**Panel:**

**Perspectives on the Future of the IS Discipline**

*The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future.*  
*Gifford Pinchot*

The Panel on the same topic as the conference track is proposed to foster a debate about the future of the Information Systems (IS) discipline as a field of enquiry and a field of practice. The response to the call for papers for this track, which was not exactly overwhelming, reminds us that we, IS researchers seem to be reluctant participants in such a debate. The aim of this panel is therefore to draw attention to the topic of the future of IS and to attract and motivate IS researchers to engage in the debate. The topic of the future of the IS discipline cannot of course be debated without reflecting on its past. The participants of this Panel are taking different perspectives and angles of observation to explore the past and envisage the future of the IS discipline. We do this with awareness that by engaging in the debate we not only ‘envisage’ the future of our discipline but also take part in its creation. (Even when we do nothing we have our share of responsibility for its future).

The Panel will take lead from the recent reflective article by Walsham (2012) and IFIP 8.2 Working Conference on Researching the Future of IS (Chiasson et al., 2011). The Panel members will join these debates by offering their own experiences and reflections on IS teaching, research and practice, and provide their own perspectives on the possible futures of IS. The debate will include the audience with the aim to stimulate questioning the assumed roles and tasks of IS (and IS research) in business and society and the underlying sense of powerlessness in regard to its inevitable future (crisis ?). It is hoped that by exposing the past of the IS discipline to some fundamental and (why not) unpleasant questions we will be able open the debate wider than it has been so far, and also raise consciousness about IS community’s role and responsibility in debating and contributing to the IS future.

There will be five panellists:

**Robert Johnson** will reflect on the significance for the future of IS of the increasing ubiquity of IT use. The IS discipline arose in the context of mainframe computers in business organizations where Information Systems were conceived as computational tools for achieving business efficiency. The central problematic was the unexpected difficulty organization encountered in making good the promise of these instrumental uses (Friedman 1989). As computers have become more pervasive and computer use is now second nature for large parts of the population, it is tempting to speculate that the IS discipline is losing its key phenomenon.

By contrast he will argue that this shift of computer use from the foreground to a taken-for-granted background is not a threat but an opportunity for IS. Increasingly we have to conceive of information systems as infra-structure rather than as instrumental tools. The defining characteristics of infrastructure are its multi-purpose nature and that rather than being designed it evolves over a pre-existinginstalled-base (Hanseth 2000). This means that for IS to take up this new opportunity (Tilson et. al. 2010) it must embrace new orientations to the role of technologies for human action, new units of analysis, new theories and new methodologies (Hanseth and Lyttinen 2010).

**Roger Clarke** will reflect on the Information Systems discipline’s history and draw lessons for its future. The IS discipline spends a great deal of time searching for its soul.  Historical research on the discipline in Australia and overseas, complemented by a more specific review of the last 25 years of research into electronic interaction (including EDI, eCommerce, eGovernment and social media) provide a basis for identifying the tensions underlying our collective existential nervousness.  This leads to specific proposals for resolving those tensions, redirecting our energy towards constructive discussions, and achieving some degree of coordination among our necessarily diverse streams of research.

**Séamas Kelly** will join us from Ireland via Skype connection. He will consider the notion of IS as a 'discipline', with reference to Foucault's notion of regimes of truth. This will provide a perspective on IS and IS community that enables questioning IS as a coherent discipline. This might also suggest different ways of orienting us to the future of IS (Walsham, 2012).

Continuing on this path, **Kai Riemer** will argue that mainstream research in the IS discipline has been severely circumscribed by a taken-for-granted commitment to the Cartesian worldview. If our discipline wants to get serious about understanding and explaining the effective use of IS in organisations it needs to engage in a critical discourse of its own paradigmatic foundations. For a discipline that claims to be researching human engagement with technology, our mainstream theories remarkably fail to account for and explain the most mundane, everyday phenomena of human engagement with IT. While recent works on sociomateriality have begun arguing for a non-Cartesian view of human engagement with IT, this concept is already being taken over and misappropriated under the Cartesian worldview as yet another socio-technical theory that perpetuates instead of overcoming this worldview.

Kai will argue that the discipline should not indulge in abstraction and physics-envy theorizing as is often requested by scholars in the field. Rather it should go in the opposite direction, engaging with and questioning in much detail the everyday engagement with technology. He will show briefly how the phenomenological work by German philosopher Martin Heidegger can be useful in deriving such an alternative research agenda.

This argument will be further discussed by **Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic** who will look into the relationship between IS research and organizing practices. She will show how IS research not only describes but is often also implicated in the performance of IS practices (IS development, implementation and use) and IS-mediated realities. IS research can no longer ignore its preformative implications; it is not good enough to limit our responsibility to the ‘rigour’ of its methods, the ‘accuracy’ of its findings, and the ‘external and internal validity’; is there anyone who still believe that our contribution to knowledge is ‘value-neutral’ and ‘interest-free’? IS research community should wake up to the evidence and accept its share of responsible for the enactment of particular realities in practice that are value-laden and interest-based (e.g. IS development processes and assessment; IS role in increasing control and surveillance, diminishing employees’ agency and declining workplace democracy). While the IS discipline is not the only nor the key actor in these processes, it is by no means a neutral or innocent actor. The IS discipline plays a visible role in the creation of IS-mediated social and organizational realities – power and social structures, decision-making forms and control mechanisms, dehumanizing and enslaving workplace conditions – these would not be possible without effective and efficient IS. If we continue to ignore the performative role of IS research and the implication of IS in social practices the future of the IS discipline will be determined for us. But this is not inevitable. Dubravka will invite other panellists and the audience to explore alternative IS futures and our roles in their creation.

S**hort bios of the panellists**

Robert Johnstonis Professor of Information and Organisation at University College Dublin, and Senior Research fellow at The University of Melbourne. His main research areas are electronic commerce, supply chain management, inter-organisational information systems and theoretical foundations of IS . He has over 130 refereed publications, many in leading international journals, including *Information Systems Research,* *Management Science, European Journal of Information Systems, Communications of the ACM,* *International Journal of Electronic Commerce, Electronic Markets, Journal of the Operational Research Society, International Journal of Production Economics, Journal of Strategic Information Systems,* and *Supply Chain Management.* Prior to becoming an academic he spent 13 years as an IT practitioner.

**Roger Clarke** is a consultant in strategic and policy aspects of eBusiness, information infrastructure, and dataveillance and privacy. He spent a decade at the ANU, during which time he was a foundation member of the ACIS organising committee.  Since returning to consultancy in the mid-1990s, he has been a Visiting Professor in eCommerce at the University of Hong Kong, in computer science at ANU, and in cyberspace law and policy at UNSW. He has 120 refereed publications which generate a Google citation-count of 3500, and provides a heavily-used web-site at [http://www.rogerclarke.com](http://www.rogerclarke.com/).  His papers on historical aspects of the IS discipline are indexed at <http://www.rogerclarke.com/SOS/#ISHist>.

**Séamas Kelly is Director of the Centre for Innovation, Technology & Organisation (CITO) at University College Dublin.** His work has been concerned with the development of practice theory perspectives on information systems and knowledge management. His recent work explores the affective dimensions of management (e.g. anxiety, style and mood) that are brought into focus by such approaches, with specific application to areas such as globally distributed software work or the development of national health information infrastructures.

**Dr. Kai Riemer** is a Senior Lecturer in Business Information Systems at the University of Sydney Business School. He joined the University of Sydney in 2009 coming from the University of Münster in Germany. Kai has extensive experience with industry-funded research and leads the School¹s strategic research initiative on Enterprise 2.0 and Corporate Social Media. His expertise spans the fields of E-Collaboration, social media, Enterprise 2.0, inter-firm networking, virtual work, and the philosophy of technology. In a recent series of projects he studies the proliferation of Enterprise Social Networking in various Australian organisations and the resulting management implications with a view to understand better how people make sense of new technologies in practice.

**Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic**’s research has spanned a wide domain from technological design of information systems based on formal logics, to studies of social systems of information and government information systems, to ethnographies of electronically mediated work and electronic collaboration, to exploring social theoretic foundations of Information Systems. Her recent research interests include theoretical and methodological developments in understanding information systems’ entanglement within organizational and social contexts. She remains concerned with advancing a critical social agenda in IS research and IS practice. She has published in *Journal of Information Systems, European Journal of Information Systems, Information Technology and People, International Journal of Global Information Technology Management, Decision Support Systems, Journal of Information Technology, International Journal of Actor Network Theory and Technological Innovation*, and others.

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