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Encyclopedias Are a Man's Best Friend

by Andrew Vazsonyi, Feature Editor

People keep on badgering me about what do I do and how I earn a living. My answer? Well, I'm a *management scientist*. They respond with a blank stare.

Some time ago a curious person asked a management scientist, "What is management science?" The expert answered, "Management science is what management scientists do." A wittier expert overheard this and said: "Management science is what management scientists *think* they do.

Today, fortunately, there is an unequivocal answer. The definition of management science can now be found in the *Encyclopedia of Operations Research and Management Science*, centennial edition.

So the last time a friend badgered me, I brought out the *Encyclopedia*. "This is what my colleagues and I do."

He weighed the tome, flipping through its pages. "You told me you help management. This is a book on math."

I shrugged. "As you can see, we find that math is the most effective way to deal with some management issues."

We need to realize that publication of an encyclopedia in a particular field of inquiry is a defining moment. That's what happened in 1745 when the French philosopher Denis Diderot and the distinguished mathematician Jean Le Rond d'Alembert produced their 35-volume work, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, usually known as the *Encyclopédie*. Diderot gathered around him a team of dedicated litterateurs, scientists, and even priests, including Voltaire and Montesquieu. All were fired with a common purpose: to further knowledge by a "rational dictionary" and to bring out the essential principles and applications of every art and science.

Drs. Saul I. Gass and the late Carl M. Harris followed in the footsteps of Diderot and d'Alembert, gathered an international group of the best brains, and produced the monumental 917-page tome *Encyclopedia*

of *OR/MS*, with 228 major expository articles to provide decision makers and problem solvers a "comprehensive overview of the wide range of ideas, methodologies, and synergistic forces that combine to form the pre-eminent decision-aiding fields of operations research and management science."

Encyclopedias are my best friends. When I retired from teaching, what I missed most was having nearby colleagues. Now, when I start researching a field, the first step I take is to consult my distinguished colleagues—the contributors to the *Encyclopedia of OR/MS*. Some personal friends, others friends by proxy. I enter into imaginary conversations, try to figure out what they would say, and occasionally resort to e-mail. Life would be isolated and lonely without them. Then, if necessary, I consult my other encyclopedias and dictionaries like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or *Encarta*. My own private library and the Internet are next. But the *Encyclopedia OR/MS* is the pivotal first step.

The centennial edition of the *Encyclopedia* is a befitting monument for the 50th anniversary celebration of the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences, INFORMS. ■

A student was in the MIT library watching Norbert Wiener (1894-1964), the American mathematician and founder of cybernetics.

Apparently, Wiener was researching something in the Encyclopedia Britannica. The next day, and the day after that, the student noticed Wiener at the same spot. Finally, he got up the nerve to ask Wiener what he was looking up. "I am not searching for anything," Wiener said.

"I got tired coming to the library looking things up, so I decided to memorize the encyclopedia."



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