Editors' Comments

From the Editor-in-Chief:

Dear Readers,

I am delighted to start this editorial by congratulating Mary Lacity again. As you may recall, *MIS Quarterly Executive's* Senior Editors nominated her paper "Addressing Key Challenges to Making Enterprise Blockchain Applications a Reality" to represent the journal at the 2019 Association for Information Systems (AIS) College of Senior Scholars Best Papers Awards. The award is competitive because any journal publishing information systems research can nominate one paper, but the AIS College of Senior Scholars can select only up to five winners from each year's submission pool. I am delighted to report that Mary's paper was one of the five recipients of the award – an award that *MIS Quarterly Executive* has won in three of the last five years. Since we seem to garner the recognition in odd years – 2015, 2017, 2019 – our challenge will be to win again in 2020 and start a new tradition of winning in even-numbered years.

I am also happy to report that the SIM/*MISQE* pre-*ICIS* workshop held last December in Munich was the most successful ever in terms of number of submissions. Hind Benbya, Stella Pachidi and Sirkka Jarvenpaa organized and managed the workshop. My heartfelt thanks go to each of them. Along with Tom Davenport, who could not be in Munich, Hind, Stella and Sirkka are the guest editors for the innovative special issue themed: "Artificial Intelligence in Organizations: Opportunities for Management and Implications for IS Research." This special issue is a joint effort between *MIS Quarterly Executive* and the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, and I have no doubt that it will be a great issue.

The recent success of *MIS Quarterly Executive* at the AIS College of Senior Scholars Best Papers Awards and the attendance at the SIM/*MISQE* pre-*ICIS* workshop demonstrate the increasing value our community places on practice-oriented research. In the spirit of continuing to spur submissions that will improve the value of the journal to our community, I set out below the final installment of my ideas on what makes a great *MIS Quarterly Executive* article.

Some Reflections from the Editor-in-Chief

If you had a chance to read my reflections on timeliness (2019, Issue 2) and actionability (2019, Issue 3), you know my thesis: A practice-oriented journal like *MIS Quarterly Executive* serves the needs of busy executives and future executives (i.e., students) who have to weigh the expected value they will get from a published article against the time and cognitive cost of reading it. I suggested that those who try to perform rigorous research *while striving to be* relevant, should write their articles with the aim of offering timely, actionable and clear recommendations for current and future executives. Every element of an article, from the introduction, to the data and analysis of the data, to the discussion of insights from the research effort, should lead to recommendations and knowledge that practicing managers can apply to the problems and opportunities they tackle in their own work.

Clarity means delivering the timely actionable content (the value) in a way that minimizes the reader's time and effort. Clarity is of prime importance: It does not matter how timely and actionable your recommendations are if readers quickly abandon your article because they find it cryptic, confusing, boring or divorced from their reality. While each *MIS Quarterly Executive* article is reviewed and masterfully revised by David Seabrook, our professional production editor, it is the authors' responsibility to ensure that their insights come through crisply in their writing.

The following are suggestions based on my own experience:

- Be precise: There is nothing more confusing than imprecise writing. Don't bog down your writing with lengthy definitions or citations to prior uses of terms and constructs. But don't compromise in establishing the

cornerstone elements of your thesis. Use clear terminology in a consistent manner.

- Use examples: The practice-oriented research published in *MIS Quarterly Executive* is intended and designed to get the widest possible distribution amongst current professionals and future leaders. When introducing concepts or discussing relationships amongst them, use short, crisp and precise examples that make the ideas real in your readers' minds. Practicing managers use examples and anecdotes as reality and credibility checks.

- Be straightforward: When writing for the *MIS Quarterly Executive* audience, identify the problem or opportunity immediately, ideally in the opening paragraph, and clearly link it to your work, asserting how you will contribute to the solution. Link your data, your analysis and your recommendations to the problem and your proposed solution.

- Take responsibility: If you have done the work and you are convinced of your results, you should stand by your recommendations. This should come through in your writing. The academic review process has trained us to be very careful in drawing conclusions from our research. This is a good thing, but it can also get in the way of good writing. Practicing managers are reading your work to access your guidance. You studied the topic and analyzed the available data; now provide your recommendations and stand by them.

- Use theory and methods appropriately: Theory and methodology are extremely important in *MIS Quarterly Executive* articles; they are the hidden pillars that ensure your work is intellectually rigorous, going far beyond surface explanations of the data you have gathered. But theory and methodology should not predominate in a practice-oriented article, the way they do in a traditional academic journal publication. More often than not, methodology can

be clearly and transparently discussed in an appendix. Theory is imbued in your writing; it silently underpins the logical links in your argument in a way that ensures that your readers (especially our reviewers) find you credible and knowledgeable. Theory can be more conspicuous, typically in the form of a framework to guide the structure of your article and the readers' thinking.

- Make it interesting: Cynics will quickly point out that writing for a scholarly journal is not about being entertaining. I agree. If you find yourself sacrificing depth of insight or precision for the sake entertainment, you are off course. However, rigor does not imply boring, innovative does not imply confusing, profound does not imply convoluted. The best exemplars of the "rigorous while relevant movement" are those authors who can provide insights that make you stop and think, and do so with style.

I have always believed that academics are best positioned to inform practice. We have the luxury of picking interesting projects and devoting considerable time to researching them. We also have the ability to draw on years of studying and depth of understanding. Translating the results into timely, actionable and clear guidelines for practicing managers and future leaders is the mission of the *MIS Quarterly Executive*. I hope you will join us by sending your best work to the journal.

In this Issue

The current issue has five contributions: four research articles and the annual report of the findings of the Society for Information Management's IT trends survey. The first two articles complete our special issue on "Delivering Business Value through Enterprise Blockchain Applications" edited by Mary Lacity, Rajiv Sabherwal, and Carsten Sørensen as the guest editors.

The first paper, titled "Management, Governance, and Value "Creation in a Blockchain Consortium" is authored by Liudmila Zavolokina, Ingrid Bauer, Rafael Ziolkowski and Gerhard Schwabe. As indicated by the special issue

editors in their December 2019 editorial, the article "reports from a university-industry collaboration for the second-hand car industry. [...] The paper focuses on one of the key challenges for private permissioned blockchains — establishing a viable consortium of partners. In this case, the consortium represents an industry vertical with a representative from each element in the value-chain, rather than a consortium of similar companies seeking pre-competitive standardization."

The second article, titled "A Case Study of Using Blockchain Technology in Regulatory Technology" is contributed by Daniel Gozman, Jonathan Liebenau, and Tomaso Aste. Again, from the guest editor's report: "This paper focuses on the use of blockchain technology for regulatory compliance. It draws upon Project Maison, a prototype blockchain developed in conjunction with two banks and the UK regulator, to discuss the benefits, risks, use cases, and governance challenges, and offer five mitigation principles for realizing the benefits."

The third contribution, submitted by Yolande Chan, Rashmi Krishnamurthy and Craig Desjardins, is titled: "Technology-Driven Innovation in Small Firms." The authors focus on Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), an important constituency of our research that we often neglect. Using two case studies of Canadian SME, they show how these organizations can take advantage of widespread, and often freely available, digital technologies and services. The findings are targeted to small firm owners and managers seeking to leverage commonly available, inexpensive digital technologies. But they may also spur novel thinking for managers in larger organization who have access to the same technologies.

The fourth paper, "How to Avoid Enterprise Systems Landscape Complexity," is authored by Martin Mocker and John Boochever. They focus on large firms, at the opposite end of the size spectrum from the preceding article. The article describes three gaps that generate complexity which ultimately reflects into enterprise systems and hampers agile business operations. The authors advance three recommendations for not only reducing complexity that has already built up, but also to proactively recognize its occurrence and curb it before it calcifies into enterprise systems complexity.

Rounding out the issue is the report of the 39th Society for Information Management's IT trends survey. The authors are Leon Kappelman, Ephraim McLean, Vess Johnson, Chris Mauer, Katia Guerra, Kevin Kim, Russell Torres, and Mark Snyder. The findings, surely to be of interest to practicing manager and academics alike, are based on the authors' analysis of responses from 1,033 IT executives in 618 organizations.

Read on!

Gabriele Piccoli
Editor-in-Chief