Special Issue on 'Advances in Designing Group Decision and Negotiation Processes'

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Groups and group work has long been seen to be an important aspect of both organizational and social life. Group members pool knowledge, share tasks and through negotiation agree on the best way to move forward. However, there are always difficulties including dealing with social conformity pressures, scheduling problems, and the management of content. This task is further complicated by the emergence of 'virtual' teams, the plethora of information and communication media, and the changing nature of organizations (for example the increased focus on Corporate Social Responsibility). As such finding ways for both managing the social life of the group (balancing conformity with ownership) as well as enhancing its analytical abilities is seen as a key component to supporting successful groups and has given rise to the field of Group Decision and Negotiation.

This special issue was first conceived at the 2006 GDN conference as part of the ongoing series of conferences stemming from the inaugural conference in 2000 in Glasgow at Strathclyde Business School. The longevity of the demand for such a conference, which was initially conceived as being a one off, bears testimony to the strong and growing interest in the area as this year we see the 2010 GDN conference taking place in Delft—10 years on! Whilst following the pattern of many of the GDN conferences in stimulating a special issue, the key focus for this particular issue was that of design—more specific the design of Group Decision and Negotiation processes. These advances take the form of either considering how to support those in leadership positions within the group or support the facilitator running the intervention/meeting. These advances hopefully will increase the uptake of more effective ways of working

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with groups allowing the benefits to be realised and reducing some of the negative side effects.

The special issue thus commences with the work of Ocker and colleagues who explore the role of leadership in partially distributed teams. This is a key area that has had very little exposure to date—the predominant foci has been to concentrate on participants' contributions for example exploring the quantity and quality of contributions rather than considering participants' ability to work together and implement the changes. The paper is based on an in-depth study which explores leadership dynamics and its affect on team performance and presents as the conclusions an interesting and useful set of propositions when working in this environment.

This paper is followed by the work of Ackermann and Eden who explore at a micro level some of the nuances experienced by those involved with group decision making. Working with three top teams on the development of their strategy, the authors used a computer log to identify how participants surfaced their contributions. The resultant patterns provided insights into the nature of both making and integrating inputs, assessing options and gradually, over time, moving towards a common understanding and direction. This work provides valuable insights for facilitators as it can assist both in the up front design of a workshop but also adaptations throughout.

The next paper by Briggs and Murphy focuses on the growing subfield of Collaboration Engineering which focuses on moving away from the need for groups to have a specialised facilitator to developing protocols/designs for enabling organizational staff to run highly structured workshops. However, designing these structured workshops has implications and therefore careful assessment of both resource and political feasibility becomes important. This paper presents a way forward through the development of a protocol encompassing a two layered question set—the first considering where there might be opportunities within the organization for such a structured workshop and the second for determining the level of interest. The paper also discusses the testing of the protocol in the field concluding with some observations about the efficacy of the protocol.

Finally, building on the previous paper the work of Kolfschoten and colleagues looks at approaches for training these structured workshop facilitators. Commencing with an investigation into how best to provide training materials in terms of cognitive load, the paper presents a carefully constructed training approach. The approach is evaluated through a case study, providing further improvements to the process and insights useful for others adopting group decision support systems.

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who has helped in completing this special issue. Whilst there are many people we should thank for helping us put together this special issue it is obviously not possible to mention them all. First, we would like to thank those submitting the papers regardless of whether they were accepted or not (unfortunately we cannot include all in a single issue). In particular, we would like to thank all authors for their patience when the schedule experienced delays. Second, we thank the reviewers who put the time and effort into reading through the papers, making valuable comments, and helping make this an excellent issue. Finally, we are indebted to Mel Shakun who throughout the gestation of this project has been supportive and has provided the necessary support (and pressure) to get this special issue completed.