



A New Professional Organization: Success Through Keeping to the Knitting

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Abstract

The Institute of Behavioral and Applied Management (IBAM) has come from nowhere ten years ago to becoming a well-respected, growing "boutique" academic professional organization. The road has not been smooth, but by sticking to an original mission and by staging a series of annual conferences that were "consumer-friendly," collegial, and more developmental than evaluational, IBAM has grown and prospered. Now, with the launching of its long-awaited scholarly journal, IBAM seeks to provide a unique opportunity for academics and professionals to work together in developing a better understanding of the phenomenon of the management discipline. As to the future, well, who really knows? Yet, what the founders and supporters of IBAM have created over the years sustains a culture that is growing and vibrant. So instead of being just another professional organization, perhaps IBAM will continue to thrive and prosper as a strong culture is challenged by change.

A Brief History

It's nearly impossible to understand the Institute of Behavioral and Applied Management (IBAM) without understanding the motivations of its founding members to create a new academic professional organization. IBAM's roots are in another academic professional organization, the Association of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior (AHRMOB). Fortunately, that organization shortened its name to the Association of Management (the Association), which made it a bit more recognizable, if not easier to remember. AHRMOB had been founded to provide an alternative to the Academy of Management (the Academy). However, with the Academy's approximately 10,000 strong membership, it is a formidable, highly prestigious, and widely recognized international professional organization.

Unfortunately, some of its strengths are also its weaknesses. Its sheer size, its reputation, and its highly esteemed membership are daunting to many, particularly the new doctoral student who seeks a forum for her/his research. At a national conference acceptance rate of 33%, and acceptance rates in its *Academy of Management Review* and *Academy of Management Journal* at 5 to 10%, if the young professor had only the Academy to rely on for outlets for his/her scholarship, very few would get tenure. So, while the Academy does an exceptional job in setting up benchmarks, management academics and practitioners have sought other, high quality outlets. Enter the Association.

Dr. Will Hamel, founder of AHRMOB and long-time CEO of both AHRMOB and the Association created a major opportunity for younger academics to 1) have a forum to present their new scholarship, 2) provide a series of venues where younger academics could interface with their more established counterparts (several seasoned and well-recognized full professors),



and 3) create a more intimate network for developing partnerships, collegial relationships, and publishing opportunities.

As one looks at the roster of officers and chairs for IBAM, as well as at the editorial board of the *Journal for Behavioral and Applied Management* (JBAM), one sees a listing of a group of individuals who took advantage of the opportunities presented at the Association and eventually went a step further.

So, then, why break up a good thing? What was it that caused this group of Association members to leave the organization and start out on their own? The simple answer is that of diverging goals. The purposes and financial stability of the Association depended upon its ability to grow. One would think that with the world-wide potential of large numbers given the number of people teaching management courses at all levels (of which, the approximately 10,000 members of the Academy represent less than half), there would be a wide range of management academics anxious to join the Association! Well, it just isn't the case. Despite good marketing, good national meeting locations, and the birth of 3 journals, the Association had difficulty attracting more than a core group of management instructors and professors. The answer, for the Association, was to branch out. They did this first by including the discipline of management information systems (MIS) into the Association. This worked in terms of bringing additional numbers in, but did not achieve a much-needed collegiality between disciplines. The management and MIS folks talked together at coffee, but rarely went to each other's presentations.

When it was decided that the Association should open itself up even more to the other disciplines in Business (and since has opened up even further into Education and some disciplines in the Arts and Sciences), that group of Association members identified above decided that the organization no longer would be able to meet their particular needs. And they quit.

A New Beginning

This very well could have been the end of the story, but in this particular case, it was not. The author of this piece, along with about 7 other people listed in the IBAM and JBAM lists referred to earlier, kept in touch to bat around the idea of forming a "boutique" organization. Finally, the group of 8 agreed to meet in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the early Spring of 1991. The group had no resources, no sponsorship, but they did have an idea. They met for two days and finally agreed upon four things: 1) that creating a new, strictly management-oriented academic professional organization was needed (please overlook the validity of the marketing survey of 8); 2) that the group would do its best to find sponsorships to provide resources; 3) that the group would try to hold a first national conference within the next two years; and 4) that they had come to an agreement on a mission statement. Oh yes, there was also a 5th decision, that of the name, "The Institute of Behavioral and Applied Management." More on the name later on.

The present mission statement is slightly different from that original one, due to a fair amount of word-smithing since 1991, but it does contain the spirit and essence of what that group came up with. The mission statement of IBAM is as follows:



"The Institute for Behavioral and Applied Management (IBAM) provides a forum for management educators, business practitioners, and students to share their ideas, research, and experiences in a friendly and supportive environment. These adjectives and others like "constructive" are typical of comments made by participants of IBAM conferences. Session discussions are lively, stimulating, broad-based and helpful to presenters and all concerned."

What the original mission statement stated, and what its polished-up current edition continues to state is that the organization is primarily designed as a forum -- a forum that seeks to bring like-minded academics, students, and management practitioners together to discuss those issues of the discipline of management, both from the academic point-of-view, as well as from that of the practicing manager. This last part, along with the inclusion of students are a significant departure from the philosophies of the Association, but somewhat mirrored in those of the Academy. But again, because of the formidable nature of the Academy, IBAM founders sought to provide a much more welcoming and comfortable environment which, along with some focused marketing efforts, would be appealing to this type of professional group. Much of this is well summed up in the mission statement.

A Chance Taken

After the Pittsburgh meeting, the 8 began to recruit other former members of the Association, academic and professional associates, and institutions to begin to build both a meaningful resource base and a meaningful membership base. Finally, after a year's worth of effort, and an additional leadership meeting for IBAM at the 1991 Academy of Management Meetings, IBAM had raised enough money to buy a mailing list from the Academy, print a call for papers, and mail it. So in the early spring of 1993, the Institute mailed out its first call for papers for its first annual national meeting to be held in October, 1993 in Denver, Colorado.

That first conference was full of both good news and bad news. The good news was that we had been able to attract the attention of Fred Luthans (whose support and friendship continues as is seen in his article, co-written by another friend Richard Hodgetts, which leads off this inaugural edition of *JBAM*) who agreed to join us as the keynote speaker at the first conference. The bad news was that we only attracted 47 people. And the rest of the good news was that, even with the small number, the conference actually showed a small profit.

Perhaps the best of the good news was what happened at the Denver conference. The objectives of that first group of organizers, backed up by the mission statement, were all realized. The paper sessions were lively, inter-active, collegial, and well-attended (so much for the appeal of Colorado skiing). People enjoyed themselves. People got to know each other. And those who were there, including 3 practitioners, were excited enough to push for a second national meeting a year later. At the business meeting of that conference, those in attendance (the founding membership) voted unanimously to found the Institute, and they also selected a slate of inaugural officers and division chairs. They adopted a constitution and by-laws which created IBAM as an entity owned solely by its membership. For whatever reason, the author of this piece was elected as the first national president of IBAM (which is the primary reason the Editorial Board of



JBAM asked him to write this article for the inaugural edition). Regardless, IBAM was off and running, and to underscore an earlier point, was in the black.

The 1994 national meeting (IBAM2) was held in Washington, D.C.; the 1995 national meeting (IBAM3) was held in Seattle; the 1996 national meeting (IBAM4) was held in Portland, Maine; the 1997 national meeting (IBAM5) was held in San Antonio; the 1998 national meeting (IBAM6) was held in Orlando; and the 1999 national meeting (IBAM7) will be held in Annapolis in November. Membership has grown steadily to where we believe we will have nearly 170 to 180 participants in Annapolis. IBAM has managed its treasury well and has never gone in the hole, but has instead steadily built a comfortable cushion that supports its growing list of activities. Sponsorship was very important to the first few years, and the University of Northern Colorado, Central Washington University, the University of New England, Wilkes University, among other colleges and universities have been very generous in making sure that IBAM could operate smoothly and effectively.

The Decision to Journal or Not to Journal

Having a steady growth in membership is good, but serving that membership becomes more and more of an issue as the organization grows larger. In the beginning, conference fees and dues paid for conference costs, added amenities to lunches and session breaks, and paid for the next call for papers. In the first two years, that was all the new organization was able to do for members. But other dynamics were at work. From our study of economics and production management, we understand that once an entity reaches a break-even point, fixed costs stay steady, and variable costs can go down as larger purchases result in lower prices. This happened to IBAM. We reached a point where fixed costs (such as the printing and mailing of the call for papers) remained steady in the overall budget, and with the increase in numbers, our cost of services per member began to go down. This meant that we started having some extra money at the end of the accounting year to start pursuing other services to members.

Another interesting thing that happened was that a small number of people began to buy memberships only, and did not take part in the annual conferences. The immediate question was, what you do for people who want to be associated with you, but for whom services do not exist outside of the national meetings. The initial answer was to include such people on the newsletter mailing list and send them a copy of the most recent conference *Proceedings*. There were some potential problems for this on both sides: 1) the new member was really not getting much for her/his membership fee, and this could likely lead to bad feelings; and 2) this was a potential way for people who had submitted a paper to the conference, but then never registered for or attended the conference to get a hold of a copy of their *Proceedings* at a much reduced rate.

Add to all that, the growing general call from the membership, itself, for a more formalized outlet for scholarship - namely a journal. So in the fifth year of its existence, the membership as a whole voted to form an editorial board to investigate the efforts needed to create a journal. That editorial board set out to establish policies, investigate costs, and determine what all needed to be put together to create a high-quality journal that would serve the mission of IBAM. A great deal of credit needs to be given to Dr. Sally Dresdow of the University of



Wisconsin at Green Bay and Dr. Joy Benson of the University of Illinois at Springfield for their time-consuming efforts to found the journal and get it to the point where it was ready to begin reviewing papers for publication.

Perhaps the most important decisions made fairly early on were that the journal had to be cost effective, as well as leading edge, and that it should be an electronic journal rather than a paper journal. With the explosive growth of the Internet and other journals already out on the World Wide Web as models, the editorial board quickly endorsed the concept. At IBAM's meeting in Orlando, October, 1998, a final decision was made to go ahead with the journal.

The balance of the needs of an operating journal: solidified editorial policies; listing in Cabell's; recruiting of the initial paper pool for review; solidifying the inaugural invited article by Luthans and Hodgetts; creation of the web site; selection of a webmaster; and putting together the first edition has taken nearly a year to complete. But what you are now reading is the final result. *JBAM* is no longer on the drawing board, it's in cyber space.

A good, well-designed, timely, creative, interesting, and widely read journal should bring additional legitimacy to IBAM. The editorial board of *JBAM* intends to uphold these objectives as they work over the next several years to build and polish the journal. Much is at stake: the reputation of the journal; the reputation of IBAM; the yearly investment of IBAM members; and the academic credit of its published contributors. Certainly, IBAM has come to understand this and can now utilize the journal to provide greater value to its membership, as well as serve its mission in a more tangible and continuous manner.

Not Just Another Professional Organization

Now, back to that issue of the name. IBAM's full name, the Institute of Behavioral and Applied Management implies that we are an institute -- something more substantive than an association or perhaps even more so than an academy (at least in terms of a professional organization). The selection of this word was intentional because those first few organizers hoped that IBAM would become more than just a place for presenting papers, enjoying an on-going collegiality, and seeing new parts of the country. IBAM was also envisioned as a place where scholarship, research, and cooperation could occur year-round based on the burgeoning of ideas at our national conferences.

To date, the founding of the Institute is still a matter of discussion. Certainly the smaller size of the Institute, its fledgling journal, and its limited resource base contribute to the hesitancy in moving forward with an additional dimension of IBAM that would demand greater commitment and extremely high quality programming to be successful. With all that IBAM has accomplished in it's nearly 10 years of planning and operation, no one wants to risk it all on something that will overshadow the basic directions that have proven to be useful. The Institute remains, however, a good idea.

The current President of IBAM, Dr. Pam Hopkins Stepanovich of Wilkes University, has been passionate about her vision for the Institute. She sees the Institute as a virtual organization where experts in both management theory and management practice can work together to



provide seminars, training opportunities, and even some longer term consulting services. Through using the talents of its ever-expanding and extremely talented membership base, the Institute could provide its membership practical opportunities to apply their expertise in real company and organizational situations. Perhaps much of this could be conducted in the various cities IBAM goes to for its annual conference as pre-conference activities. Perhaps there should be a national office that could coordinate IBAM member expertise with companies and organizations that request our help. Perhaps IBAM should ally itself more specifically to one or more colleges or universities (domestic and international) to share resources. There are a lot of possibilities. But the bottom line is to serve the mission - provide a forum where academics, students, and practitioners can learn more about the phenomenon of management and put that knowledge to work in real world situations. In doing so, IBAM has the potential of using an incredibly valuable resource base to make some positive differences.

Into the Future

What I have tried to do in this piece is give the reader a brief history in the form of a story being developed. The history of IBAM may be similar or dissimilar to the development of most other professional associations, though I have seldom seen any of those histories written down. Regardless, in relating this history, I hope I have been able to give the reader a sense of the culture of the organization. This is a culture that has attempted to form itself purposefully, to establish a worth-while and meaningful outlet for its membership. And now, with the publication of its journal, IBAM is broadening its presence in a cyber world, and it hopes that its culture will guide that incursion and find like-minded academics and practitioners who can benefit from their involvement. A tall order. It would be a mistake to end this piece without talking briefly about future growth and where IBAM wants to go over the next several years. Because all of this could change as the swinging door of leadership ushers presidents through at the rate of one every two years, and its membership continues to increase with new faces and new ideas. The founding members hoped for a "boutique" organization - one that was focused and small. That is still a goal, and as long as the central mission remains that of serving those in the academic or practitioner field of management, it is reasonable to assume that the Institute can grow to a size of 250 to 300 and not lose its mission. And I would venture to say that such a future appears realistic. As we know from our study of culture, initial cultures tend to be pervasive, and as organizations grow, those cultures can change, but if they are properly managed, they can remain strong and durable. So as IBAM continues to build its reputation as a quality outlet for scholarship through its annual national (and potentially international) meetings, its journal, and its yet-to-be-solidified Institute, a strong culture can continue to serve the mission of IBAM.

One of my favorite people is a woman named Sister Wendy Beckett who has hosted a 10-program series on the history of painting for the BBC. In her first program, she makes the remark that "art changes (over the centuries), but it doesn't get better."¹ Not that IBAM is a painting, but I think IBAM is an organization whose genre serves many of the same motivations. Painting is an expression of knowledge and passion; it seeks to describe what an artist feels and wants to share with others; it expresses the best within us; and it seeks to explain real world phenomena in new and creative ways. Professional organizations demonstrate several similarities. They provide



a forum for the expression of new knowledge, sometimes passionately; they allow presenters and writers to describe what they feel or know in an atmosphere where they can share their thoughts with others; they seek to promote new theory and practices that will make things better; and they seek to explain real world phenomena in new and creative ways that will benefit both the academic and the practitioner.

IBAM is a new professional academic organization that is no better or worse than other professional academic organizations in the field of management or any other academic disciplines. It is simply like a new artist, or more boldly, a new school of art that is seeking to support and present new ideas in new ways. So, while the nature and structure of professional organizations may change, they don't necessarily get better. Each serves a unique group of people to the best of their abilities. Those who find a niche, like a successful artist might do, are able to do a tremendous amount of good. Those who cannot find a niche, like so many unsuccessful artists have discovered, simply die off unrecognized. It is the hope of IBAM that its strong mission and strong culture will make it one of the first group rather than one of the second. Time will tell.

1 Beckett, W. (1996). Sister Wendy's Story of Painting: Early Art. Beverly Hills, CA: BBC Video, Distributed by CBS/Fox