
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Professor Robin G. Qiu is with the Department of Information Science at the Pennsylvania State University, USA. His research interests include service science, business transformation and service innovations, and control and management of manufacturing systems. He has had over 110 publications including over 40 journal papers. He was the founding and General Chair of 2005 IEEE Conference on Service Operations and Logistics, and Informatics (SOLI) and has been a General Co-Chair of SOLI conferences since 2006 and the General Chair of 2007 Conference on Flexible Automation and Intelligent Manufacturing. He was also the founding chair of the INFORMS Service Science Section.

Being mainly characterised with the perishable, heterogeneous and intangible nature, service is broadly considered as an application of specialised knowledge, skills and experiences, collaboratively performed for the benefit of another. Because of the quick advancement of technologies (networks, telecommunication, and others) and stringently intensified business competition, the economy globalisation has been accelerated, which indeed has transformed how we work, live, leisure and compete. In order to meet the needs of the global economy, leading and competitive services are essentially required to be customer-centric, e-oriented, information-driven and satisfaction-focused.

In spite of the dominative role of service in today's economic activities, there is a lack of sound and solid understanding how enterprises would operate cost-effectively and efficiently in order to stay competitive as they have been shifting their product foci to customer-centric, e-oriented, information-driven and satisfaction-focused services. This research and education gap has been created largely due to the complexity of inter-disciplinary issues across service business strategy and modelling, operations research, information technologies, industrial engineering, management science, social and cognitive science, work force management and legal science. Filling the gap is essential.

Many scholars, professionals and I have been involved in many initiatives aimed at promoting the most relevant research and education in this pivotal area to help develop the knowledge and skills required in today's service-led economy. In 2004, I initiated the International Annual Conference on Service Operations and Logistics, and Informatics (SOLI), aimed at providing global scholars and professionals a timely and effective platform to exchange their new findings, ideas and experiences in their research and education on service science, management and engineering. The international dimension has been emphasised in order to overcome cultural and national barriers and to meet the needs of accelerated service globalisation and technological advances and changes in the global service-led economy. Last three conferences (SOLI05, 06 and 07) were held

very successfully, which had in total about 600 attendees and published over 500 quality proceedings papers. Many international leading scholars in the service research community contributed to the successes of those great international gatherings. Leading scholars include Daniel Berg, Mary Jo Bitner, Xiuli Chao, Richard Chase, Morris Cohen, Brenda Dietrich, Terry Friesz, Craig Froehle, Noah Gans, Julia Higle, Antonie Jetter, Richard Larson, Grace Lin, Way Kuo, Stephen Nash, Robin Qiu, Matthew Realff, Roland Rust, Francois Sainfort, Scott Sampson, Suvrajeet Sen, Leyuan Shi, David Simchi-Levi, James Spohrer, Kathryn Stecke, James Tien, Kwok-Leung Tsui, Irving Wladawsky-Berger, Mei Xue, Wei Zhang, etc.

This special issue aims at helping disseminate the latest findings and stimulate more works in service research. Based on the presented research works at 2007 SOLI conference, 26 papers were recommended for submission to this special issue. The new submissions required substantial revisions and enrichment by including their newly findings in their research projects. After another round peer review 16 papers were accepted for this publication. The final inclusion covers a variety of service research topics such as service business modelling, service marketing, logistics and supply chain management, workforce management, retailing, service benchmark study, service innovations, informatics and case studies. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the authors for the time and effort they spent in contributing to this special issue. I also thank the anonymous reviewers whose peer reviews helped retain the high quality of the special issue.

The special issue is divided into two parts: ten papers are included in V3 N3/4 and six in V4 N1.