From Visions of Grandeur to Grand Failure: Alternative schools of descriptive decision theories to explain the Berlin Brandenburg

Berlin Brandenburg Airport exemplifies the impact of poor decisions in projects. Extant research on behavioural decision making in project contexts offers a variety of explanations for poor decisions. However, the research sheds only spotlights on the field. It could benefit from a stronger coverage of theories in cognitive and social psychology and integration of findings and concepts across theoretical traditions. Drawing on the developments of Behavioural Strategy, this paper proposes the concept of ‘Behavioural Projects’ as a host of the growing body of research on behavioural decision making in projects. We organise extant research in a conceptual framework rooted in three schools of thinking - psychological (reductionist), political (pluralist) and social (contextualist). We illustrate how the three schools and their integration provide ample research opportunities through an analysis of decisions in the Berlin Brandenburg Airport fiasco. Based on our framework, we propose a research program that serves as inspiration for future studies on the crossroads between cognitive and social psychology theories and decision situations in projects. We hope that such future research will give rise to the development of an integrated behavioural decision making theories for temporary organisations.

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