Professor Edgar H. Sibley: A Tribute and A Scientometric Profile

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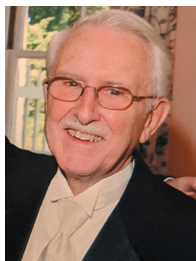Check for updates

EDITORIAL

Professor Edgar H. Sibley: A Tribute and A Scientometric Profile

Introduction

Professor Edgar Henry Sibley, who was an accomplished scholar and a giant in the Information Systems (IS) field, passed away peacefully in Virginia, USA, on January 12, 2020. Among his many prestigious appointments, he was an Advisory Editor to the *Journal of Global Information Technology Management* and the Founding Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Information & Management*. While Professor Sibley left a remarkable legacy to both journals and the IS discipline, he was an unspoken mentor to scores of academics and left an indelible mark on their careers. A detailed tribute was presented in the journal *Information & Management* (Palvia et al., 2020), which detailed his many accomplishments and selfless service to the IS community. In this editorial, we include some of our personal experiences as well as provide a scientometric profile and analysis of his works. The scientometric analysis shows that Professor Sibley published 3–14 papers per year, several in conference proceedings, and typically with another coauthor. We also share our personal experiences and highlight Professor Sibley's contributions to the IS academic world as well as the real world.

Some Personal Experiences

Professor Sibley was sincere, kind, and especially enthusiastic in mentoring junior faculty members and supportive of international Information Systems (IS) research and IS education. He was genuinely helpful and encouraging to all, irrespective of their status or standing in the academy. Although several of us met Professor Sibley only a few times in person, we know that his professional conduct reflected his personal values. These personal values were selflessness, simplicity, empathy, inclusiveness, and excellence. We present a few examples and conversations with other people in the IS discipline which confirm the essence of this remarkable man.

"As an example, one of the authors of this article, Ting-Peng Liang, mentioned his experience of publishing his first Information & Management (I&M) article in 1987 when he was a first-year Assistant Professor. Professor Sibley not only provided him with constructive comments for improving the manuscript, but also copy edited his non-native English writing. This treatment was a special honor for a junior faculty member." (Palvia, Benitez, Liang, & Chau, 2020, p. 2). *"I learned a lot from him in my early career. In fact, this is not a special case. I heard that many scholars benefited from his supportive and constructive comments while working with him in the review process. As a pioneer and influential scholar in the area, his willingness to help junior faculty is particularly respectable."* Said Professor Liang.

Dr. Sibley welcomed manuscripts from all scholars, including junior academics and students, and helped them further develop their works to meet the *I&M* requirements. As Alexander Serenko recalls,

"I will never forget the night of December 11th, 2005, when my coauthor and I received a "major revision decision" from I&M accompanied by Dr. Sibley's detailed instructions on how to approach the reviewers' comments. This was a paper that the two of us wrote while being doctoral students. I was so elated that my wife and I went to the bar for the remainder of the night – to celebrate. At the end of the review process, Dr. Sibley personally edited the entire manuscript

by removing verbose writing, streamlining arguments, and fixing typos, which served as an unforgettably valuable lesson for both of us. This unexpectedly positive experience with a major journal was a pivotal point in my career that boosted my research self-efficacy for years to come. Today, I am serving as the Associate Editor of I&M."

"Patrick Chau, the current Editor-in-Chief of I&M, shared his experience of his early interaction with Professor Sibley. He recalls an instance in which Professor Sibley cut one-third of his article before accepting it for publication, stating that the paper must be concise and precise without extraneous verbiage. Indeed, this was more the rule than the exception of Professor Sibley's editing style." (Palvia et al., 2020, p. 2).

"Jose Benitez recalls the first I&M paper he read when he was completing his Ph.D. in IS at the University of Granada, Granada, Spain. It taught him the importance of relevance, rigor, parsimony, and impact of IS research, which was confirmed in his research and consulting work in subsequent years." (Palvia et al., 2020, p. 2). As Professor Jose Benitez reminiscences, *"I&M has always been a special IS journal to me. I&M has some specificities, and its special personality was evoked during the leadership of Professor Edgar Sibley, and it has been reinforced during the mandate of Professor Patrick Chau. Today, I am honored to serve as Associate Editor of I&M, which I expect to continue doing and developing in the future. Both Edgar and Patrick are two good mirrors where I want to look at me and my job."*

Murad Mehmet, a former Ph. D. student wrote:

"Dr. Sibley was a father, role-model, mentor, advisor (academia and life) for the most critical years in my life and since after my graduation under his scholarly tutoring. Since knowing Dr. Sibley in 2003, he paved the way for me to succeed in professional and academic life as a professor/mentor/father. I grew fond of his compassion, straightfor-wardness, honesty, and sharp intelligence. He was the flag that most of us tried to hold under, knowing that it is rare to find such quality human-being like himself in life. Our dear Dr. Sibley preserved the rare quality of scholars that vanished in a nowadays selfish world. Dr. Sibley was a guidebook that all humans meant to read and benefit from to learn good ethics and be productive for science and humanity. It has been one of my utmost honors in my life to know Dr. Sibley, work for/with him, and be nurtured from his rare wisdom and compassionate teaching. He taught me how to be patient the best I can while achieving the end-goals and help others." (Palvia et al., 2020, p. 5).

Prashant Palvia had similar experiences. He wrote:

"Professor Sibley was helpful to all authors, irrespective of their affiliation or status. There might be a perception, true or not, that publications in some of the top IS journals are dominated by leading names or people with power, pedigree, or status. Not so in I&M. As long as you do quality work, you have a chance to publish in I&M, even if you are at the bottom of the totem pole. Professor Sibley always listened. There are instances when an Associate Editor or Reviewers rejected a paper. In such a case, most Editors would reject a paper and would not entertain protests from the authors. But Professor Sibley actually listened to arguments made by the authors. I know of instances when desk-rejected papers, as well as papers first rejected by Associate Editors, were later published in I&M after suitable revisions. Then Professor Sibley would personally invest countless hours in editing and rewriting major portions of each revised and accepted paper. By the time a paper went for production, it would be a superior submission based on the quality of writing. Many of us are indebted to him for teaching us how to write a good paper clearly and concisely. Professor Sibley's motto was, "keep it simple." He would eliminate much of the hyperbole, flowery language, and repetition in a paper (which is often seen in some leading IS journals). He would substantially shorten endless verbiage spent on literature reviews and discussion sections of a paper. He knew fully well that most readers would skip over these sections anyway. He would also repudiate excessive references in a paper and limit them to a reasonable number in the range of 40-50." (Palvia et al., 2020, p. 6).

Accomplishments and Scientometric Profile

Dr. Sibley received a B.S. in Engineering from the University of London, UK, and an M.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). During the first 20 years of his career, he worked as an engineer and a consultant and co-invented the low-temperature electromagnetic transducer. Driven by a quest for knowledge, Dr. Sibley earned his highest degree, an Sc.D. in Mechanical Engineering, in 1967 from MIT. In his dissertation, Dr. Sibley proposed a design of a general-purpose symbolic manipulation system by focusing on user requirements, computer speed, robustness, and extensibility. This pioneering work established his long-term line of research and helped researchers develop the first generations of information systems.

Dr. Sibley launched his formal academic career in 1966 when he joined the Department of Industrial Engineering at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor as a faculty member. From 1973 to 1984, he served

as a Professor and the Chair of the Business and Management, and Information Systems Management Schools at the University of Maryland at College Park. From 1979 to 1980, he was a Visiting Professor at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and in 1984, Dr. Sibley accepted a permanent position of University Professor and Eminent Scholar with appointments in both the Volgenau School of Information Technology and Engineering (Departments of Information and Software Systems Engineering and Computer Science) and the Institute for Public Policy at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. In the IS research community, he was best recognized for his service as the Editor-in-Chief of *I&M* from 1977 to 2013. The first editorial – in *I&M's* inaugural issue – established the journal's appeal to the needs of practitioners and emphasized both its academic rigor and practical relevance (Palvia et al., 2020).

Dr. Sibley was an Advisory Editor to the *Journal of Global Information Technology Management (JGITM)* which focuses on various aspects of the application of information technology (IT) in international settings, including cross-cultural IT studies, global information systems, transborder data flow, comparative studies of national IT, and the role, diffusion, and impact of IT in developing countries. The Editor-in-Chief of *JGITM*, Prashant Palvia, learned from Professor Sibley and followed his advice in terms of encouraging submissions from all levels in academia and keeping the writing focused and terse.

In addition to his contribution to science, Dr. Sibley was active in all areas of large-scale information and general systems design for many major government agencies and business organizations. This included work with the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Energy, as well as joint contract efforts with the Boeing Corporation, Batelle, Science Applications International Corporation, and many small businesses in the DC area. Examples of Dr. Sibley's projects included the definition of controls on the design and implementation of information systems, such as large-scale database management, and several major economic and reengineering issues, with extensions into some large industrial enterprise and governmental efforts. One such effort was the electronic integration of the Textile industry under AMTEX for Argonne National Laboratories. In the period from 1970 to 2000, Dr. Sibley was a part-time consultant at the Institute for Defense Analyses. From 2000 to 2004, Dr. Sibley was a member of the National Research Council. He also served as a reviewer for the National Science Foundation and was a senior member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Dr. Sibley chaired the Conference/Committee on Data Systems Languages (CODASYL) from 1971 to 1975, the Board of the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) from 1978 to 1981, and the Computing Practices Panel of Communications of the ACM. Dr. Sibley also contributed to the National Academy of Science and developed strategic plans for large-scale transaction processing in a distributed environment for the Social Security Agency. He also acted as an expert witness for four law firms and provided *pro bono* work in support of juvenile victims.

Dr. Sibley's practice was not confined to the U.S. He spent summers working with the United Nations and its agencies in Slovakia, Hungary, Israel, and the Philippines. He also traveled to Russia when working on the National Academy of Science's projects. He guest-lectured and gave keynote speeches in South America, Europe, and Asia. He spent many summers at the National Sun Yat-Sen University at Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and went to mainland China to give presentations in Hong Kong, Beijing, Wuhan, and Xi'an. Upon his retirement, Dr. Sibley was appointed as a part-time research professor for three years from 2012 through 2015.

As a scholar, Dr. Sibley had developed a unique and truly remarkable scientometric profile. His productivity skyrocketed immediately after the completion of his doctoral degree in 1967 and remained high until 1997 when he engaged heavily in editorial duties (see Figure 1). He published more than 100 works in the fields of Computer Science, Leadership, Engineering, and IS (Palvia et al., 2020). The actual number of Dr. Sibley's intellectual contributions is much higher and may approach 150; many of his colleagues said that in coauthored articles, he requested his name be removed to allow younger faculty members to get the credit. He was extremely generous in mentoring and insisted on foregoing first authorship in publications in order to help cultivate subsequent generations of academics. As a result of a comprehensive and exhaustive search, we were able to locate 96 of Dr. Sibley's publications.

Dr. Sibley's works appeared from 1967 to 2014. This time period covers the entire evolution of IS research from the point when no specialized information systems journals existed to the advanced
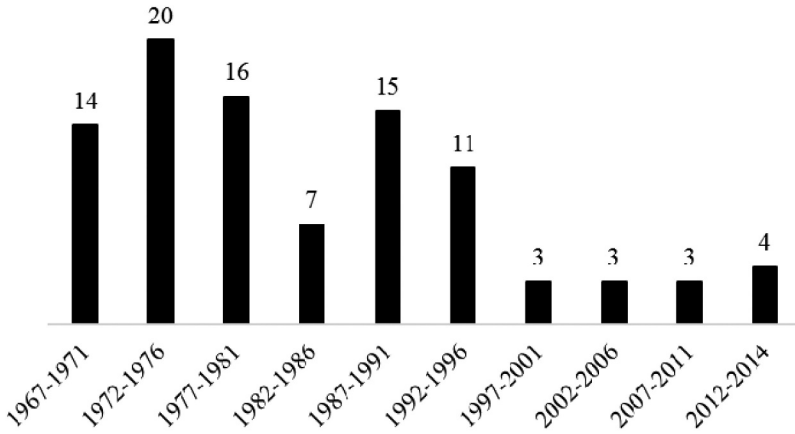
Figure 1. Research productivity patterns – number of publications per year.

stage with more than fifty outlets available. For this reason, half of his publications appeared in the proceedings of major conferences, frequently organized by the *Association for Computing Machinery* and the *Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers*, which are considered highly respected academic and professional bodies. Dr. Sibley also published journal articles, books, and book chapters. His articles appeared in well-known academic journals, such as *Communications of the ACM, ACM Computing Surveys*, and *Information & Management*. At the same time, to transfer academic knowledge and directly contribute to the state of practice, Dr. Sibley published a large number of technical reports and working papers to be used by major organizations, including the *National Bureau of Standards*, the *Institute for Defense Analyses*, and the *National Aeronautics and Space Administration* (NASA) (see Figure 2). Due to his modest character, he refrained from self-citations unless necessary.

Dr. Sibley launched his academic career in the late 1960s at the dawn of computing. His first research stream focused on the development of computer systems and the application of programming languages. For instance, one of his initial pioneering works proposed the design, configuration, and specification of an IBM 360/67-based graphic system that employed conventional phone lines for inter-computer communication – long before the ARPANET (the predecessor of the Internet) was
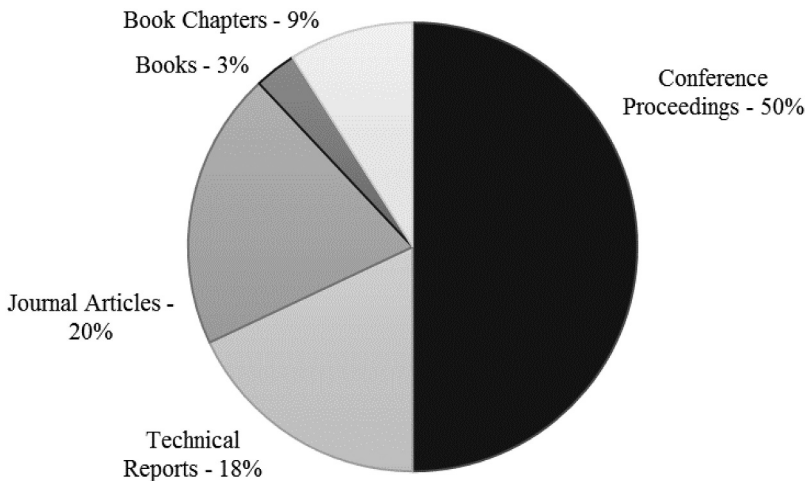

Figure 2. Type of published works.

created. Because almost every information system must include data storage capabilities, Dr. Sibley also concentrated on the various aspects of data processing, data mapping, and database design. A notable example is his work on a data definition and mapping language as part of the CODASYL initiative; many of these ideas were incorporated into COBOL programming language. This represented a natural progression of Dr. Sibley's research interests toward database topics. His work, however, was not limited to a mere system and database design. Since the 1970s, he published extensively on the managerial aspects of IT, including organizational issues of database implementation and operation, business impact of IT, the role of IT in organizations, effective use of IT, IT continuity, economic justification of IT investment, IT selection and evaluation criteria, strategic IT alignment, and IT productivity. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Dr. Sibley focused his attention on IT policy development and implementation. He frequently elaborated on the current trends, evolution, and future directions of IT research. His later works approached IT from a managerial perspective, and topics included electronic commerce, privacy, and meta-analysis of IT research. In these later years, he also examined IT security, text mining, and curriculum development. In sum, he was able to contribute to the development of both the hard and the soft sides of IS research.

Dr. Sibley was a pioneer of the research methodology that is presently known as Design Science (Hevner, March, Park, & Ram, 2004). Even though Dr. Sibley and his coauthored never formally referred to this method as "design science," the research methodology he frequently employed included designing, testing, and evaluating the IT artifact by focusing on its relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness in an organizational context. This approach was later recognized and documented in IS research as a formal method of inquiry. In addition, Dr. Sibley conducted meta-analyses and overviews of the state of database and system design research, which further attests to his expertise in this domain. He published comprehensive literature reviews and conducted case studies of IT initiatives in various organizations. Thus, both the breadth and depth of his research interests and inquiry methods reveal a profile of a persistent and versatile scholar driven by a desire to produce quality research that really matters.

As a true scholar, Dr. Sibley published many single-authored works, but he also extensively collaborated with others – 73% of his publications were coauthored (see Figure 3). On average, Dr. Sibley's papers included 2.6 authors, and his collaboration preferences reflect both the breadth and depth of his scholarship. For example, with respect to depth, Dr. Sibley successfully established and conducted long-terms lines of research with J.B. Michael (10 publications); J.P. Fry, W.T. Hardgrave, and R.W. Taylor (5 publications); and W.L. Ash and A.G. Merten (4 publications). In
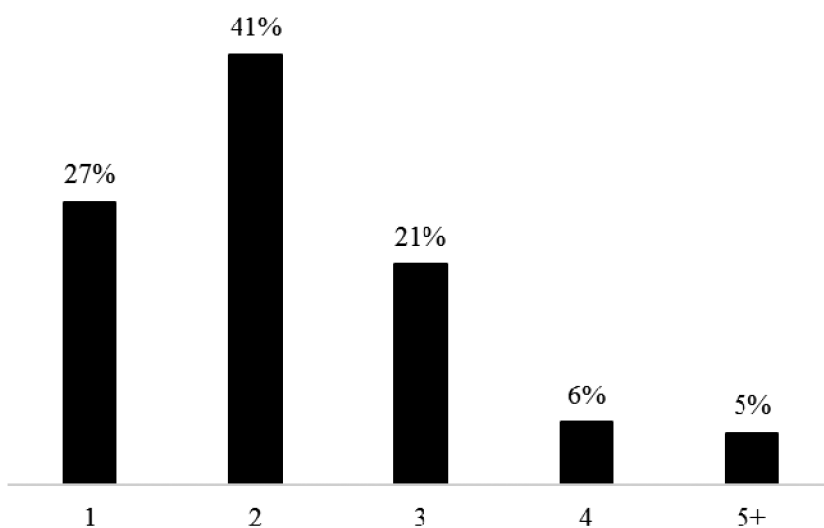

Figure 3. Number of authors in Dr. Sibley's publications.

terms of breadth, he coauthored his works with 99 unique individuals, and with 68 of them, he collaborated only once. In effect, Dr. Sibley shared his research expertise with as many students, academics, and practitioners as he could.

Conclusion

Professor Sibley lived a rich and meaningful professional life. Along the way, he touched the lives of many people and impacted not only their careers but also their minds. Of special relevance are his contributions to the IS discipline and the IS family. We join together in this scientometric profile of Dr. Sibley to remember his contributions and insights in this heartfelt tribute.

We will always be grateful for his guidance and leadership. It is always sad to hear when a senior scholar passes away. But let us celebrate Professor Sibley´s legacy He made remarkable contributions to the IS field, and the field would not have been as valued and progressive without his efforts, vision, and passion. *Together we salute Dr. Sibley.*

Notes on contributors

Prashant Palvia is Joe Rosenthal Excellence Professor in the Bryan School of Business & Economics at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, USA. Dr. Palvia is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Global Information Technology Management* and Associate Editor for *Information & Management*. His research interests include global information technology management, dark side of IT, security and privacy, virtual teams, and societal issues of IT. He has published 122 journal articles and 6 books, and has received more than 10,000 citations. His latest book is "The World IT Project: Global Issues in Information Technology" published by NOW publishers in May 2020.

Alexander Serenko is an Associate Professor of Management Information Systems in the Faculty of Business and IT, University of Ontario Institute of Technology and a Lecturer in the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. Dr. Serenko holds a Ph.D. in Management Information Systems from McMaster University. His research interests pertain to scientometrics, knowledge management, technology addiction, and implicit cognitive processes. Alexander has published more than 90 articles in refereed journals, including *MIS Quarterly, European Journal of Information Systems, Information & Management, Communications of the ACM*, and *Journal of Knowledge Management*, and his works have received more than 8,000 citations. Alexander has also won six Best Paper awards at Canadian and international conferences.

Jose Benitez is a Distinguished Chair Professor of IS and the Department Chair of Supply Chain Management and IS at Rennes School of Business, Rennes, France. His research has been published in top IS journals such as *MIS Quarterly, European Journal of Information Systems, Decision Sciences, Journal of Information Technology, Decision Support Systems*, and *Information & Management*. Jose wants to thank for the research sponsorship received by the European Regional Development Fund (EU) and the Government of Spain (Research Project ECO2017-84138-P), the Regional Government of Andalusia (Research Project A-SEJ-154-UGR18), and the Slovenian Research Agency (Research Core Funding No. P5-0410).

Ting-Peng Liang is a National Chair Professor and Director of the Electronic Commerce Research Center at National Sun Yat-Sen University in Taiwan. He is a past president of the Association for Information Systems (AIS) and has published broadly in information systems, including electronic commerce, data analytics, knowledge management, and intelligent decision support. He is a fellow and Leo Awardee of AIS. His papers have appeared in *MIS Quarterly, Management Science, Operations Research, Journal of MIS, Journal of AIS, Decision Support Systems, Information &vManagement, International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, among others.

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