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Clayton Arlen Looney

University of Montana, clayton.looney@business.umt.edu

David Firth

University of Montana, david.firth@business.umt.edu

Hope Koch

Baylor University, hope_koch@baylor.edu

Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic

University of New South Wales, dubravka@unsw.edu.au

J.J. Po-An Hsieh

Georgia State University, jjhsieh@gsu.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Clayton Arlen Looney, David Firth, Hope Koch, Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic, J.J. Po-An Hsieh, Christina Soh, Joseph S. Valacich, and Edgar Whitley

THE CREDIBILITY CRISIS IN IS: A GLOBAL STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

ICIS 2011 PANEL STATEMENT

Clayton Arlen Looney
University of Montana
Missoula, MT, USA
Clayton.Looney@business.umt.edu

David Firth
University of Montana
Missoula, MT, USA
David.Firth@business.umt.edu

Hope Koch
Baylor University
Waco, TX, USA
Hope_Koch@baylor.edu

Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic
University of New South Wales
Sydney, Australia
dubravka@unsw.edu.au

J.J. Po-An Hsieh
Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong
JJ.Hsieh@inet.polyu.edu.hk

Christina Soh
Nanyang Technological University
50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore
ACSOH@ntu.edu.sg

Joseph S. Valacich
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona
valacich@arizona.edu

Edgar Whitley
London School of Economics
London, England
e.a.whitley@lse.ac.uk

Abstract

The purpose of this panel involves helping the IS community devise strategies for augmenting the field's credibility. Representing different continents, educational systems, and roles, our panelists will provide a global perspective on IS credibility. Using stakeholder theory as an organizing framework, this panel will identify the key stakeholders that positively and negatively influence the IS discipline as well as strategies for leveraging these stakeholders. Spirited debates will occur concerning the role of regulators, funding sources, faculty, administrators, students, and employers in shaping the credibility of the IS discipline.

Keywords: *Credibility crisis, education, stakeholders, enrollment, and research*

Introduction

The field of Information Systems (IS) faces a credibility crisis, which threatens its stature as a highly-respected academic discipline (Firth et al. 2011). While other academic units, ranging from humanities to computer science, face similar challenges to IS such as low enrollment, program reductions, and research relevance (Davidson 2011), few disciplines face the unique combination of challenges inherent to IS. These challenges include lack of understanding regarding what the field of IS represents, declining enrollments despite positive job market prospects (Light 2010), and research that is rarely utilized in teaching or practice (Gill and Bhattacharjee 2009). This combination of challenges drives the IS credibility crisis, which is broadly defined as “uncertainty about the domain, future direction, and value of IS within academia” (Firth et al. 2011, p. 200). To better understand the origins, challenges, and solutions related to the credibility crisis in IS, this panel will bring together academics from across the globe to share their experiences about increasing the IS field’s credibility.

To date, discussions have tended to adopt a piecemeal approach toward understanding the credibility crisis. In addition to IS enrollment (Firth et al. 2008 and Koch et al. 2010), discussions have mainly targeted research (Davidson 2011, Dennis et al. 2008, Gill and Bhattacharjee 2009, Straub and Ang 2011) and teaching practices (Firth et al. 2008, Looney and Akbulut 2007), overlooking the potential effects of other relevant factors, such as prevailing market trends and political landscapes (Firth et al. 2011). Consequently, a more comprehensive understanding is needed to generate a unified strategy for addressing the issues that plague the IS discipline (Swanson and Ramiller, 1997). Moreover, much of the debate has taken place among US scholars (Firth et al. 2011), representing a regional, myopic view of a global problem.

Addressing the need for a comprehensive vision and unifying strategy, the panel leverages stakeholder theory (Freeman 1984) as an overarching framework for understanding the credibility crisis in IS. A stakeholder can be defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives” (Freeman 1984, p. 46). Stakeholder analysis involves a process of generating and examining qualitative information to ascertain which party’s interests should be considered when implementing a particular intervention strategy. Stakeholder theory allows the stature of the IS discipline to be viewed as an integration of resource, market, and socio-political forces (Donaldson and Preston 1995, Mitchell et al. 1997). Thus, the theory is well-suited for examining the dynamics of the credibility crisis in a more holistic manner.

Stakeholder theory includes both normative and descriptive aspects (Donaldson and Preston 1995, Freeman 1984, Mitchell et al. 1997). The normative portion involves a process of identification to explain why certain parties should be considered as stakeholders. As an initial step toward framing the credibility crisis, Table 1 identifies the stakes that key IS stakeholders have in the IS discipline. These stakeholders reciprocally influence and are influenced by the IS discipline.

Expanding our understanding of the IS credibility crisis beyond the US perspective, which largely dominates the literature (Firth et al. 2011), this panel considers the global environment where the credibility crisis subsists. According to stakeholder theory, each stakeholder’s influence varies in terms of salience, which can be defined as “the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims” (Mitchell et al. 1997 p.854). By examining the multi-dimensional nature of salience – power, legitimacy, and urgency – we can identify stakeholders’ interests, the mechanisms through which stakeholders influence other stakeholders, and the potential risks and opportunities that exist with particular stakeholders.

Power can be defined as “the extent to which individuals or groups are able to persuade, induce, or coerce others into following certain courses of action” (Johnson and Scholes 1999, p. 36). Stakeholders who can exert power over other stakeholders possess a greater influence on the IS discipline. Legitimacy refers to “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574). Without legitimacy, a stakeholder cannot affect the stature of the IS discipline. Finally, urgency can be defined as “the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate action” (Mitchell et al. 1997, p. 867). Stakeholders who require or demand immediate attention will often be given higher priorities over other stakeholders.

The multi-dimensional nature of stakeholder salience implies that all stakeholders do not deserve equal consideration. Moreover, stakeholder attributes (i.e., power, legitimacy, and urgency) vary over time based on environmental and global factors. For example, regulatory forces, such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), shape academia in the US, but may have little influence on universities in Asia or

Europe. Differences in research traditions provide evidence of more systemic differences across regions. For instance, the European research tradition, which involves working closely with industry partners, is far less prevalent in US universities. Thus, stakeholder analysis is expected to reveal insightful differences across geographical regions. These dynamic forces are expected to contribute to the IS credibility crisis in unique ways.

Table 1. Panelists Viewpoints on Stakeholders in the IS Discipline		
<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Stake in the IS Discipline</i>	<i>Panelists</i>
Administrators/ University Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set strategic objectives for universities, schools, & programs • Allocate resources to programs • Allocate teaching resources to courses 	Joseph Valacich <i>North America</i>
IS Faculty/ Academic Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce and consume research • Produce and consume course material • Teach courses and mentor student 	Dubravka Cecez- Kecmanovic- <i>Australia</i>
Regulators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define course standards • Dictate course offerings (e.g., AACSB) • Establish program legitimacy (e.g., accreditation) 	Joseph Valacich <i>North America</i>
Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources for research efforts and teaching • Define research legitimacy 	JJ Po-An Hsieh <i>Asia</i>
Journals/Research /Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish research results • Define quality and legitimacy of academic knowledge 	Edgar Whitley <i>Europe</i>
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consume teaching and research • Work in IS jobs 	Christina Soh <i>Asia</i>
Practitioners/ Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ students • Partner on research projects and consume research • Provide funding for programs • Serve as program advisors and guest speakers 	Christina Soh <i>Asia</i>

Controversial Issues and Panelists' Positions

Table 1 above identifies the stakeholders that each panelist will debate as having a strong impact on the IS discipline, and its credibility. The panelists were chosen because of their experiences increasing the IS field's credibility in educational environments that span the globe (i.e., Asia, Australia, North America, and Europe). The panelists' role diversity (i.e., administrator, teacher, and researcher), gender diversity, and institutional diversity will lead each panelist to share different perspectives on how key stakeholders affect the IS discipline. Some controversial issues that may emerge from the debate include:

IS faculty and staff must engage the public about how unique IS skills and knowledge continues to meet essential society needs. Australian media reports discuss how a lack of engagement negatively impacts the credibility of the IS discipline.

Regulators such as AACSB exert power in the US, negatively impacting the IS discipline by prioritizing and legitimizing other disciplines such as management and accounting.

Funding sources for research and education are drying up. Funding sources such as the National Science Foundation in the US fund research, legitimizing specific streams that may compete with IS research. Higher education tends to be moving toward low cost models, characterized by broadcasting education to the masses. The IS field needs to align closer with disciplines that secure research grants such as schools of medicine, engineering, and computer science.

Journals, research, media, administrators and university colleagues. While academic institutions around the world measure the IS discipline's credibility by journal impact factor, citations, and publishing in top journals, this may not be the best measure of overall impact. Using wider societal measures may address the credibility crisis afflicting the IS discipline. Panelists will share the forthcoming UK research assessment exercise, as well as other non-academic research impact measures.

Students across the globe hold passive views regarding the role of IS in organizations. Many students are more interested in pursuing careers in finance, real estate, and accounting which they perceive as providing easier and more lucrative career paths.

Employers and Practitioners for the most part are uninterested in partnering on research projects, consuming IS research, or developing IS programs. Rather, they see their stake in university IS programs as transactional and centered on their hiring needs.

Panel Structure

Controversial issues such as those discussed above will surface as each panelist discusses how a given stakeholder positively and negatively impacts the IS discipline. After the panelists make their points, the audience will vote on the three stakeholders that have the biggest impact on the IS discipline's success. Based on the votes, the panelists and audience will share their experiences and suggestions on how IS academics can work with these stakeholders to increase the field's credibility.

Biographies

Clayton Looney, David Firth, and Hope Koch will serve as the panel's organizers and facilitators.

Dubravka Cezec-Kecmanovic is Professor of IS in the Australian School of Business at the University of New South Wales. Until 1992, she was with the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (former Yugoslavia), where she served as the Dean. Since arriving in Australia, she has held the positions of Professor and Head of School of Information Systems and Management Science, and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Administration, Griffith University, Brisbane; Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Consultancy, and Professor and Founding Chair in IS at the UWS, Hawkesbury. Her recent research interests include theoretical and methodological developments in understanding IS' entanglement within organizational and social contexts and advancing a critical social agenda. She has published in *Journal of Information Systems*, *European Journal of Information Systems*, *Information Technology and People*, and others.

J.J. Po-An Hsieh is an Associate Professor and the Deputy Director of the Doctor of Management Program at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. JJ is a Research Associate at Georgia State University and serves as an Associate Editor for *MIS Quarterly*. JJ conducts research on the Digital Divide, Post-Acceptance Behaviors, CRM Systems, and Knowledge Management. JJ has years of experience in E-Commerce, high-tech, and international business. He teaches IT Strategy, E-Commerce, and Information Management. He received his Ph.D. from Georgia State University, a dual-master degree from University of Maryland, and a bachelor's degree from Tsinghua University. His works have been published in *MIS Quarterly*, *Management Science*, *ISR*, and others. His research is mostly sponsored by leading corporations such as China Mobile, Orient Overseas Container Line, China Unicom, and China Telecom. In 2010, he received the Faculty Award for Outstanding Achievement in Research.

Christina Soh is with the Division of IT and Operations Management, Nanyang Business School. During her 18 years with NTU, she has served as the Head of the ITOM division, Director of the Information Management Research Center, and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Business. Her research interests include IT and strategy, management of global IT in multinational corporations, management of large complex projects such as enterprise systems implementations, electronic markets, and national IT policy. Her work has been published in *MIS Quarterly*, *MIS Quarterly Executive*, *the European Journal of Information Systems*, and others. She co-chaired the ICIS 2006 and PACIS 2007 doctoral consortiums.

Joseph S. Valacich is an Eller Professor in the MIS Department at The University of Arizona. He has had visiting faculty appointments in Hong Kong, Norway, Latvia, and Finland. Professor Valacich served on the national task forces to design The Model Curriculum and Guidelines for Undergraduate and Master's Degree Programs in IS and on NSF's Executive Committee to define the IS Program Accreditation Standards. He is currently a Senior Editor at *MIS Quarterly*. He is a prolific researcher, with publications in numerous prestigious journals, including: *MIS Quarterly*, *ISR*, *Management Science*, and others.

Edgar Whitley is in the Information Systems and Innovation Group at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His present research and practical interests include global outsourcing, social aspects of IT-based change, collaborative innovation in an outsourcing context, and the business implications of cloud computing. Edgar has extensive teaching and executive education experience, and is also an expert in identity, privacy, and security issues relating to information and net-based technologies. Edgar is the co-editor for the journal *Information Technology & People* and was previously an associate editor for *MIS Quarterly*. Edgar has been research coordinator of the LSE Identity Project and has written extensively about the Identity Cards Programme for both academic and trade audiences, which has helped emphasize the relevance of rigorous research on topics of national and international significance. He is co-author of *Global Challenges for Identity Policies*.

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