

The Chronicle workshop  
– A method to enhance and explore innovative processes in project-based organizations

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Globalization and the transformation from an industrial society towards a knowledge society are both trends that challenge today's businesses. They are being met with an increased demand for innovation, renewal and flexibility in order to stay competitive, and many companies respond by organizing their corporate activities in projects, implementing project-organizations and training staff within project-management.

According to general organizational theory, the project-based organization is considered the best way of organizing a company in order to promote innovation and innovative activities. Flexibility, low hierarchical systems and informal contact and communication between managers and employees are among the elements that are positively emphasized in this organic structure. However, recent studies of how management of innovation in project-based firms is put into practice have raised doubt about whether the project-based organization provides a supportive frame for innovation or not.

This doubt is raised as the study shows that innovation is stifled even though work is organized as described above. The cause for this is likely to be the extended use of planning and control systems. According to the recommendations of existing literature, firms should de-emphasize planning and control in order to be innovative, but several/few studies show that project-based firms do the opposite. A reason for this is found in a mechanistic attitude towards control and management instead of an organically oriented management attitude loosening up on the control elements.

The description above forms the background of a study which has had the objective *to identify the organizational options for supporting innovation in project based organizations and how the organization and innovative processes can be developed using a story-telling method.*

### **Methodology**

The paper is based on a study consisting of two empirical parts: In the first part a multiple case study in four unrelated companies was carried out based on qualitative interviews. Besides, a chronicle workshop was carried out in one of the companies. The case studies resulted in several interesting findings in relation to the problem but they also showed the limits of the qualitative interview method. Using the interview method made it evident that it was difficult for the informants to articulate their problems and dilemmas in relation to project management and innovation work. From a researchers point of view the interview

method didn't support an optimal frame for grasping the actual work process as the informants terminology of project management created a communicative barrier for articulating the actual tasks and activities in the work process. In order to overcome these gaps the second empirical part was established and *the chronicle workshop* was chosen. Methodologically it was an experiment as the chronicle workshop originally was developed for telling stories with a time frame of 10-15 years. In this case study the chronicle workshop was used in a project context with a much smaller time frame (18-24 months) and with a lower number of participants. In this paper we will focus on this last empirical part.

## **Conclusions**

The results from the chronicle workshop imply that by focusing on important events in the project, it can reveal breakdowns in the project and work process. Both the breakdowns and important events in the project point at opportunities for improvements of the work processes and a better understanding of managing the innovation process. Overall the method can make tacit knowledge explicit on what causes the problems and the implications for the innovation process.

It has also become evident that it is a method that demonstrates it's potential for creating an organizational room for reflection, where tacit knowledge can be explicated and support learning and creativity in the organization. A chronicle workshop can thus provide a platform for improvement of both processes and products which is crucial in supporting innovation.

The chronicle workshop can thus be regarded to be both a frame for understanding problems in the management and organization of work and an option for improving products and work processes.