



Interfaces

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://pubsonline.informs.org>

Book Reviews

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To cite this article:

Benjamin Lev, (1992) Book Reviews. Interfaces 22(5):85-89. <https://doi.org/10.1287/inte.22.5.85>

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Book Reviews

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The range of books reviewed is wide, covering theory and applications in operations research, statistics, econometrics, mathematics, computers, and information systems (no software is reviewed). In addition, we include books in other fields that emphasize technical applications. Publishers who wish to have their books and proceedings reviewed should send them to Professor Benjamin Lev, School of Management, The University of Michigan-Dearborn, 4901 Evergreen Road, Dearborn, Michigan 48128-1491. We list the books and proceedings received; not all books received can be reviewed because space and time are limited. Those who would like to review books are urged to send me their names, addresses, and specific areas of expertise. We commission all reviews and do not accept unsolicited book reviews. Readers are encouraged to suggest books that might be reviewed or to ask publishers to send me copies of such books.

The Process of Book Reviewing

Fred Murphy appointed me as a book review editor on July 1, 1988. I thought that after three and a half years in this capacity, it was time to report on my experience. Here are some statistics that I found very interesting. I will not try to explain them or to comment on them.

The data base that I am using is not an accurate one but it is the only one I have. I believe it is sufficient for this use; at the same time I do apologize for its inaccuracy

and errors.

In the period from September 1, 1988 through August 31, 1991, we sent out 218 books for review (an average of six books per month). Here is what happened to these 218 books:

- 23 books were returned to us,
- one book was lost in the mail, and
- one book was received, but the potential reviewer decided it was not worth reviewing.

Of the remaining $218 - 25 = 193$ books,

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nine were forwarded by the original potential reviewer to another potential reviewer.

In the cover letter to each reviewer, we request that the book review be completed within six weeks. If we do not hear from this person within 12 weeks, we used to send him or her a reminder letter. We sent 19 such reminder letters, the last one on February 28, 1989. We realized the ineffectiveness of such letters and decided to stop this practice.

Do you wonder what happened to those 193 books? I do too! Therefore, I spent time checking the data base, and now I am able to report the good news to you.

Months Needed for Review	Number of Books
1	11
2	50
3	28
4	9
5	5
6	4
7	3
8	3
9	2
10	0
11	1

Table 1: The distribution of the number of months needed for book reviews.

Eleven books were reviewed within one month, and another 50 books were reviewed within two months. Our cover letter requests reviewers to complete their reviews within six weeks. So if we allow a couple of weeks for delivery and consider three months a "reasonable" period, then a total of 89 books (or 76.7 percent) were reviewed within three months. The total number of books reviewed is 116 with an average of about three months per review. Only one reviewer took 11 months, and he

notified us that it would take that long. I think we should all be proud of the cooperation and collaboration that results in this quick process. The only disappointment is that $193 - 116 = 77$ books are still being reviewed. . . .

There are many reasons why book reviewers do not review the books sent to them. The main reason is that we send books to potential reviewers thinking that the topics they cover are within their main areas of interest, and often that is not the case. A second reason could be that when we describe the title and table of contents to the potential reviewer on the phone, it seems appropriate, but when he or she receives the book it looks totally different. A third reason is that for many potential reviewers the review is a low priority project, and if they don't do it immediately, it becomes a no priority project.

Over a similar period of time, January 1, 1989 through December 31, 1991, we have listed in *Interfaces* 495 books that were received for review and published 121 book reviews; that averages to about 27 books received for review per issue and seven book reviews per issue. The discrepancy between the 116 books reviewed and 121 book reviews published is due to the fact that the two figures do not pertain to the same period of time and that we have starting and ending inventories of book reviews.

An additional statistic that may be of interest is the age of the book at the time the review is published. (We assume that a book with a publication date of 1990 was published in July 1990—which may be optimistic). During 1989, the average age of the books reviewed was 24.7 months; dur-

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ing 1990, the average age of the books reviewed decreased to 23.1 months, and in 1990, the average age of the books reviewed decreased to 22.3 months. The reason for the delay is the time consumed by all the steps in the review process [Lev 1991]. Publishers often send out review copies after books have been on the market for some time. Identifying potential reviewers and reading and reviewing the books takes time; and finally, the publishing process takes time.

I eagerly await your comments and suggestions on how to improve the process. I have very few opportunities to thank our book reviewers—this is one of them. Thank you all for a job well done!

Reference

Lev, Ben 1991, "Interfaces' book review dilemma," *OR/MS Today*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (April), p. 57.

— Benjamin Lev

The Reviews

BOYNTON, ANDREW C. AND ZMUD, ROBERT W. 1990, *Management Information Systems: Readings and Cases, A Managerial Perspective*, Scott Foresman, Glenview, Illinois, 511 pp., \$16.00.

As I started this book, it was difficult to keep my reading down and work on other tasks. I postponed writing the review because I wanted to read the book thoroughly. But, it contains so many interesting and informative articles that it is impossible to read and internalize all the material. This book definitely belongs on the reference shelf of MIS academics. Practitioners also may find it of value.

The book's major value is in presenting an excellent collection of articles that deal with many important issues in the MIS area. It includes cases illustrating the use

of information systems in organizations and reprints many classic articles from a wide variety of sources. Boynton and Zmud have not restricted themselves to academic or practitioner journals in their search for articles. They have focused on management issues and omitted technical details. This is an excellent text for a master's or PhD level course covering the spectrum of MIS theory and applications. As the authors state, it "provides topical, informative, and interesting cases and readings."

One limitation is that the authors do not discuss their reasons for organizing the book in five parts:

- Waves of change,
- The bottom line: payoffs from information technology investments,
- Beating the high costs of building information systems,
- Managing waves of change, and
- Information technology management: in-depth studies.

Further, they do not make clear why they chose the articles in each section. For example, they do not illustrate how companies gain competitive advantage using such tools as computer integrated manufacturing, electronic mail, and international phone systems. An introductory chapter discussing the criteria used to select articles would have been helpful.

This book definitely has a place on the bookshelves of professors and PhD students of MIS. The authors encourage readers to refer additional cases or readings to them for a revised edition.

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