Editor's Comments

The summer (supposedly) affords an academic the opportunity to engage in relaxed reflection and to complete tasks deferred during the semester when teaching duties take priority. One of my deferred tasks is the preparation of guidelines for prospective authors of papers for the *MIS Quarterly*.

The stated editorial policy of the journal gives a good starting point for defining the types of papers we seek: "The intention of the *Quarterly* is to provide a forum for materials addressing the information systems field in both practice and theory. We hope, thereby, to unite the efforts of those teaching and doing research in this area with those applying information systems to organizational problems."

We classify papers into two major categories, (1) Theory and Research and (2) Application. In practice the boundary between the two may be quite fuzzy, but in concept there exists an important distinction — one that accurately reflects the dual objectives and constituencies of the *Quarterly*.

A paper in the Theory and Research category should satisfy the traditional criteria for high quality scholarly research. It should be based on a set of well-defined hypotheses, unbiased and reproducible procedures for collecting evidence that supports or refutes the hypotheses, and sound analytical procedures for drawing appropriate conclusions from the evidence. This research often involves the collection of considerable quantitative data through such means as laboratory experiments or survey instruments. The data are then subjected to statistical analysis to draw the appropriate inferences from the research. High-quality research need not be limited to work generating large quantities of data that can be statistically validated, however: a well-constructed case study can also meet the tests of rigorous research (as Allen Lee pointed out so well in his March 1989 article in *MISQ*, "A Scientific Methodology for MIS Case Studies").

Progress in information systems as a valid academic and professional discipline rests heavily on building a foundation of knowledge through painstaking scientific research. We must make every effort to ensure that the *Quarterly* retains its strong position as a respected, authoritative forum for such research. The continued flow of submitted papers from the academic community — the predominant source for Theory and Research papers — requires that the *Quarterly* be regarded as a research journal of record that adds unequivocal luster to the scholar's list of publications when he or she comes up for promotion or tenure. This, after all, is a thoroughly legitimate motivation for a scholar to put in the great effort required to conduct quality research and publish the results.

If *MISQ* limited itself to papers that met the strict criteria for rigorous scientific research it would slight an important part of its mission to serve the practitioner community (as well as the academic community). Practitioners should certainly find value in Theory and Research papers, but they have other needs as well. They are looking for aid in dealing with the myriad problems they face in applying information technology in their organizations. Their primary sources of information are their colleagues, peers in other organizations, vendors, firms specializing in technology assessment, conferences, trade journals, and general business publications. *MISQ* cannot compete with these sources, but it surely can provide a unique source of thoughtful and authoritative information of value to practitioners.

The criteria for accepting an Application paper are less traditional and therefore somewhat more difficult to define than the Theory and Research papers. But just as in the case of Theory/Research papers, an Application paper should add to the cumulative body of knowledge that aids us in applying information technology and educating future generations of practitioners and scholars. It should, in short, help us to build the field on the shoulders of our predecessors. The criteria listed below are intended to serve this purpose. Some of these criteria may not be appropriate in some situations, but failure to satisfy a criterion detracts from the value of a paper.

- An Application paper should describe an innovative use of information technology in solving a significant organizational problem, or it should provide insights or guidelines for others to develop such applications. An innovation might be in the form of developing new technology, or it could involve the application of well-known technology in new ways.

- The paper should draw generalizations from the specific application so that the lessons learned can be applied more broadly. This places a burden on the author to abstract from the details of the application and focus on its essential characteristics that make it a worthy subject of study.

- The paper should point out any unique characteristics of the application or its environment that might limit the general applicability of the knowledge gained.

- The paper should carefully delimit the scope of the study, explicitly identifying aspects of the problem that were not covered and that might be significant in seemingly related situations.

- The paper should identify new technological trends or prospective changes in the environment that might significantly limit, extend, or modify the general applicability of the work described.

- The paper should be soundly wedded to the existing base of knowledge. References should be made to existing literature to support assertions, provide evidence to support the actions taken in the study, point out inconsistencies or differences in viewpoint with previously published results, and establish intellectual linkages to related prior work.

Not all useful contributions that can suitably be published in the *Quarterly* will necessarily pass the criteria for either the Theory/Research or Application categories. There is some room, I believe, for more speculative and unsubstantiated papers that potentially could have an important influence on the field. The paper by Dixon and John in this issue, for example, reflects the considered opinions of a thoughtful group of MIS executives in the SIM President's Council. This paper would probably not pass the normal *MISQ* review process, but it is nevertheless a legitimate contribution for a journal that aspires to provide a depository of important thinking in the MIS field.

There is a real danger, of course, that accepting papers that do not satisfy our normal criteria for scholarly work could result in a journal of conjectures and unsupported opinions. Any such paper must therefore be viewed as distinct and rare exceptions to the normal screening process. In order for such a paper to have the stamp of authority that publication in *MISQ* must represent, the authors of such a paper must have especially strong credentials for us to give credence to their insights and wisdom.

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I would be remiss, in my musing about the editorial objectives and policies of the *Quarterly,* if I failed to recognize the critical role played by our associate editors. They are the ones who have primary responsibility for evaluating comments from reviewers and making a recommendation as to whether a submitted paper should be accepted for publication, revised, or rejected. In some cases a paper may go through several revisions before its publication. The associate editors do this with great competence and dedication.

A number of associate editors have served the normal three-year term, and are now being honorably "retired." Izak Benbasat deserves special recognition for his contributions. His term as the senior associate editor for Theory and Research is expiring with the December issue. In this position he has had the primary editorial responsibility for all papers classified as Theory and Research. My job as senior editor would have been almost impossible without his contributions and wisdom.

Other associate editors whose terms have expired are Brandt Allen, Joyce Elam, Blake Ives, Richard Mason, and Burton Swanson. I thank them all most sincerely for their support.

A number of new members have joined our editorial board. Michael Ginzberg is taking over as senior associate editor of Theory and Research, and will, I am confident, carry on the tradition of excellence of that office. Other new associate editors are Robert Benjamin, Jane Fedorowicz, Sidney Harris, Haim Mendelson, John Weitzel, and Frederic Withington. I will lean on them heavily to keep the *Quarterly* the respected journal that it is.

James C. Emery