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A Rejoinder to Iivari (2016)

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Abstract:

Juhani Iivari's (2016) suggestions have merit as incremental steps that are directed towards fixing parts of a broken system—a system in which it often takes six to eight months to get an editorial decision on a paper, in which papers are rejected after five years and five rounds of reviews, and in which radically new ideas struggle to be published. Iivari's suggestions all require the support of journal editors to be effective. These editors are embedded into a system that they have learned to navigate successfully. In fact, they may be too close to the system to make major changes to it. Perhaps people embedded in a review system in which they have been successful will not be able to develop viable solutions to a system that is really broken. Rather, it may be time for a radical change to the IS reviewing system that emanates from a groundswell of IS researchers who are suffering from the problems inherent in the existing malfunctioning system.

Keywords: Review System, Incremental Changes, Radical Change.

This manuscript was solicited by the Department Editor for Debates, Karlheinz Kautz.

1 Introduction

I appreciate the invitation to respond to Iivari (2016). Although I do not have enough to add to warrant a full essay, I make a few observations.

Iivari's (2016) three suggestions are excellent. His suggestion about the research forum is very creative. Perhaps some editor would be willing to try it as a way to encourage better (and timelier) reviews. One research forum issue on an infrequent basis would not ruin a journal's reputation, and the benefits could be substantial to the information systems (IS) discipline and, perhaps, to the respective journal in that reviewers would be more willing to volunteer their services to it if they thought they might have the privilege to contribute to the research forum. The best reviewers could perhaps review one another's papers in the research forum issue. They might be especially understanding of the special forum's purpose and the importance of working with authors to help them publish good papers.

Getting reviewers to sign their names is a good idea, but it will probably take some encouragement from journal editors to make the practice successful. I think it would have to be voluntary. One downside is that authors sometimes are so upset when they receive truly helpful (but not welcome) feedback that they might bear a grudge toward (and create bad blood against) the reviewer even if the review was a good one.

I instituted the practice of publishing reviewers' names on published papers in *MIS Quarterly* on a voluntary basis. I thought that a good reviewer is one who provides developmental reviews. As such, reviewers should improve papers' quality. Though papers are clearly their authors' work, journals could also recognize their review team members for their efforts. I received a lot of resistance for this practice because, I guess, many perceived it as creating more harm than good because it was halted immediately after I stepped down as Editor-in-Chief. I never really understood why people were upset with publishing reviewers' names if they agreed to it. Of course, as Iivari (2016) points out, the practice may not be a loss because the reviewers may not have been highly critical. It is true that reviewers are more likely to be more critical (and rude) on rejected papers. However, not publishing reviewers' names may be a loss to the extent that good reviewing work goes unmentioned and we lose an opportunity for recognizing people who have devoted their time and effort toward improving others' writing.

In respect to Iivari's (2016) comments about providing systematic feedback to the authors, it might be a good idea to see what impact the reviewer feedback system has had on reviewing for the annual Academy of Management (AOM) meetings. The AOM system captures authors' responses about reviews, and, I believe, the responses are used to select best reviewer award winners. I perceive that the reviews for the AOM meetings are more polite than reviews for IS conferences, or, at least, the tone is more positive and they usually end with a sentence such as "I hope this is helpful". I wanted to implement a reviewer feedback system at *MIS Quarterly*. I envisioned the AEs' and SEs' providing reviews of each reviewer's performance. However, I was told that this would not be possible due to reviewer privacy issues that could create legal problems—a reason I never fully understood.

In summary, Juhani Iivari's suggestions have merit as incremental steps that are directed towards fixing parts of a broken system—a system in which it often takes six to eight months to get an editorial decision on a paper, in which papers are rejected after five years and five rounds of reviews, and in which radically new ideas struggle to be published. Iivari's suggestions all require the support of journal editors to be effective. These editors are embedded into a system that they have learned to navigate successfully. In fact, they may be too close to the system to make major changes to it. Izak Benbasat and I have reported the suggestions of a group of senior scholars deeply embedded in the current IS reviewing system in our *MIS Quarterly* editorial (Saunders & Benbasat, 2007). However, naught has come from most of these carefully developed suggestions for incremental changes by an august group of IS researchers who are familiar with the current system. Perhaps people embedded in a review system in which they have been successful will not be able to develop viable solutions to a system that is really broken. Rather, it may be time for a radical change to the IS reviewing system that emanates from a groundswell of IS researchers who are suffering from the problems inherent in the existing malfunctioning system.

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About the Authors

Carol Saunders is currently Research Professor at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ. She has received two lifetime accomplishment awards: the LEO award in the information systems (IS) discipline and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the OCIS Division of the Academy of Management. She also is an Association of Information Systems Fellow and a Schoeller Senior Fellow. She has served on several editorial boards, including a three-year term as Editor-in-Chief of *MIS Quarterly*. She was the General Conference Chair of ICIS'99 and Program Co-chair of AMCIS 2015. She has held research chairs in Germany, New Zealand, Singapore, and the Netherlands. Her current research interests include inter-organizational systems, overload, sourcing, coopetition, virtual teams, and time. She has published in top-ranked management, IS, computer science and communication journals. She now serves on several editorial boards for journals such as *Organization Science* and *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*.

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