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Senior Editor Perspectives

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Senior Editor Perspectives

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Introduction

As my term as a Senior Editor at *Information Systems Research (ISR)* comes to a close, I have begun to reflect more on the field, our journals, and our reviewing and publication process. I have two main takeaways from these reflections.

An IS Seat at the Industry Table

One of the most important recent trends from the perspective of IS researchers (and arguably all management/business researchers) is the industry's embrace of data science and analytics. Data scientists in the industry—whether at technology companies like Facebook, Google, and Uber or at energy and healthcare companies—are solving problems of significant interest to IS. These problems range from analytics and predictive modeling to issues of technology adoption and acceptance. This has led to a surge in student enrollment in IS courses and created demand for IS PhDs. However, despite these encouraging trends, our engagement with the industry community is rather limited. We rarely see submissions from data scientists in the industry at our conferences and journals. I have personally not seen any submissions from data scientists in the industry and neither have other SEs with whom I have discussed the matter. Even though the problems these companies are tackling are in the IS domain (or the OR/MS domain), our community's impact in these settings is low. Most of these companies hire PhDs from computer science and economics and sometimes even reinvent the wheel a bit. Therein lies a major problem. The IS community needs to have a seat at the table with the managers, data scientists, and policymakers in these industries. I'm going to argue that the problem has its roots in the fact that we don't place our PhDs in the industry in these roles. Our PhD programs are often judged based on academic placements. The emphasis on placement in research positions is good but the definition of research positions needs to be broadened to include placements at research divisions of tech companies like Google, Facebook, and Uber as well as companies in energy, healthcare, and other domains. Once our students are having an impact on the ground and setting agendas at these companies, our excitement about broader industry trends and our feelings about the timeliness and relevance of our research will be well justified.

Big Questions, Half Answers

My most important observation as an SE is that the review process mostly works. Let me place that statement in context. Oftentimes, I speak to colleagues and collaborators and hear their cynicism and skepticism about the review process and, in particular, the intentions and motivations of reviewers and AEs. But in all my experience as an SE, I have seen reviewers are usually objective and not guided by ulterior motives as authors sometimes believe. I am not suggesting there aren't false positives and false negatives (type I and type II errors) in the process. That is simply unavoidable. But, at the end of the day, I believe that the process mostly works.

That said, the only aspect of being an SE that has troubled me a bit is that our community often seems to prefer papers that ask very narrow questions but provide seemingly complete answers. In some cases, the questions do not even have a grounding in the real world. Papers that ask big questions often don't stand a chance in the review process. This is not because referees don't appreciate big questions. The issue is the discomfort around incomplete answers. We need to acknowledge that the grand questions that define a field or shape an industry cannot be answered in one attempt. The answers will invariably be incomplete and we need to get comfortable with that. To be clear, incomplete answers are not wrong answers. So I am not suggesting that we accept papers that ask big, bold questions and answer them incorrectly. Rather, I am suggesting that it's sometimes OK for the answer to be incomplete with a clear statement of the gaps in understanding that remain at the end of the work. In any event, we are trying to create entire research streams and such papers tend to do that. If the question is novel and important, the science is correct, and the answer is incomplete but makes the gaps in knowledge is clear, that is the perfect paper in my opinion.

These are my main observations as an SE. Before I conclude, I have to thank the former and current editors, Ritu Agarwal and Alok Gupta, for the faith they bestowed in me as well as a number of AEs and referees for their service. I wish the new editorial board great success in shaping the path for *ISR* and, more generally, for IS.