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Team development and team performance. Responsibilities, responsiveness and results

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2005

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kuipers, B. (2005). *Team development and team performance. Responsibilities, responsiveness and results: A longitudinal study of teamwork at Volvo Trucks Umeå*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. s.n.

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Team Development and Team Performance

*Responsibilities, Responsiveness and Results;
A Longitudinal Study of Teamwork at Volvo Trucks Umeå*

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Published by: Labyrint Publications
PO Box 334
2984 AX Ridderkerk
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0)180-463962

Printed by:



Offsetdrukkerij Ridderprint B.V., Ridderkerk

ISBN 90-5335-060-8

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RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT GRONINGEN

Team Development and Team Performance

*Responsibilities, Responsiveness and Results: A Longitudinal Study
of Teamwork at Volvo Trucks Umeå*

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van het doctoraat in de
Bedrijfskunde
aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
op gezag van de
Rector Magnificus, dr. F. Zwarts,
in het openbaar te verdedigen op
donderdag 7 juli 2005
om 14.45 uur

door

Benjamin Stanley Kuipers

geboren op 18 augustus 1975
te Groningen

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	Prof. dr. A.M. Sorge

Preface

First of all, I would like to address the reader who is curious as to what this book about teamwork might bring. Let me tell you up front: dissertations are not known for being read thoroughly, so don't be bothered too much about that. Actually, I would already be happy when each of you manages to find just one useful thing in this book to improve your way of working with others and enjoying it.

But before you start, you may wonder what inspired me to make a four-year study of teamwork, spending months and months in the North of Sweden and ages at my desk writing this dissertation. That's easy to explain. It's because the world is full of beautiful and inspiring things: the clean air and sultry midsummer nights 300 km below the polar circle*, the forgetting-everything-around-you music and lyrics from bands like Coldplay**, the fascinating words from books like Funky Business*** and the brightly colored impressionistic landscapes by Van Gogh**** (the painter). Most of all, it's just the plain simple people like you and me trying to accomplish something together.

Let me set you at ease: the path to a dissertation is not just full of clichés like those mentioned above; there are actually a lot more. It also takes some pretty lonely days at the computer, some tough struggles to get valuable questionnaires back from a few respondents, some really frustrating moments with figures that don't look like you want them to, and indeed those stubborn colleagues who believe their theory of reality (which they never even saw) is best. But what the heck, it could have been worse! Try to imagine life as a PhD candidate with 760500 responded items, but then without a computer (actually there were more, but calculating these precisely would involve me sitting at my desk even longer). These "unreliable" respondents did give me a good story and the bad figures did help me think over my theory more carefully. So what's left now are these unworldly colleagues; but since I'm one of them, things actually seems to be pretty much back to normal.

To be honest, my four years and several months of working on this research gave me a lot of fun, important new insights, great experiences, many new friends, and my girlfriend. All these things can't be captured in a book like this, nor on a page with a few acknowledgements. In a sense, everyone in their own way contributed equally to this work, though some more equally than others. I'll try to name a few of the most equal ones here.

First of all, I would like to thank the four people who formed both the basis for the research project leading to this dissertation as well as the platform for my professional career. My supervisors in Groningen, Ad van der Zwaan and Marco de Witte, who by their coaching showed what "steering of self-organization" means in practice and how to reach something in science. With Peter Hertinge and Mona Edström-Frohm from Volvo in Umeå I experienced the value of real teamwork by accomplishing something together in a large organization like Volvo. Also, I would like to thank all my other friends (some of whom are also colleagues) in and from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Germany, The United Kingdom, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Canada, The United States, Colombia,

Surinam, Uruguay, South Africa, Australia, Russia, Kyrgyz, Vietnam, and of course all of those in The Netherlands for their inputs, ideas, interest and warm relationships. I would also like to thank my family: my mother, father and sister, oma and opa (who unfortunately is not with us anymore to see me becoming a doctor), and my uncles, aunts and cousins, who are always there for me. A special thanks goes to Natasha, who always looks at science with common sense and after me with love. Furthermore, I would like to thank the members of the examination committee for their time and valuable feedback. Last but not least, I need to thank the more than 2200 employees and managers of Volvo Umeå who provided me with all the valuable data and patience during all those years of research. These people showed me what teamwork and organizations really are. And finally, according to good Swedish custom: "kram till er alla"!

Ben Kuipers

's Gravenhage, May 2005

benkuipers@yahoo.com

* If you are interested to find out, beware that the Umeå tourist office has very limited opening hours.

** "I was just guessing at numbers and figures
Pulling the puzzles apart
Questions of science, science and progress
Do not speak as loud as my heart
Tell me you love me, come back and haunt me
Oh and I rush to the start
Running in circles, chasing our tails
Coming back as we are" From: *The Scientist* by Coldplay (2002) (source: www.coldpaying.com)

*** "Reasoning is what the typical manager is rewarded for. Eventually the analytical side of the brain grows so large and heavy that some executives find it difficult to avoid walking in circles." [p.273] From: *Funky Business* by K.A. Nordström and J. Ridderstråle (2000)

**** For those who hate museums, we have two cheap repro's hanging in our living room.

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