

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

### From the Trenches: Thoughts on Developmental Reviewing

Developmental reviewing is more of an art than it is a science. In this editorial, I have asked some master artisans to share with you their tricks of the reviewing trade. Because each person on the editorial team performs a different role, I asked for input from a Senior Editor (SE), an Associate Editor (AE), and a Reviewer. It was a challenge to decide whom I should ask to help me write this editorial since I have worked with and learned from so many excellent senior editors, associate editors, and reviewers. I asked Cynthia Beath to provide the perspective of a Senior Editor. She has served or is serving in many editorial positions, including Senior Editor of *MIS Quarterly* and *Information Systems Research*. The Associate Editor and Reviewer perspectives are provided by Ulrike Schultze and Paul Pavlou, respectively. Ulrike Schultze just ended her tenure as Associate Editor at *MIS Quarterly*. Both she and Paul Pavlou have been recognized as *MISQ* reviewers of the year.

It should be clear from Cynthia's, Ulrike's, and Paul's comments below that working with authors to help them develop their research and shape it into a publishable article is hard, challenging work, especially since authors often unwittingly obfuscate the contribution of their research. I don't think these efforts of the review team should go unrecognized. Although Paul suggested the novel approach of adopting the co-author's hat when preparing reviews, he quite appropriately did not suggest adding the names of reviewers to the coauthor list. However, starting with the September issue, *MIS Quarterly* will list the names of reviewers and the Associate Editor, as well as that of the Senior Editor, for each paper that is published. Reviewers and Associate Editors may choose not to have their names published. While not everyone wants the recognition, I think it is important to provide an avenue to recognize the time and effort that each member of the review team has devoted to developing the paper. I view this as one way, albeit limited, of thanking team members for their important contributions to the article, journal, and discipline.

#### ***Cynthia Beath, Professor Emerita, University of Texas at Austin: A Senior Editor's Perspective***

Carol asked me to respond to two questions: How do you go about writing good developmental SE letters? What are the characteristics of a developmental AE report? I've agonized over my answers to these questions for months, because I regret that more of my SE work has not been more developmental. I have learned most of what I know from those who served as SE or AE on my papers or my SE/AE colleagues. Unfortunately, I've also learned a lot by trial and error (my apologies to the authors whose papers were rejected or not resubmitted because of my errors). With respect to the AE report, I must confess that what I've written here is very idealistic. But I expect that is what Carol was after. Here are my answers.

#### **How do you go about writing good developmental SE letters?**

I assume this question is oriented toward understanding my "SE process," but let me start by saying a little about what my developmental goals are as an SE. While there are a number of "upstream" research

capabilities behind any manuscript that sometimes need development—like capabilities to plan and execute a research project, to succinctly leverage existing literature, to theorize, and to collect and analyze evidence—I tend to focus on the development of the capability that is the most proximal to the paper: the ability to write. A paper is a tangible product of the authors' collective research capabilities, but the inability to write well often stands between a great new insight and a publication. So my developmental goal as an SE is to help authors write better papers. Better papers will be more correctly understood and leveraged by others, they will be more widely and carefully read, and they will have more impact on the field.

Of course, I agree with those who argue that writing and thinking are really the same thing. I suppose I am trying to help authors improve their thinking, but there is a certain neutrality in focusing on writing that seems to help authors listen and hear what we have to say. It is so much more constructive to ask, "What does this paragraph say?" than, "Whatever in the world could you have been thinking!"

My cherished writing principle is that a paper should have good bones and make a worthy contribution to our literature. The image that I often use is that of the Ouroboros, or the serpent with its tail in its mouth. This ancient symbol combines two important images: unity and creative destruction. I think this is the perfect image for academic papers: on the one hand they should tell a unified, logical story, and on the other they should contribute to knowledge by both destroying old knowledge and creating new knowledge. The "good bones" that I look for I think of as the serpent's spine—a tightly linked set of arguments running through motivation, choice of theoretical domain, review of foundational knowledge, articulation of new theory, and empirical tests directly and inexorably to a new contribution to knowledge. The particular circular arrangement of these bones in the Ouroboros is instructive: the creative contribution of the paper is the serpent's head, and this contribution responds to the paper's motivation by destroying old knowledge. While authors I've worked with might tell you that I'm an annoying pest about grammar and punctuation, what I'm really looking for is a nice, clear Ouroboros.

Believe it or not, this actually drives my SE process. When I first receive a paper, I read it carefully, slashing my way through the fat and meat of the paper to find the bones and their connective tissue. I extract these bones in the form of simple statements that capture things like motivation, research question and dependent variable, choice of theoretical domain, theoretical development, empirical design, and contribution. Naturally, I read the end of the paper first, since that's where you might expect to find the contribution described. Keep in mind that I'm not trying to assess the quality or level of contribution at this point, I'm just trying to figure out what its domain is so I can decide if the paper is within the journal's domain, and if it is, pick the right AE for the paper! Usually, at least one of the bones will suggest the area of contribution—new theory in the area of organization behavior often leads to contributions in individual adoption or use of technology; clever analysis of firm level data may yield insights about IT investments or IT management; leveraging literature on systems development may signal a contribution to that literature. But not necessarily. If I can't figure out the paper's contribution area, I may be the wrong SE for the paper, the paper may have a fatal writing flaw, or it may not be a research paper at all (that is, it does not have a "creative destruction" objective). In the latter two unfortunate cases, the paper is likely to go back to the authors with suggestions about how to craft a more logical flow of argument or how the main line of argument would have to change for me to see the paper as a research paper.

Once I've selected an AE I think is likely to appreciate the paper's contribution, I do only a few things. Mostly I bug the AE about turnaround, but I often read some of the key works that the paper references, if I haven't already.

When the AE report comes back to me, I begin by reading the entire review package. Then I reread the paper and revisit my analysis of its bones. Usually the review package causes me to reassess or refine my

view of the bones. If the AE recommends rejection, I will occasionally provide feedback to the authors in line with my bones analysis, but more often than not, I just try to accentuate the positive and be sympathetic and encouraging; my principle objective is to get the authors to read the review package carefully. They can usually learn a lot about their writing—and their thinking—if they will really study the review package.

If the AE report recommends a revision, I may add only a little. To encourage the authors to attempt a revision, I usually outline the key changes we would like to see in the revised paper. I will often summarize these at the bones level: the revised paper will have a motivation that is more in line with the paper's contribution; its literature review will be more pointed or more synthetic; it will justify the hypotheses using theory; it will explain better why the data are appropriate for testing the hypotheses; it will be more explicit about its limitations to generalizability; and finally, it will explain how the findings address the issues that motivated the paper and/or the failings of the existing literature. I try to show the authors where the journal's bar is so they can see that it is surmountable and that they should, therefore, attempt a revision. It has always been my conviction that those who publish the most in our field submit the most revised papers and so I try to encourage revisions.

When the revision is returned, I go through the same loop. This time I read the paper not only for its bones, but also to examine the meat, and to look for fat. I make copious notes on the paper itself. After I get the AE report and digest it, I compare my notes on the paper with those of the review team. With luck, the paper will be moving toward acceptance. If parts of the paper appear to be stable, I may give the authors detailed feedback on the rhetoric in those areas of the paper. If the grammar and punctuation are very poor, I ask the authors to work with a local expert, as I believe they will learn more this way. As a rule, I suggest areas where fat can be cut, too. As the paper moves to publication, I continue to press the authors to improve the writing, trying to get the paper's message to come through loud and clear. Throughout the process, I continue to revisit the paper's Ouroboros.

### What are the characteristics of a developmental AE report?

As you will see, the Ouroboros principle is critical to what I am looking for in an AE report. An AE report is most helpful to the authors (regardless of whether the paper is rejected or not) if it does the following:

1. *The AE report takes a position on what the paper's potential contribution to the literature might be—the serpent's head in the Ouroboros.* The better the paper, the more likely the AE will be able to pinpoint the paper's contribution. Regardless of the clarity of the target, taking a stand on the contribution of the paper is key to writing a developmental AE report. It is not uncommon for there to be a couple of quite distinctly different contribution possibilities. The more distinct these contributions, the more difficult the AE's job. Even if the paper is going to be rejected, the AE needs to say what the contribution target was, as he or she sees it. If it is impossible to determine what the contribution of the paper might be, it will be very difficult to provide clear guidance to the authors.
2. *The report synthesizes, rather than summarizes, the reviewer's comments in light of the expected contribution.* Just as I expect a literature review in a paper to synthesize across an often disparate literature, I expect the AE to synthesize the reviews, making sense of them by adding his or her own perspective and experienced insight to the mix. This is not easy to do, especially with the specter of the reviewers glaring over his/her shoulder, but this synthesis is extremely helpful to the authors. Ideally, this synthesis is undertaken in light of some particular targeted contribution. It is hard to line up the bones of the serpent if we cannot envision the serpent's head; it is hard to assess the logic of the paper's argument if the contribution target is missing. It is very difficult to prioritize problems or

comments if the objective of the paper is not clear. Most importantly for the “diamond cutter” AE, the targeted contribution will show the AE and the authors when problems should be resolved and when they should be simply acknowledged. Let's say that some control variable was not included. If the contribution of the paper is to develop theory and provide an initial test of it, then perhaps the missing control is simply a limitation that should be acknowledged. If the contribution is to show that some new factor improves our ability to predict a particular dependent variable, then that missing control may be a problematic. Or, say a hypothesis is poorly developed. Given the expected contribution of the paper, does it matter? Is it a tangent that can be dropped? Is it an “extra” whose development is interesting but not crucial? Authors learn a great deal about how to revise papers from an objective-focused analysis (and so do reviewers, by the way).

3. *For each major problem in this paper, the AE should recommend one or more candidate solutions.* If the contribution target is very clear, then the candidate solutions can be ticked off one by one along with the problems. If there are multiple distinct contribution options, then it makes more sense to run through solutions for each of these options, so the authors can see their distinctive and connective logic. The candidate solutions usually help the authors see which reviewers to attend to most closely with regard to which problem.
4. *In addition to a point by point synthesis, the AE will encourage the authors to study the reviews and will help the authors interpret them.* The AE puts the reviews in context for the authors: Reviewer 1 is an expert in X; Reviewer 2 appears to have taken the abstract too seriously; Reviewer 3, like many of your future readers, finds this method objectionable. This can help authors see dispassionately why one reviewer was frustrated with the work, why another was confused about the hypotheses, and why the third rejected the data analysis strategy. If the AE can heighten the authors' curiosity about the reviews, the review package will add more value.
5. *A decision to recommend rejection is justified clearly.* If the AE is recommending that the paper be rejected, it should be clear to the authors which problem the AE regards as insurmountable, or which problem the AE believes cannot be overcome within a reasonable period of time. If the contribution target is judged to be marginal, then the paper should be rejected. If the theory or data are not appropriate for the target contribution, then it will be difficult to revise the paper expeditiously. A developmental AE report will show the authors what they need to do to develop publishable work in the future or what they need to do to publish this work elsewhere.
6. *A decision to recommend revision provides clear direction to the authors for the revision, while leaving the authors room to write the paper they want to write.* This is a tricky business, to be sure. The clearer the paper's contribution target, the more directive the AE can be as to how the problems should be addressed; the more elusive the contribution target, the more the AE's solutions must be expressed as “possibilities,” “proposals,” or “suggestions.” It is possible that the AE will have gone out on the wrong limb in identifying the paper's intended contribution. The AE may have erred in synthesizing the reviewer's comments, or may have missed an obvious solution to a problem that has been identified. I have undying respect for AEs who take risks in attempting to identify the candidate contribution and who then try to show authors how to fix the paper in line with this objective. If they are right, they obviously help the authors move the paper toward publication. They also make it clear to the author that the objective is to satisfy the AE, not each and every reviewer.
7. *Finally, the tone of a developmental AE report is professional but also personal, critical while also empathetic, and self-possessed but not overly confident.* These are usually achieved by adding balance to the report. A report that achieves a professional tone by critiquing the paper *but not the*

*authors* may also begin and end on a personal note. One that is mainly critical also identifies strengths of the paper or compliments the authors on those parts of the paper that really work well. A report that is directive ends with an acknowledgment that if the premise about the expected contribution is wrong, then the authors are on their own. A developmental AE report will motivate the authors' careful examination of the review package, from which they will learn.

As you can see, I expect the AE to focus on the guts of the paper while I pay close attention to its bones. I know that this particular division of labor will not work for every SE/AE team, and that there are many other ways to make our review process work. I think the important thing is for there to be a real distinction in the SE/AE/reviewer roles, so that we are not doing each other's work, and so the authors receive value from every bottleneck in the process.

### ***Ulrike Schultze, Associate Professor, Southern Methodist University: An Associate Editor's Perspective***

When I joined the *MISQ* editorial board as an Associate Editor, I learned why the journal had made as its mission helping IS researchers develop their work, irrespective of the work's potential for publication in the journal. Given the low acceptance rates typically associated with a premier academic journal, the reality of publishing high-quality IS research is less about accepting than about rejecting manuscripts. However, providing authors with critical feedback and ideas for improving their work can be a value-adding side-effect of the review process, independent of the final editorial decision. During the initial paper screening that AEs do prior to sending a paper out for review, I frequently reminded myself of the *MISQ* mission to provide helpful feedback to authors. Even if I had some misgivings about a manuscript's likely success in the *MISQ* review process, I tended to err on the side of sending the paper out for review in order to give the authors a fair reading of their work and the benefit of different reviewers' perspectives and ideas. Even though this practice sometimes earned me criticism from reviewers who thought that a paper should have been dismissed out of hand, most reviewers saw something laudable in the manuscript and crafted developmental reviews.

#### **How do you write a developmental AE report?**

Before being able to describe how to write a developmental AE report, one needs an idea of what such a report looks like. First, it synthesizes and tries to make sense of three or four reviewers' sometimes contradictory comments and suggestions. Second, it prioritizes the problems that need to be addressed in a revision and suggestions for improvements. Third, based on the reviewers' and the AE's assessment of the manuscript, an AE report also makes editorial recommendations to the Senior Editor. The reasoning behind this editorial recommendation is communicated to not only the SE, but also the authors.

A developmental AE report includes all three of these elements, irrespective of the AE's editorial recommendation. In other words, even if the AE recommends that the manuscript be rejected at a given journal, the AE report should nevertheless provide the authors with recommendations for how to improve the work either for submission elsewhere or in the authors' future research projects. Ideally, an AE report should help authors develop a specific paper, as well as their research as a whole. However, one difference between an AE report accompanying a "revise" (versus a "reject") recommendation is that it is more directive because the AE report needs to give authors an unambiguous sense of the hurdles that the next revision will have to clear in order for the paper to move toward publication in a specific journal. Furthermore, the AE needs to make his/her preferences with regard to the paper's future direction clear so that the authors

have an indication of how they can garner the AE's continued support for the manuscript. Ideally, however, an AE report should not be overly directive; instead of providing only one path for a successful revision, the AE should suggest alternative paths, each qualified by their likelihood of leading to a successful revision.

To write a developmental AE report, I keep a couple of things in mind. Firstly, I remind myself that the objective is to help authors improve their research. This means that I try to communicate as clearly as possible (frequently in a blunt, pull-no-punches style) what the problems in the manuscript are. For each concern, I typically provide ideas for how they might be addressed. Second, I remind myself that my role as a member of an editorial board is to encourage high-quality research rather than to shut low-quality research down. This translates into balancing the criticism of the work with praise and encouragement to continue the pursuit of new knowledge. It also means that I spend considerable time explaining a "reject" recommendation. In my explanation, I draw on specific flaws in the paper rather than on criticisms of the entire area of research. Third, I try to put myself into the shoes of the authors receiving the review packet. While some do this by overtly empathizing with the authors through phrases like "I know how disappointing this reject recommendation must be," I tend to rely on the following principle to assess the overall quality of my AE report: Does the overall tone convey respect and my intention to help the authors develop their work? Is it too long, overwhelming, and debilitating for the authors? Is the report structured in a logical, understandable way? Does it provide clear guidelines and priorities for improving the research? Is the critique of the paper sufficiently balanced with suggestions for improvement and encouragement for continuing the research? Does the report convey a sense of possibility—even excitement—for the research?

In closing, I would like to stress what developmental reviewing and AE'ing is not. In my mind, it is not about "going soft" on the standards of high-quality research. It is not about molly-coddling authors and "playing nice." It is not about recommending "revise and resubmit" when "reject" is more justified. Instead, it is about a community effort to collectively improve research by creatively helping authors open their research to new possibilities—different research questions, different theoretical lenses, different interpretations of their results, and different methods than the authors are currently using. To me, the crux of developmental reviewing and AE'ing is opening research up, as opposed to shutting it down.

### **What does a developmental review look like?**

In my experience, a developmental review has at least the following characteristics:

- An objective tone
- A conversational style
- Specifics

**An Objective Tone.** Reviewing is a strangely emotional activity. Reviewers react with frustration to a paper that is too long, that is poorly written and confusing in its structure, whose arguments lack coherence, and whose results lack credibility. They wonder why the author is wasting their time and trying their patience (and why the AE did not screen the paper out of the review process!). Through a litany of remarks intended to shut the research—and possibly the author—down (e.g., "the arguments are utterly naïve" or "this method is completely unacceptable"), the reviewer's annoyance and exasperation are made apparent. Conveying such negative emotions is counter-productive in the context of developmental reviewing, however, as it creates an additional sound barrier that the authors need to overcome before they can hear and understand the reviewer's perspective.

In contrast, developmental reviews convey the reviewer's emotional distance from the manuscript. They incorporate both praise and criticism and rely on language intended to communicate precise meaning rather than denigration. That does not mean, however, that criticism is played down or sugar-coated in a developmental review. Instead, critique is offered in a tone that conveys objectivity and the possibility for improvement.

**A Conversational Style.** One indication of a development review is when reviewers engage in conversation with the authors. Some reviewers achieve this conversational style by giving the authors insights into what it is like to be the reader of the manuscript under review. Saying something like "I found this paper difficult to follow because ..." is a way of inviting the author to step into the reader's shoes and to experience the manuscript from the reader's perspective. This highlights not only the reciprocal nature of research, but also the personal and subjective nature of the review process. Acknowledging the latter reinforces the notion that there are different ways of evaluating research, as well as numerous alternatives for addressing weaknesses. Thus, even though one reviewer may not like the work, it does not necessarily mean that nobody will like it.

Another mechanism to engage authors in a conversation is by asking such direct questions as, "What is your research question?" and then venturing to answer them, for example, "Based on your discussion on page xx, it seems that it is ..., but on page yy, you seem to say that it is ..." This Q&A format focuses and simplifies the review, while simultaneously opening the door to a multitude of different answers, for example, "One research question that you might want to consider is ..." Reviewers that cast a wide net with regard to proposing answers to their own questions are particularly helpful in generating ideas for authors to pursue.

**Specifics.** Development reviews do not stop at generalities; they provide specifics. Instead of recommending "You should review the literature on ...," they will provide the names of specific researchers and/or references to publications that the authors should review. Instead of making such general statements as "Your discussion section is weak," a reviewer committed to helping the authors develop their work will elaborate "Your discussion section is a mere summary of your paper" and will provide the authors with some ideas on how to improve it. Instead of stopping at the question "What is your theory?" a developmental reviewer will suggest "You may want to consider using theory a, b, or c."

In sum, a developmental review focuses on helping authors improve their research. It leaves authors with a new sense of perspective and, hopefully, a new sense of possibility for their work, even if the paper is rejected at a specific journal.

***Paul A. Pavlou, Assistant Professor, University of California  
at Riverside: A Reviewer's Perspective***

The reviewing process can be described as a sequential process composed of two distinct, yet related activities: the *refereeing* or *gatekeeping* process (identifying the paper's flaws) and the *advising* process (overcoming the flaws by providing constructive comments). In order to write good developmental reviews, a reviewer must first be able to adequately identify a paper's flaws. In her excellent editorial commentary on "Looking for Diamond Cutters," *MISQ* Editor-in-Chief Carol Saunders<sup>1</sup> recognizes that most reviewers

---

<sup>1</sup> Available online at <http://www.misq.org/archivist/vol/no29/Issue1/EdCommentsV29I1.pdf>.

are excellent gatekeepers who can adequately identify a manuscript's flaws. However, recognizing that the "advising" process is what needs to be enhanced in the *MISQ* reviewing process, Carol notes: "To accomplish this, *MISQ* needs to...change the mindset of many of its reviewers" (p. iii). In an attempt change some reviewers' mindset, this note aims to provide a fresh, optimistic look at the reviewing process.

Reviewing is a highly individualized and inherently intangible process with a strong tacit knowledge component that cannot be easily described. Most important, I believe writing good developmental reviews is a matter of having a positive mindset toward reviewing rather than being able to identify a paper's flaws and suggest solutions. Therefore, the description is largely based on my own experiences in attempting to write good developmental reviews.

My attitude as a reviewer is neither a gatekeeper nor an advisor, but rather as a coauthor. In fact, every time I am asked to review a paper, I try to envision myself as one of the paper's authors. Even if I obviously have absolutely no stake in the papers I am asked to review, I assume that a good friend and research colleague has sent me a draft of his/her idea, asking me to collaborate in publishing this manuscript in his/her chosen outlet. This perspective automatically transforms my goal from simply writing a good review into doing my absolute best to help my "coauthors" get this paper published. It also transforms my mindset from an indifferent third-party reviewer to a key stakeholder with a vested interest in the paper's fate. I believe that this coauthor mindset makes it much easier for me to write good developmental reviews, as I explain below:

- **Offering New Ideas and Suggestions.** Research colleagues only ask me to collaborate when they expect me to contribute to a research project. Assuming a coauthorship role, I naturally feel obliged to offer new ideas and suggestions to boost the paper's contribution. Consequently, as opposed to the common complaint by reviewers that the paper does not make a sufficient contribution, I genuinely feel the need to come up with ways to enhance the paper's contribution and its implications for theory and practice. Accordingly, for all problems and flaws I find with the paper, my primary goal is to find innovative solutions so the paper can move forward. This natural predisposition that the coauthor identity facilitates closely resembles Carol's "golden rule for developmental reviewing: **Counter every problem with a suggestion**" (p. vi; emphasis in original). In sum, a coauthor role creates an inherent propensity to offer new and innovative solutions to refine a paper. It is much easier for me to consider myself as a coauthor than to simply offer suggestions for the problems I identify.
- **Time Management.** A coauthorship role also helps me to work on my reviews in a timely fashion. Rather than viewing a paper to review as an isolated burden, I simply see it as another component of my research portfolio that I also need to work on promptly! When receiving a paper to review, I try my best to carefully read it during the first few days. Having read and understood the paper, I have enough time to reflect on its intended contribution, underlying theory and logic, research methodology, and implications. This also gives me the opportunity to find solutions to the paper's major problems and come up with innovative ideas and solutions. It also helps me better plan to allocate 1 or 2 days to write the actual review without being in a rush.
- **Tough Recommendations in a Friendly, Persuading Tone.** Talking to a coauthor is most likely to be in a friendly, encouraging tone. By viewing the author of a paper as a coauthor and not as a stranger, I find it very easy to "talk" to the authors and better communicate my concerns, thoughts, and suggestions. I also assume that the authors would be more receptive to my concerns and suggestions since I am trying to convince them of my ideas, as opposed to forcing them by leveraging my referee's "power."

By assuming the role of the coauthor and writing in a friendly and constructive tone, I also feel more comfortable conveying to the authors a tough recommendation or decision. As authors ourselves, we



often come to the conclusion that a certain paper does not meet certain standards and needs to go to a less prestigious outlet, or that we need much more work to bring the paper closer to publishability. Accordingly, I often have to recommend that a major revision is needed before the paper can be considered for publication, or suggest a rejection and that a brand new submission with a radical reconceptualization is required. In such unfortunate cases, I feel more confident that the authors will appreciate my decision and still take advantage of my ideas and suggestions to undertake the pain of a major revision or revise their paper for a new submission and not abandon their work.

- **Reasonable Standards.** When presuming a coauthor's role, I naturally apply my own standards of what I typically expect from my own papers. Hence, I am more likely to be sympathetic to difficulties in obtaining an ideal sample size, conducting a reasonable number of validation tests, and living with a few acknowledged limitations. Since I endeavor to adhere to very strict standards of excellence in my own papers, I also feel more comfortable requesting my "coauthors" to adhere to strict standards. The question that I have in my mind is "What would I do in this case?" versus "What would be ideal in this case?" I also appreciate that length limitations may have prevented the authors from citing all related references or showing all statistical tests, and I am less inclined to assume that there is something wrong with the paper because something is not explained in great detail. I believe that assuming an authorship role as a reviewer prevents me from placing unrealistic requests to the actual authors, while it still allows me to request adherence to strict standards of excellence.
- **Hiding behind the blind review process.** By adapting the coauthor role, I try to avoid the need to hide behind the blind review process, and I would even feel comfortable sending a personal e-mail to the authors with my review. I believe this helps my reviews to be fair and not irritate the authors. Assuming the role of a coauthor introduces a certain level of responsibility, friendliness, and empathy to my reviews.
- **Divergence of Opinions.** While differences of opinion between the authors and the reviewers in terms of conceptualization, research methodology, and overall approach are generally healthy, some good papers, alas, may be rejected because of such differences. Assuming a coauthor's role helps prevent such potential problems and helps embrace divergence of opinions. Serving as a reviewer with the coauthor's hat has personally helped me better appreciate different views, novel approaches, and research methods.
- **Ranking the Problems.** As authors, we generally have a good appreciation of the major problems in our papers, even if we do not always have a good solution to all of them. Accordingly, when reviewing a paper from an author's standpoint, I find it easier to rank the various issues in terms of severity, and spend more time thinking about them and trying to overcome them. Moreover, this helps my actual review since I can easily categorize and rank the various issues, which then hopefully assists the authors in their revision.
- **Careful Reading.** Perhaps the worst aspect of a review is when a reviewer misses some important points (perhaps because of not carefully reading the paper), and then criticizes the lack of these points. Out of respect to my coauthors, I feel obliged to carefully read the paper and avoid criticizing and requesting points that are already described in the paper. Accordingly, realizing that these important points need to become absolutely clear to the reader, I try my best to help the authors clarify their paper's key contributions and implications.
- **Personal Benefits.** While writing developmental reviews may sound like an unnecessary burden, the added benefit of reviewing with a coauthor's hat (as opposed to a referee's hat) is simply that I don't

have to switch hats at all when I am reviewing papers! As a developmental reviewer from a coauthor's perspective, I am essentially doing exactly what I am doing in my own papers; identifying the problems and coming up with novel solutions. Thus, I see reviewing as a problem-solving exercise, which has tremendously helped me with my own research.

In summary, by viewing myself as an author and an integral stakeholder of a paper under review, I help my reviews to become more constructive, timely, reasonable, and friendly, while I still feel more comfortable writing reviews that are tougher, more detailed, and hopefully more consequential. I also feel responsible for the paper's fate, and I try my best to help the authors improve it and hopefully get it published. Since I have spent valuable time reading a manuscript, thinking of how it can be improved, and writing a detailed review, I do hope my comments and suggestions are put to good use by the authors. Therefore, my attempt to write good developmental reviews is based on considering the papers I review as my very own papers. As Carol notes, "I would like to expand *MISQ*'s reviewer base of diamond cutters who are willing to work with rough manuscripts and help transform them into brilliant gems" (p. iii). Wouldn't we all be better diamond cutters if we owned (or envisioned owning) the diamond?

In general, even if the idea of assuming a coauthorship role may initially sound far-fetched, it is actually quite realistic. I can safely say that most of the reviewers and editors of my papers could qualify as coauthors because of their excellent ideas and suggestions during the review process! This perspective could also help the IS discipline in general since a cooperative effort among authors and developmental reviewers could translate into superior publications.

**Carol Saunders**  
**Editor-in-Chief**  
**[misq@bus.ucf.edu](mailto:misq@bus.ucf.edu)**