Editor's Comments

The primary issue addressed in this commentary involves the appropriateness of technically oriented submissions to the *MIS Quarterly*. The commentary concludes with announcements of our second *MISQ Discovery* production and recent Editorial Board changes.

Technically Oriented Submissions

In my discussion of inappropriate topic areas in my December 1995 editorial comment, the following appears (p. ivi):

> A number of scholarly information systems journals have shown a desire to publish articles that contain formalized descriptions of an application, a methodology, or a practice. Such materials often take the form of mathematical models, generic analytical models, or formalized specification sets. While the *Quarterly* recognizes the scholarly value inherent with such articles, the senior editors do not believe that such manuscripts are of sufficient interest to the majority of the journal readership to warrant their publication consideration.

Conversations with both potential authors and other of the *MIS Quarterly*'s senior editors have led me to believe that some confusion might exist regarding our willingness to consider for publication manuscripts on technically oriented topics. (Here, "technically oriented" refers to both detailed examinations of information technology itself as well as highly technical analytical manuscripts.) By clarifying the *Quarterly*'s position, I hope to both encourage the submission of appropriate manuscripts that would otherwise be sent to other journals and improve the initial quality of appropriate manuscripts submitted to the *MIS Quarterly*. Most of the *Quarterly*'s readership is keenly interested in the "technology side" of our field: academic readers must keep up-to-date with evolving technologies for teaching purposes and maintain a current awareness of the technological contexts involved with their research programs, and our executive readership includes many IT managers whose current organizational roles require a rich grasp of specific technologies.

Again quoting from an earlier editorial comment (June 1995, p. xxi):

> With occasional exceptions, articles should thus have as their primary focus enhancing our current understanding of either how information technologies are managed (so that they can be appropriately used within organizations) or how information technologies are used (and the implications of such use) within organizations.

Note that this editorial mission statement does not place constraints on the nature of the object or entity actually being studied. It certainly is possible (and many authors have done so!) to publish articles in *MIS Quarterly* that focus on a technical topic area: databases, telecommunication networks, systems development methodologies, CASE tools, expert systems methods and tools, etc. Rather than focusing on the object of study, it is more relevant to focus on the nature of the knowledge or learning being communicated through a manuscript.

As observed in the quoted remark in the prior paragraph, *MIS Quarterly* expects manuscripts to enhance our collective understanding of how best to manage or use information technologies. Thus, while the *Quarterly*

would most likely not be interested in an article that solely proposed a new methodology or a new schema, it would most certainly be interested in articles that (1) evaluate one or more methodologies or schemas such that an individual or organization might apply either the outcome or the evaluation scheme or (2) examine both generic and situational antecedents associated with the adoption/use of a methodology or schema as well as associated performance gains (or losses). In other words, the objective of technically oriented articles published in *MIS Quarterly* is not to advance our knowledge about the inherent nature of information technologies. Instead, the objective is to advance our knowledge regarding the decisions, taken by individuals or organizations, to apply these technologies within specific contexts for individual or organizational gain. Most certainly, such an editorial mission does not question the potential value of research aimed at extending our knowledge regarding the inherent nature of information technology. Such research simply does not lie within the established domain of the *MIS Quarterly*.

How might one undertake technically oriented research for the *Quarterly*? The *MIS Quarterly* is open to all appropriate methods; it is left to authors to first, justify their choice of a particular research strategy and second, carry out their chosen strategy in a correct manner. For example, an examination of alternative structures for database query languages might be accomplished through theoretical argumentation, laboratory experiments, field experiments, simulation studies, examinations of use protocols, comparative case studies, "action research" interventions (i.e., where a prototype of the structure is applied and assessed within a specific context), etc.; and, the particular research strategy adopted might very well include formal analytical modeling.

It is also very important that all articles submitted to the *MIS Quarterly* be "well crafted." The senior editors desire that every article appearing in the *Quarterly* be relatively accessible by most readers, including our executive readers. Most often, authors preparing a scholarly article on any given topic make the assumption that they are primarily writing to readers already quite familiar with this topic. This is often not the case with the MIS Quarterly! Two problems thus present themselves. First, many readers might not be aware of basic background material necessary to understand the major points being introduced in a manuscript. Second, most readers are likely going to be unwilling to "wade through" deep technical discussions in order to get to the salient (to them) aspects (regarding the management or use of the technology) of a manuscript. Such issues are especially troublesome with technically oriented manuscripts.

In crafting a technically oriented manuscript for the *MIS Quarterly*, it is highly advised that much of the more technical material be removed from the body of the manuscript and placed in appendices. Appendices can be used very effectively to provide background tutorials (with suggested references), to develop/provide analytical arguments or formal specifications, to present supportive technical analyses, etc. All too often, technically oriented articles are returned to authors as being inappropriate for the *Quarterly* (or are rather quickly rejected by referees) because they appear inappropriate when, in fact, they might be very appropriate if crafted in a way to more effectively market the manuscript's actual contribution to the MIS literature.

In summary, then, while many technically oriented manuscripts are, in fact, inappropriate for the *MIS Quarterly*, just about any technical topic area could conceivably be the focus of an article published in the *Quarterly*. The key issue is not the topic area itself, but rather what is being communicated about the topic area. If a research project has uncovered significant observations relevant to the assessment, selection, deployment, and/or use of a technical object (tool, method, schema, etc.), then it very likely will fit well with the *Quarterly*'s editorial mission. Finally, in preparing such a manuscript for submission to the *Quarterly*, authors are advised to keep in mind the broad nature of the *Quarterly*'s readership and to craft their manuscripts such that they are accessible to the majority of this readership.

Our Second *MISQ Discovery* Production

I am pleased to formally announce the acceptance of Michael D. Myers' contribution to *MISQ Discovery*, "Qualitative Research in Information Systems," and strongly encourage readers to visit this site and explore this very innovative piece contributing to information systems scholarship. All scholars interested in qualitative research methods — be they doctoral students just beginning their lives as researchers, researchers undertaking their first qualitative study, or established qualitative researchers — should find much to value in Michael's comprehensive and informative archive.

I would like to encourage readers also to take a fresh look at our first *MISQ Discovery* production, "Teledemocracy: Using Information Technology to Enhance Political Work," by Pål Ytterstad, Sigmund Akselsen, Gunnvald Svendsen, and Richard T. Watson. These first two *MISQ Discovery* productions (the first illustrating an instance of original inquiry and the second an example of "living scholarship") only suggest the possibilities that new technology might bring to our collective efforts to push forward the frontiers of knowledge regarding information systems. I hope these first two *MISQ Discovery* productions serve to stimulate others in our community to consider "breaking the bounds" of traditional scholarship and to conceive of similarly exciting ways of communicating their ideas to the research community. If you have an interest in pursuing projects along such lines, please contact Blake Ives (bives@acm.org) or myself (bzmud@cob.fsu.edu). We and other members of our Editorial Board would love to work with you!

Editorial Board Changes

Wanda Orlikowski (MIT), having served both a regular associate editor appointment and a reappointment, is leaving the Editorial Board. Wanda, thanks for your many contributions to the *Quarterly* over the past five years! I am pleased to announce the appointment of two new associate editors: Michael Myers (University of Auckland) and Gerry DeSanctis (Duke University). While this is Michael's first appointment to the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Board, most readers are well aware of Gerry's prior association with the *Quarterly* (having served previously as an both an associate editor and a senior editor). I am especially delighted that Gerry was enticed back to the Editorial Board because of her interest in collaborating with authors of potential contributions to *MISQ Discovery*.

Finally, I am extremely pleased to announce two additional editorial appointments. Munir Mandviwalla (Temple University) and Michael Parks (University of Houston) have each been appointed to the newly created position of design editor. As we move into new frontiers of scholarly publishing (with initiatives such as *MISQ Discovery* as well as our web site, *MISQ Central*), it is critically important that expertise be maintained on the Editorial Board regarding state-of-the-art thinking on how best to exploit new media and new modes of communication. Through their past contributions to both *ISWorld* and *MISQ Discovery*, Munir and Michael have amply demonstrated such an expertise. I eagerly anticipate their future contributions to the *Quarterly*!

Bob Zmud,
Editor-in-Chief