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Evaluating as Designing

Towards a Balanced IT Investments Approach

by

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ABSTRACT

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The evaluation of information technology (IT) investments continues to present challenges to many organizations. While the emergence of new technologies complicates this activity, business value from IT typically resides with both tangible and intangible aspects. Managers today rely still on economic and financial methods when evaluating IT investments. In doing so, they tend to fail to understand how new IT systems affect the organization and its different stakeholders in ways that can have indirect yet significant impact on business performance. IS literature suggests therefore that interpretative evaluation approaches have to be enacted as to complement the traditional economic and financial ones. Such approaches view value as pluralistic and multifaceted, and evaluation is seen as a collaborative endeavor that involves multiple stakeholders. However, despite calls for integrative IS evaluation approaches, scant attention has been paid to innovative ways to combine the economic and interpretative perspectives. Addressing this knowledge gap, this thesis proposes ‘Evaluating as Designing’ (EaD) as a Meta IS evaluation approach. At the heart of EaD is the idea that by adopting a design attitude managers are able to balance these different perspectives. It suggests that managers must balance decision-making and sense-making to be able to tailor the evaluation activity to the specifics of the organizational context. To assess its effectiveness, EaD was applied through a collaborative practice research effort involving three public organizations. Building on the findings from this study, the thesis theorizes on the nature and role of IS evaluation in contemporary organizations. It also concludes with implications for research and practice.