

The Soft Time Constraint

Studies of project extension within an aid agency

Anna Krohwinkel-Karlsson

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Anna Krohwinkel-Karlsson





Address: Hölländargatan 32, P.O. Box 6501, SE-113 83 Stockholm, Sweden.

Telephone: +46 (0)8 736 9500; Fax: +46 (0)8 31 99 27; E-mail: kerstin.wedin@hhs.se

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To be continued... (?)

“Wie immer man sich theoretisch zu dieser Frage stellen mag, die Beendigung einer Analyse ist, meine ich, eine Angelegenheit der Praxis.” [Whatever one’s theoretical attitude to the question may be, the termination of an analysis is, I think, a practical matter.] Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): *Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse* [Analysis terminable and interminable], 1937/1950 [1964], p. 96 [249].



Preface

This doctoral dissertation was written while Anna Krohwinkel-Karlsson was a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of International Business (IIB). The research was generously supported by the Swedish Research Council for Developing Countries (U-landsforskningsrådet) and Stiftelsen Lars Hiertas Minne. This support is gratefully acknowledged.

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Lars Ågren

Acting Director, Institute of International Business
Stockholm School of Economics



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Rucklet, 26 November 2008
Anna Krohwinkel Karlsson

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Acronyms

AFRA	Sida's Africa Department
ASIA	Sida's Asia Department
BITS	Beredningen för Internationellt Tekniskt-ekonomiskt Samarbete [<i>Working committee for international technological cooperation</i>] (-1995)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DESO	Sida's Department for Democracy and Social Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
ILO	International Labor Organization
INEC	Sidas's Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation
KTS	Contract-Financed Technical Assistance
LDC	Least Developed Country
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
NATUR	Sida's Department for Natural Resources and the Environment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Aid
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLUS	Sida's Planning System
PMI	Project Management Institute
RELA	Sida's Department for Latin America
SADEV	Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation
SAREC	Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (-1995), now Sida's Department for Research Cooperation
SEK	Swedish Krona (currency)
SEKA	Sida's Department for Cooperation with NGOs, Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict Management
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority (1965-1995)
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (1995-)
Sida-East	Sida's Department for Central and Eastern Europe

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SiRS	Sida's Rating System
SIYB	Start and Improve Your Business
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Adequate, Realistic, and Timed
SNAO	Swedish National Audit Office
SOU	Statens Offentliga Utredningar [<i>Swedish Public Inquiries</i>]
UN	United Nations
UNIDROIT	International Institute for the Unification of Private Law
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter 1

Time to go? Organizing with exit in mind

How long should one persist with something from which one intends to withdraw? From the perspective of classic economic theory, which supposes that economic actors – individuals and organizations – have explicit preferences according to which they behave, this question is paradoxical: either one finds it worthwhile to be involved (and then continues to stay so until this perception changes); or it is not worthwhile (and then one immediately tries to get out).¹

However, for a wide variety of actors within different societal spheres, the question of how to operate with exit in mind is central and recurrent. It is dealt with within organizations as disparate as construction companies undertaking scheduled work towards completion of physical structures, product developers seeking to take advantage of temporary market opportunities, consultancy firms delivering services based on time-limited contractual assignments, venture capitalists involved in active, but short-term, ownership, universities aiming for their students to graduate within a certain time period, and even the family, where children are encouraged to become self-sufficient within two decades or so.

A common aspect of the described activities is that they aspire to achieve specific objectives within anticipated periods of time: they are

¹ The assumptions of purposive behavior based on expected utility axioms and revised probabilities are commonly traced back to Bayes's theorem (see e.g. Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981 for a review of its applications to decision theory).

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run in the form of *projects*, or *temporary organizations*.² A project is distinguished by having a predetermined date or time-related conditional state when its operations and/or its mission are collectively expected to cease to exist (Packendorff, 1995).

At the same time, the temporary character does not generally apply to the output of the project. On the contrary, the vast majority of projects are undertaken to create some lasting result or effect. A project to erect an edifice will bear tangible evidence for centuries. An industrial development project is intended to generate revenues long after the new product has been launched. An organizational reform project will be expected to establish routines and structures that outlive the consultants' final report. And with a bit of luck, educational and parental upbringing efforts will bear fruit even after children have left school and moved out of the family home. Therefore, project organizing can also be described as aims to reconcile short-term action with long-term impact (cf. PMI, 2004).

1.1 The problem of project redundancy

Notwithstanding these aspirations, few projects produce results that persist independently. Rather, many project-based organizations operate by temporary 'interventions' into the ongoing activities of other actors, with the intent that generated outcomes will be sustained by these other actors beyond completion of the project. Thus, the managerial concerns related to project termination involve not only the questions of 'when and how to close down the project' but, more importantly, 'when and how to make the project redundant'.

For project redundancy to be achieved, two apparently simple conditions must be fulfilled: the project organization must be ready and willing to abdicate further engagement, and the local actor(s) must be ready and willing to engage in maintenance of created results. In projects delivering concrete output, handover usually takes place when the product or facility is 'completed'. In projects with more abstract objectives, such as those that try to initiate a process of development or change, the time by which a project is to be con-

² The concept of the 'temporary organization' is a theoretical development of the more practitioner-oriented notion of the 'project'. In this dissertation, the two terms will be used interchangeably.

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sidered 'done' may be hard to determine in advance, since it depends on a jointly achieved pace of progress (as implicit, for example, in the concept of 'graduation'). In this context, project schedules have been described as key tools not only for specifying steps towards conclusion, but also for communicating a shared agenda for both passing on and taking over (Turner & Simister, 2001).

Nevertheless, the importance attached to time specifications in project management has received much criticism for its failure to deliver on its promises (Morris & Hough, 1987 and followers). It is a frequently expressed concern that, in practice, the creation and transition of project results seem more often than not to occur off-schedule. Commonly, the causes for timing deviations have been sought in 'external' factors related to environmental uncertainty and change during the course of project implementation, or in 'internal' factors related to inherently complex tasks, poor project management or unclear division of responsibilities between involved counterparts (e.g. Pinto & Prescott, 1988).

Enter the continuing organization

This thesis expands on the realization that a dichotomization into what is 'internal' or 'external' to a specific project fails to take into account the fact that most projects are not managed independently, but are embedded within various overarching structures (commonly referred to as *parent* or *umbrella* organizations) (cf. Hobday, 2000; Whitley, 2006). In contrast with the project itself, the project's parent organization is typically characterized by having the aim of continuance: neither the construction company, the product developer, the consultancy firm, the venture capitalist, the university or the family will be expected to cease to exist once buildings, technologies, reforms, shares, graduates or children have been 'spun off'. Rather, these organizations will typically proceed by initiating new temporary endeavors of a similar or related kind to the ones just concluded. Furthermore, parent organizations are often engaged in administering several projects simultaneously: they are so-called *multi-project organizations*.

A multi-project organization is defined by its concurrent and recurrent use of temporary organizational forms for the production of products or services, while at the same time maintaining a more permanent umbrella structure hosting administrative functions (Ga-

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reis, 1989; Payne, 1995). The consideration of the interface between these multiple levels and cycles of activities has been described as being central for advancing a more 'contextualized' analysis of projects and their outcomes (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002; Engwall, 2003a). Accordingly, this thesis argues that a focus on intra-organizational interdependencies is central to understanding the duration outcomes of individual projects. For example, the redistribution of key personnel to a construction project of high urgency may cause delays in lower priority projects. The degree of success in the reception of a new product in the market may require adjustments of the timing of the launch of an updated product version. The process of recruiting and installing a new manager may impact on the pace of renewing consultancy contracts. A change in overall investment strategy may entail a re-weighting of a venture capitalist's portfolio, with little regard to the performance of individual companies. The way in which courses with higher and lighter workloads are scheduled over the academic year may affect the likelihood of students graduating on time. And in many parts of the world, the rank of a child in a group of siblings (considered in combination with the total number of siblings in relation to the overall family budget) may determine the timeframe by which a child must become self-sufficient.

The above-described projects differ widely with respect to their intrinsic resource requirements and expected durations. When contained within a portfolio, however, they must all compete for the resources and commitment of their respective parent organizations (cf. Engwall & Jerbrandt, 2003; Lindkvist, 2004). As the previous examples illustrate, the importance and timing of a project in relation to other activities executed under the same umbrella structure affects how the issue of completion is anticipated. By extension, an organization's internal principles for assigning priorities and distributing resources over time should be expected to have a key impact on activity duration outcomes.

This dissertation is about temporal management within multi-project organizations. Specifically, I examine one example of such an organization: the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (referred to in this volume also as *Sida* or *the Agency*). Sida is a government authority responsible for administering a major part of

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Sweden's development aid.³ My studies explore completion timing outcomes within this organization's project portfolio. In particular, I focus on patterns of continued commitment beyond initial schedules – so-called project *extensions* – and on how such decisions are justified and valued within the Agency. Using the case of Sida, I look to answer the broader research question: *Why do organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end?*

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The element of the 'organization' as an active agent in the above question is central: it was selected to reflect my interest in how the outcomes of individual projects are affected by the structures and processes of a continuing umbrella organization. As I will argue throughout this dissertation, this is a theoretically under-researched issue. Within the context of development cooperation, it is also a controversial one: not only is the aim for project redundancy a key ideological component of aid provision, but the question of who can legitimately influence project plans and outcomes is also highly topical. The following section of this introduction will sketch an historical background as to why this is so, before outlining the focus, delimitations and disposition of the thesis.

1.2 An illustration from development aid

For some time, the question of how an aid intervention should be designed to make itself redundant has been a central issue in debates about the content and organization of international development cooperation. However, when the multilateral and bilateral aid agencies were founded in the decades after World War II, the dominant perception was that aid would automatically become a temporary phenomenon. Just as a devastated Europe was rebuilt with the help of the Marshall Plan, so the countries newly emerging from colonialism

³ When the organization was founded in 1965, its acronym was *SIDA* (Swedish International Development Authority). The current *Sida* (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) was formed in 1995 through a merger of *SIDA* and four smaller agencies. When making reference to Agency documents, this dissertation uses large or small capitalization to indicate the relevant iteration of the organization under which the material was published.

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would be supported by the industrialized world to bring about self-sustaining development. Massive transfers of capital and technical assistance would boost economic growth and eventually make aid obsolete (see e.g. Chenery & Strout, 1966).⁴ Although this assumption appeared to be confirmed in a few exceptional cases, most experiences challenged this linear view of development. Most notably, latecomers amongst independent nations in Sub-Saharan Africa seemingly never 'took off', but were instead sliding into stagnation with disturbing frequency.

One consequence of these developments was that aid turned into a substantial, permanent industry, with the associated institutionalization of organizations, professionals, language, and resource flows. Another consequence was that the idealism and optimism that characterized development work in the post-war period through to the 1970s shifted increasingly towards realism and pessimism. Notions like 'aid dependency' and 'aid fatigue' worked their way into debates, depicting various negative manifestations of the donor-recipient relationship (Cassen *et al.*, 1986; Hydén, 1986; Riddell, 1996; Lensink & White, 1999). At the operational level, aggregate reviews of project performance showed that schedule overruns were close to becoming standard (World Bank, 1985). In addition, there was ample evidence of aid projects that had drifted into becoming ostensibly permanent activities (e.g. Karlström, 1991; Hedlund, 1994). In parallel with these accounts, the concept of *sustainability* was formulated as a key criterion for the achievement of effective aid (OECD, 1989).

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Sustainability in the aid context relates to the extent to which the effects of a particular development effort are likely to be maintained after donor support has been withdrawn (cf. e.g. Catterson & Lindahl, 1999). As Sida's mission statement from 1997 declares:

Sida's task is to create the conditions for sustainable development, and thus make development assistance superfluous in the long run (Sida, 1997, p. 9).

⁴ Influential representatives of such 'gap-filling' approaches were the economic growth models of Rosenstein-Rodan, Harrod-Domar and Rostow (see e.g. Blomqvist & Lundahl, 1992).

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To practitioners and policy-makers within development cooperation, the sustainability concept has become closely linked to the question of how to 'succeed' with an intervention (cf. Ostrom *et al.*, 2002, pp. 7-9). Although the terminology is quite recent, the aspiration for durable changes is not a new one. However, as the below review will show, the roles and approaches adopted by donor agencies in creating such changes have varied over time, influenced by their own experiences as well as by broader societal trends and public sector reforms.⁵

Retrospect

In the heydays of state planning of the 1960s and 70s, a primary emphasis in the selection and scope of projects eligible for aid was on the developing countries' own priorities: an application for funding was seen as an indication of the target government's intention to make the promoted project a success, and a lasting one at that. Thus, the principle of 'recipient orientation' [Swedish: *mottagarcentrering*] was to guide Swedish support, as illustrated by this passage from Sida's first handbook of working methods:

An important part of goal assessment [during project preparations] is the confirmation by authorities within the recipient country ministries that Sida has understood the formulation and meaning of the main goal. Such a discussion should be initiated as early as possible during the preparation stage (SIDA, 1972, p. 41, my translation).

Motivated by theories emphasizing the accumulation of physical capital as the key to economic growth, a typical aid project consisted of an ambitious investment in infrastructure. While the aim of meeting the developing countries' own demands in these respects seemed promising, the conditions faced by the projects were often found to be difficult. Most importantly, donors were troubled by the lack of local capacity to handle the projects. A subsequent version of Sida's methods handbook suggested two different ways of handling this problem:

[In the case of low absorptive capacity] a donor can act in two principally different ways. Either one tries to organize the projects to make them as independent as possible from the recipient country administration. This

⁵ In addition to material from Sida's archives, the review has borrowed from Stokke, 1978; Frühling, 1986; Hveem & McNeill, 1994; Edgren, 2000; and Odén, 2006.

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mode of managing development aid can be very efficient with regard to payment rates and the requirement to keep the time plan. However, it may also mean that the project turns into an enclave, which cannot survive without aid [...] Alternatively, the donor can seek to compensate the shortages in the absorptive capacity of the developing country administration by adopting its own organization [...] The more flexible the donor, the greater the possibilities for increasing the absorptive capacity (SIDA, 1985, p. 58, my translation).

Although the disadvantages of a 'by-pass' organization were clearly recognized at the time, this approach became typical of the first decades of development aid. Projects often created their own institutional structures, in which management and implementation was commonly handled by foreign 'experts' (including donor agency personnel). Given that interventions were designed in this way, the question of how to provide aid in accordance with recipients' preferences was, in practice, replaced by the question of how to deal with the transition of more-or-less completed activities to the local beneficiaries. However, numerous examples of facilities that could not be maintained at a working level after donors had withdrawn came to trigger discussions concerning the technical suitability of projects. The following extract from an internal SIDA review illustrates the nature of the concern:

[Until the beginning of the 1970s] heavy equipment was brought into the villages, deep wells were drilled, diesel motors installed and water systems built [...] Often, these were large, expensive and technically advanced constructions which soon proved hard for the recipient countries to operate and maintain [...] In many cases, the systems had been built without participation of the local communities. As a result, many pumps fell into disuse and were left to corrode [...] In the future, Sida will only support constructions that can be operated and maintained by the users. Development assistance shall be employed to ensure that the user group is organized and participates in decision-making, implementation, operations and maintenance (SIDA, 1987, p. 37, my translation).

Throughout the 1980s, it became commonly agreed within the donor community that development aid had often failed to meet its objectives. The massive transfer of resources had contributed to a large debt burden in recipient countries, which damaged the preconditions for economic growth and development. The dimension of sustainability that came into focus in the ensuing introduction of 'structural adjustment programs' was 'commitment', or 'political will' in the more

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serious cases. Macro-economic analyses were increasingly used to design aid strategies at the country level. Towards the end of the decade, however, the development model based on a strong governmental apparatus and centralized decision-making was gradually abandoned. Abuse of power, inefficiency and faulty investments were considered to have caused negative results. More generally, the view that economic growth and technological innovation did not necessarily equate with progress began to dominate, prompting debate on the conditions for pro-poor growth, societal change and environmentally sustainable development (WCED, 1987). New procedures were elaborated for increasing popular participation and local capacity-building, as illustrated in the above passage from SIDA's 1987 review.

At the same time, the perception grew among donors that institution building and transfer of knowledge were important components to enable the recipient countries to exercise effective development policies themselves. Foreign aid can only be 'help to self-help' (a popular slogan in development circles). In Sida's case, the 'Role Inquiry' [Swedish: *Rollutredningen*] appears to have been a watershed. The concluding document of the inquiry, presented in 1989, strongly emphasized greater responsibility of recipient country actors as a precondition for long-term effectiveness and sustainability:

As regards the allocation of roles between Sida and the recipient country, one finds that Sida has increasingly tended to assume a large share of responsibility for the implementation of assistance in certain countries. There are natural explanations for this, but it also means that Sida has sometimes taken upon itself a role which we have difficulty in coping with, because it is often found that this assumption of responsibility does not improve the results of development assistance. It may seem irresponsible to transfer a larger share of responsibility to the recipient country when we know that the recipient country is inefficient in a number of respects. The answer is that we have no alternative if we want to achieve lasting development effects. Sida cannot and should not take upon itself the prime responsibility for development activities in a recipient country (SIDA, 1989, p. 6, cited in Molund, 2000).

The views expressed in the report were incorporated in Sida's methods handbook of 1990. It stated that Swedish support should, as far as possible, be channeled through the developing countries' regular administrations, and, as much as possible, make use of local resources. At the same time, Sida's role as a financier was clarified. According to the handbook:

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The recipient country is always responsible for its own development efforts. Sida's main task is to assess and monitor development assistance projects and programmes and to plan and guide the Swedish contribution to them. Sida does not carry out development assistance projects, but contributes to them with a variety of resources (SIDA, 1990, p. 10, my translation).

Current concerns

Beginning in the mid-1990s and continuing to the present, the focus has moved to *ownership* by recipient country institutions as a primary prerequisite for better aid performance. In the aid context, the term ownership is normally used to refer to the exercise of command over development activities – 'being in the driver's seat'. This definition goes further than ownership in the legal sense. As illustrated by the following extract from the updated operations manual *Sida at Work*, the understanding of ownership includes elements of participation and commitment, as well as a confidence in local capabilities for action:

In order to be able to say that a partner in co-operation is the owner of a project, the partner must have full rights to use the resources provided within the framework laid down in the project agreement. But this is not enough. The co-operation partner must also be prepared to assume full responsibility, participate actively in the work, and be ready to implement the project on its own initiative. Complete ownership can also require that political bodies, such as parliament, the government, local communities as well as the target group support the project and participate in the decision-making processes (Sida, 1998, p. 17).

Parallel with this move to ownership has been the recognition that the conditions for development vary widely, both across and within countries, and the development sector has endeavored to increasingly take this variation into account in the design of aid activities. At the operational level, the understanding of poverty as "complex, context-specific, relative and dynamic" (Sida, 2002, p. 26) has created a preference for broader and more flexible forms of support, by which *à priori* 'earmarking' of funds should ideally be abandoned in favor of incremental steps of experimentation and learning.⁶ Yet, as in previ-

⁶ As Valdellin and Schill (1997) noted, complexity considerations involve a bias towards long-term engagement for the production of sustainable results. This partly explains why time limits have only been occasionally applied to entire countries or sectors.

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ous periods, the widespread practical adoption of such process-oriented approaches has been undermined by demands to ensure that disbursed funds are put to good use.⁷ As a more recent edition of *Sida at Work* makes clear:

The respect of the co-operation partner's ownership [...] does not exclude Sida from requesting legitimate audits and controls, even if they contradict the owner's wish to exercise control (Sida, 2003a, p. 41).

Similarly, in a commentary to a major evaluation, Sida's management stresses that:

[...] special efforts [on behalf of the Agency] might be needed in order to organise and co-ordinate the resources necessary for planning, implementing and follow-up (Sida, 2003b, p. 2).

These latter two passages are representative of an increasing emphasis on internal effectiveness and accountability within aid agencies that has led to the adoption of a wide array of new administrative tools for the measurement of outcomes and impacts. The introduction of quantifiable and time-bound performance indicators, as well as baseline analyses and results assessment built on 'logframe' structures, are just some of the recent developments within Sida (Schmidt, 2004). Many of these tools require a detailed specification of 'intervention logics' from the beginning of the planning process, a practice that seems hard to combine with a movement towards 'true' process- and context-orientation (cf. Naudet's (2000) critical paraphrasing of donor activities as "designing problems to fit the solutions").

1.3 Who sets the schedule?

As the above quotes illustrate, the history of development cooperation has demonstrated considerable variation in the sectors and counterparts targeted, ranging from concrete, direct interventions into the

⁷ Molund (2000) mentions an evaluation of Dutch development assistance to Tanzania, which argues that Dutch support has in fact become increasingly donor-controlled over the years. The cause of this development is said to be demands from national politicians and the public that development assistance should deliver 'value for money' (Netherlands Development Cooperation, 1994, cited in Molund, 2000).

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livelihoods of poor people, to less specific efforts of capacity-building at the governmental level. It can be argued, however, that throughout these changes, the project model has retained its stronghold as a “cog-wheel in the development process” (Forss, 1985, p. 5).

This assertion is confirmed when examining the distribution of Sida’s various forms of support: In 2007, 70 per cent of the Agency’s core activities (equaling disbursements of over SEK 7 billion) were explicitly labeled as ‘projects’. These projects were implemented across five continents and spread across sectors as diverse as infrastructure and democratic governance (cf. data displays in *chapter three*). Moreover, the chief handbooks guiding the work of Sida staff are heavily based on conventional project management tools such as the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), which should be universally applied (see e.g. Sida, 2005a; 2005b). While the main texts usually include reservations about flexibility, an internal policy for the application of LFA in the project cycle speaks for itself:

For simplicity, the word *project* is used here to signify every kind of activity for which a country or organization requires support, and where the form of cooperation implies that Sida follows up on goals, results and costs (Sida, 1996, p. 2, my translation).

Thus, a foundational assumption for the arguments put forward in this thesis is that temporary organizing is a central component of the ongoing operations within a donor agency. I argue that this rationale is primarily an ideological one, reinforced by international trends towards a ‘rationalization’ of public management (Hood, 1995; Christensen & Laegreid, 2002. See also Sundström, 2003 and SOU 2007:75 for broad reviews of the Swedish context). The project model fits well with donors justifying their existence by the transitory character of interventions; at the same time, it is a convenient tool for responding to growing demands for demonstration of realized results (cf. Rottenburg, 2002).⁸

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⁸ It has been suggested that accountability concerns are more serious within development aid than within other public sectors. A primary reason is the ‘broken information feedback loop’ that occurs between geographically and politically distant aid beneficiaries – which are those that can directly observe performance – and taxpayers – who are, by extension, those that can modulate financing (Martens *et al.*, 2002).

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While the emphasis on designing aid as a set of temporary activities has remained unchanged, it is important to note the shift in responsibilities for setting schedules and deadlines that has occurred over the last few decades. In particular, the idea of 'smooth transitions' as a prerequisite for project redundancy builds on a diminution of the influence of donor agencies over project implementation. As the above historical review shows, this trend has proceeded in two steps, whereby agencies first resigned from assuming practical executive positions, and more recently have also sought to avoid acting on their initiative in intervention proposals.⁹ As a result of these two organizational reforms, Sida's current role is portrayed similarly as that of an *investment manager*, in that its core activities consist of planning, monitoring and evaluating Swedish financial contributions into the development-oriented activities of other actors (Sida, 2005a).

Sida's aim of being removed from implementation does not imply that the Agency is no longer engaging in what can be described as 'project management/administration'.¹⁰ On the contrary, contracting out is common sense in most other project-based organizations, and the core of project management theory is often described precisely in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation principles (Packendorff, 1995). What it does imply, however, is that these activities are to be undertaken only as responses to external initiatives. For example, when it comes to project scheduling, it is supposed that the partnering organization should set its own deadlines by which implementation and reporting will proceed.¹¹ And while it is acknowledged that

⁹ Concurrently, there has been a preference for relabeling donor activities as 'assistance' and 'cooperation' rather than 'aid'. For simplicity and convenience, the term 'aid project' will be used throughout this thesis.

¹⁰ The terms 'management' and 'administration' have been used interchangeably in the project literature. In the American context, 'administration' is commonly associated with activities within the public sector, but the terminology is not unambiguous (cf. 'business administration'; 'public management'). Nevertheless, I label Sida's activities as 'project administration', since this expression underlines the distinction from on-the-ground implementation.

¹¹ To emphasize this distribution of responsibilities, Sida makes a semantic distinction between 'programs/projects' and 'contributions', where the former is defined as a development effort carried out by a cooperation partner, and the latter is Sida's financial support provided to this endeavor. In contrast, in this thesis the project concept is used to describe Sida's internal resource conversion process in terms of preparations, monitoring and evaluation of Swedish interventions. (Moreover, as the sustainability discussion suggests, development project initiation and imple-

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reschedulings might be inevitable – especially in the larger and more complex projects – any changes are to be triggered by counterpart needs and requests not to erode their sense of ownership (e.g. Sida, 2005a; 2005b).¹²

The view that timing changes are prone to frequent occurrence, but that the causes of such changes are only in exceptional cases to be found inside Sida, was recently confirmed by an anonymous survey among the Agency's personnel. 34 staff members (a majority of whom in managerial positions) were asked to rate different types of deviation from project plans that, according to common guidelines, ought to be taken into account when assessing the performance of aid activities. In this investigation, 82 per cent of the respondents considered '*not keeping to the specified time schedule*' to be a very common or moderately common discrepancy; 74 per cent regarded it as a very serious or moderately serious one; and a similar majority believed that Sida made very large or moderate attempts to avoid this problem. Meanwhile, 77 per cent thought that Sida had only little or moderate *opportunities* to avoid this discrepancy. Reschedulings were considered to be the most frequent type of deviation from project plans (more so than meeting qualitative, quantitative and budgetary targets), but also the type of deviation that Sida could do the least about (Krohwinkel-Karlsson, 2008, partly reproduced in appendix A:11).

As will be explained in detail in the following chapter, the reported response pattern resembles accounts within the mainstream project management perspective, in which the causes for deviations have often been sought in the inherent complexities of a project assignment, or in the complexities imposed by the external environment in which a project is implemented. Literature with a less strong rationality assumption has complemented this picture by emphasizing the inherent limitations and biases of individual project managers in acting according to plans (e.g. Staw & Ross, 1987).¹³ However, individual

mentation has often been heavily reliant on donor involvement, blurring the distinction between the two parties' undertakings.)

¹² Cf. also the highly critical comments of the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) concerning one particular extension decision, which seemed to have been made "just because it suited the staffing situation within the Agency" (RiR, 2004, p. 177).

¹³ The frequently cited work of Catterson and Lindahl (1999) takes this approach to the study of Swedish aid to Tanzania. According to the authors, Sida officers expressed an excessively strong commitment to 'their own' projects and a concomi-

project outcomes have not been systematically associated with the intra-organizational structures and processes of a continuing parent organization. As stated earlier in this introduction, this dissertation aims to address this knowledge gap.

1.4 Mixed agendas: On project cycles in their organizational context

In their strong focus on assuring the 'accurate' handling of various steps in the project cycle, Sida's administration procedures can give the impression that projects are implemented one at a time, discretely from each other. Curiously, the impact of intra-agency considerations on project planning outcomes is a well-recognized reality when discussed in a broader organizational context, for example in relation to staffing concerns. Notably, Sida has, over the last decade, been tasked with managing a constantly growing allotment of funds by a close to stable administrative budget. To meet this challenge, the Agency has attempted to reduce the number of funding agreements, and its principal strategy for reaching this goal has been to increase the sizes and durations of new projects (see Sida, 1997 and onwards).

As noted in a recent review of the Agency's internal effectiveness, an equally important condition for the concentration approach to be successful is that ongoing projects are completed according to plan (Mapsec, 2007, p. 23). However, scattered observations indicate that this requirement is problematic for the Agency to fulfill. In a situation of perceived work overload, it can appear ineffective to conclude 'smoothly running' projects implemented by well-known partners (*ibid.*). In a more general analysis, Ostrom *et al.* (2002) identified a propensity among Sida staff to renew ongoing projects, rather than to initiate long processes to prepare entirely new ones. Moreover, such tendencies seemed to be stronger at the end of the calendar year, influenced by the cyclical properties of the budgetary process. The Swedish National Audit Office observed a converse relationship in several cases in which insecurity about future resource allocations at the end of a five-year country strategy period have led to the signing

tant lack of detachment. In the case of consultants and experts, economic self-interest was also judged an important reason for not abandoning control.

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of short-term agreements with a view towards extending these in the following period (RiR, 2004).

As these examples indicate, project investments do not occur in isolation, and are not exclusively based on case-specific considerations. Rather, they are bound within a wider organizational framework involving multiple layers of planning processes, which span the constitutional-, the policy-making-, and the operational levels. In Sida's case, these procedures are designed to handle another fundamental type of resource constraint: that of a restricted Swedish aid budget in relation to the immense amount of development needs that call for fulfillment (cf. Krohwinkel-Karlsson & Sjögren, 2008).¹⁴ Since there are no official restrictions on the Agency's scope of operations other than an internationally agreed list of countries eligible for foreign aid,¹⁵ most of Sida's administrative procedures involve aspects of trade-off between alternative activities across the portfolio and over time. Thus, even projects that appear to be separate and independent are linked by their competition for strategic commitment within the organization. As the above examples show, this also implies that commitments must be adjusted to the cycles of strategy-making, which often have different timing considerations from those of the individual projects. In sum, it seems natural to expect that duration outcomes should vary across Sida's portfolio for reasons that lie outside the scope of any single project. Moreover, the importance and timing of projects in relation to other ongoing activities is likely to influence how prolongation decisions are justified and valued within the Agency. My aim is to increase the understanding of how intra-organizational mechanisms contribute to these quantitative, as well as quantitative, aspects of project extension.

¹⁴ The challenge of dealing with 'unsolvable problems' is not unique to development aid. Already in the mid-1960s, Baumol and Bowen (1965) posited that the goal structure of public organizations tends to contribute to an unlimited supply of financial 'holes' to be filled. That 'there is always another investment to be made' is also a widespread notion among business firms.

¹⁵ The *DAC List of Aid Recipients*, which has traditionally divided countries into 'Developing Countries and Territories' eligible for 'Official Development Assistance', and 'Countries and Territories in Transition' qualifying for 'Official Aid'. Since 2006, however, the categories have been merged (see appendix A:1 for the most recent version of the list. A history is available at www.oecd.org/dac).

1.5 Key definitions and delimitations

This dissertation is based on empirical studies of project administration within one particular multi-project organization, Sida. Although Sida's mandate is in many ways unique among organizations in Sweden, the challenges it faces in achieving internal coordination across functions and over time are similar to those faced by any other multi-project organization. Likewise, the question of how to balance administrative and operational allocations is a general concern of most organizations (cf. Cyert & March, 1963/1992). Thus, I contend that conclusions concerning the impact of intra-organizational mechanisms on patterns of project extension drawn from the case of Sida will also be relevant to the large and growing number of other organizations that operate by projects.

Within the donor agency context, the *project* as a unit of analysis is understood in terms of an aid funding agreement that is prepared, monitored and evaluated according to conventional project management logic and by the application of associated tools and techniques. In addition, all of the studied projects fall under the regular budget procedures and overarching long-term strategies for bilateral development cooperation. This means that activities such as humanitarian aid, grants to Swedish non-governmental organizations, and research funding are not covered (an overview of Sida's different areas of operation is contained in *chapter three*).

In accounting for *extension*, I refer to Sida's registration of a postponed end of agreement date. As mentioned above in the discussion about the Agency's current role, this implies that I will not be concerned with project implementation in its traditional sense: I will not consider what is 'actually' going on in projects at the field level, including whether or not activities are 'in fact' continued. Rather, I will concentrate on Sida's documentation of these developments, and on how such information is acted upon by the Agency in terms of formalized agreement reschedulings. Here again, it must be emphasized that my primary focus in studying empirical instances of extension is on the *temporal* dimension of the phenomenon (in contrast, thus, with the more extensively analyzed breaching of budget constraints following Kornai's (1986) conceptualization). The importance of the cost and quality dimensions for explaining the observed timing patterns is discussed in *chapters eight* and *nine*.

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My focus on *intra-organizational* activities also implies that I will not undertake an evaluation of project results. I do not intend to judge whether stated reasons for extension are 'correct', or to analyze the consequences for beneficiaries of donor-initiated changes to plans. Nor do I seek to determine whether extended projects are, in general, either more or less successful than those that are completed by their original deadlines. I will, however, look in detail at how Sida justifies its extension decisions, and how deviations from schedules are reflected in the Agency's own project performance assessments.

In endeavoring to provide a convincing research account, the internal approach is necessarily complex: that there are gaps between how an organization presents itself and how it operates is a widely acknowledged methodological challenge (e.g. Brunsson, 1989). To mitigate the potential problems of such 'loose couplings' within Sida, three different data sources, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative information, are combined to explore patterns of extension lengths, motives and valuations. Thus, both formal and informal representations of the extension phenomenon are analyzed in reaching the results of this thesis (on the issue of integration across the various steps of the research process, see *chapter four*).

Finally, it should be noted that this is not a longitudinal study. Except for the introductory overview presented in this chapter, the dissertation does not intend to examine tendencies in aid project administration over time. Notwithstanding this, it is noteworthy that the mentioned trend towards an increasing Swedish aid budget (and consequently, larger projects) was consistent throughout the period 1998-2006, the years covered by the three empirical studies within this thesis. Nor were there any significant overarching changes in the geographical and sectoral composition of Sweden's bilateral aid program during this period. Thus, recent policy directives towards fewer areas of cooperation with the associated (donor-initiated) exits from non-prioritized countries and sectors (cf. Ekengren & Lindahl, 2006) fall outside the scope of this account. However, a discussion about how such developments can be interpreted in the light of my conclusions will wrap up this volume in its final chapter.

1.6 Outline of the dissertation

This thesis is organized as follows:

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Chapter two reviews how extant organization theory has approached the issue of (re)scheduling. I position my work in relation to earlier studies of temporary organizing, and in relation to more general research on time in organizations. A basic argument appearing in both areas of literature is that dependencies among coexisting projects, as well as between individual projects and more permanent organizational structures and processes, are likely to affect duration outcomes. Dependencies are discussed in light of the need to coordinate organizational activities along two fundamental dimensions: a hierarchical dimension involving the *prioritization* between activities in terms of strategic commitment; and a temporal dimension involving the *synchronization* of activity cycles. Drawing on this dual conceptualization, I propose to explore variations in the propensity for projects to be extended, variations in how extension decisions are justified, and variations in the normative connotations of extension within the multi-project context.

Chapter three provides a background to the structures and processes of the organization under study, Sida. Particular foci are on the different levels at which project priorities are determined, and on the cyclical dimensions of priority-setting activities. Another emphasis is on the Agency's working methods relating to (multi-)project administration. Hence, this chapter offers a basis for the subsequent operationalization of the concepts of prioritization and synchronization, and introduces the rationale behind my choice of empirical material (to be further explicated in next chapter).

Chapter four discusses my research strategy, and describes the steps involved in crafting the three empirical studies (of extension lengths, motives and valuations, respectively) that comprise the empirical core of this dissertation. I comment on my methodological foundations, delineate the overall research design, and explain how key units of analysis, events and outcomes were identified. Latter sections reflect on the data collection process and investigation methods applied. I specifically dwell on issues of integration and standards of quality in research that attempts to address a topic from different analytical dimensions, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

Chapter five presents the results of my mapping of project extension lengths. Building on the theoretical arguments and their operationalization (as previously discussed), I define various indicators of a project's priority status in relation to Sida's overall portfolio of activi-

ties. Using a data set of 3632 projects under implementation between 1998 and 2005, I then assess the relationship between project characteristics and completion timing. In addition to specifying the direction of significant correlations, this chapter contributes to identifying 'salient' measures of project priority, amenable to further investigation in subsequent studies.

Chapter six contains the outcome of my readings of archival material on specific extension decisions. 107 extension events are classified according to the motives and purposes expressed in available documentation. Drawing on earlier arguments, two grouping variables of central interest are (i) the functional locus of the extension, and (ii) the extension purpose. I then investigate whether projects extended on these different bases can be distinguished in terms of their configuration of salient priority status indicators (as identified in the previous empirical study). By combining information on decision motives and project characteristics, this chapter provides empirical support for a typology of project extension, which is further explored in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter seven provides the findings from my study regarding how timing outcomes are treated in project performance assessments. Through a content analysis of 26 rating documents including both rating scores and written comments, I seek to examine how different types of deviation from plan are valued within Sida. Building on the findings of the preceding chapter, a particular focus is on the normative connotations of extensions that are generated by intra-agency reasons.

Chapter eight brings together the results from the three complementary empirical studies, and generalizes the findings beyond the setting of development cooperation. I draw on the concepts of prioritization and synchronization to provide an integrated account of the observed patterns of extension lengths, motives and valuations. My studies suggest that project extensions can be used to adjust the balance between an organization's administrative and operational budgets, as well as to address periodicities in its overarching frameworks for strategic planning. I touch upon the implications of these results for understanding how an organization's allocations of additional resources – in terms of both funding and administrative effort – are interlinked with its rescheduling decisions. The conclusions are discussed in the relation to previous research on project timing outcomes.

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Chapter nine discusses the circumstances under which the thesis's conclusions are generalizable, and expands the analysis with an argument about the alternative ways in which an organization can choose to balance the dimensions of time, cost and quality in order to generate value. I propose a theoretical reconsideration of the linkages between productivity tradeoffs, priority systems and timing outcomes within multi-project organizations, and discuss the importance of this development for temporal management in practice.

Chapter ten concludes the dissertation with a discussion of how current and anticipated developments within Swedish development cooperation can be interpreted in the light of my conclusions, and touches on the implications for aid agency activities in the future.



Chapter 2

About time: Theoretical views on activity duration

Much of organization theory can be said to be preoccupied with two fundamental issues: *What* do organizations do, and *when* do they do it? The first question relates to the configuration of organizational activities across functions, and has received vast treatment by scholars within several fields (Chandler, 1962 and onwards). The second question relates to the distribution activities over time, and has received less attention. While prescriptions about how to deal with temporal issues such as timing, pace, sequencing and duration are abundant, experiences within organizations regarding time are less well explored (Ancona & Chong, 1996; Ancona *et al.*, 2001b; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). Rather, most literature has focused on incorporating temporal variables as more-or-less objective 'inputs' to, or 'outputs' of, other phenomena of interest. For example, the duration of organizational activities has variously been conceptualized as a consequence of performance, or as an organizational design variable. However, the factors and processes that contribute to how organizations justify and value time structures have seldom been the subject of inquiry.

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical foundation for a multi-dimensional study of one specific temporal concern: the continuation of activities beyond an anticipated end date. As outlined in the introduction, this theoretical focus emerged out of my interest in the problem of *project redundancy*, that is, how organizations can achieve

lasting results through transitory interventions. This topic required consideration of extant answers to the fundamental question: *How long should an organization stay involved in an activity?*, before moving on to the core research question to be addressed in this dissertation: *Why do organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end?*

In my review of how activity duration has thus far been explained, I begin by contrasting perspectives that are based on an assumption of activity continuance, and those that focus on time-limited organizing (commonly *projects*). I then discuss how the latter studies have approached the issue of (re)scheduling. Once these foundations have been established, I will argue the need for broadening the analysis beyond single activities when attempting to understand duration extension. In particular, I position my study in relation to earlier empirical accounts of project organizing within permanent organizations, which have highlighted the dependencies created between a portfolio of temporary endeavors and more stable organizational structures and processes. I then move to propose an expansion of current knowledge by introducing ideas from more general theorizing on time, timing and temporal adjustment in organizations. In particular, I draw on a body of literature that has emphasized the division of temporal research into multiple dimensions such as ‘conceptions of time’, ‘mapping activities to time’ and ‘actors relating to timing outcomes’ (Ancona *et al.*, 2001b). I argue that this theoretical perspective provides conceptual tools for a more nuanced investigation of the lengths, motives and valuations of project extensions when understood as events situated within the context of a continuing parent organization.

2.1 Traditional perspectives: Duration as a consequence

What determines the duration of an organizational activity? In the wake of the Schumpeterian thesis of ‘creative destruction’ (Schumpeter, 1942), a large body of research within economics and business studies has taken an interest in explaining when activities start and stop. Activity duration – conceptualized as the time span between entry and exit – has been a recurrent topic within such diverse theoretical perspectives as population ecology (e.g. Hannan & Freeman, 1977; 1989), industrial organization (e.g. Ghemawat & Nalebuff,

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1985; Coyne & Wright, 1986; Siegfried & Evans, 1994), and strategic management (e.g. Cameron *et al.*, 1988; Hambrick & D'Aveni, 1988; Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989; Burgelman, 1994). Researchers within these streams have studied duration and its determinants at various levels of aggregation, spanning organizational populations, national markets and industry sectors, organizational sub-units, and individual members of an organization. They variously attribute withdrawal to 'externally'- or 'internally'-generated circumstances, and pay different levels of attention to incentives for and impediments to exit. They also diverge in their accounts of managerial influence and intentionality in organizational exit decisions.

Despite these considerable differences, 'traditional' approaches to duration share a commonality in their generalization of exit as a negative phenomenon. While many observers have argued the potential for positive effects of organizational replacement at more aggregated analytical levels (discussing corporate-, sectoral- or societal-level outcomes), withdrawal from individual activities has often been taken as an indicator of poor performance. Accordingly, exit has been associated with an inability to attract the scarce resources needed for activity continuation. This has variously been explained by weak organizational legitimacy at the population level (Hannan & Freeman, 1988; Delacroix *et al.*, 1989; Petersen & Koput, 1991), supply-and/or demand-side changes in market structure (Lippman & Rumelt, 1982; Frank, 1988; Jovanovich & Lach, 1989), or low strategic priority in relation to the organization's 'core' activities (Duhaime & Grant, 1984; Hamilton & Chow, 1993. Cf. also Drucker's (1999) notion of 'organized abandonment').

Research on exit by business firms has tended to focus on absolute performance indicators such as outright losses, while analyses of not-for-profit organizations have emphasized relative measures, that is, the existence of alternatives producing a higher level of utility (e.g. Twombly, 2003). The latter also applies to studies that conceptualize exit as transfer of ownership ('divestment') rather than as definite closure. In either case, persistence has been taken as a chief measure of managerial efficiency, and withdrawal has frequently been interpreted as failure.¹⁶

¹⁶ As Casson (1986) pointed out, the association of exit with failure is empirically founded. In contrast, economic theory does not support a direct relationship be-

Beyond the assumption of going concern

The understanding of activity duration as consequential upon performance rests on the assumption that organizations are *going concerns*, that is, established with an expectation of their activities continuing for an indefinite period of time.¹⁷ According to this logic, exit events are undesired interruptions to a constant and persisting flow of resources (cf. Paterson's (1988) discussion of Chandler, 1962). In contrast, if the assumption of a preference for sustained activities is relaxed, this opens up the possibility of systematic consideration of cases where exit may be not only a voluntary, but even a desired, course of action. Recent theorizing in relation to time-limited organizations and temporary organizing offers a theoretical frame for such analysis (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995 and others cited below).

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A comment on the various streams of project-oriented research is warranted. By the notion of *mainstream project management* I will particularly refer to the prescriptions related to skills, tools and techniques that are offered to managers through the vast number of practitioner-oriented manuals. A cornerstone of this body of reference material is *The Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMI, 2004. Cf. also Hodgson and Cicmil's (2006) discussion of the impact of this particular text). This literature can be contrasted with academic studies by organization theorists, which have conceptualized projects as *temporary organizations*, and have aimed to move beyond the functional and instrumentalist understandings of projects by emphasizing "behavioral aspects rather than techniques" (Lundin & Söderholm 1995, p. 437, following Cyert & March, 1963/1992). Notably, a number of themes vital for this study have emerged from what has become known as the 'Scandinavian School' of project studies (e.g. Engwall, 1995; Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Packendorff,

tween production efficiency and the decision about whether to persist or withdraw. Rather, these choices are seen as expressions of the time preferences of managers.

¹⁷ Lelebici (2000) sees this assumption as rooted in a general disregard for the temporal nature of social patterns. Social sciences, including organization studies, have tended to consider "all that is real as necessary, all that exists as inevitable, and thus the present mode of production as eternal" (Braverman, 1974, p. 16, cited in Lelebici, 2000, p. 150).

1995; and the edited volume of Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002).¹⁸

2.2 The project perspective: Duration as a design variable

The expansion of activities labeled as projects in a variety of settings has spurred a critique of perspectives that view organizations as permanent establishments that will endure as long as they are generating value. In contrast, projects have been conceptualized as organized activities to perform specific tasks within a predefined period of time (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Packendorff, 1995; Wikström, 2000). The project notion is general enough to encompass large inter-organizational ventures as well as temporary activities inside organizations, various kinds of time-limited investment, and even short-term work contracts (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002).¹⁹ A common characteristic of these different undertakings is that they are managed towards completion, that is, with the expectation of coming to an end once the objectives have been fulfilled. This of course does not mean that projects are necessarily short. As clarified by Grabher (2001), projects are defined by their anticipated temporal limitation rather than by their actual length. In other words, the mainstream strand of the project management literature has approached activity duration as an organizational design variable that can (and should) be subject to strategic planning and management (cf. Engwall, 1995; Ekstedt *et al.*, 1999).

¹⁸ There is also an even more fundamentally 'critical' branch of project studies, which focuses on the power structures created by project organizing (cf. the edited volume of Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006). This theoretical account has been less influential for the present thesis.

¹⁹ Some authors have gone as far as arguing that since the gatherers started hunting, the most significant pursuits of humankind can be regarded as projects. Some commonly mentioned historical examples include Columbus's exploration voyages, the campaigns of Napoleon, and the building of edifices such as the Egyptian Pyramids and the Great Wall of China (cf. Engwall *et al.*, 2003). Others have discussed a 'projectification of society' (a seminal reference is Bennis & Slater, 1968). Without passing judgments about the validity of these assertions, it is evident that the 'project' has become an increasingly popular way of describing activities within a wide variety of societal spheres.

Reasons for imposing a deadline

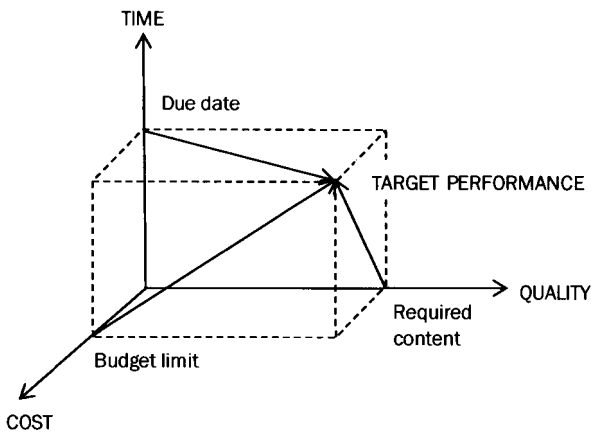
The origins of the project model are often traced back to the US defense industry in the 1950s, in which the time factor was of predominant concern during the Cold War arms races (see e.g. Engwall, 1995 and Morris, 1997 for reviews). More contemporary theories on project-based organizations have raised several other dimensions as being important for the suitability and prevalence of temporary organizing. First, some endeavors have intrinsic features delimiting the period during which they are relevant. Examples include activities with a natural or fixed deadline (such as Christmas, or the date of a major event). Second, some organizations have ideological reasons for defining their undertakings as temporary engagements. Notably, this applies to 'developmental' activities, where lingering involvement is considered to have negative consequences for the creation of durable results. As outlined in the previous chapter, development aid could be considered a prime example of this.

In addition to these fundamental concerns, it has been argued that some tasks have technical properties that make them appropriate for management towards completion. For example, it is often assumed that activities that are to deliver concrete outputs (like buildings or IT systems) are most effectively accomplished in a time-limited setting. In particular, complex tasks which require the coordination and integration of competencies from several actors are thought to benefit from specified time schedules. At the same time, project organizing is common in the execution of experimental tasks (such as the development of a novel product, or renewing organizational work routines). The 'action-orientated' project logic is believed to foster creativity and to allow for high risk-taking, potentially making this form of organizing a good vehicle for innovation and change. Within the context of a permanent organization, "temporary organizations provide a means for achieving 'a free area of activities', that can be handled as independent" (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995, p. 440, paraphrasing Burrell, 1992, p. 177). Thus, intra-organizational reform efforts are often executed in the form of projects, with the expectation that they can overcome the inertia and path dependence associated with a more traditional structure (Ekstedt *et al.*, 1999; Hobday, 2000; Normann, 2001; Sydow *et al.*, 2004. Cf. also Whitley's (2006) typology of 'project-based firms').

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Project management models have been described as tools that attempt both “to approximate factory Taylorization of non-manufacturing activities [and] to rationalize approaches to so-called ‘ill structured problems’” (Perin, 1998, p. 42, paraphrasing Shenhar, 1991; 1992). So, while projects are believed to be more appropriate for change and flexibility than are permanent organizations, at the same time they have a strong association with something planned, well-defined, delimited and controlled. In this respect, temporary organizing also reflects a desire for visibility and auditability (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002).²⁰

Figure 2:1: The triple constraints of project management



Note: Based on Meredith & Mantel, 2003, p. 4.

Although many projects appear ‘fuzzy’ in definition, and proceed in an incremental or exploratory manner (cf. Linderoth, 2002), the mainstream literature holds that a project should be formed around a particular objective, against which completion can be identified. So, while deadlines can follow different rationales and be subject to different degrees of rigidity in different kinds of projects, the temporal

²⁰ For a discussion about how the interest in measuring results against time interacts with the Western conception of time as a scarce resource, see e.g. Arvidsson, 2006. Cf. also Power’s (1997) concept of ‘audit society’, which identifies the increasing use of various accounting tools as a global trend.

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dimension provided by project management prescriptions has a clear normative stance, by which timely completion is considered to be more desirable than premature or delayed ending. Accordingly, project time management is frequently mentioned as one of the cornerstones of the 'golden project triangle'; the others being cost- and quality control (figure 2:1).

Projects as contractual arrangements

The importance attached to timeliness is clarified when considering that most project deadlines are not 'abstract' matters that are subject to the pacing preferences of one single actor. Rather, they are important tools for coordination in projects that involve multiple parties, so-called 'inter-organizational projects'. Such cooperative ventures provide a mechanism for bringing together, combining and coordinating the assets that each partner organization holds. Thus, they are seen to allow for the accomplishment of complex tasks, while retaining the competitive advantages of unique knowledge and resources. A similar tendency towards specialization and contracting out is prevalent within the public sector, where market-inspired reforms have tended to emphasize the division of policy formulation and implementation.

A common way of creating an inter-organizational project is through a contractual arrangement between a project sponsor and one or several contractors, where the former provides the financial resources, and the latter is responsible for implementing the project. Contract provisions provide a framework for the sponsor's 'management at a distance' of occurrences that cannot be directly observed or controlled (cf. Blomgren & Sahlin-Andersson, 2004). Accordingly, project performance has often been equated with the implementing partner's fulfillment of contractual obligations (Lewis, 1986). Regarding contract duration design, economists have emphasized the tradeoff between the opposite transaction costs related to the lower renegotiation frequency inherent in long-term contracting, compared with the higher risks for deviation associated with longer agreement periods (Williamson, 1979). Alternatively, time specifications have been described as important components in the creation of mutually agreed objectives regarding a project's output and the process for delivering it (Turner & Simister, 2001. Cf. also the discussion about shared

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agendas for project completion and handover in the introduction to this volume).

Although project contractors may have to deal with the practical challenges of meeting agreed targets, the efforts of project sponsors in preparing and monitoring contracts are an equally important component of an intra-organizational project agreement. Based on their allocation or withdrawal of funding, sponsors ultimately set the scale and speed targets of project progress. This is particularly evident as soon as project implementation deviates from plans, and sponsors are faced with the dilemma of deciding how long to wait for results before committing more resources, or alternatively deciding to finally abandon the project.²¹ Noting that such recurrent judgment of contract compliance is a central component of all project administration, Stinchcombe and Heimer (1985) proposed to (re)define projects as “systems for producing decisions under conditions of uncertainty to guide activities on schedule” (p. 30). In a theoretical development, the authors argued that if project organizing comprises activities and sequences of activities, rather than positions and lines of authority on an organization chart, it is not easily analyzed with classic organization theory. As already indicated, I align with this opinion. Thus, the latter sections of this chapter aim to introduce a temporal complement to the functional perspectives of traditional approaches to activity duration.

2.3 When schedules change: Accounts of project extension

Consistent with the accounts already presented in this chapter, correspondence to time schedules is one of the most emphasized success criteria within mainstream project management research. Nonetheless, over two decades ago Morris and Hough (1987) concluded, from their summary of 33 databases of project outcomes in various industries, that “despite the enormous attention project management and analysis have received over the years, the track re-

²¹ For a practical illustration of how the issue of ‘anticipatory non-performance’ is framed in international commercial law, see e.g. UNIDROIT, 2004, article 7.3.3. A benchmark within contracting theory is the ‘complete contingent claim contract’. *Ex ante*, this is achieved by assessing the risks to the contractual partners’ fulfillment of their respective obligations, and prescribing a joint-surplus maximizing action in relation to each of them (Furlotti, 2007, p. 78).

cord of projects is fundamentally poor, particularly for the larger and more difficult ones [...] Projects are often completed late or over budget, do not perform the way expected, involve severe strain on participating institutions or are cancelled prior to their completion after the expenditure of considerable sums of money” (p. 5). This observation remains representative for a wide array of studies on project success and failure (e.g. Murphy, 1983; Winch, 1996; Williams, 1999; Atkinson, 1999; Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2003). It is thus well recognized that, in practice, project completion often occurs off-schedule and for unplanned reasons.

Mainstream project management theory has tended to classify the causes of untimely completion according to factors that are either ‘external’ or ‘internal’ to the project. In this context, environmental contingencies, such as unstable markets, unfamiliar business climates, or untried partners, have primarily been perceived as causing disturbances to the project activities. Reflecting the practical orientation of the managerial literature, a main focus has been on identifying individual determinants of project extension. In addition to ‘inherent’ complexities of the project assignment, for example in terms of size, length or technical content, some of the most frequently cited explanations for project deviations are related to poor management (insufficient planning, lack of coordination, inappropriate technical solutions, and so on). Another common set of explanations is associated with unclear and/or inconsistent goals, leading to vaguely defined assignments, imprecise contract specifications, or schedules that change significantly during project execution (cf. e.g. Pinto & Prescott, 1988; Williams, 1995 and the reviews in Wikström, 2000 and Engwall, 2002).

Some of the predominantly proposed solutions for ensuring that projects deliver on time revolve around administrative methods concerning project planning, monitoring and evaluation. To facilitate the achievement of set timeframes, the recommendations favor establishing clear goals for the pace of activities, for example in the form of specific and measurable objectives, results-based performance indicators, time-bound targets, explicit exit strategies, and the like (Cleland & King, 1968; Archibald, 1976; Turner, 1999; Meredith & Mantel, 2003; PMI, 2004). Such solutions also assume that success rates should increase with growing managerial experience with particular project tasks and environments.

When is extension warranted?

An alternative discussion of duration extension can be found in the literature concerning escalation of commitment (Staw, 1976; Staw & Ross, 1978; 1987; Brockner, 1992), some of which has specifically targeted the continuation of engagement in project-like endeavors (Keil, 1995; Drummond, 1996; Keil & Montealegre, 2000; Mähring, 2002). Escalating commitment is associated with the decision to extend an activity beyond an initial plan in the hope of attaining some as-yet unmet goal. Explanations are grounded in behavioral theories of decision-making, notably expectancy theory and self-justification theory (cf. Brockner, 1992). Expectancy theory holds that decision-makers assess the probability and value of goal attainment, and then generate an expected utility associated with the allocation of additional resources. This conception is consistent with the mainstream project management discourse, by which extension in time is seen as a 'rational' trade-off for the realization of particular quantitative or qualitative goals. In contrast, self-justification theory posits that decision-makers become entrapped in previous courses of action because of their unwillingness to admit (to themselves and/or to others) that prior resources were allocated in vain. Expanding on the latter perspective, most escalation studies have been devoted to understanding and resolving 'irrational' (and ultimately disastrous) organizational persistence in the face of negative feedback.

The integrative framework developed by Staw and Ross (1987) suggests that escalation tendencies are promoted by a mixing of four sets of forces: (i) project-specific factors such as high costs of entry, a long investment horizon or large closing penalties; (ii) psychological factors, such as high personal responsibility for investment outcomes and the need for self-justification, as well as general lags in the human perception of gradual change; (iii) social factors related to group rivalry and the like; and (iv) structural factors, such as political support for a project within an organization, administrative inertia, or tie-in with organizational objectives and values.²²

So, while project management and escalation studies have been consistent on the basic project characteristics that increase the likelihood of extension, they present conflicting hypotheses regarding the

²² Cf. Selznick's (1957) classic account of how organizations may unintendedly become "infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand" (p. 17).

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effects of growing experience. The project management approach regards repetitive and increasing involvement in areas in which an organization believes itself to have 'competitive advantages' as productive, whereas escalation research tends to associate the expression of strategic commitment with excessive managerial attachment, supposedly leading to slack resources, loose controls, and a stronger inclination towards self-deception in the recognition of performance deterioration. The proposed solutions to hinder such destructive behaviors usually center on human resource management reforms designed to reduce personal involvement by increasing job rotation, separating decision-making and operational procedures, and sharing of authority between several project managers (cf. Staw & Ross, 1987; Ross & Staw, 1993).

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In this context, Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, voice, and loyalty* is a seminal work. The author argues that it can be functional to persist with an activity in spite of acknowledged deterioration in performance, under the condition that one is powerful enough to influence the organization from within (that is, through complaints and/or recommendations for improvement rather than instant abandonment). Moreover, he explicitly discusses the possibilities that a member (or investor): (i) anticipates his exit to lead to further deterioration in the quality of an organization's activities and outputs; but at the same time (ii) continues to care about these activities and outputs even after he has left. In such situations, which are noted as especially common in the provision of public goods, "the member will compare, at any one point in the process of deterioration, the disutility, discomfort, or shame of remaining a member to the prospective damage which would be inflicted on society at large by the additional deterioration that would occur if he were to get out" (p. 98). While these arguments are clearly relevant to a study of development aid, they are centered on understanding different responses to *decline* in organizations. As I will explain throughout this chapter and in my discussion of methodology, my study aims to assume a 'neutral' position with regard to the normative content of feedback leading to extension.

Beyond the single project approach

As outlined above, most of the mainstream project management literature has tended to discuss project outcomes from an 'inside' perspective, taking a primary interest in the structures and dynamics of distinct projects. Likewise, escalation theory has focused mainly on understanding the actions of individual project managers or investors. This single project perspective has been reinforced by the empirical bias of project studies within both veins towards 'extraordinary' and 'unique' undertakings (notably major infrastructure projects).²³

At the same time, this narrow analytical focus has been criticized by several observers. For example, Bowen (1987) emphasized that decisions to recommit resources often occur within a larger organizational context. Such decisions are therefore subject to important considerations outside the scope of any single activity. For example, a project's strategic position in the firm's business portfolio, the strength of a project's linkages to other investments in the organization, a project's relative contribution to the firm's revenues or expenses, and the number of, perceived quality of, and uncertainties surrounding other feasible alternative(s), could all be expected to influence decisions to persist or withdraw (cf. also Cyert & March, 1963/1992, pp. 181-183).²⁴ Building on these arguments, Ross and Staw (1993) have more recently suggested "provid[ing] additional grounding for an organizational theory of escalation [by] lodging the research within organizational contexts" (p. 701, emphasis added).

The emerging discussions about project-based organizations (Midler, 1995; Hobday, 2000; Whitley, 2006) have similarly argued the

²³ Many studies have in fact taken uniqueness as a starting point for defining what a project is (cf. e.g. Wikström, 2000).

²⁴ In envisaging the practical relevance of their theory of organizational behavior, Cyert and March (1963/1992) discussed preliminary empirical work on the allocation of an organizational budget to individual projects. It was argued that this kind of internal resource distribution proceeds through a sequence of allocations to project 'classes' (beginning with general denominators such as 'normal' or 'major', and continuing to more refined types and groups), the budget shares of which depend on considerations such as historical legitimacy, current organizational emphasis, and presumed performance. Thus, the authors suggested that "a theory of project allocation would focus on the processes by which project classes are defined, class criteria for evaluation of project are developed, and specific individual projects are assigned to classes" (p. 182).

need to go beyond the treatment of projects as solitary units of analysis, pointing out that most projects are not managed independently, but are rather embedded within various overarching settings. Empirical studies have stressed the character of the linkages between, for instance, a project and its parent system (Blomquist & Packendorff, 1998; Mähring, 2002), a project and its principal (Söderlund, 2000), and a project and its prehistory (Kreiner, 1995; Engwall, 2003a). There have been calls for a widened spatial focus as well as an enlarged time frame for investigating the interrelationships between individual projects and more permanent organizational structures.

2.4 Theoretical gap: Project extension within a continuing organization

One empirical arena that has been identified as particularly appropriate for moving beyond the single project perspective is the *multi-project organization*. A multi-project organization is defined by its concurrent and recurrent use of temporary organizational forms for the production of products or services, while at the same time maintaining a more permanent umbrella structure hosting administrative functions (Gareis, 1989; Payne, 1995). This form of organizing is prevalent in larger engineering- and research-based organizations, within consulting firms and in the construction business, and seems also to be expanding into more traditional industries (Sydow *et al.*, 2004). 'Projectification' has also been evident in the public sector where it is closely associated with calls for rationalistic reforms (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002).

A distinguishing feature of a multi-project context is that even projects that may appear as separate and autonomous have to compete for scarce organizational resources and strategic commitment (Engwall & Jerbrandt, 2003; Lindkvist, 2004). Consequently, much of the multi-project management literature deals with issues concerning optimal portfolio composition (e.g. Wiley *et al.*, 1998; Archer & Ghasemzadeh, 1999). More comprehensively, project portfolio management has been defined as "activities that relate to (1) the initial screening, selection and prioritisation of project proposals, (2) the concurrent reprioritisation of projects in the portfolio, and (3) the allocation and reallocation of resources to projects according to priority" (Blichfeldt & Eskerod, 2008, p. 358).

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Another much-emphasized theme in the multi-project management literature is *coordination*, which calls for identifying interdependent activities and describing (or prescribing) how dependencies should be handled (Malone & Crowston, 1994). Models of coordination in multi-project contexts tend to stress both parallel interlinkages (between simultaneous activities, for example with regard to distribution of personnel and communication between projects) and sequential interlinkages (between consecutive activities, for example in terms of projects leveraging on each others' technical developments) (e.g. Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997). Moreover, the possibilities for transfer of knowledge and learning between projects are increasingly acknowledged as 'higher-order path dependencies' (Alscher & Brauer, 2007). These discussions express explicit recognition of the potential advantages of persisting with a project that is, in a strict sense, poorly performing, based on its expected benefits to other concurrent or planned activities. When signaling effects between project contractors are deemed important, a converse pattern (early withdrawal pending results) is also possible. Generally, the inclusion of a portfolio perspective in analyses of organizational performance should involve a modification of the tight conceptual linkage between persistence/withdrawal and success/failure (cf. discussion in Krohwinkel-Karlsson & Wennberg, 2008).

The managerial perspectives aside, multi-project organizing has also received attention from organization theorists concerned with the less instrumental aspects of coordination. Examples include Eskerod's (1997) study of the allocation of human resources among projects in a consulting firm; Cusomano and Nobeoka's (1998) account of multi-project thinking applied to product development at an automotive manufacturer; Sjögren Källkvist's (2000) analysis of the simultaneous management of systems delivery projects within a high-tech industrial firm; and Mähring's (2002) study of executive involvement in intra-organizational IT-projects within a bank. In different ways, these accounts demonstrate the practical difficulties involved in applying (multi-)project management ideals, emphasizing the complex and often conflicting requirements involved in the day-to-day handling of projects of varying sizes and degrees of urgency, and with different associated challenges along the way (cf. also Dawidson, 2006).

There is also a small body of literature concerning how the outcomes of individual projects are affected by structural factors at the level of the umbrella organization. Two examples with particular rele-

vance to the arguments developed in this thesis are Eskerod (1998) and Engwall (2003a), who both argue that project access to resources is strongly connected to organizational contingencies such as legitimacy, uniqueness, visibility and top management support. They also emphasize that the planning, scheduling and implementation of projects is normatively influenced by the institutional environment of the parent organization, pointing out that a multi-project organization incorporates many procedures, rules and routines that are more general in nature and persist longer in time than one single project (cf. also Kadefors, 1995; Eskerod & Östergren, 2000). Thus, in contrast with the managerial approaches that have mainly focused on rational tradeoffs between multiple projects (that is, between units at the same level of analysis), process-oriented studies have tended to emphasize the (often less rationalized) dependencies created in the interface between the portfolio of temporary organizations and the permanent umbrella organization.

Beyond prescriptive theory

An application of the findings of the aforementioned literatures to the study of activity duration raises several issues that have to-date received scant attention in both project management and escalation research. A fundamental argument has been that in multi-project organizations, competition for organizational resources and strategic commitment is likely to create dependencies even among projects that appear to be separate and autonomous. Notably, a project's importance in relation to other ongoing activities is likely to affect what are perceived as legitimate grounds for the termination or continuation of engagement in different situations. Moreover, the consideration of which projects are judged to be of high importance is likely to be influenced by factors outside the scope of the single project; relating to explicit long-term strategies as well as to more implicit norms and ideals of the parent organization.

Thus, to take seriously the study of extensions as events situated within an organizational context requires a focus on the processes leading up to completion timing outcomes. Rather than trying to identify successes and failures, it is necessary to understand how organizations justify and value extensions at the time they are realized (rather than after their final impact has become known). However, my conclusion is that prescriptive theory provides a limited scope for

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such a 'neutral' starting point. To engineer a shift towards a less normative stance to the study of extension, I will, in the proceeding sections, introduce ideas from an emerging stream within organization theory devoted to the study of time and timing in organizations (hereafter also referred to as the *temporal perspective*). This area of study has taken an interest in mapping activities to time with respect to their pace, duration, sequencing and the like, while at the same time exploring aspects such as organizational conceptions of time, and how actors relate to timing outcomes (Ancona *et al.*, 2001b). Thus, the temporal perspective provides tools for a more nuanced investigation of the lengths, motives and valuations of duration changes. By placing emphasis on activity cycle coordination it also contributes to an alternative conceptualization of project/context relationships, which I will explain further below.

2.5 The temporal perspective: Duration as a topic of inquiry

The temporal perspective in organization theory has emerged partly as a reflection of the "obsession [of managers] with time" (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002, p. 684). Ever since Taylor's (1911/1998) 'time and motion' studies at the turn of the last century, a great deal of practitioner-oriented research has emphasized the importance of temporal coordination and planning (e.g. Moore, 1963; Thompson, 1967; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Much attention has been devoted to how to accelerate ongoing organizational processes to achieve competitive advantage, for example by speeding up decision-making (Eisenhardt, 1989; 1990; Wally & Baum, 1994), or by shortening cycles for product development (Clark & Fujimoto, 1989). Accordingly, time plays a key role in identifying popular managerial concepts such as 'windows of opportunity' (Tyre & Orlikowski, 1994), 'time to market' (Stalk & Hout, 1990), and 'just-in-time' (Shingo, 1989). In addition, there is a perception that the last two decades of expanding global competition, exponential increases in the speed of computers and telecommunications, and raised expectations for the availability and immediacy of products and services, have contributed to strengthening the belief that 'faster is better' (Ancona & Chong, 1996). In a parallel argument, many observers have attributed the spread of project management ideals to these developments (cf. Weick, 1995).

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Echoing this resurgence in managerial interest, time has also emerged as a focus of attention in organization theory. However, theoretically-oriented research on temporal structures tends to position itself against the managerial stand. In contrast with accounts which use the language of design, regularity and control to propose models and prescriptions for increasing the ability of managers to control complex worlds (cf. Stacey, 2001; Wood, 2002), the temporal perspective takes organizational experiences with time as a topic of research in its own right. Thus, it provides an alternative to the literature that has focused on incorporating temporal variables as ostensibly objective 'inputs' to, or 'outputs' of, other phenomena of interest. The implication for a study of the temporal distribution of organizational activities is that rather than conceptualizing duration as either an outcome of performance or as an organizational design variable, it is possible to explicitly inquire into the factors and processes that contribute to how organizations justify and value time structures.

Multi-project organizing as overlapping temporal orientations

In a relatively recent synthesis of the literature, Ancona *et al.* (2001a; 2001b) state that research within the temporal perspective is still in its initial period of experimentation. Thus, multiple overarching frameworks have been proposed to explain timing, time-reckoning, and the experience of time in organizations (seminal articles include McGrath & Rotchford, 1983; Clark, 1985; Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988; Das, 1993; Albert, 1995; Butler, 1995; Hassard, 1996). In addition, views of time from sociology (e.g. Adam, 1995), social psychology (e.g. McGrath & Kelly, 1986), anthropology (e.g. Hall, 1983), and philosophy (e.g. Reichenbach, 1958) are having an influence on the organizational literature. A number of empirical studies – most of which have a descriptive focus – have investigated individual- or group-level experiences with organizational time, touching on issues such as time perspective and time urgency (Conte *et al.*, 1995; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; Waller *et al.*, 2001), time responsiveness (Lim & Murnighan, 1994; Blount & Janicik, 2001), and temporal transitions (Zerubavel, 1979; Gersick, 1988; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997).

A general finding has been that entities – individuals, groups, and organizations – can adopt particular *temporal orientations* according to their endogenous preferences, in combination with exogenous con-

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straints (McGrath & Rotchford, 1983; Clark, 1985). For example, managers in fast-moving, innovative sectors have been described as more future-oriented and prone to change than their counterparts in more stable industries (Butler, 1995). Likewise, the temporal orientations of owners (spanning 'faceless' investors with a focus on realizing short-term returns, institutional shareholders, and self-employed entrepreneurs with a very long-term engagement in operations) have been found to influence organizations' planning horizons (cf. Arvidsson, 2006).

Furthermore, it has been argued that different temporal orientations may coexist within the same organization. Brown and Herring (1998) found that temporal perceptions varied with the sex, age, and position of employees, while Butler (2006) emphasized the cultural differences in time orientation within a multinational firm (cf. also Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). It has also been suggested that temporal orientations vary functionally within organizations. For example, in his ethnographic study of genetic engineering teams, Dubinskas (1988) highlighted the opposition between what he called 'closed' and 'open-ended' temporal orientations. Studying different subcultures within such firms, he found that scientists tended to adopt an open-ended temporal orientation appropriate to their image of scientific work as "drawn continually forward by the questions posed to it by nature [so that] there is no fixed end in view" (p. 196). Managers, in contrast, adopted a short-term, closed temporal orientation that focused on "the immediate present and the proximate future" in line with their sensitivities to market demand (*ibid.*, p. 195). Similarly, Schein (1992) argued that some organizational tasks (such as finance and accounting) run on 'planning time' which values 'closure', while others (such as research and development) run on 'development time' which values 'process'. This conceptualization can easily be associated with multi-project organizing, by which a project cycle can be understood as a closed type of temporal order existing in concurrence with the more open-ended order(s) of the continuing parent organization.

Notwithstanding these extant studies, it has been noted that research on temporal structures has often failed to notice patterns in the temporal coordination of activities across levels of analysis (Ancona & Chong, 1996). Similarly, the introduction to a recent special issue of the *Academy of Management Review* announced that a main challenge for advancing theoretical developments on time in organiza-

tions was to begin “thinking about time in a multi-level context” (Goodman *et al.*, 2001, p. 509). This statement bears close resemblance to the calls for a better understanding of the interface between a portfolio of temporary organizations and a permanent umbrella organization raised by scholars within the ‘Scandinavian School’ of project studies.

Schedule change as adjustment of temporal orders

A suggested direction of particular relevance to this thesis involves analyzing timing changes in the light of how different *temporal orders* (Ancona & Chong, 1996; Ancona *et al.*, 2001b) interact within organizations. A fundamental idea behind the concept of temporal order is that individuals, groups, organizations and environments are subject to different cyclical processes, and that these processes influence each other. Similarly, organizations are themselves subject to multiple variant temporal orders, such as business cycles, political cycles, budgeting and accounting cycles, agreement cycles, and career cycles, which coexist and interact (Ancona & Chong, 1996). Some of these cycles are formalized into calendars, schedules, deadlines and the like, while some convey a more abstract form of socio-temporal information (Blount & Janicik, 2001) by which work is structured.

Based on these fundamental ideas, the temporal perspective suggests an alternative way of situating a study of scheduling changes within an organizational context. While most of the multi-project literature has focused on the functional dependencies between activities, timing research highlights a temporal coordination dimension. Notably, it suggests that much of what have been loosely labeled ‘routines’ inhibit cyclical properties, which have to be taken into account when investigating what an organizational setting means for timing outcomes. For example, the fiscal year is used as a planning horizon in most organizations, and it is not uncommon for longer-term organizational strategies to cover specific time periods.

The impact of these enmeshed cycles is that the pacing and duration of single activities is not based simply on internal mechanisms of the task at hand (cf. Gersick, 1989). An evident example is provided in Stinchcombe and Heimer’s (1985) study of the waiting times for government concessions encountered by Norwegian offshore oil exploitation projects. The authors observed that “many delays due to approvals [...] serve no purpose for the case at hand – they are being

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held up for purposes of the bureaucracy itself, rather than for substantive control [...] For example, if a matter must be treated in a meeting, the next regularly scheduled meeting will determine the delay time. But if the next regular meeting is a Monday, and Monday is a holiday, then if there is no incentive for fast decisions the waiting time can be increased by a week" (p. 94). Thus, if 'organizational context' is conceptualized as the coexistence of many temporal orders, then reschedulings could be understood as (more or less deliberate) adjustments of the timing of an activity to match the cycle of another activity.²⁵ For the purpose of this dissertation, this temporal coordination dimension should be understood as complementary to the functional coordination dimension commonly stressed in multi-project management studies: this emphasizes that many priority-setting processes are in themselves cyclical, and highlights the need to take this fact into account when examining project timing outcomes.

Timing valuation as enactment of temporal norms

In addition to providing a new set of potential extension motives related to the adjustment of activity cycles, the temporal perspective also suggests how to understand the valuation of timing outcomes. Several authors have pointed out that although time structures such as schedules, agreements and deadlines can be perceived as objective, they also have sense-making properties (Blount & Janicik, 2001; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002).²⁶ In attempting to address the factors and processes that contribute to how actors perceive and/or value time structures, the temporal perspective draws attention to *timing norms*,

²⁵ Previous research has taken varied positions on the issue of determinism in temporal adjustment. While Hassard (1996) talked about the strategic 'relocation of time' within organizations, Ancona and Chong (1996) used the biological concept of 'entrainment' to describe the process by which organizational activities are 'captured' by external pacers.

²⁶ How people value time has also been studied in adjacent disciplines. In prescriptive models within economics, the value of time is modeled through discount rates (e.g. Sharp, 1981). Psychologists have studied temporal preferences in personal consumption (see Loewenstein & Elster, 1992 for a review). In sociology and anthropology, researches have documented how the individual's temporal experience is shaped by the surrounding social environment (e.g. Landes, 1983; Flaherty, 1999).

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which are experienced as shared, expected patterns of paced activity (Ancona *et al.*, 2001a, pp. 648-651).

The concept of timing norm builds on the idea that each element of an organization's temporal structure – the explicit organizational schedules, sequencing patterns, and deadlines; the implicit cycles and rhythms of behavior; and the internal cultural norms about time – contributes to how time is understood by organizational actors. Moreover, temporal norms also emerge from the patterned recurrence of events to which actors respond (that is, what is commonly known as 'experience'). The evolution of timing norms can therefore be the result of institutionalized assumptions and routines (e.g. March & Olsen, 1989), as well as adaptive forces reflecting learning and change (e.g. Levitt & March, 1988; Barnett & Carroll, 1995).

Regardless of their source, timing norms contribute to how organizational actors establish temporal reference points (Blount & Janicik, 2001). A general argument (which draws on findings in cognitive psychological research; e.g. Kahneman & Miller, 1986) is that, once salient reference points are in place, attention is focused on situations that deviate from these points. When an event does not conform, actors tend to evaluate it in terms of counterfactuals – that is, what could have been or was expected to be (Roese, 1997). Applying this reasoning to the time associated with realizing a specific outcome in an organizational setting (for example, project completion), it has been suggested that a stimulus of valuing time is a change in schedules that represents a deviation from a socially shared temporal reference point (Loewenstein, 1988). As Ancona and Chong (1996) write: "If your product cycles are eight years, then three months [late] is on time. If your cycle is nine months, then three months [late] is very late" (p. 268).

Conversely, when an event conforms to existing norms or reference points, it is likely to receive relatively little attention. For instance, Stinchcombe and Heimer (1985) noted that a striking feature of their interviews on delays in oil concession approvals was that "most of the people, both from the Government and from the oil companies, did not see the time used in negotiating a solution as a delay which could have been avoided, but as the time that is necessary to get the decision made" (p. 304). In other words, when actors have come to regard a situation as 'normal', they tend not to react negatively to it. Another explanation for a lack of awareness about time lags may be that schedules are set only late in the project cycle, so

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there are no reference points to violate and hence no perceived deviations at early stages. So, it is only when a time lag is unexpected, or unexpectedly long in comparison to what is recognized as common, that it can be assumed that cognitive resources will be devoted to perceiving and evaluating it.

Given the complexities associated with the evolving nature of projects, parent organizations and their surrounding environments, process-oriented studies have noted that project goals are seldom static. This should be particularly true in projects for which the output targets are hard to define, such as those aiming to initiate a development process. Furthermore, research on the 'planning fallacy' (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) indicates that even if external and internal conditions do not change, organizational schedules are prone to systematic error. This is because when planning, organizations often focus on plan-based scenarios rather than on actual past experiences for generating predictions: they tend to set schedules based on how much time they think each task should take, rather than draw on past experience about how long similar tasks have taken (Buehler *et al.*, 1994). It is arguably not controversial to suppose that in a multi-project organization, extension might be routinized behavior (at least some types of extension, in certain types of projects). Thus, this thesis explores variation in how timing changes are anticipated and assessed across the portfolio of a multi-project organization.

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In a final comment on the normative implications of extension, I note the argument of Orlikowski and Yates (2002), who stressed that temporal norms are not stable, but rather are emergent properties depending on the content of activities and the pressures at hand. For example, stipulated project completion dates may initially appear to be so far away that most involved actors do not consider them as binding temporal referents. At some point, however, project members may suddenly perceive a deadline as 'real' and begin making references to it, for example by relating achieved results to the time left until anticipated completion (cf. Gersick, 1988; 1989). The possibilities for enactment of different temporal norms and temporal referents at different points in time may have interesting implications for a study of activity duration in a multi-project environment, in which

actors work under the particular circumstances in which continuance is based on the prerequisite of recurrent entry and exit.

2.6 Summary and concepts going forward

In this chapter I have argued that previous studies of organizational activity duration take one of two approaches. In perspectives based on a going concern assumption, exit is closely associated with poor performance. In contrast, the project perspective treats duration as a design variable, and involves a normative agenda by which planning (and adherence to plan) is of principal concern. Due to their shared focus on single units of analysis, neither approach provides scope for discussing how coexisting organizational activities are distributed over time. To this end, I reviewed research on multi-project organizing, which highlights the dependencies created among concurrent projects, and between projects and longer-lasting organizational structures and processes (of varying degrees of formality). In a synthesizing effort, I propose the notion of *prioritization* for investigating how the coordination of competing activities relates to the propensity for duration extension; to how extension decisions are justified; and to the normative connotations of extension in a multi-project organization.

With these arguments laid out, I noted that a design perspective provides limited analytical leverage for investigating procedural aspects of duration changes, such as motives and valuations. In an attempt to provide an alternative understanding of the implications of organizational context for the timing of individual activities, I introduced ideas from the temporal perspective in organization studies. This literature draws attention to coexisting temporal structures (of varying degrees of abstraction) as a prominent feature of the multi-project organization. Of specific importance for this study, the approach highlights the cyclical features of many organizational priority-setting processes. Thus, as a complement and modifier to the concept of prioritization introduced above, I propose the notion of *synchronization* to account for how the coordination of overlapping temporal orders relates to patterns of project extension.

Both prioritization and synchronization are intended as generally applicable tools for the study of intra-organizational dependencies

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between coexisting activities.²⁷ These tools are not bound by the technical content of projects, and can be employed in relation to both project sponsors and contractors. (In fact, they are probably also valid in non-project organizations.) The following chapter will, however, situate these universal concepts in a specific empirical setting: that of a development aid agency. I have previously introduced the history, rationale and practical dilemmas associated with project organizing within development aid. I will now explain how prioritization and synchronization can be operationalized within the organization of Sida. Subsequently, in *chapter four*, I describe the steps involved in crafting the three complementary empirical studies (of extension lengths, motives and valuations, respectively) that constitute the core of this dissertation.

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To conclude this theoretical chapter, some reflection on the relation of the proposed analytical concepts to the research question formulated in the introduction to this thesis is warranted. The question was phrased: *Why do organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end?*, stressing the (hitherto largely overlooked) agency of a multi-project organization in relation to project extension patterns. Considering the emphasis of timing research on processes of varying degrees of formality and abstraction, this phrasing could be contested for its potential bias towards rationally implemented decisions. By referring to what organizations 'do' I do *not* imply, however, that organizational action is always based on purposive judgment. As defined within the psychological current of behavioral decision theory, judgment serves to reduce the uncertainty in choice by processes of deliberative reasoning and conscious evaluation of evidence (and tends to be invoked especially when large commitments are at stake). The distinction between these two concepts of 'choice' and 'judgment' is also exemplified in common language: one can *choose* to do something in spite of one's better *judgment*, whereas the reverse formula-

²⁷ The concepts of prioritization and synchronization are, not, in themselves, new; various versions of the terms are in common use in both academic and general language. However, they are less frequently discussed in combination. One advantage of the exploratory approach to the definition of the concepts within the scope of this thesis is that it allows for a discussion about the various ways in which hierarchical and temporal coordination systems can be interlinked (see *chapter nine*).

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tion makes little sense. Thus, while judgment is often an aid to choice, it is neither necessary nor sufficient for choice (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981, pp. 73-74). Accordingly, my understanding of what organizations 'do' in terms of project extension encompasses both intentional and unintentional courses of action.²⁸

²⁸ Many scholars have commented on the (failing) logical connection between decisions and implementation, and between implementation and subsequent assessment (e.g. Brunsson, 1989). Rather than engaging in these debates, this thesis adopts a performative approach that sees all kinds of organizational activity as different kinds of action (cf. Czarniawska, 1998). In the current case, the registration of contractual changes, the documentation of decisions, and the rating of project outcomes are all different kinds of action that need to be understood in order to explain extension patterns (on the methodological implications of adopting a performative view, see further *chapter four*).

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Timeframes in use: Project management within an aid agency

At the beginning of 2008, Sida's financial commitments were allocated across a portfolio of 2592 individual funding agreements spread over a wide spectrum of societal sectors and across five continents. According to the Agency's espoused ideals, this resource distribution should be based on the partner countries' expressed needs for external support. At the same time, Sida is embedded in a set of constitutional, policy-related, and operational rule- and goal structures, many of which exist as formal documents that are periodically revised. My introductory chapter identified the relevance of examining how such features of internal (multi-project) management affect levels of commitment to specific projects. The previous chapter proposed the notions of *prioritization* and *synchronization* for the study of intra-organizational influences on project outcomes. Prioritization accounts for the *hierarchical coordination* between projects within a portfolio, assuming that concurrent activities – although implemented separately – are related by their competition for the scarce resources and strategic commitment of the parent organization. Synchronization accounts for the *temporal coordination* between projects and other organizational processes, assuming that dependencies also arise though a parent organization's attempts to match the timing of concurrent activities.

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This chapter will use Sida as a basis for situating these theoretical concepts. I commence by outlining the structure, scale and scope of the Agency's operations. I then describe the different levels at which the composition of the project portfolio is determined. A subsequent focus is on the principles and tools applied in project administration. An illustrative example of how a specific instance of duration extension was documented summarizes the chapter and serves as a preamble for the succeeding empirical studies.

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By way of disclaimer, the contents of the present and succeeding chapters are based on historical data. During 2008, Sida has undergone a major reorganization, triggered in part by the Swedish Government's proposal for a revised distribution model for the bilateral aid program. These contemporary developments will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation (*chapter ten*).

3.1 Sida at a glance: Structure, scale and scope

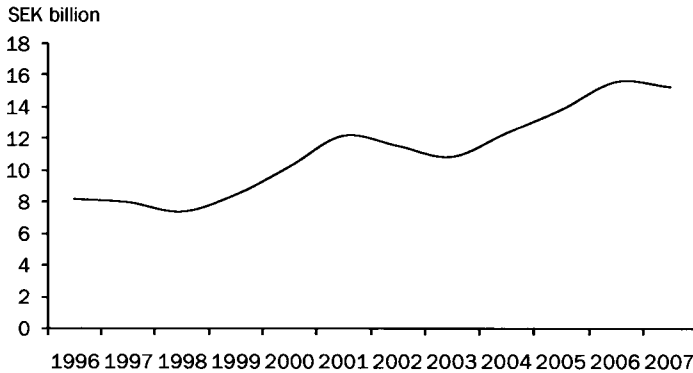
The Swedish Government has been involved in international development cooperation since the end of World War II. In 1965, the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) was formed as the main administrator of the aid appropriation. Three years later, a parliamentary decision announced that Swedish development cooperation commitments should be aiming at the level of one per cent of GNI (Proposition 1968:101). Given the general growth in the Swedish economy over subsequent decades, this has implied a gradual increase in aid allocations. The formation of the current *Sida* (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) in 1995 brought about a further widening of the organization's mandate, as it involved a merger of SIDA and four smaller agencies that had specialized in technical support (BITS), private sector development (SwedeCorp), research cooperation (SAREC), and information and training (Sandö U-centrum).

In 2007, Swedish development cooperation engaged more than 120 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. The Swedish aid budget contains two major parts: multilateral aid, which is channeled primarily through the United Nations

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system and the international development banks; and bilateral aid, which goes directly to the recipient countries. Generally, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs administers the core of the multilateral support, while Sida is responsible for the in-depth bilateral programs of cooperation with some 40 countries. All in all, Sida handles almost three-quarters of the total Swedish aid budget. Figure 3:1 shows the total volume of Sida's expenditures over the past decade. In 2007, the Agency's disbursements amounted to SEK 15.4 billion, the vast majority of which was provided in various forms of grants.

Figure 3:1: Swedish foreign aid disbursed through Sida



Sources: Sida Annual Reports and Statistical Yearbooks (several years).

Sida is a government agency that reports to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It is headed by a director-general, and supervised by a board. Its operations at the Stockholm headquarters are organized in a matrix structure. This structure encompasses four regional departments responsible respectively for Africa (AFRA), Asia (ASIA), Latin America (RELA), and Central and Eastern Europe (Sida-East); and five sector departments, focusing on infrastructure and economic cooperation (INEC), natural resources and the environment (NATUR), democracy and social development (DESO), cooperation with NGOs and humanitarian assistance (SEKA), and research cooperation (SAREC). Sida also maintains a number of intra-agency functions such as a personnel department, an information department, a methods development

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department and a department for evaluation and internal audit. In addition, the Agency has approximately forty field offices at Swedish embassies in partner countries. At the beginning of 2008, Sida had around 800 employees, of whom some 150 were working abroad.

Sida's support is commonly classified into different 'aid modalities', as displayed in table 3:1. The modalities target different kinds of recipient groups, and are subject to different administrative procedures within the Agency. Humanitarian assistance is an appeals-based form of support, which addresses emergencies caused by conflicts or natural disasters. Grants to NGOs are provided on an annual basis to a selected number of Swedish framework organizations. Research funding goes to universities and institutes in partner countries, and to Swedish research that may benefit developing countries. These three types of support are handled by separate organizational units (SEKA and SAREC), and are affected by special regulations and policies.

Table 3:1: Volume of Sida's development cooperation activities 2007

<i>Form of support</i>	<i>Expenditures (MSEK)</i>	<i>Percent of total</i>
Project support	7 185	47%
Sector program support	1 087	7%
<hr/>		
Budget support	966	6%
Technical support and training	967	6%
Humanitarian assistance	2 102	14%
Research funding	1 039	7%
Grants to NGOs	2 082	14%
Other ^a	-65	-1%
Total	15 363	100%

Source: Sida's Annual Report 2007. ^a = concessionary credit repayments.

Activities classified as project-, sector-, budget- and technical support are administered jointly by the regional departments, by the three sector departments INEC, NATUR and DESO, and by the field units at embassies. In general, regional divisions assume responsibility for the programming of country portfolios, while sector divisions take care of the planning and monitoring of individual projects. The sharing of tasks between headquarters and embassy offices is determined

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according to recurrent delegation decisions within the organization (see further description of the project administration process below).

Technical support and training is most commonly granted as contract-financed technical assistance (KTS), a form of short-term funding for Swedish consultants providing advisory services and training to organizations and institutions in middle income developing countries and countries in transition (cf. appendix A:1). Sida also finances consulting funds in development banks to enable procurements of Swedish expertise within the framework of the projects that these organizations administer. Budget support concerns a select group of countries with which Sida has a long experience of cooperation, and the public administrations of which are considered to have reached a certain degree of 'maturity'. It involves a lump sum transfer of foreign exchange that is channeled directly to partner governments using their own allocation, procurement and accounting systems, and is not linked to specific project activities. Thus, both technical assistance and budget support are characterized by limited involvement of Sida in specifying the content of funded activities.

In contrast, project- and sector program support can be described as Sida's 'standard' forms of cooperation. Together, these two types of funding represent more than half of the Agency's total disbursements. Programs have emerged out of a desire for a stronger process orientation, and they are generally larger, longer, and broader in scope than regular projects. However, for both programs and projects Sida tends to engage in extensive planning, monitoring and evaluation of the individual agreements in accordance with what can be labeled as 'common project management principles'. Thus, from an administrative point of view, the difference between the two aid modalities is largely one of scale and complexity (cf. Sida, 2004, p. 23). As projects have tended to grow in size, it has also become increasingly difficult to distinguish them from programs.

Since this thesis builds on a generally applicable conceptualization of projects as activities administered by conventional project management logic (cf. discussion in *chapter two*), funding agreements defined as program support are henceforth included when this thesis refers to Sida *projects*. By the same rationale, budget- and technical support will be excluded from further analyses. Also excluded are activities labeled as humanitarian assistance, grants to NGOs, and research cooperation, since these types of funding are governed by frameworks that are separate from those systematized below (a de-

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tailed account of the case selection procedures for the individual studies follows in each empirical chapter). By application of the above definition, Sida's project-based activities had the following geographical and sectoral distribution in 2007:

Table 3.2: Distribution of Sida's project-based activities 2007

<i>By region</i>	<i>Percent of expenditures</i>	<i>By sector</i>	<i>Percent of expenditures</i>
Africa	38%	Health	20%
Asia, Middle East and North Africa	24%	Education	7%
Latin America	8%	Infrastructure	10%
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	14%	Business	6%
Transnational	16%	Natural resources and environmental protection	20%
		Democratic governance	37%
Total (project- and program support)	100%		100%

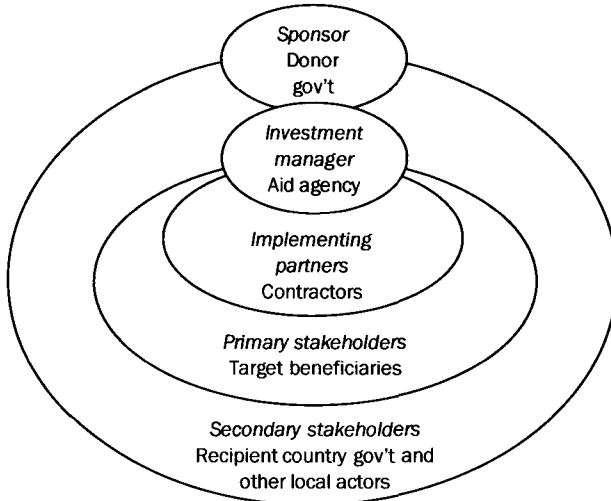
Source: Sida's Annual Report 2007.

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A comment on Sida's various roles is warranted. As described in the introduction to this dissertation, Sida's function in aid project administration can be seen similarly as that of an investment manager, whose main task is to allocate and transfer financial resources so that they eventually come to the target group's benefit (figure 3.2). To this end, the Agency establishes and monitors various contractual arrangements with implementing partners (public and private organizations of varying nationalities). According to mainstream project management terminology, the role of the Swedish Government (and, by extension, Swedish taxpayers) in this model is that of a project sponsor deciding on the budgetary frame for Sida's operations. According to the basic principle of task division within the public sector by which "the politicians decide and the administration executes" (SOU 2007:75, p. 316), the government is also formally responsible for developing Swedish aid policy. In practice, however, Sida enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy in shaping the content and format of the bilateral aid program.

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Figure 3:2: Main actors in a development aid project



Source: Based on PMI, 2004, adapted to Sida.

As described below, one of Sida's important functions is to participate in the formulation of long-term geographic strategies for Swedish support. Moreover, Sida has a growing role as a dialogue partner with other actors in the development cooperation sector, notably civil society organizations in Sweden and abroad, government bodies in recipient countries, and other donor agencies. This latter aspect of the Agency's work will not, however, be considered within the scope of this thesis.

3.2 Formal frameworks for portfolio configuration

According to Hveem and McNeill (1994), ideas about development aid are of four types: whether to provide it; why to provide it; to whom to provide it; and how it should be provided. Sweden's basic pledge for aid and its possible underlying rationales will not be discussed further here.²⁹ Rather, I will concentrate on the various rule- and goal

²⁹ As Ostrom *et al.* (2002) put it: "When a government allocates close to 1 percent of a country's GNP to an activity, it is assigning that activity as a high priority" (p.

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structures, by which strategic commitment is distributed across Sida's various areas of operation and which, by extension, are to have a significant impact on the allocations made to individual projects. My delimitation to project support implies that I will not discuss the tradeoffs between different aid modalities, but will rather focus on geographical and sectoral priorities. The procedural aspects of resource allocation are discussed in the section dealing with the Agency's internal management.

Constitutional goals and objectives

The constitutional guidelines for Sida are indicated in government bills and formalized in *long-term ordinances* specifying the Agency's mandate and tasks. In the first development cooperation bill of 1962 (Proposition 1962:100), the Swedish Parliament stipulated that the goal of Sweden's development cooperation should be to "improve the standard of living of poor people", a goal which remains in place today. Between 1978 and 1996, this overall principle was supplemented with six sub-goals: economic growth; economic and social equality; economic and political independence; democratic development (Proposition 1977/78:135); sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment (Proposition 1987/88:100); and equality between women and men (Proposition 1995/96:153). In 2003, Sweden's new *Policy for Global Development* (Proposition 2002/03:122) replaced these goals with one single overarching aim for development cooperation: "to help create conditions that enable poor people to improve their lives". Further, all areas of foreign policy should "contribute to equitable and sustainable development", and be permeated by a "rights perspective", and the "perspectives of the poor".³⁰

The adoption of one single objective for Swedish support can be seen as recognition that the partial goals did not always pull in the same direction, and as indicative of the complex prioritization issues

122). For a short, up-to-date history of the pursuit of moral, political, and commercial interests in the formulation of aid policy, see Stillhoff Sørensen, 2008.

³⁰ A rights perspective means that the measures taken towards equitable and sustainable development are compatible with respect for human rights. The perspectives of the poor means that poor people's needs, interests, capacity and conditions should be a point of departure in efforts to achieve equitable and sustainable development (Prop. 2002/03:122, p. 19).

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involved in aid policy formulation.³¹ However, the application of a so-called ‘promotion goal’ [Swedish: *främjandemål*] to an area characterized by essentially unlimited needs suffers from inherent vagueness in respect of what shall actually be achieved.³² Consequently, the ways in which long-term political ambitions are translated into more concrete (periodical) steering of Sida are of crucial importance in the Agency’s consideration of directions.

Annual directives

For most government agencies, the steering system can be seen as divided into two alternative flows: a flow of numbers and a flow of words (Tarschys, 2006). Commonly, both types of instruction are provided in the ministries’ annual *letters of appropriation*. In the case of Sida, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs sets out the Agency’s financial framework for the forthcoming calendar year, and presents directives for reporting back to the Government [Swedish: *återrapporteringskrav*].³³ The aid budget is divided into two parts: A development cooperation appropriation, which refers to funds for activities in recipient countries, and an administrative appropriation, which translates into costs for staff salaries, personnel development, duty travel, and the like.

The budgetary process is often seen as a central tool for a government’s recurrent reexamination of the scale and scope of various policy areas. To allow for this, the development cooperation appropriation divides allocations among Sida’s individual areas of operation, and indicates the sub-goals and purposes for these allocations. Until 2004, a sectoral model of division was applied, specifying the allotments and priorities of activities within health, infrastructure, democratic governance, and so on. However, broad formulations, like “the goal for health support is to promote the expansion of good quality health care that comprises the whole population” (*Letter of appropriation for Sida*, 2001, p. 3, my translation) tended to create

³¹ It is also consistent with an international trend towards a renewed focus on poverty and poverty reduction strategies as overall guiding principles for development assistance, as stressed by the UN Millennium Declaration and its prime goal of halving poverty by 2015.

³² In contrast, note that the Millennium Development Goals are time-bound ‘bar goals’ [Swedish: *ribbmål*].

³³ Sida’s financial year coincides with the calendar year.

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considerable latitude for prioritization between individual activities. Another observation is that goals and allotments have seldom changed radically over time; rather, new goals and reporting requirements have been added to the old ones. In a similar vein, the Swedish Agency for Public Management described Sida's letters of appropriation as a "scribble wall" [Swedish: *klotterplank*] (Statskontoret, 2005, p. 82).³⁴ Since 2004, allocations have been distributed geographically (by continent), and contain even fewer concrete instructions for Sida's operations. Instead, general reference is made to the goals specified in approved country- (or, less frequently, regional) strategies, which are further described in the following section.

Long-term strategies and contracts

Formally, *country strategies* are 'specific instructions' for Sida, commissioned by the Government. They are often described as Sweden's most important policy instruments for the cooperation with individual recipient countries. In practice, Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs cooperate closely in elaborating these documents. Sida generally prepares a strategy draft to which the Ministry may make revisions, before making a formal approval decision. The Government's endorsement normally includes a delegation to Sida's director general of the right to decide on issues that fall within the framework of the strategy (most notably, in respect of the composition of a portfolio of aid activities).

Country strategies are based on analyses of the conditions for development within the prioritized group of countries that receive wide-ranging support from Sweden. While such documents have been in place for a long time, they were not 'mainstreamed' with respect to their content, format and formulation process until 2001, when a set of first guidelines were jointly developed (see Ministry for Foreign Affairs & Sida, 2001).³⁵ Since then, all country strategy documents must be based on conclusions from a performance analysis of earlier support, in combination with the recipient country's own develop-

³⁴ As addressed in detail by a recent public inquiry, vagueness of goals is endemic in much of the Swedish public sector. At the same time, public agencies seem to devote more and more resources to complying with the Government's reporting requirements (see SOU 2007:75, pp. 116-124).

³⁵ A further update of the guidelines was issued in 2005, reflecting Sweden's new *Policy for Global Development* (Proposition 2002/03:122).

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ment policy in terms of prospects, weaknesses and desired results. They should include statements about the overall objectives for the bilateral cooperation program and the goals for specific areas of cooperation, as well as tentative indications of the financial allocations that are anticipated for achieving these goals and objectives (*ibid.*, p. 16).

Country strategies normally span a five-year period, and are the most long-term of Sida's time-bound policies. However, a number of steering documents with a shorter planning horizon contain related content. One such document is the *development cooperation agreement*, which is an overarching contract signed between Sweden and individual recipient country governments, stating the overall goals as well as priority issues to be targeted by Swedish support within the following two- or three-year period. In contrast with the broader country strategies, development cooperation agreements tend to involve Sida's reservation of funds for specific interventions; they are also amended from time to time in accordance with changes to individual project contracts.³⁶ At the operational level, the annual distribution of funds is endorsed through the Agency's internal *country plans*, which outline the configuration of country activity portfolios over the forthcoming year, and also serve as a basis for the allocation of staff and other administrative resources within the organization.

However, a frequent internal criticism has been that there is a 'strategic vacuum' between Sida's country strategies and the practical selection and orientation of interventions (Egerö *et al.*, 2002). It can be argued that this gap is caused by the different time perspectives applying to the various levels of planning within the Agency. One inherent problem is the uncertainties about future directions generated towards the end of a strategy period (especially in cases of rapid environmental change). Another issue, which is related to the length of implementation cycles, is that a shift in strategic priorities is not likely to be executed until 'old' projects have been terminated so that resources for new ones are released (cf. RiR, 2004, pp. 52-67).

³⁶ Formally, the signing of an agreement on development cooperation follows after the Swedish Government's sanctioning of a country strategy. In practice, however, the application and overlap of the two types of documents has varied among countries, as indicated by the guideline that 'new generation' country strategies should henceforth be drawn up for "all countries with which Sweden has signed or *intends to sign* a general agreement on development cooperation" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs & Sida, 2001, p. 7, my emphasis).

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Consequently, Sida's day-to-day administration tends to involve a significant amount of goal interpretation (Statskontoret, 2005).³⁷

Operational guidelines

The objective for the policy framework encompassing Sida's instruction, annual directives, and country strategies is to provide a coherent hierarchy of goals: from the overall goal of poverty reduction, to country program goals, to goals for priority sectors and sub-sectors, to goals for individual projects. Ultimately, this hierarchy should inform Agency staff in their assessments of incoming funding proposals (including proposals for the continuation of ongoing activities).

Strategies and policies serve an important function in terms of 'negative selection', that is, in the identification and rejection of projects that are ineligible for Sida support. Apart from this, however, operational guidance is seldom given in concrete terms. For instance, Sida's country plans have the character of a list of current projects in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages, rather than a statement of future-oriented strategic choices (Egerö *et al.*, 2002). However, most of Sida's sectoral departments have developed their own policies to direct the support within the areas of health, education, trade, energy, and so on. Moreover, there is a growing number of policies concerned with cross-cutting themes, such as environmental impact and gender equality. These internal documents should be consistent with higher-level steering documents. However, a recent peer review of the Swedish aid system argued that the "forest of policies" within Sida had led to a lack of focus on the main goal of poverty reduction within individual projects (OECD, 2005a, pp. 50-52). Accordingly, Agency staff have expressed the difficulties they perceive in simultaneously taking all of the different stipulations into account in their daily work (Svensson & Holmgren, 2003).

Table 3:3 summarizes the parallel rule- and goal structures discussed thus far. The next section will describe the complementary ways of prioritizing that are found within the Agency's project administration process (as also indicated in the last two rows of the table).

³⁷ Commenting on goal uncertainty as well as the collaborative process by which country strategies are developed, Ostrom *et al.* (2002) described the steering power of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over Sida as "practically limited to issues governed by constitutional-level rules" (p. 129).

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Table 3.3: Levels and cycles of project prioritization

<i>Level</i>	<i>Document type</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Priority aspect</i>	<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Main actors</i>
Constitutional	Long-term ordinances (the <i>Policy for Global Development</i> ; Sida's instruction)	Overarching goals of Swedish development cooperation and Sida's mandate	Overall level and ambitions of Swedish aid	Until revision	Parliament, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Political (agency-wide)	Letters of appropriation	Financial allocations, goals and purposes of allocations, and directives for reporting back to government; specific instructions on country- and regional strategies	Specification of strategic thematic objectives and strategic recipient countries	Annual	Ministry of Finance, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Sida
Political (country-specific)	Country- and regional strategies	Analysis of current situation and development prospects in individual recipient countries. Scope, focus and expected results of Swedish long-term cooperation	Indication of strategic areas of activity within countries	5 years	Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida
Contractual (country level)	Development cooperation agreements	Overall goals and main areas of cooperation, and the overall level of Swedish support to a country during the relevant period	Commitment to strategic interventions within countries	2-3 years	Sida and recipient country governments
Administrative (country portfolio composition)	Country plans	Operational decision for country project portfolios, including administration costs and delegation of the right to control funds between departments	Strengthening of strategic organizational units (at the time: field offices)	Annual	Sida head-quarter departments and field units
Contractual (project level)	Specific agreements	Format and content of individual interventions (including budget, duration, and formal division of responsibilities)	Strategic selection of implementing partners	One month to several years	Sida and contractors (sometimes also other donors)
Administrative (project management)	Working methods manuals and other internal policy documents	Guidance to Sida employees in the practical application and interpretation of the above-described frameworks		Until revision	Various Sida units

Source: Expanded from Ostrom et al., 2002.

3.3 The project administration process

Sida's internal management can be described as a resource conversion process by which the flow of inputs into the Agency are converted into effects for the recipients of the organization's funds and services (Svensson & Holmgren, 2003). Some of the Agency's outputs are in the form of policy documents and dialogue with stakeholders. Most importantly, however, resources are converted through the transfer of time-bound financial support for defined development purposes. The process by which this is achieved is internally labeled as 'contribution management', but this dissertation refers to this process as Sida's *project administration model*. A series of Sida handbooks provide guidance to Agency employees in their practical application of the model. According to the primary manual, *Sida at Work*, the Agency's project cycle proceeds in three phases: a preparatory phase comprising initial and in-depth assessment, the agreement phase, and a phase of retrospective follow-up (cf. Sida, 2005a, pp. 64-69; Sida, 2005b).

Planning, monitoring and evaluation

Formally, Sida's consideration of support is triggered by a request from a government, an organization, or (less frequently) an individual. Requests can be written or oral; there is no standard format for a request and no formal requirements regarding its contents. An important principle, however, is that proposals should originate with external parties and not from the Agency itself. As explained above, the underlying rationale of Sida's profile as a 'responding organization' is the view that recipient country actors should, as far as possible, be responsible for their own development efforts. In practice, however, there are instances in which Sida is active in proposing and designing development initiatives. The handbook provides that Sida may participate in the formulation of projects as long as this involvement is at the partner's request (Sida, 2005b, p. 22). Also, the reassessment of larger projects (which takes place every two- to three years) provides opportunities for Agency-initiated changes in the scale and scope of interventions.

Initial preparations (which are only compulsory for projects with a budget above SEK 3 million and with a planned agreement period of more than 24 months) are a first opportunity to assess a request, and

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result in either a rejection, or a decision to continue with in-depth preparations. According to the guidelines, requests are rejected if they do not match the approved frameworks of Swedish support in a country or thematic area. It is apparent that assessment at this early stage is also influenced by more informal factors. For example, the previous experience of Sida with a particular partner organization may be taken into account.³⁸ Moreover, Sida ought to consider the expected actions of other donors within the same geographic area or sector.³⁹

The main purpose of the in-depth preparation phase is to produce the documentation necessary for Sida's design of a possible intervention. Preparations vary in time and scope, depending on the size and character of the proposed project. Projects range in duration from a few months up to several years, and in size from the order of some ten thousand to several hundred million SEK. For large grants or complex proposal considerations, the preparation phase normally spans several months (occasionally even years) and involves consultations with numerous internal and external parties. Ultimately, however, all proposals should be assessed according to a number of specific criteria: relevance; effectiveness; feasibility; sustainability; coordination; and risk management.⁴⁰ Moreover, Sida encourages the use of the 'Logical Framework Approach' as a tool in the design of interventions. This involves identifying the casual relationship between strategic elements (inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact) and the risks that may influence success or failure, and then assigning 'SMART' targets and indicators.⁴¹ As a summary of the preparation activities, Sida prepares an assessment memorandum, which sets out

³⁸ The strategic aspects of partner selection have been explicitly recognized within other areas of Sida's operations. For humanitarian and NGO support, special *framework agreements* exist, through which Sida grants untied resources to 'reliable and experienced' partners. Likewise, the UN system has been described as frequently receiving "special treatment" because of its "intrinsic value" (cf. Krohwinkel-Karlsson & Sjögren, 2008, pp. 205-212).

³⁹ The need for donor coordination has received increasing emphasis in recent debates on aid effectiveness, as expressed notably in the so-called *Paris Declaration* (OECD, 2005b).

⁴⁰ These notions are part of a common international vocabulary for aid as notably defined by the OECD/DAC *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management* (English/Swedish translation in Sida, 2007a).

⁴¹ According to contemporary standards, a well-defined target is Specific, Measurable, Adequate, Realistic, and Timed (Sida, 2007a, p. 52).

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the volume, contents and format of a proposed Swedish contribution. This document then forms the basis for the Agency's decision about whether or not to provide support.

Decisions about new allocations can be made at various levels within the organization. Given the relatively few layers in the Sida hierarchy, even project administrators in non-managerial positions (*desk officers*) have substantial responsibility and discretion. If a project is larger than SEK 50 million, a review and recommendation by a special 'project committee' is required, and the funding decision is taken by the director general. For most other types of proposal, the desk officer recommends approval or rejection of the proposal to his or her department or field unit head. Following the launch of Sida's 'vision for a strengthened field orientation' in 2002 (see Sida, 2005c), 15 embassy offices have been given increased responsibility and authority to make decisions about the aid activities in their respective countries of responsibility (cf. list in appendix A:10). The field vision states that a stronger foreign resource base is likely to generate increased knowledge about local circumstances and better opportunities for cooperation with partner country actors and other donors. 'Fully delegated' field offices take care of all aspects of project management including initiation, planning, implementation, and follow-up of contributions up to SEK 50 million. In other cases, delegation is determined case-by-case. Typically, the embassy carries out the initial assessment, and then the regional department gives mandates to the relevant sector department for in-depth preparations and approval of the project. Finally, for countries with no special Sida representation, the entire process takes place within headquarter units.

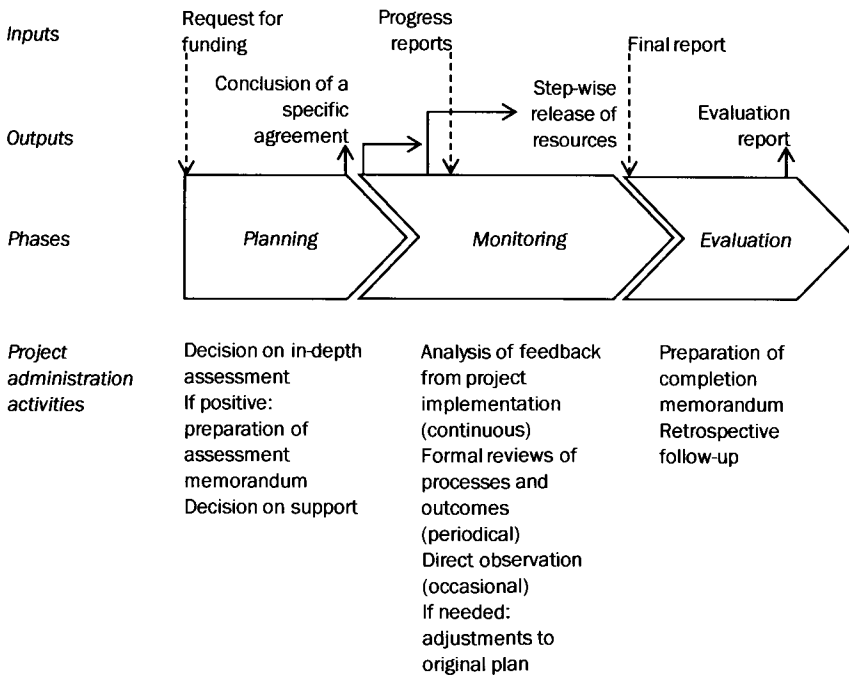
When Sida has approved support, a *specific agreement* is concluded between the Agency and one or several implementing partners. This agreement defines the amount to be disbursed and the time period for the use of granted funds, and delineates the partners' respective contractual responsibilities. Formally, Sida's main task under the agreement is the periodic release of financial resources, and the corresponding obligation of the cooperation partner is to account for the utilization of received funding. The schedule for disbursement, implementation and reporting is contained in a plan of operations accompanying the agreement.

During the implementation phase, the project is continuously monitored by the responsible desk officer. In addition to agreed-upon reports and consultative arrangements, Sida's financial management

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system, PLUS, and its rating system, SiRS, should provide essential inputs to the Agency’s monitoring. Sida may also initiate special interim studies or field visits to obtain supplementary information “as a basis for possible adjustments” (Sida 2005a, p. 68). Towards the end of the support period, the cooperation partner is normally obliged to prepare a results analysis report, and Sida should prepare a completion memorandum. Subsequently, a final project evaluation can be carried out. The standards and procedures for this process are described in detail in a separate evaluation manual (most recent edition: Sida, 2007b). However, when retrospective evaluations are carried out, they are commonly commissioned to external consultants. Figure 3:3 recapitulates the main steps in Sida’s project administration process.

Figure 3:3: Typical sequence of activities in Sida’s project cycle



Source: Based on PMI, 2004, adapted to Sida.

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A summarizing impression of Sida's operational guidelines is that they tend to be highly explicit in respect of the preparation and evaluation phases, but far more vague with respect to adjustments during the agreement phase. *Sida at Work* states that "through dialogue, the parties can identify desirable changes in the emphasis and format of the cooperation, but such changes only take effect once they are confirmed through formal changes in accordance with the provisions of the agreement to which they relate" (Sida, 2005a, p. 74). However, no prescribed criteria for such interim changes are specified. The Swedish National Audit Office has also remarked that modification and extension decisions tend to be less thoroughly justified (and less well documented) than Sida's initial commitment decisions (RiR 2004, pp. 176-178).

The subsequent section provides a concrete illustration of extension management in order to further illuminate the thesis topic. The intention is not to fully describe how Sida's resources have been allocated across an entire project cycle, but rather to explain how a duration extension can typically arise. Moreover, by emphasizing Sida's various documentation procedures, the example serves to introduce the data sources that are used more systematically in the empirical studies to follow.

Extension management: An exemplary case

Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) is a project in Sri Lanka that aims to strengthen entrepreneurial activities in the small enterprise sector. Following an assessment and decision in late 2001, Sida's INEC department committed SEK 11.1 million to the project within the framework of a specific agreement covering the period 1 January 2002 to 30 June 2005. (To allow for follow-up and reporting, Sida normally sets agreement durations six months longer than the anticipated implementation period of a project. Thus, the activities of SIYB were expected to come to an end in December 2004.) The project was to be implemented by the International Labor Organisation (ILO), which had also been the partner in an earlier phase of the project during the period 2000-2002.⁴² The agreement, titled *SIYB, Phase II*, was filed in Sida's planning system PLUS on 31 December 2001 (appendix A:2).

⁴² The ILO is also engaged in the implementation of similar projects in many other developing countries.

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In October 2004, the ILO proposed a three-month extension of the SYIB project (appendix A:3). The request was forwarded to Sida's field office in Colombo through the Sri Lankan Ministry of Finance and Planning (appendix A:4). The reason stated for the solicited extension was that the transfer of project management from the ILO to a local organization (the 'SYIB Association of Sri Lanka') was behind schedule. The detailed project extension proposal envisaged further recruitment activities and the ensuing "development of a schedule of transfer of responsibilities, of which some will, however, remain shared responsibilities until the [SYIB] Association [of Sri Lanka] has demonstrated that it is capable of fulfilling them without project support". (Cf. reference in appendix A:3. The proposal is not reproduced in full due to its length.) The request also stated that support to the local organization after the current project phase was to be included in a 'new' ILO program on micro- and small enterprise development starting contemporaneously with the proposed extension period.

Based on ILO's proposal, and with reference to a 2003 progress report, Sida approved the request (appendix A:5). In a decision dated 10 November 2004, the activity period of the SYIB project was extended by six months until 30 June 2005 (implying a formal extension of the validity of the agreement until 31 December 2005). Simultaneously, an additional SEK 640 000 was committed to the project, raising the total level of funding to SEK 11.7 million. (Sida acceded to the ILO application in making an additional US\$ 85 309 budget allocation, while the Agency granted an additional three months to the extension period requested.) The decision was accompanied by a corresponding amendment to the specific agreement with ILO (appendix A:6). These changes were administered in their entirety by the Colombo field office, which had by then been granted full powers of delegation (cf. appendix A:10).

In April 2005, the responsible Sida desk officer made an internal evaluation of the SIYB project using the Sida Rating System (SiRS). The overall performance of the project was assessed under the category 'Minor Deviations from Plan'. At the same time, the imminent withdrawal of the external advisor (the ILO) was described by the desk officer as a serious threat to the sustainability of the SIYB project (appendix A:7). However, no direct reference to the newly awarded extension was made. In fact, some disparity is evident between the decision and rating documents regarding the month of anticipated project termination. One reason for this may be that the

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approved extension was not filed in PLUS until 17 August 2005 (cf. logfile excerpts in appendix A:2), which is the same date that the project was registered as completed.

★ ★ ★

The extension procedure described above appears to have been completed largely in accordance with the requirements: it was triggered by a request from the implementing partner with the involvement of the recipient country government; the reasons for the request were detailed in a proposal document, and referred to the fulfillment of a well-established project objective (sustainability); the proposal was assessed by Sida with reference to a previous progress report before a formal extension decision was taken; and agreements were amended accordingly. Moreover, the changes were registered in appropriate order (although significantly later than the dates the changes were decided), and the project was rated according to stipulated practice. However, project extensions handled by Sida vary widely with respect to their initiating party, the motives provided, the formality of the decision process, and the extent and detail of documentation. The aim of the forthcoming chapters is to systematically study these and other aspects of project extension across three different data sets. In searching for patterns in extension outcomes, I will draw specifically on the hierarchical and temporal dimensions of project portfolio configuration discussed in this chapter (but to which no explicit reference was made in the above example).

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Catching time: Research design and methodology

The preceding chapters have introduced the dissertation topic, developed a theoretical framework for investigation of the core research question, and presented the organization that is the subject of the empirical study. This chapter addresses issues concerned with research operationalization. It discusses the rationales behind the choices of setting and scope and the dissertation's methodological foundations, and explains the overall research design. The latter sections reflect on the data collection process and the analysis methods chosen, focusing specifically on quality standards in studies that attempt to address a research question from various analytical dimensions, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

4.1 Initial choices of setting and scope

As outlined in the previous chapters, this dissertation's research question suggests studying project extensions as events situated within the context of a continuing parent organization. Accordingly, the empirical arena is that of the multi-project organization, in which the maintenance of several simultaneous projects represents standard operating procedure. A basic argument has been that in multi-project organizations, competition for scarce organizational resources

and strategic commitment creates dependencies among projects, even among those that appear to be separate and autonomous. Moreover, projects are dependent on higher-level organizational structures and processes. In particular, I have suggested that a project's importance and its timing in relation to other ongoing activities should affect how completion issues are anticipated. Aspects of project prioritization and synchronization are likely to influence not only the propensity to complete or continue, but also how such decisions are justified and how their outcomes are valued within the parent organization. The desire for an in-depth understanding of these multiple and complex aspects – *lengths*, *motives* and *valuations* – of project extension was the key reason for my decision to study one single organization (one with a large portfolio of completed and ongoing projects). Moreover, this requirement steered research design, data collection and analysis techniques towards a mixed methodology approach.⁴³ The processes, outcomes and consequences of my decisions on *what* to study and *how* to go about it are discussed below.

4.2 Research foundations: A mixed methodology approach

In the theory chapter (*chapter two*), I argued for the potential for thinking about temporal phenomena in a multi-level context. The implications of this argument go beyond looking at extensions at different degrees of aggregation. Rather, it involves an ambition to analyze the research question – generally framed as: *Why do organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end?* – using multiple analytical dimensions.⁴⁴ In this chapter, I will explain the steps taken in crafting the three complementary studies that make up the empiri-

⁴³ There has been some debate about the precise nature of the 'case study'. A case study methodology has often been equated with an interpretivist or constructionist approach, typical of, for example, ethnographic work or participant-observatory type investigations (Maxwell, 2002). Alternatively, the 'case study' has been described as a research strategy whose use is dictated by the research question and the area of inquiry, rather than by epistemological conviction (Stake, 1994). By the latter definition (which is closer to my own understanding and application), case study research embraces – or even requires – a broad and multidisciplinary approach for gathering and analyzing information (Yin, 1994).

⁴⁴ I here adjoin to several authors calling for multiple methodologies in the study of temporal phenomena, e.g. Staw & Ross, 1993; Ancona & Chong, 1996; Ancona *et al.*, 2001b; Orlikowski & Yates, 2002.

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cal core of the dissertation. Based on the assumption that activity durations have functional, contextual and sense-making properties (cf. Sjöberg, 2002), a guiding goal was to encompass various alternative accounts of extension within the studied organization. Thus, the first empirical study (presented in *chapter five*) focuses on extension lengths, the second (in *chapter six*) on extension motives, and the third on extension valuations (*chapter seven*). These dimensions are investigated based on observations of project characteristics, decision justifications and performance assessments, ranging from 'objective' to more 'subjective' types of representation.⁴⁵ Each of the dimensions led me to investigate certain variables and relationships, while allowing me to ignore others. Moreover, they required different types of data and analytical techniques (see table 4:1). Consequently, my thesis is an example of what has been described as a *mixed methodology* approach to social inquiry (cf. Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Newman & Benz, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; 2003; Creswell, 2003).

Table 4:1: Key characteristics of the three empirical studies

<i>Analytical dimension</i>	<i>Empirical instance</i>	<i>Data source</i>	<i>Analytical approach Technique</i>	
Extension lengths (study 1)	Project characteristics	Administrative statistics	Statistical	Survival analysis
Extension motives (study 2)	Decision justifications	Archival documentation	Categorization	Set-theoretic analysis
Extension valuations (study 3)	Performance assessments	Rating records	Interpretative	Content analysis
Integration technique		Sequential/ matched sampling		Variable transfer
Aim of integration	Expansion	Complementarity	Development	

The desire to use multiple analytical dimensions has been described as one of the primary reasons for using a mixed methodology ap-

⁴⁵ The words 'objective' and 'subjective' should not be interpreted here in epistemological terms. I do not conceive of information on project characteristics as conveying a more 'neutral' or 'accurate' depiction of extension than what is conveyed by performance assessments (cf. discussion in the final section of this chapter). However, from the perspective of a Sida desk officer, the registration of basic project data is commonly perceived as involving less personal judgment than does a project rating.

proach (see e.g. Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Mixed methodology (also interchangeably labeled as 'multiple methodology', or 'mixed methods'), has been broadly defined as "research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry" (*ibid.*, p. 4). Developing from a technical focus on how to combine quantitative and qualitative *methods*, the literature has more recently taken a *methodological* turn, holding that it is not possible to separate technical issues from the larger process of research, of which they are part. Consequently, the discussions of mixed methods/methodology should focus on the entire research process: the specification of research questions, the data collection procedures, data analysis and the interpretation of findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).⁴⁶ In this evolving agenda, special importance has been devoted to the problems and possibilities of 'genuinely integrating' the qualitative and quantitative elements of a study so that the end product is more than the sum of the individual parts (Bryman, 2007).

In a review article, Greene *et al.* (1989) inductively identified the following five broad rationales of integration in mixed methodology studies: (i) triangulation (seeking convergence and corroboration of results from different methods studying the same phenomenon); (ii) complementarity (seeking elaboration, enhancement, illustration, or clarification of the results from one method with results from another method); (iii) development (using the results from one method to help inform another method); (iv) initiation (discovering paradoxes and contradictions that lead to a reframing of the research question); and (v) expansion (seeking to expand the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components).

In this dissertation, the primary reason for considering the use of multiple analytical dimensions (and, by extension, multiple methods) was *expansion*. In particular, it was assumed that the use of several data sources and analysis techniques would enhance the coverage of various aspects of project extension at Sida. At a more practical level,

⁴⁶ Moreover, the methodological approach has tied the mixing of methods to philosophical discussions about the commensurability of different paradigms. Most researchers seem to assume a pragmatist position by which research design and implementation decisions are made according to which methods best meet the practical demands of a particular inquiry (cf. Patton, 1988; Morgan, 2007). This perspective is consistent with the 'holistic' approach to case studies.

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the various data sources were used complementarily. In particular, the comparison of information on matched cases and events across several data sources rendered insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each source. In addition, results from the various analytical components were used for research *development*, notably in terms of the sequential transfer of 'salient' variables between studies for further inspection under another dimension (see detailed descriptions below). An overarching aim was the cumulative development of an enriched and more nuanced understanding of the subject phenomenon. Although the three empirical studies were designed to generate different types of answers to the overarching research question, potentially different explanations were not to be evaluated against each other in terms of their truth content (see further discussion in the final section of this chapter). On the contrary, they were to be regarded as mutually informative, and the aim of the analysis would be to construct a negotiated account of their joint meaning (cf. Bryman, 2007). How this goal was operationalized is described below. In particular, I address how the issue of integration was handled in the various steps of the research process.

4.3 Research design: Three complementary dimensions

A common recommendation for researchers who seek an in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of a complex phenomenon is to undertake close, real-time observation of practice, preferably over a relatively long period of time (see e.g. Agar, 1980). However, due to resource constraints, such research strategies are not easily implemented. Further, researchers seeking to apply a temporal perspective have noted inherent methodological difficulties in capturing and tracing their units of analysis. For example, a study of project extension is complicated by the fact that it is not known beforehand which projects will be extended, or how long an eventual extension will endure (cf. Ancona *et al.*, 2001a). These issues are especially problematic if the intention is to collect value-laden information along the project cycle, such as a project's initial priority status, the motive behind an extension decision or the rating of performance in an extended project. Although interviewing with involved actors is a widely used technique, individuals often suffer from post-rationalization bias in their recollection of events (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Even more im-

portantly, I have argued for the theoretical interest in remaining 'neutral' with regard to *ex post* judgments of performance (including *ex post* reconstructions of interim performance assessments) when selecting the units of analysis for a study of reschedulings.

Based on a combination of the above considerations, I decided not to undertake a regular process study, but rather to aim for 'snapshots' of various aspects of the extension process. These snapshots would consist of 'remnants' [Swedish: *kvarlevor*], that is, authentic historical evidence produced at a point in time close to the past events being studied (Torstendahl, 1966). Moreover, my search for empirical material was guided by the challenge to explore both behavioral and cognitive extension patterns.⁴⁷ The selection of specific data points was largely an outcome of pragmatic concerns related to information availability, notably the convenient access to an administrative statistics database, open archives, and a rating system. The data contained in these sources led me to focus on project characteristics, decision justifications and performance assessments for investigating the lengths, motives and valuations of project extension at Sida. As previously described, an overarching aim was to generate complementary understandings of the overall research topic. A tool for this end was the development of a subset of research questions, each of which contributes to situating my studies of project extensions within the context of the continuing parent organization (and each of which challenges conventional assumptions about project extension).

Extension lengths

In my first empirical study, I ask the basic question: *What kinds of projects are most susceptible to being extended?* As outlined in the theory chapter, typical answers to this question from the prescriptive project management literature have tended to emphasize the inherent complexities of project assignments, and/or the complexities imposed by the external environment in which a project is implemented. I have

⁴⁷ I am not unaware of the inherent delimitations in using 'codified' sources for the examination of decision- and sense-making. However, without dismissing the conclusions of the empirical studies, it is arguable that the exclusion of certain procedural elements would have presented a more significant problem, had I *not* been able to discern any impact of 'organizational context' on extension patterns, based on the selected data sources.

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argued for the need to complement this perspective with a view that takes into consideration how projects fit within larger organizational structures, implying that projects can be characterized in alternative ways beyond merely referring to the single project task. In this study I define various indicators of a project's priority status in relation to Sida's overall portfolio of activities. I then explore whether and, if so, how project priority is connected to the likelihood of extension.

Extension motives

My second empirical study asks the question: *How are project extensions justified?* A typical answer portrays extension decisions as based on negative feedback from the project activities, notably in terms of delayed implementation. Again, I have argued that this view fails to take into account any higher-level organizational processes, implying that extensions may not always be contingent solely upon feedback from individual projects. Moreover, I have questioned the assumption of negative performance as the only 'rational' basis for prolongation. In this study, the contextual aspects of decision-making are investigated by considering how Sida formally argues for project extension. In categorizing aims and purposes, I particularly focus on whether and, if so, how intra-agency considerations are reflected in decision justifications, and on how feedback from previous project activities is considered.

Extension valuations

My third empirical study asks: *How are effected extensions valued?* Typically, project extensions have been described as inherently negative deviations from plan that nevertheless serve to maintain hope of attaining as-yet unmet goals. I have argued above that this conception tends to disregard how the judgment of individual reschedulings is influenced by organizational frameworks for the distribution of commitment. Furthermore, the conception tends to disregard the extent to which extension is anticipated or routinized behavior within the organization. In this study, the meaning of extension is explored through an analysis of Sida's internal ratings of project performance. I consider whether and, if so, how effected time lags are reflected in these assessments, focusing specifically on the connection between underlying motives and the subsequent valuation of granted exten-

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sions. Moreover, I explore the treatment of timing outcomes in relation to other result indicators.

Linking the dimensions

The three empirical studies are linked through a number of analytical concepts that remained central throughout the research process. As discussed above, *extension* is one such concept: it was used as a background idea informing the overall research problem, and figures as the prime outcome to be addressed by the research question(s). By analogy, *prioritization* and *synchronization* were proposed as two key 'explanatory' constructs. Priority measures were developed based on the studied organization's strategic frameworks for portfolio composition, and on the status of individual projects with respect to these frameworks (*chapter five* and further). Likewise, the issue of temporality of extension rates, motives and assessment outcomes was approached in relation to the periodicities implicit in the Agency's operational planning (see notably sections 5.4, 6.6 and 7.4).

The analytical approach pursued in this thesis is exploratory, in the sense that no *a priori* hypotheses about the precise relationships between variables were proposed. Rather, prioritization and synchronization were regarded as *sensitizing concepts*, serving as a point of departure from which to study various aspects of extension. In contrast with definitive concepts, "a sensitizing concept lacks specification of attributes or bench marks [...] Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). Hence, my understanding of extension was successively developed through association with different empirical instances (cf. also Van den Hoonaard, 1997).

To allow for this exploratory 'twisting and turning' (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994), it was particularly important to adopt an information collection approach by which I could remain 'neutral' with regard to latter outcomes. In the study of extension lengths, this involved including data on both extended and un-extended projects. In the study of decision motives, it meant considering all end-date postponements, regardless of their underlying purpose. In the study of extension valuations, it implied accounting for negative, positive and non-existent assessments of effected time lags. While these principles may seem mere common sense, they represent a break with much of

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the previous literature on extension, which has focused on confirmed cases of negative deviance, based on negative feedback and/or with negative outcomes. Consequently, authors have tended to study project delays, escalations or failures rather than extensions. It was also important to incorporate an exploratory element in the definition and examination of potential explanatory variables (hence, the inclusion of both 'whethers' and (if so) 'hows' in the above elaborations).⁴⁸

My operationalization of the chosen sensitizing concepts within the organization of Sida inevitably implied a delineation of the types of explanation sought. As described in *chapter three*, prioritization and synchronization were used as tools for examining agency-wide frameworks for portfolio composition at the constitutional, political, contractual and administrative levels. By extension, alternative conceptualizations of commitment (drawing for example on the individual desk officers' personal biases towards certain projects) were ruled out. Meanwhile, my inclusion of different extension outcomes allowed for an expansion in depth rather than in breadth. Below, I describe how I moved from collecting and analyzing a larger sample of quantitative data to a smaller sample of qualitative data, and the integration techniques that were used to ensure comparability between the empirical studies.

4.4 Case selection and within-case delimitations

As outlined in the introduction, this dissertation's focus on the topic of project extension emerged out of my interest in the problem of project redundancy, that is, how organizations can achieve lasting results by transitory interventions. This issue is relevant within many types of organization, but is explicitly expressed within development cooperation in terms of a *sustainability* criterion. The centrality of the sustainability concept in the mission statements, operational policies and methods guidelines of Sida led me to anticipate that this organization would be an ideal locus for studying purposively time-limited activities. By the same rationale, a study of completion timing would potentially be relevant to the Agency itself, thereby conceivably in-

⁴⁸ Similar arguments have been made by action researchers, who have argued for approaches that do not 'conceal' the processes under inquiry through various pre-defined categories (Latour, 1987; cf. also Bowker & Star, 1999).

creasing the organization's interest in participating in this study and providing material. In addition, an empirical reason for choosing Sida was the rare opportunity of comparing projects of different sizes and lengths, in many different sectors and countries and over a relatively long period of time within one organization. This wide variation in baseline project characteristics was considered valuable for mitigating some of the negative consequences of conducting a single case study, and to enhance the possibility for generalization of the results to other settings.⁴⁹

Strata of organizational activities

Once Sida was selected as the subject of this dissertation, I decided to delimit the study to funding agreements labeled either as 'project support' or 'sector program support' according to Sida's internal classification scheme. These activity types were considered relevant for the purposes of this thesis because: (i) they are part of the 'core' operations falling under the Agency's general frameworks for portfolio composition, and (ii) they are subject to conventional project management procedures, for example with respect to scheduling (cf. description in *chapter three*). The delimitation was based on an 'etic' understanding of what constitutes traditional (multi-)project management; I then relied on the organization's own (espoused) principles for selection, preparation, monitoring and evaluation in identifying which units of analysis should be considered as projects.⁵⁰ It should be emphasized that this 'emic' element did not involve a direct adoption of the Agency's own administrative terminology. As explained above, Sida prefers to use the term 'contributions' as a generalized expression for all types of support, and tends to label its major activities as 'programs' rather than 'projects'.

⁴⁹ By their strategic selection of individual objects of analysis, case study research has often been deemed suitable for *theoretical* generalization, that is, the application of results from a particular case to a theoretical argument or model. In contrast, case studies are often regarded as weak in terms of *statistical* generalization, that is, the application of results to a larger population or group (De Vaus, 2001). The existence of detailed information on a large set of diverse projects within Sida was seen as an opportunity to balance the two types of generalization.

⁵⁰ An 'etic' understanding can be equated with an 'outsider' perspective, while an 'emic' view is that of an 'insider' (see Headland *et al.*, 1990 for a further discussion of the distinction between emics and etics).

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A more pragmatically driven delimitation was the exclusion of small and short Sida projects in the studies of extension motives and valuations (*chapters six and seven*). In these studies, funding agreements with original budgets smaller than SEK 3 million and original durations shorter than 24 months were disregarded, thereby eliminating approximately half of the projects in the above-specified population. These cut-off points were chosen because projects above the specified size and length are subject to more formalized administrative routines, notably in terms of Sida's assessment prerequisites. Thus, the coverage and detail of documentation on motives and valuations was expected to be higher for the projects inside the selection criteria ranges. At a practical level, the reduced sample sizes also facilitated an in-depth qualitative analysis. Sampling procedures and analysis techniques are further described below. For detailed discussions about dropout distributions and potential sub-sampling biases, see *chapters six and seven*.

Time periods

The selection of relevant time periods for the three empirical studies was driven to a large extent by matters of 'convenience and opportunity' (cf. Ancona *et al.*, 2001a). The mapping of project extension lengths (*chapter five*) examines the population of Sida-funded projects that were approved between 1998 and 2005. The choice of 1998 as the commencement year was imposed by Sida's introduction in that year of a new, comprehensive system for planning and financial management; the choice of end year was consequential upon the fact that most of the data collection occurred during 2006. Since it is not this dissertation's goal to analyze trends over time, actuality was preferred over historical exposure when examining extension motives (*chapter six*) and valuations (*chapter seven*). In these two studies, I focus on a set of projects extended in 2005 and rated during the subsequent year. (Given that the geographical and sectoral composition of the Swedish bilateral aid program remained relatively stable during the sample decade, it appears likely that even the latter years' observations are representative of a longer period.) Potential biases due to dropouts from the samples of each study are described below.

4.5 Data collection procedure

Three major types of data – project characteristics, decision justifications, and performance assessments – were used for the three empirical studies of extension lengths, motives and valuations. The data was gathered from three major sources: an administrative statistics database, document archives, and an internal rating system. In parallel with the collection procedure described below, I consulted a large quantity of material concerning development agencies in general, and Sida in particular. Occasionally, I also engaged in informal discussions with Sida personnel about the dissertation topic. Although these complementary sources are not formally part of the study (except where reference is made to specific policy documents and other material), they played an important role in shaping my pre-understanding of the phenomenon at hand. In many instances, anecdotal evidence has been recalled to support the development of conclusions. Yet, for reasons already discussed, this type of oral testimony was not systematically considered within the scope of the three empirical studies.

Administrative statistics

For the mapping of extension lengths, data on project characteristics (and, by aggregation, portfolio composition) was retrieved from Sida's system of planning and financial management, *PLUS*. *PLUS* is a database that contains real-time information, dated from 1988, about basic project traits such as size, duration, target country, sector, implementing partner, and so on. Changes over time for individual fields (for example, the change of an agreement duration) can be traced through the comparison of year-end files. For an illustrative display of the data, see appendix A:2.

Through a case processing procedure involving both theoretical and statistical criteria, a total of 3632 projects implemented during 1998-2005 were selected for study (cf. case processing summary in *chapter five*). Due to the comprehensive character of *PLUS*, this data set represents the entire population of relevant Sida projects, rather than a sample. For the initial examination of extension patterns, the analytical benefit of full coverage, along with detailed project-specific information, was considered to overrule the drawbacks of the system, consisting mainly of typing errors in the registration of project char-

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acteristics, and lacking or late registrations of changes (compare with archival documentation below).

Archival documentation

Information concerning the motives behind specific extension events was gathered from both Sida's central archives at the Stockholm headquarters, and embassy archives abroad. Requests for documentation were based on a list of all projects for which a postponement of the end-of-agreement date had been filed in PLUS during 2005. Any kind of written statement containing justifications of the relevant extensions was considered. The retrieved material ranged in degree of formality from formal decision documents to internal e-mail correspondence (all of which fall under Sweden's principle of free access to public records). Examples of formal documentation are given in appendices A:3 to A:6.

Through an iterative search process over a period of more than one year, documentation in respect of approximately one-quarter of the relevant extensions was still lacking. Reasons for the absences include an actual absence of written statements, inadequate filing routines and, in some cases, denied access (notably in the form of unanswered requests). In addition to enabling retrieval of qualitative information concerning motives, an advantage of interrogating archive directories was that extension events could be cross-checked with respect to their duration and timing. This process of verification revealed many cases of erroneous registrations in PLUS, and the subsequent dropping of cases (cf. case processing summary in *chapter six*). Ultimately, archival documentation concerning 107 specific extensions registered during 2005 was analyzed.

Rating records

Material concerning Sida's evaluation of extensions was compiled from the internal project rating system, *SiRS*. *SiRS* contains the responsible project officers' own assessments of project performance, and should be updated continuously throughout the implementation phase. Ratings of results and risks are recorded in the form of scores on a four-level ordinal grading scale, complemented by explanations in text. An example is provided in appendix A:7. Unlike Sida's administrative statistics and archival documentation, *SiRS* does not fall under the principle of free access to public records, and access for

the purposes of this study had to be separately negotiated. For these reasons, the sample was delimited to those projects for which extension decision justifications had been retrieved in the previous step of the data collection procedure.

SiRS is not the only form of project evaluation at Sida (notably, many projects are subject to external assessment by consultants). However, it is the only form of systematized, internal assessment of project performance. Nevertheless, the system has been poorly implemented within Sida's organization. Despite the procedure being compulsory since 2004, by 2006 only one quarter of all relevant projects had been rated. There are also discrepancies within the system, such as incomplete and/or outdated filings, which created problems in the process of comparing pre- and post-extension ratings.

To ensure that the existing information was current, requests for informal reconfirmations of existing pre-extension ratings were sent via e-mail to the relevant Sida desk officers during the latter half of 2006 (appendix A:8). After some reminders, the response rate to the e-mail survey reached 100 per cent. However, four respondents could not provide an updated rating, either because the project in question was already completed, or the respondent was new to the post and therefore had limited knowledge of ongoing activities. Ultimately, ratings of 26 individual Sida projects were examined (cf. case processing summary in *chapter seven*).

Combining the data

As is evident from the above, data was collected sequentially (commencing with administrative statistics, followed by archival data, and then rating records) and with a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling encompasses the sampling of special or unique cases (for example the initial choice of Sida as the subject organization of this thesis), and the selection of units or cases based on their relevance to research questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). A step-wise selection of matched cases was undertaken, starting with exploring the characteristics of a population of both extended and un-extended projects over several years. Subsequently, a sub-set of projects extended during one particular year was analyzed with respect to decision motives. In the final step, projects with an identified decision justification were isolated for the examination of ratings. The composite effect of strata, dropouts and (notably) the across-samples match-

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ing criterion was a 'funnel structure' [Swedish: *trattstruktur*] with significant reduction of data set sizes between the empirical studies (as illustrated in figure 4:1 below).

The data collection procedure involved trading off the representativity of larger, randomized samples against the potential gains of the matched approach. The primary reason for the decision to follow the same units of analysis across studies was the potential of grasping important aspect of a process, while retaining the possibility of parallel data collection once sub-samples had been defined. (As previously described, the data collection procedure was lengthy, especially for the study of extension motives.) Whenever possible, I tried to mitigate the negative effects of cross-study comparability by within-study benchmarking against relevant project populations and analysis of dropouts.

In addition to the above, a positive side effect of analyzing matched projects and extension events was the opportunity for systematic reflection on the quality of data. By comparing information on the same cases across several empirical instances, a discussion about the reasons for systematic biases in the different data sources could be initiated. One observation was that the administrative statistics, archival documentation and rating records have different associated strengths and weaknesses. While the PLUS data covers the whole population of relevant projects, it is not adjusted for erroneous extension registrations. The archival data is adjusted for erroneous registrations filed during 2005, but is also biased towards documented extensions during the same period. The SiRS data considers all extensions, but suffers from limited coverage. The variation in bases of validity and reliability supported the case for data integration (cf. Denzin's (1978) argument for 'triangulation').⁵¹ In addition, the juxtaposition of the different data sources contributed to the understanding of how Sida's various representation practices are inter-linked (which was, in turn, an important basis for the integrated analysis of the different dimensions of extension).

⁵¹ Note, however, the difference between this account and Denzin's original (1978) formulation, by which "the bias inherent in any particular data source will be canceled out when used in conjunction with other data sources [so that] the result will be the convergence upon the truth of some social phenomenon" (p. 14). I do not adhere to a philosophical stance by which the 'truth' can be revealed, but nevertheless value the opportunity for comparison (cf. section 4.7).

4.6 Methods of analysis

Given the nature of the various data sources and the resulting sample sizes, it was natural to consider analysis techniques spanning quantitative to qualitative approaches. With some overlap, one major analysis technique was used for each analytical dimension and data source. A statistical technique was employed for the analysis of extension lengths, a categorization approach was applied for the analysis of motives, and an interpretative approach was used for the analysis of valuations. The principal relationships in focus of each approach are described below (for detailed specifications of the individual models and variables, see *chapters five, six and seven*).

Statistical approach

My mapping of extension lengths consists of a statistical assessment of the relationship between various project characteristics and project completion timing. For this purpose, I use a multivariate technique known as survival analysis, or event history analysis. The method is similar to the standard multiple regression technique, but has the advantage of mitigating right-hand censoring problems: that is, cases can be analyzed independently of whether or not the event of interest – in this case, project termination – has occurred by the end of the observation period. The outcome (dependent) variable is the time interval between the original end date of a project and its revised completion date – that is, the length of project extension. As covariates (independent variables) I use various project characteristics as specified at the time of project inception.⁵² In addition to providing descriptive statistics about extension rates among different types of projects, I focus particularly on investigating the relationship between a project's priority status and its propensity to be extended. Five separate indicators of priority, encompassing the different levels of portfolio configuration outlined in *chapter three* are tested. Thus, the statistical approach serves to single out those 'salient' measures of

⁵² One problem in providing an integrated account encompassing both qualitative and quantitative elements has been the terminology used to describe variables, and the relationship between variables (cf. Romani, 2008). I have adopted the concepts most frequently used within each approach, appreciating that some of them can be associated with 'strong' forms of rationality (which this thesis aims to move beyond).

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project priority that are to be further investigated in the subsequent studies, and also to demonstrate the direction of significant relationships.

Categorization approach

My examination of extension motives is based on a step-wise categorization approach, by which I classify extension justifications into different groups based on two theoretically interesting aspects: the organizational locus of the request, and the nature of the underlying feedback on project progress. I then use an analysis technique known as set-theoretic analysis to investigate similarities and differences between the projects in each of the derived categories. A set-theoretic approach uses Boolean algebra to determine how configurations of attributes (the simultaneous or mutually exclusive existence of certain project characteristics) combine to result in an outcome (extension of some kind). A major difference between the set-theoretic method and regression analysis is the assumption of *equifinality*, or that an outcome can be generated by a variety of different paths (cf. Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Specifically, I investigate whether projects extended for intra-agency reasons can be distinguished in terms of their configuration of 'salient' priority status indicators (as identified in the preceding empirical study in this thesis). Thus, the categorization approach is used as a tool for seeking empirical confirmation of a theoretically derived typology. In addition, the technique facilitates deepened analysis of the interlinkages between multiple levels of prioritization within Sida.

Interpretative approach

My analysis of extension valuations relies on two elements. The first involves a quantitative comparison of rating score means across the extension types identified in the previous empirical study. The second element consists of a content analysis of qualitative project performance assessments, by which I seek to gain a deeper understanding of Sida's valuation of different kinds of deviation from project plans. Special attention is given to the treatment of duration outcomes in the written comments accompanying the rating scores. While my interpretation builds on the theoretically derived extension types identified in the previous chapter, I seek to remain sensitive to the

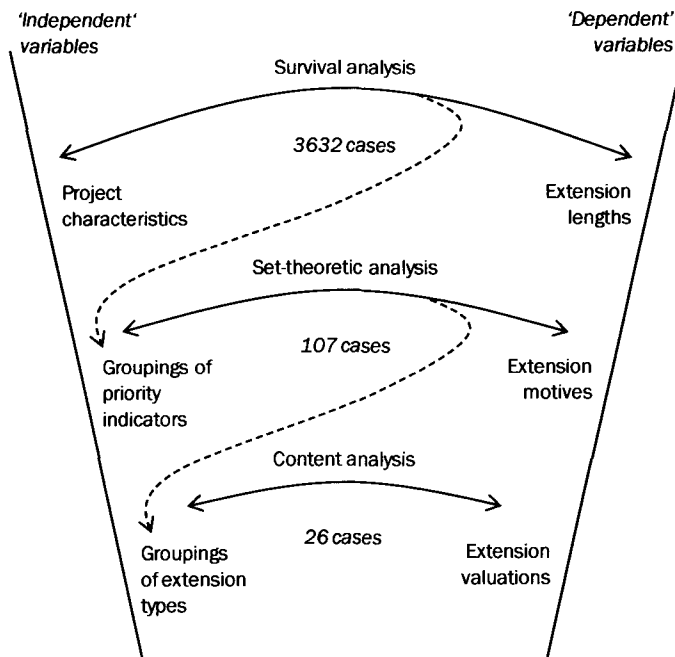
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endogenous emergence of individual themes and categories. Thus, the analysis also refines the proposed extension typology.

Integrating the analyses

Figure 4:1 provides a summarizing illustration of the overall research design and the integration between studies.

Figure 4:1: Integration between studies



Note: Tables 5:1, 6:1 and 7:1 specify the case processing procedures applied to each of the three data sets.

As discussed above, my sample strategy was a step-wise approach involving a progressively narrow selection of cases, aiming towards investigation of increasingly subtle nuances of the phenomenon of interest. In quantitative terms, my approach can be described as sampling on the dependent variable of each previous empirical study. This strategy is problematic if the dependent variable is to remain

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constant between successive studies. However, if the aim of the subsequent study is to explore variation within a set of confirming cases, then excluding cases where the outcome of interest is not present is legitimate (Fiss, 2007). Thus, projects completed on time were disregarded in the studies of extension motives and valuations. However, for this argument to hold, a redefinition of the dependent and independent variables between successive studies is required. Thus, an important way of integrating the different analytical approaches was through the reexamination of 'salient' variables and categories across the empirical studies. Together with the juxtaposition of analytical dimensions and the strategy of sequential and matched sampling, the technique of variable transfer was anticipated to create the basis for developing genuinely integrated conclusions.

4.7 Reflections on quality in multi-method studies

A common way to evaluate research is through applying three notions formulated within the natural sciences during the enlightenment: validity, generalizability and reliability. Briefly, these concepts refer to whether the outcomes of research work are representative for the phenomena that have been studied, and whether the same conclusions would also be made others studying the same phenomenon, regardless of the setting. The use of these indicators for judging the quality of research within the social sciences has been frequently criticized. A methodological argument raised against their use is that the concepts do not provide a meaningful way to discuss whether or not a qualitatively oriented study offers a 'good' account, since studies with qualitative elements systematically fail to conform to these three ideals. A more fundamental concern raised is that social phenomena and processes are so inherently complex and changeable that results that are simultaneously general, accurate, and simple are not achievable (Thorngate, 1976, cited in Weick, 1979). Accordingly, the very ambition for social science studies to give a 'correct' depiction of the state of the world has been questioned.⁵³

⁵³ In this context, social scientists have proposed numerous alternative criteria of 'good' research. Weber (1922/1983) suggested that research should be evaluated based on whether it is relevant and applicable in practice. Two oft-cited works by Lincoln and Guba (1985; 1989) propose looking at process criteria such as trustworthiness and authenticity, as well as the qualities of the research product in

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I adjoin with authors who have denounced the 'truth' ideal as a productive basis of research. Rather, my work has been founded in a *performative* view of science. The performative view adheres to other relativist epistemologies (cf. Bernstein, 1983) which assume that we can never gain knowledge about the 'real' character and nature of what is being studied. However, a distinctive feature of the performative definition is the belief that in *practice*, the generation of such knowledge is not problematic. Making sense of the world is what all human beings (regardless of their shifting identities as researchers, organizational members, or representatives of the public) do on a daily basis. From their own perspectives and interests, they try to persuade others that their interpretation of 'what is really going on' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992) is right. Thus, from a performative viewpoint, the dominance of a certain theory in science (or the dominance of a certain rationale in an organization) does not imply that this theory or rationale is conveying the 'truth'. Rather, it is taken as a sign of the success of certain advocates in convincing others that their understanding is correct (Callon & Latour, 1981). Consequently, the difference between researchers and other actors is not that the researcher is on an intellectually higher level, or that the actors being studied have a privileged relation or access to 'reality'. Instead, researchers are distinguished by their differing points of departure, aims and practical ways of convincing others of the reality of their depiction of the world (Latour, 1986).

Embracing a performative view involves consequences for how to approach research material. Instead of aiming to distinguish between correct and 'true' information and 'mere beliefs', empirical instances of various kinds are seen as expressions of theories, which, like the theories of a researcher, take their point of departure in certain basic assumptions and perspectives. Making the positive assumption that accounts of any kind take on meaning only in relation to the context in which they are situated mitigates the problems commonly associated with mixing different types and sources of data. From this view-

terms of resonance, rhetoric, empowerment and applicability. The latter aspects are comparable with Czarniawska's (1998) notion of good research as defined also by the esthetics of narratives. Finally, a commonly applied practice for assuring quality is to engage colleagues to undertake evaluations of work in progress (Merriam, 1994). While it is difficult to judge a research process in retrospect, it could be noted that the present study was undertaken in an organized, academic setting, and therefore subject to various forms of formal and informal scrutiny.

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point, different kinds of empirical instances (quantitative and qualitative data) can be interpreted at an equal level, without making prejudiced judgments about the relative usefulness of either type of account. By extension, representations can be understood as 'intermediaries' that link multiple forms of action, and that interact in the ongoing production of the empirical phenomena under observation. If representations appear to be incongruent, this points to the importance of inquiring more precisely into the chains of practices by which such loose couplings are reached (Helgesson *et al.*, 2004).

The task of a performative researcher can be framed as developing a voice by which a story can be convincingly told (Silverman, 1989).⁵⁴ This conception is commensurate with the argument that an important aim of social science research is to 'create language' [Swedish: *språkutveckling*] (Brunsson, 1981). In contrast with the classic ideal of depiction, the language creation approach views the development of new terminology for describing (organizational) behavior as a primer. The researcher's ambition should be to arrive at concepts that are open for flexible interpretations in different settings, by both academic colleagues and practitioners. Thus, the evaluation of 'good' research rests primarily on a criterion of interest, that is, whether the developed conclusions are thought-provoking for various audiences. From this perspective, this thesis aspires to present alternative 'truths' to the established ones about projects and their management (cf. Sahlin-Andersson, 1986; Engwall, 1995).

⁵⁴ I do not intend by referring to this argument to infer support for anecdotalism. Silverman (1989) noted that an important element in telling convincing stories is to "tell convincing stories about convincing stories" (p. 68). Likewise, Maxell (1996) argued that a general principle for supporting a credible account is to be transparent and reflective with regard to one's own process (which indeed is the primary purpose of this chapter).



Chapter 5

Mapping activities to time: Patterns of project extension lengths

What kinds of projects are most susceptible to being extended? As discussed in the theory chapter (*chapter two*), the prescriptive project management literature has tended to associate project timing deviations with the inherent complexities of project assignments, or with the complexities imposed by the external environment in which a project is implemented. The empirical studies contained in this thesis seek to complement this picture by taking into account how projects are situated within the context of their parent organization. In this chapter, I begin by investigating whether extended projects share common characteristics related to their *priority status* within Sida's project portfolio. Building on the systematization of the Agency's verbal frameworks for priority setting suggested in *chapter three*, five indicators of project priority are specified, together with a number of task-specific controls. I then explore whether and, if so, how these variables are associated with the likelihood of duration extension. In addition to mapping extension lengths among different types of projects, the analysis serves to single out 'salient' intra-organizational relationships that are to be further examined in the subsequent empirical study.

5.1 Data set and case selection

This empirical study relies on a quantitative data set comprising all development aid projects supported by Sida that were in any stage of implementation in the period between 1998 and 2005. The data consists of project-level statistics from Sida's financial management system PLUS. Considered as projects were funding agreements categorized either as 'project support' or 'sector program support' in Sida's internal classification scheme (cf. table 3:1).

Of the 5513 cases fulfilling these criteria, full observations on 3632 cases remained after adding the dependent, independent and control variables described below. The loss of data was mainly attributable to the exclusion of all projects initiated prior to the observation period (that is, before 1998). This dropout rate represents the 'cost' of avoiding left-hand censoring.⁵⁵ In addition, projects with an original end date outside the data set (that is, later than 2005) were disregarded. In statistical terms, these projects are not (yet) to be considered at risk for duration extension.⁵⁶ Furthermore, a small number of projects with negative extension times (that is, completed ahead of schedule) were excluded. Consequently, this study examines the population of Sida-funded projects which were approved and managed between 1998 and 2005, which were originally intended to be terminated before 2006, and which had not been terminated prematurely. The case processing procedure is summarized in table 5:1.

⁵⁵ Left-hand censoring denotes that the starting time of a case is unknown, because it occurs before the beginning of the observation period. Right-hand censoring denotes that the termination time of a case is unknown, because it occurs after the end of the observation period.

⁵⁶ Not being at statistical risk for extension is *not* equivalent to not being at risk for termination. If the dependent variable of interest had been total time to completion, all ongoing projects would have been retained.

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Table 5.1: Case processing summary (study 1)

		<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Total		5513	100%
Cases dropped	Projects initiated before the first year of the observation period	975	18%
	Projects not at risk for extension	801	15%
	Prematurely completed projects	105	2%
Cases available in analysis	Completed and ongoing project agreements	3632	

5.2 Survival analysis specifications

My analysis of the 3632 projects sought to examine the relationship between a set of project characteristics and completion timing. Information concerning basic project characteristics such as size, duration, target country, sector, and implementing partner could be imported directly from PLUS. The organization of the data as a panel of year-end records made it possible to track changes made to each field over time. I also supplemented the data from PLUS with some qualitative descriptors, such as country strategy coverage and the delegation order of field offices, from Sida's letters of appropriation and annual reports (cf. appendices A:9 and A:10). An excerpt of the database, from the typical case of extension described at the end of *chapter three* (the *SIYB* project in Sri Lanka), is found in appendix A:2.

The next step (described in detail below) involves the use of survival analysis (event history analysis) to assess the influence of certain project characteristics on project continuation beyond plan. This analysis models the time it takes until project completion occurs, given that the originally postulated end date has passed. Specifically, the Cox proportional hazards model (Cox, 1972) is applied.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁷ Survival analyses have several advantages over traditional regression models or log linear models, because they do not require that all cases have an equal probability of reaching a particular state by the end of the observation period. Thus, problems with right-hand censoring are avoided and all cases can be analyzed independently of whether or not the event of interest (in this case, project completion) has occurred. An advantage of the Cox procedure relative to other commonly applied models (exponential, Weibull) is that it does not assume any distribution of

method is similar to a standard multiple regression technique, except that the outcome variable is the hazard rate; that is, the probability that a case will experience the event of termination given that the case has survived to that time. Explanatory variables are assumed to be linearly related to the log of the hazard function.⁵⁸ In the current empirical study, this means that project characteristics with positive coefficients are associated with a reduced likelihood of extension, while characteristics with negative coefficients are associated with an increased extension propensity.

Outcome variable: Extension lengths

The outcome variable in this study is the time interval between the original end date of a project and its revised termination date – that is, the length of project extension – measured in months. The original date of completion is defined as the end of agreement date, as registered at project inception. The revised date of completion is set equal to the most recently filed end of agreement date. Termination is considered confirmed for the purposes of this study when a project has moved from status ‘Agreed’ to status ‘Completed’ in the PLUS system. Projects for which the end of agreement date has remained the same over the observation period are considered as implemented on time (regardless of their completion status). Consequently, these cases enter the analysis with an outcome variable value of ‘0’.

Covariates: Project priority characteristics

As outlined in previous chapters, my research question suggests studying project extensions as events situated within a continuing parent organization, in which the maintenance of several simultaneous projects is standard operating procedure. In such multi-project organizations, competition for strategic commitment creates dependencies even among projects that appear to be separate and autonomous. Moreover, the allocation of project resources is dependent on overarching organizational structures and processes. I have argued that termination and continuation issues cannot be considered im-

the underlying data but rather allows the hazard shape to be determined by the data itself and the covariates that are used to empirically estimate the model.

⁵⁸ $h(a, X) = h_0(a)e^{\beta X}$ where a is the time, X is a set of covariates, h_0 is the baseline hazard, and β is a vector of parameters to be empirically estimated.

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immune from these higher-level contingencies. In particular, I hypothesize that a project's priority status in relation to other ongoing activities is likely to affect individual extension decisions.

Due to the previously-described vagueness of goals at several levels within Sida's organization, a ranking of projects with respect to their overall priority status within the portfolio was not considered meaningful. Rather, I aimed to investigate several complementary aspects of the constitutional, political, contractual and administrative frameworks for prioritization, as identified and discussed in *chapter three*. A methodological complication in the definition of covariates was that the contents of overarching policy documents were often complex and ambiguous, and could not easily be tied to individual projects. Rather, I chose to focus on the more clearly defined dimension of coverage vs. non-coverage, operationalized into binary variables. For example, the existence of a formal Swedish strategy for long-term cooperation with a certain recipient country was conceived as an indicator of geographic priority affecting all projects implemented in that country (cf. the variable *Strategic_Country*, defined below).

With regard to the sector-specific goal formulations in appropriation letters and country strategies, I chose to use the data on priorities contained in PLUS. For example, PLUS requires the registration of the degree of project conformity with three crosscutting policy objectives: environmental sustainability, equality between women and men, and protection of human rights. This information was transformed into a variable labeled *Strategic_Objective*. Also, projects covered by a development cooperation agreement are indicated by a separate marker, included in this study as the variable *Strategic_Agreement*. The covariates were defined as follows:⁵⁹

Strategic_Objective is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects which were coded in PLUS as significantly contributing to one or several of the three main Swedish policy goals on crosscutting issues (en-

⁵⁹ All variables were measured at the time of project inception. Although the event history technique allows for time-varying covariates – for example, on project characteristics in the year when an extension was granted – the measurement of such variables is complicated by the fact that many projects are subject to several re-scheduling decisions which together result in their final completion date. Thus, the inclusion of time-dependent information in a study of total extension lengths would have theoretically ambiguous implications.

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vironment, gender and human rights).⁶⁰ The variable is an indicator of the project being consistent with important strategic considerations within the Swedish aid policy, and representative of areas in which Sweden (and Sida) is commonly recognized as having special competencies.⁶¹

Strategic_Country is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects implemented under an elaborated Swedish country strategy. The variable indicates that Sida has a long-term commitment to the country in question, and may imply more certainty regarding the future direction of the cooperation program. The relevant countries and strategy periods considered are displayed in appendix A:9.⁶²

Strategic_Agreement is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects included in a development cooperation agreement between Sweden and a recipient country government. It normally involves a reservation of funds in Sida's operational planning for the coming year(s). The variable is seen as indicating that a project is of strategic importance to the donor and recipient.

Strategic_Partner is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects whose recipient organizations are known to Sida through prior cooperation, or which are engaged in several projects simultaneously. The variable indicates that any preceding or concurrent projects have been initiated with the same counterpart (international organizations which are involved in several projects are considered by their recipient country branches). The variable is a proxy for Sida's familiarity with and commitment to a partner.⁶³

⁶⁰ A project agreement can be coded as having an objective as a 'primary goal'; including it as a 'consideration'; or not being relevant for achieving the objective. The variable considers projects within the first category.

⁶¹ A separation of the three objectives did not generate significantly different results to those displayed in table 5:5.

⁶² The delimitation to 'new generation' country strategies (see section 3.2) in the definition of the variable involves a lack of coverage of projects initiated prior to 2001. Cases with missing values were excluded pair-wise (meaning that cases with missing data on one independent variable were excluded from the computation of the relevant variable coefficient, but included in the other parts of the survival analysis).

⁶³ Since the variable requires knowledge of previous Agency activities, it could not be specified for projects that commenced during the first year of the observation window. Cases with missing values were excluded pair-wise.

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Strategic_Office is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects administered by one of Sida's fully delegated offices located at Swedish embassies in the recipient countries. The allocation of administrative responsibility has implications for the proximity of desk officers to the field, and is a complementary indicator of Sida's strategic commitment to the country in question. A list of Sida's local offices and their respective delegation years is provided in appendix A:10.

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Existing empirical evidence concerning how organizational contingencies influence project completion timing is sparse. This study is therefore exploratory in its choice of covariates, and does not hypothesize about the expected direction of their effects. While the study of another organization could have suggested other priority indicators, the difficulty in predicting results is theoretically generated and generalizable. As discussed in *chapter two*, alternative research traditions present conflicting hypotheses regarding the effects of growing commitment: while the project management approach regards repetitive and increasing involvement in areas in which an organization believes itself to have 'competitive advantage' as productive, escalation studies tend to associate the expression of organizational commitment with a destructive degree of attachment.

In the context of Sida and the above-described variables, this logic translates as follows: while explicit objectives and strategies may induce more frequent and strict controls of results (including adherence to time plans), the sense of secured funding may render it easier to argue for the extension of projects in order to provide the opportunity for desired outcomes to materialize. Similarly, while flagship projects may be more closely monitored with respect to the timing of outcomes, the stake already invested in these projects may reinforce the tendency to wait for results. And while donor loyalty to a partner may be indicative of 'true' expertise, previous experiences of good cooperation may render it easier to argue for prolongation in cases where feedback is uncertain. Finally, while local involvement may improve the opportunities for control and reduce administrative slack, it may also cultivate the development of disadvantageous agency institutionalization into certain recipient environments. Thus, I do not preempt the composite effects of the covariates on project

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completion timing, but rather I leave these to be revealed by the statistical analysis.

Controls: Task-specific project characteristics

A number of task-specific project characteristics that are commonly believed to affect timing outcomes or project survival in general are included as control variables. Specifically, aspects of project complexity, geographic location, type of counterpart and sector are controlled for. The controls were defined as follows:

Original_Project_Size measures the magnitude of Sida's financial contribution to a project as stated at the initiation date. The variable is continuous, and measured in million SEK. Project size is a common proxy for task complexity, and high monetary investments are frequently associated with a higher likelihood of project extension.

Original_Project_Duration measures the agreement period as anticipated at the initiation date. The variable is continuous, and defined in months. It captures the tendency for a long implementation period to increase the risk of unexpected events occurring. Long durations are usually expected to increase the probability of project extension.⁶⁴

No_of_Project_Components measures the number of sub-projects covered by an agreement. It is a proxy for complexity, in the sense of internal project heterogeneity and potential coordination problems. Projects consisting of many components are commonly regarded as having a greater propensity for extension.

LDC is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects implemented in a 'least developed country' according to the OECD/DAC listing (cf. appendix A:1). The variable represents country characteristics at the time of project inception, and varies according to revisions to the list. It is a proxy for the investment climate of the host country. Compared with projects implemented in middle-income devel-

⁶⁴ An alternative hypothesis is possible: if project funding is perceived as scarce, it is not unlikely that the project promoter will set an overly 'optimistic' end date in order that the project appear more attractive to prospective investors. Due to the wide variation in capital intensity and qualitative content of projects within Sida's portfolio, a systematic tracing of 'optimistic' projects was not deemed feasible within this study. For an empirical review of contract duration design, see Furlotti, 2007.

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oping countries, it is frequently assumed that LDC projects are more likely to be extended.

Private_Partner is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the project is implemented by a private organization, regardless of nationality. Compared with not-for-profit entities (for example, government bodies and NGOs), business firms are commonly assumed to have greater incentives to minimize project costs. Based on the supposition represented in the common adage that 'time is money', it can be argued that projects run by private counterparts should exhibit a lower likelihood of extension.

Swedish_Partner is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the project is implemented by a Swedish organization, regardless of ownership mode. It controls for the supposition that similar organizational cultures may facilitate cooperation between Sida and the implementing partner. Compared with projects run by foreign partners, it is arguable that Swedish partner-implemented projects should be less likely to be extended.

Moreover, I introduce a theoretically neutral control for geographic variation, by choosing Africa as the base continent, and specifying four dummy variables for recipient country location: *Americas*, *Asia*, *Europe* and *Transnational*. Likewise, six dummy variables for different sectors are included: *Education*, *Infrastructure*, *Business*, *Natural_Resources*, *Democracy*, and *Other*. The health sector is the baseline.⁶⁵

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In addition, a control was made for calendar-year cyclicity in the above-defined variables. A variable measuring the timing of original project agreement end dates (*Original_End_Month_Mmm*, with January as the baseline) was introduced and run as part of a 'test model', the results of which are reported in appendix B:2. As discussed below, project schedules are commonly matched to the calendar year, and a majority of extension periods commence in January or July.

⁶⁵ All categorical variables are dummy coded, which means that their values were transformed into a new set of variables that correspond to the original categories. The number of new variables created is one fewer than the number of categories. In the statistical analysis, each category of the predictor variable except the reference (that is, uncoded) category is compared with the reference category.

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Since none of the end month cohorts (*Original_End_Month_Mmm*, with January as the baseline) are significant, this pattern can be taken to reflect merely the fact that most original agreements conclude in either December or June. (However, as discussed in the next chapter, there is an apparent cyclical variation in how project extension *decision dates* are distributed throughout a calendar year.) Moreover, there are no differences in the signs and significance of the remaining covariates and controls, in comparing the test model to the model without cohorts. Thus, end month cohorts were excluded from further analysis.

5.3 Descriptives

Table 5:2 summarizes the distribution of the studied cases with respect to outcomes and censoring. The table indicates that half of the projects in the data set had been completed later than originally anticipated, or were operating beyond their original timetable. Extension times range from 0 to 99 months, averaging 7 months (including on-time projects).⁶⁶

Table 5:2: Data composition by project timing and status

	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Total N</i>	<i>Percent of total</i>
On time	176	1630	1806	50%
Extended	413	1413	1826	50%
Total <i>N</i>	589	3043	3632	100%
Percent of total	16%	84%	100%	

As shown in table 5:3, the mean prolongation time amongst extended projects is 14 months, accumulated through an average of approximately two separate extension registrations. The mean extension time is just below the average initial duration of project agreements (cf.

⁶⁶ That extension periods can be longer in duration than the entire observation window defined above is, in principle, not contradictory, since an ongoing project included in the sample may have been assigned a new end date which lay several years beyond 2005. In practice, however, this is not common: only 23 projects have a total extension length of more than 60 months.

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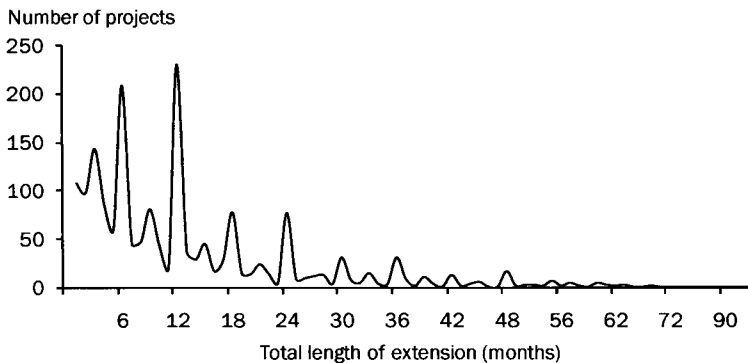
table 5:4, row 7). This means that once projects are extended, they tend to survive about twice as long as the initially-planned project duration. These basic descriptives provide support for the assertion that duration extension is indeed a widespread type of deviation from project plans at Sida.

Table 5:3: Basic extension outcomes

	Full set Mean	Of which:	
		On time Mean	Extended Mean
Total length of extension (months)	7.0	n/a	14.0
Total number of extension registrations	1.2	n/a	2.2
N	3632	1806	1826

Figure 5:1 illustrates that there is an interesting periodicity in the distribution of total extension lengths, showing clear ‘peaks’ for every added six-month period (6 months, 12 months, 18 months, and so on). One year is the most common extension period. The demonstrated pattern is most likely associated with the customary requests for interim progress reports to be delivered every half-year. (In contrast, the total number of extension registrations declines exponentially. The timing of extension *decisions* is examined in *chapter six*.)

Figure 5:1: Distribution of total extension lengths



Note: N = 3632.

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Table 5:4: Descriptive statistics: Covariates and controls

	Full set		Of which:			
	Mean	(S.d.)	On time Mean	(S.d.)	Extended Mean	(S.d.)
Strategic_Objective	0.59		0.61		0.57	
Strategic_Country	0.07		0.07		0.08	
Strategic_Agreement	0.12		0.08		0.16	
Strategic_Partner	0.49		0.48		0.51	
Strategic_Office	0.09		0.08		0.09	
Original_Project_Size (MSEK)	5.29	(31.14)	3.17	(25.64)	7.38	(35.64)
Original_Project_Duration (months)	14.91	(11.26)	14.19	(10.75)	15.62	(11.70)
No_of_Project_Components (count)	1.53	(2.63)	1.21	(1.18)	1.84	(3.49)
LDC	0.17		0.17		0.17	
Private_Partner	0.19		0.18		0.21	
Swedish_Partner	0.52		0.51		0.53	
Americas	0.16		0.16		0.16	
Asia	0.14		0.12		0.16	
Europe	0.11		0.11		0.11	
Transnational	0.26		0.29		0.24	
Education	0.05		0.05		0.05	
Infrastructure	0.08		0.06		0.09	
Business	0.08		0.07		0.09	
Natural_Resources	0.17		0.16		0.19	
Democracy	0.40		0.42		0.36	
Other	0.09		0.09		0.08	
N	3632		1806		1826	

Table 5:4 displays some descriptive statistics of the explanatory variables. Two variables stand out when comparing the outcome groups: extended projects are on average 2.5 times 'larger' than timely projects in terms of the original investment amount (*Original_Project_Size*); and it is twice as common for extended projects to be prioritized through their inclusion in an agreement on development cooperation (*Strategic_Agreement*).

A correlation matrix appears in appendix B:1. The correlations are generally modest (mostly below 0.3), indicating no significant multicollinearity problems. The strongest interactions are found between the variables *Strategic_Office* and *Strategic_Country* (0.307); *Strategic_Office* and *Strategic_Agreement* (0.352); and *LDC* and *Strate-*

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gic_Country (0.304). These relationships are intuitive, since the delegation of powers has predominantly been granted to offices in countries for which country strategies and/or development cooperation agreements are in place (however, not all countries for which these documents exist have fully delegated field offices). Moreover, many (but not all) of Sida's strategic countries are within the 'least developed' group. Since no correlations exceed 0.5, all variables are retained for the subsequent analysis.

5.4 Results

Table 5:5 presents the results of the regression on project survival beyond original completion date. In order to avoid problems related to multicollinearity, a hierarchical approach is used. I commence with a base model of 'conventional' variables (the controls, variables 6 to 12), and then enter the variables of 'special interest' (the covariates, variables 1 to 5). The test statistic displayed in the final row of the table shows that the overall contribution of the covariates is significant at the 1 per cent level. Hence, the table reports the results of the full model. In accounting for variable effects, I follow the hierarchical approach by describing the controls first.

The results of the survival analysis should be interpreted in the following manner. For example, the 6th row of table 5:5 presents the statistics for the control variable *Original_Project_Size* when entered into the Cox model. The coefficient for *Original_Project_Size* is -0.005, with an observed significance at the 1 per cent level, based on the Wald test. Consequently, the null hypothesis that the value of the coefficient is 0 can be rejected. The negative sign of the coefficient indicates that the variable is related to increased survival times; that is, projects with larger initial investment amounts are more likely to be extended than smaller projects. (Consistent with regression modeling, the value of the regression coefficient does not indicate the 'importance' of a variable. The value of the coefficient depends both on the units of measurement of the variable, and on the variable's correlations with the other variables in the model.)

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Table 5-5: Results of survival analysis

Variable	B	(S.d.)	Exp(B)
1 Strategic_Objective	0.038	(0.042)	1.039
2 Strategic_Country	-0.358***	(0.095)	0.699
3 Strategic_Agreement	-0.403***	(0.070)	0.668
4 Strategic_Partner	-0.153***	(0.038)	0.858
5 Strategic_Office	0.041	(0.078)	1.042
6 Original_Project_Size	-0.005***	(0.002)	0.995
7 Original_Project_Duration	-0.015***	(0.002)	0.985
8 No_of_Project_Components	-0.051***	(0.013)	0.950
9 LDC	0.135**	(0.059)	1.145
10 Private_Partner	-0.027	(0.047)	0.973
11 Swedish_Partner	0.085**	(0.039)	1.088
12 Americas	0.012	(0.062)	1.012
13 Asia	-0.002	(0.061)	0.998
14 Europe	-0.097	(0.071)	0.907
15 Transnational	0.095	(0.058)	1.100
16 Education	-0.089	(0.099)	0.915
17 Infrastructure	-0.364***	(0.086)	0.695
18 Business	-0.117	(0.081)	0.890
19 Natural_Resources	-0.167***	(0.066)	0.846
20 Democracy	0.012	(0.058)	1.012
21 Other	-0.139	(0.080)	0.870
N	3632		
-2 Log-likelihood: overall model	45432.98		
-2 Log-likelihood: model with variables 6-21 only	455513.74		
Likelihood ratio test statistic for the contribution of variables 1-5 to model fit ⁶⁷	80.77***		

Note: *** = $p \leq 0.01$; ** = $p \leq 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

The column labeled $Exp(B)$ is useful for describing the impact of a predictor variable. $Exp(B)$ represents the ratio of the hazard rate for cases that are one unit apart in terms of the values of the predictor

⁶⁷ The test statistic is calculated as $2(\text{LogLik}(\text{overall model}) - \text{LogLik}(\text{reference model}))$ and follows approximately a chi-square distribution with m degrees of freedom, where m is the number of additionally included covariates.

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variable.⁶⁸ For example, a SEK 1 million increase in *Original_Project_Size* decreases the likelihood of timely termination by 0.5 per cent, since the ratio of the hazard rate for cases that are SEK 1 million apart is 0.995. Different units of measurement for the same variable will change the hazard ratio, so that different values will be generated if duration is represented in months rather than in years. Thus, even values close to one can be important. In this example, SEK 10 million translates to a hazard ratio of 0.995 raised by 10, which equals 0.951. This means that the predicted probability of extension increases by about 5 per cent for each increase of SEK 10 million in project size, and by 40 per cent ($0.995^{100} = 0.606$) for each SEK 100 million increase.

The effects of task-specific characteristics

As indicated in the example of *Original_Project_Size* discussed above, project size is adversely associated with the probability of timely project completion. That is, the larger financial commitment that is made to a project at commencement, the more likely it is to be extended. Examining the results of the other control variables, as expected I find strong negative effects (at the 1 per cent level) of both initial agreement length (*Original_Project_Duration*) and internal project heterogeneity (*No_of_Project_Components*). Thus, with increasing complexity, the probability of duration extension increases.

Contrary to expectation, projects implemented in the least developed countries appear to be *less* extension-prone than those in higher-income economies (*LDC*, positive sign significant at the 5 per cent level). Meanwhile, projects carried out by Swedish partners appear to more often be completed within schedule than those implemented by local or international organizations (*Swedish_Partner*, significant at the 5 per cent level). An explanation potentially valid for both variables is that Sida's long and wide-ranging experience with LDC environments and Swedish partners (and the combination of the two) work in favor of timely outcomes.

There are no significant geographical effects evident (variables 12 to 15). However, *Infrastructure* and *Natural_Resources* stand out as

⁶⁸ For covariates that are dichotomous, such as the dummy variables in this study, $Exp(B)$ is the ratio of the estimated hazard rate for a case displaying the characteristic, to a case without the characteristic. This is often called the 'relative risk' associated with the variable.

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more extension-prone sectors (both coefficients have negative signs and are significant at the 1 per cent level). A possible explanation is that the projects associated with these sectors are often to deliver 'tangible' outputs such as buildings, roads and water systems. In these cases, implementation time schedules are normally clearly defined, and deviations from plan are therefore easily identifiable.⁶⁹ Conversely, for process-oriented projects, the boundaries between a delayed project and a new phase of a project may be less clear (on the practical distinction between duration extension and phase transition, see further *chapter six*).

The effects of priority characteristics

Turning to the effects of the variables of 'special interest' (covariates 1 to 5), an interesting pattern can be observed. As discussed in section 5.2 and previously, mainstream project management tends to associate project priority with increased managerial effort, which arguably decreases the likelihood of deviations from plans. However, the results of this study indicate that the converse is true: I find strong negative relationships between indicators of Sida's strategic commitment on both country, agreement and partner level, and the probability of timely project completion (the variables *Strategic_Country*, *Strategic_Agreement*, and *Strategic_Partner* are all significant at the 1 per cent level). Notably, the inclusion of a project in a development cooperation agreement increases the relative risk of extension by more than one-third. Likewise, projects implemented in countries with elaborated country strategies are 30 per cent more likely to be extended. The intensity of partner involvement in terms of previous engagement with Sida also appears to have a negative effect on timely completion (14 per cent relative risk). In contrast, the aggregate effect of Sida's crosscutting policy objectives (*Strategic_Objective*) is insignificant, as is the variable relating to the allocation of management responsibility within the organization (*Strategic_Office*).

⁶⁹ Another point that has been made is that worldwide, the construction sector is regularly rated as the most corruption-prone industry (Transparency International, 2005), and therefore the associated projects should be more susceptible to being delayed.

A note on the temporality of extension rates

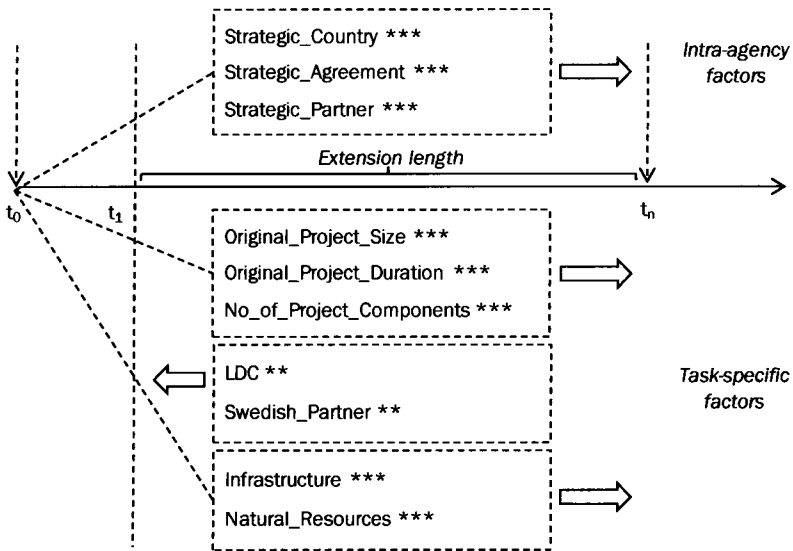
The analysis presented thus far has demonstrated the effects of static project characteristics on total extension lengths. However, as with other types of regression, the survival model is silent about the shapes of individual variable distributions. As demonstrated in figure 5:1 above, the frequency (and the commencement month) of particular extension periods follows a calendar year cyclicity. Likewise, there is an inherent periodicity in several of the independent variables. Most notably, the three significant priority characteristics are periodically revised at the turn of the country strategy-, the cooperation agreement- and the specific agreement cycle, respectively. (In contrast, more stable indicators relating to Sida's overarching objectives and the allocation of control within the Agency had no explanatory power for extension propensities.)

These results are interesting against the background of a previous study conducted by the SNAO, which found evidence of strategic cyclicity in the development of Sida's project portfolio over time (RiR, 2004). Specifically, the study indicated that new project contracts tended to become shorter towards the end of a five-year country strategy period, a pattern that was attributed to insecurity within the Agency about future resource allocations. As discussed earlier, the general trends towards longer funding agreements complicated the operationalization of endogenous temporal variation within the current survival model. Nevertheless, a 'spot check' of extensions granted during the year of 2005 shows that during that year, the extension rate of ongoing projects was approximately twice as high in countries for which a new strategy had recently been put into effect (first year of the strategy period), than in those countries covered by a more mature strategy (second to fifth year) (cf. appendices A:9 and B:3). These figures indicate that extension propensities are higher when the future allocation of resources has been recently refreshed, thereby complementing the RRV findings. While oscillating effects do not change the interpretation of the survival model's overall results, they are most relevant in relation to this thesis's particular interest in how procedural cyclicity affects project timing outcomes. *Chapter six* will systematically analyze at how Sida's internal administration processes are reflected in extension decisions. The following section integrates the observations on temporality into a summarizing discussion about the current chapter's findings.

5.5 Summary and discussion

This chapter presented the results of my mapping of project extension lengths over time. I commenced by with establishing that half of the projects in the data set had been completed later than originally anticipated, and that once extended, projects have tended to run approximately twice as long as initially planned. Subsequently, I investigated whether extended projects share common characteristics related to their priority status within Sida's project portfolio. This emphasis differs from much of the previous literature, in which projects have often been analyzed as separate and autonomous units. A survival model was used to explore the relationship between project completion timing and indicators of project priority, as measured by strategic commitments at various operational levels, while controlling for the effects of task-specific project characteristics within the same model. The overall results are summarized in figure 5:2.

Figure 5:2: A model of project characteristics and completion timing



Note: t_0 = initiation date; t_1 = original completion date; t_n = revised completion date.

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As figure 5:2 illustrates, the survival analysis was strongly supportive of earlier findings regarding the pervasive influence of project complexity (in terms of initial project size, duration and task heterogeneity) on timely completion outcomes. Projects within the infrastructure and natural resources sectors stood out as particularly extension-prone. While projects within these sectors are often large and complex, it was suggested that the 'tangible' character of these projects and their clearly-defined schedules might render them more amenable to identifying instances of deviation from project plans. Some confirmation of the common contention that 'culture matters' was provided through the higher propensity of Swedish implementing partners to complete projects on time. A similar tendency was evident in projects implemented in the least developed countries. Sida's long experience of working within these environments is assumed to account for the latter relationship, thus outweighing the supposedly countervailing effects associated with weaker investment climates.⁷⁰

An equally apparent, but arguably more surprising, finding was that intra-agency factors do influence project duration. In particular, the analysis showed that certain indicators of project priority status have a strong association with a higher likelihood of project extension within Sida. Most notably, projects covered by a development cooperation agreement, and implemented within the framework of a country strategy, are more susceptible to running overtime than other comparable projects. From a mainstream project management perspective, the direction of these relationships is surprising, since the accumulated view within the managerial tradition holds that stronger involvement and greater levels of planning should increase the probability of projects being completed on schedule.

Meanwhile, research with a less strong rationality assumption has indicated that extensive commitment – especially when taken for granted and continuing – may increase the propensity for investors to 'wait and see', and therefore increase the likelihood of extension. Moreover, prior positive experiences with certain contractual partners and institutional environments may contribute to trust-based tolerance of slippage in project implementation. Thus, one interpretation

⁷⁰ An alternative explanation could be that Sida tends to take on intrinsically 'easier' projects in LDCs. The correlations between the *LDC* variable and the three complexity variables (size, duration and number of components) do not however support such an interpretation (appendix B:1).

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of this study's findings is that Sida is more hopeful, but at the same time more patient, for results to be realized in relation to their priority projects. In particular, loyalty tends to explain why projects implemented by repeatedly engaged partners are more susceptible to being extended.

Another plausible explanation for the positive association between priority indicators and extension propensity is that Sida is more *concerned* that priority projects demonstrate results, and may therefore be more likely to involve actively in quality enhancement efforts if this is considered necessary to achieve the desired results.⁷¹ That is, the Agency's strategic engagement with certain countries, sectors and partners may increase the propensity for weak-performing, yet still promising projects to be reshaped or otherwise improved within the framework of an extension.

A further possibility is to regard duration extension simply as one of several alternative forms of project continuation that appears to be more commonly applied to priority interventions. An underlying assumption is that non-prioritized activities are more often prolonged in the form of a new project or a new project phase. Decisions to support a new intervention tend to be more formal and require deeper preparatory assessment by Sida, than is the case for interim extensions. This explanation insinuates that not only are there more resources set aside for prioritized tasks, but also that Sida tends to dispense these resources more freely. By extension, the recorded patterns of project completion timing need not be seen as tightly coupled to previous project performance. Rather, the results can be taken to indicate that expectations about *future* resource availability are decisive in Sida's choice about granting an extension. That is, if a project enjoys a high priority status, there is an implied access to further organizational resources if scheduled completion dates are exceeded for any of the above reasons. By synthesizing the findings of this chapter, this interpretation provides an initial explanation for *why organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end*.

⁷¹ Alternatively, one might speculate that priority projects tend to be intrinsically more 'difficult' than other comparable projects. Although there is some evidence that projects included in a development cooperation agreement are on average longer, there are no generally consistent patterns in the correlations between the three significant priority characteristics and the three complexity controls (appendix B:1).

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The above discussion indicates the limitations of the empirical study presented in this chapter. Since it is based on an analysis of initial project characteristics, it is not revelatory about the intra-agency processes that occur prior to extension decisions. Nor does it address the crucial issue of extension *motives* (and how these are connected to feedback on previous project performance). Thus, the analysis is complicated not only by the fact that there are conflicting theoretical hypotheses about extension antecedents, but also by the possibility that the observed patterns are aggregates of dissimilar phenomena. Two potential bases of differentiation are the functionality of the extension (what type of organizational activity it refers to), and the extension purpose (what is aimed to be achieved within the additional time period granted). Consideration of these and related dimensions suggest that there is a procedural aspect to the relationship between priorities and timing that requires clarification.

Without preempting the analysis in the following chapter, something can be said about the implications of a procedural approach for the current study's results. A procedural approach suggests that in addition to illuminating the influence of priority *status* on Sida's extension decisions, the observed effects may demonstrate the impact of the Agency's priority-setting *processes* on project timing. Viewed from this perspective, the observed outcomes are illustrative of 'schedule change as adjustment of temporal orders' (see *chapter two*). For example, the finding that extensions are more frequently granted at the beginning of a country strategy period is one indication of how Sida is adjusting agreement durations to match higher-level organizational cycles. More generally, it suggests that, not only do intra-agency considerations exert indirect influence on project duration outcomes (for example by modifying the trade-off between timing and other dimensions of performance), but that there is also a more strategic aspect to such outcomes. The following chapter inquires further into these issues by developing a typology of extension motives, within which the interlinkages between multiple levels of priority-setting are explored.



Chapter 6

Classifying timing changes: A typology of extension motives

The analysis presented in the previous chapter asserts that intra-organizational priority-setting influences on the likelihood that the duration of projects will be extended. However, it has been my argument that aspects of project prioritization and synchronization are likely to influence not only the propensity to either complete or continue, but also how such decisions are made and how their outcomes are valued within Sida. As a second step towards situating extensions within their organizational context, the analysis in this chapter addresses the question: *How are project extensions justified?*

Based on my readings of Sida archival material concerning specific decisions, I explore different bases for extension categorization. Two theoretically interesting aspects are in focus: (i) the *functional locus* of the extension (notably, whether it refers to task-specific or agency-associated activities); and (ii) the extension *purpose* (based on the nature of the underlying feedback concerning prior project progress). Drawing on these and related dimensions, a typology of project extension is developed. I then investigate whether projects extended for different reasons can be distinguished in terms of their configuration of 'salient' priority status indicators (as identified in the previous empirical study presented in *chapter five*). The analysis serves both to seek empirical confirmation of the proposed typology,

and to deepen the understanding of how multiple levels of prioritization are interlinked within the Agency.

6.1 Data set and case selection

This empirical study relies on a qualitative data set comprising Sida projects that experienced a duration extension during 2005. The data consists of project-specific documentation from Sida's archives. As with the preceding study, *projects* were defined as funding agreements categorized either as 'project support' or 'sector program support' in Sida's internal classification scheme. Extended projects were identified based on duration time changes filed in PLUS during the calendar year 2005. In total, 701 such changes were registered. However, for reasons of data manageability, a delimitation was made to projects with original budgets larger than SEK 3 million and with original durations exceeding 24 months. These thresholds were chosen because at Sida larger and longer projects are subject to more formalized administrative procedures, notably in terms of documentation and assessment prerequisites (on assessment, see also *chapter seven*).⁷²

Initially, 209 cases of duration extension were identified that fulfilled these criteria. After an iterative process of requests made to Sida's central archives, embassy archives, and individual desk officers, written information about 161 of the extension events could be retrieved. However, a cross-check of the written information with the information in PLUS revealed that 54 of the extension filings appeared erroneous (consisting either of an incorrect registration of an extension *per se*, an incorrect definition of an extension period, or a classification of a new project phase as an extension).⁷³ Conse-

⁷² The threshold points correspond roughly with the median values of Sida's 2005 project portfolio, implying a focus on the larger and longer half of all relevant projects. The *combination* of the two criteria accounts for the further reduction in sample size.

⁷³ While the proportion of erroneous registrations may appear high, it is consistent with earlier reports on the lack of congruence between information in PLUS and the specifications in underlying agreements. In an examination of 200 randomly selected agreements, the Swedish National Audit Office found that 30 per cent were filed with an erroneous commencement date, and 40 per cent with an erroneous end date (RRV, dnr. 2002-0512, cited in RiR, 2004, p. 68). Thus, it can be assumed that the data set analyzed in *chapter five* suffers from similar problems. There is,

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quently, this study examines documentation on 107 project extensions filed during 2005. The case processing procedure is summarized in table 6:1.

Table 6:1: Case processing summary (study 2)

		<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Total		209	100%
Cases dropped	Extensions for which written documentation could not be retrieved	48	24%
	Erroneous extension registrations	54	25%
Cases available in analysis	Documented extension justifications	107	

Note: Three projects were extended twice during 2005. Thus, the sample includes 104 distinct projects.

Complementing the above data summary, appendix B:4 includes descriptive statistics for the 107 cases covered by this study, next to the descriptives of the 48 cases for which written documentation on registered extensions could not be retrieved. The comparison shows that dropout due to failing record access (and, possibly, the non-existence of records) was less common among the projects archived at delegated field offices. Based on my experience with the data collection process, the retrieval of documentation from local embassy archives was facilitated by the small sizes of the associated organizations. At the field offices, my requests were often forwarded directly by the archivist to the relevant Sida desk officer, while this did not occur at the Stockholm head office.

Due to the predominance of Sida's fully delegated field offices being located in prioritized countries, the better accessibility to documents from these offices led to a slight over-representation of projects implemented under a country strategy (*Strategic_Country*) in the present sample. Based on the dropout analysis, there is no evidence of bias with respect to the two other variables included in this study (the differences in mean values for *Strategic_Agreement* and *Strategic_Partner* are small). Also, all three priority indicators occur with

however, no reason to assume a skewed distribution of errata (with regard to systematic biases in archival documentation coverage, see further section 8.2 and appendices C:5 to C:7).

greater frequency in the present data set than in the population of projects studied in the previous chapter (cf. descriptives contained in tables 5:2 and 6:4). Since the variables in focus were selected based on their association with a higher overall likelihood of extension, this accords with expectations.

A second issue concerns the singling out of 'erroneous' extension registrations, notably those few cases in which a differentiation was made between an extension and a succeeding project phase. This is potentially a difficult issue to cater for in the analysis, especially within a theoretical discussion of the exit concept. Within Sida's project administration process, however, the two phenomena of project phase initiation and extension are associated with different preparation and formalization procedures: while extensions are granted within the framework of an amendment to an existing agreement, new project phases are accompanied by new agreements. Thus, the practical distinction between the two types of event ultimately presented little difficulty.

6.2 Set-theoretic analysis specifications

My analysis of the 107 project extensions involves two steps. Firstly, I endeavor to make a theoretically-informed distinction between different types of extension. I then seek empirical confirmation for the typology by examining the relationship between the proposed extension types and a set of project characteristics. To this end, the archival material was matched with information concerning project characteristics imported from the data set used in the previous empirical study (that is, information from Sida's financial management system PLUS). Further, individual extension decisions were coded both by their date of registration and by the type of underlying documentation.

The main kinds of sources considered for the analysis were: (i) internal decision documents: Sida's formal decisions, normally approved by a head of unit; (ii) exchange of letters: requests or approvals of extensions by way of postal mail correspondence between the implementing partner and Sida; (iii) internal e-mails: informal correspondence among Sida desk officers on the topic of project extension; and (iv) 'archival short lists' [Swedish: *ärendelistor*]: directory summaries specifying titles and registration dates of available documents in a project file (sometimes used as a complement to

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the other sources to situate extension events within wider project histories). Additionally, a few cases of 'indirect' documentation (references to prior extension justifications in succeeding project assessments) were considered.⁷⁴ An example of a formal decision document, from the typical case of extension described at the end of *chapter three* (the SIYB project in Sri Lanka), is found in appendix A:5.

The first analytical step involved the classification of Sida's extension justifications according to various expressions in the texts. Excerpts from the available documents were tagged with descriptors specifying the activities concerned and anticipated accomplishments in each case of extension. These descriptors were then coded and grouped into categories of theoretical interest. The process was reiterated several times for each document, in order to ensure the highest possible degree of within-category consistency, and the highest possible degree of across-category difference (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The following sections describe the resulting outcome typology in detail.

Subsequently, the derived extension outcome types were analyzed in relation to the priority characteristics of extended projects. In this stage I relied upon a set-theoretic approach. A unique characteristic of set-theoretic methods is that they conceptualize cases as combinations of attributes, and emphasize that it is these specific combinations that give cases their unique nature (Ragin, 1987). Furthermore, set-theoretic analysis stresses the concept of *equifinality*, which refers to a situation in which "a system can reach the same final state (in this case, project continuation beyond plan), from very different initial conditions and by a variety of different paths" (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 30, based on Von Bertalanffy's (1968) original definition). In contrast, the traditional linear regression model treats variables as competing in explaining variation in outcomes,⁷⁵ rather than showing how variables combine to create outcomes.

A set-theoretic approach uses Boolean algebra to determine how combinations of attributes combine to result in the observed out-

⁷⁴ As a general rule, any kind of written documentation specifying the motives of relevant extensions was included, while information given to me only orally was not systematized within the scope of this study. In the case of multiple sources, extensions were coded by the most formal type of justification document available.

⁷⁵ This becomes particularly evident by virtue of the fact that regression analysis focuses on the unique contribution of a variable while the values of all other variables are held constant.

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come. In statistical terms, the method starts with a group of attributes (X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n) and an outcome Y . In a fictitious example, Y occurs when both X_1 and X_2 are present simultaneously. Y also occurs if X_1 is not present but X_3 is. Boolean algebra uses logical operators to express this relationship in the following way:

$$Y = X_1 \text{ AND } X_2 \text{ OR } X_3 \text{ BUT NOT } X_1$$

This analysis could be repeated for several different outcomes (Y_1, Y_2, \dots, Y_m), resulting in one model of variance for each Y_i .

In the current empirical study, attributes consist of salient priority status indicators, as identified in the previous study (*chapter five*), while outcomes are different categories of project extension, as informed by theory and operationalized through my reading of project documentation (see further definitions below). I thus examine the simultaneous or mutually exclusive existence of certain project characteristics in relation to the type of extension that each project has experienced.

★ ★ ★

A clarification of the various uses of set-theoretic analysis is warranted here. Used in an exploratory context, the technique can be applied to generate different outcome categories by the identification of frequently occurring attribute combinations (a procedure similar to cluster analysis). Another type of application involves the *ex ante* specification of combinatory laws, and the theory-based prediction of effective combinations (cf. Grandori & Furnari, 2008). This empirical study adopts an intermediate approach with both descriptive and confirmatory purposes, in seeking to explore the differences in attribute grouping frequencies between a set of theoretically derived outcome types. In addition to observing the level of the grouping proportions themselves, I wanted to assess whether certain attribute combinations were significantly more common among certain types of extension, compared to the other types (cf. Ragin *et al.*, 2006, pp. 68-69. The authors suggest using linguistic qualifiers such as 'more often than not' (> 0.5), 'usually' (> 0.65), and 'almost always' (> 0.8) to assess the sufficiency of causal combinations in explaining an outcome; and to then use probabilistic criteria to test the hypothesis that the observed proportions are greater than a benchmark proportion).

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In the current study, a non-parametric test procedure was applied to validate a set of outcomes of particular theoretical interest (see further below).

Grouping variable (i): Functional bases of extension

A key argument of this thesis has been that previous accounts of project deviations from schedule have suffered from an inadequate focus on the implementation level, thus failing to recognize causes of extension that originate within the strategic considerations of an umbrella organization in which the project is embedded. The results of my first empirical study (reported in *chapter five*) provided clear support for the contention that Sida's internal priorities have an influence on project duration, but did not inquire into the agency behind these outcomes.

In my reading of Sida's archive material, I made a preliminary attempt to address the latter issue by focusing specifically on extension solicitors. However, much of the available documentation included only vague indications of the originator of an extension request (often, reference is made to common discussions or joint reviews). Against this background, it was considered to be less problematic to distinguish between the different types of activity, or project function, with which an extension might be associated. As a tool for activity classification, I departed from the stylized model of Sida's project administration process proposed in *chapter three* (cf. figure 3:3). Based on this account, the following three functional bases of extension were identified:

Implementation level extensions are concerned with project operations in the 'field'. Requests can make reference to managerial conditions and/or environmental factors affecting project progress.

Contractual extensions relate to the agreed relationship between Sida and the implementing partner, encompassing activities such as disbursement (on behalf of the Agency) and reporting (on behalf of the partner). These extensions are commonly not preceded by a formal proposal, but are rather granted to allow for the fulfillment of formal obligations.

Administrative extensions are associated with Sida's internal administration activities, such as those concerned with project planning, monitoring and evaluation, as well as those where reference is

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made to other intra-agency procedures (for example, an ongoing country strategy process).⁷⁶

Attributes: Project priority indicators

As emphasized in the theoretical chapter (*chapter two*), this thesis seeks to explore how projects are affected not only by multiple organizational processes, but also by the fact of the simultaneous occurrence of these processes, and their mutual influence over each other. My analysis of attribute configurations is a first step towards this aim. In particular, I investigate whether projects extended for different reasons can be distinguished according to their different combinations of priority status indicators. (An inherent assumption is that such an analysis can also illuminate the interdependencies between different hierarchical levels of priority setting, as displayed in table 3:3). As a starting point, markers of project priority that were found to increase the likelihood of extension were transferred from the analysis presented in the previous chapter. More specifically, the three significant covariates in the survival model presented in table 5:5 were imported. By way of reminder, these variables were defined as follows:

Strategic_Country is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects implemented under an elaborated Swedish country strategy. The variable indicates that Sida has a long-term commitment to the country in question, and may imply more certainty regarding the future direction of the cooperation program.

Strategic_Agreement is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects included in a development cooperation agreement between Sweden and a recipient country government. It normally involves a reservation of funds in Sida's operational planning for the coming year(s). The variable is seen as indicating that a project is of strategic importance to the donor and recipient.

Strategic_Partner is a dummy variable equal to 1 for projects whose recipient organizations are known to Sida through prior cooperation, or which are engaged in several projects simultaneously. The

⁷⁶ Of course, all types of extension necessitate some type of preparatory administrative work on behalf of Sida. The distinctiveness of *Administrative* extensions, as defined in the current study, is that these are *caused* by the Agency's internal procedures, and involve additional administrative efforts during the extension period.

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variable indicates that any preceding or concurrent projects have been initiated with the same counterpart (international organizations which are involved in several projects are considered by their recipient country branches). The variable is a proxy for Sida's familiarity with and commitment to a partner.

6.3 Descriptives

Table 6:2 summarizes the frequency of the suggested outcome categories, and compares the projects within each category according to three time-related measures. Approximately half of the data set is comprised of extensions relating to *Implementation* level activities. A key further observation is that more than one-quarter of the studied extensions are justified with explicit reference to *Administrative* activities, that is, processes within the organization of Sida. This finding is important when considered in relation to the common view that Sida – and development cooperation agencies in general – should not exert a predominant influence on project plans (cf. discussion in *chapter one*).

Table 6:2: Extension outcomes according to functional locus

	Full set Mean	Of which:		
		Implementation Mean	Contractual Mean	Administrative Mean
Original duration of extended project (months)	38.1	38.6	39.4	35.9
Age of project at the time of the most recent extension decision ^a (months)	48.9	43.9	62.9	44.9
Length of most recent extension ^a (months)	10.9	9.8	15.0	9.1
N	107	53	27	27
Percent of total N	100%	50%	25%	25%

Note: ^a = as of year-end 2005.

The table data furthermore indicates that initial agreement lengths and extension periods are similar across the sample, with the exception of extensions motivated by *Contractual* circumstances, which are on average longer and occur later in the project cycle, than exten-

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sions relating to occurrences related to the *Implementation* and *Administrative* functions. This is not surprising, given that many of the extensions in the former category are granted in order to allow time for the due submission of lacking or incomplete performance reports (sometimes with the supposition that the project is no longer active).⁷⁷

Table 6:3: Types of documentation

	Full set Percent	Of which:		
		Implementation Percent	Contractual Percent	Administrative Percent
Formal decision	36%	45%	4%	48%
Exchange of letters	30%	40%	11%	30%
Internal e-mail	15%	4%	44%	7%
Archival short list	13%	6%	37%	4%
Indirect reference	7%	6%	4%	11%
Total (all sources)	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	107	53	27	27

Table 6:3 displays the distribution of source documents consulted for the identification of motives. It shows that *Formal decisions* and *Exchanges of letters* are the most common forms of documentation for all types of extension except those related to *Contractual* procedures (which, as expected, tend to be justified less formally).

⁷⁷ The length of extension mean of the *Contractual* category is biased by the inclusion of two 'outlier' extensions of 57 and 71 months, respectively. These cases suggest that rather than being used as a signal to implementing partners to conform with obligations, contractual extension periods are sometimes determined after the fact; that is, to allow for administrative closure of an agreement once certain stipulations have been fulfilled.

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Table 6.4: Single attribute frequencies

		Of which:			
	Full set	Implementation	Contractual	Administrative	
	Proportion	Proportion	Proportion	Proportion	
1	Strategic_Country	0.13	0.17	0.15	0.04
2	Strategic_Agreement	0.44	0.40	0.41	0.56
3	Strategic_Partner	0.71	0.70	0.70	0.74
	N	107	53	27	27

Table 6.4 shows simple attribute presence across the sample, that is, the proportion of projects within each group displaying the priority characteristic in question. As noted above, the overall ratios of all three priority characteristics are relatively high when benchmarked to the relevant population. (Cf. also the data displayed in the first row of table 6.6 below, which shows that only 20 per cent of the studied projects are *not* covered by any of these characteristics.) A more detailed analysis of category differences follows.

6.4 Initial results

In order to use Boolean algebra as a technique of qualitative comparison, it is necessary to sort the data into their different combinations of attribute values (0's and 1's for absence/presence). The information can be summarized as a 'truth table', which is a raw data matrix with as many rows as there are logically possible combinations of values for the attributes. A truth table for a data set with six attributes will contain maximally 2^3 combinations of values, which implies 8 rows.⁷⁸ Appendix B:5 contains a truth table with a listing of all attribute configurations present in the current data set.

Just as it is possible to calculate the logically possible number of combinations, one can also calculate the number of logically possible groupings, or combinations of combinations.⁷⁹ A grouping can include all attributes in a data set, or may consist of only a single attribute.⁸⁰ Each grouping only considers the relationship between

⁷⁸ Based on the formula 2^k , where k is the number of attributes.

⁷⁹ Based on the formula $2^k - 1$, where k is the number of attributes.

⁸⁰ In the latter case, the grouping is equal to the frequency of the attribute.

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specified attributes; the absence/presence of non-mentioned attributes is disregarded. The difference between a 'simple' attribute combination and a grouping is that a grouping relates attributes to one another by logical operators (rather than simple indications of absence/presence).

Simultaneous presence of priority indicators

The most common local operator is *AND* (commonly referred to as 'Boolean addition'), denoting the simultaneous presence of two or more attributes. Table 6:5 displays paired grouping frequencies according to the extension categories defined above. It is common for projects to score on several attributes simultaneously. On an aggregated level, these results can be largely explained by the correlation between the attributes (cf. discussion in *chapter five* and appendix B:1).

Given the different 'input' frequencies of considered attributes (cf. table 6:4), the most relevant comparisons are made across extension outcome categories (table columns), rather than across groupings (table rows). Most notably, projects extended for *Administrative* reasons display clear differences in their configuration of characteristics compared with the two other categories: almost half of all *Administrative* extensions concern projects that are both covered by a development cooperation agreement and implemented by a repeatedly engaged partner, while in the remainder of the data set this is only true for less than one-third of the cases (row 3, table 6:5). Meanwhile, very few *Administrative* extensions tend to occur in projects covered by a country strategy (rows 1 and 2).

Table 6:5: Paired grouping frequencies

	<i>Implementation Proportion</i>	<i>Contractual Proportion</i>	<i>Administrative Proportion</i>
1 Strategic_Country AND Strategic_Agreement	0.13	0.11	0.04
2 Strategic_Country AND Strategic_Partner	0.15	0.11	0.00
3 Strategic_Agreement AND Strategic_Partner	0.30	0.30	0.48
<i>N</i>	53	27	27

Paired presence coupled with the absence of a third indicator

A further step in qualitative comparative analysis is to consider the inclusion of other logical operators in the definition of groupings. In the further analysis below, *OR* denotes that either one of the two considered attributes is present; *AND/OR* means that at least one of the attributes is present; and (*BUT*) *NOT* refers to simultaneous absence. For example, the grouping *Strategic_Country AND/OR Strategic_Agreement BUT NOT Strategic_Partner* (grouping 2 in table 6:6 below) consists of all cases for which either or both of the attributes *Strategic_Country* and *Strategic_Agreement* are present, while at the same time, *Strategic_Country* is absent. Given the combinations contained in the data set, the researcher must determine which groupings are of relevant interest. Using an iterative logic based on the preliminary findings presented above, I chose to consider for closer analysis all groupings defined by the presence of one or two of a pair of attributes, and the simultaneous absence of the third attribute.

Table 6:6: Paired groupings with negations

		<i>Implementation Proportion</i>	<i>Contractual Proportion</i>	<i>Administrative Proportion</i>
1	Strategic_Country AND/OR Strategic_Agreement AND/OR Strategic_Partner	0.79	0.81	0.81
2	Strategic_Country AND/OR Strategic_Agreement BUT NOT Strategic_Partner	0.09	0.11	0.07
3	Strategic_Country AND/OR Strategic_Partner BUT NOT Strategic_Agreement	0.40	0.41	0.26
4	Strategic_Agreement AND/OR Strategic_Partner BUT NOT Strategic_Country	0.62	0.67	0.78
5	Strategic_Agreement BUT NOT Strategic_Country	0.26	0.30	0.52**
	<i>N</i>	53	27	27

Note: ** = $p \leq 0.05$ (asymptotic significance of chi-square test with 1 degree of freedom).⁸¹

⁸¹ The chi-square test is a nonparametric procedure for assessing the observed frequencies in a specified number of categories against the null hypothesis that obser-

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The outcomes of the second step analysis procedure are displayed in table 6:6, which summarizes the frequencies of the four focal attribute groupings across functional extension categories. The first row indicates the presence of any one of the three attributes under consideration. The data shows that the proportions of projects covered by either of the priority indicators *Strategic_Country*, *Strategic_Agreement* or *Strategic_Partner* are very stable across extension types. Thus, there are only minor differences between the projects contained within the various categories when the three attributes are considered together.

However, when markers of priority are combined using the selected logical operators (rows 2 to 4, table 6:6), a more nuanced pattern emerges. Most notably, the analysis refines the understanding of how *Administrative* extensions can be distinguished from the other two types of extension. According to the figures, projects extended for agency-associated reasons are more often characterized as being of strategic importance by way of inclusion in a development cooperation agreement or being implemented by favored partners, while at the same time being implemented in countries for which there is *no* official Swedish strategy for development cooperation. This particular combination of attributes covers up to 8 out of every 10 cases within the *Administrative* extension category (row 4).

A parallel observation is that the grouping that excludes the attribute *Strategic_Agreement* (row 3) is less well represented among the projects in the *Administrative* extension group. In contrast, a difference in frequencies is not as apparent when *Strategic_Partner* is excluded (row 2). Thus, the last row of table 6:6 provides further refinement of the findings regarding the singularity of agency-associated extensions: it shows that more than half of all projects extended with reference to *Administrative* procedures are executed within the frame of a development cooperation agreement but in the absence of a country strategy, compared with less than one-third of projects within the other extension categories. The result of a chi-square test supports the contention that the pattern does not occur

vations are equally distributed between the categories (expected frequencies are adjusted for the number of subjects in each category). The applied test shows that there is strong statistical evidence (about 95 per cent certainty) that the attribute combination *Strategic_Agreement BUT NOT Strategic_Country* is more common among projects in the *Administrative* extension group than among projects in the two other functional groups taken together.

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'by chance'. The differing combination of this particular pair of attributes is intriguing when considered alongside the previous empirical study's findings regarding the general relationship between organizational priorities and project completion timing (as will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter).

6.5 Respecifications

As I have argued above, project management studies have typically portrayed extension decisions as consequential upon implementation problems, and extensions are often conceptualized in terms of 'delay'. While the above analysis provides nuance to this picture by considering functional bases for extension other than implementation, it does not problematize the 'problem' issue – that is, to what extent extensions are contingent upon negative feedback from the project activities. This issue is addressed in the following sections.

Grouping variable (ii): Purposive bases of extension

In the theory chapter (*chapter two*), I questioned the assumption of negative feedback as the only 'rational' reason for project extension. More fundamentally, I suggested that reschedulings might not always be based on clearly defined feedback from individual projects. Departing from these arguments, I sought to examine the normative content of Sida's extension justifications. In seeking to identify positive and negative motives, I found that such a dichotomy was only relevant in respect of extensions referring to *Implementation* level activities. In contrast, *Contractual* extensions tended to be associated with lacking or incomplete information concerning project progress (and associated attempts to achieve compliance with reporting requirements). Similarly, the predominant purpose of *Administrative* extensions was the assessment of *ambiguous* feedback. In respect of these latter categories, the shift from the functional to the purposive basis of division did not inform a change in project groupings. For consistency and description, extensions within all three functions were nevertheless respecified in accordance with their typical purposes. However,

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the subsequent analysis step focuses primarily on the differences between the two *Implementation* level sub-categories.⁸²

Continuation is a first sub-set of *Implementation* level extensions. It involves motives such as 'strategic planning adjustment'; 'experimental reorientation phase'; 'upscaling/expansion'; 'transition to new implementing partner'; and 'replenishment'. It is a summarizing label for extensions that aim to expand or develop project activities beyond the original plan, and thus has a positive connotation.

Recuperation is a second sub-category of *Implementation*. It includes motives such as 'problems of maintenance and operation'; 'local administrative and/or political problems'; 'weak implementation capacity'; and 'management rotation/loss of staff'. It encompasses distortions in project activities associated with unfavorable managerial and/or environmental conditions. It is a summarizing label for extensions to allow for the utilization of already-agreed or disbursed project funding. This type of extension can be interpreted as a prolonged phase for the completion of original project plans, and thus has a generally negative connotation.

Compliance is the purposive category corresponding to extensions related to *Contractual* procedures. It is comprised of motives such as 'extension to adjust for late repayment of unspent balance'; 'request for updated/revised fiscal reports'; and 'extension awaiting final audit'. It is a summarizing label for extensions that do not involve a continuation of project operations *per se*, but are rather granted pending fulfillment of the formally-agreed conditions of project plans. As discussed above, this type of extension often occurs towards the end of a project cycle.

⁸² A preparatory study for a recent evaluation of aid transformation management (commissioned jointly by the donor agencies of Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) engages in a similar attempt to classify the (potential) reasons behind country and sector exits (Ekengren & Lindahl, 2006). While the 'outcome variable' in that report (*withdrawal* at the project *portfolio* level) is in the opposite direction and at a different level of aggregation than that considered in this thesis, the typology shares a common logic with that presented above. Notably, the authors suggest considering 'policy-driven exits' as one main category, alongside exits due to 'graduation' and 'poor performance'. However, the evaluation (Slob & Jerve, 2008) investigates cases only of the two latter types.

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Assessment is the purposive category corresponding to extensions related to the Sida's *Administrative* function. It comprises motives such as 'bridging phase pending Sida's decision on continued support'; 'harmonization of agreement period with other ongoing Sida projects within the same sector'; 'awaiting the development of a new country strategy and new long-term development cooperation agreement'; and 'interim extension to ensure continuity during mid-term review'. This label covers extensions that relate to procedures within the Agency, typically those that are concerned with revising project plans.⁸³

6.6 Descriptives and results (continued)

In this section, the above analysis of functional extension categories is complemented with an analysis of the purposive categories of *Continuation* and *Recuperation* (both sub-groups of *Implementation* level extensions). As shown in table 6:7, extensions based on the *Recuperation* purpose (bearing a negative connotation) were only marginally more frequent in this sample than extensions associated with the more positive purpose of *Continuation*. These observations aside, the purposive basis of division did not yield any descriptive data that was significantly differentiated from the data analyzed in the previous results section. Although extensions granted for *Continuation* purposes were generally longer than those justified with reference to *Recuperation* activities, there were no significant differences between the projects in the two categories with respect to initial agreement length or extension timing. Likewise, equally large proportions of the extension decisions in both categories were formally documented.

⁸³ Of course, all types of extension necessitate varying amounts of assessment on the part of Sida prior to a decision being taken. The distinctiveness of extensions within the *Assessment* group is that these are granted for the *purpose* of the Agency's further assessment during the extension period.

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Table 6:7: Extension outcomes according to purpose

	<i>Continuation Recuperation</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Original duration of extended project (months)	38.2	39.0
Age of project at the time of the most recent extension decision ^a (months)	42.8	44.6
Length of most recent extension ^a (months)	12.5	7.7
Formal documentation ^b	83%	86%
<i>N</i>	24	29
Percent of <i>N</i> (Implementation)	45%	55%
Percent of total <i>N</i> (all functions)	22%	27%

Note: The table displays implementation sub-groups only. ^a = as of year-end 2005; ^b = documentation in the form of a formal decision or exchange of letters.

The set-theoretic analysis of attribute combinations further substantiates the difficulty in distinguishing between different kinds of projects based on the stated purpose of their extension. Comparing the frequencies of four distinct paired groupings (in a procedure analogous with the initial step of the analysis described in section 6.4), no significant differences are observed between the *Continuation* and *Recuperation* categories (table 6:8). The full analysis results, appearing in appendix B:6, confirm this picture.

Table 6:8: Paired grouping frequencies (revisited)

	<i>Continuation Recuperation</i>	
	<i>Proportion</i>	<i>Proportion</i>
1 Strategic_Country AND Strategic_Agreement	0.13	0.14
2 Strategic_Country AND Strategic_Partner	0.17	0.14
3 Strategic_Agreement AND Strategic_Partner	0.29	0.31
<i>N</i>	24	29

While not adding explanatory power to the relationship between project results and extension motives, the step-wise analysis contained in this chapter supports one finding of general importance: it demon-

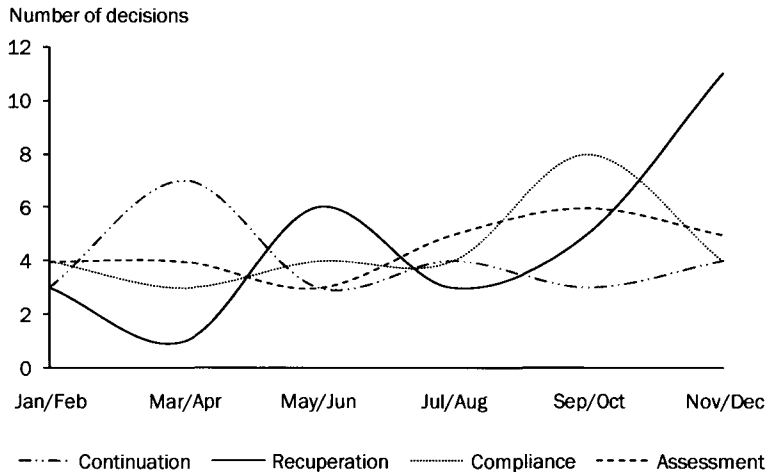
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strates that functional locus is a stronger factor than performance feedback in terms of explaining differences in extension propensities. This conclusion supports this thesis's contention that 'organizational context' matters for project outcomes.

A note on the temporality of extension motives

While the set-theoretic analysis did not reveal any significant variation among the kinds of projects extended for *Continuation*, *Recuperation* and *Compliance* reasons, the justification documentation in itself indicates clear differences in the ways in which the respective decisions are practically administered within Sida. For example, one aspect of procedural difference highlighted earlier in this chapter was that extensions related to failing contractual compliance are subject to less formal (if any) assessment within Sida, and that their final durations are sometimes not determined until after the projects have indeed concluded. However, an examination of how the extension decisions studied in this chapter were spread over the annual calendar does not support a hypothesis of random distribution:

Figure 6:1: Distribution of extension decisions over the calendar year



Note: $N = 107$.

Figure 6:1 shows that there is systematic variation in the timing of different kinds of project reschedulings: while most extensions associated with activity expansion are granted at the beginning of the year, a significantly larger proportion of extensions related to failing compliance are filed during the second half of the year. Extensions of projects that are behind schedule take mixed positions in the annual calendar, with mid-year and year-end peaks. In contrast, extensions associated with Sida's further assessment are granted on a more continuous basis. Such outcomes could be attributable to the differing timing of original agreement end dates, or of incoming extension requests.⁸⁴ However it is more likely that they are indicative of an internal 'pecking order' of extension types within the Agency, and of a cyclical variation in relation to how Sida distributes its project administration work.⁸⁵

The demonstrated pattern begs reconsideration of the principles according to which different kinds of project extension are granted. Notably, such reconsideration is relevant against the background of studies that characterize extension primarily as a vehicle (albeit of questionable external effectiveness) for speeding up Agency investments towards the end of the budget year (cf. e.g. Ostrom *et al.*, 2002), or for deferring the realization of failures. While the present study cannot rule out such antecedents, the current mapping of extension decision motives and timing shows that they are at best only partial explanations for project extension. *Chapter seven* looks more closely at the normative connotations of different extension types. The following section integrates the observations on temporality into a summarizing discussion about this chapter's findings.

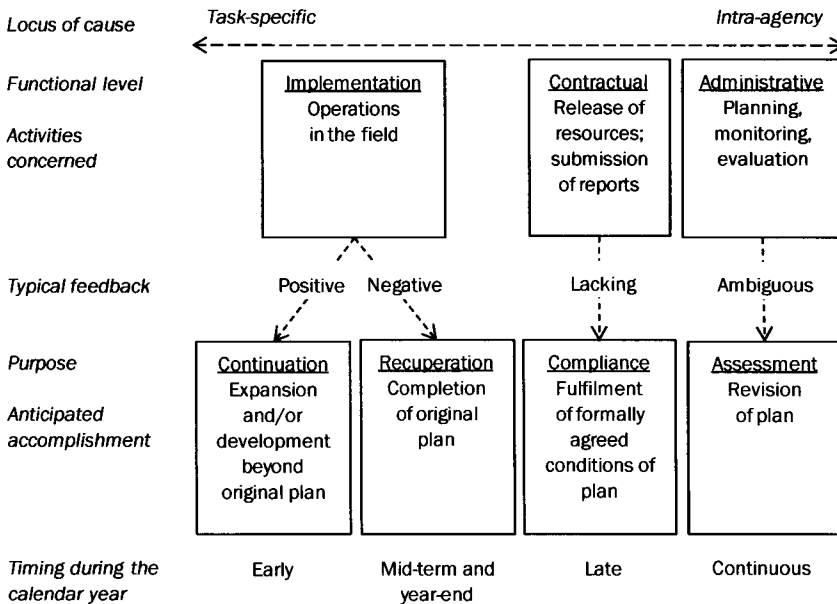
⁸⁴ Compare, however, the survival analysis contained in *chapter five*, which did not provide support for a systematic variation in overall extension propensity depending on the original end month of project agreements (appendix B:2). An intuitive explanation is that extension decisions can be made at any time during the course of project implementation, often well in advance of the formal time period added to the relevant agreement.

⁸⁵ A systematic examination of the distribution of extension types across endogenous cycles, such as the country strategy period, would have been an interesting complement. However, the sample size and variable coverage did not allow for such a detailed analysis.

6.7 Summary and discussion

This chapter has presented the outcome of my readings of archival material on specific extension events. As summarized in figure 6:2, extensions were sorted into categories based on a number of different determinants revealed in the written documentation. One key observation was that project extensions can be associated with a variety of organizational activities, including the administrative procedures within the Agency itself. The *Administrative* function was found to account for more than one-quarter of the studied extensions – a finding that contrasts starkly with much of the previous project management literature, in which timing outcomes have commonly been reduced to task-specific reasons at the implementation level.

Figure 6:2: A step-wise typology of project extensions



The classification exercise highlighted that extensions can have a variety of different purposes: while approximately one-quarter of the projects under this study were extended in order to allow for the Re-

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cuperation of operational activities in accordance with original plans, a similar proportion of extensions were found to be justified with reference to project development or expansion (*Continuation*). Thus, re-schedulings may not always be triggered by perceived problems, but may also be granted to facilitate continuance along or beyond a chosen track. By extension, this finding raises the possibility that some extended projects may, in fact, perform *better* than the average intervention.

Furthermore, the study has shown that not all extensions are contingent upon clearly defined feedback from the project activities: half of the sample comprised cases involving lacking or ambiguous accounts of previous performance. Most notably, one-quarter of the studied extension decisions were justified with explicit reference to motives that can be described as intra-agency (commonly relating to *Assessment* procedures within Sida). This impact of Sida's internal processes on project timing was implied in the results discussion of the preceding chapter, but is contrary to the practical ideal that aid project scheduling should be left to the implementing partner. It is also contrary to many of the accounts within mainstream project management theory, in which extension decisions have often been understood as reactions to poor outcomes in project implementation.

The typology developed in this study identifies the need to recognize that multiple rationales for the determination of duration outcomes may coexist within one multi-project organization. However, this chapter went further than establishing the *presence* of different extension motives/rationales: it also sought to examine whether and, if so, how the distribution of project priority indicators differed across the suggested extension types. To this end, a set-theoretic analysis was performed.

A key finding was that projects extended for agency-associated reasons stand out from the rest when it comes to the configuration of priority characteristics. A striking result was that 80 per cent of the projects extended with reference to Sida's administrative function were either covered by a development cooperation agreement or executed by a repeatedly engaged partner, while at the same time being implemented *outside* an overarching country strategy. (Notably, the paired attribute combination *Strategic_Agreement* BUT NOT *Strategic_Country* was found to apply to more than half of the projects in the *Administrative* category, compared with less than one-third of the cases in the remaining categories.)

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In addition to establishing the importance of parent organization agency for specific project extension outcomes, the results of the set-theoretic analysis served to nuance some of the findings of the survival analysis contained in *chapter five*. As discussed in that chapter, the preceding study showed that projects implemented within the framework of a country strategy are, in general, *more* likely to be extended. A reassessment of these findings in light of the current study's results points to the following pattern: although country priority increases the *overall* propensity for extension, the implementation of a project outside a country strategy appears to increase the likelihood of reschedulings originating within Sida itself.

One reading of these results is that a lack in the specification of future resource distribution at the portfolio level increases the scope for intermittent adjustments at the project level. By reverse logic, a clear country strategy may imply less freedom for changing the scope, methods and other parameters of individual interventions, and thus may also reduce the 'risk' of such reassessments being made within the frame of an extension.

The contention that extension can be used as an instrument to make time for administrative efforts is especially relevant when considered in relation to the discussion in *chapter one* about extension as the *least* labor-intensive way for Sida to continue supporting a project. While the first empirical study suggested that projects with a high priority status seem to enjoy an implied access to organizational resources in the event that specified completion dates are surpassed for whatever reason, the current study's findings indicate that priority resources are not, by default, released frivolously. While the distribution of extension registration dates over an annual calendar was indicative of a tendency for tardily implemented projects to be rescheduled towards the year-end, it showed that a similar proportion of extensions are granted during the first months of the calendar year. In particular, extensions associated with the development or expansion of (supposedly) promising projects were found to occur early in the budget period. A similar tendency of 'continuation through extension' was discussed in the temporality section in *chapter five*, which noted that the extension rate for projects covered by a country strategy was higher in the initial stages of the strategy cycle.

While the above results can be taken to support a view of extension as a project-level response to an Agency's ambition to realize the level and composition of its resource allocations determined by its

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government for the current period, my analysis points to a complementary explanation. It suggests that extensions may often be made with the aim of formalizing priority project access to resources in *subsequent* periods. In particular, the latter explanation appears pertinent in situations in which the Agency's higher-level prioritization work is pending. By synthesizing the findings of this chapter, this interpretation provides a complementary explanation for *why organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end*.

★ ★ ★

That the above conclusions are presented tentatively is indicative of some of the limitations of the study presented in this chapter. Since it is based on an analysis of *ex ante* documentation, it is not revelatory about the implications of effected extensions: notably, the circumstances in which reschedulings are perceived as 'problematic' or 'unproblematic'. While a rational answer will point to the expected utility of changes – that is, the extent to which the granting of extra time is perceived as a worthwhile trade-off for other dimensions of a project's achievements – behavioral accounts tend to emphasize the extent to which the occurrence of changes *per se* is anticipated.

Moreover, the temporal perspective suggests that there is a key difference between the time granted to accomplish established plans, and the establishment of a revised agenda (in theoretical terms, the former consists of a deviation from an extant temporal referent, while the latter sets a new one). Thus, whether an extension is externally or internally generated, and the extent to which it is planned for, should have implications not only for the practical administration of that extension, but also for its normative connotations within the granting organization. The following chapter investigates these issues by exploring how different kinds of reschedulings are acknowledged in Sida's project performance ratings.

Chapter 7

Relating to time lags: Valuations of extension in project performance assessments

The analysis in the previous chapter argues that duration extension is a multi-faceted phenomenon that can originate from both project-specific circumstances and circumstances within the administering parent organization. I have showed that extensions can have a range of different causal connections with previous project progress: while some are motivated by reported low performance, it appears equally true that well-performing projects are prolonged. Moreover, half of all extensions are based on lacking or ambiguous information. While these results imply that different types of extension have different normative connotations, the preceding empirical study presented in *chapter six* did not examine Sida's internal view of project timing outcomes once extensions occur. Thus, as a third and final step towards situating extensions within their organizational context, the analysis in this chapter addresses the question: *How are effected extensions valued?*

Based on an examination of both quantitative and qualitative project performance ratings, this chapter explores variation in the acknowledgement of different kinds of deviation from project plans. Drawing on the typology suggested in the previous chapter, I investigate whether and, if so, how effected time lags are taken into consid-

eration when project outcomes are rated within Sida. The results suggest a development of the typology, and add an interpretive complement to the understandings gained thus far of extension patterns within the studied Agency's project portfolio.

7.1 Data set and case selection

This empirical study relies on a data set of both quantitative and qualitative properties, comprising Sida's assessments of projects extended during 2005. The data consists of project-specific scores and written comments from the internal rating system, SiRS. As with the preceding studies, *projects* were defined as funding agreements categorized either as 'project support' or 'sector program support' in the Agency's own classification scheme. Extended projects were identified through duration time changes filed in PLUS during 2005, and on the availability of written information concerning the motives of these extensions, generating a preliminary sample of 104 cases (cf. case processing procedure in *chapter six*).

In a first matching between the preliminary sample and projects registered in SiRS in the period between the beginning of 2005 and the end of 2006, 30 corresponding project ratings were found. The relatively large loss of data is due to the low level of usage of SiRS within Sida: at the end of 2006, only about 25 per cent of the relevant projects had been rated, and the dropout rate from this study therefore corresponds with this level. (The fact that the preliminary sample was limited to projects with original budgets of more than SEK 3 million and original durations exceeding 24 months was not a source of additional dropout, since rating in SiRS is compulsory only for projects above these particular thresholds.)

A subsequent cross-check of the registration dates of extensions and ratings respectively showed that only six of the 30 selected ratings comprised a post-extension assessment. To ensure that the remaining information was up-to-date, requests for informal reconfirmations of available scores were sent via e-mail to the responsible Sida desk officers during the latter half of 2006 (see appendix A:8). The response rate to the survey was 100 per cent. However, four respondents were not able to provide an update, either because the project in question was already completed or because the employee was new to the post and therefore had limited knowledge of

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past activities. The exclusion of unconfirmed cases resulted in a data set of 26 ratings for further analysis. The case processing procedure is summarized in table 7:1.

Table 7:1: Case processing summary (study 3)

		N	Percent
Total		104	100%
Cases dropped	Extended projects without corresponding rating	74	71%
	Non-confirmed pre-extension ratings	4	4%
Cases available in analysis	Confirmed ratings of extended projects	26	

Complementing the above data summary, appendix B:7 contrasts descriptive statistics for the aggregate of projects rated by the end of 2005 with the descriptives of a benchmark portfolio consisting of all ongoing projects at the same point in time. The comparison indicates that projects administered by the Sida-East department are over-represented in the rating system, while projects administered by the delegated field units are generally under-represented. Anecdotal evidence based on my contacts with desk officers supports the contention that different Sida units engage in somewhat different practices relating to results evaluation (for the sectoral departments, this is partly related to the different character of the projects administered by these units). Moreover, the lagging integration of information technology systems at the field level has been raised elsewhere (e.g. in Agrell, 2006).

It should be noted that the 26-case sample of this study and the full SiRS database have different associated 'problems' in terms of the validity and reliability of extension accounts. In the SiRS population, timely projects are distinguished from extended projects based on the changes filed in PLUS, with no manual filtering for potentially erroneous registrations (cf. the case selection principles applied to the data set studied in *chapter five*). The sample of the current study is adjusted for erroneous registrations filed during 2005, but is also biased towards extension *documented* during the same period (cf. case selection procedure of *chapter six*). This matched sampling approach was a prerequisite for incorporating the previously gathered information concerning extension motives into the present empirical study.

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The proportional coverage of all extension types in the current data set suggests that this procedure did not lead to systematic selection biases (compare data in table 6:2 and figure 7:1).

7.2 Content analysis specifications

The analysis of project performance assessments seeks to examine how different types of extension are reflected in Sida's internal assessments of project results. SiRS contains assessments of performance made during the project implementation phase or upon completion. Assessments are recorded in the form of an overall rating score and brief comments at the project component level. In a preparatory step, the ratings were matched with information concerning project extension lengths, and rated projects were categorized according to the motive of their most recent extension as identified in the previous empirical study. Moreover, both individual extensions and ratings were coded by their respective dates of registration. A rating file excerpt, from the typical case of extension described at the end of *chapter three* (the *SIYB* project in Sri Lanka), is found in appendix A:7.

The analytical approach of this study involves looking at both the distribution of ranked rating scores and more qualitative assessments, through a simple form of conceptual content analysis. The central idea behind this method is 'selective reduction', whereby texts (defined broadly as any occurrence of communicative language) are reduced to manageable categories such as a word, a sentence, or a theme (Weber, 1990). Citations referring to these categories are then examined with respect to both their presence and frequency.

The first analytical step involves the comparison of rating score means for each extension type. Both cross-sectional and sequential patterns are analyzed. In the subsequent step, I identify and compare the frequency of certain types of citation contained in the written comments. Compared with the categorization exercise in *chapter six*, which was based on the consideration of a number of theoretically interesting dimensions, an overarching aim is to make the study of rating documents more sensitive to the endogenous emergence of categories and themes relevant for understanding project timing outcomes.

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Quantitative outcome measure: Rating scores

The prime outcome measure in the SiRS system is the retrospective indicator of 'Overall Performance'. According to the *SiRS Principles and General Guidelines* (Sida, 2004) performance is generally defined as "the extent to which the project has produced immediate results against agreed plans in terms of quality, quantity, time and cost, and can generally be regarded as on track" (p. 14). Overall Performance is "one comprehensive rating of the performance of the project against plans, reflecting a balanced assessment of key results, overall progress in implementation and management capacity bearing the immediate project objectives in mind" (*ibid.*, p. 15). The following scale is used in assessing Overall Performance (from Sida, 2004, p. 15):

Exceeding plans (EP): "Performance positively goes beyond targets and work plans in terms of quality, quantity, time or cost without compromising quality or other vital result specifications or the realization of the project purpose, or is otherwise considered outstanding."

According to plans (AP): "Performance is in principal [*sic*] accordance with targets and work plans in terms of quality, quantity, time and cost. Firmly on track."

Minor deviation from plans (MDP): "Performance falls somewhat short of targets and work plans in terms of quality, quantity, time and cost but is still on track."

Serious deviation from plans (SDP): "Performance shows substantial shortfalls or other negative deviations from targets and work plans in terms of quality, quantity, time and cost and is off-track."

To enable a more straightforward display of scores across different groups of projects, I assigned numerical values to each of the steps of the above-described rating scale. Cases rated as *According to plans* were coded with an outcome measure value of 0; *Exceeding plans* were coded as 1; *Minor deviation from plans* as -1; and *Serious deviation from plans* as -2. To offset the arbitrary nature of this procedure in respect of assuming equal 'distance' between scores, I relied on a 'value-neutral', non-parametric procedure for the test of the equality of population centers when judging on the statistical significance of differences in rating patterns across project categories (table 7:4 below).

Qualitative outcome measure: Rating comments

While the assignment of rating scores focuses on the question of whether or not planned targets have been achieved, the SiRS guidelines suggest that factors contributing to or explaining performance should be reflected in written comments accompanying the gradings. According to the manual, aspects to cover could be: information about whether original plans have been substantially changed, possible explanations/reasons for shortcoming or success, and proposed action, if any, to be taken. Comments are given on the project component level, meaning that one rating record normally contains several (brief) statements (cf. example in appendix A:7). The analysis procedure applied to this material is described in greater detail in the results section below.

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Some observations about measurement timing are warranted here. As described above, the projects studied in this chapter were identified and classified based on the character of their *most recent* extension. This, of course, did not exclude the possibility that the corresponding agreements had been subject to earlier changes to plans, which might be reflected in performance assessments. For the analysis of rating scores, I sought to mitigate some of these 'blurring effects' through ensuring a close timing between the extension decision and rating in focus (cf. the above-described updating procedure). As an unintended consequence, a comparison of *ex ante* and *ex post* ratings could also be invoked to strengthen the conclusions of the cross-sectional analysis. (In contrast, in the qualitative part, I chose to deal with the same problem by focusing on general references to timing outcomes, rather than on individual extension events.)

Similarly, it is possible that the studied projects have been subject to unobserved changes occurring after the present data was collected, meaning that even the so-called *ex post* ratings could refer to still ongoing projects. In other words, the presented scores should be understood precisely as assessments of projects for which a specified extension has recently been realized (rather than as evaluations of final project outcomes completed after a particular agreement has been terminated). Note also that the ratings represent the views of Sida desk officers in relation to project performance: these views

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would be expected to reflect that a rescheduling has been deemed appropriate, but to reveal little about the impact of this change in terms of development results. For a more nuanced discussion about extension *productivity*, see *chapter nine*.

Explanatory categories: Extension types

As with the previous two empirical studies, my analysis of project performance assessments seeks to explore extensions as events associated with a variety of coexisting organizational processes. Two basic arguments laid out in this thesis have been that extension decisions are not necessarily triggered by project-specific developments, and they are not always based on clearly defined feedback. My first empirical study (presented in *chapter five*) confirmed that intra-agency priorities have a significant influence on extension tendencies. My second study (in *chapter six*) established the presence of agency-associated motives among extension justifications, and showed that projects rescheduled for intra-agency purposes could be distinguished in terms of the configuration of their priority characteristics. Moreover, I found that the timing of project extensions over the calendar year varied with the stated reasons for granting additional time. In this study, I seek to complement these findings by investigating whether there is variation in how various types of extension are reflected in Sida's project performance ratings. As a starting point, functional and purposive extension categories were imported from the typology proposed in the preceding chapter. By way of reminder, the categories were defined as follows:

Implementation level extensions are concerned with project field operations, and can make reference to managerial conditions and environmental factors affecting project progress. This category was subsequently broken down into extensions with a purpose of *Continuation* (aiming at expansion and/or development of activities beyond original plan), and those with a purpose of *Recuperation* (aiming at completion of original project plans).

Contractual is an intermediate category relating to the agreed relationship between Sida and the implementing partner, encompassing activities such as disbursement (on behalf of the Agency) and reporting (on behalf of the partner). These extensions are commonly not preceded by a formal proposal, but are rather granted

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to allow for the fulfillment of contractual obligations. Using a purposive classification base, this category was described as *Compliance* (aiming at fulfillment of the formally agreed conditions of project plans).

Administrative extensions are associated with Sida's internal project administration activities, such as those concerned with planning, monitoring and evaluation, as well as those where reference is made to other internal processes (for example, the country strategy process). The category corresponds to *Assessment* purposes (aiming to revise project plans).

7.3 Descriptives

Table 7:2 summarizes the distribution of rating scores across the sample, comparing the originally retrieved records with the reconfirmed post-extension records gathered through the e-mail survey. In both data sets, projects are most commonly assessed as either performing *According to plans* or with *Minor deviation from plans*, and both mean rating scores are below zero. At an aggregated level, there are only small differences between the pre- and post-extension samples.

Table 7:2: Distribution of pre- and post-extension rating scores

	<i>Original records</i>	<i>Post-extension records</i>
	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Exceeding plans (1)	5%	12%
According to plans (0)	59%	42%
Minor deviation from plans (-1)	36%	42%
Serious deviation from plans (-2)	0%	4%
Total (all scores)	100%	100%
Average score	-0.32	-0.38
<i>N</i>		26

The interpretation of the above figures in terms of extension impact is complicated by the fact that even projects in the *ex ante* sample might have been subject to earlier changes that were not operational-

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ized within the scope of this study. However, as table 7:3 shows, no consistent trends are evident in the distribution of extension lengths across rating outcomes. Consistent with the results of the previous empirical study (*chapter six*), duration extensions seem to be assessed interchangeably as positive and negative deviations. (Moreover, the suspicion that reschedulings are not systematically considered as problematic is reinforced when comparing groups of timely projects against extended projects in the entire SiRS database; cf. appendix B:8.)

Table 7:3: Extension outcomes according to rating score

	Full set Mean	Of which:			
		EP Mean	AP Mean	MDP Mean	SDP Mean
Original duration of extended project (months)	38.6	34.3	37.5	39.5	54.0
Total length of extension (months) ^a	13.7	32.0	9.5	10.4	42.0
Length of most recent extension (months) ^a	7.2	12.0	6.3	6.8	6.0
<i>N</i>	26	3	11	11	1

Note: ^a = as of year-end 2005.

For case frequencies across the explanatory categories in focus, I refer to figure 7:1 below.

7.4 Results

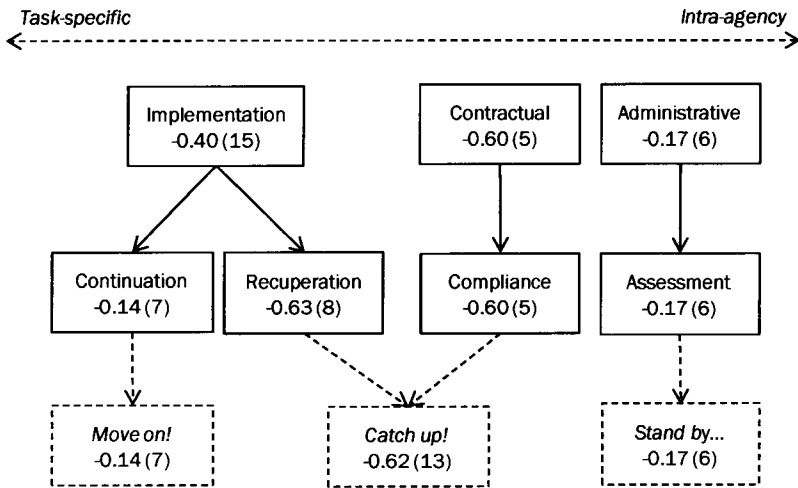
Cross-sectional distribution of scores

Figure 7:1 compares post-extension rating scores across the categories generated in the preceding empirical study of extension motives (cf. figure 6:2). The results show that there is significant variation in how different types of rescheduling are assessed within Sida. Notably, extensions granted with reference to the *Administrative* function appear to be less negatively valued than extensions referring to procedures at the *Contractual* and *Implementation* levels. However, a division of *Implementation* level extensions into those associated with *Continuation* and *Recuperation* purposes, respectively, shows that ex-

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tra time granted for the development or expansion of project activities is valued more positively than time added for the fulfillment of original plans. Thus, the analysis of ratings lends further support to the relevance of a step-wise typology.

Figure 7.1: Rating scores according to extension type



Note: $N = 26$ (sub-group sizes in parentheses).

Further, the categories *Recuperation* and *Compliance* have relatively similar rating score means. An intuitive note is that both *Recuperation* and *Compliance* motives can be associated with a *Catch-up* signal from Sida to the contractual partner (indicating that implementation or reporting activities are lagging behind schedule),⁸⁶ while *Continuation* motives can be understood as the Agency's indication to the partner to *Move on* with operational activities. By the same logic, my interpretation suggests that reschedulings caused by Sida's need for *Assessment* time are akin to a *Stand-by* order from the Agency to the implementing partner, with future project developments pending the outcomes of the Agency's administrative procedures.

⁸⁶ A similar connection was made in a recent report by the SNAO, in which lagging reporting was taken as an indication of failing implementation (RiR, 2007, p. 14 and onwards).

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The regrouped results are explored in more detail in table 7:4, which displays the frequencies of individual rating outcomes across the *Move-on*, *Catch-up* and *Stand-by* categories. As demonstrated in the table, the observed differences in aggregate ratings are based on a significantly different configuration of ranked scores. Moreover, the patterns are confirmed by the number and direction of changes between *ex ante* and *ex post* ratings. As expected, extensions within the *Catch-up* category are more frequently associated with low and deteriorating assessments of performance, while projects within the *Move-on* group receive relatively more positive assessments. From this limited material, it appears that *Stand-by* extensions assume a mid-range position, with an unclear impact on rating outcomes. This supports my contention that *Stand-by* extensions are more closely related to Sida's analysis of past or desired performance than to the enhancement of current performance.

Table 7:4: Rating scores according to extension signal

	<i>Move-on</i> Count	<i>Catch-up</i> * Count	<i>Stand-by</i> Count
Exceeding plans	2	1	0
According to plans	2	4	5
Minor deviation from plans	3	7	1
Serious deviation from plans	0	1	0
Change from pre-extension records	1 improvement, 1 deterioration	1 improvement, 5 deteriorations	No change
<i>N</i>	7	13	6

Note: * = $p \leq 0.1$ (one-sided Mann-Whitney test).⁸⁷

A note on the temporality of assessment outcomes

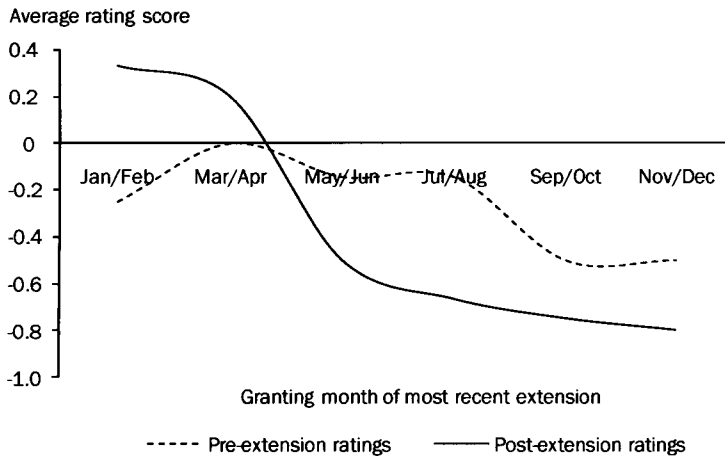
The findings presented thus far are interesting when juxtaposed against the temporal pattern of extension decisions analyzed in the previous chapter (cf. figure 6:1), and against the related discussion

⁸⁷ The Mann-Whitney test is a nonparametric procedure for assessing the null hypothesis that the central locations of two population distributions are equal. The applied test shows that there is sufficient statistical evidence (greater than 90 per cent certainty) that projects in the *Catch-up* group do not receive better ratings than projects in the other two extension groups taken together.

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about an internal 'pecking order' of extensions. Reinterpreted in accordance with the terminology introduced above, figure 6:1 shows that Sida's signals to *Move on* are, in general, given during the early months of the year, whereas the Agency's granting of *Catch-up* time is skewed towards later periods in the calendar cycle. While the idea of supporting the best candidates first appears to be an impeccable business principle, research within the public sector has frequently been concerned with the reverse side of the coin, pointing to the tendency for less promising projects to receive a form of 'last resort' endorsement associated more with achieving budgetary targets than with expectations of improvement (cf. Ostrom *et al.*, 2002 for a discussion of this problem in the aid context).

Figure 7:2: Distribution of pre- and post-extension rating scores over the calendar year



Note: $N = 26$.

Figure 7:2 puts this argument into perspective. On the one hand, the temporal distribution of post-extension averages appears to confirm that projects whose schedules are changed during the second half of the year perform worse than those being rescheduled early. On the other hand, a comparison of the level of the post-extension curve with the pre-extension curve reveals an interesting pattern. It shows that early extensions do not have an obvious association with (hitherto)

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well-performing projects, but rather that these reschedulings are *in themselves* valued as having a positive impact on overall performance levels (as the curve of post-extension rating averages is *above* the pre-extension line during the early part of the year). In contrast, the performance pattern of projects prolonged in the mid- and latter stages of the year confirms the conventional association of extension with negative deviance from original plans.

Discerning the implications of the above results is difficult without specific knowledge about how timing outcomes are traded off against other aspects of a project's achievements. My examination of written rating comments described below takes an initial step in this direction through examining how the dimensions of quality, quantity, time and cost are represented in Sida's performance assessments. In this sense, this final empirical section also serves as a transition to the integrated analysis in *chapter eight*, which discusses how allocations of money and effort can be understood in connection with duration extension.

On the composition of rating comments

Parallel with my examination of rating scores, I explored the contents of the written comments contained in the SiRS database. An overall aim was to complement the quantitative analysis with a qualitatively-oriented description of how timing outcomes appear in the explanations of performance gradings. Due to both the irregularities in rating coverage and the assumed reflection of wider project histories in the small number of available assessments, it was recognized early that connecting individual comments with special extension events was problematic. Thus, the focus broadened towards encompassing more general references to timing outcomes, and to the consideration of scheduling in relation to other aspects of project performance not systematically analyzed within the previous studies. In accordance with content analysis principles, I use ranked displays of frequently appearing themes to support the discussion.

An underlying contention of the interpretive methodology is that the understanding of textual outcomes is incomplete without a critical examination of the prevailing structural circumstances associated with providing such statements. In terms of the literature review in *chapter two*, the SiRS database format and instructions are heavily influenced by a 'single project management logic', by which the clas-

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sification of deviations and risks are predefined as either 'managerial' or 'environmental' factors. By implication, comments on deviations (regardless of type and direction) refer exclusively to conditions and occurrences at the task-specific level, while neglecting agency-associated changes (table 7:5). The same logic suggests an explanation for why none of the studied reschedulings with an *Assessment* purpose (also interpreted as *Stand-by* time for the implementing partner) were reflected in changed post-extension ratings (table 7:4). Although these patterns accord with the donor community's espoused ideal of recipient party ownership, the results of my empirical studies point to the relevance of also recognizing the extent to which Sida's organization influences on project plans and partner activities.

Table 7:5: Most frequently cited triggers of deviation

<i>Locus of cause</i>	<i>Deviating aspect</i>	<i>Citation count</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Task-specific	Managerial	23	1
	Environmental	10	2
(Intra-agency)		0	

Note: *N* = 26. Deviating aspects are not mutually exclusive.

Another, related, observation is that the SiRS system focuses narrowly on the LFA-inspired performance indicators quality, quantity, time and cost (table 7:6). Although the rating manual attempts to separate these indicators, the system structure (requiring weighted quantitative scores, to which qualitative comments can be added) makes a practical distinction between references to timing and other project outcomes difficult. Time lags are the most frequently acknowledged deviation, followed by diverging qualitative and quantitative results. However, the time perspective is often used as a 'modifier' in the assessment of quality and quantity; a somewhat curious standard phrase is that a project is "on track, but behind schedule". (Generally, the inclusion of both a quantity and a time indicator in the same weighted measure makes analysis for the purposes of this study problematic, since a deviation in any of the two dimensions must be defined in relation to the other dimension.)

Surprisingly, the examined material did not mention deviations in terms of costs. While this may of course reflect actual project devel-

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opments, it is interesting that several of the comments on project *risk levels* include concerns about lacking (financial) sustainability after agreement completion (with some explicitly acknowledging that the maintenance of activities would depend on Sida's decisions on continued support for the project). However, the stipulation that all aspects of performance are to be judged against the activities of the implementation partner excludes a closer examination of Sida's own inputs. This may also explain why needs for budget infusions are not an issue in the ratings of overall results.⁸⁸

Table 7.6: Most frequently cited types of deviation

<i>Functional level</i>	<i>Deviating aspect</i>	<i>Citation count</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Implementation	Quality	8	2
	Quantity	7	3
	Time	17	1
	Cost	0	5
Contractual	Reporting	2	4
(Administrative)		0	

Note: $N = 26$. Deviating aspects are not mutually exclusive.

When timing deviations are clearly elaborated, these are usually limited to comments about negative deviations (phrased commonly as 'implementation delay'). Somewhat paradoxically, a large proportion of all extended projects are nevertheless assessed as running *According to plans* (table 7.2 and appendix B:8). Moreover, the comments associated with the few projects rated as performing well (*Exceeding plans*) give the impression that these have in fact been implemented in accordance with the relevant schedules (thereby possibly exceeding expectations in that regard). While these patterns may be indicative of desk officers giving less weight to timing deviations than to deviations with respect to other aspects of performance when assigning

⁸⁸ Evidence from a recent survey among Sida personnel supports this interpretation. Compared with other types of deviation from project plans, the respondents considered '*exceeding the specified budget*' to be the type of deviation that Sida had the greatest opportunity of avoiding (more so than deviations relating to meeting qualitative, quantitative and timing targets) (appendix A:11).

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compound scores,⁸⁹ they also bring into question the aspiration levels against which overall performance is judged. The final section integrates these observations in a discussion about the chapter's overall findings.

7.5 Summary and discussion

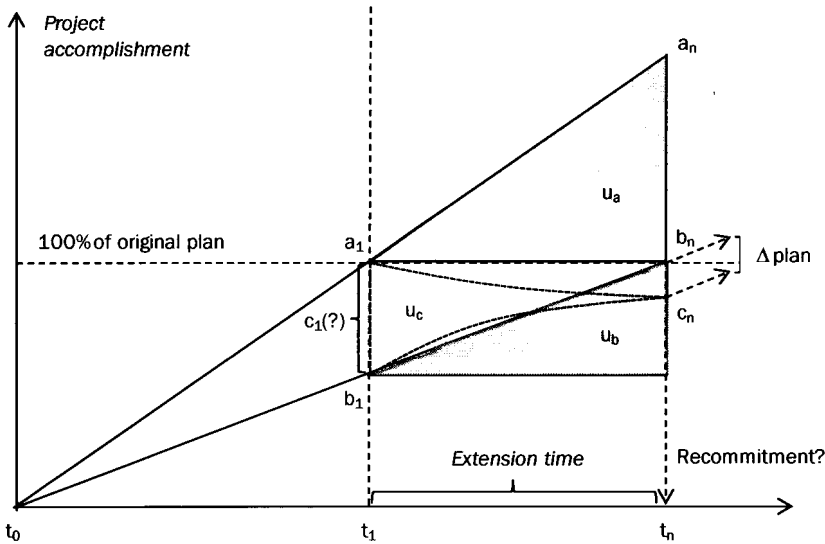
This chapter has presented findings from my study of the treatment of timing outcomes in Sida's project performance assessments. I analyzed aggregate rating scores across different types of extension, as well as the changes incurred between pre- and post-decision gradings. One general observation made was that Sida's valuation of effected reschedulings can be both positive and negative, depending on the aims behind providing extra time (rather than on the amount of time provided). Although this may seem a logical position, the emphasis on variation in how time is valued differs from much of the previous literature, in which project extensions have primarily been understood as negative deviance.

Based on observed patterns in rating score means and associated comments, the study identified a normative divide between projects extended in order to *Move on* with operational activities beyond original plans, and those extended to allow for the implementation partner to *Catch up* with either implementation or reporting in accordance with previously agreed stipulations. I demonstrated that projects extended for the former reasons were retrospectively assessed more favorably in terms of achieved results (thereby supporting the motives-based typology developed in *chapter six*, while also complementing the typology by indicating the normative association between *Compliance* and *Recuperation* purposes). Furthermore, the analysis reemphasized the singling out of extensions primarily associated with an additional period of interim assessment by Sida (to revise past or desired results rather than to enhance current performance). With respect to project operations in the field, this category of extension was interpreted as involving a *Stand-by* signal.

⁸⁹ There is survey evidence of an inverse relationship between the frequency with which schedule slippage occurs (and is commented upon), and the importance that desk officers assign to this type of deviation when assessing project results. Although (or because) timing deviations are common, it appears that they are not perceived as particularly serious negative incidents (cf. appendix A:11).

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Figure 7.3: A model of expected extension utility



Note: t_0 = initiation date; t_1 = original completion date; t_n = revised completion date; a = Move-on time; b = Catch-up time; c = Stand-by time; a_1 ; b_1 ; c_1 = project accomplishment at original completion date; a_n ; b_n ; c_n = project accomplishment at revised completion date; u_a ; u_b ; u_c = expected extension utility.

With these differences established, it is interesting to note that a large proportion of the studied projects (within all extension categories) were rated as performing ‘according to plans’. It appears counterintuitive that a rescheduled project can be assessed as non-deviating. In practice, however, the SiRS system structure allows a timing deviation to be offset (and therefore cancelled out) against other (apparently more positive or important) project developments. At the same time, the study’s results raise the issue of the standards against which performance is judged. Less rationalistic perspectives on timing valuation have suggested that one key aspect to consider is the extent to which a certain outcome is anticipated (and, consequently, also the extent to which predefined goals are realistic).⁹⁰ If

⁹⁰ Cf. Mapsec’s (2007) review of Sida’s internal effectiveness, which expressed concern that the current structure of the SiRS system could lead to a systematic under-estimation of desired results in the formulation of project goals, in order to increase the probability of positive deviations in actual performance (pp. 74-77).

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plans are confused with anticipations, late project completion may be perceived as completion 'according to plans'. By the same logic, a project rated as 'exceeding plans' may have been implemented according to the original schedule (exceeding expectations in that regard). The validity of this interpretation is supported by the knowledge that extension is indeed a common (or 'normal') type of deviation within Sida (*chapter five* and appendix A:11).⁹¹

Similarly, extensions granted for agency-associated reasons were not reflected in changed rating scores, nor were they apparent in the written comments. Although these extensions can be described as 'neutral' in terms of changes to the level and scope of operational activities, they nevertheless exert an impact by requiring implementation partners to maintain or postpone their activities pending the outcomes of Sida's assessment. My examination of the rating system revealed that the tendency to disregard these effects is in part a structural issue, with valuation principles and guidelines in themselves heavily weighted towards the project's operational activities. While this accords with mainstream project management principles, it leads to a neglect of how agency-associated factors (including the control over disbursements) affect project performance.

The contention that changes to project schedules initiated by Sida are not considered problematic – particularly if they are anticipated – is especially interesting in relation to the discussion in *chapter six* concerning 'continuation through extension', or 'planned' reschedulings being routinely made at the beginning of a year or strategy period. I argued that these instances of extension can be understood as ways of adjusting project schedules in response to oscillating levels of certainty regarding future resource distribution within the organization. I also highlighted extension as a solution in those cases in which there was *no* overarching commitment plan against which project schedules could be paced. This study suggests that the utility of such administrative reschedulings lies, precisely, in the opportunity for Sida to establish a revised agenda that is synchronized with its internal processes. Thus, a theoretical interpretation of this study's observations is that intra-organizational reschedulings are valued not as deviations from project plans, but rather as adjustments to the

⁹¹ Cf. also the instruction in the SiRS manual that "contributions initially and formally shorter than 24 months, but *expected* to be extended, should be rated" (Sida 2004, p. 11).

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plans against which performance is to be assessed. By synthesizing the findings of this chapter, this explanation suggests an additional way of understanding *why organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end*.

★ ★ ★

According to Sida's espoused ideals, project performance valuation should be a 'rational' assessment of the 'nominal' deviation of project achievements from stipulated plans. However, as the above discussion suggests, in practice, the rating exercise is far from such a straightforward calculation. For example, it varies according to the Agency's motives behind extension rather than according to extension lengths. Moreover, this study has identified the practical difficulty in making a distinction between aspiration levels and expected outcomes, and the importance of organizational origin on the 'visibility' of effected changes.

A further complication suggested in my analysis of qualitative rating material is that there is much scope for how different aspects of performance (notably quality, time and cost) can be offset against each other in making a weighted assessment of project performance. While a mainstream account would point to the expected implications of a deviation in one of the dimensions for a project's achievements in the other dimensions, the findings of this thesis suggest that the perceived seriousness of a deviation also varies contextually. My first empirical study (in *chapter five*) revealed the influence of project priority status on Sida's extension considerations, and concluded that, in general, the granting of extension time is more extensive in projects for which the continued supply of organizational resources is understood to be assured. My second study (*chapter six*) highlighted the impact of the studied Agency's priority-setting processes on project timing, concluding that agency-associated extensions are more common when there is an administrative requirement to formalize a project's future access to resources. The current, third, study has suggested that Sida's underlying principles for the valuation of project timing deviations makes a distinction between externally- and internally-triggered extensions, with the latter typically considered as less noteworthy.

A necessary condition for the validity of the above conclusions is that extensions may involve varying amounts of additional project

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funding and administrative work by Sida. However, I have not yet discussed how Sida's allocations of operational and administrative resources are connected with their rescheduling decisions. The consideration of these 'internal' cost and quality dimensions in explaining the observed timing patterns is one expansion in scope suggested in *chapter eight*, which integrates findings on extension lengths, motives and valuations, drawn from all three empirical studies presented thus far. The analysis concludes with a generalized discussion about the relationships between performance constraints, priority systems and timing outcomes within multi-project organizations (*chapter nine*).

Chapter 8

Conceptions of extension: The integrated account

In a classic critique of overly rational assumptions in theorizing about organizational behavior, Weick (1979) argued that:

People often treat organizations as if they were clocks that can be read, counted, measured. If organizations are clocks, they are certainly unusual ones. Not only can they be misread, but it is also possible that: "(1) the frequency with which the clock is consulted may modify the time it reports; (2) the time the clock is expected to show may modify the time it actually reports; (3) if the observer dislikes the clock, it will report time differently than if he is fond of it; (4) if the observer sends someone else to consult the clock, it will report differently; (5) the time indicated by other clocks adjacent to the one being consulted or the position of this clock relative to other clocks might influence the time the clock in question reports" (Weick, 1979, p. 25, citing Wallerstein & Sampson, 1971, p. 45).

If the word 'clock' is replaced with 'project', and the word 'observer' with (multi-project) 'organization' in the exposition above, it can be postulated that:

- (i) the frequency with which a project is assessed may modify the (perceived) timeliness of its achievements;
- (ii) the expected (un)timeliness of project achievements may modify the actual timing of its outcomes;

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- (iii) if the organization (dis)likes a project, then the timeliness of its achievements will be perceived differently;
- (iv) if the organization lets someone else (for instance, a researcher) assess a project, then the timeliness of its achievements will be perceived differently;
- (v) the timing of other projects adjacent to the one being assessed or the position of the project relative to other projects might influence the timing of its outcomes.

This paraphrasing presents a concise summary of the current thesis's findings. Thus, a first assertion from my studies is that projects should be analyzed not as clocks, but as parts of organizations. The internal structures, processes and norms of such organizations should be assumed to affect how the results of individual project activities are conceived. While this may appear a self-evident statement in a piece of research within the field of organization studies, it has been my argument that previous explanations of project timing outcomes have often been under-contextualized. My inquiry into *duration extensions* as a phenomenon situated at the interface between temporary and permanent organizing contributes to addressing this knowledge gap.

This chapter will synthesize and generalize the observations from my three empirical studies, and initiate a discussion about the different ways in which 'organizational context' was found to be reflected in patterns of extension *lengths*, *motives* and *valuations*. The integrated results are discussed in relation to the knowledge gap identified in previous research on temporary organizing and time in organizations. A theoretical development based on the thesis's conclusions follows in *chapter nine*.

8.1 Synthesis

The question raised in the introduction – about *why organizations prolong activities which they have set out to end* – was posed in relation to the traditional assumption that organizations are 'going concerns', that is, established with the expectation that their activities will be maintained for an indefinite period of time (cf. Paterson, 1988). The question was also posed in relation to mainstream project management, which highlights the existence of temporary organiza-

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tional arrangements, but involves a prescriptive agenda whereby deviations from schedules are not chosen, but rather occur as a consequence of unexpected developments during execution (e.g. PMI, 2004). Even studies that have aimed to move beyond these instrumentalist approaches have promoted a conceptualization of projects as distinct and unique undertakings (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Packendorff, 1995; Wikström, 2000). My contention has been that neither perspective provides a fruitful starting point for the examination of temporary activities within a continuing organization. Instead, I have drawn on a body of literature that takes organizational experiences with time as a topic of research in its own right, enabling an explicit inquiry into the factors and processes that contribute to how organizations justify and value time structures (see Ancona *et al.*, 2001a).

The reason why context-sensitive research is needed becomes apparent when considering the above passage's metaphorical illustration of how projects and their results are affected by their surrounding environments. Empirically, this thesis has identified the *multi-project organization* (Gareis, 1989; Payne, 1995) as one arena in which the relevance of going beyond the 'single project perspective' in explaining project outcomes is apparent. A basic argument has been that in multi-project organizations, projects are affected by overarching structures and processes relating to explicit strategies as well as to more implicit organizational routines – all of which lie outside the scope of any single project task (cf. Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002; Engwall, 2003a). The theoretical chapter (*chapter two*) discussed these contextual influences in light of the need to coordinate organizational activities along two fundamental dimensions: a *hierarchical* dimension involving the *prioritization* between activities in terms of strategic commitment; and a *temporal* dimension involving the *synchronization* of activity cycles. Drawing on this dual conceptualization, I hypothesized that both a project's relative importance and its timing in relation to other ongoing activities should be reflected in duration outcomes.

Inspired by the behavioral view on organizational decision-making (Cyert & March, 1963/1992 and followers), a further contention was that aspects of prioritization and synchronization should influence not only the propensity for projects to be extended, but also how re-schedulings are justified and how the resulting time lags are valued within the parent organization. In search of a deep understanding of

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these multiple and complex dimensions, I undertook three complementary empirical studies (of extension lengths, motives and valuations, respectively) within one particular multi-project organization – Sida. The activities of this organization are conducted under a set of constitutional, policy-related, and operational rule- and goal structures, which guide the composition of its project portfolio. Meanwhile, the organization has aspired to outsource the responsibility for achieving individual project objectives to its contractual partners (*chapter one*).

Although the aim of transferring ownership over implementation is in part an ideological issue specific to the aid sector, its implications are representative of a tendency to underestimate external influences on project outcomes that is common in much of the theory-practice nexus of project management (cf. Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006). My introduction of the ‘organization’ as an active agent in this thesis’s question about how timing outcomes are arrived at aimed to challenge the managerial view of activity duration as a matter of intentional design. Rather, I sought to highlight the interdependencies between individual projects and longer-lasting organizational structures and processes as a key feature of multi-project organizing. Specifically, I argued for understanding multi-project organizations as characterized by the challenge of accommodating, on the one hand, a ‘closed’ mode of designing operational activities, and on the other, an ‘open-ended’ mode of organizing administrative functions (cf. Dubinskas, 1988; Schein, 1992).

The results of my studies demonstrate clearly that individual project outcomes are not immune from the parent organization’s overarching considerations of how to coordinate its activities, both hierarchically and temporally. Below follows a recapitulation of how the observed patterns of extension lengths, motives and valuations can be explained in terms of prioritization and synchronization (full accounts of each study’s findings are found in *chapters five, six and seven*).

Reflections of prioritization in extension patterns

The analytical concept of *prioritization* was introduced to account for the hierarchical coordination between projects within a portfolio, assuming that concurrent activities – although implemented separately – are related by their competition for the scarce resources and strate-

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gic commitment of the parent organization. In practice, priorities were operationalized based on the directions set out in the studied organization's overarching strategic frameworks for portfolio composition (see *chapter three*).

In my examination of extension lengths (*chapter five*), I found that the studied organization was more likely to extend projects that enjoyed a high priority status within its portfolio. Expressions of organizational commitment to prolonged engagement in certain geographic areas, with certain contractual partners, and according to the intentions specified in overarching agreements with key stakeholders, were all found to significantly increase the propensity for projects to run overtime. My interpretation was that, in general, projects for which the sustained supply of organizational resources is ostensibly secured are more likely to be continued beyond original end dates. The relatively small amount of administrative work incurred through prolongation was suggested as one explanation of why such ongoing commitment is frequently effected through an interim extension decision rather than as a new project.

These conclusions were developed in my study of extension motives (*chapter six*). Here I showed that a significant proportion of the extensions granted by the studied organization were justified with reference to its internal portfolio administration activities (notably, the reassessment of realized and intended project outcomes pending continued commitment). Moreover, I found that projects rescheduled for administrative reasons differed in their priority status: frequently, these projects were *not* covered by an overarching geographic strategy, while being prioritized in another dimension. My contention was that internally-generated extensions are more common in the absence of higher-level strategy-making, as disparities in the organization's consideration of future directions must be 'solved' during the course of the individual project assessment procedure. These findings suggested that the utility of some extensions does not lie primarily in adjusting operational deadlines, but rather in providing the freedom for a parent organization to make time for addressing internal uncertainties regarding a project's achieved results or priority status (and that in these cases, prolongation is more than 'just' a convenient way to continue activities).

In my study of extension valuations (*chapter seven*), the understanding of intra-organizational reschedulings was further nuanced. I showed that in contrast with those project extensions solicited by ex-

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ternal parties, internally-generated extensions were often disregarded in the organization's own assessments of project performance. The structure of the applied rating model (which was, unsurprisingly, found to be heavily influenced by conventional project management logic) was put forward as a technical factor contributing to the neglect of parent organization impact on individual project outcomes. However, I also argued a conceptual difference in the analysis of the organization's 'own' reschedulings: these are likely to be accounted for not as deviations from plans, but as changes to the plans against which results are benchmarked (the latter scenario of course being even more probable if changes are anticipated, or even planned). By implication, this last study brought together the empirical investigation with the conclusion that extending its own projects is not only a relatively simple and potentially useful type of action, but also an unproblematic step for a multi-project organization to take.

Reflections of synchronization in extension patterns

The concept of *synchronization* was introduced to account for the temporal coordination between projects and other organizational processes, assuming that dependencies also arise though a parent organization's attempts to match the timing of concurrent activities. In practice, timing was operationalized based on the periodicities implicit in the studied organization's overarching frameworks for portfolio composition (*chapter three*).

In my examination of extension lengths (*chapter five*), I started out by observing that the allocation of extension time was synchronized with the calendar year, and that the typical prolongation period was timed to the parent organization's administrative routines for interim reporting and (re)commitment. Similarly, I pointed to the oscillating effects of a project's priority status on extension rates, in accordance with longer cycles of operational planning (notably, the five-year horizon by which geographic strategies are formulated within the organization under study). These findings reinforced the contention that the propensity for project extension varies positively with the degree of certainty about future resource distribution within a multi-project organization.

In my study of extension motives (*chapter six*), this interpretation was elaborated on. When distinguishing between different motives for providing extra time, I found a clear variation in the way that the or-

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ganization's extension decisions were distributed over the calendar year. The observations suggested a pattern of 'planned continuance' of relatively promising projects when the organization's allocation of resources had recently been refreshed, and a concomitant last resort endorsement of projects in which implementation was lagging. In contrast, decisions regarding the organization's 'administrative' extensions (typically undertaken with the aim of reassessing projects from which available feedback is ambiguous) were found to be less dependent on the cyclicity of the calendar year.

My study of extension valuation (*chapter seven*) complemented the earlier findings by demonstrating a temporal variation in how extension outcomes were retrospectively assessed: extra time granted at the beginning of the year was often valued positively in terms of resulting project accomplishments, while the reverse tended to be true for end-of-year reschedulings. That administrative reschedulings were granted continuously throughout the budget period, and that they were also more likely to be made in the absence of an overarching strategy setting the reference pace for the organization's long-term advances in commitment, is a complementary way to understand why little attention was devoted to the resulting time lags in subsequent assessments of project outcomes.

Contributions to filling the identified knowledge gap

As reviewed above, the research topic of this thesis was identified in response to calls for a better understanding of the interrelationships between temporary activities and more permanent organizational structures, raised notably by scholars within the 'Scandinavian School' of project studies (e.g. Blomquist & Packendorff, 1998; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002; Engwall, 2003a). Similarly, the need for a widened spatial focus has been articulated as being central to advancing more general theoretical arguments about time in organizations (Ancona & Chong, 1996; Goodman *et al.*, 2001).

In 'temporal terms', project duration extension can be understood as the outcome of a successive move from the hard deadlines of the predefined project plan, to a more open-ended and *soft time constraint* as the project proceeds. Although earlier studies have emphasized the possibility for enactment of different temporal norms at different points in time (see Orlikowski & Yates, 2001), the opposite pattern to that problematized in this thesis is usually expected: that is, project

deadlines are assumed to increase in importance the closer they loom (Gersick, 1988; 1989). At the same time, there is abundant empirical evidence that aligns with this dissertation's contention that activity prolongation is indeed a widespread organizational phenomenon (Morris & Hough, 1987 and followers).

As discussed in *chapter two*, practical instances of extension have commonly been understood as responses to the perceived need to handle complexities arising in a project over time, amplified by the hope of attaining as-yet unmet goals (cf. e.g. Staw & Ross, 1978; Brockner, 1992; Meredith & Mantel, 2003). While my empirical studies align with earlier accounts regarding the pervasive influence of project complexity on timely completion, as well as the frequent justification of extensions with reference to a catch-up ambition, my findings are, at the same time, strongly affirmative of the relevance of going beyond these task-specific antecedents towards a more contextualized view of projects and their performance.

At the theoretical level, this thesis confirms preliminary hypotheses about the importance of taking overarching structures, processes and norms into account when aiming to understand the (re)allocation of resources and commitment across an organization's project portfolio (cf. Cyert & March, 1963/1992; Bowen, 1987; Ross & Staw, 1993). Specifically, it points to the relevance of analyzing timing changes in the light of how temporal orders interact across different levels and functions within an organization (Ancona *et al.*, 2001b). At the empirical level, the thesis aligns with previous case-based evidence regarding the pervasiveness of multi-level coordination needs within multi-project organizations (e.g. Eskerod, 1998; Sjögren Källkvist, 2000; Mähring, 2002). In particular, my studies add rigidity to Engwall's (2003a) postulation that project scheduling is strongly contingent upon the principles for intra-organizational prioritization between concurrent activities.

In addition to these general claims, this dissertation also suggests some specific directions along which project/context relationships can be fruitfully analyzed. A synthesis of the findings presented above suggests that multi-project organizations can resort to project-level extension because it is a convenient, useful and unproblematic way for such organizations to give themselves time to solve managerial problems that are not primarily related to the individual project tasks. Superficially, this conclusion seems to align with earlier research that has described extension as a way for public organizations

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to increase the size of their project portfolios while keeping administrative costs down (amplified, arguably, by the increasing need for realizing a certain predefined level of portfolio investments within certain strategic areas during a fixed period of time) (e.g. Wildavsky, 1984 and followers).⁹²

While this thesis has not inquired quantitatively into the dimensioning and allocation of operational and administrative budgets (see, however, the following section for a brief complementary discussion), the mapping of extension decision timing and motives nevertheless suggests that the above-described *disbursement pressure* is at best only a partial explanation for project extension patterns within the studied organization. Rather, I have emphasized that many reschedulings occur early in the calendar year and in the initial stages of a strategy cycle, and that these cases are frequently associated with positive purposes such as activity expansion or development. These results suggest that extensions may alternatively be explained through a *planning pressure*, that is, the need to formalize priority project access to organizational resources in future periods.

My inquiry into extension functionality moreover shows that it is not uncommon for extensions to be justified with respect to the parent organization's ambitions of *increasing* administrative efforts directed to a particular project. While this option has traditionally been understood as activated primarily in response to decline in the performance of individual projects (cf. Hirschman, 1970), my studies have highlighted the effect of organizational contingencies in influencing how administrative resources are distributed. Notably, I have argued that project-level recommitments tend to be particularly labor-intensive (and time-consuming) in situations of *strategic vacuum*, as for example when the general directions for portfolio composition are pending (cf. Åkesson, 1997; Egerö *et al.*, 2002). In this respect, my findings are consistent with Stinchcombe and Heimer's (1985) postulation that "the analysis of administrative delays is really the analysis of delays in policy-making" (pp. 319-320). The realization that a par-

⁹² The common association of project extension with a soft *budget constraint* (Kornai, 1986) is based on game-theoretic arguments, which hold that the primary incentive for government agencies to exert effort is to prove to their respective ministries that a sufficient number of projects have been launched in a formally correct manner, with little concern for the content and 'real' outcomes of commitments made (cf. Maskin, 1999). My discussion about alternative rationales for the balancing of multiple performance dimensions continues in *chapter nine*.

ent organization can *proactively* reallocate working time as a means of mitigating uncertainties or inconsistencies in its overarching strategic frameworks is, however, an important complement to the reactive mechanisms raised in many earlier accounts of extension.⁹³

A key conclusion of this thesis is that the need to synchronize project cycles with overarching processes of budgeting and strategy-making is a recurrent reason for a parent organization to adjust project scheduling. Interestingly, this reason also appears as an internally legitimate justification for actively engaging in project quality enhancement, even in cases where the expressed intention is to out-source operational planning and implementation to external partners. A traditional way of explaining this paradox would be to refer to the routinization of frequently occurring courses of action (e.g. March & Olsen, 1989). A complementary explanation, which is more sensitive to the importance of organizational agency when analyzing timing valuation (cf. Blount & Janicik, 2001), is to look at extension as involving a possibility for the parent organization to reset a project clock with fresh schedules and new deadlines, or, interchangeably, to pause the clock while new schedules and deadlines are being established. Both actions imply that temporal reference points are altered to create a *free period of activities*, the duration of which can be used as the originator deems suitable.⁹⁴

In sum, the practice of softening time constraints when it is useful for internal purposes is one example of how multi-project organizations respond to the challenge of bridging the interface between their portfolio of time-limited activities and their continuing umbrella

⁹³ That organizations respond to ambiguity by delaying decisions has, however, been observed in earlier studies of organizational decision-making. For example, it has been shown that demanding adherence to a rational choice model of decision-making and highlighting additional information needs or new decision alternatives is a way for an organization to gain time before having to act (Brunsson, 1981). Similarly, external demands on procedural and substantive rationality have been seen to trigger delay in reaching decision outcomes (see Sjögren, 2006 for one such example).

⁹⁴ My discussions with one recently-retired desk officer about the topic of this thesis illustrated anecdotally that transitions in temporal mind-sets are easily 'normalized'. The subject argued that Sida's project activities would not be an informative basis for the study of time limits in intervention design, since "in reality, out projects have always been long-term". Rather, he suggested looking more deeply into budget support, which is agreed in annual lump sums (and thus abides by a fixed, 'externally-paced' temporal structure).

structure. The possibilities for enactment of the temporal referents that are best suited for the moment, and for creation of new temporal referents when this is needed, are important components in understanding how multi-project organizations succeed in sustaining both their temporary and permanent characters. More specifically, project extension provides an opportunity for smoothing cyclical variations at overarching organizational levels by the reallocation of time at a lower level, in order to assure continuity in the infusions of funding and effort to priority areas. In drawing this conclusion, this dissertation adds both a temporal dimension to the hierarchical coordination mechanisms often emphasized in prior accounts of multi-project organizing, and a hierarchical dimension to the temporal coordination mechanisms emphasized in the literature on time in organizations. It also suggests that duration extension can be understood in relation to how organizations balance their administrative and operational allocations. This argument is initiated through an empirical extension below, and developed theoretically in the subsequent chapter.

8.2 Money, effort and extension: An empirical complement

A necessary condition upon which the above conclusion is premised is that project extensions can involve varying amounts of additional operational funding and administrative work on the part of a parent organization. A natural follow-up question concerns how the studied organization's actual allocations of operational and administrative resources were connected with its extension decisions. To fully account for these alternative dimensions of extension would require significant research that is outside the scope of the present thesis. Nonetheless, even a limited 'twisting and turning' (cf. Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 1994) of the data sets and variables used thus far provides some revealing supplements to the arguments outlined above. Notably, the coupling of changes to end-of-agreement dates with concurrent changes in the value of project investment (as defined by the variable *Original_Project_Size* in *chapter five*) provides a proxy for measuring infusions of operational funding made within the frame of a duration extension.⁹⁵ Regarding the amount of administrative work

⁹⁵ Within the studied organization, a registered increase in the value of investment formally committed to a project is a necessary, but not a sufficient, requirement for

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incurred by an extension, the degree of formality of extension documentation (see *chapter six*, table 6:3) provides fair guidance.⁹⁶ These two outcome variables are particularly interesting when juxtaposed against the arguments of Ostrom *et al.* (2002), who postulate that empirical evidence on budgetary pressure should see an increasing amount of 'costly' – but relatively poorly prepared – project extensions towards the end of the year, legitimized by the replacement of formal preparations for trust and experience (for instance, with repeatedly engaged partners) (pp. 156-157).

Appendix C displays key variable relationships rearranged according to a *budget dimension* and a *documentation dimension*, respectively. Notably, it appears that in the studied population, only one in every six extended projects was concurrently granted additional funding (appendix C:1). Moreover, funding infusions were seldom granted to poorly implemented projects (appendix C:2), and most budget addition decisions were formally documented (appendix C:6). Thus, while the year-end surge in extensions with a recuperation purpose might be related to the deferral of the reporting of weak results, it does not seem to coincide with a frivolous release of resources. These observations indicate the limits of an explanation related to disbursement pressure in accounting for project timing outcomes within the studied multi-project organization.

On the other hand, a number of observations increase the validity of a planning pressure explanation for the observed project extension patterns. While it appears that projects with a high priority status have a greater propensity for receiving additional funding (appendix C:3), the changes made to priority agreements are generally better documented (appendix C:5). In combination with the observations concerning budget infusion timing above, these findings support my interpretation of extension as a response to the need to tie up organ-

the subsequent disbursement of funds. Thus, the chosen variable is a good proxy for infusions of additional funding, but does not capture instances of delayed transfer of originally agreed project budgets. (In contrast, infusions of time have the convenient property of being 'transferred' from the granting agent to the implementing partner as soon as the endorsement by the former is communicated.)

⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the preparation of 'good documents' is not necessarily synonymous with devising good project design (or conversely: much fruitful effort towards this end may be undocumented). These points may be especially relevant given the lack of opportunities to (legitimately) discuss Sida's potential contributions to improving intervention results (see further *chapter ten*).

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izational resources (both administrative and operational) for later use within priority areas. In general, the findings indicate that prioritized projects are associated with higher administrative efforts (and most likely, higher aspiration levels) within the studied organization.⁹⁷

In sum, a limited empirical reexamination of the resource reallocation aspects of extension provides initial support to the notion that timing outcomes must be understood in relation to how the parent organization's ambitions for quality-making are distributed across its project portfolio. Therefore, timing patterns must also be considered in the context of a wider discussion about how organizational productivity is achieved. The following chapter expands the analysis with a theoretical argument about the alternative ways in which multi-project organizations can choose to trade off the dimensions of time, cost and quality in order to generate value, and discusses the implications of this model for future research on time in organizations, as well as for temporal management in practice.

⁹⁷ The documentation dimension is also important in the light of the observation (albeit based on very limited material) that extensions that had been subject to a formal justification process were significantly more likely to be acknowledged as negative deviations in the organization's subsequent ratings of project performance (appendix C:7), regardless of whether or not they were 'costly' (cf. appendix C:4). Thus, what is perceived as a 'noteworthy' change of plan appears to be partly a matter of the extent to which the decision about such a change is made *visible* to internal and external parties. Thus, the deficiencies in extension documentation observed in connection with this thesis's data collection procedure may well exacerbate the tendency for the Agency to underestimate its own impact upon project timing outcomes, with a concomitant deterioration in the external communication about 'stand-by times' (see *chapter ten* for practical implications).

Chapter 9

Productivity tradeoffs, priority systems and timing outcomes: A theoretical development

This dissertation was introduced with an illustrative display of the wide variety of activities within different societal spheres that are managed towards completion. I also listed several hypothetical scenarios in which planned deadlines might be susceptible to revision, including construction project delays, product launch reschedulings, consultancy contract prolongations, venture capital recommitments, and postponements in plans for grown children to move out from the family home. The many expressions that are in common use to describe different types of project duration extension (of which those listed above are only a small selection) are a general indication that the phenomenon under study is multi-faceted. Moreover, the empirical studies undertaken and presented within this thesis have demonstrated that even within one organization, there can be considerable variation in the reasons for why activities are rescheduled, as well as in the consequences of such decisions. For example, extension may be internally or externally triggered. It can be a response to positive, negative, or no feedback from project implementation. It may be used to reduce workloads, but also to provide for more working time. It may involve additional spending of funds, withholding spending, or reserving funds for later spending.

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Taking all of these different antecedents and implications into account, the previous chapter concluded that the granting of an extension can be understood as the creation of a *free period of activities*, the duration of which can be used as the originator deems suitable. The overarching conclusion that extension is a flexible strategic tool may seem imprecise. This chapter argues that the prevalence by which this tool is employed must, however, be understood in relation to the constraints on organizational productivity that arise out of the project model's emphasis on standardization across tasks, as well as out of the repeated use of this model within organizations (Benner & Tushman, 2003; Engwall, 2003b). In other words, in organizations in which time-limited organizing represents standard operating procedure, projects are unlikely to automatically provide the kind of 'free area of activities' that Lundin and Söderholm (1995) – and many others – have taken as a foundation for their analyses of temporary organizations. These observations inform a discussion of project extension productivity from a parent organization perspective. I consider the circumstances under which my propositions are generalizable to different kinds of project portfolios, before reflecting on alternative modes of temporal coordination within multi-project organizations. The chapter concludes with suggestions of routes for future research, and implications for temporal management in practice.

9.1 When are soft time constraints productive?

To address the question of when extension is productive requires consideration of extant answers to the fundamental question: How is organizational productivity achieved? As discussed in *chapter two*, the project management literature has tended to focus on the efficiency and effectiveness with which certain pre-formulated goals are accomplished, over limited periods of time. In contrast, research on how ongoing productivity is achieved has stressed the importance of organizations striking a balance between the *exploration* of new possibilities, and the *exploitation* of old trajectories (Abernathy, 1978). Exploration emphasizes activities such as experimentation and innovation, while exploitation focuses on the cost-effective employment of existing assets. In studies of organizational learning, the relationship between the two concepts is expressed in the distinction between the search for a new idea, technology, market or relationship, and the

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further refinement of an old one (Winter, 1971; Levinthal & March, 1981; March, 1991).

Both exploration and exploitation are essential for organizations, but the two types of productivity require different arrangements of resources. An emphasis on exploitation involves reinforcing (extant) operational activities, while exploration involves assigning relatively more weight to adjacent activities such as research, innovation and human resource development. For convenience, I will henceforth refer to *operational* and *administrative* resource allocations; the latter should be interpreted as encompassing all organizational activities without immediate reference to baseline project implementation (cf. Cyert & March, 1963/1992, p. 181).⁹⁸

The tradeoffs that organizations make between operational and administrative allocations are partly found in explicit decisions about alternative investments and competitive strategies. Project-based organizations vary considerably in the kinds of products and services they produce, the level of market and technical uncertainty they deal with, and their organizational complexity. Project outcomes, for example, can differ in terms of their customization, ambiguity of specification, and the extent to which partners co-produce them. They are also more or less discrete, tradable, predictable, and continuous (Whitley, 2006). Such variations in project characteristics have implications for the basic levels of exploration and exploitation that organizations exhibit.

These 'intrinsic' features aside, ongoing intra-organizational tradeoffs between exploration and exploitation tend to be heavily dependent on internal structures, processes and norms, not least regarding the ways in which productivity targets are set and revised (e.g. March, 1988; Greve, 2003). In the context of this dissertation, Benner and Tushman's (2003) discussion of how the increased utilization of process management techniques impacts on the balancing of exploratory and exploitative activities within organizations is of particular relevance. The authors argue that as process management

⁹⁸ As described in *chapter two*, temporary organizational forms are common for both exploitative and exploratory types of activities. However, this dissertation (including this chapter) focuses on *multi-project organizations*. A multi-project organization is commonly defined by its concurrent and recurrent use of projects for the production of products or services, while maintaining a more permanent umbrella structure hosting administrative functions (see, however, the final section of this chapter for a discussion of this conceptualization).

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focuses on measurable efficiency and improvement in routines, in the long-term these practices tend to drive out innovative activities. For example, process management techniques stabilize the decision processes that determine which projects will be supported, and affect the types of deviation from plans that are recognized and addressed. At the same time, the concerted administrative efforts required to map, improve and adhere to organizational processes may be perceived as hampering operational effectiveness in the short-term.

Extension as a free period of activities

That the rigid application of a standardized management model may, intertemporally, infringe on both exploration and exploitation, has also been a key point in this thesis's analysis of project extension patterns. In *chapter eight* I argued that the need for a multi-project organization to 'step out' of originally agreed schedules by way of duration extension may arise for efficiency-seeking reasons, as well as for the purpose of assessing a project's potential for future development or expansion. This means that project extension may involve a rebalancing of the weightings of an organization's administrative and operational allocations in either direction, as the circumstances require.

Figure 9:1: Forms of extension productivity from an intra-organizational perspective

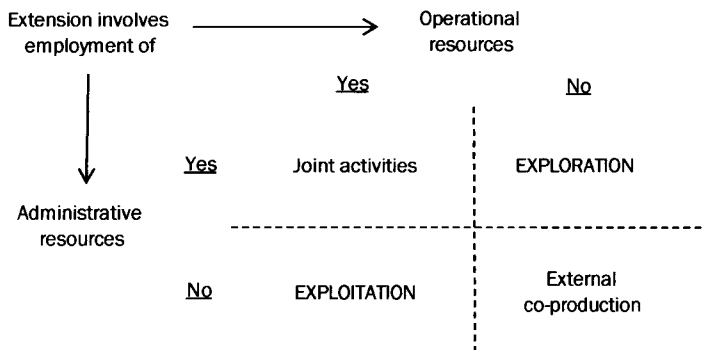


Figure 9:1 provides a schematic illustration of different kinds of intra-organizational extension productivity. Some extensions involve the

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use of operational resources, without the employment of additional administrative resources. In these cases, extension is a labor-efficient way for the organization to *exploit* its earlier efforts and experiences in terms of idea assessment, market screening, production planning, partner search, and so on.⁹⁹ Other extensions involve the employment of administrative resources, but do not (yet) affect operational budgets. In these cases, extension represents an opportunity for the organization's *exploration* of innovative approaches not yet 'qualified' for a stand-alone commitment decision.¹⁰⁰ Extensions that require neither operational nor administrative resources may be interpreted as lead time for the *external co-production* of project results (as, for example, when contractual partners are lagging in their fulfillment of agreed obligations). Finally, extensions may take on a mixed character with the infusion of both administrative and operational resources, perhaps to be associated with *joint activities* between a parent organization and its partners.¹⁰¹

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That a potential for agreement revision implies flexibility is, in itself, not a new idea. For example, some economists have observed that 'incomplete contracts' – traditionally understood as contracts that are poorly defined (Tirole, 1999) – have the positive property of leaving room for learning and adaptation (e.g. Loasby, 1976). Likewise, constitutional theory postulates that in situations of high uncertainty, contractual partners are likely to respond by shifting attention from the specification of agreement terms, to a more general focus on the process of adjusting the terms over time (e.g. Goldberg, 1976). Thus, Furlotti (2007) argues that 'incompleteness' should be reinterpreted

⁹⁹ Somewhat colloquially, the existence of exploitative extensions reflects the fact that it takes time to spend money. That it is time-consuming to consume was realized by Burenstam Linder (1969), although his unit of analysis was the individual.

¹⁰⁰ Some exploratory extensions may take on a character akin to Jönsson's (1999) notion of 'setup time' [Swedish: *ställtid*]: "Setup time is the time required for sorting things out and putting things in order so that one can start operating" (p. 37, my translation). This seems a particularly appropriate description of cases in which project extension is associated with the parent organization's need to establish its overarching strategic positions.

¹⁰¹ Of course, the ultimate productivity of a particular extension is not dependent primarily on the commitment of resources, but rather on the amount of output produced through the employment of these resources during the extension period.

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precisely as the possibility for productive contract amendments (p. 79). As Grandori (2007) observes, this redefinition implies that when contingencies are unforeseeable, "incomplete contracts may be more the solution than the problem to be solved" (p. 9).

My studies indicate that the amendment 'solution' may actually be of broader applicability than these previous accounts have suggested, at least relating to timing revisions. Indeed, flexible deadlines provide opportunities for organizations to address unexpected occurrences during project implementation. However, an equally important trigger for reschedulings is found in managerial challenges that lie outside the accomplishment of specific project tasks, such as the balancing of an organization's administrative and operational allocations. This chapter has argued that the practice of *intermittently* creating free activity slots across a project portfolio is an important mechanism for combining exploitative and exploratory activities within multi-project organizations. Thus, I contend that within the studied setting, the productivity achieved by extension does not lie in being vague about initial agreement specifications, but rather in the *gradual softening of time constraints* as projects proceed. The following sections discuss the generalizability of this claim.

About the alternatives

Under what circumstances is the extension option a viable 'solution' to the productivity dilemma? A starting point for addressing this question is to consider some of the alternative responses to the challenge of balancing exploration and exploitation described in the organizational literature. Many authors have suggested accommodating both types of productivity by way of functional separation; that is, to buffer experimenting units from units focused on baseline production (e.g. Weick, 1976; Levinthal, 1997), while retaining a coordinating umbrella structure (Benner & Tushman, 2003). In contrast to creating loosely coupled organizations, others have argued for 'relentlessly' alternating between more organic and more mechanistic designs (Hedberg *et al.*, 1976; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997), for example through project portfolio reconfiguration.

Several circumstances make it difficult for the organization under study in this thesis to deal with the productivity dilemma using these well-known methods. One factor that makes sweeping shifts between exploitation and exploration inappropriate concerns the amount of

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control that the organization exerts over its budgets: a government agency has limited flexibility to adjust the size of, and relationship between, its administrative and operational allocations. While the exogenous definition of activity space may be unusual within the private sector, other types of 'environmental determinism' are not unusual: at least in the short-term, all organizations suffer from some degree of inertia with respect to both the dimensioning of their labor force and their operational commitments. A more decisive circumstance hampering sweeping shifts between exploitation and exploration may be the principles according to which the studied organization's project portfolio is composed: an aid agency has relatively stable long-term priorities regarding the selection of operational areas, both geographically and sectorally. This implies that such an organization cannot easily switch between exploration and exploitation by exchanging the types of projects contained in its portfolio (for example, with regard to intrinsic risk levels).

Furthermore, a circumstance that makes functional separation of exploitative and exploratory activities inappropriate within the studied organization is the way in which it arranges its value-adding activities. Most national aid policies build upon assuring the 'strategic fit' of project contents against a number of target areas within which a particular donor can contribute to improved development results. Hence, the Swedish aid program focuses on areas in which the presence of *Swedish* funding is likely to have maximum impact. The effectiveness of such a strategy is contingent upon the potential for engaging in *quality-making from within*, that is, the transfer of knowledge and experience through dialogue between and among contractual partners (rather than control by exit) (Hirschman, 1970). By extension, this implies that the Agency's exploratory and exploitative activities must be performed within the same 'production units' (at least for high priority projects).¹⁰²

As a result of the combined effects of all of these circumstances, intertemporal adjustment of the types of activity that are performed within existing projects (for example, by way of extension) appears a more appropriate solution to the productivity dilemma than both portfolio reconfiguration and functional separation. This conclusion could also apply to organizations, other than the studied Agency,

¹⁰² See further *chapter ten* for a discussion about current developments within Swedish aid policy and organization.

which share characteristics similar to the ones described above. Conversely, organizations to subject to different circumstances – especially concerning the linkage between administration and operations – could be expected to exhibit different rationales for the tradeoff between performance constraints. The next section loosely sketches out a framework of three generic variants of these relationships. This conceptual exploration goes beyond the particular findings of the present study, and indicates possible directions for further empirical and analytical work.

9.2 Three modes of temporal coordination

In my theory chapter (*chapter two*), I began with reviewing mainstream project management approaches, whose explanations of timing outcomes emphasize the project-specific balancing of the triple performance dimensions of time, cost and quality (cf. figure 2:1). A primary aspiration of this dissertation has been to reconsider project outcomes by situating them in the context of their parent organization. Accordingly, my findings beg a reexamination of the tradeoffs between the triple constraints of project management at the overarching level of the multi-project organization.

As an alternative to valuing the timeliness of outcomes in relation to other dimensions of an individual project's achievements, I have suggested that a parent organization's use of project time is contingent upon this organization's allocations of money and effort across its project portfolio (*chapter eight*). Building on this conclusion, the current chapter has suggested that a productivity issue of general concern for any multi-project organization is how *operational* and *administrative* allocations should be balanced. Conversely, the methods that organizations apply in seeking this balance have wide-ranging implications for the time, cost and quality of the organization's output.

The fact that organizations develop different preferences in relation to the levels of exploration and exploitation they aim for, and that the dynamics for shifting between the two forms of productivity vary between different types of organization and in different settings, suggests that the tradeoff between the time, cost and quality of projects cannot be conceived as 'neutral'. Rather, I posit that the 'texture' of these respective constraints should vary within different types of

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parent organizations, depending on the principles according to which projects are selected, the character of these projects, and the degree to which the parent organization's value-adding activities are integrated into project operations. To begin thinking about these issues, I have found it useful to draw on the distinction between *hard* and *soft* constraints as defined, for example, within real-time computing (e.g. Baptiste *et al.*, 2001): if a constraint is *hard*, this does not necessarily mean that it cannot be changed or that it does not frequently change, but rather that the system (or organization) chiefly aspires to meeting (project) activity goals in this particular dimension. A *soft* constraint, on the other hand, is one that is more easily changed as a trade-off for achieving activity goals in a more important dimension. My comments below build on the contention that in project-based organizing, one of the three goals – timeliness, cost control or quality targeting – is usually more pressing than the two others, and that the way in which goals are configured has practical implications for temporal management in multi-project organizations.

A starting point is that most extant accounts of (multi-)project management involve a (more or less explicit) assumption of *hard cost constraints*, that is, a notion of practical project management as concerned mostly with balancing time against quality within a non-negotiable budget ceiling (Stinchcombe & Heimer, 1985). An extension of this initial premise is that multi-project organizations compose their project portfolios according to the principles of risk-adjusted expected return, and that internal coordination is achieved through efficiency-seeking market-like modes, for example by the use of internal pricing for the exchange of resources across parallel activities (Lindkvist, 2004). According to this logic, the most valuable projects have the highest priority, and the fact that a project is prioritized means that the parent organization will put more effort into assuring that it is executed *just-in-time* (in this context, with a degree of timeliness corresponding to what the project client or sponsor has paid for).

Although the above-described conceptualization of multi-project organizing appears a valid description for organizations directed to the fabrication of ostensibly pre-specified products and services (such as manufacturing activities, construction projects, or the provision of tangible services like accounting and cleaning), I consider it to be unsatisfactory for two principal reasons. Firstly, the market-like governance form cannot account for the variety of multi-project

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organizations that can be observed in economic life. The model is biased towards the industrial production context for which it was originally specified, while 'projectification' has extended to a much wider set of organizational activities and societal spheres (cf. examples in *chapter one*). Secondly, the predictions of the model with respect to the temporal implications of project prioritization are sometimes invalid, which has led to skewed interpretations of the connection between timing outcomes and performance (notably, the conventional association of extension with failure, which was problematized in *chapter two*). My studies have provided empirical evidence that contests the dominant model at several junctures. For example, I have shown that project priority often exhibits an inverse relationship with timeliness, and that project duration extension often has positive connotations. If it can be accepted that these observations are not random, this implies that there are ways of balancing time, cost and quality constraints outside those suggested by mainstream project theory.

For example, the organization under study in this thesis adds value though its efforts in creating a jointly achieved pace of progress towards the ultimate aim of project redundancy: it operates according to a logic of *hard quality constraints*. A similar logic applies to other kinds of projects that are directed to abstract goals involving change, development or reform. Aid interventions are typical examples; others include complex technological innovation, academic research projects, and parental upbringing. Commonly, these are 'process' projects with barely specifiable timelines for the achievement of results, or with a poorly articulated demand for what the final outcome should be; circumstances that make 'simple' risk-return calculations difficult. Rather, project portfolios are composed with respect to the fit of project contents with the long-term strategies and ambitions of their respective parent organizations. Within their umbrella organizations, projects are coordinated according to a *goal hierarchy*, that is, the internal ranking of different priorities. As this thesis has shown, such contexts tend to favor a 'slow and careful' handling of high priority projects, with significant administrative resources being devoted to achieving the best (rather than the cheapest or timeliest) results.

For symmetry, it is possible to imagine a third type of multi-project context to which *hard time constraints* apply. This ought to be the case for organizations managing projects with exogenous deadlines, or delivery projects that are directed to 'transporting' a product

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or service (rather than fabricating content). Typical examples include postal delivery, or standardized services such as taxi drives, freight services, and financial settlements, all of which are handled according to chronology: first come, first serve (with the possibility of fast-forwarding priority projects). Accordingly, the intra-organizational coordination of projects can be described as adhering to a *queue* logic.

Table 9.1: A constraints-based exposition of multi-project organizing

<i>Hard constraint</i>	<i>TIME</i>	<i>COST</i>	<i>QUALITY</i>
Chief aspiration	Schedule control	Budget control	Content control
Typical project aim	Delivery	Production	Reform
Mechanism for portfolio (re)configuration	Arrival	Risk-adjusted expected return	Strategic fit
Intra-organizational coordination system	Queue	Market	Goal hierarchy
Temporal implication of project prioritization	Fast forward	Just-in-time	Slow & careful
Viable forms of extension-productivity:			
<i>Exploitation</i>	NO (timeliness of primary concern)	YES	YES
<i>Exploration</i>	NO (functional separation more viable?)	NO (portfolio reconfiguration more viable?)	YES

Table 9.1 is an approximate representation of how three archetypal multi-project organizations would be arranged in an analysis whose classification criterion is the 'hardest' performance constraint of the respective organization. This loose exposition does not aspire to describe discrete structural alternatives for multi-project organizing. Rather, it aims to demonstrate the potential diversity in the forms of such organizing. As others have argued, the emphasis on universally applicable methods and standards for design and control that are common within the project management tradition has tended to obscure the behavioral flexibility contained within multi-project coordination practice. Thus, the ways in which 'administration' and 'operations' may be practically interlinked are much more varied than previous accounts have suggested. By extension, I contend that the

boundary between 'temporary' project activities and their 'permanent' umbrella organizations is also more diverse – and sometimes more continuous – than common thinking holds. In describing this variation, the dimension of *time* (beyond initial duration design) can fruitfully complement other dimensions relating to the characteristics of technologies, tasks and resources, or environmental contingencies (cf. Whitley, 2006; Grandori & Furnari, 2008).

This chapter has endeavored to systematically articulate why certain activity timing patterns appear over others. The qualitative typology of different 'textures' of performance constraints suggests that duration extension has different productivity implications within different types of project portfolios, and that therefore, the timeliness of project outcomes ought also to vary among parent organizations. The association of these patterns with ideal-typical governance modes such as market, queue and (goal) hierarchy may be one place to commence discussion about the various modes of temporal coordination existing in economic 'reality'. A temporal perspective – which contends that any organizational form that involves regularized relations of interdependence between social actors must take time into consideration – may also contribute to more general theorizing about governance mechanisms and the fundamental underlying principles for achieving coordination, both within and between organizations.

Suggestions for research

The theoretical expansion proposed above was deduced from the empirical study of timing outcomes within one specific multi-project organization, in combination with inductive discussion about alternative organizing modes and their likely temporal implications. It is evident that more research is needed to validate the stability of the elaborated framework across other (possibly less formalized) bases of prioritization and synchronization. Towards this end, systematic investigation into the ('actual' as well as perceived) frequency, seriousness, avoidability, legitimacy and usefulness of different kinds of deviation from project plans within different types of multi-project organizations may be a productive next step. Such an inquiry should remain sensitive to the coexistence of – and potential tensions between – several modes of temporal coordination within the same organization (relating to various project types, various steps in the

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project cycle, across organizational functions or levels, over time, or according to some other principle of division).

A second trajectory for exploration concerns the organizational implications of the three stylized modes of temporal coordination. One hypothesis emerging from this thesis's conclusions is that the selection of projects according to a market, queue or goal hierarchy logic should have consequences not only for the operational side of project management, but also for how resources for planning, monitoring and evaluation are distributed within the administering organization. Tentatively, a transfer of the 'operational' performance dimensions of cost, quality and time may also prove useful for the analysis of administrative functions; these dimensions highlight variation in the amount of administrative effort required, the type of effort required, and – critically – the temporal requirements of effort, in relation to allocations of varying degrees of hierarchical status within a project portfolio. Further study concerning how *re*-commitments are handled under different coordination modes – building explicitly on the conclusions of this thesis – would bring these focal aspects into contrast.

Implications for practice

While the adherence to time limits is at the forefront of prescriptive project management interest, it remains firmly in the background of the experience of many organizations. The above sketch of temporal coordination varieties may help to resolve some of this paradox. A general insight is that as long as projects are managed as part of the portfolio of a continuing umbrella organization, their outcomes are inevitably affected by the internal structures, processes and norms of this overarching organization. The interdependence between 'administrative' and 'operational' budgets is one tangible dimension that could be more explicitly incorporated in future models of multi-project organizing.

At a more profound level, if the insights regarding the various relationships between priority systems and timing outcomes withstand empirical testing, they might extend managerial considerations about likely and desirable degrees of project timeliness in different settings. Meanwhile, managers should benefit from developing their knowledge about how (and why) their employees spend their working hours across activities of different functional types and at different strategic

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levels, and about the synchronization issues that may arise out of how time is allocated between administration and operations. Arguably, such a move towards improved temporal management is a prerequisite not only for increasing internal productivity, but also for assuring adequate communication to external stakeholders about how organizational processes will affect project scheduling.

An awareness of the inherent tendencies towards certain timing patterns associated with certain intra-organizational coordination systems may be particularly helpful for managers seeking to estimate the temporal effects of reprioritization across their portfolios. Within the public sector, for example, such an understanding could provide valuable insight in predicting the consequences that changes in allocation systems (for example, between rights-, needs- and performance-based subsidization) might have for the cost, quality and timing of administrative work. The final chapter of this dissertation discusses some highly topical changes concerning priority-setting and timeframes that have occurred within Swedish aid policy subsequent to the empirical observations made in this study, and elaborates on the practical implications of these reforms for temporal management within Sida.

Chapter 10

On time and beyond: About the future of Swedish aid

10.1 Epilogue

In the earlier chapters of this volume, much effort has been made to abstract the discussion about activity duration beyond the setting of development cooperation. However, some highly topical changes within Swedish aid policy with respect to priority-setting and timeframes that have occurred subsequent to the period during which my empirical observations were made demand that some further attention be paid, in these final pages, to the context of Sida. Thus, this concluding chapter will touch on how anticipated developments within Swedish aid administration can be understood in the light of this thesis's results, and will speculate about the likely implications of current reforms for future temporal management within Sida.

Changing priorities ahead

A starting point in my introductory chapter was that the treatment of time within development cooperation has been a controversial and often paradoxical issue. This is partly a result of an attribution problem: it is commonly argued that the question of when foreign aid is no longer warranted can only be addressed in relation to the overall development levels of a country; at the same time, donors can only account for the timeframe within which their own interventions are

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expected to become superfluous. Ideally, the aspiration date for a donor's withdrawal from a project builds on the developing country partner's own definition of what is a reasonable pace of progress towards achieving self-sufficiency. Meanwhile, ample accumulated experience from half-a-century of development aid shows that this preferred approach does not automatically create timely results. For example, this thesis commenced by establishing that half of all Sida-funded projects that were implemented between 1998 and 2005 were completed later than originally anticipated, and that once extended, projects had tended to run, on average, twice as long as initially planned (*chapter five*). The risk of aid projects drifting towards becoming ostensibly permanent activities has triggered debates regarding what are desirable and legitimate levels of temporal conditionality within development cooperation. Still, the complicated causal relationship between short-term results and long-term sustainable development has led to inconsistencies in the ways in which temporal management is practically pursued within aid agencies today (see *chapter one*).

This dissertation commenced with the contention that much confusion arises from the fact that different time perspectives are applied simultaneously at different levels within the development cooperation system. While most (if not all) donors support the overall ambition of ultimately making their activities redundant, many nations have sharply increased their aid volumes during the past decade, signaling the long-term persistence of foreign aid flows (see *chapter three* for a review of the Swedish context). Historically, most Swedish aid strategies have also conveyed a picture of a more-or-less permanent presence in 'important' geographical and sectoral areas. At the same time, the specification of schedules and deadlines are described as key tools for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness by which contribution-specific targets can be accomplished and accounted for. This incongruity between the temporal logics applying to operational and strategic activities within aid administration may partly explain the disagreement regarding the appropriate time horizons and levels of rigidity according to which time limits should be imposed.

Against the above background, a notable policy change facing Sida in the coming years is the Swedish Government's new directives for the concentration of support to fewer geographical and sectoral areas of cooperation, and Sweden's concomitant exits from non-prioritized countries and sectors (*Den nya utvecklingspolitiken*, press

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release issued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 27 August 2007). While a 1995 analysis of Sida's (lack of) use of time provisions argued that "it is inconceivable that aid agencies could in any way estimate and plan their assistance on the basis of the future dates of country or sector graduation" (Valdelin & Schill, 1997, p. 86), such strategies for donor-initiated and time-bound withdrawal are precisely what is now being pursued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. My findings can be invoked to stimulate a discussion about how these altered principles for resource allocation in space and in time can be expected to affect the timeliness and sustainability of individual interventions, as well as the aggregate effectiveness of Swedish aid administration.

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It is worth recapitulating how this thesis's conclusions relate to current rhetoric within development cooperation. A first comment concerns the focus on *projects* as the aid modality primarily discussed within this volume. Contemporary ambitions within the aid sector involve a movement from projects to 'programs', which are broader in scope and involve longer planning horizons. My contention in this thesis has been that for as long as donors justify their existence according to the transitory character of interventions, a discussion about timing outcomes will remain important. At a more practical level, the continued provision and administration of aid funding within the framework of contractual arrangements (regardless of their size and label) and the increasing emphasis on time-bound performance indicators suggest the ongoing relevance of the arguments presented in this thesis. (Indeed in 2007, around 50 per cent of Sida's disbursements – amounting to a value of over SEK 7 billion – were still explicitly categorized as 'projects'.)

A second comment concerns my discussion about the influence of donor agencies in general, and of Sida in particular, over project timing outcomes. The aid sector's current emphasis on recipient party ownership builds on a trend towards the diminution of the control that donor agencies exert over project planning and implementation. This thesis argues that this desired division of responsibilities must not be confused with the abolishment of agency *impact*. In short, my principal argument has been that as long as projects are managed as part of the portfolio of a continuing umbrella organization (in this

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case, an aid agency), their outcomes are inevitably affected by the internal structures, processes and norms of this overarching organization. The three studies within this thesis provide substantial empirical support for the relevance of such a 'contextualized' perspective for understanding project extension patterns within Sida (some of which is reexamined below).

The discussion about timeliness contained within this chapter (and the dissertation overall) should not be understood as arguing against the relevance of increasingly taking variation and complexity into account in the choice of aid modalities, nor against donor ambitions to be responsive to recipient country actors' demands. What I do argue, however, is that the extent to which Sida exerts an influence over project scheduling has been greatly underestimated. One reason for this is that the Agency has demonstrated a lack of compliance with its general routines for documenting instances of extension: notwithstanding a somewhat ambitious data collection effort (see *chapter four*), this thesis's examination of extension motives suffered a drop-out rate of 25 per cent due to erroneous extension registrations, and an additional 24 per cent due to extensions for which written documentation could not be retrieved. A further reason for the underestimation of impact is that agency-generated reschedulings have tended to be disregarded in internal assessments of project performance (*chapter seven*).

The above observations provide cause for optimism that this thesis may raise awareness about extension patterns within Sida and its governing Ministry. The following section initiates a discussion about the likely implications of current policy changes for project timing outcomes, with a view towards contributing to improved temporal management within Swedish aid administration.

Temporal effects of reprioritization

The new development policy of the Swedish Government specifies 33 developing, post-conflict and transition countries to which Sweden's bilateral aid should now be targeted. Of these 33, 12 low-income countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America to which Sweden has a wide-ranging experience of providing support have been selected for 'long-term development cooperation'. Moreover, the new directives identify three core problem areas towards which the majority of Swedish support should be targeted: democracy and human rights,

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equal opportunities, and environment and climate change. In both geographical and sectoral terms, the new priorities are to imply a significant narrowing of the focus of Sweden's bilateral aid program.

My first postulation is that in the medium- and long-term, a realignment of project extension propensities is likely to occur as a consequence of the changing priority status of certain countries and sectors. In my study of extension lengths (*chapter five*), I found a higher overall extension susceptibility for projects enjoying a high priority status within Sida's portfolio. Notably, projects implemented under elaborated Swedish country strategies, or within the framework of long-term cooperation agreements between Sweden and individual recipient country governments, have historically been more susceptible to running overtime. Each of these variables increased the relative risk of extension by about 30 per cent, other factors remaining constant. This pattern suggests that the secured supply of funding to the relevant country programs during the studied period implied latitude for Sida to wait for results (reflected, arguably, by a concomitant adjustment in stakeholder behavior at the operational level). A direct transposition of these findings suggests that interventions targeted to any of the 12 countries (re)selected for long-term cooperation will remain highly susceptible to running overtime. The clarified definition of a reduced number of sectoral priority areas may lead to a similar adverse relationship between sectoral priorities and completion timing becoming increasingly significant. Notably, the challenges of achieving timely and sustainable results in projects in which the assurance of continued donor commitment has both sectoral and geographical elements should not be underestimated.

In my study of extension motives (*chapter six*), I argued for a distinction between the antecedents of reschedulings that are made with reference to external project developments, and those that originate with the Agency's administrative function (notably, the reassessment of projects pending continued commitment). During 2005, more than one-quarter of the extensions granted by Sida were justified with reference to the Agency's internal activities. I found that, in contrast with externally-generated extensions, the majority of agency-associated reschedulings were effected in the *absence* of elaborated country strategies. Thus, a second postulation based on my findings is that internally-generated extensions are likely to increase in the short-term, because of the high levels of uncertainty prevailing until Sida's strategies for portfolio composition have been adjusted in ac-

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cordance with the Government's new directives. Indeed, there is some explicit evidence that this is already occurring. Notably, Sida's most recent annual report states that "Sida's new contributions in 2007 have fallen in number compared with 2006. The average agreed amount and duration of agreement have also fallen, and the median values for agreed amount and duration of agreement are lower than the average values. Contributory factors in this trend include the country focusing, which has resulted in a delay in entering into new agreements until new country strategies have been established" (Sida, 2008a, p. 100). Given that total commitments decreased only marginally over that same period, these developments represent an up-to-date illustration of this thesis's conclusions about how *strategic vacuums* that arise within the Agency are bridged by extensions of ongoing projects.¹⁰³

A further, related, remark is that the distribution of working time within Sida's organization is likely to change as a result of the reprioritization of its operational activities. By underscoring that ambiguity regarding resource distribution at the portfolio level increases both the scope and the need for intermittent adjustments of project-level schedules, the empirical studies within this thesis highlight the importance of establishing elaborated strategies not only for the countries and areas identified for the new focus, but also in relation to the distribution of future commitments in countries and areas that will have a reduced emphasis over the coming years and will ultimately be phased out of Swedish development assistance. Otherwise, Sida desk officers may find *more* of their working time is consumed by ruminations about the appropriate level and distribution of support to remaining interventions within low priority areas, with numerous associated project extensions being an unintended consequence.

Is the current priority system productive?

A comment of a more fundamental character concerns the Government's 'methodology' for pursuing concentration. Rather than first defining a set of sectoral priority areas, and then identifying the counties in which projects within the targeted sectors have histori-

¹⁰³ Egerö *et al.* (2002) coined the term 'strategic vacuum' to describe the gap between Sida's country strategies and the practical selection and orientation of interventions. I have used the term in a somewhat broader sense, referring also to the permanent or temporary absence of elaborated country strategies.

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cally been most effective, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has adopted the reverse strategy: first selecting a limited number of countries towards which bilateral support should be focused, and then defining a set of sectoral objectives towards which all interventions should ideally be targeted. This methodology represents a double affirmation of the political *goal hierarchy* as the chief mechanism for portfolio coordination within Sida (*chapter nine*). The selection system builds on assuring the 'strategic fit' of project contents against a number of geographical and sectoral areas within which Sweden – given the level and direction of other donors' engagement – can provide "a clear value-added", that is, contribute to improved development results in the future. Thus, the system is based on the assumption that the presence of *Swedish* funding will maximize the impact of aid within the targeted areas.

From the perspective of an organization theorist, the described emphasis on donor country strengths is not problematic *per se*. On the contrary, business models based on competitive advantage are common in most organizations whose projects aim to achieve development or reform. However, the long-term commitment to pre-selected areas of priority, in combination with high and increasing budget pledges, provides generally poor incentives for the production of timely and cost-effective results. According to common project management logic (see *chapter two*), these negative parameters can, however, be balanced by the potential for engaging in *quality-making from within*,¹⁰⁴ that is, the transfer of knowledge and experience to achieve the best (rather than the quickest or cheapest) outcomes possible.

In the context of aid intervention, the effectiveness of Swedish value-adding is contingent upon a two-way dialogue taking place between contractual partners as a project proceeds. In my view, the implications for aid agencies of this requirement should be a *slow and careful* handling of priority interventions, with important amounts of administrative resources being committed to the joint improvement of performance (cf. table 9:1). This way of working, however, fits badly with the 'hands-off' model of project content influence currently pro-

¹⁰⁴ Hirschman's (1970) classic essay *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* coined the notion of 'quality-making from within' to describe a situation in which it is more effective to bring about change through working within an organization (or partnership), than through terminating the partnership.

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motated by the donor community.¹⁰⁵ For example, this thesis has concluded that many project extensions arise out of the intention to explore a project's potential for expansion, or out of Sida desk officers' need to make time for learning about a project's achievements in order to enhance its future design. However, such ambitions are unlikely to be successfully realized, unless: (i) they are rendered internally legitimate within the aid administration system; and (ii) the Government allocates sufficient administrative resources to Sida. Moreover, in order to ensure the adequate distribution of administrative resources within Sida's organization, the Agency needs to develop its knowledge about how (and why) employees spend their working hours across activities of different functional types and at different strategic levels (cf. Mapsec, 2007). Arguably, such a move towards improved internal temporal management is a prerequisite for improving communication to external stakeholders about how Sida's processes will affect project scheduling.¹⁰⁶

A plea for the reappraisal of working time

A central argument in the debate about ownership has been that the 'right to definition' is as strong a resource as the 'power of the purse'. I have argued that ironically, the heavy emphasis on recipient country responsibilities has led to a disregard of the impact that donor

¹⁰⁵ In my view, the misfit of the 'hands-off' approach is further emphasized by the types of sectors selected for the concentration of Swedish effort. For example, it appears inconceivable that the provision of democracy support can be pursued through the central procurement systems of the nations in which such support is needed.

¹⁰⁶ While this chapter does not provide the scope for a lengthy discussion about alternative organizing modes, I note that a clearer temporal structuring of agency effort across the various stages of the project cycle may contribute to reinforcing recipient country actors' control over implementation, while providing Agency opportunity to be actively involved in methods selection and design. For example, the periodic and recurrent announcement of funding opportunities within clearly specified areas is one way for ensuring that the distribution of support is at the same time demand-driven, qualitatively competitive, and consistent with Swedish priorities. Given that refunding decisions are conditioned upon achieving the results set out for the prior period, it is also implicitly time-bound. This model is successfully used for parts of Sida's operations (notably, within research cooperation). However, the model is associated with a knowledge-intensive screening and (re)selection process, which unfortunately appears to be difficult to combine with Sida's new aim of "dislocating focus from preparations" (Sida, 2008b).

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organizations have on project outcomes. This is important, not least because the positive incentives associated with time limits cannot be fully effective if stakeholders do not expect time factors to be respected by donors themselves. Moreover, aid agencies' underestimation of their possibility of exerting influence (or mixed messages regarding the legitimacy of having such influence) is one way of understanding why information about waiting times and time horizons for the provision of support has not always been adequate.

While more research is needed in relation to the perspectives of partner organizations, a topical piece of evidence supporting this thesis's conclusions is the *Accra Agenda's* recent call for increasing the predictability of the temporal distribution of aid flows. The document calls for "regular and timely information [from donors] on their rolling three- to five-year expenditure and/or implementation plans" in order to facilitate recipient country actors' planning processes (OECD, 2008, p. 6). In the Swedish context, recent reports have acknowledged that further project-level study of country and sector exits is needed to identify which aspects of communication are most crucial for limiting the negative effects of donor-initiated change (e.g. Slob & Jerve, 2008).

This dissertation highlights the importance of also improving temporal management within areas of high aid priority – areas for which Sweden has ambitions for ongoing contribution. In arguing that aid agency influence on project plans is directly linked to the crucial issue of how (and *when*) a donor adds value, this volume may prompt discussion about not only the 'hidden impact' of aid agency work, but also the 'hidden potential' that such work has for raising the quality of intervention results. Releasing this potential depends on a concerted reappraisal of aid agency activities, directed by the temporal requirements of administration as well as the implications for timing outcomes in the field.



Appendix A

Complementary source material

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Appendix A:1: DAC List of ODA Recipients

DAC List of ODA Recipients
Effective from 2006 for reporting on flows in 2005, 2006 and 2007

Afghanistan	Cameroon	Albania	* Anguilla
Angola	Congo, Rep.	Algeria	Antigua and Barbuda
Bangladesh	Côte d'Ivoire	Armenia	Argentina
Benin	Ghana	Azerbaijan	Barbados
Bhutan	India	Belarus	Belize
Burkina Faso	Kenya	Bolivia	Botswana
Burundi	Korea, Dem.Rep.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Chile
Cambodia	Kyrgyz Rep.	Brazil	Cook Islands
Cape Verde	Moldova	China	Costa Rica
Central African Rep.	Mongolia	Colombia	Croatia
Chad	Nicaragua	Cuba	Dominica
Comoros	Nigeria	Dominican Republic	Gabon
Congo, Dem. Rep.	Pakistan	Ecuador	Grenada
Djibouti	Papua New Guinea	Egypt	Lebanon
Equatorial Guinea	Tajikistan	El Salvador	Libya
Eritrea	Uzbekistan	Fiji	Malaysia
Ethiopia	Viet Nam	Georgia	Mauritius
Gambia	Zimbabwe	Guatemala	* Mayotte
Guinea		Guyana	Mexico
Guinea-Bissau		Honduras	* Montserrat
Haiti		Indonesia	Nauru
Kiribati		Iran	Oman
Laos		Iraq	Palau
Lesotho		Jamaica	Panama
Liberia		Jordan	Saudi Arabia (1)
Madagascar		Kazakhstan	Seychelles
Malawi		Macedonia, Former Yugoslavia	South Africa
Maldives		Republic of	* St. Helena
Mali		Marshall Islands	St. Kitts-Nevis
Mauritania		Micronesia, Fed. States	St. Lucia
Mozambique		Montenegro	St. Vincent and Grenadines
Myanmar		Morocco	Trinidad and Tobago
Nepal		Namibia	Turkey
Niger		Niue	* Turks and Caicos Islands
Rwanda		Palestinian Adm. Areas	Uruguay
Samoa		Paraguay	Venezuela
Sao Tome and Principe		Peru	
Senegal		Philippines	
Sierra Leone		Serbia	
Solomon Islands		Sri Lanka	
Somalia		Suriname	
Sudan		Swaziland	
Tanzania		Syria	
Timor-Leste		Thailand	
Togo		* Tokelau	
Tuvalu		Tonga	
Uganda		Tunisia	
Vanuatu		Turkmenistan	
Yemen		Ukraine	
Zambia		* Wallis and Futuna	

* Territory.

(1) Saudi Arabia passed the high income country threshold in 2004. In accordance with the DAC rules for revision of this List, it will graduate from the List in 2008 if it remains a high income country in 2005 and 2006.

As of October 2007, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) are : Afghanistan, Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Dem. Rep.), Congo (Rep.), Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Kyrgyz Republic, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia.

Source: www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist

Appendix A

Appendix A.2: Project information filed in Sida's Planning System (excerpt)

	A	B	C	D	E
1	PLUS standard fields (selection)				
2	<i>Field label</i>	<i>Year end 2002</i>	<i>Year end 2003</i>	<i>Year end 2004</i>	<i>Year end 2005</i>
3	<i>Agreement_ID</i>	A7101062	all ibid.	all ibid.	
4	<i>Contribution_ID</i>	7100517601			
5	<i>Agreement_Title</i>	SIYB, Phase II			
6	<i>Agr_Amount</i>	11 100 000			11 740 000
7	<i>Agr_Start</i>	2002 01			
8	<i>Agr_End</i>	2005 06			2005 12
9	<i>Agr_Partner</i>	International Labour Organisation			
10	<i>Status</i>	Agreed			Completed
11	<i>Resp_Unit</i>	INEC/Market Development			
12	<i>Partner_Country</i>	Sri Lanka			
13	<i>Main_Sector_Text</i>	Trade, markets and financial systems			
14	<i>Sub_Sector_Text</i>	Service and institutions for business development			
15	<i>Type_of_Assistance</i>	Project support			
16	<i>Dev_Coop_Agreement</i>	1			
17	<i>Imp_Channel</i>	UN			
18	<i>Envir_Objective</i>	Partial goal			
19	<i>Equal_Objective</i>	Partial goal			
20	<i>Demo_Objective</i>	Not relevant/applicable			

Source: Sida's Department for Finance and Corporate Development.

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Appendix A:3: Cover letter to project extension proposal by ILO's Sri Lanka Office



Telephone : 2500539 (Director)
2592525, 2580691-8
Facsimile : 2500865
E-mail : colombo@ilo.org

Your ref :

Our ref :

11th October 2004



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION
ILO Office

P. O. Box 1505, Colombo
Street Address :
202 & 204, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 7,
Sri Lanka.

Mr. P.M. Leelaratne
Secretary
Ministry of Small & Medium Enterprise Development
6th Floor, DHPL Building
42, Navam Mawatha
Colombo 2.

Dear Mr. Leelaratne,

SIYB Project Extension Proposal for 3 months

Reference is made to the last Steering Committee Meeting and also the discussion that this office had with you on the above.

Please find enclosed the Project extension proposal. Please be kind enough to forward the proposal to Department of External Resources to be sent to SIDA for funding consideration.

Thanking you.


Yours sincerely,

fa Claudia Coenjaerts
Director

Source: Sida Central Archives, dnr. 1997-030181.

Appendix A

Appendix A:4: Extension request from Sri Lanka's Ministry of Finance and Planning

අංකය } 94-11-2484500 දුරකථන } 94-11-2484600 Telephone } 94-11-2484700 } 94-11-2484693		අංකය } ලේඛන අංකය } BW/SE/24/B අංකය } 2004/002 අංකය } අංකය } අංකය }
දුරකථන } 94-11-2447633 අංකය } 94-11-2387153	විදේශ සම්පත් දෙපාර්තමේන්තුව	මහලක් කොමසාරිස් (3වන මහල)
E-mail } Info@erdl.gov.lk	කුඩු හා මුද්‍රාණයේ අධ්‍යක්ෂ බෙහෙවින්දා වෙහෙර ත්‍රිත්ති විද්‍යාලය කොළඹ 01.	The Secretariat, (3 rd Floor) No. 277, Colombo 01. P.O. Box 277, Colombo 01.
Web Site } www.erdl.gov.lk	DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL RESOURCES Ministry of Finance and Planning	

Mr.
Program officer
The Embassy of Sweden

October, 25 2004

INK. AMB. COLOMBO
D.No. 13/433
2004-10-26

AVD	GR 11	MÁL 1.3.3+5
-----	-------	-------------

Dear Mr.

Extension of SIYB Project


The Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise Development has informed us that ILO, Colombo has proposed to extend the above Project for further 3 months from December 2004. A copy of the project extension proposal is attached for your information.

A new project "Small Enterprise Development for Pro-poor Growth in Sri Lanka is being formulated as intervention to ensure sustainability of the programmes introduced is expected to be commenced by April, 2005 and the SIYB Project comes to an end in December 2004.

In the view of the fact, we would be grateful if you could extend the SIYB Project for a period of 3 months to provide an effective nexus between the two projects.

Your early response in this regard is very much appreciated.

Best regards,





Bikaratha Ramaniyake
Assistant Director, Bilateral West Division
For DG/ERD

CC:
1. Secretary, Ministry of Small & Medium Enterprise Development
2. Mr. Claudia Coenjaerts, Director, ILO

Source: Sida Central Archives, dnr. 1997-030181.

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Appendix A:5: Extension decision made by Sida's field office in Colombo

 SVERIGES AMBASSAD		Decision on contribution			
Embassy of Sweden Colombo			Decision date 2004-11-10	Decision No. 161/2004	
Reporting <i>KL</i>			Dnr/Reg. No		
Approved by			Signature <i>[Signature]</i>		
Present			Consultation with		
1. Acc. No	2. Org. Code	3. FU	4. Contribution/Component	5. Contract/Activ.	6. Acc. Spec
	451	20	7100517601		
Allocation account: 15515			Contribution identity in the PLUS system: 7100517601		
Copy to Embassy (orig) INFO				Distr. (date/sign) 10/11 2004 <i>[Signature]</i>	
				INEC	
Subject and decision					
Contribution to:			Extension of Start and Improve Your Business Sri Lanka		
Country:		Sri Lanka			
Sector:		Micro and Small Enterprise Development			
External Part/implementing org:		International Labour Organisation, ILO			
Cooperating part:		SIYB Association			
Starting date:		1 January 2005			
Time schedule:		1 January 2005 - 30 June 2005			
Sida-contribution:		640 000 SEK			
Planned disbursement 2004:		0			
Planned disbursement 2005:		640 000 SEK			
Planned disbursement 2006 -:		0			
Other financing via Sida:					
Project costs, total:		11 740 000 SEK			
Information:		@sida.se			
Sida has supported the Start and Improve Your Business programme in Sri Lanka since 2000. The current phase ends December 2004. The management of the programme is being transferred to the SIYB Association of Sri Lanka. Support to the SIYB Association after the current project phase, will be included in the planned integrated ILO programme on micro and small enterprise development which is planned to start April 2005. It is proposed that the current agreement is extended and that additional funds are allocated to allow smooth transition to the new programme set up.					
With reference to Asia 184/03 and ILO's proposal on project extension it is proposed that the extension of the SIYB programme be approved with a total Sida contribution of 640 000 SEK..					
H:\User\PSD\SIYB\Decision Extension.doc					

Appendix A

Appendix A:5 (continued)

Decision

The Head of Mission decides

that the support to the SIYB programme is extended up to June 2005 in main accordance with ILO's project extension proposal, appendix 1,

that 640 000 SEK be allocated for this purpose from Appropriation 7 International Development cooperation, 8:1 budgetline 6 Asia, Middle East and North Africa, country allocation Sri Lanka, 2005,

that 640 000 SEK be allocated from the right to enter into financial commitments/right to make guarantees received,

that the Head of Mission sign, on behalf of Sida, the amendment with Sri Lanka and the ILO in main accordance with the enclosed draft amendments, appendix 2 and 3.

H:\User\PSD\SIYB\Decision Extension.doc

Source: Sida Central Archives, dnr. 1997-030181.

Sida Contribution No:
71005176

AMENDMENT TO THE AGREEMENT ON SUPPORT TO START AND IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS IN SRI LANKA, PHASE II, (SRL/01/MO1/SID) BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF SWEDEN AND THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION

ARTICLE 1 EXTENSION OF THE AGREEMENT

The Agreement on Support to Start and Improve Your Business in Sri Lanka, Phase II, dated 19 December 2001, shall be extended.

The period during which project activities may be financed by the Swedish contribution shall be extended from 31 December 2004 to 30 June 2005.

The Agreement shall thereby remain valid until 31 December 2005.

ARTICLE 2 ADDITIONAL SWEDISH CONTRIBUTION

Sweden shall, subject to the provisions of the aforementioned Agreement, make available to the ILO additional resources in a sum of SEK 640 000 for the period 1 January – 30 June 2005. The additional amount shall be available for disbursement on 1 January 2005.

With the additional contribution the total amount for the Swedish contribution will be SEK 11 740 000.

The additional amount shall be financed from the amount made available in the Agreement on Development Cooperation dated 7 April 2003, as amended from time to time.

ARTICLE 3 USE OF ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION

The additional amount shall be used in accordance with the aforementioned Specific Agreement, as amended from time to time, and in main accordance with the Project Extension Proposal attached to this Amedment as Annex 1.

Appendix A

Appendix A:6 (continued)

2 (2)

Two originals of the text of this Agreement, written in the English language, have been signed.

Colombo, 10 November 2004

Place and date

Colombo,

Place and date

For the Government of Sweden

For the Government of Sri Lanka

Signature

Signature

Name and title in block letters

Name and title in block letters

acting Head of Mission
Embassy of Sweden

Claudia Coenjaerts
Director
ILO Office

Source: Sida Central Archives, dnr. 1997-030181.

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Appendix A.7: Internal project assessment filed in Sida's Rating System (excerpt)

Contribution Profile Report		Date of Report:	
		User:	
Contribution: 71005176 - SIYB/Phase II			
Responsible Officer: SIRSGUEST		Status: Rating in Progress	
Rating Reviewed/Shared with:		Date of Status: 2005-04-04	
Project Abstract			
To contribute to the overall economic growth of Sri Lanka through the creation and improvement of entrepreneurial activities resulting in the generation of quality employment opportunities in the private sector of the Sri Lankan economy			
Rating Based On			
Progress Report June 2003			
Overall Performance			
Rating Score: MDP			
Comments:			
The project trained 3766 (target 5000). Active in 22 of the 25 districts. The business start-up rate has been 42% (target 40%). 50% of the IYB trainees reported better profits (target 70%). The job creation rate has been 0.15 / trainee (target 2). The sustainability strategy is not fully in place.			
Immediate Results			
No	Immediate Results (Planned)	Rating Score	
01	New and existing entrepreneurs throughout Sri Lanka should have the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to start a new business or to consolidate or expand an existing one	AP	
		109 persons from 27 Partner Organizations (POs) have been trained. The POs have 72 offices spread all over the country. The Northern most part of the country is yet to be effectively covered. Training material in native languages are used during training.	
02	Growth-oriented enterprises in selected districts should have benefited in up scaling and expanding their enterprises from the development and pilot-test of EYB as part of the SIYB family of entrepreneurial development package	N/A	
		GYB material tested and launched in October 2003	
03	Institutional and technical capabilities of the POs and BDS providers should have been strengthened for sustainable availability of the SIYB programme in Sri Lanka after the completion of the project	SDP	
		Cost recovery rate is 30%. The constitution of the SIYB stakeholder organization has been drawn-up. However financial sustainability of the organization to be created is yet a question.	
Internal Risk			
Rating Score: S			
Comments:			
The contract of the external advisor comes to an end by March 2004. The effects of it and the ability of the local personnel to lead the project needs to be seen. , Sustainability of the SIYB programme is an issue that requires to be resolved.			
External Risk			
Rating Score: S			
Comments:			
The co-operation amongst the master trainers, partner organizations and the trainers would be the deciding factor on the sustainability of the programme			
Previous Rating Scores			
Date of Confirmation	Overall	Internal Risk	External Risk

Source: Sida's Department for Policy and Methodology.

Appendix A

Appendix A:8: Pro-forma letter outlining SiRS e-mail survey

Subject: SiRS survey

Dear NN [*Sida desk officer responsible for latest rating*],

My name is Anna Krohwinkel Karlsson and I am a PhD candidate at the Stockholm School of Economics. My dissertation investigates the connections between project planning and outcomes at Sida. In one study, I am using data from the Sida Rating System (SiRS) to assess how unexpected events during implementation affect the assessment of results.

SiRS is a very useful data source for me. Unfortunately, it is incomplete. I am therefore conducting a survey to gather updated information on selected contributions. Contribution XX [*Number, Title*], which has been previously rated by you, is one of the selected cases. I therefore kindly ask you to participate in the below survey. It consists of only four (4) tick-box questions and should not take long to fill in.

Please complete the below form, then return this e-mail to its sender. Should you no longer be the responsible officer for the above contribution, please forward this message to the right person, or simply return it to me. Do not hesitate to come back for any further questions on my research project or this survey.

Thank you in advance for your help. Your participation is of greatest value to my research!

Kind regards,

Anna Krohwinkel Karlsson
PhD candidate
Institute of International Business
Stockholm School of Economics

e-mail: anna.k.karlsson@hhs.se
tel.: 08-7369500

Disclaimer: The use of SiRS data within the above-described research project has been approved by Sida and is supervised by NN [*Sida department head*]. Information gathered through this survey will be dis-identified before being shared with any internal or external party to ensure the anonymity of individual programme officers.

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Appendix A:8 (continued)

Below, you will find four tick-box questions related to overall ratings of performance, internal risk and external risk, according to the current SiRS definitions. Please answer the questions as if you were conducting an ordinary rating today, taking into account all the information about project implementation available to you to the present date. You do not, however, have to provide verbal explanations of your assessments.

Contribution: [Number, Title]

Please tick [X] the one box you find most appropriate for each question.

Question 1: If you were to assess the above contribution today, how would you rate its overall performance?

Serious Deviation from Plans	[]
Minor Deviation from Plans	[]
According to Plans	[]
Exceeding Plans	[]

Question 2: If you were to assess the above contribution today, how would you rate its internal risk?

Low	[]
Medium	[]
Substantial	[]
High	[]

Question 3: If you were to assess the above contribution today, how would you rate its external risk?

Low	[]
Medium	[]
Substantial	[]
High	[]

Question 4: Do you plan to perform a regular rating (using the SiRS system) of the above contribution before the end of the present year?

Yes	[]
No	[]

Appendix A

Appendix A:9: Country strategy periods

<i>Country</i>	<i>Time period considered in analyses</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Time period considered in analyses</i>
1 Afghanistan	2002 - 2005	20 Macedonia	2003 - 2005
2 Albania	2004 - 2007	21 Malawi	2001 - 2005
3 Angola	2003 - 2006	22 Mozambique	2002 - 2006
4 Bangladesh	2002 - 2006	23 Moldova	2004 - 2006
5 Belarus	2002 - 2005	24 Mongolia	2002 - 2006
6 Bolivia	2003 - 2007	25 Namibia	2004 - 2008
7 Bosnia & Herzegovina	2003 - 2005	26 Russia	2005 - 2008
8 Burkina Faso & Mali	2004 - 2006	27 Serbia & Montenegro	2004 - 2007
9 Cambodia	2002 - 2006	28 Somalia	2003 - 2005
10 China	2001 - 2005	29 South Africa	2004 - 2008
11 Colombia	2003 - 2007	30 Sri Lanka	2003 - 2007
12 Croatia	2004 - 2006	31 Sudan	2004 - 2007
13 Ethiopia	2003 - 2007	32 Tanzania	2001 - 2006
14 India	2005 - 2009	33 Turkey	2005 - 2009
15 Indonesia. East Timor & the Philippines	2005 - 2009	34 Uganda	2001 - 2006
16 Irak	2004 - 2006	35 Ukraina	2005 - 2008
17 Kenya	2004 - 2008	36 Vietnam	2004 - 2008
18 Kosovo	2005 - 2006	37 West Bank & Gaza	2001 - 2005
19 Laos	2004 - 2008	38 Zambia	2003 - 2007

Source: Sida Letters of Appropriation (several years) and Proposition 2005/06:1.

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Appendix A:10: Delegation order of Sida's field offices

	Country	First year of full delegation		Country	First year of full delegation
1	Afghanistan	n/a	23	Laos	2004
2	Albania	n/a	24	Macedonia	n/a
3	Angola	n/a	25	Mali	n/a
4	Bangladesh	2004	26	Mozambique	2002
5	Bolivia	2003	27	Moldova	n/a
6	Bosnia & Herzegovina	n/a	28	Namibia	n/a
7	Burkina Faso	n/a	29	Nicaragua	1999
8	Cambodia	n/a	30	Russia	n/a
9	China	n/a	31	Rwanda	n/a
10	Colombia	n/a	32	Peru	n/a
11	Croatia	n/a	33	Senegal	n/a
12	Cuba	n/a	34	Serbia	n/a
13	Egypt	n/a	35	South Africa	2002
14	Ethiopia	2004	36	Sri Lanka	2004
15	Georgia	n/a	37	Tajikistan	n/a
16	Guatemala	n/a	38	Tanzania	1999
17	Honduras	2003	39	Thailand	n/a
18	India	n/a	40	Uganda	2004
19	Indonesia	n/a	41	Vietnam	1999
20	Jerusalem	n/a	42	Zambia	2003
21	Kenya	2004	43	Zimbabwe	n/a
22	Kosovo	n/a			

Source: Sida Annual Reports (several years).

Appendix A

Appendix A:11: SADEV survey results (excerpt)

<i>How common is the discrepancy at Sida?</i>	<i>Quality Answer count</i>	<i>Quantity Answer count</i>	<i>Time Answer count</i>	<i>Cost Answer count</i>
Common	5	5	17	4
Neither common nor uncommon	21	19	11	19
Uncommon	3	5	1	6
Don't know	5	5	5	5
<i>How serious is the discrepancy?</i>				
Serious	17	8	2	10
Neither serious nor insignificant	11	19	23	17
Insignificant	1	2	4	2
Don't know	5	5	5	5
<i>How large are Sida's opportunities to avoid the discrepancy?</i>				
Large	8	7	3	11
Neither large nor small	18	17	15	15
Small	3	5	11	3
Don't know	5	5	5	5
<i>How much effort does Sida put into avoiding the discrepancy?</i>				
Much	19	20	13	22
Neither much nor little	8	7	12	6
Little	2	2	4	1
Don't know	5	5	5	5

Note: N = 34. Source: Krohwinkel-Karlsson, 2008.



Appendix B

Complementary statistics

Appendix B:1: Correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Strategic_Objective												
2 Strategic_Country	-0.019											
3 Strategic_Agreement	-0.045	0.145										
4 Strategic_Partner	0.026	0.077	0.108									
5 Strategic_Office	0.000	0.307	0.352	0.019								
6 Original_Project_Size	-0.014	0.026	0.123	0.050	0.008							
7 Original_Project_Duration	0.055	-0.006	0.274	0.166	0.000	0.212						
8 No_of_Project_Components	-0.018	0.031	0.174	-0.004	0.061	0.125	0.140					
9 LDC	-0.053	0.304	0.150	-0.022	0.214	0.058	0.003	0.113				
10 Private_Partner	-0.053	-0.019	0.011	-0.038	-0.015	-0.012	-0.065	-0.001	-0.023			
11 Swedish_Partner	-0.037	-0.118	-0.103	-0.060	-0.085	-0.027	-0.131	0.021	-0.056	0.217		
12 Americas	0.074	-0.078	0.103	0.034	0.194	-0.009	0.031	-0.016	-0.174	-0.024	-0.044	
13 Asia	-0.003	-0.003	0.163	-0.022	0.007	0.050	0.085	0.014	0.052	0.011	-0.049	-0.171
14 Europe	-0.012	0.131	-0.132	0.106	-0.110	-0.019	-0.058	-0.052	-0.160	0.048	0.076	-0.152
15 Global	0.026	-0.158	-0.214	-0.050	-0.184	-0.026	-0.080	-0.024	-0.257	0.007	0.100	-0.258
16 Education	-0.124	-0.017	0.074	-0.043	-0.011	0.038	0.002	0.035	0.098	0.004	-0.027	-0.043
17 Infrastructure	-0.148	0.059	0.058	-0.022	0.032	0.044	0.029	-0.003	0.010	0.044	0.013	-0.032
18 Business	-0.270	-0.006	0.027	-0.024	-0.013	-0.024	-0.019	-0.026	0.002	-0.013	0.068	-0.049
19 Natural_Resources	0.181	-0.061	-0.055	0.019	-0.058	-0.005	-0.002	-0.009	-0.059	0.013	0.037	-0.111
20 Democracy	0.277	0.062	0.019	0.038	0.068	-0.038	0.025	0.007	0.014	-0.035	-0.057	0.151
21 Other	-0.127	-0.012	-0.045	-0.065	-0.005	-0.026	-0.071	0.008	0.016	0.001	0.036	0.092

Note: $N = 3632$. Correlations ≤ 0.01 are generally significant at $p \leq 0.05$.

Appendix B:1 (continued)

13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
-0.140							
-0.237	-0.212						
-0.021	-0.059	0.024					
0.023	0.025	-0.015	-0.064				
0.002	-0.040	0.036	-0.066	-0.084			
0.009	0.037	0.160	-0.103	-0.131	-0.135		
0.020	0.051	-0.218	-0.181	-0.231	-0.238	-0.369	
0.002	-0.021	-0.016	-0.069	-0.088	-0.090	-0.140	-0.247

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Appendix B:2: Survival analysis with original end month cohorts

	<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>(S.d.)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
1	Strategic_Objective	0.031	(0.042)	1.031
2	Strategic_Country	-0.369***	(0.096)	0.691
3	Strategic_Agreement	-0.402***	(0.070)	0.669
4	Strategic_Partner	-0.156***	(0.038)	0.856
5	Strategic_Office	0.047	(0.078)	1.049
6	Original_Project_Size	-0.005***	(0.002)	0.995
7	Original_Project_Duration	-0.016***	(0.002)	0.984
8	No_of_Project_Components	-0.050***	(0.013)	0.952
9	LDC	0.141**	(0.059)	1.152
10	Private_Partner	-0.025	(0.047)	0.975
11	Swedish_Partner	0.086**	(0.039)	1.090
12	Americas	0.017	(0.062)	1.017
13	Asia	-0.003	(0.061)	0.997
14	Europe	-0.103	(0.072)	0.902
15	Transnational	0.099	(0.053)	1.104
16	Education	-0.089	(0.099)	0.915
17	Infrastructure	-0.362***	(0.086)	0.697
18	Business	-0.113	(0.081)	0.893
19	Natural_Resources	-0.161**	(0.066)	0.852
20	Democracy	0.016	(0.058)	1.016
21	Other	-0.133	(0.080)	0.876
22	Original_End_Month_Feb	0.086	(0.141)	1.089
23	Original_End_Month_Mar	0.154	(0.116)	1.166
24	Original_End_Month_Apr	0.227	(0.137)	1.255
25	Original_End_Month_May	0.143	(0.139)	1.154
26	Original_End_Month_Jun	0.188	(0.109)	1.207
27	Original_End_Month_Jul	0.187	(0.139)	1.205
28	Original_End_Month_Aug	0.098	(0.138)	1.103
29	Original_End_Month_Sep	0.128	(0.126)	1.136
30	Original_End_Month_Oct	0.181	(0.138)	1.198
31	Original_End_Month_Nov	0.055	(0.160)	1.056
32	Original_End_Month_Dec	0.069	(0.106)	1.071
	<i>N</i>	3632		
	-2 Log-likelihood	45422.71		

Note: *** = $p \leq 0.01$; ** = $p \leq 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

Appendix B

Appendix B:3: Extension timing over the county strategy cycle

<i>Phase in country strategy cycle</i>	<i>Number of ongoing projects covered^a</i>	<i>Of which: Extended during 2005^b</i>	<i>Extension rate per ongoing project</i>
Year 1	94	54	0.57
Year 2	149	46	0.31
Years 3-5	160	50	0.31
<i>N</i>	403	150	

Note: ^a = all projects that were ongoing at the end of 2005 and were covered by a country strategy according to appendix A:9; ^b = all extensions filed in PLUS during 2005 concerning projects covered by a country strategy.

Appendix B:4: Dropout analysis for archival documentation

		<i>Documented extensions^a</i>	<i>Non-documented extensions^b</i>
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1	Strategic_Objective	0.65	0.60
2	Strategic_Country	0.13	0.08
3	Strategic_Agreement	0.44	0.40
4	Strategic_Partner	0.71	0.69
5	Strategic_Office	0.21	0.10
6	Original_Project_Size (MSEK)	36.53	27.11
7	Original_Project_Duration (months)	38.11	37.10
8	No_of_Project_Components (count)	3.76	2.81
9	LDC	0.28	0.10
10	Private_Partner	0.20	0.13
11	Swedish_Partner	0.41	0.38
12	Americas	0.15	0.23
13	Asia	0.26	0.08
14	Europe	0.09	0.04
15	Transnational	0.08	0.06
16	Education	0.05	0.06
17	Infrastructure	0.14	0.13
18	Business	0.11	0.08
19	Natural_Resources	0.18	0.06
20	Democracy	0.32	0.58
21	Other	0.05	0.04
	<i>N</i>	107	48

Note: ^a = all extensions of projects having an initial budget larger than SEK 3 million and an initial duration exceeding 24 months that were granted during 2005, and for which a written justification could be retrieved (adjusted for erroneous extension registrations, cf. table 6:1); ^b = extensions for which written documentation could not be retrieved.

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Appendix B:5: Truth table of all present combinations of attributes

<i>Combination no</i>	<i>Strategic_Country</i>	<i>Strategic_Agreement</i>	<i>Strategic_Partner</i>	<i>N</i>
1	0	0	1	36
2	0	1	1	28
3	0	0	0	21
4	1	1	1	8
5	0	1	0	6
6	1	1	0	3
7	1	0	1	3
8	0	1	0	1
Total <i>N</i>				107

Appendix B:6: Complementary results of set-theoretic analysis

		<i>Continuation Proportion</i>	<i>Recuperation Proportion</i>	<i>Compliance Proportion</i>	<i>Assessment Proportion</i>
1	Strategic_Country AND/OR Strategic_Agreement AND/OR Strategic_Partner	0.71	0.86	0.81	0.81
2	Strategic_Country AND/OR Strategic_Agreement BUT NOT Strategic_Partner	0.13	0.07	0.11	0.07
3	Strategic_Country AND/OR Strategic_Partner BUT NOT Strategic_Agreement	0.29	0.48	0.41	0.26
4	Strategic_Agreement AND/OR Strategic_Partner BUT NOT Strategic_Country	0.50	0.72	0.67	0.78
	<i>N</i>	24	29	27	27

Appendix B

Appendix B.7: Dropout analysis for rating records

	Benchmark portfolio ^a Mean	SiRS portfolio ^b Mean
1 Strategic_Objective	0.62	0.68
2 Strategic_Country	0.23	0.24
3 Strategic_Agreement	0.32	0.12
4 Strategic_Partner	0.84	0.77
5 Strategic_Office	0.23	0.07
6 Original_Project_Size (MSEK)	30.68	17.15
7 Original_Project_Duration (months)	41.67	35.85
8 No_of_Project_Components (count)	2.03	1.69
9 LDC	0.21	0.14
10 Private_Partner	0.10	0.22
11 Swedish_Partner	0.26	0.39
12 Americas	0.16	0.11
13 Asia	0.20	0.18
14 Europe	0.13	0.49
15 Transnational	0.13	0.06
16 Education	0.06	0.08
17 Infrastructure	0.10	0.13
18 Business	0.07	0.14
19 Natural_Resources	0.15	0.14
20 Democracy	0.40	0.39
21 Other	0.06	0.04
N	636	114

Note: ^a = all projects having an initial budget larger than SEK 3 million and an initial duration exceeding 24 months that were ongoing at the end of 2005; ^b = all ongoing projects that had been rated by the end of 2005. Four projects had been rated twice. Thus, the sample includes 118 distinct ratings.

Appendix B.8: SiRS population averages

	Full set ^a	Of which:		Of which:	
	Mean	On time Mean	Extended ^b Mean	No-cost extensions Mean	Extended with budget commitment ^b Mean
Post-extension rating score	-0.37	-0.35	-0.40	-0.41	-0.39
N ^b	118	66	52	29	23

Note: ^a = all ratings of projects that were ongoing at the end of 2005; ^b = according to PLUS log-files, prior to rating date.



Appendix C

Alternative measures of extension

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The budget dimension

Appendix C:1: Data composition by timing and budgetary outcome

	<i>Number of projects</i>	<i>Percent of total</i>
On time	1806	50%
Extended	1826	50%
Of which: Extended with budget commitment ^a	616	17%
Total N	3632	100%

Note: Data set from *chapter five*. ^a = according to PLUS logfile.

Appendix C:2: Budgetary outcomes according to extension purpose

	<i>Continuation Percent</i>	<i>Recuperation Percent</i>	<i>Compliance Percent</i>	<i>Assessment Percent</i>
Extensions with budget commitment ^a	75%	14%	0%	63%
No-cost extensions	25%	86%	100%	37%
Total (all extensions)	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	24	29	27	27

Note: Data set from *chapter six*. ^a = according to written documentation.

Appendix C:3: Project priority characteristics by timing and budgetary outcome

	<i>On time</i>	<i>Extended</i>	<i>Of which: Extended with budget commitment</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1 Strategic_Objective	0.61	0.57	0.57
2 Strategic_Country	0.07	0.08	0.09
3 Strategic_Agreement	0.08	0.16	0.22
4 Strategic_Partner	0.48	0.51	0.53
5 Strategic_Office	0.08	0.09	0.11
N	1806	1826	616

Note: Data set from *chapter five*. All displayed variables are dummy-coded.

Appendix C

Appendix C:4: Post-extension rating scores according to budgetary outcome

	<i>No-cost extensions</i> Mean	<i>Extensions with budget commitment^a</i> Mean
Ex post rating score	-0.41	-0.33
N ^b	17	9

Note: Data set from *chapter seven*. ^a = according to written documentation.

The documentation dimension

Appendix C:5: Project priority characteristics according to type of extension documentation

	<i>Non-documented extensions</i> Mean	<i>Documented extensions</i> Mean	<i>Of which: Formally justified extensions^a</i> Mean
1 Strategic_Objective	0.60	0.65	0.66
2 Strategic_Country	0.08	0.13	0.13
3 Strategic_Agreement	0.40	0.44	0.47
4 Strategic_Partner	0.69	0.71	0.77
5 Strategic_Office	0.10	0.21	0.23
N	48	107	70

Note: Data set from *chapter five*. All the displayed variables are dummy-coded. ^a = documentation in the form of a formal decision or exchange of letters.

Appendix C:6: Types of documentation according to budgetary outcome

	<i>No-cost extensions</i> Percent	<i>Extensions with budget commitment^a</i> Percent
Formal decision	12%	77%
Exchange of letters	37%	17%
Internal e-mail	23%	0%
Archival short list	19%	3%
Indirect reference	9%	3%
Total (all sources)	100%	100%
N	68	39

Note: Data set from *chapter six*. ^a = according to written documentation.

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Appendix C:7: Rating scores according to type of extension documentation

	<i>Formally justified extensions Mean</i>	<i>Informally justified extensions Mean</i>
Ex post rating score	-0,65	0,11
<i>N</i>	17	9

Note: Data set from *chapter seven*.

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