

Editor's Comments

The decade of the 80's is a particularly interesting and tumultuous period in the information systems field. In large part, this turbulence derives from the confluence of four forces. The first is the dramatic shift in technology economics and capabilities. This has unlocked genuinely new and exciting applications which were previously infeasible. Large-scale expert systems, interorganizational systems, and office networks are a few examples of these applications.

A second force is the completion of many large corporate infrastructure applications. The databases embedded in these applications now provide the foundation for new control and information applications which can transform the way an organization does business.

Third, there is a rapidly expanding portfolio of applications yielding highly observable competitive benefits. The case for success and general management attention is no longer an intellectual or theoretical one, but can be based in fact. Finally, the work done by Michael Porter and others in the field of competitive strategy has yielded a language and set of concepts which allow us to talk more crisply about information systems applications and competition. Words like "switching costs," "barriers to entry," and "exit barriers" have become a part of the IS lexicon. This has led to the current emphasis on using IS technology to gain pre-emptive competitive advantage.

All this, however, is but a prologue. New opportunities and challenges now lie ahead. We have turned the prism, looked at the same world from a new perspective, and found rewarding paths for future development.

One step lies in the need for interdisciplinary research. This research must yield deeper insights into the analysis and codification of potential areas for strategic opportunity; areas as diverse as marketing, engineering, industrial economics, organization theory, and finance. The article by Cynthia Beath and Blake Ives in the March 1986 issue of the *MIS Quarterly* is an example of this work. The paper by J.A. Bakos and Michael Treacy in this issue articulates in more detail a way of thinking about the scope of such research. In my judgement, if such work is to be effective it will require the close partnership of both functional specialists and IS professionals. Neither side can easily do the job by themselves (as is always true in business).

Of equal importance is the need for improvement in the fields of change management and implementation. Inevitably, such work leads one deep into the area of organizational structure and motivation. All too often one finds the kernel of strategic ideas present in the organization, but safely insulated from action through a combination of organizational structure, management policies, and inertial barriers. The old saying that genius is 5% inspiration and 95% perspiration has its analogy here.

The needed interdisciplinary work requires first a multidisciplinary team. As in the industrial world, a partnership must be forged between those skilled in technology management and those skilled in functional applications. It is unlikely that the readership of this journal by themselves has the full breadth to conceive and execute all the research to be done. They represent an important, technical half of the team, yet only *half* the team.

Second, such research requires a large component of field-based investigation. The answers to many of the questions in this domain cannot be found in the laboratories, but instead required arduous longitudinal studies. Only carefully architected, in-depth collection of data within organizations will do the job. Third, such data collection must be carefully articulated to embody the best of research methodologies. This work is difficult, demanding, and absolutely necessary.

• • • • •

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Joyce Elam of the University of Texas as a new Associate Editor of the *MIS Quarterly* for a three-year term.