System Dynamics Review

Executive Editor Report to SDS Policy Council

March, 2017

This is my first yearly report as Executive Editor of SDR to System Dynamics Society. Prior to this, I submitted a short 'Statement' in the July 2016 meeting of the Policy Council in Delft. In this report I will try to summarize the current state of SDR, the main challenges, major activities/developments to combat them, and the outlook and future plans.

1- The 2016 Volume (32)

We were able to publish 2016 issues with significant delays unfortunately. The first two issues were about six months late each. The last two issues are now ready to be printed as a double issue, in production stage. So we will be able to complete the 2016 volume only by the end of March 2017, with about a three-month delay.

As for the contents: the first issue had three main articles and a short note (in addition to my inaugural editorial); the second issue had three main articles and the 2016 JWF Forrester citation for the winners; and the final double issue has (will have) six main articles, my brief editorial, In Memoriam for Jay W. Forrester, and a recent article of his as an archive piece. This double issue will also have Jay's image in the cover background, with 'In Memoriam Jay W. Forrester 1918-2016' subtitle on it.

Overall, 2016 volume thus has 12 main articles, a short note and insight, an archive article, the 2016 JWF Award citation, In Memoriam, and my two editorials.

These numbers are right around our average numbers for the past few years. But having 12-14 articles per year is far beyond satisfactory for our journal. This is a major problem that we are working on and will continue to work on.

Delayed release of SDR issues is another problem that is not new, that has been a problem for many years, but particularly more pronounced in the last few years. The root cause of the problem is low rate of high quality submissions. In general, we have almost zero backlog of accepted papers (in addition to the ones to be used in the immediate issue). This was also the case when I took over in January 2016. In my first 6 months, the delay problem became even worse due to several transition problems in interaction. Most notably, the entire Wiley-SDR and Production team also changed coincidentally when I took over as EE. But procedures have recently improved and are moving in the right direction. So we expect at least no significant publication delays due to technical, online system or communication problems.

2- Current paper backlog and submissions

We have the following paper backlog (stocks) in different categories:

8 with authors waiting revision
6 Waiting for review reports and scores
1 Waiting RE decision
2 Waiting EE Assignment/Decision (ie. just submitted)

Of the above papers, two main papers and one short note are 'almost' accepted, with very minor revisions. So, with the acceptance of one more main paper, the first issue of 2017 can be published. This can happen by April-early May 2017, which would mean a significant reduction in our publication delay (down to 2 months). By the end of 2017, our goal is to eliminate any significant delays in issue production.

Our review/decision times continue to be good, compatible with best journals. Average times from submission to decision are:

40 days for main/research articles
32 days for short notes and insights

The distribution of these decision times is so that a majority of articles (58/104) fall in the 0-30 day group, while a small minority (5/104) fall in the extreme 121-150 day group, the rest being distributed in between. If we exclude these two extreme classes, the average decision time of the remaining articles is about 78 days. We continue to take new measures to further improve our decision times.

Submission rate is gradually improving:

Manuscript Type	Original	Revised	Total
Main Article	13	0	13
Notes and Insights	2	3	5
Research Article	51	35	86
Total	66	38	104

 (Based on all manuscripts whose submission date is between Jan 1, 2016 and Dec 31, 2016)

The original (initial) submission rate (66) in 2016 is above the yearly submission rates for the last three years (a piece of good news), but certainly not high enough to solve our problems.

Our acceptance rate for 2016 has been 18%, neither too high, nor too low in my view. To increase our backlog of accepted articles, we need to increase the submission rate of high quality articles.

3- Major activities/developments
As I stated it when I accepted the position, the most critical problem SDR faces today (and has faced for many years) is: submission rate of high quality articles is too low, leading to thin (with 2-3 main articles only) and/or delayed, or 'combined' issues.
We must find ways of increasing not just the submission rates, but also their quality. (Our desk reject rate is quite high, at around 50%).

Our primary workforce for paper recruitment is Associate Editors. I increased our AE board by 50% (from 10 to 15, with strong five new AEs) in 2016. AE's are also critical for SDR, as they (should) constitute our pool of best reviewers. I recently contacted a few other candidates to increase our AE board to 20 in 2017.

A related problem that I discovered in my first year as EE is that many good system dynamics experts either decline our reviewer invitation, or they do not respond at all. It is potentially a serious problem: there are instances where we spend a month just to come up with three reviewers (after having faced 4-5 declines and 4-5 no responses!) I intend to talk about this problem at the ISDC conference this summer, or even prior to that by email. This is definitely an issue we need to be sensitized about. I will also urge all members (and non-member system scientists) to join our online database of reviewers.

I wrote an inaugural editorial in the first issue of 2016 to make it absolutely clear that: i- all sorts of papers (methodology, applications, mathematical, experimental, conceptual, philosophical...) are welcome by SDR, as long as they are scientifically rigorous and well written, ii- SD belongs to the larger family of 'systems science'; a high quality paper that deals with a dynamic problem of systemic (endogenous, feedback) nature is more than welcome by SDR, regardless what modeling/simulation methods it adopts. More interaction between other dynamic-systems disciplines and SDR can produce multiple synergistic results.

To make the above two points even clearer, I am in the process of revising our author guidelines. In the process, I also want to minimize formalities, formatting and presentation difficulties, particularly to make

life easy for authors of best papers. We must focus on content quality and facilitate the submission and review of best papers.

We have been working closely with Wiley to promote SDR in a variety of media, including conferences, print media, web sites and social media. We will learn about the details of these and to what extent they influenced SDR readership in Wiley's yearly report. We expect that these promotion activities will also increase our submission rates from other systems fields (we have already seen signs in 2016).

We have also worked together with the technical team of Scholar One to make several improvements in the online submission and review system. We will continue to work together for further improvements.

4- Outlook and Future Plans
The outlook for 2017 looks better than 2016 and our recent past: As I explained above, we can realistically release issue 1 of 2017 in April-May. Beyond the ones for issue 1, we already have 15 papers currently either with reviewers, or with authors. It is reasonable to assume that issue 2 can then be produced in July-August. Then my goal would be to produce issue 3 in November-December. Finally, we can have the last issue of 2017 and the first issue of 2018 produced together as the 60th anniversary special (double) issue in February-March 2018. This would mean being back on track finally, after several years of delayed issues. I believe this plan is realistic.
Moreover, if the full papers submitted to the 60th anniversary issue happen to be high both in quality and number, then we should expect an increase in the number of high quality submissions to SDR in 2017-2018, as some of these papers would be encouraged for submission to regular issues by the guest editors.

My medium-term goal (before my term is over) is to have consistently 5-6 papers per issue, released with no delays. Once this is achieved, I believe we must target 7-8 articles per issue for the long term (>5-6 years). A majority of serious journals in our 'league' publish 100 or more papers per year. About 30 papers per year is not an ambitious goal at all for a mature field like SD and sister sciences. This latter would require new additions to the board of Managing and Associate Editors and a new page budget contract with Wiley. A related step would then be grouping and listing of the ME's and/or AE's by their interest areas. These issues can be discussed in 3-4 years, after the acute problem is solved.

Respectfully,

Yaman Barlas
Istanbul, March 2017