

CHANGES IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC CRISIS AND DYNAMIC FAST-PACED LARGE-SCALE INDUSTRIAL REFRESH

In a previous page, a couple of months ago, we talked about the rapid industry sea change in applications and operators and that it is important for ComSoc to understand the market directions and ride the tiger and participate in guiding the changes. The virus pandemic forced major changes in the way the Society does business in the past few months and likely for the next year. All the conferences in the next few months are either canceled or going virtual. We have found virtual conferences are different from in-person conferences and many modes of operation need to be adapted to the virtual medium. Electronic networking based interactions have come to the forefront. While we are adapting the practice of how we interact and operate, this is an opportune time to implement the strategic plan of the Society. In this particular month I want to specifically address diversity and involvement of young professionals.

If one takes a look at the percentage of young professional and women members, it is easy to recognize the two are under-represented for whatever reasons. At our flagship conferences, the participations of these groups exceed the proportions in memberships. Compared to the percentages in the industry and academia (faculty and especially students), the gap is rather striking. My own university, which is a largely technical university, has 50% undergraduate women, and even in our EECS graduate school, the proportion is 35 percent. To better represent the potential constituents of ComSoc something needs to be done. In the 2018 Globecom BoG meeting, two motions on changing the ComSoc Bylaws were passed as the first step to remedy the situation on diversity (that includes gender and demographics):

3.3.5 For each appointed BoG position, there shall be documentation attesting that an earnest effort was made to identify a diverse set of qualified candidates and that no discrimination was made pursuant to IEEE Policy 9.26. The process for preparing and submitting the Diversity Efforts documentation shall be outlined in the Society P&Ps.

12.5.12 Nominations & Elections – This Committee is responsible for recommending to the BoG candidates to fill elected Society office positions, and for the development, implementation, and supervision of election procedures. For each position, there shall be documentation attesting that an earnest effort was made to identify a diverse set of qualified candidates and that no discrimination was made pursuant to IEEE Policy 9.2.6. The process for preparing and submitting the Diversity Efforts documentation shall be outlined in the Society P&Ps. Meetings of this Committee shall always be held in Executive Session.



Vincent Chan

Governance has established procedures for the execution of the two passed motions. Some might observe that passing these measures may indicate an existing problem. I think that is true and the statistics seem to support the thesis. What we don't know fully is why. Nonetheless, we need to immediately take actions. These small steps allow us to facilitate promoting diversity in gender, geography, and discipline in leadership positions. We have been trying to accomplish some of the goals via:

1. BoG appointments to Directorships and Chairs of Standing and Ad Hoc committees.

2. Reaching out to qualified members for nominations to elected positions on the BoG.

3. Increasing pipelines to appointed and elected offices by providing training grounds and experience to members who are willing to serve.

4. Introducing shorter term limits to elected and appointed offices.

5. Providing venues and opportunities for socializing the issues and creating valued added services to these sectors.

6. Publications, Conferences, Technical Activities, Members and Geographic Activities, Awards, and NEC, etc. are all conscious of the goals of the societies and actively seeking and appointing qualified candidates.

7. Actively engaging ComSoc's Women in Communications Engineering (WICE) Committee to actively identify and support diverse candidates for elected and appointed offices.

Young professionals are the future of the Society and we need to redouble our efforts to recruit and nurture/mentor the next generations. The rate of young members joining the Society is not high enough to sustain the viability of its future. In addition to traditional services provided by the Society we need to create new services for young professionals. The following are some of the actions taken:

1. Networking with the Leaders: This is a networking program held at our flagship ICC and GLOBECOM conferences, which provides students with the opportunity to network with ComSoc's senior volunteer leadership and learn about the benefits offered through a Society membership.

2. Student Career Lunch: This luncheon, held at our flagship ICC and Globecom conferences, aims to connect students or new graduates with prospective employers who are looking to recruit new talent. Student attendees have the chance to meet with these industry representatives, learn about their companies, and discuss potential employment opportunities.

3. Reduced the student membership fee to \$1.

4. IEEE ComSoc Student Competition: Competition focused on proposing communications technology that can change the world. There is a monetary prize for the winners and an award plaque. Both will be given at Globecom and ICC conferences, (in Hawaii travel expenses were refunded).

(Continued on next page)

5. YP Blog: Two Technical and one Experience articles per month. Contributors are from the ComSoc community, conference award recipients and leaders.

6. Virtual Events: Tutorials on Research Proposal, Panel on Volunteering, and Fireside Chats with leaders.

7. Social Media: Exclusive Curated Content on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. New form of engagement with our members with dedicated volunteers.

8. New Website: yp.comsoc.org is a new home for YPs in ComSoc that provides information on all relevant activities.

To be implemented soon and/or under explorations:

9. Ask A Question: A knowledge community to discuss and answer questions of young members, i.e. mentor YPs digitally. A viability test will be done by collecting frequently asked questions.

10. Technical Bootcamps: Hands-on tutorial content to be distributed for one-day on trending topics. This will be done in collaboration with ComSoc Education Activities.

11. Video Content: Short videos with experts, up to 10 minutes. This will be an extension of our blog.

12. Awards: Revitalized YP Career award across ComSoc in academia and industry, to be discussed with ComSoc Awards Board.

In the past few months as I was seeking diversity and young candidates for appointed positions in the Society, I discovered some hidden unofficial metrics that have inadvertently blocked the entry of new blood into the management of the Society. The most common argument for reappointing an incumbent to the same or a similar position is that the candidate has the best experience. If no other attributes trumps experience, we will never refresh our management team! Thus, many dictators around the world can argue they have the best experience and as years pass by they accumulate even more experience! I do agree that a candidate

should have some experience in the area of their appointment, but when a minimum level of experience is present then other factors should have weighed in the selection process. Some of these attributes are:

1. Having fresh perspectives and willing to take new initiatives.

2. Diversity of views and backgrounds.

3. Ability to work with others and create alliances.

4. Willingness to mentor the next generation and create a succession plan.

It is natural to feel more assured and comfortable if incumbents who have done the job before assume these positions, especially if they are close friends. However, fresh blood does not represent big risks. Almost every volunteer is a professional with excellent working and management experiences. The incumbents are still around and can provide guidance and support. The Society also has a cadre of staff members who know operations and policies well and are there to provide advice and checks and balances. On the whole, allowing fresh blood to take over management duties is not that risky.

The BoG and in particular the VPs have been sensitized to this issue. Changes are slow because of the election cycle and refresh cycles of appointed positions. To make way for fresh blood, we will institute/practice term limits in elected and appointed positions. There will be term limit motions in the next BoG meeting coming up in a month or so. Write to your favorite BoG members to support our moves to accelerate the evolution and transformation of the Society.

ComSoc is striving for a better global and technical balance in representations, management, technical programs and activities. Infusion of new ideas, diversity and fresh blood is critical to ComSoc's health and its strategic future in multi-disciplinary and global endeavors.