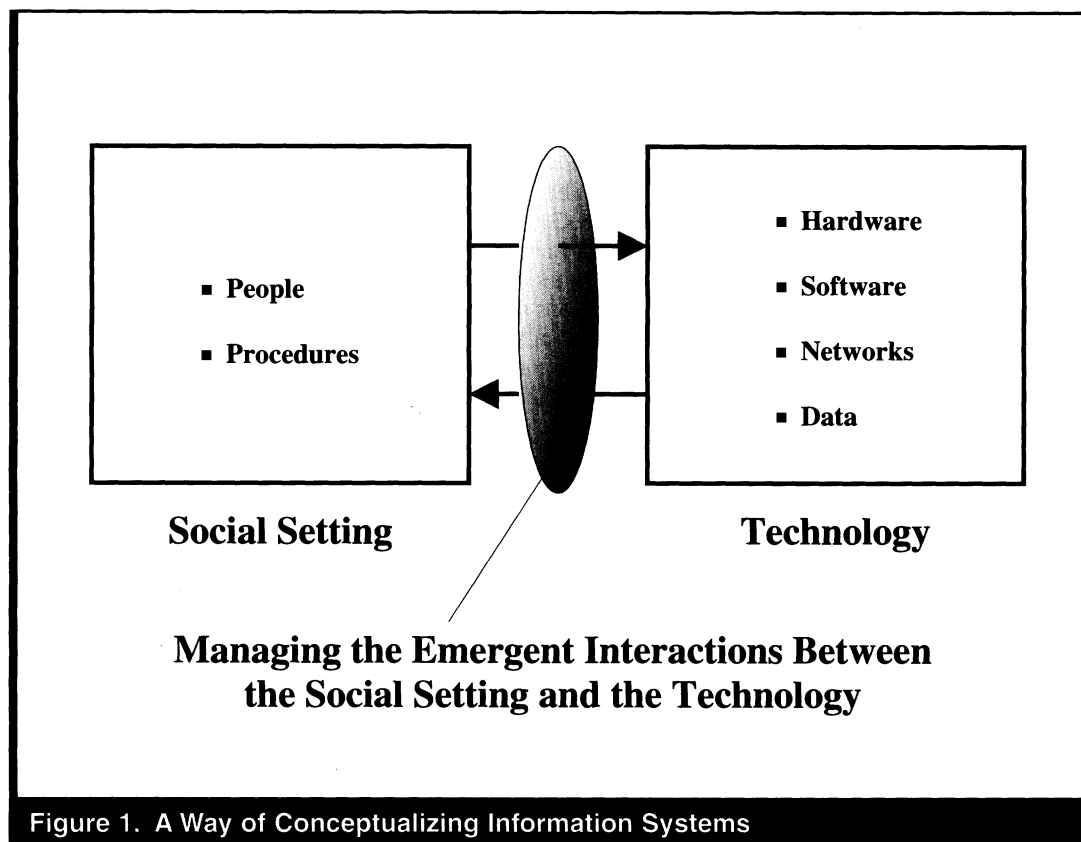# INAUGURAL EDITOR'S COMMENTS ■

When Gordon Davis, in his role as executive editor, invited me to be the editor-in-chief of *MIS Quarterly*, I accepted immediately. Working as the editor-in-chief would allow me to return something to a journal and an academic field that have given so much to me. I am more than happy to accept the responsibility of continuing the efforts of Blake Ives and Robert Zmud (the preceding two editors-in-chief under whom I have worked and learned) to secure *MIS Quarterly*'s place among the best research journals in the academic field of MIS. And at the same time, I am more than happy to be in a position to promote my own conceptions of our field, the publication process, and the future course of *MISQ*. In my inaugural editorial statement, I will share the conceptions that will guide me in my three-year tenure as editor-in-chief. I will also announce a new department of the journal—Research Articles (which is a consolidation of the Theory and Research department and the Application department)—as well as review the remaining existing departments in *MISQ* and two other *MISQ* publications accepting contributions from authors: *MISQ Discovery* and *MISQ Review.*

The MIS Field, the Publication Process, and the Future Course of
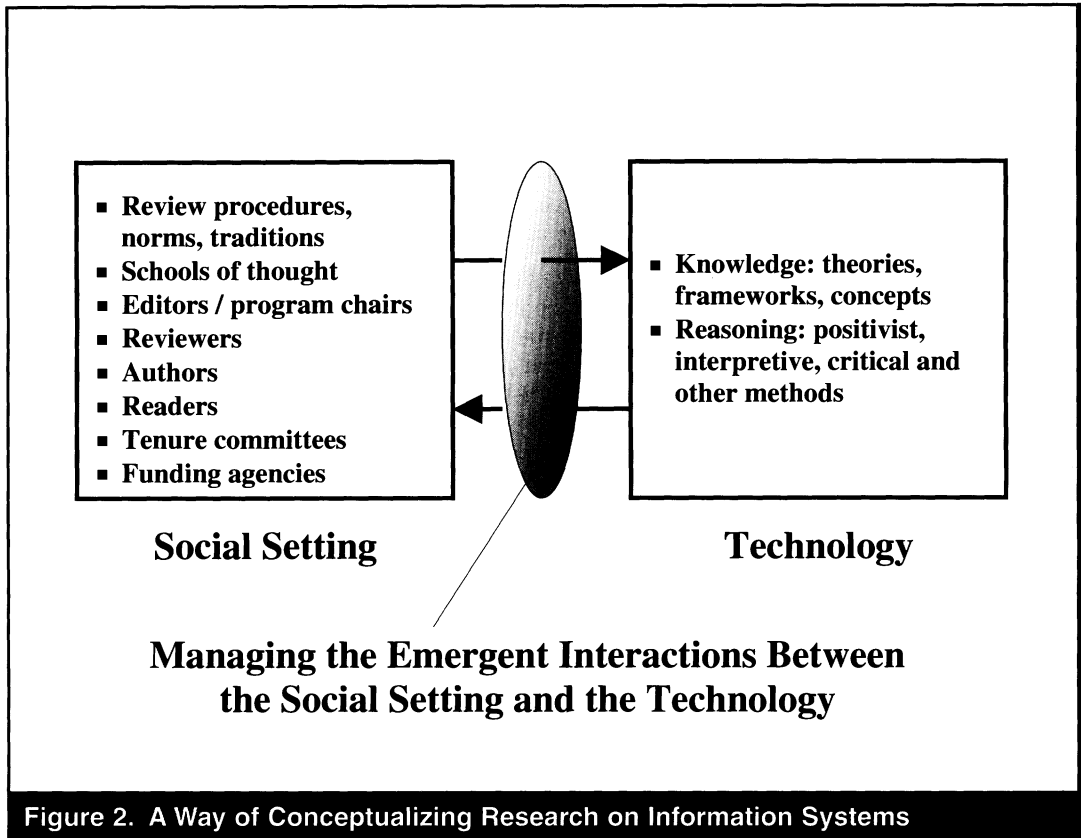## *MIS Quarterly* ■

My conception of an information system, which reflects the classic work of many MIS scholars, is that it consists of not just the technology (hardware, software, data, networks) or the social setting (people, business processes, politics, economics, psychology, culture, organization, and management), but also the rich phenomena that emerge from the interactions between the two (Figure 1). Technology disciplines, such as computer science and engineering, are already making excellent contributions to our understanding of the technology. At the same time, the social sciences, both inside and outside business schools, are making excellent contributions to our understanding of the social setting. It is important for the academic field of MIS to add research value, rather than only do what other research fields are already doing. One way of accomplishing this is to place a research focus on the rich phenomena that emerge whenever the technological and the social come into contact with, react to, and transform each other. Rigorously researched understandings of the rich, emergent interactions between the two have been, and should continue to be, among the best contributions that we can offer to the practice of managing information systems on the daily, operational, and strategic levels. Other research foci are, of course, also necessary and desirable, but attending to what makes our research distinct is essential to our prospering as an academic field.

My conception of an information system also extends to my conception of the research and publication process (Figure 2). For us as scholars, our knowledge (theories, frameworks, concepts) and our reasoning (positivist, interpretive, critical, and other methods) constitute our technology. And just as information technology interacts with a social setting, our research technology interacts with a social setting (review procedures, norms, traditions, schools of thought, editors, program chairs, reviewers, authors, readers, tenure committees, funding agencies). Authors of submitted manuscripts, their reviewers, and their associate editors may appropriately narrow their attention to the logical and cognitive aspects of our "technology"; however, senior editors (including the editor-in-chief) find themselves additionally responsible for anticipating and attending to the administrative and even political dramas that often emerge in the interactions among the submitted manuscripts, the already existing traditions, and the human participants in the research-and-publication process. A senior editor's selection of the right reviewers and an appropriate associate editor for a manuscript requires attention not just to the manuscript's theory and method, but also to the overall social setting of the research (including, among other things, the schools of thought supportive of or hostile to the manuscript's theory and method). Sometimes, as a sign that the senior editor has set up the review process for a manuscript successfully,

Figure 1. A Way of Conceptualizing Information Systems

the result is that the reviewers and associate editor largely complete the process by themselves, with lit-tle additional intervention needed from the senior editor. The irony is that, for a job well done, the senior editor is sometimes left with little voice in both the unfolding of the review process and the con-tent of the accepted manuscript.

Another irony is that, because 85 to 90 percent of the articles submitted to *MIS Quarterly* do not end up being published in it, one can say that *MISQ* is, in a sense, not really in the business of publishing MIS research. In practice, *MISQ* is mostly in the business of providing constructive feedback to authors of the manuscripts that it does not publish, whether the manuscript is returned to the author immediately or spends some time in the review process. Based on my experience as an editor for *MISQ* since 1990, I can report that the quality of comments from referees and editors has improved steadily. Extensive, multiple-page commentaries (from the senior editor, the associate editor, and typically at least three reviewers) are common, if not the norm. Author nominations of candidates for reviewers and associate editors, and the direct submission of manuscripts from authors to their preferred senior editor, have given authors a sense of ownership in the review process while also substantially improving the quality of the process. Another factor serving to improve our "business process" of providing constructive feedback is *MISQ*'s practice in which associate editors rate the performance of reviewers, and the ratings subsequently become avail-able to senior editors when selecting reviewers for new submissions. Exemplary work as a reviewer can lead to an invitation to be an associate editor, just as exemplary work as an associate editor can lead to an invitation to be a senior editor. I see this organizational infrastructure as having enabled a business process effective not only for publishing the best MIS research, but also for providing excellent feedback even to authors of rejected manuscripts. Coloring my past work as an associate editor and senior editor,

Figure 2. A Way of Conceptualizing Research on Information Systems

and my future work as editor-in-chief, is my sense of responsibility to all authors, including the vast majority whose manuscripts *MISQ* does not publish.

My conception of the future course for *MIS Quarterly* is for it to continue in the same directions established by my predecessors, as well as to embark on a few new directions. I laud my predecessors for developing *MISQ* into a journal whose research rigor matches that of the top journals in any other business-school discipline. As it happens, this issue of *MISQ* includes the first installment (two articles) of the "Special Issue on Intensive Research in Information Systems: Using Qualitative, Interpretive, and Case Methods to Study Information Technology," for which the senior editors are M. Lynne Markus and myself. By publishing research exemplars that spell out and apply criteria by which to judge the quality of qualitative research, the Special Issue should further entrench *MISQ*'s reputation for research rigor.

I also laud my predecessors for creating the current organizational structure of six senior editors and 29 associate editors, among whom expertise in all substantive and methodological areas in MIS research are represented. The structure is held together by strongly shared understandings of the journal's values and is reinforced by the unrelenting momentum of the procedures hardwired into the electronic (both web-based and e-mail-based) reviewing process. I must also credit my predecessors for the progress, over the past 10 years, in which the representation of scholars from outside North America on the Editorial Board has gone from nothing to 39 percent, while the representation of women has improved from 21 percent to 25 percent. Also, once seen as a bastion of quantitative and positivist research, *MIS Quarterly* now boasts excellent representation from qualitative, interpretive, and case researchers among its associate and senior editors (where the current editor-in-chief is a qualitative methodologist) and has even given its

best paper award to qualitative articles. I will continue the progress in achieving diversity by seeking out and, as necessary, developing qualified scholars to join our Editorial Board.

One new future direction is a thrust at better imbuing rigorous research with the element of relevance to managers, consultants, and other practitioners. As it happens, this thrust is initiated in this issue of *MIS Quarterly* in the form of the "Issues and Opinions" article by Izak Benbasat and Robert Zmud, "Empirical Research in Information Systems: the Practice of Relevance" and additional commentaries (by Lynda M. Applegate and John L. King, by Thomas H. Davenport and M. Lynne Markus, by Kalle Lyytinen, and by myself), all of which Lynda Applegate has overseen as the senior editor.

Another future direction, inspired by the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Board meeting held in Helsinki during the 1998 meeting of the International Conference on Information Systems, is to establish our academic MIS field as a "reference discipline" for other academic management fields. The pleasant irony underlying this direction is that, two decades ago, the incipient academic MIS field was in search of one or another better established field to provide guidance as its "reference discipline," but today, the pre-eminence and criticality of information systems in more and more business functions (such as accounting, finance, marketing, operations, organization design, business process reengineering, and electronic commerce), along with the recognition of the rigor of MIS research, are moving our field to center stage, hence positioning us to enact our field as a central one to which other fields would be referring. To achieve this, one possibility could involve *MISQ*'s pursuing a cross-journal special issue, with an editorial board composed of some *MISQ* editors and some of the editors of another journal (representing accounting, marketing, or another field), where *MISQ* would publish two of the articles and the other journal would publish another two; more than one such cross-journal special issue would be needed to represent different fields. A less ambitious but more easily implemented possibility would be to commission papers on specific themes (such as "MIS research and marketing research" and "MIS research and organizational research"), where the commissioned papers would still undergo the standard *MISQ* review process.

MIS Quarterly Departments, *MISQ Discovery,* and *MISQ Review* ▬▬

I will also take advantage of this inaugural editorial statement to clarify the different types of contributions that *MIS Quarterly* will consider for possible publication. *MISQ* accepts contributions of the following types:[1]

- Research Articles
- Issues and Opinions
- Research Notes
- Research Essays
- *MISQ Discovery* Articles
- *MISQ Review* Articles

The topics of all articles in all departments of *MIS Quarterly* must relate to the journal's editorial objective, which is the development and communication of knowledge concerning both the management of information technology and the use of information technology for managerial and organizational purposes. A detailed explanation of this editorial objective can be found in Robert Zmud's Editorial Comments of June 1995.

The review process generally involves, except as noted below, a senior editor (who could be the editor-in-chief), an associate editor, and reviewers. Additional detailed information about the mechanics of the review process (including the nomination of candidates for reviewers and associate editors) is available at http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html. A detailed explanation of the criteria that the editors and reviewers are likely to apply can be found in Robert Zmud's Editorial Statement of December 1996.

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[1]*MIS Quarterly* publishes not only unsolicited manuscripts that authors contribute, but also certain solicited manuscripts such as some of the SIM Paper Competition winners and the MISRC/SIM key issues surveys, all of which still undergo the review process.

Research Articles

The new Research Articles department is the result of merging, and slightly expanding, the former Theory and Research department and Application department. All recent articles in the Theory and Research department and the Application department have come to share two features, which MIS Quarterly is now requiring of all submissions to the new Research Articles department. Submissions to this department should:

- Offer a contribution that is sufficiently original and significant so as to warrant a full-length article for the authors to develop and present their argument.
- Have a strong grounding in theory, whether it is a new theory the authors are advancing or an existing theory the authors are illustrating, testing, refining, challenging, or (in the case of some articles for an executive audience) simply applying.

Over the past few years, the theory component of articles in the Application department has become as strong as the theory component of articles in the Theory and Research department. Naturally, there have been differences in style and emphasis in how articles in the two departments have presented theory and data. However, these differences in style and emphasis no longer provide sufficient reason to segregate full-length, theory-based contributions into different categories, especially when there have been some submissions that did not seem to fit neatly or necessarily into one category or the other. And often, MIS Quarterly authors and reviewers have been confused by whatever editorial distinctions were offered to explain the difference between an Application submission and a Theory and Research submission. All new submissions that would have been previously deemed suitable for the Theory and Research department or the Application department will now be considered for the Research Articles department.

Because the Research Articles department is subsuming, rather than eliminating, the former Theory and Research department and Application department, previous editorial guidelines about the style and substance of submissions to these two departments can be approached as options that can still be usefully followed. They can be found in the Editorial Statements of March 1992, March 1993, March 1995, and December 1996.

The new Research Articles department will also provide a home for "pure theory" submissions, which would fall into the same genre as the articles appearing in Academy of Management Review. Robert Zmud provided a detailed explanation of "pure theory" submissions in his editorial statement of June 1998.

In summary, the Research Articles department will publish:

- Articles that are "pure theory"
- Articles that empirically test or illustrate theory
- Articles that apply existing theory

The audience a submission intends to address could be academics, practitioners, or both. A submission should clearly and prominently make known its intended audience so that the editors, reviewers, and readers will know how to approach it.

Relevance to MIS Professionals

A hallmark of MIS Quarterly has been the journal's sustained attention to the world of practice. MIS Quarterly has required both rigor and relevance in the articles it has accepted in the Theory and Research department and Application department and will continue this requirement for all submissions to the Research Articles department. Importantly, there is a wide of variety of ways in which an article can demonstrate its relevance. Some articles, in the genre of applied research, pose research results that are immediately useable by managers; the article "Ethics and Information Systems: The Corporate Domain," by H. Jeff Smith and John Hasnas (published in this issue), exemplifies this by presenting existing theory (from philosophy and ethics) in such a clear manner that executives, managers, and students can grasp and apply their theoretical framework immediately for analyzing ethical issues in prac-

tice. Other articles, in the genre of basic research, offer only a single step toward an eventual theoreti-
cal outcome that executives could directly apply, but are nonetheless careful to draw attention to this
eventual practical utility; for instance, the article "GIS for District-Level Administration in India:
Problems and Opportunities" by Geoff Walsham and Sundeep Sahay (also published in this issue) clear-
ly performs basic research, but still mentions general implications for practice. The diversity of ways in
which an article can demonstrate its relevance reflects the diversity of ways in which scholars believe
that relevance, along with rigor, can be achieved in research; for a good indication of this diversity, see
the Issues and Opinions article "Empirical Research in Information Systems: The Practice of Relevance"
by Izak Benbasat and Robert Zmud in this issue of *MISQ* and the respective commentaries accompa-
nying it.

Issues and Opinions

This department provides a forum for the communication of well-developed, well-articulated, and
provocative position statements concerning emerging, paradoxical, or controversial issues in the field of
MIS. It is expected that such articles would open new areas of discourse, close stale areas, and/or offer
fresh, insightful views on topics of importance to MIS academicians and executives. An Issues and
Opinions submission should:

- Identify the issue(s) in terms that are easy to understand
- Provide appropriate conceptual frameworks for the issue
- Offer opinions and supportive arguments
- Describe the implications of these opinions to research, practice, and/or teaching

All Issues and Opinions submissions should be submitted to the editor-in-chief, who will then serve as
the senior editor for the submission. Generally, the referees commenting on these submissions will be
members of the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Board.

Research Notes

This department provides an outlet for two types of concise contributions. First are commentaries that
relate to a methodological issue (or issues) associated with a published *MIS Quarterly* article. The con-
nections between a Research Note's content and earlier articles published by *MISQ* must be made obvi-
ous. In many cases, the Research Note may arouse controversy and encourage dialogue within the field
on an important methodological issue. In other cases, the Research Note may lead to new research direc-
tions or approaches. Such commentaries should:

- Address an important methodological issue with broad appeal to the *MIS Quarterly* readership
- Provide a sufficient advance in knowledge beyond already published papers
- Be as succinct as possible

Second are incremental contributions of an empirical nature on research topics that frequently appear in
MIS Quarterly. Generally, incremental validity and/or reliability studies would not be viewed with favor.
Such commentaries should:

- Address an important theoretical issue with broad appeal to the *MIS Quarterly* readership
- Provide a sufficient advance in knowledge beyond already published papers
- Be as succinct as possible

All Research Notes should give careful attention to relevant prior literature, to appropriate theories, and
to rigorous methods. Finally, because a Research Note refers to earlier articles published by *MIS
Quarterly*, we may invite authors of one of the referenced papers to provide a "Reply" to the Research
Note.

Research Essays

Occasionally manuscripts are received that solely address methodological issues, but apply a depth of exposition and analysis that goes beyond what is normally associated with a Research Note. Such manuscripts are suitable as Research Essays. Like a Research Note, a Research Essay should give careful attention to relevant prior literature, to appropriate theories, and to rigorous methods. Although a Research Essay is not expected necessarily to be empirical, it should still illustrate its methodological points with examples. A good case of this is the research essay, "A Set of Principles for Conducting and Evaluating Interpretive Field Studies in Information Studies" by Heinz Klein and Michael Myers (published in this issue), who apply their proposed methodological principles to three previously published articles taken from the MIS literature.

MISQ Discovery *Articles*

MISQ Discovery provides an outlet for electronic publications that are not merely electronic analogues of traditional paper-based articles, but take advantage of electronic forms to present and disseminate research in new ways.

MISQ Discovery will publish research reports, albeit in new forms, and also encourage one-time initiatives intended to release us from the box of "paper publishing." An author who is restricted to a traditional paper-based format might take numerous pages to explain a project in 3-Dimensional modeling; however, if released from a paper-based format and enabled by a web-based one, the author could show the readers a 3-D representation and let them experience it for themselves. They might then examine the underlying program or data structure, comments from users, and even download the model for their own use. With an electronic format, it will be possible to show both the model or concept and the way it is constructed or applied. Through the use of multimedia, video, interactivity, hypertext, live data, and so on, *MISQ Discovery* expects authors to challenge our existing assumptions about research and learning.

Authors interested in preparing a submission for *MISQ Discovery* should contact *MISQ Discovery*'s own editor-in-chief, Robert Zmud, at rzmud@ou.edu. Other members of the *MISQ Discovery* Editorial Board consist of three *MISQ* associate editors and the *MISQ* editor-in-chief. Additional information is available at http://www.misq.org/discovery/home.html.

MISQ Review *Articles*

MISQ Review, a new annual publication of *MIS Quarterly,* will focus on original, high-quality review articles by accomplished scholars. The mission of *MISQ Review* is to promote MIS research by publishing articles that conceptualize research areas and survey and synthesize prior research. Both commissioned and submitted articles will be published. Leading scholars may be invited to write articles in their area of specialty; any scholar may submit an article for publication consideration.

Published articles will be broad in scope relative to a topic area and embrace multiple studies. They will be selected for their contribution to the development of MIS as an academic discipline by synthesizing prior research and providing a conceptual foundation for future research. The survey of research on a topic should include the major relevant work by scholars who are part of the international community of researchers. Articles fitting these criteria are expected to be in the range of 30 to 50 pages, including bibliography, when published.

All articles will be reviewed by two or three *MISQ* editors. Scholars who wish to submit articles may obtain advice by sending an abstract and outline of the proposed manuscript to *MISQ Review*'s senior editor, Richard T. Watson, at rwatson@uga.edu.

Allen Lee
Editor-In-Chief