Editor's Comments

This is my inaugural issue as Senior Editor of the *Quarterly,* and so it might be appropriate to make some general comments about the journal and the role it can play in the MIS profession.

The *Quarterly*'s charter of serving the dual constituencies of practitioners and academics gives the journal a unique mission and important strengths. By serving the needs of practitioners, we impose the discipline of relevancy; by serving the academic community, we provide a forum for presenting research that provides fresh ideas and a solid foundation for building a more rigorous and vibrant field.

The articles published in the *Quarterly* are generally classified as "application" or "theory and re-search." This dichotomy is by no means clear-cut, however; many articles include both research and application components. As a rough approximation, though, practitioners probably find the application papers to be of greatest direct use, while academics probably turn first to the research papers.

Both constituencies stand to benefit greatly from the dual focus of application and theory. Our field is not like pure mathematics, where an elegant theory may have great aesthetic appeal even though — or because — it has no conceivable application (although "pure" mathematics has the capricious habit of often turning out to be quite useful). The field of MIS, in contrast, is an applied discipline. Lurking somewhere in even the most arcane MIS research should be the seed of a useful application.

A practical orientation to MIS research certainly does not imply lack of intellectual rigor. On the con-trary, the critical issues facing our field present genuinely difficult problems. Any one of them can easily challenge all of the intellectual power we can possibly muster. The fact that first-rate research is motivated by the researcher's desire to solve a real problem should not detract from the intellectual respect due the work.

Take, for example, the issue of how we can better coordinate the myriad activities of a multinational firm scattered over the globe. Achieving a fundamental improvement in coordination would have a tremendous impact on the organization's efficiency and effectiveness. Research on this topic, if it is to have much hope of real success, would necessarily involve a broad range of research skills in such areas as information technology, management science, and organizational behavior.

Another topic of equal importance and difficulty is how we can develop better methodologies for trans-lating business needs into functioning information systems. So-called "fourth-generation" tools hold great promise in making revolutionary improvements in systems implementation, but we are a long way from understanding the technical, behavioral, and economic implications of 4GLs. The list of such challenging issues could go on and on.

Practitioners have a great stake in the researchers' efforts to extend the boundaries of our knowledge. MIS managers are under continual pressure to expand the scope and functional capabilities of their organizations' information systems. Highly competitive worldwide markets, compression of product cycles, flattening of organizational structure, and distribution of decision making all place tremendous demands for improvements in information handling. It is fair to say, I think, that an organization's success in exploiting information technology will have a profound effect on its ability to survive in the Nineties and beyond.

It is inconceivable that we can meet these challenges without building a solid theoretical foundation. Nothing is more practical than sound theory. Early airplanes could be built with little theory, but the design and production of a modern fighter aircraft demands a prodigious body of science and technol-ogy that deals with such matters as structures, materials, propulsion, and control. As MIS practitioners are similarly pushed to the limits of current theory, we must continually add to the body of our knowl-edge.

I and my associates connected with the *Quarterly* — editors, reviewers, and staff — aspire to continue the role of the journal as an important contributor to progress in the MIS field. Our task is made much easier by the outstanding work of our predecessors. For many academics, *MISQ* is already their publication of choice for reaching a broad and respected audience, as well as a valued source

of information on current scholarly work in the field. For many MIS practitioners, the journal provides useful ideas and insights for coping with the enormously complex issues they face.

We want to build on this reputation, and make the *Quarterly* still more useful to its constituencies.

There are a few changes we are currently working on to move us in this direction. The review and editorial process has to deal with a growing volume of articles. We need improved systems — an MIS, no less! — for tracking the progress of papers through this process. A primary aim is to speed up the cycle time from submission to publication, which too often is unacceptably long (and to which I, alas, have also contributed).

We also need to improve the match between an article's subject matter and the interests and qualifications of our reviewers. The new information system will certainly help. As part of this effort, we are planning to institute a comprehensive new classification scheme for papers, based on the work of Barki, Rivard, and Talbot, "An Information Systems Keyword Classification Scheme," (*MIS Quarterly* (12:2), June 1988, pp. 299-322).

Each submitted paper will be classified under this scheme, which provides a concise description of its contents. Similarly, each person in our list of reviewers will also be asked to define his or her qualifications and interests in terms of the same classification scheme. By this means we can better ensure that the right set of reviewers is selected for each paper. This new classification will also build a database of classified articles, which can greatly assist users in locating published articles that match their information needs.

Naturally, I welcome any comments and suggestions from readers for improving the *Quarterly* and making it a more helpful publication.