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Editor's Comments

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to this issue of MISQ Executive! In it you will find three types of articles that are new to MISQE. While all of these are together in this issue for the first time, they represent different features that, in the future, will be interspersed through different issues. The first of these new article types is an interview with a well-recognized IT academic discussing a timely issue. The second is a survey of SIM members on the issues that they feel to be most important today. Thirdly, in this issue we introduce for the first time a "Research Digest" article. These are papers previously published in the academic literature (and written in academic style), but rewritten for an MISQE audience in the belief that they offer much to practitioners in the field. One of our Senior Editors, Allen Lee, has been working hard to bring Research Digest articles to fruition and his efforts are now paying off. You will see more articles in this vein in the future.

Speaking of articles, it is a pleasure to note that submissions to MISQE continue to grow in both number and quality. We expect, for the first time, to publish four issues this year–thus making us truly "quarterly."

CO-SOURCING

Our one "traditional" article in this issue is about co-sourcing in a major US insurance company. While the papers today are full of articles on outsourcing, with particular emphasis on overseas efforts, another sourcing option is gaining importance in some major companies. While outsourcing turns work over to a different company, co-sourcing is the process of bringing in an outsourcer to work together with the existing IT people in close collaboration. As Kaiser and Hawk note in their paper, the objectives of doing this include bringing expertise into the client firm, educating the client workforce, and joint management of projects where this is most appropriate. At the same time, the outsourcer can learn much more about the client firm and its industry and thus be more effective. The drawbacks and difficulties of co-sourcing at this firm are also well described. While the paper presents cooperation with an Indian firm, it should be noted that IBM and other domestic suppliers are also providing this capability in the marketplace.

A WARREN MCFARLAN INTERVIEW

In an attempt to provide more insights into the future of information technology, we have instituted a series of interviews with senior IT academics who are involved in leading-edge issues. One of these issues is the future of IT in China. Perhaps no one in academia can better describe the current situation and the trend in the use of IT from an American perspective than Warren McFarlan. He has long had responsibility for Harvard Business School's teaching and research in China. He sits on the Board of Directors of a major Chinese trading company. And he is known for telling things as he sees them.

McFarlan sees, to put it mildly, China as a growing power in the IT area. Its education system, powered by leaders in the government, is turning out systems engineers and computer scientists by the thousands. The push toward English as the second language could make China challenge India for supremacy in outsourcing in coming years. E-commerce entrepreneurship is thriving. And large private companies in Hong Kong and mainland China are making exceptional use of IT. In this area, as in all others, China's public sector companies are still far behind, however.

SIM SURVEY

The Society for Information Management has commissioned six formal surveys of its members on key issues facing IT executives. Luftman and McLean report in this article on the results of the 2003 survey and compare these results with those of the prior surveys that took place from 1980 to 1994. Not surprisingly, "IT and business alignment" and "IT strategic planning" were the two top issues in the most recent survey. While the latter has been almost a perennial top-three issue, alignment has surged to the fore only in the most recent survey. Expecting that this would be the case, the authors for the first time included questions on the "enablers" and "inhibitors" of alignment between IT and the business. The recent survey data on alignment is also compared with previous data provided by 500 firms that attended classes at IBM from 1993-1997. Interestingly, the "enablers" of alignment vary little from the earlier study.

All in all, it is clear that many of the managerial challenges facing IT executives have remained relatively unchanged throughout the years. It is perhaps not too far a reach to suggest that those scoring "IT strategic planning" as key in previous surveys had the issue of "business alignment" clearly in mind. The naming and description of this issue by Luftman, Henderson and others in the last several years has enabled IT executives to more precisely home in on a critical issue underlying effective strategic planning.

RESEARCH DIGEST

When we founded MISQE three years ago, we had a strong belief that much information of practical use was hidden away in articles in academic journals, written in academic style and, in Peter Keen's words, read only by seven people – including the author's mother! Each of the Senior Editors and I knew of some articles that almost begged to be translated into information accessible by people who might put it to use. Allen Lee has undertaken to persuade authors to rewrite their articles for us. It has taken a while, but the first article is in this issue and others will be forthcoming.

The Smith article that you will find here is an excellent one. However, it is far from a "digest." For readers deeply interested in ethics, it lays out the subject completely. For those less involved, but still interested, one can skim briefly to the case, read it as it provides pragmatic insights, and then read the author's conclusions.

My best to you all,

Jack