

INFORMATION SYSTEMS ACADEMICS: ADVOCATING POLITICAL DECISION MAKING TO EXPAND IMPACT AND RELEVANCE?

Panel

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Abstract

For IS academics to provide political consulting and to offer expertise in political decision making would seem to open enormous opportunities for 'doing good' and for reinforcing the relevance of the IS field. However, the contributions of IS academics to political decision making are minor compared to our colleagues in other fields. This panel will offer the personal views of panel members on their involvement in different political activities and will explore the pros and cons of senior and junior IS academics getting involved in these activities from an individual's, a school's, and a community's perspective. It should be of interest to those who wish to learn about political consulting in the field of IS, to those who have been involved in political activities, and to those who want to discuss the role of ICT-related experience in the field of public decision making and regulation.

Keywords: Political consultancy, IS community, conflicting perspectives and experiences

¹ August-Wilhelm Scheer has external commitments on Dec. 16, Arnold Picot on Dec. 17/18.

General Panel Description or Issues to be Discussed

For IS academics to provide political consulting and to offer expertise in political decision making would seem to open enormous opportunities for 'doing good' and for reinforcing the relevance of the IS field. Throughout Europe and around the world, issues such as data privacy, online gaming, the protection of youth, net neutrality, media competency, public health ICT, ICT-based citizen services, digital divide, encryption versus transparency, and the social, competitive, and political impacts of phenomena such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter are all on the table.

However, the contributions of IS academics to political decision making are minor compared to our colleagues in the fields of law, political science, or macroeconomics. Why is that so? Why are IS academics rarely invited into hearings, to governmental (or oppositional) scientific advisory councils, or to law making initiatives? Is it a thoughtful choice? Are we not interested in sharing our expertise in those circles? Or – more worrisome – are political bodies rarely interested in inviting us to contribute our expertise? Do they feel that we have nothing to offer?

This panel will offer the personal views of panel members on their involvement in different political activities and in different governmental organizations, and will explore the pros and cons of senior and junior IS academics getting involved in these activities from an individual's, a school's, and a community's perspective. It explores the extent to which IS academics should play a role in politics; the panel will share their observations from the perspective of five different countries. The panel asks, "Should IS academics get more involved in policy making? Is our competence crucial for the development of the information society? Is society being institutionalized and transformed with IS/ICT infrastructures, and do politicians need the knowledge and skills of IS academics?" Panel members discuss the advantages and disadvantages of political involvement and exchange differing perspectives. This panel should be of interest to those who wish to learn about political consulting in the field of IS, to those who have been involved in political activities or who have been invited to become involved and to those who want to discuss the role of ICT-related experience in the field of public decision making and regulation.

Controversial Issues and Panelists' Positions

August-Wilhelm Scheer has offered extensive political consultancy as described above nationally and internationally. For four years, he was president of BITKOM, Germany's largest industry association in the fields of information technology, telecommunications and new media, and has been a frequent contributor to political decision making on related topics. His main political consulting activities started after his very successful career as director of one of the largest Germany IS university institutes and the establishment of one of the largest IT consulting companies starting from a university campus (IDS Scheer AG). He appreciates political consulting and lobbying activities as they offer corporate and academic visibility. At the same time he sees opportunities and rewards in launching IS companies out of a university campus. Given academics' time constraints, he argues they must prioritize their commitments. An IS academic career and the launch of a start-up seem to go well together; getting involved in political consulting activities may be more realistic later in one's career.

Arnold Picot has served and still serves on several public boards and councils related to ICT-research programs and policy aspects at various ministries and agencies on the federal and state level. Among other honors, he was part of a parliamentary 'Enquete Commission' on the Information Society and new media in the late 90s and has chaired for more than 15 years now the Scientific Advisory Group for Regulatory Affairs to the German Network Agency (Bundesnetzagentur). He favors such scientific and political advisory activity as it allows IS academics to contribute to real-life issues and problems, but also to import real-life issues into their research and teaching. Political contributions enjoy a much larger forum for his ideas and expertise than journal or conference publications could ever provide. However, he advocates relevant and high level research as well. In his view providing expertise to government/political units is favorable not only for his discipline's and his own standing and reputation, but also for his school's quality of teaching and its national and international reputation.

Boon Siong Neo has been very active in political consulting in the last 20 years after an even longer period of focusing on academic contributions. Having moved from being a great IS researcher to serving as a dean in

one of the world's top business schools, he now sees the opportunity and need for, and the societal relevance of, providing a variety of government consulting. He will share his political advisory experiences as an IS academic familiar with several Asian countries. And he will also provide some recommendations for younger IS researchers – perhaps torn between meeting scientific publication requirements and aiming to doing good by providing advice to local, regional and even national political units.

Sirkka Jarvenpaa is involved in university-organized projects as well as her own direct university activities, which have contributed enormously to her standing and fame in the US and in Finland and throughout Europe. Mainly during her engagements with the Finnish Technology and Development Fund, she notes that for-profit consulting companies are more often asked to provide expertise in political decision making processes than academics who have a more complex understanding of the underlying processes. Her experiences lead her to assume that politicians prefer consulting companies over individual IS academics as IS academics are less willing to polarize issues and describe solutions as black and white. Along these lines, she wonders whether the kind of 'gray' expertise that IS academics have to offer is one reason why they are rarely asked to consult. In the country that prides itself in having the highest percentage of college graduated citizens in the world, the inability to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty may be a key reason for the distrust of academics in political decision making process.

Yolande Chan has built her successful and international academic career without getting directly involved in political activities. She finds that providing political consultancy as an IS academic in a business school rarely contributes to one's research reputation and can be problematic for schools whose alumni and donors hold varying political views. Instead, it takes time away from what we are educated for and what we are good at – that is, providing unbiased, theoretically grounded research insights. She pursues policy-related research in partnership with academics, corporate organizations, NGOs and governmental units and thus avoids the pitfalls of perceived academic bias while enjoying opportunities for publications in applied journals. The partnership approach results in relevant, co-created research agendas and increased long-term multi-party commitment to implementing political and policy changes. The academic loses personal income but gains increased research impact. Therefore, while she will acknowledge that political influence can be commendable, she will argue against political consultancy, instead outlining alternative strategies for influencing political outcomes.

Ephraim McLean, taking the position of the head of a very large department and having headed numerous P&T committees, advises IS academics to be careful about getting involved in such 'side' activities as providing expertise and consulting in political decision making processes. He argues that there is a reason why promotion and hiring decisions are based on research and teaching, and not on external activities, which neither bring in substantial funds to a school or department nor enhance its national/international reputation. The fact that we know of very few colleagues who do provide political consultancy shows that – with very few exceptions – political advisory activities get local attention at best; therefore this should not be the ambition of a school, a department, or even an individual faculty member.

As panel chair, *Claudia Loebbecke* will introduce topics and panelists and then guide panelists and the audience through the session as outlined below.

Panel Structure

Instead of introductory presentations backed by slides, the panel chair will briefly introduce the topic and the panelists and then facilitate three rounds of controversial statements and contributions by the panelists.

- In the first round, panelists will briefly outline their rather different experiences with providing consultancy to political decision making processes and elaborate on their experience with having, or not having, pursued political consulting as part of their activity portfolios as senior IS academics.
- In the second round, panelists will draw from their own experiences and illustrate the different opportunities and challenges arising from providing political consulting in different academic systems, and the pros and cons of different attitudes towards 'Political Consultancy.'

- In the third round, panelists will reflect upon their own and others' experiences, and comment on the other opinions and experiences presented. Further, as appropriate, they will offer advice, guidelines and cautions regarding getting involved in political decision making processes.

After each round, the chair will also ask for experiences and insights from the audience and moderate an exchange of views and opinions among panelists and the audience. Hopefully, this will trigger a lively discussion that will last beyond the 90 minutes allotted to the session.

Biographies – Panel Chair and Panelists

Claudia Loebbecke (claudia.loebbecke@uni-koeln.de), panel moderator, holds the Chair for Media and Technology Management at the University of Cologne. In 2005-2006, she was AIS President; in 2012, she was named AIS Fellow. She was an AIS Council Member (2001-2007) and ECIS Conference Co-Chair (2009). In 2011, she won the Research Competition of the Society for Information Management (www.simnet.org) for her co-authored study 'Assessing Cloud Readiness'. She is a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts and of Beta Gamma Sigma. She previously worked and researched at McKinsey & Co., Erasmus University, INSEAD, HKUST, UNSW, Copenhagen Business School, University of Paris Dauphine, CISR (Sloan School), Bentley University, the LSE (UK), and LUISS University (Italy). Dr. Loebbecke holds a PhD in Business Administration from the University of Cologne (Germany) and an MBA from Indiana University, Bloomington, IN (US). View her CV at www.mtm.uni-koeln.de/team-loebbecke-home-engl.htm.

Yolande E. Chan (ychan@queensu.ca) is Associate Vice-Principal (Research) and E. Marie Shantz Professor of MIS at Queen's University in Canada. She recently directed The Monieson Centre, Queen's School of Business, a research centre that facilitates community-university research partnerships, and coordinates interdisciplinary, multi-agency projects focused on revitalizing Canadian communities. Her current research interests include digital technology strategy, knowledge management, and innovation. She sits on several editorial boards and has published her research in leading journals such as MIS Quarterly, Information Systems Research, Journal of Management Information Systems, Journal of Strategic Information Systems, Journal of Information Technology, and Journal of the AIS. Dr. Chan is a Rhodes Scholar. She holds a PhD in Business Administration from Ivey Business School, an MPhil in Management from Oxford, and SM and SB degrees in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science from MIT. View her CV at business.queensu.ca/faculty_and_research/faculty_list/ychan.php.

Sirkka L. Jarvenpaa (sirkka.jarvenpaa@mcombs.utexas.edu) is the James Bayless/Rauscher Pierce Refsnes Chair in Business Administration at the McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin, where she directs the Center for Business, Technology, and Law and the Information Management Program. During 2008-2012, she held the Finnish Distinguished Professorship at Aalto University. She has held visiting professorships at Harvard Business School, the MIT (Sloan School), Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, City University of Hong Kong, and Queen's University. Dr. Jarvenpaa is the co-editor in chief of the Journal of Strategic Information Systems. She has served as the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Association for Information Systems and as the senior editor of Organization Science, Information Systems Research and MIS Quarterly. She holds a PhD from Minnesota University and honorary doctorate degrees from the University of Jyväskylä, Aalto University, and the University of Goteborg. View her CV at www.mcombs.utexas.edu/irom.

Ephraim R. McLean (emclean@gsu.edu) is a Regents' Professor and Chairman of the CIS Department at Georgia State University (GSU) in Atlanta, GA. After earning his PhD at the MIT in 1970, he joined the Anderson Graduate School of Management at UCLA and then moved to GSU in 1987. He has been a visiting professor at the University of South Australia, Erasmus University, ESADE, and the Alexandria Institute of Technology in Egypt. Dr. McLean has published over 150 articles in outlets such as Harvard Business Review, Sloan Management Review, Information System Research, Management Science, MIS Quarterly, MISQ Executive, Journal of MIS, and European Journal of Information Systems. In 2007, his 1992 ISR paper (with W. DeLone) on 'Information Systems Success' was ranked as the globally most-cited IS research paper in the last 15 years. For 10 years, he served as Executive Director of ICIS and the AIS, became an AIS Fellow in 1999, and was honored with the LEO Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007. View his CV at www.cis.gsu.edu/emclean/.

Boon Siong Neo (absneo@ntu.edu.sg) is Chairman of the Nanyang Executive Education and former Dean of the Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He taught at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in the National University of Singapore from 2006 to 2010, and is a Fellow of the Civil Service College and the Centre for Liveable Cities. He was the founding Director of the Information Management Research Centre (IMARC) at NTU and the Asia Competitiveness Institute at NUS. Dr. Neo is a Certified Public Accountant (Singapore) and holds MBA and PhD degrees from the University of Pittsburgh, US. He has served on boards of various business and government organizations in Singapore. In 1996, he won the ICIS Best Paper award. Dr. Neo has published in outlets such as MIS Quarterly and Journal of Strategic Information Systems. Prior to joining the University, he held professional and management positions in Hewlett-Packard and Shell Petroleum companies in Singapore. View his CV at www.nbs.ntu.edu.sg.

Arnold Picot (picot@lmu.de) held until March 2013 the Chair of the Institute for Information, Organization and Management at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich, Germany. His research and teaching activities focus on the management of information and communication. He investigates organizational design given the scarcity of information and communication systems which modify the problem of scarcity of information and thus influence organizational design. He co-founded the Center for Digital Technology and Management, a teaching and research institute operating also at the University of Munich and the Technical University Munich. Dr. Picot is Chairman of the 'Muenchner Kreis' – a supranational association for communications research at the interface between academia, industry and politics, and holds several board positions in private as well as public organizations. View his CV at www.iom.bwl.uni-muenchen.de/personen/professoren/picot/index.html.

August-Wilhelm Scheer (scheer@scheer-group.com) was director of the Institute for Information Systems at Saarland University from 1975 until 2005. He is the founder of IDS Scheer AG (1984). From its IPO in 1999 until its acquisition by Software AG in September 2009, he was chairman of the supervisory Board of the IDS Scheer AG. In 2000, he founded the Scheer Group GmbH which participates in innovative high tech companies. In 2003, he received the Philip Morris Research award. From 2006 to 2008, Dr. Scheer was a member of the Council for Innovation and Growth of Germany's Federal Government. He was president of the German Federal Association for Information Economy, Telecommunications, and New Media (BITKOM), representing more than 1,700 companies. Moreover, he was VP of the 'German Industry Association' (BDI), and is a member of the Research Union Economy - Science. He has authored more than 300 papers and more than 10 books. View his CV at www.im-c.de/germany/en/company/about-us/supervisory-board/prof-dr-dr-hc-mult-august-wilhelm-scheer/.