

Report VP Chapters for the 2013 Winter Meeting of the Policy Council

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1. Main events and achievements of 2012

The discovery that Chapters and SIGs have a lot in common. Several events have to do with this:

1. The questions and petitions on behalf of SIGs related to the “Capacity Development Fund”, which lead to an effort to “evolve the Capacity Development Fund” into a more general “Strengthening the Field Fund”, to be discussed in the upcoming Winter Meeting.
2. The preparation of the VP Chapters report, where I was struck to find how much overlap there is between Chapters and SIGs membership. From this recognition came the idea to strengthen the coordination in membership management between VP Member Services (which includes SIGs) and VP Chapters.
3. In the aftermath of the Summer Meeting, I started to think about an information system which might help improving this coordination. This started of an ongoing discussion about what the Society expects from Chapters and SIGs, respectively, what it should offer them (in order to be attractive), how we can deal with the fact that Chapters have members who are not SDS members, and related questions (discussed below). Even though it was not a VP Chapters initiative, the fact to develop Policies which deal with SIGs as separate groups of members is also an important step (<http://systemdynamics.org/PoliciesDraftJan22-2012.pdf>).
4. Two things concerning continuity. David Ford made me write down a “user’s manual VP Chapters”. It was also an important event that there now is an Assistant VP - Ozgle Pala - who might take over the VP when my term is over (even though I now will serve a second term).

2. Main aims for 2013

In the current situation, we have an explicit recognition that SIGs and Chapters are two different types of groups of members. The policy document also mentions what the SDS expects from Chapters and from SIGs. On grounds of a mail discussion with Kim Warren, I would still say the function of Chapters and of SIGs is not entirely clear - especially when we recognize that there groups’ members may have their own ideas concerning what their functions and goals are.

For this reason, I believe that 2013 should be the year when we work out an explicit consensus on what function SIGs and Chapters have (and accept to have) referring to the SDS, which obviously includes a definition of what functions the SDS has for these types of groups.

One step in this direction is the proposal to “evolve the Capacity Develop Fund” which is moved now to be discussed and decided on.

While the “Strengthening the Field” work is well under way, a different matter is that, in my opinion, the SDS still has to make clear what the Chapters and the SIGs are for.

Since I plan to make this the main activity of VC Chapters for 2013, I want to explain how I see the current situation, what I propose to achieve and how I propose to get there.

2.1 Membership states

Most of us will accept the following two statements

1. System dynamics is not an application domains in itself; rather, it is a methodology which is useful in a variety of application domains
2. System dynamics is practiced in a variety of territories, most of which are English speaking or have a substantial part of their population educated with a high level of English language (USA, UK and central continental Europe).
3. Most people in the world are not aware of system dynamics. Of those who are aware of it, many have a certain level of practice but are not members of the SDS.
4. The SDS dedicates itself to system dynamics as methodology; members who are active or interested in a given application domain can participate in SIGs (or start one), and members who live in a given territory can participate in a Chapter (or start one), except for the USA. Some SDS members may thus participate in more than one SIG (but usually no several Chapters, to the exception of the students and the economists). However, it is possible to be a SDS member without participating in a Chapter or a SIG. It is also possible to be a Chapter member without being a SDS member. And it is possible to work together with SIG members without becoming a SDS member.

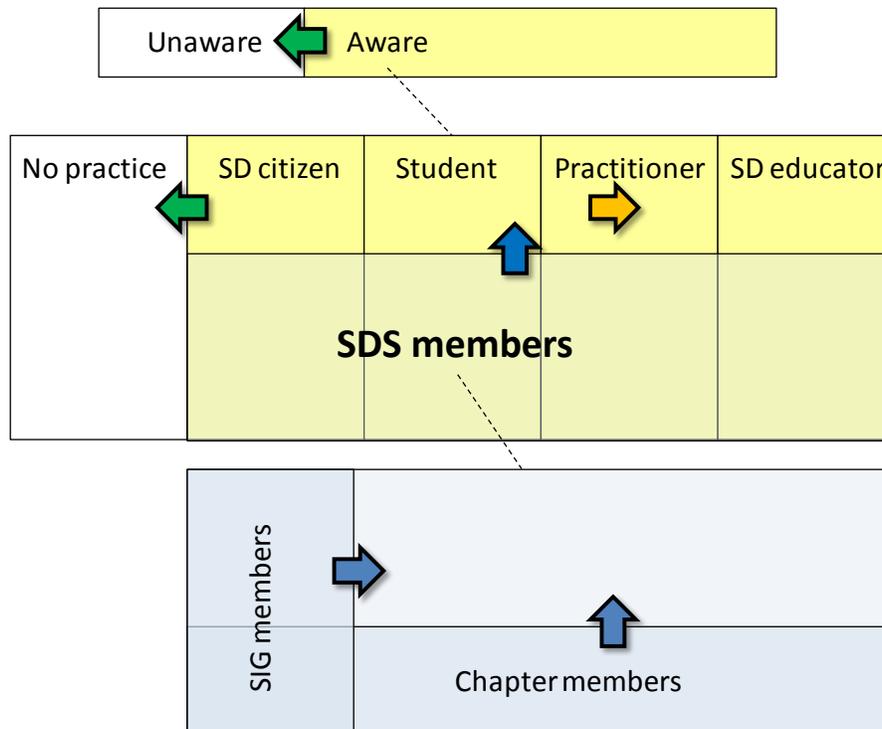
It is certainly worthwhile to reflect upon the meaning of not having a USA Chapter. Also, there are two Chapters which are not geographically or language oriented: the Students and the Economics Chapters. However, these are only local exceptions, and they will not be discussed here.

If we consider “person” as a class of objects, we can attach a set of specific properties to this class (beyond the usual ones like name, address, age, gender, profession, income range). The following table lists this set, giving each property a name and a set of possible values:

| <i>Property</i> | <i>Possible values</i> |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Awareness of system dynamics | yes; no |
| Practice of system dynamics | no; SD citizen; student; practitioner; SD educator |
| SDS membership | yes; no |
| Chapter membership | yes; no |
| SIG memberships | {SIG list}; no |
| Work domain (application domain) | {Chapter list}; no |

2.2 Membership development

Using these properties, we can depict our situation in the following way:



In the most general terms, we can divide the population into two states (unaware, aware) and our objective will be to expand the part of the “aware” (like indicated by the green arrow), transferring individuals from “unaware” to “aware”. But it is not enough that people be aware of SD; therefore we decompose this segment into 5 subgroups, according to their “practice” property. Certainly, we would like to transfer “no practice” individuals to “SD citizen” (and even further to the right side, like suggested by the orange coloured arrow; the “Capacity Development Fund” can be thought of as being this arrow).

On top of this, the SDS will be interested in these people to become SDS members (not only system dynamicists), therefore expanding the area covered by the semitransparent “SDS members” box.

Eventually, we also zoom into the SDS, where we see that not all members are in a Chapter and in a SIG. This is problematic for the following reasons: there is a SIG for virtually any application domain where SD is employed, including methodological SIGs like “model analysis”. So if a SDS member is not in any SIG, what is he or she doing? It might be a “SD citizen” (not interested in specific topics), but it might be as well a person inquiring into a new application domain, and we

should pay attention to him or her for he may be the only contact we have with this potential application domain.

If he is not in any Chapter (outside the USA), is he just not participating in his local Chapter (why?), or is it someone living in a place where there are not enough other system dynamicists to have a Chapter yet? We should know.

Therefore, the blue arrows represent our efforts to have our SDS members in the groups they (should) belong to and help creating the groups which would be useful to exist.

The green arrows roughly represent “dissemination” – helping that people know about SD and that they become at least SD citizens. The orange arrow represents “advancement” (capacity building, strengthening the field). In both cases, we are acting on behalf of the general interest of spreading SD. The blue arrows represent our self-interest: the SDS needs paying members. If there are Chapter members who are not yet “full” SDS members, then we would like them to become “full” members. If there are SIGs and Chapters for our members, then we want them to be so attractive that members do find it worthwhile to participate.

2.3 Goals

According to the argument presented above, *there is a clear statement concerning the functions of SIGs and Chapters*. We should like Chapters to make unaware people in their territory aware, to provide opportunities for becoming a SD citizen, to make their members become SDS members and to help strengthening SD capacity. We would like SIGs to make other members of their application domain aware of SD, allow them to become SD citizens, to advance the usefulness and use of SD in this domain and to be attractive for all SDS members being interested in this application domain.

Therefore we *should be able to know* the quantities of individuals in the states where the SDS membership property is “yes” and where SDS membership = “no” AND Chapter membership <> “no” (thus this is equivalent to where “aware = no”, which we cannot directly know). We *should also have educated guesses* concerning the size of the populations where “aware = yes AND Chapter <> yes” (equivalent to the “no practice” group of the aware population). We *should also know* the yearly flow rates in order to monitor the development. (This would require some kind of information system, which will be discussed below.)

What we *cannot* do now is to define target levels or percentages: as long as we do not know the typical lifecycles of membership (get into a local Chapter -> become a SDS member -> become a SIG member or other itineraries), we do not know how to define a useful level of people, say, being only local Chapter members. I believe we are just at the beginning of setting up a tentative conceptual model of membership dynamics, so we will have to invest some observation time before being able to announce quantified objectives.

Even if we now have an explicit statement of the functions of Chapters and of SIGs for the SDS, *We are not sure if what the SDS offers to SIGs and Chapters is enough* to make them assess their

own opinion (Is this way to define what Chapters/SIGs are for desirable? Is it feasible?). I would welcome discussion on how valuable is what the SDS offers (and how to develop it).

We have to dialogue with the Chapters and SIGs in order to have them “buy in” on this and add their own understanding and needs. As soon as we have an agreement in the PC, VP member Services and VP Chapters can start these dialogs.

Goal 1: agreeing on the functions of Chapters and SIGs for the SDS, hopefully to be achieved during the PC Winter Meeting 2013

Goal 2: to reach a mutual agreement with the Chapters and SIGs concerning their functions for the SDS and the SDS’ functions for them. Hopefully to be met during the International Conference.

Goal 3: design and develop a prototype for a membership management information system that allows Chapters and SIGs to manage their memberships in coordination with the SDS membership management.

The current membership management information system is located in the Home Office and has been used for years. It is robust and well dominated by its users. However, the simplicity of its design and implementation make it little convenient for monitoring the diverse stocks and flows referred to above.

The information system called for would allow Chapters to register their members (differentiated according to if they are only members of the Chapter or also full SDS members), observing the different legal and ethical restrictions concerning their members’ identities. This means that the Home Office automatically transfers information on SDS members who are also in a Chapter or a SIG to the respective Chapter or SIG. On top of this, Chapters can register their own “local” members, whose identity will not be disclosed; still the information system can tell the SDS the total number of “local” members and other stocks and flows. (Beyond informing, this will mean that the workload generated by Chapter/SIG representatives sending questions to the Home Office (and the other way around) is reduced.)

In order not to create additional work for the Home Office, it is suggested here that VP Chapters will lead and carry out the necessary design and programming work to generate a working prototype which can import data from the current MS Access application and be test used by Chapters and SIGs, while the Home Office continues working with the current application. We can design and develop during 2013 (the preliminary design can be presented for the International Conference) and test-use during 2014; this gives the Home Office protection and assures a smooth transition.

3. Support, cooperation and resources needed

The whole initiative of negotiating the mutual functions of SDS, Chapters and SIGs requires the moral support of the President and the PC, as well as the Home Office (which has already been very supportive in this topic). The practical work concerning goals 1 and 2 demands close cooperation between VP Members Services and VP Chapters (mainly over the Internet). Goal 3 will be carried out locally at my university by a student team under my active supervision.

Therefore there are no monetary or material resources needed.