



Governance and governmentality in projects: Profiles and relationships with success

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of governance and governmentality in project and organizational success. Results from 121 responses to a worldwide survey provided for profiling of different governance and governmentality approaches at different levels of success, and quantitative investigation of the relationships between them. Results support the model of governmentality being positively related with both project level and organizational level success. Governance as structural context variable moderates this relationship. Moderation takes place at the project level through the governance mechanisms (trust and control) influencing the strength of the relationship, and at the organizational level through governance complexity, measured as the number of governance institutions involved in projects, influencing the form of the relationship. Contingency theory serves as a theoretical lens to interpret and discuss the findings, as well as theoretical and managerial implications.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between governance and governmentality of projects with their success has recently caught the attention of researchers. Governance in the realm of projects is often defined as the value system, structures, processes and policies that allow projects to achieve organizational objectives (Müller, 2016). Governance differs by organizational levels (Turner, 1999), and recent work distinguishes between *project governance* as the governance of a single project, and *governance of projects* as the governance of groups of projects, such as programs or portfolios (e.g. Biesenthal and Wilden, 2014). Foucault (1991) explains how these levels of governance are linked through the concept of governmentality, which is defined in the realm of projects as *the*

mentalities, rationalities, and ways of interaction, chosen by the governance roles to implement, maintain, and change the governance structure (Müller, 2016, p20). Governmentality expresses itself in the ways governing institutions interact with those that are governed (Barthes, 2013). OECD (2004) and project management researchers claim inseparability of the two concepts, and suggest that governance should not be discussed without governmentality as its integrating mechanism (e.g. Müller et al., 2014).

1.1. Approaches to governance and governmentality

Earlier research investigated the particularities of governance approaches for projects of different types, sizes, etc., which showed large variety in governance approaches in and for projects (e.g. Miller and Hobbs, 2005). This patchwork of studies uncovered issues like a) no common framework to capture, outline and compare the different governance approaches, because b) most studies invented their own governance dimensions,

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instead of using already established concepts from existing studies, and c) often ignored the relation of governance with project and organizational success.

The aim of the present study is to address these issues by using a conceptual framework for governance and governmentality for projects recently developed and published by Müller et al. (2016b). Their profiling tool provides dimensions for qualitatively measuring governance and governmentality. The profiles derived from their study are not generalizable, as they are based on eight case studies and collected with the intent to identify the largest variety in possible measures in order to develop measurement dimensions and scales.

The present paper tests and applies this tool by quantitatively operationalizing the formerly qualitative scales, validate them through a worldwide survey, derive patterns of governance approaches, and assess the impact of governance and governmentality on success at project and organizational level.

Through this, we measure, quantify and profile different governance and governmentality approaches and identify those dimensions that correlate with success at both the project and the organizational level, using compounds of soft and hard measures of success. To address the issues outlined above we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the patterns of approaches to governance and governmentality in organizations?

RQ2: How do the dimensions of these patterns relate to project success and organizational success?

The Unit of Analysis is the project-based part of an organization. The study takes a Critical Realism perspective, which implies that the study results provide for some often found, but not automatically generalizable findings (Bhaskar, 2016).

The data was collected through a worldwide, web-based questionnaire. Subsequent data analysis controlled for influences by demographic parameters, project specifics, and the level of projectification of the organization (in the sense of Midler, 1995). The questionnaire was newly developed, based on the tool by Müller et al. (2016b).

We chose a contingency theory perspective (Donaldson, 2001), and used existing studies to define governance as structural context (i.e. contingency variable), which may influence the relationship between governmentality and success.

We developed scales for existing governance and governmentality concepts, based on general management literature and earlier studies. This extends the predominantly normative results of earlier studies into a relativistic perspective, which provides academics with new avenues for theory development. Practitioners benefit from the identification of potential success factors and the identification of profiles of governance and governmentality at different levels of project and organizational success.

The paper is structured the following way: the next section reviews the most relevant literature, which is followed by the study's methodology, data analysis, and discussion. The paper finishes with conclusions and answers to the research questions, and the Appendix A provides the questionnaire.

2. Literature review

We found only one existing framework that integrates and assesses governance and governmentality for projects and uses a majority of dimensions that relate to the corporate governance and governmentality literature. Hence, a framework that allows to connect project governance level theory development to governance theories of the project's parent organization. This framework, developed by Müller et al. (2016b) is based on eight qualitative case studies in Europe and Asia, and structured into three main categories: Governmentality, governance, and projectification. Governmentality is assessed along the dimensions of approach and precept. *Approach* refers to authoritative, liberal or neo-liberal governmentality (as described by Dean, 2010). *Precept* was a newly identified dimension that reflects the dominant theme in the interaction between governors (such as steering committees) and their project managers. It measures the preference of governors for their managers to either "follow the process", maximize the project's wellbeing (in terms of both short and long term results), or the adherence to corporate values. Governance includes the dimensions for *sovereignty* of projects, the preferred *governance mechanisms* and the number of *governance institutions*. A control variable in form of *projectification* indicates possible differences in approaches based on the level project management thinking that pervades the organization (in the sense of Midler, 1995).

2.1. Governmentality

Governmentality (the combination of the words governance and mentality) was invented by the French semiologist Roland Barthes (2013) in 1957, by conceptualizing the way governing organizations (such as governments) present themselves to the public. This presentation reveals the rational and attitudes of governors and sets the 'tone' between the members in a society, as well as between governors and governed individuals (Dean, 2010). The concept became popular twenty years later through the French philosopher Michel Foucault, who used the concept in a narrower sense in his studies on power. We apply the term in its original (i.e. Barthes') scope, of which power is only one of many different contexts for related investigations.

Nowadays the literature distinguishes between *authoritarian*, *liberal* and *neoliberal* rationalities or approaches in governmentality (e.g. Dean, 2010).

Authoritarian approaches assume reconcilability of the various governance principles (Burchell, 1991), expressed through centralized decision making, clearness of directions, and significant power distance, which "seek[s] to operate through obedient rather than free subjects, or, at a minimum, endeavor to neutralize any opposition to authority" (Dean, 2010, p155). In projects, this is typical for major public investment projects where process compliance is enforced within rigid governance structures (Miller and Hobbs, 2005).

Liberal approaches emphasize the heterogeneity and incompatibility of different governance approaches (Burchell, 1991), and are expressed, for example, through use of economic principles and market awareness to drive rationalistic decision

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