
Editor's Comments

This commentary addresses issues related to the rigor and relevancy of *MIS Quarterly* articles, continuing the discussion of "practitioner-oriented research" that was started in the June 1996 "Editor's Comments." A few announcements conclude my comments.

On Rigor and Relevancy

In an ideal world, all scholarly journals would publish research that was both rigorous (i.e., demonstrating a soundness regarding its theoretical and conceptual development, its methodological design and execution, its interpretation of findings, and its use of these findings in extending theory or developing new theory) and relevant (i.e., demonstrating a meaningfulness regarding its application to the significant problems and opportunities being faced by today's organizations and their members). However, ours is not an ideal world; and all journals fail in varying degrees in their pursuit of both rigor and relevance.

Since its inception, the intentional (and rather unique for a scholarly journal) dual, i.e., academic and executive, readership of *MIS Quarterly* has simultaneously fostered and impeded the journal's efforts to demonstrate both rigor and relevancy through its published articles. The academic readership requires rigor in order to attribute sufficient integrity to the scientific contributions of published research such that the respect of other scholars as well as of promotion and tenure committees is gained. The executive readership requires relevance first, for the journal to successfully compete for the attention of these extremely busy individuals and second, to provide insights and tactics that have the potential to improve these individuals' efforts to successfully direct their organizations' information systems activities. Over time, *MIS Quarterly* has adopted different strategies in its effort to "walk this tightrope" between rigor and relevance. I leave it to the interested reader to examine past issues of the *Quarterly* to "discover" these various strategies.

Most recently, the *Quarterly's* editors have stressed a synthesis strategy (i.e., *all* published articles should demonstrate *both* rigor and relevance) rather than a differentiated strategy (i.e., certain sections of the journal emphasizing rigor and other sections of the journal emphasizing relevance). Authors and readers might best recognize our efforts to implement this synthesis strategy by noting the shifts that are on-going with both Theory & Research and Applications articles. As has been pointed out in earlier "Editor's Comments" (March 1992, March 1993, March 1995), Theory & Research contributions should possess clear and compelling implications for the executive reader, and Applications contributions should possess a sound theoretical basis and demonstrate sound and appropriate research methods. The difference between these two categories of articles is becoming one of style and tone rather than content.

Requiring all accepted articles to be both rigorous and relevant is indeed a tough goal for a scholarly journal. It is certainly very difficult to first conceptualize and then execute research initiatives that are both rigorous and relevant. Still, this is the *Quarterly's* current editorial objective, and the journal's senior editors are committed to working with authors in order to achieve this goal.

In prior "Editor's Comments" (June 1995, September 1995, December 1995, March 1996), I have devoted much space to discussions of how authors might improve the rigor of manuscripts submitted to *MIS Quarterly*. Here, I will simply add that a single "rigor template" is not applied to all manuscripts. While we expect all studies to be executed well, exactly what "well" means is likely to vary depending on the phenomena studied, the epistemological positions of authors, and the specific methodological strategies employed. For example, studies applying experimental methods or studies applying survey methods for a domain others have examined extensively would be assessed through a very different "rigor template" than would a study that gathers its data through observation and open-ended interviews and focuses on either an understudied domain or a truly fresh perspective regarding a well-studied domain. Don't inter-

pret the preceding statement as implying that "less" rigor is expected of the latter type of studies. Again, all studies must be executed well.

In my June 1996 "Editor's Comments," I began to address issues of relevancy in describing the "why" and "what" of practice-oriented research. In the remainder of this issue's statement, I discuss "how" an author might demonstrate an article's relevancy.

When can a researcher make a valid claim that the fruits of his/her research is relevant? It might be helpful to think in terms of "weak relevance" and "strong relevance." An article can be said to demonstrate weak relevance when the research questions being examined touch on organizational phenomena that are clearly of interest to practice, and I expect all articles submitted to *MIS Quarterly* to minimally demonstrate weak relevance. Normally, this would be accomplished by (1) using the concerns of practice (rather than scientific literature) as the primary motivation behind the research effort being described in an article, and (2) clearly discussing the meaningfulness of the article's scientific contributions to the executive audience. An article could be said to demonstrate strong relevance when a research effort not only surfaces findings relevant to practice but also reveals both how the findings would be implemented in practice and the validity-in-practice of these findings. Thus, essentially any research effort claiming strong relevancy would by definition possess an action research component. Admittedly, few of the manuscripts currently submitted to *MIS Quarterly* would be able to claim both rigor and strong relevance. Over time, I strongly encourage authors striving to publish in the *Quarterly* to move the thrust of their research efforts along this relevancy continuum, i.e., from weak relevance toward strong relevance.

Does this mean that all research published in the *Quarterly* must describe strategies and tactics that result in direct, actionable organizational impacts? Of course not. One can influence practice in innumerable ways: by recommending implementable tactics, by contrasting differentiated strategies or tactics, by introducing innovative perspectives or practices, by expanding the world views of IT professionals and their business counterparts, etc. We would rather forego providing a tight definition of how research published in *MIS Quarterly* should impact practice and instead allow authors the opportunity to explain to readers the precise way in which the knowledge being communicated through their manuscripts influences the world of practice. The key point to note is simply that it has never been the *Quarterly's* mission to publish research that is not inextricably linked to practice in a meaningful way.

I would be remiss in not pointing out the one exception to the above policy ... our Research Notes section. Occasionally, manuscripts are submitted to the *Quarterly* that critique previously published work or otherwise enhance the abilities of information systems researchers to explore the many phenomena that together comprise our field of study. Previous "Editorial Comments" (March 1993 and March 1995) have described the nature of the manuscripts likely to fit well within this section of the *MIS Quarterly*.

Announcements

As I am a co-author of one of the articles in this issue, this provides an opportune time to formally state the *Quarterly's* policy regarding manuscripts co-written by senior editors. Because a decision to prohibit such manuscripts from being considered by *MIS Quarterly* might harm a senior editor's co-author(s), it has been agreed that such manuscripts will be considered for publication given that multiple authors exist and that the senior editor is not the lead author. Of course, the senior editor involved has no influence whatsoever with this review process. To remind readers: senior editors independently make all editorial decisions regarding the manuscripts assigned to them.

I am very pleased to announce that this issue of the *Quarterly* includes the first article to be published through our electronic publishing arm, "MISQ Discovery." I heartily congratulate Pål Ytterstad, Sigmund Akselsen, Gunnvald Svendsen, and Richard Watson for their production, "Teledemocracy: Using Information Technology to Enhance Political Work" for this significant and innovative contribution to *MIS Quarterly*. My thanks are also extended to Blake Ives and others involved in the review process for this submission; they, as well as the authors, are breaking much new ground with such efforts. Blake's com-

ments regarding this initial "MISQ Discovery" production follow these "Editorial Comments."

I am also very pleased that this issue continues the *Quarterly's* tradition of publishing the winning papers from the SIM Paper Competition. The winning article from the 1995 competition, "Sustaining Process Improvement and Innovation in the Information Services Function: Lessons Learned at the Bose Corporation" by Warren Harkness, Bill Kettinger, and Al Segars, is an outstanding example of how thoughtfully crafted articles extolling *best practices* can enrich both segments of the *MIS Quarterly* readership.

Finally, starting with this issue and as a service to information systems scholarship, *MIS Quarterly* will print, at no charge, brief announcements describing "Calls for Papers" regarding special issues of journals, conferences, or edited books. As these announcements will be limited to two or three sentences, the content provided the *Quarterly* should address only the theme of the "call," relevant dates, and contact information (name, email address, URL, etc.). Please direct all inquiries regarding announcements to our managing editor, Susan Scanlan, at the *MIS Quarterly* editorial office.

—Bob Zmud
Editor-in-Chief

***MIS Quarterly* Publishes First Edition of "MISQ Discovery"**

I am pleased to announce the publication of the first edition of "MISQ Discovery," an electronic publishing outlet of the *Management Information Systems Quarterly*. "MISQ Discovery" was first described in the editor's statement of our June 1995 issue. It is intended to harness the *MIS Quarterly's* reputation for quality to the critical mission of creating a new intellectual infrastructure. "MISQ Discovery" also provides opportunities to explore new possibilities for the creation and dissemination of knowledge, a topic that has been previously addressed in the *MIS Quarterly* (Ives, 1994; Ives and Zmud, 1994; Watson, 1994).

Works published in "MISQ Discovery" will be abstracted in *MIS Quarterly*, be listed in *MIS Quarterly's* table of contents, and carry *MIS Quarterly* volume and issue numbers. From the perspective of the *Quarterly*, this is a new department that joins our existing departments. Via its presence on the world wide web (WWW) at <http://www.misq.org/discovery/home.html>, "MISQ Discovery" also presents the image of a standalone publication.

"MISQ Discovery" is free of many of the constraints of time, space, and cost that face paper journals. Thus, we can publish individual pieces rather than collections of works and publish them on the WWW as soon as they become available. These works can include much more background information than traditional articles—data, survey measures, sample software, live user interfaces, and so on. Consider, for instance, our first publication, "Teledemocracy: Using Information Technology to Enhance Political Work" by Ytterstad, Akselsen, Svendsen, and Watson. This work includes, among other features, context-sensitive maps, a bulletin board, animation of the software's interface, a demonstration version of that software, and access to a spreadsheet of data.

Although this first article includes ancillary features not usually found in more traditional works, it is still a fairly traditional presentation of scholarship. We welcome future submissions that press further in exploring this new media. We value submissions that exploit electronic media to provide new methodologies, interfaces, development tools, and so on that can be directly applied by other researchers or practitioners. We also value leading-edge use of this technology for education—such as online case studies, educational simulations, and so on. Such submissions should exploit the technology, push us toward new frontiers of knowledge creation and/or dissemination, and be embedded in relevant literature and, particularly, appropriate theory. Our call for submission describes both "archival works," illustrated by our first publication, as well as "living works" that are intended to be continually maintained by their authors. Potential examples include a reference archive related to qualitative research methods, an archive of measures used in information systems survey research, or experimental tasks used in experimental research. Living works may exist as part of other electronic entities such as "ISWorld Net." They will

carry the "MISQ Discovery" logo and the date of publication but can otherwise continue to evolve. Periodically, if they continue to be enhanced, they can be reconsidered for renewed publication.

The *MIS Quarterly* is committed to the emergence of a new intellectual infrastructure for the discipline of information systems. Although we may not see many publications in "MISQ Discovery" in the near term, we are pleased to provide an opportunity for innovation and motivation for innovators.

I enthusiastically thank Mike Parks, Rick Watson, and Bob Zmud for their special contributions to "MISQ Discovery." Rick and his co-authors first had to navigate the learning curve of this new media, then Rick was also instrumental in helping us establish the format for individual contributions. Michael Parks' contribution has been the wonderful graphics for our WWW pages and considerable insights about navigation among our pages. Bob Zmud has tightened the critical links with *MIS Quarterly* and provided sage advice.

References:

- Ives, B. "*MISQ Central*, Creating a New Intellectual Infrastructure," *MIS Quarterly* (18:3), September 1994.
- Ives, B. and Zmud, R. "ISWorld Net': Scholarly Infrastructure for Information Systems," *MIS Quarterly* (18:4), December 1994.
- Watson, R. "Creating and Sustaining a Global Community of Scholars," *MIS Quarterly* (18:3), September 1994.

—Blake Ives
"MISQ Discovery" Editor-in-Chief
MISQ Senior Editor for Electronic Productions