

The Institute of Industrial Engineers: Issues of Change.

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Note that this document has been revised. An edited version of the earlier paper appeared in the May 2002 issue of PACE, the magazine Process and Control Engineering.

Introduction.

The lens of the present can sometimes make the past clearer. While this may help us to understand the forces that shaped our institute, we need to understand the current factors of influence in order to remain relevant and to be positioned to take advantage opportunities that will emerge. There may well be circumstances that allow us to shape the emerging opportunities.

1948-1954, Formation and Early Development.

The Institute of Industrial Engineers, (IIE) traces its formation to 1954 when a group of practitioners formalized their cooperative alliances into a corporate body. The initiators were all practitioners of productivity improvement techniques. A singularly significant impetus for the development of their body of knowledge derived from WW 11, when improved aircraft and other armament production were of national importance. By 1954 the specialized knowledge is effectively transforming Australia's burgeoning manufacturing industry. Industrial Engineers and the Institute are in demand.

The Sixties.

During the 1960s the IIE is very strong. It holds examinations for accreditation, has encouraged graduate and postgraduate engineering degrees in some Australian universities while technicians obtain certificates and diplomas from technical colleges. The Institute runs international conferences, seminars, training workshops and publishes a respected technical journal. The membership is around 2000 (my recollection) and there were links with practitioners' professional associations in UK and USA. There is effective symbiosis with corporation members, some of the company members are industrial engineering consultants. The knowledge disseminated by the Institute is valued and it's activities strongly supported by its membership, government and industry. The organization has some paid staff, but is still dependent on the efforts of unpaid volunteers. The Institute is organized as a federation of separate (sometimes separating!) state divisions with a federal council. There is concern that other disciplines are beginning to impact on the field covered by Industrial Engineers. The Institute focuses on keeping its field of practice pure and strengthening the chosen areas of technical expertise. Some practitioners of other techniques are excluded from the IIE. Many of the long term members are moving on to other careers, particularly production management and general management.

The New Century Begins.

By 2000 there are many other professionals, who have evolved their own professional associations, working to optimize the outputs of industry enterprises. The Institute's membership is a tenth of what it was. The traditional areas of employment, particularly manufacturing are in decline and employment opportunities for traditional practitioners are limited. It is difficult find volunteers to keep the divisions operating. Our members are under more career pressure and it is difficult to find the time attend meetings, courses and seminars but still IE's need opportunities to network and to develop their professional expertise.

The Institute no longer carries out or supports consultancies either directly or indirectly on its own behalf. Many members continue to successfully carry out consulting and education projects in their own right.

The Present

Over the last few years a number of initiatives have been commenced to empower our members; enhance their careers and to ensure the Institute remains relevant. Success at the basics may provide a platform for globalization of the profession with access to international accreditation and career development; wider opportunities for self education and the sharing of new and existing professional knowledge.

We have an alliance with the Institution of Engineers Australia and with international Industrial Engineering Institutes in Europe and Asia.

The Future

We are restructuring our organizational infrastructure and developing the website www.ie.com.au to provide our members with information, networking possibilities and technical papers. We may also be able to use the website to administer the Institute. Future developments may see IEs able to educate themselves on the web, download data and software for their professional use and contribute to the development of the profession's knowledge base.

The educational opportunities in Australia are being assessed.

It is possible that the future will see IEs members of an inclusive International Virtual Institute, using websites to deliver educational and library services; accreditation; networking with other IEs internationally and providing direct access to enhanced professional capabilities.

If IEs provide some impetus to increase productivity and create greater global wealth, then perhaps it will be counted as a worthwhile achievement for the whole profession.

Summary.

Some good things done, some good things being done, but much more yet to do.

Ends