Editor's Comments

My intention in this issue's commentary is to describe how the *MIS Quarterly's* review process unfolds from an editorial, rather than a procedural, perspective. More specifically, two overarching issues are addressed: the nature of the criteria likely to be used by editors and reviewers in their consideration of a submitted manuscript; and how these criteria are likely to vary across the different types of articles that can be submitted to the *MIS Quarterly*. Descriptions of these different types of articles can be obtained from the "Information for Prospective Authors" page on **MISQ Central** (http://misq.org/roadmap/standards.html).

General Criteria

All submitted manuscripts to *MIS Quarterly* must satisfy two criteria. First, they must be appropriate for the journal's mission. Second, they must be written such that they are reasonably accessible by all of the journal's readership, including our executive readers.

Appropriateness

Roughly one-fifth of submitted manuscripts are directly returned to authors because they are just not appropriate to the *Quarterly's* editorial mission. (Another one-fifth are returned to authors with revision directions prior to their being entered into the journal's formal review process.) In prior editorial com-ments — December 1995 and March 1996 — I have detailed the types of articles that are *not appro-priate* for *MIS Quarterly*. (These, as well as other, editorial comments are available on **MISQ Central**: http://www.misq.org/archivist/home.html.) Very briefly, these include articles whose **primary purpose** involves:

- Pragmatic descriptions of information systems applications, methodologies, or practices;

- Formal descriptions of information systems applications, methodologies, or practices;

- Replications of prior studies;

- Criticism of prior studies; and

- Professional topics of interest to IS academics, such as journal rankings and promotion/tenure criteria.

Of course, certain of these topics (aside from the latter) might very well prove acceptable as part of a more substantial contribution to one of the *Quarterly's* manuscript sections.

It is somewhat more difficult to clarify the *Quarterly's* current policies regarding the appropriateness of education topics. Descriptive articles, e.g., those that essentially describe practices, courses, or curric-ula, are not appropriate. Authors are encouraged to submit their education-related manuscripts, how-ever, if they either (1) propose new theories (and associated techniques, tools, or strategies) of how to best communicate information systems concepts and skills (in both formal classroom and corporate training contexts), or (2) describe formal assessments of the benefits of applying newly developed techniques, tools, or strategies for communicating information systems concepts and skills. Authors contemplating such a submission are strongly encouraged to read my September 1995 editorial com-ment (http://www.misq.org/archivist/vol/no19/issue3/edstat.html).

Accessibility

All submissions to the *MIS Quarterly* should be written in a clear and concise manner. Everyday lan-guage is preferred wherever possible over the more formal, scholarly style. Shorter articles are always preferred over longer articles. Ancillary or supporting materials should be kept from disrupting the flow of an article's ideas and arguments. Thus, authors are highly encouraged to use tables and figures

rather than text to communicate dense or multidimensional information. Moreover, the use of footnotes and endnotes is discouraged, while the use of appendices (to present primarily explanatory or archival information) is encouraged.

For many of our authors (and potential authors), English is not their native language. I sincerely hope that this emphasis on readability does not discourage such authors from submitting their work to the *Quarterly*. The issue is one of understandability, not one of correctness! The journal's editors and editorial staff are committed to working with all authors to improve the readability of manuscripts accepted for publication in *MIS Quarterly*.

Criteria Specific to Research Contributions

MIS Quarterly publishes two types of research contributions: Theory and Research articles, and Applications articles. As with many of the terms used in organizations, these labels are primarily historical in nature. Today, these labels do not directly connote the formative nature of an article's contents. Currently, the distinction between Theory/Research articles and Applications articles is one of style and tone, not content. The *Quarterly's* senior editors expect that most research contributions potentially could be submitted either as a Theory/Research article or as an Applications article. The choice is up to the author. It should be made on the basis of whether the research being described primarily contributes to the research literature (e.g., by developing new theory, by rigorously assessing existing or new theory, by synthesizing the findings of prior studies, etc.) or primarily contributes to practice (e.g., by prescribing behaviors, by articulating the benefits of innovative practices, by contrasting the strengths and weaknesses of tools, methods, or behaviors, etc.). Stated perhaps in an overly simplistic manner, Theory/Research articles mainly contribute to the research literature, while Applications articles mainly contribute to practice.

With occasional exceptions, both types of articles should thus have as their primary focus enhancing our current understanding (in either a descriptive sense or a prescriptive sense, or both) of how information technologies are either managed (so that they can be used appropriately within organizations) or used (and the implications of such use) within organizations. (More description of these topic areas are provided in my June 1995 editorial statement: http://www.misq.org/archivist/vol/no19/issue2/edstat.html.) Further, the research being communicated in both Theory/Research and Applications articles must be based on strong theory and must use appropriate methods effectively. Ideally, all research contributions to the *MIS Quarterly* should reflect both rigor and relevance.

Theory/Research articles are expected to possess or produce robust theoretical frames, to demonstrate a keen understanding of relevant literatures (including reference disciplines), to provide justification for and comprehensive descriptions of a study's methodological and analytical approaches (recognizing that not all Theory/Research articles apply such approaches), and to produce results that contribute to both the research literature and to practice. Studies employing research instruments (i.e., surveys, interview guides, experiment instructions, research protocols, etc.) should include these in appendices.

Essentially, the style and tone of Theory/Research articles is similar to that of articles published in other leading scholarly journals. Of course, conscious efforts by authors of Theory/Research submissions to enhance the accessibility of their manuscripts is certainly appreciated.

While **Applications articles** are expected to reflect an attention to strong theory, to indicate an understanding of relevant literatures, and to apply rigorous research methods, much of these considerations are expected to be "hidden" from the reader. To do otherwise might very well discourage an author's targeted audience — the *Quarterly's* executive readership — from examining the published material. How exactly should it be "hidden"? By not going into too much detail, by providing understandable (rather than archival) discussions, and by moving much of the material that would appear in a

Theory/Research article (i.e., the details of a study's methodological and analytical procedures) to appendices.

On the other hand, applications articles should possess rich implications for practice, presented in a very "actionable manner." That is, it should be clear to the reader how the knowledge being communicated through the research could be implemented or otherwise used. Authors of Applications articles are also expected to discuss (though, not in as rich a manner) the research implications of their ideas.

Criteria Specific to Methodological or Epistemological Contributions

MIS Quarterly has published **Research Notes** for some time. These relatively short and narrowly focused contributions address issues of a purely methodological or epistemological nature. That is, rather than investigating a phenomenon relating to the management or use of information technologies, Research Notes most often focus on the methodological or analytical tools or techniques being applied in information systems research. Occasionally, manuscripts are submitted as Research Notes, but they collect "fresh" data that is contrasted with results obtained from prior research. Such articles are normally treated editorially as Theory/Research or Applications articles.

With this issue of the *Quarterly*, we are announcing a new form of methodological contribution — the **Research Essay**. Occasionally, manuscripts are received that solely address methodological or epistemological issues but apply a breadth of topic and/or a depth of exposition analysis that goes beyond what is normally associated with a "Note." Such articles, when published, will be termed Research Essays.

Research Notes and Essays should be written in a style and tone similar to that of Theory/Research articles because it is expected that the target audience is the academic, rather than the executive, readership. Careful attention must be given to relevant prior literature, to appropriate theories, and to rigorous methods. Finally, the implications of an article's findings for information systems research must be articulated clearly and compellingly.

Criteria Specific to Issues and Opinions Contributions

Issues and Opinions Essays provide a forum for academicians and practitioners to develop and express fresh perspectives regarding emerging, paradoxical, or controversial issues relevant to the information systems field. Authors submitting Issues and Opinions Essays will be held to a very tough "yardstick." Accepted articles should open new areas of discourse, close stale areas, define a research agenda, identify new opportunities or challenges for practice, and otherwise offer fresh and insightful views on topics of critical importance to information systems academicians and executives.

A successful Issues and Opinions Essay should identify the issue at hand in easy-to-understand terminology, provide conceptual frameworks that enable readers to more easily grasp the essentials of these issues, offer opinions and supportive arguments, and clearly describe the implications of these opinions to research, practice, and/or teaching. The style and tone of an Issues and Opinions Essay should be similar to that of an Applications article rather than that of a Theory/Research article.

Criteria for Practice-Oriented Contributions

Finally, opportunities do arise for the *MIS Quarterly* to consider for publication submissions that are "practice-oriented" rather than "research-oriented." Examples of these **Practice-Oriented articles** are those that have finished high in the SIM Paper Competition as well as recurring MISRC/SIM "Key Issues" studies. Invariably, these are *invited* submissions, reflecting the long-standing relationship

between SIM, International and the *MIS Quarterly*. Generally, the submission of unsolicited Practice-Oriented manuscripts is strongly discouraged.

Practice-Oriented articles obviously should be very accessible to the executive readership and should have an ultimate purpose of providing clear and compelling prescriptions or recommendations for practice. However, because these manuscripts are being considered for publication in the *MIS Quarterly*, they should also reflect and contribute to the information systems research literature. Thus, successful Practice-Oriented articles are expected to: demonstrate a knowledge of relevant prior literature; organize their "story" around a conceptual frame that enables readers to better understand the key decisions, processes, and forces associated with the phenomena being addressed; and objectively and accurately determine and report the benefits, concerns, and limitations of the practices being examined.

Conclusion

I anticipate that the above discussion will prove helpful to (current and future) editors, reviewers, and authors. Readers should recognize, however, that the editorial directions and policies of all scholarly journals do evolve over time (e.g., the announcement of the Research Essay type of article in the above commentary). Nonetheless, I hope this information does prove useful and will, in time, improve the quality of the manuscripts submitted to the *MIS Quarterly* as well as the quality and consistency of the review comments that authors receive regarding their manuscripts.

—**Bob Zmud**
Editor-In-Chief