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Control Configuration and Control Enactment in Information Systems Projects: Review and Expanded Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

The control of information systems (IS) projects is a key activity for deployment of information technology (IT) resources and ultimately for value creation through IT. For the last 20 years, research on IS project control has grown to cover a wide range of aspects and issues, including control modes, amounts, and portfolios, control in internal and outsourced settings, and control antecedents, consequences, and dynamics. There is an important theoretical and practical impetus for this research, since the nature of IS projects creates specific and challenging conditions for control, and since control research in neighboring disciplines often neglects temporary endeavors such as projects.

In this study, we provide a systematic review and synthesis of the literature and develop an expanded theoretical framework for IS project control with supporting conjectures. Our review reveals that existing research primarily studies the contextual antecedents and performance consequences of control modes and amounts, and thus focuses on control portfolio configurations (what). In contrast, prior research largely neglects control enactment, that is, how the controller interacts with the controllee to put the portfolio of controls into practice. Our expanded framework points to the importance of studying control portfolio configurations and control enactment (in terms of control style and control congruence) in combination, in order to better understand IS project control effectiveness. Expanding the “toolbox” of concepts available to IS researchers, our framework helps resolve existing research gaps and inconsistencies, and opens up new avenues for future research on the control of IS projects.

Keywords: Information systems projects, control theory, literature review, control portfolio configuration, control enactment, control style, control congruence, control effectiveness, project performance.