

Joining P&OM forces worldwide: present and future of operations management

About the P&OM World Conferences

Time has flown since the first P&OM World Conference in 2000; nearly 20 years, in fact, so it might be a good idea to recap, as there are bound to be many younger P&OMers out there who are not aware of the history of these P&OM conferences.

Although the importance of operations management had been rapidly growing throughout the 1980s and 1990, at the turn of the century, its importance was still not as widely acknowledged as other business disciplines and it did not enjoy the standing and recognition that its importance deserved. So, in 1998, Jose A.D. Machuca was approached by POMS officers Martin Starr and Sushil Gupta, and asked to organize the POMS International Conference. He thought that it was a good opportunity to strengthen the field through something new and constructive: a new idea was proposed to the various P&OM Associations around the world – POMS in America, EurOMA in Europe and JOMSA in Asia – that they could come together for the first time at a World P&OM Conference to create a joint platform for the advancement of P&OM all around the world.

At the time, progress in operations management was at fever pitch: it was a period of change, of difficult new challenges that required new approaches and new solutions. The time was ripe for a P&OM World Conference that would enable a global response to address all the developments and innovations emerging in POM through a diverse range of optics and from a wide spectrum of cultures. And, above all, the advance of globalization meant that companies had to tackle new problems, operate in a global economy and face up to competition from all corners of the planet.

The three associations fully agreed and, as a result, the concept behind the P&OM World Conferences was born: to launch a new kind of Conference, designed to provide: a richer and wider worldwide debate and exchange of knowledge in the discipline with the large-scale involvement of operations management researchers and managers from all over the world and the collaboration of P&OM field leaders; and a major effort to enable greater worldwide networking of OM academics. The organization of the Conference would have to be underpinned by the joint work of the three Associations and their members.

The success of the first World P&OM Conference in Seville (2000) led to an agreement between the three associations to continue holding a World Conference every four years (just like the Olympic Games). Their Presidents, Bob Hayes, Chris Voss and Masanori Kodama, all put their names to the agreement on a barrel of sherry wine, which can still be seen in one of the most famous sherry cellars in Jerez, Spain (Plate 1).

Seville (2000) was followed by P&OM World Conferences in Cancun (2004), Tokyo (2008) and Amsterdam (2012), with a great success. Then, in 2016, it was time for the fifth. The business environment continued to be characterized by increasingly intense globalized competition, more and more demanding customers, and ever-scarcer resources. To this could be added the impact of the new technologies, especially in the field of information systems and communications. Operations management should continue playing a major role in achieving competitive advantages and adding economic value in a context of very swift change. Our discipline was becoming more and more complex and often requiring mastering uncertainty and creatively solving unpredictable problems. We did not shrink from the challenge, despite the complexity of the environment. A collaboration between experts appeared to be needed more than ever to create the synergic effects that would continue to drive POM forward. So the time had once again arrived to “join forces” and





Source: Machuca Jose (2003)

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Plate 1.
2000 agreement to
hold future P&OM
World Conferences

respond to the requirements of the rapidly growing field of OM. A Conference theme was chosen to reflect this: Joining P&OM forces worldwide: Present and future of Operations Management. This embodied the spirit of the P&OM World Conferences and sought to encourage people from all over the world to get involved one way or another. With cooperation at the essence, members of all three co-organizing Associations took seats together on the Steering Committee (Jose A.D. Machuca, Raffaella Cagliano, Sergio Gouvea da Costa, Andreas Groessler, Dorothee Honhon, Munehiko Itoh and Yoshiki Matsui).

The 5th P&OM World Conference: P&OM Havana 2016 (September 6–10, 2016)

The first challenge facing the organizers was how to compete with so many different OM and related conferences around the world. We determined to make use of the competitive advantages that had made previous P&OM World Conferences so successful which were as follows: an attractive location for the event; the collaboration of committed POM world leaders; huge opportunities for networking, thanks to a broad range of enjoyable social activities (if possible at no extra cost) and more contact-days; and the driving force of an enthusiastic and highly committed organizing team.

The location chosen was the mythical city of Havana, one of the “7 wonder Cities of the World,” but there was a rocky road ahead. A large number of factors had to be contended with that could have completely derailed the World Conference: it was not being organized in conjunction with the Annual Conference of one of the Associations, on top of which the annual EurOMA conference was being held only two months before; the Conference dates were not perfect, as most universities return to work in September, and in Cuba, it signals the hurricane season; obstacles to US citizens traveling to Cuba; and, above all, Cuba’s underdeveloped infrastructure, which made the organization of this Conference the most challenging and time-demanding that the Chairs have ever experienced. Fortunately, the previously mentioned competitive advantages of the P&OM World Conference and the collaboration of so many friends and colleagues from all over the world played a very positive role in making the 2016 World Conference a success.

The opening ceremony took place on September 6 in one of the main rooms at the Conference's impressive venue, the Havana International Convention Center. The Steering Committee Chair, Jose A. D. Machuca, EurOMA's representatives Andy Neely and Giovanni Perrone, POMS's Jeet Gupta and Sergio Gouvea, JOMSA's Masaharu Ota and Michiya Morita, and the local Committee heads Jose A. Acevedo and Martha Gómez all extended a warm welcome to participants. The first plenary session followed, immediately before a city tour around Old Havana and a welcome cocktail with live music at the famous Hotel Nacional.

In the end, P&OM Havana 2016 also turned out to be resounding success and continued the tradition of a World Conference in the real sense: 432 attendees from 38 countries from all 5 continents (Europe: 19 countries/252 attendees; America 8 countries/123 attendees; Asia (7 countries/48 attendees), Africa (3 countries/4 attendees) and Australia (1 country/5 participants)). We must highlight especially the huge European contingent (58 percent). See <https://figshare.com/s/c1d9bc0fb8437c970b0d> for participants and their geographical distribution.

Many positive personal remarks were heard made by participants at the Conference, but for accuracy's sake an online survey was sent to attendees to gauge satisfaction and the extent to which the conference goals had been accomplished. Questions were measured on a Likert scale: 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (good), 4 (very good) and 5(excellent). The results showed a very high degree of satisfaction: the Conference as a whole was very well considered (good (26.8 percent), very good (45.6 percent), excellent (22.1 percent)), as were two major aspects relating to P&OM World Conference aims: the sessions (good (34.7 percent), very good (42.2 percent), excellent (14.3 percent)) and the networking/Social program (good (17.8 percent), very good (35.6 percent), excellent (40.4 percent)). Two other major "human factor" aspects also scored high: organization (good (21.6 percent), very good (40.5 percent), excellent (23.6 percent)) and the closeness and kindness of the organizers (good (16.4 percent), very good (34.2 percent), excellent (39. percent)).

A number of key factors were responsible for this success: the location, the scientific aspects, the networking features, the commitment and hard work of all the Conference Committees, and global cooperation. Below we detail two of these.

Scientific aspects

With respect to the scientific side of the Conference, one of the aims was to spark fertile, worldwide debate. We were fortunate that we were able to rely on a large number of P&OM leaders from EurOMA, POMS and JOMSA, who generously gave their time and effort as keynote speakers or as organizers of invited tracks and sessions. Specifically, over 20 keynote Speakers took part in 7 keynote sessions, while over 30 well-known scholars organized 5 invited tracks and 35 invited sessions (detailed information can be found in the Conference Book of Abstracts; see: <https://figshare.com/s/c1d9bc0fb8437c970b0d>). One specific innovation was introduced to lay the foundations for worldwide discussion on a range of major topics: keynote presentations were not made by a single person, but with three or more presenters in a panel format who instead explained the approaches taken to the topic in their respective geographic areas. Simultaneous translation was provided at the plenary keynote sessions and at the opening and closing ceremonies to enable the P&OM Latin American community to take full part.

Regular sessions were organized around a list of carefully chosen OM topics. The Program Committee had four co-chairs, one each from the three associations and a fifth from the local team. In total, 602 extended abstracts were submitted and double blind reviewed by the 205 EurOMA, POMS and JOMSA members on the Scientific Committee. Finally, 377 papers were presented over three days at the Havana International Convention Center in 123 parallel sessions. In the long-held tradition of P&OM World Conferences, some sessions were held in Spanish. A total of nine sessions included 27 papers presented in Spanish, with two sessions including simultaneous translation. Detailed information about the topics, Committees and

sessions can be found in the Book of Abstracts of the Conference (see (<https://figshare.com/s/c1d9bc0fb8437c970b0d>)). Two prizes were awarded: the Jose A.D. Machuca P&OM World Conference Best paper Award and the Emerald Best Paper Award.

Participants were given a copy of the Book of Abstracts and also a pen drive with the Conference Proceedings including all 377 papers. Both of these have ISBNs (ISBN: 978-959-261-532-8 and ISBN: 978-959-261-531-1, respectively).

Four major Journals agreed to publish Conference papers either in Special issues (*IJOPM*, *IJPDLM* and *JOMS*) or regular issues (*IJPE*), papers to be pre-selected from potentially interesting studies. We would like to take the opportunity here to thank the journals' then respective Editors-in-Chief for their support and commitment: Steve Brown, Alex Ellinger, Hirofumi Matsuo and Robert Grubbstrom (and also Peter Kelle, *IJPE* America Editor).

Networking

Networking has always been one of the most important aims of the P&OM World Conferences, so special attention was again paid to enabling the best networking opportunities at a breathtaking location. A carefully designed social program was therefore designed at no extra cost, with joint activities almost every day. These started with a bus and walking tour of Old Havana – a UNESCO world heritage site – followed by the welcome cocktail to the sound of live Cuban music at the Hotel Nacional (the icon of Havana hotels). The Conference dinner was held at the Tropicana Cabaret (an absolutely unique place in the world for savoring Cuban music and folklore), where we were also treated to a cabaret of the type of sequin-and-feather musical show that would later come to be replicated in Paris, New York and Las Vegas. The Farewell Cocktail was held at the Havana International Convention Center hotel, once more to the sound of live Cuban music. The conference finale was a tour of the Viñales National Park (one of Cuba's most magnificent natural settings and a UNESCO World Heritage site,), including a visit to a tobacco plantation (where we were given a demonstration of how Havana cigars are produced). The tour was rounded off with a typical Cuban lunch, again to the sound of live Cuban music. Some shots of networking events are included in Plate 2.



Plate 2.
The local organizing committee with the steering committee chair (Jose A.D. Machuca and representatives of EurOMA (President Giovanni Perrone), POMS (Jeet Gupta) and JOMSA (President M. Ota and Michiya Morita), and Program Committee Chairs (Gerald Reiner and Cesar Ortega)

This special issue

This special issue is based on papers presented at the Conference. In selecting papers, we analyzed the feedback and scores given by the Scientific Committee in the initial extended abstract evaluation process. Papers that selected *IJOPM* as their first SI choice (89 papers) and that received the highest marks in the reviewers' grading (a minimum of 2.75 (on a scale 1–3)) were considered as potential candidates. As a result, 17 papers fulfilling both conditions were pre-selected. Finally, 12 authors agreed to take part in the review process. They were asked to improve their papers and to submit them for this Special issue. They were subsequently blind reviewed to ensure they complied with the standards of the journal. Finally, six papers were accepted for publication. Before commenting on the papers in this special issue, we would like to express our warm gratitude to the reviewers involved for their contribution to improving the published papers. We would also like to thank Steve Brown and Pamela Danese for their support for this publication.

In the first paper, "Performance assessment process model for international manufacturing networks," Ferreira and Corrêa Fleury (2018) address a subject that has been omitted from the International Operations Management (IOM) literature for a long time. Despite the strategic relevance of feedback information on the performance of international manufacturing networks (IMNs) – the network-based operations of factories – for coordination and strategic management, there is scarce evidence on how multinational companies approach such an assessment, an intricate and context-dependent managerial practice. Based on knowledge extracted from IOM and organizational performance, the authors develop a process model for IMN performance assessment, looking at purposes, features and effects, combining the constituent elements of IMNs with the necessary adequate conditions for performance assessment implementation. The process model's congruency and usefulness was empirically verified by multiple case studies. Data based on profiling forms collected from company reports and interviews with corporate managers were examined through within-case analyses and cross-case analysis. The process model showed itself to be a valuable tool for describing how IMN performance assessment unfolds in multinational enterprises, while providing a framework for managers to evaluate their performance assessment approaches. Multinationals in which manufacture is rooted (in-house) and globally coordinated (centralized management) seem to give greater importance and be more structured with regard to IMN performance assessment than those adopting other configuration approaches. The process model, the main outcome of this study, might be seen as a "prototype," combining purposes, processes and key performance indicators. It provides the foundation for further studies on IOM, whereas its descriptive insights may encourage managers to improve the assessment process of their IMNs for enhanced performance.

Research in the supply chain management arena has recently advocated the "people dimension of SCM" as the most underestimated research theme in the domain (Wieland *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, the study by Durach and Machuca (2018), "A matter of perspective – the role of inter-personal relationships in supply chain risk management," may be considered a pivotal contribution to this void. The authors set out to review the old case of inter-organizational relational ties between buyers and suppliers in bringing risk resilience to the buying firm. The authors seek to provide us with a more fine-grained understanding of these ties by moving the level of analysis onto the inter-personal relations that exist between buying and supplying firms. The results of an analysis of data collected from 229 manufacturing firms in Austria, Germany and Switzerland show that inter-personal ties in terms of complementary employees and inter-personal investments (e.g. joint training) are a fundamental building block for the resilience of the buying firm. In addition, they show that continuous information exchange between these two parties provides no immediate resilience benefits to the buying firm. This suggests that the right information at the right time might be enough to appropriately implement mitigation measures with the supplier, challenging prior findings reported by organizational-level studies in which the unit of data

collection was the individual. Finally, the authors depict vibrant managerial levers, by showing that managers can meaningfully alter the resilience efficacy of such inter-personal ties through their choice of inter-organizational governance (i.e. formal vs informal).

In their paper “Tackling the sustainability iceberg: a transaction cost economics approach to lower tier sustainability management,” Meinschmidt and Schleper address the important topic of sustainability in supply networks. More specifically, they investigate how focal firms manage sustainability in their supply networks and the contextual factors that influence the choice of approaches. This is relevant since most of the impact on sustainability is determined in the lower tiers of a supply network. Meinschmidt and Schleper use an abductive research strategy for which transaction cost economics builds the theoretical framework to guide the process. On the basis of 12 case studies and more than 50 interviews, the authors categorize three major classes of approaches to managing sustainability in lower tiers: direct, indirect and neglect. Furthermore, they show that the choice of approach depends on a number of contextual factors, including stakeholder salience, structural supply network complexity, product and industry salience, past supply network incidents, socio-economic and cultural distance, and lower tier supplier dependency, resulting in different levels of perceived sustainability risk.

The paper “How do national cultures impact the operations strategy process?” by Park and Paiva addresses a prototypical research question for the World P&OM conference: whether (and if so, how) do operations differ between countries and regions. Based on Hofstede’s well-known dimensions of cultural difference, the authors analyze the extent to which patterns of integration and differences in the operations strategy process can be explained by national culture. Park and Paiva base their study on a survey of more than 100 manufacturing companies in four countries (Brazil, China, Germany and South Korea). One important finding from this analysis is that the alignment between manufacturing and corporate strategy differs for different levels of power distance, individualism vs collectivism and uncertainty avoidance. How manufacturing strategy is formulated differs between countries along with the degree of individualism vs collectivism and their long-term orientation. Thus, national culture is a key aspect in the process of formulating an operations strategy and managers need to adjust their strategy-making process when developing a global operations strategy.

Disaster management poses an important challenge to operations management in alleviating potential human and social losses caused by natural disasters. In the paper “Decision-making and operations in disasters: challenges and opportunities,” Rodriguez-Espindola *et al.* adopt a case-based approach to the disaster management issue of alignment between the organizational structure (usually a centralized decision-making structure) and the delivery operation of relief supplies. The analysis is based on a case study in Mexico, with particular emphasis on the 2007 Villahermosa flood. Using data collected by document analysis, interviews and freedom of information requests, the paper reveals the problems brought about by poor alignment between the decision-making structure and delivery operations. This study, which is based on the viewpoint of integrating the organizational structure and operational activities on the ground, shows how several of the problems commonly attributed to the centralized structure can be managed. Based on the case analysis, several aspects are discussed to improve logistics activity performance at the operational level, and a set of recommendations for best practice are proposed together with performance criteria. These practices include increased preparedness, goal alignment of involved organizational units, information management to reduce unreliability of information and duplication efforts, clarification of decision-makers, establishment of participation and collaboration mechanisms for stakeholders, strengthening of needs assessment capability and standardization of relief items. These are meaningful and provide us with perspectives and insights which may generate future research, and are suggestive for theoretical modeling in this socially important issue. This study is also beneficial for practitioners in charge as is.

In the last paper in this SI, “Evaluating the impact of modular product design on flexibility performance and cost performance with delivery performance as a moderator,” Wurzer and Reiner examine whether modular product design is an appropriate practice to improve manufacturers’ flexibility performance and cost performance. The authors also address the question whether combined effects of modular product design and delivery performance exist, which would indicate that it is worthwhile to string together the respective improvement practices. In following the assumption that a certain sequence of improvement practices is what characterizes best performers (Bortolotti *et al.*, 2015), the work complements prior research on the cumulative effects of improvement practices on operational performance. For the analysis, Wurzer and Reiner analyze 256 plants from the machinery, electronics and automotive industry using structural equation modeling with moderating effects. Data used in the study originate from the fourth round of the high performance manufacturing survey. One important finding from the analysis is that modular product design is not a universal solution for the improvement of flexibility performance and cost performance. Complementary methods for achieving an increase in flexibility while maintaining cost-efficiency are necessary. Furthermore, analysis results do not show a significant moderating effect, which indicates that stringing together modular product design and practices that improve delivery performance is not required.

Final remarks about the conference

On behalf of EurOMA, POMS and JOMSA, the Steering Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people and organizations that made P&OM Havana 2016 possible. These include the Program Committee (with special thanks to Gerald Reiner and Cesar Ortega), the local Organizing Committee (with special thanks to José Acevedo, Martha Gómez and Roberto Cespón), the outstanding group of Keynote Speakers, the well-known scholars who organized the invited sessions and tracks, the Scientific Committee, the Session Chairs and the Best Paper Awards Review Committees (detailed information can be found in the Book of Abstract of the Conference. See <https://figshare.com/s/c1d9bc0fb8437c970b0d>). Special thanks are also due to the EIASM team (and, in particular, Ene Kannel), with whom we worked so closely together and so effectively. And, last but not least, we must not forget our sponsors (EIASM, Emerald and UNIA), without whose financial support the event would not have been possible. And, of course, a huge thank you to all of you who were involved in the 5th World P&OM Conference for joining forces to make it happen and for sharing your OM knowledge with scholars from all around the world in a discussion about the present and the future of OM.

The Conference can be said to have been a great success. And the importance of holding this P&OM World Conference in a country like Cuba should also be highlighted as:

- (1) It enabled 27 Cuban academics to attend a major Conference and allowed them to network with over 400 P&OM scholars from all over the world. This would not have happened if the Conference had been held in a developed country.
- (2) We experienced, first hand, the difficulties that arranging a Conference in a very challenging environment presents and, at the same time, gave us a better understanding of how difficult it is for our Cuban colleagues to do their daily work in such difficult conditions, with a scarcity of resources that we cannot even begin to imagine in developed countries. This only makes it all the more important for us to show our great appreciation for their sterling work, their friendship and their kindness.
- (3) It allowed us to offer an improved service that included a wide variety of social activities at no additional charge to standard Conference fees. Despite this, the Conference still made enough profit for a Logistics and Supply Chain Management laboratory to be set up at the Technological University of Havana (CUJAE). This would not have been

possible without the Conference. And on behalf of EurOMA, POMS and JOMSA, we have to say that this is one of the very best outcomes of the event. This Conference and all those who took part in one way or another have contributed to enhancing our Cuban colleagues' research resources and that should make us all extremely happy.

Guest editorial

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Further reading

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