



EDITORIAL

Publishing and getting published in *EJIS*: marshaling contributions for a diversity of genres

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Introduction and mission

With this issue we conclude 2015 and are about to enter 2016, closing a quarter of a century, which has taken the *European Journal of Information Systems (EJIS)* out of the 20th century, in which the information systems (IS) discipline was born, to the 21st century, which promises a very different 'beast'. This is a good time to present to you, our community of authors, editors, reviewers and readers, a current and as far as possible comprehensive view of *EJIS* – its mission, structure, people and processes. We have based this editorial on our own views expressed in editorials over the past 3 years, as well as earlier editorials that set out some important principles for how to conduct ourselves until this very day. Unless we hear otherwise from you, we will probably continue to do so. We therefore urge you to make your voices heard. We also hope that potential authors will benefit, especially when preparing and submitting manuscripts, although we hasten to state that the general discussion here does not come in place of detailed submission instructions.

EJIS has evolved with every editorial board, adding new policies and practices, but perhaps more importantly, new perspectives and sensitivities. The past editors-in-chief who gradually established the policies on which we build here are Jonathan Liebenau, Steve Smithson, Bob O'Keefe, Ray Paul, and Richard Baskerville. The immediate past Editor-in-Chief is Frantz Rowe, the current is Dov Te'eni and the next will be Pär Ågerfalk. From time to time, they presented their views of the journal in editorials such as this, which we encourage prospective authors, editors and reviewers to consult in order to better understand our journal and its mission.

We see *EJIS* as a catalyst and platform for critical discussion of information systems as they are built and used by individuals, groups, organizations and society. In this discussion, the organizational context, however blurred in today's way of work and life, has traditionally been important to *EJIS*. In pursuing this vision of *EJIS*, we wish to contribute to the many dialogues that are developing through a web of interrelated journals and conferences that serve our community (Te'eni, 2013).

Partaking effectively in the discussion means that *EJIS* must continually strive towards the highest quality publications that are interesting and that have impact, in order to encourage ongoing diverse discussions in our community but also in other related academic disciplines. As we listen to scholars of other fields, we ought to be heard by them too (Baskerville & Myers, 2002). And while *EJIS* provides a distinctive European perspective on the theory and practice of information systems, it also aims for a global audience (Rowe, 2010). Furthermore, wherever possible, we look for discussions that are relevant to practice (Ågerfalk, 2014). To this end, in addition to

first-rate research articles by academics we also encourage reflective articles by practitioners. Above all, we provide a critical view on technology, development, implementation, strategy, management and policy.

Since the journal began, editorial boards of *EJIS* have looked to make the journal a distinct place for discussing research into meaningful problems. The themes associated with distinguishing ourselves that have come up repeatedly are relevance and impact (Liebenau & Smithson, 1991), as well as diversity in almost every aspect of the journal (Baskerville & Wood-Harper, 1998; Rowe, 2010, 2011; Ågerfalk, 2013) and interesting reading (Te'eni, 2014).

In an early editorial, editors O'Keefe & Paul (2000) said: 'To us, the key aspect of European research into IS is *pluralism*. The joy of IS is the integration of the technical, personal, organizational, strategic and societal issues that seemed to be so intertwined in any particular IS'. These words reflect our thinking too. Research that picks on one aspect to study implementation or use, and ignores others aspects, is less interesting to us because the chances are that the research will not tell a full enough story to be successful. More often than not, interesting messages rely first of all on understanding the complex relationships between aspects in a particular context. Therefore, *EJIS* will not generally publish papers that focus purely on technology, or interface design, or organizational design, or whatever single aspect.

In terms of research methodology, *EJIS* has been at the forefront of pluralism. We particularly welcome innovations in methodology. In our view, relevance is a function of what is researched, and how it is written up, rather than how it is researched. The balance can be addressed by making sensible choices and ensuring that publication is timely. We wish to do everything we can to promote relevance without loss of rigor.

So much for vision and content. Nevertheless, we need to put two other aspects on the table before going forward, namely the performance and the processes of *EJIS*.

A journal lives by its reputation. By virtue of its reputation, a journal draws submissions from potential authors, and the editors and authors develop the best possible articles, which build on that reputation. We have built a reputation for an outlet of interesting, quality articles. Our goal is to do more of the same, only better. Unfortunately, rankings are also part of the game. Our immediate objectives are to continue to be the most esteemed European journal of IS and to be recognized among the top three IS journals worldwide.

How successful have we been so far? The easiest measure, one that we do not necessarily like but one that has had a major impact is the 2- and 5-year Impact Factor. The 2004 Impact Factors raised *EJIS* from 0.897 to 1.000, and this year, we have jumped to 2.213. We have seen journal league tables that place *EJIS* fourth among all IS journals in the world, and first among the non-North American journals. *EJIS* is profitable for its owner and publisher. Since 2010 we have been publishing 720 pages a year!

However, to us, the success of *EJIS* lies in its ability first of all to serve our community and, through the community, the practice of IT too. To this end, we are committed to improving our services and operations continuously.

Drawing quality submission also depends on the journal's operations, and mainly the speed and quality of the review system. Our main and pressing challenge is to reduce the time of the paper lifecycle. We are working hard to improve procedures and the way the electronic submission system works, and we are looking to enhance the structure and size of the editorial board. In the next sections, we describe the current way of doing things with an eye on how to learn and improve. After outlining the diversity of genres, we publish at *EJIS*, we will briefly explain the types of contribution we expect from each.

Structure and review process

Background and structure

EJIS is run by its editorial board, led by three editors, one of whom is designated Editor-in-Chief. We also have a managing editor and an editorial administrator. The five of us all come from different countries. Our over 50 editorial board members (Associate Editors and Senior Associate Editors) come from 17 countries in all continents but Africa, which we will correct shortly. *EJIS* is owned by the OR Society in the U.K., and is published by Palgrave Macmillan.

We are currently looking to increase the number of editorial members at all levels of editorial roles. We believe our best editors are not only successful authors and experts in their domain, but have good reviewing skills. The review template we use is quite comprehensive, but is also flexible, allowing reviewers to write constructive reviews that are mostly comprehensive and insightful. As noted above, the quality of our publications rests on the developmental efforts of the review panel. A typical review in the early rounds will encompass most aspects of the paper (contribution, theory, method, findings and so on) but also provide general, as well as detailed comments. This represents a considerable investment of time and energy, and we are very grateful that the members of our community are willing to make this investment to see excellent papers published. The reviewers who lead this investment are the women and men that comprise our editorial board.

In addition to our human resources of reviewers and editorial board, we rely on several resources and operations. Recently, the OR Society's office in Birmingham has begun to support the administration of manuscripts, and Palgrave Macmillan is reorganizing its publishing services in the midst of a merger with Springer. These are times of change, and we are now considering several changes of our own. In particular, we are revisiting our structure as mentioned above, reexamining the review process and redesigning the infrastructure, particularly computerized support. The review process is the element most relevant to the authors, and here we have already made some changes, which are reflected in the electronic submission system.

Review process

We begin with the current process. *EJIS* has operated in this way for quite some time, but some features have been recently added to the computerized system. Each stage of the process and each iteration is an opportunity to add to the quality of the paper through feedback and guidance. Indeed, our product reflects this effort. Nonetheless, in our continual pursuit of progress, it is time to revisit this.

Each submission received in the electronic submission system is first inspected by the Editorial Administrator to ensure that it is complete. Manuscripts that do not conform to the Journals' submission requirements may be returned to the authors for corrections or changes. Once the initial inspection is completed and approved by the Editorial Administrator, the Managing Editor evaluates the manuscript, largely based on two criteria: (1) whether the manuscript falls within the scope and the mission of the journal and (2) whether the manuscript has significant flaws or errors that it does not hold promise for success in the *EJIS* review process. At this stage, the Managing Editor may recommend that the Editor-in-Chief 'rejects' manuscripts that do not meet minimum expectations. Manuscripts that fall within the scope of the journal and hold promise are assigned to one of the three Editors for further evaluation. In choosing an Editor to manage a manuscript, the Managing Editor considers several factors, such as the fit of the topic and the methodology with the Editor's expertise and nominations for Editor indicated in the cover letter by the authors.

Next, the Editor decides whether to carry on with the review process. The main criterion is whether the manuscript has a contribution to make, and stands a good chance of success in the *EJIS* review process. Sometimes, the Editor returns the manuscript to the author and asks for specific revisions that are deemed important to increase the likelihood of a successful review. Of nearly 400 submissions in the first nine months of 2015, only around 60% were forwarded to an Associate Editor.

If the Editor decides to move a manuscript forward, he or she selects an Associate Editor (AE) to manage the manuscript's reviewing process by soliciting constructive feedback from qualified and competent reviewers and by supporting the development of the manuscript to its highest quality. In some cases, however, based on his or her evaluation the AE may recommend that the manuscript be rejected without obtaining feedback from reviewers. In other cases, the AE builds a review panel of, usually, three reviewers and oversees their work. Once the reviews are received by the AE, the AE integrates the reviews in an AE report, and makes a recommendation. (Note that the duties of our Senior Associate Editors are exactly the same as our Associate Editors. The title recognizes that our Senior Associate Editors have more *EJIS* editorial experience. They may be asked to handle 'complicated' cases such as when a fellow AE submits a paper.) The Editor reviews the AE recommendation, modifies it if necessary, and decides how to proceed. The Editor may add comments or request particular changes. Finally,

a decision letter is sent out to the authors on behalf of the three Editors.

For manuscripts that have revisions (previously received 'major' decisions), they are typically assigned to the same review panel, including Editor, AE, and reviewers. However, in some rare cases, the Editor may choose to replace the AE, or the Editor or AE may choose to replace one or more reviewers.

It typically takes multiple rounds of review until the manuscript warrants a decision of 'accept'. Importantly, an invitation to submit a revised version does not guarantee the eventual acceptance of the manuscript. It is not unusual for the Editor to decide to give the author the benefit of the doubt, and a subsequent revision regrettably only confirms the suspicion that the manuscript will not hold up in the end. Once the decision is 'accept' and the author is notified accordingly, the manuscript is examined by the Editorial Administrator for a technical quality check, and is moved to the production department. Authors get one last chance to correct the proofs before they appear in our Advanced Online Publication (AOP). Typically, the article will be available in full text only to *EJIS* subscribers. The article will eventually appear in print, and its timing is determined by the Editor-in-Chief.

This description of the review process serves two purposes. First, this is our sincere attempt to be transparent about our review process. We believe authors deserve to know ahead of time how their manuscripts will be handled upon submission and what criteria and standards will be used to evaluate their manuscripts. Second, we hope this opens up opportunities for authors and editors in the community to offer constructive feedback on our review process. We strive to continue to improve our review process and seek the community's feedback.

Genres

EJIS categorizes papers according to the genres of research that we find helpful in managing, evaluating and presenting papers. We have distinguished some genres that are less common in IS outlets in order to help potential authors understand our expectations. Thus, this is more of a pragmatic list than a conceptual mapping of research genres. A previous editorial also mentioned sub-types within certain genres and gave examples (Rowe, 2012). The current editorial aims to delineate more precisely the differences across these genres, especially when they are not evident.

Our intention is to be open to a great variety of genres. The particular list below is meant to evolve to fit our evolving field, and is certainly not meant to discourage types of research not highlighted by the list of categories. Our challenge is to leverage these categories to produce a collection of high-quality papers in all categories. We will need to update the categorization periodically, and complete the specification of our expectations of quality for each category. We will also have to recruit and maintain the requisite variety of capabilities to ensure the development of papers in all categories.

When submitting their paper authors are asked to choose among the following genres of papers:

1. Literature Review
2. Theory Development
3. Empirical Research
4. Ethnography/Narrative
5. Research Essay
6. Issues and Opinion
7. Response

Literature review

This genre is well known yet there is a wide range of types of literature reviews. In order to target literature reviews that can help most to grow scientific knowledge in more appropriate directions, we define this genre as 'a literature review synthesizes past knowledge on a topic or domain of interest, identifies important biases and knowledge gaps in the literature and proposes corresponding future research directions' (Rowe, 2014, p. 243).

A lot has been said about the methods required to collect, organize, document and summarize the set of empirical and non-empirical papers that are relevant to the problem such as meta-analysis, meta-synthesis and the like. This attempt to collect papers has to be significant and substantial, that is, done with rigor, intelligence, and be applied to a sufficient set of papers. However, we argue that in order to analyze a phenomenon through a literature review and get interesting results, researchers need to have a good conceptual framework, or a theory that they will use as an analytical lens to study a set of carefully selected papers (Rowe, 2014). This lens will help them to code the data and interpret the literature, its biases and gaps.

In sum, literature reviews are useful when they provide a synthesis and a vision of part of the future in a knowledge universe, where most objects are more and more atomistic. The distinction between a literature review paper and a theory development paper depends on the systematicity and the goal of the review (Rowe, 2014).

Theory development

Theory development can be reported in purely conceptual papers or in theory-testing or theory-building papers that rely on empirical analysis of data. This genre is only the former. We are happy that *EJIS* has earned a good reputation for empirical papers, but we think that, as Europeans, we could do better and that we should also accept pure theory papers as long as they are of the highest quality. Many that we have received have not met these expectations. However, our feeling is that with all the institutional pressures to publish, not sending a positive and welcoming signal for theory papers that fit our policy would lead to even more incremental papers, with a quantitative standard methodology and a theory-testing inclination. In the continental tradition, we have known for centuries, if not since the Greeks, that we do not only learn by

experience but that categories of knowledge are also constructed by reason.

Our discipline is constantly being populated by apparently new technological artifacts which call for new empirical research through measures, observations and meaning making. However, human perception, visual or audio, is often defeated. Hence, we should also cultivate our critical thinking instead of fighting a losing battle when trying to update research results against the overwhelming flow of data about new technologies that we receive each day. The act of being reflexively critical is essential because (1) it helps see knowledge connections with other domains of application and thus questions the generalizability of our knowledge contribution; (2) critique is part of the mission of journals such as *EJIS* and (3) it is an underutilized resource that is not time-consuming but, if well-used, can greatly enhance the potential of our contributions. It is our reason that allows us to sort the ivy from the chaff. Moreover it is our critical thinking that allows us to take into account normative concerns and to anticipate and project the possibilities for designing the future. If IS is also about designing, we cannot only rely on observation. We also need theory to guide our reflection and endeavors.

Papers that produce a new typology or an analytical framework can also be interesting, and can be considered as theory papers, as long as they do not test these typologies with empirical data in the same paper. If the theoretical description of the typology is strong enough, and based on an in-depth treatment of the compatibility of characteristics between different constructs that are part of the theory, it should be published as a standalone theory development paper. In the very classic sense a good theory paper rests on arguments that build on the literature and stand by their consistency and compelling logic.

Empirical research

It is certainly interesting to complement theoretical knowledge with empirical data describing the different forms that actually exist in the field. This empirical knowledge will enrich its description and reinforce the theory by delineating more precisely boundary conditions for the occurrence of the phenomena. But if theoretical arguments are novel, should such papers be published as theory development papers or as empirical research? For the sake of simplicity of our classification, we will publish in the empirical research category those papers that provide both a significant theoretical development and refine it with empirical analysis (e.g., De Corbière & Rowe, 2013).

Apart from 'ethnographies and narratives' which are singled out at *EJIS*, all other genres based on an analysis of empirical data fall under the 'empirical research' category. This category includes all types of empirical research strategies such as experiments, design science research, quantitative analysis of empirical data (econometrics, network analysis, content analysis, and surveys), qualitative analysis of empirical data (Realist case, Naturalistic Inquiry,

grounded theory, content analysis, Hermeneutic analysis, Critical analysis). Meanwhile, quantitative analyses focus on theoretical explanations of phenomena with a parsimonious set of variables, qualitative analyses such as case studies are open to all types of epistemological paradigms (e.g., positivist, critical realist, pragmatist, interpretivist).

Ethnographies and narratives

Of the many streams of empirical research, we distinguished ethnographies and narratives (Rowe, 2012). We need powerful and smart techniques to describe situations rarely observed, or for which a better understanding may have important consequences. This responds to a need to understand better what people really do, how intentions develop and how people take stances or make compromises. Observing situations, whether novel or more usual, requires negotiating windows of presence on site, playing a dual consulting-researcher role or doing 'auto-ethnography'. Ethnography is a privileged research method if we can devote enough time and effort to it and are able to observe and feel what is happening or not. In fact, through immersion the researcher not only gains an in-depth understanding of the actors' viewpoints but of their broad context in which they act. But it is not enough to simply live with the natives to identify important issues. To develop this ability, ethnographers memorize (record traces in some way) what happened and suggest, or allow to be inferred from the sequence of events why things happen as they do.

Causes and reasons can then be identified, and theories developed through narratives. What distinguishes narratives from canonical variance theories is the inclusion of a focal actor or actors and an identifiable narrative voice. Even in realist tale mode, narratives 'carry cultural values because they encode implicitly or explicitly, standards against which actions of the characters can be judged' (Pentland, 1999, pp. 712–713). Because narratives do not remove actions, actors and events, their vividness and accuracy can be better recognized by managers. Ethnography allows the writer to build narratives accounting for an experience, to argue about relationships and to describe and qualify objects. It can be nicely complemented by other methods such as grounded theory. As an ethnographic technique, the narrative does not aim at describing what has been witnessed, but what has been lived or done.

Research essay

Research essays usually relate to research methods or research practice. Two good examples of this are the special issues on Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research, which appeared in 2012, and the Grounded Theory special issue in the first issue of 2013. Research essays may also link to philosophy. Such essays can bear on the ontology and epistemology of information systems, or on the philology of information systems, or on critical research allowing to rethink our theoretical categories and

research genres (cf. the Kleinian *EJIS* Special Issue). All these traditions for research essays have in common the fact that they allow us to rethink our philosophical assumptions.

Issues and opinion

An 'Issues and Opinion' paper generally addresses an institutional problem or a disciplinary challenge or opportunity. Such papers generally focus on a complex and multi-faceted problem that is amenable to investigation or discussion, but cannot be reduced to a typical scientific analysis. Thus, it develops a discourse against which, in turn, another set of authors could be invited to respond or specifically refer to (i.e., extend or criticize).

Response

Papers in the 'Response' genre comments on a paper previously published in *EJIS*. It can respond to an 'Issues and Opinion' paper or to a paper of another genre that had developed a position or made a statement. It could also be a response to a Research Essay paper, or to an Empirical paper, including contrarian (Nandhakumar & Baskerville, 2011). An empirical contrarian research paper is a research note that generally replicates a study with a different method and finds somehow different results. Thus, a contrarian paper should be published in the empirical research genre, and a response paper may follow.

A note on design science research

The observant reader has already noted that our above account of submission genres has not singled out design science research (DSR), or, more generally, design-oriented research. *EJIS* is strongly committed to the design research tradition, with important landmarks such as the publication of the memorandum on design-oriented information systems research (Österle et al, 2011) and the upcoming special issue on exemplars and criteria for applicable design science research. With this commitment to design one may argue that *EJIS* ought to have a distinct DSR submission category. The editors have certainly entertained this idea, but have come to the conclusion that it may not be the best way to promote DSR research; at least not for the moment. The reason is simple. Since design-oriented research is so fundamental to our discipline, it should be welcomed in all genres.

Pragmatically speaking (Ågerfalk, 2010), DSR is essentially concerned with practical knowledge about design, through design and for design, and the most obvious submission category for typical DSR studies may thus be Empirical Research. However, considering the importance of design theorizing and the contemporary discussion about the role of DSR in theory development, there is reason to believe that many significant future DSR contributions will be more appropriate for the Theory Development, Research Essay or Literature Review submission categories. Thus, while we agree with Goes (2014, p. vi) that 'it is absolutely not a requirement of successful design

science manuscripts to have an explicit tie to theory', we also acknowledge that there is no requirement that a successful DSR manuscript has an explicit empirical component. Furthermore, European research has a long tradition in other forms of design-oriented approaches than DSR proper, including, for example, participatory design, which may draw heavily on ethnographies and narratives. Proposing a separate DSR submission category may then turn out to be a disservice to the community since it may be interpreted as suggesting that other design approaches are less welcome. Thus, we would like to emphasize that not having a separate DSR submission category is our way of embracing the diversity of design-oriented approaches that has helped shape the IS discipline and will most likely continue to do so in the foreseeable future. It is certainly our hope that *EJIS* will provide an arena where these diverse approaches can cross-fertilize in order to push the DSR and IS design discourse further.

Contribution and criteria for acceptance

Given the diversity of genres encompassed by *EJIS*, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive set of criteria for acceptance. In fact, it is probably not even desirable. No matter how well such a set is carved out, the most successful manuscripts will be those that provide novel insights through innovative and creative inquiry that editors and reviewers would never even have thought of.

It has been suggested that there are three major components to a successful manuscript: contribution, contribution and contribution. An earlier editorial explored the notion of research contribution by contrasting theoretical contribution with empirical contribution and emphasizing the importance of theoretical implications (Ågerfalk, 2014). We recapitulate on the essence of this message below by paying particular attention to the submission categories of *EJIS*. First, however, let us consider some useful advice provided by former *EJIS* editors. This advice was first provided some 10 years ago, but is still startlingly relevant and very much worth repeating.

Fundamentals

Paul (2005) provided a thorough account of refereed journal dissemination with the purpose to assist in the desire to 'improve the content, appropriateness and readability of IS Journals' (p. 217):

- papers should be readable in the language in which they are published;
- an IS journal should publish papers dealing with IS-related issues;
- papers should be meaningful and provide some rationale;
- they should avoid mere presentation of statistical relationships; and
- should be more than a castle built on sand.

Paul's first point is a delicate one, especially for those of us who are not native English speakers. However, if a paper

is not intelligible, it simply cannot be reviewed properly. At the other end of the spectrum, we find papers that are made up of long declamatory sentences with little actual content, seemingly made to impress rather than to convey a crisp message and a good, engaging story. Neither approach is likely to lead to a successful review.

At *EJIS*, we receive many papers that may be of good quality but have little to do with IS. These papers, which represent a significant proportion of the papers we receive, are typically rejected by the Managing Editor before they even reach an Editor's desk.

Most frequently, misplaced papers are Computer Science papers with little or no ambition to relate the findings to people, organizations or society. Two good ways to ensure that the journal one submits to is a good fit is to (1) check that the journal is actually included in your references – if not, you are probably not connecting to the relevant discourse (unless your research is extraordinarily novel), and (2) try to find a paper from the target journal that can serve as a role model for your paper – not to replicate but to learn the house style.

Paul's third point is as simple as that: no message, no publication. A manuscript that does not tell a story will not survive. Baskerville (2009) suggested that we should ask ourselves, 'what will my reader do differently, day-to-day, after reading my article?' Journal readers expect to learn something from reading each article. It is thus important for our authors and editors to keep such rewards in mind for our readers.

In Paul's original account he drew attention to a number of problems with the typical, quantitative paper so often submitted: the relevance of student samples, addressing questions without (practically findable) answers, stating the obvious, and the faithful belief in and abuse of statistical packages. Although these issues still prevail, the main problems currently in relation to the traditional quantitative research paper are (1) the lack of contribution because of a belief that everything that is statistically significant is also important and interesting, and (2) poor contextualization of findings. The first problem can be rephrased as: no, we are not particularly interested in yet another TAM study unless it brings something really novel to the table. Simply adding a new construct to an already published research model does not qualify. The second issue was addressed by Te'eni (2015), and suggests that to make findings exciting, one needs to make an effort to put the findings into a context that is also relevant outside the confines of the scientific study. This can, for instance, be done by adopting mixed methods (Ågerfalk, 2013), which combine statistical 'evidence' with qualitative context awareness and richness in description.

Contributions and implications

An earlier editorial challenged the knee-jerk reaction of many reviewers to reject anything that does not provide a strong theoretical contribution (Ågerfalk, 2014), which laid the groundwork for understanding precisely what *EJIS*

could consider as a 'sufficient' theoretical contribution. The main message was, 'try not to get too hung up on the theoretical contribution (or lack thereof), and focus instead on novel and useful ideas that can help advance our understanding of information systems'. The rationale for this position is that in the limited space offered by a typical journal paper we need to make a judgement call as to how many words to spend on empirical descriptions and on theoretical elaboration respectively. The issue at stake is that sometimes, most words are needed to make the empirical contribution come across. Before looking at how this relates to our different submission categories, let us take a step back and revisit the notions of theoretical and empirical contribution.

Corley & Gioia (2011) drew on Sutton & Staw (1995) to define 'theory' as 'a statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs'. A theoretical contribution can then be understood as something that advances our understanding of such concepts and interrelationships. To be seen as significant, a theoretical contribution must show both originality and utility (Corley & Gioia, 2011). A theoretical contribution must be discussed in relation to existing theory, in order to be established as a contribution and the novelty of a theoretical contribution is thus closely related to its theoretical implications. In an applied field such as IS, it is generally expected that a theoretical contribution also has practical implications.

'Empirical contribution' can be defined as 'a novel account of an empirical phenomenon that challenges existing assumptions about the world or reveals something previously undocumented' (Ågerfalk, 2014, p. 594). An empirical contribution thus reveals insights into a phenomenon and does not have to rely explicitly on any *a priori* conceptualizations. Similar to a theoretical contribution, an empirical contribution needs to show both originality and utility, and give rise to implications for research and practice.

A key idea here is that the novelty of an empirical contribution is not intrinsically tied to possible theoretical implications, as is the case with theoretical contributions. A rich account of an empirical phenomenon may be a solid contribution in and of itself. Furthermore, the theoretical implications of an empirical contribution materialize outside of the immediate research context, and therefore cannot be fully specified – they rather depend on how the research is subsequently taken up by others.

Essentially, if the empirical contribution is strong enough in itself, there is no intrinsic reason that also a substantial theoretical contribution is needed in a given paper. On the contrary, there are strong arguments for 'theory-light' papers (Avison & Malaurent, 2014) that focus on empirical contributions and defer claims to theoretical contribution until later, possibly by other researchers.

Furthermore, a theoretical implication is not the same as an implication for research. A theoretical contribution advances a theory, while an implication for research

typically identifies a need to investigate a phenomenon further. Similarly, empirical contributions are not the same as implications for practice. An empirical contribution provides a novel or revealing account, while an implication for practice may be an identified need to address a practical problem identified through such an account. Certainly, an implication for research can be seen as an implication for (research) practice.

So, where does this leave us in terms of submission categories? As indicated above, without committing to particular sets of success criteria, we here give an account of where each of the *EJIS* submission categories may fit in terms of theoretical vs empirical contribution and theoretical vs practical implications, respectively. The purpose is primarily to provide food for thought. Exactly how to position a particular study is beyond the scope of this editorial, and requires a more thorough reading of relevant previous editorials, which we strongly encourage.

Ethnography/Narrative manuscripts are expected to have a strong empirical contribution with practical and theoretical implications. A potential theoretical contribution may be achieved but is not necessarily in the foreground. In a sense, ethnographies and narratives can be seen as providing archetypes for in-depth research with rich empirical description and engagement in the field (Rowe, 2012).

Empirical Research manuscripts can aim at either empirical or theoretical contributions. In some cases both types of contribution can be achieved but one typically needs to be emphasized. These manuscripts are also expected to display both theoretical and practical implications.

Literature Review manuscripts should always aim for theoretical contribution by means of developing theory from, synthesizing, or contrasting previous work. This is why descriptive reviews should not be submitted to *EJIS* unless they have a bearing on methodological or epistemological issues. Very systematic literature reviews, such as meta-analyses, can also make empirical contributions by summarizing previously published findings.

Theory Development manuscripts are intended for theoretical contribution (and thus theoretical implications) but can also elaborate on practical implications, perhaps especially for research(ers).

Research Essay manuscripts typically emphasize theoretical implications without necessarily making a strong theoretical contribution. Since these manuscripts often deal with research methods and research practice, they will display practical implications for researchers.

Manuscripts submitted under the categories of Issues and Opinion, Response, and Editorial (including Guest Editorial) can, by their very nature, address any combination contribution and implication.

Special issues

Special issues are an important part of our publication, even though we do not usually have more than a couple in

a year. A proposal for a special issue will typically be developed with the editors, and is presented to the *EJIS* editorial board for further feedback and approval. Indeed, we ask that at least one of the special issue editors be an experienced member of the *EJIS* editorial board. We believe this makes it easier to develop the special issue in the spirit of *EJIS*.

As with paper submissions, we insist on academic quality, interesting and timely issues that fit our scope, and a good opportunity to solicit a good number of submissions. Special issues should not be viewed as byproducts of conferences, regardless of their own selection process – *EJIS* does not publish ‘selected papers from ...’ and there is no such thing as a ‘fast track’ to publication (all submissions go through the same rigorous peer review). This is not only because of the limited rounds of reviews and the length of conference papers, but also because conference papers can only be used as a starting point. Such papers, like those originally developed for the special issue, should adapt their content and broaden and adjust their contributions and implications to the goals of the special issue.

The *EJIS* policy is that guest editors should not submit to their own special issue. However, they will have a unique opportunity to develop a full introductory paper, often highly cited, leveraging the special issue papers’ contributions and implications, and beyond. Thus, the most successful introductory papers will be rewarded to address both targeted and unforeseen challenges, and will make by itself (themselves) an important contribution to the field.

Typically, a special issue is a subtle mix of breadth and specificity. Breadth is necessary to attract enough papers so that we can be selective (in order to publish only excellent papers). Specificity is required to give the special issue enough personality to appeal to the IS community at large (and possibly beyond). The Editors, in dialogue with the special issue proposers, will carefully select the special issue guest editor team, including a regular *EJIS* editorial board member. Selection criteria include geographical spread (i.e., guest editors should not be from the same university but ideally from different continents) and name recognition, also beyond the theme in order to attract a large number of quality submissions. Successful special issues typically receive more than 50 submissions.

In 2015 we published two special issues: *Information System Integration in Mergers and Acquisitions* edited by Jonas Hedman and Suprateek Sarker and *Cross-cultural IS research: perspectives from Eastern and Western traditions* edited by Merrill Warkentin, Brigitte Charles-Pauvers and Patrick Y.K. Chau. The year before, we published three special issues or sections on: mobile IS, business analytics and identity and identification.

We are currently still accepting submissions for two special issues: *Security and Privacy in 21st Century Organisations* (until 31 January 2016) and *Philosophy and the Future of the IS Field* (until 30 June 2016). Two are in the making but no longer accepting submissions: *Alternative Genres*, and *Exemplars and criteria for applicable design science research*.

Before submitting a proposal for a special issue, please refer to the *EJIS* special issues of the last 5 years. We are unlikely to accept proposals for special issue topics that have been published in *EJIS* or similar journals in recent years.

Instructions and procedures

Submission of papers

As we have noted in the outset, this section does not cover the mechanics of submitting a manuscript, which are essential for submitting successfully to *EJIS*. It only provides general instructions for those wishing to submit manuscripts, and concentrates on a few elements, which from our experience, deserve special attention.

First, *EJIS* uses an *electronic submission system* and authors must submit their manuscript electronically using this system. The system is designed to be self-explanatory, but help is available within the submission site via the ‘Author Instructions’ tab.

Once authors create an account with and log into system, they will see ‘Author Instructions’ on the menu, and this is where they will be able to learn about the various features of the system in greater detail. We recommend that authors consult this feature when they first start using the system, or when they encounter any issue with the system.

Second, we strongly encourage all authors to read carefully the ‘Instructions for Authors’ page on the *EJIS* website BEFORE submitting their manuscript. This page contains detailed information regarding submission requirements, including the genres of papers, length of submissions, abstract and keywords, figures and tables, references, ethics policy, etc. Manuscripts that do not meet these submission requirements may be returned to the author without further review.

Third, in early 2015, we implemented a policy that every submission must be accompanied by a cover letter that conforms to specific requirements (authors are encouraged to consult the cover letter template). This cover letter is not just an administrative step, but an important element in the entire review process. For example, the three Editors and the Managing Editor may use the cover letter to evaluate and judge at a glance the fit of the manuscript with the Journal, as well as its potential contributions. Further, this cover letter may be used to identify an AE that is well suited to handling the submission. Submissions that do not conform to the cover letter requirements, or do not follow the guidelines, may be rejected by an Editor.

Fourth, our editorial office is committed to helping and assisting authors concerning any issues or problems that they may experience during submissions. Thus, our editorial administrator will do their best to answer authors’ inquiries or questions in a prompt manner, and may forward inquiries to the Editors or the Managing Editor as necessary.

Fifth, this journal is a member of the *Committee on Publication Ethics*. We expect all prospective authors to

read and understand our *Ethics Policy* before submitting any manuscript. All articles submitted to *EJIS* should be original contributions, and should not be under consideration for publication at any other outlet. The copyright of all material published in the journal is held by the OR Society.

Last but not least, having introduced the genres, we ask authors to make a careful choice of which genre best describes the submission (noted in the cover letter described above). The choice of genre may affect its allocation and initial evaluation. When submitting their paper authors will therefore have to choose genre from the options of a pull-down menu. However, depending on the review process the Editors may decide to review and to publish a paper in a different category.

Getting involved

The quality of our reviewers determines the quality of our papers. In our view, the quality reviewers are (1) those who offer insightful and critical, but constructive and developmental comments, and (2) those who complete reviews in a timely manner. After all, we are in the business of publishing papers through a developmental review process (not in the business of rejecting papers). Further, we must be sensible in protecting not only the valuable time of authors but particularly the scarce time and energy of our Associate Editors and reviewers. Lastly, *EJIS* expects those who publish and benefit from the feedback of others in the community to review the work of others. Therefore, we encourage capable and willing authors to volunteer as reviewers by indicating their availability in the system, or writing to our editorial administrator.

Reviewers that are of exceptional quality (see above) and have experience from publishing in *EJIS* may be asked to join the editorial board as associate editors. For sure, this requires a much higher level of commitment and engagement than just doing the odd review. A clear benefit, however, is the opportunity to be part of an exclusive set of extraordinary individuals that share a passion for shaping and developing the future of the journal and our field in a very direct way.

Conclusion

In this editorial we have attempted to explain some of the most important policies and practices of *EJIS*. Our hope is that anyone interested in participating in our community (authors, reviewers, editorial board members, guest editors, and of course readers) will benefit from knowing more about the inner workings and rationale of the Journal. Parts of this material have been taken from earlier

editorials, which we encourage everyone to go back to. However, by providing an up-to-date account, we hope to have produced a useful summary and synergy. In particular, we have more clearly delineated the genres and reflected upon the contributions we expect from each.

What we have presented thus far is the current state of affairs. However, embedded in this message lies a hint about our future, which we would like to summarize here in a few words.

On the operational side we are working on ways to improve our processes. Increasing the number of submissions puts stress on the system, and our commitment to returning decisions to authors within three months cannot always be honored. Interestingly, it seems that Brook's Law applies not only to software development teams but also to editorial boards. Thus, although we will extend the editorial board, the main challenge is to get enough senior eyeballs on the submissions to provide a swift, yet high-quality review experience. To achieve this, we are trying to extend the Editors layer with additional Senior Editors who can help making sure that everything flows satisfactorily. We are also hoping to streamline the submission system to cater better for the needs of the journal as it develops. We are indeed committed to return immediate decisions on submissions that do not fit our Journal within two weeks and on reviewed submissions within three months.

EJIS will continue to pursue its critical, pluralism, impact and diversity agenda. We are not particularly interested in protecting the mainstream of IS research – others do that very well. Instead, we are keen to endorse approaches that help push the envelope. Although we will still publish 'traditional' research, we will always prefer difficult and risky endeavors with high potential impact. Some people will probably call us exotic and maybe even eccentric. We like to think of it as 'distinctively European'. Although being European is not necessarily a geographical designation but more of a mindset, we must never forget our global audience. *EJIS* will never become an introvert outlet only serving a select few that understand the deeper aspects of Habermas, Derrida and Foucault (and probably not much besides that). Our future, however, lies not in becoming more mainstream but in making 'obscure' research accessible for the masses. We hope to see you engaging with us on this journey.

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