

fees. A new association could not succeed without the endorsement of a large number of the prospective membership.³ This is one reason we have chosen to bring the issue to your attention and we hope that you will draw it to the attention of others. Existing societies conceivably could offer proposals that might help us better meet our responsibilities to the entire field of information management, rather than just the niche they currently serve. Similarly, joint alliances could be forged; we welcome invitations for such collaborations from throughout the world.⁴

Whatever the solution, it must reach beyond the borders of a particular discipline and of a particular country or region. We hope to initiate a dialog among the members of our community concerning these issues, while perhaps prompting one or more of our affiliated societies to consider how they can reach out to all of us or help us along the way. Until such options are explored, it is premature to endorse a specific solution. Nevertheless, it is our shared belief that the status quo is not meeting the leadership requirements of the academic information systems profession.

Gary W. Dickson (senior editor, 1977-1982)
James C. Emery (senior editor, 1989-1991)
Blake Ives (current senior editor)
William R. King (senior editor, 1983-1985)
F. Warren McFarlan (senior editor, 1986-1988)

* * * * *

Theory and Research: Goals, Priorities, and Approaches

I am very honored to begin my three-year term as senior editor for theory and research. It is an important service role in our field and one I take on with great anticipation. I first encountered the information systems research literature as a doctoral student and, of course, much of my reading centered around the *MIS Quarterly*. Through my reading, I quickly became an admirer of researchers such as Izak Benbasat and Michael Ginzberg. To follow in their footsteps at the *MIS Quarterly* is a special opportunity for me. Foremost among my goals as I take on the position of senior editor for theory and research is to maintain the standards of excellence that my predecessors brought to the journal. Their efforts continue to enhance the *MIS Quarterly's* reputation as a strong scholarly journal.

Strong scholarly journals are required for the field of management information systems to flourish. Through our journals we dynamically define our science—its domain, scope, research methods, and findings. The *MIS Quarterly* is widely regarded as a “top” journal because of its contributions over the years to the formation of a science of information systems. The *Quarterly* has become an important forum for scientific dialogue, both within the scientific community and between scientists and the practicing management community.

If the *MIS Quarterly* is to continue to play a leadership role, we must be enterprising in the face of ongoing changes in technology, organizations, and academia. As senior editor, Blake Ives has introduced a number of initiatives. He has been working hard to advance the breadth and relevance of the Applications section of our journal while maintaining high standards of scholarship. The Issues and Opinions section is being revamped to provide lively discussion of critical matters in the professional practice

³ There are 1889 names of North American faculty in the 1992 edition of the *Directory of Management Information Systems Faculty*. There are 800 more names in the 1993 edition of the *Directory of Information Systems Faculty in Europe*. Assuming perhaps 1,000 IS professionals in Asia and the rest of the world, and another 1,000 interested people who are not represented in the existing directories, there might be a total population of 4-5,000 potential members.

⁴ A task force to investigate the need for a new society was initiated by Paul Grey and others at the December 1992, International Conference on Information Systems in Dallas. Inquiries, suggestions, and proposals can be directed to Bill King, who chairs that effort. The address is Katz Graduate School of Business, Mervis Hall, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260.

of information systems. Finally, Blake is providing summaries of the refereed articles in each issue and reflective comments on their contributions to current knowledge in information systems.

Within the Theory and Research section of the journal, Blake and I have a shared commitment to maintain and build upon the rigorous scholarly standards established by my predecessors. We will publish articles that represent "good science" in the sense that they (a) address problems that are important to advancing the body of knowledge concerned with information systems, (b) are robust in theory, method, and analytic approach, and (c) are presented in ways that are interesting and appealing to our readership. With regard to (a), there is always the question of "what is an important problem?" Whether or not the problem addressed in a specific research paper is sufficiently important to warrant publication is ultimately a judgment made by reviewers, but a general rule of thumb for the *MIS Quarterly* is that the paper must address an issue in which a reasonable number of our readers have some interest. *MIS Quarterly* covers a wide spectrum of research topics; it is not narrowly focused. So, authors must situate their work within the broad context of information systems research and present arguments for the importance of their work that take this broad context into account. Over the course of many issues, published research articles start to weave a tapestry we call our field, or science, with patterns and cross-patterns that link similar works together. Authors are asked to develop clear statements of the contributions of their work to the field at large.

What type of material are we looking for in the Theory and Research section of the journal? One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the *MIS Quarterly* as compared to other journals devoted to information systems is its emphasis on management. The research published in our journal must have a connection to management as defined in the broad sense, including management of public and private organizations, government and labor organizations, and professional and social societies. Studies of systems outside of a managerial context are not of interest. A managerial emphasis does *not* mean that every paper will have direct implications for practicing management, nor does it mean that every paper in its entirety will appeal to all readers. The purpose of research is not just to study the problems of today but to provide insight into events and behaviors of the past and to articulate the problems and opportunities of the future. Since the future is never clear, a certain amount of published research may not bring anticipated payoff in terms of utility to practice. This is the research risk; we do not apologize for publishing papers that fail to reap so-called "real world relevance." The potential for relevance is what matters. Each paper must have a strong argument that connects—either directly or indirectly—the presented work with past, current, or future practice in management information systems.

We have no official priorities for papers, but my own belief is that our field could benefit from more theory generation. In the 1970s and early 1980s, numerous "frameworks" for organizing MIS research were proposed. Later, frameworks for specific aspects of MIS (such as decision support and expert systems) were outlined. Frameworks are useful systems for identifying and organizing variables for scientists to study; but they do not lend good insight into cause/effect relationships, nor do they articulate the properties and behaviors underlying phenomena. We need fresh theoretical ideas about causal relationships in order to facilitate understanding and prediction of events in the world. For example, more theoretical thinking might be devoted to the relationship between information technology investment and organizational effectiveness; or to the impact of alternative government or managerial policies on use of information resources. New theoretical ideas will lead, in turn, to fresh streams of empirical work and to lively dialogue about the relative value of contrasting theoretical approaches to common problems. The *MIS Quarterly* is well-known for its contributions to data gathering and analysis. I hope that within the next three years we can also become well-known as a forum for theoretical exchange.

On the empirical side, we welcome research based on positivist, interpretive, or integrated approaches. Traditionally, *MIS Quarterly* has emphasized positivist research methods. Though we remain strong in our commitment to hypothesis testing and quantitative data analysis, we would like to stress our interest in research that applies interpretive techniques, such as case studies, textual analysis, ethnography, and participant/observation. Several of our editorial board members have particular strengths in interpretive research methods. Authors can be confident in our commitment to publish studies that draw from a broad range of methods.

Finally, Blake and I agree that while our field continually is in need of basic and applied research—in the sense of theory development, theory testing, and theory application—we are not in need of “research about research.” We are not referring here to indepth literature reviews or reflective essays that advance intellectual thought about a particular issue or set of issues. We invite these kinds of papers. Rather, our concern is with papers that count and categorize articles, authors, journals and the like, to yield listings, rankings, or patterns. Our limited journal space is better devoted to presentation of research ideas and findings than to quantitative summaries of the research literature itself. Though such analyses can provide insights into gaps in literature and can serve as tracking devices for progress in the field, they detract from the core mission of the journal, which is to add to the scientific literature.

* * * * *

With this issue we introduce a new section to our journal, “Research Notes,” which incorporates technical commentaries that previously were published in the “Issues and Opinions” section. We plan to publish only a small number of research notes each year, so it is important that they (a) address an important research issue with broad appeal to the *MIS Quarterly* readership, (b) provide sufficient advance in knowledge beyond already published papers or other reports, and (c) are as succinct as possible. Obvious connections between the note content and other papers published by *MIS Quarterly* are essential. In many cases the note may arouse controversy and encourage dialogue within the field on an important research issue. In other cases, the note may lead to new research directions or methodological approaches. Where notes pertain to a specific paper published by *MIS Quarterly*, we may invite authors of the referenced paper to provide a “Reply” to the note.

Since only a small number of notes will be published, authors are encouraged to discuss their research note with the senior editor for theory and research prior to submission. The senior editor for theory and research will serve as associate editor on all submitted notes.

Submitted notes should be typed, double spaced, and prepared according to the same guidelines as other papers submitted to *MIS Quarterly*. An abstract is not required. Brevity is essential. Published papers will be approximately three to four journal pages in length.

—Gerry DeSanctis