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POMS Initiatives for Facilitating Practice-Driven Research and Research-Influenced Practice

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Abstract

The *Production and Operations Management Society (POMS)* and *Production and Operations Management (POM)* announce new initiatives to achieve the following objectives: (1) Translate research findings, particularly those published in *POM* to managerial implications and disseminate them to practitioners, MBA students, and participants in executive development programs; (2) solicit descriptions of current and emerging issues from practitioners and share them with academics; and (3) recognize academic research that entailed direct work with practice.

Key words: Research and practice, interactions between academics and practitioners, dissemination of academic research to practitioners

1. The Challenge of Linking Practice and Research in Operations Management

The Production and Operations Management Society (POMS) was founded in 1989 with the mission of creating and disseminating knowledge in our field so that it would be useful to the society. In the inaugural issue of the society's flagship research publication, *Production and Operations Management* (*POM*), its editor-in-chief, Kalyan Singhal (1992, p. 1), stated, "Our objective in publishing this journal is to improve practice."

Giants in our field have noted that operations management (OM) is an area of practice research and deals with issues arising from actual practice (Harris 1913, Buffa 1980, and Erlenkotter 2013). Throughout the last century, operational improvements, whether they came from practice leaders or from researchers, have had a tremendous positive impact on the business world and on society in general. Its impact has been phenomenal: from division of labor to focused factory; from Deming's total quality management to the Toyota Production System; and from low-cost manufacturing to AAA supply chains (Lee 2004).

Over time, practice and research to some extent have evolved to have different emphases if not different directions altogether. The reason the two developed differently is that they were faced with different forces. OM practice had to deal with the expansion from local to global operations and from manufacturing to service as well as with the dramatic changes in information and communication technology. On the other hand, as OM matured as an area of research, refining methods became more important as it did in other fields, resulting in sophisticated analyses. Some OM researchers did try to keep up with practice in accepting the broadening of scope, but research articles that deal with multi-faceted issues (multi-disciplinary research using multiple research methods) were difficult to publish. Before *POM* was founded, some OM journals tended to favor one research method over others to bring together researchers who wanted their research to be understood and appreciated by other researchers who followed the same research method. Moreover, there might not always be appreciation of a given method by the users and proponents of other methods. As such, many practitioners were unable to see through

the thicket of methodology; unable to see the relevance of many research articles; and unable to apply the research findings developed by academics. Consequently, there was a concern about an underlying risk: inadequate connections between practice and research in OM.

Alluding to the absence of outlets that did not cover certain topics and research paradigms, Singhal (1992, p. 2) stated in the inaugural issue of *POM*, "We hope that the existence of a journal with broad coverage will encourage authors to write articles on many nontraditional topics. The editors realize that authors have not written articles on certain topics or articles that use certain research paradigms simply because the outlets for publishing them have been limited. In *Production and Operations Management*, papers do not have to fit into an established mold, follow one of the traditional research paradigms, concern an accepted topic, or conform to conventional wisdom."

To make research still more meaningful for practice and more vibrant, the OM community needs to take proactive steps to ensure our research is driven by practice so that our research can also influence practice. Only through such interactions and exchanges can OM research remain relevant, and can OM practice benefit from research findings. However, as we develop various steps for strengthening the connection between research and practice, we must be cognizant of the different forces on research and on practice, and in particular, the different incentives for researchers and practitioners:

- Academic appointments and promotions are primarily based on the innovative ideas and/or technical contributions of their published articles in top academic journals. In addition, the impact of their research is based on citation counts, opinions of other academics (rarely practitioners), and the use of their articles in Ph.D. seminars and teaching. Therefore, the incentive for academics to interact with practitioners is not strong.
- Practitioners are evaluated according to their contributions to business operations. Therefore, unless practitioners find real value in interacting with researchers, it is difficult for academic researchers to capture the attention of practitioners.

Therefore, academics have little incentive to translate their research ideas and findings into insights that are comprehensible by practitioners or even the MBA or Executive MBA students they teach. Likewise,

practitioners have no incentive to share their real business issues with academics. In view of this misaligned incentive, POMS has developed new initiatives to facilitate exchanges between academics and practitioners.

2. POMS Practice Initiatives

POMS is pleased to announce new initiatives to achieve the following objectives:

(1) Translate research findings, particularly those published in *POM* to managerial implications and disseminate them to practitioners, MBA students, and participants in executive development programs;

(2) Solicit descriptions of current and emerging issues from practitioners and share them with academics; and

(3) Recognize academic research that entailed direct work with practice.

Correspondingly, POMS is launching three initiatives as follows:

2.1. POM Practice Review Coupled with the *POM*

This initiative will be launched in May 2014 and will be co-chaired by ManMohan S. Sodhi and Christopher S. Tang, with the support of Kalyan Singhal and additional members (to be determined later). The committee will work with POMS executive director Sushil Gupta to develop a website called *POM Practice Review (POM-PR)* at least initially with free online access. The website will publish short articles as follows with appropriate links to articles published in *POM*:

- Authors of recent *POM* papers, on their own or by invitation, would select a paper or a subset of their papers and write a short article (1000-1500 words) for *POM-PR* at the level that each article can be used in MBA or Executive MBA classes. The objective of each article is to translate and disseminate research findings into managerial insights for practitioners. Authors could ask for suggestions or even a template from the committee to help with this.
- POMS Practice Leaders listed in Section 2.2 and all POMS Starr Practice Award winners will be encouraged to work with POMS academic members to submit short articles (1000-1500 words) to

capture existing or emerging OM issues in their experience for their companies or their industry and translate them into research topics.

- Members of our community, particularly MBA and/or PhD students, will be welcome to submit short articles (1000-1500 words) that summarize and synthesize their learning and thoughts based on (a) presentations given by practitioners or academics; or (b) articles written by practitioners or academics.

The success of this initiative can be assessed on the basis of (1) site visits, number of downloads, and number of click-throughs to POM or POM-PR articles; and (2) feedback from practitioners and academics.

2.2 POMS Practice Leaders Forum

In the May 2013 conference in Denver, POMS launched a new initiative called *POMS Practice Leaders Forum* to engage practitioners for generating relevant research ideas for academic researchers. This initiative is co-chaired by Kevin O'Marah (Chief Contents Officer of Supply Chain Management World) and Christopher S. Tang (UCLA). POMS Practice Leaders are senior OM practitioners who have decade(s) of practical OM experience from industries ranging from IC manufacturing to biotech, from information technology to healthcare, and from consultancy to home electronics. (For details, please see: http://www.poms.org/pom_practice).

POMS plans to host a full day event during POMS national conference each year as it did in Denver 2013. Success of this initiative will be assessed on the basis of (1) the number of POM practice leaders who continue to participate; (2) number of attendees of the POMS Practice Leaders Forum event; (3) feedback from POMS Practice Leaders and POMS members; and (4) number of POM-PR articles outlining research topics published each year.

2.3 POMS Applied Research Challenge

In May 2013, POMS launched a new initiative called *POMS Applied Research Challenge* to encourage academics to conduct practice-relevant topics by recognizing such research. This initiative is chaired by Felipe Caro (UCLA). Any POMS member is welcome to enter this competition by submitting an article

based on an OM topic (approved by the panel of judges) using any research methodology as long as it is directly motivated by practice. There are two review cycles, the first by an academic panel with academics from different methodological backgrounds to ensure rigor, and the second by a distinguished Practitioner Judge Panel with all panel members being former POMS Martin K. Starr Excellence in POM Practice Award Winners to ensure practical relevance. The extended abstracts of the finalist submissions will be compiled into an article to be published in *POM*. (For details, please see http://www.poms.org/pom_practice/poms_applied_research_challeng/). The success of this initiative will be assessed on the basis of (1) the number of entries and (2) feedback from the panel of judges.

3. Conclusion

Conducting practice-driven research and in turn influencing practice through research are two important goals to ensure future the success of OM as a thriving community of practitioners and academics. Translating real practical issues into research ideas for academics and translating research insights into practical terms for practitioners are critical steps to achieve these two goals. POMS seeks to facilitate this by launching three initiatives: *POM Practice Review (POM-PR), POMS Practice Leaders Forum,* and *POMS Applied Research Challenge*. Clearly, the success of each of these initiatives relies on the support of academics and practitioners. We look forward to your reactions and suggestions and to working with you to build a more vibrant future for the OM community.

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