Editorial

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Biographical notes: Rolf A. Lundin has considerable experience from running projects in previous capacities as the Dean of two business schools and as a Supervisor of 50 plus PhD students who have finalised their thesis work. Since the middle of the 80s, he has been focusing his research on projects and temporary organisations which has resulted in few publications, relations to practitioners and a network to essentially all prominent researchers in that field worldwide. He is also a Professor at Jönköping International Business School at the same time doing research at the Media Management and Transformation Centre and studying projects in media industries.

The articles in this special issue have two things in common. They are all based on cases related to project organisations and they were all included in a conference at the Technical University in Berlin last October 11–13, 2009, arranged by the International Research Network on Organizing by Projects (IRNOP). There have now been nine conferences all over the world arranged by IRNOP.

Even though IRNOP is primarily a researcher network, several participants from industry, consultancy and the like regularly participate in these conferences. This was the case in Berlin, where Professor Hans Georg Gemünden and his team organised a memorable event.

The field of project research has one definite advantage over many other research areas in that it is highly valued by people 'out there'. And those of us who are on the researcher side of that relationship should never be allowed to forget that research also has to contribute to problem solving or problem contemplation in practice. That competitive advantage also should be upheld in the publications researchers produce. Even though researchers are trained primarily to advance theory, the issues we raise should always have a connection to the problems faced by people working with projects in practice.

Some researchers in engineering and the social sciences might say that doing case studies is not really research. In their view, statements about reality can never be based on soft data, like in case studies. Instead, massive data collection has to be performed. Only data collection based on measurement and on solid and reliable definitions of what is observed and recorded can be thought of as trustworthy.

Even though there might be a grain of truth in such a stance in favour of mass data, researchers and practitioners very seldom get insights only from mass data collections and mass data interpretations. In that respect, soft case studies have a definite advantage for idea generation and practical implementations.

The articles included in this issue illustrate the use of case studies for several purposes. Some of them demonstrate techniques to improve the efficiency of projects. On the other extreme, cases are used to illustrate and shed light on eternal research problems.

All should have an interested audience within the community of researchers and of practitioners. Maybe the articles are even a good ground for co-production of knowledge, engaging both groups, which perhaps should never have been regarded as separate.

The first article in the collection is by Kaye Remington and Anders Söderholm. They illustrate how time is perceived differently in a project context as compared to a context of organisational change. A project manager trained in classical project delivery will face difficulties when trying to manage an organisational change project. The perception of time is a very important matter from a theoretical point of view – time is one of the least understood ingredients in a project – but the message for the practitioner is clear. The implication is: be aware of the variability in conceptions of time!

The second article contains an analysis of an upcoming event, the Universal EXPO 2015 in Italy. The authors Giorgio Locatelli and Mauro Mancini cope with the uncertainty linked to mega-events, a particular type of mega-project where stakeholder management is the critical success factor. After a review of the international literature on mega-projects, the authors use a framework, SHAMPU (available from another publication), to analyse the possible effects of an optimistic view of the project coming from the overall social and economical environment. Their analysis stresses the importance of continuous assessment over the entire lifecycle of the project as the tool to alleviate problems inherent in the specific origins of the project, and concerning its extremely dynamic context.

In a sense, the article that follows treats a similar matter. Projects are devoted to getting things done in an efficient way. But efficiency might not be all that counts, and the authors, Hans Andersson and Mattias Johansson, illustrate that when it comes to R&D projects in an organisation called Westco, the projects must be handled in such a way that creativeness and exploration are handled at the same time as efficient exploitation has to be taken into account. Inventions require both!

Laurent Bourgeon and Timothy M. Devinney discuss the classical difficulty of learning and knowledge handling in a non-temporal organisation. Their empirical material mostly relates to the progressive transformation of the classical 'Opera de Paris'. It is probably fair to say that this is not a typical project, but an effort to improve and adapt a historical building to also house the most modern technical advancements. Simultaneously, there was a need to adapt the functioning of the non-temporal part so that the production projects (i.e., the various performances) were handled efficiently in the new context. In fact, some of the issues from the very first article reappear in this discussion.

The final article in this selection is about cooperation between two different software firms combining efforts to serve customers. The article is by François Scheid and Florence Charue-Duboc highlights an original process of modularisation. Contrary to the decomposition in several modules of an integrated product, modularisation emerged along with the development of a specific complete offer combining several pieces of software designed by the different firms. Two customers assumed a crucial role in requiring a specific offer and the cooperation of the selected firms. The architecture of the innovation is of course crucially important and designed by the customer. At the same time customer involvement in innovative product development for software is embedded in a complex web of interactions. The companies involved are of course interested to make use of advances in the pilot project for projects to come.

My hope as a guest editor is that the current selection of articles provides food for thought – in practice and in theory generation. *Bon appétit*!