Can one adhere to the norms of rationality in the selection of complex enterprise information systems? Can one achieve and guarantee the selection of an optimal system?

Automation in libraries started in modest forms in the late fifties and early sixties and has since evolved to become a global multi-million dollars market. Library Management Systems (LMS) are complex enterprise information systems and can include a vast array of functions and adaptation possibilities. With evolving technologies, and increasing complexities, at each system change occasion, libraries are faced with an uncertain situation and large number of products from which to choose. Much literature in the professional journals reports successful selections of optimal systems. When libraries are faced with a choice between a number of very complex systems, how can they decide which option is the best? How do libraries manage to identify the optimal system? Is there such a thing as an optimal option?

These are some of the background questions that gave rise to this study. In Taken for Granted, four cases in three countries are analyzed. Building on the theoretical work within decision theory, science and technology studies and structuration theory, it is argued that the superiority of an LMS is a socially constructed status. It can be seen to emerge through the LMS decision process based on actions and interactions that take place. The causes and consequences of the LMS decision process are not necessarily, or only, the choice of an LMS. The day-to-day actions and interactions are shaped and shape social structures and can have wider implications than the choice of an LMS. Through the various activities and practices that emerge during an LMS decision process, shared perceptions and conceptual order is constructed and maintained.

With a background in computer science, Nasrine Olson has wide experiences with library management systems. Her previous positions have included the posts of systems librarian, systems manager, technical support analyst (at a commercial company developing library management systems), and owning a small firm offering consultancy and technical support to libraries. She has been a lecturer at the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, a joint department at Universities of Borås and Göteborg, for the past fifteen years.