

The Asian Pacific Institute of Decision Sciences: An International Perspective

by Don Kerr, Griffith University, Australia

I have been asked to share my reactions to the Asia-Pacific Regional Institute of Decision Sciences (APDSI) meetings, my perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of APDSI, and the role of APDSI in the international community of scholars. In order for me to provide an assessment of the points raised above and in order for you as a reader to put these views in some context, I feel obliged to provide some details of my present circumstances and my past history.

First, I live and work in Australia, therefore, I probably feel more comfortable belonging to an institute directed to the Southeast Asian region than many of my European and North American counterparts. I have attended and presented papers at both the Singapore and the Bangkok (Thailand) APDSI conferences. I thoroughly enjoyed both conferences and feel that not only can I comment on APDSI and how I think it fits into my research program but also provide some constructive criticisms on aspects of the running of both conferences.

Much of my experience is through the eyes of an applied research scientist, based in agricultural and environmental sciences with a very strong multi-disciplinary approach to studying the world. Much of my research years were spent developing research programs and disseminating results to dairy farmers. I quickly came to the conclusion that the use of decision support systems could be an effective way of disseminating results. To this end, I started developing knowledge-based decision support systems to help agricultural advisers and farmers make decisions on resource allocation problems on dairy farms. I have since left this research position and have been an academic based in the School of

Management at Griffith University in Australia.

I find APDSI a useful institute given my past experience because of its interdisciplinary focus. The papers presented in the last two conferences demonstrate this focus. For example, the Singapore conference had tracks ranging from international business to operations management and quantitative methods, while the Bangkok conference had a similar diversity of presentations.

Analysis of the Strengths and Weaknesses of APDSI

One of the most important aspects of effective decision-making is the ability to explore alternatives. Because the interdisciplinary aspect of APDSI encourages the exploration of alternatives, I thought it appropriate for me to conduct my own SWOT analysis of the benefits of APDSI and its membership (Table 1).

The strengths of interdisciplinary focus far outweigh the weaknesses of diversity of presentations, especially if people can move freely between concurrent sessions. The Asian focus is a definite strength as it allows researchers in the Austral-Asian region of the world a forum and access to other views as well as some input into the operations of the U.S.-based Decision Sciences Institute. It must also be noted that the opportunity to publish peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary papers at an international conference is always beneficial, especially if they can be converted to journal papers at a later date. The final strength relates to value for money. I consider the registration and accommodation costs to be very reasonable and, of course, cheaper airfares from Australia are an added bonus for me.



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is a senior lecturer in the School of Management at Griffith University (Australia). He teaches in the field of Information Systems and has 25 years experience as a research scientist in the development of Decision Support Systems.

During these 25 years, he has pioneered the development of whole farm models for the Australian dairy industry using techniques such as intervention analysis, regression analysis, simulation models, and artificial neural networks. He has also pioneered the development of expert systems in the same industry.

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The weaknesses of some tracks being too far removed from one's own research and the lack of rigour in some presentations could equally apply to many other conferences. I suppose the point I am trying to make relates to ensuring that we maintain high standards and relevance. One other point that concerns me is an Australian requirement for proof of the peer review process. Under our system, academics are paid a research quantum if they can prove that their paper has been accepted by a conference and it was peer-reviewed. This process usually involves producing copies of the referees' reports. I have not been able to obtain these reports from the last two conferences and have subsequently not received my research quantum for these two papers. This is of only minor concern to me, but it would still be nice to be able to fulfill all the Australian requirements for proof of peer review.

With regard to opportunities, I find that being able to meet academics with similar research interests from around the world is very useful. For example, I discovered that all academics that I meet appear to have similar pressures, as is the case in Australia—we must teach larger and larger classes amid concerns of falling standards. It is always good to go to an international conference at least once a year to gain a "reality check" of your own situation with respect to other countries. Another opportunity is collaborative research projects, and I have seen at least one collaborative project come to fruition as a result of discussions at conferences.

With respect to threats, I consider the previous two conferences to be very well sponsored by both the government and private sectors. The Singapore conference provided good value for money with what appeared to be significant government and corporate sponsorship. This either reflects some significant entrepreneurial efforts by the conference organizers or a more enlightened attitude by government authorities and corporations with regard to international conferences. I am sure that efforts by conference organizers were significant, but I am equally convinced that there was significant corporate and government sponsorship for this event. This is an excellent reflection on the conference organizers' ability to generate interest in

these sectors; however, I feel that this would be particularly difficult in Australia and perhaps some other countries, especially obtaining money from the government sector. I base this judgement on my experiences in assisting in planning two conferences in Australia. Perhaps this threat could be reduced if we had a stable home city to host a conference each year where local sponsorship was assured and this could be supplemented with sponsorship from foreign guest countries.

Conference Format

The general format of both conferences was very good. The two-day conference with several concurrent sessions followed by a tour for those wishing to do some sightseeing is a good format to follow. I also think the APDSI conferences are well presented and provide many benefits to participants such as a diversity of presentations allowing for a diversity of thought, research options, and opportunities.

Opinions of a Novice Conference Attendee

I have asked a colleague who attended her first APSDI conference in Singapore for opinions on the conference and the institute. Her name is Dale and she is a Ph.D. student under my supervision. She is a

novice researcher but had interesting comments about the conduct of the Singapore conference. First, she felt that the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly, which made her feel very at ease during the conference. However, she also felt it was difficult to move from session to session mainly because closed doors made a discrete exit to another session very difficult. This situation was similar in the Bangkok conference.

I agree with Dale in this instance as even sessions containing uniform subject matter may have presentations that are less relevant than others in concurrent sessions. Attendees should be able to move freely from session to session. This can become problematic if the audience disturbs the presenter, or even worse, a novice presenter gets the wrong idea and thinks that people are leaving the presentation for other reasons. The solution may be to coordinate presentations so that they finish within two minutes of each other, allowing participants to change sessions without disturbing others.

Dale also found it difficult to determine the true content of presentations from the few words in the session title. This could have been due to inexperience; however, it would probably be useful to have a more descriptive title for each session. Dale's final suggestion was a request for a doctoral consortium where new researchers could

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-disciplinary • Asian focus • Good contacts with north American, European and Asian counterparts • Publication of inter-disciplinary papers • Peer reviewed • Good value for money 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-disciplinary approach can result in too much of a diversity of presentations. • Some of the tracks end up being too far removed from your own research. • Some presentations appeared to lack rigour • Proof of the peer review process is not well established
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to meet researchers both from south-east Asia, Europe and North America • Collaborative research – especially participating countries • A home city that is able to sponsor the conference on an ongoing basis 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings may become too expensive if corporate and/or government sponsorship does not continue. • APDSI may run out of cities willing to host the conference

Table 1: Strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities with APDSI membership.

be introduced to APDSI through a critical review of their Ph.D. proposal. This would need to be in a supportive and non-threatening environment.

On a final note, and of concern to only a few participants, namely those from the

southern hemisphere, is the timing of the conference in late July. In Australia, this is the first week of teaching, and I find it difficult to get the time off. If it were a week earlier, as it will be in Shanghai, it would improve the situation for me. ■

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NAMES IN THE NEWS

CAROL LATTA, Executive Director, Decision Sciences Institute, clatta@gsu.edu



Sanjay L. Ahire has recently been promoted to the rank of professor in operations management (OM) at the University of Dayton. Over the last eight years, Sanjay has

published numerous articles on evaluation of various operations improvement strategies with respect to organizational performance, and conceptual and empirical interfaces between such approaches as TQM, JIT, ISO campaigns, and management science applications. His accomplishments include the 2002 Wickham Skinner Teaching Innovation Achievements Award (Production and Operations Management Society in recognition of his supervision of 130 actual operations improvement projects by students at the Indiana University South Bend in the only survey OM course at the undergraduate and graduate levels during just a two-year period (1998-2000). At the University of Dayton, Sanjay has led the launch of a state-of-the-art undergraduate program in OM supported by an elite OM Advisory Council, and the development of a CD-ROM that explains the field of OM to incoming freshmen, parents, and employers.

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Nancy Hyer, Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, and **Urban Wemmerlöv**, School of Business, University of Wisconsin-Madison, are recipients of the 2003 Shingo Prize for Excellence in Manufacturing for their book *Reorganizing the Factory: Competing through Cellular Manufacturing* (Productivity Press, 2002). This work was one of four winners in the Research & Profes-



sional Publication category which "recognizes and promotes research and writing regarding new understanding of manufacturing." The award letter says: "Your submission has undergone an extensive review process during the past few months. The examiners for the research award are among the most prestigious academicians and practitioners in the country in terms of manufacturing excellence. You can be justifiably proud of this accomplishment."

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William C. Perkins (Indiana University), Fellow and past president and Distinguished Service Award recipient of DSL, has recently received an "all-university" Distinguished Service Award from Indiana University. Bill will be retiring in the summer of 2003 after



37 years of exceptional service to Indiana University and his profession. He was selected to receive one of two Distinguished Service Awards for the Bloomington Campus "because of the extraordinary model he provides of truly distinguished service." The Distinguished Service Awards were initiated by the Bloomington Faculty Council to recognize leadership and dedication within the University, within a discipline and/or in the community. Congratulations to Bill for this well-deserved award and on the occasion his retirement.

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Andy Vazsonyi (*Decision Line* feature editor) has published a memoir about his life and times in mathematics and decision sciences. In *Which Door Has the*

Cadillac: Adventures of a Real-Life Mathematician (Writers Club Press, 2002), Andy reveals the personal side of a mathematician who passionately believes that the more people know about real-life math, the better their lives will be. Laced with offbeat humor and plenty of anecdotes, *Which Door* provides a lively, personal account of a world shaped by math and decision making. Students especially will find a fascinating look at the early history of their research area (from Pythagoras to Herb Simon). Martin K. Starr, Distinguished Professor of Management Science and Operations Management at Rollins College's Crummer Graduate School of Business, says, "Andy's memoirs are an unconventional trip to places you can never find again with people who remain great even though they are no more, in ways that only Andy's mind can fashion."

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