System Dynamics Review

Executive Editor Report to SDS Policy Council
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This report is structured in four sections and represents the summary of activities since January 1, 2012 when I accepted the position as Executive Editor.

1. **Publication Status**
    1.1. Publication of Volume 28 (2012) has progressed in time and we are now a bit ahead of schedule with about 1.5 issues of accepted backlog.
       - Issue 1, 20Feb12, on time. 106 pages; 4 research articles, 1 notes and insights and 1 editorial. With the exception of the editorial, the previous executive editor had accepted all papers.
       - Issue 2, 18Jun12, two weeks late. 102 pages; 4 research articles, 1 notes and insights and 1 editorial. The previous executive editor had accepted two of the research articles. Delayed caused in the production process not the review process.
       - We have accepted enough material for issue number 3 (two months ahead of schedule) and have enough material to cover half of the page coverage for issue number 4. Specifically, the following items have been accepted and are at some stage in the production process: 4 research papers, 1 research note, 1 archives paper, and 1 Notes & Insight.

    1.2. I am working with Wiley to speed up the production process to get papers out in "Early View" faster — currently the time between acceptance of the paper and its appearance in the website is about 80 days (down from 162 last year), but I see no reason why this number shod not be much lower.

2. **Structural and Process Changes**
    2.1. Returned to the original spirit of Notes and Insights section to Non-research/Non-review papers of interest to the system dynamics community
       - The first N&I under the new format appeared on issue 28(2) introducing the documentation tool for SD models developed by Argonne Laboratories. A second N&I on the work done with the C_ROADS simulation is at the proof stage. We are currently working with Jay W. Forrester obtain a version of the field over the next 50 years and working on similar ideas.
       - Currently I've been requesting and handling the editorial process for N&I myself, but I am looking for an Editor of this section.
       - Author guidelines have been expanded to now look for 'short' research papers (what we use to print as notes and insights – see §2.2).

2.2. Changed the existing editors of Notes and Insights (Yaman Barlas and Andreas Grossler) to become full Managing Editors.
- Our previous definition of the Notes & Insights section was more consistent with a 'short' research article (required full review and all the sections of a full research paper). As a result of those requirements Yaman and Andreas were performing almost the same job as the regular Managing Editors.
- The new appointment permits us to have a more balance workload among the managing editors and a faster response time.

2.3. Revived the Archives Section of the journal
- Jack Homer's 1983 ISDC paper on partial model testing is already at the proofs stage.
- I am working with Christian E. Kampmann publish his 1996 ISDC paper.
- I am looking to additional papers for this section (ideas are welcomed) — although I do not expect to have more than two archive papers per year.

2.4. Changes in the review flow
  2.4.1. Changed the submission form in ManuscriptOne system to capture more data relevant to review process. Specifically, we are capturing the number of words in the article, number of pages, whether there is material for the electronic supplement. This questions simplify our review process but also constitute a self check for authors to assess whether they are within the journal guidelines.
  2.4.2. Reduced the number of papers going out to reviewers.
  - Judging from the contents of the backlog when I first arrived, there was very little screening at the editorial level (only obvious misfits to the journal). Now the Editorial Team explicitly assesses the paper in four dimensions before deciding on whether the paper is ready to go out for review. These dimensions are: contribution to the SD community, whether the paper is well written (language, structure and argument), inspectability of SD work, and originality of the contribution. All of these dimensions are minimum requisites for any paper in the SDR (see §2.4.4) and do not require a reviewer to make the assessment.
  - This has resulted in a 'desk' rejection rate of 71% for new papers submitted in 2012, and 25% of the non-rejected papers have gone back to the authors with suggestions from the editors without going directly to the reviewers. Note that this rejection rate is only marginally higher than the journal's rejection rate in the previous four years. The difference is that it now takes one week to make the decision instead of 3 months (see §3) and the decision is made without burdening our reviewers.
  2.4.3. All revise and resubmit and acceptance decision letters now are first discusses with and agreed with the Executive Editor. Having the EE input at this stages is helping to reduce the number of iterations for final acceptance and reducing significantly the time in the production process.

2.4.4. All decision letters *and* reviews are now shared with all the reviewers of the paper. The idea is to slowly increase the reviewing standards as reviewers see the work done by other reviewers and the journal editors.

2.4.5. Increased the control on the length-to-contribution ratio of each paper. We are pushing for sorter papers (while not compromising the effectiveness of the paper) and encouraging the use of electronic supplements.

2.4.6. To increase the editorial teams accountability for the review process, we started to include in each published paper the dates when it was originally submitted, revised, and accepted.

2.5. Guidelines for Authors
(see http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1099-1727/homepage/ForAuthors.html).
New guidelines for authors were uploaded in the journal website on May12. The purpose of these guidelines is to reflect the new editorial strategy for the journal (see §§2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) and to reduce the workload on editors and reviewers as authors' have a clearer understanding of what is required to publish a manuscript in the SDR. Note that the journal's aim and scope was not modified. Specifically, the new guidelines

    a. delineate the four MINIMUM requirements for a paper to be accepted in the SDR:
        i. Relevant to SD community,
        ii. Well written (language, structure, and argument),
        iii. SD impecable ... inspectable at time of submission, and
        iv. An original contribution (this is research)
    b. made available/required the model documentation tool;
        i. See http://tools.systemdynamics.org/sdm-doc/
    c. provide precise guidelines for CLD and S&F Diagrams;
    d. provide precise guidelines for graphs; and
    e. encourage the use of electronic supplements.

2.6. I am currently working with Wiley and the Home Office to generate an automatic email notification with the Table of Contents to all SDS members at the time of release of a new issue.

3. **Reviewing Performance**
3.1. We dealt with the existing review backlog.
From 34 manuscripts that were in the system (either with reviewers or with authors) on 01Jan12, we are now down to 5 manuscripts with authors and 11 manuscripts in the review process, representing a 53% drop of the existing review backlog.

3.2. We have much faster review times.

The average and maximum submission-to-decision times for submissions made during 2012 (original and revisions) have improved, respectively, by 78 and 72% from last year.
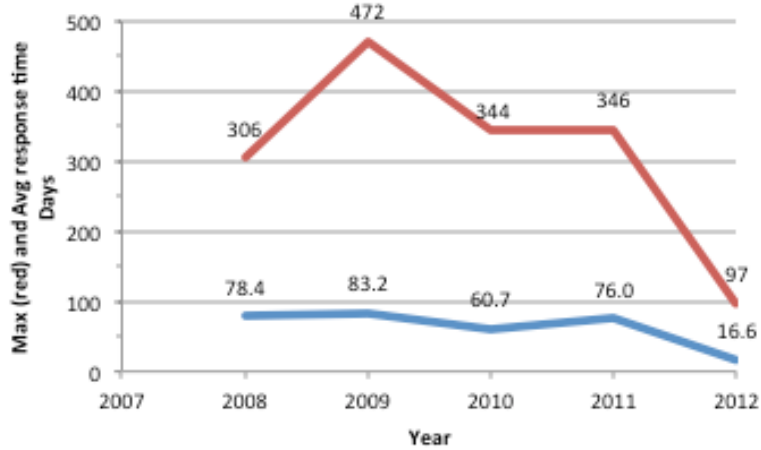

3.3. As of 30Jun12, the submission rate is slightly under the average for the last four years.
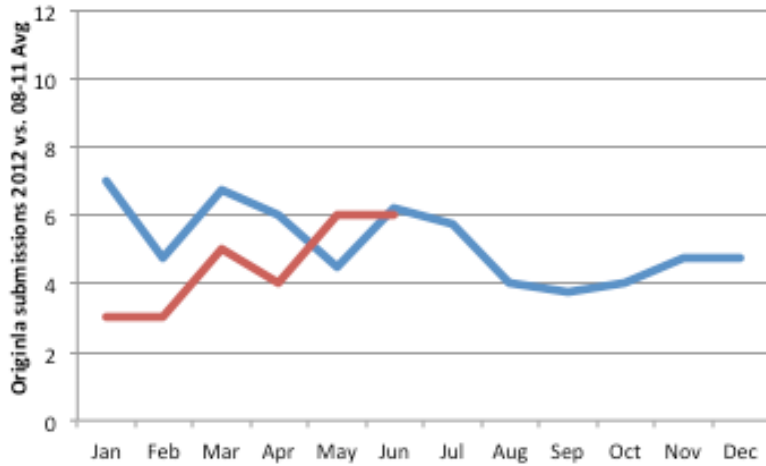
3.4. As a consequence of the aggressive review process to reduce the backlog, submission of revisions are higher than the average for the last four years (as of 30Jun12).
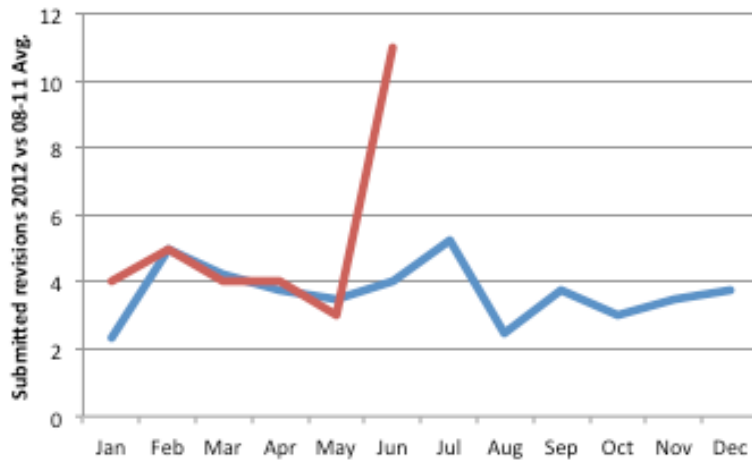
3.5. It was not possible to assess an acceptance ratio that was representative over a time frame since some of the decisions are taken months after the paper was submitted. A 'steady state' approximation would be to consider the number of accepted papers in a year divided by the number of original submissions in that year.
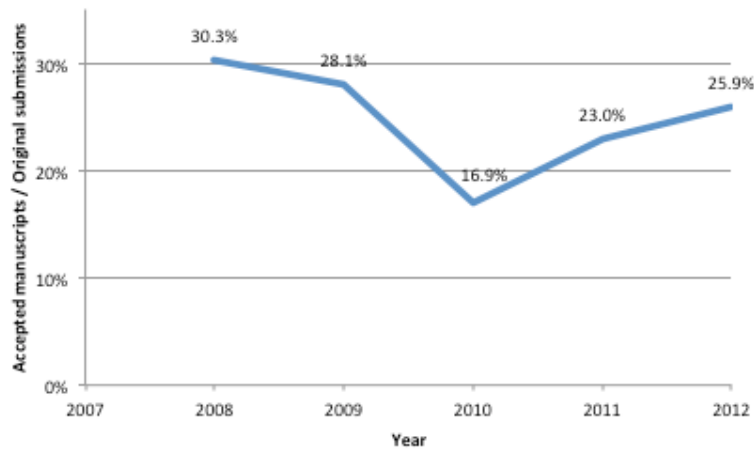
This number, however, is also affected by the intensity of the review process. For instance, in 2012 we've accelerated some of the decision from submissions in 2011 and we have not yet seen all the submissions of the year. Thus, I expect the final acceptance rate for 2012 to be slightly lower than what is reported in the graph. Finally, note that we are achieving these similar acceptance ratios with a much lower load on our reviewer base.

4. Future Plans

4.1. With Wiley's support, in the next six months I'm planning to release one or two 'virtual issues' of the SDR. A virtual issue is a grouping of already published SDR paper on a single topic (e.g., model analysis, participatory model building) with a short introduction. Since our journal has such an eclectic audience, and we all enter the journal from different angles, I believe these special issues will have an effective impact on readability. Furthermore, virtual issues would be a good entry point for novices into our journal (e.g., "What does the SDR have to say about supply chain management?"). If successful, I would like to ask each of the SIGs to propose their own virtual issue.

4.2. I plan to develop guidelines and policies for potential conflict of interest issues among authors, reviewers, and editors.

4.3. Up to this date all my efforts have been concentrated in improving the speed and outcomes of review process. Very little has been done to improve the journal's ability to attract interesting papers to the community. I plan to engage the Associate Editors in this important role.

4.4. I want to explore with possibility of recognizing the Managing Editors for their work and include in the name of the Managing Editor at the foot of the first page of each published paper together with the submitted/revised/accepted dates.

4.5. I am considering the possibility of establishing an annual "best reviewer" award to recognize the work and dedication of our reviewers.

4.6. I would like to figure out a better way to get a handle on our reviewers. It is not clear to me whether we are fully utilizing our reviewers' talents and whether we are 'abusing' the generosity of some of our reviewers.