

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

### The Parable of the Golf Balls

*When I was 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)*

It is with a deep sense of pride, but at the same time trepidation, that I take on the role of eighth Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*—pride because I have the honor of being given the helm of one of our discipline's outstanding journals; and trepidation because I feel unable to wear the shoes of the wonderful colleagues who have gone before me as Editors-in-Chief.

Special thanks go to Izak Benbasat and Blake Ives who conspired to get me to finally commit to becoming an Associate Editor for the *MIS Quarterly* back in 1995. Special thanks go, also, to Bob Zmud from whom I have learned much in working with him on *MIS Quarterly* business. As an item of history, Bob was the Senior Editor and I was the Associate Editor for the first fully electronic review that the *MIS Quarterly* undertook as an experiment. And finally, special thanks go to Allen Lee and Gordon Davis. Allen has been an outstanding leader, a counsellor, a friend, and a kindred spirit these last few years, in spite of the thousands of miles that separate us. His commitment to seeing the *MIS Quarterly* grow and prosper has been unwavering. Gordon took on the role of my advisor when I first went to Minnesota in 1973 to undertake my Ph.D. With his usual good grace and gentleness, he has accepted the fact that I have not allowed him to relinquish this role in spite of the many years that have now passed since I left Minnesota. With my new responsibilities as Editor-in-Chief, I am afraid that he is stuck with me yet again!

### A Vision for the Next Three Years

Shortly after it was announced I would be Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly* for the next three years, I received a congratulatory message from Blake Ives. I replied, thanking Blake for his message and indicating my fears about my ability to do the job adequately. I felt that Blake, as a past Editor-in-Chief, would understand my concerns. Blake then sent me a message containing the paragraph with which I opened this editorial statement. Upon receiving his new message, my fears were somewhat assuaged. He helped me re-frame the way I thought about the duties I would assume.

At the end of three years, I hope to have followed the tradition established by all prior Editors-in-Chief and leave the "cottage" (the *MIS Quarterly*) a little nicer than it was when I first got here. In no way is this comment intended to disparage the work of my predecessors. Rather, it reflects that (1) in three years, no Editor-in-Chief can do "everything," and (2) each Editor-in-Chief must strive to adapt the *MIS Quarterly* to reflect the changing context in which we undertake and publish research within the information systems discipline.

What, then, do I hope to leave in the cottage at the end of my three-year term? I have three goals. First, I hope to improve even more the *MIS Quarterly's* reputation for providing fast, high-quality, constructive reviews. My reason is straightforward. I have perhaps a simple-minded view of the thing that is *the* critical success factor for any journal—namely, the regard in which colleagues hold its review process. Why? There are three reasons. First, conducting research is usually an arduous affair. All of us feel disaffected when colleagues charged with the responsibility of reviewing our work for journals treat it superficially or dismiss it summarily. Second, when we review the work of our colleagues for a journal, we are "playing with their lives." Especially for younger colleagues, the outcomes of review processes can have a major impact on their careers. In many cases, tenure and promotion decisions still rely heavily on the extent and impact of one's published work. Third, effective progress in our discipline depends upon our publishing timely, high-quality research. It takes little time for us to realize that we cannot do all the work in a discipline ourselves. We depend inextricably on our colleagues for the ideas and knowledge that germinate our own research, the materials needed to support our teaching, and the intellectual bases that underlie any consulting work we undertake. To the extent the best research is not available to us on a timely basis, our whole scholarly enterprise is undermined.

The second goal I hope to achieve is to increase the *MIS Quarterly's* impact both within and outside the information systems discipline. In this regard, some objective measures of a journal's impact relate to how frequently and how long, on average, papers within a journal are cited. The ISI's (Institute of Scientific Information) *Journal Citation Reports* provide these sorts of measures for many journals in many different disciplines. One such measure is the *journal impact factor*, which is a measure of the frequency with which the average article in a journal has been cited in a year. ISI states, "The impact factor is calculated by dividing the number of current citations to articles published in the two previous years by the total number of articles published in the two previous years." In this regard, here are the impact factors for the *MIS Quarterly* for the period, 1996-2000:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Impact Factor</i>
1996	1.569
1997	1.620
1998	1.548
1999	1.171
2000	2.064

These figures show that the average paper published in the *MIS Quarterly* gets cited somewhere between 1.5 and 2.0 times. It turns out that this rate is high for journals published in the information systems, computer science, and management fields. Indeed, in terms of the journal impact factor, the *MIS Quarterly* ranks among the very top journals in all three fields. So authors who publish in the *MIS Quarterly* are likely to have their paper "noticed," and of course this is the first step to having one's paper affect the work of other colleagues.

How can we improve the impact of the *MIS Quarterly*? Clearly we need to publish the best research undertaken within the information systems discipline, because high-quality research is more likely to have

an impact on others. We therefore need to attract colleagues who do such research to submit their papers to the *MIS Quarterly*. They will do so if they perceive that the journal has (1) an outstanding reputation (and thus their papers are more likely to be noticed), and (2) they will receive timely, high-quality, constructive reviews. I believe the latter attribute is a prerequisite for the former—hence, my goal is to do still better with our review processes at the *MIS Quarterly*.

There is still one other aspect of improving the impact of papers published in the *MIS Quarterly* on which I want to focus. Specifically, our review processes will now place greater emphasis on evaluating papers to determine their likelihood of opening up or articulating new areas of research. I stress that I do not mean to imply we are now actively encouraging submission of papers that address the latest “hot” topic in our field. Rather, we are seeking papers that describe substantive innovations in research approach and especially substantive innovations in fundamental theory. For a paper to be publishable in the *MIS Quarterly*, an acceptable level of rigor will remain important. However, the paper’s innovative content will exceed rigor as a criterion of significance. Pursuing rigor for its own sake will be insufficient to justify publication of a paper. In short, we will not publish highly rigorous research that lacks substantive innovations and is deemed uninteresting. I have asked the Editorial Board of the *MIS Quarterly* to work hard over this next year to internalize this perspective. In short, we will strive to live peacefully with a paradox. We will maintain our commitment to publishing the highest-quality research in the information systems field. At the same time we will be prepared to take greater risks with the papers we publish if, in the long run, we believe their impact will be high. As an Editorial Board, we will be going through a learning process as we develop the explicit and implicit knowledge needed to support this view. As an author or reader of the *MIS Quarterly*, I ask for your tolerance and support as we undergo this learning experience.

My third goal is to have the *MIS Quarterly* publish papers on a broader range of topics in the information systems field. For some time, the *MIS Quarterly* has focused on publishing papers in a particular niche of the information systems discipline. Specifically, our stated goal is to publish papers that address “the development and communication of knowledge concerning both the management of information technology and the use of information technology for managerial and organizational purposes.” Like my predecessor, Allen Lee, I am concerned that some colleagues feel disenfranchised by this goal because they conclude they no longer have access to the *MIS Quarterly* as a venue in which to publish their best work. In particular, I have had colleagues who do technically oriented or economically oriented research in the information systems field voice this concern to me.

The *MIS Quarterly* will eventually publish papers on the full gamut of topics that command the attention of researchers in the information systems field. We will continue to keep a strong focus, however, on the managerial and organizational phenomena associated with information systems and information technology. The reason is that our core competencies (our strategic resources) lie in working with authors to develop and publish papers that adopt this focus. Any shift from this focus would require careful discernment and careful management of the change processes that would have to ensue. Some behind-the-scenes work has been underway to enlarge the focus. Hopefully, this work will come to fruition in due course.

Nonetheless, I believe that most, if not all, papers that we might write as information systems researchers can be framed to draw out their managerial or organizational implications. The trick is to ask the following question about the research phenomena that interest us: What are the managerial or organizational implications of these phenomena? For instance, assume we are working on some aspect of conceptual modeling or some charging algorithm associated with the provision of network services. We might be dealing with relatively arcane technical or economic phenomena. Nevertheless, their behavior is still likely to have some type of implication for managers or organizations. In the introduction to our paper, we can

motivate our examination of the phenomena by explaining their importance for managers or organizations. In the later sections of our paper, we can tease out the implications of our findings for managers and organizations. The implications for managers and organizations cannot be an afterthought for papers that we wish to publish in the *MIS Quarterly*. They must be central to our papers. We must craft our papers carefully using the *MIS Quarterly* genre.

Of course, we might not always deem it to be appropriate to craft our papers so the managerial implications are a prominent feature of the paper. For instance, in some cases we might regard the technical or economic innovation that underlies the paper as the feature that should be emphasized. Moreover, if the background knowledge required to understand the innovation is deep, we may need to write for an audience of our colleagues who are specialists in the area. Whenever the managerial or organizational implications of the innovation surface are prominent, however, the *MIS Quarterly* is an appropriate publication outlet.

## Some Challenges Ahead

Over the next three years, I believe the *MIS Quarterly*, along with other journals, will face some important challenges. In particular, many stakeholders in the journal publication “game” are now talking about a crisis in scholarly communications. There are several “faces” to the crisis. Two, however, are prominent.

The first is that many libraries are now beginning to react aggressively to substantial increases in journal costs that have been imposed upon them by a number of journal publishers over several years. With the merger of many publishing houses, each of the new consolidated publishers now holds more power in the market. There is at least some evidence to suggest that they have used this increased power to extract economic “rents” from the marketplace for journals. Some of our major libraries are responding by forming associations to act on their behalf in dealing with the publishers. There have been threats of and enacted boycotts of particular journals and particular publishers. The problem is that the publishers and the libraries are powerful players in the journal marketplace. At least at this time, the scholars in this game are not. We need to take care that we do not end up being squeezed in the middle by powerful forces over which we have little control. If this outcome occurs, our research enterprise could be undermined fundamentally.

The second face of the crisis arises from the ongoing revolution in electronic publications. Increasingly, researchers expect that they can access the contents of journals online. Moreover, if my perceptions are correct, increasingly they are unwilling to pay to obtain copies of published papers—in part because many journals now allow free access to their papers, in part because they are annoyed by the transaction costs associated with having to pay online for access to journal papers, and in part because they have become used to their libraries bearing the cost of their online access to journal papers.

If a journal is to survive, someone has to pay to cover the costs of its production. We need to take care that extensive free riding on journal use does not occur. Otherwise, the survival of our journals may be at risk.

## A Service Role and Joint Responsibilities

The role of a Reviewer, Associate Editor, Senior Editor, or Editor-in-Chief is to be of service to one's colleagues. It should *never* be perceived as a role where one exercises power over one's colleagues. At

the *MIS Quarterly* we work diligently with authors to develop their papers to the point where hopefully their research can be published. As Allen Lee has pointed out lucidly in a previous editorial (December 1999), however, the *MIS Quarterly* plays more of a developmental role in the information systems discipline than a publication role. The reason is that historically our rejection rates are higher than our acceptance rates. In spite of this situation, hopefully our authors benefit substantially from the review feedback we provide to them, irrespective of the final disposition of their papers.

Having a low acceptance rate is *not* a goal of the *MIS Quarterly*. We would prefer to publish papers rather than reject them. If we are to increase our acceptance rates, however, both authors and the review team must share the responsibility. On the one hand, authors must commit to refining their papers *before* they submit them to the *MIS Quarterly*. Too often, we receive papers that clearly have not been exposed to other colleagues nor presented at workshops/seminars to obtain feedback. The review team has to do the preliminary refinement work as well as evaluate more-substantive issues like the extent of the contribution to knowledge provided by the paper. By following this path, authors are taxing the goodwill of Reviewers and inviting rejection from the outset. On the other hand, the review team must be willing to take risks and to work positively and constructively with authors in the hope that an acceptance decision will be the eventual outcome. At the *MIS Quarterly*, we already have a strong ethic that results in our working with authors in this way. We will strive to continue to work in this way.

Over the next few years, I hope to see more evidence of authors having done the hard work of refining their papers *before* they submit them to the *MIS Quarterly*. For example, it would be good if the acknowledgements section of a paper showed evidence of the paper already having been presented at workshops or seminars and that authors had taken the feedback obtained from these presentations into account. If we can achieve this outcome, I am confident that the review teams will respond positively and that we will see a higher acceptance rate.

## Reviewer of the Year for 2000

I am pleased to announce, somewhat belatedly, that the *MIS Quarterly*'s Reviewer of the Year for 2000 is Ulrike Schultze. Ulrike has been a frequent Reviewer for the *MIS Quarterly*, and Senior Editors and Associate Editors alike have regarded her reviews as outstanding. On behalf of the *MIS Quarterly*, I would like to extend to Ulrike our congratulations on her achievement. We look forward to working with her in her new role as an Associate Editor for the *MIS Quarterly* (see below).

## Changes in the Editorial Board

The following colleagues have completed their three-year terms as Associate Editors of the *MIS Quarterly*: Soon Ang (Nanyang Technological University), Alan Dennis (Indiana University), Mats Lundberg (Stockholm School of Economics), Kar Yan Tam (Hong Kong University of Science & Technology), and Bernard Tan (National University of Singapore). 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 Anandhi Bharadwaj (Emory University), Patrick Chau (University of Hong Kong), Vivek Choudhury (University of Cincinnati), Rob Fichman (Boston College), Kai Lim (City University of Hong Kong), Ojelanki Ngwenyama (Virginia Commonwealth University), and Ulrike Schultze (Southern Methodist University) as new Associate Editors of the *MIS Quarterly*. Each of these colleagues has been

invited to be an Associate Editor 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 look forward to working with them over the next three years.

Two colleagues have accepted our invitations to them to extend their terms as Associate Editors for a further two years: Laurie Kirsch (University of Pittsburgh) and Deborah Compeau (University of Western Ontario). Re-appointments are rare. They are offered only to Associate Editors who demonstrate extraordinary performance. In this regard, both Laurie's and Deborah's credentials are impeccable. I thank them for the wonderful contributions they have made already to the *MIS Quarterly*, and I look forward to continuing my work with them for a further two years.

Dan Robey (Georgia State University), Richard Watson (University of Georgia), and Bob Zmud (University of Oklahoma) have retired as Senior Editors of the *MIS Quarterly*. All three of these colleagues rank among the most-distinguished scholars in our field. All three have also provided outstanding service to the *MIS Quarterly*. Dan brought his enthusiasm for and commitment to qualitative research and research on managerial and organizational issues. Rick was the driving force behind the establishment of *MISQ Review*. Bob was Editor-in-Chief from 1995-1998 before he took on his three-year term as a Senior Editor. It will be hard to imagine the *MIS Quarterly* without Bob's presence. I hope he will forgive me if from time to time I still rely on his counsel. It is with regret and heartfelt thanks that I bid Dan, Rick, and Bob farewell from the *MIS Quarterly*.

It is my pleasure to welcome Peter Todd (University of Virginia) as a Senior Editor of the *MIS Quarterly* for a three-year term. I first met Peter in 1986 when he was a graduate student at the University of British Columbia. I was visiting the University of British Columbia on sabbatical leave from the University of Queensland. Peter was an outstanding young graduate student at the time. His subsequent career has more than justified the confidence we placed in him as someone who would attain high status as a scholar. I look forward to working closely with him again and renewing our vigorous debates on disciplinary matters!

I would like to extend special thanks, also, to Jane Webster (Queen's University) for having taken on the role of Senior Editor for *MISQ Review*. The task of managing review papers is especially difficult, and I am grateful to Jane for her willingness to assume this role. Jane was an outstanding Associate Editor for the *MIS Quarterly*. I look forward to working with her again in her role as Senior Editor.

Finally, on 31 December 2001, Allen Lee (Virginia Commonwealth University) completed his three-year term as Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*. Allen has brought great distinction to the position. He is an awesome intellectual and a multi-award-winning scholar. His knowledge of the information systems field is both broad and deep, and this has allowed him to show empathy toward and have insights into many of the diverse currents that run through our field. Allen's dedication and commitment as Editor-in-Chief have been unfailing. He has left many improvements in the cottage that is the *MIS Quarterly*. On behalf of the *MIS Quarterly*, I thank him for his enormous contributions. Personally, I thank him most sincerely for his friendship and support. I look forward to working with him in his new role as a Senior Editor for the *MIS Quarterly*.

**Ron Weber**  
**Editor-in-Chief**