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Editorial Notes

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This is my first editorial statement since taking over the role of editor-in-chief from Izak Benbasat this year. Before I begin, I'd like to offer my thanks to Izak and his staff, particularly Ron Cenfetelli, for their help and support during the transition.

Academic journal publication has two roles (1) authenticating and disseminating research results and (2) providing key input into faculty evaluations. The latter role has stemmed from the first, with the notion being that because research productivity is a critical variable for faculty promotion and tenure, committees look at the number and quality of faculty research publications as a metric.

As far as the second role of academic publishing goes, *ISR* has done admirably. *ISR* is clearly an "A" rated journal, and was established as such by the careful work of my predecessors, Burt Swanson, John King, and Izak Benbasat. Any decisions about the journal will clearly be bounded to the goal of maintaining this position.

In terms of the first role, however, I think we can do much better. There is a real paradox in that although information technology is fundamental to the changes that are taking place in organizations throughout industry, government, and even homes, the journal articles that we write as academic specialists in IT are generally nowhere in evidence, even when you take into account some normal lags between forward-looking researchers and current problems and issues.

My idea of a stretch goal for our community is to be in a position like that of medicine: They have journals, e.g., *JAMA* (*Journal of the American Medical Association*), that publish the results of research studies and are generally targeted at other physicians. However, their most interesting results are often picked up and highlighted in the regular press, e.g., the *New York Times*

might summarize the result of a *JAMA* study about treatments for breast cancer.

ISR can aspire to fulfill the same role for IT. Clearly, there are differences. Healthcare is of some interest to everybody, and therefore merits a prominent position in the *New York Times*. However, there is no reason why our work should not be featured in publications where the results would be of interest, e.g., *Business Week* for the productivity effects of IT. (In fact, the *New York Times* might be appropriate for this also or perhaps for a longitudinal study on the social effects of telecommuting.) Clearly, the idea is not for the members of our research community to become journalists—We need to continue to do what we are trained to do, which is to execute and write research studies. However, we ought to be doing research studies that others, outside of our community, sometimes find of interest. And, in every issue of *ISR* there ought to be some article(s) of interest to every subscriber.

We have an established brand name for quality, which works in our favor to achieve this kind of goal. Working against us, however, are a number of factors, some of which can and need to be addressed.

One clear constraint is that we are a small community, and *ISR* is limited to four issues a year of about six articles each. I do not see this changing during my three-year tenure. Therefore, we only have about two dozen opportunities to take in any one year. I think we have to be extremely careful how we use these opportunities.

Another concern is that it currently takes too long to get submitted manuscripts published. Ideas that are fresh and/or cutting edge tend to get stale in the review and revision process. To give you an idea of the problem you should know that, consistent with past *ISR* "tradition," I have inherited all in-process manuscripts from the prior Editor-in-Chief, as he did from his

predecessor. One of the manuscripts that just crossed my desk was originally submitted in 1998 and is still undergoing revision! No matter how interesting this work was in 1998, if it does not get published until 2003, it would be hard to claim that nothing has been lost in the delay.

However, I think the biggest concern is one that was expressed by previous EIC Izak Benbasat in his last editorial where he wrote: "John [King] observed that when he took over as editor-in-chief in 1993 the main reason for rejecting manuscripts was poor use of 'methods'; in 1997 it became 'insufficient contributions.' I concur with his assessment." As a community we need to put more focus on our choice of problems and our efforts to explain our choice of problems to others in the broad community, not just to those in some familiar niche.

Quality reviewing is always a challenge because do-

ing good reviews takes time and hard work, and the rewards, other than the satisfaction of aiding the research community, are few. The reviewing system at *ISR* has too often suffered from benign neglect, with the expectation, usually (but not always) met, that the strong efforts of a few dedicated individuals will somehow continue to ensure a quality product. This needs to change, and I am going to be implementing a number of new policies (and enforcing some existing ones) with the goal being better quality reviewing.

The kinds of improvement I want to see in *ISR* will take a long time because some of them will need to start with the studies researchers are only now starting, hoping for publication in *ISR* in the future. However, with the help of the editorial and reviewing teams at *ISR*, and with the support of the community, by the end of my term in 2004, readers should benefit from a new and improved *ISR*.