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# Table of Content

## Technology and Knowledge Management 1

Enhancing the Sense of Power and User Adoption in Gerontechnology: An Experimental Investigation of Near-Field Communication Lighting Systems <i>Weng Marc LIM, Pei-Lee TEH, Pervaiz Khalid AHMED, Alan H.S. CHAN, Soon-Nyeon CHEONG, Wen-Jiun YAP</i>	1
Relationship Among Individual Factors, Knowledge Sharing, and Work Performance: A Model from Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y Perspective <i>Amelia KURNIAWATI, T. M. A. ARISAMADHI, Iwan Inrawan WIRATMADJA</i>	6
Impact of Tacit and Explicit Knowledge on Knowledge Sharing at Indonesian Small and Medium Enterprise <i>Augustina Asih RUMANTI, T. M. A. ARISAMADHI, Iwan Inrawan WIRATMADJA</i>	11
Web Usability and Self-Efficacy in Promoting Individual Knowledge Sharing <i>Ceicalia TESAVRITA, Kadarsah SURYADI, Iwan Inrawan WIRATMADJA</i>	16
The Effects of R&D Engineers' Work Engagement and Workplace Climate on Positive Attitude to Knowledge Sharing Within Japanese R&D Workplace <i>Hideki SHIMIZU-TANAKA</i>	21
Applying Balanced Scorecard for Quality Assurance in Educational Management: A Case Study of a Research Group in a University <i>Soontarin NUPAP</i>	26
Evolution of Product Design and Development Process on Organizational Growth Stages : A Knowledge Management Strategy <i>Made ANDRIANI, Kadarsah SURYADI, T. M. A. ARISAMADHI, Joko SISWANTO</i>	30

## Operations Research 1

An Implementation of the Parallel Schedule-Generation Scheme for Applying Microsoft Excel's Evolutionary Solver to the Resource-Constrained Project Scheduling Problem RCPSP <i>Norbert TRAUTMANN, Mario GNÄGI</i>	35
Agile Energy Modelling: A Business Centric Approach <i>Megashnee MUNSAMY, Arnesh TELUKDARIE</i>	40
Elevator Performance Estimation Model Based on Square Lattices <i>Yoichi SHIMAKAWA, Yuki SATO, Hiroyuki GOTO</i>	46
Multi-Objective Constraint Optimization in Mail-Order Pharmacy Automated Distribution System <i>Toshiyuki MIYAMOTO, Natsuhito UENO, Debiao LI, Sang Won YOON</i>	51
Measuring Organizations' Operations Competitive Priorities <i>Andre VERMEULEN, Jan Harm C. PRETORIUS</i>	56
Single Machine Scheduling for Multi-Assembly Jobs with Preemption <i>Luksamon BOONMA, Ronnachai SIROVETNUKUL, Thana SARTTRA</i>	60
The Evaluation of Green Manufacturing: A DEA-Based Approach <i>Mei-Niang FAN, Jun-Der LEU, André KRISCHKE</i>	65

## Operations Research 2

A Two-Stage Heuristic Approach for Solving the Long-Term Unit Commitment Problem with Hydro-Thermal Coordination in Large-Scale Electricity Systems <i>Alexander FRANZ, Juergen ZIMMERMANN</i>	70
Relationship between Overall Equipment Effectiveness, Throughput and Production Part Cost in Semiconductor Manufacturing Industry <i>Chong KUAN ENG, Kam-Choi NG</i>	75
Formulation of Service Network Design with Time Requirements to Schedule Heterogeneous Fleet <i>Zujian WANG, Mingyao QI</i>	80
A Heuristic Algorithm for Maximizing the Total Weight of Just-In-Time Jobs Under Multi-Slot Conditions <i>Ryo SAITO, Eishi CHIBA</i>	84
A New Solution Representation for the Rectilinear Block Packing Problem <i>Ken MATSUSHITA, Yannan HU, Hideki HASHIMOTO, Shinji IMAHORI, Mutsumori YAGIURA</i>	89
Facility Location and Routing Decisions for a Food Delivery Network <i>Niraj Ramesh DAYAMA, Mohan KRISHNAMOORTHY</i>	94
Improving Column Generation Methods or Sheduling Problems Using ZDD and Stabilization <i>Roel LEUS, Daniel KOWALCZYK</i>	99

## Supply Chain Management 1

The Effect of Collaborative Communication, Power Dependency, and Price Satisfaction on Trust and Loyalty of Individual Farmers to Dairy Cooperative Case Study Dairy Supply Chain in Boyolali <i>Aries SUSANTY, Arfan BAKHTIAR, Hery SULLANTORO, Christopher MANALU</i>	104
Supply Chain Collaboration: A Triadic View <i>Lin HUANG, Yong LIN, Li ZHOU, Petros IEROMONACHOU</i>	109
Designing a Recycling Supply Chain Network for a Bottle Manufacturing Factory <i>Parichehr PAAM, Regina BERRETTA, Mojtaba HEYDAR</i>	114
Effect of Manufacturing Machines Upgrading on Green Supply Chain Planning <i>Elnaz MOAYYERI, Farzad DEHGHANIAN, Mahla BABAGOLZADEH</i>	119
Evaluation of Supply Chain Resilience Enhancement with Multi-Tier Supplier Selection Policy Using Agent-Based Modeling <i>Shijian CHEN, Kang TAI, ZhengPing LI</i>	124
Commodity Price Volatility Mitigation in Supply Chain Risk Management: Real Options to Assess the Value of Flexibility-Driven Strategies <i>Nicola COSTANTINO, Roberta PELLEGRINO, Danilo TAURO</i>	129

## Supply Chain Management 2

Applying the Volatility Models for Supply Chain Forecasting: The Case of the Taiwanese TFT-LCD Industry <i>Yi-Hui LIANG</i>	134
Capacity Investments and Technology Decisions Under Regulatory Uncertainty <i>Tarun JAIN, Jishnu HAZRA</i>	139

Correlation of Barriers to Reverse Logistics Performance Using Structural Equation Modeling <i>Pornwasin SIRISAWAT, Tossapol KIATCHAROENPOL</i>	144
A Review of Supply Network Configuration Literature and Decision Support Tools <i>Subodha DHARMAPRIYA, Senevi KIRIDENA, Nagesh SHUKLA</i>	149
Modeling Disruption Propagation in a Complex Supply Chain <i>Puay Siew TAN, Siang Guan LEE, Chin Sheng TAN</i>	154
Self-Assembly of Supplier Selection Strategies <i>Gabriel YEE, Yew Soon ONG, Puay Siew TAN</i>	159
<b>Engineering Education and Training</b>	
Gamification Based Lean Knowledge Dissemination: A Case Study <i>Rui SOUSA, Dorota STADNICKA, Jose DINIS-CARVALHO, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE, J. Ville ISOHERRANEN</i>	164
Trends Preventing Engineers from Obtaining Professional Registration with ECSA in the Required Time <i>Nishaal ROOPLALL, Annize MARNEWICK, Jan Harm C. PRETORIUS</i>	169
Attraction, Education and Retention of Technical Women in South Africa <i>Hannelie NEL, Johan MEYER</i>	174
A Comparison Study of Methods to Solve the Mental Health Problem Between the Engineering and Non-Engineering Students <i>Ming Foong LEE, W. M. H. WAN ADAM</i>	179
Competencies Model for Entrepreneur Development in Software Industries <i>Atya AISHA, Joko SISWANTO, Iman SUDIRMAN</i>	184
Broadening Access to Problem-Based Learning: Design of the Shell Eco-Marathon Car-In-A-Box Concept <i>Sune VON SOLMS, Johan MEYER, Warren HURTER</i>	189
A Study on Information System Quality Management on Productivity Monitoring Model in a Governmental Organization with Multi-Performance Objectives - A Case Study in National Iranian Gas Company <i>Ali MASSAELI</i>	194
<b>Quality Control and Management 1</b>	
Operational Excellence Evaluation Model for SMEs and Regional Findings <i>Ville ISOHERRANEN, Eija-Riitta NIINIKOSKI, Tapio MALINEN, Martti JOKINEN, Pekka KESS, Minna Katariina KARKKAINEN</i>	199
Software Test Estimation Tool: Comparable with COCOMOII Model <i>Shaiful ISLAM, Bishwajit Banik PATHIK, Manzur H. KHAN, Md. Mamun HABIB</i>	204
A Self-Starting Control Chart for Simultaneous Monitoring of Mean and Variance of Autocorrelated Simple Linear Profile <i>Amirhossein AMIRI, Reza GHASHGHAEI, Peyman KHOSRAVI</i>	209
The Effects of Violations of Assumptions in Multivariate Shewhart Control Charts <i>Sudarat NIDSUNKID, John BORKOWSKI, Kamon BUDSABA</i>	214
Design of Gamma Control Charts Based on the Narrowest Confidence Interval <i>Songhua HAO, Shuo HUANG, Jun YANG</i>	219

Monitoring Categorical Processes by Integrating Ordinal Information <i>Junjie WANG, Jian LI, Qin SU</i>	224
Assessing the Raters Agreement in the Diagnostic Catheter Tube Connector Production Process Using Novel Fuzzy Similarity Coefficient <i>Magdalena DIERING, Krzysztof DYCZKOWSKI</i>	228
<b>Human Factors 1</b>	
Intelligent Car Seat Design with Ingress, Egress and Sit-to-Stand Services <i>Seng Fat WONG, Bin LIN, Z. C. LUO, Y. F. CONG</i>	233
Criteria Based Ergonomic Assessment in a Manufacturing Industry <i>V. KAMALA, Malliga POOSANDARAM, G. M. PRIYANKA</i>	238
Pothole- and Patch Repair Failure Recurrence in Gauteng: The Human Influence <i>Joanne MULLER, Annlize MARNEWICK</i>	243
Investigating the RGB-D Camera Tracking Accuracy in Different Carrying Tasks <i>Pin-Ling LIU, Chien-Chi CHANG, Chih-Ting CHEN</i>	248
The Relation Between Performance of Lean Manufacturing and Employee' Mental Workload <i>Ari WIDYANTI, Wiku LARUTAMA</i>	252
Adoption of Near Field Communication in Hotel Industry Based on Risk Perspectives and Individual Characteristics <i>Kin Meng SAM, Chris CHATWIN</i>	257
<b>Human Factors 2</b>	
Indonesian Anthropometry Update Through Drillis & Contini Revisited and Structural Equation Modeling Incorporating Children, Adult and Elderly Populations <i>Markus HARTONO</i>	262
Effects of Morning-Night Differences and Sleep Deprivation on Situation Awareness and Driving Performance <i>Titis WIJAYANTO, Sunu WIBIRAMA, Zakian Zakaria MARYOTO, Mumtaz Naufal WINADI, M. BAHIT</i>	267
Identifying the Visual Interference by Design and Tactile Properties of Leathers Using Automobile Interior <i>Wonjoon KIM, Gee Won SHIN, Joong Hee LEE, Yushin LEE, Myung Hwan YUN</i>	272
Community Behavior During the Evacuation of Mount Merapi Eruption Disaster <i>Dwi HANDAYANI, Muhammad Kusumawan HERLIANSYAH, Budi HARTONO, Bertha Maya SOPHA</i>	276
How to Define the User's Tolerance of Response Time in Using Mobile Applications <i>Ronggang ZHOU, Shuang SHAO, Wen LI, Lei ZHOU</i>	281
Designing Meaningful User Experiences: Interactive Learning Experience Model <i>Simon KREMER, Tony SIES, Udo LINDEMANN</i>	286
<b>Healthcare Systems and Management</b>	
Low Cost Vision System for Human Gait Acquisition and Characterization <i>Paulo FERREIRA, João FERREIRA, Manuel CRISÓSTOMO, Ant3nio COIMBRA</i>	291
Practicing Information Therapy in Self-Care: A Solution to the Rise in Health Care Costs <i>Juha PUUSTJÄRVI, Leena PUUSTJÄRVI</i>	296



Benchmarking Lean Practices and Performance Measures of a Hospital <i>Gopalakrishnan NARAYANAMURTHY, Anand GURUMURTHY</i>	301
Comparison of 3D Scanning and 3D Modelling of a Workplace from Various Aspects <i>Marek BURES, Jiri POLCAR</i>	306
A Regression-Based Approach to Identifying Factors Affecting Operational Efficiency in Surgical Rooms <i>Jun-Der LEU, Larry Jung-Hsing LEE, Yi-Wei HUNAG</i>	311
Hierarchical Status and Job Idiosyncrasy in Formalized Organizations: A Field Study on Hospital Physicians <i>Severin HORNUNG, Juergen GLASER, Matthias WEIGL</i>	316
Simulation Study of Patient Arrivals and Doctors Scheduling in a Children's Emergency Department <i>Leslie CHIA, Weidong LIN</i>	321

### **Decision Analysis and Methods 1**

On the Use of Reference Profiles to Compute Alternative PROMETHEE II Rankings: A Preliminary Study <i>Nguyen Anh Vu DOAN, Yves DE SMET</i>	326
Group Decision Using Analytical Hierarchical Process: Surabaya's Universities Library in Digital Natives Perspective <i>Siana HALIM, Felecia FELECIA, Dian WULANDARI, Fransica Lucy SUSANTI</i>	331
A Ranking Method for Large Scale Competitions Based on Sample Grouping <i>Hsiang-Ching WANG, Yi-Feng HUNG, Hsiang-Hui HUNG</i>	335
A Cloud-Based Approach to Specifying New Components in Open Configuration <i>Linda ZHANG</i>	340
A Method to Group Reliability Data by Hierarchical Clustering <i>Sheng KANG, Wei-Ting Kary CHIEN</i>	345
Sustainable Maintenance Performance Evaluation Model for Cement Industry <i>Elita AMRINA, Dhova ARIDHARMA</i>	350
Human Capital, Social Capital and Innovation Outcome: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda <i>Arie Restu WARDHANI, N. ACUR, K. MENDIBIL</i>	355

### **Systems Modeling and Simulation 1**

Simulation and Optimisation Based Approach for Job Shop Scheduling Problems <i>Pooja KULKARNI, Jayendran VENKATESWARAN</i>	360
Using Animation to Develop a MOOC on Information Security <i>Cheuk Hang AU, Kyle Chun Sing LAM, Walter S. L. FUNG, Xin XU</i>	365
Simulation Approach for Practical Testing Improvement of Logistics Professional Qualification System Level 1 in Thailand <i>Chawalit MANISRI, Tharinee MANISRI, Jenjai LITTLE</i>	370
Integrating Usage Data into the Planning of Product-Service Systems <i>Daniel KAMMERL, Gabriel NOVAK, Christoph HOLLAUER, Markus MÖRTL</i>	375

An Investigation of Chloride Penetration and Maintenance Strategies for Concrete Structures by a Modeling Approach <i>Tharana YOSPRAKOB, Chaiwoot BOONYASIRIWAT, Farida CHAMCHOD</i>	380
Finite Element Modeling for Stress Analysis of a Buried Pipeline Under Soil and Traffic Loads <i>Natapol MEESAWASD, Supachara KONGNUAN, Chaiwoot BOONYASIRIWAT, Farida CHAMCHOD</i>	385
Quality Improvement by Variance Reduction of Component Using Learning Investment Allocation Model <i>Cucuk Nur ROSYIDI, Aris Wahyu NUGROHO, Wakhid Ahmad JAUHARI, Bambang SUHARDI, Kunihiro HAMADA</i>	391

## Systems Modeling and Simulation 2

General Conversion of Integer Programming Problems into Optimal Firing Sequence Problem of Petri Nets <i>Akito KODAMA, Tatsushi NISHI</i>	395
Routing Containers in a Dry Port Transport System <i>Stefano FAZI</i>	400
Signal Loss of RFID Technology with Short Distance and High Frequency <i>Seng Fat WONG, Weng Ian HO, K. C. SUN</i>	405
Concept of System Architecture Database Analysis <i>Kristin GOEVERT, Robert CLOUTIER, Michael ROTH, Udo LINDEMANN</i>	410
Modeling Indonesia's Rice Supply and Demand Using System Dynamics <i>Sinta SULISTYO, Bonitasari ALFA, Subagyo</i>	415
Mapping the Construction Innovation System in the Russian Federation: Conceptual Model Development <i>Emiliya SUPRUN, Rodney STEWART, Oz SAHIN, Kriengsak PANUWATWANICH</i>	420
A Module Partition Method Base on Complex Network Theory <i>Na ZHANG, Yu YANG, Yujie ZHENG</i>	424

## Intelligent Systems

Predictive Modeling of Corporate Credit Ratings Using a Semi-Supervised Random Forest Regression <i>Fumiaki SAITOH</i>	429
A Conceptual Framework of Decentralized Learning Neural Network Control Approach for Multi-Robot Cooperation in an Object Balancing Task <i>Nattapon JAISUMROUM, Pholchai CHOTIPRAYANAKUL, Sunpasit LIMNARARAT</i>	434
A New Approach for Solving Single Machine Total Weighted Tardiness (SMTWT) Problem <i>Qunjie FU, Tsui-Ping CHUNG</i>	438
Two-Stage Hybrid Flowshop Scheduling Problem with Waiting Time <i>Heng SUN, Tsui-Ping CHUNG</i>	442
Genetic Algorithm for Scheduling Double Different Size Crane System with Different Truck Ready Times <i>XiaoMeng GAO, Yang YANG, ZhenHui WU</i>	447

Financial and Strategic Impact of VCs on Start-up Development: Silicon Valley Decacorns vs. Northern-European Experience	452
<i>Mait RUNGI, Egon SAKS, Kristiina TUIISK</i>	

## **Safety, Security and Risk Management**

A Training and Development Skills to Support Product - Service Design from Informatics Perspective	457
<i>Anies Faziehan ZAKARIA, S.C. Johnson LIM</i>	
A Prediction Model of Hard landing Based on RBF Neural Network with K-means Clustering Algorithm	462
<i>Xiaoduo QIAO, Wenbing CHANG, Shenghan ZHOU, Xuefeng LU</i>	
Risk Perception and Safety Compliance of Construction Workers	466
<i>Nini XIA, Xueqing WANG, Wei NI, Xing LIU</i>	
Artificial Intelligence Improving Safety and Risk Analysis: A Comparative Analysis for Critical Infrastructure	471
<i>Alexander GUZMAN, Shuichi ISHIDA, Eugene CHOI, Atsushi AOYAMA</i>	
Risk-Based Decision Making in Complex Systems: The ALBA Method	476
<i>Simone COLOMBO</i>	
Developing Rail Safety Competencies Based on Accident and Incident Investigations: Using Root Cause Taxonomies to Learn from Accidents	481
<i>Ibrahim Mujdat BASARAN, Sinan YILMAZ</i>	

## **Reliability and Maintenance Engineering 1**

Mathematical Analysis of Soot Particles in Oil Used as System State Indicator	486
<i>David VALIS, Libor ZAK, Zdenek VINTR, Kamila HASILOVA</i>	
Simulation Study on the Influence of Process Parameters on the Hybrid Forging Quality of a Control Arm	491
<i>Jonathan ROSS, Johannes KNUST, Arne JAGODZINSKI, Malte STONIS, Bernd-Arno BEHRENS</i>	
Optimal Preventive Maintenance for System in Time-Varying Operation Condition	496
<i>Jiawen HU, Zuhua JIANG</i>	
Risk Based Inspection of Offshore Topsides Static Mechanical Equipment in Arctic Conditions	501
<i>Yonas Zewdu AYELE, Abbas BARABADI</i>	
Economic Life Prediction of Repairable Multi-Component Systems Based on Extension Theory	507
<i>Wenjun GONG, Yunxia CHEN, Yi YANG, Rui KANG</i>	
A Conditional Test for the Exponential Distribution in Load-Sharing Systems	512
<i>Kong YAONAN, Zhisheng YE</i>	
Two Dimensional Maintenance Contract with Coordination Between Owner and Agent	516
<i>Hennie HUSNIAH, Udjianna S. PASARIBU, Bermawi ISKANDAR</i>	

## Reliability and Maintenance Engineering 2

Issues and Challenges of Balancing Cost, Performance and Risk in Heavy-Haul Rail Asset Management <i>Gopinath CHATTOPADHYAY</i>	521
Evaluation of Mission Success for Binary System with Repairable Spare Parts <i>Zhiqiang CAI, Peng GUO, Yang LI, Weitao SI</i>	526
Reliability Improvement for Electrical Pneumatic Arm Loading System <i>Laith A. HADIDI, Abdullah F. ALKHALDI</i>	531
Modelling of Influence of Various Operational Conditions on Li-ion Battery Capability <i>David VALIS, Kamila HASILOVA, Jan LEUCHTER</i>	536
Bayesian Estimation for Failure Probability Through Bogey Test Data <i>Wanjiao WANG, Qingpei HU, Dan YU</i>	541
Investigating the Necessity of Acceleration in a Degradation Test <i>Lanqing HONG, Zhisheng YE, Xingqiu ZHAO</i>	546
Optimal Supply Planning for Two-Levels Assembly System with Stochastic Lead-Times and Maintenance Actions <i>Zouhour GUIRAS, Sadok TURKI, Nidhal REZG, Alexandre DOLGUI</i>	551

## Service Innovation and Management

Study on Hotel Revenue Management Without Explicitly Incorporating Competition <i>Nur Aini MASRUOH, Hafizha NABILA ABSARI, Yun PRIHANTINA MULYANI</i>	557
Measuring Service Productivity and Complexity in Medical Rescue Services <i>Markus HARLACHER, Andreas PETZ, Philipp M. PRZYBYSZ, Susanne MÜTZE-NIEWÖHNER, Christopher M. SCHLICK</i>	562
Electricity-Saving Behavior Antecedents: Electricity-Saving Motivations, Constraints, Knowledge and Beliefs <i>Hung Chih LAI, Yao Cheng YU, Yi-Min TUAN</i>	567
Characterization and Empirical Analysis of Variety-Induced Costs in Integrated Product-Service Systems (PSS) <i>Guenther SCHUH, Michael RIESENER, Jan KOCH, Stefan BREUNIG, Jan KUNTZ</i>	572
An Integration of Function- and Affordance-Based Methods for Product-Service System Utilizing Finite State Automata <i>Hyunwoong KO, Seung Ki MOON, Kristin L. WOOD, Hyung Sool OH</i>	577
Identification of Variant-Creating Factors in Product Service Systems <i>Guenther SCHUH, Jan KUNTZ, Katharina HEEG, Philipp JUSSEN, Jan KOCH, Stefan BREUNIG</i>	582
Software Development of a Catalogue of Engineering Symbols as an Add-On Facility for Use in CAD <i>Wilson R. NYEMBA, Charles MBOHWA</i>	587

## **E-Business and E-Commerce**

- How Reference Options Affect Customer Decisions in Product Configuration 592  
*Yue WANG, Guohua TANG*
- A Continuous Toolchain for User-Driven Customization 597  
*Michael ROTH, Lisa MAYR, Maik PLOETNER, Udo LINDEMANN*
- An Evaluation of Customer Repurchase Behaviour in Mobile Telecommunication Services in Australia 602  
*Hassan Shakil BHATTI, Ahmad ABARESHI, Siddhi PITTAYACHAWAN*
- Evaluation of Hospital Web Services Using Intuitionistic Fuzzy AHP and Intuitionistic Fuzzy VIKOR 607  
*Gülçin BÜYÜKÖZKAN, Orhan FEYZIOĞLU, Fethullah GOCER*

## **Technology and Knowledge Management 2**

- Research on Effect Factors Evaluation of Internet of Things (IOT) Adoption in Chinese Agricultural Supply Chain 612  
*Danping LIN, Carman Ka Man LEE, Kangwei LIN*
- Technology Acceptance Model of Internet Banking Service for Student's Tuition Fee Payment (Case Study: Public Government University) 616  
*Zulhans Ramadhan MAHAROESMAN, Iwan Inrawan WIRATMADJA*
- Strategic Planning of Immature Technologies for Serial Application Using the Example of Selective Laser Melting 621  
*Robin KOPF, Gisela LANZA*
- One's Fault is Another's Lesson: What Motivates the Employees to Participate in the Learning Activity? 626  
*Sanetake NAGAYOSHI, Jun NAKAMURA*
- Development of a Toolkit of Methods for Simulations in Product Development 631  
*Cristina CARRO SAAVEDRA, Nils Jorge MARAHRENS, Sebastian SCHWEIGERT, Philipp KESTEL, Simon KREMER, Sandro WARTZACK, Udo LINDEMANN*
- Evaluating the Regional Innovation Inputs Inequalities in China: Gini Coefficient Based on the Innovative Outputs 636  
*Yingying JIA, Peng GUO*
- Effect of Maintenance Resource Constraints on Flow-Shop Environment in a Joint production and Maintenance Context 641  
*Sandeep KUMAR, Bhupesh Kumar LAD*

## **Technology and Knowledge Management 3**

- Types of Knowledge Transferred in Family Business Succession 646  
*Nurul INDARTI, Gabriella Hanny KUSUMA*
- Experience Reuse to Improve Agility in Knowledge-Driven Industrial Processes 651  
*Valentina Maria LLAMAS, Thierry COUDERT, Laurent GENESTE, Juan Camilo ROMERO BEJARANO, Aymeric DE VALROGER*
- Research on Knowledge Push Method for Business Process Based on Multidimensional Hierarchical Context Model 656  
*Faping ZHANG, Li LI*

Study on Main Delivery Actors in Technology Delivery System (TDS) Based on Multi-Data Sources <i>Ying GUO, Ganlu SUN, Ying HUANG, Yun FU, Yue QIAN</i>	661
Does Innovation Promote Exports? Evidence from Chinese Manufacturing Firms <i>Ke Ji, Jianwei DANG, Kazumitsu NAWATA</i>	666
Product Configuration System and its Impact on Product's Life Cycle Complexity <i>Anna MYRODIA, Katrin KRISTJANSDOTTIR, Sara SHAFIEE, Lars HVAM</i>	670
Implementation of Lean Knowledge Work in Oil and Gas Industry - A Case Study from a Risk-Based Inspection Project <i>Andika RACHMAN, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE</i>	675

## Technology and Knowledge Management 4

Knowledge Societies and Their Role in Sustainable Development <i>Ambica DATTAKUMAR, Guan CHONG, Lin MALONE, Ravi S. SHARMA, Jesus Felix VALENZUELA</i>	681
Knowledge Roadmap Across Design and Engineering: An User-centric Didactic Approach <i>Arne Kjetil RUGAAS, Yang Yang ZHAO</i>	686
On the Estimation of Hospital Beds Occupancy After Hip Surgery <i>Sergio SOUSA, Cristina RODRIGUES, Eusebio NUNES</i>	691
Customization of the CAD Software in a Typical Drawing Office for a Power and Electricity Distribution Company in Zimbabwe <i>Wilson R. NYEMBA, Charles MBOHWA</i>	696
Process Improvement and Utilization of Machines in the Production Area of a Shoe Manufacturing Company <i>Ma. Carole MARCELO, Gerlie AVILA, Monti CRUZ, Baldwin PRADO, M. M. NAVARRO</i>	701
A Robust Design Based Methodology for Investigation of Optimal Parameters' Combination in Ultrasonic Assisted Face Grinding <i>Roman WDOWIK, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE</i>	706

## Operations Research 3

The Electric Vehicle Routing Problem with Time Windows and Battery Swapping Stations <i>Jinbo CHEN, Mingyao QI, Lixin MIAO</i>	712
Maintenance Data Allocation Model for Repairable Items in Echelon Inventory System <i>Mojahid F. SAEED OSMAN</i>	717
An Exact Approach for the Identical Parallel Machine Scheduling Problem with Sequence-Dependent Setup Times and the Job Splitting Property <i>Taha ARBAOUI, Farouk YALAOUI</i>	721
An Iterated Dual Substitution Approach for the Min-Max Regret Multidimensional Knapsack Problem <i>Wei WU, Manuel IORI, Silvano MARTELLO, Mutsunori YAGIURA</i>	726
Modeling Thailand Power Market: Mathematical Program with Equilibrium Constraints <i>Seksun MORYADEE</i>	731
A Robust Approach for Newsvendor Problem with the Alternative Product Under Price and Ordering Quantity Competitions <i>Takashi HASUIKE</i>	735

## Operations Research 4

Efficient Metaheuristic for Multi-Product Disassembly Lot Sizing Problem with Lost Sales <i>Mustapha HROUGA, Matthieu GODICHAUD, Lionel AMODEO</i>	740
An Application of Microsoft Excel's Evolutionary Solver Based on a Novel Chromosome Encoding Scheme to the 1/N Portfolio Tracking Problem <i>Oliver STRUB, Norbert TRAUTMANN</i>	745
Makespan Minimization in Aircraft Landing Problem Under Congested Traffic Situation Using Modified Artificial Bee Colony Algorithm <i>Kam Hung NG, Carman Ka Man LEE</i>	750
The Resource Transfer Problem: Modeling and Solving Integrated Scheduling and Routing Problems <i>Illa WEISS, Christoph SCHWINDT</i>	755
U-shaped Line Balancing Model with an Uncertainty Time on some Tasks <i>Suthep VARNASILPIN, R. MASUCHUN</i>	760
Joint Financing Strategy for a Cash-Constrained Supply Chain <i>Jinjin ZHANG, Ting NIE, Junzhe HUANG, Yan CHEN</i>	764

## Operations Research 5

A Hybrid Supplier Selection Model Considering Non-Homogeneous Group Decision Makers <i>Tuan Son NGUYEN, Sherif MOHAMED, Anisur RAHMAN</i>	769
A Score-Based Dispatching Rule for Job Shop Scheduling <i>Ahmed W. EL-BOURI</i>	774
Maintenance Optimization Considering Winterization Problem for the Power Supply System of Railway in Norway <i>Fuqing YUAN</i>	779
A Linear Programming Based Iterative Heuristic for the Recreational Vehicle Scheduling Problem <i>Sarang KULKARNI, Andreas ERNST, Abhiram RANADE, Mohan KRISHNAMOORTHY</i>	784
The One-Shot Decision Theory Based Production Planning Models <i>Xide ZHU, Peijun GUO</i>	789
Analysis of Visual Representation Techniques for Product Configuration Systems in Industrial Companies <i>Sara SHAFIEE, Katrin KRISTJANSDOTTIR, Lars HVAM, Alexander FELFERNIG, Anna MYRODIA</i>	793

## Supply Chain Management 3

Dynamic Priority Repair Policy for Service Parts Supply Chain <i>Aghil REZAEI SOMARIN, Sobhan ASIAN, Songlin CHEN</i>	798
Reverse Logistics Service Provider Selection: A TOPSIS-QFD Approach <i>Vipul JAIN, Sharfuddin Ahmed KHAN</i>	803
Integrated Methodology for Supplier Selection in Supply Chain Management <i>Naveen JAIN, Amit Raj SINGH, Akhilesh CHOUDHARY</i>	807
Supply Chain Management Framework Development for New Multiple Life Cycle Product Development <i>Mohamad Fariz MOHAMED NASIR, Abd Rahman ABDUL RAHIM, Halim Shah HAMZAH</i>	812

Assessing the Effectiveness of Diesel and Petrol Supply Chain: A Case of Namibia <i>Tupomukumo IYAMBO, Michael MUTINGI, Charles MBOHWA</i>	817
---	-----

#### **Supply Chain Management 4**

Empirical Studies of New Product Diffusion Under Uncertainty <i>Jayendran VENKATESWARAN, Siddhartha PAUL, R. VIDYADHAR, Chetan Singh SOLANKI, N.C. NARAYANAN</i>	822
Make Sure You Understood Your Strategic Partner in Your Buyer-Supplier Relationship <i>Alireza FARAZ, Zach ZACHARIA, Markus GERSCHBERGER</i>	827
Development of Risk Assessment Model for Farmers in Tomato Supply Chain <i>Gowri RAJAGOPAL, Malliga POOSANDARAM, R. KALA</i>	831
Game Theoretical Analysis of Supply Chain Configurations <i>Soh SAKURAI, Tatsushi NISHI</i>	836
Relating Supply Chain Integration with the Culture and Strategy of its Constituent Members: A Theoretical Framework <i>Dhan SINGH, R R K. SHARMA</i>	841
Maturity Model For Supply Chain Collaboration: CMMI Approach <i>Thi Phuong Dung HO, Arun KUMAR, Nirajan SHIWAKOTI</i>	845
Estimating the On-Time Probability for Vendor Selection Problem <i>B. Ashish KUMAR, Parthasarathy RAMACHANDRAN, Girish MODGIL</i>	850

#### **Supply Chain Management 5**

Inter-Organizational Trust and Knowledge Sharing Model Between Manufacturer and Supplier in the Automotive Industry <i>Fadillah RAMADHAN, T. M. A. ARISAMADHI</i>	856
Modeling and Evaluation of Overbooking Rules for Primary Health Care Clinic with Different Patient Behavior <i>Ping FAN, D. FAN, Yong-Hong KUO, Yan CHEN</i>	861
Integrated Versus Non-Integrated Perspectives of Auditors Concerning the New ISO 9001 Revision <i>J. Pedro DOMINGUES, Luis FONSECA, Paulo SAMPAIO, Pedro AREZES</i>	866
Fuzzy-AHP Approach for Warehouse Performance Measurement <i>Sharfuddin Ahmed KHAN, Fikri DWEIRI, Amin CHAABANE</i>	871
Statistical Process Control Automation in the Final Inspection Process: An Industrial Case Study <i>Liliana GUERRA, Sergio SOUSA, Eusebio NUNES</i>	876

#### **Quality Control and Management 2**

Application of Quality Function Deployment to Improve Smart Services Applications, Dubai Public Entity as a Case Study <i>O. A. L. ZAWATI, Fikri DWEIRI</i>	881
Acceptance Sampling Plans Based on Truncated Life Test for the Generalized Weibull Model <i>Shovan CHOWDHURY</i>	886



Heteroscedastic Linear Model Based Reliability Evaluation for Solar Cell Degradation Testing <i>Zhidong SHENG, Rui LIANG</i>	890
Integrating Lean Six Sigma with ISO 9001:2015 <i>Pedro Alexandre MARQUES, Paulo MEYRELLES, Pedro SARAIVA, Francisco FRAZÃO GUERREIRO</i>	894
Refining of Heat Treatment Process Parameters on Large Cup-Type SAE4140 Alloy <i>Pai-Chung TSENG, Y. C. TENG, P. SAWADOGO</i>	899

## **Production Planning and Control 1**

Solving the Scheduling Problem of Machines with Auxiliary Tools <i>Ya-Chu YANG, Yu-Ting LIN, Yi-Feng HUNG</i>	903
Solving Cutting Scheduling Problem by Simulated Annealing Search Method <i>Kuan-Ting TUNG, Chih-Yu CHEN, Yi-Feng HUNG</i>	907
Testing Multiple Threads Tabu Search by Solving Scheduling Problems <i>Shuo-Cheng SHUN, Yi-Feng HUNG</i>	912
Comparisons of Three Mixed Integer Programming Models for Parallel Machine Scheduling <i>Shan-Hao YU, Yi-Feng HUNG</i>	917
Modeling Fabric Cutting Scheduling as Mixed Integer Programming <i>To-Ju WANG, Jia-Ying PENG, Yi-Feng HUNG</i>	922
Integration Aggregate Production Planning and Maintenance Using Mixed Integer Linear Programming <i>M. ERFANIAN, Mohammadali PIRAYESH</i>	927
Production Planning for Customer Innovated Products <i>Johannes ATUG, Andreas HEES, Marcel WAGNER, Stefan BRAUNREUTHER, Gunther REINHART</i>	931

## **Production Planning and Control 2**

An Optimization Model Integrated Production Scheduling and Preventive Maintenance for Group Production <i>Wenzhu LIAO, Xiufang ZHANG, Min JIANG</i>	936
Reducing Schedule Nervousness in Production and Operations Under Non-Stationary Stochastic Demand: The Case of an Airline Catering Company <i>Narat HASACHOO, Ruedee MASUCHUN</i>	941
Joint Optimization of Flowshop Sequence-Dependent Manufacturing Cell Scheduling and Preventive Maintenance <i>Hanxin FENG, Wen DA, Hao HUANG, Lifeng XI, Ershun PAN</i>	946
Integrated Preventive Maintenance and Production Scheduling Optimization on Uniform Parallel Machines with Deterioration Effect <i>Wen DA, Hanxin FENG, Ershun PAN</i>	951
The Planning and Documentation Problem of Emergent Changes <i>Peter SJÖGREN, Johannes HECK</i>	956
Investigating Production Planning and Control Challenges in the Semi-Process Industry, the Case of a Metal Parts Producer <i>Philipp SPENHOFF, Marco SEMINI, Daryl POWELL</i>	961

## Manufacturing Systems 1

A Method to Generate Lattice Structure for Additive Manufacturing <i>Dinh Son NGUYEN, Frederic VIGNAT</i>	966
Make or Buy Analysis Model in a Multi-Stage Manufacturing Processes <i>Cucuk Nur ROSYIDI, Mega Aria PRATAMA, Wakhid Ahmad JAUHARI, Bambang SUHARDI, Kunihiro HAMADA</i>	971
A Fuzzy Logic Expert System for the Automated Generation of Roadmaps for Automated Guided Vehicle Systems <i>Sarah UTTENDORF, Björn EILERT, Ludger OVERMEYER</i>	977
Influencing Factors on Goal Achievement in Teamwork of Production Teams <i>Robert STRANZENBACH, Susanne MÜTZE-NIEWÖHNER, Philipp M. PRZYBYSZ, Christopher M. SCHLICK</i>	982
Heuristics for Minimizing the Total Tardiness in a Re-Entrant Hybrid Flow Shop With Non-Identical Machines in Parallel <i>Xiang Yi ZHANG, Lu CHEN</i>	987
Machine and Production Scheduling Under Electricity Time Varying Prices <i>MohammadMohsen AGHELINJAD, Yassine OUAZENE, Alice YALAOUI</i>	992

## Manufacturing Systems 2

A Finite Element Simulation for Shape Influences of the Drawbead on the Non-Symmetrical Deep Drawing Process <i>Sirichai TORSAKUL, Alexander BREZING</i>	997
Active Energy Saving Strategy for Sensible Manufacturing Systems Operation Based on Real Time Production Status <i>Junfeng WANG, Jin XUE, Yi FENG, Shiqi LI, Yan FU, Qing CHANG</i>	1001
External Buildings Retrofit: Employing Guillotine Cuts for Aesthetic Envelopes <i>Andres Felipe BARCO, Michel ALDANONDO, Elise VAREILLES, Paul GABORIT</i>	1006
A Hybrid Discrete Cuckoo Search Algorithm for Cell Formation Problem with Alternative Process Routings and Operation Sequence <i>Hao HUANG, Hanxin FENG, Ershun PAN, Lifeng XI</i>	1011
Non-Cyclic Scheduling of Dual-Armed Cluster Tools for Bi-Objective Minimization of Wafer Residence Time and Makespan <i>Masaru SAKAI, Tatsushi NISHI</i>	1016
Internet of Things Value for Mechanical Engineers and Evolving Commercial Product Lifecycle Management System <i>Satoshi GOTO, Osamu YOSHIE, Shigeru FUJIMURA</i>	1021
Variation of Elastic Modulus During Cold Drawing of Seamless Tubes and it's Influence on Springback <i>Dada KARANJULE, Sunil BHAMARE, Thota RAO</i>	1025

### **Manufacturing Systems 3**

MES to ERP Integration: Rapid Deployment Toolset <i>Arnesh TELUKDARIE</i>	1030
Intelligent Modeling and Multi-Objective Optimization of Powder Mixed Electrical Discharge Diamond Grinding of MMC <i>Ashvarya AGRAWAL, Avnish Kumar DUBEY, Pankaj Kumar SHRIVASTAVA</i>	1036
Process Parameters Optimization for Multiple-Inputs-Multiple-Outputs Pulsed Green Laser Welding via Response Surface Methodology <i>Safwan ALTARAZI, Leen HIJAZI, Elke KAISER</i>	1041
Inventory Management Models and Their Effects on Uncertain Demand <i>Ndivhuwo NEMTAJELA, Charles MBOHWA</i>	1046
Machine Reliability Modelling in Manufacturing: A Continuous-Time State-Dependent Heterogeneous Markov Chain Approach <i>Na LI, Xin YU, Mike ZHANG</i>	1050
Seru Loading with Worker-Operation Assignment in Single Period <i>Lan LUO, Zhe ZHANG, Yong YIN</i>	1055

### **Decision Analysis and Methods 2**

The Choice of a Collaboration Form - A Special Insight in the Case of R&D Consortia <i>Xiao-Li CHEN, Christina HESSE, Ralph RIEDEL, Egon MÜLLER</i>	1059
Biogas Use as Fuel in Spark Ignition Engines <i>Temitope KUKOYI, Edison MUZENDA, Esther AKINLABI, Able MASHAMBA, Charles MBOHWA, Thabo MAHLATSI</i>	1064
A Weighted Preference Graph Approach to Analyze Incomplete Customer Preference Information in QFD Product Planning <i>Pai ZHENG, Xun XU, Shane XIE</i>	1070
Generating Decision Rules for Flexible Capacity Expansion to Achieve Better Lifecycle Performance <i>Junfei HU, Peng GUO, Kim Leng POH, Linbo LUO</i>	1075
A Model of the N-Player Multiple Period Bargaining Game with Equal Discounting Rate <i>Pongsakorn NIMNUAL, Naraphorn PAOPRASERT</i>	1080
Performance Comparison of Two Truth Telling Incentive Mechanisms: An Experimental Method <i>Min YANG, Caijia JIA, Zhuwei WANG</i>	1085
POLCA Simulation Game for Job Shop <i>Whee Ching HOW, Kuan Eng CHONG</i>	1091

### **Decision Analysis and Methods 3**

Multi-Criteria Performance Management Methodology for Decision Support in Industrial Project Selection Problems <i>Fan LI, Alain ETIENNE, François VERNADAT, Ali SIADAT</i>	1096
A Real Options Investment Model for the Evaluation of Wind and Photovoltaic Plants <i>Mauro MANCINI, Roberto SALA, Daniele TEDESCO, Agnese TRAVAGLINI</i>	1101

Conflict Analysis in Redevelopment of Brownfield Caused by Contingency: Tianjin Port “8•12” Explosion Hazard, in China <i>Xia LI, Yuming ZHU, Yumeng SHI</i>	1106
Theory of Inventive Problem Solving (TRIZ) Based Contradiction Resolution Strategies for Shaanxi Aviation Industrial Upgrading <i>Wenqi YAN, Yuming ZHU, Naveed AHMAD</i>	1111
About the Computation of Robust PROMETHEE II Rankings: Empirical Evidence <i>Yves DE SMET</i>	1116
Risk Perception, Risk Propensity, and Unsafe Behavior: An Empirical Study of Workers in Chinese Construction Industry <i>Yiping HUANG, Xueqing WANG, Ruxi DING, Nini XIA</i>	1121

#### **Decision Analysis and Methods 4**

A Fuzzy TOPSIS Approach in Multi-Criteria Decision Making for Supplier Selection in a Pharmaceutical Distributor <i>Kaushik NAG, Magdy HELAL</i>	1126
Excellence in Integrating Care into the Product Development Process: A Case Study of Nokia <i>Jukka MAJAVA, J. Ville ISOHERRANEN</i>	1131
A Combination Use of Bagging and Random Subspace with Memory Mechanism for Dynamic Financial Distress Prediction <i>Chong WU, Jiaming LIU</i>	1136
Collaborative Distribution - Application to the City of Yogyakarta, Indonesia <i>Anna Maria Sri ASIH, Wandhansari Sekar JATININGRUM, Bertha Maya SOPHA</i>	1141
Minimal Cost Stable Workforce Allocation in Presence of Ties <i>Mangesh GHAROTE, Rahul PATIL, Sachin LODHA</i>	1146
Rule-Based Discrete Event Simulation for Optimising Railway Hump Yard Operations <i>Harshad KHADILKAR, Sudhir Kumar SINHA</i>	1151

#### **Project Management 1**

Knowledge Management Maturity and Firm’s Performance: Firm’s Size as a Moderating Variable <i>Budi HARTONO, Nurul INDARTI, Kah-Hin CHAI, Sinta SULISTYO</i>	1156
Guidelines for Building Information Modeling (BIM) Performance Improvement in the EPC industry <i>Andrea BOTTARI, Gabriele IOUDIUX, Mauro MANCINI, Agnese TRAVAGLINI</i>	1161
Predicting the Effect of Wastes on Project Cost Using Multiple Linear Regressions <i>Khanh HA DUY, Kim SOO YONG</i>	1166
Structuring Highly Iterative Product Development Projects by Using HIP-Indicators <i>Günther SCHUH, Michael RIESENER, Frederic DIELS</i>	1171
Project Success Factors: The Opinion of Facilities Managers <i>Edoghogho OGBEIFUN, Charles MBOHWA, Jan Harm C. PRETORIUS</i>	1176
Performance Metrics in Engineering Change Management - Key Performance Indicators and Engineering Change Performance Levels <i>Niklas KATTNER, Tianyi WANG, Udo LINDEMANN</i>	1180

## Project Management 2

Investigating the Effects of Replacing the Project Manager During Project Execution <i>James DUBBER, Jan Harm C. PRETORIUS</i>	1185
Multistakeholder Engagement in the Face of Stakeholder Adversities Among Globally Distributed ICT Projects - A Conceptual Model and a Research Agenda <i>Krishnan MYSORE, Abbas ELMUALIM, Konstantinos KIRYTOPOULOS</i>	1190
An MIP-Based Heuristic for Scheduling Projects with Work-Content Constraints <i>Adrian ZIMMERMANN</i>	1195
Process Maturity Models for the Development of Mechatronic Products <i>Christoph HOLLAUER, Lennart HORNAUER, Udo LINDEMANN</i>	1200
The Key Drivers of Sustainability <i>Hosein DANESHPOUR, Josu TAKALA</i>	1205
Success by Efficient Resource Planning in a Project Based Environment <i>Mandy THURM, Ralph RIEDEL, Egon MÜLLER</i>	1210
Methods Collection to Support Requirements Engineering with Focus on Structuring and Consolidation of Requirements <i>Dominik WEIDMANN, Niklas KATTNER, Christoph HOLLAUER, Lucia BECERRIL, Nepomuk CHUCHOŁOWSKI, Udo LINDEMANN</i>	1215

## Project Management 3

Solving a Multi-Objective Mathematical Model for a Multi-Skilled Project Scheduling Problem by CPLEX Solver <i>Reza KIA, Parisa SHAHNAZARI-SHAHREZAEI, Sina ZABIHI</i>	1220
Determinants of On-Going Trust Within a Collaboration <i>Xiao-Li CHEN, Ralph RIEDEL, Anne GOETZE, Egon MÜLLER</i>	1225
Why Construction Workers' Workplace Deviant Behavior Happens? The Effect of Psychological Ownership <i>Xing LIU, Xueqing WANG, Nini XIA</i>	1230
Scenario Selection Optimization in System Engineering Projects Under Uncertainty: A Multi-Objective Ant Colony Method Based on a Learning Mechanism <i>Majda LACHHAB, Thierry COUDERT, Cedrik BÉLER</i>	1235
An Approach for Improving Method and Model Application in Engineering Design Processes: Case Study of a German Plant Engineering Company <i>Christoph HOLLAUER, Peter RIEBL, L. BECERRIL, N. KATTNER, D. WEIDMANN, N. CHUCHOŁOWSKI, Karl RUHLAND, Karl AMANN, Udo LINDEMANN</i>	1240
The Need for Integration Between Organizational Project Management and Change Management <i>Julien POLLACK</i>	1245

## Facilities Planning and Management

Performance Enhancing in the Manufacturing Industry: An Improvement KATA Application <i>Jose DINIS-CARVALHO, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE, Dorota STADNICKA, Rui SOUSA, J. Ville ISOHERRANEN, Maneesh KUMAR</i>	1250
---	------

Optimal Re-Arrangement in Fast Enumeration for Integer Programming Problems <i>Shin-Guang CHEN</i>	1255
Assessing E-Waste Recycling Programs by Developing Preference Selection Index Under Interval Type-2 Fuzzy Uncertainty <i>V. MOHAGHEGHI, S. M. MOUSAVI, Ali SIADAT</i>	1259
Overall Reliability Index Development for Railway Infrastructure and Rolling Stock with Case Study <i>Fuqing YUAN</i>	1264
Complementing a Delphi Exercise with a Focus Group Session <i>Edoghogho OGBEIFUN, Charles MBOHWA, Jan Harm C. PRETORIUS</i>	1269
Research on Incentive Policies of Medical Information Sharing of Medical Consortium in China Based on the Principal-Agent Theory <i>Qiang ZHANG, Liya WANG, Jinze CHAI, Donghao PEI, Zhibin JIANG</i>	1274
<b>Big Data and Analytics</b>	
An Independent Study of Two Deep Learning Platforms – H2O and SINGA <i>Selina NG, Wei ZHU, Wilson TANG, Louis WAN, Andrew WAT</i>	1279
Sparse-Reduced Computation for Large-Scale Spectral Clustering <i>Philipp BAUMANN</i>	1284
A New Area Linearization Method for Unequal Area Facility Layout Problem <i>Yue XIE, Shenghan ZHOU, Yiyong XIAO, Wenbing CHANG</i>	1289
Evaluation of Air Traffic Management System Using a Hybrid Model <i>Yuefei MA, Xiaoyue WU</i>	1294
Vessel Speed Analytics Using Satellite-Based Ship Position Data <i>Roar ADLAND, Haiying JIA</i>	1299
<b>Redesign of Thresher Machine for Farmers Using Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA) Method</b> <i>Nilda Tri PUTRI, Lusi SUSANTI, Anugrah TITO, Agus SUTANTO</i>	<b>1304</b>
Parameter Estimation for Load-Sharing Systems with Degrading Components <i>Bin LIU, Jianyu XU, Xiujie ZHAO</i>	1310
<b>Engineering Economy and Cost Analysis</b>	
Risk Assessment in Costing Systems Using Costing at Risk (CaR): An Application to the Coffee Production Cost <i>Victor Javier JIMÉNEZ, Paulo AFONSO</i>	1315
A Risk Addendum for Complex Risky Projects <i>Pradip K BHAUMIK</i>	1320
Supporting Product Platform Decisions with Lifecycle Costing <i>Sebastian MAISENBACHER, Kristin GOEVERT, Udo LINDEMANN, Markus MÖRTL</i>	1325
Reliability Analysis of Dynamic Reliability Blocks Through Conversion into Dynamic Bayesian Networks <i>Kanjing LI, Ren YI, Zheng MA</i>	1330
Simulating Dynamic Vehicle Routing Problem Using Agent-Based Modeling and Simulation <i>Bertha Maya SOPHA, Afriana SIAGIAN, Anna Maria Sri ASIH</i>	1335

### Reliability and Maintenance Engineering 3

Evaluation of Customer's Risk to Lifetime Warranty <i>Anisur RAHMAN</i>	1340
Comparison of Big Data Analyses for Reliable Open Source Software <i>Yoshinobu TAMURA, Shigeru YAMADA</i>	1345
Kinetic Reliability Analysis of Space Four-Links Mechanism Considering Wear <i>Yu SHI, Bifeng SONG, Tianxiang YU, Yugang ZHANG</i>	1350
Decision-Support Approach for Selecting the Suitable Maintenance Policy <i>Nasser Youssouf MAHAMOUD, Pierre DEHOMBREUX, Marc PIRLOT, Hassan ELMI ROBLE</i>	1355
A Quantitative Study on the Impact of Opportunistic Maintenance in the Presence of Time-Varying Costs <i>Huy TRUONG BA, Michael E. CHOLETTE, Pietro BORGHESANI, Lin MA</i>	1360
Time Series of Multivariate Zero-inflated Poisson Counts <i>Chen ZHANG, Nan CHEN, Linmiao ZHANG</i>	1365
A Fuzzy Logic Based Approach for Deciding the Corrective Action to Minimize Vibration Induced Fatigue Damage on Offshore Pipework <i>Arvind KEPRATE, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE</i>	1370

### Reliability and Maintenance Engineering 4

Reliability Analysis Method of Phased-Mission Nuclear Power Equipment Based on Goal Oriented Methodology <i>Huina MU, Jianwen LIU, Mingchao LU, Jianfeng CHEN, Xiaojian YI</i>	1375
Machinery Classification and Prioritization: Empirical Models and AHP Based Approach for Effective Preventive Maintenance <i>Katarzyna ANTOSZ, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE</i>	1380
A Partitioning Method of Experimental Levels for Low Failure Probability Estimation Problems <i>Kunling SONG, Yugang ZHANG, Xinshui YU, Bifeng SONG</i>	1387
Reliability Analysis of Rubber O-rings Used in the Rockets <i>Li SUN, Xiaohui GU, Lei FENG, Yi DI</i>	1392
Joint Optimization of Degradation-Based Burn-in, Quality, and Preventive Maintenance <i>Zhen CHEN, Yapin LI, Ershun PAN</i>	1397
Critical Success Factors for Developing Building Maintenance Strategies: A Case of Namibia <i>Michael MUTINGI, Rudolf KALUMBU, Charles MBOHWA</i>	1402
Selecting a Modeling Approach for Predicting Remnant Fatigue Life of Offshore Topside Piping <i>Arvind KEPRATE, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE</i>	1407

### Reliability and Maintenance Engineering 5

Railway Switches and Crossings Reliability Analysis <i>Behzad GHODRATI, Stephen FAMUREWA, Seyed Hadi HOSEINIE</i>	1412
Nonparametric Information Criterion for Change Point Problems <i>Asokan MULAYATH VARIYATH, Chithran Vadaverkkot VASUDEVAN</i>	1417

A Maintenance Waste Risk Appraisal Model Based on Modified Failure Mode and Effect Analysis (FMEA) 1422

*Agung SUTRISNO, Indra GUNAWAN, Iwan VANANY, Hadi Akbarzadeh KHORSHIDI*

The Reliability Analysis of Repairable K-Out-of-N Systems with Component Lifetimes and Repair Time Subjected to Phase-Type Distribution 1426

*Wei WANG, Tong CHEN, Di PENG*

Preventive Maintenance Operations Based on Weighted Similarity Coefficient 1431

*Abdelhakim ABDELHADI, Tamara KHREIS*

Analysis on Reliability Model for Warm Standby System with a Repairman Taking Multiple Vacations Based on Phase-Type Distribution 1436

*Fang LI, Dongliang YIN, Bin HU*

### **Information Processing and Engineering**

Hybrid Methods of Particle Swarm Optimization and Spatial Credibilistic Clustering with a Clustering Factor for Image Segmentation 1443

*Peihan WEN, Dongqun ZHOU, Meng Jie WU, Shuping YI*

Information Processing and Knowledge Discovery Framework for Sustainable Building Environment Using Multiple Sensor Network 1448

*S.C. Johnson LIM, Safullizam PUTEH, Kai Chen GOH*

An Explorative Study on Management and Maintenance of Systems for Design and Manufacture of Customized Products 1453

*Morteza POORKIANY, Joel JOHANSSON, Fredrik ELGH*

Determining the Relationship Between Psychological and Physiological Measurements of Human Trust Using Rough Set Analysis 1458

*Wei Shiung LIEW, Halimahtun MOHD KHALID, Parham NOORALISHAHI, Zeeshan RASOOL, Chu Kiong LOO, Martin HELANDER*

SPSA-Based PID Parameters Optimization for a Dual-Tank Liquid-Level Control System 1463

*Xiangsong KONG, Lingwu QIAN, Ziyang WANG*

A Disassembly Complexity Assessment Method for Sustainable Product Design 1468

*Samyeon KIM, Seung Ki MOON, Su Min JEON, Hyung Sool OH*

Factors That Drive Purchasing Performance in Engineering Procurement and Construction Companies 1473

*Gitesh CHAVAN, Ranjan CHAUDHURI*

### **Poster**

Matching Successful Supply Chain Configuration Practices of Best Performer Suppliers with Clients' Wishes: Guidelines for the Italian Engineered Valve Suppliers of the Oil & Gas Sector 1478

*Guido J. L. MICHELI, Enrico CAGNO, Gianlorenzo PADOVANI*

Earthquake Disaster Emergency Supply Chain Performance Evaluation Based on Triangular Fuzzy Numbers 1483

*Fumin DENG, Xiaoyun ZHANG, Xuedong LIANG, Chao BAO, Zhaoxia GUO*

A Method of Predicting Demand for Aircraft Follow-up Spare Based on Discrete Particle Swarm Optimization Algorithm and RBF Neural Network 1488

*Dongdong LI, Boping XIAO, Haiping HUANG, Aoqing WANG*



Analysis of a Pharmaceutical Reverse Supply Chain Based on Unwanted Medications Categories in Household <i>Meina HUA, Huajun TANG, Zilin WU</i>	1493
A Comprehensive Closed Loop Supply Chain Model; Environmental, Technology and Energy Concerns <i>Amirhesam SOUFALI, Mahdi BASHIRI</i>	1498
Robust Optimization for Lean Supply Chain Design Under Disruptive Risk <i>Thi Hong Dang NGUYEN, Thien-My DAO</i>	1503
Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis for Estimating Marbling Score of Live Beef Cattle in Japan <i>Osamu FUKUDA, Daisuke HASHIMOTO, Iqbal AHMED</i>	1508
Single-Machine Production Scheduling Integrated Preventive Maintenance Planning for Minimizing Makespan and Flow Time <i>Shengliang XU, Liya WANG</i>	1513
Managing Unforeseen Events in Production Scheduling and Control <i>Emrah ARICA, Peter FALSTER, Hans-Henrik HVOLBY, Jan Ola STRANDHAGEN, Kim FRASER</i>	1518
Use of Lean Management Philosophy in Health Sector: A VSM Based Case Study <i>Katarzyna ANTOSZ, Dorota STADNICKA, R.M. Chandima RATNAYAKE</i>	1523
The Optimal Entry Point for Corporate Social Responsibility of Sustainable Business in the Food Industry - The TBL Model <i>Shu Yen HSU, Chiao Chen CHANG, Tyrone T. LIN</i>	1529
Multi Criteria Decision Making with Evidential Reasoning Under Uncertainty <i>Farzaneh AHMADZADEH</i>	1534
Effects of Incentive Time Point on Cooperation <i>Yan WANG, Yan-Mei LI</i>	1539
Environmental Sustainability: Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis for Resource Recovery from Organic Fraction of Municipal Solid Waste <i>Samson MASEBINU, Esther AKINLABI, Edison MUZENDA, Charles MBOHWA, Akinwale ABOYADE, Thabo MAHLATSI</i>	1543
Identification of Modular Platform Potential in Complex Product Portfolios Using Data Analytics <i>Günther SCHUH, Michael RIESENER, Casimir ORTLIEB, J. KOCH</i>	1548
Analysis of Transnational Joint Venture Decision Evaluation on Aesthetic Medicine: Extended Binomial Options Pricing Model <i>Hui-Tzu YEN, Tyrone T. LIN</i>	1553
Prediction of Trust in Scripted Dialogs Using Neuro-Fuzzy Method <i>Halimahtun MOHD KHALID, Wei Shiung LIEW, Martin HELANDER, Chu Kiong LOO</i>	1558
Technology Assessment Based on Growth Functions for Prediction of Future Development Trends and the Maximum Achievable Potential <i>Michael FRIES, Markus LIENKAMP</i>	1563
Experimental and Numerical Studies on the Effects of Heating Frequency in the Thixoforming Process for the 2D Aluminum Alloy Semi-Solid State <i>Vinh Du NGUYEN, Phuong Minh LUU, Tri NGUYEN-QUANG</i>	1569
The Influence of Cutting Parameters on Residual Stress Distribution During Turning of 20Cr2Ni4 Steel <i>Qianru WU, Jiping LU, Xianping CHEN, Sicheng JIAO</i>	1574

Integrating Human Factors and Ergonomics in a Participatory Program for Improvements of Work Systems: An Effectiveness Study <i>Helia FONSECA, Nuno SANTOS, Isabel LOUREIRO, Pedro AREZES</i>	1579
Equipment Assessment Methodology and Automatic Management System in Automotive Semiconductor Manufacturing <i>Ziqian Javaer LIU, Hongtao H.T. QIAN, Yuhong Betsy XU</i>	1584
A Method for Configuration Design of Reconfigurable Machine Tool <i>Xiwen SHANG, Guoxin WANG, Sihan HUANG, Daming PEI, Zhenjun MING, Yan YAN</i>	1588
Oil & Gas Industry Perception of Modularization Barriers and Impacts <i>Mauro MANCINI, Guido J. L. MICHELI, Agnese TRAVAGLINI, Giacomo GILARDONE</i>	1595
Using Answer Set Programming in an Order-Picking System with Cellular Transport Vehicles <i>Steffen SCHIEWECK, Gabriele KERN-ISBERNER, Michael TEN HOMPEL</i>	1600
Dynamic Analysis of Customer Needs Using Fuzzy Markov Chain and Fuzzy Weighted Average Methods <i>C.K. KWONG, Huimin JIANG, Ridvan AYDIN</i>	1605
Layout Design for Large Scale Problems with a Hybridized Clustering Based Heuristic Method <i>Maryam SAHRAGARD, Mahdi BASHIRI</i>	1610
Time-Varying Response Surface Method for High-Temperature Structural Reliability Analysis Using Copula <i>Jian-Chun ZHANG, Xiao-Bing MA, Yu ZHAO</i>	1615
Residual Life Estimation Fusing Life Data and Expert Informaiton <i>Hao CHEN, Bo GUO, Xiang JIA, Ping JIANG</i>	1620
Research on the Task Allocation Model for Equipment Joint Support Demands <i>Di ZHOU, Baocheng LIU, Yishu XU, Lin MA</i>	1625
Multi-Failure Mode Reliability Evaluation Based on Virtual Sample Method <i>Junchao DONG, Chuanri LI, Huan DU, Xingyue YANG</i>	1630
The Determination Method on Products Sample Size Under the Condition of Bayesian Sequential Testing <i>Yunyan XING, Ping JIANG, Zhijun CHENG</i>	1635
Joint Optimization of LORA and Spares Inventory with Fuzzy Parameters <i>Weikang XUE, Boping XIAO, Dongdong LI, Lin MA</i>	1640
Lean Maintenance Excellence in the Container Handling Industry: A Case Study <i>Akram A. EBEID, Ingy A. EL-KHOULY, Aziz E. EL-SAYED</i>	1646
Research on Reliability Assessment of Space Electronic Products Based on Integration of Highly Accelerated Life Test and Accelerated Degradation Test <i>Kai LIU, Congmin LV, Wei DANG, Lingjiang LI, Tianji ZOU, Peng LI</i>	1651
A Study of Availability-Based Warranty Policy <i>Chun SU, Xiaolin WANG</i>	1655
Reliability Modeling Method for Dependent Competing Failure System <i>Chunlei BAI, Chuanri LI, Junchao DONG, Peng LI</i>	1660
A Survey of Condition-Based Maintenance Modeling of Multi-Component Systems <i>Rui WANG, Nan CHEN</i>	1664

Fault Tree Analysis of Oil and Gas Distillation Tower and Application of Bayesian Networks <i>Alireza NASSAJ, Javad BARABADY</i>	1669
A Study on Analyzing and Modeling Dynamic Random Access Memory Power Under Burn-in Test Condition <i>Chang-Ki HAN, Ilkyung YOON, Hyun-Sung LIM, Sung-Mun KANG, Jajun KIM, Jae Woo RU, Hong-Sun HWANG, Sangjae RHEE, Kang-Yong CHO, Gyo-Young JIN</i>	1674
Dynamic Energy Portfolio Optimization Model for Electricity System and Heating System <i>Chen LI, Fajie WEI, Shan LU, Junwei ZENG</i>	1677
Genetic Algorithm for Generalized Resource Constrained Multi Project Scheduling Problem Integrated with Closed Loop Supply Chain Planning <i>Shadan GHOLIZADEH TAYYAR, Jacques LAMOTHE, Lionel DUPONT</i>	1683
Implicit Modelling for Manpower Scheduling with Part-Time Workers <i>Ping Chong CHUA, Hendra Teja WIRAWAN</i>	1688
Robust Resource Investment Problem with Time-Dependent Resource Cost and Tardiness Penalty <i>Asem HATTAB, Mohamed HAOUARI</i>	1693
Solving the Cutting-Stock Problem by Using the Sequential Quadratic Programming Optimization Method <i>Tsung Yin LIN, Shihming CHEN, M. T. YU</i>	1699
Analysis of Critical Infrastructure Operation Process Including Operating Environment Threats <i>Krzysztof KOŁOWROCKI, Joanna SOSZYŃSKA-BUDNY</i>	1703
Identification of Port Oil Piping Transportation System Operation Process Including Operating Environment Threats <i>Krzysztof KOŁOWROCKI, Joanna SOSZYŃSKA-BUDNY</i>	1708
An Investment Allocation Model for Quality Improvement to Reduce Component Variances at Manufacturer and Supplier Side to Maximize the Return on Investment <i>Cucuk Nur ROSYIDI, Ibnu PAMUNGKAS, Wakhid Ahmad JAUHARI, Bambang SUHARDI, Kunihiro HAMADA</i>	1713
The Optimization Model of Transport Routes Taking into Account the State of Roads and Road Traffic Congestions <i>Dmitriy ANUFRIEV, Olga SHIKULSKAYA, Timur ESMAGAMBETOV, Mikhail SHIKULSKIY</i>	1717
A Variable-Fidelity Modeling Method Based on Self-Organizing Maps Spatial Reduction <i>Ping JIANG, Leshi SHU, Xiangzheng MENG, Qi ZHOU, Jiexiang HU, Junnan XU</i>	1722
Evaluating Human Resource Competitiveness Based on an Improved TOPSIS Method: The Case of Automotive Industry <i>Han HAO, Shijia ZHAO, Zongwei LIU, Fuquan ZHAO</i>	1727
Influence of Work-Family Conflict on Job Involvement and Organizational Commitment: The Moderating Effect of Perceived Supervisor Support and the Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction <i>Chenchen LIU, Xin LI, Tong LIU, Yi-Wen CHEN</i>	1732
The Impact of Work-Family Interface on Turnover Intention of IT R&D Personnel: A Mediator Role of Psychological Contract <i>Zhiyong ZHANG, Tong LIU, Yi-Wen CHEN</i>	1737
Effect of Height on Sense of Power <i>Chunyi WANG, Yan-Mei LI, Xiaoshu LI, Weibo HAO</i>	1742
Development of Affective Modeling for Toilet Seat Comfort <i>Sunghwan PARK, Y. L. RHIE, Joong Hee LEE, Minjee KIM, Kyung-Jun LEE, Injae LEE, Myung Hwan YUN</i>	1746

Understanding Characteristics of User-Generated Content as a Source of Extracting User Value <i>G. W. KIM, Yongmin KIM, Jun Soo HAN, Y. L. RHIE, Myung Hwan YUN</i>	1751
Identifying the Structure of Perceived Luxuriousness in Real and Web-Based Model House <i>Yong Min KIM, Myung Bin CHOI, Sung Hee AHN, Donggun PARK, Jin Woo OH, Myung Hwan YUN</i>	1756
Difference Thresholds of Multi-Axis Whole-Body Vibration <i>Andi WJAYA, Orjan JOHANSSON</i>	1760
A Selection Framework of E-Business Model by Assessing Organizational E-Readiness <i>Kayvan MOHITMAFI, Payam HANAFIZADEH</i>	1765
An Assessment Method of Aviation Equipment Affordability Based on AHP <i>Wei WANG, Jing LYU, Xiao Cui LI, Yin Ping REN</i>	1770
Efficiency Change in Companies Participating in the Rural Appliance Rebate Program of China <i>Shuo ZHANG, Yongzhong WU, Wenhui ZHOU</i>	1775
Interaction Capability, Process Quality, and Outsourcing Success: A Vendor Perspective in Offshore IT Outsourcing <i>Yogi WIBISONO, Rajesri GOVINDARAJU, Dradjad IRIANTO, Iman SUDIRMAN</i>	1780
Social Innovation, Research and Community Engagement: Managing Interdisciplinary Projects for Societal Change <i>Nickey JANSE VAN RENSBURG, Johan MEYER, Hannelie NEL</i>	1785
It's Not the Plan, It's the Process of Planning <i>Julien POLLACK</i>	1790
Exploring Anxiety in Ignoring Read Messages of Line- Comparison in Four Stages of Romance Relationship <i>Y. J. LIU, Chih Chieh HSU</i>	1795
Researcher Qualitative Change by Governmental Support in Japan <i>Kazuya TANAKA, Ichiro SAKATA</i>	1800
Communication Constraints and Motivations in the Context of Knowledge Sharing: A Systematic Literature Review <i>Trifandi LASALEWO, Subagyo, Budi HARTONO, Hari Agung YUNIARTO</i>	1804
Development and Implementation Strategy for Product Configuration Systems in Engineer-to-Order Companies <i>Katrin KRISTJANSDOTTIR, Sara SHAFIEE, Lars HVAM</i>	1809
ERP System Usage and Panoptic Control: The Role of Perceived Organizational Support <i>Bayu Andika RAMADHANA, Rajesri GOVINDARAJU, Yogi WIBISONO</i>	1814
Design Knowledge Modeling of Complex Products Based on the Living Systems Theory <i>Guoxin WANG, Kun LUO, Daming PEI, Yan YAN, Sihan HUANG, Xiwen SHANG</i>	1819
Study on Cross-Domain Knowledge Inspired Innovation Design <i>Nian YANG, Yan YAN, Jia HAO, Guoxin WANG, Daming PEI, Jianxiang YANG</i>	1826
Social Innovation Activities in Japanese Firms: A Pilot Study with Text Mining <i>Weilin ZHAO, Noritomo OUCHI, Chihiro WATANABE</i>	1833
The Impact of Compensation Structure of Salespeople on Team Performance and Turnover Rate: the Moderated- Mediating Effect of Knowledge Sharing Behavior <i>Yuanyuan LAI, Jifan REN</i>	1836

Towards Improving Public Procurement Process Through Lean Principles: A Case of the Agricultural Engineering Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Namibia <i>Felix NDINAMWENE, Michael MUTINGI, Charles MBOHWA, Herbert MAPFAIRA</i>	1841
Hotel's Online Booking Segmentation for Heterogenous Customers <i>Zhaowei MIAO, Ting WEI, Yongquan LAN</i>	1846
Visualization of the Mobility Patterns in the Bike-Sharing Transport Systems in Mexico City <i>Luis A. MONCAYO-MARTINEZ, Adrian RAMIREZ-NAFARRATE</i>	1851
The Important Impact Factors of Entrepreneurial Motivation for College Students <i>Jen-Chia CHANG, Feng-Ming SUI, Hsi-Chi HSIAO, Po-Ying CHIANG</i>	1856
The Mediator Role of Psychological Capital: A Study Among Authentic Leadership, Work Engagement, and Psychological Capital <i>Xiaonan ZHONG, Xin LI, Tong LIU, Yi-Wen CHEN</i>	1861
An Efficient Data Leakage Prevention Framework for Semiconductor Industry <i>Sherry ZHU, Eric GUO, Max LU, Anna YUE</i>	1866
A Study on the Relationship Between the Moral Self-Concept and the Cyber Aggression Behavior of College Students <i>Wenqi CHEN, Yan-Mei LI</i>	1870
Characterization and Damage Identification of Acoustic Emission Signal in Tensile Process of the Material of High-Speed Train Gearbox Shell <i>Yibo AI, Chang SUN, Hao CUI, Weidong ZHANG</i>	1875
An Investigation on the Relationship Between Control Self-Assessment, Cloud Security, and Cloud-Related Business Performance - Using Partial Least Squares <i>Cheuk Hang AU, Walter S. L. FUNG, Aaron TSES</i>	1879
Safety Measurement for the Road Transport in Northern Norway in Wintertime <i>Fuqing YUAN, Jinmei LU</i>	1884
An IOT-Based System to Prevent Injuries in Assembly Line Production Systems <i>Maria Grazia GNONI, Valerio ELIA, Paolo BRAGATTO</i>	1889
A Study for Big-Data (Hadoop) Application in Semiconductor Manufacturing <i>Sheng KANG, Wei-Ting Kary CHIEN, Jun Gang YANG</i>	1893
Key Issues of Incorporating Social Network Effects in Product Portfolio Planning <i>Roger JIAO, Feng ZHOU, Jun DU</i>	1898
Critical Issues of Applying Machine Learning to Condition Monitoring for Failure Diagnosis <i>Fuqing YUAN</i>	1903
Monthly Electricity Demand Forecasting by GANN <i>Hsiao-Fan WANG, Chia-Liang LAI</i>	1908
Flexible Vehicle Scheduling for Urban Last Mile Logistics: The Emerging Technology of Shared Reception Box <i>Shuzhu ZHANG, Carman Ka Man LEE</i>	1913
Managing Routing Information for Optimal Vehicle Refueling in Transportation Networks <i>Shieu-Hong LIN</i>	1918
Applying Microsoft Kinect for Windows to Develop a Stroke Rehabilitation System <i>Keng-Chieh YANG, Chia-Hui HUANG, Cyuan-Fong LE</i>	1923

Supplier Management in Photomask Field <i>Kelly CHEN, Eric GUO, Sammy CHEN, Sherry ZHU</i>	1928
A Study on the Control Charts Based on Quality Loss Function <i>Suyi LI, Wenjia WANG</i>	1933
A General Framework for Multiple Responses Optimization Based on Bayesian Posterior Predictive Method <i>Suyi LI, Wenjia WANG</i>	1938
Acceptance Sampling Plans Based on Truncated Life Tests for LOG-EIG Distribution <i>Wanbo LU, Haozhen XU, Lingyu ZUO</i>	1942
<b>Author Index</b>	1947

# Redesign of Thresher Machine for Farmers Using Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA) Method

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**Abstract** – The use of thresher machines for threshing rice plants helped farmers in improving agricultural productivity. However, thresher machine design that is currently available has not fairly concerned on the working position and posture of the farmers using it. The working position that was modeled by farmers when operating a thresher machine tent to cause injury because of the dimensions of the engine and the body of farmers that did not conform to each other. RULA method was one of the methods that could analyze work postures. From the results of the data collection and the process using RULA method, it was clear that the measures that had to be taken to the thresher machines which used to be available were promptly modified in order to avoid musculoskeletal problem. Improvements that could be undertaken to avoid the musculoskeletal problem on farmers who used the thresher machine were redesigning the thresher machine based on farmers working posture. One of these ways was by adjusting the dimensions of the farmers' body with the dimensions of the machine. In addition, the use of adjustable concept in the design could probably assist the farmers adjust the working position with the machinery they used.

**Keywords:** Design, Musculoskeletal, Thresher Machines, RULA method

## I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of several kinds of machinery and technology in assisting farmers to manage crops would be fairly useful in balancing the inhabitants' growth rate by the existing crops. One of the examples was thresher machine used by farmers to thresh rice plant. The use of thresher machine in defoliating the rice plants remarkably assisted the farmers in elevating agricultural productivity. In terms of time, the use of thresher machine was faster than using traditional method. Apart from that, in terms of energy released, the traditional method demanded greater energy to separate the rice from the straw. It was found that from the preliminary study conducted in which cardiovascular load (% CVL) spent by the farmers using traditional method was much greater that using thresher machine.

It could possibly happen due to the fact that the amount of energy used by farmers when defoliating the rice from the straw. The working position modeled by the farmers was prone to cause injury since they had to bend down ample of times to plum the rice down traditionally.

It can be seen in the Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the farmers positions operating the thresher machine. However, according to Figure 1 it can be seen that the farmers position when operating the thresher machine was prone to cause musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) problem.



Fig 1 Thresher machine use

Musculoskeletal problem is a kind of ergonomics matter which is relatively found in a working place particularly relating to physical work that required power and endurance. This matter used to experience by workers commenced constant and continuous movements, and could automatically slow down the workers' productivity [1]. Chang et al. [2] revealed that working posture criteria is one of the common causes of MSD which consider from material or tool usage.

The farmers' work using thresher machine could also lead to musculoskeletal matter as the working positions were constant. Besides, the body's position while operating thresher machine was leaned and straightness when the body's position slightly bended down. It could be clearly seen because the farmers' back formed an angle, and did not stand straightly towards the thresher machine. Besides, the farmers' legs also did not straightly stand as the farmers needed to keep the balance the machine height towards the standing position while operating the machine. Once the farmers straightened the legs, they had to bend down to balance the machine position as well as the body's position.

The greatest complaint experienced by the farmers, which collected using Nordic Body Map questionnaire, was in their waists. From 30 samples observed, 24 of respondents said that there was a problem in their waists while operating the machine or even after operating the thresher machine. Other than that, there were also several

complaints felt by the respondents in one of their body part while operating the machine.

Working position evaluation in this study was conducted by using Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA) method. RULA designed by McAtamney and Corlett (1993) [3] is a widely used tool designed for the investigation of the work posture. RULA was developed specifically to examine the level of risk associated with upper limb disorder of individual workers. It is used to investigate working postures at one instant in time by using a coding system of RULA [4]. This method used a diagram from body posture along with three score tables in determining the risk factor evaluation. The risk factors evaluated as the external load factors were a number of movement, statics body mass activity, power/energy, determining working posture by equipment and working period without taking a rest [3].

## II. METHODOLOGY

The benefit of RULA is to provide a quick method for screening a variety of workstation and to give results that can be explained the conditions of work posture. There are some previous researchers using RULA method to evaluate the working posture of workers. Choobineh et al. [5] evaluated 72 menders in carpet mending workstation. They used RULA technique to calculate scores for the posture of body parts in the operation of the task pre- and post- intervention. The mending table with an attached seat was redesigned. Choobineh et al. [6] also used the result of RULA analysis to improve the design of hand-woven carpet workstation in Iranian carpet industry. Rahman et al. [7] conducted the research in a selected ceramic factory in Bangladesh. They used RULA method to analyze working posture of workers in the production section of the factory and their impact on labor productivity.

### *Data Collection and Analysis Procedure*

Data have been collected through RULA worksheet. The observed work postures have been assessed in terms of RULA score and the various score have been compiled according to RULA worksheet in order to get RULA grand score. The RULA produces a score to demonstrate the risk level of posture. Low scores of 1 or 2 indicate that the working posture is acceptable. Further investigation and changes are required for grand scores 3 or 4; prompt investigation and changes for grand scores of 5 or 6 and immediate investigations and changes for a grand score of 7. Data collected was the data in form of pictures of farmers working posture when operating thresher machine and the size of angle or segment which is formed once the farmers operating the machine. The picture of the farmers' working posture operating thresher machine was taken by using a camera. An angle then was drawn depicting farmer's body position while working and an angle size was counted afterward. The body part angles counted were upper arm, lower arm, wrist, wrist twist, neck, trunk, and legs. Apart from that, the data collected

was the pictures of thresher machine concept designed by Bifadhlih [8] after which was used to test RULA value.

At first, the initial and final arm and wrist posture scores have been assessed in association with the initial and final neck, trunk and leg posture scores. The resultant scores have been evaluated and compiled together with the muscle use and muscle force or carrying load score in order to assess the RULA grand score.

## III. RESULTS

The accumulation of the working postures by the RULA method commenced by the farmers operating Thresher machine was by separating the body segments into 2 group segments, namely Group A and Group B. Body posture group A consisted of upper arm, lower arm, wrist, and wrist twist. Whereas, body posture group B comprised of neck, trunk, and legs. Following that were measuring the size of angle formed by the farmers' body while operating the thresher machine, and adjusting the size of the angle formed by the value of RULA table. Table I until Table III shown the total numbers of scores of body segments a, b, and the total scores of RULA overall on 12 farmers and the result of the RULA simulation test on the design created by Bifadhlih [8].

Table I Recapitulation of RULA Accumulation Result for Every Body Segment of Group A

	Upper Arm	Lower Arm	Wrist	Wrist Twist	Group A Activity Score
<b>Operator 1</b>	3	1	3	2	5
<b>Operator 2</b>	3	2	3	2	4
<b>Operator 3</b>	2	1	3	2	3
<b>Operator 4</b>	3	1	3	2	4
<b>Operator 5</b>	1	1	3	2	3
<b>Operator 6</b>	2	2	2	2	3
<b>Operator 7</b>	3	1	3	2	4
<b>Operator 8</b>	2	1	3	2	3
<b>Operator 9</b>	2	1	2	2	3
<b>Operator 10</b>	2	1	3	2	3
<b>Operator 11</b>	2	1	3	2	3
<b>Operator 12</b>	3	1	3	2	4
<b>Bifadhlih Design</b>	3	1	3	2	4

Table II Recapitulation of RULA Accumulation Result for Every Body Segment of Group B

	Neck	Trunk	Legs	Group B Activity Score
<b>Operator 1</b>	3	3	2	5
<b>Operator 2</b>	2	2	2	3
<b>Operator 3</b>	3	3	2	5
<b>Operator 4</b>	2	2	2	3
<b>Operator 5</b>	3	3	2	5
<b>Operator 6</b>	3	2	2	4
<b>Operator 7</b>	3	3	2	5
<b>Operator 8</b>	3	2	2	4
<b>Operator 9</b>	3	2	2	4
<b>Operator 10</b>	3	2	2	4
<b>Operator 11</b>	3	2	2	4
<b>Operator 12</b>	3	3	2	5
<b>Bifadhlih Design</b>	3	3	1	4



Table III Recapitulation of RULA Risk Level

No	Operator	Age	Risk Level	Treatment
1	Operator 1	35 years	High	Treated now
2	Operator 2	18 years	Medium	Treated soon
3	Operator 3	40 years	Medium	Treated soon
4	Operator 4	38 years	Medium	Treated soon
5	Operator 5	45 years	Medium	Treated soon
6	Operator 6	49 years	Medium	Treated soon
7	Operator 7	47 years	High	Treated now
8	Operator 8	45 years	Medium	Treated soon
9	Operator 9	40 years	Medium	Treated soon
10	Operator 10	50 years	Medium	Treated soon
11	Operator 11	42 years	Medium	Treated now
12	Operator 12	50 years	High	Treated soon
13	Bifadhlih Design	-	Medium	Treated soon

RULA accumulation result above shows that a treatment was required to be undertaken to decrease RULA risk level to the farmers operating thresher machine. A treatment commenced was modifying the thresher machine in order to neutralize farmers' working position. Figure 2 until Figure 4 shown the redesign of thresher machine which can be executed.



Fig. 2 Thresher Machine

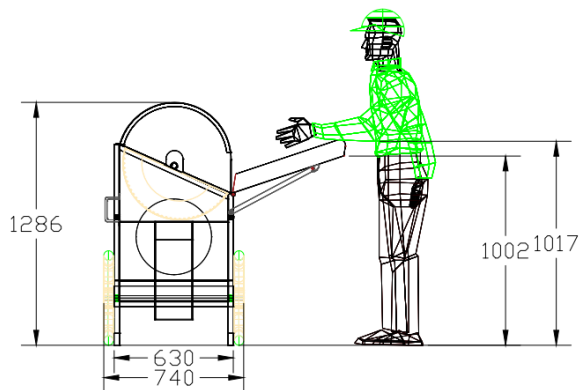


Fig. 3 Thresher Machine Side View

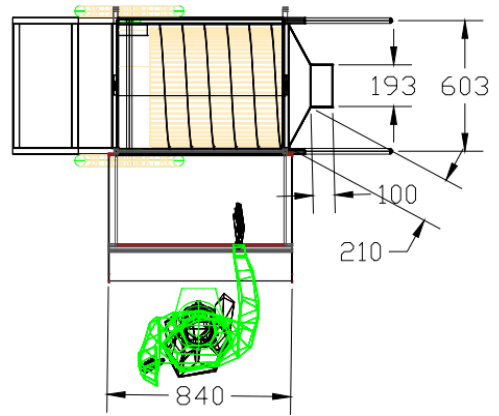


Fig. 4 Thresher Machine Top View

The RULA accumulation was subsequently applied to the redesigned of the thresher machine to find out whether the designed machine has showed lower RULA risk level compared to the previous ones. Table IV and Table V depict the recapitulation of RULA scores from the re-design machinery.

Table IV Total Score of Group A

Upper Arm	Lower Arm	Wrist								
		1		2		3		4		
		Wrist Twist	Wrist Twist	Wrist Twist	Wrist Twist	Wrist Twist	Wrist Twist	Wrist Twist	Wrist Twist	
1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3
	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
2	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	5	5	5
3	1	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	5
	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	5
	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5
4	1	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5
	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5
	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	6
5	1	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	7	7
	2	5	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7
	3	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	8	8
6	1	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	9	9
	2	7	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9
	3	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

Table V Total Score of Group B

Score Group A	Score Group B						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	1	2	3	3	4	5	5
2	2	2	3	4	4	5	5
3	3	3	3	4	4	5	6
4	3	3	3	4	5	6	6
5	4	4	4	5	6	7	7
6	4	4	5	6	6	7	7
7	5	5	6	6	7	7	7
.+8	5	5	6	7	7	7	7

Due to the fact that the operators undertook consecutive movements during work, the total score of group A and B were added to one score. Hence, the total score of group A and B were 4. It can be seen in Table VI and Table VII.

Table VI Total Score

Score Group A	Score Group B						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	1	2	3	3	4	5	5
2	2	2	3	4	4	5	5
3	3	3	3	4	4	5	6
4	3	3	3	4	5	6	6
5	4	4	4	5	6	7	7
6	4	4	5	6	6	7	7
7	5	5	6	6	7	7	7
.+8	5	5	6	7	7	7	7

Table VII Treatment Category

Category	Risk Level	Treatment
1-2	Minimum	Posture is acceptable if it is not maintained and repeated for long periods
3-4	Small	Further investigation is needed and change of posture may be required
5-6	Medium	Further investigation and changes are required soon
7	High	Investigate and changes are required now

RULA risk level category found was small. It caused the need for specific treatment towards the machine or operator's working position.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

##### A. An Analysis of Working Posture and RULA Value on Existing Thresher Machine

Based on the result of RULA method evaluation data processing on working posture for the farmers operating thresher machine was found that the risk level of the farmers was on the medium and high position. Both had distinctive treatments where the medium risk required to be treated immediately, and for the high risk required to be treated at current time. However, either medium risk level or high risk level basically needed to be treated as soon as possible in order that any injuries or musculoskeletal problem would not turn up. Musculoskeletal matter was a kind of ergonomic problem which was frequently encountered in a working place particularly with regards of human power and endurance in commencing their work. This matter was commonly experienced by workers who underwent almost exactly the same movements continuously and would likely lead the working productivity gradually dipped.

The risk level obtained was caused by farmers' working position which was prone to not ergonomic and the machine condition was incompatible to the farmers' working position. The angle created by the farmers' body while operating thresher machine tent to result higher RULA score; as the consequence, it caused bad impacts

towards the farmers' body. The following Figure 5 shows inappropriate thresher machine placement.



Fig. 5 the Placement of the Thresher Machine

RULA value could be dropped by some ways one of which was the modification of the existing thresher machine. The improvement could be done through adjusting the machine dimension towards farmers' body dimension. By this improvement, it was expected that RULA value could be decreased; thus, it would not cause musculoskeletal problem to the framers using the machine. One of the examples of the thresher modification was adjusting the machine size with anthropometry of the farmers using it in order that the imbalance between machine dimension and farmers' body dimension could be avoided. Apart from the segment of group A, group B, and the machine position, the number of repetitions undertaken and the weight of the load lifted by the farmers also determined the total score of the RULA value. As a lot of the repetitions/activities undergone by the farmers, the load would also go up; thus, the RULA value resulted were greater, and vice versa.

##### B. An Analysis of Working Position and RULA Value on the Thresher Machine Designed by Bifadhlih

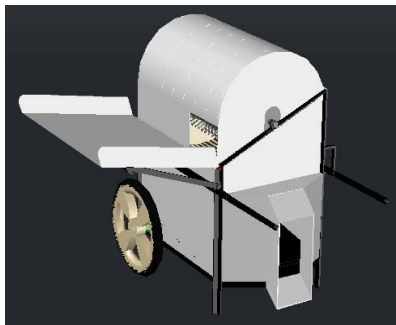
Bifadhlih [8] designed a closed drum-type (cylinder) thresher machine according to the costumers' preferences. The distinction between the thresher designed by Bifadhlih and the existing thresher was the thresher constructed using wheels to ease for mobilization, the thresher teeth designed using bolt-like screw to ease the control suited the operator's need (portable), and the collector board dimension was designed using anthropometry data to alter the operators' working position better. According to the evaluation resulting from the operators' working position using thresher machine through RULA method and the assistance of AutoCAD Software, the risk level of RULA value obtained was medium. The medium risk level in RULA required a prompt treatment. The improvement which could be done

was the modification of the thresher machine used by the operators.

The accumulation and evaluation of the working position by using RULA method depicted several segments which had high score that was wrist twist and trunk. It was due to that fact that the machine height has not been compatible to the operators' body dimension which was using it and the inclination of the steam roller board which was not compatible to the operator's arm condition. The thresher board was considerably leaned so that it did not conform the operator's working posture, the farmers. Therefore, the redesign of the thresher machine was required to suit the farmers' body dimension particularly in West Sumatera and the reparation of the leaned thresher machine in order that the operator felt more comfortable when using the thresher machine.

### C. An Analysis of the Redesign of the Thresher

The thresher machine re-designed in this research was closed drum-type thresher machine (cylinder). Figure 6 illustrates the closed drum-type thresher machine (cylinder).



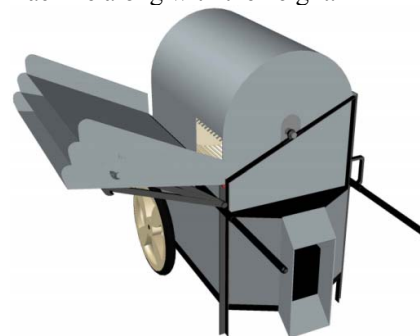
**Fig. 6 the Re-design Product**

Designing product was conducted by applying anthropometry approach in order that RULA value on the operator (the farmer) was smaller than the existing product. The percentage taken in this design was the percentile of 50. Taking the percentile of 50 aimed that the product which was being designed used the relative size of the user. The anthropometry used was the anthropometry of the height of the user's elbow while standing to determine the height of the working board on the thresher machine, the height of the palm's user used to determine the height of the machine handle, and the anthropometry of the stretching arm used to determine the width dimension of the working board on the designed machine. Table IX shows the value of the anthropometry data used in designing the thresher machine.

**Table VIII Anthropometry Data of the West Sumatera Inhabitants**

Dimension	Code	Percentile 50
Elbow's height while standing	EHS	101.7
Palm's Height	PH	71.9
Stretching Arm	SA	166.9
Body height while standing	BHS	163.1

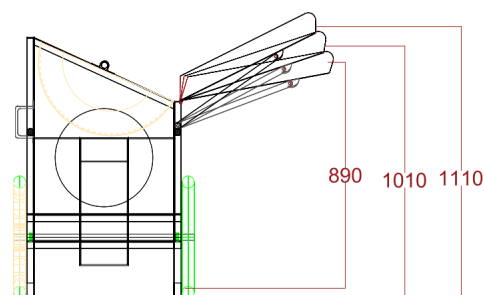
On the board of the thresher machine was used adjustable principle in order that the board's height and could be adjusted based on the operator's height. It was slightly different from Bifadhlih's design [8] which did not design the board with the adjustable principle and the board height that could not be adjusted. The use of the adjustable principle aimed to decrease musculoskeletal problem. The musculoskeletal problem was an ergonomic matter which frequently encountered in the working place particularly with regards to human power and endurance while working. By designing the product with the adjustable principle, it was expected to minimize the inconvenience while using the product due to the imbalance between the dimension of the product and the operator using it. On the thresher's board, the height could be set up into three heights, they were; 89 cm height, 101 cm height, and 111 cm height. The height has been adjusted to the loose and the anthropometry data of the farmers' standing elbow in West Sumatera based on the percentile of 5.50 and 99. The loose was defined due to the fact that the farmers worked dynamically/movable and the adjusting on other new tools could be operated while working such as, shoes; slippers; etc. Figure 7 and 8 illustrate the level of the working board height on the thresher machine along with the height.



**Fig. 7 Adjustable Principle on the Working Board**

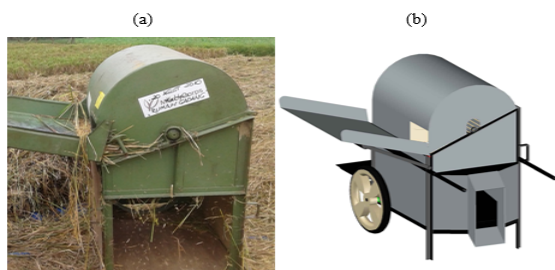
Apart from the use of the adjustable principle, the design improvement was also conducted on the funnel where the rice resulting from greater threshing plants fell out. The funnel where the rice plants fell out on the existing thresher machine caused the looser number of the threshing rice plants was bigger. It was because the space where the rice plants fell out was considerably wide;

hence, the after threshing rice was scattered by wind either from the machine or the surrounding.



**Fig. 8 The Dimension of the Thresher Machine Working Board**

Figure 9 illustrated the funnel where the rice plants threshing out of the machine.



**Fig. 9 The Funnel Form where the Rice Fell Out- Former Design (a) New Design (b)**

## V. CONCLUSION

The redesign of the thresher machine using anthropometry approach was aimed to adjust the machine dimension towards the operator. Apart from that, the re-design also used adjustable principle on the working board in order that the operator felt comfortable while using the thresher machine. From the evaluation of RULA on the designed product, it indicated smaller RULA risk level compared to the existing products. The result of the redesign of the thresher machine could elevate working productivity due to the fact that the operator operating the machine would not be exhausted as well as the musculoskeletal matter after working would not likely to pain the user. Other than that, the loser number on the threshing rice plants was slightly marginal since the funnel where the rice plants fell out was designed to accommodate the rice plants in order not to scattered after which passing through the thresher.

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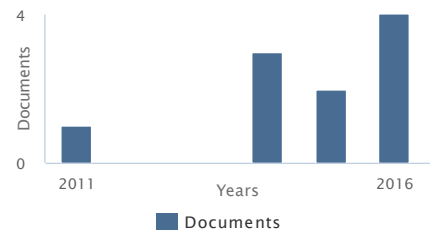
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