

Over the course of a lively conversation held in December 2007, Natasa Christodoulidou of California State University Dominguez Hills interviewed Professor D. Clay Whybark of the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. Professor Whybark talked about his involvement with the Decision Sciences Institute, discussed his long association with the Institute, and provided insights into its early years and future potential. [Krishna S. Dhir, Editor]



## A Conversation with... D. Clay Whybark

by Natasa Christodoulidou of California  
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**Natasa:** *How did your association with the Decision Sciences Institute begin?*

**Clay:** In the early 1950s and 1960s, there was an Operations Management interest group in the Academy of Management. We met as part of its meeting in Cleveland, Ohio. In addition to me, there were two other individuals interested in the area at the meeting. We had observed that there was not a lot of interest for the operations perspective at the Academy of Management. We wanted something that better suited our academic needs. Unfortunately, there was nothing to satisfy us at that time. Fortunately, this need became one of the foundation stones for the Decision Sciences Institute early in its formation.

We wanted the Decision Sciences Institute to be distinct from other academic organizations in one particular way. We wanted it to be an organization that was multidisciplinary, inclusive of different disciplines and not exclusionary like some of the other organizations that were then in existence. Again, it is important to understand that there was nothing that met our needs at that time. We needed something that was managerial but also cross-disciplinary

in its orientation, not like the alternative organizations that were then promoting old-boys-club networking within narrow areas. The only organization that existed at that time which came anywhere close to resembling what we sought was The Institute of Management Sciences.

The Decision Sciences Institute started as the American Institute of Decision Sciences with 16 people. The operations management component was added with about 20-25 people. Soon, the Institute ended up with a membership of about 100 people during its early stages of formation. Please bear in mind that I joined the Institute one or two years after it was officially founded; that is, I was not part of the initial group of founders who created the Institute.

**Natasa:** *How did the Decision Sciences Institute influence your career?*

**Clay:** Being a member of the Decision Sciences Institute has been a tremendously positive experience. There are primarily three aspects of my career that the Decision Sciences Institute has influenced over the years. These are meetings, growth, and networking.



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**Meetings.** The meetings have provided a good forum for academic feedback and criticism. These components sharpened my research and that of many people within the Institute.

**Growth.** The Decision Sciences Institute has allowed a broad range of its academic members to be part of its administration. Its members have developed as academics, but with an understanding of the administrative perspective. The Decision Sciences Institute has given a number of its academic members the opportunity to be involved in various administrative duties and receive experience in that domain.

**Networking.** The Decision Sciences Institute has provided the opportunity to its academic members from different disciplines to be involved in all the Institute's activities, increasing the size of the network. The camaraderie that has been created over the years has had huge impact on the development of individual academic careers.

**Natasa:** *What factors/trends contributed to the development of Decision Sciences Institute?*

**Clay:** Two very influential factors contributed to the development of the Decision Sciences Institute. These are the diversity of disciplines and being open to everyone.

**Diversity of disciplines.** The Institute has been a broad home for academics with interests in aspects of management education. From the early years of its formation, the Decision Sciences Institute has welcomed marketing, operations, information systems, accounting, finance, and people from many other disciplines as well. In the early years, having a multi-disciplinary environment in an academic association, instead of being narrowly focused, was quite unique. The diversity of disciplinary attributes among the Institute's members resulted in a very good number of able presidents, administrators, and committee members. This helped the organization to be effective and to move forward over time.

**Open to everyone.** I take a lot of personal pride in the fact that when the Decision Sciences Institute was created

it was open to anyone who wanted to join in. There was no implicit or explicit blackballing. Anyone who wanted to join was welcome to do so. In the early years, academic organizations were viewed very critically by their own members as being exclusive and tightly knit. Academic associations were perceived as being quite closed and it was very hard to get involved in institutes such as The Institute for Management Sciences, Operations Research Society, and (perhaps less so) the Academy of Management. It was very hard to become involved in any of these organizations unless you knew people or you were known by them. Whether the perception was right or not, did not matter at that time. Most people believed that it was very hard to gain access to these organizations. Since it appeared to be awfully hard to get into any of these closed networks, many were looking for other outlets to expand their academic horizons. As mentioned earlier, the Decision Sciences Institute started with 16 people and we now have over 1,300 active members. The Decision Science Institute has grown because of the openness and the diversity that the membership has brought to the Institute.

**Natasa:** *How do you see Decision Sciences Institute evolving? How would you like it to evolve?*

**Clay:** We have been very fortunate that throughout its evolution, the Decision Sciences Institute has avoided chasing rabbits. We have not gone off on tangents or down narrow paths. The Institute has effectively incorporated what we think are important elements of managerial thinking. It has been proactive. For example, when we noticed the growth in Information Systems and the Cognitive Sciences, we included those areas among our fields of interest, as important components of our organization. We did so 20 years ago! These very important managerial areas are now very much a part of the Decision Sciences Institute spectrum. We have achieved this by considering articles in these areas for the *Decision Sciences* journal, by having tracks for these fields in the annual meetings, as well as

organizing special sessions in the areas as part of the Decision Sciences Institute conferences. The Institute continues to incorporate substantive issues of management education and theory as part of its mission. I would like us to continue to be inclusive of new business disciplines in the future. I believe it is very important for us to continue to evolve as an organization and incorporate new issues as they become important in our disciplines.

The international dimension is an important aspect to continue to nurture. We have now created international divisions of the Decision Sciences Institute that move us beyond the U.S. geographical boundaries. We have welcomed people into the organization who teach

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subjects like international business. However, we still have not incorporated into our administration the way international management is practiced. At the present time, we do not appear to know how to research or teach international business effectively. So, over time, these are areas we need to work on.

Finally, the management of non-for-profit organizations is currently not heavily represented in our Institute. There are humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross, the United Nations and its agencies, and the World Trade Organization that have special management challenges that aren't addressed in schools of public administration. These types of organizations require management talent. But currently we are not studying them. We are not developing materials either from a research perspective or a teaching perspective for the non-profit sector.

**Natasa:** *What is the future likely to be for those who are just starting their academic career today?*

**Clay:** Within the Decision Sciences Institute, it appears that the more-experienced folks need to work with the new faculty—the new management researchers—to make sure that we evolve professionally in our business schools and management programs in broad, not narrow, ways. Let me be more specific about this. I am extremely concerned about business education and mentoring in its current state. We may end up like law schools. We need to evolve more like medical schools. That means, we need to develop a balance of practice or a balance of art, science, mentoring, and research. We currently lack such a balance in business schools. We produce deans who are bean counting and deans and associate deans who are looking for simple metrics to manage complex situations. The young faculty need us to help fight off those trends and to ensure that they are not forced into a mold. We need to change the current situation so that young faculty can have a career that fits the skills and personality of individual faculty. The Decision Sciences Institute

tries to deal with these issues by offering sessions and programs at its conferences where issues such as the development of new faculty are covered.

The Decision Sciences Institute can help mould the academic future of management education and to do so requires leadership from the young people. I'm not the only guy crying wolf about this is-

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sue. We need a rich and diverse approach to training managers, not a narrowly focused approach. We need people to champion these approaches. The Decision Sciences Institute is probably well positioned to develop such champions. It is better positioned to do so than the Academy of Management because of the broad nature and diversity of our membership.

In addition, the future for the faculty that is currently going through the tenure cycle is different than the tenure cycle that faculty went through 10-15 years ago. It has already changed and it has changed in ways that I do not particularly like. For instance, we had to make some odd moves here at my university. At my school we could not promote our executive education teachers under the new faculty tenure criteria. The research these educators conduct is highly applied. They do not place their works in the journals preferred by our associate dean. So, to keep them on our faculty, we have put them on contracts that make them look like second-class citizens.

I think that the promotion and tenure criteria at many universities, both in the U.S. and abroad, are increasingly narrow. The criteria are certainly appropriate, but remain insufficient. I want to see a broader portfolio of human talent in business school faculties than a group

of people publishing in journals with narrow areas of interests. The academic landscape has certainly changed.

Finally, it also appears that there is a lot of tension regarding new faculty's involvement in the Decision Sciences Institute. There is very little accommodation in tenure credit now for people who invest themselves in professional organizations such as the Decision Sciences Institute. I think that having young faculty members involved at conferences in a broad set of academic activities such as creating sessions, presenting and discussing scholarly works and such is important. However, business schools are now telling the new faculty members not to waste their time at such activities because investing energy in these types of activities will not get them tenure or promoted.

**Natasa:** *Thank you, Professor Whybark, for sharing your thoughts with me.*

### **Concluding Remarks**

The interview concluded on a constructive tone with Professor Clay Whybark's impeccable optimism for the future of the Decision Sciences Institute. As one starting out in an academic career, I was delighted with my interaction with Professor Whybark and glimpse his experience, knowledge, and passion for the Decision Sciences Institute. Many times, knowing the background and the evolutionary history of an organization helps one to form a better understanding of its character. Professor Whybark provided me with an understanding of the Institute's past culture and future potential. Naturally, it remains to be seen what the future holds for younger faculty like me; however, having these useful insights may help us be effective contributors to our academic disciplines and to the Decision Sciences Institute. ■