

Debate Forum Editorial

Karlheinz Kautz

Copenhagen Business School

karl.kautz@cbs.dk

In the last volume of the SJIS the problem of agency and dealing with it as proposed in social science theories such as Structuration Theory and Actor-Network Theory was subject of the debate forum.

This volume takes up another timely topic namely that of the concept of ontology and its foundation for conceptual modelling, in particular the appropriateness and influence of the so-called Bunge-Wand-Weber (BWW) ontology for among others designing and evaluating modelling languages and conceptual models. Ontology as a background and conceptual modelling as analytical and constructive systems development lie at the heart of the SJIS mission namely promoting research that engages in the field and should therefore be for interest for the IS community at large and in particular the readership of the SJIS.

At the Information Systems Seminar in Scandinavia in Finland 2003 (IRIS 26) Ron Weber gave a presentation entitled “Theoretically Speaking” in which he laid out his view on theory-building in the IS discipline. This presentation caused some lively discussion mainly with regard to Weber’s philosophical perspective and his ‘materialist’, some might argue his seemingly objectivist and formalistic view of the world and the rather subjectivist and interpretivist approach to the world by many of the present Scandinavian researchers (if the objectivist-subjectivist dichotomy makes sense at all). The matter could of course not be resolved during the talk. It resulted however in an invitation of continuing the debate face-to-face during my sabbatical 2005 in Australia. Although this continuation never really happened due to time constraints, for me it became the starting point to discuss Weber’s concept of ontology with other Australian colleagues and I found that the different perspectives and opinions were well worth being shared by a larger public. Thus I invited one of my discussion partners to formulate his position on “The Ontological Foundation of Conceptual Modelling” in written form for the debate section of the

SJIS. To respond to his standpoint I could find a number of excellent experts in the field from South Europe, North America, Australia and Scandinavia, among them to my great delight, Yair Wand and Ron Weber, the authors of the BWW ontology, which is subjected to a critique in the opening statement of this debate forum. Whether the critique is justified or not, I leave to the readers to judge—the debate forum should help you to make informed judgment.

Organising the debate provided me with the opportunity to get some clarification regarding ontologies (by the way, the spell checker does not like the plural form of ontology) and conceptual modelling. I hope it will in a similar way assist the readers, interested in the topic, in finding their position and gaining new insights.

I like to thank all participants in the debate forum for their contributions and their support in reviving the academic tradition of debate.

I have already a new topic in mind for the next volume. The revival of design science as a valid research approach to IS should give us ample opportunity for debate.