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## Editor's Comments

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I have two objectives with this issue's editorial comment. First, I wish to encourage the *MIS Quarterly* readership to consider submitting manuscripts whose primary contribution lies with the theory being developed and articulated. Second, this commentary concludes with the announcement of a forthcoming change in the journal's editorial leadership.

### “Pure” Theory Manuscripts

The *MIS Quarterly* receives many different types of manuscripts from authors. Most are appropriate for the journal, but some are not. I strongly encourage potential authors to closely examine the *Quarterly's* website (<http://www.misq.org/>) prior to submitting their work. Sections of the website that are particularly relevant are prior editorial comments (contained in the “MISQ Archivist”) and descriptions of the different departments of the journal (contained in the “MISQ Roadmap”). I very strongly encourage potential authors to informally submit their manuscripts to one of the journal's senior editors prior to formal submission. This is an ideal way to obtain fast feedback on both the appropriateness and readiness of your manuscript.

However, the *MIS Quarterly* has received (during my tenure as editor-in-chief) very few submissions that might best be described as “pure theory” submissions. And the *Quarterly* is not alone regarding this gap in the nature of submission; the same could be said of each of the major information systems scholarly journals. The purpose of this editorial commentary is to encourage authors to both consider producing such manuscripts and to send the products of such creative effort to the *MIS Quarterly*.

#### *What is a “pure theory” manuscript?*

A pure theory manuscript is one whose purpose is to develop and describe a rich conceptual understanding of an information systems phenomenon such that the ideas communicated serve to enhance the field's collective understanding of the phenomenon and to serve as a basis for future empirical as well as theoretical work. Such manuscripts emphasize:

1. Descriptions of the phenomenon being examined,
2. Construct creation, development, and explication,
3. Identification of key relationships among constructs, and
4. Development, justification, and articulation of these relationships.

If done creatively and well, such manuscripts can significantly add to the ongoing dialogue regarding a phenomenon and can make an enduring contribution to the literature. However, such manuscripts are not easy to produce. They stand solely on their authors' understanding of a phenomenon, understanding of relevant theoretical perspectives for embracing this phenomenon, and writing abilities; and, there is no data or analysis on which to fall back!

### *What is not a "pure theory" manuscript?*

A reader might well examine prior issues of the *MIS Quarterly* and challenge my assertion that few "pure theory" manuscripts have been submitted to and published in the *Quarterly*. For example, a number of articles have been published whose primary contribution consists of a comprehensive literature review regarding a phenomenon or the development of insightful "frameworks" that apply to a phenomenon, or both of these together. While such articles do contribute to the literature, they do not fit my view of a "pure theory" manuscript. What is missing are compelling discussions of relationships (which might reflect either variance or process theoretical postures) regarding a phenomenon's constructs . . . and it is the effort put forth to identify and develop arguments for such relationships that are the core of the most valuable theoretical contributions. This is not to say that a well-crafted, "pure theory" contribution would neither review the literature nor offer frameworks. However, both of these elements should be secondary, and may in fact be quite invisible, relative to the focus on constructs and their relationships.

I would also be remiss not to caution authors regarding the inadvisability of "splitting" a single empirical manuscript into two manuscripts: one that addresses the theory being tested and a second that reviews this theory but focuses on describing the nature of an empirical study to assess this theory and the resultant findings. If the theory being offered is fully tested by the empirical study, your research should be communicated through a single manuscript. On the other hand, it would be quite appropriate to produce a comprehensive theoretical treatment of a phenomenon as a "pure theory" manuscript and also produce another manuscript describing an empirical assessment of some "piece" of the comprehensive theoretical model.

### *How is a "pure theory" manuscript crafted?*

My best suggestion is for the interested reader to examine past issues of the *Academy of Management Review*, a scholarly journal whose sole editorial mission involves publishing theoretical contributions. While generally not on "information systems" topics, many of the articles published in the *Academy of Management Review* provide concrete examples of what I am terming a "pure theory" manuscript. Hopefully, many of these will be able to serve as templates for authors striving to develop such a manuscript on a topic area relevant to the *MIS Quarterly*.

A "pure theory" manuscript minimally should have four major sections—an introduction, the development of a research model, a discussion of the implications of the research model, and a conclusion. The suggested contents of each of these sections follows:

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| Introduction               | Describes the phenomenon, explains why it is an important topic, previews the objectives of the manuscript, and provides an overview of the remainder of the manuscript.  |
| Research Model Development | Provides an overall description of the model to be developed (using both text and diagrams), defines the constructs and/or variables that populate this model, and develops and provides compelling arguments for the relationships that comprise this model. Typically, formal statements of these relationships would be provided in the form of research propositions. The research model would be based on prior literature as well as the authors' understanding of and insights about the phenomenon. |
| Implications               | Develops the implications of the research model for both research and practice. Regarding research, two types of implications should be raised: suggestions of aspects of the research model that would benefit most from empirical testing, and sug-   |

gestions of ways in which the model itself might be improved through further theorizing. Regarding practice, two types of implications are also advocated: suggestions of prescriptive guidelines that follow from the improved understanding of the phenomenon, and suggestions of those situational contexts for which the ideas being expressed would be most relevant.

**Conclusion** Re-emphasizes the nature of the manuscript's theoretical contributions. Here, it is crucial to provide strong justification regarding why the conceptualizations developed in the manuscript have advanced our collective understanding of the phenomenon.

Of course, it is highly likely that a given manuscript would deviate from this very simplified structure. However, what has been described might best be viewed as the minimal content of a "pure theory" manuscript.

## Conclusion

An often-voiced critique of the information systems field holds that insufficient attention has been devoted to the field's theoretical development. I fully agree.

Information systems theory can be developed in three major ways. First, new theories can be developed. By a new theory, I am referring to ideas that have not previously appeared in either the information systems or reference discipline literatures. Second, existing theories (from either information systems or reference disciplines) can be applied "as is" to information systems phenomena that had previously not been informed by these specific theories. Third, existing theories can be improved while being applied to information systems phenomena. Each of these pathways represents a means for making a value-added contribution to the information systems field, and the third pathway can produce value-added contributions to reference disciplines.

I strongly encourage readers to examine their own research programs and identify ways in which they might develop a "pure theory" manuscript. It is guaranteed that such an endeavor will not be easy and most likely will not occur quickly. However, I can assure you that if done well the final products of such efforts are likely to prove highly rewarding—both for the researcher involved and for the information systems field. And, when you do produce such a manuscript, please consider submitting it to the *MIS Quarterly*.

## Announcement of the Next Editor-In-Chief

I am very pleased to announce that Allen Lee (McGill University) has agreed to serve as the next editor-in-chief of the *MIS Quarterly*, beginning January 1, 1999. Allen was initially appointed to the journal's Editorial Board in 1990. His truly outstanding performance was rewarded with, first, a two-year reappointment as an associate editor and, second, a three-year appointment as a senior editor. While Allen completed his senior editor tenure in 1998, he has remained editorially involved with the *Quarterly* by co-editing (along with Lynne Markus) the special issue on "Intensive Research in Information Systems: Using Qualitative, Interpretive, and Case Methods to Study Information Technology."

I have enjoyed interacting with Allen during my tenure as editor-in-chief. It is with the upmost confidence that I look forward to Allen's stepping into the role. His concerns for scholarship, for readability,

and for meaningfulness clearly signal an intention to continue the *MIS Quarterly's* mission of publishing manuscripts that meet the joint criteria of rigor and relevance. In addition, Allen's mentoring of associate editors, referees, and authors (and, at times, the editor-in-chief!) demonstrates his zeal for learning and teaching and a deep compassion for authors. I very much look forward to working with Allen over the remainder of this year as we transition the journal's leadership. Please join with me on congratulating Allen on this very well-deserved honor.

**—Bob Zmud  
Editor-In-Chief**

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The paper titled "Success of Data Resource Management in Distributed Environments: An Empirical Investigation," published in the March 1998 issue, was missing a footnote about the authors—*The four authors are listed alphabetically and each contributed equally to the paper.* We regret the oversight.

**Ed.**