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# PUBLICATION STRATEGY FOR JUNIOR RESEARCHERS: QUANTITY VS. QUALITY, THE FIRST AUTHORSHIP AND THE OPTIMAL NUMBER OF AUTHORS

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# **PUBLICATION STRATEGY FOR JUNIOR RESEARCHERS: QUANTITY VS. QUALITY, THE FIRST AUTHORSHIP AND THE OPTIMAL NUMBER OF AUTHORS**

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## **Abstract**

*A good publication record is one of the most important prerequisites of a successful academic career in IS. Despite the weight hiring and promotion committees place on it, the definition of a “good publication record” especially for junior researchers remains unclear. Indeed, is it better to have one A-publication or three B-publications? Does being the third author on an A-publication have a bigger weight than being the first author on a B-publication? Should one strive to publish with as few co-authors as possible to demonstrate that one is capable of independent work? Facing these ambiguities, young researchers are increasingly asking themselves about the choices they make with regard to their publication strategy. Equally, academic mentors have a strong interest in correctly setting incentives of their young protégés. If unaddressed, uncertainty regarding these issues is bound to interfere with the quality of the IS research and scholars’ job and life satisfaction. This panel proposal aims to offer a forum for discussion and clarification on these problematic issues. Specifically, the following topics will be raised: quantity vs. quality, value of the first authorship and optimal number of authors.*

*Keywords: Collaboration, Information Systems, Junior Researchers, Quality vs. Quantity, First Authorship*

# 1 Motivation of the Panel

When it comes to academic career, getting a professorship position in the best university possible is often a major ambition for many IS researchers. To accomplish this goal, a potential candidate is expected to fulfil a set of prerequisites, such as a good publication record, experience in teaching IS courses, a record of research grants, and international research experience. Among them, it is the publication list that has been consistently recognized as the most important selection criteria (Floyd 1994). Despite its weight, the definition of a “good publication record” especially for junior researchers remains unclear. Indeed, is it better to have one A-publication or three B-publications? Does being the third author on an A-publication have a bigger weight than being the first author on a B-publication? Should one strive to publish with as few authors as possible to demonstrate that one is capable of independent work? The answers to these questions are far from straightforward. Facing significant time constraints and growing competition, young researchers are increasingly asking themselves about the choices they make with regard to their publication strategy. Equally, academic mentors have a strong interest in correctly guiding their young protégés. If unaddressed, uncertainty regarding these issues is bound to interfere with the quality of the IS research and scholars’ job and life satisfaction. This panel proposal aims to address these issues and offer a forum for discussion.

# 2 Controversial Issues for Discussion

**(1) Quantity vs. Quality:** Reflected in the level of publication outlet, quality of publications has consistently been recognized as the major criteria of academic excellence. To warrant a publication in an A-journal, authors are expected to have a novel and relevant idea grounded in thorough theoretical development, collect supporting and representative data and apply rigorous methodology. Significant theoretical and practical contributions are not just desirable but are a must. Considering these substantial requirements, it is no wonder that authors of A-publications are respected by the community and rewarded in terms of better employment outcomes. On the downside, strict requirements as well as competition for a limited number of slots often turn submissions to A-journals to a time-consuming lottery, in which chances of winning are slim. As a result, young researchers may perceive aiming for A-journals as a luxury they simply cannot afford. At the same time, for a “marginal” drop in quality, B- and C-publication outlets may place fewer restrictions on the data, be less picky about the methodology and place lower demands on theoretical and practical contribution. As these submissions require less effort, researchers could publish more of them in a given time period. Since quantity of publications is also important, junior researchers working under significant time pressure may be especially tempted to pursue this path. Against this background, even a simple choice between striving for an A publication vs. authoring two B publications is genuinely complex. These choices are also complicated by the lack of agreement on what is viewed as an A-, B- or C-outlet. For example, AIS (2012) places Information Systems Journal (ISJ) into the Senior Scholars' Basket of Journals, which provides clear evidence for its ‘A’ quality. In contrast, VHB-JOURQUAL 2.1 (2011) rating, widely used in Germany, only ranks it as a B-outlet. Further, the status of ICIS/ECIS conferences is unclear: While acceptance rates for these conferences are rather low, these publications are often ignored during hiring and promotion reviews.

To address these issues, five scholars on our panel will be asked to express their opinion on the following issues: Is a smaller number of ‘better quality’ publications *always* preferable over a higher number of ‘lower quality’ publications? Does a candidate with 1 A-publication have better chances than a candidate with 3 B-publications? When is a publication list big enough to stop “caring” about its size? To what extent should academic advisors encourage publication in non-top-tier outlets? Which ranking should be used as a guidance to determine journal quality and what is the status of ICIS/ECIS submissions?

**(2) Value of the First Authorship:** Research in the IS discipline is collaborative in nature. By cooperating researchers are likely to improve the research quality, capitalize on the diversity of perspectives, gain in productivity and develop elevated team spirit (e.g. Moore and Griffin 2006). On the other hand, many research teams find themselves torn by competition, antagonism and resentment (Erlen et al. 1997). Incentive to be the first author is often at the root of these conflicts (Floyd et al. 1994). For example, 30.5% of survey respondents in the study by Krasnova et al. (2012, p. 10) reported to have at least sometimes experienced tension with other co-authors regarding “*who will be the first author*”. Conflicts over the first authorship have good reasons. Even in situations where author names are expressly ordered alphabetically, Einav and Yariv (2006) find a positive correlation between surname initials (the earlier in the alphabet the better) and tenure at highly ranked schools. Indeed, being the first author on a publication leads to higher recognition and credit, which over time may lead to better chances of getting research grants, employment, merit-based salary raises, promotion, and tenure (Erlen et al. 1997). Signalling importance of being the first author some universities routinely apply differential weighting schemes for authorship when assessing the candidates for employment (Moore and Griffin 2006). Study results of Krasnova et al. (2012) indicate that 47.6% of IS researchers slightly or more agree that a particular publication helps to improve their career prospects only when they are listed as the first author. Whether these beliefs are justified is an important issue to be discussed by the panellists and the audience.

Moreover, a dilemma over quality vs. quantity becomes exponentially more complex when a place of the author’s name gets factored in. When faced with a choice between being the third author on an A publication vs. being the first author on a B publication, what option should researchers pursue? In the light of this complexity, the following set of issues needs to be discussed: What value is placed on being the first author? What share of work should be fairly invested to warrant being the first/.../fourth author? Is a forced alphabetical ordering a viable alternative? How can academic mentors facilitate cooperation among “competitors”?

**(3) Optimal number of authors:** Whether or not adding an extra author diminishes the perceived contribution of other authors in the eyes of a hiring or promotion committee remains unclear. While adding an extra author does increase coordination costs, the experience of an additional author may improve the overall quality of research – the ultimate goal scientists are assumed to pursue. Against this background, the following issues need to be discussed: Does additional author “water down” the credit of other authors? Should academic mentors encourage solo-authored papers?

### 3 Panel Structure, Participants and their Positions

The panel will include one moderator and five panellists who have all committed to participate and present their views at the panel. The panellists, consisting of four senior scholars and one assistant professor, were carefully selected to ensure that different viewpoints are represented as summarized in Table 1. The panel is intended to be an open dialogue between panellists and the audience. The moderator will share some intriguing insights from past research to provide substance for discussion.

<p><b>Dr. Hanna Krasnova</b> is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in Germany. Hanna has authored over 25 publications in the area of social media acceptance and use. Together with Kerstin Schäfer and Natasha Veltri, she is the initiator of this panel proposal. She will chair and moderate the discussion. <a href="http://warhol.wiwi.hu-berlin.de/~hkrasnova">warhol.wiwi.hu-berlin.de/~hkrasnova</a>.</p>
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<p><b>Prof. Oliver Günther</b> is President-elect of the University of Potsdam (Germany) and Vice President of the German Informatics Society (GI). Prof. Günther is a fervent advocate of collaborative research. When collaborating, researchers should ask themselves how they can work together to make a better contribution, rather than fight over the question of first authorship. He believes that fine-grained rules for the order of authors do not work and he is working on alternative ways to appreciate individual contributions, especially in hiring and promotion decisions. <a href="http://lvb.wiwi.hu-berlin.de/wi/personen/hl/oliver.guenther">lvb.wiwi.hu-berlin.de/wi/personen/hl/oliver.guenther</a></p>
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<p><b>Prof. Ola Henfridsson</b> is a Professor at the Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden. He thinks junior researchers should approach the PhD program as an opportunity to build the basis for conducting the creative</p>
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and intellectually challenging research that eventually results in publications in top-tier journals. He also thinks that the learning gained in the process behind the first major hit will pay off tremendously in the future publication record. Collaboration is an increasingly necessary element in becoming successful. Being too strategic about authorship may jeopardize fruitful collaboration and strike back in the form of missed opportunities. [www.olahenfridsson.com](http://www.olahenfridsson.com)

**Dr. Natasha Veltri** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Tampa in the USA. When it comes to publications, she advocates maintaining a balance of different levels of quality and involvement. She believes in collaboration with fellow researchers because multiple contributors improve the quality of the resulting work. Certainly researchers should strive for the best possible publication outlets from the very start of their careers, yet recognize that all their work cannot be published in top-tier journals. [www.ut.edu/NatashaVeltri/](http://www.ut.edu/NatashaVeltri/).

**Prof. Cindy Riemenschneider** is an Associate Professor at Baylor University in the USA. She has served on numerous doctoral dissertation committees as both a member and chair. Prof. Riemenschneider has published multiple co-authored papers and worked with an interdisciplinary research team of 4 to publish over 22 journal articles and conference proceedings. During the panel Cindy will answer raised questions by drawing on her experiences of successful and unsuccessful research team collaboration. [business.baylor.edu/directory/?id=C\\_Riemenschneider](http://business.baylor.edu/directory/?id=C_Riemenschneider)

**Prof. Edgar A. Whitley** is a Reader at the London School of Economics and Political Science in UK. He is the co-editor for the journal *Information Technology & People* and was previously an associate editor for MIS Quarterly. He also has edited special issues for *The Information Society*, *Information Technology and People* and the *European Journal of Information Systems*. His publications include a number of papers that reflect on the practice of being an IS academic. Edgar's approach to these questions will draw on his experiences as a journal editor and the particular promotion and tenure processes at his institution. [personal.lse.ac.uk/whitley/](http://personal.lse.ac.uk/whitley/)

Table 1. Panellists and their positions

Time-wise the panel will be structured as follows: **Module 1: 10 minutes:** The moderator will introduce the topic and the goals of the panel and share several intriguing findings from the survey described above to provoke interest. Next, five panellists will be invited to introduce themselves. **Modules 2 / 3 / 4** will be centred around the issues outlined above and will take **30 / 30 / 10 minutes** respectively. In each of these modules, the issue will first be introduced by the moderator. Panellists will then be invited to share their views on the topic. The dialog with the audience is expected to emerge and will be facilitated by the moderator. **Module 5: 10 minutes:** The moderator will summarize the strategies junior researchers are advised to follow as discussed in the panel. Best practices identified during the panel will flow into a position paper.

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