



'Paper-based' accreditation and academic status

Despite vigorous and sometimes frantic arguments against the practice of establishing the status of a scientist according to the number of his/her publications, this age-old tradition is still alive and well. Staff appointments are made, promotions motivated, tenure confirmed (despite efforts to add additional criteria) and the rating of scientific authors still measured according to the number of journal articles that have been accepted and consequently published in peer-reviewed journals. To simplify the evaluation process, journals have been pre-evaluated, resulting in a list of approved journals; hence the concept of 'accreditation'. It is not the intention of this editorial to side for or against peer reviewing or accreditation, but rather to observe that the standing of a scientist is currently still based upon the number of his/her articles being published in *paper-based* journals. This question can be rephrased in question format: Will the peer-reviewed e-journal be accepted as equal in status to its paper-based counterpart, and specifically with regard to accreditation?

The good news is that some international abstracting services have started to include e-journals as part of their indexing coverage, albeit on a very limited scale. This is an important development as it has already been proven that e-journals dispose of alternative and more advanced functionalities:

- **Hypertext and hypermedia:** These features can be optimised in an e-journal. This means that apart from text and graphics, a specific article can contain hyperlinks to other sources of information, which could be video, sound files or a paper to be delivered at a conference. References in the text or bibliography could also be linked to the full text.
- **Interactivity:** After publication, readers' comments on a particular article can be added to the issue, either as an addendum to the article or in a separate column provided for comments or correspondence. The author's remarks or interpretation can also be added on an ongoing basis.
- **Mobility:** Various technical options exist in terms of the formal publication of the journal: it can be hosted in one location or provide for quicker downloading (by moving servers to distributed areas to improve the download speed).
- **Publication choice:** Multiple options are available – the traditional approach, on a monthly or any other regular frequency – while another approach is to publish an article as soon as it is peer-reviewed and ready for publication. There is no definite time lapse between acceptance and publication.
- **Archiving:** The articles of back issues could be archived, indexed and saved permanently. Copies of the archives could be easily retrieved and printed or made available in digital format.
- **International search engines:** These can visit a journal site and make the contents

available to anybody using that specific search engine.

- Local search engine: Visitors to the archived site can utilize a dedicated search engine to retrieve information within the site.
- Automatic notices: The interface for subscribers could be an easy-to-use form, created for a hassle-free subscription procedure.

'Postings' as publications?

The 'traditional' viewpoint, that is, the status of a scientist is established by means of accredited paper-based publications, therefore has to be scrutinized. In fact, the scholarly journal as the *only* publication that can be accepted for accreditation should be questioned. Take the possibilities of the 'posting' of research results (Kling and McKim 1999). Postings can include a wide range of methods, for example on a password-protected Web site in order to share the content with other co-authors; a private discussion forum for comments; a public discussion list for comments and feedback; a personal Web site; or an organisation's Web site as a working paper or pre-print.

Each of these postings has different properties: different audiences, different restrictions on readership, different representations of the status of the document; different costs to post and maintain the document; and different requirements with regard to the permanency of archiving the original document. It is this editor's prediction that in the near future these developments will have a profound impact on the way that research publications will be evaluated for accreditation. Consider the following hypothesis: If a digital document, containing valuable research results, is posted on an internationally available Web site (i.e. its address or URL is made available to anyone that is interested in gaining access to the document, either at a fee or free of charge, and if the digital document conforms to the same criteria as those for a peer-reviewed scholarly journal in paper format), then this document should be seen as of value and therefore be accredited. Although there is still wide debate between professional societies about the validity of *postings*, some already accept postings *per se* as equivalent to *publication*.

Moratorium

Being a digital-only, peer-reviewed scholarly journal, and therefore publishing articles of quality within the Information Management areas, this editor will soon initiate the process of adding *SAJIM* to the list of accredited South African journals. The moratorium on new journals has been lifted by the South African Department of Education, which opens the way for applying for new journals to be added to the list. If successful, this will be an important breakthrough in the advancement of science in general and the Information Management disciplines in particular, as more manuscripts of quality will be submitted for peer reviewing.

This issue's peer reviewed articles

For this issue three articles have been selected for publication: Weeks and Lessing discuss the integration of information technology and business practices. At the heart of this environment is the reality that modern day economic transformation is being driven by the development and diffusion of emerging information technology. It is such a pervasive transformation that there are scarcely any domain of the business environment in which organizations function that has not been influenced. The characteristics of this environment are briefly explored and a strategic model presented for debate. It is a model that is designed to integrate business practice and information technology transformation.

Van der Klashorst illustrates how the integration of some aspects of the technology, the so-called enterprise architecture, could be applied in practice. Nedcor, a large South African financial enterprise, is discussed as an example in this regard. The knowledge intensity of enterprise architecture in support of the organisation's ability to be innovative, competitive and proactive towards change is emphasized, and it is illustrated how this knowledge base is managed to leverage value to the rest of the organization.

In contrast, the third article by Van der Westhuizen is a theoretical article that establishes the degree to which training is responsible for return on investment where superior technology is in use. It is suggested that all levels of management should get involved in the quest for return on investment by addressing their relevant concerns and passions. Technology should also be designed to be user-friendly and responsive to visitor interests in order to increase customer loyalty.

Reference

Kling, R. & McKim, G. 1999. Scholarly communication and the continuum of electronic publishing. *Journal of the American Society of Information Science*, 50(10):890-906.

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