

Congress On Practice

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INFORMS is the premiere professional society in the world serving professionals in operations research and management science with approximately 12,000 members worldwide. About 70% of those members are academics and 30% practitioners. It is widely agreed within the society that the academic and practitioner communities depend on each other for their respective growths. Indeed many professionals in the OR/MS community are active in both areas of the profession. In this regard the New York Metro Chapter is a very unusual entity within INFORMS with about 95% practitioners.

From the time that the predecessors to INFORMS were first born (ORSA in 1952 and TIMS in 1953) the practitioner community spanning the two societies often felt that there was undue emphasis on the academic side of the profession. To that end CPMS (College on the Practice of Management Science) was formed within TIMS and continues to serve the practice community within INFORMS today.

To further its goal of strengthening and reinvigorating the role of practice within INFORMS, CPMS sponsored the first Congress on Practice at the INFORMS national meeting in Philadelphia on November 9, 1999. The congress was attended by 37 representatives from all corners of INFORMS including members of the INFORMS Board, representatives from many subdivisions (chapters, societies, sections, fora), CPMS Council members, members of the INFORMS executive office and others. In short this congress was a very significant event in the history of INFORMS and was a huge success. I attended the Congress on Practice and along with Peter Norden represented the New York Metro Chapter.

Introductory remarks were made by Howard Finkelberg and Newt Garber followed by individual introductions around the table. Then the floor was opened to a discussion on the role of practice followed by the formulation of 14 potential next steps to be implemented. The goal is to influence

the direction of INFORMS to place more emphasis on the role of practice. Space in this column is short and in the interest of brevity I will recap the bare highlights here.

The discussion on the role of practice covered the benefits and economics of belonging to a professional society and attending conferences, concerns surrounding the new INFORMS national meeting format (with a general meeting once per year in the fall and a practice meeting in the spring), the quality of academic vs. practitioner speakers, efforts by the Roundtable in 1995 to identify opportunities for INFORMS to support practice and an experiment by the practice journal Interfaces to put back issues online.

A summary of the potential next steps includes creating a taxonomy of OR/MS practice issues and areas, inclusion of news in the Practitioners Page in OR/MS Today on practice activities in the sections and chapters, publishing a debate in Interfaces on Practice as a Process, links from the CPMS website to section and chapter websites with practice activities, inviting INFORMS Board members and Division Directors to participate in monthly section conference calls, assigning liaison contacts from each section and chapter to CPMS, institutionalizing the Congress and meeting 1-2 times each year (the Congress will meet again in Salt Lake City at the Spring 2000 meeting) and more.

This Congress on Practice signifies a new momentum in the role of practice within INFORMS and a broad-based, unified effort to expand its role. Anyone who would like to offer suggestions on this subject should feel free to contact me at theurer@aol.com. Also, I will be glad to forward the full minutes of the Congress on Practice to anyone desiring them.

Jack Theurer is President of G. Theurer Associates Inc., a consulting firm headquartered in New York City specializing in management science applications in business and industry. He is currently president of the New York Metro Chapter of INFORMS and also INFORMS Chairman of International Chapters. He serves on the International Chapters Subcommittee, the Subdivisions Committee and has served in past years as a judge and a coach at the prestigious CPMS Franz Edelman Prize Competition for Management Science Achievement.