Letter to the Editor

I would like to take issue with Stephen Ward over his implied condemnation in a recent editorial [1] of 'straight' case studies because 'their value to experienced operational researchers may be rather limited'.

Writing as an OR worker of long experience and, dare I say it, of some success in industry, I read a case study with interest and then decide on its applicability and potential in my own particular situation. I do not require a 'detailed description ... of the relationship between parties etc' which all too often can amount to little more than padding.

As an example of my dislike, I would quote a paper [2] in the same issue of OR Insight describing the results of a questionnaire. The paper concluded with about 850 words (25% of the paper) of pure and not very enlightened speculation; the only factual part of this section was that the sample was too small for generality.

Lest I be considered totally destructive, the same issue of OR Insight contained two admirable case studies [3] [4] which met *my* criteria.

I cannot resist questioning the use of cognitive mapping by my friend Alberto Canen [5] to establish the blindingly obvious three groups (players) and the relevant factors of 'cost, quality and convenience'. I can only conclude that this was done to give his fellow (student) author practise in the use of the technique: Experienced OR practitioners would get as far as this on the back of an envelope. Is university OR falling too much in love with its own techniques to be truly relevant to the essentially practical nature of applied OR?

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References

- 1 Ward S (1993) Categorising Case Studies, *OR Insight*, Vol 6, No 3, p2.
- 2 Edge C, and Klein J (1993), No Job Too Small?, *OR Insight*, Vol 6, No 3, pp 8-12.
- 3 Baker B M (1993), Bags You Choose, *OR Insight*, Vol 6, No 3, pp 3-7.

- 4 Marples C and Robertson C (1993), Option Review with HIVIEW, *OR Insight*, Vol 6, No 3, pp 13-18.
- 5 Campbell J and Canen A G (1993), Administrative Transportation, *OR Insight*, Vol 6, No 3, pp 26-32.