Revised October 26, 2018

Extended Biography

**E. Burton Swanson** (born 1939) is an American information scientist, and Research Professor of Information Systems at the [UCLA Anderson School of Management](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UCLA_Anderson_School_of_Management). The author of over 100 career publications, Swanson is widely recognized as one of the founders of the information systems field. His research addresses issues of IS innovation, implementation, utilization, and maintenance.

Swanson is a native Californian and grew up in San Jose. He received his BS in Industrial and Systems Engineering in 1962 from [San Jose State University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Jose_State_University) and began his career at IBM, where he worked first as an industrial engineer. He took leave to earn his MBA in 1964 from the [University of Michigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Michigan) and returned to work in the development of computer applications in manufacturing. He took further leave to earn his PhD in Business Administration in 1971 from [University of California, Berkeley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_California%2C_Berkeley), where he was a student of C. West Churchman.In 1972, Swanson left IBM to take an appointment as Visiting Scientist with the Studiengruppe für Systemforschung, Heidelberg, Germany, He remained there for two years, working on a variety of applied research projects [13].

Swanson returned to academia in 1974 to the [University of California, Los Angeles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_California%2C_Los_Angeles), first as a visiting assistant professor, eventually becoming full Professor at the [Anderson School of Management](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UCLA_Anderson_School_of_Management). There he helped to build one of the country’s leading academic information systems programs, serving as faculty area chair and directing its Information Systems Research Program [14]. Swanson was a Visiting Professor at IBM’s European Systems Research Institute, Belgium (1982) and at the London Business School (1989). Retired in 2013, he was recalled to continue his work at UCLA as Research Professor.

Swanson was the founding Editor-in-Chief of the journal [*Information Systems Research*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Systems_Research) from 1987 to 1992 [11]. In 1980 he also participated in founding the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS). A Fellow of the [Association for Information Systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_for_Information_Systems), in 2009 he received its LEO award for exceptional lifetime achievement [10].

Swanson’s research has touched on many information systems topics, but the bulk of it has addressed three overarching questions. The first of these was motivated by his early work experience, where MIS sometimes went unused by managers, and asked: why are information systems used or not? Swanson’s (1974) findings argued that managers were able to be informed by an MIS and thereby make use of it to the extent they were also involved in its development, such that they understood it [1]. Subsequent work explored other aspects of implementation and use [9].

The second overarching question was motivated by reports that maintenance of application software consumed surprisingly large fractions of IS organizational budgets, and asked: why do information systems require so much maintenance? In a highly cited conference paper, Swanson (1976) introduced a typology of maintenance- corrective, adaptive, and perfective- that provided a new foundation for both research and practice [2]. In collaboration with Bennet Lientz, Swanson conducted a large-scale survey that found that perfective maintenance, improving systems for users, accounted for more than half the maintenance effort [3]. In collaboration with Cynthia Beath, Swanson further undertook a series of case studies that explored how maintenance was organized in firms [4], [6].

The third overarching question was motivated by a new interest in information system innovation [5], and the observation that new innovations seemed to break upon the scene with high expectations, which were frequently not met, and asked: why do some IS innovations diffuse widely while others do not? In collaboration with Neil Ramiller, Swanson proposed that innovation is often guided by an organizing vision, a focal community idea for applying new IT in firms, that provides for interpretation, legitimation, and mobilization of entrepreneurial and market forces, and that successfully launching the vision, gaining and holding widespread attention to it, and sustaining momentum over its career is problematic, and where the vision fails or ceases to be compelling, diffusion of the innovation itself may not progress [7], [8]. In collaboration with Ramiller, Ping Wang, and others, Swanson engaged in a series of empirical studies that explored various aspects of this theory [12].

Since his retirement, Swanson has most recently pursued his long interest in the foundations of the information systems field. His most ambitious work has sought to reframe the understanding of IS and the change it brings about in the broader context of theorizing technology as routine capability achieved in practice [15].

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