

Managing and Working in Project Society¹

A Digitalization Project for a Changing Society

Mats Ragnarsson and Rolf A. Lundin

Every year the Swedish Project Academy chooses “The Project Manager of the Year” as one of many ways to promote and develop project work by awarding good practices. The functions of the academy have been alluded to in a previous article in *PM World Journal* (Lundin & Söderholm, 2012). The award has been given every year since the project academy started in 1994. When the decision is made on the recipient to receive the award, the criteria are: exerted leadership, project results, project scope, complexity and fresh ideas. It is significant that it is project leadership rather than project management that is rewarded!

Chosen for 2016 were two persons, one female and one male: Charlotte Dingertz and Claes Johannesson who both are working for the local government of Stockholm connected to public schools. The fact that two persons received the award for the same project is in a way significant for this part of the world, where leadership is not considered to be concentrated to one person only. The project has been called “Digitalization for Better Learning”.

The young students at school today will be working in other ways and with other things than previous generations. There will be new and fundamentally changed occupations driven by the adaptation to project society and the connections to digitalization. And the new generation is in need of modern ways of teaching.

The winners this time have been in charge of a major project (or possibly a number of projects) to increase the potential of teachers to use digital means and methods to improve their work in teaching to promote profound changes in the way students learn in preparing for future needs.

The project was started in 2013 with the purpose to improve and to utilize the inherent capacities that digitalization provides for pre-university education in the Stockholm area ranging from primary schools to secondary schools. This far, the project has been very successful in the sense that for instance the secondary schools in general have increased their competence level by 35% in the digital area (according to a measurement instrument developed within the project). This was achieved only two years after the new tool was developed.

¹This series of articles from members of the Swedish Project Academy is based on concepts in the book [*Managing and Working in Project Society*](#) by Rolf A. Lundin, Niklas Arvidsson, Tim Brady, Eskil Ekstedt, Christophe Midler and Jorg Sydow, published by Cambridge University Press in 2015. The book won the PMI David I. Cleland Project Management Literature Award in 2016.

Headmasters and teachers of 180 schools were involved (and in total 12 000 employees in the school system in Stockholm). By introducing web based tools, by working out action plans and very concrete actions, by direct communication to those involved and through more than 300 visits to school sites, good and tangible results have been reached. The tools and the procedures used have demonstrated the strength of the collegial learning for the future development of the schools. The tools are unique and have renewed the thinking related to changes of the school system. One headmaster has officially described the entire venture as “the best thing ever happening in the Stockholm school system”.

The venture digitalization of schools consists of two components:

- The administrative part making it possible to track the development of individual students, revising development plans, keep track of attendance, of grades, etc.
- The pedagogical part where digital tools are used as part of teaching activities.

In the pedagogical part the work has merely got started. What kind of pedagogical methods lead to better learning by the students and which of those can be digitized? And how can new methods be used to make students be active in their learning?

One such new method “to learn to write by reading” has been developed to make it possible for the students to read early. By bringing digital units to the classroom, making the students focus on typing by using a keyboard rather than using a pen (when students focus on their handwriting rather than reading) leads to better writing and better reading.

“Flipped Classroom” is a way to distribute learning over time. Parts of the teaching are filmed and the students have access to the material before the teaching as well as after and can use it for repetition. They can do so again and again without worrying about being seen by the classmates.

There are many opportunities useful for digitalization: film, pod, computer programs like Excel and PowerPoint. Traditionally the classroom has indeed been a closed room, but digitalization opens up to the world. And the students can produce and record material to be published. This implies that a wide group of students at this and other schools as well as parents, siblings, friends and others can benefit from it. The notion “results for real” appears to be a useful ambition!

A good example of a combination of project work and digitalization is a book produced by one of the schools, Årstaskolan. There students are expected to write and illustrate their own book. During the course of that work the contents of the teaching is integrated and used in the book project. In that way the students are also trained in giving feedback and support to each other in accordance with “two stars and a wish”. Åstaskolan makes the books available in a virtual library so they have a

wide group of parent, relatives, classmates and friends who can read what has been published.

Another example is "talk like Ted", where the script for presentation is put together and recorded as a presentation. Material from the teaching can as well be used.

The main idea is to use digitalization where it makes sense. A total digitalization is not aspired. The teachers will have to decide on the cases where it is useful to use the digital tools and when conventional teaching is to be preferred. Assisting the teachers to make a deliberate and thought through choice is to be one result of the entire effort.

– The teacher has to be trained to realize when it is good but also learn how to work with digital tools in a good way. This should be useful for all students but in particular for those who have problems in the school. We do feel that there is a need to assist that underprivileged group. For them there seems that digital tools can make a true and huge difference, says one of the project leaders, Charlotte Dingertz.

– In a way, this is an extension of their bodies and brains empowering them to read, see and understand, says the other project leader, Claes Johannesson.

The project has been carried through via a double and shared leadership. One reason was simply that the project was so big, not to say huge, but also that it was useful to have a partner in this project where all levels in the school system was involved and where the components were overlapping. We needed to be two so that we could discuss the steps to take between the two of us. It has been very useful to have someone to discuss with and to weather dilemmas knowing that the feedback you get comes from someone who is trustworthy. The leadership functions were divided so that Charlotte Dingertz focused on the upper secondary schools and Claes Johannesson on the others. Claes worked with the development of the tools and has had contact with the technical companies involved whereas Charlotte has taken care of the contacts with the managerial body.

Charlotte and Claes have had regular meetings to coordinate actions and in fact also regular meetings with the entire project group, each week. Those meetings were a must for all, leading to a common understanding of the state of the project and all could ask questions. Every group member was to present a summary of the week and to tell the story of what was to happen in the future. This organization worked well so we had a group where all felt they shared important responsibilities.

Those meeting were very important according to both project leaders. We have shared experiences, received proposals for action, changes in the project plan and in the tools. Criteria and actions have been revised in a broad way three times during the project. The tool has also been revised three times and the time plan has been adapted (the budget gave some leeway for that).

– It did not hurt that we know each other well from previous cooperative ventures. Rather it has been natural for us to work together and that made dual leadership useful and the outcome this far a success!

References:

Lundin, R. & Söderholm, A. (2012). A Project Academy - Something Worthwhile?, *PM World Journal*: 1(3).

About the Authors



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Mats Ragnarsson has 30 years of experience in project management. He spent 11 years as project manager in product development for all kinds of projects, ranging from small projects to large and complex projects involving more than 350 people. The remaining 19 years have been spent as a consultant for Wenell Management, where he has worked on international assignments for SKF and AstraZeneca. He is a coordinator for the research committee at the Swedish Project Academy, an academy that stimulates research and awards the Project Manager of the Year in Sweden.

Mats also has a history as a reserve officer in the Swedish Navy and is very interested in the ocean and boating.

Mats is author of the books **Leading in Uncertain and Complex Projects – Supporting structures for self-management** (*Mats Ragnarsson and Lars Marmgren*) and **Organizing Projects – From a mechanical to an organic perspective** (*Mats Ragnarsson and Lars Marmgren*)



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board for the PMI Global Accreditation Center which is working with accreditation of project management educational programs around the world. His current research focus is on the use of projects in media industries.

He is the lead author of the monograph *Managing and Working in Project Society: Institutional Challenges of Temporary Organizations*, published in 2015 by Cambridge University Press winning the 2016 PMI Book of the Year award. Rolf is active in the Swedish Project Academy. He can be contacted at Rolf.A.Lundin@ju.se.