

*Capacity Development Fund:
Reflecting on the Brazilian workshops*

By Aldo Zagonel

This report is based upon my personal experience, championing and helping to organize and carry out two workshops delivered in Brazil, in conjunction with the Brazilian & Latin American conference in November 2011. My views were also informed by the results of participant evaluations collected using entry and/or exit questionnaires.

One of the workshops was partially funded (US\$4,000) by the Society's Capacity Development Fund; however, both workshops were intended to support the development of capacity. The objective of this report is to inform Society policy dealing with sponsoring workshops and/or training.

This report will be superseded by a panel discussion on “The use of the Society’s capacity development funding: the Brazilian Chapter experience,” to be held on Monday, July 23, at 12:30PM, in Seminar Room 09-112. This is a public meeting open to all. The meeting will be chaired by the Society President (David Ford) and will include the VP Chapters (Martin Schaffernicht), the instructor of the workshop sponsored by the Society (Paulo Gonçalves), and the local organizer of both workshops (Ricardo Chaim). There will be opportunity for Q&A.

Preface

We documented a lot of information in the appendix to this report but, in the body, I offer my personal reflections and raise some questions for clarification and discussion. The reader may want to refer to the appendices.

List of appendices

*Associated with the MGM Workshop (by Paulo Gonçalves):*¹

1. Capacity Development Fund
2. Approved workshop application
3. Workshop announcements
4. Final program of study
5. Participants & pictures
6. Budgeted vs. realized revenues & expenses
7. Sample of entry questionnaire
8. Sample of exit questionnaire
9. Results of the participant evaluations
10. Summary of the evaluations
11. Certificate of Participation

*Associated with the Fish Banks Simulation (by George Richardson):*²

12. Simulation exercise announcement
13. Participants & pictures
14. Sample of exit questionnaire
15. Results of the participant evaluations
16. Summary of the evaluations

¹ Available for download at: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B-F3Xg6GPgGidERNZjk5Z0lNR3M/edit>

² Available for download at: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B-F3Xg6GPgGiSjEzTy1aUXhBeWM/edit>

Background

The origin of these workshops is a meeting that I had with John Sterman around the time of the Winter PC meeting, in Boston, in early 2011. The Brazilians were in the process of re-constituting our Chapter and I invited John to join us for our regional conference on November 14-16, 2011. I asked John to facilitate a half or full-day simulation exercise. Instead, John proposed that we carry out a weeklong boot camp-type workshop, to “break down” vices and “drill in” fundamentals, in addition to covering specific advanced techniques.

Due to time and resource constraints, what we were able to propose to the Society was a two-day workshop on model analysis. Paulo Gonçalves agreed to serve as the instructor and conceived the curriculum. Initially, I was worried that we could not proceed with Paulo as the instructor because he is Brazilian and the Capacity Development Fund requires use of “experts external to the proposing group.” But, John, and also Rogelio Oliva were unable to attend, and I was persuaded that there was no conflict of interest because Paulo lived and worked in Switzerland.

Without using Society funds, we supplemented this effort by asking George Richardson to attend the conference and carry out a simulation exercise as originally desired. With sponsorship from the Society, and thanks to George’s interest in facilitating the play of *Fish Banks*, we were able to implement both activities. In addition to conducting their workshops, Paulo and George also delivered keynote presentations at the conference.³

November 16, 09:00-09:30: “System Dynamics modeling of humanitarian operations” by *Paulo Gonçalves*

November 18, 12:00-12:30: “Reflections on the foundations of System Dynamics” by *George Richardson*

Choice of instructors

It is probably not ideal to have an expert in our field be funded by the Society to help promote capacity development in his/her own country. This is something that can probably be arranged directly by the interested parties. In our case, we gravitated toward Paulo unintentionally and I believe there were no specific issues associated with the fact that he is Brazilian. On the contrary, it actually allowed for ease in the communication between the instructor and the attendees due to common background, language, and culture.

Question:

- How to define and judge who is “an established expert external do the proposing group?”

³ Conference program available at:

<https://sites.google.com/site/systemdynamicsbrazilorg/atividades/ix-congresso-latinoamericano-de-dinamica-de-sistemas-y-ii-congresso-brasileno-de-dinamica-de-sistemas#TOC-PROGRAMA-DA-CONFER-NCIA->

Instructor compensation

My limited experience suggests that it could be difficult to secure an instructor without compensation. The minimum compensation is probably around US\$1,000 per day of instruction. Given the effort and costs associated with distant travel, it becomes necessary to utilize the instructor for at least one full day and, ideally, more. It is likely that competitive compensation is in the range of \$3K to \$6K per day of instruction. The latter may be advisable to facilitate the process of recruiting the most suitable instructor for a specific event. Naturally, there will be additional expenses associated with travel, food and lodging.

Question:

- How to establish compensation?

Who pays for what?

In many cases local sponsors and registration fees may cover all of the expenses associated with the event with exception of instructor compensation, particularly at competitive rates. The manager of the Capacity Development Fund could decide on the value and form of payment for compensation in direct understanding with the instructor. This would give the Society a large degree of control. The Society may want to place requirements for disbursement of this payment (e.g.: commitments and deliverables – a report).

In addition to instructor payment, it might be necessary to create a financial buffer to cover a gap between the break-even budget and the minimum number of registrations that constitutes a “go.” For example, let us assume that for a particular event the minimum number of participants is set at 10 and the break-even budget formulated at 15. Once there are 10 people pre-registered, the event is a “go;” however, the event will not be financially viable until 15 people have paid the registration fee. In this case, the Society may want to absorb the difference to enable the event to take place.

Questions:

- What are the minimum and the break-even number of participants required for a particular event? What do these numbers depend upon?
- What should be done if there is a profit (i.e., if the number of participants is above the break-even point)?

Payment of registration fees

Currently, most Chapters are not able or prepared to handle registration and payment. The Society could decide to do this. It already has a system in place to collect membership fees and conference registration fees, as well as sales of products. There would be some advantages to taking on this task:

1. Authorizing an event only after it reaches the minimum number of paid registrations;
2. Direct access to the participants for follow-up questions/evaluation;
3. Potential for direct recruitment of new members.

Burden on the Society Office

The previous items add work to the Society Office and this may not be desirable. It is not essential that the Society Office oversee instructor compensation, registrations and payments. The current arrangement, by which the Society transfers an agreed-upon lump sum to the local organizer, might work. However, the Society must weigh the pros and cons of each approach, taking into account how important this initiative is in the context of the Society's development strategy.

Development of capacity

We conducted two workshops that aim to develop capacity in different ways. First and foremost, our goal was to enhance knowledge and skill of existing Chapter members. For this, we envisioned an intermediate-to-advanced workshop. Secondly, we desired to bring to the regional conference a luminary in our field to conduct a simulation exercise.

Questions:

- What does it mean to develop capacity? Do we mean to develop quality or quantity?
- What are some of the ideal ways of achieving each? Are there ways to achieve both simultaneously?

Hopefully our two workshops will help spark discussion on these questions. I think both of our events were useful but the model analysis workshop could be refined and expanded.

A boot camp workshop

There was no apparent benefit in aligning the advanced technical workshop with the regional conference. (Only Brazilians participated at the expense of limited time.) It might be best to pursue John's vision and carry it out on its own (at least five full-days of instruction). The curriculum that Paulo developed (and the video recordings of the lessons) may be useful in developing this concept for reapplication in a new setting. It should be interesting to see if there is another Chapter interested in hosting it.

Questions:

- What do the officers of the Society think of the model-analysis curriculum proposed?
- What is the ideal core curriculum for an intermediate-to-advanced boot camp-style five-day workshop?

Registration fees

It might be necessary to split the registration fee into professional and student categories. The participants suggested US\$125/day (range: \$95-\$250) for a professional and US\$50 (range: \$40-\$60) for a student. If we followed this suggestion, the participants would pay the following for a five-day boot camp workshop:

- ⇒ US\$625 (\$475 to \$1,250) for a professional
- ⇒ US\$250 (\$200 to \$300) for a student

Questions:

- What are adequate values for the registration fees, provided that the goal is to make these workshops appealing and affordable, while minimizing financial burden upon the Society?
- Do these fees depend upon the curriculum and/or the instructor?

Measuring impact

Question:

- What impact have these workshops had in the capacity of the field in Brazil and Latin America?

This is a fair question and one that may be difficult to address. We could point to the evaluation results in terms of the scores and praise given by the participants. We could list the participants' impressions on their learning. We could highlight their desires for the Society and their Chapters. All of this is captured in the appendices. We could even argue that the Brazilian Chapter has grown 60 percent since its reconstitution in 2011. Also, there are more people involved in running the Chapter and there are more activities planned for the future. However, we do not know how to measure impact, particularly in the longer term.

Questions:

- How should we measure impact?
- What are the different ways that capacity can be developed?
- Which approaches will lead to the best results?

What's the next step?

These are just a few thoughts and questions to provoke discussion. Examination of the make up of the participants in each workshop may raise additional issues associated with broadening the constituencies that we serve, promoting diversity in gender, and reaching out to more locations. The questionnaires could be improved to assess, among other things, the degree of preparation (education and experience) of the participants. Their desires for the Society and its Chapters include, among other things, promoting applications in industry and government, and even generating business and work opportunities. The latter may call into question further expansion of the SDS charter or the creation of another entity, such as the System Dynamics Institute proposed by Khalid Saeed.

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