

Letter from the Editor The Professional Organization as Community

Bridget N. O'Connor

The Organizational Systems Research Association (OSRA), which sponsors this journal, celebrated its 20th anniversary in Cleveland, Ohio in February, 2001 with a continuing sense of community. The term *community* is bandied around a lot these days, meaning different things to different groups. A *learning* community is composed of individuals who know each other, who are self-organizing, task focused, use tools for sharing ideas, and generally have some type of an output. A *knowledge building* community is a group of individuals who may or may not know each other, are organized around tasks, participate in peer review, and continually adapt and use knowledge. *Communities of practice*, a term popularized by Etienne Wenger, have embodied knowledge and long-term participants; they are a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise.

For those of us who are members of OSRA, it is perhaps the combination of these definitions of *community* that defines our relationship to each other and to our profession. OSRA's relatively small size may be an advantage to our community building, as we tend to know those members who attend our annual conference and write for our publications. We have also been involved in the development of two major curriculum efforts and are in the midst of a third (organized around tasks; have an output). We have a Web site, a listserv, and a newsletter (use tools for sharing ideas). We have a journal that is built around the process of peer review, and we are continually working to define our field and develop new ways of sharing ideas and conducting and publishing research around the issues we care most about (adapt and use knowledge). Our primary voice to the world and to each other, the *ITL&PJ*, is now accessible through our Web site. And our voice is getting stronger and louder as we have renewed our relationship with Bell & Howell Information

Learning, which will ensure that researchers and practitioners worldwide have access to our scholarship. *ITL&PJ* articles are now accessible to subscribers of Bell & Howell programs.

OSRA, our professional community, is characterized by our long-term shared expertise and passion for this field of organizational systems, which was initially referred to as office systems, office information systems, and/or end-user computing. We once described our field as emerging; now, we refer to it as established. It is established because OSRA has been an *active* community. We have built community through curriculum projects, conferences, newsletters, and journal issues. We share what we know with each other, and we're passionate about what we do. And as we've moved from "office systems" to "organizational systems," we've changed our journal's name to reflect our emphasis on research on how information technology is used to support learning and performance.

This journal is but one output of our community, but an important one. So I'm using the theme of community as I retire from the position of journal Editor to say a public thank you to the entire OSRA community and to those of you who have submitted manuscripts and have served as members of three Review Boards (1998-99; 1999-00; 2000-01). A journal is only as strong as the quality of the manuscripts it receives and the vigor of its reviewers.

Additional thanks to Assistant Editor Lynn Bacon, whose desktop and Web publishing skills have given a new look to the journal. And thanks to Associate Editor Bob Brookshire, who will begin his term as Editor with the Fall 2001 issue. Bob is well known as a researcher, scholar, and

Bridget N. O'Connor is Associate Professor, Department of Administration, Leadership, and Technology, New York University.

instructor and will take the *ITL&PJ* to new heights. I've been a member of our OSRA community for all of its 20 years, and being a part of this community and serving as journal Editor these past three years has been very rewarding. I'm sure my community membership will be equally exciting in the next 20 years!

About This Issue

Continuing the theme of community, we've invited Jack Stallard and Charlie Ray, early leaders and active members of our OSRA community who are retiring this year, to reflect on the changes they have seen in the field. In their opening editorial, they describe the roads and byways of their careers as the entire field changed focus from administrative skills to organizational systems. They remind us of OSRA's shared mission of supporting the learning needs of the end user through innovative curricula, teaching strategies, and directions for inquiry.

Both of the articles in the Research Section of this issue describe how individuals use software programs. In the opening research article of this issue, Catherine Chen used think aloud protocols to examine students' thinking processes, showing that students using menu interfaces were more likely than command-based interface users to use large files and create relations for complex problem solving. Then, Bob Mills tackles the difficult issue of instructional software evaluation. He used a computer-tracking system to record navigational paths and selections made by

learners and compares the way they navigated a program designed to teach relational database functions with their overall success in mastering the subject.

In our Making a Difference Section, Jan Henry, Susan Rehwaldt, and George Vineyard offer results of a survey in which they investigated the importance of academic and worksite elements of internships—both in general and in particular—from the perspectives of both the employer and the student intern. Their findings will be of interest to anyone involved in running or participating in internship programs. Then, as an aid to individuals doing survey research in organizations, James Bartlett II, Joe Kotrlík, and Chadwick Higgins recommend procedures to determine the sample size for continuous and categorical variables using Cochran's formulas.

We conclude this issue with a book review and an instructional software program review. First, Michael Prietula reviews Mary Boone's *Managing Inter@ctively* (New York: McGraw-Hill 2001), which is based on 85 interviews on how managers use technologies to connect, inform, and engage. Prietula suggests that *Managing Inter@ctively* is not a book about technology but rather a book about management in an age of technology. Finally, Eric Canny reviews *Virtual U®*, a software simulation that models university operations. Those of us in academe, whether we are directly involved in higher education administration or have faculty roles, may find this program fascinating.

Material published as part of this journal, either on-line or in print, is copyrighted by the Organizational Systems Research Association. Permission to make digital or paper copy of part or all of these works for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that the copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage AND that copies 1) bear this notice in full and 2) give the full citation. It is permissible to abstract these works so long as credit is given. To copy in all other cases or to republish or to post on a server or to redistribute to lists requires specific permission and payment of a fee. Contact Donna Everett, d.everett@morehead-st.edu to request redistribution permission.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, formerly known as the *Office System Research Journal*, publishes articles related to the field of organizational and end-user information systems (OEIS). Submissions may present the results of research in the discipline, deal with research methodologies and data treatment techniques, or describe research or experiences related to instruction in the discipline. For the “Making a Difference” section, manuscripts that discuss our theoretical bases or describe an innovative policy, procedure, method, technique, or practice that has potential benefit for systems professionals and/or educators and technology trainers are encouraged. We also accept reviews of current books—both academic and popular presses—related to OEIS. All submissions are submitted to a blind review process.

Authors should follow the style described for manuscripts and bibliographies in the Fourth Edition (1994) of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; however, tables should be single-spaced. Authors should not be identified anywhere in the manuscript. Submit four copies of the manuscript. On the original copy, include a cover page with author name, title, organizational affiliation, telephone number, and email address. A 100-150 word abstract of the manuscript should be included with the manuscript.

Manuscripts should be submitted exclusively to the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*. Previously published manuscripts are not acceptable. Manuscripts are selected through a blind review process involving the editors and referees selected from the Review Board. The Journal is indexed in the *Business Education Index*, the *Current Index to Journals in Education*, and the *Computer Literature Index*.

Upon acceptance, a digital copy in Microsoft Word format will be required. Send four copies of your manuscript to Robert G. Brookshire, Editor, *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, James Madison University, MSC 0202, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA 22807.