EDITORIAL PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first edition of the *International Journal of Systems and Society* (IJSS). Although this is the first edition of the journal it is the offspring of the UK Systems Society Journal, *Systemist*, that has been printed exclusively for members since 1975. *Systemist* has a long tradition of publishing Systems papers but the Society is excited by the prospect that IJSS provides. It will enable Systems practitioners and academics to publish their ideas and experiences to the wider Systems community and provide the Society with a broader platform. Whilst maintaining many of the features and traditions of Systemist the IJSS is different. It is different in that all papers published here are double blind refereed and the journal is available to the wider Systems community and not just members. The journal will be widely available to interested readers through IGI's excellent portfolio of journals although membership of the UKSS will give access to IJSS at an attractive rate.

IJSS will publish two kinds of papers. The traditional academic papers that one would expect to find in an international journal where papers are discussing new ideas or papers that are challenging existing work. The papers will include empirical research but they will relate to past and emergent paradigms. As with the practitioner papers interdisciplinary research is particularly welcome. The practitioner papers will also be of the highest standards and undergo double blind refereeing but will have a different format to the "normal" academic journal papers. The practitioner papers will reflect the practical difficulties of implementing ideas and what has been learnt from the practice. In particular we anticipate papers concerned with the effects and the problems of managing change. Practitioner papers will include practice that crosses the boundaries of traditional management science. Interdisciplinary papers are particularly welcome especially those that challenge the paradigms and assumptions of individual disciplines or functions.

The journal will be published twice each year and include 4-5 academic/practitioner papers in each issue. There also will be a "End Note' in each issue written by members of the Systems community in which they will tell us about an aspect of Systems they consider of interest. The intention is for each issue to include short papers from colleagues across the globe. In that way we can all share in a Systems perspective of local and international events and concerns. The final section of the journal will include a book review. The review will be of a book considered of importance. Mostly the books will be current but this need not necessarily be the case if a reviewer wishes to raise the importance of a key text they posses that is no longer published.

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We hope that you enjoy this first edition that is a mixture of theory building, Empirical research and Innovative methodologies and applications.

THIS EDITION

John Martin, who is a long-standing member of the UKSS, writes the first paper. John has made a significant contribution to Systems education through his work for the Open University and many "sytemists" owe their introduction to Systems Thinking and Practice to John. John has always been at the forefront of Systems innovation in Systems education indeed I have a copy of one of John's early texts "*Systems Management and Change*" [out of print now] in which he substituted narrative with diagrams. To some this was frustrating to others enlightening; A bold thing to do and typical of John. In many respects this first paper continues in this vein of exploration and innovation. The paper, entitled, "*How Can We Incorporate Relevant Findings from Psychology into Systems Methods?"* is a study of citation patterns. The result of his investigation suggests that it is rare for Systems writers to cite findings from the cognitive sciences, though common in writers in analogous areas, for example Psychology. As a consequence Martin suggests that this omission raises the possibility that there may be useful areas of modern psychology that are neglected by systems practitioners. For example, behavioural economics in which the idea of a 'decision illusion', the distinction between System 1 and System 2 brain systems that are believed to underlie these illusions is introduced. This possibility brings with it the problem of how to interface descriptive (and usually reductionist) domains such as psychology with normative systems methods. Martin suggests that this can be managed by switching attention from 'How to do it' to 'What might go wrong', raising the possibility that systems methods might be much enriched by a systematic analysis of failure modes.

Frank Stowell writes the second paper. Frank is an ex President of the UKSS and a long-standing member of the Board. He has played a major role in many of the changes that have taken place in the society over the past decades as well as editing Systemist. In some respects his paper continues with the theme of cognitive processing and how the might be addressed in practice. The paper entitled, *"Organisational Power and the Metaphor Commodity"* deals with the difficulty of recognizing then "managing" power in organisations. The ideas expressed in the paper were developed from an action research project carried out in a light engineering company. The underpinning philosophy of the ideas reflect the phenomenology of Husserl [1859-1938] and the sociological roots in interpretivism, e.g. Schutz [1899-1959], These ideas have subsequently been incorporated in some areas of Systems practice including Soft Systems Methodology, the Appreciative Inquiry Method and Client Led Information System Creation.

The argument is thus: Organisational intervention is problematic as each inquirer has a different notion of what an organisation is and in order to make sense of it the inquirer adopts a model or concept of organisation. Stowell's research suggests that models of organisation are unsatisfactory because they assume a certain level of predictability. Studies show that that members of an organisation cooperate only when it is in their interest to do so; in other words it is far from being predictable. Organisational research carried out at the University of Lancaster suggests that ontology be abandoned in favor of epistemology in recognition of the dynamic of organisational behaviour. This is particularly the case at a time of change when tensions are created that threaten its stability. Individual members and groups may use their power in an attempt to shape outcomes. Stowell proposes the notion of "commodity" as a means of enhancing our understanding of the way organisational power is used. Commodity is introduced as a means of surfacing the way in

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which individual power is used. By thinking in terms of commodity the inquirer gains insight into the effects of power within the group and opens the way for a wider range of discussions to take place that may bring out hidden and imagined manifestations of power.

The third paper is one written by Steen Leleur. Steen has made many useful contributions to systems thinking and practice particularly in the area of Planning. This paper is a review paper that provides us with an account of Systems thinking clearly influenced by a particular strand of Systems ideas. Leleur's paper encourages us to think about the evolution of ideas over the recent past. In the paper, entitled "*The Meaning of System: Towards a Complexity Orientation in Systems Thinking*" the author reviews the generic meaning of 'system' and attempts to put a chronological framework around key ideas. Leleur goes on to consider the benefits of adding ideas from complexity theory. He argues that with system as the core concept of systems theory, its actual meaning is not just of theoretical interest but is highly relevant also for systems practice. A complexity theory and Luhmann's ideas should be given greater recognition by the systems community. A complexity orientation, he asserts, may contribute to extend and enrich the explanatory power of current systems theory when used to address complex real-world problems. Systems practice may be strengthened by the selective use of five research approaches, namely functionalist, interpretive, emancipatory, postmodern and complexity. These function as different but complementing 'epistemic lenses' in a process described as constructive circularity.

The final paper, by Teri Taylor is entitled *"Considering Complexity in Simple Solutions: What's so Complicated about Skype*?" This paper is concerned with Video-based communications technologies. Increasing expectations of efficiency and cost-effectiveness gains in higher education Terri explores the question about the use of technology as a potential supplement [or replacement] for traditional face-to-face activities. The article conceptualises the intricacies of influencing factors affecting the performance of video-based communications in student support activities. By thinking of video-based communication in terms of a complex adaptive system, Taylor explains how a multitude of intrinsic and extrinsic variables interact and impact upon individual experiences. With the use of an illustrative diagram, Taylor explores how psychology and behavioural aspects integrate with communications theory, technological experience, task objectives and social presence theory to promote careful consideration of individual need and purpose when planning for technological implementation.

These papers, although dealing with different subjects are united by the desire to push Systems thinking and practice forward.

ALSO IN THIS EDITION

Thoughts from Around the Systems Community

Systems Thinking: Dealing with Time Scales – Ian Roderick

Book Review

Introduction to Systems Theory – Niklas Luhman
Reviewed by Stephen Probert

We hope that you will enjoy this edtion and contribute to the journal yourself.

Frank Stowell
Editor-in-Chief
IJSS

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Frank Stowell is Emeritus Professor of Systems and Information Systems at the University of Portsmouth. He has a PhD in Organisational Change and his research centers around methods of participative design. He has supervised a number of research projects from modeling complex decision-making in mental health care, knowledge management, through to methods for client-led information systems development. He has been co-chair of a number of research council funded projects notably the Systems Practice for Managing Complexity project, designed to help managers address complex issues, which has developed into a self sustaining network. His latest publication The Managers Guide to Systems Practice *(2012, Wiley Chichester) is a text written expressly with the kind of managers in mind who have attended the workshops over the past decade. The text deals with Systems ideas and models that are discussed as potential methods of addressing the complex issues encountered in the workplace. He is past President of the UK Academy of Information Systems and the UK Systems Society (http://www.ukss.org.uk/). He presently occupies the chair of the Council of Information Systems Professors and has recently joined the Board of the World Organisation of Systems and Cybernetics. He has published papers and texts in the field and presented papers at a number of international conferences in Europe and the United States. Prior to his academic career he was employed by central government as a consultant within the Management Systems Development Group and has experience of defining and developing IT supported management information systems.*

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