Editor's Comments

Among other purposes, I will be using these editor statements to "paint a picture" of the articles I would like to see submitted to and published in *MIS Quarterly*. While I certainly cannot guarantee anyone success in publishing, I am confident that your manuscript will be far better understood by reviewers and editors if these guidelines are followed. In this issue, I will be talking about the nature of the topics being addressed in *MIS Quarterly* articles, as well as the way in which manuscripts are introduced and concluded. In future issues, I will discuss the development of a manuscript's theoretical concepts, appropriate methodological approaches and how these approaches should be described, and the nature of a manuscript's discussion and implications section.

Nature of Topics

The editorial objective of the *Quarterly* has been and will continue to be the development and communication of knowledge concerning both the management of information technology and the use of information technology for managerial and organizational purposes. 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. Let's look more closely at each of these two domains.

The operative terms regarding the first domain are: management, information, and information technology. In this domain, the concept of "management" is very broadly defined to include the wealth of notions involved with planning, organizing, staffing, leading, directing, coordinating, and controlling the resources and activities associated with acquiring, deploying, and supporting information and information technology such that they can be effectively and efficiently utilized within organizations. Notice that who exactly is involved in the "act of managing" is left open. In every organization today, some (on occasion, most) of this "act of managing" is performed by line and senior executives or by service providers. Articles that ignore or overly simplify this contextual reality are most likely to detract from, rather than enhance, our collective understanding of the management of information technology.

The operative terms regarding the second domain are: use, information, information technology, managerial purposes, and organizational purposes. Manuscripts that describe or explore technologies without talking about how they are to be used (or have been used, or will be used) within organizations are simply not appropriate. Manuscripts that examine semantic or epistemological notions about information (or, data) in the absence of situational or organizational contexts are similarly inappropriate. The complexities associated with information or information technology "in action" arise precisely because of the nuances that characterize contextual realities. Articles that ignore or overly simplify these contextual realities are most likely to detract from, rather than enhance, our collective understanding of the use of information technology for managerial or organizational purposes.

Ideally, the research published on these topical areas in *MIS Quarterly* should address the questions and concerns of the most insightful executives in the best organizations across our global economy. And, these topics should be able to stand the test of time. That is, rather than reflecting the latest "buzz" in the managerial or technological press, the research published in *MIS Quarterly* should reflect the enduring phenomena that are critical to organizations and to those individuals being positioned to make appropriate decisions about the acquisition, deployment, and use of information technology.

Selecting the phenomena to study and posing interesting research questions are perhaps the most difficult tasks in scholarly research. Usually, these decisions are made years before a manuscript is produced. Poor decisions can result in inadequately formulated research designs, in apathetic subjects (or

respondents or interviewees), and in the production of manuscripts that are of little interest to readers (including referees and editors). As with all design activity, the earliest decisions often prove the most crucial! Don't jump into any research project. Carefully think it through before you start: What exactly am I studying? Why am I studying it? What do we already know about it? Of those aspects that are little understood, which are the more important? Why? Who is interested in the phenomena? Why are they interested? Will they be interested in the topic four or five years from now? If you can't answer such questions about a topic, you are not prepared to begin a research project on the topic.

A Manuscript's Introduction

A manuscript's introduction has three major purposes. First, the phenomenon to be studied and the purpose of the manuscript are described. Second, an effort is made to convince the reader that the topic and the purpose are important and worth reading about. Finally, an overview (a "road map") of the manuscript is provided so that the reader begins to develop an appropriate mental structure through which to digest and interpret the manuscript's ideas. Let's look at each of these a bit closer.

I'm always surprised at how often, in the initial version of a mansucript sent to a journal, authors either don't describe what they will be doing, or they wait until they are halfway through the manuscript before doing so. How can readers begin to develop an interest in a manuscript if they do not possess a firm awareness of the manuscript's primary topic and purpose? A reader should never have to "guess" anything about a manuscript. As an author, it is your responsibility to anticipate what a reader needs to know to follow your ideas and to provide it to the reader before he/she needs it. And, the first two things any reader wants to know about a manuscript are: "What exactly is this article about?", and "What exactly is the author trying to accomplish in this article?"

Readers need to be convinced that your research is important. It could be important for other researchers, it could be important for practitioners, or (ideally) it could be important for both. If it is not important, why should it be published? (And, why did you invest your efforts in the project in the first place?) Both readers' time and journal space are scarce resources. If you can't build a compelling case for the value of your research, who can? Again, readers shouldn't have to figure this out on their own.

Finally, provide the reader with the structure through which you will be developing the manuscript's major ideas. Your manuscript should follow a natural order, where the reader is provided in earlier sections with everything needed to understand the current section. By telling the reader how the manuscript will flow, the reader will be able to better anticipate and absorb each of the manuscript's sections. As a consequence, the reader's overall comprehension of your ideas, assuming they are described well, should be enhanced.

A Manuscript's Conclusion

A manuscript's concluding section should not be a summary of the article. Rather, it is the vehicle through which an author markets the contributions that have been made both to scholarly knowledge and to practice through the ideas and findings that have been presented. It is the author's responsibility to clearly articulate what the article has accomplished and why these accomplishments are important. It is not the readers' obligation to attempt to figure these out by themselves.

Most successful articles, regardless of how complicated their conceptualizations or research designs, have but a few "key messages" that are communicated to readers. It is difficult to do more than this within the standard journal (25 pages, double-spaced) format. What exactly do you want the reader to "take away" from your manuscript? What two or three concepts (or relationships, or guidelines, or prescriptions, etc.) do you want the reader to remember? These two or three key messages, argued clearly and confidently, should comprise the manuscript's conclusion.

It is also important to recognize what should not be placed in a manuscript's conclusion. Do not intro-duce anything for the first time. Any important ideas should have appeared earlier. And, be sure to maintain a positive tone. The conclusion is not the place to describe the limitations of your research de-sign or the gaps in your understanding of a phenomenon. Always try to leave the reader feeling positive about what you have done!

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Announcements

I am pleased to announce the article that has been selected as the Best Paper published in Volume 18 of the *MIS Quarterly*: "Computerized Loan Origination Systems: An Industry Case Study of the Elec-tronic Markets Hypothesis," by Christopher M. Hess and Chris F. Kemerer. Christopher Hess is an in-formation systems manager at ValueQuest, Ltd., and Chris Kemerer is both an MIT faculty member and a member of the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Board. This year's award procedure began with the *Quarterly*'s associate editors each being asked to nominate two articles from Volume 18. Three articles stood out from all others regarding the number of nominations they received. The *Quarterly*'s senior editors were then asked to rank-order these three articles, resulting in the final selection of the winning article.

I am also happy to announce two reappointments and six new appointments to the Editorial Board. Tom Davenport (University of Texas at Austin) and Wanda Orlikowski (MIT) have both agreed to continue in their role as associate editors. Richard Baskerville (Binghamton University and Copenhagen Business School), Kwok-Kee Wei (National University of Singapore), Ron Rice (Rutgers University), V. Samba-murthy (Florida State University), Mike Vitale (University of Melbourne), and Ron Weber (University of Queensland) will each begin terms as associate editors. Welcome! The sad aspect of new editorial ap-pointments is that it means others are leaving the Editorial Board. Jack Baroudi (New York University), Jane Fedorowicz (Bentley College), Mike Ginzberg (Case Western Reserve University), Rudy Hirschheim (University of Houston), and Ken Kozar (University of Colorado at Boulder) have all served the *Quarterly* exceptionally well over a number of years. Thanks to all of you for your support!

Finally, there are also two changes occurring at the senior editor level. Blake Ives (Southern Methodist University) is moving from his current senior editor position to the new position of senior editor for elec-tronic productions, and Lynda Applegate (Harvard University) is being appointed as a senior editor for the *MIS Quarterly*. Provided below is a short bio, including research interests, about Lynda and an an-nouncement by Blake about *MISQ Discovery*. I truly look forward to working with both of these fine scholars over the next few years.

—Bud Zmud
Editor-in-Chief

Lynda M. Applegate

Lynda is a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, teaching within the general management and management information systems areas. She has been a member of the editorial board at MISQ since 1990. Her current research focuses on the interrelationship of markets, organiza-tions, and information technology (IT). She welcomes papers that deal with IT-enabled organizational change initiatives, electronic commerce, and information infrastructure design, implementation, man-agement, and evaluation (e.g., pre-implementation investment criteria and post-implementation audit). She also continues to pursue her previous research focus on the assimilation and diffusion of technolo-gies to support collaborative work. Papers in this area are also welcome.

MISQ Discovery: A Call for Submissions

In our October 1994, *Editor's Comments,* we announced the *MIS Quarterly*'s entrance into the world of electronic publishing. Among the elements were, *MISQ Central*—our home page on the world wide web, *MISQ Archivist*—an electronic archive for the *MIS Quarterly, MISQ Roadmap*—an information station for our authors, and *MISQ Discovery*—an electronic production focused on innovations in the creation and dissemination of knowledge regarding information technology management.

MISQ Central and *MISQ Archivist* have been realities for some time, and we recently began to provide submission status information at *MISQ Roadmap.* We have been deliberately slower in filling in the vision for *MISQ Discovery,* the flagship of our electronic initiative. Our speed of implementation was hampered by the realization that both a greater awareness about electronic scholarship and the acquisition of new skills were required before we would have the necessary critical mass within our intended constituency. Thus, the *MIS Quarterly* has played a leadership role in initiating *ISWorld Net,* described in our December 1994, editor's statement. That initiative, although still relatively modest in content and participation, has been an important motivator of our field's rapid involvement in electronic scholarship and education over the past year.

To move further, however, requires high-quality publication outlets, the existence of which will motivate scholars to make the necessary migration toward the use and cultivation of an electronic intellectual infrastructure. I am therefore pleased to announce the formal arrival of *MISQ Discovery.* You can get to the *MISQ Discovery* Call for Submissions from our home page on the world wide web at:

http://www.cox.smu.edu/mis/misq/applied/home.html

The Editorial Board of *MISQ Discovery* includes current and past editors-in-chief for *MIS Quarterly* and *Information Systems Research,* as well as several department, senior, or associate editors from many of the major journals in our field. The Board includes a distinguished set of scholars, many of whom are either already very active in electronic scholarship or who have expressed considerable interest in becoming so in the near future. If electronic publications are to be deemed as acceptable and rewardable publication outlets, then the leaders of the field and its various institutions must, as these Board members have done by their participation, endorse and contribute to initiatives such as *MISQ Discovery.*

The members of the *MISQ Discovery* Board include: Izak Benbasat, University of British Columbia; Thomas Ho, Indiana University; Sid Huff, University of Western Ontario; Blake Ives, Southern Methodist University, Sirkka Jarvenpaa, University of Texas at Austin; Ajit Kambil, New York University; John King, University of California at Irvine; Bob O'Keefe, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Mike Parks, University of Houston; John Sviokla, Harvard Business School; Burt Swanson, University of California at Los Angeles; Rick Watson, University of Georgia; and Bob Zmud, Florida State University.

—**Blake Ives**
Editor-In-Chief, *MISQ Discovery*