

: Who are the pioneers in the field of computerized decision support?

by Dan Power

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On April 7, 2007, we started a new feature at DSSResources.com called "Reflections of Decision Support Pioneers" and posted the initial reflections interview with Paul Gray. DSS pioneers are individuals who have made major intellectual contributions to our understanding of how, what, why, and when computing and information technologies and software are and should be used to aid, assist, support and even replace people in decision making activities, processes, and tasks. The structured interviews help capture the varied history of computerized decision support.

Who are these pioneers? Our initial Decision Support Pioneers page with photos and short biographical sketches was posted at DSSResources.com on September 29, 2006. The URL is

<http://dssresources.com/history/pioneers/pioneerslist.html>

The goal of the Decision Support Pioneers page is to recognize those individuals who made major contributions to the study and practice of using computers to support decision making. These influential people developed this applied research area and demonstrated how information technology could be used to support decision making. Identifying these individuals helps place the study of and practice of building decision support systems in an historical context. The reflections capture the past and help guide the future of computerized decision support.

The initial Decision Support Pioneers list includes 27 individuals: Steven L. Alter, Eric D. Carlson, James F. Courtney, George B. Dantzig, Gerardine DeSanctis, Douglas C. Engelbart, Jay W. Forrester, Paul Gray, Richard Hackathorn, Clyde W. Holsapple, Dustin Huntington, William H. Inmon, Peter G. W. Keen, Ralph Kimball, Michel R. Klein, Oleg I. Larichev, John D. C. Little, Andrew M. McCosh, Jay F. Nunamaker, Michael S. Scott Morton, Herbert A. Simon, Ralph H. Sprague, Jr., Efraim Turban, Murray Turoff, Gerald R. Wagner, Hugh J. Watson, and Andrew B. Whinston. We are soliciting nominations of

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others who should be added to the Decision Support Pioneers page. Send nominations to me, Daniel.Power@dssresources.com

I know many of the pioneers in the Decision Support field and I hope to receive "Reflections" interviews from all of the pioneers who can contribute. The interviews will be posted at DSSResources.com and the plan is that eventually these reflections will be included in a book (possibly in the Springer Integrated Series in Information Systems). The idea is to have everyone associated with innovation in decision support research and technologies respond to the "same" 5 structured questions and then answer a more open-ended final question.

The initial response to my email requests for "reflections" has been very positive. Both Jim Courtney and Bill Inmon have sent responses. After an interview is formatted and finalized, it will be posted at DSSResources.com -- so periodically check the "What's New" list.

Also, I've had positive email responses from Steven Alter, Richard Hackathorn, Michel Klein, Michael S. Scott Morton, Ralph Sprague, and Hugh Watson. Michael Scott Morton commented "Sounds like a great idea and a useful piece of history." Richard Hackathorn replied "This is awesome!" So far I have not received any negative responses to my email requests.

In today's Ask Dan column, I want to recognize four colleagues who made pioneering contributions related to computerized decision support and who have died in recent years.

George Bernard Dantzig (November 8, 1914 – May 13, 2005) devised the simplex algorithm and is considered the "father of linear programming". He earned bachelor's degrees in mathematics and physics from the University of Maryland in 1936, his master's degree in mathematics from the University of Michigan, and his Ph.D. from UC Berkeley in 1946. In 1952, he became a research mathematician at the RAND Corporation, where he began implementing linear programming on its computers. He taught at Stanford until his retirement in the 1990s.

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Gerardine DeSanctis (January 5, 1954 - August 16, 2005) was the Thomas F. Keller Professor of Business Administration at Duke University. Previously she taught at the University of Minnesota. Her research focused on group decision support systems, learning in distributed teams and online communities. She received a Ph.D. from Texas Tech University. Her article with Brent Gallupe titled "A foundation for the study of group decision support systems" (Management Science, May 1987) is a classic.

Oleg Ivanovich Larichev (September 20, 1934 — January 19, 2003) worked in the Institute for Systems Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences (Moscow) beginning in 1976. He graduated in 1958 from Moscow State Technical University with the specialty of technical cybernetics. In 1994, Oleg was awarded the Gold Medal of the International Society on Multiple Criteria Decision Making. In 1997, he was elected as Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He published more than 200 papers (80 papers in English) and 8 Books.

Herbert Alexander Simon (June 15, 1916 – February 9, 2001) was an innovative thinker whose research helped found several research domains including Artificial Intelligence, information processing, decision-making, decision support, problem-solving, attention economics, organization theory, complex systems, and computer simulation. He coined the terms bounded rationality and satisficing. Simon received both his B.A. (1936) and his Ph.D. (1943) in political science, from the University of Chicago. His book Administrative Behavior was based on his doctoral dissertation and has had a major influence on both researchers and practitioners.

Thanks to all of the Decision Support pioneers. As always I appreciate your comments, questions and suggestions.

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