System Dynamics Society
2014 Summer Policy Council Meeting
Marketing & Communications Report

by

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Accomplishments

Over the last six months, there have been many discussions about the visibility of the field, quality of work, and career pathways of people doing high quality work. In seeking to develop a more comprehensive view of our field that spans multiple allied fields, it is clear that we disagree on a number of basic assumptions that arguably appear to stem from where we are practicing system dynamics. Hopefully, we may be able to clarify and resolve some differences during this conference, but others will require more information and discussion. I would be happy to share my summary on these discussions after the meeting, but I believe that the activity led by George Richardson at the PC meeting will be much more productive in terms of surfacing these issues as they exist among the PC and advancing the discussion.

In addition to the discussions to help me better understand the scope of the marketing and communication challenges I have also allocated some of Nancy Mueller's staff time at the Social System Design Lab (Wash U) to help support marketing and communications efforts.

Additionally, I am in the process of developing job descriptions and appointing Jenny Zhao and Andrew Frangos (Systems and Us website) as assistant vice presidents (AVPs) for marketing and communications. Jenny and Andrew started their website on their own time with the idea of increasing the visibility of system dynamics/systems thinking. Working with Nancy, they will be convening monthly meetings to help share and keep track of trends in online marketing and communication of system dynamics topics.

The major effort has been focused on developing a marketing and communications plan for 2014.

Marketing and Communications Plan 2014

- *Develop proposal for a magazine.* While the academic journals provide an outlet for peer reviewed work and newsletters update members on the state of the field, we presently do not have an outlet to tell stories about how people are using system dynamics, what brought them into the field, and so on. Many professional organizations have in addition to their main journal and newsletter also a magazine. For example, IEEE Spectrum routinely profiles careers of electrical engineers with a notable emphasis on both early and mid-career professionals. We need a similar distribution channel. I will be convening a small

ad-hoc committee to look at our options and prepare a proposal for the Winter PC meeting for developing a magazine including representation from publications, professional practice, online presence and the home office.

- *Design and conduct an online survey*. Many of the questions about direction in marketing and communication depend on assumptions that vary by the field and practice of system dynamics. We need better information to determine the distribution of demand for system dynamics and supply of human capital to perform quality work. I am looking for cooperation from software vendors and organizations promoting system dynamics/systems thinking (e.g., Creative Learning Exchange, Waters Foundation) in providing access to their mailing lists in hopes of being able to both estimate the size of the potential community of practitioners and response rate. In addition to providing some initial baseline survey, this will also provide us with a basis for judging the value of seeking out a professional marketing firm.

- *Inventory existing communication channels.* There are already a variety of public communication channels (e.g., blogs, newsletters, lists, forums, webpages) and private communication channels (e.g., reviewers for journals, conferences, grants, Facebook, personal communication) that shape how system dynamics is perceived. While the former tend to be more visible, the latter can have a significant impact. To better understand this, we will be conducting an inventory of communication channels and conduct a content analysis to try and quantify sources of positive and negative messages in the field, with the longer term goal being to track changes over time in how we projecting messages about system dynamics as a field.

- *Develop and review system dynamics "talking points"*. One of the outputs from the survey will be a set of common communication issues that respondents identify within their organization and communications. These will be analyzed and talking points drafted based on these in addition to input from experienced practitioners in different fields. A draft will be circulated to the PC for review and discussion at the Winter PC meeting. The goal of this effort is both to develop some consensus on how we want to project our image as a field with respect to specific aspects of system dynamics, and provide a tool that can help novices and moderately experienced users to communicate more effectively with diverse audiences.

Support, cooperation and resources needed as well as potential obstacles/issues

- *Start regular (e.g., monthly or quarterly) VP meetings.* Many of these activities crosscut a number of other VP areas (e.g., professional practice, publications, online presence, membership, chapters and SIGs). It would be helpful to have a regular (e.g., monthly or quarterly) online meeting for VPs to communicate their efforts with each other, the home office, and president.

- *Develop a certification process for **certifying models**.* Much of the discussion about certification has focused on certifying people, but most of our complaints about visibility concern the quality of the work and modeling. It strikes me in addition to considering certification of people we could develop a process for certifying models (e.g., similar to LEED building certification).

- *Discontinue publishing the conference proceedings altogether.* Alternatively, if there is a process to select the best papers to publish, consider having them formally edited, reviewed, and formatted in an annual issue of *System Dynamics Review*.

- *Support for collecting mailing list memberships from system dynamics software vendors and other organizations*. One option here is to send the link to the survey to the vendors, but we would still need to know the size of their mailing list and there would be duplication of survey requests adding to respondent burden. The second and preferred option is to develop a comprehensive survey list that would only be used for the purpose of the survey. This would minimize duplication of survey requests and provide more accurate information about the size of the sampling frame. Ideally, we would want to do a randomized survey with incentives to maximize survey responses and improve the generalizability of the results.

- *Recommendations of marketing firms we might solicit for a survey in 2015.*

- Nominations or volunteers for the ad-hoc magazine committee.