Foreword

The importance of the time dimension is acknowledged increasingly in studies of management and organization. This is true with respect both to the object of study and to theorizing. For instance, temporary work and working in temporary systems – such as projects or temporary organizations – have received more and more scholarly attention, not least because these organizational forms are on the rise. On the other hand, process theories, to which – obviously – the dimension of time is central, will soon overtake variance theories in terms of scholarly popularity and practical/societal relevance. Although the study of temporary systems has become increasingly popular during the last decade or so and has gradually adopted a more process-focused perspective, it still suffers somewhat from the imprints of its original ‘birth’ in engineering sciences. From there, the study of temporary systems has inherited the normative and value-laden rather than the descriptive and theory-based approach to what such systems are and what it means to ‘manage’ them. Because of this heritage, it is still surprisingly unclear what temporariness really means for managerial and non-managerial members and what it implies for the management of such systems. This is astonishing, because in praxi project managers as well as other members of temporary systems seem more-or-less capable, not only of handling the continuous lack of time, but also of dealing with the challenges of temporary membership, for instance, a lack of commitment due to the temporariness of the task.

Despite the continuous spread of temporary systems that transcend the boundaries of single organizations more often than not, we do not seem even close to getting away from a ‘society of organizations’ (Perrow, 1991). But in face of ongoing ‘projectification’ (Midler, 1995) the character of these organizations is quite likely to change radically, not least with regard to the time dimension. It is against this theoretical and empirical background that Patrick Kenis and his research group from Tilburg University in the Netherlands use insights from organization studies, on the one hand, to understand the antecedents and goals as well as the processes and outcomes of temporary systems and, on the other hand, to inject the notion of temporariness into organization studies.

And it is against the same background that this scholarly endeavor is to be sincerely welcomed! In particular, the focus of this edited volume...
on interorganizational projects as one form of what the authors call ‘temporary organizations’ (or TOs for short) is important because it offers the chance to link research on projects, task forces, consortia and other types of temporary systems with those on interorganizational relations and networks. This seems to be highly important for a better or, more accurately, a theoretically sounder and empirically based understanding of organizing practices in an increasing number of industries including construction, film making, event management and engineering. And much can also be learned from the organizing efforts in these fields for more traditional industries, which have already started to become just as much a component of a projectified society as those project-based fields. This book, together with ongoing empirical research, particularly in Tilburg and the Scandinavian countries, will sustain Europe’s competitive advantage in this kind of research.

Jörg Sydow  
Berlin-Dahlem  
March 2009

REFERENCES