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A Debate on the Blindness of IS Journal Reviews

DEBATE

A DEBATE ON THE BLINDNESS OF IS JOURNAL REVIEWS

Moderator: **Detmar W. Straub**, Georgia State University, U.S.A.

Debaters: **Daniel Robey**, Georgia State University, U.S.A.
Robert Zmud, University of Oklahoma, U.S.A.

The IS journal reviewing process, as with most scholarly journals, is most often practiced as a double-blind process. In double-blind reviews, the journal's editor-in-chief (EIC) and associate editor (AE) handling the manuscript are aware of the identities of authors, but the reviewers are not. The manuscript's authors are unaware of both the identities of the AE and the reviewers but are, of course, aware of the name of the EIC. Some variation in this practice occurs across journals. For example, *Management Science* uses a single-blind process wherein both the AE and reviewers know the identities of authors but not vice-versa. However, most IS journals hold to a double-blind process.

The double-blind reviewing process has become institutionalized for a number of reasons, the most salient of these being to maintain objectivity of the review process. In evaluating manuscripts with no indication of author identity, reviewers presumably offer more objective evaluations of the work, independent of the evaluations of the authors. Likewise, reviewers are likely to be more candid when rendering evaluations if they know that their own identities will be concealed from the authors. Blind reviewing mitigates suspicions of unfair practices and offers scholars without reputations the advantage of a level playing field in which their ideas compete equally for journal space with more well-known authors.

Despite these presumed advantages of blind reviewing, the desirability of the status quo described above is being challenged by some of the individuals involved with journal editorial processes. For example, some advocates of electronic journals/letters have argued that the collaborative nature of new technology enables a more "open" and egalitarian reviewing process. Moreover, some traditional "paper" journals have also recently questioned the merits of a more open review process. In particular, senior editors at *MIS Quarterly* are currently running an "experiment," utilizing a completely open reviewing process on a paper submitted to the journal (with, of course, agreement by all the parties involved).

There are interesting theoretical arguments that would suggest either the continuance of blind reviewing or its abandonment. Information asymmetry theory suggests that there are power differentials created when one group possesses information that other groups do not have. These may be viewed positively or negatively. Information asymmetries also can lead to adverse selection, role conflicts, and other effects. The debaters may or may not choose to investigate such theoretical impacts, but the debatable topic has many dimensions of interest to the IS field, including ethical dimensions.

Should the reviewing process for IS journals be blind or non-blind? Is the double-blind process an idea that has stood the test of time or an idea that has lasted beyond its time? Would a completely open review process produce more biased or less biased outcomes? Would a completely open review process add more or less value within the review process? Would a completely open review process have a positive or negative impact on IS scholarship as published in the field's top journals?

The debaters taking opposite sides on this issue are Bob Zmud at the University of Oklahoma and Dan Robey at Georgia State University. Detmar Straub from Georgia State University will moderate the debate.

The debatable proposition is: *Blindness should be removed completely from the IS journal review process.*

The format for the debate will be as follows:

Opening statement	Affirmative (Bob Zmud)	Negative (Dan Robey)
	10 minutes	10 minutes

Cross-questioning	Bob of Dan	Dan of Bob
	10 minutes	10 minutes

Audience questioning	Of Dan	Of Bob
	10 minutes	10 minutes

Closing arguments	Negative (Dan Robey)	Affirmative (Bob Zmud)
	10 minutes	10 minutes

The moderator and debaters have been editors and associate editors for numerous journals. Bob Zmud is the former Editor-in-Chief of the *MIS Quarterly*. Dan Robey is a current Senior Editor for the *MIS Quarterly* and the incoming Editor-in-Chief for *Accounting, Management, and Information Technologies*. Both have held many associate editorships with major IS and non-IS journals. Detmar Straub is former co-Editor-in-Chief of DATA BASE *for Advances in Information Systems* and a current Associate Editor for *Management Science* and *Information Systems Research.*