First, I would like to thank Bernd Carsten Stahl for the opportunity to write this editorial, and for his vision, hard work, and dedication. It also has been a privilege to work with the editorial team, the reviewers, and, of course, the authors.

IJTHI is off to a good start. It has been exciting for me to be part of a new journal and to see it go from just a concept to its fourth issue. Although many processes had to be defined (i.e., made up) as we went along, papers have been submitted and reviewed, and a number of those papers have even made it into print. This has been my first real experience in being part of the review process from the editor’s side, and I have found it to be very rewarding. I am pleased to report that the whole process seems to be settling in. In short, we now have an ongoing journal.

So where do we go from here? The true test of IJTHI’s success will be whether the journal outlives us or we outlive the journal. I truly hope that we are part of something that will become a legacy for future generations of researchers long after we all retire.

I believe that two critical and interdependent factors are necessary for IJTHI to become a legacy: quality and relevance. I am going to go out on a limb here and say that most, if not all, of us aspire to publish quality research in quality journals. We derive satisfaction from the intrinsic feeling that we not only produced our best work, but that the quality of our work has been validated externally. This external validation comes from reviewers, editors, citations of our work by other authors, and, most notably, from our promotion and tenure committees.

The principle of incremental improvement associated with total quality management may provide an effective approach to improve continually the quality of our journal. Although the quality (and to a certain degree, quantity) of paper submission is important, the quality of the reviews and the editorial process will help make IJTHI a journal to which authors want to submit their best work. For the most part, I have been impressed with the quality of reviews for the papers that have been assigned to me as an associate editor; however, there is still opportunity for improvement.

First, IJTHI needs a broad base of quality reviewers so that the potential for burning out our best reviewers is reduced. Therefore, I encourage you to become a reviewer and to encourage others to become reviewers as well. In particular, we should all encourage junior colleagues to become reviewers. Being a reviewer not only provides a valuable service to our field, but also provides a unique opportunity to learn from the experience of others. Moreover, if you are part of a doctoral-granting institution, you should encour-
age your doctoral students to learn how to write a good review. Second, although a good review takes time, reviews should be completed within a reasonable time frame. Authors, especially those who hear the promotion and tenure clock ticking loudly, need to know within a reasonable time if their work has a good chance of being published or if they should consider an alternative outlet. Third, a good review should not only provide criticism, but also should offer specific guidance to the authors if the paper has potential. Speaking from my own experience, nothing is more frustrating than receiving a review that recommends to revise and resubmit, but offers little or no direction as to what should be revised.

Instead of writing about platitudes (i.e., reviewers should write quality reviews), perhaps the IJTHI editorial team should work with our reviewers to define what a quality review is and how to write better reviews. In the meantime, I will continue to look for ways to help improve the editorial processes so that good papers become better papers.

In addition, the relevance of IJTHI can lead to the quality and quantity of journal submissions. Based upon just the few issues in print so far, I believe that we are filling a niche. It appears that we are getting a good cross section of international authors and fresh, new ideas. Hopefully, this will lead to new discussions, new approaches, and new insights that lead us in new directions as a discipline. It may take some courage, but we may have the opportunity to redefine mainstream IS research. Redefining mainstream IS research and our field may be appropriate given that the field of IS and IT is at a crossroads. For example, my initial reaction after reading the article was, “Of course IT matters!” But I believe my true feeling was more, “IT must matter because if it doesn’t, then maybe I don’t matter as an IS teacher and researcher!” Shaking the pillars of the IS discipline every once in a while and sparking debate is good for the discipline. It gets us thinking about our past, present, and future.

The discussion as to whether IT matters also comes at a time when many have witnessed a slump in the IT job market for both professionals and academics. Moreover, many IS programs, especially in the United States, have witnessed a significant decline in enrollment while other majors within the college and university continue to grow. To add fuel to the fire, many entry-level jobs for graduating IS students have been outsourced to other countries. It may not be long before many college and university administrators begin to make adjustments in terms of various resources to support those programs that are growing.

However, I remember there appeared to be a similar crisis as to what the future would hold for the IS and IT field when I was completing my PhD in 1994. I even recall one member of my dissertation committee telling me shortly before my defense that I may not even have a field in a few years. I also recollect attending one of the larger IS conferences as a doctoral student and listening to a panel of some well-known IS academics give their prognosis of our field’s future. The future they painted was not very bright.

Interestingly, a few years later brought the arrival of the Internet and World Wide Web, and things seemed to change rather quickly. Attending another conference as an assistant professor, I took note of a panel (that I swear was comprised mostly of the same experts in 1994) that attested to the virtues of our field’s future. We went from doom and gloom to a rosy picture almost overnight.
So what does this mean? And, again, where do we go from here? This past year I had the opportunity to teach a new class in IT strategy. Although tooling up for a new class has been a challenge, it also has provided me with a chance to revisit a number of classic papers that I read as a doctoral student. In particular, I took great interest in rereading Gibson and Nolan’s (1974) classic article “Managing the Four Stages of EDP Growth” and a more recent version update by Nolan (2001), “Information Technology Management from 1960-2000.” These articles gave me a new perspective on some things.

In 1974, Gibson and Nolan described a framework for understanding, evaluating, and controlling the growth of EDP in terms of four distinct phases of development. These four segments make up an s curve that represents initiation, expansion, formalization, and maturity. Each phase has its own distinctive applications, rewards, and problems. The framework allows a firm’s management to understand the organizational forces at work so that effective decisions can be made at each phase. For example, the first stage focused on limited investment and experimentation with newly acquired computer technology. Following this initiation, the s curve becomes increasingly steep, whereby technology proliferates in an uncontrolled manner. As this uncontrolled growth leads to spiraling costs, the third stage entails management’s demand for increasing controls. This slowing of technology growth is reflected in a flattening out of the s curve. Lastly, the fourth stage provides an era of maturity where the organization may achieve continuing economic benefits through a balance of control and investment.

In 2001, Nolan extended this previous concept by introducing the notion that we have gone through several eras of computing, each with its own distinct s curve. These include the DP Era (1960-1980), the Micro Era (1980-1995), and the Network Era (1995-2010). Moreover, each era is characterized by its own s curve, and the overlapping of s curves as one era ends and the next begins creates a period of technological discontinuity or crisis. Therefore, the phenomenal growth years for IT in the late 1990s, as supported by the Internet craze and rise of the dot-coms, could be viewed as the rising side of the s curve for that era. As predicted by the stages theory, the subsequent shakeout of the dot-coms and IT spending, in general, was a normal reaction to the growth years and uncontrolled spending, and is consistent with Carr’s (2003) call for businesses to spend less money on IT, to follow and not lead when it comes to using IT strategically, and to focus on vulnerabilities, not opportunities.

The point is that while one era has ended, we most likely are in the beginning of a new era and s curve. While the field of IS may currently be in a state of discontinuity, we may very well be just at the beginning of a new s curve that will take us for another wild ride over the next several years. The key questions are: What will be the catalyst? And what can we do as a discipline to be positioned to take advantage of this new era?

I believe that IJTHI can be poised to take advantage of this new s curve if we have the courage and creativity to rethink and redefine where we go from here.

References
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