

COLUMN: *Editorial*

Our Changing Environment

In this final issue of 2010, you'll find a three-article series describing the remote/virtual editorial office environment many of us work in every day. Two of the articles describe the experience of moving from a traditional office space to a virtual office, and the other describes the benefits and challenges of working remotely.

Although working remotely is now commonplace for many of us, it wasn't so long ago that this was 'cutting edge,' and a little longer ago, 'impossible.' The Internet and systems such as ScholarOne Manuscripts™ and Editorial Manager® have given office staff a great amount of flexibility in the options for their office environments, the management of these environments, and the opportunities for roles and positions that no longer require being physically present with the journal editor(s) and owners.

The publishing world is changing fast. A flexible office environment is one aspect, and ISMTE is another.

In 2010, our society offered members a monthly newsletter, office resources, training modules,

discussion forums, and informative, interactive meetings. Planning is underway for how ISMTE can grow in 2011.

We are a young society, and it's exciting to imagine what we can become. It's hard for me to imagine doing my job now without the resources that ISMTE offers. I'm thrilled to have a society to call my own, one that truly caters to my professional needs.

I hope you have found ISMTE to be a worthy partner for you and that you have found ways to contribute to the Society and benefit from the collaboration.

ISMTE was born with the purpose of bringing us together, virtually and physically, to share, learn, and enhance our individual work and our profession. Through the portals on our desks in our physical or remote offices we are given the opportunity to connect to our professional community. Join us!

Kristen Overstreet
Editor, EON

In this issue:

Articles

- *From Physical to Virtual Office in 30 Days* 2
- *Vanishing Act* 5
- *Remote Control* 7

Columns

- *Editorial* 1
- *Taming Technology* 9
- *Portrait of an Editorial Office* 10

Miscellaneous

- *Calendar* 6

From Physical to Virtual Office in 30 Days

by Kristen Overstreet

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Why Go Virtual?

Editorial offices determine that it's time "to go virtual" for different reasons. Some make the decision when an editor retires or her term comes to an end and a new editor is hired in a different location but the journal owner wants to keep the same staff. Some decide it's time when they determine that the virtual model will save money over maintaining a physical space. Some may move directly from one to the other and others may move in a series of steps, having some staff work virtually while maintaining a physical office space with others.

Recently I managed the transition of a physical office where the staff members were working together in one place. (The editors were already working virtually.) The previous managing editor had also worked in the physical office space, but upon her departure from the journal, the Association decided it was an ideal time to get out of some very expensive (and beautiful) real estate and go virtual. As the interim managing editor, my first job was to transition the three editorial assistants to their new virtual offices in their homes.

Develop a Plan

A good plan will save a lot of angst. The first thing we did as a team was to create a spreadsheet that included the relevant people involved, the steps we identified as necessary to closing the physical office and establishing

three virtual offices, and the timeline. We created this document in the third week of June with a plan to be virtual by the end of August. The people involved included me, the three editorial assistants, and a person from the association who was already working virtually but lived in the same town and could be in the office as much as needed during the transition. She became the process coordinator. I flew in to meet with the group for two separate weeks during the process. This was crucial for me so I could see the physical layout, meet the staff in person, and help identify what needed to be done to close this specific office.

The steps we identified for this process included

- a. Identifying processes that were not yet digital and converting them, where possible;
- b. Reviewing the policy on what documents needed to be stored in perpetuity: How long should documents be stored? Which physical documents should be scanned and stored electronically? What should be recycled?
- c. Setting up file sharing for electronic documents and determining where necessary physical documents would be stored;
- d. Creating a master document that would list the old and new

Virtual Office in 30 Days

continued

- storage locations and distributing it to all staff;
- e. Creating a list of equipment, furniture, and office supplies. Identifying which items could be reused in the virtual offices and noting the new locations in the document. Identifying which items should be sold, donated, or disposed of. Recording the decisions for each item or group of items in the document;
- f. Canceling contracts – copier, water dispenser, phone/fax, trash, etc.;
- g. Identifying what will be needed in each person's virtual office and providing Internet access, computer, printer, copier, phone, and fax for each worker;
- h. Determining how the team will connect from their virtual offices (i.e., instead of weekly staff meetings in the office, meeting via Skype twice per week);
- i. Scheduling trial days to identify what is working well and what isn't in the virtual offices. Scheduling these early enough that the issues can be resolved before the staff members are expected to work from their virtual offices exclusively.

Communication is important. Everyone involved needs to be kept in the loop about the status of the move and the needed next steps. The process coordinator did an excellent job in this case of communicating what was needed for each step in the process and identifying when the staff were feeling uncomfortable and needed more information

or support. It was easy for me to forget from far away what a big change this was for a group of people who had been sharing physical space for many years. By being on site, the process coordinator was connected in a way I couldn't be, identifying issues before they became problems and seeking solutions proactively. Also because she was on site, the process coordinator was able to coordinate the pick up of the leased copy machine and the rented water dispenser, the pick up of the office furniture that was donated to a third party, the collection of the keys and badges, and the final walk-through by the landlord, while the editorial assistants focused on setting up their home offices and keeping up with their daily tasks.

My role was to encourage the staff to truly move to a system-based workflow. Because they were all located in the same facility, the editorial office had moved from a paper-based workflow to using a submission and review system, but their workflow had remained much the same. They were printing and creating paper manuscript files for every submission and storing them in file cabinets. Now that the office would be virtual, there would be no optimal place to store these files and they could not be shared. The Association was already using a file-sharing (or cloud-sharing) system called Box.net, so it was easy to move files such as disclosure and copyright forms into this location. We talked about storing these files electronically instead of in hard copy, and after some initial concern, the editorial assistants agreed that this would serve their needs. We also talked about whether there was a real need to print and store manuscript files and to use postal mail for communicating with the publisher. After some discussion, the staff determined that using electronic files and mail would meet their needs and they could let go of having

Virtual Office in 30 Days

continued

paper files. During one of my weeks on site, we cleaned out all the filing cabinets, recycling much of the contents and only boxing up the disclosure and copyright forms for perpetual storage. A move like this can be a good time to consider current practice versus best practice, asking “why” as you consider the steps of your workflow and policies and procedures. For this office, the decision to move to a virtual office prompted the staff to also change their workflow to a fully system-based workflow, which is more efficient and cheaper to operate.

Workflow

The virtual office workflow may require a shift from working a set schedule, such as 8a.m. to 5p.m., to a task-based workflow. It is difficult to ascertain if staff are sitting down to work at a “certain” start time each day or not taking a long lunch. There’s no need to try to manage workers this way in a virtual office if you switch to a task-based workflow instead of time-based. Identify the tasks that need to be accomplished each day/week/month/issue, assign them to staff with the idea of generally filling the number of expected paid hours, and then communicate

often to identify whether assignments need to be adjusted. Lunches and breaks should no longer be considered billable time.

Summary

With my recent experience, the transition went very smoothly. Thanks to the trial days, we identified minor issues that were fixed prior to going fully virtual; and thanks to the process coordinator, we were able to close the physical office one month ahead of schedule.

We have found that two 30-minute meetings per week via Skype have worked well to keep the team connected and encourage good communication. The team has adapted well to a fully electronic workflow and to the less structured virtual environment. Staff enjoy the extra time they have gained by not needing to commute to the old physical location, and the journal benefits from staff’s more flexible work hours. It’s much easier for staff to check in during the evenings and on weekends if something important occurs outside “office hours” and requires immediate attention.



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Vanishing Act

by **Elizabeth Blalock**

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Twelve hundred miles from its editor, Paul Bergstresser, MD, in Dallas, Texas (with whom we communicate by e-mail and Skype) and 500 miles from the Society for Investigative Dermatology headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio, the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology (JID)* editorial office could already be considered 'virtual.' But for its inhabitants, our 700-square-foot office is very real, and until very recently it contained 6 years' worth of license to publish forms, the bound volumes of the *journal's* entire print existence (from 1938), and all the equipment and accoutrements of a two-person operation. Since the fall, however, we have been making changes that will allow us to vacate this space by the end of the year.

Why go virtual? Having already established systems that would allow us to work from home one day a week (laptops; remote file access), it occurred to me that the money for rent and other utilities might be better invested elsewhere. In addition, work could theoretically be completed from anywhere in the world, providing flexibility and potentially increasing our productivity. I proposed the idea of a virtual model to my editor and Society. Somewhat to my surprise, there was no opposition. We have had the luxury of effecting this change over the course of a few months, and we are now in the last stages of the conversion.

After drawing up a simple plan on a spreadsheet (with due dates), I investigated our options for our communications, file storage, and divestment of our equipment and

furniture.

First, we changed our means of receiving license to publish and conflict of interest forms. These had always been faxed to us, and for several reasons we cannot take advantage of the e-forms on our online submission system. Instead, we cleared digital signatures with our society's publications counsel and with our publisher. Having ensured that electrons were as acceptable as paper, we moved to an online fax service (Trustfax.com; \$8.95/month to receive 250 pages). Authors can still use a fax machine to send their forms, but we receive PDF files instead of paper, eliminating the need for file cabinets and shipping boxes of material to the society for eternal storage. While it was necessary to scan the forms that we had previously received in print form, by the January 2011 issue these forms were all digitized and exported to the publisher electronically with the manuscript files (an arrangement they much prefer). Now, all *JID's* publication forms are received and stored digitally.

Our phones were next. Instead of a dedicated phone line for our each of our homes, I opted for basic cell phones that, placed in a briefcase, make the office phone system completely portable. As most of our business is conducted by e-mail, we selected a very basic shared plan with minimal minutes and no data/texting, but with international dialing. Two months in, this plan seems more than adequate to meet our needs and should save about \$1,200 compared to our previous

Vanishing Act

continued

phone system.

Of course, there have been some expenses. The purchase of a printer/scanner for each home office was necessary, and our phone/fax services have had to overlap. There has also been the expense of shipping materials to the society headquarters (all those publication forms and bound journals).

Resolving the issue of file sharing and database hosting has been the stickiest. While our operation is small enough that our server could be run out of a home, I needed to ensure 24/7 power, secure backups, and technical assistance (none of which I could provide, especially if I were to leave on holiday or if there were a power outage). I have recently concluded that the contents of our small business server will be handled by a hosted file storage service – otherwise known (at least in TV ads) as ‘cloud computing.’ The provider securely stores files that are accessible only to *JID* via the Internet (the cloud). There are many reliable and reasonably priced providers; when selecting a provider, it is important to read the service level agreement closely to be sure it fits your needs. At this point, *JID* is still finalizing its selection. Laptops, however, will continue to be backed up daily, using the remote service we had used for our small business server (MozyPro; about \$30/month for the server, and should be less for the laptops).

Giving up our physical address necessitated the purchase of a Post Office Box (\$100 annually). This address, along with our new phone and fax numbers, has been published on the journal’s home page, submission website, and the society’s online directory. We also individually notified our publisher, vendors, and editorial board.

As Kristie mentioned in her article (page 2), the move to a virtual office means a change of mind, reassessing how and why we do things the way we do. This is an important exercise, and while it has at times caused some head-scratching, we are better for having gone through the process. A minor example: where previously I had used a printed ‘issue checklist’ to note the progress of the editorial content of each issue, this checklist is now electronic. Not only is it neater, but also it can be accessed readily by both me and my assistant. While not necessary for the virtual office; this small improvement is the result of the change in mindset arising from the exercise of going virtual; I am sure there will be more.

In the coming months I hope to be able to report, as Kristie has, that our move to a completely virtual office has been a smooth one.



Calendar of Events

Web 2.0: Online Communities and Social Media
10 February 2011
 London, UK
www.alpsp.org

Project Management for Publishing
17 February 2011
 Oxford, UK
www.alpsp.org

Remote Control

by **Deborah Bowman, MFA**

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When I was asked to write an article about my ‘virtual office,’ the first thing I wanted to do was to define a virtual office. Did I really have one? After all, I do have an actual, physical office, four walls and a floor and ceiling that contain my computer, a desk, and a file cabinet. That doesn’t sound virtual. And yet, when I travel I can work from my hotel room or in an airport. On a beautiful day, I can work from my deck or from a growing number of establishments with Internet access. While I’m waiting in a line, I answer e-mail on my phone or check the GIE Facebook hits. I can send PDFs to my Kindle and read them anywhere in the world. So maybe I do have a virtual office...but if that is the case, we all do. I think what makes me different is that I have a remote office. I work apart from the editor-in-chief, the associate editors, and apart from the society that employs me, the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE). My predecessor as managing editor of *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy* worked in the society office in Chicago, but when the position was vacated in 2005, Pat Blake, the Executive Director of the ASGE, was open-minded enough to consider hiring the society’s first remote worker. I had been working with the journal in my position at Elsevier in St. Louis, so I was the most qualified person she’d interviewed, and Pat decided to give it a try. I have written previously about actually setting up a remote office (see “Follow Your Yellow Brick Road” in December 2008 *EON*), but the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely deserve to be discussed.

Pat was understandably concerned when I first began to work 300 miles away, so she had me drive up to the office for a few days each month for the first several months. As she saw that the work was getting done, the journal was coming out on time each month, and the editor-in-chief was happy with my work, she relaxed and my visits were spaced further apart. Now I only go to Chicago to work about four or five times per year, usually for a meeting or a party. Interestingly, I have an editorial assistant who works in the Chicago office. I find that having her located in the main office instead of here with me actually works to my advantage; in addition to helping me with my work, she acts as a liaison between me and the ASGE office. I direct her from my office in small-town Wentzville, Missouri, and I have found that this arrangement has highs and lows. The journal is fairly independent of most of the society’s programs, so being apart from the office hasn’t been a problem. We have a weekly communications department meeting that they phone me in for, and I have a weekly call with our editor-in-chief and our publisher. Phone calls and e-mails with my assistant are frequent and have kept us in sync.

Being outside of the office has advantages: I am never interrupted or distracted by loud voices or office politics, my commute is a breeze, I can work barefoot if I wish, and bad weather never keeps me from work. I never have to worry about someone else using up the Post-its or pilfering my lunch. Best of all, I didn’t have to sell my home and move away

Remote Control

continued

from my friends and family to accept this great job.

On the other hand, lunch can be lonely and I am often the recipient of office-wide e-mails announcing that someone has brought in a fabulous dessert or an assortment of bagels for everyone to share. I can drive to Chicago to attend the Christmas party, but I am never asked to be in on planning it. I get the office news second-hand, through my assistant. One of the biggest problems I've experienced is that people here in Wentzville think that because I'm not in an office with other workers, my time is my own. I am involved in a number of community activities, and when I tell people I can't go to meetings during the day, I often get quizzical looks. Some even go so far as to say, "But don't you work out of your own office?" Yes, but I am expected to be there between certain hours, and if my boss e-mails or phones me during those hours, I'd better be there to answer. I've had to explain this many times to numerous people. Whether it is neighbors who think you can take off to pick their children up from school or friends who think you should be able to take a two-hour lunch, people will have trouble understanding the demands of a remote office. For me, this can work the other way too: no one is waiting for me to leave the office so they can lock up, so working extra hours is a constant temptation. Separating work from personal time is a real challenge for me. Sometimes I have to force myself to walk away from my computer, but even then my e-mail beckons from my cell phone, and article PDFs wink at me on my Kindle.

I find that I have to wear many hats; I order my own supplies and must be aware when I am running low on anything. If I run out of printer toner, only I am to blame. I know that no cleaning company will vacuum my floor or empty my wastebaskets for me overnight. I have a bin for recycling paper, but I am the one who makes the run to the recycling center. If I want my office to look festive for the holidays, I alone must decorate.

My situation is actually emblematic of the world today. At a time when you can learn what an old high school chum who lives across the country had for breakfast before you leave your home in the morning, a time when social networking can be less than social, communication from a remote office is a snap. Many people talk via e-mail even when they are only steps away in the next cubicle. When I do make my trips to the Chicago office, I make an effort to meet new employees, to have face-to-face discussions with them, to go out for lunch with groups of people. The problem that we all share, whether we work remotely or not, is not how to communicate electronically but rather how to turn off the computers, cell phones, and iPads and connect with each other again; how to look each other in the eye and talk, instead of via iPhone. Working apart from a central office is the wave of the future, and I'm grateful to be a part of that movement, but losing the personal touch is not all right. Not even remotely.



EON is seeking *column editors* for the *Tips & Tricks* and *Publication Partners* columns. The column editor is responsible for recruiting the column's articles. Interested? Contact the Editor, Kristen Overstreet, at kristen.overstreet@mac.com. We look forward to working with you!



Using Audioboo

by **Kristine Novak**

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AGA Institute

Blog: <http://agajournals.wordpress.com>

Have you ever been someplace and heard something so exciting and important that you wanted to record it and broadcast it right away? I have been using the free iPhone application Audioboo (<http://audioboo.fm/>) to do just that.

As a science editor for two medical journals, I attend several scientific conferences each year, and have been using Audioboo to broadcast interviews via the Internet with speakers who present interesting or controversial new findings. (see <http://audioboo.fm/ScienceEditor>)

The application is relatively straightforward to use – you simply record your subject (for up to 5 minutes), take their picture, and then click ‘broadcast’. The Audioboo website has a short video that shows you exactly how to record and broadcast. Audioboo allows you to share audio using the Web, iPhone, and Android devices, and will soon add Blackberry, Nokia, and Windows Mobile. Their mission is to be the one platform you use when you want to record audio and share it or archive it.

Advantages to the application are that you don’t need any elaborate equipment (just your phone, which surprises some interviewees) and that your audio recording appears on the Internet—at its own URL—within a few minutes. The location where the interview was recorded (Google Maps) and related clips are presented alongside the interview, and you are one click away from posting it on your Facebook or Twitter™ account. There doesn’t seem to be a limit as to how much you can

store, so you can use it as an audio archive. You can also follow other *boosers* and listen to people’s *boos* as podcasts.

Disadvantages are that neither the soundtrack nor the photo can be edited – once you record your audio and attach your photo, you are stuck with those (although you can delete your recordings). So if you can’t get a good picture of your speaker, there is no opportunity to add one later; if the speaker goes over the 5 minute time limit or if unwanted sounds get into the recording, there is no way to edit these. Also, transmitting a large amount of data from a conference at an overseas location, via the iPhone, can be expensive. Sometimes you have to try several times to upload a file for publishing via 3G; there’s a 50 Mb limit on uploads.

Audioboo does not make professional recordings but it is fun to use and a great way to quickly get your audio file up on the Web – this is especially important when you are competing with other science writers to cover hot topics and interview interesting people at a conference.

I have been broadcasting only audio interviews, but other applications, such as JustinTV (<http://www.justin.tv/>), allow you to broadcast video from your iPhone or Android.



See the Audioboo Training Module at www.ismte.org

Green Grass in the Global Village

by **Michael Willis**

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It was on a cold January day in 2005 that I was recruited to the UK Medical Division of former Blackwell Publishing (now Wiley-Blackwell) as an editorial services manager with three key responsibilities: to run the editorial office for one particular journal; to manage and lead our small in-house team of editorial assistants (EAs), each running one or more editorial offices; and to be the Manuscript Central™ (MC, as it was then) ‘expert’ for our UK and European medical journals, one of a global group of such experts.

Prior to my employment with Wiley-Blackwell, and after a number of years in higher education and a stint of teaching at the secondary school level (my background is Classics), I had spent five years working for a company that hosted journal content online for scientific, technical, and medical (STM) publishers. The company was CatchWord; it was acquired by Ingenta in 2001 and has since been acquired by Publishing Technology. This, my first foray into learned journal publishing, gave me a solid background in electronic production processes and management of online content.

The editorial office

Editorial work was foreign to me, and I was rather thrown into the deep end when I took over the running of my first editorial office. At that time the journal received around 450 submissions annually and the office was run

using Excel, e-mail, and paper. We moved to MC within months and the time spent processing submissions fell dramatically, even though—thanks largely to a huge push in marketing—the number of submissions increased to around 800 within two years. Most of what I know about running an editorial office came from my work with that journal, in particular through close collaboration with the journal publisher to whom I remain indebted for his mentoring and guidance.

Since that time I have migrated several other journals to ScholarOne Manuscripts™ (as it is now; SIM). I always feel a sense of tremendous relief in closing the Excel spreadsheet of paper submissions for the last time and moving onto an entirely electronic system.

A key responsibility in my capacity as team leader is to take charge of editorial offices when we first bring them into the team. I ensure procedures are clearly established and documented, they fit well into our existing editorial and production processes, and they adhere as far as possible to our internal best practice principles. In addition, I sometimes need to provide or arrange for training of editors, since the transition of an editorial office often coincides with the start of a new editorial team.

Although I have run a handful of editorial offices over the past five years, at the time of writing I am looking after just one journal, in

the field of surgery/gastroenterology. Aside from managing the basic throughput of papers on SiM, my time is spent in arranging meetings (we have several throughout the year, including editors meetings in London and one board meeting in mainland Europe), preparing reports on editorial office activity, and drawing up running orders for future issues in conjunction with the editor.

Team Building

In the past five years, the number of journals whose editorial offices we run in-house has grown substantially, naturally with a corresponding growth in the number of EAs. We are now in three United Kingdom locations (Oxford, Chichester, and Edinburgh), which presents the challenge of remote management and the question of how to maintain cohesion within a multi-site team. We hold monthly meetings, at which we often invite a guest speaker from another department to report on developments within their area, and each EA is routinely asked to report on specific challenges or successes for each of their journals. We also have a discussion board on the Intranet, which enables us to share items of interest, such as publishing-related news items. Given that the team has increased significantly in the past five years, regular communication within the team is pivotal to our success as an entity within the business.

A large team contains within its members a wide range of skills, and it's important I develop these, both for the good of my EAs (individually and as a team) and to benefit the journals whose editorial offices are represented within the team. So we have various projects

running within the team. For example, being able to report effectively and efficiently, with reliable and transparently accurate data, is in my view an essential ingredient in running a well-managed editorial office, and our benchmarking project audits key stages in the editorial process across a wide range of journals we publish, such as time to first decision, or time between acceptance and despatch to production. The object is to find a benchmark for each stage in the process, and to see which stages in the editorial process are particularly difficult for some journals. We can then focus on the 'pinchpoints' and devise solutions to ease them.

Coupled with this we have also devoted a significant amount of time within the team to coming to grips with the new Cognos reporting tool on SiM, and to honing our skills with Excel functions (we have one advanced Excel user, and most of the team are proficient) to manipulate exported data (we have found this to be far more effective than using the similar functions within Cognos).

My overriding objective for my team is to provide the best possible service for our editors, authors, and reviewers. So each team member can appreciate the context of their job, whether within the Wiley-Blackwell environment or within the broader STM publishing industry, I build up a dossier of resources and documents relating to the peer review process, publication ethics, reporting guidelines, citations and rankings, the open access debate, and so on.

ScholarOne Liaison

The third responsibility, being an SiM expert, in which I provide guidance and advice

to around 130 of our Health Sciences editorial offices, provides immense opportunities for interaction with a wide range of people and a broad variety of office practices and processes. Our global Experts team is very much a collaborative project, as we share knowledge and best practice, which we can then pass on to our respective editorial office contacts. Running an editorial office myself enables me to understand better the perspective of those who contact us for advice and assistance.

All told, I think I have a great job, made especially enjoyable not only by the variety of activities and the occasional travel (mostly in

the United Kingdom and occasionally mainland Europe), but also by the friendliness and professionalism of my colleagues, and the large number of external editorial personnel with whom I am in regular contact. Many stay as names in an e-mail; but it's always a pleasure to meet some of them face-to-face—at the ISMTE conference, for example.



New Training Module! How to Publish Figures with Maximum Results

Have you struggled with how to optimize the quality of figures published in your journal? Are the figures often inconsistently styled, poor resolution, and generally below the standards for achieving a visually cohesive publication? If you're looking for ways to improve the overall presentation of figures in your journal, check out ISMTE's two-part training module on figure publication. The module contains a concise yet comprehensive video featuring eight simple tips that can be easily and effectively implemented. In addition, a supplemental guide accompanies the video, offering valuable information on developing style guidelines, training staff, and working with authors. **View the training module now** at <http://www.ismte.org/Figures>

The module is available to all users for a limited time and will remain available to ISMTE members.

ISMTE *EON*

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A note on English: ISMTE aims to be a truly international society. English will represent our lingua franca, but we would like to stress that in materials published in EON or online that variations in idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.

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