

SISTM Seminar Series: Jan Recker

UNSW Business School, Quadrangle Building 2093

Thu, 13 Oct 2016, 11am – 12pm

Title: What Makes a Successful Theory? Studying Research Programs with a Framework for Pursuing Success and Failure

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Abstract: Theories spawn research programs that examine, test, extend, falsify or otherwise inspect the theory. Over time, the questions beckon: what makes a successful theory? Which theory is worth pursuing further, which should be abandoned? We study these questions using the example of one of the few theories researchers consider native to the IS discipline, which posits the essential purpose of information systems is to provide faithful representations of human perceptions about the meaning of some focal real-world phenomena. Over the past 25 years, this theory has spawned a wide program of work, primarily on modelling of information systems but also on other phenomena such as data quality, system alignment, security, and effective system use. The theory has also attracted repeated criticism, however, about assumptions, tests, and results. In this light, a verdict about whether the theory succeeds or fails remains open. We argue a more coherent debate on the merits of the theory can occur by following a systematic approach to identifying elements of success and failure in research that targets the theory. We develop a new framework to create an account of the pursuit of success and failure of representation theory and identify pathways by which these pursuits can proceed more systematically. Our analysis shows a verdict about the value of representation theory remains inconclusive. Nonetheless, we find several avenues to facilitate reaching a conclusion about its merits. More generally, our study offers a novel framework for reviewing, assessing, and developing theoretical programs of research.

Bio: Jan Recker is Alexander-von-Humboldt Fellow and Full Professor for Information Systems and Retail Innovation at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia, where he held the inaugural Woolworths Chair of Retail Innovation. His research focuses on process-oriented systems analysis, Green IS and IT-enabled innovation. His research has

appeared in MISQ, JAIS, EJIS, JIT, DSS, SJIS, Information & Management, Information Systems, and others. He is Editor-in-Chief of the Communications of the Association for Information Systems, and Associate Editor for the MIS Quarterly.