

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Reprise: The Parable of the Golf Balls

When I was as at Dartmouth, they had this summer home in Maine that some wealthy alumni had donated to the school for faculty vacationing. Each summer, and the summers are short in Maine, they drew out of a hat the names of 12 faculty members who had expressed an interest in staying at the house—each got one week, free of charge, in Booth Bay Harbor—a lovely posting. There was but one requirement, or in the vernacular of Dartmouth, one "tradition"—you had to leave the cottage nicer than it was when you got there. The first year I took cousin Ralph with me, and every day or two we played a round of golf on the nearby public course. We both like to walk in the rough as we go from shot to shot—looking for golf balls (usually our own). We found quite a number, including some of those phosphorescent ones. At the end of the week, there were a dozen shiny and nearly unblemished orange and yellow golf balls in the egg compartment in the refrigerator—a pleasant surprise for any golfer or kid who showed up the next week. (Blake Ives, Personal Communication, 2001)

My first editorial as Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly* was published in the March 2002 issue of the journal. Previously, I had described my apprehensions at taking on the role of Editor-in-Chief to Blake Ives. Blake had been a past Editor-in-Chief and a fellow Ph.D. student, colleague, friend, and confidant over many years. I questioned my abilities to discharge the very demanding responsibilities associated with the role. I was also mindful of the wonderful contributions made by those colleagues who had preceded me as Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*, including Blake himself. Blake's "gift" to me was "the parable of the golf balls." In a quiet and insightful way, he was reminding me that I needed to walk my own path with the journal. I should be circumspect about trying to walk down the paths of my predecessors.

In this my last editorial as Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*, I would like to reflect briefly on my three years as caretaker of the "summer home in Maine." As I prepare to leave the home, I continue to experience many different feelings—joy, relief, gratitude, frustration, self-disappointment, sadness. I also have many poignant memories. My stay in the home has changed my life and who I am irrevocably. I am acutely aware of the privilege that has been afforded to me over these last three years.

A Day in the Life

Daily life in the home was always hectic and often frenetic, but inevitably it was rich, rewarding, and challenging. At times, however, the number of visitors and the workload they generated around the home became overwhelming. The home became untidy, and many members of the family began to show signs of exhaustion. Somehow they dug deep. They persevered until life in the home again approached normality. As the old maxim goes: when the going gets tough, the tough get going.

Over the last few years, the number of submissions to the *MIS Quarterly* has increased significantly. In part, I believe this increase reflects the increase in the number of academics entering the information systems

discipline in the boom times of the Year-2000 and dot-com eras. In part, I believe it reflects the growing maturity of the information systems discipline and the fact that new Ph.D. graduates have better research training. In part, I believe it reflects that the *MIS Quarterly* continues to be regarded as a high-quality publication outlet.

The increased number of submissions has been both "good news" and "bad news." The good news is that the journal is receiving a larger number of high-quality papers that cover a more-diverse range of topics than it received in the past. In this regard, I am grateful to and indebted to the many colleagues who have supported the *MIS Quarterly* during my time as Editor-in-Chief through submission of their papers to the journal. A journal cannot survive without submissions. A high-quality research journal cannot survive without high-quality submissions.

The bad news is that at times the Editorial Board and the *MIS Quarterly* office have struggled to keep up with the inflow of work. I commenced my time as Editor-in-Chief with lofty aspirations about lowering review turnaround time. For the most part, we have succeeded. As the workload has grown, however, unfortunately our review turnaround times have again begun to suffer. I suspect, also, that some types of services previously provided to authors have suffered. For instance, as a Senior Editor, increasingly I have been unable to provide comments on working papers submitted to me by colleagues who are seeking feedback on their papers prior to their submitting them to the *MIS Quarterly*. There simply is no more time left in a day or a week to respond to these requests. Over the last two years, I have become progressively more concerned about how the journal can be organized to handle the larger workloads in an effective and efficient way.

During my time as Editor-in-Chief, one of my major concerns has been the increasing workload that my colleagues on the Editorial Board have borne. On average, Associate Editors receive a paper every three to four weeks to manage. The evaluation and administration work they undertake probably amounts to about two to three days per month. On average, Senior Editors deal with a paper every week. Together with the administration they have to undertake as part of their role, on average they probably spend about two days per week on *MIS Quarterly* business. At the *MIS Quarterly* office, the work is unrelenting. Submissions arrive in uneven waves. The northern-hemisphere summer period is especially intense. Colleagues use the class-free time to finalize papers and review reports. Like large ocean waves, the waves of submissions knock you down. You struggle to pick yourself up, only to be knocked down again by the next wave of submissions. From personal experience, I know often one has to strive hard to keep the growing panic associated with seemingly impossible workloads under control. On the Editorial Board, one learns much about oneself, especially in relation to whether tranquillity can be maintained in the face of chaos. As Editor-in-Chief, I also learned much about many of my colleagues on the Editorial Board. The selfless way in which I saw them continue to respond to impossible demands placed on them was many times a humbling yet inspiring experience for me.

Overall, I have become concerned that as a discipline we now devote too much time to review work that is not cost-effective. I believe we have too many conferences and too many journals. Because many of us are under substantial pressure to publish, the consequence is that quantity rather than quality of publications becomes the focus. More conferences and more journals arise to address the demand that has been generated by promotion-and-tenure processes. Unfortunately, the same, relatively small cohort of colleagues ends up reviewing papers for many different conferences and many different journals. As a result, at times finding qualified colleagues to undertake review work for the *MIS Quarterly* has been difficult. Increasingly, the Senior Editors and I have found that colleagues we have approached have been too committed with review work to take on yet more review responsibilities. Given that the time our colleagues can devote to reviews is a limited, high-value resource, I substantially doubt that we are making the best use of it within our discipline.

Collectively, I believe we need to be much more circumspect about how we use the time of our colleagues in review work. In this regard, we need to remember always that reviewing is the bedrock of our discipline. Without colleagues who are willing to undertake good reviews, we will be unable to publish high-quality articles about our research. Moreover, our discipline will flounder unless reviews are evenly distributed among researchers in our discipline. Unfortunately, some colleagues happily take advantage of the many hours that other colleagues spend providing thoughtful, constructive reviews of their papers. They are too busy, however, to undertake review work themselves. For every sole-authored paper we submit to a journal or conference, a simple rule of thumb is that we ought to be prepared to undertake three reviews ourselves. In the case of a multi-authored paper, we can distribute the three reviews across all authors. If we are then invited to revise and resubmit the paper, we again generate an obligation to undertake three reviews ourselves of other colleagues' papers.

Maintenance, Repairs, and Refurbishments

The home had not been designed to hold the large number of visitors that now arrived at times. Breakdowns began to occur. Some could be repaired. Others could not be fixed. If the flow of visitors were to keep up, several major refurbishments would be needed to accommodate them. The problem was to ensure that these refurbishments remained faithful to the initial design of the home.

When workload slippages occur, I am always mindful of Frederick P. Brooks, Jr.'s admonitions in his book, *The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995). Rectifying the slippages cannot always be achieved by assigning more people to work on the problem. Increasing numbers of people lead to communication and coordination difficulties that exacerbate rather than mitigate the workload slippages.

Over the last few years, I have increased the size of the Editorial Board slightly to try to address in part the greater workloads that the journal has experienced. We have also been working on improving our management reporting systems, reengineering some of our editorial processes, and automating some of our editorial processes. For example, we now have management reports that we can generate automatically to help us pinpoint when and where problems are occurring. Gradually we have been implementing an automatic reminder system to prompt reviewers, associate editors, and senior editors when they are late with their reports. We have also been working on a Web-based reviewing system that will facilitate the work of our review teams and allow us to exercise greater control over our review processes. Hopefully the benefits of these measures will become apparent over the next year or so.

I have been concerned, however, not to undermine the *MIS Quarterly's* reputation for high-quality reviewing—a reputation that has been so carefully built by those Editors-in-Chief who preceded me. For the most part, colleagues who review for and act as Associate Editors for the *MIS Quarterly* do an outstanding job. The culture among Senior Editors, also, is that they do not act as a rubber stamp for the Associate Editor's disposition recommendation on a paper. They take an active, hands-on role when making editorial decisions. I know that most authors, if not all, appreciate the way in which the different members of an *MIS Quarterly* review team discharge their editorial responsibilities.

I have also been proud of the way that colleagues on the *MIS Quarterly's* Editorial Board steadfastly have maintained a service-oriented view of their role. They have not used their role as a means of self-aggrandizement. Rather, they have strived to assist colleagues in their publication endeavors. As a journal's reputation grows, colleagues on its editorial board easily can become victims of its success. They

can lose sight of the fact that retaining a service-oriented ethic is an imperative if the journal is to sustain its high status over the long run. I believe the sorts of induction processes for editorial board members developed at the *MIS Quarterly* over many years provide important safeguards to ensure that service to colleagues remains the primary goal of the journal.

Like all journals, the *MIS Quarterly* faces an uncertain future in some ways. As I indicated in my December 2002 editorial comments, the marketplace for journals is changing quickly. Increasingly, scholars are demanding online access to journals. Print-based demand for journals, on the other hand, is declining. Journal aggregators that offer online access to many journals are now significant and powerful players in the marketplace for journals. As a result of these changes, the types of business models that will allow journals to survive in the long run in this new marketplace are still unclear. Some aspects of the *MIS Quarterly* will have to change if it is to survive and prosper in this new environment. Nonetheless, I am confident the journal's reputation for quality and service to colleagues can be sustained. I am confident, also, that the current leadership team will ensure the *MIS Quarterly* is well positioned to cope with whatever challenges the journal faces.

The Visitors

The family had visits from many old friends. Many new folk also visited, however, to see the home and to try out the family's hospitality. Some left joyful. Others left saddened. Nonetheless, most, if not all, left feeling that their lives had been enriched in some way.

As Editor-in-Chief, I have been delighted to see that many colleagues continue to submit their papers to the *MIS Quarterly* for publication throughout their careers. I have also been delighted to see that many colleagues who submit their papers to the *MIS Quarterly* are first-time authors—that is, they are new members of the information systems discipline, or for whatever reason they have decided the *MIS Quarterly* is now a suitable publication venue for their papers. First-time authors are especially welcome at the *MIS Quarterly*. They are an important source of papers that are fresh and innovative.

I believe the *MIS Quarterly* has become more eclectic in the types of papers it publishes. In this light, my sense is that it now appeals to a greater number of colleagues within the information systems discipline. I believe, also, that it has achieved greater eclecticism without compromising its high standards for quality. The shift toward greater eclecticism has been gradual rather than sudden. As a result, the fundamental integrity of the *MIS Quarterly* has been maintained.

Given the relatively high rejection rate of papers submitted to the *MIS Quarterly* (around 87 percent), clearly many authors are disappointed with the final disposition outcome that occurs with their papers. Nonetheless, I believe that most authors have a constructive experience when they submit their paper to the *MIS Quarterly*. For the most part, the review process is timely, high quality, and constructive. Colleagues usually learn much from each encounter they have with the *MIS Quarterly*. The journal has always viewed its developmental role as critical. It publishes papers, but it also assists colleagues to develop as scholars.

An urban myth is that the editors of journals have a rejection mentality. In other words, their preference is to reject papers rather than to accept them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout my time as an editor, the hardest task I have had to undertake has always been the same—namely, writing rejection letters. I strongly suspect I am no different from any other editor. Especially with colleagues who are in the early stages of their careers, I am forever mindful of the fact that the disposition decisions I make in relation

to their papers can have an important impact on their lives. In the case of acceptance decisions, it can lead to their getting tenure and/or promotion. In the case of rejections, it can be a factor that leads to cessation of employment with one institution and their having to seek work in another institution. The professional and personal costs of such changes can be high. I cannot conceive of an editor who becomes inured to the potential consequences of the disposition decisions they make. Editors are authors too. They know the disappointment, shock, and despondency that often accompany rejection of their own papers. Indeed, I suspect the best editors are those for whom rejection of their own papers is a frequent experience. They then go about their role with an acute sense of empathy and humility.

In short, authors should understand that editors want to accept papers rather than reject them. Editors experience a tension, however. On the one hand, they want to accept papers so they can fill the issues of their journals and have the satisfaction of seeing their colleagues' lives prosper. They also want to see their discipline grow through the dissemination of high-quality research. On the other hand, they are the gatekeepers of quality with their journals. Readers of a journal have an expectation that papers published in the journal comply with certain quality criteria. To the extent readers perceive these quality criteria have been compromised on too many occasions, the reputation of the journal will begin to fall. The journal then can no longer fulfil its mission. The discipline is also undermined when researchers in other disciplines read the research and deem it to be substandard. In short, the editor has not discharged appropriately her or his fiduciary obligations to the readership of the journal and to her or his discipline more generally. Moreover, she or he has undermined the professional capital that has been accrued by colleagues who previously have published in the journal.

I believe authors will have a more-productive experience with a journal if they frame their interactions with the editors and the reviewers in a positive light. They should work on the basis that the editors and the reviewers want to see their paper published and not rejected. They should also work on the basis that editors and reviewers are seeking to be constructive rather than destructive. The nature and the spirit of the communications between the author and the review team then takes on a different light—one that hopefully moves a paper toward a better outcome for both the author and the journal.

The Family

The family members were a special lot. Many went to extraordinary lengths to ensure all visitors to the home received superb levels of hospitality. Many also went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the home remained in ship-shape condition. A major strength of the family was the diversity of its members. No matter what crisis arose, someone in the family had the knowledge, experience, and wisdom to handle it. And they were close-knit. They shut ranks quickly when the home was under threat or any member of the family was in trouble.

During my time as Editor-in-Chief, I have had the pleasure and the privilege of working with a number of colleagues who have been Associate Editors and Senior Editors of the *MIS Quarterly*. For their support and contributions to the *MIS Quarterly*, I would like to thank the following colleagues who have acted as Associate Editors: Fran Ackerman, Anitesh Barua, Anol Bhattacharjee, Ben Bensaou, Anandhi Bharadwaj, Carol Brown, Sue Brown, Yolande Chan, Patrick Chau, Vivek Choudhury, Deborah Compeau, Wendy Currie, Gert-Jan de Vreede, Debabrata Dey, Robert Fichman, Dale Goodhue, Terri Griffith, Varun Grover, Suzanne Iacono, Elena Karahanna, Michelle Kaarst-Brown, Laurie Kirsch, Prabhudev Konana, Dorothy Leidner, Kai Lim, Moez Limayem, Ann Majchrzak, Barbara Marcolin, Lars Mathiassen, Poppy McLeod, Shaila Miranda, Jo Ellen Moore, Mike Newman, Ojelanki Ngwenyama, Peter Axel Nielsen, Guy Pare, Alain

Pinsonneault, G. Prem Premkumar, T. Ravichandran, Vern Richardson, Rajiv Sabherwal, Radhika Santhanam, Chris Sauer, Carol Saunders, Mani Subramani, Ulrike Schultze, Peter Seddon, Al Segars, Sandra Slaughter, Jeff Smith, Christina Soh, Sandy Staples, Veda Storey, Ron Thompson, James Thong, Cathy Urquhart, and Viswaneth Venkatesh.

I have been especially fortunate to have the following colleagues act as Senior Editors for the *MIS Quarterly* during my time as Editor-in-Chief: Ritu Agarwal, Deborah Compeau, Allen Lee, Lars Mathiassen, Michael Myers, Rajiv Sabherwal, V. Sambamurthy, Carol Saunders, Veda Storey, Bernard Tan, Dov Te'eni, Peter Todd, Jane Webster, Kwok-Kei Wei, and Ilze Zigurs. All these colleagues have served with great distinction, and I am indebted to them for the support and assistance they have provided to me. It has been a pleasure and privilege to work with them. I have learned much from them.

As the immediate past Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*, Allen Lee has been unfailing in his support of my efforts. He has been a constant source of encouragement and wisdom. I am most grateful to him for the many occasions on which he has lent me an empathetic ear and extended his friendship to me. Allen has provided me with a remarkable role model that somehow I must strive to emulate over the next three years. I especially appreciate his patience with the slow-learning student that I often was.

To two special people at the *MIS Quarterly* office, Jan DeGross and Jennifer Syverson, go my heartfelt thanks. Jan and I have known each other since my graduate student days at Minnesota. Indeed, she typed my Ph.D. thesis at a time when tape cassette-based word processors were first beginning to appear in the marketplace. I suspect she was dismayed to see me come back to haunt her after some 25 years! For my part, however, I was delighted to have the opportunity to work with her again, because her high level of competence as a production editor is legendary. I knew, therefore, that I would be in good hands. More important, I have valued our three years together at the *MIS Quarterly* as an opportunity to renew our friendship, if only via frequent e-mails across the Pacific Ocean. Jennifer and I got to know each other, however, only after I commenced my term as Editor-in-Chief. I quickly found that she remained calm, courteous, and cheerful during storms. She has provided extraordinary support to authors, reviewers, and members of the Editorial Board. On many occasions, also, she has gently steered me back on track when I have lost my way. She was the beacon that helped me regain my sense of direction.

I would like to record once again my thanks to Gordon Davis for his support to me when he held the position of Publisher of the *MIS Quarterly*. In my editorial comments in the June 2004 issue of the journal, I attempted to outline the ways in which Gordon has assisted me over many years. More recently, the support I have received from Alok Gupta as the new Publisher of the *MIS Quarterly* has been outstanding. Alok has been giving substantial thought to the sorts of actions that must be undertaken to ensure the *MIS Quarterly* survives and prospers in the long run. I am most grateful to him for the high level of commitment he has already demonstrated in his new role.

Members of the *MIS Quarterly*'s Policy Council have also provided me with outstanding support during my term as Editor-in-Chief. I am most grateful to Blake Ives, Cynthia Beath, Gordon Davis, Robert Kauffman, Detmar Straub, Izak Benbasat, and Alok Gupta for all their work on behalf of the journal. On a number of occasions, their individual and collective counsel has meant much to me.

Turning in the Keys

It is time to leave. All my bags are packed. I have not cleaned up the home as well as I would have liked. I can do no more, however, because I have run out of time.

Nonetheless, I have known the new caretaker for many years, and I know she understands my foibles and failings. In her usual way, she will take care of the messes I have left in her stride. One task I have not done is clean out the refrigerator. For some reason, this task is one I cannot face.

I would like to extend to Carol Saunders my best wishes for a successful term as Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*. Over the last few months, I have worked closely with Carol as we have begun to make the transition in our roles. Yet again Carol has demonstrated those special qualities that make her such a wonderful colleague. I know Carol will do an outstanding job, and I know the journal will grow and prosper under her guidance. I know, also, that she will relish the opportunities for personal and professional growth that her new role will provide. Finally, in the tradition of past Editors-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*, I would like to assure Carol that I will strive to support her to the best of my ability.

Changes in the Editorial Board

The following colleagues have completed their three-year terms as Associate Editors of the *MIS Quarterly*: Anandhi Bharadwaj (Emory University), Patrick Chau (University of Hong Kong), Vivek Choudhury (University of Cincinnati), Robert Fichman (Bentley College), Kai Lim (City University of Hong Kong), Ojelanki Ngwenyama (Virginia Commonwealth University), and Ulrike Schultze (Southern Methodist University). On behalf of the *MIS Quarterly*, I thank them for the outstanding service that they have provided, and I wish them well in their future endeavors.

I am pleased to welcome Blaize Horner Reich (Simon Fraser University), Jan Pries-Heje (University of Copenhagen), Sia Choon Ling (City University of Hong Kong), K. Ramamurthy (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), Lucas Introna (Lancaster University), Traci Carte (University of Oklahoma), and Mike Morris (University of Virginia) as new Associate Editors of the *MIS Quarterly*. Each of these colleagues has been invited to be Associate Editors because of the outstanding review work that they have undertaken for the *MIS Quarterly* in the past and their distinguished record of publications. I congratulate them on their appointment to the Editorial Board, and I wish them every success in their roles over the next three years.

Allen Lee (Virginia Commonwealth University), V. Sambamurthy (Michigan State University), and Peter Todd (University of Virginia) have retired as Senior Editors of the *MIS Quarterly*. All three colleagues rank among the most-distinguished scholars in our field. All three have also provided outstanding service to the *MIS Quarterly*. Allen was Editor-in-Chief from 1999-2001. Samba is the incoming Editor-in-Chief of *Information Systems Research*. Peter somehow manages to maintain high research productivity in spite of the onerous senior administrative responsibilities he has within his university. It is with regret and much gratitude that I bid Allen, Samba, and Peter farewell.

It is my pleasure to welcome Vivek Choudhury (University of Cincinnati), Joey George (Florida State University), Peter Seddon (University of Melbourne), and Elena Karahanna (University of Georgia) as Senior Editors of the *MIS Quarterly* for a three-year term. Vivek, Joey, Peter, and Elena have been outstanding Associate Editors for the *MIS Quarterly*, and I am confident they will discharge the responsibilities of their new role with distinction. I wish them every success during their terms as Senior Editors.

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