Understanding Conceptual Rigor: Guidelines and Criteria for Composing Conceptual Research

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Conceptual Research Articles

• Draw new insights from published works
• Conceptual analysis articles comprise 15% of major IS publications. (Data analysis & literature reviews add 6% more.)
• Foundations upon which much IS research is based and justified. Compelling theories for future empirical research.

Diverse Genres of Conceptual Writing

• Reviews of empirical literature
  ▫ Show empirical support for hypothesized relationships and new contingencies that affect empirical results. e.g., Robey, D., Boudreau, M-C., and Rose, G.M., "Information Technology and Organizational Learning: A Review and Assessment of Research" Accounting, Management and Information Technologies, 10 (2), 2000, 125-155.

• Theoretical reviews

• Theory development
  ▫ Makes a novel theoretical statement. e.g., new constructs, new relationships among constructs, an inventory of propositions or narrative explanation.

• Theory application
  ▫ Applies existing theory to an IS problem. e.g., using institutional theory to explain dot.com failures or using structuration theory to explain IT impacts on organizations.

• Methodological analyses
  ▫ Review and critique the use of research methodologies in IS, suggesting best or better practices. e.g., Straub (1989) (instrument validation), Klein & Myers (1999) (interpretive field studies), Lee & Baskerville (2003) (generalization)

• Commentaries, book reviews, issues and opinions
  ▫ Short essays commenting on an article published in a journal.
Conceptual Rigor?

- The collective criteria used for evaluating the contribution of conceptual research.
- A learned skill, equal in value to empirical rigor.
- Components in Theoretical Reviews:
  - Logical consistency
  - Convincing rhetorical strategy
  - Completeness of argument
  - Value of contribution
Dimensions of Conceptual Rigor and Characteristics in Theoretical Reviews

- Process
- Product
- Generative
- Analytical
- Effective Rhetorical Strategy
- Meaningful Contribution
- Logical Consistency
- Argumentative Completeness
- Means-End or “Red Thread” Aspect
- Modes of Reasoning Aspect

Graphical representation with axes and key concepts.
Applying The Dimensions of Conceptual Rigor as Characteristics of Theoretical Review

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Questions

• Would such a paper be valued?
• Should we focus on one or more genres of conceptual research? If multiple, then which ones?