



ADAPSO Reunion Workshop: ADAPSO Conferences

Moderators:
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ADAPSO Reunion – ADAPSO Conferences Workshop

Conducted by Software History Center—Oral History Project

Abstract: A group of computer software and services CEOs from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s shared their experiences in participating in ADAPSO and particularly in the national conferences. They described the importance of the free interchange of information among the ADAPSO members at the conferences and how this enabled them to improve their own business operations. They talked about how the conferences were planned and the contention among the sections on allocating sessions and speakers. The relationship of ADAPSO/ITAA to regional associations was explained in some depth and how ITAA's role changed so that national conferences were no longer a valuable part of the ITAA activities.

Participants:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Former Affiliation</u>
Sam Albert	IBM
Betty Blankenship	
Buck Blankenship	Data Processing of the South
Joe Blumberg	Comshare, Specifics
Ed Bride	<i>Computerworld, Software News, Software Magazine</i>
Barbara Brizdle	
Bart Carlson	National Systems Laboratories, Group 1 Software
Rich Carpenter	Index Technology
Bruce Coleman	Boole & Babbage, Informatics
Jerry Dreyer	ADAPSO
Arthur Esch	Decision Strategies
Kim Jones	Genesys, Forecross Corporation
Mike Maples	IBM, Microsoft
John Rollins	AZTECH Corporation
Dave Sturtevant	ADAPSO
Jim Treleaven	Univac, Service Bureau Corporation, Control Data
Bob Weissman	National CSS
Jack Yeaton	Merit Systems
Linda Schnell	ADAPSO

Larry Welke: Since we're short of time, we're going to run this workshop by the numbers. You'll notice that I'm the leader and you aren't. [*Laughter*] And Nathan Ensmenger is going to be the referee and Linda Schnell is going to keep score. OK?

We'll run this the way we used to run the planning committees for the conferences. And I would encourage everybody to tell it the way it really was, rather than how you would like people to think it was. Let's start by going around the room so that we get a record of everybody's name and company affiliation during the time period that we're talking about.

Introductions

Betty Blankenship: I'm Betty Blankenship and I'm affiliated with Buck. [*Laughter*]

Buck Blankenship: I'm Buck Blankenship and, in addition to being affiliated with Betty, back in those days I was with a company called Data Processing of the South from Charlotte, NC.

Welke: I'm Larry Welke. At that particular time, I was with International Computer Programs and I was involved with the conferences because of a fluke more than anything else. I had participated in bringing the software group into ADAPSO and, as a consequence, I was involved in planning the program content for the software group. And, then, I just sort of kept my hand in it because I've always looked upon the conferences as being a power point within the organization. Because whoever ran the program decided who was going to be in front of the audience and it was a real pivotal position in many, many ways. And I enjoyed exercising that pivot point.

Bruce Coleman: You enjoyed that power. Admit it. [*Laughter*]

Arthur Esch: Arthur Esch. When I joined ADAPSO in the 1970s, I was with a company called Decision Strategies. We were interested in helping other software companies go from having batch products to having online products with CICS and IMS and things that I don't understand any more. And then in the 1980s, I was with a company called Nabu Networks that was delivering software over broadband to the first of the PC marketplaces.

Coleman: Bruce Coleman. I was with Boole & Babbage in the 1970s and with Informatics in the 1980s. And I first joined ADAPSO because I didn't have a clue what I was doing and I hoped somebody else would. [*Laughter*]

Unidentified voice: Sorry to disappoint you. [*Laughter*]

Ed Bride: Ed Bride. *Computerworld* in the early 1970s and *Software News* and then *Software Magazine* in the 1980s. I was a paid professional observer as opposed to a creator of the content for the conferences. But I thought of them as going to school so I went to a lot of planning meetings for the Software Industry Section which is what we were calling it at the time.

Rich Carpenter: Rich Carpenter. I got active in ADAPSO in 1983 when I formed Index Technology. Like Bruce, it was my first time in the software products business and I didn't really have much of a clue as to what I was doing. I wanted to get to know people who did, and ADAPSO was the place to go. The conferences were a key part of that for me, just linking up with people from our industry from all over the country. It was very beneficial.

Welke: Rather than continue, we'll go back and pick up the strays, the late arrivals, who nonetheless are relatively significant. Or were at one point. Could you please state your name and your affiliation? [*Laughter*]

Bob Weissman: I used to be Bob Weissman. [*Laughter*] And my company was National CSS, one of the major timesharing players in the 1960s and 1970s.

Jerry Dreyer: I'm Jerry Dreyer. I joined ADAPSO as assistant to incoming president Frank Lautenberg in December of 1966. I became its executive vice president in July of 1967, the executive director two years later, and spent 19 years helping to run the organization.

John Rollins: I'm John Rollins, founder of AZTECH Corporation in 1968. I sold the business in 2000 and I was CEO from 1970 until 2000. I got involved with ADAPSO, primarily the management conferences, because I needed to figure out what was going on in this industry, like Bruce and others here. It was a very dynamic industry, with a lot of tumult, lots of changes, things moving fast. I was trying to find the right business plan. Revenue models were of interest to me and I could meet people at these conferences that knew a lot more than I did about how to make money in software.

Welke: And often times it wasn't that you met people who knew more. You just *thought* they knew more. [*Laughter*]

Rollins: That's the important thing. I thought they knew more.

Nathan Ensmenger: My name is Nathan Ensmenger. I'm the token historian in the group. I teach at the University of Pennsylvania. I'm currently working on a book on software development and software workers in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. So this is of great interest to me.

Joe Blumberg: Joe Blumberg. I originally got affiliated with ADAPSO through my work at Comshare in 1978. I never helped plan any of the conferences, but I was often a participant providing research information about what was going on in the industry. And in 1983, I formed a firm to do research on the industry and then acquired another research firm called Specifics in 1991. I guess I have participated in every ADAPSO conference since 1978. For what that's worth, I can address it as a participant.

Jack Yeaton: Jack Yeaton. I formed Merit Systems, a professional services firm, in 1976. After we managed to get through the first couple of years and looked like we might live awhile, I looked for ways to learn more about the industry. We were starting to grow and move outside of our local office and that was kind of scary. So I started coming to the conferences in the late 1970s or early 1980s. About the third year or so that I attended, I met with a couple of the people that were on the board of the Professional Services Section with some suggestions about the conference program, and managed immediately to get elected to chair the next two planning committee meetings. And also immediately became a member of the section board.

Unidentified voice: What year was that, Jack?

Yeaton: That would have been in the early 1980s, 1983 or 1984. What I discovered was that the more you got involved, the more you learned, and the more you realized what there was to learn. It was interesting because the first two or three times, just packing up and going to a conference and attending some sessions and packing up and going home, you wondered if it was a good idea. But when you started to get involved, it became a very important, useful part of trying to grow a business.

Jim Treleaven: Jim Treleaven. I was with Univac in the late 1960s and early 1970s, then with the Service Bureau Corporation, which was part of IBM when I joined them, and part of Control Data when I left. And then with Interactive Data Corporation, which was a sister company of National CSS for quite awhile, into the 1980s. I'm currently on the board of ITAA and of the Software Division. My attendance at the conferences has spanned the same period as Joe, but my attendance has not been as regular.

Welke: And we'll pick up one more stray.

Sam Albert: My name is Sam Albert. I started in IBM in 1959 and—I don't use the R word—graduated in 1989. For 18 of the 30 years, I was responsible at IBM for all consultants in the world, all the CPAs in the world, as an industry. In 1981, they told me that nobody else wanted the software and services industry, so I was put in charge of it. So I took that on. I remember one of the other industry directors, one of the ones responsible for the manufacturing industry, saying that he had a real industry but I had the cats and dogs. It turns out that he was wrong in the final analysis.

I introduced Bob Berland from IBM to this organization and it was the start of a positive outlook on what IBM could bring to the table. Before that, although there were very good people representing IBM at ADAPSO, there was a lot of animosity and antipathy between IBM and ADAPSO members. In 1981, we ran an application software developers' conference at IBM attended by many people who were in charge of software firms and, from then on, Bob Berland

and I tried to make IBM be seen as a friend rather than a foe of the software developers. I think it was a turning point and Bob became a very valued and respected member of ADAPSO.

Bart Carlson: My name is Bart Carlson. I can't remember the exact year I first joined, but it was around 1980, representing the company I had at that time, National Systems Laboratories. I sold that in 1984, and started another one called Group 1 Software. I was there until 1986 and then I started Napersoft. I got involved with the program committee and did a lot as chairman of the Software Program Committee for a couple of years in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I was also president of the Software Division for a couple of years in the mid- to late 1990s. And now I'm still working on new companies and chairman of all of them.

Welke: For other people they make rules like "three times and you're out". [*Laughter*]

Dave Sturtevant: My name is Dave Sturtevant. I had the privilege of being vice president of public communications for ADAPSO from 1979 to 1987. My primary responsibilities were public relations, financial analyst relations, and bringing new members into the organization.

Mike Maples: My name is Mike Maples. I was introduced to ADAPSO by Bob Berland. I worked for IBM and my area of interest at the time was intellectual property and protection of intellectual property assets. I attended some conferences, then changed jobs and went to Microsoft and was with Microsoft for eight years. I thought that ADAPSO was getting too broadly focused and worked with the software group for a number of years trying to get more of a software focus. Now I raise exotic deer and antelope. [*Laughter*]

Kim Jones: My name is Kim Jones. I wish I had known about ADAPSO in the 1970s when I founded my first software and services company called Genesys. I joined ADAPSO in the early 1980s with the second company I founded called Forecross Corporation, where I still reside professionally. I, too, found that participating actively in the programs of ADAPSO had a huge payback to me and my company, and being active was a way to take advantage of the opportunities that were provided both within the conference sessions and also outside of the conferences.

I was very active with Mike, Bob Berland and others in the Software Division in the initial stages of dealing with what we called "openness" of software code. And it's been interesting personally and professionally to see that the people in the industry are really just people like me, however big their companies are in relation to my small one. In the end, we can talk shop and learn from each other in ways that one might not otherwise think about. I found the conferences to be hugely beneficial and attended them regularly for 10 or 12 years.

Welke: Of the people in this group, I have probably attended more ADAPSO meetings than anybody else. My first one was the fall of 1967, down in Houston. Twenty-three

people—and that was the total ADAPSO membership at the time—got together. I don't know that you could call it a conference as much as it was just a bunch of guys who got together.

We had one speaker, Ross Perot. This was shortly after he started his company, EDS, and I will always remember that when he got up to speak, he stood on an orange crate in order to peer over the podium. And he was, well, an interesting speaker.

I don't know how we got to the point of planning a program where we had group meetings with a leader or a presenter. I don't know when we formalized the procedure. Jerry, maybe you can fill us in on this. I do know that as we brought the software group into the association, I got involved in planning a program for them. But I don't know what the rest of ADAPSO—the computer service sections—were doing.

Conference Planning Committees

Dreyer: We started having committees to plan the programs in 1967. But the problem was that we were trying to define an industry. We had all these less-than-synergistic companies involved and everybody had issues that they wanted to address. So we came up with the idea of having different sections for different types of businesses. Each section would get representation on a committee to formulate the program for the conferences. And seminars. Each group would select a representative to participate in developing the program so that everybody had a piece of the action at a conference.

Weissman: I don't know if others remember it, but my recollection is that, in the early 1970s, the sections had become cohesive enough that there were growing pressures between the sections in terms of the allocation of resources. I particularly remember an ADAPSO meeting in Mexico City where the software group was seriously considering breaking away from ADAPSO because it was looking for, I think, \$100,000 in funding for a PR media program and since the demographics of the membership were highly skewed, with the biggest dues being paid by the remote processing services companies, it created some real tensions. The remote processing companies were asking why the hell they should pay, in effect, \$98,000 of the \$100,000 so these little software companies could go off and do their PR thing. Part of the process of governance of ADAPSO in the 1970s was transcending those tensions and creating coalitions that allowed us to operate as an association.

Welke: Yeah, I can remember that conference planning started with just a group of people who were interested in working on conferences, and whoever showed up contributed to the meeting and decided what was going to be put on the program. And then it became a political issue of: How many members of ADAPSO are software companies as opposed to timesharing companies as opposed to processing services? Well, if we have more members, then we need three people at the table and you only get one. And in retrospect, we spent too

much time on that kind of political infighting. But you're right, Bob, it was a very serious issue at the time.

Carlson: It didn't go away. That actually carried into the 1990s. In the 1990s, the governance issue of participation and how many slots you got continued to be a major concern.

Yeaton: When I was on the board of the Professional Services Section, we had some very large services companies, but a survey we did showed that we had a very large number of members where the average size was about \$3 - 4 million. This was back in the 1980s. When you started to allocate resources, you had two or three companies paying 60-70% of the dues, but the real need in that section was to support the very small companies. And they had a whole set of issues that were different from the large professional services companies. So it was difficult, first, to get a program together and, secondly, to allocate resources. Because the guys who had all the needs and were the largest number of companies by far, didn't have the time or the resources to do a lot for the conferences.

Albert: That kind of competition continues today. I'm on the board of the Information Technology Services Division and that discussion occupies a good deal of time. They have accomplished a lot with recruiting smaller companies but it continues to fuel the kind of tension we're talking about.

Weissman: I think that one of the things that helped in the process was that as the association developed, it began to focus more on public policy issues. And when that happened, it became important to get raw numbers of members, to be able to go to the Hill and say we represent 1,000 companies instead of 23 companies. To say that there are this number of companies in your district or in your state, Mr. Representative, and you ought to pay attention to this issue. And so the small professional services, batch services, and software companies brought to the table, through their membership, the mere fact that they allowed the association to have a more important voice in public policy issues.

Yeaton: What was the largest number of member companies in ADAPSO?

Dreyer: We were shooting at 1,000.

Sturtevant: The high water mark, I think, was 1987. We got just over 1,000 companies and very shortly thereafter, it started to slide.

Welke: For a number of different reasons, none of which are associated with conferences. [*Laughter*]

Dreyer: Some of the reduction in members occurred as a result of industry consolidation through mergers and acquisitions, many of which started at the conferences.

Value of Conferences

Maples: To go back to IBM, at one time there were a lot of executives of smaller companies trying to create a space in the IBM world who were brought together by an anti-IBM feeling. I sense that the meetings have changed so that, instead of having a few common enemies such as IBM, there's now more emphasis on policy, on influencing government for the good of the industry. I wonder how that has affected who attends the conferences and what goes on at the conferences.

Welke: I think you've got a good point, Mike. Several of you have commented on the fact that you went to the conferences because of the openness, and because of the fact that everybody was able to learn from each other. There was a culture of sharing that was established within ADAPSO by dint of, I think, the fact that the initial members were all small computer services companies and they were not competitive. There was a guy from San Diego and another guy from New York and somebody from Chicago and everybody had their local market. So the feeling was: I don't mind telling you what I'm doing because you're not my competitor because you're in a different city. But then as the companies grew and there was consolidation, the big company/small company differences came into play. The small companies still wanted to learn and they wanted to learn from the large companies. Well, the large companies were sometimes a little bit reluctant to share all of their knowledge with these little guys.

Unidentified voice: But I think *they* can learn from each other, too.

Carlson: We had the formal conference sessions and we had the board meetings. But the thing that facilitated that consolidation was the deals made in the hallways and coffee shops. People were putting deals together at ADAPSO meetings because they knew each other and it was a common place to meet, especially the late 1970s and early 1980s. I saw lots and lots of that happening.

In fact, a lot of the growth of the industry, I believe, came from that consolidation in all sectors, not just software. Look at ADP's growth. It happened where people had an IT services group in one section of the country and wanted to expand to Chicago or the West Coast. And it happened in software, also.

Rollins: Taking off from what Bart was just saying, my recollection of conferences is that they were a 48-hour period of time with so much packed into it. You'd come with a list of people you wanted to talk to and the conference sessions you wanted to attend. Then you'd

buy tapes for the sessions that you hadn't had time to attend in person because you were doing a deal in the hallway. Or there were two sessions you wanted to attend in the same time slot and you could only go to one, so you bought the tapes for the other one.

Coleman: Until about five years ago, I still had the tapes of twenty or thirty sessions that I liked. You couldn't go to all of them because you had to attend board or committee meetings, so you'd buy the tapes and play them in your car when you were commuting. They were wonderful.

Rollins: I still have a few of the tapes.

Blankenship: John and others have spoken about the relationships that started out in the bar, at the cocktail party, at dinners and so forth. That kind of formalized itself into a series of roundtables. The first ones were called Presidents' Roundtables. There were, I don't know, maybe half a dozen of these subsets of ADAPSO that met apart from the ADAPSO meetings. I know some of the Presidents' Roundtable, for some reason, I'm not sure why, chose to meet in the most exotic places you can imagine.

Welke: Well, that was your experience. The one that I joined was a little bit different.

Dreyer: One of the things I worked with closely was the nominating committee. And seeing the people who participated in the conferences, I was able to go back to the committee and say that we've got some great, articulate, knowledgeable guys that should be considered for the section boards or the ADAPSO Board. The conferences were an opportunity to evaluate the people in the membership.

Conference Attendance

Rollins: Getting back to the planning sessions for the conferences. You described some of the early ones in the 1960s as being small and informal. My recollection of the first one I was asked to chair—I don't remember the year, but I know the conference was held at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington DC sometime in the late 1970s—was that things were really down to a system by then. I was sort of a young kid brought in to chair this planning committee, and Jerry taught me all the things I needed to know to run the meeting, to line up the sessions, and to do this and do that. ADAPSO had a good staff. We met in Jerry's office with half a dozen people, I think, for a planning meeting to organize that management conference. So there was actually very good discipline by the late 1970s.

Sturtevant: The Washington conference at the Shoreham you are referring to was in September of 1978.

Rollins: Thank you.

Weissman: I'd like to expand that discussion of association meetings to include the World Congresses, which evidently have continued over the years. I heard this morning that they'd had the 13th recently. The first one was held in 1976 in Barcelona. It was the first effort, and it was led by ADAPSO, to create a forum where participants in the computer services/software industry globally could get together and meet each other. And that was successful enough that we decided that we would run them every four years. Obviously, that cycle is shortened. The second one was held here in the United States at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco in 1980. We had about 1100 people at that conference from a number of countries. It was, in part, so that the learning experience could be more generalized, but it was also to make a statement that this was a real industry and a global industry and one of increasing power and importance.

Welke: It was also, Bob, a case of an increasing number of European firms who were coming into the United States market.

Sturtevant: The Barcelona conference was in 1978.

Weissman: There's a document floating around that says the Barcelona conference in 1978, but Jerry and I were there and we thought it was 1976.

Dreyer: Maybe we got there too early. [*Laughter*]

Weissman: Jerry and I remembered it as being 1976 because in 1978 we were involved in establishing the location and planning the program for the 1980 World Congress. We worked for more than two years putting together the 1980 Congress. What is the document? Oh, it's the annual report and it says 1978. Jerry?

Dreyer: I guess the first thing to go is your mind. [*Laughter*]

Weissman: I guess we've just proven the value of primary documents. [*Laughter*]

Maples: I have a question for the people who are active in ITAA now. I got the impression from Harris Miller's talk today that the organization has changed to focusing primarily on lobbying and less on conferences. And I suspect there are fewer members who run small companies and get together to network now than there were in the past. What is the character of the meetings they have now and how has that evolved?

Blumberg: When ADAPSO was really at its peak, attendance at the conferences was excellent. There was really a broad base of members attending. But attendance started to drop precipitously in the 1990s. Last year, when they held a conference down in Florida, I counted 37 people in the room. At that point, ITAA made the decision to stay away from doing conferences. There were just too many conflicting organizations doing similar kinds of things. Now they're trying to focus on very targeted subject areas. I see where they're going to do a conference for IT services executives in June.

Albert: The IT Services Division Board, which I sit on, decided we needed a specialized conference since ITAA is no longer having general conferences. But there's been a change in the economics of conferences. The events business has gone almost out of existence because of limited travel since 9/11.

Welke: Is the decline in conference attendance a consequence of the membership, the size or type of companies that are members now, or is it a function of the marketplace? Or is it a function of the fact that the industry has become more subject to political influence and that has changed the emphasis at ITAA?

Albert: I think there is a lot more competition for attendance at conferences. I'm not talking just about conferences of the type ITAA used to have, but about events in general. I'm a member of the New York New Media Association and they can't get people to come to the meetings because they can't get people to travel.

Regional Associations

Carlson: I agree with what you're saying. I think what happened is the industry grew up and it went from hundreds of companies to tens of thousands of companies which changed the dynamic from the 1960s to today. We also had periods when ADAPSO was not filling the need for that great expansion and so there were pockets where local associations began to fill the need of smaller startups and early stage companies for camaraderie and the opportunity to learn from each other. An example is Boston where the Mass Software Council has been around for a long time. There are now at least 26 local associations that I know of throughout the country in major urban areas, Chicago, Indianapolis, West Coast, all over the country.

In Chicago, we have the Chicago Software Association. I helped form that over ten years ago, and it has 600 or 700 member companies, just in the Chicago area. It serves some of the training, education, networking need that ADAPSO did when it was the only game in town in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. So now you have a way for people to go spend the day locally as opposed to flying to San Francisco or wherever.

Welke: And without spending two and a half thousand dollars in the process.

Albert: It's certainly true in New York. They have the New York Software Industry Association and they had an event where I'm sure the number of attendees approached 1,000. The speakers were Mayor Bloomberg and Senator Hillary Clinton.

Welke: Wow, what a combination. If you can turn out that kind of an audience with those speakers, imagine the potential. *[Laughter]*

Carlson: We have the same kind of thing in Chicago. Mayor Daley is very involved. He comes to the meetings. Many of the things he is trying to do are related to our industry such as: "How do we get gigabyte service to every single school and wire every house on the street?" And things of that nature.

Welke: Ed, you had a comment.

Bride: The idea of the local associations is one that ADAPSO embraced and helped spawn, so it became sort of logical when Harris Miller came in with his background in public policy to focus on that as what the ITAA constituency needed next. For networking, to talk about business problems, to talk about local legislation problems, you can now do that locally, instead of going to the national association.

Weissman: Is part of the reason for the decline in total membership also the lack of a set of overriding national level issues that can only be solved by a national association? Do you think that's part of the reason?

Bride: I'll bet that's a major part of it. I think that a lot of the reason the conferences drew a lot of people was because that was the only game in town. So when their primary value was subsumed by other organizations, absent the national issues, yeah, it was inevitable.

Yeaton: There were several initiatives by ADAPSO in the 1980s to have regional participation and regional conferences. It would have been very specific, very directed, and a lot cheaper to attend. I know we tried on three occasions in the Midwest, and particularly in the Greater Detroit area, and it just didn't work. We'd get a few people together like Bob Jones of Computer Dynamics and Peter Karmanos from Compuware and several others, and it didn't work. I've never been quite sure why. Maybe we were too close as competitors, maybe the topics were wrong, but at least on three different occasions there were initiatives to have regional subsets, and then maybe go to one conference a year with a broader base. Why didn't that work? Bob Jones really put some effort into it. I helped him on two or three of them and it didn't go anywhere.

Welke: You just didn't try hard enough, Jack. *[Laughter]* In Indianapolis, I brought six guys together in 1985. It didn't work. We brought them together again in 1986. It still didn't

work. We did that until 1990 and, in the sixth year, we finally began expanding. At this point, we have 370 members.

Yeaton: What did you change that gained their interest so that it went from six to 370?

Welke: It was a matter of getting a couple of lead people to recognize that even they had something to learn in spite of the fact that they were allegedly the big fish in a small pond.

Albert: ITAA still has programs that are national in nature, as outlined by Harris in his talk this morning. One of them has to do with workforce. And another one has to do with taxation. These are national issues.

Welke: Richard, you had a comment way back when.

Carpenter: ADAPSO and, more recently ITAA, in my experience, has always kind of ebbed and flowed based on the issues. At the first meeting I went to in 1983, the issue was software piracy and "anti-duping" and I remember being impressed because there were CEOs of two or three microcomputer software companies who were actively participating and rolling up their sleeves and getting involved.

One phenomenon in the more recent history, that I think came at a low point in ITAA, was the emergence of the Web and the Internet. And I think that's had a profound impact by providing a number of issues, as Harris mentioned this morning. Everything from dealing with the global market place to Internet taxation, which has been a huge issue. But it's also been an enabler. I was very involved six or seven years ago in saying, "Gee, as an industry trade association shouldn't we be using this new Internet thing to inform our members of what's going on?" The good news now is that I almost get no real mail, paper mail, from ITAA any more but—I won't call it the bad news—I'm deluged with information that comes in via email. So that's had a very, very big impact, I think, on the way ITAA communicates with its members.

All of that, to the best of my knowledge, is made available to the local organizations. For example, the Software Division has been active on the stock options issue, and I started forwarding the information to the guy at the Mass Software Council who's working on stock options. I saw him at a meeting about a week ago and he said, "Oh, I get all that from ITAA." So I think ITAA can provide a lead role nationally, but then bring in Mass Software Council and try to influence Senators Kennedy and Kerry on issues. I think there's an important relationship between ITAA and the local organizations on policy issues. But Mass Software Council does almost all of what ADAPSO did for me when I was starting my company.

Mergers with Other Associations

Sturtevant: I think there's another thing that has been left out as to the ebb and flow. In 1985, 1986, 1987, the association got a real challenge from the Microcomputer Software Association which was a separate entity. It was the first time in the association's history that we didn't figure out how to incorporate a new group that was a logical extension of where the industry was headed. And, ultimately, we cut off a growth avenue as other companies were consolidating. We'd always managed previously to bring the next thing in. We failed there and I think that changed the dynamic at the same time that the regional associations were coming into play. So I think the two dynamics together really hurt us at that point.

Welke: Good point. You know, to be very blunt about it, I can remember the conversations we had relative to: "How do we react to this PC phenomenon that is under our feet?" And we did a crummy job of reacting to it. We did a very, very poor job.

Weissman: I remember, at the time, we sent an emissary to go talk to them to see if we could interest them in joining ADAPSO. And I remember the Board meeting where he came in to report. He said that it was going pretty well. They were interested in joining, but the biggest problem that they had expressed to him was their concern as to whether or not they could relate to a group of people as old as the people in ADAPSO. *[Laughter]* I looked around the table at the Board, and the average age of the ADAPSO Board at that point was late 30s. *[Laughter]*

Rollins: Right. Pretty old. Let me report on two other merger initiatives that I was involved with when I was on the ADAPSO Board, which was from 1984 to 1994. One was with the Information Industry Association where we attempted a merger of two non-profits. We had a lot in common; we all agreed it made a lot of sense. It never happened. And as I recall, the reason had to do with issues of who would be on the surviving board.

Unidentified voices: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Rollins: That's a common problem with non-profits, sorting out the governance. However, I was involved in another merger initiative when I was president of the VAR Division of ADAPSO which did work on a smaller scale. There was an independent group of IBM VARs called the Value Group. The Value Group had about thirty VARs across the United States, maybe more. Ultimately, about 30 of them joined ADAPSO, and we were successful in accomplishing that merger. And it was very simple. They all just dropped out of the Value Group. It dissolved, and they became members of the VAR Division and members of ADAPSO. So we grew.

Welke: As I recall, if we had done the merger with the Information Industry Association, the size of the Board would have exceeded the membership. *[Laughter]*

Rollins: You got it. Just an historical note. The Value Group merger occurred in 1987. I looked that up on my calendar.

Weissman: At the time of those IIA discussions, I was with Dun & Bradstreet Corporation, which was one of the major players in IIA. I actually hosted some of those meetings at the Dun & Bradstreet offices. And, as John points out, it was a failed effort. There was also an attempt to merge with CCIA. There was a common thread in both of those failures related to power-sharing and trust. You had two groups of people who did not know each other and did not have, therefore, enough trust to create an association. I think that that is one of the reasons why ADAPSO over a period of several decades was able to morph. Because there were distinct groups with separate interests, but quite apart from that, there were strong personal relationships which had developed as a result of attending ADAPSO meetings. And so there was a trust that came out of that which allowed people to make accommodations.

Welke: Good point.

Entrepreneurs as ADAPSO Members

Coleman: Following on that, I was thinking about what happened over time. Some of us software guys started showing up at ADAPSO meetings because there were little bits of the program that were of interest to us. We got to know the services people and the data center people and the personal relationships bridged the differences in interests. When it came to the PC folks, they were people that we didn't know. There was no strong sense of bond with "those guys." And I think as we grew larger, we lost the personal relationships that glued us together and inevitably the disparate groups were going to fly apart because we didn't have that glue.

Welke: Good point.

Esch: I think that back in the 1970s and 1980s, the thing that distinguished all of us was that we were the heads of companies. We weren't running divisions of larger organizations. When we came to the table, Bob Weissman sat down with Jim McCormack. They did a deal, shook hands and moved on to the next issue. I think that happened a lot. And it was the deals, it was the networking, it was the "do you want to go co-market together" discussions, that happened right there at the bar, at the cocktail party, at the coffee shop. To me, that was the real strength of ADAPSO and how it became, in fact, a sort of fraternity of people who, over ten or fifteen years, grew up together in this business. They were the people who actually made this business.

Rollins: They were entrepreneurs who had started their own businesses and were making deals. And were empowered to do so. And inclined to do so by their nature.

Unidentified voice: Yes, they were all entrepreneurs.

Coleman: I agree 100% with what you're saying Arthur, which is that the membership has changed from the entrepreneurs who were CEOs, to the senior management team. I wasn't here in the 1960s, but from what I understand, there weren't too many companies that were over \$100 million. [Laughter] There weren't too many of them that were over \$1 million.

As they got bigger, they brought in professional management and the attendance at conferences changed from an entrepreneurial CEO/ founder kind of perspective to more of a mix of senior management. Now there are very large multinational worldwide companies. The CEO is off attending to business and working with ITAA is delegated to someone down the line. They are public companies, they have a whole different set of problems and we lost the mix.

Bride: You may remember that there was a National Computer Conference serving the computer industry for a couple of decades. As the industry matured, special interest conferences took little pieces of it, and the charter, the mission, was gone. NCC died. Taking some of the ADAPSO functions away were things like Comdex, which is where the micro guys go to do their networking. And then you have special interests such as the graphics groups, the new media groups. CASE is another example. Every technology grew up, had its special interest, and carved a little bit away from ADAPSO, and what we have left is not very much for conference value. And, therefore, not very many reasons to go to the conferences.

Jones: Larry, I certainly found all of the networking we did to be infinitely valuable. Like John, I made a list of people that I wanted to make sure to spend some time with in the hallways between sessions. But to some of the companies, those hallways were not just for discussing the sort of deals that Bart was alluding to, but opportunities to find the constituencies to whom they would sell. For companies like Joe Blumberg's that sell services to the industry, the conferences provided an opportunity for them to network with all of their potential prospects.

Local Chapters Revisited

Welke: One comment that I want to make relative to the regional associations. They began to form back in the 1980s. Massachusetts was one of the first, and then Washington got a very active group going, and the Software Entrepreneurs' Forum in Northern California was a very strong operation. That movement increased until we have, as Bart said, 26 or 30, or something like that.

Carlson: Twenty-six that I know of, but there probably are more.

Welke: There is an organization at this point called the Council of Regional Information Technology Associations. ADAPSO attempted for a time to support that organization but I'm not sure where that effort went.

Unidentified voice: They even held meetings at the ITAA conferences.

Rollins: Wasn't there a brief period when ADAPSO actually stated its membership as being 20,000 or 30,000 including all the members of the regional associations?

Unidentified voice: It still does.

[Ed. Note: In the early 1990s, ITAA actively supported the creation of the Council of Regional Information Technology Associations by providing staff support to organize and facilitate its meetings. A representative of CRITA was given a seat on the ITAA Board. ITAA provided information about government policy issues to the regional associations which were members of CRITA, and ITAA counted the thousands of members of those associations as affiliate members of ITAA. In March 2000, CRITA incorporated as a non-profit organization and subsequently spun off from ITAA. Its website (www.crita.org) lists over 50 regional associations in the U.S. and Canada as CRITA members as of the date of this writing.]

Dreyer: In 1968, I presented to the Board of Directors of ADAPSO the idea of setting up local chapters. And I got Gordon Taubenheim, who was a member of the Board at that time, to use Cleveland to test the idea. We tried to get a chapter established and got five or six people who showed some significant interest. But when we went back to the Board again, they felt that having chapters would be divisive to the organization and its goals because of the dues issue. You would have to pay dues to the parent organization and you would have to pay dues to the local organization. So, ADAPSO did address the issue of chapters way back in 1968 and thought it might fly, but then decided it was not in the association's best interest.

Welke: We've got roughly five, maybe 5-1/2 minutes, left. I'd like to go around the room and see who has a comment that they absolutely have to get on tape.

Conclusions and Comments

Blumberg: Those of us who were providing services to the industry often felt that the association was sort of closed and provincial because we wanted to attend the conferences as vendors and be able to have something like booth space, or a way to display what we could do for the conference attendees. And that was never an open issue; it was always closed for some reason.

Yeaton: The best you could do at that point was pick up someone's bar tab and put your name on it.

Bride: I'd like to address what Joe said because that's where getting involved in conference planning really helped. You'd show up and pound on the table a few times to get your topic on the program and then say, "By the way, I can provide a speaker, too, if you like." So you'd get a chance to get exposure to the attendees. You're right that there were only one or two conferences where they tried having exhibits to support the service organizations. But the conferences were a good way for the service companies to have a presence.

Welke: I was involved in conferences for almost all the twenty years that I was active with the Board and when I became Chairman of the association. There was an incredible amount of backroom dealing and wheeling in order to get a subject on or off a particular agenda. Anybody who denies that is lying.

Dreyer: Nobody denies it.

Welke: But that's a reality with any kind of an organization. And I think we even had gotten to the point where we were doing more than just conference planning in the back room. I mean, succession of leadership was very much an organized pattern.

Carpenter: One of the things that struck me at my first several meetings was the culture of the ADAPSO conferences, and the fact that someone like myself starting a company that had 20 people, had no concern whatsoever about approaching anyone, from any company of any size. I too had a list of all the people I wanted to make contact with. But how open people were—meeting, talking, sharing ideas—that's what kept me coming back.

Jones: One of the things that didn't get on the tape yet that I was heavily involved in was the Technology Information Service Committee which sponsored some reasonably successful spin-off conferences. We had three or four or five conferences on emerging technology that were very, very useful to the community of technologists that were members of ADAPSO. Or to people within their organizations that were focused on technology.

Rollins: Larry, I just thought of one other thing that attracted a certain number of members to ADAPSO, particularly small companies. There was a group insurance program. Many companies would join to get this medical insurance for their employees. There was a firm in New York called Leterman-Gortz that was the intermediary. I served on the ADAPSO Insurance Trust Board and was a trustee with two or three other people, over a period of many years, to help administer that trust and set rates. And they were very competitive rates. You join organizations for a lot of reasons, but that was a reason for many of the small companies.

Welke: Barbara, do you have any comment to make?

Barbara Brizdle: Perhaps you discussed it before I got here, but I was thinking how important camaraderie was throughout all the meetings. It was extremely easy to meet with people and, if you were new, it was very easy to be brought in and to be a part of everything which, I think, is a little unusual.

Sturtevant: Well, one of the things the staff did was try to make that easy. When we would get new members, we'd assign a current member to go and find that new member at their first conference, and bring them into the fold so that nobody was walking around lost. We literally paired them off. Your assignment at the first reception was to go and find this guy. And God love you guys, you went out and did it. But that got people involved much quicker than walking into a room and saying, "Oh God, I don't know anybody here."

Blumberg: One more thing that Kim triggered for me when he talked about spin-off conferences. There was a compelling need to share personnel information when I first started with Comshare. I kept asking what NCSS was paying for these people and what Tymshare was paying for these people. And none of that information was ever available. One of the things that happened as a result is that seven people got together in a room—it was NCSS and Cybernetics and Comshare and Informatics and GE Computer Services—and started something called the Computer Services Personnel Association which wound up sharing the information. And, in fact, it conducted the first executive and management compensation studies that were done for ADAPSO. That was one of the successful spin-offs of groups getting together at conferences to say, "What do we need to share and how can we make that happen?"

Welke: OK, this could be the end of the meeting. Going once, going twice...

[Laughter and applause]