5521 Research Park Drive, Suite 200
Catonsville, MD 21228 USA

The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences

Edward A. Silver – MSOM Fellow Interview

MSOM Fellow, 2000

What was OM like for you early in your career, and how has it changed?

My undergraduate degree was in engineering - the idea of engineering adapting scientific ideas/concepts to deal with real world problems has had a profound effect on my research/teaching/consulting. My doctorate was in Operations Research, not Operations Management. I then worked for 4 years with the consulting firm, Arthur D. Little - this practical experience again had a major impact on my subsequent research, etc. Although throughout my career I have worked on problems that could be considered in OM (e.g. inventory management, maintenance management, SQC, etc.), I wasn't affiliated with an OM group until we changed the name/focus of our area here at the University of Calgary in the 1980's.

What are some common misconceptions you observe that young researchers have? Do you feel you've made any mistakes?

Of course, I've made plenty of mistakes in my research and other activities. If you don't make any mistakes, you're not taking enough risks! The key is to make sure to learn from the mistakes.

What has been the key to your success?

The keys to my success - the aforementioned educational experience and the continuing part-time consulting, executive workshops, etc. Also, I think I found my niche in terms of trying to get reasonable solutions to realistic problem representations instead of emphasizing mathematical elegance.

In you view, why is OM important? What significant contributions has OM made to the society and world?

Why is OM important? - it is concerned with providing goods and services, i.e. core activities of any organization. In fact, my focus later in my career was on a process management perspective, which has universal applicability.

Professor Silver has also written an article including some advice on his research philosophy:

“Some ideas on enhancing research productivity” International Journal of Production Economics, March 2009.