic Journal Foundations of IS and Editor of the Systèmes d'Information et Management.

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