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# ISSUES IN PUBLISHING FOR MIS ACADEMICIANS

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• N E W D O C •

## ISSUES IN PUBLISHING FOR MIS ACADEMICIANS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper depicts some of the issues facing the academicians seeking to publish in the field of Management Information Systems (MIS). Several environmental factors or "driving forces" are identified along with the results of their interaction. The resulting situation is troublesome, but some recent developments promise opportunities for minimizing the disadvantages and exploiting the advantages of publishing in this evolving field.

### INTRODUCTION

Several papers in this conference deal with the nature of the dilemma facing the evolving field of MIS. No where is this dilemma more critical than in the area of publishing academic manuscripts and research results. The purpose of this paper is to identify the nature of the dilemma and some of its implications. The other papers in this session offer some suggestions or evidence that constitute guidance for academicians seeking to publish MIS work.

### ENVIRONMENTAL FORCES

There are a powerful set of environmental "driving forces" which set the stage for the problems faced by the MIS academicians. They include the following:

1. The information technology evolution is in full swing. The increasing power and decreasing cost of the technology is making the computer and related information technology one of the most pervasive forces in modern life. The need for increasing productivity and effectiveness of organizations in our society make them the most important context for the application of this information technology.
2. The technology alone is not sufficient. Advances and improvements in organizational structures and procedures, and management behavior are required to properly apply and exploit the information technology.
3. The result is a critical need for (a) research on the application of information technology in the organizational setting and (b)

education of people who can play a creative and active role in developing and using information systems in organizations (i.e., for a strong academic community in MIS).

4. A strong academic community will require academic respectability to exist within the infrastructure of the American higher education system. Respectability is defined in terms of scholarly output and performance as evidenced by tenure and promotion of its members through a peer review process in the broad academic community.
5. The information technology industry continues to produce technical advances much more rapidly than they can comfortably assimilate into the organizational structure. At the same time, the information technology industry has become a multibillion dollar business with strong market imperatives that generate a level of competition leading to continual shakeouts and instability.

### THE RESULTS

The interaction of these "driving forces" results in a situation that can be depicted by Figure 1 and summarized as follows.

1. MIS as an academic field must draw on several "source disciplines," coalescing and integrating them to form a synthesis which, in the true sense of the word "system," is more powerful and just the sum of their individual contributions. Until it is finally established as viable academic discipline, MIS must seek academic respectability from these source disciplines.

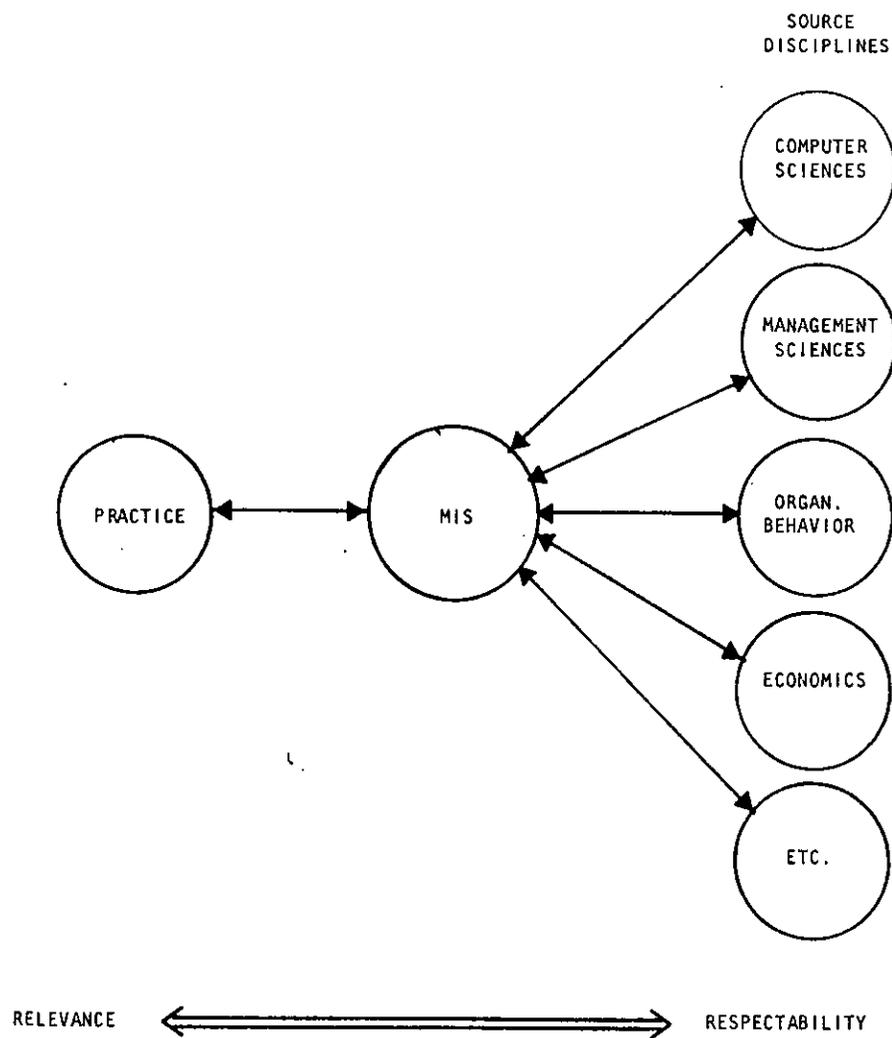


FIGURE 1

2. As an applied field, MIS must simultaneously maintain "relevance" to the ongoing practice of MIS in organizations which provide the test bed for research and the market for the universities' students. The "tug-of-war" between academic respectability and practical relevance is one of the most pervasive aspects of the MIS dilemma.
3. The literature base in MIS is very dispersed. In terms of the diagram, there is both vertical dispersion across the wide range of source disciplines and horizontal dispersion across the continuum from pragmatic to theoretical.
4. The diversity of the literature alone is not necessarily bad because it provides a wealth of opportunities and options for publishing outlets, but several other complicating factors arise.
  - a) There has been no one journal that can "bridge the gap" to reach practitioners and maintain academic respectability at the same time, although the results of the Hamilton and Ives study suggest that the MIS Quarterly may be in a position to assume that role. As a result, there has been no forum in which to develop the orthodoxy so critical to the evolution of a discipline.
  - b) Publishing in the source disciplines usually requires that the author maintain a cutting edge in that field, continuing to develop new knowledge. Mere "application" of the discipline, which is the way MIS is usually viewed, is often considered second class work.
5. The entire situation depicted above is severely complicated by the rapid rate of change in information technology. Many of us feel that we "re-earn" our doctorate degree every three or four years just keeping pace with the rapid developments. This rate of change is particularly troublesome in the face of typically long referee and publishing lead times.

#### CONCLUSIONS

With apologies, this paper does not contain many answers. It is meant to identify the nature of the situation faced by the MIS academician who must publish. The other papers in this session suggest some guidance in dealing with this situation. Nunamaker suggests the value of a citation index for evaluating the importance of journals and their contributions to the MIS literature. Davis provides a type of self evaluation form for gathering input from the promotion and tenure decision makers in measuring progress toward those goals. The Hamilton and Ives survey provides a wealth of data on how some journals are viewed by MIS practitioners and academicians, and suggest a promising trend toward bridging the gap between relevance and respectability.

In closing, it is important to remember that the situation has a bright side. Many of us have chosen this field specifically because it is dynamic, relevant, fast-moving, and exciting. Fortunately, the mechanisms and opportunities for minimizing the disadvantages and exploiting the advantages are evolving as indicated by the following papers.

**A SYSTEMATIC EVALUATION OF PUBLICATIONS  
FOR PROMOTION OF MIS ACADEMICS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the role of publications as evidence for university promotion and postulates reasons why the academic "publish or perish" rule applies. A systematic approach to evaluation of an academic's publication portfolio is described. The approach uses a four-step process for evaluating each publication:

1. Ranking of journal where article appeared or classification of book
2. Ranking of quality/impact
3. Evaluating effect of coauthors
4. Evaluating effect of multiple publication of same basic material

Following the individual item evaluation, there is an overall evaluation of the publication portfolio for mix of articles and for rate of output. A method is suggested for applying this procedure in evaluating one's own portfolio and developing a personal publication strategy for promotion.

**INTRODUCTION**

Senior professors in MIS typically receive several requests each year from other universities to evaluate the publication record of MIS academics who are being considered for promotion. Although I have done this many times, I am not comfortable with the task, not only because I do not like to make judgments affecting the future of my colleagues, but also because the objectives and criteria for the evaluation are not clear. In this paper I describe the results of some thinking to clarify objectives and to formulate a more systematic approach to evaluating publication records for promotion purposes. A systematic method with clear criteria may not produce better results than a fuzzy one, but it is easier to explain why the evaluation turned out the way it did. Also, the trend to legal challenges of promotion processes may make it necessary to have a well-defined process. The evaluation method is general and can be applied outside of the MIS area; the emphasis in this paper is on its application to MIS academics.

**WHY THE "PUBLISH OR PERISH" RULE APPLIES**

The underlying criterion for promotion is whether or not (based on evidence to date) the person is expected to be productive in those activities that help to achieve the goals and objectives of the university department making the promotion decision.

The evidence for promotion is often stated as a performance in the three activities of teaching, service, and research. In practice, the publication record of the individual is often used as the only real measure of performance. Very few academics are promoted for outstanding classroom teaching, excellent service, or research activities (not resulting in publications) and only a few are not promoted or terminated for poor teaching, poor service record, or absence of research activity.

Publications are sometimes equated with research, but, in fact, publications can be related to teaching or service as well as research. The relationship of publications to the three areas of activity are: