When Rigor and Relevance Meet: Experience from a Fruitful Researcher-Practitioner Partnership

Professional Development Symposium Proposal

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Symposium Overview

The perennial debate in the Information Systems (IS) field about rigor and relevance of IS research to practicing managers often ends with the admonition for IS researchers to more actively engage with practice to bridge the gap between the two (Robey and Markus, 1998; Rosemann and Vessey, 2008). The expected outcome is that research will become both more rigorous as well as more relevant. While this goal is easy to articulate enacting it in practice is more difficult and time-consuming. Successful achievement of rigorous research that is practically relevant occurs at the confluence of a multiplicity of institutional and relational factors (Rosemann and Vessey, 2008). It requires incentive structures (both academic and practice-based) that foster organizational and individual collaboration, networks of personal and institutional connections that are mutually trusting and beneficial, and experiences of successful collaboration that have produced measurable benefits for both academics and practitioners.

We discuss, in this workshop, the genesis and outcomes of what we consider to be a successful and ongoing partnership between an IS researcher, Dr. Gerald Grant, and a CIO practitioner, Robert Collins, in addressing the challenges and opportunities of collaborating to better understand how organizations can derive more lasting value from their IT investments. Under the rubric of “The Value Imperative” www.itvalueimperative.com, the collaborators have applied leading-edge research to address issues that managers, both business and IT face in their real world settings. Dr. Grant, drawing his own and other academics research has advanced theoretical ideas around issues such as the business value cycle, the agricultural model for managing IT investments in organizations, and the value realization cycle to explain why and how business organizations may or may not derive value from their IT investments. Rob Collins has used these ideas to both reflect on his past roles as CIO at a leading software company and has also applied them in practice, at the City of Ottawa, where he served as Transitional CIO. By applying the ideas he was able to change the approach and language that business and IT people used to address issues faced when making investments in IT. At the City of Ottawa, a new IT governance arrangement was instituted that reflected the core ideas advanced in the theoretical work.

Consequently, we are able to attest the extent to which the theoretical ideas resonated with practice and how they have help to streamline and clarify what organizations should focus on when seeking to deliver business value from IT investments.
The collaboration between Dr. Grant and Mr. Collins has resulted in a number of outcomes that are ongoing. These include:

2. Use of the material in senior undergraduate and MBA teaching (curriculum ideas will be shared)
3. Development and delivery of several one-day, two-day, and three-day seminars for practicing business and IT executives.
4. Seminar presentations to audiences such as:
   a. Deloitte University North, CIO Fellows Conference, April 21, 2017, Toronto, Canada
   b. Employment and Social Development Canada, Government of Canada, Project Management Forum, April 13, 2017, Ottawa, Canada
   c. Government of Canada, Interdepartmental Investment Planning and Project Management – Community of Practitioners, November 2016, Ottawa, Canada
   d. Conference Board of Canada, CIO Council, Toronto, Canada
   g. DPI (The Association of Public Sector IT Professionals in Canada) at their 2012 annual conference.

5. Original research involving doctoral and MBA students in the municipal setting.

We will share our journey of collaboration with the participants in the professional development symposia. Our intention and expectation are to help participants gain insights on:

1. How to develop and maintain a collaborative relationship with IS practitioners over time.
2. How to translate theoretical ideas into consumable and beneficial ideas for practitioners.
3. How to test ideas for relevance (importance, accessibility, suitability).
4. How to leverage the collaboration to serve a wider audience of practitioners.
5. How to develop new research opportunities to advance the development of new theoretical ideas.

We believe this workshop will be beneficial to the audience as we continue on the journey of bridging the divide between academia and practice in management.

*Note: An earlier version of this workshop was presented at the 2015 International Conference on Information Resources Management (Conf-IRM) in Ottawa, Canada. Substantial work has taken place since then.

**PDS Presenters**
Dr. Gerald Grant

Dr. Gerald Grant is Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Information Technology, Organizations, and People (CITOP) at the Sprott School of Business, Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. He obtained his Ph.D. in Information Systems from the London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom. Currently, he is an associate editor for Information and Management as well as for Information Technology for Development Journal. Dr. Grant’s research focuses on the policy and strategy implications of ICTs in private and public sector organizations. He is also a member of the Advisory Board of DPI-The Association of Public Sector Information Professionals in Canada.

Robert Collins

Rob Collins is a technology executive with more than 35 years experience. He was the Chair of the Mayor’s Task Force on eGovernment for the City of Ottawa. In 2013, Rob was Transitional CIO for the City of Ottawa where he was brought in to change that organization’s approach to IT. To do this, he implemented a new planning model, new governance process and reorganized the IT department. Rob spent twenty years with Cognos, Inc., including roles as product line Vice-President and Chief Information Officer.