

INFORMS Practice Section Newsletter – April 2026

A Message from the 2026 INFORMS Practice Section President

By Patricia Neri, Intelligent Analytics Solutions, LLC; patricianerib@gmail.com



The Practice Section's Bylaws clearly state our purposes, and in this newsletter, I would like to focus on two of them that are especially meaningful as we approach Analytics+ taking place April 13–15:

A. To focus attention on the great value delivered by successful practice and on the fact that our profession exists to achieve success in practice.

C. To help INFORMS initiate and administer competitions that are intended to advance successful practice in general, and thus typically are open without restrictions on application types, analytical methods, or geographical locations of candidates.

At Analytics+, the Practice Section proudly administers three premier competitions: the Franz Edelman Award, the 2025 Wagner Prize and the UPS Smith Prize.

The Edelman competition is truly a community effort. Practice Section members and other Informs volunteers, serve as chair, judges, coaches, and verifiers, all working together to celebrate excellence in the application of operations research, management science, analytics, and data science to real-world problems. At the Franz Edelman Gala, we will once again celebrate the transformative power of O.R. and advanced analytics, a tradition spanning more than 20 years. I warmly invite you to consider competing or volunteering for next year's Edelman competition.

At the 2026 INFORMS Analytics+ Conference, the 2025 Wagner Prize will be recognized during the Edelman Gala.

The UPS Smith Prize recognizes academic programs that excel in preparing students to become outstanding practitioners in analytics and data science. The competition highlights the strong connection between education and impactful practice. This prize is especially meaningful to me because of my early career experiences at UPS.

The Practice Section, as mentioned in the previous newsletter, will recognize outstanding members through two new awards: the Distinguished Practitioner Award and the Service Award. More information will be posted by May on the Practice Section homepage, and you are encouraged to apply.

Finally, for those of you interested in presenting at the INFORMS Annual Meeting in San Francisco, please reach out to the Practice Section Annual Meeting Cluster Chairs:

Margery Connor (margery.connor@gmail.com) and Krishna Teja Malladi (malladi.kt@gmail.com)

Updates from the Wagner Prize Chair

By **Konstantina Mellou, Microsoft Research**; kmellou@microsoft.com



The Wagner Prize is awarded annually by INFORMS to recognize and reward quality and coherence of analysis used in practice. This award, given in memory of the late Daniel H. Wagner, was established by a generous endowment from the firms Metron, Inc.; Daniel H. Wagner, Associates, Inc.; and Applied Mathematics, Inc.

In recognition of Dr. Wagner's career-long efforts to encourage the application of strong mathematics to practical problems, supported by clear and intelligible writing, this prize emphasizes the quality and coherence of the analysis used in practice, good writing, strong analytical content, and verifiable practice successes. The Wagner Prize competition is held each year at the INFORMS Annual Meeting.

At the 2026 INFORMS Analytics+ Conference, the 2025 Wagner Prize will be recognized during the Edelman Gala. The winning work, "Rebalancing and Pricing of Near-Expiry Inventory in Online Grocery Retail," was authored by Long He, Ziyuan Zhou, and Zhengling Qi (George Washington University) and Guangrui Ma, Yuanbo Peng, Yushu Yao, Zhongyi Zha, Mingyong Zhao, and Zhenyu Zhuo (Meituan Group). If you are attending the conference, don't miss the Wagner Prize winner reprise on Monday, April 13, at 10:00 AM.

Submissions for the 2026 Wagner Prize are now open. For an opportunity to get your own work recognized, submit your entry by May 1st!

INFORMS Practice Section Webinar Series

By **Rajesh Tyagi, GE Research (Retired)**; rajeshtyagi@yahoo.com



The Practice Section has been conducting a webinar series that showcases (1) individual analytics applications and (2) panel discussions on areas such as recruiting and training analytics professionals and managing analytics projects.

Our recent webinars include:

GenAI & Your Career: Navigating Shifts, Skills, and Opportunities

- **When ERP, WMS, and TMS Don't Behave as One System: Execution and change-management lessons from practice**
- **Delighting a Billion Indian Customers through Supply Chain Optimization at Flipkart (2025 Edelman Finalist)**

Our next webinar is on **May 1, 2026: From Dashboards to AI Integrity: A Framework for Metric Governance and Ledger-Accurate Analytics**. More information is available at the link below.

Those interested in upcoming webinars can visit:

<https://connect.informs.org/practice/events/upcoming-webinars>.

Recordings of past webinars are available at: <https://connect.informs.org/practice/events/past-webinars>.

If you are interested in giving a webinar or have suggestions for a speaker or topic, please contact Rajesh Tyagi (rajeshtyagi@yahoo.com).

ECPN 2026: Learn, Mentor, Volunteer

By Subramanian Narayanaswamy, 2026 ECPN Chair; snsubbu@gmail.com



Early in your career, the technical foundation is there. What's often missing is everything around it, how you communicate, how you build confidence, and how you navigate real-world decisions.

That's exactly where the Early Career Professionals' Network (ECPN) comes in.

ECPN has always been about learning by doing. Not passive sessions, but structured, hands-on experiences that push participants to think, communicate, and engage like professionals.

This year's program continues that focus:

Role Play Exercise

Participants work through a case study across different professional roles, seeing how decisions change depending on perspective.

Speed Mentoring

A fast-paced, high-impact session where participants connect directly with experienced practitioners.

Interactive Elevator Speech

Mentors work closely with participants to refine how they present themselves, then bring those pitches to life in a supportive setting.

What makes ECPN work isn't just the structure, it's the people behind it. The mentors and volunteers who show up, share honestly, and invest in the next generation.

We're looking for volunteers to be part of ECPN 2026.

If you've benefited from mentorship in your own journey, this is a chance to give that forward, whether through mentoring, facilitating sessions, or engaging with participants during the program.

When: Sunday, April 12, 2026

Where: Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD

If you're interested in getting involved, please reach out to me at snsubbu@gmail.com.

Join Us for ECPN 2026 - INFORMS Analytics+ Conference

- **Date:** Sunday, April 12, 2026
- **Location:** Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD
- <https://meetings.informs.org/wordpress/analytics/>

Data4Good: Reflection, Growth, and Applied Impact

By **Matthew A. Lanham**, Butler University; malanham@gmail.com



The pace of change in analytics continues to accelerate. New AI tools are reshaping how many of us work, learn, and create value, while also forcing practitioners, educators, and organizations to reconsider which skills matter most. In that kind of environment, reflection is not optional. It is how we assess where we are, what capabilities we need to strengthen, and how we want to invest our time and effort moving forward.

That is one reason the [National Data4Good Analytics Competition](#) has continued to matter. The competition is designed not only to challenge participants with a meaningful case, but also to help them build durable analytical capabilities through structured training, applied problem solving, and professional credentials. From my perspective as an educator, it has been especially rewarding to see participants grow in both confidence and competence while applying analytics to problems intended to serve a broader good.

The results from the most recent competition cycle were encouraging. Participants reported gains across multiple analytical skill areas between the beginning and end of the competition, and 240 participants earned Microsoft AI-900 certification. Those outcomes do not include the additional DataCamp, SAS, and INFORMS learning modules completed during the event. Taken together, the results suggest that Data4Good can serve as more than a competition; it can function as a practical development pathway for learners and professionals seeking to strengthen their analytics and AI readiness.

Looking ahead, we are working to make the next cycle even more valuable for participants. While details are still being finalized, we expect the competition to begin in August and conclude in December. Planned benefits for registered participants may include:

- Complimentary subscriptions to [DataCamp](#) for technical and AI-focused learning.
- Training opportunities and knowledge badges connected to [SAS](#) coursework.
- Access to [Interview Query](#) resources that support technical interview preparation and career development.
- Training on the [INFORMS Analytics Framework](#), along with Certified Analytics Professional ([CAP-E](#)) preparation materials.
- Training and discounted certification vouchers for Microsoft Artificial Intelligence Fundamentals ([AI-900](#)). Last year, participants could access this opportunity for \$27 compared with the standard \$99 retail price.
- A new Data4Good case challenge designed to combine analytical rigor with meaningful social impact.

As all of us consider our own professional growth, it is worth remembering that improvement always requires some investment of time, attention, and effort. Our hope is that Data4Good will be one of the

opportunities practitioners, students, and educators choose when they want to build relevant analytics skills while applying them to something worthwhile.

A Proposed Initiative for Increasing Meaningful Interaction Between OR/Analytics Practitioners and Instructors (2026 Update)

By Dr. James Cochran, University of Alabama; jjcochran@ua.edu



Background and Context

For decades, educators and practitioners in Operations Research and Analytics have shared a common challenge: preparing students to transition effectively from the classroom to professional practice. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, teaching cases (Cochran, 2000, 2004, 2009a, 2009b) have been recognized as a powerful way to bridge theory and application. Initiatives such as

the integration of case-based pedagogy into INFORMS Teaching Effectiveness Colloquia and the establishment of formal publication channels for teaching cases helped legitimize and disseminate this approach.

Despite these advances, widespread adoption has lagged. The primary barrier was access. High-quality, classroom-ready cases were limited, often costly, and unevenly aligned with rapidly evolving industry practices. Many instructors, especially those new to teaching, were understandably reluctant to invest in resources they had limited experience using, while practitioners rarely had structured pathways to contribute their real-world insights to education.

A 2026 Perspective and Solution

In 2026, the proposed solution remains simple and powerful: intentionally pairing practitioners with instructors to co-develop teaching cases grounded on the practitioner's experience. The instructor can then classroom-test the case(s) the team has produced. After revising the case(s) and associated teaching notes to reflect what has been learned during the classroom testing, practitioner/instructor team could write an article on what the case covers and how it can be used in the classroom. This article, the case, and the teaching notes could then be submitted to INFORMS Transactions on Education. With today's collaborative technologies and growing emphasis on experiential learning, this partnership-based model offers a scalable way to better align education with practice for students, faculty, and industry alike.

Updates from the Analytics+ Conference Chair

By **Zohar Strinka**, Principal Consultant, Analytics Strategies; zstrinka@gmail.com



The programming at the Analytics+ Conference has been going through an evolution over the past few years to ensure a better attendee experience and help grow the conference.

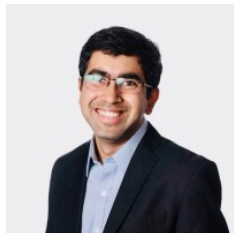
For those of us who attend year after year, we most often go to learn. It's great to see old friends, meet new people, and be inspired by what's possible. But we attend many technical sessions to learn more about the practice of analytics.

This year, we've leaned into that identity as a learning opportunity. You'll see a major change to the technical agenda on Tuesday as we now have the keynote after lunch and followed by a two-hour workshop block with a more interactive and hands-on style than the traditional talks. (Importantly for the Edelman folks, this also gave us the flexibility to have the Edelman Reprise as the first technical session of the day)

Instead of enumerating all the great talks attendees will be able to attend, I'll end with my biggest puzzle in planning the conference. As I was gathering data from potential attendees last year, I heard from many people who said it was easier to convince their employer to pay for an industry-specific conference than one that would make them better at their analytics job. We've tried to bridge that gap as noted above, but I think it speaks to a deeper issue for all of us in analytics. What will convince people outside our field to give us what we need to do our jobs well?

Networking Happy Hour

By **Tabish Azeem** (azeem.tabish@gmail.com) and **Ritish Chugh** ritish.chugh@gmail.com



Join your fellow analytics practitioners in a [monthly virtual happy hour \[connect.informs.org\]](https://connect.informs.org). With networking as the focus, everyone is welcome. Invite your colleagues!

The one-hour Zoom call will be at 5 pm Eastern on these Fridays:

- Apr 24, 2026
- May 29, 2026
- Jun 26, 2026
- Jul 31, 2026
- Aug 28, 2026
- Sep 25, 2026
- Oct 30, 2026
- Nov 20, 2026
- Dec 18, 2026

We'll have a topic for each call. For the first couple of meetings in 2026, we discussed a) the Role of AI in Analytics and b) the tradeoff between data quality and speed.

If you have suggestions for future topics, please reach out to the hosts.. Looking forward to the conversations and connections ahead! You can [register here](#).
