Abstract

The Power of Connecting,
or Organizing Between Organizations

The public administration in Sweden is at present under the influence of several different organizational trends. Local units have received more autonomy and the decentralisation trend has brought new ways of managing within units and organizations. But how to manage work that takes place among different organizations, making them dependent on each other? This study demonstrates one way of answering this question, providing a detailed example of such organizing, or the "local construction" of organizing between organizations.

The study focused on a project initiated within the Swedish health care sector. Three different organizations took part in the project, which aimed at developing forms for cooperation between organizations. An idea of "care-chain" was translated – first into a practice and then into another idea, a model for cooperation, which was consequently objectified and spread to other places/organizations.

In this study organizing between organizations means connecting actions separated in space and time, so that they form a chain, and later a net. Such connections are possible because different actions, but also objects and ideas, become translated into each other. The translation model also explains why the result is not always as intended. It reveals that imitation, or mimesis, is important for the understanding of why and how translations take place.

Management often relies on coercive and normative mechanisms that keep organizations and their work activities separated, thus becoming an obstacle for cooperation. The study showed how the project overcame these obstacles with help of conscious initiation of mimetic processes. Organizing between organizations led to a more structured organization field, but did not make organizations within the field more alike. Mimetic processes deserve more attention in the context of managing inter-organizational activities.

Key words: organizing between organizations, translation, action net, connections, imitation.