Operations management in Italy

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The beginnings of operations management: some historical notes

Some credit for the development of both study and training in the field of operations management (OM) in Italy, should go to the “Training within Industry” programme, which was part of the Marshall Plan in the 1950s. Through this programme, firms received funding for pilot programmes aimed at the reorganization of production and the work organization, projects that were carried out with the aid of a new figure introduced at the time: plant managers. The Italian state set up a “Comitato Nazionale per la Produttività” (National Committee for Productivity) and the Chambers of Commerce, in their turn, set up centri per la produttività (productivity centres) which, initially, offered courses for production technicians especially in the areas of work measurement, layout, materials management and scheduling. The productivity centres in two regions, the Veneto and Liguria, are still closely involved in training.

In the same decade, the 1950s, three schools of management where OM was an important part of teaching, were also set up. First, the Istituto per gli Studi di Organizzazione Aziendale, IPSOA (Institute for the Study of Company Organization), which was founded in 1953, in Turin, which was supported by the major firms in the region (Fiat and Olivetti); in its early years most teachers were temporarily recruited abroad and the OM teachers came from Harvard. Next, the National Committee for Productivity was involved in setting up two other schools, Istituto per gli Studi in Direzione Aziendale, ISIDA (Institute for the Management Studies), in 1956 in Palermo, Sicily and the Consorzio Universitario per gli studi di Organizzazione Aziendale, CUOA, (University Consortium for Management Studies), which was founded the following year, 1957, at the University of Padua. The first researchers and teachers in the field of OM were trained in these early schools. During the 1970s and 1980s there were many other initiatives regarding OM, but most developments in the discipline took place within the Italian universities themselves.

A specific OM course began at the Faculty of Engineering in the University of Bologna in 1963 and, soon after, a similar course was introduced in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Padua. The same faculty, this time in Pisa, soon followed suit, as did the Polytechnic of Milan where courses in OM