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20th Anniversary Invited Article

The Launch of *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*: A Long and Difficult Gestation, but a Significant Birth

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Abstract. I was honored when Chris Tang requested my recollections about the launch of *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management* (M&SOM) 20+ years ago. Yet I have scant memories of those seven years, although I remember the challenging ones very well. Also, I have no records. So, many thanks to Steve Graves, whose memory and record-keeping are better than mine. Special thanks to Mathew Walls, publications director of INFORMS, who provided copies of INFORMS documents. I quote some below. Regardless, I take full responsibility regarding the “truth” of what follows. In other words, it’s *my* story, and I’m stickin’ to it.

History: This paper has been accepted for the *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management* 20th Anniversary Special Issue.

Keywords: M&SOM history • M&SOM start-up

Before the Start-up

According to the minutes of the INFORMS Board of Directors in 1993, a letter from John Buzacott, York University, proposed the development of a “Journal on Manufacturing and Operations Management.” Early in 1994, the Institute of Management Sciences (TIMS)/Operations Research Society of America publications committee formed a search committee to solicit proposals from prospective editors in chief. The committee was chaired by Paul Zipkin and included Hau Lee, Mike Magazine, Bob Markland, Joe Mazzola, and Candace Yano. Steve Graves was the TIMS vice president of publications at the time, which transitioned to INFORMS in 1995.

In August 1995, the search committee reported having received five proposals, three of which had been seriously reviewed and evaluated. In October 1995, a publications committee report notes that “the search committee [had] identified two highly-qualified candidates who were both ‘overwhelmingly acceptable’; further, the committee was evenly split on its preference, and did not attempt to break the tie.”

Subsequent to the 1995 INFORMS meeting in New Orleans, the committee continued to discuss and debate the proposals and was able to break its deadlock. The committee made its recommendation in mid-November, which was then approved, and I was named editor in chief for a four-year term, January 1, 1996, to December 31, 1999.

My Proposal for M&SOM

Although I was among the many who, for years, wanted/expected INFORMS to launch a manufacturing and service operations journal, it was clear to me that a major challenge would have to be overcome for that launch to be successful: *that* journal would be a *very* late entrant into the knowledge domain of several highly regarded journals, not the least of which were *two* journals under the INFORMS marquee. *Management Science* was the most significant competitor, with a very large number of submissions per year. In addition, *Operations Research* was increasing its coverage of manufacturing and service research. Equally prominent in the eyes of submitting authors was *Production and Operations Management*, founded by Kalyan Singhal, University of Baltimore. (Kal was among the first to phone me congratulations after learning of my appointment.) *AIIE Transactions* and the *Naval Research Logistics Quarterly*, now renamed *IIE Transactions* and *Naval Research Logistics*, respectively, were also serious competitors.

Of course, the INFORMS marquee *was* an advantage. More important to me were the many colleagues I had worked with during my years as an associate editor and then department editor for *Management Science*. I knew I could count on them for help.

So, as I considered submitting a proposal for what would become M&SOM, I knew that M&SOM needed to have a *competitive advantage* over its well-established

rivals: a reason why authors would *choose* to submit to an unknown latecomer.

To me, the obvious *potential* competitive advantage was “review cycle time”—that is, the time between submission of a new or revised manuscript and receipt of reviews. No data were publicly available on review cycle times at any of M&SOM’s competitors; indeed, I was not aware of *any* of M&SOM’s competitors that were even keeping track of cycle times. Folklore hinted that some journals were worse than others, but virtually no submitting author expected a review cycle time of less than three or four months. And seven months was grudgingly regarded as “nothing to complain about.” Some authors reported cycle times of over a year.

My proposal for M&SOM promised an average cycle time of 45 days, an editorial organization and review process designed to deliver it, and a reporting system to monitor it. The operations management (OM) community’s reaction to this promise ranged from “that will be very difficult” to “that isn’t possible.” My response was, “If any journal sets the standard for quality for its manuscript processing, shouldn’t it be the ‘operations’ journal?”

I designed three levels of organization: me, a group of senior editors (SEs), and an editorial review board. M&SOM was, I believe, the first INFORMS journal to list the names and affiliations of reviewers in every single issue. Why? I wanted reviewers to have some ownership in M&SOM.

The review process was as follows: I screened all submitted manuscripts for appropriateness of topic *and* quality of organization and presentation. During my seven years as editor in chief, the overwhelming majority of manuscripts passed this screening (not so during the first year). If not, I would write the submitting author to explain why and to suggest what might be done in a possible subsequent *new* submission.

For manuscripts that passed this screening, I selected an SE to review the manuscript and discuss it with me by phone. This selection was based on topic expertise and the SE’s current M&SOM workload. *Every* SE had signed an agreement stating that when he or she was asked by email for a review, he or she would either decline within three days or agree to review and discuss it with me within 10 days. If the SE agreed, then my managing editor would arrange a day and time for us to talk by phone. That talk focused on a single question: *Assuming that this manuscript is original and correct, then should M&SOM publish it?*

If the answer was “Yes,” then the SE and I would identify three or four possible reviewers. *Every* reviewer had signed an agreement stating that when he or she was asked by email for a review, then he or she would either decline within three days or agree to

review it within 25 days.¹ Every (surviving) manuscript was reviewed by at least two reviewers. My managing editor kept track of who was doing what and kept everyone—including me—on schedule. Initially, this process used a three-ring binder as its database. Over time, we developed a website that, among other things, provided submitting authors with the status of their manuscripts’ reviews. Before long, authors could also submit manuscripts using the web. This was before INFORMS adopted its own web-based system.

After all the reviews were in hand, our managing editor would arrange a day and time for the SE and me to discuss them. On the basis of these reviews and our own initial assessments of the manuscript, we would decide to accept, reject, or require revision from the submitting author.² Rejections and requests for revision were usually accompanied by notes from me and/or the SE in addition to the reviews themselves.

The First Months

I spent the spring of 1996 hiring Lois Gast to be our managing editor, recruiting SEs and reviewers, and preparing a call for papers. The call for papers, officially published in November 1996 but widely circulated during that summer, identified four broad classes of manuscripts of particular interest: “(1) manuscripts that examine the application of mathematical modeling to operations management in novel and interesting ways; (2) manuscripts that examine the application of the social sciences (e.g., economics, organizational behavior, psychology) or any other science or discipline to operations management; (3) manuscripts that examine management concerns at the interfaces between operations management and other functional areas (e.g., accounting, finance, human resources, MIS, marketing); and (4) manuscripts that interpret state-of-the-art implementation from the viewpoint of current theory and/or examine contemporary practice in order to suggest new opportunities for research.”

The following were listed as topics of interest: “operations strategy, product/service design, technologies and processes, manufacturing operations, service operations, supply-chain operations, cross-functional coordination, global coordination and practice-based research.” The call for papers further stated, “Manuscripts accepted for publication ... must address topics that are relevant to the practice of Operations Management and address questions whose answers are of interest to practitioners. Results must have the potential to improve practice; insights should enhance understanding about management concerns.”

The call for papers also stated that M&SOM’s “first issue (was) planned for publication in the first quarter of 1998.” The first issue was published in early 1999.

Table 1. Statistics on Average Reviewing Times (All Times in Days)

Stage	Current month (average)	Current month (maximum)	Cumulative from 9/15/96 (average)
To editor in chief (EiC) screening	5.2	8	5.8
EiC to SE screening	5.9	15	9.6
Editorial board review	53.3	99	44.8
Reviews received to SE review	9	13	10.3
Review cycle time	44.9	115	37.4

1997–1998: Challenging Early Years

The delay in the planned publication of *M&SOM*'s first issue was cause for considerable concern to the INFORMS Board of Directors, to its then vice president of publications, to the INFORMS publication office, and, of course, to me. I *knew* that the organization and review process I had designed *was working*, but I also knew that volume 1 had to be a hit. And submissions weren't coming in fast enough to please anyone. For example, only 19 manuscripts had been submitted during 1996. Fourteen were rejected.

The INFORMS board had witnessed much higher initial submission and acceptance rates for its other recently launched journals, which may not have faced the same entrenched competition as *M&SOM*. Nonetheless, important issues were at stake. INFORMS' original plan was to publish four issues during *M&SOM*'s first year. This had to be scaled back to only two issues. This was significant because the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) would only include *M&SOM* in its Science Citation Index (SCI) after we had published *quarterly* issues for two years. Library subscriptions depended, in part, on being included in the SCI. Even postal discounts were based on mailing at least four issues per year.

I wrote letters to faculty groups and to individual faculty members—and asked my senior editors to do the same—encouraging their readership, subscription, and submission to *M&SOM* and asking that they encourage their libraries to subscribe, too. I even distributed stickers for INFORMS meeting name badges reading, “I [Heart] *M&SOM*—Ask Me Why.”

I understood that the INFORMS board was nervous, but except for asking me to do more or different things—all of which I did—I hadn't been directly criticized. Then, during the Montreal meetings in April 1998, the then vice president of publications called me into a private meeting to express “the Board's loss of confidence in your leadership of the journal.”

On my way home from those meetings, I decided to email all my SEs to inform them of the INFORMS board's “loss of confidence” and asking them to write to members of the INFORMS board (and to its vice president of publications) offering their personal opinion about my leadership of the journal.

I never heard *anything* about that email or whatever emails my SE's might have written to INFORMS board members. But I never heard (or read) that phrase again. Yet the future of *M&SOM* was at stake. Yes, I was confident that we would *eventually* be very successful, but would there be time?

INFORMS' concern continued even *after* the publication of volume 1, issue 1, in 1999. The then director of the INFORMS publications office wrote the following to the INFORMS board: “Since it has taken about 3 years to accept enough papers for 2 issues, we are understandably worried about the future of *M&SOM*.”

Of course, everyone reading this knows that there *was* a future for *M&SOM* then—indeed, a very significant one.

In November 1999, I was reappointed editor in chief for a second, three-year term, based on the recommendation of a committee chaired by Wally Hopp. Their recommendation was unanimous, noting, “He is the person with the best chance of making the journal succeed.”

So what about those promised 45-day cycle times? Shown in Table 1 are the statistics from July 1999. These data were provided to every senior editor every month.

And just how high were *M&SOM*'s publication standards from the beginning? Let everyone decide for themselves. Me? During my tenure as editor in chief, I submitted three manuscripts to *M&SOM* (whose review I recused myself from): the first two were rejected; one was published after significant revisions. My rejection experience brought to mind that quote from Groucho Marx about not wanting to belong to a club that would have him as a member. *Had I formed a club that didn't want me as a member?*

Concluding Thoughts

Looking back now, I am enormously proud of what *we*—my SEs, reviewers, managing editor, and I—accomplished then. I also take personal pleasure in noting that *M&SOM*'s competitors now pay much more attention to review cycle time than they did before. Imitation *is* the sincerest form of flattery.

Many thanks to INFORMS for giving me the opportunity to launch *M&SOM*, to the Manufacturing

and Service Operations Management (MSOM) Society for its support, and to my SEs and board of reviewers. Special thanks to Dennis Weidenaar, dean of the Krannert School, who provided personnel, computer support, and a reduced teaching load. Last, but not least, thanks to my colleagues in the Krannert Operations Management group who provided help in dozens of ways.

Personal Note

My seven years as editor in chief were, without a doubt, the most challenging and rewarding of my academic career. In 2012, I retired from Purdue as the Louis A. Weil, Jr., Professor of Management, Emeritus. Since then, as a volunteer, I've helped to establish

a music and memory (M&m) program at a local adult day-care center. M&m programs develop personalized music playlists for dementia sufferers. I also volunteer twice a week to read with kindergarteners. These are the most gratifying things I have ever done.

Endnotes

¹ In my seven years as editor in chief, I “fired” fewer than a handful of SEs or reviewers because they had failed to keep their agreements.

² The SE and I never “counted votes” during our reviews. Indeed, we sometimes accepted manuscripts that had received split accept/reject recommendations. I was even *prepared* to accept a manuscript that had received unanimous reject recommendations, but that never happened. The point was that accept/reject/revise decisions were the SEs’ and mine to make, not the reviewers.