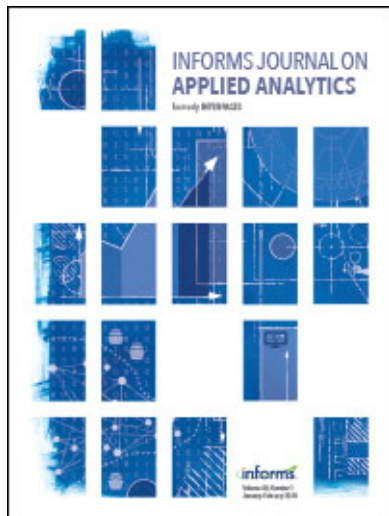




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The Fifth Column Returns

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Introduction

For more than 35 years, and across 80-plus contributions, Gene Woolsey, former editor-in-chief of the *INFORMS Journal on Applied Analytics* (IJAA), authored The Fifth Column. With this issue, IJAA brings it back. The column has always focused on lessons learned in practice. Reviving it feels both timely and, frankly, overdue. Before looking ahead, perhaps it is worth revisiting the history of The Fifth Column and the evolution of the publication of practice.

How We Got Here

To understand the significance of The Fifth Column, we begin with the history of IJAA itself. Somewhat surprisingly, the story starts with *Management Science*. What we now call INFORMS was once the Operations Research Society of America (ORSA), founded in 1952, with its flagship journal, *Operations Research*, debuting in 1953. Not everyone was satisfied. Some viewed *Operations Research* as overly mathematical and ORSA as somewhat exclusive. In response, The Institute for Management Sciences (TIMS) was formed, and its flagship journal, *Management Science*, appeared in 1954.

The founding editor, C. West Churchman, envisioned *Management Science* as a “big tent,” a place where diverse perspectives could coexist (Churchman 1955). His ambition was not modest. He wanted mathematical rigor, yes, but also measurement, philosophy, and real-world cases, authored by anyone from mathematicians to managers to philosophers. It was an inclusive vision, bordering on audacious.

Reality, however, proved less accommodating. Churchman later expressed frustration at how difficult it was to publish the very “broad viewpoints” and “cases” he had championed (Churchman 1994). His response was characteristically direct: He helped launch a second journal in 1960, *Management Technology*, aimed at recovering some of the original spirit of *Management Science*. Its mission was clear: document

applications, discuss implementation challenges, and engage managers in meaningful dialogue about real problems (Crane and Churchman 1960).¹

By 1964, *Management Technology* was folded back into *Management Science*, which briefly expanded into multiple series (A: Sciences, B: Managerial, C: Bulletin). If this sounds like organizational experimentation, that is because it was. By 1967, *The Bulletin* was spun off again, and by 1970, it evolved into something more ambitious. In November of that year, TIMS President Peter Norden announced the creation of a new journal that would be informative, brisk, relevant, and, notably, “entertaining” (Norden 1970). The new journal would take the name *Interfaces*. The idea that a journal might aim to be entertaining was, and still is, mildly radical. But it reflected the same “big tent” philosophy: a journal not just for academics, but for practitioners and managers. Leonard Simon, the first editor-in-chief of *Interfaces*, later described its dual purpose with admirable clarity: to explore both the philosophy of management science and the reporting of practice. That balance, thinking and doing, became the journal’s defining feature (Simon 1976).

Enter Gene Woolsey and The Fifth Column

Gene Woolsey, the second editor-in-chief of *Interfaces*, gave the Journal’s vision its most distinctive voice. His editorial standards, equal parts rigorous and mischievous, remain memorable. Applications had to be real, results had to be verifiable, and vague claims of “public benefit” were treated with healthy skepticism. Authors asserting that their client “felt better” were gently redirected to submit to psychology journals instead. It was a serious set of standards, delivered with a raised eyebrow.

Gene’s personal literary contribution was The Fifth Column, a short, recurring piece that captured the spirit of practice with wit, candor, and occasional

irreverence. Woolsey did not merely describe applications; he exposed their messiness, celebrated their successes, and poked fun at their excesses. Woolsey understood something essential: If a journal is to reflect practice, it must also reflect people. That means acknowledging imperfection, ambiguity, and, occasionally, humor. When Woolsey stepped down as editor-in-chief, the next editor, Gary Lilien, wisely kept him on to continue *The Fifth Column*, a decision that ensured its continuity until 2012, just a few years before Woolsey's passing.

The name "The Fifth Column" itself carries a subtle, and perhaps mischievous, meaning.² Although it evokes the familiar column of a matrix, its deeper origin lies in the Spanish Civil War, where a "fifth column" referred to insiders working to influence outcomes from within. In this context, the phrase feels particularly apt. Woolsey's column gave voice to practitioners and those working within the community to broaden its scope and challenge its orthodoxy.

In that sense, Woolsey did more than write a column: He practiced the "big tent" philosophy that Churchman had articulated in "theory" decades earlier. Others, including Churchman and Russell Ackoff, eventually moved on from the ORSA/TIMS/INFORMS community to different intellectual pursuits. Woolsey stayed and fought from the inside.

The Fifth Column Returns

We now bring back *The Fifth Column* with both enthusiasm and humility. The shoes are, to put it mildly, large. But the need is just as great. Our community, spanning academics, practitioners, and managers, has

much to share, including lessons that extend well beyond technical results. In its new form, *The Fifth Column* will focus on lessons learned in practice: how to succeed (and sometimes fail) as an analytics practitioner; reflections on the evolving state of analytics; and thoughtful commentary on what drives impact, or prevents it.

We welcome submissions from across industry, government, and academia. After all, if the past has taught us anything, it is this: Progress in our field rarely comes from theory alone. It also comes from those willing to work within the system, and occasionally nudge it, ever so slightly, sometimes with humor, from the inside.

Endnotes

¹ INFORMS "hides" these *Management Technology* issues under *Management Science* proper in its online archive as issues MT-1 to MT-4.

² As far as we know, the meaning of "Fifth Column" was never disclosed by Woolsey in any of his columns. But as editor-in-chief, Jeff Camm hints at it at least a few times, inviting the reader to "do their homework" to find out what it meant.

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