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The emergence of service operations management as an academic discipline

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Abstract

During the latter part of the 20th century, the service sector grew significantly in virtually every developed country, with the United States taking the lead. By 2000, services comprised almost 80% of U.S. employment. This rapid growth was caused by several factors including changing population lifestyles, deregulation, and new and improved infrastructure including the widespread availability of new technologies. With the service sector surpassing 50% of the U.S. economy in the 1950s, researchers – especially economists – began to examine the characteristics of services and attempt to apply some of the concepts that were developed and proven in manufacturing. From these early efforts there emerged a growing demand for business schools to develop both research agendas and courses in service operations. Beginning at the Harvard Business School in the early 1970s, and continuing through to the present, research and courses in service operations have evolved from simply applying basic manufacturing

concepts in a service environment to recognizing the need for a trans-disciplinary approach appropriately suited to the particular characteristics of service operations. This article traces the evolution of service operations from its immediate pre-business school days through its early years as an academic discipline in business schools to the present, identifying “pioneers” in service operations who truly blazed a previously unmarked trail that many have since followed.



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Keywords

Service operations; Academic discipline; Pioneers

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