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The purpose of the “Membership Roundtable” is to discuss proposed initiatives, keep members up to date on membership issues, and to help establish a dialogue among members on important membership issues. Having served on both the Member Services and the Development Committees over the last several years, my impression is that the Institute’s mission and purpose as an interdisciplinary society has been receiving more attention at the officer level. It is my sincere hope that this installment of the Membership Roundtable will serve to establish a similar a dialog among the membership. I encourage you to contact me if you would like to respond, elaborate, support and/or extend the ideas presented in this column. Suggestions for new directions are also welcome.

## Rethinking the Concept of the Decision Sciences and the Role of DSI

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Last November 2000, I spoke to the students at the Doctoral Consortium during the annual meeting, as I usually do every year, regarding how to publish in the *Journal of Operations Management*. However, this time I was struck at how small the group was. Not many years ago when I was giving virtually the same speech (life doesn’t change much for editors), it appeared that the Consortium was bursting at its seams, with standing room only in a huge room seating over a 100. I spoke to a few people about why the Consortium had shrunk so much but it didn’t seem to be due to more stringent acceptance procedures or anything that anyone could put their finger on. This got me to thinking about the dynamics of our business fields and the following ruminations, which may be in gross error, are where my mind took me. Forgive me if these thoughts appear ridiculous, threatening, or heretical—I often feel that way about my ruminations myself. And as ruminations, I am also not offering any “solutions” since I don’t even know if these thoughts are correct or deserve solutions. What’s more, although I may still be sane enough to see difficulties, if such were the case, I’m quite sure I’m not the best person to determine what to do about them, or offer presumptuous solutions. Thus, I leave you with my worries, which you may feel free to either dismiss

as senile ramblings, or take up as serious issues worthy of further consideration.

As I thought about the role of quantitative analysis in business, one that has been in considerable flux lately, it seemed to me that there was a major difference in perspective between the hard-core members of INFORMS (earlier TIMS and ORSA) and the hardcore members of DSI. By “hardcore,” I mean those who are in tight sync with the goals, processes, and philosophy of the organization, often taking leadership positions in the society. The non-hardcore members belong to the organization but are more on the fringe, finding it useful and interesting in a tangential way to their main interests, which are probably functional such as operations or marketing or information systems. It appears to me that the hardcore INFORMS members are primarily modelers, but may apply their craft in one or more functional areas (or may not, being strict algorithm builders, or theoreticians). In contrast, the hardcore DSI members seem more interested in practice and solving managerial problems, primarily through applying their quantitative tools but realizing there are also organizational, behavioral, political, and other issues that need attention for permanently solving managerial problems. I realize this comparison may not sound fruitful, being perhaps analogous to the comparison of a rock with a giraffe, but I’ll

get back to sharpening up the comparison a bit further on.

In considering DSI, one cannot but help observe the large proportion of members in the operations management area, as are many of the tracks and sessions at the annual meeting. I believe this has been somewhat of a concern in DSI for its entire history and many would prefer an equal distribution of members across the functional areas. In terms of first priority conferences and second priority conferences, it also seems that for the operations management members, DSI has historically been their first priority conference, particularly for those operations members who do not consider themselves as primarily modelers. However, for the other functional areas it has always appeared to me that DSI was their second (or third) priority conference and their first priority was their own functional area annual conference.

Of course, for most of the history of DSI, there was no academic operations management society and most academics in the area were divided among multiple societies: INFORMS, Academy of Management, APICS, and so on. Many years ago, a few of us started the Operations Management Association but the concept was flawed and the OMA disbanded a couple of years ago. (Yet in Europe, the UK-OMA proved quite viable, filling an obvious need, and even expanded to become EUROMA.) But more recently, POMS was founded primarily through the efforts of Kal Singhal and seems to be on its way to becoming a permanent society and potential competitor to DSI for first conference priority. If this happens and POMS draws off many of the DSI operations management members, it will certainly go a long way toward equaling out the membership across the functional disciplines, but it might also significantly reduce membership.

The conclusion, in thinking about such a scenario, is that perhaps DSI has been successful to date due more to the lack of a home society for operations management academics than to an attractive philosophical basis for the institute. If true, this clearly is worth thinking about. This is not to say that DSI doesn't have many attractions for membership. The organization is well-run, with a permanent home office and competent staff. The annual conference offers many diverse and interesting, as well as

educational, sessions. The DSI Doctoral Consortium and the New Faculty Consortium were one of the first of their kinds, and have been big successes. The more recent mini-conferences such as SOMA (Service Operations Management Associates) have been innovative and well received. The regional meetings bring nearby colleagues together to meet and communicate in a more relaxed and informal setting. The journal and newsletter are valuable and of interest to the membership. And so on.

However, is the basic premise flawed? Does anyone come to DSI in order to meet and interact with people in other functional areas? I don't. I look forward to seeing those old roustabouts in my field (I won't name them) who I know of and have been reading about or emailing, and perhaps other new faces in my field who I suspect will do well and become leaders of the area. If every functional area has a more preferred first priority association/meeting, is there any basic purpose or interest holding the DSI members together? Will the role of quantitative solutions to managerial problems—a.k.a. *decision science*—be enough? Is there really such a thing as *decision science*? If there were, and it was different from *management science*, shouldn't we see our journal *Decision Sciences* hailed as the top journal in its field? Is there any other functional area in business besides operations management where an academic would rather have their research paper published in *Decision Sciences* than in their own functional journal such as *MIS Quarterly*, *Strategic Management Journal*, or *Journal of Marketing*?

Returning to the contrast between the modelers in INFORMS and the managerial problem solvers in DSI, may the latter not just be functional academics who hope to see the managers in their functional areas reap some rewards of their research? Even though the role of modelers in business schools has been attacked rather brutally in the recent past, with some of their courses deleted from the curriculum or combined with other courses, we still generally recognize that there is a role for statisticians and management scientists in our schools. In some ways, this seems analogous to the economists in our business schools who have their own discipline even though it is not a functional area of business. However, what is the role of decision

scientists in business schools? None, to my knowledge.

And finally, getting back to the Doctoral Consortium and other such activities, there is clearly more competition now from the functional conferences. Even in operations, we now have doctoral consortia at the Academy of Management's OM Division, and POMS, as well as at DSI. And I imagine the functional societies are copying some of the other innovative initiatives of DSI, as well as coming up with some ideas of their own. Thus, I suspect that the competitive edge that DSI has held in the past will be worn down over time and the various consortia will shrink to some smaller, steady-state amount. So we are left in a quandary: If there is no central role or mission for DSI, to what end is an excellently staffed and managed organization, a quality journal and newsletter, and interesting and informative national and regional meetings? Or perhaps those are enough by themselves. ■

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### **Online DSI Membership Directory Will Be Available to All DSI Members**

The DSI Online Membership Directory, containing current members for the 2000-01 dues year, will be available to Institute members in March 2001. The password-protected directory is only available to DSI members, who will receive an email containing the password. Included with the directory is a handy change-of-address form.