

Preface

After fifteen years, knowledge is back on the political agenda. During the no-nonsense period that is behind us, firms and institutions have learned to focus on the market. Quality has become the subject of continuous attention and focus. Bureaucracies have been dismantled. Lean is in fashion. Now, on the threshold of the turn of a new century, we are becoming aware that inexpensive and rapid delivery of products and services is not sufficient to be able to, at least, maintain our economic position. In countries with an open economic order, it is impossible to put up barriers against the outflow of activities that can be performed in other countries and companies more cheaply and better. Under such circumstances we will have to rely upon our own strengths to deliver products and services which others are unable to deliver at the same time. Thus, the knowledge factor is now the focus of business strategy. Concentration on core competencies ('doing the right things') and a drastic increase in the effectiveness of knowledge work ('doing the right things right') have become priorities on the strategic agenda of the firm. This holds true not only of the trade and business community, but for the public sector as well.

The development and exploitation of the knowledge factor requires investments in the knowledge infrastructure. Without substantial investments in education and public and private R&D, the future of the firm as a knowledge enterprise is no more than an illusion. More important, however, is the way in which knowledge processes are organized. Knowledge processes are not so much concerned with the application of new organizational techniques, but with an essentially different way of organizational thinking. This book is about this new view of the organization. The

firm is regarded in this vision as a knowledge system which faces risky choices: the knowledge enterprise. The starting point of this study is that the success of the knowledge enterprise fully depends on the ability of organizations to innovate. Yet the source of organizational innovations are seldom found in organizational theory. Innovations ensue (Daft & Lewis, 1993) from the organizational experiments continuously carried out by managers in actual practice. Nevertheless, there are also significant tasks for organization scientists, which are concerned with the analysis, integration and transfer of experiences and theoretical underpinning. This is also the division of tasks that has been the basis of this book. The innovative work has been performed by seven Dutch market leaders in industry and the service sector. The authors are responsible for the analysis and synthesis. In so doing, they have tried to fine-tune their analysis to the knowledge stored within the organization sciences.

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