Dear Lance,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinions on this matter. I am sure that the committee spent much thought on the matter and thus I doubt that any argument I have will surprise any you. But I'll be happy to put in my two cents. I'll be happy to elaborate if needed.

A summary of my reaction: (1) in the best case scenario, the proposed event could work fine and may even have some positive impact on the community. (2) Even if everything goes well (which is far from guaranteed), this change will also have negative impact (both in itself and by the void left from missing the "old STOC"), (3) I personally am not sure that this event would be at all attractive to me, whereas the old FOCS and STOC are very valuable to me, (4) FOCS/STOC are not as broken as is fashionable to portray, and they still have very important contribution to our community, (5) It is better to first try less radical and risky changes and monitor their affect

Let me elaborate a bit. In my eyes, the role of FOCS/STOC is to preserve TCS as a community. It is true that TCS has deepened in the last decades and each sub-area requires some more serious background. Still, the ideas used in TCS are still useful across areas and the connections are still very strong. In addition, FOCS/STOC supports the rapid dissemination of ideas and the vibrant nature of this community. I think that in both respects, FOCS/STOC is still extremely important and the community owes this forum a debt of gratitude. I want to point out that even theoreticians that attend FOCS/STOC once in a while get some snapshot (even if partial) of the entire community, and I think this is great.

Is FOCS/STOC perfect? Certainly not! There are always topics that are hyped and the selection process is not perfect. But comparing to what I know of other conferences, I feel we are not in such a bad situation. The most serious problem of FOCS/STOC in my opinion is that it is too selective. Accepting more papers will allow for different kinds of papers and will attract more people (in particular, the authors of the papers). I was always opposed to a single session (though not always convinced others), and would much rather have more sessions or more days over the proposed change (acknowledging the additional difficulty in selecting such a program). An alternative change would be to co-locate FOCS/STOC with other workshops and conferences. In my eyes, this is the most appealing change (and I'll try to elaborate at the end).

Other issues regarding FOCS/STOC are more of an educational issue in my eyes. Acceptance of a paper to FOCS and STOC is not an award and a wonderful career can be made through more specialized conferences. In addition FOCS and STOC cannot host every line of research, as important as it may be. As an example, a lot of criticism was given to the fact that papers modeling real-life problems do not get the appropriate treatment in FOCS/STOC. I believe that some of the best papers were modeling papers, but many of the worse papers are modeling papers as well. Sometimes it is easy to separate the good from the bad in real time and then

the community can gain from such a paper appearing in FOCS/STOC. In other cases, it is completely appropriate that the right modeling will be debated in a more specialized forum and will appear in a general forum like FOCS/STOC only after maturing a bit. We should always remember what the purpose of FOCS/STOC is – it is not to decide which paper is more important but rather to expose the entire community to what can benefit the community the most. Misconceptions about FOCS/STOC can be changed and are changing. It is not clear to me that throwing the baby with the water is the right solution.

Let me briefly elaborate on my reaction to the proposal itself. This is a radical solution. Who knows if it will turn out the way these conferences look at other communities. Also, it is not clear that our community (which is doing quite well in part due to its unique publication traditions) has the same needs as other communities. Offhand I see several dangers (and I'm sure there are many more): (a) more pressure on FOCS that will now have even worse acceptance ratio and will suffer more significantly from every current problem (it is naïve to assume that FOCS can stay the same in the face of such a radical change to STOC). (b) The lack of appropriate filtration may create an atmosphere of superficiality and will aggravate current problems. (c) while the conference will host more papers, people will get less exposed to different fields. On a personal note, I doubt that in such a conference I would like to step into any talk in areas other than mine. This is different in FOCS/STOC where I have some assurances about the quality of the work and its general appeal. So what will remain is attending talks in my own topic (workshops are better at that), and possibly the tutorials. At the moment, it does not sound too attractive to me.

I want to put forth the idea to try a less radical approach for a limited time (e.g., 5 years) and to monitor its affect. This is more work than just breaking the current system but I think it is worth the effort. The best solution I would like to see is a federated theory conference (a bit like FCRC but focused on theory). With STOC co-located with some algorithm conferences/workshops as well as CCC and with other conferences. This should be done on a regular basis and we could enjoy the best of all worlds: larger attendance, keeping the PC work of STOC at a tolerable level, room for many lines of research that usually are underrepresented in STOC, and a celebration of theory. There are other possible solutions (e.g., making the PC larger, distributing its work and having more papers accepted), and I think they all make better sense as a first attempt.

Best wishes,

Omer