

From competition back to cooperation?

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Symposia and workshops are usually centering attention on a specific theme that is announced on beforehand to alert potential participants.

But attending them nowadays offers a different view from attending them 30 to 50 years ago. In the period called the 1960s through the 1980s, a theme announced in the program of a conference or symposium was addressed full time by the speaker.

Not anymore.

Numerous are the symposia and workshops, where—irrespective of the title announced—speakers start with a (sometimes fairly elaborate) presentation of their laboratory or of their institute and its products. They then describe these products—sometimes at length—attempting to stress their quality. Indicating the intended use of the products is not so much emphasized as one would wish; for example, describing basic properties of advertised certified reference materials (CRMs) would duly arouse the interest of the audience: demonstrating the ‘metrological traceability’ of their certified quantity value, necessary as it is to verify the certified measurement uncertainty of that value, would be extremely meaningful and useful, but is almost never done. And rare are the cases where their intended function in the process of measurement is indicated: use as ‘calibrator’ or as ‘trueness control material’ (see entry 5.14 Example, in [1]).

Just publicity is made instead, keeping the audience at bay, waiting for the theme announced in the program.

Eventually, that theme is treated somewhat at the cost of the speaker’s (or next speaker’s) time. The allocated time is running. The organizers cannot say anything, as they have accepted (or invited!) the speaker. The session chairs could intervene sooner if organizers would insist on that and timely issue appropriate instructions to that effect at an early stage.

Nowadays, the frequency of such “publicity” has increased dramatically. Apparently, a scientific meeting is considered an occasion to use as a tool to compete rather than being a good opportunity for exchange of ideas and results. Here “compete” means heading for sometimes making the same or similar products in the same field of application.

The question arises whether, in fact, that does not reduce to *bringing known knowledge* rather than to *release new insights*, the original purpose of a conference or symposium.

Comparing meetings today with similar meetings in the period from the 1960s through the 1980s, leads to the observation that the latter were positively intended—and used—to aim at *cooperation* and *interaction* on the international scene, whereas the former seem to shift attention to focussing on *competition*. Has the all-overriding pressure to “compete” in the economic sector invaded the measurement community?

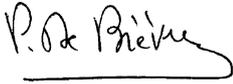
There is more.

When attending such meetings, one almost “feels” the difference in emphasis. It is important to remember that creating a feeling of open and sincere collegiality generates the atmosphere necessary for partnership in *cooperation*. Doesn’t creating an atmosphere of too much focusing on publicity promote *competition*?

One wonders whether “advertising” cannot be done on a good website and on ... “advertising posters” (of the same size for everybody) in a section or session separate from “scientific posters”.

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Wouldn't it be better in times of budget squeezes to *cooperate* to avoid duplication and act in a complementary way, rather than *compete*?



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Reference

1. BIPM, IEC, IFCC, ILAC, IUPAC, IUPAP, ISO, OIML (2008) International vocabulary of metrology—basic and general concepts and associated terms (VIM). JCGM 200:2008. <http://www.bipm.org/vim>