

## The trilogy

### A fundamental critique of new organizational forms

The blind spots of popular management concepts like the holacratic organization or the agile enterprise



#### *When the Monkeys Run the Zoo: The Pitfalls of Flat Hierarchies (the first book)*

Every change takes its toll. This book critically examines the blind enthusiasm that continues to celebrate the leveling of hierarchies and the decentralization of organizations. Relying on studies performed in European and U.S. companies, Stefan Kühl describes why these management concepts can carry organizations to the edge of extinction. Organizations are facing the challenge of coming to grips with the threat of losing their identity, ever-escalating complexity, and increasing power struggles.

#### *Sisyphus in Management: The Futile Search for the Optimal Organizational Structure (the second book)*

This book explains why attempting to reconcile the contradictions in organizations is futile. The often praised Holy Grail of organization – the perfectly functioning company – will never be found. Drawing on central management topics such as hierarchy, markets, group work, quality, mission statements, and reorganization, Stefan Kühl elaborates the paradoxes of modern management and points out the undesirable side effects that arise as a result of striving to achieve optimal organizational structure. *Sisyphus in Management* shows that often, as if by an invisible hand, organizational realities form structures that lie beyond the intentions of management. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the actions of management are arbitrary. On the contrary, the potential and limitations of managerial action can only be demonstrated through an understanding of organizations that goes beyond recipe books and PowerPoint presentations.

#### *The Rainmaker Effect. Contradictions of the Learning Organization (the third book)*

The belief that rainmakers bring rain is a superstition, but they are able to create cohesion among the people who believe in their powers. Stefan Kühl describes how the rainmaker effect works in the model of the learning organization. Many of the modern management principles that are billed as formulas for success – e.g., clear objectives, employee identification, participation, and continuous learning – fail to deliver on their promises. However, they do have other beneficial effects. They ensure that organizations keep evolving.

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## The context

Every few years a new organizational revolution is declared. In most cases, the presentation of the new organizational concepts is really just a repackaging of post-bureaucratic organizational principles that have been known for a long time. Innovation in new post-bureaucratic organizational concepts has come to rest almost exclusively on the invention of new terminology. Yesterday's "flexible firm" is today's "agile company" and probably tomorrow's "systemic operation." The "adhocracy" of yesterday is today's "team-based organization," and perhaps tomorrow it will morph into a "holacratic organization." Much-vaunted "expert networks" are marketed today as "communities of practice" and will probably become "crowds of wisdom" tomorrow.

If we gain some distance and perspective, however, this urge to dramatize innovation is understandable. Managers entering a new organization often feel compelled to expound on conceptual innovations to show that they will approach things differently than their predecessors. Consultants find themselves competing with other consultants not just for clients, but also for claims to authority over organizational concepts, leading them to invent new buzz words over and over to impress their clients.

However, the invention of ever-new terms for post-bureaucratic forms of organization cannot conceal the fact that the problems largely remain the same. In Stefan Kühl's critical examination of ostensibly new organizational principles, he therefore refers to the verbal excitement in management literature merely to present fundamental scholarly insights into the ways in which post-bureaucratic organizations function.

The three books will put readers in a position to identify the central organizational principles in the latest iteration of management concepts, and to build a bridge to the problem areas of post-bureaucratic organizations. Those who know the troubles of "adhocracies" or "team-based organizations" will also recognize the basic problems of similarly constructed "agile," "modular," "fractal," or "cellular" organizations.

## Unique selling points

- These books present the first fundamental and comprehensive critique of the new management fashions. They draw on the verbal excitement in management literature, as they elaborate new insights into how post-bureaucratic organizations function.
- For companies, public administrations, hospitals, universities, or the military, these books destroy the hope of being able to find an optimal organizational structure. They explain the undesired side effects and the paradoxical outcomes that management faces as it strives for perfection.
- The books are based on the most advanced theory in organizational science – the sociological systems theory. They are unusual in that they make a conscious attempt to build a bridge between organizational science and organizational practice without intending to fundamentally remove the tension between the two.

## The author

After studying organizational sociology, history of science and social theory at the University of Bielefeld, the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the University of Oxford, and Paris-X-Nanterre, Stefan Kühl became professor of sociology at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. He works as a senior consultant for Metaplan – a consulting firm based in Princeton, Versailles, Hamburg, Shanghai and Singapore – consulting different types of organizations like ministries, companies, public administrations, hospitals and universities.

He is author of several bestsellers in the fields of organizational studies, history of science and management theory. He recently published "Organizations. A Systems Approach" (Gower 2013) and "The Sudoku Effect. Universities in the Vicious Circle of Bureaucracy" (Springer International 2014). His publication on the history of science includes "The Nazi Connection. Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism" (Oxford University Press 2002) and "For the Betterment of the Race. The Rise and Fall of the International Movement for Eugenics and Racial Hygiene" (Palgrave Macmillan 2013). His book "Ordinary Organizations: Why Normal Men Carried Out the Holocaust" (Polity Press 2016) is due to be published.

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