Dissertation Proposal

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"Errors or Illusions of Control? Imperfections and Biases in the Subjective Sense of Control"

This dissertation focuses on subjective perceptions of control and explores the factors that alter the relationship between actual control and perceived control. Perceptions of control are especially important in organizations from a decision making point of view, however, previous research has mostly focused on examining errors in control, such as the illusion of control, and in narrow contexts. The work proposed here seeks to address these concerns theoretically, methodologically and analytically.

The first chapter questions our understanding of the illusion of control by examining estimates of control in situations where individuals have high degrees of control. It is hypothesized that traditional methods of eliciting control are vulnerable to floor and ceiling effects, leading to misestimates of control, rather than an actual illusion of control.

The second chapter proposes a novel technique based on Bayesian inference in understanding the processes people use in estimating and updating perceived control. The results here will allow the construction of models of how people estimate control, which can then be further tested in new contexts. I also argue that previous work has failed to measure people's estimates of control against a proper normative standard.

Previous research on perceived control has mostly focused on control in situations where outcomes are binary in nature: success or failure. The final chapter examines how control is perceived in situations where outcomes are continuous and contrasts these results with previous work.

Overall, the work proposed here will expand our understanding of relationship between actual and perceived control and the processes that shape estimates of control. This will form a foundation for examining perception of control in new contexts and situations.