

# The Early Years of *ISR*: Recollections of the Editors

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## 1. Introduction

The journal *Information Systems Research (ISR)* has, for two decades now, been a leading outlet for research in the information systems (IS) field. Commencing publication in 1990, it emerged from events in the 1980s that established important foundations for IS, beginning with the founding of the International Conference on Information Systems in 1980 and culminating in the founding of the Association for Information Systems in 1994. Over the years, *ISR* has itself proven to be of foundational importance to IS. Today, in joining to celebrate *ISR*'s 20th anniversary, as its first four editors-in-chief, we recall here the early years of *ISR*.

The story begins in the mid-1980s with IS researchers struggling to publish their work across a spectrum of journals, few of which were their own. As documented in the newsletters *MIS Interfaces* (April 1986) and *MIS Interrupt* (July 1986), an ad hoc committee chaired by Bill King was formed at the 1985 International Conference on Information Systems in Indianapolis to "look into the feasibility of creating a new, high quality, prestigious research journal in the IS field." In various discussions, four key views were expressed. First, IS lacked its own journal with prestige equivalent to those of its reference discipline journals and very much needed the "coalescing force"

that such a journal would exert on the field's further development. Second, *MIS Quarterly*, with its dual practitioner-research focus, would "without radical change, ... never be perceived as an absolutely top-rate journal." Third, there was then an "uncertain supply of first-rate papers" and "much debate about whether the lack of an appropriate journal is the cause or the result of this situation." Fourth, for a new journal to be first rate, it should be associated with a well-recognized professional group, such as The Institute of Management Sciences (TIMS).

Embracing the opportunity to found an important new journal, notwithstanding the risks involved, TIMS approved its establishment and appointed a search committee also led by King to recommend an editor-in-chief and to work with the appointee to develop a name for the journal, a statement of editorial policy, and a startup plan. The search committee's recommendation for the new editor-in-chief was submitted to TIMS Council at its Fall 1986 New Orleans meeting.

## 2. First Editorship

Burt Swanson was appointed Editor-in-Chief of the new journal, assuming the position in July 1987. The process by which *ISR* then came to be named and

put into operation over the first year or two was documented in its very first issue (Swanson 1990). Many individuals played important roles in making *ISR* happen, and as this is detailed and credit was duly given in Swanson (1990), we simply acknowledge and thank them all again here. The present focus will be on editorial policy and accomplishments during the first editorship.

In the light of the IS community's hopes and expectations, Swanson felt it important that *ISR* be widely seen as a top journal from the outset. Several decisions were made with this in mind. One was to bring to the Editorial and Advisory Boards a number of leaders and researchers based in adjacent fields who could be effective boundary spanners for the new journal. Swanson favored porous boundaries between IS and adjacent fields, such as organizational studies. He wanted to invite others in more than keep others out. The broader the community committed to the new journal, in his judgment, the more likely it would achieve a high reputation.

The editorial policy was thus to cast a wide net. It was articulated in a widely circulated call for papers and on the inside cover of the first issue. Quoting in part:

*Information Systems Research (ISR)* is dedicated to advancing the understanding and practice of information systems in organizations through theoretical and empirical research. The scope of *ISR's* interests is wide ranging. In general, submitted articles should address the application of information technology to human organizations and their management.

Submitted articles should make a contribution to knowledge in the field. Either or both quantitative and qualitative research methods may be employed. No one reference discipline is viewed as inherently superior. Research based in any of the social sciences is welcome.

Acceptable research articles will most frequently join theoretical analysis with empirical investigation. Reviews and syntheses of prior research are also welcome, where significant implications for future work are drawn.

Although the net cast may have been wide, a careful reading of the editorial policy revealed the journal's focus. In particular, the statement that submitted articles should "address the application of information

technology to human organizations and their management" placed a stake in the ground that differentiated *ISR* from its several reference disciplines. Swanson would later use this policy to redirect certain submissions to what he felt to be more appropriate outlets.

The debut of *ISR* in March 1990 featured five articles. Swanson recalls being delighted with the composition. The lead article, by Joyce Elam and Melissa Mead, "Can Software Influence Creativity?," posed a question that today might be considered quaint. Answering it, the authors reported the results of an experiment designed to test two hypotheses related to the use of a "creativity-enhancing" decision support system. The other four articles addressed IS spending growth in the United States, decision support system design in terms of system restrictiveness and decisional guidance, alternative mechanisms for computer resource allocation and chargeback, and user involvement as an interactive process in system development.

The initial five articles thus illustrated the diversity sought by the original call for papers. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were represented, as were multiple reference disciplines. Three of the articles were primarily theoretically motivated empirical investigations. Two were primarily theoretical works, rooted in empirics. Beyond the call, but also reflective of diversity, three of the eight authors were women. One of the five contributions came from outside the United States, signaling the journal's openness and outreach on the international dimension, as the IS research community was at the time seeking to become truly global.

Now, 20 years after the publication of the first issue, we can also assess something of its impact. From a search on Google Scholar, we find that the citations to the five articles over the years now total 466, an average of 93.2, a substantial number. For three of the five lead authors, the articles in the first issue of *ISR* are among his or her three most cited works. In the other two cases, the lead authors, then assistant professors, have achieved significant prominence for publications beyond their contributions to *ISR's* first issue. All in all, then, the first issue proved to be both a notable contribution, both to the field and to the careers of the respective authors.

Subsequent to the appearance of the first issue, three complete volumes of *ISR* were eventually published under Swanson's leadership as editor-in-chief. Notwithstanding initial worries to the contrary, there proved to be an adequate number of high-quality articles submitted to sustain the new journal in its first years. In his 1992 end-of-year report to Mary DeMelim, Executive Director of TIMS, Swanson summarized the accomplishment. Over the first approximately five years, 461 articles had been submitted, with decisions reached on 362. Forty-nine articles (13.5%) were accepted for publication. The balance were either screened by the editor-in-chief (64, 17.7%) or rejected through the review process (249, 68.8%). Of the 49 articles accepted, however, 48 had already appeared in the first three volumes. *ISR* was barely being sustained by the high-quality articles sought, although submissions had ticked up in 1992. The absence of a modest backlog of accepted articles to support timely publication of future issues presented an obvious concern to Swanson's successor.

Finally, as an additional contribution to the journal, in collaboration with Neil Ramiller, *ISR*'s Managing Editor Swanson carried out research on the submission stream through 1992 in an effort to shed light on its and the field's topical domain, or "thematics." The findings are documented in Swanson and Ramiller (1993). Although confirming from these that the field remained something of a "fragmented adhocracy" (Banville and Landry 1989), the authors conclude—

We are ourselves optimistic that the common bond of interest in information technology among researchers will prove as durable and lasting as information technology itself appears to be, in its continuing evolutionary and revolutionary applications. Once attracted to the IS academic village, many scholars will continue to choose to reside there, and will carry on the building of a heterogeneous, and yet congenial, community (Swanson and Ramiller 1993, p. 326).

And so the mantle was passed to *ISR*'s next editor-in-chief.

### 3. Second Editorship

The second editor-in-chief was John Leslie King, then a professor of information and computer science and management at the University of California at Irvine.

As with most institutional enterprises, succession from the founder to the next leader is the moment of truth. Ideally, the enterprise will continue and prosper under the vision of its founder, becoming better over time. But with a highly "executive" enterprise such as *ISR*, much depends on the next leader's actions.

Mechanically, the process of selecting the next editor-in-chief was similar to the process that selected Burt Swanson as the first editor-in-chief. A committee was formed, a call was sent out asking people to apply with a letter explaining why they were interested in the job, and a selection protocol devised by the committee was executed. In the end, the committee notified King that he had the job if he wanted it. He did, and things went forward from there. On a summer evening in 1992 King and *ISR*'s new managing editor, John Tillquist, drove King's Ford station wagon from Irvine to Westwood to pick up the *ISR* files from Swanson and Ramiller. The grins on the faces of Swanson and Ramiller were hard to disguise as King and Tillquist drove away.

Swanson had performed the heroic feat of launching a new journal within the TIMS framework, soliciting manuscripts of high quality, ensuring strong review processes, and publishing papers that established *ISR*'s reputation as a top journal. By 1992 when King took over, two key issues had been resolved. The first was that top researchers in the field would submit their work to *ISR*. The second was that the quality of the work published by *ISR* under the TIMS umbrella would be recognized as top level within the field. *ISR* was well on its way to becoming a leading academic journal. King recognized three challenges for his term as editor-in-chief:

- Getting the journal indexed and abstracted by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), necessary for any "established" scholarly journal
- Publishing *ISR* on schedule each quarter, as required by ISI before the journal could be indexed and abstracted
- Obtaining a broad range of high-quality submissions.

The first two challenges were basically issues of production management. The production system Swanson and Ramiller developed had to be shifted to Irvine and modified to fit the new enterprise run by King and Tillquist. The university's Center

for Research on Information Technology and Organizations provided the office for *ISR*, and Tillquist began building computer-based support to handle the review process. (There was discussion of taking the entire submission/review process online, but that was premature and was not accomplished until well after King's time as editor-in-chief.) The primary innovation was to enter all the papers in a new database and to do all production of routine review documents as "print on demand," thus eliminating preprinted forms. To publish on time each quarter, the main requirement was to speed up the review process from initial submission to appearance in print. The goal was one year from end to end. That goal was, for the most part, met. (Some associate editors [AEs] were less attentive than others, so the results were uneven.)

Getting *ISR* indexed and abstracted was relatively easy once the journal was publishing on time. The editor-in-chief notified ISI that *ISR* wished to be indexed and abstracted, and ISI put the journal on watch to see if it was being published on time. After about 18 months of on-time publication, ISI took *ISR* into the indexing and abstracting process.

An unexpected challenge arose about a year into the second editorship. *ISR* had been started by TIMS and had been run very competently as one of the TIMS journals under the overall leadership of Mary DeMelim and the editorial direction of Candida Gerzevitz out of the TIMS office in Providence, Rhode Island. TIMS had long maintained a collegial working relationship with the Operations Research Society of America (ORSA), holding joint meetings, and so on. Both TIMS and ORSA were losing membership at an accelerating rate, and it was clear that the two organizations were going to face serious difficulties before long. The governing bodies of the two organizations decided to merge them into a new organization to be called the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences, or INFORMS.

The question facing the editor-in-chief of *ISR* and the other TIMS journals was how this merger would be handled, and in particular, what would happen to the editorial function that had worked so well. In the end, the decision was made to all but disband the TIMS operation in Providence and merge TIMS functions with the ORSA operation in Linthicum,

Maryland. This raised concerns among the editors-in-chief of the TIMS journals because TIMS published more journals than ORSA did, and the Providence operation had done an excellent job with those journals. Disruption was avoided when Candy Gerzevitz moved from Providence to Linthicum to join the new INFORMS operation, and continuity was maintained.

At about the end of King's first three-year term, his first managing editor, John Tillquist, finished his Ph.D. and took a job at a different university. King then enlisted the assistance of another Ph.D. student, Mark Bergman, who used his considerable computer skills to rewrite the software developed for online operations and to make further improvements in the automated portions of the journal's production. He also evaluated whether to move into online reviews and online publishing but was able to provide evidence to both King and Gerzevitz that this was not yet practical. He served in the managing editor role until the journal went to the next editor-in-chief.

By 1992 the seemingly endless deliberations of the IS field about identity, legitimacy, inclusion, and so forth were well under way. An important mission of *ISR* was to help establish the parameters of the IS field, meaning the range of issues that might be covered and the array of methods that might be represented in covering those issues. This is discussed to some extent in one of King's editorial notes (King 1993). The goal of obtaining a broader range of high-quality submissions was one of the objectives King had mentioned in his letter to the editor-in-chief selection committee, and the need to do that was reinforced in the comments the committee provided to King when he took the job.

There were two keys to accomplishing this broadening. The first was to expand the board of AEs to include people who might not be recognized as IS people, but who were of indisputable excellence as scholars and who were at least sympathetic to a wide variety of topics and methods relevant to IS. By broadening the pool of AEs, a broader array of potential authors would see that their work might fit the journal. The Associate Editor Board was expanded and broadened between 1992 and 1998. The second key action was to solicit work directly from top scholars. This was done by the editor-in-chief personally, as well as by the AEs.

One result of this effort was the acceptance of submissions from the growing area of economics of IS. This community had arrived on the IS research scene a little later than some other areas had, and there was no clear home for its work. King was asked by people within the area—as well as some outside the area but clearly within the IS field—to accommodate such work. Appropriate AEs were appointed, and people who worked in the economics of IS were invited to submit manuscripts. Papers in this area began to appear in *ISR*. Several years after this, King was surprised to learn that some people in the field felt he had made a mistake “letting in” this area of research, but King merely quoted Lee Kwan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, saying he was “absolutely unrepentant.”

An experiment with shorter papers called Research Reports was tried during this period. The editor-in-chief as well as some of the AEs felt that too many *ISR* papers recapitulated the motivation and literature of common research topics before reporting the results of new work. The readers in those areas of work already knew the literature, and detailed discussion was unlikely to be of interest to people outside the areas. The Research Reports copied the practice from publications such as *Science* and *Nature*, avoiding long papers that explicate a research topic in favor of shorter papers that pick up where previous research left off, adding new contributions quickly. Longer articles would still be published, but generally to “open up” or “close out” a topic.

In retrospect, two problems with these Research Reports were evident. Authors and reviewers sometimes had difficulty discriminating between a Research Report and a regular article. This led to some confusion. Also, some felt that full articles would be given more credit than Research Reports in academic performance evaluation, which naturally put a premium on full articles over Research Reports. The Research Report was thus quietly abandoned, although it appears to have been resurrected of late.

The objectives set at the beginning of the second editorship—getting *ISR* indexed and abstracted by ISI, publishing on time, and broadening the range of high-quality submissions—were met. In addition, the move from TIMS to INFORMS was accomplished. Some other accomplishments stood out. The

form-factor for the journal was increased in size, which provided the opportunity for a new cover design that used symbols from the Rosetta Stone. The redesign also incorporated a common look and feel for INFORMS journals. That common look and feel has been retained, although the *ISR* cover was redesigned by subsequent editors.

By the time his second term as editor-in-chief was nearing an end, King was ready to hand the journal off to someone new. By good fortune, the new editor-in-chief, Izak Benbasat, was an excellent choice. King advised Benbasat to demand greater financial assistance from INFORMS for the editorial operation, which he did. The result was a six-month delay before the journal was finally handed off to Benbasat, which made the second editorship six and a half years rather than six. But no one was counting.

A final anecdote is worth reporting. When King moved to the University of Michigan in 2000, he took all of the files of manuscripts handled by his editorship of *ISR* with him. This included all manuscripts, whether accepted or rejected. It was King’s plan to team up with former Managing Editors John Tillquist and Mark Bergman to write a paper with the tentative title, “Anatomy of Rejection,” summarizing the various reasons papers had been accepted or rejected. It was determined that such use of the files might constitute a violation of implicit agreements between authors and the editors regarding how the manuscripts were to be used, and thus would be a problem for the university’s Institutional Review Board. The plan for the paper was abandoned and the files were destroyed.

#### 4. Third Editorship

When Izak Benbasat, a professor of management information systems at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada, took over as editor-in-chief in March 1999,<sup>1</sup> *ISR* was already a well-known scholarly IS journal. Thanks to the excellent foundational and development work of Benbasat’s predecessors, *ISR* had become one of the top two research journals in IS, had a first-class editorial board, had a steady

<sup>1</sup> Benbasat’s predecessor John King kindly agreed to continue as Acting Editor-in-Chief until after the publication of the June 1999 issue to facilitate the transition.

rate of new submissions, published five to six papers an issue, and was indexed by ISI. Just as important for Benbasat, King had passed along to him an inventory of accepted papers that would fill the next two issues. This provided Benbasat a “safety net” that allowed him to implement the changes he was contemplating for *ISR*.

Benbasat had three goals in mind. The first, and the most significant one for the way *ISR* would operate in the future, was to establish a Senior Editor Board. He had discussed this idea in his phone interview with the *ISR* editor-in-chief selection committee members and had received their tacit approval. *ISR* had already established itself as the journal that represented and welcomed the diversity of the research interests in the IS community, a policy that he concurred with wholeheartedly. In his December 1999 Editorial Notes, he stated that

*ISR* is an academic journal that caters to the wide spectrum of the information systems community, broadly defined. *ISR* is interested in all kinds of topics associated with the design, development, use, management, evaluation, and impacts of information systems in organizations, institutions, the economy, and society. It does not favor certain types of research methods, research topics, or philosophies about the conduct of research over others. *ISR*'s main goal is to serve as an outlet for high quality scholarly research in information systems (Benbasat 1999).

These sentiments notwithstanding, Benbasat did not feel personally competent to evaluate submissions covering such a wide-ranging set of IS topics and methodologies. In addition, with the increasing number of submissions, the workload of the editor was growing; hence, the senior editors would help in providing not only quicker but also more informed assessments and constructive comments to the authors. Benbasat is grateful for the support of his colleagues who joined the Senior Editorial Board and did their best to help the authors, streamline the review process, and make *ISR* a better journal: Sirkka Jarvenpaa (University of Texas at Austin), Salvatore T. March (Vanderbilt University), Tridas Mukhopadhyay (Carnegie Mellon University), Geoff Walsham (University of Cambridge), and Robert W. Zmud (University of Oklahoma). These distinguished scholars had the collective expertise in the behavioral, organizational, design, and economics areas of IS, as well as in the methods commonly used in IS studies.

Benbasat's second goal was to implement an electronic submission and reviewing system. The aim was—to the extent possible—to reduce the delays in getting the manuscripts from authors to editors, to reviewers and back to authors. It was clear that *ISR*, like most other journals, would eventually adopt such an approach, and because we were in the midst of the Internet revolution, this was as good a time as any to implement a new system! However, these were the days prior to Manuscript Central and other such prepackaged software; thus, *ISR* had to implement the system on its own. The programming tasks were handled expertly by Samson Hui, a master of science student in management information systems, and Joshua Slive, a doctoral student in the University of British Columbia's finance program. Genevieve Bassellier, Benbasat's doctoral student, served as his first managing editor and coordinated the many aspects of the new review process. Janice Doyle, who served as his first secretarial assistant, her successor Sati Muthanna, Genevieve, and Benbasat's doctoral student Ronald T. Cenfetelli (who took over Genevieve's position as managing editor when she accepted an academic post) worked on the various phases of the improvement and implementation of the electronic review and database system; it ultimately worked well with very few problems.

Benbasat's third goal was to make part of the contents the journal forward looking. Usually, because of the delays due to conducting the research, writing the manuscript, the several “submit-review-revise-resubmit” cycles, and publication queues, most papers that appear in scholarly journals provide answers to questions that were of interest a few years ago. To provide research directions to IS scholars about topics of current and potential future interest, and guidance to junior scholars, Benbasat commissioned a number of Research Commentaries entitled “A Research Agenda for the Next Decade,” to be written by the prominent members of the IS community. These included management of IT (Sambamurthy and Zmud), application-driven, technology-intensive information systems research<sup>2</sup> (March, Hevner, and

<sup>2</sup> This paper was the precursor to the widely quoted design science paper by the same authors, with Jinsoo Park, that appeared in *MIS Quarterly* in March 2004.

Ram), technology-mediated learning (Alavi and Leidner), organizational incentive alignment in information systems design and evaluation (Ba, Stallaert, and Whinston), Net-enabled organizations (Straub and Watson), workflow management (Basu and Kumar), and conceptual modeling (Wand and Weber). Interestingly, the commentary by Orlikowski and Iacono, “Desperately Seeking the ‘IT’ in IT Research” (June 2001) which performed a 10-year retrospective analysis of content in terms of the nature of the IT artifact, or the lack of it, in the papers published in *ISR*, garnered the most attention (about 650 citations according to Google Scholar). This paper was the launching point for other commentaries, and responses to them, published a couple of years later about the “identity crisis” in IS; it has led to important debates about the core, nature and future of the IS field.

Though e-commerce research in IS had not yet reached a mature phase, after discussions with Detmar Straub, a professor of IS at the Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University, Benbasat believed that this was a good time to showcase the ongoing research via a special issue entitled “Measuring e-Commerce in Net Enabled Organizations.” Reflecting the eclectic and multidisciplinary nature of e-commerce, the special issue was coedited by a distinguished group of scholars from IS (Detmar Straub Georgia State, and Bruce Weber, Baruch College), marketing (Donna Hoffman, Vanderbilt), and communications (Charles Steinfield, Michigan State). Due to the large numbers of high-quality submissions, the accepted papers appeared in two issues of *ISR* (June and September 2002).

Two and a half years into his first term, Benbasat decided that he did not wish to continue for a second term as Editor-in-Chief. At this time, *ISR* was operating with few problems. In this regard, the support he had received from the INFORMS technical editors—Candita Gerzevitz, Molly O’Donnell, and Midori Baer-Price—over his term as editor-in-chief had been invaluable. *ISR* was publishing six papers per issue, and—not counting the special issue—the submissions were going up by 15%–20% a year. During the handing-over process, John King had given Benbasat excellent advice about how to figure out when the right time to step down was. Keeping

this in mind and having been satisfied that the three goals he had set for *ISR* were accomplished, Benbasat was ready to hand the journal off to the next editor-in-chief.

## 5. Fourth Editorship

When Chris Kemerer was asked by the committee to assume the role of editor-in-chief of *ISR*, he was in the process of starting a fourth year as departmental editor (DE) for IS at another INFORMS journal, *Management Science*. His experience at *Management Science* was very helpful in preparing him for the *ISR* assignment, although the need to give the journal his “one-year notice” so that they could form a search committee to find a new DE meant that Kemerer was doing both jobs for a year. Although he looks back now and wonders how he got anything else done during that period, it did have the effect of focusing him clearly on the task at hand, and also gave him a bit of “carte blanche” to ask other busy people to serve as editors and reviewers in order to get things done.

Given the hard work of his three predecessors, Kemerer inherited a journal whose reputation for high quality and considerable impact was already well established. Therefore, in the editorial that Kemerer wrote for his first issue, he set his immediate goals for the journal as follows:

*ISR* has established itself as one of a small set of top-tier academic journals in the information systems discipline. Editorial policy changes have been designed to strengthen a number of aspects of the journal, particularly the timeliness of the work published, without having a negative impact on the journal’s reputation for publishing high-quality work (*ISR* website 2002).

*ISR* simultaneously implemented a set of both new and reemphasized processes that were all designed to improve review turnaround time and publication timeliness without sacrificing quality. Looking back, those goals were clearly met—review turnaround time decreased by more than 50% from 2002 to December of 2004, and long lags between initial submission and publication were eliminated, both while maintaining or improving the journal’s quality.

These changes and emphases affected all the stakeholders in the submission and review cycle. For authors, *ISR* provided instructions on the website to help maximize the chances of submission receiving

a positive first review. Page limits were increased to 38 pages, but strictly enforced to place the responsibility on the authors for focusing the paper on the most important material. In particular, this limit was enforced throughout the process, including any revision cycles, which facilitated faster turnaround. The existing policy of a maximum six-month turnaround time for any revision was more strictly enforced, which had a number of beneficial effects. For the journal, this helped decrease the total time between the initial submission and eventual publication, which allowed *ISR* to publish more timely research results. For the authors, a finite revision period increased the likelihood of getting the same set of reviewers and editors, with the concomitant increase in reviewer interest and review consistency. Finally, the six-month policy provided an extra check on the sometimes gray area of editorial decisions to offer revise-and-resubmit versus to reject—concerns that cannot be accommodated in a revision written within six months, e.g., the need to collect new data, are likely to be grounds for rejection.

Senior and AEs were appointed for three-year terms, but these appointments were subject to yearly reviews. The goal was to entice excellent candidates to accept these positions, knowing that their service would be for a finite amount of time. This enabled faculty to plan their service commitments accordingly and helped reduce the potential for “editor burnout,” where sometimes even excellent editors either lose their enthusiasm or simply have other life events that prevent them from performing at their highest level. In addition, the guaranteed turnover of editors implied by such a policy provides more opportunities for newer faculty to be involved in the editorial process, especially those who received strong ratings as reviewers (see below). In addition, each year *ISR* posted an open call for nominations for new editors to encourage new ideas and to keep the Editorial Board from becoming too insular.

Much of the “heavy lifting” of the review process occurs at the AE level, because these editors are both closer to the subject matter of the manuscript and have the option of searching throughout the entire community to select the best subject matter experts as reviewers. Two policies were put into place to assist AEs in meeting their goals. First, they were

strongly encouraged to make a decision to accept or reject after no more than two rounds (original submission plus one revision) of reviews. This is consistent with the notion that a revision decision is for a paper that has strong publication potential, and also limits the amount of low-value-added reviewing suggestions that sometimes are the result of multicycle reviews. Second, *ISR*'s goal was to limit AEs to having no more than four active manuscripts at a time; this had a number of positive effects. First, it allowed AEs to focus their time on a smaller set of manuscripts than would otherwise be the case. Second, it encouraged senior editors to spread their assignments over a larger group of AEs and therefore avoid creating the possibility that a small minority of AEs would exert undue influence over which manuscripts were accepted. Finally, in the possible case of an AE running into a situation where he or she was unable to live up to his prior commitment to editing in a timely manner, the journal and the authors are protected to the extent that there could be a maximum of four manuscripts that would be delayed.

For reviewers, the biggest change was that they were given a maximum of six weeks to review a manuscript. The assigning AE was expected to rate reviewer performance on both a quality and a timeliness dimension, a process adopted for two primary reasons. First, *ISR* wanted to improve both the speed and quality of reviews. The formal evaluation approach clearly communicated to reviewers what was expected of them. Reviewers who repeatedly failed to meet expectations did not have the opportunity to do further reviews. Second, reviewers who did a good job were recognized, and such high-quality reviewers were good candidates for a future role as an AE.

In terms of the numbers, Kemerer evaluated progress using the *ISR* historical database established by his colleagues dating back to 1997. In terms of both submission volume and acceptance rate, *ISR* stayed very consistent with the prior editorial team. During the 1999–2001 period, there was an average of 164 submissions per year (including the double special issue submissions in 2001), an increase over the 1997–1998 average of 111. *ISR* had 151 submissions in 2002, 164 in 2003, and a similar number in 2004. In terms of acceptances, from 1997 to 1998 an average of 19.8%

of articles were accepted. With the increase in volume between 1999 and 2001, this decreased to an average of 14%, and the 2002–2003 average was also exactly that level, 14%.

So, overall, using the new procedures, *ISR* handled about the same volume of manuscripts and accepted about the same percentage as prior editorial teams. Where the processes added value, however, was in average turnaround time, the number of days elapsed from the author's submission to receipt of the first editorial response. The complete list of data from 1997 through 2004 was provided in Kemerer's Editorial Notes in the December 2004 issue (Kemerer 2004). The sum of all of the process changes implemented resulted in an average turnaround time at the end of his term of 67 days, or just a little over two months, versus an average turnaround time of just over five months when Kemerer began the editorship. Improving turnaround was his primary goal on accepting the editorship, because he believed that authors, particularly junior faculty on the tenure clock, should never have to choose between a high-quality publication outlet and a reasonable turnaround time.

In addition to this decrease in the average turnaround time, *ISR* also worked to avoid long outliers in terms of the total time manuscripts are in process. In his first editorial note, Kemerer wrote

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 reviewing and revision process. Consistent with past *ISR* protocol Kemerer inherited all in-process manuscripts from the prior editor-in-chief, as he did from his predecessor. One of the manuscripts that crossed his desk in 2002 was originally submitted in 1998, and was still undergoing revision!

As Kemerer noted on the *ISR* website, "No matter how interesting this work was in 1998, if it doesn't get published until 2003, it would be hard to claim that nothing has been lost in the delay." By the end of 2004, *ISR* had only three manuscripts still in process from 2002, and none from any prior year.

Critical in making changes to improve the timeliness of the editorial process was to do so without having a negative impact on the journal's reputation for quality. Contemporaneous ratings showed

that *ISR* maintained or improved its status from 2002 through 2004 (Bharati and Tarasewich 2002, Katerattanakul et al. 2003, Peffers and Ya 2003, Lowry et al. rated 2004). Additional evidence of *ISR*'s reputation for quality came in the form of three special recognitions. First and foremost (and one that is of particular importance to faculty in business schools) was the recognition in October 2002 and again in 2004 that *ISR* had been added to the dozen and a half journals representing all the disciplines within business schools that had been selected by *Business Week* to calculate each school's intellectual capital rating, which was a new component to the widely read *Business Week* ranking of schools. *ISR* was the only IS journal on the list and joined only two other INFORMS journals, *Operations Research* and *Management Science*, which both appeared on the 2000 list. Second, in 2004 *ISR* was selected as the winner of an Emerald Management Reviews Golden Page Award for Research Implications in the category of information management and technology. Finally, ISI publishes an annual impact factor rating for a wide variety of journals. *ISR* was ranked with more than 50 other IS and library science journals based on citations counts from the Social Sciences Citation Index. *ISR*'s ranking had steadily climbed each year since 1998, when it was 20th of 54 journals, and this trend continued each year, with *ISR* finally being ranked 4th of 55 journals in 2003 (see Kemerer 2004 for the full list of data).

After three years at the helm, Kemerer was pleased to be able to turn over the reins to Professor V. Sambamurthy. The pair collaborated in Kemerer's final summer in order to ensure a smooth transition. When he was only a reader of *ISR*, Kemerer was blissfully unaware of the number of people and the amount of time required to produce each issue. Over his tenure as editor-in-chief, he gained a heightened appreciation for this and for the selfless manner in which a large number of individuals dedicate their time to the journal. At the risk of leaving out some individuals behind the scenes, he wants to say thank you again to a whole host of people who provided *ISR* with great service during his term. Although there is a large group that supports the publication of *ISR*, those with whom Kemerer had primary contact with were Pat Shaffer, Molly O'Donnell, and Midori Baer-Price. These individuals also initiated and oversaw

Kemerer's decision to change the cover to a design featuring ones and zeros in order to emphasize the notion that information now represents anything that can be stored digitally. The editorial process is headed by the senior editors, and during his term as editor-in-chief, Kemerer had the pleasure of working with an exceptional board, including Cynthia Beath, Sanjeev Dewan, Sal March, Tridas Mukhopadhyay, Sandy Slaughter, Geoff Walsham, and Bob Zmud. They, in turn, were supported by a large cast of AEs and reviewers. At the University of Pittsburgh, Kemerer's assistant, Jason Vey, finished his second "tour of duty" for INFORMS, having served as the primary point of contact for manuscripts when Kemerer was DE for Information Systems at *Management Science*. For *ISR*, this role eventually migrated to (then) Ph.D. students Alexandra Durcikova and Xiaoqing Wang. To each of the above Kemerer offers his sincere thanks.

## 6. Conclusion

*ISR* was founded out of a concern more than 20 years ago that the IS field lacked its own top-tier journal. By 2004 the original goal of "creating a new, high-quality, prestigious research journal in the IS field" had been accomplished. *ISR* was respected both within and outside the IS academic community. The new challenges ahead included the expansion of journal space

to accommodate the needs of the members of the international IS research community, which had significantly increased in the 15 years since *ISR* was first published.

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