
Editor's Comments

This issue's editor's statement addresses four topics. First, I thought it might be useful to describe the type of manuscripts that **should not** be submitted to *MIS Quarterly*. Second, I offer some guidelines on describing the methodological procedures in an empirically based submission to the *Quarterly*. Third, I repeat a message recently distributed by Blake Ives and myself regarding the *MISQ Archivist*. Finally, as usual, I announce changes in the make-up of the *MIS Quarterly's* Editorial Board.

What Should Not Be Submitted to the *MIS Quarterly*

It is hard to describe the type of manuscripts I would like to see submitted to *MIS Quarterly*. Assuming that the topic being addressed is appropriate for the *Quarterly* (see my June 1995 editorial statement), essentially any interesting manuscript that significantly contributes to research and/or practice is welcomed. The senior editors truly strive to remain free of biases regarding theoretical perspectives, epistemological positions, and methodological choices.

It is much easier to identify the nature of manuscripts I would rather not see submitted to *MIS Quarterly*. These fit into four major categories: pragmatic descriptions of information systems applications, methodologies, or practices; formal descriptions of information systems applications, methodologies, or practices; replications of prior studies; and criticisms of prior studies. In each of these cases, I am referring to a manuscript whose sole purpose is characterized in this fashion. The following discussions elaborate on each of the categories.

Pragmatic descriptions of information system applications, methodologies, or practices

Authors often submit manuscripts that describe particular (possibly innovative) applications, methodologies, or practices. If such description is all that is accomplished in a manuscript, the manuscript is immediately returned to the author. Does this mean that articles that describe applications, methodologies, or practices are never published in the *Quarterly*? Of course not! The senior editors desire and the readership demands scholarly treatments of innovative applications, methodologies, or practices.

But what exactly is meant by the term "scholarly treatment"? I can think of three illustrations, among many, that capture the spirit of what might produce an exciting, yet scholarly, article for publication in the *Quarterly*. These are all in the context of IT management "practices" but could just as well be applied to other types of practices, applications, or methodologies. First, an author might develop a new theoretical perspective on IT management and then illustrate the relevance of the perspective by describing one or more innovative practices that reflected the perspective. Second, an author might develop, based on strong theory, a new taxonomy for IT management practice directed toward a specific set of activities or objectives and then populate the taxonomy with descriptions of practices that illustrate key aspects of the taxonomy. Third, an author might develop theory that argues the benefits of particular IT management practices and then carefully examine the outcomes associated with applying these practices within one or more organizations as a means of formally "testing" the proposed theory. The common thread among these three illustrations should be clear—the application, methodology, or practice must be grounded in (or followed by) strong theory, and the description itself must not be an end in itself but rather a means toward achieving a scholarly contribution.

There is one exception to the above "guideline." *MIS Quarterly* has maintained (and is committed to continuing this relationship) a tradition of working with the authors of award-winning papers associated with the SIM Paper Competition so that their articles might be published in the *MIS Quarterly*.

Formal descriptions of information system applications, methodologies, or practices

A number of scholarly information systems journals have shown a desire to publish articles that contain formalized descriptions of an application, a methodology, or a practice. Such materials often take the form of mathematical models, generic analytical models, or formalized specification sets. While the *Quarterly* recognizes the scholarly value inherent with such articles, the senior editors do not believe that such manuscripts are of sufficient interest to the majority of the journal readership to warrant their publication consideration. Thus, we discourage the submission of such articles to the *Quarterly*.

We recognize, however, that occasionally the only way to effectively make one's point is through the careful use of formal or analytical mechanisms. Manuscripts with limited, but appropriate, formal description or argumentation are thus certainly welcome. Authors preparing such manuscripts are strongly encouraged to consider placing, where appropriate, such formalized descriptions in an appendix.

Replications of prior studies

The senior editors have decided that the *MIS Quarterly* should not publish articles that offer little that is truly new to the information systems literature. Journal space is a scarce commodity; and there is increased competition for the space that exists. Thus, even if a manuscript describes a study that is carefully executed and internally valid, it is unlikely the manuscript would be published if its primary contribution was a corroboration of earlier studies. Authors of such manuscripts are strongly encouraged to submit them elsewhere.

Authors desiring to publish their research in *MIS Quarterly* should always be striving to extend, not replicate, prior work. One might extend prior work by improving the theory through a clarification of constructs or a tightening of relationships among constructs, by incorporating new variables (particularly in the form of moderating, intervening, or control variables), through improved instrumentation, or through the application of more appropriate analytical techniques and more insightful interpretations of results.

Criticism of prior studies

MIS Quarterly certainly does receive manuscripts that strongly, and correctly, critique prior work. Critical examinations of existing theory and current understanding are a fundamental way in which progress occurs in any scholarly field. But a successful manuscript submitted to the *Quarterly* does not just criticize prior work. Rather, the successful manuscript offers new ideas that overcome or otherwise move past the ideas or findings over which doubt has been cast. Thus, the primary focus of the successful manuscript is not its criticisms but instead its contributions. And, as a matter of collegial respect, such criticism, where properly applied, must be directed at ideas or methods rather than at individuals.

Occasionally, exceptions to the above guideline do occur in the form of research notes targeted at recent articles published in the *Quarterly*. Authors discovering (potential) problems in published articles are strongly encouraged to submit their communications to one of the senior editors. Again, authors should neither attack nor otherwise denigrate an author; rather, they should focus their criticism on the idea or method or interpretation at question. Even with research notes, authors should attempt to move their essays past pure criticism and consider the nature of strategies or approaches for better coping with the issue, situation, or context being addressed in the research note.

Describing a Study's Methodological Procedures

Most authors, when submitting the initial version of an empirical manuscript to the *MIS Quarterly*, do an inadequate job of describing their methodological procedures. This often leads to one of two outcomes, neither of which is satisfactory for the authors involved or for the *Quarterly*: a potentially publishable manuscript is quickly rejected because reviewers and editors are frustrated by this lack of information, or a manuscript is eventually rejected after one or more major revisions (on which the authors and reviewers have spent considerable effort) when the clarity in writing that finally does occur makes it evident that "fatal flaws" exist in the study's methodological procedures.

There are at least five compelling reasons why authors should insure that careful and complete descriptions of a study's methodological procedures are contained within manuscripts submitted to the *MIS Quarterly*. First, reviewers and editors must understand what an author has done in order to provide a valid assessment of a study's scholarly contributions. Second, readers of a published manuscript must understand what the author has done in order to interpret and otherwise "make sense" of the study's findings. Third, scholars examining the body of research to which the study contributes must understand what the author has done in order to compare his or her findings with those of other studies. Fourth, where appropriate, other researchers should be provided with sufficient information about a study's research methods in order to apply relevant elements within a subsequent research project. Fifth, every published manuscript in the *Quarterly* should serve as an instrument of learning about how to conduct good research—the "educational value" of a published article is significantly reduced if adequate descriptions of methodological procedures are absent.

Guidelines are presented below regarding the location of these descriptions in a manuscript, as well as provisions for the overall research strategy and data gathering procedures. A future editor's statement will discuss the reporting and interpretation of an author's findings.

Positioning descriptions of the methodological procedures applied in an empirical study

The description of a study's methodological and analytical procedures should come *after* the research questions, research models, and research hypotheses have been formally specified but *before* the results are presented and discussed. It is meaningless to describe a study's operational procedures without having first made clear the study's objectives, just as it is somewhat mystifying to describe a study's findings without having first made clear the manner in which the data providing these findings were collected and analyzed.

Providing an overview of an empirical study's research strategies

Prior to describing the methodological procedures applied in a study, it is important for an author to provide a description of the study's research strategy, a justification for this research strategy, and a rich discussion of the research context. With each of these, strong links back to the research objectives (questions, models, hypotheses) are necessary.

Readers' understanding of a manuscript is significantly enhanced through the provision of a concise description of, and justifications for, a study's overall research strategy. What data gathering methods were employed, why were they employed, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these choices? Who served as informants, what was the nature of the data obtained from each type of informant, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these decisions? What data analysis techniques were employed, how are the research questions (or hypotheses) to be assessed through the use of these techniques, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to data analysis? Such a description essentially serves as a methodological roadmap that enables readers to more easily grasp the nature of the data collected and to more easily interpret a study's findings.

A study's research context refers to the entity within which the phenomena under examination were studied. Depending on the nature of these phenomena and a study's research objectives, this entity might be a type of organization, organizational unit, group, individual, or project or application, etc. Readers must be made aware of the research context (clearly describe all aspects of the research context that are salient to the research design and to interpretations of the study's findings), must be told why this particular context was selected as the focus of the study, and must be made aware of the implications of this selection. Generally, the fewer the number of entities that populate a research context, the more detailed this description must be. In other words, if all of a study's data is collected from within a single organization, a very rich discussion of this organization must be provided.

Providing descriptions of an empirical study's data-gathering procedures

The objective of this section of a manuscript should be to anticipate and provide the answers for any questions that knowledgeable readers might have about the nature of the data collected. Because many of the "fatal flaws" that arise in empirical studies can be traced to problems with a study's data, knowledgeable readers expect to find robust descriptions of a study's data-gathering procedures. Poor or inadequate descriptions will only raise serious methodological concerns about a study in such readers' minds.

Clear and complete descriptions of the following should always be provided: the sampling frame, sampling procedures (or site selection criteria), characteristics of the entities comprising the sample, characteristics of informants (or respondents or subjects), how access to sites and informants was gained, logistics and timing of data collection, operationalization of research variables, instrumentation (instructions, measurement scales, interview guides), and the psychometric properties of a study's measures. It is strongly recommended that a copy of the instrumentation (survey instructions and items, interview guides, etc.) be included as an appendix.

Finally, three guidelines are offered in a spirit of encouraging "user friendly" descriptions of a study's data-gathering procedures:

- Guideline 1: If in doubt, provide more description.
- Guideline 2: Anything that could best be communicated via a table (or some other exhibit) belongs in a table.
- Guideline 3: Do not repeat material appearing in a table in a manuscript's text.

An MIS Quarterly Electronic Initiative

In his role as the *Quarterly's* senior editor for electronic productions, Blake Ives has introduced the following initiative, which we hope will be found useful by the information systems global community and will spur others to think of yet other innovative ways for stimulating our teaching and scholarship. Please pass on your own ideas about how to best exploit the *MIS Quarterly's* electronic elements: *MISQ Archivist* and *MISQ Discovery*.

In support of the new *ISWorld Net* teaching and learning page on information systems ethics, the *MIS Quarterly* is making available in full text on the *MISQ Archivist* two ethics-related articles that have appeared previously in the *MIS Quarterly*. The first of these two articles, "Four Ethical Issues of the Information Age" by Richard O. Mason (Vol. 10, No. 1, March, 1986, pp. 5–12), is currently available either through *MISQ Archivist* (<http://www.cox.smu.edu/mis/misq/archivist/home.html>) or from the ethics course page (<http://www.siu.edu/departments/coba/mgmt/iswnet/isethics/>). The second article, "Ethical Standards for Information Systems Professionals: A Case for a Unified Code of Ethics," by Effy Oz (Vol. 16, No. 4, December 1992, pp. 423–433) should be available soon, if not already.

As an experiment, we are also offering to provide the authors of all our full-text articles with a link to a non-refereed page where they could, if they wish, provide further information related to the article or the topic of the paper (in this case, "ethics"). These pages, if they are created, will not be part of *MISQ Archivist* and will not be reviewed. Such optional links will not be activated until the authors request them and until there is some content of substance in place. The decision to continue to support such author links is at the sole discretion of the *MIS Quarterly*.

Editorial Board Changes

It is with very mixed feelings that I report that Gerry DeSanctis, after many years of service to the *MIS Quarterly* as senior editor and as an associate editor, is stepping off the Editorial Board. Gerry's commitment to scholarship and to working with authors to improve their manuscripts is clearly a major factor

behind the *Quarterly's* solid academic reputation. Just as important (but far less visible) are Gerry's behind-the-scenes contributions to the journal's editorial directions and policies. Most important of all, however, is her kindness. We will all certainly miss her.

Two other members will be leaving the Editorial Board with this December issue. Brent Gallupe (Queen's University) and Detmar Straub (Georgia State University) are both completing their terms as associate editors. I personally wish to extend my thanks to Brent and Detmar for the fine job each has done while serving as a *Quarterly* associate editor.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that Sirkka Jarvenpaa (University of Texas at Austin) has been appointed as a senior editor for *MIS Quarterly*. Remember that authors are encouraged to nominate reviewers, to nominate one or more associate editors to manage their manuscript, and to directly submit the manuscript to a specific senior editor (who will then be responsible for all editorial decisions regarding the manuscript).

—Bob Zmud
Editor-in-Chief