



SOCIETY OF DECISION
PROFESSIONALS
Clarity & Insight for Decisive Action

NEWSLETTER

Issue 14

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President's Message

by Pat Leach



Hello, SDP members and newsletter subscribers! I'm excited and honored to be the Society's ninth President. I also feel quite lucky, both to have the opportunity to steer our professional community, and to be doing so during a time in which the society is turning a corner financially. My predecessors had to deal with the constant threat of bankruptcy; I have the comparative luxury of being able to make a few investments to move the society forward. We still have to be cautious with our cash, but at least we now have a bit of breathing room. Kudos to our past Presidents, Officers, and Board members for getting us to this point.

As an example of such an investment, we have hired the Event Planning team at INFORMS to help Hilda with the planning, marketing, and running of DAAG 2020 (taking place in Houston March 31 – April 3). With the INFORMS marketing machine behind us (and in a city with a large population of DA professionals), we have every reason to believe that this conference will be a big success. We are also investing in legal advice on transitioning to 501(c)3 status, which could bring a number of benefits to the Society and to our sponsors. Neither of these efforts would have been possible just a year or two ago.

So yes, we have passed a financial inflection point. Now it is time to focus on moving the society past a reputational/name recognition inflection point. It's great that we now have about six hundred members, but what percentage is that of the people who have to wrestle with difficult decisions in their work and/or their lives? The potential to raise the SDP's profile and expand our influence is enormous.

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There are many ways to do this: increase the number of SDP chapters, hold local events, spread the word about DAAG, reach out to and collaborate with complementary organizations (e.g., risk management professionals, project managers, corporate directors), get up and speak in front of those organizations, etc. I would encourage all SDP members to give some thought to how you might expand the sphere of good decision-making, even if it's just a little. Karen Jenni (President of the Decision Analysis Society of INFORMS) and I have been discussing how the two societies might work more closely together on this. More to come on that.

The success of SDP-sponsored workshops in Houston and London last year demonstrated the value of such events. We can also spread the word by giving talks at non-DA conferences. We all have causes and arenas that interest us; in my case, I will be speaking at the 12th Int'l Conference on Climate Change - Impacts & Responses in April, and I'm submitting an abstract for the 2020 Int'l Conference on Resource Sustainability next July. If you enjoy presenting DA concepts to new people, find a group that interests you that could use our help, and see if there might be an opportunity to talk at one of their conferences. The wider the net we cast, the more likely it is that one or more of these groups will see the value of a structured approach to making decisions and become involved with the SDP.

In my view, the primary objective of the SDP is to improve decision-making globally. Everything we do should tie back to that goal. Sometimes, that means ensuring that we are on a surer financial footing so that we might continue to spread the word. Sometimes it means actually getting out and spreading the word. In any case, one thing is certain: we have only scratched the surface of what is possible.

Pat Leach



Spotlight on SDP Member Rebecca Brafman

In every issue of this newsletter, we turn the spotlight on a randomly-selected member of the SDP to learn more about that member's life as a decision professional.

The editors



SDP member Rebecca Brafman is an active member of the Decision Analysis team within Chevron Corporation. She joined Chevron 14 years ago with a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering, while still in the process of earning no fewer than three Master's degrees – in Chemistry, Statistics, and Business Administration. She was introduced to decision analysis shortly after joining Chevron and entered the formal decision analysis career path a few years later. Based at the corporate headquarters in San Ramon, California, Rebecca currently serves as a data scientist working on improving decision-making within the downstream business unit. She also occasionally helps out teaching decision analysis classes within Chevron and mentors new team members.

Among the chief satisfactions that she has experienced in her role as a decision professional were the occasions when she was able to bring a team into agreement on which path to take forward. She remembers one such occasion when the team, about to embark on the analysis of an important environmental decision, expressed strong doubts that they could ever reach an agreement on a course of action to recommend to management. The problem being addressed was characterized by the need to make trade-offs among a wide variety of objectives – short-term finances, long-term liabilities, regulatory compliance, corporate environmental profile, etc. But, using the well-structured decision analytic processes and employing effective facilitation techniques, she was able to achieve a satisfying team consensus on a “green” alternative that combined reasonable cost with good environmental impacts.

A challenge that Rebecca has had to address in her role at Chevron is, in her words, “Trying to keep all of the customers happy.” The team members with whom she works usually come from widely diverse backgrounds and have had different levels of exposure to decision analysis. Some of them find it intimidating. To meet this challenge successfully, she has found it useful to be patient and approachable, always willing to talk team members through the process and being flexible in how decision analysis is applied in specific situations.

Rebecca finds value in her SDP membership by being able to network with many others in the profession and by being encouraged that she has the opportunity to create much value through her work. She also values the exposure to new ideas in the field via webinars and the possibility of continued learning.

SDP Council Focus

Certification Council

Over the past two years, the certification council has certified two applicants and received two applications that are not complete and therefore cannot be adjudicated. We have also received some input from SDP members, council members, and board members highlighting various issues with the certification process.

While we continue to accept applications and respond to certification applications, we are also beginning a process of re-thinking our certification approach, and we would like input from members.

Do you have thoughts about your certification experience? Whether those thoughts are criticisms or accolades or something in between, we would like to hear them. Below is a brief summary of the issues that have been raised to date; we welcome your comments on these topics or others-- please email your comments to lippard@gmail.com.

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Upcoming Events



**SOCIETY OF DECISION
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- Webinar: [Better Decision-Making Enabled By Metalog Distributions: Acquiring And Resolving 1,456 Residential Mortgages From 16 Failed Banks In The Wake Of The Financial Crisis](#)

Wednesday, September 18, 2019
8 am PT | 11 am ET

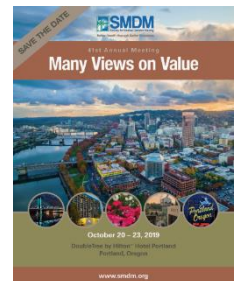
- **DAAG 2020**
March 31 – April 3 , 2020
The Westin Oaks Houston at the Galleria
5011 Westheimer at Post Oak,
Houston, TX 77056, US



Save the Date!
[SMDM 41st Annual Meeting:](#)

Portland, OR
October 20 - 23, 2019
The meeting theme is *Many Views on Value*.

Meeting co-chairs: Karen Eden, PhD, Carmen Lewis, MD, MPH and Dan Matlock, MD



Do you know of upcoming professional events that might be of interest to other SDP members? If so, please email the SDP newsletter at newsletter@decisionprofessionals.com



Issues with the Certification Process:

1. Not too many people apply for certification, so it does not seem to be that appealing to membership.
2. The process excludes those who aren't well integrated into our existing community, so is not as supportive of the organization's growth as it might be. For example, applicants are asked for references who are either leads or fellows, which is a barrier for those who are new to the organization and don't know anyone who is a lead or a fellow.
3. There are some notable omissions to our list of certified people, e.g. Howard Raiffa, in whose name we make an award, was never certified. It is likely that there are other people whom we have overlooked as well, as currently, there is no process to address this.
4. However, many people have commented that they don't want a certification process that isn't rigorous—that certification should “mean something”. As a result, changes made to the process should not allow certification of people who lack expertise.
5. The majority of people who are certified come from the Stanford School of DA. Over time, other schools have emerged (Harvard, Duke, Carnegie Mellon, others) and as an organization, we would like to be inclusive of these other perspectives for the long term sustainability of the organization and the certification process.
6. Several people have commented that there is little benefit to certification; that very few people are aware of certification and so, in their opinion, it's not worth the time and effort to become certified since there is no recognition from their colleagues. This creates a Catch 22, because as qualified people choose to forego certification, the certification means less and less as in terms of the expertise that you would associate with it, and there are fewer and fewer certified people who can act as references for others.
7. Our current framework/approach misses an opportunity that we have to use certification to drive membership.
8. Several members (even board members) have shared their own challenging experiences with certification, which culminated in them not completing the process. If our own board members can't make it through, that seems like a good indicator that change is needed.

If you are an SDP member and would like to work on refreshing the certification process, please email Leslie (llippard@gmail.com). We will be kicking off our Certification 2.0 effort towards the end of September and welcome those who are interested to join us.

The team currently consists of Terry Bresnick, Dan Hudson, Laura Keating, Leslie Lippard, Brian Putt, David Skinner and Jeremy Walker.





Dear SDP Fellows: “We always want to encourage our members to become more involved. One avenue for doing so is to become certified as a Practitioner, Lead Practitioner, or Fellow. What have you gained from becoming a Fellow and what would you say to members who may be considering pursuing one of those certifications?”

One of the Fellows gave his opinion of the value of becoming certified and the process of becoming certified, sharing,

A certification process for a successful practitioner is often put off due to more urgent priorities. However, the rigor such a program provides for getting deeper into the concepts and tools than your normal working layer of thinking has multiple benefits for you and your clients.

- The clarity in understanding how the elements of the process integrate make it easier to be flexible in different situations and adapt more quickly.
- Your efficiency and efficacy as a practitioner improves as you are better able to explain what you are doing to the working team and decision makers.
- You can more easily catch, and perhaps force out, the ambiguities that can derail a decision.
- You will have the confidence to work through conditional influences and risk more easily, quantifying critical factors that may be significant sources of value via control or risk mitigation.
- The conversations you will have with other practitioners will be more useful for them as you take on a sounding board, or even a mentoring role within the community.

It is a significant investment of time and energy, and often difficult to fit in to the schedules of busy people. The downside is that once you get to the next level in a craft, you will look at the work you used to do and perhaps cringe a bit.

Another Fellow similarly spoke to the value of the process of becoming certified and the balance between rigor and process when considering changes to certification procedures, stating,

Like many worthwhile endeavors, certification tries to strike a balance between two competing objectives: being rigorous enough to be meaningful, and having a process that is straightforward enough so as not to be onerous. This balance is one of the key issues we want to address as we revamp the certification process.

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If you have a question for the SDP Fellows about good practice among decision professionals, please send it to us at [SDP Newsletter: Ask The Fellows](#).



Ask the Fellows, continued from page 6:

I would make an analogy to giving a talk at a conference. Some conferences require that you write a proper paper for publication if you are going to speak on any given subject; others require only an abstract, and then you show up with your Powerpoint slides and give your talk. I have given a lot of talks, and I always grumble when I have to write an entire paper – but afterwards, I'm always glad I did. It's good discipline, it forces you to think through your subject carefully, and when the conference is over, you have a published paper you can use as a credential and everyone can reference. Similarly, going through the process of becoming certified is probably no one's idea of fun, but it forces you to think seriously about the different dimensions of our profession, it provides goals to which we can (and should) aspire, and once it's over, you've got a credential and a great feeling of accomplishment. And just like publishing the paper, you're glad you did it.

SDP Fellows Patrick Leach and Gerald Bush provided the answer for this question

Chapter News

Houston Chapter

Over the summer break, the chapter Executive Committee met on Friday July 19th to elect chapter officers for the 2019-2020 year. I am pleased to announce the following results:

President: Chris Travis, Appraisal General Manager, Global Projects Organization, BP

VP/President Elect: Ray Spence, Consultant, Decision Frameworks

Secretary/Marketing Chair: Diana Swift, Director of Brand, KCA

Chris, Ray, and Diana will be a great team to lead our chapter forward!

The Houston chapter has three events planned for the second half of 2019. On September 5th, we will meet at Chevron downtown where our presenter Gary Summers will discuss "How Frictions Affect Project Portfolio Management". This will be a great opportunity for our chapter, mostly oil and gas professionals, to hear from a practitioner with a pharmaceutical background. The chapter is planning a social in October and another general meeting in November.

To sign up for the Houston Chapter's email list for notifications on future events, please visit <http://houston.decisionprofessionals.com/>



A Word From an SDP Sponsor

In every issue of this newsletter, we include a message from one of the SDP sponsors, whose support contributes significantly to the on-going success of the Society.



Strategic Decisions Group: Supporting Decision Professionals

Strategic Decisions Group (SDG) is pleased to be a charter sponsor of the Society of Decision Professionals. Our firm shares SDP's mission of creating greater value for organizations, individuals, and stakeholders by bringing decision quality to important, complex decisions. We share DNA with the DQ champions of SDP who work every day to advance the adoption of DQ, expand the community of decision professionals, and safeguard the integrity of our profession.

For more than 35 years, motivated by the complex, real-world issues faced by our clients, our team of decision professionals has strived to find new value, deliver superior business results, and ensure organizational alignment. We take as a point of pride that the first four recipients of the Raiffa-Howard Award for Organizational Decision Quality—Chevron, Pfizer, Lilly, and China Mobile—began their ODQ journey with a connection to SDG. [Read more about our work.](#)

Equally important is extending the reach of decision quality by teaching and coaching students and practitioners. The [Strategic Decision and Risk Management certificate program](#) at the University of Texas is an example of how our education team has worked to extend the reach of DQ beyond our client engagements. Not everyone has the interest or desire to become a decision professional, but anyone can learn to appreciate the elements of decision quality and to demand it for their organization's decisions.

A career at SDG offers the unique opportunity to make a real difference—both on client projects and in helping to shape the firm's direction and culture. We invite you to [learn more about a career at SDG.](#)

Our vision? Simply this: That DQ is seen as indispensable not only in business, but also in important societal decisions. That every complex, important decision is made with the guidance of a decision professional, and that the profession itself grows in number—and in stature.

To stay abreast of the latest thinking delivered in articles, webinars, videos, and courses, [join SDG's email community.](#)

Brain Teaser

Congratulations to Sam Steffen

The brain teaser posed in the June issue has several solutions, one of which is:

$$\frac{2^3!}{((1+1+1)!)!} = 56$$

A full explanation of the solutions can be found by [clicking here](#). Sam Steffen was the first to submit a correct answer.

THE SEPTEMBER BRAIN TEASER

Instructions: You can win “bragging rights” by being the first to submit the correct answer of this brain teaser to the newsletter editors ([SDP Newsletter: Brain Teaser](#)). We will announce the winner in the next issue.

Boarding the Plane

You are the last of 100 passengers in line to board a 100-seat airplane. Everyone in line has a boarding pass with a reserved seat number on it. However, the first guy in line drops his boarding pass, so he takes a seat chosen at random. As the other passengers board the plane, each takes his or her assigned seat unless someone is already sitting in it. In that case, he or she takes an open seat chosen at random. What is the probability that you will wind up in your assigned seat?

Useful Links

The SDP Board has posted the Society’s Bylaws and Policy and Procedure Manual, which can be found at: <http://www.decisionprofessionals.com/about/governance>

The SDP Knowledge Sharing Council maintains a Fellows Blog at: <http://www.decisionprofessionals.com/?scrollTo=blog-news#blog-news>

A listing of courses in decision analysis available to SDP members is at: <http://www.decisionprofessionals.com/courses/training-program>

Join Us in Producing the SDP Newsletter

We, the editors, are actively looking for other SDP members to join us in producing this newsletter. If you are interested, please contact us. [Click here](#) to email the editors.

Emilia Silebi and Steve Tani
SDP Newsletter Editors

