Changing the rules of the game

There is a growing consensus that we are seeing a change in the way working in projects and organizations are being viewed. Trends come and go, but some will persevere and strengthen in the future, e.g. globalization, unstable economies, the increasing rate of change and virtual reality. To paraphrase someone, 'Where progress is slow today, it will be quicker tomorrow and not at all slow the day after that'.

1. **Agile methodologies are gaining ground**
    In order to cope with the increasing rate of change, as well as increasing economic instability, agile working methods will become more established. Iterative development and incremental work to make successive deliveries will become much more common practice for many projects within branches that have historically had a traditional approach to project management and control. At the same time, projects themselves will become shorter and more frequent.

    Many organizations that have, in individual projects and units, been pushed to adopt iterative/successive methods due to circumstance and planning uncertainties, will find that they will need to embrace a more agile approach across the whole organization in the future.

2. **Simplification, transparency and flexibility will become watchwords for change.**
    The levels of complexity in many businesses will have to be reduced, rather than increased. A study by BCG, described in the Harvard Business Review Spotlight, shows that the number of internal rules, processes, coordinating bodies, vertical structures, etc., indicative of internal complexity, has increased by between 50 and 350% during the last 15 years. Simplification, increased transparency and flexibility are the keys to the future. Rather than building new structures in the future we will need to think about what is more likely to really make things easier for the workforce, increase the probability that their available time is used in the right way, and create value for the organization.

3. **More and more people will use virtual meeting places**
   Knowledge is becoming more and more distributed and difficult to consolidate, resulting in stronger demand for better coordination and functional communication. The use of virtual meetings will increase and technological advances mean that the issue is more about how we can utilize these new possibilities and work better in our projects, rather than what the limitations may be.

   We are already seeing organizations that have banned internal email in favor of digital forums for meeting and communication in order to improve internal efficiency.

   At the same time, there are signs that virtual communication can be falsely regarded as a cure-all. The challenge in the future, is to find the right balance between meeting the need for physical meetings and human contact whilst exploiting the advantages that current and new technology can offer us.

4. **From processes to human behavior**
   We are likely to become more and more interested in how people behave in different situations and how to influence this. There is already an abundance of solid psychological research available, through which it is easier to understand how visual planning tools and digital boards (based, e.g. on KanBan) can positively influence behavior in an organization and thereby enable everyone to use positive and constructive feedback techniques to steer behavior.

   Leadership is now being viewed by many as being one of the most important factors for successful projects. However, in too many cases we just label people and personalities and end up having far too simplified a discussion about roles, leadership and working in teams. We need to increase our understanding of how different behavioral patterns develop in an organization and how we, as leaders, can influence key behaviors and thereby improve organizational effectiveness.

5. **Established project teams will continue working on new tasks**
   We will develop more projects using established well-functioning teams, as happens in many development-intensive projects today. Here, the task is given center-stage and energy is not wasted on building up a new organization. Instead it can be maintained and improved.

It will be more important to have an established, functional and tightly-knit team, rather than having the composition of the team for every new project to be dictated by that specific task

Companies such as Spotify are already structuring their line organization on cross-functional teams (a.k.a. Squads, organized in Tribes)

6. **From sub-optimization to holistic view**
Increasingly, understanding the big picture and understanding benefit or the business case will come into focus. It is of no avail to improve the effectiveness of a limited part of a process or system if all the parts do not work together. How many times have we seen improvement/rationalization projects, with impressive benefits on paper, deliver little or no overall benefit in practice? The classic adage, 'it doesn't help to be really good at managing projects, if you keep choosing the wrong projects', exemplifies this. There will need to be better focus on portfolio management, and for simpler, transparent systems for evaluating, selecting and prioritizing projects. Visual decision-making and planning tools will be useful here too in order to quickly gain oversight.

7. **Measures used for internal efficiency will be refined**
Today's attempts at measuring maturity, e.g. in managing projects, in an organization look at existing processes such as the documentation in use, the structure of the organization (e.g. is there a project office?), and how decision-making processes are defined. But does this really say anything about how the business really works and which results are achieved? In the future we will need to pay more attention to how people behave and relate different maturity levels to this instead. In spite of everything, it is people working together that create results in an organization and individual behavior contributes, to a greater or lesser extent, to this.

Some current research (Simon Elvnäs, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm) points to there being a large difference between what a manager says they do, compared to how they actually behave. As a consequence, this raises a lot of questions as to why this is so and how these observed differences influence our measurement of organizational efficiency and maturity.

8. **We will have to accept uncertainty and learn to live with it.**
Leadership in an organization, at varying levels, will need more to **deal with** uncertainty rather than try to **reduce** it. According to Kristoffer Ahlström-Vij, a researcher and author of "Magkänslans anatomi", ('An anatomy of gut-feelings'), we humans are hopeless at risk-assessment and we don't understand simple probability theory. We have a strong tendency to always believe that our thinking is right, even

when it's completely wrong. A successful project leader is prepared for risks, incidents, changes in circumstance and scope-creep and learns to welcome all the deviations.

Our ability to reduce uncertainty via increasing control and more risk-analysis is limited. As a way of dealing with unforeseen circumstances, e.g. the need to correct or change course in a project, it might be better to discuss how we can and need to work together, rather than drawing up ever more detailed plans.

9. **Our view of the role of the leader and of leadership will change.**
We have a strong tendency to overstate the role and the capacity of the leader. The days when leadership was built on hierarchical structures and information advantage have long-since passed. Increasing internal complexity means that this kind of leadership today is becoming almost impossible, as many studies have shown. Leaders function as part of a social system with limited opportunities to physically influence dependencies and results. More time has to be made available for reflection and future leaders will need to influence people's behavior by being leader, facilitator, listener and motivator - adopting a more coaching leadership style and providing continuous feedback. Reduce the control need and trust your people more. Today, companies such as Google are giving their staff the possibility of spending up to 20% of their time on their own projects and Spotify give a corresponding 10% as 'hack days' to be devoted to learning, knowledge-sharing and innovation.

10. **Future organizations will talk more about 'why?'**
Organizations wishing to attract new employees and to better motivate their existing ones, will find clear visions and common values increasingly more important. It will be about creating a positive attitude for people involved with the organization. Objectives, plans, deliverables, budgets, etc., create very little feeling and have only limited value in building motivation and commitment. Discussing visions, however, and what our motivators are, which values we share, what drives our organization, etc., will become significantly more influential. More and more people will not only want to know what (objectives, deliverables) needs to be done and how (processes, plans) it should be done, but also why (visions, drivers, motivators).

Feeling that organizations are being genuine, truthful and for an honest cause will become ever more influential when we evaluate them, from both an internal and external perspective. To quote Jon Duschinsky at 'Project Inspiration 2015 in Stockholm', "It´s not what you make, it´s what you´re made of that counts".

Hints and tips for future project leaders

- Reserve dedicated time for reflection – differentiate between formulating a problem and solving one
- By all means analyze, but devote most of your time to giving feedback to your colleagues on their behavior
- Scope, plans, budgets, processes, do not really affect people´s feelings. Don´t forget to work with visions, explain why something is important, understand the driving forces, establish shared values etc., to build strong motivation in an organization.
- Recognize uncertainty and learn to welcome deviations
- Stimulate learning and the sharing of experience – facilitate when and where necessary
- Make sure that the things you think are important are reflected in your behavior.
- Practice your ability to actively listen, discuss and give feedback
- Build on the things that work well – for you and with your colleagues