Editorial

- in theory there is no difference between theory and practice

Roy Johnston

For the last two and a half years I have been privileged to be the Editor of this Journal. One of the factors which encouraged me to take on the role was the knowledge that there was a lot of good OR going on, indeed that belief was incorporated into the title of my first Editorial. The work, the cases and the experiences are there, but I recognised it was going to be difficult to encourage OR people to write about their accomplishments. OR has an important contribution to make, but its success might inhibit organisations from allowing publication, and furthermore, writing would add to the pressures on already busy people. I thought it might prove difficult, if not impossible to maintain the number and quality of the articles in OR Insight. To some extent this fear has been borne out, but only as far as the number of articles. The quality has far exceeded my expectations and has turned my role into a fascinating task.

I took on the role as Editor because I believe that OR and the process of model building has an important contribution in facilitating good decision making. The role of a model is to help one understand a highly complex situation. Whilst it should describe the area of interest, it needs to do more than just specify important features and perhaps their interaction. A model exists to enable deductions to be made and tested, and new, perhaps unexpected features to be uncovered and explored. Some papers in journals seem to consider that a collection of equations equates to a model. These equations may be amenable to algebraic manipulation but are unlikely to add insight, because they were conceived and formulated bearing in mind the limitations or restrictions needed for their solution rather than trying to represent a real world model. I am pleased to say that many of the papers submitted to OR Insight have illustrated modelling at its best.

Anyone who questions the relevance of OR to real decision situations should look at the opening section of the paper on page 10 of this issue entitled "Operational Analysis in the Frontline" by Suzanne Griffin. The horrific situation presented, and the scientific approach to its evaluation make a fascinating paper. On the basis of this work, Suzanne was selected to be the recipient of this year's Simpson Award, the prize for the best paper presented at the Young OR Conference. It makes a worthy addition to our pages.

To return to my title, "In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice, but in practice" goes the well known saying. The papers in OR Insight are about the real practice of OR and not some extra theoretical permutation on existing irrelevant theory. This accounts for the attraction of OR Insight to members of the Society, and I hope this journal can continue to be a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Academic journals require papers to make a contribution to the theory and practice of the subject, therefore published papers are at the frontier of a field and hence rather specialist in topic and appeal. OR Insight aims to present general issues and contexts and is therefore a major source for professional development. Long may this continue, but it does require your support in the form of contributions describing your work. Over 80% of OR Insight articles are by members of the Society, so publication is very much sharing our experiences within the club.

Times are always changing, and new issues and opportunities arise. Electronic publishing is now very cost effective and additionally offers indexing on line and direct links to other references. Whilst these features are desirable for more formal and specialist journals I hope that OR Insight can continue in its paper form, remaining a magazine, providing a good general read to enable all practitioners to keep up to date across the whole spectrum of OR.

I am stepping down from my Editorial role as I shall be retiring from my University position this summer. The task of editor does require the support of an institution, and, whilst it is with many regrets, it is also with considerable pleasure that I am handing over my role to the enthusiasm of Brian Lehaney and Steve Clarke, both based at Luton University. Many people in the Society will know them and be aware of the contribution they have already made to the OR Society, however to aid recognition, photographs appear with their article in this issue. I pass over the editorial role to them, knowing they will get excellent support and help from the team at Seymour House and in particular from Christine Faulkner, without whose ready help, experience and patience, my task would have been impossible. My thanks go to them and all the contributors and associate editors for their work and involvement over the recent issues.