

# Editorial Preface

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In keeping with the policy of the international Journal of Systems and Society I am pleased to introduce the guest editors for this edition. Christine Welch, who was the guest editor of Volume 1, No. 2 and Peter Bednar, new to IJSS, have provided us with this collection of eight papers. All papers relate in some way to the social technical approach pioneered by Enid <sup>1</sup>Mumford and Don Henshall [1979] in a 21st century setting. The Socio technical approach developed by Professor Mumford was one of number of important ideas in which systems thinking was applied in some form to ‘real world’ problems in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other important contributions to applied Systems thinking in this era include Stafford Beer, C. West Churchman, Russ Ackoff and Peter Checkland. Although there were differences of opinion about the nature of Systems they all shared the belief of applying the ideas and learning from the practice - for without the <sup>2</sup>practice Systems thinking becomes little more than a collection of anecdotes, of limited value; theory without practice is infertile and practice without theory is aimless.

In this edition Welch and Bednar have provided us with a collection of papers mainly related to the use of systems ideas in information systems of which five explore the ideas in the ‘field’ – i.e. learn from the practice rather than add to the theory based solely on what they have learnt from time spent in the library. The guest editors provide us with a detailed editorial so there is little point in repeating that here so I will limit myself to drawing your attention to aspects in these papers that I found of interest. For example, Barn and Barn draw our attention to the changes that modern communication systems have had and continue to have, on society. In their paper they report on a refinement of the value sensitive action-reflection model used in co-design, first introduced by Yoo et al, that recognises the tension between values and resilience. They report on their activities of using this approach for a project aimed at developing mobile apps for promoting better engagement between young people in conflict with the law and their case workers in the UK youth justice system. The Waring et al paper reports upon the development of an analytical framework which they used in a longitudinal, ethnographic study within a UK university. The lessons learnt from the study they suggest may help to avoid some of the problems experienced due to the lack of recognition of the important role of power and improvisation in what may be misrepresented as planned strategic and deliberate organizational change. Weilbach and Matthee, Machdel undertake a socio-technical analysis of the change caused by an e-textbook implementation in a secondary school in South Africa. To undertake their research, which was an action research study, they collected data which was analysed using the Punctuated Socio-Technical Change (PSIC) model. The outcome of their research revealed the ST-model used within the PSIC model failed to address the vertical gaps between levels in sufficient detail the authors plan future research in which they will apply ANT which they suggest might help to to overcome this shortcoming.

Lindekilde and Bjørn also adopted a method of action research over a period of 21 months, working within a global engineering company. Over the course of two action cycles the techniques were improved to help people reflect upon current practices. Their paper adds the sociotechnical approach arguing that while discursive interventions challenging people’s perceptions are important,

the embodied experience of the activities are essential to be able to transform people's perceptions on presence and improve the global collaboration. Edwards and Horton explore the adoption and diffusion of 'transformational' information technologies in three UK universities through the use of a longitudinal case study. Their research involved UK universities adoption of the Managed Learning Environment (MLE). In the paper they explore the influence of ideology on the socio-technical process of adoption, in particular the interplay of ideological and contextual understandings. Their findings, they contend, contribute to better understanding trajectories of socio technical development

It is good to know that these ideas are still being applied and lessons learnt from their application adding our understanding.

We hope that you enjoy this edition.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Mumford, E., & Henshall, D. (1979). *A Participative Approach to Computer Systems Design*, London: Associated Business Press.
- <sup>2</sup> We do not find people becoming qualified in medicine by reading handbooks, these handbooks are considered helpful to the experienced, but useless to the layman (Aristotle, 'Ethics', p. 341).