Editorial

Steve Clarke and Brian Lehaney
Editors

Welcome to Volume 21 Issue 4 of OR Insight 2008, which is the final issue edited by us. We have enjoyed immensely working on ORI for the past eight years (yes, it really is that long!), but felt the time was right for a fresh look at the journal, and are happy to pass it over now. We believe ORI to be in as good a shape as ever, and we have managed to get a steady flow of papers from a variety of contributors, from a wide range of countries, and covering a substantial array of topics.

Our final issue continues with global contributions, and Italy, Canada and the U.K. are represented. The first paper, by Vinh Quan and Xianjie Shi, looks at an integer programming approach to retail labour scheduling problems. They argue that, since it may not be possible to solve such problems optimally within a reasonable amount of time, it may be necessary in practice to be satisfied if the solution reaches an acceptable gap from the best bound. An analysis of several real life labour scheduling problems reveals that, whilst for some cases a reasonable gap (say, for example, 5%) can be found quickly, it may take several hours or more to find a 2% gap. In large schedules, with several hundreds of employees, this difference in solution quality may not be significant, but the difference between the times needed to generate the schedules, on the other hand, becomes critical. This paper presents a dynamic termination scheme that can be used to prevent long search processes that do not yield recognizable practical improvements.

Nang Laik Ma and Eleni Hadjiconstantinou look at the evaluation of container yard operations using discrete-event simulation. As world container volumes continue to soar, container terminals form a very important chain in the global transportation network. It is a generally accepted view that the modelling of the dynamic and stochastic nature of the container terminal systems using analytical or closed form models is a complicated process and the use of such models is very limited. Hence, this paper presents a simulation model for complete terminal operations which is developed and implemented with the view to validating and evaluating the operational results obtained from a new optimization model of the combined container assignment and yard crane deployment problem. The various aspects of the container terminal operations are modelled using discrete-event simulation. Computational results from the simulation model are reported for a UK container terminal using operational data.

It is good to see a paper by one of our Associate Editors, Gill Ragsdell (together with Laura Cronk) in this issue. Their case study paper on Knowledge Sharing by Micro-Teams is based on a research project that aimed to identify the enhancers and inhibitors of human-centred knowledge sharing (KS) by micro-teams. The study focused on KS within and between micro-teams in an Information Services (IS) Department of a large, international organisation. Primary data was collected via questionnaires and its analysis highlighted a range of reasons why some teams fail to share knowledge. The conclusions and resultant recommendations focus on eliminating the notion of 'tunnel vision' within and between the micro-teams.

The paper by Andrea Milani, Roberto Steri and Diego Viviani looks at a new artificial neural networks approach to forms of decision making related to strategic alliances. They argue that increased competition and more demanding customers have led to a need for firms to look for high-level skills provided by business partners that are strategic with regard to the process goals. They use Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) to propose a Reasoned Neural Networks Design (RNND) model in order to strategically design the alliances characteristics coherently with the company's goals and to support the partners' selection of strategic alliances.

Enjoy this, our last issue of ORI.

We extend best wishes for a successful future to our successors.

Steve Clarke and Brian Lehaney

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