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978-1-107-07765-2 - Managing and Working in Project Society: Institutional Challenges of Temporary Organizations

Rolf A. Lundin, Niklas Arvidsson, Tim Brady, Eskil Ekstedt, Christophe Midler And Jörg Sydow  
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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## **Managing and Working in Project Society**

In this book, leading authorities on project organizing explore the growing deployment of projects and other types of temporary organizations, with a focus on the challenges created by projectification. The way projects are coordinated and handled influences the success of innovation and change within organizations and is critical for strategic development in our societies, yet it is often at odds with the institutions of traditional industrial society. Drawing on both theoretical perspectives and real-world cases, this book sheds light on the transformation toward a project society and explores the effects, opportunities, and conflicts it has created. As change continues, the authors make a case for renewing institutions and mind-sets and provide a foundation from which to discuss societal changes for the future. This is an invaluable book for researchers and students in project management and organizational theory programs, as well as professionals involved in the management of projects.

ROLF A. LUNDIN is Professor Emeritus of Business Administration at Jönköping International Business School and Courtesy Professor-in-Residence at Umeå School of Business and Economics. He has received several prizes and awards for his research on projects and temporary organizations, including the 2014 PMI Research Achievement Award. He has published widely, with a concentration on temporary organizations, and has edited numerous special issues of journals focusing on the area of projects. Currently, his main focus is on innovative research on projects and temporary organizations.

NIKLAS ARVIDSSON is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Sustainability and Industrial Dynamics at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm. He also has long working experience as a management consultant. His research is focused on innovation, learning, and change in organizations and industrial systems, with a

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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particular interest in processes in which currently dominating ideas and practices are being replaced by new ones.

TIM BRADY is Professor of Innovation in the Centre for Research in Innovation Management at Brighton Business School, the University of Brighton, and Visiting Professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering Management at the University of Oulu, Finland. He was a member of the Rethinking Project Management network funded by the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and Deputy Director of the Complex Product Systems (CoPS) Innovation Centre funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council. His current research interests include the development of new business models for infrastructure, the management of complex projects and programs, and learning and capability development in project-based business.

ESKIL EKSTEDT is Professor in Business Administration and Associate Professor in Economic History at the University of Uppsala. He was the founding editor of the Scientific Publication series *Work Life in Transition* and the project leader of several major research programs dealing with knowledge formation and organizational and local economic development. His research has focused on knowledge formation, temporary organizations, and structural change of business and work life.

CHRISTOPHE MIDLER is Professor of Innovation Management at École Polytechnique and Research Director at the French National Research Council (FNRS). He has received many prizes and awards for his research on project organizing, among them Doctor Honoris Causa at Umeå University, Sweden, and the 2013 PMI Research Achievement Award. His research topics include project management and innovation management in relation to organizational theory and strategy, exploring them in various industrial contexts.

JÖRG SYDOW is Professor of Management and Chair for Inter-firm Cooperation at the School of Business & Economics, Freie Universität Berlin, and a Visiting Professor at Strathclyde Business School in Glasgow. He is a founding coeditor of two leading German academic

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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journals, *Managementforschung* and *Industrielle Beziehungen*, and is a member of several editorial boards. His current research interests are management and organization theory, inter-organizational relations and networks, innovation and project management, and industrial relations.

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Frontmatter

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# Managing and Working in Project Society

## Institutional Challenges of Temporary Organizations

**ROLF A. LUNDIN**

*Jönköping International Business School*

**NIKLAS ARVIDSSON**

*Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm*

**TIM BRADY**

*CENTRIM, University of Brighton*

**ESKIL EKSTEDT**

*University of Uppsala*

**CHRISTOPHE MIDLER**

*CRG, École Polytechnique in Paris*

**JÖRG SYDOW**

*Freie Universität Berlin*



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Frontmatter

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107077652](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107077652)

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First published 2015

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Lundin, Rolf A.

Managing and working in project society : institutional challenges of temporary organizations / Rolf A. Lundin, Niklas Arvidsson, Tim Brady, Eskil Ekstedt, Christophe Midler, Jörg Sydow.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-107-07765-2 (hardback)

1. Project management. I. Title.

HD69.P75L86 2015

658.4'04--dc23

2014049480

ISBN 978-1-107-07765-2 Hardback

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

List of figures	<i>page</i> viii
Preface: contents in a nutshell	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
1 Project organizing and industrial organization – transformation dilemmas	1
2 Projectification trends and organizational archetypes	20
3 Managing in Project Society	80
4 Work and employment regimes in Project Society	129
5 Institutions and projectification	170
6 Trends and theory implications	199
References	231
Index	272

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Figures

2.1 Evolution of R&D expenses from all firms	<i>page</i> 30
2.2 Knowledge, information flows, and actors in project-based processes	41
2.3 Evolution of a European car manufacturer's new product development capability	50
2.4 Schematic picture of the organizational structure	59
2.5 The project network of Beach Production	76
3.1 The progression of projects as a dual learning and decision diachronic process	84
3.2 The concurrent project strategy	84
3.3 Characteristics of project and functional activities	111
3.4 Projectification versus programmification	115



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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## Preface: contents in a nutshell

The projectification of business and working life is ongoing and strong. This movement goes beyond traditional project-organized sectors such as construction, consultancy, media, and entertainment. Project thinking is spreading to most parts of society, including industrial enterprises, governmental organizations, educational institutions, and volunteer groups. Not only do people relate to projects and to project organizing in their working lives, but they even speak and think of their daily activities in project terms. When faced with an institutional context shaped and embedded by an earlier, now by-and-large foregone Industrial Society, a shift toward Project Society can lead to frustration, and problems may appear as a result of this imbalance. Our own and others' empirical research and observations suggest this is what is happening. We therefore aim to develop an understanding of the implications for management and work related to the projectification process. We discuss how the process will challenge the institutional framework once molded in the traditional Industrial Society and what this might lead to. By using the term "Project Society," we are pointing out specific changes in the organization of work and business activity as an important part of the overall transition from the Industrial Society without denying the continued importance of producing goods and services, the rapid and widespread diffusion of a revolutionary technology – the Internet, and the spread of knowledge discussed by other scholars. Indeed, the evolution of Project Society has been alluded to in other contexts, but the movement has accelerated and will continue to do so since it is facilitated by modern information and communication technology and knowledge formation through the Internet.

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Frontmatter[More information](#)

## X PREFACE: CONTENTS IN A NUTSHELL

This monograph is about the ascendance of projects and temporary organizations in society. The antecedents and consequences of this trend are its subject, but the particular focus is on the way that business, management, and work are being projectified. Our stance is that despite recent attempts to revive it under the notion of the Fourth Industrial Society or Industry 4.0, Industrial Society with its institutional setting represents a historic era that is diminishing in importance over time. The projectification trend is strong and is dominating business in today's economic realities. This change is occurring at the same time that the institutions of traditional Industrial Society are promoting sustainability and predictability, thereby creating tensions and conflicts that generate ambiguities, paradoxes, and an interesting future. The examples provided predominantly come from industry and industry-related activities since these jointly manifest some of the most important structural changes in our society. But the trend is also present in other parts of society that have an impact on individuals. The theoretical framing for the book is based on the advances made in research on projects and other forms of temporary organizations.

From studies and experience in various contexts, the authors have learned that projectification is widely accepted as a means of handling both old and new problems in the economic realm. This is particularly true in project-based organizations where projects are considered to be "natural." However, project work is invading many fields of management and work. At the same time, prevailing institutions often seem poorly adapted to the projectification process and eventually need to be replaced by other institutions.

The normative message is that there is a need to prepare for the emerging Project Society, and this monograph provides a theoretical apparatus for analyzing projects and projectification in a broad range of contexts. Project managers, managers in large professional organizations, public authorities, leaders of educational institutions,

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Frontmatter[More information](#)

## PREFACE: CONTENTS IN A NUTSHELL xi

politicians, leaders of trade unions and social movements, and, not least, researchers need to prepare for this shift in the predominant ways of thinking. The development is global!

The scope of the analysis includes all varieties of project work, from the traditional to the emerging, and concludes that projects or temporary organizations more generally have become the preferred organizational form for efficiency and flexibility in industry and elsewhere. The sites of this shift in approach encompass project-based organizations, project management, and project work in traditional organizations as well as in project networks that typically cut across organizational boundaries. This monograph – in contrast to books on project management as a technique – adopts a variety of complementary analytical approaches, ranging from the macro level of projectification in society and institutions to transformations of work and management practices at the meso level; occasionally, it also addresses these issues at the level of individuals, including project managers and project entrepreneurs. Moreover, it takes context and history into account. Even though it is heavily based on data about ongoing changes in industry, services, and the public sector, the tenor of the monograph is conceptual. Its goal is to raise awareness of the trend toward managing by project and working within projects in most areas of society and the implications of this for not only practitioners who are heavily involved in project management and project work but also those undertaking research on temporary organizations in different contexts.

This book presents and interprets the historical evolution of projects and organizational forms supporting projects. Given our main concerns with management, work, and institutions in a project society, our presentation of the evolution has at least face validity and is convincing when we talk with other people as well as in our own discussions. Some elements could be described in more detail, for instance, the role of the arms race, nuclear power, aircraft, and space ventures, so we have made a choice. Our somewhat unorthodox and broad approach to understanding the project society means that other

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xii PREFACE: CONTENTS IN A NUTSHELL

approaches and historical accounts that are more limited in their focus are left aside. But in our minds, this is the strength of our book.

Project Society is not an end point in history even if the label itself might provide a temptation to think of it in that way. We believe that it is merely a characteristic of a special phase of developments. The social nature of society means that it can only be understood as a process that will produce other foci for attention in the future.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Acknowledgments

The work on this book was initiated by the authors based on our shared interests, expectations, and concerns about the effect of projectification on society. The word itself did not exist in the English language, but as far as we know, it was imported from the French by one of the coauthors of this book, Christophe Midler, who introduced it as a description of what had occurred in his study on how innovation work was reorganized by a French car manufacturer. That study constitutes an example of how a traditional manufacturing firm adapted to the idea of organizing its activities into project form.

From our vantage points, we realized that the development we have chosen to call projectification is in fact very strong. It has important implications not only in isolated cases but also for society at large. The movement toward what we have labeled Project Society has potentially far-reaching consequences. Managing and working in projects is now prescribed by supranational bodies such as the United Nations and the European Union, as well as being understood by many individuals to be a guideline in their own personal activities. Primarily, there seems to be a push toward projectification in business-related activities. Projectification on all these levels does not go uncontested, however, since it is not in line with prevailing institutions. Adaptations are needed and new institutions develop to accommodate it.

As researchers, each with our own take on project-based organizing, we realize that others in academia are studying projects and temporary organizations as empirically and theoretically interesting phenomena. And we already know that professional organizations such as the Project Management Institute (PMI), the International Project Management Association (IPMA), and others are

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xiv ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

active in this field, not to mention all those in practice who earn their living from working with and in projects. These facts have convinced us of the need to put a book of this type together for researchers, students, and practitioners alike.

The ideas proposed by us were welcomed by Cambridge University Press and in particular by the editor, Paula M. Parish. We thank you, your colleague Claire Wood, and all others so much for your encouragement and assistance. We also want to express our gratitude for the support received from our home universities and external funding bodies such as the National Institute of Working Life in Stockholm, which focused on the ongoing transformation of working life (now discontinued); the Jenz and Carl-Olof Hamrin Foundation; the German Research Foundation (DFG); the UK Research Councils; the Innovation Management Chair at École Polytechnique; and others that have enabled us to carry out the research that has provided the foundation for the ideas in this book. Also, we want to thank numerous colleagues for commenting on the manuscript in constructive ways. Among them in particular are Robert DeFillippi, Mats Engwall, Mark Hughes, Håkan Lindgren, Kurt Lundgren, Håkan Sjöholm, Anders Söderholm, Reinhard Wagner, Torbjörn Wenell, and the anonymous reviewers engaged by Cambridge University Press. Finally, we thank each other. Without the group of the six of us working together, this book would not exist!