Preface and acknowledgements

The journey from inception to completion of Temporary Organizations: Prevalence, Logic and Effectiveness was an exciting although, happily, a temporary one. It all began as an idea by a group of scholars in the Department of Organization Studies at Tilburg University, the Netherlands, who, in the course of our research, had observed an increasing prevalence of organizations getting together temporarily to accomplish a task.

We had a common interest in temporary organizations and, as a group, have had years of experience studying organizational network relationships in a variety of contexts. By combining our knowledge of networks with our breadth of expertise about innovation, small and medium-sized enterprises and their challenges, organizational structure and motivation among others, we concluded that we might be able to understand and explain this phenomenon of interorganizational temporary organizations.

We defined temporary organizations as two or more non-temporary organizations collaborating to accomplish a joint task with the duration of the collaboration explicitly and ex ante fixed. Early in our common discussions we discovered, first, that in practice interorganizational temporary organizations were more prevalent than we had expected and, second, that the topic was greatly understudied within the field of organization studies. There are, of course, a number of aspects of temporary organizations that have already been described and analyzed. For example, their relational structure or their properties as projects have been studied by some. What was interesting, however, was that temporary organizations have seldom been seen as a unique form of organizing, a uniqueness, we believe, that is strongly linked to the very fact that they are temporary.

We soon learned that there is one major exception to this, the Scandinavian School of Project Studies (see the book Beyond Project Management: new perspectives on the temporary-permanent dilemma, by Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson and Anders Söderholm (eds), CBS Press, 2002). We are fortunate and thankful that we could build on their work. In particular, we would like to thank Rolf Lundin for his openness, his critical comments and his appreciation for our sometimes different take on their views.
We are also most appreciative of the EIM Business and Policy Research institute’s contributions. Their financial contribution and excellent data collection enabled us to do a first round of data gathering of evidence on the prevalence of interorganizational temporary organizations. These findings were critical to our hypothesis of the importance, relevance and different characteristics of the phenomenon of temporary organizations. A special thank you goes to Jan de Kok, senior researcher at EIM, for his outstanding intellectual and creative contributions to this project. We look forward to a future collaboration in which we will test the many theories about the functioning and performance of temporary organizations presented in this book.

We would also like to thank the Board of the Department of Organization Studies, Tilburg University, the Netherlands, for their continuous support. They provided the authors with the necessary guidance, appreciation and research time. The students enrolled in the different Master thesis circles at the Department of Organization Studies have also contributed greatly to our work on temporary organizations. In addition, we received valuable comments from a number of visiting professors (Candy Jones, Mark Ebers, Jörg Sydow, Joseph Lampel, Anna Grandori, David Knöke, Rolf Lundin, Gernot Grabher, Peter Maskell and Patrick Cohendet) and colleagues at both the European Group for Organizational Studies and Academy of Management meetings, where we presented earlier versions of our work.

We would like to thank Jill E. Provan and Mitch Levine for their meticulous editing of Temporary Organizations: Prevalence, Logic and Effectiveness. Their work was invaluable, not only because nearly all of the authors are non-native speakers, but also because they were instrumental in bringing focus and clarity to our arguments. Many thanks to Jenny Wilcox, our editor at Edward Elgar Publishing, for making the production process more enjoyable than it might have been otherwise.

And lastly, we thank everyone who has contributed to Temporary Organizations: Prevalence, Logic and Effectiveness. We have come from different directions but have found each other in this exciting and intellectually productive temporary system. It was a pleasure to work together and we are particularly thankful for the helpful comments on each other’s work. Apart from the fact that this was an exemplary academic practice, it also greatly contributed to the consistency of the book.