Conceptual Modelling for Product Configuration Systems

Individual customization of goods and processes in different industries leads to complexity due to a growing mix of products both regarding characteristics of products and support services. In order to eliminate complexity and challenges in product/process customizing, smart IT systems called Product Configuration Systems (PCS), have been proposed as the solution both by researchers and practitioners and various benefits are mentioned from utilizing PCSs. Based on the latest literature, there are challenges reported in all phases of PCS projects including planning, development, and documentation. Moreover, the challenges become more serious when it involves complicated products/processes in engineer-to-order (ETO) companies. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the existing knowledge of managing PCS projects by proposing frameworks and tools to address some of the main challenges.

First, this research focuses on the reported benefits and challenges in different phases of PCS projects aligned with the gaps in the current literature. Second, the study presents a survey in order to have a comprehensive overview to assess the most important challenges in the area. Third, in order to overcome different challenges in the PCS projects, the study contributes to the literature in forms of different frameworks, tools and IT solutions. Addressing the defined challenges, the following frameworks are proposed. 1) A framework is provided for business cases in PCS projects in order to estimate the needed investments and financial return-on-investment. 2) Furthermore, the research proposes a framework and different tools to scope the whole PCS project from planning to the maintenance phase. 3) Afterwards, the study suggests a framework to manage the knowledge in PCS projects due to reported challenges. 4) In order to make it possible to model, maintain, communicate, and document complicated products/process, a framework aligned with an IT tool is developed in close collaboration with industry. 5) Finally, the study contributes to the direction of integration of PCS and other IT systems by showing the automation impact of this alignment.

The tools and frameworks developed have been evaluated based on existing literature and by empirical tests in companies. Furthermore, areas for further investigation have been identified.