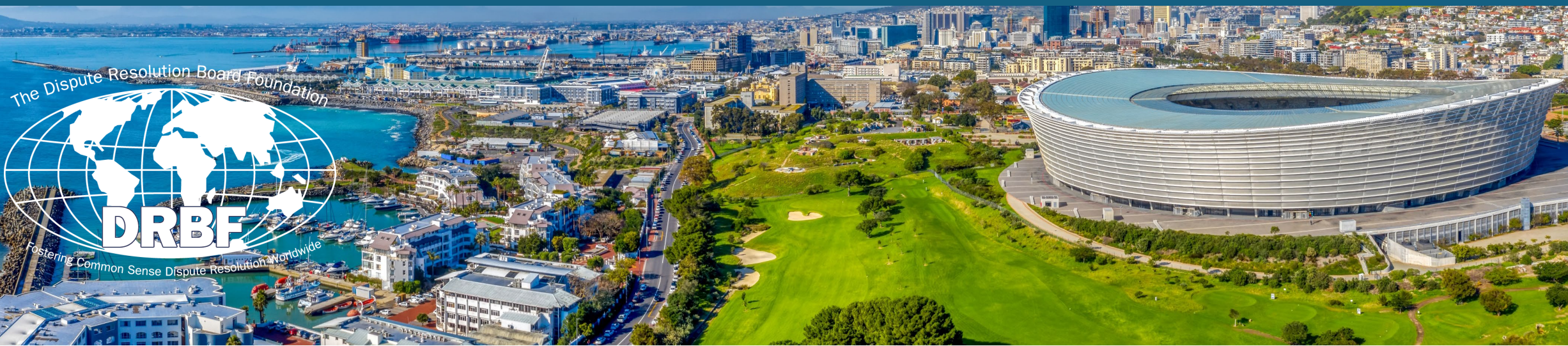


# DRBF 28<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

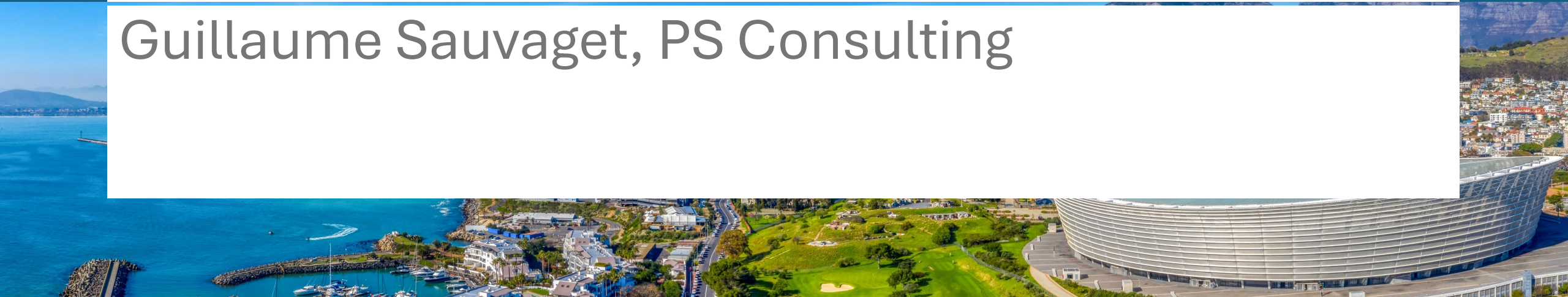
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# Evaluating Sole Member DB: Balancing Cost and Effectiveness

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# Presentation

- I'm still relatively new to the field—as a DB member for “only” 7 years.
- I am involved in several DB in France, West Francophone Africa, Europe and Middle East.
- Most of my experience outside France was gained as DAB sole member under the 1999 edition of the FIDIC Red Book.
- In other words, I was pushed into “the Big Blue” all by myself.



# Introduction

- Like of some of you here (I guess), I came to DRBF out of curiosity.
- At first, I listened and learned that DB could be a useful tool for the success of projects.
- But in the end—can we really believe it?
- I am going to share some stories and reflections, particularly about life as a Sole DB Member, where “teamwork” means arguing with yourself.



# Why Employers Often Prefer a Sole Member DB

- Why? The reason seems to be obvious (but I am not an employer): Because it's cheaper. A 3-member DB triples the costs...
- Specially since the debate on the number of DB members (one or three) takes place at the procurement phase and not at the execution phase: why would I increase cost?
- Red Book 1999 requires a standing DAB. But it doesn't specify how lonely that role has to be.



# Why Employers Often Prefer a Sole Member DB – Cost but not only

- Perceived Control: Employers may feel they have more influence with a sole member DB .
- Administrative simplicity: Coordinating one person is easy—until that person starts asking too many questions.



# Why Some Employers Limit Site Visits

- Costs again: Hotels and flights are expensive. So, claims, but that comes later.
- Fewer site visits = fewer invoices: A logic hard to dispute—until the dispute happens.
- Perception of Stability: Limited visits may give an impression of fewer issues.
- No visible conflict: Which, of course, means there are no problems. Just like a calm volcano.
- In two of my DB, site visit were limited by contract to two per year.

# And Why That Matters

- We can miss early signs: Cracks in concrete are visible. Cracks in relationships — not so much.
- Reduced perception: Reading reports is not the same as walking in the mud.
- Weakened trust: Face time matters. Even if it's just to argue over a cup of coffee.
- Regular interactions build stronger relationships among stakeholders.
- Zoom calls can help: But a drone can't detect tension in a meeting room.

# My Practical Experience with Site Visits

- Site visits often show what emails don't: poor morale, informal tensions, or quality shortcuts.
- Informal conversations during visits provide contextual information. Help identify systemic issues (design delays, delays in obtaining permits, and implementation difficulties, etc.).
- In one case, the project was stuck — paralysed by overlapping issues: design errors, permit delays, execution troubles.
- We spent a day onsite with all parties involved, listed problems, set deadlines, and built a roadmap.

# My Practical Experience with Site Visits

- And it worked. By the next visit, everyone had followed through. The project was back on track. (Apparently, talking works. Who knew?)
- Ironically, the same Employer who had requested fewer site visits later insisted that they be increased... “Just in case,” they said. Progress, it seems, is contagious.



# My Practical Experience with Opinion

- In two of my projects, I was required to provide opinions free of charge as part of the retainer fee. And because it was free... the Parties loved it.
- Better still, they always followed my opinion without going to a formal decision. Advisory opinions are very useful.
- Caution: One party may later challenge the opinion's weight — if they don't like it. Transparency and procedural fairness are therefore important.

# My Practical Experience with Decision

- In another project, I issued a major decision addressing several interrelated issues. The project was late, tensions were very high.
- By the next visit, I noticed progress. Things had started to move forwards. Solutions were being applied based on the decision.
- Both parties recognized that without the DAB's decision, nothing would've changed.
- So: Did the DB make a difference? Absolutely.



# Things to Consider Before Accepting a Sole Member Appointment

- Advantage: You're alone.
- You can schedule site visits freely. You do not have to argue for hours that your decision is a good decision. And you get used to it (more difficult if you came back to a 3 DB).
- Disadvantage: You're alone.
- The lack of peer discussion may lead to greater pressure or less robust conclusions if you are not careful enough. There's no one to blame except yourself when things go wrong.



# Things to Consider Before Accepting a Sole Member Appointment

- Can you manage the scope? Some projects are a buffet of technical, legal, and contractual headaches. One person can focus on the technical work, another on the contracts, and the third on checking and replying to the group's emails.
- Time commitment: Is it part-time... or just full-time?
- Impartiality: Will both parties trust a single voice — especially when they believe reason is on their side?
- Support: Is there a team — or will you also be your own secretary?

# Why Employers Often Prefer a Sole Member DB - Risks

- Perception of bias: Perceived lack of balance. With a single member, the losing team tends to question the rules. People might think it's unfair: When there's only one decision-maker, the losing side often feels the rules have not been followed.
- There's no automatic double-checking by the other member: You're right... until you're not.
- Best practice reminder: Even a Sole standing DB is better than an ad hoc DB...



# Conclusion

- Standing DB do work. Sometimes it's easy to see, and other times it's more behind the scenes.
- Even a Sole Member DB can help avoid disputes — by being present, asking questions, and occasionally saying what no one else dares to.
- But preparation and trust from the parties is key.
- A Sole DB is cheaper — but silence costs more.

Thank You

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