50th Anniversary Paper

Commentary on Ackoff RL (1979): The future of OR is past; Resurrecting the future of OR

KB Haley, Editor, Journal of the Operational Research Society, 1972–1980.

Professor Russell L Ackoff is the American who has had the greatest influence on the development of OR in the United Kingdom. He writes extensively on a wide range of topics but this note will concentrate on the background to the two papers published as part of the 50th anniversary celebration. His joint publication with Churchman and Arnoff in 1957 on an 'Introduction to Operations Research' was a blue print for the techniques of OR and the headings of the chapters became the contents of the many standard 8 subject introduction courses in OR that emerged in the 50's and 60's. During 1960 he was the Visiting Professor at the University of Birmingham and was completing the publication of the text on Scientific Method. He spoke throughout the country on a number of short courses which were attended by most of the leading figures in UK OR and so it was no surprise when he was invited to address the Society's 1978 National Conference in York.

The papers,^{1,2} which are inserted in this issue are those based on the two talks, which were separated by some two days. In the first he presents his view that there was an increase in the inappropriateness of OR's methodology and he argues for a comprehensive reconsideration of the field, its methodology, the way it is practised and the nature

of OR education. Many debates took place amongst the delegates in the period before the second paper. In this, Russ argues for planning to be the natural home of OR problem solving and urges a return to the original concept of interdisciplinary teams and greater involvement in research. He further advocates a redesign of the Professional Societies and a transformation of OR teaching. It would be easy for me to take issue with the apparent criticism of OR education in the UK, which has always been seen as significantly different to that in the USA but I will leave that to our readers. It is, however, interesting to read the latest issue of ORMS Today (June 2000) where the successes of both the methodology and the satisfaction of industry with the education system are described. The debate is still live and I commend the two papers to all readers.

References

- 1 Ackoff RL (1979) The future of OR is past. *J Opl Res Soc* **30**: 93–103.
- 2 Ackoff RL (1979) Resurrecting the future of OR. *J Opl Res Soc* **30**: 189–199.