



Scientist Entrepreneur Political advisor Musician

August-Wilhelm Scheer

The Art of Timing

Experiences and
Recommendations

 Springer

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Preface

As an academic, entrepreneur, political consultant and dedicated (amateur) jazz saxophonist, I have decades of experience of how important it is to deal with contemporary phenomena correctly.

For example, as an academic, I have to keep to manuscript deadlines and then organise my production run; as an entrepreneur, I have to make decisions under pressure of time; as a political adviser, I need to set time priorities for future projects. And, as a jazz musician, I have to keep time to the beat.

Choosing the right time to act and coordinating what I do when – timing, in other words – is part of my everyday life.

If I get it wrong, then, in my life as an academic, a competitor gets their research results first; as an entrepreneur, I put jobs at risk; as a political advisor, I waste tax money and, as a musician, I ruin the performance.

As I thought about the issue of timing in more depth, I gradually became more aware of how it had influenced different paths my life has taken. Examples came to mind where I had taken opportunities with both hands, along with those where I had missed the boat. With some plans and decisions, I was too early, but in other situations, I had the right idea at the right time. The more I thought about things I had experienced, seen and observed, the more varied the forms and types of timing at hand.

We can see the difference between objective and lived time when we are stressed, panicked or bored. We see the importance of the beginning and end of a lecture or a film with good speakers and their opening jokes and closing punch-lines, or in the opening and closing scenes of a film.

That's why I chose timing as the theme for this book, which also discusses a lot of experiences from the different areas of my life.

The thing that made me decide to write this book was a specific event. In the autumn of 2019, I was asked by a journalist from a well-known business journal whether, on the occasion of my approaching 80th birthday, he could ghost-write a biography about me. He had already sounded out a renowned publisher and they were interested. I took the offer as a compliment, but I had my reservations. Firstly, I did not think myself as being such a key figure that people would be waiting on my memoirs. Secondly, having a ghost-writer gave me pause for thought. After all, I had written over 20 books myself. Why should I need someone else to write about my own life? In a nutshell, I decided to write this book myself. However, it isn't like any other biography. With the reference to timing, I want to create a framing and a focal point.

In the first part, I describe developments in my four lives as an academic, entrepreneur, political advisor and musician to show the time relationships between decisions and consequences. Documents, photos and facsimiles from magazines and documents provide a collage for the individual chapters.

In the second part of the book, I describe different aspects and forms of timing in a more systematic manner.

In terms of writing style, I have aimed for plain language with plain-spoken opinions.

When it comes to male and female terms, I use the most common to keep the flow. This must not be regarded as me being discriminatory.

I refer to people using their first and last names, but without academic titles. If it is relevant to the content, I provide the academic title for the person when they are mentioned for the first time. Functional designations are provided if they facilitate understanding.

My business career is and always has been central in my life. It stirs my greatest passions, sets the toughest challenges and provides the best satisfaction. All the same, when I look at my diary entries, it seems that I was always on "high alert", as there has always been a tricky personal, strategic or business situation that I had to deal with. I often think of these problems in my sleep. At the same time, entrepreneurial life, with its highs and lows, its freedom and creativity, is the best kind of life. If I succeed in giving the reader a positive impression of life in business and inspire some people to become entrepreneurs, then I will be happy.

On the whole, I would like to encourage readers to focus on goals in this finite existence of ours on this planet, and to use life wisely. You cannot achieve this through tedious time management, which just makes people slaves to a schedule, but in a positive way, which is based on an understanding of time.

It's a remarkable coincidence that I wrote part of the manuscript during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which involved measures such as quarantine and curfews and had an impact on our own timing.

I would like to thank the following people for their help in the completion of my manuscript: Irmhild Plaetrich for our discussions on the idea of the book, Dr. Ingrid Jakobs for her help with the structure, Tobias Greff for his work with the publisher's and Lucie Bender for carefully proofreading the work and tracking down photos and documents.

Special thanks also to Sandra Ehlen and Gloria Rebmann for their dedicated, creative work in designing the picture section and the collage.

It was a pleasure working with you all.



From left to right; Lucie Bender, the author, Gloria Rebmann, Sandra Ehlen

List of contents

Part I	My timing experiences in four parallel life paths	1
1	A six-day race — a company purchase adventure	3
2	Timing life paths	13
2.1	Pre-ordained life paths	14
2.2	Timing a life path as a structuring exercise	15
2.3	My four parallel life paths	15
3	My timing experiences as an academic	17
3.1	Student years at the University of Hamburg	17
3.2	Professor at the University of Saarland	21
3.3	The German Institute for Business Informatics (IWi)	22
3.3.1	Computer Integrated Manufacturing (CIM)	24
3.3.2	Architecture of integrated information systems (ARIS)	25
3.3.3	Expert systems as the first wave of artificial intelligence (AI)	30
3.3.4	Digital teaching	31
3.3.5	Theory and practice	33
3.3.6	Securing the future of the German Institute for Business Informatics (IWi)	36
3.4	August-Wilhelm Scheer Institute for Digital Products and Processes (AWSi)	37
3.4.1	The structure of AWSi	37
3.4.2	Industry 4.0	38

3.4.3	Artificial Intelligence	39
3.4.4	Future prospects.....	40
4	My timing experiences as an entrepreneur	61
4.1	Foundation of IDS Prof. Scheer GmbH	61
4.2	Performance programme	62
4.2.1	Consultancy	63
4.2.2	FI-2 production control centre.....	63
4.2.3	The ARIS modelling tool.....	65
4.3	The growth process of IDS Scheer AG.....	68
4.3.1	The speed of growth is a challenge for everyone.....	68
4.3.2	Internationalisation means always starting afresh	69
4.3.3	Timing also key in flotations.....	73
4.3.4	Sale of IDS Scheer AG to Software AG.....	77
4.4	The entrepreneurial “comeback”	86
4.4.1	The paths of imc AG’s development	87
4.4.2	Founding of Scheer Management GmbH.....	91
4.4.3	Buyback and restructuring of IDS Scheer Consulting GmbH	92
4.4.4	Founding of Scheer GmbH and relaunch	94
4.4.5	Acquisition of the company E2E and Lessons Learned ..	96
4.4.6	Management of the Scheer company network.....	97
4.4.7	Looking ahead	99
5	My timing experiences in politics	117
5.1	Experiences as a political consultant.....	118
5.1.1	Prime Minister Oskar Lafontaine’s Structural Commission	118
5.1.2	Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s Innovation Council.....	118
5.1.3	Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Innovation Council.....	120
5.1.4	Prime Minister Müller’s Commissioner for Innovation.	120
5.1.5	Prime Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer’s digital advisor.....	125
5.1.6	Prime Minister Tobias Hans’ digital advisor.....	127
5.1.7	Some thoughts and suggestions for Saarland	128
5.2	My experiences with Bitkom association policies	131
5.2.1	The importance of the industry	132
5.2.2	Germany as an IT location	133
5.2.3	High-impact media appearances	137
5.2.4	The ripcord was pulled too late on CeBIT development	140

5.2.5	The Digital Summit: an opportunity that is still underused	141
5.2.6	Coping with the 2008/2009 financial crisis and challenges due to Fukushima	142
5.2.7	Outcomes of my tenure	143
6	My timing experiences as a musician	163
6.1	My love for the saxophone.	163
6.2	A second attempt.	164
6.3	It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.	165
6.4	Just because you're not a drummer, doesn't mean that you don't have to keep time (Thelonious Monk)	167
6.5	A musician never leaves the training camp	169
6.6	Challenging experiences.	170
6.7	The special thing about performing in Kraków	174
7	My personal time management	181
	Part II Timing is everything — everything is timing.	185
8	Time flies — but where to?	187
8.1	What does time mean?	187
8.2	It's part of common parlance.	188
8.3	Live in the moment.	189
9	How relative is time?	191
9.1	Subjective perception of time	191
9.2	Put a flow in your ear	192
9.3	Don't panic on the Titanic	193
9.4	Tension at boiling point	194
9.5	Acting in the short-term and long-term.	195
9.6	Time pressure generates mistakes, but also creativity	196
10	Who sets the tempo?	199
10.1	"Beethoven did not compose by committee"	199
10.2	Project management	200
10.3	TOP – timing matters	201
10.4	Fast thinking — slow thinking.	202
10.5	A calm mind's busy years are in its creation; only time strengthens the fermentation (Mephisto)	203
10.6	Time kills deals.	205

11	How can we use high points?	207
11.1	The primacy and recency effect: First impressions count but save the best until last	207
11.2	What do you do between the start and the end?	209
12	Kairos — the god of the right moment, the convenient opportunity. Or, “seize the opportunity”	213
12.1	Life is about the opportunities you take.	214
12.2	Sometimes it’s good to miss an opportunity.	215
12.3	Beware of hasty action	215
13	If you’re not there at the right time...	217
13.1	Those who come too early are often misunderstood	217
13.1.1	False starts in science.	217
13.1.2	First words of advice to politicians	218
13.1.3	The typical progression of hype	218
13.1.4	The start-up dilemma	220
13.2	Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come ...	221
14	From the idea (invention) to innovation.	223
14.1	The innovation process.	223
14.2	What makes good management.	227
15	When to stop.	229
15.1	Stop rules.	229
15.2	When should you make a change?	231
15.3	Retirement – or a time to really get started?	231
15.4	When is it time to say “goodbye”?	234
15.5	Try taking the horn out of your mouth ...	235
15.6	What should you never stop doing?	236
15.7	When do you prepare successors?	236
16	Assured personal timing creates freedom.	239
17	Can you shape the future?	241
17.1	Is life all about coincidence?	241
17.2	“Yeah, just make a plan ...”	242
17.3	Forecasts are difficult	244

18 When does timing come to an end?.....	245
About the author	247
Literature (selection).	251

Part I

**My timing experiences
in four parallel life paths**

1

A six-day race — a company purchase adventure

I ask myself when exactly in 2014 the buyback of the consulting arm of what had been IDS Scheer AG from the company Software AG started. Was it an act of will or did the first impulse come from my subconscious? Is it generally the case that choosing the right time is largely beyond our will? Sigmund Freud is credited with recognising and popularising the importance of the subconscious mind. However the process started, a dramatic sequence of activities – all of which required coordination – followed, in a time period of just six days. To help describe it, I will use my diary entries, in which I documented my thoughts and actions at the time. But first, here is what happened.

After the sale of my majority shares in IDS Scheer AG, a company I founded, to Software AG in 2009, I wanted to largely withdraw from the world of business. I wanted to spend more time on my interests – being a musician, an art collector and a patron of the arts. Then, however, former employees asked me if I could help them start their own businesses. I became a business angel, supporting start-ups in drawing up their business plans and investing a maximum of 25 % in their initial capital.

I granted one of the new businesses, Scheer Management GmbH, permission to use my name. Even in this business, I only invested 25 % initially, but I gradually built up my holding to 50 %. With a 60 % holding in imc AG, which I founded in 1996, I was the majority shareholder and Chairman of the Supervisory Board.

To manage my investments, I founded Scheer Holding GmbH, and in my co-director Rudolf Keul, I appointed an auditor who also fulfilled the role of CFO in the last phase of IDS Scheer AG.

And so, I slowly morphed from being a business angel back to being an entrepreneur. In parallel to this, I erected Scheer Tower I, a nine-floor office building on the campus of the University of Saarbrücken for Scheer Group businesses and start-ups. The role of private citizen and patron of the arts just didn't fit my entrepreneurial DNA. I was still silently mourning the sale of my company IDS Scheer AG. It was one of Germany's most successful IT companies and my life's work. When it was sold, IDS Scheer was made up of two areas; ARIS business process optimisation software development and sales, and SAP software introduction consultancy. Software AG integrated the ARIS division into its business and spun off the consultancy side as IDS Scheer Consulting GmbH.

I heard rumours from Software AG that many of the former employees of the consultancy wing of IDS Scheer AG were unhappy, as Software AG was a software production house and, unlike the ARIS product range, the SAP consultancy business was not part of their core skillset. I therefore felt a certain degree of guilt regarding the sale because of the unhappiness of the employees. This was the beginning of the risky buyback process that was now underway. It was slow-going at first, but then cumulated in an intense six-day race against the clock.

On Sunday 9 March 2014, during a VIP dinner after a festive CeBIT opening in Hanover, things were very calm. I was sitting at a table with friends and professor colleagues Wolfgang Wahlster and Henning Kagermann and our director Rosemarie Clarner, when the CEO of Software AG, Karl-Heinz Streibich, said 'hello' to us. As our table had no free seats, he sat at another table nearby. Karl-Heinz Streibich and I had not spoken much since the sale, and some of the wounds from the negotiations were still tender. I wanted to smooth this out after what was now five years and, after our earlier healthy relationship from working together in the industry association Bitkom. I approached him and asked if I could visit him at Software AG's headquarters in the next few days. He happily agreed, and our secretaries agreed a time for a meeting the next day at Software AG's headquarters, on Thursday 13 March at 5 p.m., after my plenary presentation on Industry 4.0 at the CeBIT conference centre.

We began with small talk about our industry but, at the end, Karl-Heinz Streibich asked whether I wanted to buy back IDS Scheer Consulting GmbH, the consulting arm of what was IDS Scheer AG, with a turnover of approximately €60 million, for a figure in the mid-double-digit millions of Euros. He said that there had been interest from a listed company and negotiations were at an advanced stage, but he would be open to a quick sale to another bidder. I instantly said "no", as the idea of buying back part of a business I had sold five years ago struck me as absurd. I added that, with Scheer Management, we were operating in a different business field anyway.

After we chatted in the discussion zone of the stand, we went to the impressively large Software AG exhibition area, and Karl-Heinz Streibich showed me

an Industry 4.0 port control system project. As many of the attendees had already dispersed, we caused a considerable stir among the employees present and someone took our picture. Karl-Heinz Streibich said: “If we shake hands then they will think we’ve done a deal”. We then shook hands in jest (or was it serious?).



I then went back to our stand.

The following week, on Wednesday 19 March, I held a lecture on Industry 4.0 in Baden, Switzerland, and then flew to Munich. The conversation with Karl-Heinz Streibich and the offer to buy back IDS Scheer Consulting were somehow still on my mind. A lot of thoughts were running through my head during the flight. The idea of being able to erase all trace of the IDS Scheer AG sale certainly appealed. At the same time, the high level of risk was a concern. But the opportunity was at hand and, in the spirit of the saying “life is full of missed opportunities”, I did not want to let this rare opportunity simply pass me by. The next day, I asked my secretary, Lucie Bender, to arrange a telephone call with Karl-Heinz Streibich for Tuesday 25 March, with the topic being “our conversation at CeBIT”. I also had a brief discussion with the CFO of Scheer Holding, Rudolf Keul, who would be the official buyer, about our conversation. He was sceptical, but he wasn’t totally against the idea.

In the telephone conversation on the Tuesday morning, I asked Karl-Heinz Streibich directly whether his comment about selling IDS Scheer Consulting GmbH was serious. He answered: “I was being very serious”. However, he told us we had to act quickly, as negotiations with other parties were at an advanced stage and were due to conclude in the coming days. There was only one way we could succeed – by closing the deal by midnight on Monday 31 March. This set a near-impossible time frame of six days for closing the deal.

The starting gun had sounded on a six-day race, with Wednesday being Day 1 and the Monday being Day 6.

The required activities immediately started running through my head: In this short time, the legal details of the contract and business conditions had to be negotiated, a company valuation (due diligence) had to be carried out and a business concept had to be developed for the positioning of the acquired company. On top of this, the final decision had to be made, the contractual text had to be finalised and the contracts had to be concluded before a notary. So it was the equivalent of covering the distance of a marathon in the time of a 100-metre sprint. For a project of this magnitude, this was simply impossible, and not consistent with the principles of regulated business procedure. On the other hand, unlike the other parties, who were listed companies, I did not have to ask any controlling bodies for approval. I could make the decision myself, even though I would then have to bear the risk personally.

It was therefore a challenge of timing. The thrill of the chase had consumed me somewhat. But I had to rein it in if I wanted to avoid sparking a financial disaster through acting recklessly.

At the end of our telephone conversation, Karl-Heinz Streibich and I agreed that our CFO and his legal department representative for contractual affairs should meet the next day, on Wednesday, two weeks after our meeting on the CeBIT stand and Day 1 of the six-day race, to explore the broad scope of a potential deal. This scope concerned details such as the number of employees affected, the country-specific organisations, locations of business offices, business fields and the scheduling of the necessary activities.

I immediately informed our CFO of this meeting. He was still sceptical, but also understood the strategic importance of the deal and set up a meeting with Software AG's legal department for Wednesday morning.

Wednesday, Day 1

The meeting took place, as planned, on Wednesday 26 March. Rudolf Keul told me that the conversation had gone well, and that we had received a single-page fact sheet on the legal structure, partial purchase of legal entities (share deal) and the partial purchase of objects (asset deal), figures on sales, employees, the names of the ten locations concerned, capacity utilisation, order backlog, incoming orders, number of active clients and the industry names of the main business units of the advisory services. I have listed these items to give readers a rough idea of just how complex the deal was.

The fact that this information was immediately available told us that negotiations with the other parties were already at an advanced stage. We later found out that a contract of 100 pages in length was already on the table.

On Wednesday afternoon, Karl-Heinz Streibich called me and asked me about my thoughts on the conversation that morning and we agreed to meet the fol-

lowing morning on Thursday 27 March, at the Marriott Hotel in Heidelberg. I asked Rudolf Keul to come to the meeting and told Karl-Heinz Streibich about this, but he wanted to come alone.

Thursday, Day 2

On the way to Heidelberg, Rudolf Keul and I discussed whether the potential deal was totally insane. We speculated as to who the other interested parties were and we quickly came to a firm assumption, as some foreign subsidiaries of what had been IDS Scheer AG had been sold to a specific business. Then we thought of the price we would be asked to pay to buy the company. Usually, the purchase price of a company is a multiple of the turnover. For consulting businesses, it is between 0.6 and 2, depending on the profit situation, and we calculated our maximum price.

When we got to the meeting room, Karl-Heinz Streibich was already there. He invited me to sit at the head of the table. This was definitely out of a mixture of politeness and an attempt to woo me. He was very awkward at first, starting with small talk about politics and industry gossip. I eventually raised the actual subject of the meeting, and straight away he gave his turnover multiple for the purchase price. I rejected this as being too high, and offered a much lower amount. Price negotiations always go like in a carpet market. After two rounds of tough negotiations, we had finally agreed on a multiple. We also discussed the national companies (Germany and Austria) and other details such as securing the work equipment (computers) of the employees concerned, lease conditions for the offices and other points. Then, according to my diary, we “gushed” about how good a technical fit the deal would be and what a good political fit it would be for Saarland, etc.

Finally, I asked Karl-Heinz Streibich if I could have a telephone call with him at 6 p.m.

Our discussions ended after two hours, at 12 o'clock. Rudolf Keul and I returned to Saarbrücken and set up a meeting for 1:30 p.m. at my private residence with Josef Bommersbach, CEO of Scheer Management GmbH, a company in which I was the majority shareholder. This is the company with which there would be the highest number of professional and sales synergies as well as overlaps. The CEO was totally surprised, took a sceptical view of the potential synergies and the prospect of constructive cooperation with the recruited employees, but his view was constructive in the end. Our HR executive, Rosemarie Clarner, whom I had let in on the secret, took a similar view.

At 3 p.m. I set off on a two-hour bike ride to clear my head and to think through the risks of the deal once again on my bike. The route was mainly through wooded terrain with several steep climbs which tested me quite a bit. As a result, my thought process was disrupted by my physical exertions and I had to reset my thinking every time, which led to new insights.

The key issue of my risk analysis was that the assumed annual turnover would not be achieved and the necessary restructuring costs would be higher than we had estimated. We would then be in a vicious circle. I estimated the amount we would need to buffer this risk. At the end of the bike ride, my decision was final: at 6 p.m., I would reject the deal on the previously agreed terms. I felt relieved.

At 5:30 p.m. I called Rudolf Keul, my CEO. In the meantime, he had obtained further information from Software AG that confirmed my fears. He summarised his risk factors in a brief email comprising six points. This confirmed the decision, and I awaited the telephone call from Karl-Heinz Streibich to reject his offer.

Shortly after 6 p.m. I called him to say that I would not be able to agree to the deal and I stated what I thought were the risks. He was disappointed, but he emphasised the strategic fit once more and tried to come up with a compromise solution, where he would help create a fund for cost overruns and turnover shortfalls. But this sounded too vague to me, and I demanded a firm price reduction to cushion the risk. Eventually, he agreed. I asked to interrupt the call so that I could discuss the new situation with Rudolf Keul and said that I would call back in 20 minutes. Rudolf Keul now also saw the risk as acceptable and I told Karl-Heinz Streibich of this decision, which we now had until the coming Monday to make a reality. The deal had been saved but, until the signature before the notary, it could be scuppered at any time.

Rosemarie Clarner was nearby during the phone conversations. She was nervous, but she saw the opportunities in the potential acquisition.

As you would expect, I was thinking about what was behind Karl-Heinz Streibich's desire to sell off the business in the first quarter of the year. The sale was to include the purchase of ARIS software licences, which would further improve the turnover of Software AG in the first year. But the reasons for the time pressure were his business. As far as we were concerned, he had given us a better negotiating position.

In the afternoon, we had contacted our lawyer in Frankfurt as a precautionary measure and informed him about the potential deal. He was not thrilled about the time pressure but he pledged to support us. Following my decision to pursue the deal, he was now able to work on the contract drafts the next day, and we arranged a telephone call between the two of us and Rudolf Keul for Saturday morning.

I then telephoned my financial advisor to inform him of the potential need for finances.

Overall, I was in a confident mood. I saw opportunities in increasing my current levels of entrepreneurial activity, resuming SAP consultancy activities and offering consultancy services using the ARIS method, which I had created. The ARIS method was my masterpiece, something which I had developed into a software product with IDS Scheer AG and which had become a global success. The

ARIS software product would still belong to Software AG, but we would get the ARIS consultants back. In addition, we would take over a data centre, where we would look after customer systems. Our service portfolio would be significantly broader as a result. I went to bed at 1 o'clock in high spirits.

Friday, Day 3

In telephone conversations on the Friday, Rudolf Keul and I developed scenarios for the management of the new business. We agreed that we should part ways with some of the managers at IDS Scheer Consulting and that we should engage people we trusted. We ran through a few scenarios until we decided on Josef Bommersbach as CEO of the operating business and Rudolf Keul as CFO. This would result in a double burden on both alongside their respective roles in Scheer Management GmbH, but would also guarantee synergies between the two businesses. At the same time, it would secure employee acceptance of the buyback, as both were trusted by the employees who would join the company. I decided to include both in my deal team right away. It would also mean that they were inside the tent, and not critical bystanders observing the process from the outside. We agreed a meeting between the three of us for Sunday morning at my private residence.

On the Friday, my thoughts were largely preoccupied with the deal, as you might expect, but I also made an effort to calm my emotions to retain oversight and control over the many parallel processes, which were now underway. The Friday was, however, the day when the lawyers and financiers got to work.

Saturday, Day 4

In the morning, I had the phone conversation with our lawyer and our CFO Rudolf Keul as agreed. Our lawyer repeated his warnings regarding the planned completion on the following Monday. He was much more in favour of signing a term sheet and having the notarised contract drawn up at a later stage. However, because I had agreed a fixed deadline with Karl-Heinz Streibich, this was not possible. Our lawyer remained stubborn. He said we did not have a contract template yet, and we had not been able to check the figures we had been presented with. In particular, we needed guarantees for risks to the business emanating from the past. I suggested clarifying the outstanding points with the other side over the weekend. Monday would then be the day for the final decision.

In the evening, I played with our band "Groovin' High" in the Hotel Leidinger jazz club in Saarbrücken. We had invited solo trumpeter Ingolf Burkhardt from the NDR big band in Hamburg as a guest. He played superbly, as did the rest of the band, but I was pretty nervous thinking about the deal. I hope the audience did not notice.

Sunday, Day 5

On Sunday, I held the conversation with the two managers of Scheer Management, Josef Bommersbach and Rudolf Keul, regarding their willingness to assume management of the business being purchased. They had come in a car together and had presumable made preparations. I took this to be a good sign of their willingness. We just needed to briefly finalise their management responsibilities and then focused on the important strategic perspectives of the new business.

In the afternoon, I held several phone conversations, as the negotiations between our lawyer and the other side were ongoing.

In the evening, I played in the concert hall of Fellenberg House in Merzig with Ingolf Burkhardt and our band. Compared to the previous day, I played in a much more relaxed manner. Playing some music did me good.

At 11:35 p.m. I got an email with the outcome of the day's negotiations. There were three positive outcomes and eight sticking points.

I arranged a telephone call with Rudolf Keul for the following morning and a subsequent conference call with our lawyer. Now came the day that would decide whether we would clinch the deal or not. I also prepared myself for a final phone call with Karl-Heinz Streibich in the event that a deal-breaker could not be resolved. In any case, a notary appointment was arranged for Monday evening in Darmstadt as a precaution.

Monday, Day 6

At nine in the morning, after preparatory phone calls, we had the telephone conference with our lawyer as planned. On the basis of the list of outstanding issues, we defined the deal-breakers which would have to be clarified before any signature before the notary. The notary appointment was set for 6:00 p.m. in Darmstadt, meaning that we would have to leave Saarbrücken at four. Everything would have to be finalised by then.

I was highly stressed all day long. Our press advisor Irmhild Plaetrich and her colleagues prepared the information on the deal for our employees, clients, partners, press and policy-makers, and organised the necessary premises for press talks.

I largely kept myself away from the flurry of activity, as I did not want to get caught in the cycle of completing tasks, but wanted to retain my decision-making freedom until the last minute.

So I went for a bike ride over lunch.

I declined a telephone call with Karl-Heinz Streibich requested by Software AG on the advice of our lawyer, as legally binding verbal agreements were to be avoided.

The assumption of risks emanating from the company's past had not been clarified by the afternoon. We then reached a compromise in this matter with the

CFO of Software AG. He then sent me a message saying “Mr Streibich won’t be having any red wine with me any more”. It was a good compromise for us.

I said that we would only get in the car in Saarbrücken if all of the deal-breakers identified by us had been resolved.

We finally set off at half-past five, an hour and a half later than planned. The time remaining until midnight had narrowed even further.

At half past seven, we began reading the contract before the notary. The notary and his assistant had Karl-Heinz Streibich, two senior employees from the Software AG legal department, our lawyer, Rudolf Keul and myself before him.

During the reading, a crucial sticking point arose. Karl-Heinz Streibich requested an interruption and a chat with me alone. We went into an anteroom to solve the problem. He again stressed how important it was to conclude the deal by midnight and that the sticking point would have to be resolved in his favour. It was the final hurdle, so we agreed a compromise. We then went back into the meeting room. A legally binding wording was agreed upon. The midnight deadline could still be met.

We signed all of the documents at 11 p.m. I stayed for half an hour to call our key managers and partners to tell them about the deal. Since the confidentiality agreements signed beforehand had now become obsolete, I was permitted to do this. I had earlier told Prime Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer to expect a message from me, and I left her a voice message.

We got back to Saarbrücken at one in the morning. A glass of red was the perfect thing before bed.

Consistent timing is still essential ...

The signing of the contracts was by no means the end of the takeover process. The following day, Karl-Heinz Streibich and I communicated the deal to employees in Saarbrücken and informed the local media in a press conference. The media in Saarland received the news very positively.

In the coming weeks, the fine details of the contract would have to be worked out in tough negotiations. There were several substantially different interpretations regarding these points. This proved that our lawyer had been right when he warned against a quick completion. At the same time, such differences in the interpretation of legal wording can never be ruled out, even in lengthy negotiations. In any case, the predicted date for the closure of the deal of 1 May was postponed and new rounds of negotiations commenced. Fortunately, there were favourable and less favourable interpretations for both sides, meaning that there was always room for compromise. Karl-Heinz Streibich and I dealt with the remaining divergences in a private meeting, and so, after formal approval by the competition commission, IDS Scheer Consulting GmbH (Germany and Austria) became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Scheer Holding GmbH on 1 July 2014.

But the process still was not complete. After a few weeks, we identified a need for restructuring and reorganisation, which kicked off a lengthy restructuring process that would last several months. I'll come back to this later. Now I will focus on the other subsequent steps and their length.

By 1 March 2015, we had completed the takeover to such an extent that we had a company with a new organisational structure, new management and a stable business model, just 11 months after the conclusion of the buyback in the notary's office.

The takeover of all the Scheer Management GmbH shares by Scheer Holding was a complex process, but was a necessary step in the merger.

On 28 July 2015, Scheer Management and IDS Scheer Consulting, which had been taken over by Software AG, became a new company: Scheer GmbH.

Today, in 2021, Scheer GmbH is a large, successful IT business. The management team is almost completely new and, like me, has a positive outlook on the future.

To this day, I still ask myself the question of how and when I felt emotionally prepared to buy the company back. Was I ready when I asked Karl-Heinz Streibich for a chat at CeBIT, thus getting the ball rolling? After all, I was already aware of rumours that Software AG might be looking to sell. Was it when I visited the Software AG stand and received the initial proposal from Karl-Heinz Streibich, even though I rejected it instantly? Was that the reason why I appeared with him before attendees at the CeBIT stand? You can almost sense it in the photograph.

However, it was over a week before I would have any further discussion with Karl-Heinz Streibich. During this time, the idea worked its way into my head, or rather my stomach. The trigger for my interest involved both reason and emotion. I did not want to see IDS Scheer Consulting – a company I founded and which bore my name – being traded as a bargaining chip. The company logo, the red letter Y, was mine, and I wanted the company name back too. I wanted to integrate my loyal ex-employees from IDS Scheer into a new company rooted in our culture.

The takeover would see my group's turnover increase to hundreds of millions of euros, meaning that I had built yet another business group with significant market presence. But the most important point, and the one that summed up all of the other arguments, was this: Thanks to strict timing, I had restored my legacy as a successful "Silicon Valley" entrepreneur, which I felt had been tainted by the sale of my shares in IDS Scheer AG to Software AG five years earlier.

The decision-making process in the buyback is, however, still a mystery to me. It shows how important and how complex timing can be.

I will come back to the development of the company in my overview of my entrepreneurial career, which will come later.

2

Timing life paths

The different situations evident during the six-day race alone show a range of forms of timing:

- A sudden opportunity was seized courageously.
- There was a great deal of time pressure.
- In stressful situations, the difference between perceived and objective time was clear to see.
- We were working towards a fixed deadline, according to a schedule.
- Timing priorities were set.
- In negotiation situations, we saw first-hand who would open the discussion and thus exploit the initial (primacy) effect and set the course of proceedings.
- The tension between a deliberate, prepared decision and an emotional, spontaneous one was clear to see.

Alongside an analysis of the timing of an individual situation, the question arises as to how timing can affect an entire life path, as a life path consists of a sequence of situations. How precisely can you plan the timing of the individual steps of a life path beforehand? What dependencies and consistencies are at hand?

Timing is acting and reacting to a combination of rational plans and actions, unforeseeable events, emotions and unconscious influences. Using time effectively and efficiently is key. Here, “effectively” means “do the right things”, while “efficiently” means “do them right”. So people should do the things that are expedient, and in the most efficient way.

The fact that you were born in the first place is down to coincidence. A faster sperm could have easily displaced yours and your “brother” or “sister” could have been born instead of you, who would never have been born. It’s pretty complicated.

We are all going to die some day, but nobody knows when. Can you really plan life in detail in advance in stages such as school, career, marriage, parenthood and retirement and live it effectively and efficiently according to this blueprint?

These are all questions that preoccupy people, some more consciously than others. Most of the time, you can only detect a logic in intertwined life paths when looking back. Then, suddenly, a situation arises from a previous one that was not recognisable beforehand.

Everyone's life path is different. Everyone plays different roles and fulfils them in parallel. That is to say, you can be a spouse, employee, parent, amateur footballer, etc. I have four main roles that have influenced and shaped my adult life; three are professional and the fourth is my hobby. In my professional life, I am an academic, businessman and political adviser, and my main hobby is playing the saxophone. Of course, my private life involves further roles too. But I will only discuss these in passing.

2.1 Pre-ordained life paths

Some life paths are already largely mapped out at birth. The first-born of a royal house is prepared for the duties of assuming the throne and largely lives according to a strict ceremonial regime as ruler. Even if these rules are somewhat more relaxed today, the life path of such people is largely predictable.

You can even find pre-determined life paths in middle-class households. Many children of doctors become doctors themselves. Since people talk about the importance of career at the dining table in such households, this is instilled automatically in the value systems of the children, and their choice of university course becomes a foregone conclusion. In many middle-class entrepreneurial families, at least one child is raised to take over the family business later in life; their choice of internship, time spent abroad and further education is all directed towards this.

In some businesses, it is common for children of employees to start their careers in the same business as their parents; some businesses even encourage this.

School pupils who are not as strongly influenced by their parents choose their career on the basis of suggestions and the influence of their teachers, and often become teachers themselves. Idols from the media or people who are admired in social circles can also influence life paths.

A person's choice of career, which is, in my experience, the most formative for their life path, then largely determines the degree of freedom that a person has to further shape their life.

People with narrow career paths, such as teachers, doctors and lawyers, lead relatively static lives. For example, a doctor with their own practice has a daily timetable and is attached to their practice. Their professional life therefore has