

Special Section

Editorial

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Over the past 2 years there have been extensive discussions of the need to record the events that led to the construction of the major institutions that comprise the marketing science discipline as we know it today. This led to a lengthy discussion of a project that would record the history of our field at a meeting of the Area Editors of *Marketing Science* at the UCLA Conference in June 2000. In the end it was decided that the objectives of the project would be to record the history of our field in the discipline's archives, provide current generations of scholars with a roadmap of how we achieved our status, and provide clues to success and failure for future innovators. Joel Steckel, who played a key role in the development of the idea for the project, graciously volunteered to coordinate the effort. We decided on the structure that is followed in this issue, which is an overview plus essays from six authors who each had a key role in the development of some aspect of marketing science. It was felt especially important to include the views of a practitioner, which led to the inclusion of Lew Pringle as an author. While each of the contributors is a major player in the history of marketing science, others have been as well, and it would have been easy to expand the list. We had to stop somewhere, and we hope that no one feels left out.

At our meeting, it became apparent that *Marketing Science* had a major advantage in accessibility and archival quality over alternative outlets for the project and that *Marketing Science* would be the ideal place in which to publish this history. Fortunately, the capacity needed for this was available in the journal. Consequently, it was decided at the Area Editor's meeting to go ahead with the project and to publish the output in *Marketing Science*. The result of this effort is the "History of Marketing Science" project that appears in the following special section.

While a major objective of the project was to record

the key events that led to the development of marketing science, its major short-term benefit should be its ability to inspire reflection on the current status and future direction of the field. The authors make a number of provocative statements and proposals. Not everyone will agree with these (I certainly don't agree with some of them), but they are worthy of consideration, even if only so you can articulate why you disagree.

There are perhaps two major themes running through the essays. One is a reminder that institutions result from the initiatives of the people who create them and also from those who resist or reject their creation. It is unlikely that the field of marketing science as we know it today would exist without the initiatives of the essay writers and of others who have been in the forefront of the development of our field, and we owe them for it. It is important to realize that the major developments discussed in the essays could easily have taken a different form or might have not happened at all. What would have happened if there had been less resistance to publishing modeling work in *Journal of Marketing Research*? If the College on Marketing had developed under the auspices of the American Marketing Association rather than TIMS? If the first Market Measurement and Analysis Conference had not been supported by ORSA/TIMS? If established groups had succeeded in killing NSF funding for management science research? If the founders had been unable to raise the required seed money for *Marketing Science*? The lesson is that the future of the field is likely to turn on similar close calls and on similar persistent initiatives by people in the field.

The other major theme running through the essays is an ongoing concern about the relevance of our work to the practice of marketing. There is a concern that our work is becoming less relevant to practition-

ers and that we are less successful than we could be at impacting practice. There is concern about the movement away from our original engineering orientation. In an insightful analysis, Lew Pringle attributes the relevance problem to an incentive compatibility problem. Dick Wittink presents a radical and provocative proposal for solving this problem, which is based on requiring business school researchers to develop solutions that get implemented to solve actual business problems.

I would take a somewhat different view of this relevance debate. I believe that most of the major developments in our area over the past 20 years have responded to real gaps in our knowledge of marketing phenomena and that our field would have been in trouble without them. Most of the developments do have at least the potential to impact practice, although it may take a long time before this potential is realized. As an example, theoretical models of channel behavior, product positioning, pricing practices, promotions, sales force compensation, and information markets provide at least an enhanced conceptual understanding of these phenomena, which can be helpful to a practitioner who is aware of them and can certainly be helpful to a consultant advising the practitioner. These models have also informed empirical work in these areas, and they are the cornerstone of recent attempts to develop econometric models of both demand- and supply-side behavior that could one day become the standard for the empirical analysis of market behavior. Although they may not have had an immediate impact on practice, the ultimate impact of these developments on practice might be very large.

That having been said, it seems that we could do much better in communicating with practitioners,

both in understanding their problems and in disseminating our results. Because the long-term payoff might be high, I believe that we need to continue our engagement in basic theoretical and empirical research. However, especially because our technical material can no longer be read by practitioners or MBA students, I also believe that we need to do a better job of communicating our findings. Perhaps John Little's proposed *Marketing Engineering* journal will allow us to do so. Perhaps we need a publication like the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* in economics, which commissions articles that present a nontechnical summary of the literature in different research areas. Perhaps the nontechnical summaries could be presented as a part of *Marketing Science*. Possibly, none of these changes will be enough, and we need to do something more radical to enhance the relevance of our research, as outlined in Dick Wittink's proposal.

In conclusion, the essays presented in this special section raise a number of important issues for the future direction of our field. If this section stimulates serious debate about these issues, it will have been well worth presenting. It is unlikely that the issue of relevance to practitioners can be resolved without a rigorous empirical study of how and whether our work influences practice. One step in this direction that surfaced at our Area Editors' meeting would be an analysis of changes in article content over the history of marketing science in general and of the journal *Marketing Science* in particular. This could provide valuable objective evidence about the course of the field and might be a good starting point for further analysis of our impact on practice. The extent to which our work influences practice, how that happens, and whether our current way of doing research is optimal are important topics for study.