Editorial

Aspects of applications

Editors of scientific journals on management science and operational research (MS/OR) often complain about the low number of papers *on* applications, *with* applications or even *mentioning the possibility* of applications being submitted. Moreover, when application-oriented papers are submitted, they complain about the lower quality of these papers: too long, many uninteresting parts, notably too many irrelevant details and often written too loosely.

Of course, there are journals which concentrate on applications and/or are problem-oriented (which is not necessarily the same thing). Other journals feature, from time to time, invited contributions devoted to the practice in some particular field of MS/OR. Nevertheless, complaints remain, and not just from editors: many readers call for more attention to 'practice' and 'real-life problems'. This leads us to the question: who are the readers of these scientific journals? It is not unreasonable to assume that the readers of these journals are indeed scientists. However, many do believe or want to believe that the readership includes a lot of practitioners. I do not accept this: I think that most practitioners are less interested in the broad-scope journals that our MS/OR journals generally are. Practitioners prefer to read material that is both easily accessible and to a large extent relevant within their own working environment. The limited number of practitioners reading MS/OR literature are probably of the species of hybrid scientists with a part-time job in practice.

If these hypotheses concerning the readership are sufficiently acceptable not to be rejected, the composition of the readership in itself already explains the low number of practical contributions: many practitioners are simply not familiar enough with our journals. Furthermore, they have less incentive to publish in scientific journals than the scientists themselves. Therefore one may assume that the practical contributions that can be found in our journals are written either by practitioners with prior experience in writing academic articles obtained during an earlier, scientific career or by the hybrid scientists mentioned before. They are also busy people, but they may have more incentives to publish in academic journals.

The practitioners who do publish in scientific journals are apparently not always aware of the following two points.

(1) The target group of the article is the scientific community and *not* the potential clients. Failure to recognize this point easily leads to somewhat exaggerated claims as regards the success of the approach followed. Claims which do well in an advertising brochure may easily irritate referees and/or editors.

(2) The article does not have to give an 'abbreviated but still complete' description of the application. An adequate description of a real-life application, especially if it is to be understandable for a larger audience than a few insiders, requires lots of pages of which many are not interesting at all for others than those familiar with the application.

Notably the second point may play a role also in the refereeing process of application-oriented articles. Editors and referees may ask for more details to have a better picture of the application. This may lead to disappointment when they discover that large parts of many applications are not worth reporting on in scientific journals because 'it has been done before' and has been described many times already.

This may raise the question of whether the results of 'interesting practical work' are interesting enough to warrant publication in scientific journals. The answer must, of course, be yes! However, it becomes boring when the complete story is told! Many applications contain surprising aspects which are well worthy to be published; for instance, because they yield important empirical insights, e.g. with respect to the validity or plausibility of the assumptions underlying our approaches.

This having been said, the Letters Editor would like to use the Letters section of this Journal to publish

ASPECTS OF APPLICATIONS, ASPECTS OF DECISION PROBLEMS

Both academics and (semi-) practitioners are invited to send contributions to the Letters section of this Journal to ventilate insights obtained through applying MCDA techniques and studying multiple-criteria decision problems in practice, thus giving mind-teasing, stimulating input to the readers of this Journal. It suffices to give a clear description of the problem/application aspect which has drawn the attention. It is not necessary to give a full description of the application at hand. The readers of the Journal are invited both to contribute directly and to react to the mind-teasers presented in the letters of others.

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