

DECISION LINE

Vol. 39, No. 5

October 2008

2009 Officers' Nominees Selected

President-Elect

G. Keong Leong, University of Nevada – Las Vegas
David L. Olson, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Secretary

Janet Hartley, Bowling Green State University
Sameer Verma, San Francisco State University

At-Large Vice-Presidents

Kenneth K. Boyer, The Ohio State University
Jatinder (Jeet) N.D. Gupta, University of Alabama – Huntsville
Richard L. Jenson, Utah State University
Jeff Ogden, Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT)
Susan Pariseau, Merrimack College
Subhashish (Sub) Samaddar, Georgia State University
John Seydel, Arkansas State University
Paulo Renato (Rodrigo) Soares, UFRGS University, Brazil

Indian Subcontinent Regionally-Elected Vice President - tbd

Southeast Regionally-Elected Vice President - tbd

Southwest Regionally-Elected Vice President - tbd

Western Regionally-Elected Vice President - tbd

See **NOMINATIONS**, page 6

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



The 'So-What?' Factor and What You Can Do about It

Norma J. Harrison, CEIBS, President, DSI

Academics continuously receive a battering from the business community about their research and publication directions. I hear words like "impractical," "irrelevant," "impossible to read by decision makers," and others much more profane, but which somehow, don't seem to reduce with time. Decision makers in business, government, and social communities are still not convinced that the majority of research in the decision sciences is going to have any impact

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on their practices and performance. Two commentaries in recent *Decision Sciences* journals have made mention of a less than ideal relationship between research, model development, and the use or reliance in practice (Guide & Wassenhove, 2007; Bendoly & Speier, 2008).

Internationally, it does not help that research methods and designs which may be applicable in the developed Western world, just fall short in the developing or undeveloped regions of the globe. For example, empirical studies which have developed to a fine art in the West, are often just not applicable in many Asian developing countries where there is a large problem of data integrity from respondents and where, even from the formal agencies, one gets constantly changing statistical data. Another thing that irritates both practitioners and researchers in developing economies is when the “fly-ins”—Western researchers who fly into less developed countries, spend a week or two there, and then emerge as “experts” in the area—either erroneously superimpose Western concepts and models on these emerging economies or conjure theories that are diametrically opposed to reality.

How helpful can exponents in decision sciences be then to industry, government and social communities in these circumstances? Often, intensive case research is more appropriate, but then this method of analysis is less commonly accepted or recognized by the “top” Western journals. This is very slowly changing as some in the production and operations management (P/OM), operations research (OR), and information systems (IS) communities have seen the need for industrially relevant research and the dangers of pursuing rigor in favor of relevance. Protocols for case research are being developed but then, junior researchers are still advised not to use case research, as there is a greater probability of publication rejection. So, a Catch 22!

Daniel Guide and Luk Wassenhove (Guide & Wassenhove, 2007) state that the need for grounded business research is now greater than ever, and have encouraged academic research partnership with industry as this can lead to research

that is relevant, rigorous, and refreshing, and indeed, encourage exploration of unexplored research territory that is of vital importance to industry. However, they admit that this is not an easy route for academics interested in operations research modeling or empirical methods. While there can, and should be, methodological work in P/OM, OR, IS and other decision science areas, there should be a minimum of work on artificial problems.

Here is where the business community and government decision makers are going to take more notice very soon. There is emerging a group of researchers who are putting themselves out on a limb. They are daring to research—and attempting to publish—in the nontraditional, non-mainstream, and sometimes politically incorrect or uncharted waters, just because these are necessary to examine or are areas that the public—community or business—should be aware of, and/or make improvements in.

For example, Ramakrishna Velamuri and Sindhu Shanmugam studied the role that entrepreneurial capacity-building played in poverty alleviation in the artisan community in the southern Indian city of Athani (Velamuri & Shanmugam, forthcoming). They traced the development of a project launched by a Bangalore-based non-governmental organization, and how it turned impoverished communities around both economically and socially by more than doubling their household incomes. This supported better nutrition, better healthcare, and children's education, and created a dramatic impact on individual families and the community at large.

Credible researchers like Aleda Roth and other (Roth, et al, 2008) have also recently made a critical study of the global food supply chain—so relevant with current concerns on the quality of food ingredients especially from developing exporting countries—and they now challenge supply chain managers to assess and improve their performance and that of their global suppliers. The criteria offered go beyond the typical focus on cost and functional specifications to emphasize the robustness of the quality,

practices and processes along the supply chain itself.

The reality is that these exporting developing economies, while fast catching up with the Western world in many aspects, are still struggling to feed billions of people, the majority of whom are living at poverty levels. Part of this effort is aided by the revenue raised through exports, and therefore the greater value and relevance of research such as the above for decision scientists is to examine, make recommendation, and assist in applying methods not only beneficial to the Western world, but also to the emerging economies so that they are more able to sustain their exports thereby improving the lot of their own people.

So, once in a while, I would encourage you to succumb to the temptation of working out of the mainstream and really stretch the art of decision sciences into areas without a comfort factor but which leads you to distinctly improve the way that businesses or governments offer their products or services, so that ultimately we improve the social fabric of life.

I hope to meet up with many of you at our DSI Annual Meeting in November this year. Baltimore should be great that time of the year!

Norma J. Harrison (海若琳)

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