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Time for Some Changes to ICIS? Reflections on our Highest-quality Conference

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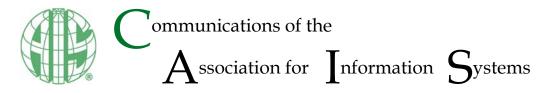
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Time for Some Changes to ICIS? Reflections on our Highest-quality Conference

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Abstract:

In this commentary, we reflect on the program chair experience of ICIS 2015 to pass on some useful organizational memory for the IS community at large. We also reflect on volunteer effort required for a high-quality conference and the challenges of maintaining quality over a diverse and dispersed reviewing effort. We ask whether we can count on this volunteer effort in a changing higher education context where universities value volunteer effort or service less than promotion and tenure. We make several wide-ranging recommendations to preserve organizational memory and ensure the ongoing excellence of ICIS. Finally, we elaborate on some hard questions about whether the current conference model is fit for purpose and consider alternative models for our high-quality conference.

Keywords: Conference Management, ICIS, AIS.

1   Introduction

ICIS, our premier conference, began in 1980 and has a well-deserved reputation for high-quality papers and excellent debate. It serves as a self-defining nexus for our community, allows us to see the shape and flow of new ideas in IS, and come together on an annual basis. Being an ICIS program chair is a huge privilege and responsibility. As program chairs, we had the privilege of shaping the conference experience, identifying the key intellectual trends in our discipline for discussion, and delivering a conference program that catered for all the diverse interests in our community. We also enjoyed working with each other tremendously and managing what is, in effect, a global project over multiple time zones.

ICIS is an institution in our discipline, and has a history of which we can be rightly proud. All that said, times change. The ICIS of 1980 bears little relation to the ICIS of today, especially in size. From 27 papers in 1980, the 2015 program contained 357 papers in 22 tracks and three panels. The 2015 ICIS conference processed 1198 submissions, which necessitated the combined involvement of 63 track chairs, 495 AEs, and over 2000 reviewers. The scale of this endeavor gave us pause for thought. Could we, after 35 years of proud history, reconsider the conference model? Did a conference model proposed in 1980 fit our purposes in 2015? What could we do to improve things for future program chairs in terms of organizational memory? Why was it so hard to recruit volunteers even though we all had excellent and geographically non-overlapping networks?

As program chairs for 2015, we felt we were in a unique position to reflect on the health and wellbeing of our most important conference, which contributes hugely to our community's intellectual life. The 2015 conference was a very labor-intensive though positive experience for us, and we were proud to deliver the best program satisfaction rating for ICIS since 2007[1]. In this paper, we reflect on the challenges we see with our much-admired conference ICIS and offer some possible solutions.

2   Naming the Challenges

From our experience as program chairs, we identified several challenges to conference organization. Namely, we struggled to find volunteers, recruit a reviewer pool that best fit the submissions, extract consistent and high-quality reviews, manage technology and administrative issues, both use and contribute to organizational memory, and balance standardization with innovation. We discuss them here before suggesting some solutions.

2.1   Finding Volunteers and Maintaining Diversity

The current program size means that the IS academic community has substantial involvement in ICIS as track chairs (TCs), associate editors (AEs) and reviewers—over 2500 people are involved in the editing and reviewing effort. To our surprise, we found it more difficult to recruit track chairs than we had anticipated, despite the fact that we ourselves saw it as an honor to be involved with our most prestigious conference. The most often-cited reason for refusal was simply a lack of time. As for why, many possible reasons exist. For instance, high-quality scholars are likely to be busy. An alternative explanation might have been that we, as program chairs, were not as well networked as we thought despite the fact that we brought our networks from AIS Regions 1, 2, and 3 with us. A third and very likely explanation is that our colleagues are finding that their own institutions do not give appropriate incentives for conference organization or reviewing. Our colleagues are likely focusing on publications and grants, which their universities value more than service. A study by Green (2008) into social work promotion and tenure shows how teaching was primary in the 80s and that scholarship and service were weighted equally behind it. Over time, promotion and tenure models now make scholarship the primary requirement, and both teaching and service have become less important (Green 2008). Given that today many promotion and tenure models are university wide rather than discipline specific (Bennett & Khanna, 2010), it is not unreasonable to assume that these changes apply to higher education as a whole and to disciplines such as our own. In addition to the refusals we encountered, some track chairs reported major difficulties in recruiting associate editors despite our efforts to recruit them early. In turn, those AEs reported issues in recruiting reviewers.

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[1] The program satisfaction rating for ICIS 2015 was 84 percent, up 20 percent on ICIS 2014 and higher than either Montreal in 2007 or St Louis in 2010 (78%)

Further, when recruiting TCs, our effort to maintain diversity (in gender, research method, AIS region, topic, and other demographics) wherever possible compounded the problem. However good our networks were, they could not represent the entire diversity of the IS community. Of course, by recruiting diverse chairs, we ensured that those TCs recruited from their networks. However, maintaining diversity was a struggle, and the lack of volunteers compounded it. The reasons that prospective TCs gave for not involving themselves were entirely reasonable: they often had high-level commitments with top journals or institutional commitments. It is this point that interested us. Academics were saying that they simply did not have the time. Over time, we knew our networks were not at fault because TCs and AEs we recruited reported same problem. We were often asked to provide emergency AEs or suggest reviewers.

So one might ask: why is there so much pressure on academics' time? We point to the massive changes that have occurred in academia since 1980. Arguably, we have witnessed a "managerial turn" in academia where academic processes are much more closely monitored and managed (Krucken, Blümel, & Kloke, 2013). At the same time, changes in funding regimes for academia mean that academics have to be much more accountable for their time. Thus, regardless of how much an academic community might value academics' volunteer work and how much reputation such work may build, their institutions may not value it and may not count it in tenure processes (Perez & Pasque, 2013). In an environment where academics are under pressure to produce papers and apply for grants on a yearly basis, volunteer activities may come a very poor second.

2.2   Recruiting a Rich and Knowledgeable Reviewer Pool

With the paper review process, we fundamentally sought to offer timely, high-quality reviews and provide submitting authors with developmental feedback at the reviewer, associate editor, and track chair levels. At least 70 percent of submitting authors to ICIS have their paper rejected. A high-quality review packet, therefore, indicates the conference's high quality and that submitting to it is worthwhile. In order to accomplish this goal, the process starts with assigning reviewers to papers for which they can provide useful feedback. We experienced several issues with achieving a good match between reviewers' expertise and the papers they were assigned to evaluate. Of course, we can all point to review requests that we managed to handle even when the paper was, to some extent, outside our direct expertise. However, there are some issues unique to conference review processes, and ICIS specifically, that exacerbate this problem.

Two such issues unique to conferences include 1) the track system and 2) the hard deadline for returned reviews. The track system provides a way to organize volunteers around a general area of expertise; however, it also requires papers to fit into a research track. A general topics track handles papers that do not neatly fit or that fit multiple tracks. However, authors may try to force their papers into a track or pick a best-fit track rather than the general topics track. Adding to this issue, it is difficult to move papers between tracks when they are a poor fit. As such, tracks may receive papers that loosely fit the track theme. However, ICIS AEs pre-recruit reviewers independent of the submissions. In contrast, journal editors recruit reviewers after their authors have submitted them and after they have read it themselves so they can select reviewers with the most appropriate expertise.

In fact, TCs solicit AEs, AEs then solicit reviewers' months in advance of the submission deadline, and this process occurs without anyone knowing the number of papers or their content. The shortage of volunteers for ICIS in general (or the sheer volume of reviews needed) culminates in pre-invitations to reviewers to "line them up" before some other track takes them. The solicitation of reviewers is quite literally a free for all due to the lack of prior knowledge of number of submissions or the content of papers. This process results in too many reviewers/experts in some tracks/areas and too few in others. Ultimately, this situation leads to the not-so-surprising suboptimal assignment of pre-committed reviewers to papers received.

2.3   Ensuring Quality Reviews

The quality of papers submitted and the quality of the review process dictates a conference's quality. While we highlight a concern about soliciting volunteers and matching reviewers to papers in Section 2.2, ultimately, the even more pressing concern involves the quality of the returned reviews. Of particular note, we believe it is more important to provide quality feedback on rejected papers than accepted ones. Accepted papers have opportunities for feedback during (and sometimes even after) the conference presentation. Rejected papers only receive the feedback in the review packet in exchange for the time and effort of submitting to the conference. The rejection point is the only contact those authors will likely have

with the conference, and it should be a good experience. This situation differs somewhat from journal reviewing where reviewers might put more effort into a high-quality manuscript than a lower-quality one. A lack of quality in the review process can likely keep these authors from attending the conference and from submitting their best work for future conferences. The fundamental role of the program committee is to ensure that high-quality papers are presented, but it also has some responsibility for maintaining ICIS going forward. It cannot do so without a high-functioning review process and consistently high-quality interactions at other touch points for the conference.

Why might some ICIS reviews be substandard? For one, given the sheer volume of work (1198 submissions and over 2000 reviewers), many reviewers have likely not previously reviewed (for ICIS or even at all); further, many have likely not had a paper accepted at ICIS or even attended it. As we have all experienced, conference reviews demonstrate significant variance in depth and quality—a problem somewhat driven by problematic mismatches between paper content and reviewer expertise. However, some reviews received for ICIS 2015 lacked almost any content and provided no more than three lines of text. Such reviews were not common but enough so to be concerning, especially with rejected papers. Unfortunately, the responsible AEs and TCs did not always try to compensate, and, sometimes, we received a summary report that provided little reflection about the paper. For example, one actual AE report said: "As both reviewers note, a well written paper, that shows a clear line of research and argument in a well thought out academic manner. Well done.".

This report clearly recommends acceptance, so the authors presumably 1) wrote a good paper and 2) would have the opportunity for additional feedback at the conference. However, the AE did nothing to contribute to the review or conference experience.

We could not manually inspect all 1198 review packets for quality; as such, in this paper, we cannot provide specific data to support our stated concerns about quality. We did, in our roles as program chairs, look at two categories of review packets: 1) packets where AEs or TCs recommended outcomes that differed from those the reviewers recommended and 2) "Amigo papers". Amigo papers constituted those papers that AEs and reviewers all from the same university handled (extracting this information required custom reports from Scholar One that an AIS staff member had to create). Such overlap suggests that some of our AEs may have had limited professional networks. Further, this concentration of effort in one university was a potential problem because the team may have lacked diversity in background and experience and so might result in a one-dimensional review that potentially harmed the authors. In all, we manually inspected one third of the review packets. In a proportion of these cases, we were compelled to request either 1) a more detailed TC report, 2) a more detailed AE report, and/or 3) replacement reviews. We believe our experience suggests a problem with review packet quality that, unfortunately, is unlikely to be isolated to ICIS 2015 given manual inspection's resource-intensive nature.

We conjecture that the review quality stemmed from inexperience among track chairs or AEs. We investigated the experience level of our track chairs and AE pool and compared the experience level and Amigo problem (see Table 1). Two thirds of our track chairs were full professors or associate professors/senior lecturers/readers, and just under one third were assistant professors/lecturers or something else. While certainly not conclusive, it is interesting to note that associate, senior lecturer, and full professor categories demonstrated a negative correlation with amigo packets and the other categories demonstrated a positive correlation with amigo packets.

2.4   Technological Challenges

As a premier technology conference, we found it somewhat surprising to encounter the technology problems we did. Some of the issues we encountered resulted from Manuscript Central's (MC) being designed for journals rather than conferences and the fact that the changes needed to support a conference represent a significant expense. As IS faculty, many of us likely teach that one role of technology is to automate those tasks that are routine and rule driven such that one more fully uses employees (or, in the case of ICIS, volunteers). Instead, we found that volunteers had to perform many routine tasks that were good candidates for automation. We summarize the major problems in Table 2 and break them down as stemming from: 1) the journal/conference differences and 2) a failure to automate.

Table 1. Summary of Associate Editor Ranks and Problem Review Packets

Track	Asst prof.	Assoc prof.	Prof.	Lect.	Sen lect.	Reader	Other	% Amigo papers
Exploring the information frontier (conference theme track)	0%	43%	35%	4%	9%	0%	9%	9%
Decision analytics and support	24%	21%	52%	0%	0%	0%	3%	11%
E-business and e-government	28%	31%	39%	0%	0%	0%	3%	14%
Economics and value of IS	5%	36%	59%	0%	0%	0%	0%	17%
General IS topics	5%	36%	59%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Human behavior in IS	18%	45%	18%	5%	9%	5%	0%	16%
Human-computer interaction	25%	20%	45%	5%	5%	0%	0%	5%
IS curriculum and education	12%	29%	41%	0%	12%	0%	6%	4%
IS design and business process management	10%	10%	65%	10%	0%	0%	5%	22%
IS governance and control	15%	35%	40%	0%	10%	0%	0%	1%
IS in healthcare	25%	25%	46%	4%	0%	0%	0%	11%
IS security and privacy	28%	41%	19%	3%	3%	0%	6%	29%
IS strategy and organizational impacts	43%	29%	14%	0%	7%	0%	7%	40%
IS theory development and use	11%	44%	22%	11%	11%	0%	0%	2%
IT implementation, adoption, and use	40%	36%	12%	4%	0%	0%	8%	0%
Managing IS projects and IS development	8%	38%	17%	17%	13%	0%	8%	9%
Methodological and philosophical foundations of IS	6%	50%	28%	6%	6%	0%	6%	31%
Panels	0%	13%	88%	0%	0%	0%	0%	18%
Practice-oriented research	0%	20%	73%	0%	0%	0%	7%	14%
Social media and digital collaborations	25%	19%	29%	6%	15%	6%	0%	21%
Sustainability and societal impacts of IS	19%	22%	52%	7%	0%	0%	0%	17%
Grand total	20%	29%	38%	4%	5%	1%	3%	12%

2.4.1   Problems that Stem from Conference versus Journal Differences

These problems stemmed from two major factors: 1) journals have a different structure from a conference (in the case of ICIS, we experienced a program chair, track chair, AE, reviewer structure) and 2) journals do not generally have a submission deadline. Further, journals typically do not experience the steep submission curve associated with a submission deadline or process almost 1200 decisions all at once. Why does the conference structure—in our case the track system—not drive the conference's technical support needs?

 While AEs and SEs on a journal each set up an account on the system and then receive privileges, conferences operate differently. ICIS (and many other conferences) create Gmail accounts for conference chairs, program chairs, and track chairs in each domain to share (e.g., track chairs in each track share one MC/Gmail account, the program chairs and the review coordinator share one account, etc.).

So, as the conference committee is seated, nearly 100 Gmail accounts are set up, added to MC, and the credentials sent to the individuals serving in these roles. Compounding the effort required for this workaround, we discovered later in the process that the generated email addresses for the track chairs did not work, which kept them from receiving copies of the decision letters.

Table 2. Major Problems with the Editorial Systems

Problem	Description	Consequence
Problems that stemmed from journal versus conference differences		
Tracks and emails	Joint email addresses for the tracks were generated via gmail accounts.	Emails addressed to our track chairs in MC were not working and none of the TCs received a copy of the final decision letters.
Testing	Tester needed to add and track all roles involved: TCs, AEs, reviewers, and authors.	A non-trivial activity that required one program chair to generate roles for testing purposes with the help of four local PhD students.
Reporting	Simple reports such as "which papers have conflicting decisions between AEs and TCs?" could not be retrieved.	AIS office generated many reports on request; however, some reports simply could not be created.
Decisions	MC could not convert a "reject flag" into an "accept flag". While sending out the decision letters, it appeared that a couple of authors got reject notifications, although the papers were actually accepted.	The "appropriate" way to make this change in MC requires the decision maker to regenerate the decision letter—a step that can also overwrite part of the letter's content.
Problems stemming from lack of automation		
Paper formatting	All 1198 submissions had to be checked manually for formatting compliance.	The conference's review coordinator and four PhD students at the site of a conference chair carried out this labor-intensive operation.
Submission deadline	Not actually possible to shut down MC at the moment the deadline closed.	We received dozens of manuscripts after the official deadline that we had to eliminate manually from the submissions received. This process was time consuming and opened us up to potential disputes with authors.

As a result of the needed workarounds, we needed to test the system and the standard "fixes". One of our program chairs developed a test plan, generated test data, and enlisted the voluntary help of four PhD students at the program chair's location. No test scripts existed, so this testing effort's success relied on our committee having a full understanding of the system and its processes. Our testing efforts helped us detect that some of the letter templates (MC creates customized letters for the different review outcomes; i.e., reject, revise, accept) needed updating. However, we failed to detect the problem with the TC Gmail accounts.

In addition, we would be remiss if we did not note that MC does not provide sufficient reporting for conferences. Anyone who has previously chaired a conference should not find this news surprising. Custom reporting was difficult largely because necessary disciplines were not available to the program chair role. In many cases, we needed reporting that an AIS staff member who had greater permissions to access disciplines had to customize. Some example reports include a track-level list of submitted decisions that show track chair, AE and reviewer recommendations, and a list of AE and reviewers with affiliation (to track Amigo papers). AIS staff members were more than willing to provide reports that we asked for, but, even then, we often had to put the data into MS Access and/or MS Excel to clean it and eliminate duplicates.

We did not identify our final issues that stemmed from MC's not being designed for conferences until decisions were made on conference manuscripts and finalized for communication to authors. It took us some time to understand and reproduce this serious and insidious error. We realized that some of the decisions letters did not reflect the actual decisions (i.e., rejected authors received acceptance letters). In order to identify this issue, we first had to manually inspect all 1198 decision letters and compare them to a back-up Excel decision list for the track chairs. We discovered that, if one changed the flag regarding the final decision from reject to accept (where the PCs overruled the TCs), MC did not update the email letter for authors. MC requires the decision maker to regenerate the email, which writes over the content of the original letter (which often contains the TCs comments for authors). We would call this issue a reproducible software bug. Thus, more than a dozen decision letters were wrong, and we had to find the needle in the haystack. When re-inspecting them all, we were able to diagnose the error: due to freed-up session spaces, we had asked all track chairs to accept a few additional papers.

At this point, the mishap with the erroneous email addresses of the track chairs came back to bite us: the track chairs could not cross-inspect the final decision letters in order to detect the problem according to a four-eyes principle. Luckily, we were two weeks ahead of our schedule and could finalize our decisions after being able to reproduce the MC fatal bug during the post-inspections. Of course, some authors became impatient because colleagues informed them after the first dozens of decision letters had already been sent out, but there was no other way to deal with the system defect.

2.4.2   Problems that Stem from Lack of Automation

ICIS has very clear formatting guidelines that include how long manuscripts may be. Because we had no automated way to minimally ensure authors complied with the length limitations, we manually had to inspect every submission and had to do so quickly to keep to the review timeline. We saw papers that were simply a half page over the limit to papers that were several pages over. A failure on our part to hold authors accountable could lead to a potential advantage to some papers and authors: those who ignore the formatting. Thankfully, our conference chairs could devote another four of their PhD students as a local review coordination team who did format checks under the supervision of our conference review coordinator. Someone on the program committee who absorbed the cost locally has often handled this task in the past.

As a final technical issue, we discovered that we could not close MC to new submissions unless the vendor's office was open and someone could manually close the submission window. We followed our predecessors and chose midnight of the respective time zone in which our conference took place. Weeks after making this decision, the AIS Office informed us that MC cannot remotely shut down the system as we had assumed. Further, Scholar One (S1), the vendor of MC, could not manually shut down MC either because its service level agreement does not include any provision that it needs to provide that service out of normal working hours. We felt strongly as a team that the deadline should be as advertised and that we had an ethical obligation to those authors that respected the deadline (and possibly put in a less good paper because of it) rather than an obligation to those authors who might possibly bet on the absence of a shut down. Because we immediately excluded all late submissions, we had to subsequently manually reinstate those who could prove they experienced system problems. Because any manual process is susceptible to errors, this issue struck us later as well when we found that, two days before the official notification date for acceptances, we had not reinstated two papers from authors who had submitted late due to genuine technical problems. They were still sitting on an Excel list that we did not work from once we informed the authors that we had accepted their papers for submission. Luckily, this issue affected only two papers, and we were able to deliver the entire review package in a week from identifying it due to the outstanding support of colleagues in our networks.

2.5   Organizational Memory

Because each conference operates as a new enterprise, the conference committee often lacked sufficient experience to even know what questions to ask of previous committees or the AIS office. Decisions we made, such as staffing the track chair and associate editor roles, would have benefited from previous chairs' experiences. Previous chairs certainly experienced many problems that we encountered, such as the technology constraints around the submission deadline or paper format checks, and AIS staff members likely knew about them; however, we experienced each problem anew. These problems have obvious solutions that we address in our recommendations.

Fundamental to many of the issues we experienced was our lack of experience or awareness of what we did not know. For example, we seated 63 track chairs and 495 AEs, many of whom we personally knew to be fine scholars and active in service roles in our community. When recruiting track chairs, we tried to recruit a balanced track chair team that represented our community. We also tried to balance for gender, ethnicity, research methods, and stage in career because we felt that doing so reflected our community's inclusive ideals. However, doing so meant that we often asked people to work with people that they did not know. Sometimes, this strategy worked brilliantly, and the end result was an inspired, diverse team. However, we observed that, for other track chair teams, the fact that people did not know each other well distinctly barred it from functioning healthily. Most of our track chairs did an admirable job, and we will be forever grateful to our colleagues. However, along the way, some tracks struggled as chairs resigned due to other commitments, fell silent and/or did not contribute, or even simply refused to do the job they had previously agreed to do.

Thus, we can identify two interacting needs about organizational memory that a program team needs to develop a high-performing set of program volunteers (i.e., track chairs, associate editors, and reviewers): 1) the conference committee needs to know who has previously served effectively (and, more importantly, who has fallen short of meeting the commitment) and 2) colleagues who accept roles such as track chair or associate editor need to understand what they have agreed to do (i.e., tasks, timeline, potential time commitment at each step and performance expectations for each task). Complicating the issue is that conference committee members must then pay attention to this information and act on it rather than counting on personal relationships. This same need for the committee to pay attention is important when thinking about some of the technical issues. The AIS maintains a set of tutorials for different roles. However, the volunteers often do not know about an issue until they experience it, and, in the tightly choreographed ICIS process, reading documentation does not always percolate to the forefront of a problem-solving effort.

2.6   Standardization versus Innovation

We slowly realized that we could characterize our work for ICIS 2015 as an issue of standardization versus innovation. Standardization of activities or processes would ensure knowledge transfer between AIS and the program chairs year after year. At the same time, we came to see that the complexity of ICIS and existing processes limited our scope for innovation.

Standardization of ICIS processes requires detailed documentation of the activities, processes, and roles for ICIS coupled with a timeline. Unfortunately, the three-page high-level document we received from the AIS Office that summarized the key milestones and activities of developing an ICIS program was far too abstract for us to really understand what our responsibilities and duties would be or how the AIS office would assist us in our endeavor. The AIS probably intends this document to persist over time, which explains why it is pitched at such a high level. We immediately turned to the previous program chairs who were hugely helpful in filling in the gaps, and we set about expanding the timeline they gave us to give us a detailed planning framework. However, we understood the scope and magnitude of our task only after we learnt by doing—an intensive undertaking. Standardized and detailed documentation of the program chair's workflows, such as the timeline we produced for ourselves, looked very different by the time we completed ICIS 2015 and bore little relation to the three page document we received at the outset.

Innovation is an important complement to standardization. We found innovating processes in MC impossible because it rigidly embedded them, and such was the degree of previous customization that any changes had a price tag from Scholar One. Innovation was feasible for those elements of the conference tasks that resided outside of MC. We decided to innovate in two areas: the program structure and the AE appointment process. We can describe our innovating the program structure only as a sweat-inducing or diaphoretic exercise, but we were determined to try (and a program satisfaction rating of 84% subsequently rewarded our efforts). We realized that participants' satisfaction scores for ICIS in past years had started to significantly trend downwards and looked at the previous survey comments in detail. When we analyzed participants' comments, we could see that dissatisfaction was often associated with the tracks offered. As such, we planned to gain some wider input about the program but also consider submission data for the tracks.

First, we crowdsourced information about which tracks we should add or drop and which format changes we should consider. We queried three groups of academics: former participants of the doctoral consortia, junior faculty, and senior scholars. We also carefully analyzed the submission data per track of the preceding years. We looked for bottlenecks where the tracks had an unfeasibly large number of submissions and also where tracks had insufficient submission numbers. Bottlenecks were a cue for dividing tracks, insufficiencies, or for combining tracks. After many rounds of analysis, we decided to rejuvenate themes such as business process management; IS design; decision analytics and support; IS theories; and IT implementation, adoption, and use into the program. We conducted these innovations completely for intrinsic reasons since we did not have access to a process handbook.

We also changed the process of AE selection in our conference. In our roles as track chairs and former AEs in previous years, we noticed that an arbitrary run on AEs occurred before the program structure was finalized. In order to avoid more than one track from lining up the same AE (in many cases, AEs over committed to more than one track without realizing), we asked our track chairs to provide a list of AEs to us. At the same time, we asked the TCs not to invite the AEs until we had resolved double nominations. We compared the lists for double nominations, acted as benevolent dictators for tie breaking, and used the backup nominations. Some TCs considered our involvement as an affront to their autonomy, but,

overall, we are confident that this process of appointing the AEs was more efficient than in the years before. Some colleagues thanked us as because they noted that, this time, they had not been approached by half a dozen track chairs for the role of AE.

While we experienced several challenges in our program chair roles, we also found the experience meaningful. In an effort to encourage (rather than discourage) potential future program chairs, we offer potential solutions to the problems we have identified in Section 3.

3   Putting Our House in Order

We believe we can and should do certain things to improve the processes that drive ICIS's quality. We present these things here, address each concern previously raised, and group potential solutions by actions future program teams can take, actions AIS can take, and actions we can take as a community[2]. Table 3 summarizes our recommendations.

3.1   Finding Volunteers

3.1.1   What Can Program Teams Do? Ask One Track Chair to Recruit Two Co-track Chairs from the Other AIS Regions

One lesson we learned from our experience was that track chairs, in the main, worked better together if they knew each other. However, we think it very important that track chair teams reflect regions (one from each ideally), diverse research methods, and demographic diversity. We can also use track chair opportunities to help develop mid-career colleagues. As such, our suggestion is that one track chair is asked to recruit two others in a balanced team and that the need for balance (region, research methods, demographics, level of experience) is made explicit in order to reflect our community's inclusive values.

Obviously, track chairs also leverage their personal networks to secure AEs, and AEs use their networks to secure reviewers. This practice should continue but perhaps be expanded to serve the conference rather than simply the track.

3.1.2   What Can the AIS Do? Send Letters

AIS could help change the mindset in universities that conference service has little value by acknowledging the contribution of all volunteers (e.g., by writing letters to chairs and/or deans). Other more public acknowledgements may also be helpful. While the effort to identify and acknowledge exemplary service (i.e., best AE or reviewer) adds to the workload of track chairs and AEs, we could potentially leverage the review systems to generate scores that incorporate on-time reviewing, number of papers handled, and so on that could provide meaningful feedback for individual annual reviews.

3.1.3   What Can the Community Do? Promote Collegiality

We have one sole recommendation for our community: promote collegiality. ICIS runs on goodwill: it is an enormous collective volunteer effort that involves over 2500 individuals. One cannot overstate the importance of interpersonal relationships: positive attitudes really matter. We all seriously need to reflect on why we contribute to the community and why it matters. We should also be realistic about changing incentives in the global higher education context in which we all work. If departments and schools value volunteer service less, how should we respond to it? What incentives and what added value might we create to help people participate? Are we arguing in our own institutions about the value of service to the academic discipline and peer esteem? Is there a generation gap in that younger academics value volunteer service less than those that have gone before? Are we passing on collegiate values? Further, we add our voices to those of our colleagues (Zhang & Niederman, 2017) to say that senior faculty can play an important role by advocating for the importance of ICIS in their home institutions' promotion and tenure guidelines and annual review expectations.

3.2   Developing a Reviewer Pool that Better Meets the Needs of Submitted Papers

3.2.1   What Can the Program Team Do? Better Manage this Process

The timeline we created for ICIS 2015 did not provide much opportunity for any submission to move between tracks; there was limited movement, but the tight timelines made it difficult and put the track chairs in a position to have to scan all papers and, in effect, substitute their judgment for that of the paper authors. A more effective solution includes 1) making authors much more aware of the use of the general topics track and 2) potentially allowing authors a chance to select two tracks. This second option permits authors to highlight the potential for fit in multiple tracks (track chairs do not bear the sole burden of identifying mismatches nor do they substitute their judgment for that of the authors). However, it allows authors to express some reservation about their understanding of the intended topic areas of a track.

3.2.2   What Can the AIS Do? Provide an Overall Reviewer Pool

We saw both tracks with too few AEs and reviewers and those with too many. Neither is ideal. As we state above, the volunteer army that ICIS needs is such that one needs to fully use any and all volunteers without overburdening any one volunteer. The pooling of reviewers around the track system (and before submissions are received) does not facilitate the most effective application of these review teams. We recommend that AE and reviewer pools be built across tracks. In each case, expertise for individuals should be captured, something the system already does, and number of accepted assignments tracked (which MC can do). With those caveats, track chairs can better leverage the full AE pool and AEs can fully leverage the reviewer pool. Pooling such resources rather than treating tracks as independent activities may further reduce the problems associated with assigning reviewers to papers that best match their expertise. Further, AIS could build and support a reviewer marketplace. Reviews that are completed on time and have sufficient quality would result in some sort of token being exchanged. Authors would then be required to be in possession of some number of tokens (perhaps three or four) in order to submit a paper[3].

3.2.3   What Can the Community Do? Volunteer To Review

The answer to this question seems rather obvious. Specifically, authors need to be held accountable for also providing reviews. If authors provided two reviews in exchange for submitting a paper, the volunteer army would be largely staffed. AIS could play a role in changing the perception among members of our community from that they do not need to review papers to that they must. The above-mentioned token system could help formalize this requirement. Ultimately, our community needs to recognize that every paper they submit comes with an obligation.

3.3   Extracting High-quality Reviews

3.3.1   What Can the Program Team Do? Provide Structure

This problem likely directly arises from the reviewer recruiting process (mentioned above). Efforts to create a more common (i.e., conference-wide rather than track-wide) reviewer pool allows at least the potential to better match reviewers and paper content while also not overtaxing or insufficiently using reviewers. However, reviewers may still perceive that, because they are reviewing conference papers, they need not put in as much effort as they would if reviewing a journal paper. Again, ICIS is a premier conference, and some universities even count ICIS papers in the promotion and tenure process. Review quality is one of the single biggest influences in a program's overall quality.

While better leveraging the pool is important, program chairs may also want to manage reviewer expectations, which they might accomplish with clear reviewer guidance. The 2016 team experimented with a reviewer template, and several journals have done the same. This sort of scaffold may be helpful in guiding inexperienced reviewers through the expectations of an ICIS review. Track chairs may also want convey an expectation to AEs that they should evaluate the quality of reviews and put in place a plan for removing and replacing poor-quality reviews. Time must be incorporated into the timeline to allow AEs to do so.

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[3] We thank Michael Avital for this great idea

We would be remiss if we did not revisit the "amigo paper" problem here. "Amigos" review teams refer to those teams that we identified as completely or mostly comprising individuals from one university. Fundamentally, this problem stems from people with poor networks' serving as AEs. The modest network results in recruiting weak reviewers, which compounds the problem. We address some efforts to improve the AE and reviewer pools above. However, we believe that this problem could persist without clear rules about diversity in reviewer selection.

3.3.2   What Can the AIS Do? Develop a Reviewer Credentialing System

An alternative to review templates, and we believe better solution, is to offer computer-based reviewer training that reviewers must complete (perhaps in conjunction with their using a template when reviewing). Completion of such training could come with a certificate (useful at annual review time for junior colleagues). Further, if our journals also enforced this standard, individual compliance would likely be greater (and the time spent on the training better leveraged). Further, if we adopt a rule that ICIS authors must be willing to do at least two reviews of submissions for every submission of their own that they put in, then it implies that all authors need to be certified reviewers before they submit.

In addition, given that a desire to build one's relationships and network often fuels conference attendance (Zhang & Niederman, 2017), AIS might consider underwriting a reviewer workshop at ICIS that targets noteworthy scholars as reviewer coaches. Many of our finest scholars are also among our finest reviewers. Efforts to share the best practices surrounding reviewing benefit the entire community and offer an additional touchpoint for junior colleagues to network with senior ones.

3.3.3   What Can the Community Do? Review

The answer to this question again has an obvious answer: provide high-quality reviews. Conferences, especially ICIS, play an important role in vetting ideas and refining research projects. However, such things cannot occur without the broad commitment from the community to provide high-quality feedback. ICIS 2017 is experimenting with a new category of submission called a "paper-a-thon". Authors will bring data, theory, knowledge of a phenomenon, and methodological or good writing skills and be invited to write a paper during the conference. Supported by mentors, authors will have 24 hours to write an extended outline with a potential for a fast-track review at the *Journal of AIS*. This innovation is exciting; however, it too needs a commitment to developmental service on the part of our community.

3.4   Leveraging Technology

3.4.1   What Can the Program Team Do? Understand and Plan

Manuscript Central is a powerful and deep editorial information system. However, it works best with journals, not conferences. In past years, program chairs have implemented many workarounds to capture the specificities of ICIS. One of the authors had been working with MC for more than 10 years in his role as a journal editor, but this level of expertise did not protect us from problems with MC in the ICIS context. Program chairs must include slack in the timeline to deal with MC issues (or any other review system implemented at ICIS), and, perhaps more to the point, they need to allow time for training in the system that identifies shortcomings.

3.4.2   What Can the AIS Do? Train and Support

As such, we recommend that AIS provide: a) better training materials for the committee members; b) offer predefined test cases, test data, and test procedures before the submission portal opens, and c) allow AIS staff and program chairs to have immediate and direct access to the Scholar One (MC) team to tackle glitches, to solve parameterization issues, and to enable submission shut-down procedures. Further, program chair credentials should provide at the least the same access as the AIS staff so they can generate more customized reports.

A well-educated and system-centric AIS review coordination process may help committee members to effectively and efficiently perform their work. Such a process includes master data management and customized report generation. Unfortunately, our experience differed, and we had to invest lots of time to tackle these challenges. Further, it would be extremely helpful if the AIS office expanded the administrative support it provides to program chairs for all AIS conference and clearly documented it in advance. That support could also include mail merges to assist with the considerable overhead of email

communication for program chairs and the pre-review of ICIS submissions. Further, it would be ideal if one could customize MC itself to allow for: 1) automated format compliance checks, 2) automated and integrated random plagiarism checks such as those that iThenticate offers, 3) document-length checks, 4) checks that reviewer attachments are automatically included in the review package, and 5) checks for potential homogeneity bias in the review team (for instance, if the AE and the reviewers come from the same institutions). If AIS chooses to move to a new platform, we would suggest that the above are minimum requirements of a new editorial system for AIS conferences such as ICIS. We estimate that, if MC had these functionalities, we could have saved more than 40 percent of our time. The program team also crucially needs the same access privileges for any editorial system that the AIS Office staff have, which would enable the program team to act quickly on issues that arise and make sound decisions based on good information.

3.4.3   What Can the Community Do? Add Expertise

We did not expect the technical limitations that previous program chairs faced. Given the depth of IT expertise in our discipline, the notion that our academic organization has used poor technology to support us seems like something people knew and ignored. We are more than capable of solving this issue. Recently, AIS has formed a committee to look at MC alternatives and possible ways to improve MC support for our conferences. Our community needs to understand this issue and be heard on how it can be improved.

3.5   Using and Contributing to Organizational Memory

3.5.1   What Can the Program Team Do? Contribute

In order for ICIS committees to not repeat past mistakes, the program team must make creating and maintaining organization memory one of its primary activities. For example, creating and contributing to a system that captures the quality of individual service would provide valuable input to future teams. Such a system can protect high-performers from being asked to serve in multiple roles in any given year or over multiple years, and it can save program chairs, track chairs, and even associate editors from having to solve a problem with poor performance by avoiding it altogether. We could achieve such a system simply by using the rating system already available in MC or by building something more specific.

A more complete answer to using and contributing to organizational memory may lie in treating our conferences as though they are journals. Essentially, rather than treating each conference as a new enterprise, we should have multi-year, nested terms for each role. Track chair candidates would be listed in a pool after completing high-quality service as an associate editor, and associate editors would be listed in their respective pool having served admirably as reviewers. Having staggered multi-year terms for these roles would establish a structure to maintain organizational memory. Such a structure may also induce greater care taken in serving in these roles because they could represent a more substantive contribution when listed on an annual performance report.

Another relatively simple action for ensuring knowledge transfer between outgoing and incoming program teams would be to institute a committee meeting of program teams at ICIS that comprised the current and future committee members up to two or three years in the future. As things stand, conference chairs report to the ICIS Executive Committee, but program chairs do not need to do so. We volunteered to do so and received a gracious hearing on the agenda in 2015. The requirement to report back educates colleagues as to the often hidden complexity of the program and allows them to air, share, and potentially solve problems and pass on organizational learning. An even more expansive review among the program teams could help at many levels (i.e., conference, program, tracks, doctoral consortium, etc.).

Finally, the program team must be prepared to serve over multiple years. There is currently an informal norm that program chairs serve independently as track chairs two years before their program chair role and then serve together as the general topics chairs one year before their program chair role. However, this norm is not formally required. We found that some future program chairs simply did not want the added work two years out. We believe that we need to build awareness among the program chairs about the roles and responsibilities of track chairs. The success of program chairs wholly depends on the quality of work that track chairs turn in, and developing strong track chairs can only come from fully understanding the role. Further, future program chairs should serve together on a track (preferably a heavy submission track) to build a good working relationship as a team. Finally, such requirements should be formally spelled out as part of the role when someone is asked to serve as a program chair. Even if for

very good reasons it is not always possible to involve all program chairs two years out, we strongly suggest that we should strive for this ideal and that serving together on the general topics track a year before is essential.

3.5.2   What Can the AIS Do? Create and Manage an Online Repository

We urgently need an easily accessible electronic repository for ICIS program chairs. The AIS website could host this information for simplicity and to build up organizational memory. This resource would include templates for emails to track chairs; a timeline of tasks; and role descriptions of program chairs, track chairs, associate editors, and reviewers (with a fair estimate of how long it takes to do the job). Of course, a repository in itself is not enough: we need to embed the program organizational memory into ICIS processes. While individual past program chairs helped us access organizational memory, the fact that they were willing to do so in no way obviates what we see as a very urgent need. To have the templates, timelines, and role descriptions for ICIS (and other conferences) easily and quickly available achieves two things. First, it saves valuable time for the program chairs who would no longer need to track down templates and a detailed timeline, and, second, it would clearly show what it is involved in each role and allow us to set expectations. Sensitive information could be password protected, but we would like to see as much information as possible open to the community because ICIS belongs to all of us.

3.5.3   What Can the Community Do? Volunteer

We know we may now sound like a broken record, but ICIS needs conscientious and recurring volunteerism. Organizational memory can be documented electronically and made available; however, the people who have previously served have much implicit knowledge. Senior scholars who agree to serve as track chairs in combination with more junior colleagues quite possibly provide the more effective mechanism for transferring knowledge.

3.6   Balancing Standardization and Innovation

3.6.1   What Can the Program Team Do? Engage in Limited Innovation

For some program teams, one reason they volunteer is to improve the conference experience. However, given the long timeline from conception to delivery of the conference, innovation in any given year is not delivered before the next year's committee plans their innovation, which taxes the volunteer resources and creates a bit of a disjointed ICIS experience. We think innovation is important, but it should be done in such a way as to be evaluated for effectiveness and, where desired, preserved for future conferences. We could do so most effectively if program teams: 1) focused on one or two innovations, 2) assessed the innovation in their planning and evaluated its effectiveness, and 3) delivered the idea and set of processes for implementing to the next year's committee along with the assessment of how the innovation was received.

Table 3 summarizes our recommendations.

Table 3. Recommendations for Putting Our House in Order

Problem	Potential source	Potential solutions: program team	AIS	Community
Finding volunteers	• Universities may not value conference service in promotion and tenure decisions.	• One track chair is asked to recruit two others in a balanced team. • Must leverage personal networks.	• AIS could send letters to deans.	• We could treat ICIS service as a feeder to opportunities that are valued (i.e., journal reviewing, AEing, etc.). • We need to advocate for the value of service and ICIS in our own institutions.

Table 3. Recommendations for Putting Our House in Order

Recruiting a reviewer pool that best fits the submissions	• Track system may negatively impact papers getting to the "right" AE and review team. • Pre-invitation to reviewers to create a sufficient pool may result in too many experts in some areas and too few in others (or reviewer expertise is not fully realized).	• Build track movement into time line. • Allow authors to select up to two tracks and have TCs make final decision on which track.	• Provide support for recruiting reviewers to an overall pool with expertise captured and all AEs draw from the pool (AEs must still be obligated to provide reviewers to the pool). • Provide administrative support for track transfers. • Promote a reviewer marketplace using tokens.	• We must support our premier conference. • For every paper an author submits, the author must provide two reviews: we need to couple the idea of submission with an obligation to review in exchange. • Consider a token system for reviews to embody this idea.
Extracting consistent and high-quality reviews	• Inexperienced with reviewing. • Inexperienced with ICIS • A reviewer practice of putting more effort into reviews of high-quality papers than lesser-quality ones.	• The ICIS program team experimented with a review template in 2016—consider the outcomes from this. • Have clear rules about reviewer diversity to avoid the "amigo" problem.	• Consider an AIS reviewer credentialing system. • Need to create training opportunities for reviewers using top scholars and, referring to Alan Lee's great paper (1995) on reviewing, perhaps Allen might be willing to create a training video.	• Commit to providing a high-quality, constructive, and developmental review.
Leveraging technology support	• Many opportunities for technology to ease the burden of the conference volunteers; instead, many things that could be automated were done manually.	• Plan for staffing hours.	• Clarify what administrative support is available. • Make sure that program chairs have the same access rights as AIS staff. • Provide training and support for optimum knowledge transfer.	• Investigate alternatives to Manuscript Central. • Leverage our own not inconsiderable expertise to find good technical solutions for conferences.
Utilizing and contributing to organizational memory	• Creating high-performing volunteer army.	• Organization memory use and development. • Treat conferences as journals, not one-time tournaments. • Program chairs need to serve together the previous year on the general topics track. • Institute a committee meeting of past and current program chairs at ICIS each year.	• Create an easily accessible online repository for program chairs. • Maintain and provide a list of who has previously served effectively, what is expected in each role. • Require program chairs to report to the ICIS executive committee.	• Volunteer and help mentor doctoral students and/or colleagues in the expectation of the volunteer roles.

Table 3. Recommendations for Putting Our House in Order

Balancing standardization and innovation	• Limited documentation provides some level of standardization. • Often recreating the wheel as temptation to innovate is felt.	• Preserve core set of standardizing principles and limit innovation to one or two key ideas.	• Provide standard guidelines; perhaps automate the delivery to coincide with what is needed at that point in the timeline. • Require reporting on innovations as part of the program chairs report to the ICIS executive committee.	• Be vocal and participate in efforts to identify strengths of the conference, areas for improvement, and efforts to innovate so that innovation is properly targeted.

4   Alternative Models for ICIS

In addition to contemplating the ways we could improve the conference process and outcomes, one of the questions we asked ourselves when reflecting on our experience of ICIS 2015 was a challenging one: what if the ICIS model has outgrown itself and is no longer fit for purpose? In this section, we consider alternative models. We start by considering leaving ICIS as it is because it may be that our experience of ICIS may reflect unreasonable expectations of that model.

4.1   Keep Current ICIS Format

Of course, we can collectively decide that ICIS is not really broken and leave it as it is. Certainly, reasonable people can disagree, and some our community will believe the opinions expressed in this paper reflect somewhat idealistic expectations for what ICIS can be. As long as there are cases such as Fort Worth that demonstrate that the number of attendees and participants' satisfaction can increase, ICIS can certainly continue as is and remain our premier conference. Perhaps the only thing we only need to manage conference committee members' expectations.

There are very good reasons to not make any drastic changes. As Dennis, Valacich, Fuller, and Schneider (2006) note, our discipline's promotion and tenure standards in relationship to the publishing opportunities seem to combine to create a "vicious cycle" of turnover, declining influence, and declining productivity (Dennis et al., 2006, p. 1). The high standards of ICIS offer an opportunity for it to appear in lists used for promotion and tenure. According to a recent study, accepted papers at ICIS count in about a third of survey respondents' university promotion and tenure decisions (Zhang & Niederman, 2017). Any decline in the standards (i.e., higher acceptance rates or removal of peer review) may result in its removal from such lists, and any improvement in standards (i.e., fewer papers accepted, lower acceptance rates) shrinks the opportunities for untenured faculty to be successful in their tenure pursuits.

4.2   ICIS Becomes Smaller through Being More Selective

In order to put less pressure on all committee members, one could think of making ICIS smaller. Since doing so would not likely restrict the number of submissions, the only lever will be the acceptance rate or the format of the conference.

The acceptance rate could be reduced to 10 or 15 percent, for instance, which would make ICIS more selective and, thus, smaller. However, reducing the size of ICIS might have some serious consequences. First, a lower acceptance rate may even increase the number of submissions if the community considers it more valuable to submit papers to our flagship conference. Thus, the workload for the committee would not decrease since the review process is the most challenging part of that workload. Second, a lower acceptance rate would offer junior scholars less exposure to our community. Thus, we believe we should only take this step if we can provide alternative venues to our junior colleagues. Third, the likely consequence of a reduced acceptance rate is a reduction in the number of attendees, which would negatively impact the key revenue source for AIS unless it increases registration fees. Thus, we have to carefully consider additional sources for financing AIS, which is unlikely to be an easy task in our association.

If we wish to reduce the workload with respect to the submission and review process, we have to think about sacrificing other structural elements. We could think of taking out tracks, which would make ICIS less comprehensive. Furthermore, we could take out, for instance, the "research in progress" format.

Doing so would certainly reduce complexity for the program committee but, again, would severely impact the financial model of AIS. In addition, it would reduce the opportunities of those community members who seek feedback in an early phase of their research. In principle, we could also consider abandoning the submission of full papers and instead focus on research in progress. But doing so would negatively affect the quality of our community's research and the business case for ICIS. We believe that both categories, completed research papers and research in progress, should have their place at ICIS and that reducing the number of tracks would hamper the scope and coherence of our community. Thus, we conclude that we need to consider any proposals to limit the size of the program with a large degree of caution.

4.3   ICIS, and Other Conferences, Become More Important than Journals

Another option is to raise the status of ICIS even further to provide more compelling arguments for serving on its committee. In disciplines in which knowledge has a limited half-life (e.g., computer science or the natural sciences), flagship conferences do play a more important role than journals. The review process is very rigorous and the time-constrained format assures that time critical topics get published before they become irrelevant— something that is unlikely to happen if a journal review process lasts up to five years. The Computing Research Association (CRA), the equivalent of the AIS in the computer science discipline, undertook a formal and sustained lobbying effort in their discipline to ensure that some conference papers are seen as more important than journal papers. AIS could consider this option as well.

Such a repositioning has certainly some charm, and it would further improve the financial model of ICIS. But it would also constitute a detrimental raid into the sphere of our IS journals as key academic institutions, which may affect the reputation of these institutions and the colleagues involved. Journals can themselves consider responding to critical topics with shorter review cycles or more special issues. We believe it will be very hard to make this transition to conferences as superior to journals since we view our key journals as almost untouchable.

4.4   Other Conference Formats

One thing we can do is consider the examples of the main conferences of our neighboring disciplines, management and computer science, to see if any of them might be appropriate for IS. Note that a key attribute of ICIS, which few other conferences replicate, is that it rotates geographical areas and, thus, fosters a truly global IS community. This vision of internationalism may be well worth fighting for. The IS model for conferences seems to differ from other disciplines' model for them in that other models either lack peer review or involve only shorter length papers or abstracts. Altering either of these two areas (length of paper or peer review) would substantially change the resource-intensive nature of our conference.

On average, 5,700 participants attend the Institute for Operations Research and Management Science (INFORMS) annual meeting each year. It is divided into more than 50 topic divisions, which sponsored cluster chairs and invited chairs lead in order to represent the diversity of its community[4]. Thus, one can consider the conference as a platform for diverse subcommunities. One of its subconferences is the Conference on Information Systems & Technology (CIST)[5]. Despite its huge level of topic diversity, the INFORMS Annual Event accepts abstracts and posters only.

The Academy of Management (AOM) Annual Event hosts more than 10,000 participants and is held in the US or Canada. It is divided into approximately 30 divisions and interest groups. Many colleagues will be familiar with the Organizational Communication and Information Systems division (OCIS). AOM does offer full peer review on traditional papers, discussion papers, and panel papers. The entire program comprises different session types such as the all-academy theme, professional development workshops (PDW), symposia and paper sessions, caucuses, and the teaching and learning conference[6]. Caucuses primarily provide an opportunity for scholars to innovate, share, and discuss emergent ideas still in the incubatory stage. This format provides an effective way for AOM members with shared interests to find one another and to develop a sense of community in the larger AOM. In contrast to the refereed scholarly program that has standardized time blocks and formats, PDWs include a wide variety of session formats with various

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[4] For details see http://meetings2.informs.org/wordpress/houston2017/sponsored-cluster-chairs/ and
  http://meetings2.informs.org/wordpress/houston2017/invited-chairs/
[5] See also http://meetings2.informs.org/wordpress/houston2017/cist-2017/
[6] See http://aom.org/annualmeeting/components/

session durations. These workshops include doctoral consortia and junior faculty consortia that the academy's divisions, interest groups, and committees organize.

The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), which covers computer scientists and software developers, does not organize an annual event. However, it sponsors more than 1,800 annual meetings, conferences, and events worldwide and curates content for all of the technical disciplines of interest in IEEE. Thus, it inhibits the highest degree of heterogeneity of formats and content offerings. However, it publishes accepted submissions on one platform. IEEE publishes more than 1,500 conference proceedings every year, which are recognized as a vital collection of consolidated published papers in electrical engineering, computer science, and related disciplines.

The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) follows a special interest group (SIG)-centric approach. SIGs sponsor more than 170 computing conferences, workshops, and symposia around the world. These events attract academics and professionals from a broad range of computing disciplines. Events range in size from conferences with tens of thousands attendees to small workshops. Computing experts submit leading-edge research papers for presentation at the conference and inclusion in the published proceedings. These refereed papers comprise the major source of research in the ACM Digital Library. Conferences typically incorporate invited lectures, paper and poster sessions, and panel sessions. Interestingly, ACM conferences have appeared that seem to blend their output into a journal format[7].

What would happen if we adopted one of these formats? Our brief review above shows a huge variation in formats. Few large annual conferences seem to change geographical regions every year as we do with ICIS, which adds to the complexity of arrangements. However, it is also instructive to note that our colleagues in other disciplines do appear to get funding from their institutions to present abstracts, rather than full papers.

Perhaps we have to take a step back and think about the function of conferences in our community. ICIS represents a touchstone of current, high-quality intellectual thought in our community. It also allows a space for an international community to come together and for new researchers to meet more senior researchers. It can act as a training ground for new reviewers and editors. Could we achieve such things without the massive effort of peer review of full papers? Could our resources be more effectively diverted into giving each other more chances for discussion and working through ideas? Is too much community time spent on inward looking conferences rather than engaging for impact? Or are conferences a vital first step in helping our new researchers publish internationally peer-reviewed full-length papers?

5   Conclusion

Our experience of ICIS 2015 was labor intensive, exhilarating, and rewarding in equal measure. However, we all agreed that, if we could pass on the learning from the experience, we should endeavor to do so. We developed a deep appreciation for those who had gone before and an understanding of the complexity of ICIS. Above all, we realized the importance of clearly articulated processes, roles, and the value of teamwork. It was also an object lesson in how an information system—Manuscript Central—dictated processes that did not quite fit with the task's requirements. We hope some of our reflections here spark a wider debate, which represents partly why we wrote the paper. We are proud to have been part of the ICIS 2015 collective effort and proud to be part of the IS community. However, we feel that our sense of kinship with our community should not prevent us from asking hard questions about the future of ICIS: it is precisely because we care about the future health of our discipline that we raise the questions in this paper.

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[7] An example would be *Proceedings of the ACM on Interactive, Mobile, Wearable and Ubiquitous Technologies (IMWUT)—A Premier Journal Series for Research Relevant to the Post-PC Era* (see also http://imwut.acm.org).

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