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Editor's Comments

Jeanne W. Ross
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, jross@mit.edu

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CASE STUDIES AS A TOOL FOR RESEARCH AND LEARNING

This issue of *MISQE* contains three papers based on case studies of individual firms. Two of these papers describe IT innovation efforts; the third reports on an implementation of e-procurement. An in-depth look at a specific IT-based initiative provides a useful research opportunity because it allows the researcher to identify multiple, often interacting, factors influencing a business outcome. Researchers generally agree that a case study is an appropriate research approach when the scope of investigation involves a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context.[1] Certainly, organizational efforts to adopt and benefit from information technology remain contemporary challenges. And with IT innovation increasing in importance, we can learn a great deal from cases of companies that have tried to innovate and learned something of general interest from their efforts.

The test we apply in deciding whether to accept a case study for publication in *MISQE* is twofold. First, the evidence must be compelling. The thoughtful reader willingly accepts the cause-effect relationship proposed by the researchers. Case writers can support their arguments with references to established theories, descriptive evidence refuting alternative explanations, or powerful testimonials from participants in the management effort. The second test might be called the "ah-ha" test. Published case studies should provide new insights. As a rule, researchers submit cases that offer examples of best practice—or at least very good practice. Identifying best practice in a specific company can provide useful insights—in fact, the evidence provided by best practice is far more compelling than evidence provided by failures. Typically, failures involve so many missteps that it's difficult to determine which factors mattered most. But success does not necessarily provide new insights— the formula for successful ERP implementations, for example, has largely been established. A paper that merely demonstrates that conventional wisdom about how to get an ERP in actually works would not be

appropriate for *MISQE*. (On the other hand, a paper offering new insights into how to drive value from an ERP would be quite appropriate.) It is our intent to publish papers that provide new insights. The cases in this issue offer different kinds of insights.

Rajiv Kohli's article, "Innovating to Create New IT-Based Business Opportunities at United Parcel Service," provides insight into how a company known for using IT to build business success manages to consistently raise the bar for IT in an industry that regularly competes based on the strategic use of IT. The "ah-ha" in this case is the process by which UPS builds IT infrastructure capabilities and then develops IT competencies to reuse those capabilities. In some cases, UPS managers could not predict how IT capabilities might be reused, but the case makes clear that consistent innovation involves far more than good luck. Complementary assets play a role in enabling new applications of existing capabilities and ingrained processes seek out ideas for new business processes.

It was simply good luck that Teo, Ranganathan, Srivastava, and Loo provided a partner to the UPS case. Their paper, "Fostering IT-Enabled Business Innovation at YCH Group," examines the culture for innovation in a much smaller logistics company based in Singapore. YCH does not have UPS' resources, but it has nonetheless worked toward consistent implementation of IT capabilities for competitive advantage. The "ah-ha" in this case is the YCH approach to creating a culture that encourages risk-taking and works with partners to find the resources for innovation.

The final case mostly reinforces conventional wisdom on how to succeed with e-procurement. The case passes the "ah-ha" test, however, by showing what best practice looks like in a unique context. "E-procurement: Reaching out to Small and Medium Businesses," by Shakir, Smith and Gulec describes the e-procurement efforts of a large company reaching out to small and medium sized partners. The lessons are not new, but the case offers a look at how Petroleum Development Oman adapted to the unique situation of operating in a sparsely populated Middle Eastern state with underdeveloped infrastructure and a unique government requirement to channel all purchasing activities through local businesses. The case offers

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[1] Yin offers a detailed discussion of the sources of evidence applicable to case study research. See Yin, R.K. Case Study Research: Design and Methods, (2nd ed.) Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994.

lessons on how IT can lead the way as companies attempt to adapt to local requirements in global business environments.

We are grateful to the companies featured in this issue of *MISQE* for taking the time to share their stories. They have provided valuable research settings. They have also provided learning opportunities for *MISQE's* readers, as well as themselves—as they view their journey through the eyes of an objective third party.

Editorial Staff Changes

As we enter our seventh year, we have a number of staff changes to report. First, Ritu Agarwal has agreed to join us as a senior editor. Ritu has been one of our most active editorial board members, and every senior editor has benefited from her insights on submissions. She has also coauthored three *MISQE* articles. Her work on both outsourcing and IT personnel issues has advanced research and practice. She is a welcome addition to the senior editor staff. Ritu's initial assignment is as editor of the *MISQE* special issue on IT alignment, which will be published in December 2008. She is joined in this effort by V. Sambamurthy, who is somehow finding a way to guide this special issue, even as he serves as editor in chief of *Information Systems Research* and heads up the Center for the Leadership of the Digital Enterprise at Michigan State University.

We also welcome five new members to our Editorial Board:

- Guy Fitzgerald, Brunel University
- James McKeen, Queens University
- Jo Ellen Moore, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville
- Heather Smith, Queens University
- Donna Stoddard, Babson College

Editorial board members do most of the reviewing of *MISQE* articles. We look forward to discussing future manuscripts with our new editorial board members.

In addition, ten members of the Editorial Board have agreed to another three-year term: Chuck Gibson, Janis Gogan, Dorothy Leidner, Lynne Markus, Warren McFarlan, Keri Pearlson, V. Sambamurthy, Judy Scott, Maung Sein, and Christina Soh. We thank them for their past efforts and for their willingness to continue on the Board. The authors and readers of *MISQE* benefit greatly from the Board members' dedication and efforts. I would also like to thank Jiro Kokuryo, Donald Marchand, and Brad Wheeler, who are retiring from the Board after many years of service.

Upcoming Events

Author workshops. The editorial staff of MISQE is interested in working with researchers who would like to publish their work in MISQE. We have scheduled workshops at ECIS and AMCIS and we may conduct a workshop at PACIS. For more information, please contact Cynthia Beath (Cynthia.Beath@mccombs.utexas.edu).

SIM Paper Awards. Jerry Luftman is managing SIM's annual paper awards, which recognize outstanding IT-related initiatives. The competition invites case studies, coauthored by a researcher and a practitioner, describing a specific initiative in one of the authors' organizations. Abstracts are due March 28, 2008. For more information, please contact Jerry (jluftman@stevens.edu).

Special Issue of *MISQE* on IT-Business Alignment. As noted above, Ritu Agarwal and V. Sambamurthy are editors of the December 2008 issue on IT-business alignment. The deadline for submissions is March 14, 2008. For more information, contact the editors:

Ritu Agarwal (ragarwal@rhsmith.umd.edu) or
V. Sambamurthy (smurthy@msu.edu).

SIM Academic Workshop. It's not too early to plan for the SIM Academic Workshop at ICIS. The workshop is a full-day event on Saturday, December 13, at the ICIS venue. It's a great opportunity to learn about current research targeting management practice. A call for papers will be distributed in late Spring. For more information contact Jeanne Ross (jross@mit.edu).

Thank you for your continued support of *MISQE*.

Jeanne W. Ross
Editor in Chief