
Editor's Comments

Four topics are addressed in this issue's editor's statement. The first topic, following the "education" focus of this issue, comments on the nature of education-oriented articles whose submission would likely be viewed favorably (and unfavorably) by the *MIS Quarterly's* senior editors. The second topic discusses the role to be served by theory in manuscripts submitted to the *Quarterly* and describes how a manuscript's "theory development" section should be written. The third topic repeats a message on the "globalization" of the *MIS Quarterly* that was distributed via *ISWorld* in early July. The final topic announces a few changes in the make-up of the *Quarterly's* Editorial Board.

Education-Oriented Submissions to the *MIS Quarterly*

The *Quarterly's* senior editors are extremely pleased with both the quality of the articles published in this special issue and with this use of the *MIS Quarterly* to rejuvenate the collective thinking of the journal's readership regarding information systems education. Our heart-felt appreciation goes out to all who submitted articles to the special issue, to the authors of the accepted manuscripts, to the individuals who served as associate editors and reviewers for this issue, and, especially, to Ted Stohr for effectively managing the entire endeavor.

The success of this issue clearly indicates the need for the *Quarterly* to periodically publish a special issue on information systems education. It must be emphasized, however, that this is a special issue of the *MIS Quarterly*, and I would be remiss if I did not describe the *Quarterly's* "normal" editorial objectives regarding education-oriented submissions.

The *MIS Quarterly's* mission is that of a scholarly journal for the information systems field. As such, published articles serve to propose and develop new knowledge, to synthesize thinking regarding current knowledge, and to formally assess the reasonableness of current or proposed knowledge. Education-oriented manuscripts are most certainly desired that meet these criteria. Appropriate submissions would generally fit into one or both of the following two categories:

- 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); and,
- Formal assessments of the benefits of applying newly developed techniques, tools, or strategies for communicating information systems concepts and skills.

The *Quarterly* is especially interested in manuscripts that, in addition to representing the above categories, focus on the use of information technology to support or, more importantly, to enhance information systems education.

The authors of the articles contained in this special issue might not have considered submitting their manuscripts to a "regular" issue of the *Quarterly*. Similarly, for reasons of editorial fit (and certainly not for reasons of quality), the *Quarterly's* editors might not have considered publishing some of these studies in a "regular" issue. There does exist a pathway, however, for such ideas to be communicated through the journal. Major curriculum shifts, dramatic changes in the nature of the information systems workplace, and truly innovative ideas for improving the education process are all very appropriate topics for the *Quarterly's* "Issues and Opinions" section. Such submissions should be written in a crisp, straightforward, and enthusiastic manner; and all such submissions should be directed to the Editor-in-Chief. If you have an idea for such an essay, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss it with you.

The Role of Theory in Scholarly Manuscripts

Manuscripts submitted for publication consideration to the *MIS Quarterly* often either lack a sound theoretical foundation or reflect a "literature-driven" rather than "theory-driven" structure for this foundation. While neither of these problems would necessarily result in a decision to reject the manuscript, both problems would result minimally in a request for a major revision (most likely) prior to the manuscript being sent through the journal's formal reviewing process. This section covers two main issues regarding the role of theory in *MIS Quarterly* manuscripts: the nature of a manuscript's theoretical foundation and guidelines for crafting a manuscript's theory section.

The nature of a manuscript's theory section

Adequate theory development is a fundamental requirement for all manuscripts submitted to the *Quarterly*. A manuscript's theoretical foundation defines the key constructs (and their interrelationships) through which a phenomenon will be examined. This foundation serves three main roles. First, it provides the author with a conceptual framework to concisely organize the manuscript's major ideas, and it develops within a reader a mental model with which to interpret a manuscript. Second, it serves as the vehicle through which prior research and knowledge regarding the phenomenon is incorporated into the manuscript (and thus, into the research effort being described). Third, it links this research to the larger body of work on the phenomenon. Taken together, these three roles indicate how theory serves as the language by which scholars interested in a phenomenon communicate richly and efficiently with one another.

Too often, what is provided as a manuscript's theoretical foundation is a historically ordered description, study-by-study, of prior research on a phenomenon. This is what is referred to above as being "literature-driven." While such material does introduce the reader to prior research on a phenomenon, it typically does so in a conceptually disorganized, lengthy way. As a result, the reader rather than the author must synthesize this prior work in order to develop a conceptual frame from which to interpret and understand the ideas being presented. I strongly discourage such an approach for providing a manuscript's theoretical foundation.

A manuscript's theory section should focus only on presenting the conceptual model and/or research model being applied to the phenomenon under study. A conceptual model identifies key constructs and introduces their interrelationships. A research model identifies key constructs and carefully articulates the specific relationships among these constructs, which are the focus of the manuscript. If a manuscript formally tests the validity of these relationships, then the theory section would also develop formal research hypotheses (or propositions) and provide convincing arguments supporting each of these hypotheses. Prior literature (reflecting both conceptual and empirical work) would be referenced only as these constructs and relationships and arguments are introduced, developed, and discussed.

All manuscripts submitted to the *Quarterly*—this includes both *Theory and Research* and *Applications* articles—must have a theory section. Typically, however, the theory section of an *Applications* article would present conceptual or research models that are likely to be less formalistic and conceptually simpler than those contained in a *Theory and Research* article on the same topic. With a conceptual article, the theory section would comprise the body of the manuscript. With an empirical article, the theory section would typically follow the introduction and precede the discussion of the research methodology, analysis, and results.

The only manuscripts that would normally not be expected to possess a theory section would be those describing a study applying a "grounded theory" research strategy. The reason one applies a grounded theory research strategy is that either no prior work has focused on the phenomenon being studied (hence, no "theory" exists), or the author believes the prior work is fundamentally defective. Manuscripts describing studies applying a grounded theory research strategy must provide in their "Introduction" a strong justification for adopting such a research strategy. Further, such manuscripts are most certainly not theoretically empty because their ultimate purpose is to develop a fresh theoretical view of a phenomenon.

Guidelines for crafting a manuscript's theory section

These guidelines cover two distinct issues. First, two suggestions are provided regarding the nature of the conceptual or research models that comprise the theory section. Second, suggestions are provided regarding the organization and flow of this theory section.

Conceptual and Research Models. First, and most important, keep your conceptual and research models as simple as possible. If a concept, construct, or relationship is not directly related to the ideas that are the focus of your manuscript, it should not appear as an element of a conceptual or research model. Its inclusion will only confuse or otherwise disorient a reader. Further, remember that the "typical" scholarly article is about 25 double-spaced manuscript pages in length. If your manuscript exceeds this limit, you may be trying to cover too much ground in the manuscript. Is it possible to "trim" your conceptual or research model and focus on only a subset of the initial set of constructs and/or relationships? Often, such "trimming" produces a tighter and much more compelling contribution to the literature.

Second, keep your terminology consistent with existing theory. Refrain from using a new term for a construct that has been previously defined in the literature, and do not use an existing term in a manner distinct from its normal usage in the literature. Both of these actions will only confuse readers and keep others from seeing how your ideas relate to prior work on a phenomenon.

Organization of Material. First, the theory section should begin with an overview of the conceptual or research model being developed. Ideally, such an overview should be accompanied by a visual aid to ease the readers' comprehension of your ideas. Second, the organization (i.e., subheadings and flow) of the theory section should reflect this model. In order to ease a reader's comprehension of the ideas, the organization of the section should be readily apparent (i.e., following a left-to-right or top-to-bottom flow) from the visual aid. Third, as mentioned earlier, citations of previous work should be worked into your discussions of key constructs and their interrelations. You do not need to be all-inclusive; rather, cite only those prior works that contributed directly to the development of your model. Recognize that readers are primarily interested in your ideas. They can read about others' ideas just as well on their own! Another very effective means of reflecting how prior work facilitated your own thinking is to provide a more inclusive analysis of the prior literature in a table. Such a table might be organized according to the constructs and relationships that comprise your model, might list relevant prior work, and might communicate the nature and contributions of this prior work. Thus, the text of your manuscript would not discuss each of these prior works but rather would focus on the main ideas being communicated through the table. The result is a much crisper and shorter text, again facilitating a reader's comprehension of your ideas. Finally, if the theory section concludes with a string of hypotheses (or propositions), *each* of these hypotheses (or propositions) should be *preceded* by a strong argument that discloses "why" the hypothesis (or proposition) is expected to hold.

Continuing Our Efforts to Globalize the *MIS Quarterly*

The *MIS Quarterly* has strived in the past to increase the participation of non-North Americans as authors, reviewers, and Editorial Board members. While the *Quarterly* has achieved some success in this regard, the current senior editors are not satisfied with current levels of non-North American authors and reviewers. The purpose of this note is to reach out to non-North Americans and inform them of our recent efforts to increase non-North American participation with the journal as well as to explain how manuscript reviewers and Editorial Board members are selected.

The senior editors have recommitted themselves to an openness with regard to the research methods applied in manuscripts. Our concern is not with the nature of the methods used but rather with the appropriateness of these methods to the questions that are being asked and the quality of the use of these methods. We truly believe the *Quarterly* is not biased against manuscripts that adopt other than positivistic perspectives and methods. If it seems that positivistic articles tend to dominate the *Quarterly*, a sound explanation does exist—the majority of submitted manuscripts adopt such a perspective.

We strongly encourage a variety of research approaches. The June 1995 issue, for example, contains a Call-for-Papers for a special issue of the *Quarterly* on "intensive research methodologies." Further, authors are now asked to (1) submit their manuscript to the senior editor (myself, Izak Benbasat, Allen Lee, or Lynda Applegate) who is felt most appropriate, (2) nominate one or more associate editors who are felt to be most appropriate, and (3) suggest reviewers for the manuscript. If authors take full advantage of such opportunities to affect the nature of their manuscript's reviewing process, the possibility of methodology bias becomes minimal . . . if it exists at all.

Further, the current SEs are committed to working with authors to resolve initial "problems" (which often reflect stylistic issues or the manner in which a manuscript is organized or the depth at which certain issues are described) found to exist with promising manuscripts prior to formally sending the manuscript out for review. Again, the intent here is to have submitted manuscripts be positioned to succeed, not fail, in the review process.

In addition to encouraging non-North American authors to submit manuscripts for publication consideration, the senior editors desire to increase the use of international reviewers. There are two reasons for this. First, the use of international reviewers brings multiple perspectives to bear in our collective efforts to use the review process to improve manuscripts. Second, and very importantly, the primary criteria used in appointing individuals as associate editors is their performance as manuscript reviewers—we appoint as associate editors only individuals who have consistently and frequently performed in an outstanding manner as a manuscript reviewer. The major reason we do not have more non-North American associate editors is that the current AE board is using too few non-North American reviewers; thus, when we examine our reviewer history files, we often have difficulty in identifying non-North American AE candidates. Still, it is nice to report that of the six new AE appointments announced in the June 1995 issue of the *Quarterly*, one is from Singapore, two are from Australia and a fourth is now spending the year at the Copenhagen Business School.

The current policy for assigning reviewers to manuscripts is to have the associate editor handling a manuscript make these assignments. Of course, suggestions are given by a manuscript's authors, and the senior editor—and, often, the associate editor—asks for reviewer suggestions from the entire Editorial Board by broadcasting a message to all board members. What, then, should you do if you wish to offer (or, reoffer) your services as a reviewer for the *Quarterly*? I suggest that you look over the names of current senior editors and associate editors, identify those you feel have research interests similar to your own, and send these individuals a note (either electronic or paper-based) indicating your willingness to serve as a manuscript reviewer and describing your own research interests and accomplishments. The research interests for most of the current members of the *MIS Quarterly* Editorial Board are available from <http://www.cox.smu.edu/mis/misq/archivist/editor.html>. The names of the members of the current board also appear on the inside front cover of this issue. I, and the other members of the *Quarterly*'s Editorial Board, look forward to hearing from you.

Editorial Board Changes

I am pleased to announce that Henri Barki (Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales) and Ilze Zigurs (University of Colorado at Boulder) have accepted invitations to join the Editorial Board as associate editors. Their three-year terms will end with the September 1998 issue of the *MIS Quarterly*. "Welcome aboard!" from all the senior editors. Accordingly, two associate editors who have served the *Quarterly* extremely well are moving off the Editorial Board with this issue: Michael Earl (London Business School) and Iris Vessey (Indiana University). Michael is concluding his three-year term on the Editorial Board, and Iris is concluding a two-year extension to her initial appointment. Thanks to both of you for your work over the last few years.

—Bob Zmud

Editor-in-Chief, *MIS Quarterly*