Foreword

“Why make it simple when you can do it so beautifully complicated?” This answer to a student is attributed to one of the classical German philosophers of the 19th century. Some readers may think that the author of this book would reply in a similar way. The theoretical discourse of this book, which is partly inspired by some of these philosophers, is indeed a tough piece of cerebral aerobics. However, it results in the wonderful simplicity of understanding complex issues, which makes the reader feel amply rewarded.

Mastering the mindboggling complexity of creations such as modern telecom systems cannot rely on shortcuts and silver bullets. On the basis of extensive professional experience and reflection the author convincingly demonstrates that coordinating the development of such systems needs to build on well-grounded theories and thoughtful application. The successful development and diffusion of the “anatomic-centric” approach to project coordination within the Ericsson telecommunications company, where the author was so deeply involved, testifies to the importance of this contribution.

In the area of complex systems development, thoughtful project management is a key factor for innovation, for bringing together system capabilities to actually working systems and for taking them to the customer. The critical question then is: How can managers and practitioners conceptualize and understand the central ingredients of successful project management in this and similar fields? In the extant literature there is a plethora of tools for advanced planning and scheduling, for system decomposition and modularization, for reducing interdependencies and avoiding errors. But there is also a growing criticism of these approaches. A number of these studies have criticized mainstream models of project management for an over-emphasis on the role of planning and scheduling and highlighted the need for developing models that take into account the need for flexibility and adaptability. These studies have singled out the importance of fitting project management to the situation and working out contingency formulae as critical for firm-level competitive advantage. This critique, however, tends to be overly general in character and lack grounded suggestions for effective managerial practices and coordination mechanisms which are needed to make complex system development at all possible.

This work pursues a different route, different both from the traditional planning road, and the alternative “flexibility” route, where everything is open for negotiation. By applying rigorous theoretical analysis it brings a new depth to the art and science of complex system development in general and to project management practices in particular. As the author forcefully argues, nothing is as practical as a good theory. The theories discussed and analyzed here do indeed lead to very practical results such as new forms of representing and expressing interdependencies, new means of creating shared understanding, new ways of communicating system characteristics and integrating complicated project activities into systems which function as predicted and can be delivered as promised.
The reader is invited to a rewarding ride through research and experimentation, ending up in highly useful new insights.

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