In a recent gathering of information systems academics and professionals there was yet another discussion of, “What is information systems,” and “What are appropriate areas of research in this field.” After a heated debate I am happy to report that we once again confirmed the obvious, that is capturing, storing and managing data and generating information from data still forms the core of our profession.

Database systems ranging from special purpose personal databases to large organizational databases that support transaction processing systems as well as other critical functions are pervasive in the day-to-day operations of our organizations. It is precisely this level of dependence that results in a low rate of innovation and/or adoption of new technology in the user community. The factors that kept COBOL as the leading programming language used in business systems decades beyond what was predicted by many people, are now affecting the database field in a very similar fashion. This level of caution and slow adaptation to change is not necessarily a bad thing. We just need to recognize this and understand what our roles as academicians and practitioners engaged in database research in this environment.

The word research implies discovery. As database researchers we are indeed very lucky to be in a field that is partially driven by a set of technologies that have been and are expected to continue changing rapidly. It certainly is easier to be innovative in such an environment. What role should journals like ours play in this field? Researchers walk a fine line between innovation and rigor. These two concepts are often at odds. Frequently a person with a creative idea might not be the one who develops the idea completely and/or provides the rigor that is demanded by us. One wonders what happens to all those good ideas that never see the light of the day because at the outset they lack the necessary rigor to be printed in a journal. In my opinion the academic journals increasingly have gotten more and more conservative in favor of mathematical rigor and completeness and away from encouraging original thought and innovation. This is especially critical in a field like ours where a rapidly changing technology creates opportunities to be innovative. I want to encourage all of us to start attaching more value to thought and creativity. I understand fully well that this raises the question of how to judge an idea as good and introduces potential for subjectivity. I suggest we must live with some level of subjectivity if we are to encourage innovation. Presumably the referees of a paper are experts in a field and should be able to recognize a good idea when they see one. I believe the critical issue is not the ability of referees to recognize creativity but the value attached to creativity. I want to emphasize that I am not suggesting to do away with rigor but that we should make room for pieces that stress innovation.

The coming years will be exciting ones for our field as we will witness increasingly powerful personal computers, dramatically faster and cheaper storage media, significantly improved visualization tools, gigabyte networks and other technology developments, all of which will have profound effects on our field. Following is a list of database topics that I feel we should pay close attention in the coming years:

- Innovative applications of various database technologies
- Information modelling and process modelling
- Meta data modelling and management
- Data management techniques to support Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) technologies
- Client server and distributed databases
- Heterogeneous databases
- Digital libraries, information management for information highway
- Data quality
- Data mining
- Statistical databases
- Legacy systems
- Graphical interfaces and visualization
- Multimedia databases
- Intelligent databases
- Temporal databases
- Realtime databases
- Active databases
- Object oriented databases
- Knowledge bases

In writing this editorial my main goal was to encourage us to think about innovation and point out areas that I believe are not only important but also open to innovation. We may not all agree on the items in the list, but I hope this article generates a much needed debate about the types of articles that are published not only in this journal but also in other database journals.

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