Acknowledgment

The road to wisdom?—Well, it’s plain and simple to express:
Err
and err
and err again
but less
and less
and less.

~Piet Hein, inventor, philosopher, poet

This book is the result of an enduring educational journey, which has been swaying between the attraction points of a deep interest in philosophy, my work at the Ericsson™ telecommunication company and my research at Linköping University. In a sense, I summarize my experience from a life-long career in industry and academia. Accordingly, I have allowed myself to be generous with what material I have included in the book. On the surface, issues like the philosophical question of what knowledge is, or how the cognitive system of humans conceives signs may seem rather loosely related to, say, requirement management. However, it is my firm conviction that it is not until we reach an integrated view on these seemingly non-related issues that we can truly address the extraordinary intricacies in managing complex systems in which humans are parts.

As is evident from the outline of the book, my figurative journey proceeded along several trails. The practical trail originates from 1968 when I started to work at Ericsson in Stockholm, Sweden. The experiences gained there form the empirical foundation of the book. I am deeply grateful to Ericsson for their overwhelming generosity in allowing me to use the detailed empirical material. Special thanks go to my contact person, colleague, and friend at Ericsson, Sören Ohlsson, whose continual interest in my results and life-long experience at Ericsson has been invaluable to me.

The theoretical trail originates from my personal interest in the praxis philosophy as interpreted by the young Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century. This perspective formed a kind of background fabric by which I reflected on what happened at Ericsson. This trail, no doubt, would have remained dormant if I had not met professor Sture Hägglund at Linköping University in 1997. He looked at my ideas over a cup of coffee, rubbed his chin and said: “Well, this might be something...”. Sture put me in contact with my thesis supervisor Bengt Lennartson who has been my guide throughout my academic career. His patient and thorough criticism and encouragement have kept me on track whenever I was about to get lost at some interesting waterhole. Hail to you, Bengt!

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my own preconceptions and think instead of becoming defensive; Christian, with whom I often discussed shaky thoughts on shaky trains between Linköping and Stockholm.

Perhaps the trickiest part of the theoretical trail was to stay clear of philosophical pitfalls. Oh, how easy it is to get lost in a complete confusion here! “Philosophy is like trying to open a safe with a combination lock: each little adjustment of the dials seems to achieve nothing, only when everything is in place the door does open.” (Ludwig Wittgenstein). For their help in break open this safe I am deeply indebted to two people: professor Göran Goldkuhl and Johan Schubert. Göran, whose graduate courses and seminars together with his students provided me with countless occasions for discussion and reflection. Johan, with his long experience as an opponent and supervisor, was always there to inspire, read and gently point out the flaws in my thinking. My special thanks also go to Joakim Lilliesköld for long, interesting, and truly rewarding research collaboration over many years.

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The practical and theoretical trails were eventually joined in the Activity Domain Theory, and from this perspective, possible, unbeaten trails have been outlined for the management of complex systems. With that, my final thoughts go to you who have been with me all the time: Tina for your ceaseless love and endurance, my beloved children Kerstin and Gustav for your everlasting encouragement and readings of the manuscript. And of course to Eva, my daughter-in-law and Anna and Erik, my grandchildren. Perhaps the essence of the book is best expressed by Anna. When three years old, looking at a colored version of the anatomy of the mobile switching center node in Figure 1, p. 13, she thought that the work packages looked like “square clouds over an island in the sea.” Perhaps we should think about work packages as square clouds. Or as my favorite philosopher, Karel Kosík, expressed it: “Familiarity is an obstacle to knowledge.”

Lars Taxén
Tullinge, April 2009

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