
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Dr. Rodrigo Magalhães is a Professor of Information Systems and Organisation at the Kuwait-Maastricht Business School (KMBS) in Kuwait, where he has also held the post of Academic Director. KMBS is a private graduate school associated with the Maastricht School of Management in The Netherlands. He holds a PhD (Information Systems) from The London School of Economics, an MBA from Sheffield University, an MA (Information Science) from Leeds Metropolitan University, UK, and a BA (Psychology) from the University of Natal, South Africa. He is also a Guest Professor at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Instituto Superior Técnico, Lisbon, Portugal, and he lectures regularly in postgraduate programmes at the Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa (ISCTE) also in Lisbon. Dr Magalhães has published extensively in the areas of information systems management, organisational change, knowledge management, organisation learning, business process management and e-learning. He has been active in management consulting and has held several managerial positions in Portugal.

Dr. Camille R.A. Jackson is an Associate Professor at the Kuwait Maastricht Business School (KMBS). She has been working in universities for 15 years. She commenced her studies and lecturing career at the University of Queensland, Australia. Her qualifications include: Bachelor of Arts major in Psychology (University of Queensland), Bachelor of Commerce (University of Southern Queensland), Master of Business Administration (Advanced) from the University of Queensland, Master of Management (University of Queensland) and a Doctor of Business Administration from the Southern Cross University. She has lectured in Brunei for the University of Queensland MBA programme. She was invited to Kuwait to start and manage the Bachelor of Business Degree Programme of the University of Tasmania, Australia in 2007. Her areas of interest include leadership, organisational change, bankruptcy and globalisation and she has several publications in these areas.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Business Information Systems* brings together seven papers ranging from considerations of the human aspects of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) to the modelling of Human Resources (HR) in organisations. Although the field of HRIS is reaching maturity after about two decades of academic study, there is still a lot of work to be done. Starting from the assumption that HRIS are concerned with *people management*, it is apparent that the research topics covered by this subject can be very broad indeed. So, what are HRIS? In our view, HRIS are no different from other types of information systems in terms of their basic definition, *i.e.*, they are complex social objects that are the outcome of the *embedding* of computer systems into organisations and where it is not possible to take apart the technical from the social factors.

The papers that follow all share this view of information systems while focusing on various aspects of HR and HR management. In the first paper, Zacarias *et al.* explore the topic of organisational modelling of HR, stating that the development of modelling frameworks in HR enables the proper integration of HRIS within organisations. Enterprise Modelling (EM), is widely used to model organisational strategy, activities and resources; however, current EM frameworks disregard the complexity, adaptiveness, and emergence that characterise organisations and their HR. Their paper describes an architectural view used to model the activity of HR in organisations that takes into account all those characteristics. It does so by acknowledging:

- multiple behavioural concerns
- the situational nature of the activity of people in organisations
- human adaptive and emergent behaviours.

Olivas-Luján and Florkowski make a contribution towards the study of e-HRM, combining this topic with the need for IT governance in their article ‘Does IT governance matter in e-HRM?’ These authors argue that IT governance comprises the organisational responsibility for making decisions that will impact the use of Information Technologies (IT) in a firm. In their paper, they present the results of a survey-based study of US and Canadian firms, to investigate whether the mode of HR-IT governance matters in terms of the intensity of usage of HR technologies. Olivas-Luján and Florkowski argue that their results underscore the importance of governance policies in the internal diffusion of HR-ICTs and offer a unique contribution to the literature by assessing the phenomenon of IT governance through the eyes of HRM users. Furthermore, they suggest that as technology becomes an increasingly vital component of HR service delivery, researchers must expand their efforts to understand the opportunities and threats that it fosters.

Supplementing Olivas-Luján and Florkowski’s paper, Delorme and Arcand’s contribution looks at the new roles and responsibilities of HR professionals when using HRIS. In their paper ‘HRIS implementation and deployment: a conceptual framework of the new roles, responsibilities and competences for HR professionals’ the authors raise the question of the new competencies required of HR professionals in view of the widespread use of HRIS. Starting from the observation that HR systems play a role in sustaining the competitive advantage of firms, these authors elaborate on the evolution of the roles and responsibilities of HR professionals from a strategic perspective. They highlight the new required competencies from this perspective and review how the introduction of new technologies in the organisation is affecting the way HR professionals accomplish their tasks, not only within the HR department but also in

the rest of the organisation. A conceptual framework is proposed aimed at exploring the relations between IT systems, HRM organisational design and competencies of HR professionals.

In a change of methodology, the next paper involves case study analysis. In their paper, Batenburg and Koopman investigate Employee Self-Service (ESS) applications in four Dutch governmental organisations (ministries). This work looks at user participation and user involvement, which are generally accepted as among the important factors for IS success. Several types of early end-user involvement are distinguished and empirically explored. These authors conclude that the perceived success of the ESS systems within the ministries is not directly related to the type or number of user involvement methods applied. The benefits of user participation are dependent upon factors related to time and culture. In particular, expectancy management about the project milestones is important, and so is the belief among employees that they can easily use the self-service applications without much support from the HR departments.

In their paper 'From IS to organisation: analysing the uses of a collaborative IS in a high-tech SME', Oiry *et al.* start from a disparity often observed in organisations between the actual uses of HRIS and what was expected of them prior to implementation. To investigate this phenomenon, the authors have used a model created by Orlikowski (2000) for studying technology in organisations, and the notion of the 'spirit of technology' developed by De Sanctis and Poole (1994). The paper concludes by highlighting the role of a particular actor, namely, the person who introduced the software into the organisation and who has been described as the purchase initiator. Because this actor expresses most accurately in his actions the actual uses to which this new software is put, this might lead him to minimise the actual contributions made by the software as soon as those uses fail to bring about the organisational changes the purchase initiator is seeking.

In their article 'Informating HRM: a comparison of data querying and data mining', Strohmeier and Piazza make a valuable contribution to HRIS in the context of the area of data mining. These authors report on a major potential of HRIS, the potential to go beyond automation and to move towards the 'informating' of HRM. Within current HRIS the 'informate' function is realised based on a data querying approach. Given the current innovations in the area of data mining, possibly valuable information is being lost by HRM by not paying enough attention to this approach. The paper discusses and evaluates data mining as a novel approach compared to data querying as the conventional approach of 'informating' HRM. Based on a robust framework of informational contributions, Strohmeier and Piazza's analysis reveals interesting potentials of data mining to generate explicative and prognostic information. It is concluded that data mining enriches and complements the conventional querying approach. Recommendations for future research are offered, aimed at extending the contributions of data mining to the 'informating' of HRM.

The final paper 'Conceptualising HR systems as object-oriented activity systems' by Mohamud investigates the claim that human capital is a key factor in the performance of contemporary organisations. As a consequence of this is now oft-repeated claim, HR systems are increasingly becoming the focus of analysis among researchers and practitioners. Whether discussing traditional HR systems or IT-enabled ones, existing mainstream studies have surfaced a number of issues, namely:

- the disharmony between the wider organisational strategies and individual-oriented and operational HR systems
- the tensions between IT and HR professionals in implementing technology-based HR systems
- the quest for stability in environments with prevalent ambiguities.

Using the activity theory as an analytical and interpretive framework, this paper conceptualises HR systems as object-oriented human activity systems. It argues that recasting HR systems through the lens of the activity theory would help bridge apparent gaps in the mainstream analysis. Theoretical constructs that could potentially complement mainstream approaches are suggested and explained. These include the idea that tensions and contradictions are integral part of human activities, which ought to be seen as opportunities, rather than threats, for development and change.