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Editors' Comments

Gabriele Piccoli

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From the Editor-in-Chief:

Dear Readers,

I am happy to start this editorial by congratulating Mary Lacity. Her paper, titled "Addressing Key Challenges to Making Enterprise Blockchain Applications a Reality," was selected by our Senior Editors to represent the *MIS Quarterly Executive* at the Association for Information Systems College of Senior Scholars Best Papers Awards. Nominations are forwarded by the Editors-in-Chief of Information Systems academic journals; the AIS College of Senior Scholars then selects up to five winners to be presented with the "Best IS Publications of the Year Awards" at a ceremony held during the *Fortieth International Conference on Information Systems* in Munich, Germany in December 2019. Since the award's inception in 2006, the *MIS Quarterly Executive* has won three times - most recently in 2015 and 2017.

In December in Munich we will also host the *SIM/MISQE* pre-ICIS workshop. Running the workshop will be the guest editors for the special issue themed: "Artificial Intelligence in Organizations: Opportunities for Management and Implications for IS Research." This year's special issue is a joint effort between the *MIS Quarterly Executive* and the *Journal of AIS*. The workshop presents a great opportunity to get early feedback from the special issue editors and the participating senior editors of both journals. The call for abstracts for the workshop as well as the call for papers for the joint special issue is available on the *MISQE* website. We are most appreciative of the efforts of the special issue and workshop editors: Hind Benbya (Montpellier Business School), Sirkka Jarvenpaa (University of Texas), Stella Pachidi (Cambridge University), and Tom Davenport (Babson College).

Some Reflections from the Editor-in-Chief

In my last two editorials I offered some reflections on what makes a great *MIS Quarterly Executive* article. My thesis is that a practice-oriented journal like *MISQE* serves the needs of busy executives and future executives (i.e., students) who have to weigh the expected value they will get from your paper, against the cost of reading it – in terms of time and cognitive effort. I suggested that those of us who try to perform rigorous research *while striving* to be relevant, should focus on the three dimensions of timeliness, actionability and clarity in crafting *MISQ Executive* manuscripts. Timeliness is about identifying problems or opportunities that executives are currently struggling with (or will soon struggle with). Actionability is about doing research that produces tangible practical recommendations that the reader can readily implement to solve the problem, envision a solution, or move their thinking forward. Clarity is about delivering the timely actionable content (the value) in a way that minimizes costs, be those expressed in reading difficulty, length or accessibility of the material.

In the last editorial I offered further thoughts on timeliness and how to be timely with your *MISQE* contributions. In this one, I turn my attention to actionability. Actionability is the "quality or state of being actionable." Something is actionable when it affords ground for accomplishing a goal, or it is capable of being acted upon.[1] For *MISQE* authors, this means arming IS practitioners with insights that enables them to take (timely) action and to improve their chances of accomplishing their managerial goals. Take for example the paper we just nominated for the AIS College of Senior Scholars Best Papers Awards. Lacity writes in the abstract: "Many enterprises have not progressed their blockchain solutions beyond proofs-of concept. [...] We describe the strategies that [three different organizations] are pursuing to address these challenges." She then uses a multi-year research project to show how these enterprises are building blockchain-based business applications and overcoming the challenges they encounter in their journey to contribute business value. The analysis of the cases yields a set of actionable

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1   The Cambridge Dictionary (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/timeliness).

recommendations, which are presented as five questions that managers should ask to decide if and how to implement blockchain solutions in their organizations. For each of the questions, Lacity provides a set of possible answer and discusses them within the context of her in-depth case studies.

The above is only one of many approaches to actionability of an *MISQE* article. However, it highlights the defining characteristics of an actionable contribution.

Authentic data. Anyone who has experience in executive seminars and executive education knows that practitioners seek trustworthy and factually rich stories of organizations facing similar dilemmas or opportunities to the ones they are grappling with. The best executive program educators recognize that attendees get as much value from interactions with each other as they do from the professor at the front of the room. Thus, they make themselves the conduit and orchestrator of highly interactive sessions aimed at drawing deep insight out of the experience of the participants. SIM-APC meetings for example, allocate specific times to these activities under the guise of "members sharing and discussion" session as well as a thirty-minute member only discussion after each presentation. Replicating such "sharing" in a journal article requires the ability to abstract general recommendations from relevant organizational experiences. While not the only possible approach, this sharing is most easily achieved when leveraging rich longitudinal cases with data from interviews as well as company documents.

Insightful analysis. An actionable contribution differs from a descriptive one in the depth and novelty of the insight that it is able to extract from the data. In my capacity as the Editor-in-Chief at *MISQE*, I screen all submissions. I am struck by how often authors, despite access to very rich data, simply describe their case. While description of the case data is necessary for the reader to understand the work, the true contribution of the authors is in the rigorous analysis of the case data and the identification of insights that can change practice. Rigor here does not imply "methodological rigor," the kind of rigor typically required by academic journals. It rather means intellectual rigor, as in clarity of thinking, depth of analysis and the effort

to go beyond surface explanations of the case data. In short, the intellectual rigor you apply to a practice-oriented paper sent to *MISQE* should be on par with that of the best academic publications. What is drastically different is the way your work is presented (more on writing and style in my next editorial).

Generalizable findings. An actionable contribution is one that is able to inform multiple managers grappling with the phenomenon, beyond those in the specific industry or context of the research. Thus, you should explore the implications of your findings and push beyond mere descriptions of the lessons learned in the case. As academics we are trained to be very conservative in drawing conclusions from our research. However, when writing for a practicing audience, you should trust your judgment and that of your readers. If you have established your credibility our readers will be willing to listen to you. This is another place where a practice-oriented research paper differs from standard academic work. Our readers look to you as an expert, they want your informed opinions and access to your knowledge – you don't need a citation for every statement or a p-value for every recommendation you make. You can think of this generalization effort as advice you might offer in an executive education program or a consulting engagement. Our readers (and reviewers) are discerning—they can and will decide the applicability of your findings to their organizational contexts.

Novel recommendations. Executives read *MISQE* to identify interventions that will benefit their organization.[2] They seek actionable guidelines that they can implement in their jobs. Thus, the depth of the analysis and the ability to generalize the findings I discussed above are not an end in and of themselves. Rather, they are instrumental to the crafting of specific and novel recommendations. Thus, this section should be incisive and specific. To test for specificity, substitute the technological domain of your paper (e.g., blockchain) with any other relevant to information systems managers (e.g., machine learning). Do your guidelines apply indistinctly

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2   Watson, R. and Seidel, S., (2018). Three Strategies for Information Systems Research in the Presence of an Efficient Knowledge Market. *In Proceeding of Thirty-Ninth International Conference on Information Systems. In Proceeding of Thirty-Ninth International Conference on Information Systems,* San Francisco, CA.

across the board? If so, your recommendation is most likely neither specific nor novel. For example, any major implementation requires "the right talent" and "executive sponsorship." *MISQE* readers know full well that these are important drivers of project success. If they are different in your context then focus on those differences; if not, use the space to focus instead on those recommendations that are unique to the domain of your research. This is richly illustrated in Lacity's paper; her five questions are specific to blockchain projects, and the possible answers she proposes (the recommendations) stem directly from her analysis of the case data.

In this Issue

The current issue has four contributions, three research articles and one SIM-APC report. The first article is titled "How a Low-Margin Business Cocreated Analytics Value through an Innovation Partnership." The authors, Hope Koch, Uchenna Peters, Eric Villafranca and Kevin Koch, describe the intriguing case of a grocery distribution company seeking to create an alternative revenue stream by leveraging analytics. The article provides valuable insight and recommendations for business unit and IT executives seeking to collaborate to manage the growing phenomenon of shadow IT projects.

The second article, "Applying Modular Design in Architecting Interorganizational Information Systems" was contributed by Kui Du, Guangjun Yu, Guangya Li and Wei Zhang. It leverages insight from a case study of the massive Shanghai Health Information Exchange – connecting 156 health IT systems across 69 hospitals. Extrapolating from their case analysis the authors draw five recommendations for executives engaged in the implementation of large scale interorganizational information systems.

The third article is titled "Driving Process Innovation with IoT Field Data." The authors, Dominik Bilgeri, Heiko Gebauer, Elgar Fleisch and Felix Wortmann, provide recommendations to organizations engaging in process innovations by leveraging the digital data streams produced by increasingly common IoT devices. Using the development stages of the product lifecycle as the organizing framework, the paper identifies eight innovation areas and discuss evolutionary paths for exploiting digital data streams at each stage of the lifecycle. The authors then advance four specific recommendations for leveraging IoT field data for process innovation.

Rounding out the issue is the SIM APC report titled "Gearing Up for Successful Digital Transformation" authored by Vijay Gurbaxani and Debora Dunkle of the University of California at Irvine. The contribution advances six enterprise-level dimensions of digital transformation that constitute a validated framework that executives can use to benchmark their own company's journey.

Read on!

Gabriele Piccoli
Editor-in-Chief