
Editor's Comments

Two items are addressed in this issue's commentary: some thoughts on the research opportunities provided by the "year 2000 problem," and announcements regarding Editorial Board changes. The conspicuous absence of references to the year 2000 problem in information systems scholarly journals is somewhat surprising. I have enlisted the help of Leon Kappelman (University of North Texas), who serves as the co-leader of the SIM Year 2000 Working Group, in suggesting a strategy for thinking about this "once in a lifetime" research opportunity. We hope you find these thoughts useful.

The Year 2000 Problem: A Laboratory for MIS Research (co-authored with Leon A. Kappelman)

The year 2000 or "century date" problem has certainly gained the attention of information systems executives and professionals, senior executives across most organizations, and the business and popular presses. Similarly, most members of the information systems academic community are keenly aware of the year 2000 problem (Y2KP) and, consequently, make appropriate references to it in their classes, their discussions with stakeholders, and in motivating related research projects. Undoubtedly, certain members of our community are also finding themselves involved as consultants to organizations on various aspects of the Y2KP. What is not that clear, however, is the extent to which (if at all?) the Y2KP is viewed by academics as an opportunity for pursuing information systems research. Table 1¹ is provided as a resource for anyone desiring to learn more about the Y2KP.

The existence of the Y2KP presents an unprecedented opportunity to further many of the research interests of information systems researchers and, in the process, build new bridges with practice. Essentially, the scope and magnitude of the Y2KP parallels the scope and magnitude of the entire information systems field. However, the intent of these comments is not to be all-inclusive but simply to pique the attention of information systems researchers to the rich research opportunities that may present themselves as organizations address the Y2KP.

It may be useful, if only to set appropriate boundaries, to suggest the nature of research directions **unlikely** to prove very promising. First, opportunities for research projects that directly enable practitioners to resolve their organizations' Y2KP are probably quite limited. Not only is there just not enough time to properly conduct such research, but few organizations (given the importance and immediacy of their Year 2000 efforts) are likely to welcome the intrusion of formal research methods or the formal documentation that results. Second, opportunities for research projects aimed at developing tool sets (e.g., software, methodologies, etc.) for resolving the Y2KP are also quite limited. Here, the difficulty lies not with the obtrusive nature of formal research but rather with the fact that academicians pursuing such research directions are competing directly with software vendors and service providers, who are able to invest far more funding and talent in such efforts than can academicians.

How, then, might organizational efforts to resolve the Y2KP be viewed as a "laboratory" for information systems research? These efforts—which have very finite time horizons, are driven by fairly similar constraints and objectives, but unfold in various contexts—provide the opportunity to study many enduring information systems phenomena. Two such phenomena are briefly described: risk management and IT outsourcing. In each of these areas, much of the published research tends to be concep-

¹This table is extracted from the resources directory in the book: *Year 2000 Problem: Strategies from the Fortune 100*, Leon A. Kappelman (ed.), International Thomson Computer Press: Boston, 1997.

tual or involves either a few case studies (often regarding very distinct contexts) or fairly broad surveys. What tends to be missing are studies intensively investigating multiple firms working toward similar technological objectives—and this is precisely the situation being created with organizational efforts to resolve the Y2KP.

Risk management. Risk management is a phenomenon of interest to researchers working in a variety of areas: project management, software development, security and disaster recovery, operating performance, and contract fulfillment, among others. In each of these domains, concern focuses on understanding the nature of the risks involved, appraising the extent of risk at discrete points in time, devising risk-reducing strategies, and then selecting and implementing appropriate strategies.

The Y2KP undoubtedly will find many organizations facing a common set of problems but unable, because of constraints and conflicting objectives, to address each of these in a comprehensive manner. How are these organizations confronting the situation? What methods are applied to identify the nature of the risks faced, to assess these risks across their full complement of installed hardware and software, to select those initiatives undertaken to either resolve or reduce these risks, and to track the success of these initiatives as they proceed? What risk management objectives and strategies work best? It might be interesting, for example, to assess (1) whether firms applying explicit risk management strategies outperform those that do not, (2) if complex risk management strategies outperform simpler risk management heuristics (given the immediacy and scope of the Y2KP), and (3) whether an escalating commitment to resolve the Y2KP (as the Year 2000 draws nearer) promotes a dampening or heightening effect on an enterprise's application of risk management strategies and tactics. Given the vast number of firms resolving Y2KPs across fairly similar hardware and software platforms, the opportunity arises to investigate these, as well as many other, questions with fairly similar sets of projects across organizational contexts as varied or as similar as desired within a particular research design.

IT outsourcing. The landscape of information technology (IT) management has changed dramatically with the increasing use of third-party IT service providers since the late 1980s. Accordingly, the information systems research community has sought to better understand (1) why and how organizations choose to outsource some or most of the information systems activities and operations and (2) how vendor relationships should be handled once a contract is awarded. While considerable research has been undertaken, one particular issue has proven very troublesome—that almost every outsourcing arrangement is quite unique regarding the scope of activities being outsourced. As a consequence, it becomes very difficult to compare findings across contracts and across firms.

Many firms are working with IT service providers in their efforts to resolve the Y2KP. While it would again be a rare occurrence if two such contracts were alike, the similarity across Year 2000 outsourcing contracts is likely to be far greater than is normally observed with most other IT outsourcing arrangements. Thus, the opportunity arises to investigate some of the major questions that exist regarding IT outsourcing across contracts involving very similar information systems activities. Examples of specific questions to be examined might include: To what extent does the primary intent (acquiring absent resources, a "lowest cost" solution, a "best practices" solution, etc.) of an outsourcing initiative produce better outcomes? Should contracts be comprehensive or brief? Should contracts be tightly defined or left open-ended? How should an organization structure its vendor relationship? How can an enterprise capture a vendor's practices and expertise? Of course, other factors (organizational characteristics, contract characteristics, vendor characteristics) will vary; such variance, however, is both desirable and controllable.

Conclusion

While the Y2KP must be addressed by all organizations, considerable variance in how it is being addressed is being observed across these organizations. And, because of its potentially huge repercussions, the Y2KP cannot be ignored by information systems practitioners. For most information systems academicians, on the other hand, the Y2KP primarily represents yet another topic to be brought into their courses. As has been suggested above, it actually offers much more—an abundance of opportunities for those researchers able and willing to exploit this fleeting, and very unique, circumstance.

Editorial Board Changes

Five Editorial Board members are “retiring” from the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Board with this issue. Three of these Board members—Phil Ein-Dor, Helmut Krcmar, and Dov Te’eni—have completed their three-year appointments to the Editorial Board. Many thanks to each of you for your outstanding service to the journal and to the information systems research community! The other two Board members—Joey George and Ron Tarro—both served an initial three-year appointment and then a two-year reappointment. Numerous authors have benefitted from Joey’s and Ron’s careful handling of their manuscripts, and the *Quarterly*’s senior editors have benefitted from Joey’s and Ron’s timely and carefully reasoned counsel regarding these same manuscripts. Such selfless behavior is most surely going “far beyond the call of duty.” Thanks for your help; it will be missed in the future.

—Bob Zmud
Editor-In-Chief

Table 1. Some Year 2000 Computer Date Problem Resources on the Internet

Resources	Contact Information	Description
Best Practices of Year 2000 Project Managers	www.simnet.org	Society for Information Management (SIM) Year 2000 Working Group's Best Practices website: Sharing, collaboration, and cooperation among year 2000 project managers. Open to the public. Organized according to the "steps," "things to do," and other concerns of a year 2000 project as described in the group's 1996 white paper and 1997 book. Non-profit.
Greenwich Mean Time	www.gmt-2000.com/	Software vendor focused on year 2000 problems with desktop and client-server hardware and software.
Com. <i>Links</i> Magazine General Services Administration	www.comlinks.com/ www.itpolicy.gsa.gov/ library/yr2000/	Electronic magazine covers year 2000. Index of federal year 2000 information.
IBM's Year 2000 Report	www.s390.ibm.com:80/ stories/tran2000.html	"The Year 2000 and 2-Digit Dates: A Guide for Planning and Implementation." Free.
Information Technology Association of America (ITAA)	703-284-5306 www.ita.org	Trade association for IT service providers and vendors; free buyer's guide; weekly newsletter; has year 2000 process certification program.
MITRE Year 2000 Home Page	www.mitre.org:80/ research/Y2K/	Non-profit group does research for U.S. military: Website includes costs estimation, steps to take, briefings, tools, services, and year 2000 product certification checklist.
<i>Tick, Tick, Tick</i>	800-643-8425 www.tickticktick.com	A quarterly, independent newsletter. Helps regional year 2000 user groups form. Subscription costs \$75 per year.
Year 2000 Home Page	http://www.year2000.com	For-profit site lists service providers, tool vendors, articles, events, frequently asked questions, etc.
<i>Year/2000 Journal</i>	214-340-2147 y2kjournal@connect.net	Bi-monthly, independent, year 2000 magazine-type publication. Costst \$96 per year.