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## Editor's Comments

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It is with a great sense of gratitude and pride that I begin my tenure as the editor-in-chief of *MIS Quarterly*—Gratitude to Blake Ives, Jim Wetherbe, and Bob Rubin for first raising the potential of this appointment and then offering it to me; And pride in being given the opportunity to carry on the tradition so ably handled in the past by others (Gary Dickson, Bill King, Warren McFarlan, Jim Emery, and Blake Ives). It is particularly exciting and challenging to be following Blake, with whom I have worked very closely over the last nine months considering the initiatives—a new relationship with SIM International, a new editorial structure, the ongoing reengineering of the *Quarterly's* editorial and administrative processes, and the movement toward electronic publishing—carried out under his leadership. Because of the importance of each of these initiatives to the *Quarterly* over the next three years, I will address each in the comments that follow.

### Relationship With SIM International

Prior to 1995, all SIM members received a subscription to *MIS Quarterly* as a membership benefit. Starting this year, an individual SIM membership will not include this subscription. Instead, SIM individual members will be able to subscribe to the *Quarterly* as an option and at a discounted price. Thus, instead of having a “captive” SIM market, the *Quarterly* must now actively compete, i.e., provide perceived value-added, in order to obtain subscriptions from individual SIM members.

What does this mean to the *Quarterly*? The most direct impact is a loss in subscriptions and associated revenue. Hopefully, many—if not most—of SIM individual members will recognize the value the *Quarterly* provides and will resubscribe. However, this changed relationship also raises the possibility that the *Quarterly*, given a potential of fewer practitioner readers, could redirect its direction toward the academic community and away from the practitioner community. I wish to state as strongly as possible that this is not my intention. The strength of the *Quarterly* (and its truly unique position among academic journals) has always been its meaningfulness to both academicians and practitioners. If anything, it is my intention to pursue this objective even further. The *Quarterly* must strive to publish articles that are both of high academic quality and of value to practitioners. This is clearly a very difficult goal to achieve—one that the *Quarterly* has constantly struggled with over its life, but one that is achievable as long as authors, reviewers, and editorial board members recognize this goal as the essence of the *Quarterly's* success.

What does this mean in terms of the *Quarterly's* different sections? Specifically, if the intention is to publish articles that are both of high quality and of interest to practice, why are there separate Theory/Research and Applications sections? I see two primary differences in manuscripts submitted to and published in these sections. Foremost is the nature of the contribution a manuscript makes to the MIS literature. If the intended contribution is primarily directed toward theory (that is, either enhancing existing theory or building new theory regarding the management of information systems and/or the use of information systems in organizations), then the manuscript is best suited for the Theory/Research section. If the intended contribution is primarily directed toward practice (that is, identifying and understanding best practices regarding the management of information systems and/or the use of information systems in organizations), then the manuscript is best suited for the Applications section. Second is the style in which a manuscript is written. A manuscript's style (structure, tone, language) must be consistent with that expected by its targeted reader. Thus, a manuscript intended for the Theory/Research section should reflect a style consistent with those of other leading scholarly journals, while a manuscript intended for the Applications section should be easily digested by the *Quarterly's*

discerning executive audience. This does not mean that application papers should lack a theoretic basis or be characterized by an inadequate or inappropriate methodology. Application articles should not simply describe practice but instead must be built on a base of strong theory (though the arguments themselves might be simpler and less wordy), be linked to the existing literature (though perhaps not to the same depth), utilize rigorous and appropriate methods (though much of the description of that methodology and statistical analysis might be summarized or placed in an appendix), and provide insights to our collective understanding of information systems management and use. Manuscripts submitted to the *Quarterly* should conceivably be directed toward either the Theory/Research or the Applications sections, with the decision not being driven by the "scholarly nature" of the research or ideas being presented but rather by the nature of the manuscript's primary contribution to the MIS field.

The *Quarterly* has two other sections to which manuscripts can be submitted: Issues & Opinions and Research Notes. The Issues & Opinions section is intended as a vehicle for (1) promoting needed debate regarding controversial issues and (2) signaling significant shifts (or, preferably, likely shifts) in information systems practice or education. Material submitted to this section should appeal to both academic and executive readers and should be written in a style appropriate for both of these segments of the *Quarterly's* readership. The Research Notes section is intended as a vehicle for bringing to the attention of the *Quarterly's* academic readership significant developments and debates in the practice of information system research. Material submitted to this section should be written in a style consistent with other high-quality scholarly journals. More definitive statements regarding all four of these sections can be found in the *Editor's Comments* for the March '92 and March '93 issues of *MIS Quarterly*.

## Editorial Structure

The *Quarterly's* current editorial structure is comprised of an editor-in-chief, four senior editors, and a Board of 30 associate editors. In addition to other duties, the editor-in-chief serves as a fifth senior editor. Each senior editor has full authority to accept/reject manuscripts. To insure a consistency in editorial decision making, the senior editors communicate with one another through a closed distribution list (enabling frequent, focused, and intense discussions) and have online access to all letters sent to authors regarding manuscript outcomes. When submitting their manuscripts to the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Office, authors are encouraged to indicate in their cover letter a specific senior editor to manage the manuscript. The review process can actually be "sped up" by simultaneously sending this senior editor a copy of both the cover letter and the manuscript. Upon receiving a manuscript, the senior editor makes an initial decision regarding the manuscript's appropriateness for the *Quarterly*. Inappropriate manuscripts are immediately returned to authors with an explanation, and manuscripts that have potential but obviously need refinement are returned to authors along with directions for these refinements. If a manuscript passes through this initial filter, the senior editor identifies associate editors whose interests and expertise are co-aligned with the manuscript and then assigns the manuscript to one of these associate editors, but only after this individual agrees to do the assignment. Authors are encouraged to recommend specific associate editors to handle the review process for their manuscript. Together, the senior editor and the associate editor put together a list of possible manuscript reviewers, with additional suggestions from the *Quarterly's* Editorial Office. Authors are also encouraged to recommend reviewers for their manuscripts. Author suggestions regarding senior editors, associate editors, and reviewers are taken seriously and, more often than not, are reflected in manuscript assignments. Prior to actually sending the manuscript out to reviewers, associate editors are also encouraged to examine a manuscript's appropriateness. Thus, it is possible that a manuscript might move through a senior editor but be immediately returned to the senior editor by the associate editor as being inappropriate or as needing refinement before being reviewed.

This structure has been in place since the Summer of 1994 and seems to be working extremely well. What does this structure mean for potential authors? First, it enables authors to have more control over and more confidence in the way in which their manuscripts are handled. Fewer instances should arise where authors believe an inappropriate reviewer or associate editor was involved with their manuscript.

Second, articles that are inappropriate for the journal are likely to be quickly identified and returned to authors for submission to a more appropriate journal. Third, articles that possess potential but would benefit from obvious refinement are immediately returned for revision rather than going through an initial review cycle. This should both improve the timeliness of the review process and reduce the likelihood that a potentially publishable manuscript is rejected because reviewers are very critical of its initial presentation.

Finally, it is important to note that editorial appointments (and, selectively, reappointments) are primarily being made on the basis of an individual's performance within this editorial structure. Senior editors are appointed from among the highest performing associate editors. Associate editors are appointed from among the highest performing manuscript reviewers. A discussion of ongoing efforts to continuously improve reviewing quality is provided in the *Editor's Comments* for the June '92 issue of the *Quarterly*. If you are not an active reviewer or wish to become a more active reviewer, I encourage you to contact those associate editors whose research interests are most closely aligned with your own and to indicate your research interests as well as your desire to become more involved with the *Quarterly*.

## The Reengineering Effort

Beginning in Summer 1994, Jim Wetherbe, with able assistance from Mark Saarinen, Susan Scanlan, and Tammy Mancl in the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Office, has spearheaded a major effort to redesign the *Quarterly's* administrative and editorial work processes in order to reduce both costs and cycle times and to make it easier for customers (subscribers, authors, reviewers, etc.) to do business with the *Quarterly*. Administrative process changes will be implemented first, followed by editorial changes. For a new editor-in-chief, the proposed editorial changes are both exciting and frightening! As a "stretch" goal, the objective is to fully eliminate paper by handling all editorial activities electronically. At some time in the future, authors will submit manuscripts through the internet, editorial assignments will be made through the internet, manuscript copies will be transmitted to reviewers electronically, reviews will be returned electronically, and authors will be notified of editorial outcomes electronically. These changes will not occur all at once, but will occur in pieces. For example, by requiring that all Editorial Board members (senior and associate editors) be active e-mail users, all editorial assignments are currently handled electronically (except for the passing of paper copies of manuscripts to everyone!).

As these changes unfold, I am sure the unexpected will occur more often than we wish. If such changes happen to affect you in a negative way, I hope you accept my apology (in advance). Further, if any problems arise in the handling of your manuscript, feel free to get in touch with me directly (bzmud@cob.fsu.edu) to discuss the situation and how it might be resolved and prevented in the future.

## Electronic Publishing

A fourth initiative undertaken during Blake's tenure is the *Quarterly's* foray into electronic publishing. If you haven't taken a look at *MISQ Central*, the electronic version of the *Quarterly*, I invite you to do so now (<http://www.cox.smu.edu/mis/misq/central.html>). The *Quarterly* is moving into unknown grounds in its efforts to simultaneously offer a traditional paper-based scholarly journal and an electronic journal such that each is used most effectively. However, such experiments are central to our editorial belief that the *Quarterly* itself must play a leading role in the use of information technology. Please contribute to our efforts! If you have an innovative idea (related to information systems research, practice, or education) that could best be expressed through an electronic medium, please contact Blake (bives@sun.cis.smu.edu) and explore the idea with him.

## Some Concluding Comments

It is curious, as I begin this tenure as editor-in-chief, to realize that I already have a lot of people to whom I owe favors. Blake has made this transition to editor-in-chief occur about as smooth as it could

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possibly have been. Jim Wetherbe, Susan Scanlan, and Mark Saarinen at the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Office have all been a great help in keeping me informed of what needs to be done and how to do it. This great team of senior editors (Blake, Gerry, Izak, and Allen) have drastically reduced my personal learning costs, have contributed immensely to the joint-crafting of editorial policy, and are really a fun group with whom to work. And it is really great to have associate editors who not only volunteer for assignments but also carry them out in a high-quality and timely fashion. Finally, I wish to formally recognize Professor Tadao Miyakawa, who has completed his tenure as an associate editor, for his service to the *Quarterly* over the past three years. Thank you all, very much!

**—Bob Zmud**  
**Editor-in-Chief**