Theorizing muddy practices in semi-temporary organizations

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Abstract

The projectification of organizations and the increased interest among researchers to develop knowledge about temporary organizations has led to a lot of interesting work, most often focusing on project-based organizations or firms. More scarce is research that focuses on how temporary organizing takes place in permanent host-organizations that perform the larger part of their activities in processual, routine-based operations. Previous researchers have argued that in such semi-temporary organizations, tensions emerge between the temporary and permanent due to competing organizational logics. How these tensions are played out in daily work practices is however not known. This paper addresses this gap, drawing on an in-depth case study of a waste management company. Using practice theory as an epistemological lens, we analyze the practices involved the temporary organizing in the company in light of the four basic dimensions of a temporary organization, time, team, task and transition (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Doing so, we are able to theorize the “muddy” practices of temporary organizing in a permanent host-organization.

Introduction

Temporary organizations, i.e. organizations that are characterized by a predefined limited time of interactions between members, have become common in many industries today (Bakker, 2010). A possible reason for this development is that temporary organizations are said to offer capabilities that permanent organizations lack, for example regarding efficiency (Grabher, 2004); high levels of creativity and innovation (Bakker & Janowicz-Panjaitan, 2009); and dynamic capabilities (Söderlund & Tell, 2009). In addition, it is argued that temporary organizing is flexible, ad-hoc and that it involves the possibility to adapt to the opportunities and challenges of a turbulent environment (Bakker, DeFillippi, Schwab, & Sydow, 2016).

Some researchers describe this as a trend of projectification (Fowler, Lindahl, & Sköld, 2015; Fred, 2017; R. Lundin & Söderholm, 1998; Midler, 1995; Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014). Others point out that there is more than meets the eye, and that there rather are different types of temporary organizing, where a project is one of many forms (Bakker et al., 2016).
Traditionally, temporary organizations have been seen as complements to permanent organizations (Shenhar, Dvir, Levy, & Maltz, 2001), but with the trend of projectification, researchers have directed their attention more to project-based organizations or firms, i.e. organizations where most operations are carried out in projects (Davies, Brady, Prencipe, & Hobday, 2011; Whitley, 2006). Less research today seems to be conducted on organizations that are mainly operations-based while simultaneously engaging in temporary organizing (Lundin et al., 2015). In such, organizations, sometimes called semi-temporary organizations (Bakker et al., 2016); Project Supported Organizations, PSO:s, (Lundin et al., 2015); “Type 2 project-based firms” (Keegan & Turner, 2002); or project led organizations (Hobday, 2000); the permanent organization is still the backbone of all activities that take place, but temporary organizing take place occasionally, for specific purposes.

The scarce research on temporary organizing in permanent host-organizations indicates that the temporariness of activities in a permanent host-organization creates tensions, uncertainties, synergies, and contradictions between the two forms of organizing (Bakker et al., 2016). Temporary organizing thus does not only pose challenges that are different to those of permanent organizing (R. A. Lundin et al., 2015), but the embeddedness of temporary organizing into permanent organizing poses challenges due to differences in organizing logics (Powell, Koput, & Smith-Doerr, 1996). There is, however, a need for gaining a better understanding and further theorizing regarding the tensions between temporary and permanent organizing since, as Burke & Morley recently put it: “current theories rarely address the fundamental tensions and paradoxes inherent in this symbiotic interdependence” (Burke & Morley, 2016:1248-1249).

This paper aims at addressing this gap by studying empirically how temporary organizing takes place in a permanent host-organization – a waste management company – where operations are mainly processual and where these thus guide organizational praxis (Cabantous, Gond, & Johnson-Cramer, 2010). The case was studied in-depth over a period of 1,5 years through interviews, observations, the collection of documents and different participatory research-activities. In our analysis, we adopt a practice perspective, which means that we understand temporary organizing as a social practice, coming about through the engagement of actors (practitioners) in different activities (praxis) that follow models, theories or ideas that guide their temporary organizing praxis (Cabantous et al., 2010). This way, practice theory becomes an epistemological lens through which we aim at advancing the knowledge about the relationship between the temporary and the permanent organizing in the
company and theorize these the muddy practices of temporary organizing that we see in the permanent host-organization.

Analyzing the practices involved through the framework of the four basic dimensions of a temporary organization – time, team, task and transition (R. Lundin & Söderholm, 1995) – we show that despite the fact that the company has engaged in projects for a long time; that several employees have good knowledge about projects and project management; and that the company has developed and implemented a project model for the organization, the practices of temporary organizing are still “muddy” in that the interfaces between the permanent and the temporary organization, between the temporary organizations and its stakeholders and between the different temporary organizations within the semi-temporary organization are opaque creating uncertainty and tensions. This, we argue, is because the temporary organizing takes place in an institutional environment – the permanent organization – that influences the practices of temporary organizing (Kreiner, 1995). The challenge of the muddy semi-temporary organization thus lies in the doing of temporary organizing, not in the knowing about the various forms and models of temporary organizations.

Temporary organizing: definitions, forms, and challenges
Defining the temporary organization

Temporary organizations have been a topic of particular interest to researcher during the last fifty years. Initially, the concept of temporary systems was discussed by Bennis (1965) in regards to the need for more ad-hoc groups in the form of temporary workforces. Later on, Goodman and Goodman (1972; 1976) discussed the temporary organization and some of the issues of importance, including managerial/directorial strategies, group creativity, communication, innovation and growth of personnel. They defined the temporary organization as “a set of diversely skilled people working together on a complex task over a limited period of time” (Goodman & Goodman, 1976:494).

This way of defining the temporary organization is in line with Lundin and Söderholm’s view, who in a seminal piece outlined a theory of the temporary organization (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Their theory proposes defining the temporary organization in the light of four concepts; time, team, task, and transition. Together, these four concepts are intended to help differentiate the temporary from the permanent organization. Time is considered fundamental when compared to the permanent organization since the temporary organization has a start and an end which means that time is considered a scarce resource. The concept of time also gives a
sense of urgency, where activities can be performed independently of the activities surrounding the project. Team, the second concept, refers to the group of people that are selected based on their competences and skills to work in the temporary organizations. The third concept, task, is what the temporary organization is supposed to achieve. The final concept, transition, is connected to the need for action and refers to the changes that are envisaged to happen after the task has been performed. The concept of transition is however not as easy to decode when understanding the organizing of temporary organizations as projects, and according to Bakker (2010), there is little research that can describe this concept which is why Bakker (2010) instead suggests that the concept of “context” should be used. The concept of context captures the relationships and the inter-connectedness present in temporary organizing (Engwall, 2003; Jörg Sydow & Braun, 2018).

**Forms of temporary organizing**

Much of the discussion regarding temporary organizations have been geared towards projects in project-based organizations (Jerbrant, 2014) (e.g. Prencipe and Tell 2001; Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017; Sydow, Lindkvist, & De Fillippi, 2004) where the majority of the activities in the organization take place in projects. Such organizations so called Project Based Organization, PBOs, (Lindkvist, 2004), or P-form organizations (Söderlund & Tell, 2009), perform most of their activities in projects. Examples here include construction companies (Gann & Salter, 2000) or consultancy firms (Sydow, Lindkvist & De Fillippi, 2004).

Other types of systems where permanent and temporary structures are mixed are less researched. In these systems, most operations take place within the permanent organization but may be supported by temporary organizations. The revenue mainly derives from the permanent structures, whereas the temporary systems mainly bear the cost (Arvidsson, 2009; Lundin et al., 2015). Examples of such organizational forms include project-led organizations (Hobday, 2000): Type 2 project-based firms (Keegan & Turner, 2002); project oriented organizations (Arvidsson, 2009); project supported organizations, PSO:s (Lundin et al., 2015); or semi-temporary organizations (R. M. Bakker et al., 2016).

**Challenges of the semi-temporary organizations**

Semi-temporary organizations face similar challenges as PBO:s, but also challenges that PBO:s do not face. Semi-temporary organizations often exist within matrix organizations, which means that the matrix organization consists of both permanent and temporary structures (Arvidsson, 2009). The permanent organization consists of activities that are organized around a line organization, more specifically within specific functions, geographical markets and/or
customer categories ibid. The resources and responsibilities that are allocated within each function, geographical market and/or customer category (Lundin et al., 2015). The temporary organizations on the other hand draw recourses from the line organization and are often manifested in projects. These are traditional organizations that use projects as mean to reach internal and external goals, but the projects run parallel to the activities of the line organization (ibid).

The value created through semi-temporary organizations is lower compared to PBO’s as the revenue and profit primarily comes from the activities of the permanent organization. The project members are often part of both the line organization and the project, thereby creating ambiguity in regards to the role of the project members and also the resource allocation between the project and the line organization. This can in turn create tension between the project and the line organization, due to for example conflicts of loyalty (Lundin et al., 2015).

Many organizations undergo a transformation dilemma (Ekstedt, Lundin, Söderholm, & Wirdenius, 1999), as the organization has to accommodate to the different forms of organizing. The organizing taking place within on one hand the project or the temporary organization and the permanent organization on the other hand are not isolated. The boundaries are a way to define the activities within the temporary organization, much of the activities in a temporary organization crosses the boundary and the boundary work allows the temporary organization to exploit its benefits (Sahlin-Andersson, 2002) and the permanent organization to benefit from the activities in the temporary organization, thereby affect the connectedness and outcome of these two forms of organizing (Sandal Stjerne & Svejenova, 2016).

Finally, the embeddedness of temporary organizations into permanent organizations poses challenges. Temporary organizing involves a different “logic of organizing” (Powell et al., 1996), and those involved have to operate within dual structures of marked by power and politics (Aubry, 2011).

As research has shifted focus from optimization and success factors to becoming more behavioral, processual and relational (Söderlund, 2011), it has been argued that a theory of temporary organizing cannot be developed detached from simultaneously understanding permanent organizing (Jacobsson, Burström, & Wilson, 2013). The reasons for and consequences of tensions, contradictions and synergies between temporary and permanent organizing is however yet not well theorized, which is why there is a need for more research (Bakker et al., 2016; Burke & Morley, 2016).
Methodology
To develop the understanding of how temporary organizing takes place in a permanent host organization this paper draws on a case study of a mid-sized, Swedish waste management company that was studied in-depth during 1.5 years through a variety of qualitative and participatory research methods. This will be described more detailed in the following section.

Case and collection of empirical material
The waste management company follows a business model that is common among several waste management companies in Sweden. The business model includes three types of activities: public service activities that collect solid waste from households, commercial establishments and industry; processing activities that transform this waste; and marketing activities that enable products and recycled material to re-enter the economy (Corvellec & Hultman, 2012). The company thus mainly performs its operations in processes but also performs development and maintenance work of various kinds in projects.

Formerly a company, owned by 12 municipalities, but since 2016 a municipal body of its own with representatives for the former owners (the municipalities) as executive board, the waste management company has undergone significant changes during the past two years. It has employed most members of (white collar) staff that previously worked at the municipalities with waste management issues and has today increased responsibility for what types of waste to collect and process. Today, the organization totals about 250 employees, including administrators, managers, customer service, sales personnel, as well as waste management workers of various kinds.

At present, only two members of staff are employed as “project managers”. These are in charge of projects related to renewal or development of technical facilities such as the building of a new bio-gas production facility, or the exchange of an old scale for weighing incoming waste trucks to a new one; better fitted for larger trucks. Other projects are also carried out in the organization, such as the development and implementation of a new software system for accounting. These projects are managed by people from the different departments that take on the role of being project managers in addition to their other tasks.

Case study methodology may be seen as an “intellectual gold-mine” for knowledge development (Jensen & Rodgers, 2001:235). Key is, however, to develop an in-depth understanding of the case (Gerring, 2004), therefore, the company was studied through a variety of methods, in two stages, over a period of 1,5 years and with a participatory-research approach that strived to develop actionable knowledge (Argyris, 2003), by involving the participants
The researchers and the CEO agreed already in the beginning to both advance knowledge about how temporary organizing takes place in a permanent host organization, but also to improve the waste management’s way of working in temporary organizing. Based on this agreement, a research design in two stages was agreed upon.

In the first stage and during a period of eight months, 21 semi-structured interviews were performed with managers in the company. In addition, one of the authors spent one day a week during six months at the company, observing work practices, documenting meetings and participating in various waste management-related activities. The authors also kept in touch with employees of the company in other ways; through e-mail, lunch meetings, and by involving the executives in the company in a real-life teaching case used in a master’s level course on Change Management. The research process may thus be described as truly interactive (Caswill & Shove, 2000); a set-up that aimed at counter-acting narrative circularity, i.e. the simple “truths” that research risk re-produce (Cunliffe, 2003) and at creating value for all stakeholders involved (Hartley, Alford, Knies, & Douglas, 2017). This stage ended with the researcher organizing a workshop to which all the interviewed managers were invited and where different issues of working in temporary structures in the company were discussed. The empirical material from this stage consists of transcripts of the interviews, field notes, and photos taken during the days at the company.

The outcome of the workshop held at the end of stage one formed the setting for the second stage of the study, where the authors of this paper organized three seminars for two groups at the company. One group consisted of about 20 managers, and one group consisted of about 20 project managers and/or project members. Seminars 1 and 2 were held separately, which means that they were held twice (i.e. they were held one time for managers and one time for project managers/members). The third and final seminar was only held once, and here 40 company representatives came to the same session.

The content of the seminars was a mix of mini-lectures, given by one author of the paper; group discussions and individual reflections. During the seminar, the other author documented the work of the participants, by taking photos, notes and by collecting everything that was written. Before and after each seminar, the participants were asked to submit reflections individually. These were also collected for research purpose. All participants were informed about the purpose of using the documentation as empirical material for research, and all gave their written consent.
Practice theory: an epistemological tool

Very early in the research process it became clear that there were tensions and uncertainty in the waste management company between the temporary and the permanent organizing. It also became evident that the level of competence regarding project management knowledge and skills varied, but that it did exist in the company, both among specific employees who, at various times in the past had attended courses or brought with them experiences and “know-how” from previous employments. Some of this knowledge had been institutionalized in project management models that were used, to various degrees, in the performing of projects in the company.

Since the challenges that the informants spoke about could not be explained by poor knowledge or lack of project management guidance, but in the doing of temporary organizing, we decided to adopt an analytical framework rooted in practice. Such a framework involves recognizing that organizational knowing is situated in practice rather than residing in the heads of the members of the organization (Gherardi, 2000, 2001; Nicolini, Gherardi, Yanow, 2013). Knowledge is thus situated in historical, social and cultural contexts and created via interaction and mediated via artifacts (Gherardi, 2001; Nicolini et al. 2013).

This means that we understand temporary organizing as a social practice that comes about through the engagement of actors (practitioners), in different activities (praxis) that follow models, theories or ideas that guide their temporary organizing praxis (Cabantous et al., 2010). Thus, practice theory becomes an epistemological lens through which we aim at advancing the knowledge about the relationship between the temporary and the permanent organizing in the company, and thereby enrich our understanding of the everyday organizing processes.

Results

The study shows that the organization, where the main revenue derives from its permanent organization, has strived to organize its temporary activities to support the permanent one, via projects. The challenge facing the organization is the immaturity in organizing temporary activities as projects. There is a strive among the members of the organization to accomplish and succeed, but the temporary organizing practices are influenced by permanent organizing practices, confusing project participants, project managers as well as steering committee members, making the practices of temporary organizing “muddy”. In the following, we will provide empirical support for the claim of this muddiness, by relating the practices to the four concepts of time, team, task and transition as proposed by Lundin & Söderholm (1995) as
framework for understanding the temporary organization. As we shall see, the practices involved in the temporary organizing of the waste management company are not as easily distinguished as typical of the temporary organization as Lundin & Söderholm proposes.¹

Time in temporary organizing practices in the waste management company

The empirical material indicates that there is a need in the company to distinguish temporal activities from the daily, ongoing operations of waste management and by labeling temporal activities as “large projects”, “small projects”, “activities” or “one-person investigations”, these are discerned from other operations:

“we’ve got large projects, small projects, activities, and then there are one-person-jobs that are more investigation, but that also are projects, so they are seen as separate; they don’t follow the project model, but the executive group wants to be able to follow them up, so they will be put on the same list as the projects that they follow up”. (Developmental engineer, Interview 160202 FV)

As seen in the quote, there are different forms of temporary organizing in the company, and even though several of these are not projects in that they don’t follow the model for project initiation, planning, and execution that was implemented in the company several years ago, they are partly treated as such through the way they are followed up.

The variety of temporal forms of organizing is, however, something that many members of staff find confusing, and several of them argue that there is a need for a company-wide definition of a project, compared to other forms of temporary or permanent organizing. Sometimes “the project” may not be the right form of temporary organizing, some argue:

“While working in the project, the sense has been that there is not much knowledge about working in a project form without [the company] hiring a consultant as the project manager, and then the project team follows the instructions set out in the Gannt-chart. In many cases, a project is started even though it had been enough to perform an activity to get through the change.”

(Project manager, Workshop Day 2, AÖ)

In summary, the empirical material shows that there are several types of activities that are temporary in the company, but that there is a confusion regarding what type of temporary

¹ Please note that this is an early draft of our paper. In the next version we will provide more empirical examples in the form of power quotes and proof quotes (Pratt, 2008).
organizing should be applied, as the temporariness as well as the complexity of the activities range from short/simple to long/complex.

Team in temporary organizing practices in the waste management company
As an organization with both permanent and temporary organizing, the waste management company face the challenges of a matrix organization. The teams working with temporary organizing consist of staff from the permanent organization, and since they often have responsibilities in both the line organization and in the temporary organizing, their working environment is often marked by stress and frustration. As one of the project managers states:

“*There are no extra resources to replace the people involved in projects; instead the workload piles up, creating stress and frustration for those involved in the project – and also extra work.*” (Project manager, Workshop Day 2, AÖ)

The empirical data further shows that the frustration does not only stem from the project managers trying to create a dedicated team that can devote the necessary time and effort in completing the various task, but also among the line managers who have the responsibility for the permanent activities.

“When can you say ‘no’ as the line manager, with the argument that we do not have enough resources? [...] Our mission is to perform operations, so here they work 100 percent [...], they do not really have space to work 30-40 percent in projects.” (Production manager, Interview, 160219 TL)

Another challenge that the waste management organization faces is the uncertainties that arise due to having consultants as project managers that bring with them their ways of managing the team; ways that are not complacent with how the permanent project members’ understanding of how temporary organizing should take place. There are thus different perceptions of the kind of routines and processes that should be used that affects the management of the team. As the production manager says:

“*sometimes we have [consultants] who come from other companies and have worked more in project-oriented organizations and are used to working in a certain way, for example with steering committees, where decisions are taken and so on, and this creates, well, not really conflicts, but uncertainties... and we have a different idea of where the decisions are taken and then it is like: ‘You cannot decide that, you have to take that with the steering committee.’ [And our answer is:] Well, it's just that we're going to do this, it does not have to be decided in the
steering committee. [Whereby the reply is:] ‘Yes, yes, but it must.’ (Production manager, 160219 TL)

The empirical material thus shows that the teams set up for temporary organizing in the company often lack autonomy and that there is confusion regarding division of labor as well as division of responsibility. When working with consultants brought in from other companies, this becomes especially apparent.

Task in temporary organizing practices in the waste management company

As seen above, several concepts are used in the waste management company to denote temporary organizing: projects, activities, and one-person-investigations. Whereas “projects” were examples of temporary organizing that had to follow the company’s project model, activities (sometimes also called improvement initiatives) or one-person-investigations was understood as something different from a project, and more aligned with the structures of the permanent organization and its goals:

“I’ve always wondered where the boundary between improvement initiatives [activities] versus project is. I feel it needs to be defined, above all, that we have a consensus within the company. Otherwise, the risk is that one can ‘kill’ a good improvement by doing the job too big and expensive to organize it as a project.”

(Recycling manager, Workshop, Day 1)

Furthermore, the study shows that when having the option of choosing how to execute a task, the form of the project was the preferred organizational form, since it was perceived to generate more resources and to get higher priority on the list of issues to attend to. On the other hand, there was also evidence of the resistance of organizing via projects. This can be traced back to the history of the organization, having been based on more permanent organizing forms, and where the necessary activities were performed in parallel to the ordinary processes, in a more or less ad hoc-manner.

“a big challenge that we have, is the unwillingness to do any form of projects. We have a little of this attitude that it can be solved, we can handle it within the permanent organization, doing it parallel, and we coordinate a bit, but coordination is quite complex [...]. I mean the processes require the combination of many different resources and many different organizational units.” (IT manager, Interview, 160208)
One reason for the uncertainty of how to perform a temporary task in the waste management company may thus be found in the immaturity of the waste management company in regards to managing projects. Both project managers, project members, and line managers expressed not being used to work in projects as the temporary organizing form:

"There are many of us that are not used to working with the project form, and in particular this company’s project culture; then we need to be extra explicit with each other” (Project manager, Workshop Day 2, SL)

In summary, the staff of the waste management company sees activities in temporary organizing both as tasks and as activities that are necessary to achieve the permanent organization’s goals.

**Transition in temporary organizing practices in the waste management company**

In the waste management company, temporary organizing is related both to continuous development as well as specific change:

“Normally, to purchase a new machine is not a project, it is more of procurement where we craft a specification and decide what type of machine we need. Shall we make a change, buy a larger one, etc. This [does not feel like a project]. But if we are to make larger changes […], for example buying a new excavator and a compactor, which we haven’t had before and we also want a measuring system in the excavator with a GPS […] To do a procurement […] more work is needed.”

(Production manager, Interview 160219 TL)

In this example we see that the difference achieved by the activities brought up by the Production Manager is both related to the continuous improvement work of the company that takes place in permanent organizing processes (in this case procurement processes), but also to transition that is brought about through temporary organizing, since the improvement work may entail more than simply procuring a new machine.

Another example is brought up by a Developmental engineer and concerns “Mobile”; a digital system where waste bins were digitally tagged; sending information to the garbage trucks and providing the logistics’ department with information that could be used for planning efficient garbage collection routes. The system also collects information about when bins are emptied (or not); information that is useful for the customer service-department when communicating with dissatisfied customers. The example is brought up as a project, i.e. an example of temporary organizing, but involved a fundamental change both in the operations of waste
management, both in the daily work practices of the garbage collectors and in the daily work practices of the logistics’ department:

"there was great resistance from the beginning because this meant that the drivers felt controlled [...] but then [the project manager] managed to convince them [that this was a good thing] and they started to accept the new ways of working [...]. But then something happened [...] I think it was the logistics’ department that wanted all staff members [of their department] to be able to have coffee breaks at the same time but [for the] system [to work,] someone had to sit with it all the time. [...] This meant that the drivers didn’t get the information [...] and the system failed...” (Development engineer, 160202 FV)

The example illustrates that the Mobile-project, although it was planned and managed as a project and thus according to the company’s project model, not only involved a transition of before and after, but an incremental change of the operations of the company. Hence, changes brought about through temporary organizing were closely related to the permanent organizing of the company.

Theorizing semi-temporary organizing

The empirical illustrations in the previous section show that the temporary organizing practices performed at the waste management company were muddy, in the sense that they do not clearly exemplify the practices implied by the framework for the temporary organization as proposed by Lundin & Söderholm (1995). This, however, helps us theorize semi-temporary organizing.

Time in semi-temporary organizing

According to Lundin & Söderholm (1995), temporary organizations differ from permanent ones in that the latter is defined by survival, rather than time. However, in semi-temporary organizing it is not that easy to distinguish between temporary and permanent when it comes to organizing activities. Through semi-temporary organizing, the organization becomes a mix of the temporary and permanent (Anell & Wilson, 2002), as various time-frames and different types of temporalities are practiced. Such practices are visible both in discourse, for example by distinguishing between “long” or “short” projects; “activities”; “one-person-investigations”; “procurement processes”, as well as in the practices surrounding particular forms of temporary organizing, for example by following on temporary activities as projects although they are not described or otherwise thought of as projects.
This way, time in semi-temporary organizing is both clock-based, i.e. chronological and opportunity-based, i.e. kairotic (Czarniawska, 2004; Garud & Tuertscher, 2011). The chronological dimension of semi-temporary organizing means that it involves practices that calculate and divide time in intervals, for example through Gannt-charts that organizing present practice and the kairotic dimension of semi-temporary organizing means that it also relates current temporal organizing practices to the past and the future (Engwall, 2003), as well as to current opportunities that assist or prevent the practitioners to move work forward (Garud & Tuertscher, 2011).

Teams in semi-temporary organizing

Since semi-temporary organizing takes place in a permanent host-organization, staff involved in various forms of temporary organizing belongs to (at least) two different organizational structures; a permanent structure, for example a department (in some instances a department in a different organization), and a temporary structure, for example a project team. This means that they operate under two (or more) different logics when it comes to how work is to be performed, how decisions are to be made, how information is to be distributed, etc.

Semi-temporary organizing thus means that team members are involved in building up swift trust with temporary team mates, at the same time as handling trust issue that may be found in their permanent organizational structure (Bakker, 2010; Saunders & Ahuja, 2006). It also means that they have to find ways to operate with/under different leadership and management styles, models and ideas; ranging from those of the traditional bureaucracy (Daft & Lewin, 1993), to decentralized leadership (Heckscher, 1994); shared leadership (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2007); and to the leadership styles that may be found in different types of temporary structures (Shenhar, 2001).

Tasks in semi-temporary organizing

The tasks performed in various forms of temporary organizing both pertained to activities as well as to the overall goals of the company and the distinction made by Lundin & Söderholm (1995), where tasks in the temporary organization are activity-oriented and goals in the permanent organization are decision-driven is thus not that obvious. Instead, semi-temporary organizing is legitimized through the simultaneous performing of tasks according to predefined routines as well as through the performing of the goals of the organization through these tasks.

Performing tasks according to predefined routines involve both discursive and material practices; for example by calling something “a project” and then using the documentation
required for project planning and executing according to an existing project model (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006).

When performing the tasks of temporary organizing and relating these to the goals of the permanent organization, the goals are not only achieved but from a processual point of view it may be argued that the goals are temporally unfolding as tasks are performed (Pickering, 1993).

**Transition in semi-temporary organizing**

Finally, Lundin & Söderholm’s (1995) idea of transition as the driving force of temporary organizing, rather than production processes and continual development, may not be seen in semi-temporary organizing. Changes brought about through here do involve transition, but sometimes also fundamental changes to processual operations. This way, the difference between the continual development of permanent organizations and the transition that is the objective of the temporary organization is vague, and we would argue that semi-temporary organizing involves a continuous change that goes beyond temporary organizing initiatives (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

**Summary**

A summary of the differences between the permanent and temporary organizations as proposed by Lundin & Söderholm, 1995, and semi-temporary organizing, as theorized from the empirical study may be found in table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The permanent organization according to Lundin &amp; Söderholm, 1995</th>
<th>The temporary organization according to Lundin &amp; Söderholm, 1995</th>
<th>Semi-temporary organizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td>The permanent organization aims at surviving</td>
<td>The temporary organization is limited in time</td>
<td>Semi-temporary organizing involves various time-frames and different types of temporalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEAM</strong></td>
<td>The permanent organization involves a working organization of (more-or-less) permanent staff</td>
<td>The temporary organization involves a team of dedicated resources</td>
<td>Semi-temporary organizing involves dedicated resources that also operate in the working organization of the permanent structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TASK</strong></td>
<td>The permanent organization is devoted to goals; these drive decision-making</td>
<td>The temporary organization is legitimized by tasks; these drive action</td>
<td>Semi-temporary organizing is legitimized through the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The permanent organization operates through processes and continual development

The temporary organization performs tasks that lead to transition (before-and-after)

Semi-temporary organizing involves continuous change

Table 1: Summary of differences between the permanent and temporary organizations as proposed by Lundin & Söderholm (1995) and semi-temporary organizing, as theorized from the empirical study.

Concluding comments

Drawing from an in-depth, qualitative case study of a Swedish waste management company, this paper aimed at theorizing the muddy practices of temporary organizing in a permanent host-organization and thereby addressing the challenges of the temporary in relation to the permanent in semi-temporary organizations. In our analysis, we adopted a practice perspective, where we saw temporary organizing as a social practice, taking place in a context were operations are mainly operational, thus guiding organizational praxis (Cabantous et al., 2010).

Our paper shows empirically how temporary organizing is dependent on its history and future (Engwall, 2003) and on its’ context (Gherardi, 2001; Nicolini et al., 2003), which means that semi-temporary organizing takes place in a world of competing organizing logics (Powell, Koput, & Smith-Doerr, 1996).

In the waste management company, the project managers, and project members largely based their knowledge about how to perform organizational activities on experiences developed when working in permanent structures, which lead to a muddiness when engaging in semi-temporary organizing. This suggests that the muddiness seen in the empirical case stems from a disconnectedness between knowing and doing. Knowing temporary practices is not enough: it is the not-doing temporary practices that creates uncertainty when executing the project. If organizational knowing is mainly built on the practices of the permanent organization, semi-temporary organizing practices will thus seem muddy to those involved, regardless if the possess knowledge about various forms of temporary organizations or not.

Furthermore, to describe the temporary organizations that come about through semi-temporary organizing we need to go beyond Lundin & Söderholm’s framework of the four T:s (1995). Therefore, we have attempted to theorize semi-temporary organizing as a specific type of organizing where the muddiness experienced empirically between the temporary organization and the permanent host-organization is taken into account, and where this muddiness creates challenges of the temporary in relation to the permanent in semi-temporary organizations.
References


