Research in Information Systems: A Handbook for Research Supervisors and Their Research Students

Reviewed by A. D. Elliman

If you pick this book up thinking it is yet another how-to-do-it research text then you are in for a surprise. David, Jan and the other contributors present a different and challenging view of Doctoral Research. The focus of the text is on the supervisor and student as a team rather than just looking at the research process itself. Well known for his advocacy of interpretivist and action research David turns this spot light on the process of guiding PhD students to a successful conclusion.

The book opens with two very frank reflections on the experience of being a research supervisor. The two writers trace the development of their career from being thrown in the deep-end with their first research student to the present day position as established and respected supervisors. The text is interspersed with vignettes each describing a particular experience with a student and I expect most of us can find echoes of these success and failures within our own careers.

Having drawn the reader into the subject the main part of the book goes on to explore a whole range of issues around the supervisor student relationship. Most how-to research texts have a chapter hinting at some stereotypes for the these roles but David and Jan face the question head on. This is the real unique strength of this text. For many of us our PhD is an intense experience that stays with both supervisor and student well into later life. For example, one PhD student greets me at conferences as her “Grand-supervisor” passing on kind

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regards from her supervisor, a Professor who many years ago was one of my own research students.

Outside the realm of academia, I spend some of my time in groups that might be described as “alternative sexuality” and it is not unusual for a newcomer to ask “What is the relationship between X and Y?” They are always hoping for a neat one-size-fits-all answer, but the real answer is that it is always unique — it is what X and Y have decided it should be. The critical thing in both spheres is that the cards are on the table because X and Y (or student and supervisor) have discussed their relationship instead of assuming they both fill a slot in the same stereotype.

The text emphasizes this need to talk about our roles and expectations with each student and to adapt our role to their needs. With growing numbers in higher education and mass teaching at undergraduate levels students enter the research track with less and less awareness of one-to-one tutoring relationships. The onus is on us to take the initiative. The chapter discussing metaphors for the relationship would be particularly useful for new supervisors in helping them explore their own skills, weaknesses, and comfort zones. It also provides a basis for discussion with students.

Ideally the relationship is confined to the research activity and topic but three years or more working closely together will never be so sterile. Normal life will intrude and as the supervisor you need to be prepared to deal with it in a proper, sensitive, and ethical manner. David and Jan offer a series of chapters looking at particular issues like finance, commercial collaborators, research ethics, and diversity of gender, sexual orientation, and culture. In each case they explore the issue and look at the situations you might face drawing on examples from each contributors’ experience.

However, this text isn’t just about the supervisor and student. In the last part of the book David and Jan offer several chapters exploring the nature of Information Systems research. There is the usual coverage of issues like quality, originality, and that hardy perennial quantitative vs. qualitative research. Even here it shows that freshness of view with David and Steve Elliott exploring the question of what constitutes the discipline of information systems.

Finally, the text explores differences between PhD programs in four different parts of the world. Interestingly, the discussion omits Austria where the natural scientists finally won the battle to use the title Dr. by sneaking the notion of originality into the equation. In my time on my University’s central regulatory committee it always amused me to see Lawyers and Clerics, who 300 years ago automatically had the title Doctor in the way medics still do, struggling to define “originality” so that they can use the title again today.

This book is a must for anyone entering the role of research supervisor. Almost certainly it will leave you with as many new questions as it answers but it does convey so much of what the role will hold for you. It is not just about what research is but it addresses the reality of the process for both supervisors and students. David and Jan have chosen a range of collaborators who not only know their subject but they can write clear entertaining prose. Once I had read the first two chapters there was no way I wasn’t going to finish reading this book.
Dr. A. D. (Tony) Elliman is a senior lecturer in information systems and computing at Brunel University. He gained his original degree in electronics and electrical engineering while working with ICL before becoming a computer science lecturer at Brunel in 1972. He gained his Doctorate for research in medical information systems in 1989. As a registered Chartered Engineer and Chartered IT Professional he continues to support Leukaemia Research as an IT consultant. Dr. Elliman’s research interests are in the architecture and evaluation of information systems within the public sector and in particular the development of systems for professional users, such as lawyers and doctors. As an active researcher he led the E-Arbitration-T project team at Brunel and co-ordinates the DIADEM international project team. He teaches research methods for PhD candidates and advises on research design. He has over 15 years experience managing technical service provision and large cross disciplinary course teams within the university. He is a co-chair of the UK academic network for e-Government Integration and Systems Evaluation (eGISE) and co-investigator in the Virtual Institute for Electronic Government Research (VIEGO). He is a regular conference chair and serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Enterprise Information Systems.
BOOK REVIEW

Electronic Government Strategies and Implementation

Reviewed by Jyoti Choudrie

Electronic Government Strategies and Implementation
Wayne Huang, Keng Siau, and Kwok Kee Wei
HC: ISBN: 1-59140-348-0, $84.95

This book by Huang et al. is published by Idea Group Publishing and a collection of 18 chapters that provide a comprehensive coverage of the current issues and practices that impact e-government.

The book consists of a preface and two sections. The first part is a theoretical aspect that examines the strategic issues associated with e-government. The section begins by examining the role of e-commerce in e-government. This is followed by a discussion of e-transparency in e-government and the dimensions of business process change in e-government. The chapter that examines business process change also describes and discusses Layne and Lee’s framework in the context of e-government. Chapter IV then proposes the development of an Excellence Center and examines its impact upon various stakeholders, namely the impact of a Government to Government Excellence Center. Chapter V offers a more technical aspect to e-government by determining the role of a more flexible and powerful mechanism in a Web services infrastructure. The technical aspect that this chapter offers is the introduction of XML-based Web service technologies. Chapter VI offers a more comprehensive view of e-government by examining the concept of an online one stop government and proposing a framework for realising one stop government. An aspect associated with an online environment is that of trust and privacy, which is discussed in the context of e-government in Chapter VII. The authors use Canada’s two solutions for privacy and trust to examine the aforementioned issues and also describe some new technologies for private policy negotiation and ensuring policy compliance.

The second section of the book adopts a different perspective by offering global, real life examples of the implementation...
of e-government. The first chapter of this section, Chapter VIII, offers a comparative study of the strategic issues of digital government implementations between developed and developing countries. Chapter IX provides a more realistic picture of e-government by describing the effectiveness of e-government online services in Australia. This chapter also provides a description of the research methodology, which so far none of the other chapters had provided. Chapter X provides a European perspective of e-government by detailing the experiences of the Finnish parliament from a standardisation efforts perspective. Chapter XI offers a North American perspective by reporting upon the importance of behind-the-scenes interorganisational collaboration necessary for public sector agencies to present a coherent public face in electronic government development in the context of New York. Chapter XII provides an Asian view of e-government by using a case study of the Social Security card system in Shanghai. A country that has been identified as a leading one in the e-government area is Singapore. Chapter XIII elaborates on some of the important implementation policies and best practices of Singapore’s experience with e-government. Chapter XIV examines the development of e-government strategies in South Africa. Chapter XV offers a different view of e-government by examining the use of a Web portal and specifically presents a blueprint of the network state in Switzerland based on URN: Technology. Chapter XVI applies a semiotic framework in the assessment of a national Information Systems strategy for the Police service and the Crime Justice Information Technology community in the UK. Chapter XVII offers a comparative study of Poland and Taiwan’s general development strategies of e-government. The context of Taiwan is continued in Chapter XVIII where the critical success factors of e-government adoption in Taiwan’s online tax filing and payment systems are examined and discussed.

For researchers not aware of e-government—the theories and practical examples, this book offers an interesting discussion without a prejudiced opinion of e-government. For academics and practitioners unfamiliar to e-government, the first section offers a good explanation of the concept. Further for practitioners wanting to determine where e-government is being implemented the second section offers a good and global description. Therefore, if an individual wants to research into the e-government area, this is a good book to consider.

Dr. Jyoti Choudrie is a senior lecturer in the School of Business and Economics, Swansea University. Previously she was a lecturer in the School of Information Systems, Computing and Maths, Brunel University. She obtained her PhD on “Investigating Reengineering Teams in the Context of Business Process Change” from Brunel University. Her current research encompasses the diffusion and adoption of broadband technology, the usability of e-government Web sites, the impacts of the diffusion of broadband technology on electronic government, the social aspects of information systems, and electronic commerce. She has written for peer reviewed journals such as the European Journal of Information Systems (EJIS), Journal of Information Technology (JIT), and Journal of Computing and Information Systems (JCIS).