

**OVERVIEW OF RESULTS**  
**MARKETING TASK FORCE SURVEY**

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with  
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This working report provides a review of the information obtained from 159 MCPA members through phone and mail surveys conducted between October and December, 1992. The MCPA Marketing Task Force Survey tapped into personal beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about MCPA and specifically, the annual conferences sponsored by the organization. The information serves as a benchmark for designing future marketing programs to be initiated by MCPA.

## **BACKGROUND**

The MCPA Marketing Task Force in their early discussions agreed that a survey or set of surveys of the membership was required in order to obtain the information necessary to design and develop a marketing strategy. The Collegiate Employment Research Institute of Michigan State University's Career Development and Placement Services office was asked in the Spring of 1992 to provide assistance in designing, administering, and analyzing the survey.

After several in-depth discussions on the components of effective strategic market planning, the decision was made to focus the first survey on MCPA conferences, a major revenue generator for the organization, and several general overview questions on the benefits of MCPA membership. The survey was constructed by the Fall, 1992 and administered during this period.

Prior to presenting the results, details are provided on the steps followed in the research process so that the Task Force, as a body, has a common understanding of the study's parameters.

## **INSTRUMENT**

After several discussions with Peter Rae and Larry Routh, based on the initial construction of a closed-ended instrument, the decision was made to modify the survey to an open-ended format. The basis for this decision centered on the fact that little benchmark data existed on MCPA membership; much of the programming and policy of the organization was driven by anecdotal assumptions about what members wanted from and how members perceived the organization. The open-response format offered the opportunity for members to freely express their beliefs, concerns, and thoughts about MCPA. From these responses a benchmark profile would be constructed and used later in more specific, targeted studies.

## **APPROACH**

In order to insure a representative response, a telephone survey design was used; backed-up by a mail survey. A stratified (employer, college) sample of 131 members was taken for the phone survey, including replacements. Selection was limited to those who attended the MCPA Fall Conference and were members of MCPA. The total pool included 455 members whose

names appeared on the conference attendance list (late registrants were not included). Those members not identified for the phone survey, 321 members, were sent a mail survey containing the same set of questions. No follow-up was attempted with the mail population.

Because the phone sample was only stratified by college and employer, the profile may not accurately reflect other dimensions of the organization, specifically: gender, length of membership in MCPA, level of involvement in MCPA, and institutional or organizational size. The mail survey offered an opportunity to fill-in any potential gaps; but, it could easily magnify any distortions (biases) in the respondent profile (e.g. higher percentage of women than actually in organization).

## **RESPONDENT PROFILE**

A total of 159 completed surveys were returned. Of these, 78 were from the phone pool (76 percent) and 81 from the mail pool (25 percent). The total number represented 35 percent of MCPA members (excluding replacements) who attended the Fall Conference.

The profile presented in Table 1 reveals that 60 percent of the respondents were women, 67 percent from college membership, and 37 percent, 27 percent, 27 percent, and 9 percent have served in a MCPA leadership capacity, served on a MCPA committee or task force, attended conferences regularly, or attended conferences infrequently, respectively. The average number of years in the placement profession was 10.6 years, ranging from less than a year to thirty years. There were three major groups, sorted by years of experience: those with less than three years experience (34), those with seven and eight years of experience (20), and those with twelve to fifteen years (33). number of years as a member of MCPA averaged 7.7 years, ranging from less than one year to thirty years. Members with more than ten years (25 percent) tend to pull the mean up; when, in fact, 52 percent of the sample have been with MCPA six years or less.

The sample was primarily comprised of large institutions, 33 percent larger than 20,000 students or employees with only 18 percent having less than 2,500. The most common title of those responding from colleges was placement director or equivalent (60 percent) and from employers, human resource manager or equivalent (56 percent).

TABLE 1: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS - COMPARED BY SURVEY STRATEGY

	<u>Overall</u>		<u>Phone</u>		<u>Mail</u>	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Level of Involvement</b>						
Leadership	59	37	34	44	25	31
Committee	42	27	15	19	27	34
Conference - Annual	43	27	20	26	23	29
Conference - Infrequent	14	9	9	11	5	6
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	63	40	29	38	34	42
Female	94	60	48	62	46	57
<b>Organization</b>						
Employer	52	33	31	40	21	26
College	106	67	47	60	59	74
<b>Size</b>						
< 1,000	11	7	4	8	7	9
1,000 - 2,500	18	11	9	12	9	11
2,500 - 5,000	19	12	8	10	11	14
5,000 - 10,000	23	15	10	13	13	16
10,000 - 20,000	33	21	19	25	14	18
> 20,000	52	33	27	35	25	32
<b>Position</b>						
College Dean	3	2	2	3	38	47
Placement Director	64	40	26	33	5	6
Associate	13	8	8	10	17	21
Assistant	27	17	10	13	12	15
Business Manager Overall	29	18	17	22	4	5
Regional	10	6	6	8	2	2
Human Resources Specialist	11	7	9	11	2	2
<b>Years of Experience (Averages)</b>						
Professional	10.6		11.5		9.6	
MCPA Member	7.7		7.9		7.6	

Comparisons between phone and mail respondents are also shown in Table 1. The mail survey captured a few more males (percentage wise), those who served on committees and attended conferences frequently, and college members than the phone survey. The phone survey captured more people involved in MCPA leadership, who attended conferences infrequently, and represented larger organizations. Essentially, the two approaches complimented each other, drawing upon a divergent membership to obtain a balanced profile. The one area of concern may be a slight over representation of college members.

*It is not possible to determine if these respondents reflect the profile of the entire MCPA membership. We have to assume that it does, unless, other demographic data become available for comparison. Task Force members who are very familiar with the MCPA membership should use their intuitive judgement as to whether the respondents represent MCPA as a whole. A valid observation derives from the use of both mail and phone surveys. Reliance solely on a mail format would have probably generated a low response rate, and a sample tilted toward women, colleges, and possibly those more involved in MCPA leadership.*

## CODING

Open-ended questions present problems for coding. Content analysis was used to group responses. Only one judge was used in establishing categories; thus, there is no independent confirmation that these are the most appropriate categories. The coding schemes are found in Appendix A and all open-ended responses, sorted by question, appear in Appendix B.

*If the Task Force should determine a different categorical arrangement would be more appropriate, the data can be re-coded. Please feel free to change terminology (category titles), as I was trying to be expedient. Note that Appendix B contains all written comments that appear on the surveys, including comments found adjacent to forced response items and appended to the end. It is important that each of you take time to read through the comments; even though it may become rather tedious. While responses tend to group into one or two categories per question, underneath this structure lie a rich variety of perceptions and beliefs. This is a very vibrant organization that outwardly is bound together along several key dimensions; yet it is driven by many divergent interests and subgroups.*

## RESULTS

The survey consisted of three parts. The first set of questions sought to draw out the benefits members perceive MCPA provides them. In the second set of questions, attention specifically focuses on the conference experience and the benefits derived from their attendance. These questions focused on conferences in general, not specifically the Dearborn conference. Some respondents chose to focus their comments specifically on Dearborn, however. Demographic questions comprised the final set of questions, as reported in Table 1. Several of these descriptors will be used to make comparisons.

Question 1: *What benefits do you receive from your membership in MCPA?*

This question asked respondents to reflect upon their MCPA membership and explore the benefits this relationship provided. Efforts were made to draw-out four or five benefits. Nearly everyone provided at least two with less than half providing three and only 10 percent providing five.

Grouping the 421 responses by major categories, the benefits members receive fall clearly into two groups: networking and professional development with 34 percent and 35 percent, respectively. The following figures provides a breakdown of reasons according to category.

Networking	34%
Professional Development	35%
Professional Growth	3%
Education	28%
Conferences	8%
Information	8%
Association	3%
Other	8%

Assuming that the first response listed on the survey is the most important factor to the individual, networking is clearly the major benefit with 58 percent of the respondents listing this first. Professional development appeared more as the second, third and fourth listed responses. By specific item, developing contacts (#101) was mentioned 87 times; followed by trends, issues, and current events (#202) with 56 and then a set of factors, professional relationships (#101), sharing ideas (#201) and conferences (#500), which received 37, 36, and 22 responses, respectively.

Question 2: *What do the three core elements of MCPA's mission statement mean to you?*

MCPA's mission statement sets forth three key elements to its members: professional development, professional support, and ethical practices. Since members may view the meaning or intent of an element differently, this question attempted to capture how these elements are being defined by members. Three response categories were provided for each element in an attempt to draw-out the most commonly used words or phrases.

Professional Development

Members define MCPA's professional development function as a conduit for obtaining information on current technologies, issues and trends and as a learning environment where education, training and understanding take place. Information and learning environment received 35 percent and 39 percent of the responses collectively. Additional attention was given to interaction (12 percent) and quality (12 percent). A few members considered MCPA to be "visionary".

By response order, learning environment was listed more often first with information broker spread over all three responses. The most common individual responses were information in general (54), followed by learning in general (45) and keeping current in the profession (26). A variety of other responses appeared ranging from quality enhancement and sharing common experiences, to research and developing new ideas.

Learning Environment	35 %
Information Broker	39 %
Interactions	12 %
Quality	12 %
Vision	2 %

### Professional Support

Clearly, MCPA is perceived as a facilitator to connect people who seek mutual support, contacts, mentors, and a place to share ideas in a motivational environment. This perspective captured 63 percent of the responses.

Other aspects of professional development were education through conferences where technological advances, current issues and strategies can be reviewed; administration and information which focus on the direct support of MCPA through publications (i.e. newsletter, directory), resources (labels, financial), and committees; and an identification that provides a professional voice.

Facilitator - Connector	63 %
Education	14 %
Information Purveyor	9 %
Administration	9 %
Identification	4 %

The specific categories that appeared frequently were: facilitator - general (55), network of contacts (40), sharing ideas (25) and partnership (24).

*The surprise with the distribution of responses was the absence of a strong identification with MCPA's administrative functions which provide professional support. The feeling that emanated from the comments was one of benign neglect: the old "taken for granted" argument. The efforts to provide hard administrative support, through publications, the executive director, awards and recognition, etc. just were not readily identified, even from those who have or are serving in leadership positions. It might be useful to designate administrative support as a separate core element of MCPA. While overlaps would exist with other dimensions, it would be harder to take these services for granted.*



## Ethical Practices

No topic provided such a range of emotional response as ethics. From "ethics as a way of life" to "don't see a need," feelings ran deep. This topic also generated the best mix of responses. Membership expects MCPA to provide leadership in this area by establishing ethical guidelines, educating members, facilitating discussion and awareness, and by combining responses for enforcer and handler, provide solutions for enforcing ethical standards. It is clearly evident that the majority of members want MCPA to be vigilant and forceful in this area. Several members commented that ethical issues should receive more attention at conferences.

Professional Code of Conduct	20%
Educator	21%
Guidelines	25%
Identifier	4%
Handler/Enforcer	10%
Facilitator	14%
Administration	4%
No Need	3%

Question 3: *What benefits do you expect to receive from your participation in MCPA's conferences?*

The coding scheme allowed for three benefits to be captured. The 364 responses were fairly evenly distributed over three primary benefits: networking and sharing (40%), information gathering (32%), and education through workshops, speakers, training and group meetings (30%). A few (6%) used conferences to "recharge their batteries," socialize, and see new places.

*Group meetings appear to be a highly effective way to achieve the desired benefits from attending a conference. Comments suggested that more time be given to group meetings during the conferences.*

Question 4: *How important is it to you that the conference meet the following needs?*

Respondents were presented a list of needs that MCPA attempts to provide members who attend a conference. Each need was rated from "not at all" important to "extremely" important to the respondent. Table 2 provides results for this set of questions. Respondents consider the identification of critical issues and professional relationships to be extremely important dimensions of a conference. Obtaining information and knowledge and skills to perform one's job were very important.

Examining an issue in-depth was rated as moderately to very important. Responses to this item tended toward the ends of the scale: either people liked this approach or they did not. Respondents also found a motivational environment to be moderately important.

Social activities received the lowest rating, being only somewhat important. Numerous comments focused on social activities, especially their expense, extravagance, and distraction from an environment that enables professional development.

Statistical tests were run to determine if different groups varied in their ratings on these factors. Gender proved to be significant in four instances. It was more important for women members to identify critical issues, to seek knowledge and skills to perform one's job better, and to obtain information on recent trends at conferences than men. The interaction between phone and gender indicated that men who responded by mail rated critical issues and focusing on a specific issue to be of less importance to them.

Other significant differences revealed that those who responded by mail placed more importance on obtaining knowledge/skills for job performance than phone surveys. Phone respondents, however, placed more importance on the need for a motivational environment. Level of participation in MCPA also appeared significant in an interaction with organization for information on recent trends: employers involved in MCPA leadership, employers who attended conferences infrequently, and college members who attend conferences regularly rated this need less important. Employers who attended regularly felt that providing information on trends was extremely important, rating this need higher than all other groups.

Level also appeared important with regards to providing a motivational environment. Those in leadership positions (or have held leadership positions) rated this need lower, as did those who attend conferences infrequently, than those participating at other levels.

*This section provides interesting insights into members perceptions on conferences:*

- *Social activities came under glaring scrutiny. Respondents realized, as you do, that the benefits of conference attendance is garnered through socializing. Professional relationships are promulgated; ideas are shared; and knowledge exchanged. Members are not sending a message to do away with social activities, in fact, I believe they seek more opportunities to interact. The issue is the costs associated with increasingly extravagant receptions and entertainment. These costs are becoming harder to justify on expense accounts; some members social style and beliefs are not consistent to these productions. Costs are clearly the predominant concern. Take this example into consideration: the estimated cost for the opening night reception for the Chicago conference is \$23,000 (see conference donor card). Without corporate sponsorship (assuming 700 attend), the cost per member is \$40. This is equivalent to one night's lodging (sharing a room) or the per diem to cover meals not provided by the conference. This is a serious problem that members say will only get worse as budgets continue to tighten.*

*The orientation of this project was to determine if there were differences between employers and college members. Few significant or major differences have appeared (yet). This grouping does not appear to be really important up to this point. Important differences do exist and they are:*

- *Gender. Women view conferences/MCPA differently than men. We know that women seek out and obtain information differently than men; women form and rely on professional relationships differently than men. Most of the differences pertain to information/knowledge issues. I have not explored a gender-experience interaction yet; but women have significantly fewer years of experience and years in MCPA than men. Men with more experience may weigh information/knowledge gathering as less important, as they are already established and set in their careers. Whatever may be pushing men and women along, the gender dynamics are certainly influencing MCPA.*
- *Survey Approach. The presence of this factor is disconcerting because you don't really want to see it emerge. In part, what you are seeing is the phenomena of socially acceptable answers; people on the phone reported, in most cases more favorably, because that is what they felt you wanted to hear. In exploring this further, the real key was the response pattern from men. Men who mailed in responses did not rate items as important as men who responded by phone. (Women, on the other hand, had nearly the same means throughout.) I am not sure if this is a problem as I need to look at the pattern more closely. If men in these two groups differ on certain characteristics, opportunities exist to target specific groups of men. If nothing emerges, then it is a survey bias where phone respondents were "being nice."*
- *Level of Involvement. Those in leadership positions view the organization differently. This thread is by no means strongly evident; it emerges and disappears across a number of the questions. At this time, I have not detailed a consistent pattern. But, I am reminded of a story: everyone starts at the same level (new members) with some emerging with special skills and rising to the heavens. As they enter into the clouds, the hope of those on the ground is that the ascenders return somewhere in close proximity to the rest of the membership. The results suggest that MCPA leaders may not be landing near the corporate body or they may just be stuck in the clouds.*

TABLE 2: RATING MEANS FOR CONFERENCE NEEDS WITH STATISTICAL DIFFERENCES IDENTIFIED

Identification Critical Issues	4.5	Gender (0.00) Phone X Gender (.029)
Focus Specific Issue	3.6	Phone X Gender (.062)
Present Knowledge/Skills	4.2	Phone (.008) Gender (.042)
Information	4.1	Gender (.015) Level X Organization (.033)
Professional Relationships	4.4	
Social Activities	2.8	
Motivational Environment	3.3	Phone (.003) Level (.056)

Question 5: *Which of your conference needs were best met?*

Nearly every respondent listed at least one conference need being met; about half listed two benefits; and only about ten percent listed three needs. As expected, members meet their needs in making contacts with other professionals and obtaining information on trends, issues, and current technology, with 45% and 39% of the responses, respectively. A few additional responses mentioned social/rest (6%), motivation/speakers (6%) and special group meetings (3%).

Contacts/Networks	45%
Information/Knowledge	39%
Special Groups	3%
Social	6%
Motivation	6%
All	2%
None	1%

Question 6: *Which of your conferences needs were not met?*

Two response categories were allocated to this question. Of the 152 responses listed, 18% indicated all their needs were met. Critical comments focused on information (35%) which described as not useful, lacked substance, not relevant, not oriented appropriately, or repetitious. The other major area of concern was on networking (16%); respondents felt the conference did not provide enough time to develop professional relationships, or the environment made it difficult to find people (connect). Other issues were format (10%) and program quality (10%) where concerns focused on too structured, too much emphasis on one thing, and not enough time for group meetings. Remaining comments identified too much emphasis on social activities, and lack of professional development.

*Clearly, providing or facilitating the delivery of information is the major function of MCPA. If the loops are not there, the members respond with concerns.*

Question 7: *What is the cost of attending a conference?*

This group of questions focused on the costs associated with attending conferences. One question simply asked if the registration costs were reasonable or not. The next question asked respondents to compare MCPA registration costs with registration costs of other conferences they may attend. The final three questions examined costs usually not covered in the registration fees, i.e. travel, lodging, and meals.

Table 3 provides the averages of the responses to these questions. The value of three (3) served as the mid-point on the scale (neither reasonable or unreasonable). Respondents viewed the registration costs as somewhat reasonable; in comparison to registration costs of other conferences, MCPA costs were about the same.

Most respondents believed that travel, lodging, and meal costs were somewhat reasonable. Answers were often qualified in that travel depended on where the conference was held. Spring conferences in out-of-the-way places raised concerns. Low cost travel hubs, i.e. Chicago, were encouraged as conference sites. The response to meals depended on what was covered by conference registration.

Significant groups are indicated in the column to the right of the overall means. In general, college members considered costs to be more unreasonable than employers; the same pattern appeared for women as compared to men. Another interesting pattern was the tendency for those in MCPA leadership positions to view costs more favorable than others.

With regards to MCPA registration fee compared to other conferences' fees, employers felt they were somewhat lower (mean = 2.7) than colleges (mean = 3.2). Employers who responded to the survey were more likely to view registration costs as lower. The exception was

.employers who served on committees (Level 2). This group and the group of college respondents who attend conferences infrequently considered registration fees much higher than other conferences they attended. It should be noted that for some members, the MCPA conference was the only one they attended during the year.

Travel costs provided mixed results with men who responded to the phone survey and employers who responded to the mail survey rated travel costs as less reasonable than others. The two groups that stood out, however, were employers who served on committees (felt travel unreasonable) and college members who attended regularly (neither).

Mixed reactions were also received on meals and lodging though the differences are a little more straight forward. Women viewed lodging as more reasonable than men; employers viewed meal costs as very reasonable while colleges felt neither way; and employers who served on committees and college members who attended regularly both felt that these costs were less reasonable than others viewed them.

TABLE 3: CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE COSTS

	<u>Overall (Mean)</u>	<u>Significant Differences (F Level)</u>
Registration	3.6 (Somewhat Reasonable)	
Compared to Other Conferences	3.0 (Neither)	Org. (.009) Phone X Org. (.034) Level X Org. (.028)
Travel	3.5 (Somewhat Reasonable)	Phone X Gender (.019) Phone X Org. (.05) Level X Org. (.000)
Lodging	3.7 (Somewhat Reasonable)	Gender (.038) Level X Org. (.013)
Meals	3.6 (Somewhat Reasonable)	Org. (.006) Level X Org. (.007)

Question 8: *Given the cost of attending MCPA conferences, what level of attendance can you expect to maintain?*

To obtain some indication how costs might be affecting MCPA conference attendance, respondents were asked to complete an opening phrase from a set of responses that ranged from "attend two conferences a year" to "decision to attend made before each conference."

Twenty five (25) percent of the respondents indicated that they could attend two conferences per year (Table 4). Another 21 percent checked they could attend one and often the second. Thus, slightly less than half were committed to regularly attending two conferences. At the other end, 17 percent said their decision to attend depended on who was selected from their offices to attend or the budget was finalized.

Several other observations can be derived from the breakdowns in Table 4:

- Employers can make a stronger commitment to attend both meetings than college members (29 percent to 24 percent). However, overall, employers are likely to attend only one meeting a year and 21 percent must wait to see who is selected to attend. College members make a stronger effort to attend two meetings a year. Overall, college members support two meeting (50 percent vs 39 percent).
- Men are more likely to attend two meetings than women. Women are more likely to be in situation where the decision to attend is made on a yearly basis.
- Those in leadership positions attend two conferences (70 percent) which is considerably higher than all other groups.
- Phone respondents indicated they were more likely to attend two conferences than male respondents. The imbalance seems to be between the first two responses: phone respondents gave what they thought callers wanted to hear, "I attend two meetings."

Question 9: *Considering all the costs associated with attending conferences (time, energy, and money), do you believe the benefits you receive outweigh the total cost of attending?*

Clearly, respondents believe the benefits outweigh the cost; 78 percent are positive (Table 4). College members, phone respondents, men, and those in leadership positions are extremely positive.

Those who attend irregularly are least likely to find the benefits outweigh the cost. If there was any area to examine it would be those who serve on committees. Within this group, 26 percent questioned whether benefits outweighed costs. These are obviously people who are committed to the organization. The other group that raised doubts that benefits may not exceed costs was women. There is not enough evidence yet to explain why these two groups stand out.

TABLE 4: COSTS AND ATTENDING CONFERENCES (Frequencies)

	Overall %	College %	Employer %	Phone %	Mail %	Men %	Women %	Leadership %	Committee %	Meeting % Reg.	Meeting % Infreq.
Two Conferences	25	24	29	30	21	29	23	41	21	14	7
One - Often Second	21	26	10	17	25	22	20	29	21	16	-
One - Occasionally Second	20	20	21	20	20	22	18	14	19	33	14
One Conference	15	14	17	13	17	14	16	8	19	21	14
One - Occasionally	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	-	-	2	14
Decision Made Each Year	12	10	15	14	10	8	15	5	17	9	36
Who Goes From Office	5	4	6	5	5	3	5	3	2	5	14
<b>Benefits to Attending</b>											
Yes	78	80	74	80	76	82	76	84	74	86	46
No	11	8	16	10	11	11	11	5	16	6	31
Not Sure	11	12	10	10	13	7	14	11	10	8	23