Call for Papers
MISQ Special Issue on

Next-Generation
Information Systems Theories

Special Issue Editors

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Submission Deadline: Extended Abstracts due November 15, 2018
Full Papers submissions due April 1, 2019

Motivation for the Special Issue

As a research field evolves, it is important to periodically take stock and reflect on how its core theoretical ideas are developing and be open to radical innovation. Do existing theoretical ideas need significant revision? Should well-known ideas be dropped? Are new ideas required? Have important ideas been forgotten? Are opportunities for new ideas not being taken because of academic silos or a failure to adopt innovative models of enquiry? This special issue provides an opportunity to take stock and reflect on theoretical progress in Information Systems and forge exciting new theoretical avenues for the future.

For two reasons, now is a particularly opportune time for the Information Systems field to take stock of its theoretical progress and develop next-generation IS theories.

First, we are witnessing fundamental changes in the field's core phenomena. For much of our field's history, the core phenomena has been "how IT systems are developed and how individuals, groups, organizations, and markets interact with IT" (Sidorova et al. 2008, p. 475). As a result, we have deep bodies of theory on how systems are developed (e.g., Hirschheim et al. 1995; Orlikowski 1993; Sabherwal and Robey 1995) and how individuals (e.g., Venkatesh et al. 2003), groups (e.g., Dennis et al. 2001; Majchrzak et al. 2000), organizations (e.g., Robey and Boudreau 1999), and markets (e.g., Choudhury et al. 1998) interact with IT. However, much of this theory was developed in an earlier generation when we could think of distinct users employing clearly distinguishable systems, in bounded contexts (Winter et al. 2014). As time has passed, IT has become increasingly intelligent, interconnected, and infused through all our contexts, and these older theories have become increasingly ill-suited. New systems, industries, platforms, and ecosystems have arisen that were previously unimaginable. We need next-generation theories to understand the new world we face and try to create. The problem, however, is harder than merely starting afresh. The challenge is to further develop established theories if doing so proves productive but also to be bold and build new ones that better equip us going forward.

Second, we are witnessing major changes in our data, methods, and categories of knowledge. The increasingly connected society in which we live allows researchers to explore, download, and measure like never before. We are awash in new data and new methods. Nevertheless, as explained in the June 2016 editorial on synergies between big data and theory (Rai 2016), researchers need new theoretical ideas to complement, make sense of, and harness the new data and methods. New data and methods also provide researchers with new approaches for theory building. As noted in the March 2018 editorial on outdated labels (Rai 2018), we have also reached a point where we should seriously reflect on the limits of longstanding categories for describing our research approaches. Rather than defining their work by old categories (positivist, interpretive, behavioral, economics of IS, or design

science), researchers are increasingly combining approaches or forging entirely new ones. These new approaches are providing new opportunities to connect ideas, question assumptions, and rethink the way we view phenomena at the center of the field.

For both of these reasons, now is an important time to energize the best theoretical minds in the field to see if we can lay the foundations for a new generation of research. This special issue offers that opportunity.

What We Seek for the Special Issue

This will be the second *MIS Quarterly* special issue devoted to theory papers.[1] As a result, this special issue represents an opportunity for *MISQ* to publish not only the best theoretical work, but also the best of the theory paper genre.

Regarding the best theoretical work, readers should have a clear sense of what we seek from this call for papers. We seek *next-generation theory*. We want papers that grapple intellectually with the significant issues and challenges of our time. This does not mean we have a preference for mere novelty. In fact, we seek papers that reflect on older ideas just as much as we seek papers creating new ideas. What we do not seek are papers that make minor tweaks to prior theory. While such work can be valuable, it is not what we seek for the special issue.

Criterion 1: Papers submitted to the special issue will be assessed in terms of their theoretical focus on contemporary phenomena of significant importance.

Regarding the best of the theory paper genre, however, readers may value more clarity regarding what we seek. In essence, we seek both to enforce and innovate the genre. Accordingly, we outline in some detail below what we mean by a theory paper.

In our view, the theory paper genre is best understood not in terms of a set of necessary and sufficient attributes but rather in terms of exemplars or prototypes we have experience with in practice (Smith and Medin 1981). That is, the category allows for shades of grey, and different researchers may legitimately disagree on particular instances. While being open to different possibilities, we offer four dimensions as a guide for how we plan to view theory papers for the special issue: *theory*, *platform*, *review,* and *data*.

Theory papers contribute by advancing *theory*. Research papers can have many different goals vis-à-vis theory. Some papers seek to contribute through empirical insights, not theory. As Urquhart et al. (2010) and Wiesche et al. (2017) note, other papers strive to contribute to theory, but fail to do so. However, other cases are less clear-cut. For instance, what is the difference between a theory paper, a methods paper, and a review paper? A paper that examines the interface between theory and method could still be a theory paper if it advances theory (Zyphur 2009); a good review paper could be a good theory paper as well if it goes beyond the review to create new theoretical ideas (Rivard 2014). The key is the contribution to theory.

Criterion 2: Papers submitted to the special issue will be assessed by their focus on and contribution to theory in a focal domain.

Theory papers serve as *platforms* for research. They contribute by providing the scholarly groundwork that enables and motivates many others to make substantial contributions through future empirical work. Comprehensive, integrative reviews; provocative, well-argued claims; fully developed, evocative conceptual frameworks that reveal contradictions, paradoxes, or open questions— these are just a few of the ways that theory papers can provide the intellectual foundations needed for the next-generation of ground-breaking IS research. In a Kuhnian sense (Kuhn 1996), we do not so much seek "normal science." Rather, we seek papers that lay the platform for it by creating, breaking, redirecting, or restoring a paradigm.

Criterion 3: Papers submitted to the special issue will be assessed by their ability to provide a platform for a significant body of future research.

Theory papers often contain a substantial *review* of theoretical ideas in a body of literature. Theory papers typically do so because they need to assemble the current state of thought to problematize it and move beyond it. Without the review, the new theory and the new platform we discussed above are hard to justify. By containing such a review, good theory papers often become the go-to papers for scholars in the field.

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[1]In March 1999, *MIS Quarterly* issued a Call for Submissions for a Special Issue on Redefining the Organizational Roles of Information Technology in the Information Age. The issue was motivated by transformations occurring throughout the 1990s. The papers for that Special Issue appeared in the September 2002 (Volume 26, Number 3) and June 2003 (Volume 27, Number 2) issues.

Criterion 4: Papers submitted to the special issue must contain a high-quality review of the relevant theory in the focal domain.

Theory papers may contain *no data*. Some researchers even use theory paper and non-empirical paper synonymously (Shapira 2011, p. 1312). Being free from data can enable theoretical work, allowing the theoretical mind to run free and have sufficient space to work things out. At the same time, data can be integral to theorizing, as in a grounded theory building study (e.g., Levina and Vaast 2008), or studies that use data to *illustrate* theory, either briefly (e.g., Barrett et al. 2013) or in detail (e.g., Riemer and Johnston 2017). Additionally, data can help to *justify* new theory, as we see in in-depth qualitative work (e.g., Scott and Orlikowski 2014), comprehensive quantitative work (e.g., Venkatesh et al. 2003), and theories supported by simulations (e.g., Nan 2011), or other computationally intensive approaches (Berente et al. 2018).

Criterion 5: Papers submitted to the special issue need not contain data or methods of analysis. Data is welcome, but descriptive empirical papers are not.

In short, the special issues editors plan to use the five criteria above to judge if a paper is a good fit for the special issue.

While not wishing to limit the structure of papers submitted to the special issue, we suggest three examples that might work for many authors:

1. ***Pure theory papers***: Papers that provide a detailed review of theory in a focal domain but where the new theoretical contribution departs from the prior literature and the focus is on the new theory being generated.

2. ***Review-oriented theory papers***: Papers that provide a very detailed review of theory in a focal domain and where the new theoretical contribution stems from the authors' synthesis of that review (e.g., through its critique or reformulation).

3. ***Empirically enhanced theory papers***: Papers that focus on the generation of new theory but where data plays an important developmental, illustrative or justificatory role.

We offer these different options to innovate the theory paper genre, not to dilute it (Weick 1985). If a given submission is in the grey area between a theory paper and another style of paper, the editors of the special issue will make a final decision on the paper's appropriateness for the issue. Papers that are unsuitable for the special issue may be redirected for consideration in a regular *MISQ* issue.

Having described what we mean by a theory paper, what do we mean by theory?

The special issue takes a broad and inclusive view of theory and encourages any and all types of theoretical contribution related to IS. Some authors may focus on the micro elements of theory (e.g., a single concept or idea). Other authors may focus on macro elements (e.g., a philosophical world view). Some may use well known forms of theory, such as variance, practice, process, systems, or closed-form mathematical models. Others may choose other forms or combinations of forms. Some may use formal methods of theoretical analysis while others may adopt less formal or narrative approaches. Different authors may orient their theoretical contributions toward different aims, such as understanding, explanation, prediction, or prescription. While being open to substantial variety, the common element underlying all successful papers in the special issue will be that they offer incisive and important theoretical contributions that change the way we think in the IS field.

Summing up, attractive papers for the special issue will be those that

• ***Motivate***: Strong papers will identify areas in which there is inadequate theorization and motivate the need for new theory with evidence and arguments for why the limitations of current theories, or the lack of theory altogether, has real, substantive consequences.

• ***Create***: Papers will either develop a significant theoretical advance to existing theory (whether through revising or challenging it) or create entirely new theory.

• ***Mobilize***: Effective papers will be written so as to excite a significant portion of the *MISQ* audience to take on the challenges and pursue the possibilities arising from their ideas. Authors must find a way to convey the complexity and nuance of their theoretical ideas while also seeking simplicity, elegance, and accessibility in presentation and communication.

Special Issue Editorial Board

The senior editors will choose an anonymous associate editor for each paper from *MIS Quarterly's* current associate editors or from an additional Special Issue Editorial Board (listed below, alphabetically). Reviewers may also be chosen from the Special Issue Editorial Board or from the broader IS community.

Process and Time Lines

The special issue will follow a two-stage submission process.

Stage 1: *Submission of extended abstracts, due November 15, 2018*
Submission of an extended abstract is not necessary to in order to submit to the special issue, but it is highly encouraged. Extended abstracts must be no longer than five single-spaced pages (including all tables, figures, and references). Extended abstracts will be reviewed only by members of the editorial board (and will not be sent for review), so please include author details. Authors must submit the extended abstract through the *MIS Quarterly* ScholarOne submission system, which will be open from November 1, 2018, to November 15, 2018. High-level feedback will be provided on each abstract by January 15, 2019. (*MISQ*'s ScholarOne submission site is located at **https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/misq**)

In addition, all authors submitting an extended abstract will be invited to attend an invitation-only workshop to be held at ICIS 2018 (San Francisco, December 13-16; **the workshop is scheduled for December 16** (starting at noon; please see the MISQ website for details**: https://misq.org**). at which members of the Special Issue Editorial Board will discuss the special issue, provide high-level feedback to authors based on the issues they see in the extended abstracts, and answer authors' questions.

Stage 2: *Paper submission, due April 1, 2019*
Full papers are due April 1, 2019, via the *MIS Quarterly* ScholarOne submission system. All papers must be submitted in the Special Issue category. The system will be open for submissions to the Special Issue from March 1, 2019, to April 1, 2019.

Theory Development Workshop, *Georgia State University, August 2019*
Papers that pass the first round of review will be invited to a Theory Development Workshop at Georgia State University. The workshop will aim to develop the papers further and use presentations and panels to invite dialog on the best way to develop and review all the papers submitted to make it the strongest special issue possible.

Key Dates
- Submission of extended abstracts: November 15, 2018
- Feedback on extended abstracts to authors: January 15, 2019
- First round submission: April 1, 2019
- First round decisions to authors: July 1, 2019 [i.e., 3 month review cycle]
- Theory development workshop: August 2019
- Second round submission: December 1, 2019 [i.e., 5 months for revisions]
- Second round decision to authors: March 1, 2020 [i.e., 3 month review cycle]
- Third and final round submissions: July 1, 2020 [i.e., 4 months for revisions]
- Third and final round decisions to authors: September 1, 2020 [i.e., 2 month review cycle by the editors only, not reviewers]

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