Preface

As information technologies have evolved, so too has our understanding of the information systems that employ them. A significant part of this evolving understanding is the role of the human contexts within which information systems are situated. This, in turn, has led to the need for appropriate methods of studying information systems in their context of use. There is a growing consensus that qualitative research methods offer important benefits to the study of information systems. This recognition has spawned the demand for more in-depth discussion of the various types of qualitative IS methods so that researchers can determine ones that are most appropriate for addressing their particular research problems. The objective of *Qualitative Research in IS: Issues and Trends* is to address this need. Its intent is to assist IS researchers in their efforts to learn about and employ qualitative methods for IS research.

A significant portion of established and emerging IS researchers are grappling with the issue of learning about new research methods even as they struggle to keep up with new information technologies. This is especially the case for qualitative methods. Many current IS researchers learned research methodology at a time when quantitative analysis was deemed the only legitimate scientific approach. They are now confronted with the need to teach themselves these new qualitative methods. Others may have developed expertise in the use of one particular qualitative method while in school but would now like to learn about alternative qualitative methods. Finally members of the community of qualitative IS researchers need to hear from each other about the challenges and rewards of employing qualitative methods for information systems research.
This book begins by considering trends in the choice of qualitative methods for information systems research. The book then goes on to explore concrete issues that researchers have encountered in the use of a particular qualitative method. It ends by raising issues for the IS profession and suggesting responses. To achieve its objective, this book draws upon the collective expertise of distinguished scholars who employ qualitative methods in their own research. These individuals are widely known for their experience in conducting qualitative research. They include: Richard Baskerville, Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic, Heinz Klein, Allen Lee, Enid Mumford, Michael Myers, Steve Sawyer, Ulrike Schultze, Cathy Urquhart and Eleanor Wynn. These authors address issues for individual researchers and for the IS profession from the vantage point of their own experiences. They draw upon their own published work to consider issues that they have encountered and the ways in which they have resolved them.

The audience for this book includes both IS students and IS academics. This book is suitable for use in a doctoral seminar in qualitative research in IS. It will also find an audience among established researchers. Anyone currently engaged in conducting IS research who would like to learn more about employing qualitative methods will be interested in this book.

This book fills a unique space in the IS research literature. Unlike journal articles, which focus on research findings, the focus of these chapters is on the methodology issues themselves. The details of specific research projects provide the backdrop for the discussion of methodological issues. The book also complements existing books on qualitative methodology. Some books address qualitative methodology in general. The subject of the research is not information systems per se, but rather social science in general. A problem that IS researchers
often encounter with using such books is the translation of the general ideas into the specific context of IS research. This book is different in that it shows applications of these qualitative methods in a context relevant to IS researchers. Other books are about a single IS research project that employs qualitative methodology. This book is different from these books because it provides the reader with more than one example of the application of qualitative methods to IS research. A third category of books contains collections of chapters that focus on research methodology as applied to information systems research. This book falls into this category. Like other books in this category, it is a collection of chapters by a variety of established authors. However, what makes it distinctive is that the focus of each chapter is methodology rather than the research findings. While the authors discuss the content of their research projects, methodological issues are in the foreground.

It has been a privilege serving as the editor of this volume. But as every editor knows, there are those people without whose contribution a book would never exist. First, I would like to thank Idea Group Publishing for recognizing the need for this book and for asking me to edit it. Second, I would like to thank the contributing authors who agreed to participate in this project. Their willingness to discuss their own experiences, issues and challenges has made this book what it is. Third, I would like to thank those individuals who have helped to turn the manuscript into the final product. I would like to thank my research assistant Andrew Esposito for his efforts under tight deadlines. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the editorial staff at Idea Group Publishing whose patience and assistance throughout this project has made the work of editing this book an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Eileen Trauth
December 2000