

# The role of APICS in professionalizing operations management

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## Abstract

The APICS organization is the professional association most closely affiliated with operations management practitioners. The organization is widely known for their Certified in Production and Inventory Management (CPIM) program that assesses individual knowledge in the field of production and inventory management. APICS and the CPIM certification have played a major role in elevating the professionalism of individuals who work in operations management. This paper will detail a history of APICS and the CPIM certification and describe the role of academics in the development of the certification.

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## 1. Introduction

A history of operations management would not be complete without including a perspective on the practitioner organization most closely aligned with operations professionals. APICS originally known as the American Production and Inventory Control Society has been a source of education and certification for manufacturing practitioners for almost 50 years. In 1973, APICS began offering programs and examinations leading to the Certified in Production and Inventory Management (CPIM) qualification, which is widely recognized as the required body of knowledge for many careers in manufacturing management. The organization recently re-branded itself as APICS the Association for Operations Management. This paper will describe APICS' journey from an early American-centered practitioner group focused on production control to an international organization with multiple certifications focused on the operations field. The role

played by academics working with the association will be highlighted.

APICS was founded in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1957 by a group of 27 men working in middle management positions in production and inventory control (Plossl, 1985). They were led by Nyles Reinfeld, President of an education and consulting firm, who recognized that inventory and scheduling were not viewed as professional skills. The result of their "continental congress" was the official beginning of APICS in October of that year (APICS, 1998). The objectives of the organization were to develop a body of knowledge on production and inventory control (PIC) and disseminate the principles and techniques of PIC through education of its members and others in the field. The founders hoped to develop an organization that might assist in gaining professional recognition for the field. Individual dues that first year were US \$7.50.

By 1969, the organization had 47 chapter affiliations covering most major cities in the United States and Canada (Greene, 1970). The early leadership began to focus on providing educational materials to its members. In 1963, *the APICS Dictionary* and *APICS*

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*Bibliography* were first developed through collaboration between academia, consulting firms, and knowledgeable volunteers. The *Dictionary* was the first attempt to standardize terms in the production and inventory control field: it is now in its eleventh edition (APICS, 2005a). A 1975 front-page article in *The Wall Street Journal* recognized the dictionary as APICS' "45-page dictionary (used) to keep members abreast of their 'special' language" (Wall Street Journal, 1975). See Appendix A: APICS timeline for further details on the history of the development of the organization.

## 2. APICS certification

APICS achieved early success in gaining chapters and members, but the members had not gained the professional status they had hoped for through membership in the organization. As noted by Orlicky (1975, p. ix), "the subject of production and inventory management is vocational in the sense that the knowledge is intended to be applied for solving real-life business problems. Like engineering or surgery, production and inventory management is oriented towards practice." To establish credibility, APICS began discussing some type of certification as early as 1961. In 1963, an advisory council was established and work began on developing certification exams. A committee – the Curricula and Certification Council (C&C Council) – was formed in 1969 and was charged with the "development and administration of a standardized set of tests that would effectively differentiate between people who could demonstrate a minimum level of competence in production and inventory management, and people who could not" (APICS, 1999).

These early beginnings led to the development of a series of exams that eventually became the CPIM certification. The first C&C Council included both practitioners and academics. The members included:

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Chair	George Plossl—Stanley Works
Members	Forrest Fenton—Principal, Price Waterhouse. Dr. Dean Ammer—Professor, Northeastern University Dr. Robert H. Brown—author, educator, and founder of Materials Management Systems Inc. Ford Dickey—General Electric Dr. James Greene—Professor, Purdue University Dr. Joe Orlicky—IBM

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Little information is known about the discussions in those early meetings, but based on the personalities involved, one would expect that there would have been lively debates.

In 1972, the first examinations were scheduled and the material for the content of two modules—forecasting and inventory planning—was identified. However, the examinations were cancelled because of budgetary constraints and preparation problems. Despite the setbacks, the APICS leadership re-scheduled the examinations for 1973 and on the 12th of May of that year, approximately 335 individuals took the first tests. Introduction of certification testing transformed the organization from a network of people with similar interests into a professional society. As noted by Plossl (1985, p. 5) "Like CPAs, engineers, doctors and other professionals, people could now demonstrate their understanding of the field by passing examinations." At the same time that the certification exams were being developed, APICS recognized the need to develop curricula and training courses to instruct people in PIC concepts as there was little material available to support the exams.

### 2.1. The certification exams and course materials

The concept of creating certification was admirable, but actually creating the exams and course materials was challenging for APICS. It was natural for the organization to turn to the academic community to help with certification preparation, and a number of academics became involved in the early 1970s. Many of the practitioners involved with APICS had a great disdain for academics who they viewed as teaching material that was not practical or current. As Oliver Wight, an APICS Vice President, noted (Berry et al., 1979), "I know how frustrating it was in the early years to review the many academic applications for research projects that had nothing to do with reality." Two academics who became involved early on with certification were Tom Vollmann, then of Indiana University and Ed Davis, then of the Harvard Business School. They began working with Oliver Wight on consulting projects involved with early implementations of material requirements planning (MRP).

APICS, through Wight's leadership, recognized the importance of MRP and chose to develop an additional curriculum and certification test devoted to the topic. In 1973, Joseph Orlicky was selected to chair a committee charged with developing the MRP exam. Orlicky (1975) noted that as they began developing a study guide on MRP they "...found that the entire MRP literature consisted of 26 items, good, bad, and indifferent, all of which were either articles, excerpts, special reports, or trade-press testimonials" on the topic. As a result, he decided to write his own book on MRP to put all the information together

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