

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Prelude

All of us are well aware of the challenges associated with publishing in the best journals in IS. When I assumed the role of Editor-in-Chief of *MIS Quarterly* on January 1, 2005, I had a vision of encouraging a gentler and kinder review process that would result in more and better articles being published. I shared this vision in my first editorial when I discussed the role of *diamond cutters* (as opposed to *gatekeepers*) as reviewers who could help polish manuscripts with potential into publishable articles. After a period of a year or so, I could see that there was movement in the right direction. The reviews were becoming kinder and gentler. To accommodate the greater volume of papers that I knew would soon follow, the MISQ office pointed out that we could increase the size of a printed page, and adjust the size of the font.

However, the torrent of accepted papers has yet to occur. It became obvious that the impediments to increasing the acceptance rate extended beyond the reviewers. Many associate editors appear tentative about overriding negative reviewers. So, we devised the Developmental AE Award and solicited nominations from authors whose papers had either been accepted or rejected the previous year (i.e., 2005). We selected three worthy recipients of the first annual Developmental AE Award: Mike Morris, Rob Fichman, and Jeff Smith. Each winner had received multiple nominations from authors of papers that had been rejected as well as accepted. I have since noticed more efforts on the part of associate editors to look for potential and merit, and develop it.

These efforts were designed to encourage reviewers and associate editors to assume a more developmental role. However, reviewers and associate editors are not the only gatekeepers in the system. Senior editors may also view themselves primarily as gatekeepers—and not as diamond cutters. Some senior editors have been unable to ever find papers that they think they can develop, and they left the board without ever accepting a paper during their tenure. Now, even though the majority of the papers submitted to *MIS Quarterly* do not initially reach the very high level of quality expected, I continue to believe that it is possible for each senior editor to work with authors in developing promising research to the point of publication.

Our discipline, like many others, is exhibiting a problem that can only be understood using a systems perspective. Many authors submit work that is not ready for a demanding review process, either because they lack the basic methodological skills, or they don't want to put adequate time and effort into developing their papers. Many key players in the review process—reviewers, associate editors, and senior editors—have a basic propensity to reject rather than develop. But then, these key players should not be asked to do major developmental work that the authors have chosen to burden the review team with. In short we have a system that is not as effective as it could be in converting IS research inputs into high-quality outputs, that is, publications of merit.

Fortunately, our discipline is well-equipped to handle systems problems. The remainder of this editorial describes what Izak Benbasat and I did to generate solutions to publishing more “A+” articles in the IS discipline. In particular, we describe a Delphi study used to elicit the opinions of senior MIS scholars and efforts to act upon their recommendations. We conclude with some suggestions for future directions that can be collectively taken by the IS academic community.

2006 Best Paper Award

“Industry-Wide Information Systems Standardization as Collective Action: The Case of the U.S. Residential Mortgage Industry” by M. Lynne Markus, Charles Steinfield, Rolf Wigand, and Gabe Minton has been selected as the Best Paper published in *MIS Quarterly* in 2006. It was published in the Special Issue on Standard Making. The paper was among those nominated by the associate editors. The senior editors, who did not have a nominated paper, read the nominations and discussed the papers over multiple rounds of voting. The paper is also the journal's nomination for the Best Publications Award for 2006 sponsored by the International Conference on Information Systems and to be voted upon by the Senior Scholars during the month of July.

A Camel Going Through the Eye of a Needle

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Delphi Study

When we were selected to head the Senior Scholar Consortium in 2006, we decided to call in the A-team: senior Information Systems scholars. The Senior Scholar Consortium consisted of (1) *MIS Quarterly* (MISQ) editors-in-chief, (2) *Information Systems Research* (ISR) editors-in-chief, (3) International Conference on Information Systems general conference chairs, (4) ICIS program committee chairs, and (5) Association for Information Systems past and present presidents and president-elects at the time the sample was put together. A total of 61 senior scholars, excluding us, participated in the study. We also conducted a separate Delphi study with a sample of junior scholars to make sure that we considered the opinions of our future academic leaders, and triangulated on the key issues. The study is described in more detail in Appendix A.

The Delphi approach was used to learn the opinions of senior and junior scholars as to how the Information Systems community could take steps to increase the number of A+ (top-quality) papers published by the IS community as a whole compared to the numbers published per year currently. Senior scholars were asked to participate in a three-round Delphi approach. Then, junior scholars participated separately in a similar Delphi study. In the first round of both the senior and junior scholars' version of the Delphi study, participants provided two or three suggestions of steps to be taken by members of the IS community, along with a rationale as to how this could enhance the total number of high quality research papers published. In the second round, scholars ranked the strategies identified (suggestions) in terms of the most viable. In the third round (which was only included in the senior scholars' version of the study), participants were asked to concentrate upon the most viable strategies (as ranked by the senior scholars group) and to develop and rank implementation plans to achieve them.

As a result of the senior scholar Delphi study, four general strategies for increasing the number of A+ publications emerged from round 2 results: (1) recognize at least three journals as A+ research outlets, (2) increase the capacity of MISQ and ISR, (3) improve reviewing and editorial processes, and (4) improve IS research quality. The results of round 2 are listed in Table A2 of Appendix A.

In the third and final round, 40 senior scholars (66 percent response rate) ranked these four general strategies and added an additional implementation plan. The results of round 3, listed in Table A3 of Appendix A, were presented at ICIS 2006. They were also discussed at a gathering of senior scholars who met on the Wednesday afternoon after the end of ICIS to devise ways of implementing some of the four general strategies as we discuss below.

A panel of 76 junior scholars, using the same approach focused on strategies for improving the review process. The junior scholars, in general, felt that the lack of journal space was not the key hurdle preventing them from publishing in A+ journals. They were concerned more about knowing what editors and reviewers defined A+ research to be, how to achieve it, and how to obtain the quality guidance to do so. In contrast, four of the five top suggestions provided by the senior scholars group focused on potential strategies that could be used to increase the number of A+ publication outlets, or space allotted to A+ papers.

Actions by Senior Scholars

We appreciate the fact that many of our senior scholars were willing to participate in the Delphi study and that they subsequently volunteered to form three subcommittees to address what they jointly considered to be the top two issues: (1) recognizing and including more IS journals in the A+ category and (2) improving editorial and review processes of these journals.

Recognizing an Increased Number as Premier IS Journals

Two subcommittees were formed to address this issue. The first committee, consisting of David Avison, Gordon Davis, Phillip Ein Dor, Dennis Galletta, Rudy Hirschheim, and Detmar Straub, debated about a “basket of journals” that could be recognized widely as the top journals in the discipline. A list of six journals was sent to the president of AIS, Michael Myers, in the hope that AIS could identify a group of journals that could be agreed upon by the Information Systems community to be among the A+ category when it came time for university administrators to consider tenure, merit, promotion, and, possibly, other personnel decisions. The committee emphasized that this list should truly represent the views of the international IS community and that it should not preclude IS researchers from making the case for the quality of specialty or niche journals not on the list.

The second committee, consisting of Soon Ang, Allen Lee, E. Burton Swanson and Veda Storey, suggested that a Best Publications Award be established to recognize the fact that there are many good journals in the IS discipline that publish the results of first-class research. However, since some journals are not considered to be in the A+ category, the top quality articles they publish might not get the proper recognition they deserve. Clearly, the IS community should be informed about such articles and give due credit to the journals in which they are published. Up to five articles a year will be given the Best Publications Award. ICIS is supporting the award. A call went out over IS World for nominations from journal editors for their best papers of 2006. Over 20 senior scholars have agreed to vote on the nominated papers in July using a web site set up by Andrew Schwarz.

Improve Reviewing and Editorial Processes

The third senior scholar committee, consisting of Allen Lee, Ananth Srinivasan, Joseph Valacich, and Ron Weber, tackled the challenging problem of how to improve the reviewing and editorial processes. Their report is found in Appendix B. Briefly, to increase the number of A+ papers means that the IS discipline must increase the number of quality papers entering the review process, must improve the processing of these papers, and must find the journal space to accommodate them when they are ready to be published. They made a number of recommendations:

1. Utilize a two-tier review system—utilizing an SE as the final decision maker on all acceptances (i.e., eliminating the AE level and expanding the SE level).
2. Require that all (most) senior editors (with the elimination of the AE level) hold the rank of full professor.
3. Limit the number of reviewers to a maximum of two.
4. Require a submission fee.
5. Use online reviewing systems to streamline the workflow.
6. Broaden the editorial mission to include IS-related papers focusing on topics currently going to top-level journals in management, marketing, psychology, computer science, and so on.
7. Limit the number of editorial boards (at least at the premier-level) that an individual can serve on at the same time.
8. Limit comments by reviewers to a maximum page length (e.g., four pages).
9. Require authors to only respond to editor-level revision comments (as is now done at *Academy of Management Journal*).

The report was submitted to the AIS President in the hopes that AIS would continue to work with the Vice President of Publications and the Publication Committee in refining this report so that its recommendations could be made to the appropriate journal editors.

Our Reactions

We are heartened by the response of the senior scholars in working to resolve this important problem for our discipline. In the academic community it often seems as if endless time is devoted to debating issues. The good news is that in this instance, recognizing the importance of the project for the future of the IS community, three separate committees made suggestions quite expeditiously. The Best Publications Award is being implemented as we write this note, and the other two reports look likely to lead to action, we hope in the very near future.

Further, efforts are underway to improve the review process and increase journal space. In particular, AIS has recently signed an agreement with Scholar One to use Manuscript Central for *Journal of the AIS* and *Communications of the AIS*, with the option of including *MIS Quarterly*. Many other journals use this system or a similar one. Manuscript processing should improve with the use of these types of systems, especially since they provide automatic notification to delinquent reviewers and editors. Further, *MIS Quarterly* has altered its page and font sizes to increase the journal space by approximately a third. We published a separate special issue in 2006, and approached three schools about underwriting the costs of an additional issue. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough papers to publish the sixth issue, but we hope that with the implementation of the recommendations of the three senior scholar committees we will have enough papers for larger and/or additional issues in the future. The generous donations from the University of Central Florida, Indiana University, and Washington State University have given us flexibility to do so.

As is obvious from the recommendations above, much can be done to improve the review process, but these changes tend to have counterbalancing consequences. We would like to add five other recommendations: stressing author responsibility, thinking creatively, establishing a global doctoral curriculum, encouraging proactive behavior from senior editors, and remembering that we are part of the same community.

Stressing Author Responsibility

Oddly enough, none of the recommendations of the senior scholar committees reflect the role of the authors. We believe that authors are part of the reviewing system and they need to be considered when seeking its improvement.

As noted in the MISQ editorial of March 2005, diamond cutters can not successfully polish flawed stones (i.e., manuscripts). Further, they may not be able to see the merits of a paper if it is too poorly written or developed. Authors must attempt to fully develop their ideas and refine their manuscripts before submitting them to journals. It is saddening when unseasoned authors ask for another chance to submit manuscripts previously been rejected by that same journal. These authors often state that they have used the first set of reviews to improve their paper. But in many cases, they should have addressed the issues before a very qualified review team had spent considerable time reviewing their half-baked ideas. Some specific suggestions that can help reduce these heartaches include

- vetting the paper at workshops and conferences
- asking colleagues to read the paper and offer suggestions
- carefully reading and applying journal guidelines (see MISQ's guidelines under Information for Prospective Authors at <http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html>)
- hiring a professional to edit the paper, especially if English is not the author's native language
- critically assessing problems with the paper and addressing them before submitting it

Thinking Creatively

One of us once heard the editor-in-chief of a leading accounting research journal commenting that papers submitted to that journal should be "new, true, and interesting." While doctoral programs and colleagues can help one to learn about the *true* (i.e., method) part, the responsibility for the other two rests on the shoulders of the author/researcher. Reviewers for the top IS journals expect to see the new and interesting aspects of one's work before they are willing to accept it. Less risky studies, such as making minor additions and alterations to well-established models, when properly conducted, may win accolades from the review team of a top IS journal for its true part, yet may be accompanied with a polite "sorry, not a novel or big enough contribution" let-down. Publishing in the best journals requires both creativity and solid methodology; the prospective authors need to be willing to make the serious commitment to making their work interesting.

The challenge is figuring out what is interesting to some, if not many, of a journal's readers. Murray Davis¹ suggests that a scholarly work is interesting when it disconfirms just enough of the readers' assumptions to pique their attention, but not enough

¹M. S. Davis, "That's Interesting! Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1), 1971, pp. 309-344.

for them to entirely dismiss it as absurd. Other approaches to creating interesting work could be to apply novel methodologies, to apply familiar methodologies in novel ways, to write about exciting new subject matter, or to write about seemingly mundane subject matter in a completely new way.²

Establishing a Global Doctoral Curriculum

In some cases authors are unable to conduct the quality research expected by a top tier journal even though they are willing to take the time and effort to do so. This is because they are ill-equipped by their doctoral programs to do so. They do not receive a good grounding in the assumptions and applications of multiple methodologies, and they are basically self-guided in their discovery and interpretation of theoretical foundations. In solving this system problem, it may be helpful to establish a common base for doctoral programs around the globe. Doctoral programs must ensure that their graduates have a thorough grounding in a broad range of theories and methodologies. They must impart their graduates with the skills to contemplate, design, and conduct high-quality research.

While junior scholars triangulated on some strategies for publishing more top-quality IS research, they clearly were uncertain about what quality research is and wanted to know how it should be conducted. We are not convinced that doctoral programs are providing this level of guidance consistently around the globe.

Encouraging Proactive Behavior by Senior Editors

It seems no matter how often authors are told that the senior editor's decision on their paper is not a matter of majority rule, they still focus on the number of *revise* versus the number *reject* recommendations in the review package. That is, just because the revise recommendations exceed the reject recommendations does not mean that authors will be invited to revise and resubmit their manuscript. This is especially true when considering that a review team is selected to assess the various aspects of a paper. Some reviewers are invited because they are especially able to comment on a paper's methodology. Others are selected because of their knowledge of the research topic. The senior editor must carefully weigh the assessments of each reviewer, their areas of expertise, and the integration of the various opinions expressed as a whole. Some reviewers' opinions are given more weight because of their expertise, and others may be overridden by the senior editor because their review lacks adequate justification for the recommendations made. Thus, the input of the review team must be evaluated and analyzed, but ultimately the senior editor must decide and assume full responsibility for the decision.

There is an added benefit to having the senior editor make a judgment that is more than the sum of reviewers' opinions. By doing so, the senior editor is in a better position to act proactively, identify what is good, interesting, and potentially promising about the paper, play the role of a coach rather than a gatekeeper, and take a level of risk that the reviewers will not. Ironically, reviewers who are chosen because of their high expertise in a subject area may be the very individuals who are least likely to accept new ideas, theories, or methodologies that differ from the well-established ones or for which they are recognized. Such reviewers are most likely to adopt a conservative position.

We discussed above the need for creative thinking on the part of authors. We believe that senior editor should be supportive of new theoretical and methodological developments. The senior editor can actively encourage creative behavior by championing novelty and excitement in papers accepted for publication rather than mere orthodoxy and conservatism.

Remembering That We Are Part of the Same Community

While we can not assert this based on a high degree of empirical certainty, it is our considered opinion that the IS community has a relatively inimical and unconstructive way of evaluating each other, especially when cloaked by the anonymity afforded by the

²The February 2006 issue of *Academy of Management Journal* (49:1) contains a number of articles that attempt to describe what makes an article interesting.

review process. To quote Walt Kelly, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”³ One of us recalls that, many years ago, when the departmental editor for Information Systems for *Management Science* was confronted during a “Meet the Editors” session at a conference with the criticism that he was not accepting many papers, he asked the audience members to look at the people sitting next to them because they were the ones rejecting their papers. Several years later, when he assumed that position, Izak found out that the Information Systems and Decision Analysis departments of *Management Science* had the lowest acceptance rate among all the departments.

At a recent conference, someone opined that IS reviewers adjudicating for a grant selection committee in business administration generally had more negative comments for IS applications than the reviewers for other business subdisciplines had for theirs. A highly critical frame of mind when reviewing papers leads to a negative downward spiral. Those irritated by what they view as unreasonable criticism in the reviews they received may follow the same negativism inadvertently and unconsciously when they are asked to evaluate the work of others.

In conclusion, we hope that the views and suggestions provided by the senior and junior members of the IS community, and the resulting initiatives taken by the senior colleagues, with the support of the AIS leadership and AIS community, will begin to alleviate many of the current challenges we face in publishing in the very best journals in IS—and in the business disciplines—while simultaneously the IS community increases the number of such journals, and identifies and showcases the best research in IS wherever such exemplary work is published. We encourage each one of you to remember that we are members of a community and that we collectively will benefit by developing ideas that make our community stronger.

Appendix A

Increasing the Number of A+ Published Papers in Information Systems: Suggestions Generated Based on Delphi Studies

Prepared for the Senior Scholars Consortium at ICIS 2006 by

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Overview

It has been 15 years since the first issue of *Information Systems Research* (ISR) was published, joining *MIS Quarterly* (MISQ) first published in 1977 as the other A+ journal in Information Systems. A recent Issues and Opinions article in ISR pointed out that a steady growth in IS faculty, coupled with a relatively steady number of published articles in these two premier journals, has created a situation in which IS faculty look unproductive when compared with other business school disciplines (Valacich et al. 2006). In particular, the ratio of IS faculty publishing in premier journals looks downright puny when compared to other disciplines⁴. Given the declining ratio of premier publications per author, it is believed that there is a need to increase the capacity of A+ journals by increasing the number of pages available for the publication of A+ papers. Consequently, a Delphi approach was used to learn the opinions of senior and junior scholars as to how the Information Systems community could take steps to increase the number of A+ (top-quality) papers published by the community as a whole compared to the numbers published per year currently. To do this, a three-round Delphi approach was initiated, in which senior and junior scholars were asked to participate. In the first round of both the senior and junior scholars' versions of the Delphi study, scholars were asked to provide two or three suggestions of steps that can be taken by members of the IS community along with a rationale about how this could enhance the total amount

³Walt Kelly, creator of the cartoon character Pogo, first used the quote “We Have Met The Enemy and He Is Us” on a poster for Earth Day in 1970 (source: http://www.igopogo.com/we_have_met.htm).

⁴The IS discipline had the lowest proportion of faculty publishing in premier journals (5.5 authors per 100 IS faculty) compared with Management (12.7 per 100 management faculty), Finance (9.4 authors per 100 faculty), and Marketing (9.2 authors per 100 faculty) averaged over the 10 year period from 1994 through 2003. Only Accounting, with its 4.8 authors per 100 faculty, was lower (Valacich et al. 2006).

of high quality research papers published. In the second round, scholars were asked to rank the strategies identified (suggestions) in terms of the most viable. In the third round, which was only included in the senior scholars' version of the study, scholars were asked to concentrate on the top-four most-viable strategies (as ranked by the senior scholars group) and use the Delphi approach to develop and rank implementation plans to achieve them.

Senior Scholars Study

Sample

The sample for the senior scholars' Delphi study consisted of (1) MISQ editors-in-chiefs, (2) ISR editors-in-chiefs, (3) International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) general conference chairs, (4) ICIS program committee chairs, and (5) Association for Information Systems (AIS) past, current, and elect presidents at the time the sample was put together. This resulted in a total of 61 senior scholars excluding Benbasat and Saunders. Contact information for three of the scholars could not be obtained, and four e-mail addresses were either deactivated or their owners were on leaves of absence, thus the final sample consisted of 54 senior scholars.

Round 1

Round 1 had the objective of soliciting suggestions regarding strategies that will help increase the number of high quality research papers published. Senior scholars were asked to provide two or three suggestions of strategies that can be adopted by members of the IS community, along with a rationale about how this could enhance the total amount of high quality research papers published. Two sample suggestions were provided by us, and participants could view a complete list of all suggestions submitted to date before providing their own, to minimize duplication. In all, 32 senior scholars provided responses in round 1 (for a 59 percent response rate), resulting in a total of 83 suggestions, which together with the two sample suggestions brought the total to 85.

Round 2

In round 2, senior scholars were asked to rank the strategies identified (suggestions) in terms of their importance. In order to minimize duplication, the 85 suggestions received in round 1 were categorized into 19 categories. These 19 categories were then ranked by senior scholars according to their perceived importance, using unique ranks ranging from 1 (most important) to 19 (least important). All suggestions along with their accompanying rationale were shown in random order. Scholars had the option of either submitting their rankings using the web interface that was specially developed for this round, or via an e-mail attachment. Round 2 achieved a response rate of 67 percent, where a total of 36 rankings were received. Summary statistics for the aggregated category rankings are shown in Table A1.

Round 3

The main objective of round 3 was to generate lists of clear and actionable implementation plans for each of the top strategies identified. Since many of the 19 strategies ranked in round 2 were either related to each other (satisfy the same general objective), or mainly concerned with implementation details, a careful analysis was undertaken to cluster the categories into a manageable set of broad strategies. The results of this analysis indicated that four general categories collectively incorporate all of the 19 strategies used in round 2. Three of these strategies attained the top three rankings in round 2, with the fourth being ranked as the eighth most important.

The four general strategies are (1) recognize at least three journals as A+ research outlets (rank = 1 in round 2), (2) increase the capacity of MISQ and ISR (rank = 3), (3) improve reviewing and editorial processes (rank = 2), and (4) improve IS research quality (rank = 8). The remaining 15 strategies ranked in round 2, which mainly concerned implementation details, were then classified as implementation plans that can help achieve the objectives of the four general strategies. For example, while strategies 5, 7, 10, and 11 in round 2 relate to the first general strategy, which proposes that the community recognizes another journal as an A+ journal, in terms of which journal should be considered as the next A+ journal, strategies 15 and 16, concern how we can achieve a level of acceptance for the newly recognized journal. To ensure that the set of proposed implementation plans are representative of the diverse opinions of the senior scholars group, we added a new implementation plan that concerns recognizing a European journal as the next A+ journal. Similarly, two general issues were identified that relate to the second general strategy (increasing the capacity of MISQ and ISR), which translated to two groups of implementation plans

- (1) How can we increase the number of published articles in MISQ and ISR? And for what type of articles should this new space be allotted? (Strategies 4, 12, 14, and 19 in round 2)
- (2) How can we fund the additional space? (Strategy 18 from round 2, plus three new implementation plans)

Table A2 shows the four strategies and their implementation plans, as well as the rankings of these plans in round 2.

Table A1. Round 2 Results

| Rank | Suggestion | Mean | Std. Dev. | Median | Times Ranked as Top 3 |
|------|---|-------|-----------|--------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Recognize one or more other journals as A+ (in addition to MISQ and ISR). Candidates include JAIS, IEEE/ACM, MISE, JMIS, MISQE, European journals, and a new journal. | 5.44 | 5.28 | 3 | 19 |
| 2 | Improve reviewing and editorial processes so that they are more developmental and more likely to increase acceptance rates. | 7.31 | 5.11 | 7 | 12 |
| 3 | Increase the capacity of MISQ and ISR. | 8.11 | 6.31 | 7 | 13 |
| 4 | Improve MISQ and ISR by broadening their scope. | 8.86 | 5.68 | 9 | 9 |
| 5 | Improve JAIS. | 9.11 | 5.02 | 8 | 6 |
| 6 | Develop our doctoral students into better researchers and reviewers. | 9.69 | 4.79 | 10 | 3 |
| 7 | Extend the publication community to include high-quality journals in other disciplines (i.e., <i>Management Science</i> , <i>Organization Science</i> , ASQ, ACM) and for practitioner audiences. | 9.75 | 5.45 | 9 | 6 |
| 8 | Work as a community to improve research quality. | 9.75 | 4.94 | 11 | 4 |
| 9 | Hold substantive theoretical or methodological workshops at ICIS, etc., aimed at improving the quality of IS research. | 9.78 | 4.41 | 10 | 3 |
| 10 | Improve journal structure in IS discipline. | 9.97 | 4.81 | 11 | 6 |
| 11 | Improve JMIS. | 10.22 | 4.96 | 11 | 2 |
| 12 | Broaden representation on editorial boards. | 10.31 | 4.59 | 10 | 2 |
| 13 | Speed up review process. | 10.33 | 5.44 | 10 | 4 |
| 14 | Encourage boldness. | 10.5 | 5.53 | 10 | 4 |
| 15 | Change journal ranking system. | 11 | 5.66 | 12 | 4 |
| 16 | Educate publishers of business school rankings of our top journals. | 11.19 | 4.96 | 12 | 2 |
| 17 | Improve ICIS. | 11.78 | 4.77 | 12 | 2 |
| 18 | Go electronic. | 12.36 | 6.17 | 14 | 6 |
| 19 | Publish a serial anthology of the best A+ articles from each decade of our history. | 14.53 | 4.91 | 16 | 1 |

Round 3 participants were asked to rank each implementation plan (within a strategy) where a rank of 1 indicated that this plan should be implemented first, a rank of 2 indicated that this plan should be implemented second, etc. A rank of 0 indicated that this plan should not be implemented. Furthermore, participants were also given the option of adding new implementation plans, as well as ranking these additions relative to plans that are already included in the list. Finally, participants were asked to rank the four strategies. Forty senior scholars participated in round 3, giving us a response rate of 74 percent. In addition to the rankings that are shown in Table A2, 32 new implementation plans were also received. The new plans, their relative rankings, and the strategies to which they correspond are all shown in Table A3.

Junior Scholars Study

Sample

To see if another group of scholars would hold differing views of desirable implementation plans, we conducted a Delphi Study with junior scholars. It could be argued that junior scholars concerned about tenure have the greatest stake in increasing the number of A+ publications. In selecting a sample of junior scholars, two criteria were used: (1) the sample should be representative of active MIS research programs, and (2) the sample should be universal in its coverage. As a starting point, the researchers consulted a number of studies that have provided research program rankings. The most recent, Huang and Hsu (2005), was used to identify the most productive institutions conducting MIS research. Of the 31 institutions listed in Huang and Hsu, only one Canadian institution was identified, and no European institutions were listed (while several Asian institutions were included, the list did not include any Oceania-based institutions). Consequently, the search was expanded to include relatively older rankings, namely, Athey and Plotnicki (2000) and Im et al. (1998). However, even when the three published lists are combined, no European institutions appear on the list, and only two Canadian institutions do. To ensure that the sampled institutions are geographically representative, we consulted the AIS website to obtain a list of active MIS programs in Europe, Canada, and Asia-Pacific. This added a number of institutions to the list of those that are most productive, bringing the total number of institutions in the original sample to 57 (see Table A3). Consequently, the websites of each of the 57 institutions in the list were examined to identify junior MIS faculty. Junior faculty were defined as those who graduated between the years 2002 and 2005, and who held their current position for at least 1 year. Of the 57 institutions, 5 were excluded because they did not employ any junior MIS faculty, thus, giving us a final sample of 52 institutions. In all, 76 junior scholars were identified belonging to these institutions. The publication records and research interests of all junior faculty members

| Table A2. Round 3 Results | | | | | | |
|---|--|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Round 2 Rank | Strategy – Implementation Plan | DNI¹ | Mean² | Std. Dev.² | Mean³ | Std. Dev.³ |
| Strategy 1: Recognize at least three journals as A+ research outlets. Candidates include JAIS, MISQ, ISR, IEEE/ACM, MISE, JMIS, MISQE, European journals, a new IS journal, and journals in other disciplines. | | | | | | |
| 5 | Choose JAIS in addition to ISR and MISQ. | 12 | 2.16 | 1.28 | 3.73 | 2.52 |
| 7 | Extend the publication community to include high-quality journals in other disciplines (i.e., <i>Management Science</i> , <i>Organization Science</i> , ASQ, ACM) and for practitioner audiences. | 4 | 2.82 | 1.91 | 3.27 | 2.23 |
| NEW | Choose EJIS or other European journals in addition to ISR and MISQ. | 12 | 3.32 | 1.84 | 4.51 | 2.3 |
| 11 | Choose JMIS in addition to ISR and MISQ. | 10 | 3.41 | 1.72 | 4.38 | 2.18 |
| 16 | Educate publishers of business school rankings of our top journals. | 7 | 3.5 | 1.96 | 4.16 | 2.24 |
| 10 | Improve journal structure in IS discipline by creating spin-off journals of MISQ. | 22 | 3.93 | 1.33 | 5.76 | 1.74 |
| 15 | Change journal ranking system. | 20 | 4 | 1.8 | 5.62 | 1.93 |
| Strategy 2: Increase the capacity of MISQ and ISR. | | | | | | |
| 4 | Improve MISQ and ISR by broadening their scope. | 10 | 2.22 | 1.34 | 2.22 | 1.34 |
| 14 | Encourage boldness in research. | 11 | 2.58 | 1.63 | 4.49 | 3.27 |
| 18 | Go electronic (to offset the cost of additional issues). | 14 | 3.17 | 1.75 | 3.17 | 1.75 |
| 12 | Broaden representation on editorial boards. | 10 | 3.56 | 2.26 | 3.56 | 2.26 |
| NEW | Charge fees (i.e., submission, publication). | 27 | 3.7 | 2.36 | 3.7 | 2.36 |
| NEW | Look for subsidies/sponsors. | 15 | 3.73 | 1.7 | 3.73 | 1.7 |
| NEW | Increase acceptance rates. | 20 | 4.24 | 2.63 | 4.24 | 2.63 |
| NEW | Attract more advertisers. | 22 | 4.6 | 1.99 | 4.6 | 1.99 |
| 19 | Publish a serial anthology of the best A+ articles from each decade of our history. | 22 | 5.2 | 2.27 | 5.2 | 2.27 |
| Strategy 3: Improve reviewing and editorial processes. | | | | | | |
| 2 | Make reviewing and editorial processes more developmental. | 6 | 2.35 | 1.52 | 2.78 | 1.7 |
| 13 | Speed up reviewing process (more articles will be published faster). | 5 | 2.69 | 1.67 | 3 | 1.75 |
| 9 | Hold substantive theoretical or methodological workshops at ICIS, etc., aimed at improving the quality of IS research. | 5 | 2.78 | 1.41 | 3.08 | 1.52 |
| 12 | Broaden representation on editorial boards. | 8 | 2.97 | 1.57 | 3.41 | 1.62 |
| 6 | Develop our doctoral students into better reviewers. | 8 | 3.46 | 1.35 | 3.81 | 1.35 |
| Strategy 4: Improve IS research quality. | | | | | | |
| 8 | Work as a community to improve research quality | 2 | 1.57 | 0.74 | 1.65 | 0.79 |
| 6 | Develop our doctoral students into better researchers | 4 | 1.88 | 0.78 | 2 | 0.82 |
| 17 | Improve ICIS | 13 | 2.71 | 0.86 | 2.81 | 0.7 |
| Rank the 4 strategies. | | | | | | |
| | Recognize at least three journals as A+ research outlets. Candidates include JAIS, MISQ, ISR, IEEE/ACM, MISE, JMIS, MISQE, European journals, a new IS journal, and journals in other disciplines. | | 2.09 | 1.19 | 2.14 | 1.22 |
| | Increase the capacity of MISQ and ISR. | | 2.41 | 1.04 | 2.54 | 1.09 |
| | Improve reviewing and editorial processes. | | 2.48 | 0.76 | 2.57 | 0.81 |
| | Improve IS research quality. | | 2.84 | 1.3 | 2.94 | 1.28 |

¹DNI: # of times this plan/strategy was selected as "Do not implement," meaning that this implementation plan/strategy should not be implemented.

²Computed after excluding all DNI rankings.

³Computed after adjusting for "DNI" values. DNI values were substituted with a rank equivalent to the maximum rank possible (equals the number of implementation plans/strategies being ranked).

Table A3. Suggested Additional Implementation Plans

| Plan | Relative Rank |
|--|---------------|
| Strategy 1: Recognize at least three journals as A+ research outlets. Candidates include JAIS, MISQ, ISR, IEEE/ACM, MISE, JMIS, MISQE, European journals, a new IS journal, and journals in other disciplines. | |
| Don't restrict to 3 A+ journals that everyone needs to buy into. | 2 |
| Use a Delphi approach to complete the journal rankings. | 2 |
| Create new type of journals (or include in existing journals) to allow different types of publication that fosters knowledge and understanding within the IS community. | 3 |
| Include acknowledgment that the A+ journal for different approaches and different IS topics will be different—e.g., society (Info Soc), interpretivist research (I&O), strategy (JSIS), Scandinavian tradition (SJIS). | 2 |
| Choose MISQE in addition to ISR and MISQ. | 1 |
| Restart JAIS as a top journal. | 1 |
| Come to consensus about rankings of our top journals. | 2 |
| Recognize that many journals can be "A" journals (e.g., TODS, IEEE). Attempts to limit to a few journals increases the sense that IS is a divided community. Journals should be recognized more for their quality than their "suitability to IS" narrowly defined. | 1 |
| Strategy 2: Increase the capacity of MISQ and ISR. | |
| Get rid of a layer of reviewers. | 1 |
| Change reviewing process to improve manuscripts and make them publishable | 3 |
| Make reviewing an overt process (authors remain unknown until publication, reviewers should be known to the public). | 4 |
| Include other types of publications such as scientific debate. | 1 |
| Be very aware of U.S.-centric bias in doing so. | 3 |
| Publish 6 issues of ISR per year. | 1 |
| Define better the scope of each journal so that not all journals look alike. | 1 |
| Encourage relevance of contents. | 3 |
| Strategy 3: Improve reviewing and editorial processes. | |
| Make senior editorial appointments. | 3 |
| Change the reviewing process to allow for the development of good ideas until they become publishable. | 1 |
| Change reviewing to make reviewing process overt (authors unknown until publication; reviewers known to everyone). | 2 |
| Greater international membership; different philosophical, ontological, and epistemological representation— say goodbye to the cookie cutter approach. | 2 |
| Not just ICIS, but ECIS, PACIS and AMCIS. | 3 |
| Recognize top reviewers of accepted articles. | 2 |
| Hold workshops for grooming developmental AEs and SEs. | 1 |
| Strategy 4: Improve IS research quality. | |
| Encourage collaboration with other business disciplines. | 2 |
| Encourage cross-disciplinary research. | 1 |
| Develop a better definition of what is "research quality" and educate the community. | 1 |
| Make ICIS more representative of the range of IS research traditions. | 4 |
| Hold topical workshops for doctoral students (economics of IS, strategy in IS, etc.). | 1 |
| Improve (i.e., reduce acceptance rates) AMCIS. | 4 |
| Make our research more relevant. | 1 |
| Include practical medium-term relevance as a criterion for publication. | 1 |
| Recognize a broader range of research as IS (e.g., recent admission of <i>Design Science</i>). | 1 |

| Table A4. Junior Faculty Sample | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | # Institutions in Original Sample | # Institutions in Final Sample | # Participants in Final Sample |
| Asia-Pacific | | | |
| Australia | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Hong Kong - China | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Israel | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Japan | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Korea | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| New Zealand | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Singapore | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Total (Asia-Pacific) | 12 | 10 | 14 |
| Europe | | | |
| Denmark | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Finland | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| France | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Germany | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Netherlands | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Norway | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| United Kingdom | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Total (Europe) | 12 | 9 | 13 |
| North America | | | |
| Canada | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| United States | 29 | 29 | 41 |
| Total (North America) | 33 | 33 | 49 |
| Total | 57 | 52 | 76 |

were examined to ensure that the faculty conducts research in MIS, and contact information could be obtained. The final sample of junior faculty covered 16 countries that are typically considered to be among the leading contributors to English-speaking MIS journals. Table A4 offers a summary of the junior faculty sample.

Round 1

Round 1 of the junior scholars Delphi study followed the same approach described for its senior scholars counterpart. In all, 33 responses were received (43 percent response rate), providing a total of 81 suggestions (in addition to the two sample suggestions provided by the researchers).

Round 2

As in round 2 of the senior scholars Delphi study, the 83 suggestions received in round 1 were categorized into 17 categories that were later ranked by junior faculty in terms of their importance. The 42 rankings were received either through the web interface or via email attachments (55 percent response rate). Summary statistics for the rankings are shown in Table A5.

Differences Between the Senior and Junior Scholars Comments

The concerns of the junior scholars, understandably, revolve around improving the reviewing process (suggestion 1, Table A5), its quality (4 and 5), and fairness (7). Furthermore, junior scholars feel that there is a need to define the quality needed for research to be published in an A+ journal (9), in addition to receiving more helpful training in producing A+ research and papers. Therefore, junior scholars, in general, feel that the quality and ambiguity about what top research is, and how to achieve it, is preventing them from publishing in A+ journals, rather than a lack of journal space. In contrast, four of the five top suggestions provided by the senior scholars group focused on potential strategies that can be used to increase the number of A+ publication outlets, or space allotted to A+ papers.

Table A5. Junior Scholars—Round 2 Results

| Rank | Suggestion | Mean | Std. Dev. | Median | Times Ranked in Top 3 |
|------|--|-------|-----------|--------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Improve the reviewing process. | 5.17 | 3.08 | 4 | 17 |
| 2 | Recognize one or more other journals as A+ (in addition to MISQ and ISR). Candidates include JAIS, IEEE/ACM, MISE, JMIS, MISQE, European journals and a new journal. Both JAIS and JMIS have the potentials to be ranked as A+ journals. | 5.62 | 5.15 | 3.5 | 21 |
| 3 | Increase the capacity of MISQ and ISR. | 6.33 | 5.43 | 5 | 16 |
| 4 | Measure and reward high-quality and timely reviewers. | 7.12 | 3.7 | 6.5 | 8 |
| 5 | Train reviewers. | 7.64 | 4.09 | 7 | 7 |
| 6 | Redefine scope of A+ journals/ Extend the scope of coverage at top IS journals. | 7.74 | 4.3 | 8 | 11 |
| 7 | Have an ombudsman to help with issues of unfair rejections and reviews. | 8.76 | 5.19 | 8.5 | 9 |
| 8 | Submit papers to A+ journals of other than IS fields. | 9.12 | 5.57 | 8 | 11 |
| 9 | Redefine what is meant by high quality research papers/distinguish between A+ papers and A+ journals. | 9.31 | 4.16 | 10 | 6 |
| 10 | Increase the stability of quality in top A journals. | 9.74 | 3.52 | 9 | 1 |
| 11 | Make better use of electronic journals to cover the cost of more issues/pages. | 9.81 | 4.9 | 11 | 4 |
| 12 | Broaden appointments to editorial boards of A+ journals. | 10.07 | 3.93 | 11 | 3 |
| 13 | Provide guidance/training about what is good/appropriate research. | 10.14 | 3.97 | 11 | 3 |
| 14 | Shorten the length of papers to free-up more space. | 10.98 | 4.73 | 12 | 3 |
| 15 | Register IS journals to index lists. | 11.05 | 3.7 | 11 | 1 |
| 16 | Ask for submission fees to cover the cost of more issues/pages. | 12.02 | 4.99 | 14.5 | 1 |
| 17 | Get beyond the regime of top-x rankings. | 12.38 | 5.03 | 14 | 4 |

Next Steps

It is our belief that senior scholars have the ability to influence deans and promotion committees and junior colleagues to consider certain journals as A+ journals. Furthermore, through their actions, such as publishing and promoting certain journals, individually or as a group, senior scholars can influence the IS community to submit more papers in these targeted journals. Our goals for the Senior Scholars Consortium at ICIS are the following:

- (1) Upon which strategies (from Table A2) should we focus in the short run and long run to achieve our objectives of increasing A+ publications?
- (3) What should senior scholars do to increase the number of A+ publications (i.e., which implementation plans should they undertake as a group)?

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Appendix B

Increasing the Number of A+ Published Papers in the Information Systems Discipline: Improving the Journal Review Process

Allen Lee, Virginia Commonwealth University
 Ananth Srinivasan, University of Auckland
 Joe Valacich, Washington State University
 Ron Weber, Monash University

Introduction⁵

A recent article reported on an analysis of the proportion of faculty publishing articles in premier business journals (i.e., the ratio of authors of premier business journal articles to total faculty of a discipline) across the disciplines of accounting, finance, management, marketing, and information systems for the years 1994 through 2003 (Valacich et al. 2006). This analysis revealed that over this period the management discipline had on average the highest proportion of faculty publishing in premier journals (12.7 authors per 100 management faculty), followed by finance (9.4 authors per 100 faculty), marketing (9.2 authors per 100 faculty), IS (5.5 authors per 100 faculty), and accounting (4.8 authors per 100 faculty). A further analysis found that IS was on a downward trend, having the lowest proportion in 2003.

It appears that the decrease in the authors/100 ratio in the IS discipline is to a large extent based on the growth of the discipline while the number of authors publishing in the premier journals stayed constant. However, despite growing submission rates (see Benbasat 2000, 2001; DeSanctis 2003), the two premier IS journals have not always published at full capacity, suggesting that the reasons for the current situation might be multifaceted.

A plausible explanation for the current situation is that the IS discipline has acted with the zeal of a neophyte—in other words, the IS discipline might have tried too hard in its pursuit of legitimacy. One theory, q-r theory, has been used to explain differences in publication activity across different disciplines (see Ellison 2002; Swanson 2004). This theory suggests that social norms develop over time regarding what is considered acceptable quality (Ellison 2002). Specifically, there will be a shift toward an emphasis on methodological rigor (r quality) instead of on a submission's contribution (q quality). The search for legitimacy of the IS discipline, and the accompanying debates over rigor and relevance of IS research (e.g., Benbasat and Zmud 1999; Davenport and Markus 1999; Lee 1999; Lyytinen 1999), can be seen as contributing to a trend of higher norms for what is considered acceptable r quality (see also DeSanctis 2003, Robey 2003). As no research study is without flaws (Dennis and Valacich 2001; McGrath 1982), many papers are rejected due to deficiencies in r quality, as editors tend to implement rather than overrule reviewers' suggestions (see also Saunders 2006, Starbuck 2005), leading to a decrease in publication output.⁶

Whereas Ellison (2002) originally assumed that editors would overrule reviewers in an attempt to fill journal slots, Swanson (2004) offers two compelling reasons for editors' reluctance to overrule the reviewers: the editors' dependence on competent reviewers, and the editors' own reputation, as they do not want to be regarded by reviewers as having standards below the norm. This reluctance to overrule reviewers' recommendations can lead to a journal not publishing at full capacity. Further, the authors' time needed to increase a paper's r quality takes time away from more productive research efforts (Ellison 2002), leading to a lower article submission rate (Swanson 2004), which can eventually diminish a journal's publication pipeline (however, the growth of the field can, by itself, lead to an increase in overall submissions).

Another factor leading to editors' reluctance to overrule the reviewers particular to the IS discipline is the two-tier review system. Whereas in February 2005 the editorial board members of premier journals in other business school disciplines were comprised primarily of full professors (around 90 percent), only about half (around 49 percent) of the editorial board members of ISR and MISQ were full professors (for a listing of these journals, see Valacich et al. 2006). Given that junior reviewers and editors focus relatively more on methodology (i.e., r quality) than on contribution (i.e., q quality; see Starbuck 2003), junior associate editors are more likely to follow reviewers' recommendations

⁵Much of this section was taken from Valacich et al. 2006.

⁶One of the most intriguing studies of the review process was done by Peters and Ceci (1982) who resubmitted previously published articles to the same psychology journal that published them two or three years earlier. Out of the nine articles whose prior publication went undetected, eight (89 percent) were rejected, primarily for methodological problems.

based on r quality. Furthermore, in a two-tier review system, an editor has to overrule the reviewers as well as the associate editor when deciding to accept a high-q paper that has a slightly lower r quality.⁷

Ongoing debates about the diversity and legitimacy of the IS discipline (e.g., Benbasat and Weber 1996; Benbasat and Zmud 2003; DeSanctis 2003; Galliers 2003; Piccoli and Ives 2003; Robey 1996, 2003) are also likely to have caused an exclusion of high-q quality papers from certain journals (see Dennis et al. 2006). Combined with an increased focus on methodological rigor—also partly fueled by the field's quest for legitimacy—this has led to a situation where the IS field appears to “eat its young” (Robey 2003, p. 355). This in turn limits the acceptance of high-q quality papers (despite growing submission rates) and at the same time places barriers for young IS faculty to publish a sufficient number of premier articles to meet tenure criteria at many institutions (Dennis et al. 2006).

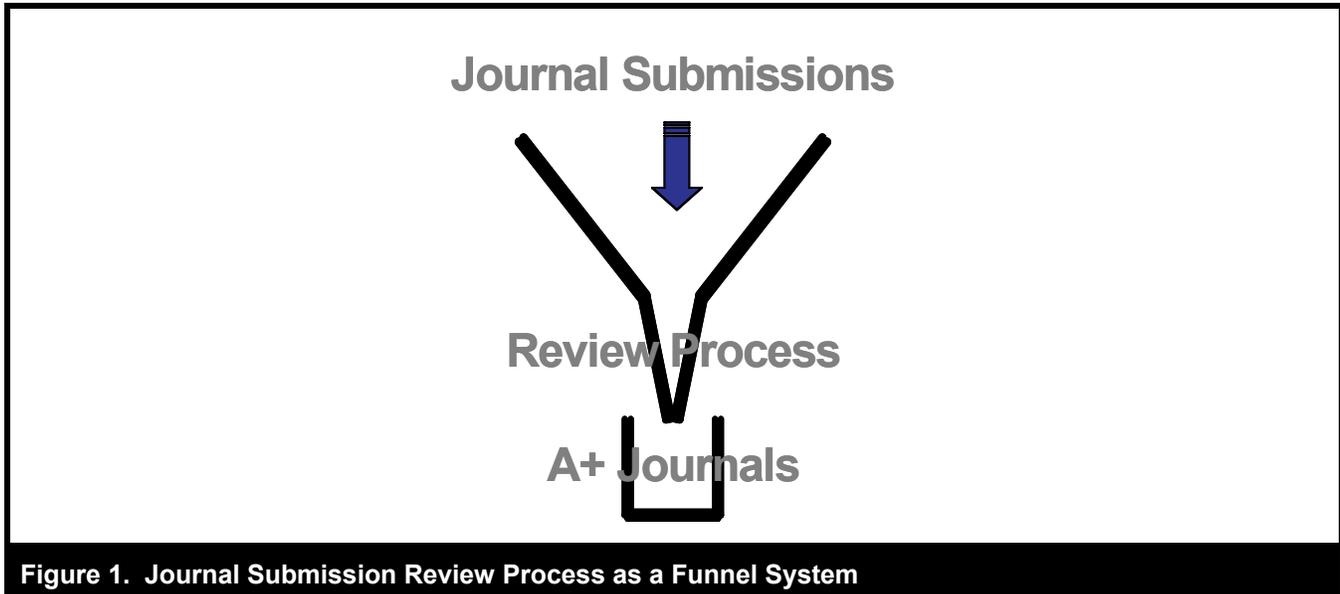
Journal Review Process as a System

The journal review process is a system in which, like all systems, the behavior of one part of the system affects other parts of the system. In this regard, a useful metaphor for the journal review process is a funnel employed to guide a liquid into a bucket (Figure B1). Paper submissions enter the mouth of the funnel. If we increase the number of high-quality submissions to journals, we may have to increase the holding capacity of the funnel. Otherwise, the funnel might quickly overflow. The funnel also might overflow, however, if the spout is too narrow or clogged with residue. The overflow problem will be exacerbated if we increase the inflow to the funnel but make no adjustment to the spout (e.g., widen it or clean out residue). Moreover, if we increase the throughput of the funnel, we need to ensure the bucket that receives the output has the capacity to accept the increased throughput. Otherwise, the bucket will also overflow.

Hence, each recommendation below must be considered in the context of all of the other recommendations. No single recommendation should be quoted, lifted from this context, and then presented as a stand-alone recommendation.

- The number of high-quality journal submissions per capita needs to be increased. Some ways in which this outcome might be achieved are
 - Better training of researchers.
 - Better mentoring of researchers.
 - Improved funding of researchers.
 - Charging authors a submission fee so they are circumspect about submitting papers that have not been refined.
 - Broadening the editorial scope of the journals to include papers that would not normally be submitted to ISR or MISQ.
 - Fast track papers from ICIS and other high-quality conferences to target journals.
- The capacity of journals to receive a larger number of journal submissions needs to be increased. This outcome might be achieved by providing automated journal submission processes and improved management of papers that are under review.
- The capacity of the review process (the number of manuscripts under review at any time across all journals, but especially “A” journals) needs to be increased. Some ways in which this outcome might be achieved are
 - Automating some aspects of the review process.
 - Increasing the number of scholars undertaking review work.
 - Improving the throughput of the review process (see the next point).
- The throughput of the review process (the rate at which manuscripts enter the review process and then exit the review process, at all journals, but especially “A” journals) needs to be increased. Some ways in which this outcome might be achieved are
 - Automating some aspects of the review process.
 - Moving from the three-tier SE-AE-reviewer system to a two-tier editor-reviewer system,
 - At each journal, increasing the number of “channels” (the number of editor-reviewer units available to review papers) at any one time.
 - Reducing the number of reviewers per submission from three to two or even one.
 - Moving the “developmental” process from the manuscript review process to the doctoral program education process.
 - Requiring editors to review a minimum number of manuscripts per year or else be dropped from the editorial board as “not needed.”
 - Paying an honorarium to editors and reviewers based on performance.
 - Require that most (if not all) editorial assignments be filled by full professors.
 - Limit the number of rounds before a final decision is made to two.
 - Limit the number of pages for reviewers' comments on a paper (e.g., four pages maximum).
 - Require that authors only respond to editor-highlighted concern in the revise-and-resubmit document.

⁷According to a senior marketing scholar, the two-tier review system could, likewise, provide a potential reason for a decline in the authors/100 ratio in marketing; researchers might perceive it as impossible to “please” five different individuals (three reviewers, one AE, and one SE) during the review process and might choose to send their papers to outlets in the reference disciplines with fewer review levels (and possibly reviewers).



- The capacity for the number of “slots” in journals (especially A journals) in which papers can be published needs to be increased. Some ways in which this outcome might be achieved are
 - Increasing the number of issues per year per journal.
 - Increasing the number of slots per issue per journal.
 - Allowing long queues for accepted manuscripts waiting to be published (it is the acceptance that counts).
 - Increasing the number of journals (especially “A” journals).
 - Charging authors a publication fee to fund extra journal capacity.

Recommendations

Although there are numerous recommendations that we feel could positively influence the journal review process, we make nine specific recommendations that we believe will have the greatest and most immediate impact.

1. Utilize a two-tier review system—utilizing an SE as the final decision maker on all acceptances (i.e., eliminating the AE level and expanding the SE level).
2. Require that all (most) senior editors (with the elimination of the AE level) hold the rank of full professor.
3. Limit the number of reviewers to a maximum of two.
4. Require a submission fee.
5. Use online reviewing systems to streamline the workflow.
6. Broaden the editorial mission to include IS-related papers focusing on topics currently going to top-level journals in management, marketing, psychology, computer science, and so on.
7. Limit the number of editorial boards (at least at the premier-level) that an individual can serve on at the same time.
8. Limit comments by reviewers to a maximum page length (e.g., four pages).
9. Require authors to only respond to editor-level revision comments (as is now done at *Academy of Management Journal*).

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