Editorial

Disciplinary tensions: the predicted demise of information systems as a discipline in its own right?

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In its advisory capacity, the Permanent Commission of the National Council of Universities (CP-CNU)[1] may propose to the French government the removal of Information Systems (IS) from Section 06 – Management Sciences. Disturbed by the potential consequences, the editorial board of *Systèmes d'Information et Management* (SIM), the leading IS journal in French, felt compelled to respond to an announcement that could foreshadow the end of Information Systems as a distinct academic discipline[2] within the French-speaking scholarly community.

To speak plainly, France is currently undergoing a period of economic strain, and the government is actively seeking every possible avenue to reduce public spending. Could this be a cost-cutting measure? When contacted by the SIM editorial board, members of CP-CNU did not confirm this hypothesis. Instead, they argued that "*everything is information systems*" or that "*information systems are everywhere*". We share here an excerpt from their rationale:

"While we understand your concerns, we note that an increasing number of scholarly publications in management sciences engage with information systems either as content (e.g., in the analysis of information or knowledge creation) or as containers within a causal perspective. […] It appears to us that the agility demonstrated by your scientific community will enable you to contribute to technical aspects

[1] CP-CNU (*Commmission permanente du Conseil national des universités*) is a national French body tasked with fostering cooperation across disciplinary fields.

[2] Although CNU generally refers to the "disciplines" within management sciences as fields, specialties, or domains, we position Information Systems (IS) as a discipline in its own right, in alignment with the practices of the IS scholarly community and its body of scientific work. Moreover, as we elaborate later in this editorial, IS meets the defining characteristics of what constitutes a discipline.

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within an interdisciplinary vision alongside colleagues from other disciplines."

Beyond the nod to our colleague François-Xavier de Vaujany (2009), our readers will have understood that this editorial aligns with the tradition of impactful academic writing (Jonsen *et al.*, 2018), recently mobilized by the editor-in-chief of *Revue française de gestion* (Rouquet, 2023, 2025). While dystopian in tone, these introductory lines should not obscure the growing tension between the need for Information Systems to remain a distinct discipline and the imperative to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries in an interdisciplinary spirit.

After fictionalizing the tensions within the IS discipline, we proceed to clarify key concepts: discipline, intradisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity. We then delve into the history of IS, which is inherently interdisciplinary. The third section explores the dimensions of interdisciplinarity, and the fourth discusses the major challenge facing IS as a discipline under pressure, using the metaphor of erosion, revival, and sedimentation. Finally, we outline SIM's expectations for interdisciplinary submissions, positioning them as levers to help mitigate the tensions highlighted in this editorial.

1. FROM DISCIPLINE TO TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

To address the above-mentioned tensions and explore one possible path toward resolving them, it is essential to delve back into the very notion of a discipline, as well as that of interdisciplinarity. Tarafdar and Davison (2018, p. 524) define a discipline as "*a field of study or a body of knowledge that is the object of scholarly attention*". As specified by Morin (1994)[3]: "*A discipline is an organizational category within scientific knowledge; it establishes the division and specialization of labor and responds to the diversity of domains covered by the sciences. Although embedded within a broader scientific context, a discipline naturally tends toward autonomy through the delineation of its boundaries, the development of its own language, the techniques it creates or adopts, and potentially through its own theories.*" A discipline typically exhibits the following characteristics (Krishnan, 2009): 1) it focuses on a particular object of research, which may be shared with other disciplines; 2) it has a specialized body of accumulated knowledge related to this object of research, which is generally not shared with other disciplines; 3) it has theories and concepts that can organize the body of knowledge effectively; 4) it uses a specific terminology or technical language; 5) it has developed research methods according to its specific research requirements; 6) it has some institutional manifestation in the form of subjects taught and academic departments at universities, as well as professional associations. Not all disciplines meet all these criteria, but the more they do, the more firmly they assert themselves as distinct disciplines.

The concept of interdisciplinarity is widely embraced within the IS discipline, as confirmed by an analysis conducted using *Artirev* (Walsh *et al.*, 2022)[4]. Interdisciplinarity refers to the combination of knowledge from different disciplines (Brewer, 1999). This combination can take various forms depending on the level of knowledge integration and the level of interaction among

[3] translated from the original text in French.

[4] This analysis (July 2025) reveals that the concept of interdisciplinarity is more frequently mobilized in IS publications than other related notions such as multidisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity.

researchers from different disciplines. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between several forms of interdisciplinarity based on these levels of integration and interaction (see Table 1): intradisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity (in the strict sense), and transdisciplinarity.

When research remains within a single discipline (Stember, 1991), we are talking about intradisciplinarity: the reflection, methods, and contributions stem exclusively from that discipline, even if it is broad and diverse. At the first level of openness, cross-disciplinarity examines the object of research of one discipline through the lens of another—considered the "*reference discipline*" (Tarafdar & Davison, 2018), borrowing its methods, concepts, or theories. More integration is found in multidisciplinarity in the strict sense, where several disciplines address the same object of research, but with minimal interaction, working either in parallel or sequentially (Stember, 1991). However, the term multidisciplinarity is sometimes used more broadly to include cross-disciplinarity. Both are characterized by low integration: either because only one discipline benefits from the research outcomes (cross-disciplinarity), or because the interaction between disciplines is minimal (multidisciplinarity in the strict sense). Interdisciplinarity, in the strict sense, involves genuine interaction and integration of knowledge: each discipline benefits from shared results (Tarafdar & Davison, 2018), which go beyond the mere sum of individual contributions (Brewer, 1999). This does not necessarily require researchers from different teams (Porter *et al.*, 2006). Finally, transdisciplinarity represents an even higher level of integration, involving the development of concepts or theories that transcend existing disciplinary boundaries (Klein, 2017; Tarafdar & Davison, 2018). According to Kleinpeter (2013), this can be seen as a super- or meta-discipline, of which each discipline is a particular realization. General systems theory and structuralism are characteristic examples of this approach (Klein, 2017).

Table 1: Forms of Interdisciplinarity

Concept	Definition	Interactions between Disciplines
Intradisciplinarity (Stember, 1991)	Within disciplinary work	Internal interactions and exchanges within the discipline only
Cross-disciplinarity (Tarafdar & Davison, 2018)	A discipline borrows concepts, methods, or theories from another discipline	Unidirectional interactions – from one discipline to another
Multidisciplinarity (in the strict sense) (Stember, 1991)	Multiple disciplines study the same problem using their own approaches	Minimal interaction; work conducted in parallel or sequentially, integrated only at the end
Multidisciplinarity (in the broad sense) (Tarafdar & Davison, 2018)	Encompasses both cross-disciplinarity and strict-sense multidisciplinarity	Limited interaction, with some unidirectional exchanges
Interdisciplinarity (in the strict sense) (Brewer, 1999; Tarafdar & Davison, 2018)	Genuine integration and interaction between disciplines, producing shared outcomes	Multidirectional interactions aimed at co-creating knowledge
Transdisciplinarity (Klein, 2017; Kleinpeter, 2013; Tarafdar & Davison, 2018)	Development of concepts or theories that transcend existing disciplines	Surpassing disciplinary boundaries

2. INFORMATION SYSTEMS: A SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE UNDERGOING CHANGE AND CONSTANTLY SEARCHING FOR ITS IDENTITY

The history of IS as a scientific field shows that it is a young, fragmented discipline still under development. The first works emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly in the English-speaking world, at the crossroads of computer science, economics, and management sciences (Davis & Olson, 1984). From the outset, IS developed around a tension between a technological approach focused on tools and an organizational approach attentive to uses and the social transformations they induce. This duality largely explains the compartmentalization of research and the difficulty in defining a common theoretical foundation.

Several authors highlight a real lack of identity in the discipline (Bouilloud & Lécuyer, 1994; David *et al.*, 2012; Petras, 2024). IS research is characterized by diversity, where a multiplicity of paradigms, methods, and intellectual traditions coexist, often in competition rather than in dialogue. The wealth of specialized work—whether the study of system design, technology governance, or individual uses—does not facilitate the construction of a common foundation based on shared concepts (Verstraete, 2007). In this perspective, David *et al.* (2012) point out that management sciences, to which IS belongs, do not consist of describing isolated economic or social facts, but of analyzing the collective dynamics that organize action. IS are fully in line with this logic: they are less a purely technical object than a space for collective interactions between technologies, organizations, and individuals. This view highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach, which remains difficult to implement in a field that many consider to be marked by divisions between computer scientists, managers, and researchers from other social sciences.

Recent contributions nevertheless emphasize possible areas of cohesion. Sarker *et al.* (2019) defend the idea of a sociotechnical foundation as a historical and still relevant "*axis of cohesion*" for the discipline, to maintain its identity while opening its borders. This proposal is an answer to criticisms of fragmentation and aims to unite the field around the co-production of technical artifacts and social configurations. At the same time, the rise of digital transformation has strengthened the role of IS in organizations, while shaping research agendas: Vial (2019) offers a structuring synthesis that shows how digital technologies trigger strategic responses and transform the properties of organizations. This dynamic fuels editorials in their quest to renew our theorizations (Burton-Jones *et al.*, 2021), to move beyond established scripts and equip the study of emerging digital phenomena.

On the French-speaking side, IS research has been structured since the 1980s and 1990s around dedicated communities and journals, in particular the *Association Information et Management* (AIM) and the journal *Systèmes d'Information et Management* (SIM), which play a central role in disciplinary cohesion. This tradition places strong emphasis on organizational dimensions, uses, and a contextual view of IS (Rowe, 2018), contributing to an identity where understanding groups and concrete situations takes precedence over strictly technical and economic modeling.

Over time, IS has established itself as a discipline, possessing the six characteristics of a discipline mentioned above (Krishnan, 2009). Among these characteristics, the most significant are the specific object of research (sociotechnical artifact), the body of knowledge accumulated around this object of research, and institutional manifestation (associations, specific journals, and academic programs). The discipline has developed its own theories and concepts, as well as research methods often adapted from other disciplines.

Considering this history, it appears that one of the challenges of IS research is to promote interdisciplinarity. Such an approach transcends disciplinary boundaries and paves the way for a better flow of knowledge. It not only allows different perspectives (technological, organizational, social) to be articulated, but also enables research to be validated by others, promoting the comparison and mutual enrichment of approaches. This interdisciplinarity also contributes to better transmission of research results, both within the academic community and to practitioners and decision-makers, which reinforces the legitimacy of the field.

Furthermore, by encouraging crossovers between paradigms and schools of thought, interdisciplinarity helps to break down the isolation of researchers, which is often the result of specialization and thematic fragmentation. It encourages a collective and dialogical approach to research, in line with the very nature of management sciences as collective sciences (David *et al.*, 2012). Finally, it imposes a form of epistemological modesty: recognizing that each approach provides only a partial view of reality and that no one can claim to be the sole source of scientific truth. As Korff-Sausse (2004) points out, this modesty is an essential condition for interdisciplinary collaboration and the development of truly shared knowledge.

In short, the future of IS as a scientific discipline depends on recognizing this transversality, considered not as a weakness but as a strength. It offers a way to overcome the lack of identity often criticized in the discipline, while affirming its central role in the study of sociotechnical transformations.

3. THE DIMENSIONS OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

It is crucial to define the dimensions of interdisciplinarity to assess its ability to respond in part to the tensions identified and mentioned in the introduction to this editorial. To this end, Huutoniemi *et al.* (2010) propose a taxonomy consisting of three dimensions: 1) the scope of interdisciplinarity (what is integrated), 2) the type of interdisciplinary interaction (how integration is carried out), and 3) the type of goals (why interdisciplinarity takes place). Our taxonomy (Table 2) draws heavily on that of Huutoniemi *et al.* (2010) and refines it. It consists of the following dimensions: 1) scope of interdisciplinarity, 2) integration and collaboration, and 3) goal. These dimensions are described below.

The first dimension, "scope of interdisciplinarity", can be considered in terms of two aspects (Klein, 2017) or sub-dimensions. First, the number of disciplines (*two* or *more than two disciplines*) and second, their epistemological and methodological proximity (*related* or *unrelated disciplines*).

Table 2: Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity (adapted from Huutoniemi *et al.* (2010))

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Possible values
Scope of interdisciplinarity	Number of disciplines	Two disciplines More than two disciplines
	Proximity between disciplines	Related disciplines Unrelated disciplines
Integration and collaboration	Level of integration or interaction between disciplines	Cross-disciplinarity – Borrowing from another discipline – Contributing to another discipline Multidisciplinarity – Encyclopedic multidisciplinarity – Contextualizing multidisciplinarity Interdisciplinarity – Empirical interdisciplinarity – Methodological interdisciplinarity – Theoretical interdisciplinarity
	Level of collaboration between researchers	Researcher(s) from a single discipline Researchers from several disciplines working independently Researchers from several disciplines cooperating with each other
Goal		Epistemological Instrumental Mixed

The dimension of "integration and collaboration" can be broken down into several sub-dimensions. The first corresponds to the level of integration or interaction between disciplines. A distinction is made between *cross-disciplinarity*, *multidisciplinarity* (in the strict sense), and *interdisciplinarity* (in the strict sense). Within cross-disciplinarity, a distinction is made between *borrowing from another discipline* (the concept of "home disciplinarity" by Tarafdar and Davison (2018)) and *contributing to another discipline*. In the field of IS, examples of borrowing from another discipline include statistics (methods) or theories developed in other disciplines such as psychology. In multidisciplinarity in a strict sense, the concepts of *encyclopedic multidisciplinarity* and *contextualizing multidisciplinarity* are specified (Huutoniemi *et al.*, 2010). In encyclopedic multidisciplinarity, contributions from different disciplines are juxtaposed, with the only commonality being the contribution to the same theme. In contextualizing multidisciplinarity, several disciplines contribute to the resolution of a problem, but the interactions between them are limited to the definition of the problem. In interdisciplinarity in the strict sense, we should distinguish between *empirical*, *methodological*, and *theoretical interdisciplinarity* (Huutoniemi *et al.*, 2010). In empirical interdisciplinarity, different disciplines contribute to the resolution of a problem. These are typically complex societal problems, such as sustainable development or the fight against terrorism (Tarafdar & Davison, 2018). Methodological interdisciplinarity integrates methodologies from different disciplines. In theoretical interdisciplinarity, theories are developed at the intersection of several disciplines, contributing to each of these disciplines. A typical example is the development of concepts or

theories for IS or digital application areas, with interdisciplinarity involving both IS and the application area, such as algorithmic trading or blockchain in finance (Tarafdar & Davison, 2018). Another example is social media marketing (Bernroider *et al.*, 2013). The second sub-dimension is the level of collaboration between researchers. This dimension does not appear explicitly in the taxonomy of Huutoniemi *et al.* (2010) but is mentioned by Klein (2017). Three possibilities are proposed: *researcher(s) from a single discipline*, *researchers from several disciplines working independently*, or *researchers from several disciplines cooperating with each other*.

Finally, regarding the "goal" dimension, a goal can be *epistemological*, *instrumental*, or *mixed* (Huutoniemi *et al.*, 2010). It is epistemological if interdisciplinarity aims to increase the body of knowledge of the participating disciplines. This is also referred to as conceptual or endogenous interdisciplinarity. It is instrumental (pragmatic or exogenous interdisciplinarity) if interdisciplinary research has an extra-academic purpose, such as solving complex social problems or developing marketable products. This type of interdisciplinarity often implies the participation of actors from outside the academic world (Kleinpeter, 2013). The objective is mixed if interdisciplinarity is both applied and theoretical in nature.

4. BETWEEN IDENTITY AND OPENNESS, THE MAJOR CHALLENGE OF A DISCIPLINE UNDER PRESSURE

Although IS originated in computer science, it has gradually moved away from it (Rodhain *et al.*, 2010). Despite this, the "*technological*" image of IS remains in the minds of some students, colleagues teaching other disciplines, and some management and administrative staff of our teaching and research institutions. This confusion is also fed by appellations such as "*information systems departments*" for "*IT departments*". The simple word "*system*" often remains synonymous with technology, even though information systems are primarily a management discipline.

As a result of this confusion, our colleagues in other management disciplines, with the approval or even at the request of their institutions, tend to appropriate interdisciplinary courses that use IS, thereby eroding our discipline (Figure 1, left): for example, we see the appropriation of courses in digital marketing, teaching of IT tools for accounting and management control, human resources management tools that now use artificial intelligence systems, and courses in digital business models. It should be noted that Figure 1 excludes disciplines outside management sciences, whether related fields such as law and economics, or more distant fields such as medicine or psychology.

These "*erosive*" periods may only last for a short time: in 2009, in MIS Quarterly, Baskerville and Myers (2009) discussed the concept of "*fashion waves*" in management research. At that time, the topics in vogue included business process reengineering (BPR) and e-commerce. Similar trends have followed one another in recent years, the most recent being big data and analytics, digital transformation (Teubner & Stockhinger, 2020), and the latest being artificial intelligence (AI) or rather, AI systems (AIS) (Johnson *et al.*, 2025). The topic of AI and AIS indeed recurs periodically (Grover *et al.*, 2019).

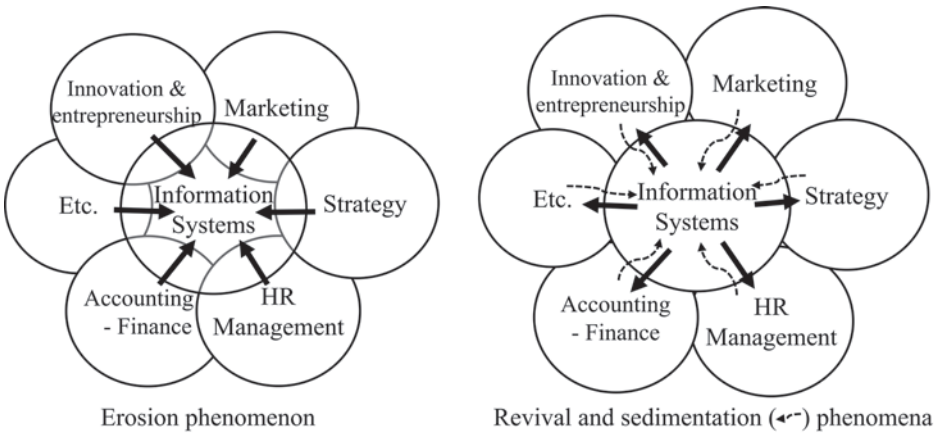

Figure 1: Information Systems – Erosion, Revival or Sedimentation?
Source: Authors

These fashion waves could increase tensions affecting our discipline through two effects: the first would be to reinforce erosion, with the various disciplines each claiming their share of the IS discipline to respond to this trend. People who do not have enough perspective on the evolution of IS will seize on trendy topics (Johnson *et al.*, 2025), such as a business leader who considers the implementation of customer relationship management (CRM) software to be a "*digital transformation*", or an innovation support director who wants to implement an AI system with the sole motivation of "*reducing costs*", or even a language teacher who introduces first-year bachelor's students to AIS.

A second effect, opposite to the previous one, would be to revive the IS discipline (Figure 1, right). IS researchers can take a step back and take stock of these trendy topics to establish effective "*informing channels to practice*" (Gill & Bhattacherjee, 2009). Thus, not only could IS experience a revival by regaining some of the ground it has lost, but thanks to interdisciplinarity, certain disciplines could also enrich IS, which would correspond to sedimentation rather than erosion. An example of sedimentation is the contribution of our colleagues in marketing to the qualitative and quantitative methodologies (SEM analysis tools, and quality criteria, such as HTMT[5]) used in IS research.

Are we therefore in a process of erosion, in which IS will eventually disappear (Figure 1)? Or are we in a system that pulsates with the trends, alternating between periods of erosion and periods of revival and/or sedimentation? Defending our discipline, given the *tensions* it faces, requires the *attention* of our community.

5. INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THE JOURNAL *SYSTÈMES D'INFORMATION ET MANAGEMENT*

In conclusion, without claiming to be exhaustive and with the aim of initiating a debate, we propose a few ideas for alleviating the tensions mentioned in this editorial.

[5] *Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations.*

What are SIM's expectations regarding interdisciplinary articles? Let us take the example of an article that draws on strategy and IS. Is it possible to submit it to SIM? Why submit it to SIM rather than a strategy journal? SIM has always welcomed interdisciplinary articles, whether in strategy or other disciplines, as the following examples show.

The taxonomy of interdisciplinarity (Table 2) allows us to identify different categories of interdisciplinary articles relevant to the SIM journal, by varying the values of the dimensions and sub-dimensions of interdisciplinarity (number of disciplines, proximity between disciplines, level of integration or interaction between disciplines, level of collaboration between researchers, goal). Without claiming to be exhaustive, we provide a few illustrative examples of relevant categories. In a cross-disciplinary approach, Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Isaac (2013), both from the IS discipline, borrow from philosophy to propose a reinterpretation of control systems in the context of ubiquitous technology use. Other works, such as that of Dutot *et al.* (2018), use models from the health sector to study the adoption of connected objects in e-health, illustrating an empirical interdisciplinarity led by IS researchers. The article by Michel *et al.* (2009) goes further by bringing together researchers in IS and sociology to evaluate the effects of serious games on learning, demonstrating effective interdisciplinary cooperation. Kefi *et al.* (2016) combine insights from IS, organizational psychology, and strategy to analyze addiction to digital social networks. We have not identified any articles representative of methodological interdisciplinarity, but SIM aims to welcome such articles in its Research Methods section. The article by Barlette and Jaouen (2019) is an example of theoretical interdisciplinarity, in the context of a collaboration between two researchers from related disciplines (IS and entrepreneurship). It studies the determinants of information security behaviors among SME managers and uses Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) developed in psychology. Finally, Dubois *et al.* (2008) propose an analysis of e-banking skills based on an organizational psychology approach, without direct input from IS researchers, but within a framework relevant to IS. These examples demonstrate SIM's ability to accommodate a variety of interdisciplinary work, whether carried out by IS researchers or researchers from other disciplines, provided that the link with IS is clearly established and theoretically justified.

As for the choice of the SIM journal as an outlet, we believe that two important factors should guide authors' decisions. First, the article should focus on a sociotechnical artifact. Second, if the article contributes to advances in one or more disciplines other than IS, it must also make a research contribution (epistemological or mixed goal) to our discipline. This contribution should be twofold, i.e., 1) it must enrich the body of knowledge in IS, with literature that is mainly rooted in the discipline, and 2) it must contribute to the SIM journal itself by advancing some of the discussions already underway in the journal.

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