



TASK FORCE ON THE IAAP CONGRESS

Addressing the Challenges Facing the International Congress of Applied Psychology in the 21st Century

According to a survey conducted recently on behalf of IAAP, the International Congress of Applied Psychology (ICAP) is one of the greatest attractions of IAAP. The IAAP congresses may be highly successful and reasonably well-attended. However, the world has changed and much change will happen due to economic variation and the rise of new internet options. It is a huge topic for IAAP and many other psychology organizations, whether they are national, regional or international. The question to be posed by the Task Force will be whether the way we go about organizing and delivering an ICAP is sturdy enough and flexible enough to withstand change and whether modifications or new ways to do things are needed to address the challenges facing ICAPs in the 21st Century.

We had a preview of the challenges facing the ICAP over the last three or four years when we called for bids for hosting the 2018 ICAP. We had to extend the call for bids twice, and still, we got only one complete application. Furthermore, the negotiations with the applicant for developing an agreement on a contract for hosting the 2018 ICAP were far more difficult than expected for the parties involved. It also took much longer than usual to reach an agreement. Those were probably the signs of time.

It took a while for all of us to recognize and accept that what used to work so well before was not working so well now. When we came to grips with this new reality, we conducted a detailed analysis of the issues. Then, we revised our approach and made several changes to it. This was a difficult period for IAAP, but it stimulated and challenged our way of thinking. It also provided the opportunity to reflect on ICAPs and IAAP's approach to organizing and delivering ICAPs. We now know that the status quo is no longer an option. The environment has changed and we need to adapt or else. Adaptation is a process and we need to find our way. Hence this proposal for a task force on the IAAP Congress.

CURRENT STATUS

Our approach to organizing and delivering an ICAP has changed little over the years. It goes essentially as follows:

Unlike most other international organizations in psychology, we organize an ICAP every four years instead of every two years; normally, eight years before an ICAP, we call for bids in the hope of finding a host who is willing and able to organize an ICAP; applicants complete and submit an application

form; the Board of Directors reviews the applications; the IAAP Officers conduct a confirmatory site visit on behalf of the Board before approving an application for hosting an ICAP; an agreement on a contract between IAAP and the host of the ICAP is negotiated; once an agreement is reached, the approved host goes ahead and organizes the ICAP on behalf of IAAP with minimal written guidelines, working with IAAP Divisions to develop the scientific program; up to three congress site visits are conducted by one of the Officers to monitor progress of the Congress Organizing Committee until the Congress is held; one site visit including all the IAAP Officers is conducted some 12 to 18 months before the actual Congress to review progress of the Congress Organizing Committee; the Congress is delivered; after the ICAP, the Congress organizers submit two reports; a final report on the congress and a financial report.

There used to be a congress manual available to assist ICAP organizers, but this manual is so outdated that, for all practical purpose, it has become useless. There would be a need to develop a new manual for ICAP organizers, but there are issues to address, discussions to be held, and decisions to be made beforehand.

Efforts have been made by ICAP organizers to deliver an ICAP which has international scope. This is not always easy because it is often difficult to attract psychologists from developing countries which have limited means to travel abroad.

IAAP has worked on the organization of ICAPs with a large number of national and regional psychology organizations over almost a century. It has produced tremendous benefits for psychology in those countries and regions, and for psychology all around the world. Obviously, ICAPs have value and deserve special attention. ICAPs have also provided an effective way for IAAP to fulfill its mission, which is "to promote the science and practice of applied psychology and to facilitate interaction and communication among applied psychologists around the world" (Article 1 of the IAAP Constitution).

ICAPs have contributed to the visibility of IAAP in the countries and the regions where they have been held. For example, the report from the IAAP Membership Committee reveals that the number of members in Australia has increased since 2010 and is now higher than the one in many other countries, and this is undoubtedly a tangible effect of the ICAP held in Melbourne in 2010. This adds to the value of ICAPs. The challenge in the long run is always retention because IAAP tends to lose many members between ICAPs. Whether or not more frequent ICAPs would help with membership retention is an open question awaiting an empirical test.

However, few ICAP organizers have developed a communication plan to promote and communicate relevant information to organizations, institutions, governments, and policy makers in the region, country or area where psychology has or may have impact. Perhaps opportunities for promoting applied psychology have been lost.

ICAPs have yet to take advantage of the latest developments in Information and Communication Technologies. For example, one could have virtual or remote registration and participation, virtual presence of prestigious contributors in the ICAP, and so on. However, as each ICAP is delivered by a different host in a different country, the use of these technologies ICAPs to optimize the delivery of an ICAP is a challenge.

ICAPs can be an outstanding medium to promote applied psychology, IAAP's activities in general and Divisions' activities. Yet, IAAP and its Divisions do not make full use of it. There is a need to find ways to address this issue.

Divisional programs are the backbone of ICAPs. Yet, these programs are not systematically and effectively promoted at ICAPs. Divisions rarely call on their local counterparts and other potential partners involved in the scientific program to promote their programs. The divisional programs usually comprise invited addresses, symposia and the like. However, they rarely include debates, roundtables, cross-cultural research or professional incubators, meetings, assemblies, fora, presentations from task forces, workshops, etc.

As each ICAP is organized and delivered by a different host, there is little continuity between ICAPs. Still, there is a need for continuity because an ICAP has core components. These components need to be considered and planned for each ICAP. For example, those include: scientific communication and exchange in the different disciplines of psychology, education and training of psychologist and promotion of cooperation between academic institutions; professional issues (licensing, credentialing and other relevant professional issues); ethics; contributions of applied psychology to society to address societal issues; promotion and dissemination of new publications; and so on.

Finally, when planning an ICAP, limited attention is given to other activities outside the scientific program such as advanced research and training seminars; young psychologists' support and mentoring program; visit of research centres or mental health facilities; professional field trips; and so on. The potential of these activities for attracting more participants in a congress has yet to be fully explored.

ISSUES

As suggested above, IAAP has an approach to organizing and delivering ICAPs which has served the Association well. However, as also suggested above, there are ways in which IAAP could do better. Actually, IAAP needs to do better if it is to continue to thrive in the 21st century as the leading international organization in applied psychology. To do better, IAAP will need to have an open mind and look outside of the box. We also need to think strategically. Hence the creation of a task force on the IAAP Congress.

There are several questions to be addressed by a task force on ICAPs. Here are some examples (it should be noted that the following is not meant to be exhaustive):

- Applications – Calls for bids for hosting an IACP have not been highly successful lately. In fact, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain bids for hosting an ICAP. Do we need to be more proactive? If so, how?
- Financial Risks – It has become increasingly expensive to host an ICAP; the financial risks associated with the hosting of an ICAP have significantly risen; fewer national organizations in psychology are willing or able to assume those risks. Is there a way to address this issue and make the hosting of an ICAP economically more viable?
- Continuity – ICAPs are organized by a different host each time. Is this model functional? Should ICAPs be organized each time by the same team while leaving the building of the scientific program to a national or regional organization in psychology?

- Participation – It is stable, but there is no significant increase. Furthermore, a small percentage of IAAP members participate in the ICAP. What can we do to make ICAPs more relevant and attractive?
- Costs – It has become increasingly expensive to attend an ICAP; costs of travelling and lodging are continuously on the rise; registration fees over the last 12 years have nearly doubled? What can we do to make ICAPs more accessible and affordable?
- Frequency – We have an ICAP every four years while most international organizations in psychology have their congresses every two years. Would a biennial model serve IAAP better than a quadrennial one? How would it affect ICAP attendance? Would it help with membership retention?
- Agreement – The business world has changed over the last 100 years. It has become more difficult to reach an agreement on a contract with a host for organizing an ICAP. Is there a need to change the way we go about developing an agreement with a potential host for an ICAP? What would work better?
- Building a Scientific Program – What are the strengths and limitations of the current approach? How could it be improved?
- Maximizing the Benefits of ICAPs – The ICAP can be a powerful tool for enhancing the visibility of IAAP and promoting applied psychology. How could we maximize those benefits?

*Janel Gauthier
President-Elect
June 2014*

*“It is not the strongest species that survive,
nor the most intelligent,
but the ones most responsive to change.”
(Darwin)*

TASK FORCE ON IAAP CONGRESS

TERMS OF REFERENCE

*Addressing the Challenges Facing
the International Congress of Applied Psychology in the 21st Century*

Mandate

The task force will have a mandate to review IAAP's approach to organizing and delivering the International Congress of Applied Psychology (ICAP) and make recommendations to the Board of Directors about actions to take for improving ICAPs' competitiveness, usefulness, and viability in today's rapidly changing and increasingly complex environment.

Tasks

To fulfill its mandate, the Task Force will:

1. Review and critically evaluate how other organizations in psychology go about organizing and delivering their conferences; identify the strengths and limitations of the various approaches;
2. Review and critically evaluate how IAAP goes about organizing and delivering its congress (frequency, application process, organizational structure, operations, etc.); identify the strengths and limitations of its approach;
3. Identify effective and efficient ways in which IAAP could make its congresses more competitive, attractive, relevant, accessible and viable for the 21st Century, and in which it could provide better continuity between one congress and the next;
4. Make recommendations to the Board of Directors as to what actions IAAP should take to address the issues identified in the foregoing critical review.

Procedure

One face-to-face (in person) meeting;
Other deliberations by electronic means (email, Skype, teleconference, etc.).

Composition

Chair appointed by IAAP President plus two or three additional participants selected by the Chair of the Task Force in consultation with the President.

Timeline

Work to begin in October 2014;
Final report to be submitted by January 31st, 2016.

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