

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Necessary Changes

It is a time of introspection as our discipline focuses on such basic issues as its identity and the meaning of the IT artifact. It is not surprising, then, that *MIS Quarterly* also finds itself reflecting on its mission and changes that may be needed to accomplish this mission. This editorial discusses recent changes that have been instituted at the *MIS Quarterly*. It also responds to an Issues and Opinions article in this issue that urges a major change in the expectations that we are setting for colleagues who have more recently entered the faculty ranks in our discipline.

Format and Procedural Changes

You probably have noticed the *MIS Quarterly*'s new look. Those receiving the print issue can quickly see that the size of a page has been increased to 8.5" × 11". We also changed the font to Times New Roman. Both changes will make it possible to print more articles in each issue. The Times New Roman font will also make it easier to accommodate mathematical formulas.

The *MIS Quarterly* website (<http://www.misq.org>) has also undergone some changes. In particular, please read the new instructions to prospective authors who are considering submitting manuscripts to the *MIS Quarterly* (<http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html>). Let me highlight some of the changes for you. In order to facilitate the more efficient processing of papers, ALL MANUSCRIPTS SHOULD BE SUBMITTED DIRECTLY TO THE *MIS QUARTERLY* OFFICE. Manuscripts should no longer be submitted through a senior editor. The review coordinator in the *MIS Quarterly* office will contact a senior editor to determine if he/she can accept the paper. This contact is based upon the author's nomination, the senior editor's workload, and the senior editor's areas of research and methodological expertise. Once the senior editor agrees to handle the paper, the submission is e-mailed to him/her.

Please note the suggested guidelines for the length of manuscripts submitted to MISQ. Excessively long papers will be returned to the authors without review. Also note the provenance declarations that authors are being asked to include with each submission (<http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html#Link55>).

New Mission Statement

The biggest change is the revised mission statement. The mission statement has been critical in signaling the types of articles that the *MIS Quarterly* seeks to print. This statement has apparently been successful in the past. In their review of articles published in five leading IS journals, Vessey, Ramesh, and Glass¹ note that 84.8 percent of the articles published in the *MIS Quarterly* from 1995 through 1999 deal with organizational or systems/software management themes, and that the range of organizational themes addressed in these articles is very broad. The types of articles published on organizational and management themes is consistent with the past mission statement: "the development and communication of knowledge concerning both the management of information technology and the use of information technology for managerial and organizational purposes."

While I consider this consistency laudatory, Vessey et al. viewed it as a matter of concern, signaling the need for the journal to diversify. Diversification is not a new issue. Debate has been raging in the discipline about the need to diversify and numerous authors have weighed

¹I. Vessey, R. Ramesh, and R. L. Glass, "Research in Information Systems—An Empirical Study of Diversity in the Discipline and its Journals," *Journal of MIS* (19:2), Fall 2002, pp. 129-174.

in with their opinions on the issue, as well as exactly what is meant by the IS core and the IS artifact. The new mission statement reflects our response to these many debates.

We are taking this opportunity to refine our mission statement and to signal to those groups of researchers who had previously felt excluded that we are more broadly defining our interest in articles with managerial and organizational implications. The revised mission statement is

the enhancement and communication of knowledge concerning the development of IT-based services, the management of IT resources, and the economics and use of IT with managerial and organizational implications.

The new mission statement retains its focus on managerial and organizational purposes. Although the difference may be considered minimal, the new focus on implications stresses the ultimate relevance of research published in the *MIS Quarterly* to managers and IS practitioners. The new statement suggests that IT-based services will be developed, IT resources managed, and information technology used for managerial and organizational purposes. With its new mission statement, the *MIS Quarterly* explicitly encourages papers about the development of IT-based services. This includes the design and development of information systems, as well as the emerging area of services that are based on IT. The addition of economics is an outreach to the IT economics researchers.

I sincerely hope that the IS community will view the revised statement as a way of broadening the *MIS Quarterly*'s mission, while building upon the distinguished and firm base of managerial and organizational research that it has published over the last 29 years. Editorial board members were selected with expertise to accommodate what I hope will be a broader range of research topics for research submissions. If we do not have expertise on the board to handle a particular topic, I will appoint a senior editor emeritus and/or guest associate editors with the necessary expertise.

Unrealistic Standards

One type of paper that the website indicates the *MIS Quarterly* does not publish is research or commentaries on professional topics (e.g., journal rankings, promotion and tenure criteria, employment practices).² In this issue I am making a one-time exception to that policy because I think the problem is so pressing that it should be aired in the IS community. Alan Dennis, Joseph Valacich, Mark Fuller, and Christoph Schneider provide a convincing argument in their Issues and Opinions article ("Research Standards for Promotion and Tenure in Information Systems") that the tenure expectations of some universities are unrealistic. Specifically, universities that want junior faculty to have three or four publications in *MIS Quarterly* or *Information Systems Research* in order to be tenurable are setting unrealistic standards. In their carefully executed study, Dennis et al. followed seven cohorts through 6 years of publication history. They found that approximately only five people worldwide (or 1.7 percent of their sample) published two or more articles in *Information Systems Research* or *MIS Quarterly* in a 6-year period. What is lacking is a definitive study that shows a considerable number of universities have not tenured faculty with less than two articles in these journals. However, I have heard the pleas of many junior faculty saying that they need several *MIS Quarterly* or *Information Systems Research* articles to get tenured, and informally I have learned that a number of universities limit their premier list to these two journals. If in fact it is the case that many universities are requiring at least two articles in these two journals as a minimum requirement for tenure, then their expectations are unrealistic. Such a requirement does a disservice to both the many quality publications in other journals and to the junior faculty in the IS discipline.

Increasing the Number and Range of MIS Quarterly Articles

Dennis and his colleagues have proposed several strategies that can be adopted. They challenge *MIS Quarterly* and *Information Systems Research* to double the number of papers they publish each year. With all due respect, this just ain't gonna happen. The *MIS Quarterly* is going to print five issues this year and the changes in format and font should result in the equivalent of an additional half issue. However, the financing is not currently available to annually print five or six issues on a sustained basis. Along with the Senior Editors and Policy Board, I am exploring ways of raising the funding to annually print five or six issues on a sustained basis, even after the Association of Information Systems payment for member access to the journal stops after 2009. A number of you responded to my last editorial and provided suggestions for raising funds. We are following through on some of these suggestions. However, the funding is currently not available for *MIS Quarterly* to double the number of papers it publishes.

²See the website for a list of other types of papers that *MIS Quarterly* does not publish (<http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html#Link13>).

Dennis and his colleagues also call on *MIS Quarterly* (alone of all the journals) to change its mission. As discussed above, the *MIS Quarterly* has refined its mission statement to encourage different types of submissions. We also are publishing special issues for research approaches and topics not normally associated with the *MIS Quarterly* such as research using action research and design science, and are calling for research on standards and information systems in developing countries. However, the journal neither can nor should be all things to everyone in the IS discipline. Our focus has been and continues to be on managerial and organizational implications. Understandably there are going to be some IS articles that do not address either of these two implications and that should be published elsewhere.

External Review Letters

I suggest that the real burden of responsibility for adjusting unrealistic expectations lies squarely on the shoulders of the IS community. As a community we need to (1) educate colleagues in other disciplines about realistic publication expectations and the full-range of quality outlets for IS research, (2) strive to get at least three journals consistently recognized as premier, and (3) encourage developmental reviewing. As a member of promotion and tenure committees at a number of universities, I continue to be impressed with the way in which Accounting faculty write external review letters. Their letters are very detailed and frequently discuss the quality of a candidate's articles even when they have not been published in what is typically considered the top-tier accounting journals. These letters consistently cite studies about how difficult it is to publish in top-tier accounting journals. They also consistently describe about the quality of the niche journals in which the candidates have published. I think we can learn from our accounting colleagues. Obviously I am not arguing that anything published in any IS journal is automatically good or that every applicant should be tenured at every university. Rather, I suggest that when we write external letters in the IS discipline we refer to the Dennis et al. article (or to Athey and Plotnicki³ or Chua, Cao, Cousins, and Straub⁴) to position the candidate's record with that of others in the discipline and to describe the challenges of publishing in the IS discipline. Further, when writing external review letters, we may need to discuss the quality of certain journals for specific types of research. For example, if a candidate is doing research in decision support systems and has one publication in *MIS Quarterly* and three publications in *Decision Support Systems*, along with some other publications, an external reviewer who wants to write a positive letter could use the Dennis et al. article in this issue to point out that, on the average, only 18 people in seven recent cohorts published one or more articles in *MIS Quarterly*. This translates to 6.7 percent of the people in these cohorts worldwide. Clearly, based on numbers alone, the publication in the *MIS Quarterly* is a mark of distinction. Then the external reviewer could acknowledge the reputation of *Decision Support Systems* for publishing high-quality articles on decision support. Since the external reviewer was probably selected for his or her expertise on the topic area, he or she could then use the expertise to discuss the strengths of the articles. That is, the letter writer could comment not only upon numbers and established rankings, but also on the quality of the individual articles when assessing a candidate's research record.

More Premier IS Journals

As noted in the Dennis et al. article, as well as many other sources, other business disciplines have more than two journals that are routinely considered *premier*. In terms of the numbers game, it would help our discipline if we had three journals (or more) that were consistently considered premier. To do so will require a concerted effort of faculty worldwide to determine and then push the three journals that would be considered premier. Over this year, the Senior Scholars Consortium will be addressing a number of journal-related issues, including how we may work together as a community to create at least three journals that are consistently considered premier. This may entail strategies for getting designated journals eligible for ISI ratings, changing editorial policies to consistently promote rigor, or expanding mission statements to cover areas of IS research that are currently not published in journals with high rankings.

Some of my IS colleagues do not think we should have journal ranking systems. While I respect their opinions, I believe that rankings are a fact of life. They probably have existed ever since there were two things to compare. One strategy to take advantage of rankings would be to conduct a survey of the quality of journals that publish topics not typically published in the current top-ranked journals. That is, it may be worthwhile to get a ranking of the best journals in which to publish topics that are not typically considered mainstream IS, then work to get these rankings published in legitimate outlets such as *Communications of AIS*, as well as the journal ranking site on ISWorld, and reference the rankings to support the quality of work that is being done outside the mainstream.

³S. Athey and J. Plotnicki, "An Evaluation of Research Productivity in Academic IT," *Communications of the AIS* (3:7), 2000.

⁴C. Chua, L. Cao, K. Cousins, and D. Straub, "Measuring Researcher Productivity in Information Systems," *Journal of the AIS* (3), 2002, pp. 145-215.

More Developmental Reviewers

Most of these suggestions describe steps that journals or the IS community could take to create more realistic standards. But realistic standards must start at the most basic level—at the level of IS researchers who are reviewing the work of others. As I have stated earlier, I think that as a discipline we are too hard on one another during the review process. As reviewers, we tend to demand perfection...while as researchers we are painfully aware that perfection is impossible to achieve. The conception of reviewers in the IS discipline needs to change from that of primarily gatekeepers to that of diamond cutters. While I discuss the differences in detail in my March 2005 (Volume 29, Issue 1) editorial, the primary distinguishing characteristic of good diamond cutters is that they are able to see the shortcomings in others' research, but they find ways of bringing out that which is of value in the research. I hope as a discipline we can work together to establish realistic standards. And, I hope that we can start with ourselves in creating realistic standards.

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