

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

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VISOKO AVTONOMNI TIMI IN NJIHOVA
USPEŠNOST

EMPOWERED TEAMS AND THEIR PERFORMANCE

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2011

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Many thanks to my high-performing team members:

- mami Polona, oči Gorazd - for teaching me so many useful things, for all opportunities you gave me to learn and explore the world, and for being wonderful parents.
- Deniz - for always being there for me, for making me feel loved and happy, and for being you, because you truly are the best thing that has ever happened to me.
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Thank you!



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Podpisani/-a Tina Pulko, z vpisno številko 21091060, sem avtor/-ica magistrskega dela z naslovom: VISOKO AVTONOMNI TIMI IN NJIHOVA USPEŠNOST (EMPOWERED TEAMS AND THEIR PERFORMANCE).

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EMPOWERED TEAMS AND THEIR PERFORMANCE

Teams operate in different structures, which offer different level of autonomy. Consequently they have different performance results. It is proved that those teams who have a significant level of autonomy can reach high performance easier than those who face constant control. But even among teams that have the highest level of autonomy, there are differences in performance. Their performance is affected by team work processes, interpersonal processes and teamwork experience. In this research it was examined whether experience with teamwork in highly autonomous team structures help reduce challenges among team work processes and team interpersonal processes, and therefore improve the performance of a team. Research findings confirmed that teams who have more experience with working in empowered team structures face less challenges among their processes and perform better than the less experienced teams. An interesting further research possibility appeared; it seems that teams who have teamwork experience and lack functional skills to perform a certain task perform better than the inexperienced teams where team members have all skills needed for the task execution. This shows the relevance and importance of this study and suggests that teamwork experiences are more important for the team's performance than the actual skill sets in the team. Research findings can shift the way companies train their employees.

Keywords: teams, autonomy, teamwork experience, performance

VISOKO AVTONOMNI TIMI IN NJIHOVA USPEŠNOST

Timi delujejo v raznovrstnih timskih strukturah, ki jim dajejo različne stopnje avtonomnosti. Posledično se ti timi razlikujejo po uspešnosti delovanja. Dokazano je, da timi, ki imajo več avtonomije, dosegajo boljše rezultate kot timi, ki jih nenehno nadzorujejo. Vendar pa se kažejo razlike v uspešnosti tudi med timi, ki imajo podobno stopnjo visoke avtonomnosti. Na uspešnost timov vplivajo delovni procesi v timu, medsebojni odnosi v timu ter izkušnje s timskim delom. Namen raziskave je bil ugotoviti, ali izkušnje s timskim delom v visoko avtonomnih timskih strukturah vplivajo na izboljšanje delovnih procesov v timu in medsebojnih odnosov v timu in tako na izboljšanje uspešnosti timov. Rezultati raziskave so pokazali, da so timi, ki imajo več izkušenj z opolnomočenjem, bolj uspešni pri svojem delovanju kot timi, ki teh izkušenj nimajo. Zanimiva je ugotovitev, ki jo je smiselno preveriti v nadaljnjih raziskavah. Nakazuje, da so timi, ki imajo več izkušenj z opolnomočenjem, bolj uspešni kot timi brez izkušenj z opolnomočenjem, kljub temu da člani tima nimajo vseh spretnosti za opravljanje dane naloge. To še dodatno poudarja pomembnost izkušenj z delovanjem v avtonomnih timskih strukturah, saj so le-te očitno lahko bolj pomembne za uspešnost tima, kot pa same sposobnosti posameznih timskih članov, da opravijo določeno nalogo. Izsledki raziskave lahko v prihodnosti spremenijo način, kako organizacije usposablajo svoje zaposlene.

Ključne besede: timi, avtonomija, izkušnje, uspešnost

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1 INTRODUCTION

High performance is desired and almost expected in every area of our lives. Teamwork is not an exception. On a daily basis we interact with people, we form groups or teams, and we strive to reach the top. Those who have at least some experience with any kind of teamwork know it is not exactly easy. In fact, it is sometimes frustrating, stressful and dysfunctional. However, it can also be extremely rewarding, when things are done right. To avoid unproductive gatherings of groups of people who call themselves a team, but they are mostly not a real team, it has to be understood what the team really is. The team is an interdependent set of members who have to rely on each other in order to achieve their shared goal. Not only that they should have an authority over their tasks and internal processes, but they should also have an opportunity to decide on their own goals and means. When a team has an opportunity to be involved, commitment will arise. Many researchers see commitment as a consequence of empowerment, and as an inevitable condition for achieving high performance.

Autonomy offers an access to a completely new level of high performance, but it also brings new responsibilities and new challenges. Research, conducted on one of the most successful management boards in Swedish IT industry, will show whether experience with autonomous teamwork really helps teams become better in managing their work and interpersonal processes. It will look at the possible challenges that experienced and empowered teams might face. It will also measure their overall performance to see whether the teamwork experience with autonomous team structures really helps teams reach high performance. Results will also be compared to research conducted on a Canadian inexperienced team, to point out the most interesting differences.

The purpose of this research is to offer an insight into how teamwork experiences with high-level autonomy team structures are relevant for a team's performance and the overall success. The goal is to give guidelines to understand and manage low or

high—experience empowered teams to help them reach high performance, and hopefully to make many lives of various team members and managers easier.

2 TEAMS AND EMPOWERMENT

2.1 Team

Work teams are complex and dynamic systems existing within an organizational context, developing when team members interact, and evolving through time (Kozlowski and Ilgen 2006, 78). Individuals in teams are interdependent and share common responsibility for the team's outcome, which affects their organizations (Sundstrom et al. 1990, 120). Interdependency happens because team members cannot achieve their goals single-handedly, but must rely on complementary skills sets, information and other shared resources (Thompson 2007, 4). Besides interdependency, another important characteristic of a team is commitment. Team members are committed to a common purpose (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 45).

Overall, teams are usually defined with the following characteristics:

- They exist to achieve a shared goal (Alderfer and Smith 1982, 38; Thompson 2007, 5; Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 45).
- Team members are interdependent (Alderfer and Smith 1982, 38; Thompson 2007, 5).
- Teams are bounded and stable over time (Alderfer and Smith 1982, 38; Hackman 2002, 41).
- Team members have the authority to manage their own work and internal processes (Alderfer and Smith 1982, 38; Hackman 2002, 41).
- Teams operate in a social context — within organizations (Alderfer and Smith 1982, 38).

2.2 Empowering a team

The terms **autonomy** and **empowerment** can be used interchangeably. Both refer to the concept of giving teams an increased opportunity to make independent

decisions (Stewart 2006). Empowered teams have freedom to decide on their own actions, to plan work activities, and to adapt to the changing conditions (Spreitzer 1995). According to Stewart (2006, 30), team-level autonomy is the key construct that has emerged to describe how the team's tasks are coordinated with other parts of the organization. In order to empower individuals in a team, the team's structure also needs to be designed in a way that supports autonomy of individuals within the team.

Teams should be designed, and team members are selected according to the task that needs to be performed (Mohammed and Angell 2008). Management usually defines the task that needs to be delivered, forms teams of members with complementary skill sets and personalities, and then they empower the team to execute the task (Eggensperger 2004, 59). Thompson (2007, 9-13) suggests that this is a point when we need to ask ourselves how much autonomy the team really needs to accomplish the task successfully. As shown in Figure 2.1, he defines four types of teams according to the autonomy level of the team's structure: manager-led teams, self-managing teams, self-directing teams and self-governing teams.

Manager-led teams are the most traditional form of a team. Team leader is responsible for setting roles, goals, methods, and all other processes in the team. The team is responsible only for the execution of the given task. Control over team members is very high (Thompson 2007, 9).

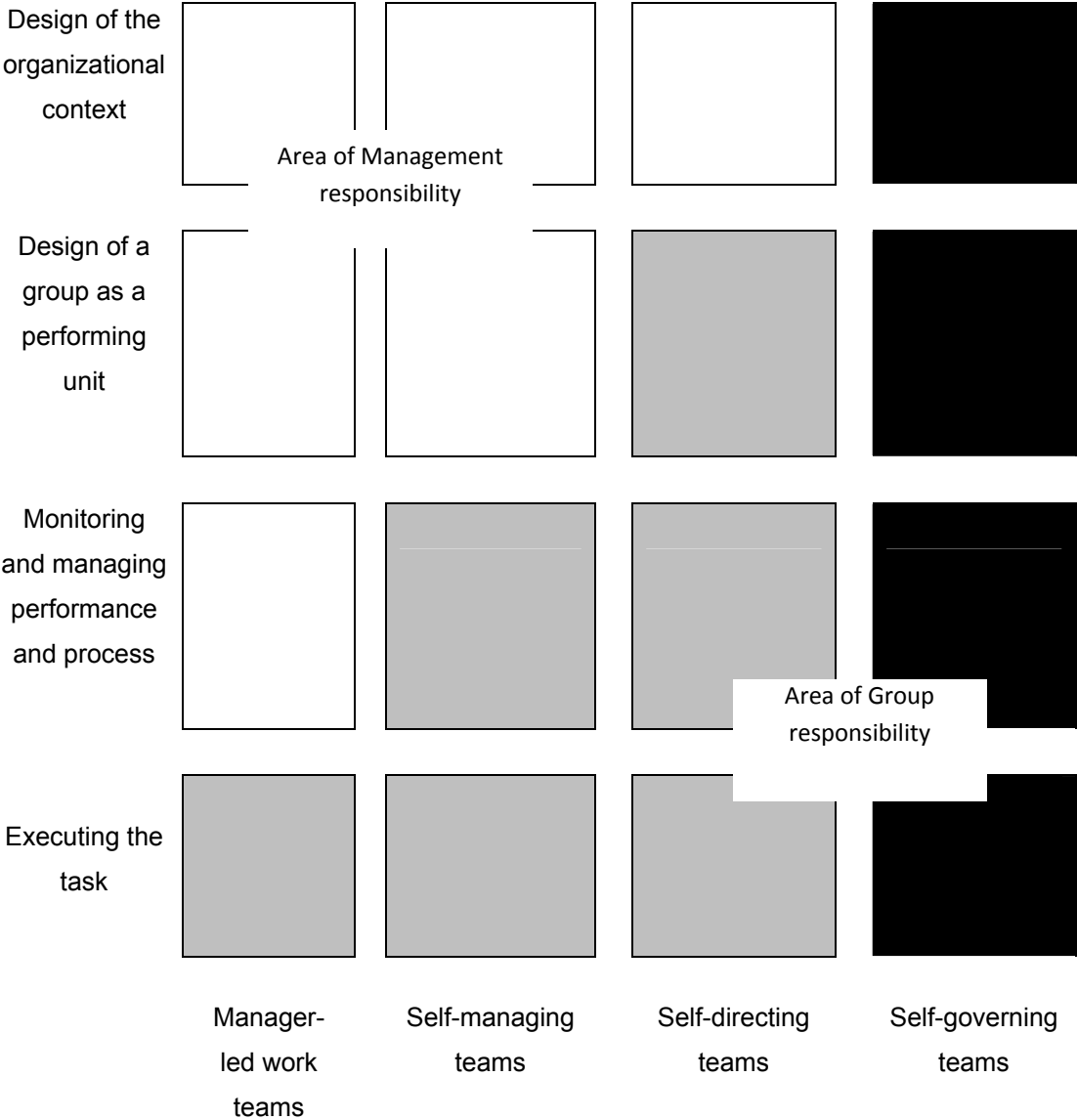
Self-managing team or self-regulating team is a democratic team structure where a manager determines the goal of the team, and the team has the power to manage methods to get to that goal (Thompson 2007, 9). Members get full responsibility and control over their roles (Grayson 1991, 22). This structure usually enables productivity and quality improvement; employee job satisfaction is higher, contribution is better, and absenteeism and turnover rates are improved (Yeatts et al. 2004, 216; Spreitzer et al. 1999, 535).

Self-directing or self-designing teams determine their own objectives and methods of work. They have the most potential for innovation. This type of structure

also enhances the goal commitment and motivation, and provides the opportunity for learning and change (Thompson 2007, 11).

Self-governing teams are responsible for executing the task, managing their own performance process, designing the team, and designing the whole organizational context (Thompson 2007, 12). This team has the highest autonomy level among all team structures.

Figure 2.1: Autonomy level for four types of work teams



Source: Hackman (2002, 52).

Different teams cannot reach the same performance level. Self-managed and self-

designed teams can outperform any other team structure (Hackman 2002, 34). Encouraging teamwork and giving employees more autonomy help individuals develop, share and apply their knowledge more fully, fulfil their social-psychological needs, and increase their intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Appelbaum et al. 2000). When a team is put in a team structure that offers more autonomy, improvement of work life quality and organizational effectiveness is noticeable (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 8). Team members are able to respond quickly to the needs of the organization because decisions are pushed down to the lower levels where information is actually available, and they can make decisions faster (Grayson 1991, 22). Employees also feel more involved which drives their commitment (MacKenzie 1979, 49). Some researchers see commitment as a main difference between an average team and a high-performing team.

3 TEAMWOR EXPERIENCE

Each team member has his own unique idea about team work processes. In fact, knowledge about teamwork relies strongly on team members past teamwork experience. This knowledge can also be referred to as a teamwork schema (Rentsch et al. 1994, 451). Schema is a knowledge structure combined from past experiences and new information, which facilitates the understanding of present events (Poole et al. 1990, 212). Highly experienced team members posses well developed teamwork knowledge structures and are likely to be more successful in a team than inexperienced or lower experienced team members (Rentsch et al. 1994). According to Anderson (1987) there are three stages when an individual is transformed from a low-experience team member to a high–experience team member:

- The first stage is declarative knowledge. This is a stage where individuals are learning facts and rules of skills they wish to acquire. Less experienced individuals are more likely to be at this stage. They will have some knowledge of teamwork, but will not be flexible in using that knowledge.
- The second stage is knowledge compilation. At this stage, individuals start to understand relationships between knowledge acquired at the first stage.
- The third stage is procedural knowledge. At this stage, individuals require little attention or cognitive resources to perform the skill.

More experienced individuals will more likely be on the higher stages of learning, and will be able to consistently express clear understanding of team work and its team processes.

The basic difference between high-experience team members and low-experience team members is that they have different teamwork knowledge structures (schemas). Higher-experience team members have more concise and general teamwork knowledge and they express it consistently. Lower-experience team members may not know how they understand teamwork at all (Rentsch et al. 1994). Experienced

work team in this research is defined as a team that had previous teamwork experience with working in a structure that offers significant autonomy level (self-directing or self-governing structure). Inexperienced team is defined as a team that had no experience with working in high-level autonomy team structures before the research was conducted.

There are not many authors who would discuss how previous teamwork experience with a high-level autonomy team structures could help improve team's performance. Experiences with the teamwork in empowered team structures are not directly part of any model, which describes performance-related factors. However, experience means knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals in the team, and those who are closely linked to the organizational environment; providing training, feedback and having efficient reward system (Hackman 2002), and to team performance (Thompson 2007).

3.1 Gaining teamwork experience

Teams will benefit from the ongoing **coaching** (Wageman et al. 2005, 378), but they need to get extended training even before they start to function. Training will help team members align their schemas and get their understanding of teamwork on the same level (Rentsch et al. 1994). It should also help develop individuals' knowledge and abilities to handle the assigned tasks (Kelleberg et al. 2009). To get the best out of training, it needs to be regular and continuous, and new skills have to be thought (negotiating performance plans, decision-making, conflict resolution, leadership, budgeting, and necessary technical skills). Teams need to know how to make decisions, how to solve conflicts and set team goals, as well as how to self monitor and take responsibility for leading themselves (Randolph 1995). A series of studies in the military, aviation and healthcare have shown that team training works (Cannon- Bowers and Salas 1998). Training increases the quality of team processes and the overall performance outcome. Teams that are trained to develop a range of team skills, such as problem-solving, interpersonal relationships, goal setting, and role allocation, reach better performance than those that were not trained (Prichard and Ashleigh 2007). Furthermore, the teams experiencing training

have higher knowledge transfer, more interoperable knowledge, higher cognitive congruence, and higher performance (Rentsch et al. 2010). To sum up, well-designed team training is systematic and it consists of measurement and **feedback** (Salas et al. 1999).

In empowered teams every member should know how to give and receive feedback. Feedback should be constructive to help correct negative behavior, develop new capabilities and reinforce the desired actions (Ryner 1996, 112). Yeatts and Hyten (1998, 138 — 141) suggest some characteristics of good feedback:

- Feedback has to be relevant to the team tasks.
- Feedback has to be easily understood.
- Feedback has to be updated as frequently as possible.
- Feedback has to be easily accessible by the team.
- Feedback has to be designed and given in a way that supports the empowerment, not control.
- Feedback should be immediate with a goal of open dialogue not punishment (Ryner 1996, 109).

Gibbs (1994, 12) offers some advice on how to give constructive feedback:

- Be descriptive, not evaluative. Describe an action, not personality of an individual (Goodale 1992).
- Reveal your own position and feelings.
- Be specific, not general. Talk about the specific action (Goodale 1992).
- Give feedback on behavior that someone can actually control.
- Give feedback immediately.
- Check the accuracy of the feedback with other team members in order to see if they noticed the same thing.
- Check if your feedback has been understood.

Team members should learn from their own experiences. Thompson (2007, 20) defined that expert **learning** happens when we make sure that members do not make the same mistake again. Druskat and Kayes (2000, 331) describe team

learning as »... team members acquiring and sharing unique knowledge and information and examining what is helping and hurting team performance to continually improve as a unit«. Several discoveries have been made about team learning in project teams (Druskat and Kayes 2000, 345- 348):

- Knowing and understanding each other enables knowledge sharing and open communication. Spending time together and focusing on becoming familiar with one another can have a positive impact on learning.
- Surprisingly, clearly defined team processes negatively influence team learning because team members give less attention and thought to processes.
- Proactive problem solving consists of anticipating potential problems and preventing them. Reflection, discussion and action are necessary for identifying and dealing with task and interpersonal problems, and they increase team learning. O'Grady model (2008) emphasizes the importance of reflection. She thinks that results have to be reviewed regularly and have to be tied back to the performance management system and the award system of the organization. Actually, the team debriefing suggests revision of the team work processes (norms, roles, goals) as often as possible to increase the team's performance.

Anderson (1987) suggests using three mechanisms to gain procedural knowledge in teams: generalization (the ability to link and apply knowledge or skill to different situations), discrimination (reorganizing the need for different approaches in situations and modifying the existing knowledge or skills accordingly), and strengthening (applying the most used knowledge and skills to various situations, even when that is unusual).

3.2 Teamwork experience and empowerment

Teams need time, hard work and support (Elmuti 1997, 238) in order to gain teamwork knowledge. As explained in the previous section, individuals learn how to

operate in teams based on their teamwork experience (Thompson 2007). Moreover, teams also need to know what empowerment is and what is not. Empowerment is not having freedom whenever you want, giving people tasks you do not want to do, disregarding organizational policies, ignoring commitments, or avoiding accountability (Harrington-Mackin 1996, 9). Autonomy is not only freedom; it is also a lot of responsibility.

The team need to demonstrate certain abilities before we empower it. Those abilities are: understanding the relevance of information and making decisions based on that, recognizing how the team's actions influence the whole organization, willingness to fully meet customer needs, capability of identifying and solving problems, capability of improving with time and giving constructive feedback to other team members, and willingness to commit (Ryner 1996).

Ryner (1996, 30) mentions the term "Team maturity gauge". Team maturity gauge assesses the level of experience of the team and the team's capability of working as a self-directed unit. He thinks that some constraints or boundaries should be pointed out when an empowered team with no experience is formed: timelines (specify constraints), resources (specify maximum of available resources), equipment, authority (what is the team's responsibility), philosophy (management principles under which the team must work), budget, location/physical space, safety, and legal/legislative constraints. (Morse 2005, 19) presents his opinion on trust and control in his article »Trust, but verify«. He believes that trust is crucial in teams, but »... a little skepticism never hurts anyone — or any team.« To assure a good start of teamwork, the supervisor should not control the team, but adjust its boundaries according to the team's maturity. We cannot have a high-performing team if we control it. It might be stressful and unproductive in the short term, but as soon as team members learn how to deal with their new freedom, there can be some great results (Hirschhorn 1991, 96). This means that members need to get some experience first.

When setting the boundaries we have to have an optimal balance between autonomy and control not to suppress commitment and to enable the team to prepare itself before it gets full independence. Isaken and Lauer (2002, 78) believe

that inexperienced teams should get guidance not on how (means), but on what (goals) and why. This is because unclear and unspecified goals can be the biggest under- utilization cause. They are not saying that teams have to get goals from the top, but organizations should provide broad, clear and understandable direction for the inexperienced teams in order to help them keep working towards the same goal.

4 TEAM PROCESSES

When teams function they deal with two types of processes; team work and team interpersonal processes.

1. Team work processes consist of trust, communication, commitment, accountability, and results (Lencioni 2003).
2. Team interpersonal processes consist of goals, common approach, and norms (O'Grady 2008).

4.1 Team work processes

Goals

There are several guidelines on how a team should set and form its goals in order to be successful:

- Team has to know what performance criteria they need to meet, and these criteria need to be tightly linked with their goals (Hirschhorn 1991, 18).
- Goals need to be clear, challenging and consequential to energize, orient and engage team members (Hackman 2002).
- Long-term goals have to be transformed into measurable, smaller goals to enable team members to keep on track. (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 49).
- Celebrate the achievement of small goals to lift commitment (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 49-56).

Empowered teams have the power to set their own goals (Thompson 2007, 9-11), and some believe that this causes increased commitment, which results in better performance (Pearce and Ravlin 1987, 757). However, according to Katzenbach and Smith (1993, 49-56) it is wrong to assume that a team will be more committed if it sets its own goals. Goal setting can cause confusion and it is time consuming

because goals have to be collective and individual at the same time. It takes a lot of effort before a team finds a goal, which gives a sense of personal relevance (and commitment) to every single team member. Teams fail very often because they cannot get a common agreement on their purpose. Therefore Katzenbach and Smith (1993) argue that performance can be equally high or even higher when a supervising manager sets team's goals. Goals get clearer and commitment can be even bigger when a person with authority assigns goals because they can be seen as a challenge from management (Locke and Latham 1990, 241). No matter who sets the goals, research by Bacon, Stewart and Silver (1999, 481) showed that the most important characteristic of the selected goals and processes is clarity. They believe that the hardest part is to set goals and processes which are not too narrow to suffocate creativity and not too broad to cause confusion in the team.

Common approach

Team members have to agree on the administrative part of the work; assign tasks, agree on schedule, and agree on the decision-making process (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 65-60) in order to be able to work effectively towards the common goal. Right use of procedures will improve coordination and make the team more efficient. The team will use less time in delegating tasks and setting timelines, coordinating resources and people, and will help save costs. High-performing teams usually seek new ways to solve problems more efficiently, and do not stick to the usual procedures. This is why having regular evaluation of procedures is so important for the team's improvement and performance (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 71).

Norms

Norms, a set of rules that guide all behavior and actions in the team, can have a positive or a negative impact on the performance (Hackman 1989, 10). They are used to regulate behavior by defining which behavior in the team is accepted and which is not (Hackman 2002). They have to be clear and strong, enable teams to spend less time in argument, put more time and energy into completing tasks. They are usually designed by all team members and normally address punctuality, communication, participation, and conflict management (Hackman 2002, 105).

Ryner (1996) suggests that the core norms have to include how meetings have to be conducted, how decisions are made, how leadership is shared among the members, and how constructive feedback is given. Norms can be modified or added through time in order to solve the emerging behavioral problems (Hackman 2002). However, they form a culture (Sherriton and Stern 1997), which is extremely hard to change (Yeatts and Hyten 1998). This is why teams have to be very careful when they are setting norms. Furthermore, the negative effect of norms can also occur when counter-productive silent norms are formed as a result of failure to set relevant norms from the early beginning. This means that either we set norms or not, they will form themselves and it is better to set them to have control over behavior in the team.

4.2 Team interpersonal processes

Lencioni (2006) listed the following five interpersonal processes as the most important for the team's success and can get affected by dysfunctions: trust, conflict or communication, commitment, accountability and results.

Trust

Researchers usually talk about cohesion and trust together (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 97). **Cohesion** is a degree to which members of a team feel attracted to their team and compelled to stay in it. Cohesiveness can be team-oriented (members express concerns for team members) or task-oriented (members express concern for the task outcome) (Carron and Brawley 2000, 90). In high performing teams both types of cohesiveness are present.

Trust is a team member's readiness to rely on other members without controlling them (Schoorman et al. 2007, 346-347). People trust others based on assumptions that these others will behave in a certain way (Mayer et al. 1995, 714). Trust can be built through certain actions (Harrington-Mackin 1996, 118): meaning what you say, being involved, not arguing too much, acting consistently, sharing information willingly, showing willingness to be vulnerable, doing more that is required, believing that another person has your best interest in mind, being able to ask for help

(Klaver 2005), maintaining the level of honesty, exposing something personal about yourself, acknowledging someone else's skill, taking risk first, and reaching out to somebody who is distant and different.

Trust is also a foundation of Lencioni's pyramid (2003), and when it is achieved several advantages appear (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 103): team members put more effort into work than into interpersonal issues. They are willing to ask for help and recognize other's strengths, accept different opinions, and they believe that everyone in the team is working towards the common interest. Team members also admit their weaknesses and mistakes, control their egos, speak openly when they disagree, confront behavioral problems, and engage in productive conflict (Lencioni 2003). It has been proved that trust affects the team performance positively (De Jong and Elfring 2010).

However, trust in empowered teams can also have a negative impact on performance. Langfred (2004) discovered that trusting team members in empowered teams does not monitor other team members much. As a result, they have relatively low awareness of each other's activities. This negatively affects the performance, probably by affecting team work processes, especially coordination. Because of mutual trust, individuals start to perform their tasks independently and lose the possibility of high performance as a team (Morse 2005). It has been proved that building trust in short-term teams may not have the same benefits as in long-term teams. The cost of building trust among team members in short-term teams might be too high compared to gains (De Jong and Elfring 2010).

Conflict and communication

There are two types of conflict. Competitive conflict or relationship conflict occurs when people fight to win over other ideas (Tjosvold 1998, 287). It has negative consequences emerging as a lack of trust and cooperation. This type of conflict usually happens when several team members cannot agree on their strengths, and are unable to decide who is going to perform the task (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 95). It can be prevented by having strong norms, or when team goals are very clear, so team member put their personal desires second and the team's goals first

(Tjosvold 1998, 304). The second type of conflict is beneficial. Task-related conflict or cooperative conflict occurs when two or more people have opposing ideas, but they are open to understand each other's views. When team members do not agree a variety of ideas are presented and that can lead to the best decision made (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 93).

Empowered teams, which have good communication and take into consideration various opinions of team members, are far more successful than teams with dominant team members (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 69). Open, ongoing, honest and regular communication includes providing new information, reviewing past work and discussing the progress, not blaming anybody, and quickly conveying the information among all team members. Those actions are important for learning from mistakes, and for building trust (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 79). Being able to openly communicate and disagree can prevent that task-related conflicts grow into relationship conflicts (Tekleab et al. 2009, 22).

Some teams can benefit more from conflicts than others. Druskat and Kayes (2000) discovered that in short-term empowered project teams confrontations between members who break norms could have negative influence on the performance. Benefits of confrontations and conflicts can be seen only in longer periods of time. They suggest that members of short-term project teams try to avoid conflicts. Langfred (2007) claims that the consequences of conflicts have not only process-related effects, but also have structure-related ones. Increased team conflicts result in lower trust among team members, which influences the team structure by reducing task interdependence and individual autonomy.

However, when it comes to long-term teams having a conflict is still better than not having one. Conflict avoidance can result in destructive consequences, such as Groupthink and Abilene paradox. Abilene paradox happens when participants take an action that actually no one wants, but everyone fails to express the disagreement. An author, who experienced a disastrous trip to Abilene with his family, defined it. After the trip everyone started to blame other individuals for a bad experience, and discovered that none of them actually wanted to go in the first place (Harvey 1977). The same thing happens in organizations, when people fail to

disagree.

Janis (1982) defined Groupthink as a quick way to adapt your mode of thinking to a cohesive group, and engage in the group's actions when in fact you override your real motivation and alternative courses of action. Kim (2010) compared those two describing Abilene Paradox as a state of "low energy" (hesitation, carelessness, passive attitude), and Groupthink as a state of "high energy" (active attitude, group euphoria, high cohesiveness).

Commitment

Commitment is an effort put into the task (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 59). Effort is the amount of energy put into work, and it is tied to commitment and motivation. Affective or emotional commitment happens when the employee is emotionally attached to the company or the team, and continuance commitment happens when the employee is staying with a team or with a company because of the need to have a job (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 65). The most common causes of commitment are: autonomy over the decision making, meaningful tasks, desired rewards, appraisal system that recognizes individual's contribution (Pearce and Ravlin 1987), open communication, not being scared of confrontations, being able to have a constructive conflict, trust among team members (Lencioni 2003, 38-39), and pride in the company or the team (Thompson 2007).

Accountability

Katzenbach and Smith (1993, 60) define commitment in an interesting way: "Think, for example, about the subtle but critical difference between "the boss holds me accountable" and "we hold ourselves accountable". The first can lead to the second; but without the second, there can be no team." Accountability is affected by trust (keeping promises), by commitment (energy and effort put into achieving goals), by having clear goals, clearly assigned tasks, and open communication (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 60; Lencioni 2002). This is the only way a team can assure that its members will keep promises, deliver results and satisfy expectations.

Orientation to results

A team has to do two things in order to be successful. Firstly, it needs to pay attention to the results and performance by having a debriefing process, reviewing the past actions, learn from mistakes, and make necessary changes (Katzenbach and Smith 1993,61). Secondly, team members need to truly work towards their common goal, not their personal desire (Lencioni 2003, 40).

A team also needs to believe that it can be successful in achieving its goals, which is defined as a group potency (Shea and Guzzo 1987, 25). Surprisingly, group potency is even more important for the team's success than the actual abilities of the team members to execute the task (Jordan et al. 2002).

4.3 Team processes and teamwork experience

Teams benefit from having more freedom (Stewart 2006). Autonomy is crucial to gain commitment (MacKenzie 1979, 49; Pearce and Ravlin 1987, 757). Without commitment, high performance is out of team's reach (Katzenbach and Smith 1993). Team members with autonomy over decision-making result in committed workforce and have better performance results (Pearce and Ravlin 1987, 757) due to greater alignment of the team's goals with personal values and interests (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 246). This is the basic advantage of empowered teams. However, some critics believe that organizations tend to overestimate the positive effects of participative management and underestimate costs (Godard 2004). Employees can have trouble seeing limits of their autonomy (Sirkin 1993, 58), and empowerment can be misunderstood or abused. Employees with a poor decision-making process and lack of judgment can make very bad decisions (Elmuti 1997, 235-236).

Research findings show that teams that do physical work benefit more from empowerment than teams that are mostly doing knowledge work. Some suggest this happens because the routine work requires less direction and supervision (Stewart 2006). Working in teams is in most cases associated with greater stressfulness than individual work, and stressfulness is even greater for empowered teams than for supervised teams. This cannot be explained by the increased workload as assumed

by Godard (2001), but it is a consequence of the increased need for communication, conflicts resolution and the role assignment (Behfar et al. 2008). Basically, challenges with communication and conflict resolution are one of the most common in low-experience teams (Behfar et al. 2008). The skills required to manage those processes in the team can be absent in inexperienced teams.

Inexperienced teams usually face difficulties deciding on goals, norms, roles and other team work processes; they fail to set right timelines and allocate resources, have an inefficient decision-making process and performance management process (Ryner 1996; Yeatts and Hyten 1998; Hackman 2002; Pulko 2009). All the listed usually affect trust, communication, commitment, accountability and results of the team, when task-related conflicts turn into interpersonal issues (Amason et al. 1995, 25; Tekleab et al. 2009, 22). Highly experienced team members possess well developed teamwork knowledge structures and are likely to be more successful in a team than inexperienced or lower experienced team members (Rentsch et al. 1994). Yeatts and Hyten (1998) think that teams need to regularly review their performance in order to learn from their past mistakes. If a team reviews its performance, the team members learn and know better how to react when a certain symptom appears. Challenges no longer grow into bigger problems, and team processes improve with time (Watson et al. 1993, 599). Therefore it is expected that **H1: The higher the team's experience with working in a high-level autonomy team structure, the fewer the challenges regarding team processes (work and interpersonal) will occur.**

5 PERFORMANCE

Performance of a team can be defined through several dimensions: productivity or how well the team meets performance standards, cohesion or how much team members enjoy working together, learning or ability to continuously improve individual and team performance (Thompson 2007; O'Grady 2008), and integration (Thompson 2007, 38). When combining several definitions of performance, characteristics of the team performance can be presented as a four dimensional model:

1. First dimension is performance standards

Team's outputs have to meet performance standards set by the organization (O'Grady 2008). Thompson (2007, 39) explicitly emphasizes that efficiency is a part of productivity, and it needs to be taken into consideration when achievements of performance standards are evaluated.

2. Second dimension is team satisfaction

This dimension focuses on team satisfaction (O'Grady 2008) and cohesion. It is important that team members enjoy working together, support and respect each other. In other words, when Thompson (2007, 40) talked to a manager at Societe Generale Bank, he said: "I ask myself whether I want to work with these people again. If the answer is yes, then the team was successful. If the answer is no, then the team was not successful."

3. Third dimension is learning and improvement

The team has to have an ability to continuously improve performance (O'Grady 2008), and help individual team members grow personally (Hackman 1989, 7) through learning (Thompson 2007). Thompson (2007, 41) claims that every individual needs the opportunity to grow and to reach self-fulfilment. That is why successful teams need to get many challenges and opportunities.

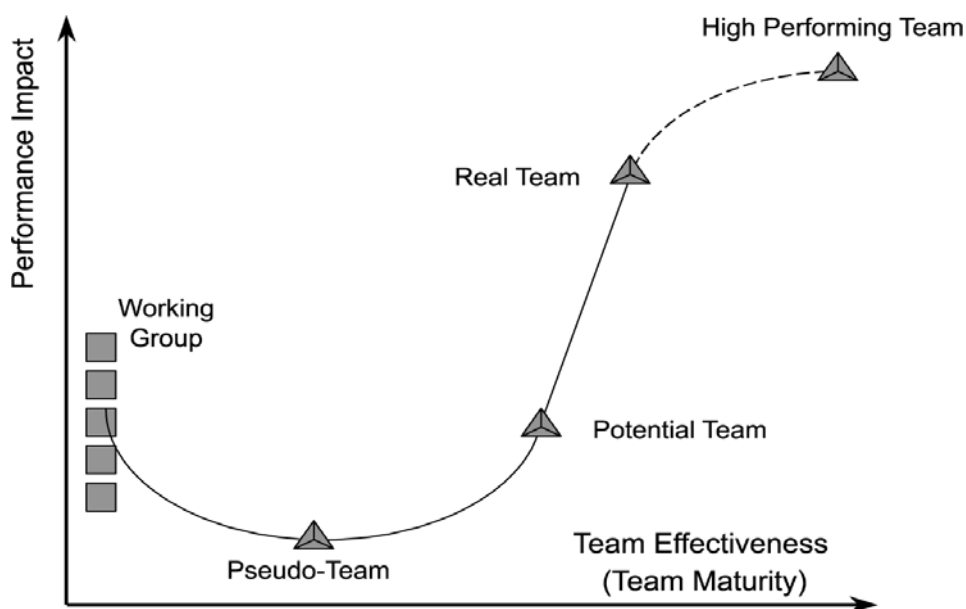
4. Fourth dimension is integration

The team has to fit well into the company's structure, it has to be integrated with other teams in the organization, and team's goals have to be consistent with larger organizational goals (Thompson 2007, 41).

5.1 Performance curve

Different types of groups and teams can achieve different performance results, as represented on the team performance curve. The team performance curve (Figure 5.1) shows how many stages of performance groups and teams can reach (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 93). On the curve, we see five different stages: work group, pseudo-team, potential team, real team, and high-performing team. The biggest performance gain happens between a potential team and a real team. The dotted line shows the level of commitment that has to be made to move from a real team to a high-performing team.

Figure 5.1: Performance curve



Source: Katzenbach and Smith (1993, 93).

1. **Working group:** A working group consists of people who might learn from one

another and share ideas, but are not interdependent. Group members usually share information and insights, make decisions, and might also help other members to do their jobs better. The main difference between a work group and the real team is that in a work group, group members focus more on individual goals and individual accountability. Therefore, the members of the group are not working towards the same goal (Thompson, 2007, 5), and do not represent a team.

2. Pseudo-team: Is a group where there could be a need for team performance, but the group is not trying to work interdependently; it has no common purpose or performance goals. They sometimes might even call themselves a team, but they are the weakest formation of all, and their sum of whole is less than the potential of the individual parts (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 93).

3. Potential team: Is a group with a significant potential for performance, but shared purpose, goals, and common work approach are not established yet.

4. Real team

5. High-performance team: Is the most evolved form of a team on the Katzenbach and Smith's performance curve. Kur (1996, 28) defines it as follows: "A high-performing team (or organization) consistently satisfies the needs of customers, employees, investors and others in its area of influence. As a result, these teams frequently outperform other teams that produce similar products and services under similar conditions and constraints."

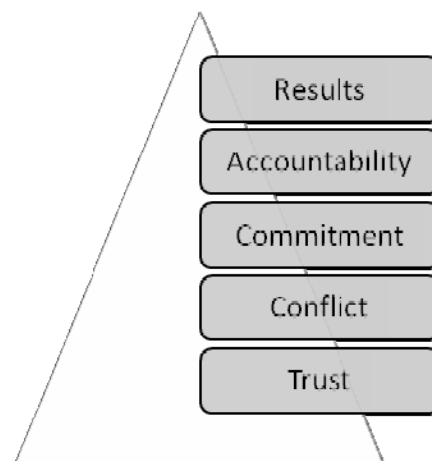
Katzenbach and Smith (1993, 65) believe that the dotted line on the curve that leads to the high performance represents commitment: "Behind a high-performing team lies a story of commitment. Like any real team, a high-performing team must have a smaller number of people with the required skills, purpose, goals, approach, and accountability [...]. What sets apart high-performing teams, however, is the degree of commitment; particularly how deeply committed the members are one to another." They describe commitment as interpersonal commitment and commitment to the goals, where one can lead to another. Because of strong interpersonal commitment, commitment to the purpose becomes even bigger, goals

are more ambitious and approach is more powerful. Mutual concern enables growth and flexibility (Katzenbach and Smith 1993, 66).

5.2 Performance and team processes

Team performance is affected by team work processes and team interpersonal processes, both were presented in the previous chapter. Lencioni (2003, 35 — 40) focuses on interpersonal processes inside the team. He believes the five conditions for success are trust, being able to have open communication and constructive conflict, commitment to the common goal, accountability, and focusing on common results. The team cannot move up the pyramid (Figure 5.2) if the bottom characteristic is not achieved. If there is no trust, conflict cannot occur; without open communication, the team cannot set engaging goals. Without engagement, team members will not want to participate and be accountable. Inattention to results happens when needs of individuals are more important than team's goals (Lencioni 2006, 6).

Figure 5.2: Five basic characteristics of a high-performing team



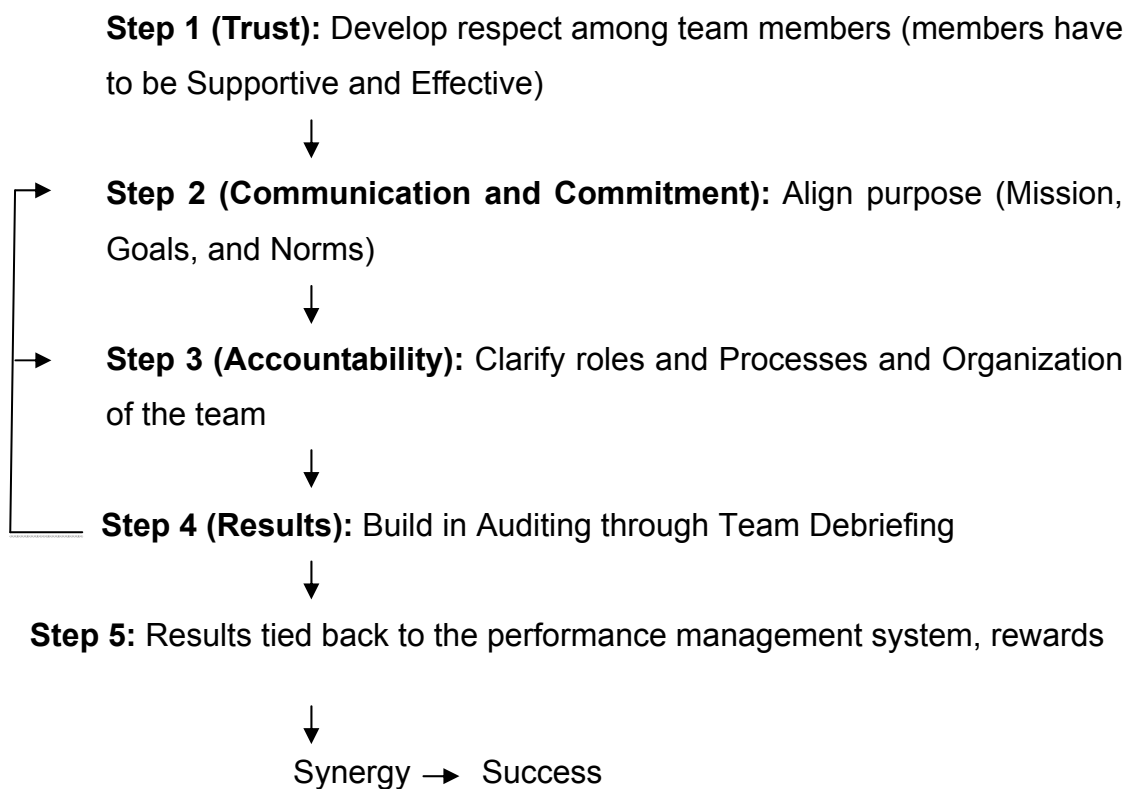
Source: Lencioni (2003, 40).

O'Grady (2008) has developed Lencioni's model even further, and she combined its interpersonal characteristic with team work processes (norms, goals, and common

approach). Professor O’Grady addressed all possible challenges in her model (Figure 5.3) in order to help empowered teams reach high performance.

In the first step of the model, respect needs to be developed. Team members have to be supportive and effective. This means that all individuals have to put equal amount of effort into work, and they also need to recognize each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

Figure 5.3: O’Grady model



Source: S. O’Grady (2008).

The second step addresses conflicts and commitment. All team members have to agree on suitable and clear goals, norms, and mission. This is the step where team needs to have open communication, and not be afraid to have constructive conflicts, in order to reach commitment.

In the third step, the team has to define roles and processes clearly, so individuals can be held accountable for their tasks.

Step four is very important. Team needs to build in an auditing system and regularly review their performance. Necessary changes need to be made if the team is not performing as planned. The final, fifth step, ties team results back to the performance management system and the reward system of the organization to support desired behaviors, give feedback and provide coaching.

Empowered teams have higher chance of reaching high performance than any other type of team (Thompson 2007; Katzenbach and Smith 1993). Their performance gets affected by how well they plan, set, execute, and follow up their team work and interpersonal processes (Yeatts and Hyten 1998; Lencioni 2003, O'Grady 2008). Teams can face challenges among both team work processes and interpersonal processes, when trying to perform (O'Grady 2008), which negatively influences their performance (Lencioni 2003; O'Grady 2008).

5.3 Teamwork experience and team performance

Performance characteristics of newly-formed groups are unquestionably different from those of longer-term groups (Watson et al. 1993, 599). The research was conducted on homogeneous and diverse work groups, and both groups experienced process and performance improvements during the course of the study. The researchers strongly suggested that the effect of experience should be studied further.

Learning happens when team members gain experience (Thompson 2007). In general, more experience means more knowledge. Consequently, more experienced individuals have a better understanding of the teamwork than less experienced individuals (Rentsch et al. 1994).

It is crucial to understand that behaviors in work teams are strongly affected by deadlines (Gersick 1989). The requirement to meet deadlines and to be efficient may result in performance goals taking precedence over learning, gaining valuable experience (Druskat, Kayes 2000), and aligning teamwork schemas. Davison (1994) thinks that it is very important to overcome differences in expectations in order to

prevent personal conflicts. Therefore, teams that rush into tasks usually face a low performance level. Teams need time to agree on work methods and to implement team basics before they are pushed into the task (Davison 1994).

Dyer (1984) discovered that high–experience teams perform more effectively than low-experience teams, and that under stress, the performance of low-experience teams decreases more than the performance of high-experience teams.

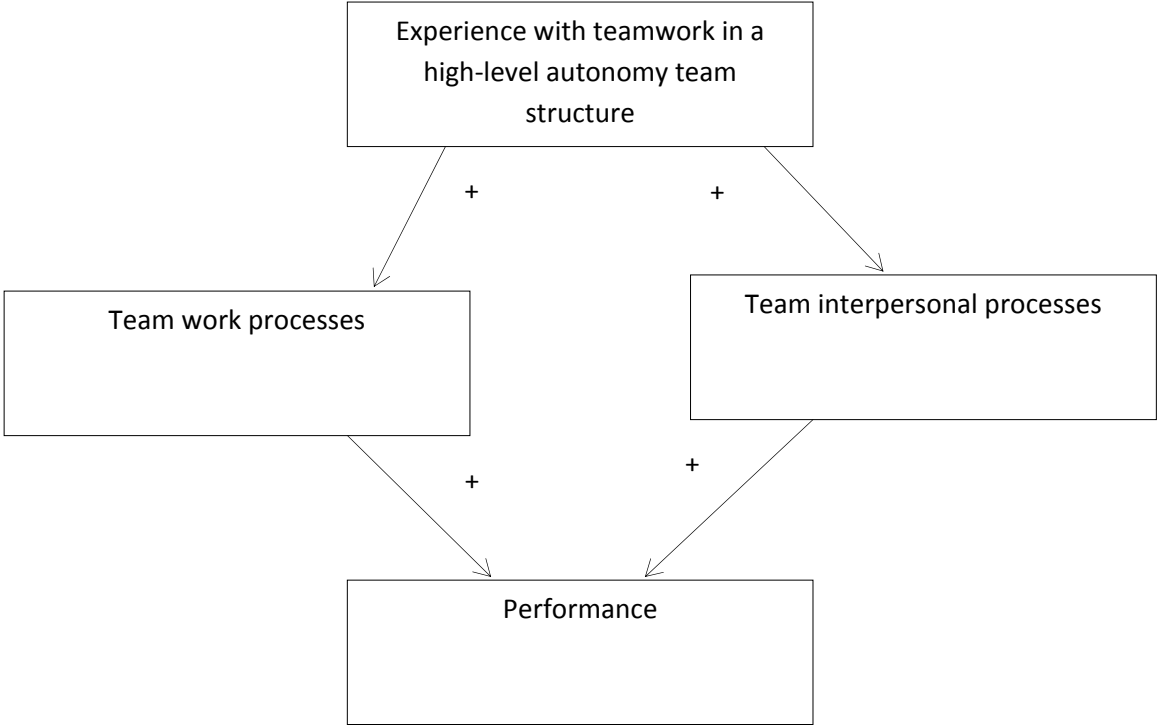
To conclude, proactive problem resolution increases both learning and performance in teams (Druskat and Kayes 2000; Goodman and Leyden 1991). Watson, Kumar and Michaelsen (1993) discovered that the performance of teams improves with time, regardless of the team being homogeneous or very diverse. Dyer (1984) discovered that high–experience teams perform more effectively than low-experience teams, and that under stress, the performance of low-experience teams decreases more than the performance of high-experience teams. Teams that are trained to develop a range of team skills, such as problem-solving, interpersonal relationships, goal setting, and role allocation, reach better performance than those that were not trained in such skills (Prichard and Ashleigh 2007). Furthermore, experience can make a team more efficient by speeding up the task completion, role assignment, etc. (Reagans et al. 2005, 880). Therefore, it can be concluded that teamwork experience improves team performance (Rentsch et al. 1994). **H2: The teams that have more experience with working in a high-level autonomy team structure will more likely reach a high performance state.**

5.4 Teamwork experience, team processes and performance

Based on the theory overview, a research model (Figure 5.4) can be formed. Experience with teamwork in an empowered team structure should positively affect team work and interpersonal processes. High-experience teams should have better processes and consequently face less challenges when they are functioning (Watson et al. 1993, 599; Ryner 1996; Yeatts and Hyten 1998; Hackman 2002; Pulko 2009; Rentsch et al. 1994) than low-experience teams. Because of more teamwork experience, which means more teamwork knowledge, with autonomous

team structures, team processes improve, and teams also have better overall performance (O’Grady 2008, Lencioni 2003, Dyer 1984; Prichard and Ashleigh 2007; Reagans et al. 2005; Rentsch et al. 1994). The main research variables are: team work processes, team interpersonal processes, and team performance.

Figure: 5.4: Research model



6 OPERALIZATION OF RESEARCH MODEL

Teamwork experience with high-level autonomy structures

In this research, an experienced work team is defined as a team that had previous teamwork experience with working in a structure that offers a significant autonomy level (self-directing or self-governing structure), and an inexperienced team is a team that had no experience with working in a high-level autonomy team structure before the research was conducted.

Team work and interpersonal processes

Assessment of team performance factors was based on dimensions suggested by two models of team performance. Lencioni's pyramid (2003) was used for team interpersonal processes, and O'Grady model (2008) was used for team work processes. Both models are presented in the fifth chapter about team performance. The emphasis was on team's interpersonal and work processes, since those are important performance factors and can negatively affect performance if the team is facing too many challenges related to them (O'Grady 2008; Lencioni 2002; Yeatts and Hyten 1998).

According to Lencioni (2003, 40), there can be five dysfunctions of the team among their interpersonal processes. These were used to identify how well the team dealt with its interpersonal processes (indicators are marked with IP1-5 in Figure 6.1):

Trust (IP1)

Indicators for trust were:

- Are team members respectful (O'Grady 2008)?
- Are team members honest (Harrington-Mackin 1996)?
- Are team members acting consistently (Mayer et al. 1995)?
- Are team members exposing personal information (Harrington-Mackin 1996)?
- Are team members acknowledging skills of other team members (Harrington-

Mackin 1996)?

- Are team members supportive and effective (O' Grady 2008)?
- Are team members helping each other (Harrington-Mackin 1996)?

Communication and conflict (IP2)

Indicators for communication and conflict were:

- Do team members have open communication (Lencioni 2003)?
- Are team members good at conflict management (Lencioni 2003)?
- Are team members engaging in conflicts (Lencioni 2003)?

Lack of commitment (IP3)

Indicators for commitment were:

- Is there commitment (Lencioni 2003)?
- Do team members put much effort into their tasks (Yeatts and Hyten 1998)?
- Do team members feel proud (Thompson 2007)?
- Do team members participate in a decision-making process (Pearce and Ravlin 1987; McFarlin and Sweeney 1992)?

Avoidance of accountability (IP4)

Indicators for accountability were:

- Is there accountability in the team (Lencioni 2003)?
- Do team members hold each other accountable (Lencioni 2003)?
- Do team members take responsibility for outcomes, or do they seek for excuses (Lencioni 2003)?

Inattention to results (IP5)

Indicators for results were:

- Do team members focus on results and review their performance (Lencioni 2003)?

Challenges among team work processes were identified through observation of:

Goals (W1)

Indicators for goals were:

- Are goals set, followed up and achieved in the most effective way?
- Are goals clear (Bacon et al. 1999), consequential (Hackman 2002), and measurable (Katzenbach and Smith 1993)?

Team norms (W2)

Indicators for norms were:

- Are there rules, which help guide behaviors in the team in a way that is helpful (O'Grady 2008)?
- Do team members have strong, appropriate norms that guide all necessary behaviors (Hackman 1989)?
- Do team members review their norms (O'Grady 2008)?

Common approach (W3)

Indicators for common approach were:

- Does the team have a solid agreement on how things get done in the team (O'Grady 2008)?
- Do team members have clear roles and other operational processes (decision-making process, performance-management system, meetings, etc.) (O'Grady 2008)?

The more dimensions the team fulfills, the least challenges among team work (setting goals, norms, agreeing on common approach) and team interpersonal processes (trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, results) it has. Identified challenges of examined experienced team processes were compared to an inexperienced self-managing team of five international students which was examined in 2008 in Canada. With the use of O'Grady model (which combines all examined interpersonal and work processes), it was assessed how many

challenges did an experienced team face compared to an inexperienced team, and how many changes would both teams have to make in order to improve, and reach the best performance. This way it was defined whether experienced empowered teams really face less challenges regarding work and interpersonal processes than inexperienced empowered teams.

Performance

The overall performance of the team was assessed, based on four dimensions of team performance: comparison of team achievements with standards (P1), team cohesion and satisfaction (P2), team learning (P3) and team integration (P4).

1. Performance standards (P1)

Indicators were:

- How well the team meets performance standards (comparison with benchmark companies or within the company) (Thompson 2007; O'Grady 2008)?

2. Satisfaction and cohesion in the team (P2)

Indicators were:

- Does the team enjoy working together (O'Grady 2008; Thompson 2007)?

3. Learning and improvement (P3)

Indicators were:

- Did team members grow professionally and personally (Thompson 2007)?
- Does the team continuously improve performance (O'Grady 2008)?

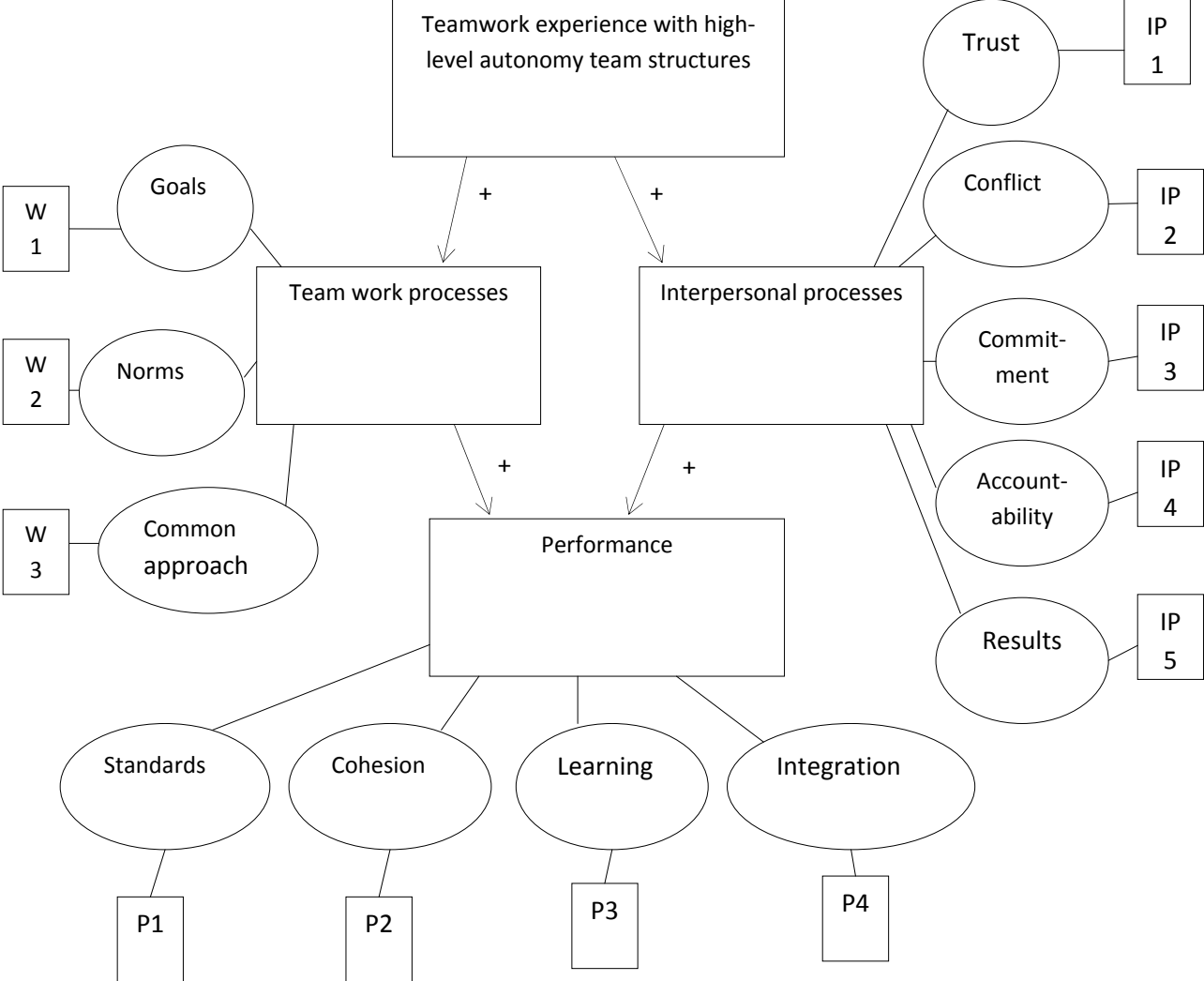
4. Integration (P4)

Indicators were:

- How well is the team following organizational goals and cooperating with other teams within the organization (Thompson 2007)?

The more dimensions the team fulfills, the better its overall performance is.

Figure 6.1: Operationalization of research model



7 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research techniques were used: observation in a setting from the middle of January until the middle of April 2011 (three months), and in-depth interviews were conducted. Observation in a setting took place at all regular meetings of the ABC team, which usually took place on Mondays between 6pm –10pm. Besides those meetings, the team had only two other meetings that took place during the weekend, which I did not attend. There were no other occasions when the team would meet without my presence.

During the observation period, I had several individual discussions with every single team member in a non-planned, relaxed, friendly way, where I tried to get to know everyone a bit better and make them feel comfortable sharing information with me.

In-depth interviews were conducted with five out of nine individuals in the middle of April, when observations were already finished and I had a fairly good understanding of the situation in the team. The structured conversation lasted for about an hour, with a goal to confirm initial findings and to clarify any misunderstandings that I might have come across during the observation period. The interview questions addressed all dimensions of the research model.

Here are three example questions (there was a list of 15 questions, but not all of them were used at every single interview):

- Do you trust your team members?
- Can you communicate openly with your team members?
- Are you proud of your team?

I had full access to internal documents of the examined team, which helped me identify team work processes, assess their quality and clarity, and observe team's discipline.

After all research findings were analyzed, a written document (the first draft of the thesis) was presented to the team leader. He agreed with the research findings, and found them

very valuable for the progress of the team.

7.1 The Company and the team

The ABC Company was a medium-sized, Swedish, IT consultancy company established in 2010. Organizational context supported self-governing, examined ABC team with its reward system, education system, information system, and corporate culture. That was not surprising since self-governing teams are teams that form an organizational context (Thompson 2007), and can easily adjust it to its needs.

Reward system

All team members had shares in the company; therefore, they were even more motivated to commit to the team's and the organization's common goals.

Education system

Since the team was a part of a knowledge-based company, several educational activities took place regularly: tracking and researching new technologies and trends, sharing newly-gained knowledge at special seminars or at over-the-weekend activities, coding events and other opportunities to test the most interesting subjects hands-on, personal development meetings, coaching sessions, different seminars, apprentice programs, etc. Personal growth was assured by receiving coaching and getting feedback.

Information system

Every employee received outstanding equipment to perform his tasks: MacBook Pro, Iphone4, MSDN licenses and books.

Corporate culture

One of the unique strengths in the organization was its corporate culture, which is based on values that truly guided all behaviors in the organization. This was especially visible in the managing team where values were commonly selected and accepted. ABC Company's corporate values (ABC Company internal documents 2011; ABC Company

website 2011) were:

- “Craftsmanship as a lifestyle: We are craftsmen; exceeding client’s expectations by delivering state-of-the-art quality and professional service, working and learning with passion, and having great pride in our work and in our company.
- What you see is who we are: Open, straightforward and honest communication helps us to build trustworthy long-term relationships within the company and with our clients. Honesty and long-term relationships are far more important for us than short-term gains.
- Embrace the family spirit: Every person in the company is equally important and encouraged to be involved in the decision-making process, which drives our commitment. We all proudly belong to the knowledgeable team of loving, caring and fair people who support each other, have an understanding for each other’s concerns, and promote mutual trust, loyalty, and respect.
- Have fun: We believe in power of freethinking and creativity. The balance of knowing when to work hard and when to have fun is of great importance in our organization. Playfulness within our professional environment engages the best skills and creates the best results.
- Challenge the world: We are continuously challenging the world, fearlessly trying out new things, following technology trends and looking for new opportunities to satisfy our hunger for up-to-date knowledge and experience. We are entrepreneurs for life.
- Keep it simple: We do not complicate our lives. There is no hierarchy in the company; we work as a team with rotating leadership, based on the company’s needs for certain skills. The use of lean practices and principles in our management strategy, as well as in our software development, increases our efficiency and flexibility. As simple as that!”

When trying to understand the organization, small research was conducted. Team members were asked to answer the question: “Why do you like to work at the ABC Company? Write it as you would describe it to your friend.” The given answers were completely aligned with their corporate values. Below are some most common reasons why individuals like to work in the examined organization:

- Everyone listens to my opinions (2).
- Everyone is equally important (2).
- We have a flat organizational structure.
- I am involved in running the company – I am working for myself and for people I like.
- The company really encourages you to increase your competence level and to grow personally and professionally (4).
- Family feeling makes you look forward to go to the office (2).
- You know you can trust everybody’s competence (3).
- I am working with fun, skilled and motivated/devoted colleagues (4).
- We have fun together, at work and in private life (5).
- We love what we do (3).
- There are no secrets and organizational politics (2).
- I get to work with people that care (about others, about software, etc.).
- We are challenging the industry and ourselves.

The numbers in the brackets describe how many people claimed the same thing. Having fun with colleagues, at work and in private life, was the most common answer. Five people wrote it, which is more than half of the team. The importance of learning, growing as a person, and working with knowledgeable colleagues was the second most important reason, favored by four people. Passion and love for work was the third most common answer. The alignment of listed answers with the organizational values was outstanding.

The organizational culture promoted supportive team environment; structure was flat, atmosphere was cohesive, interdependence was present, cooperation was encouraged, and risk-taking was appreciated. The level of the team’s autonomy was aligned with both organizational culture and structure.

A checklist is provided (Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2) to give a quick insight into team design and organizational context.

Figure 7.1: Checklist for organizational context and team design

ABC ORGANIZATION	
	Examined team and organization
Reward system	Good balance between individual and team rewards (shares in the company).
Education system	Several training and coaching activities in place, although more could have been offered to develop and foster management skills in the team.
Information system	MacBook Pro, Iphone4, MSDN licenses, intranet, document management system, internal twitter, CRM system, knowledge sharing servers, etc.
Organizational culture	Strong, positive, promotes and supports empowerment and teamwork.
Expert coaching	Unavailable. Will be available in the future.

ABC TEAM	
	Examined team and organization
Team structure	High-level autonomy, self-governing team.
People (KSA) and personality	Educated, skilled, best in the industry (demanding recruitment process), when it comes to programming. Lack of management knowledge and skills. Overall, skill sets too similar. Personalities fit with organizational culture.
Team size	9 - optimal time size.
Team diversity	Very moderately diverse according to gender, background, nationality, and age.

The examined team was a team of 9 employees in a Swedish IT consultancy organization - ABC Company. This team was established in January 2010, and has been achieving outstanding results in the IT industry since the beginning. It was a self-governing team (management board), the type of a team with the highest autonomy level. ABC Company was divided into two parts: strategy and operations. Board members were responsible for setting strategies and for managing operational tasks. Every board member was responsible for one area or function in the organization, such as marketing, sales, HR, etc. One member in the team, in this research addressed as a team leader, had a role of a CEO.

Members of the team had from five to fifteen years of work experience, most of them had an engineering background. Only one individual had a background and extensive experience in management. All individuals were well-educated males in the age group 30 – 40, all possessing university degrees or up to master's degrees. The team was relatively homogeneous according to nationalities, backgrounds (education), age and gender. Most team members knew each other for several years because they had already worked together at other companies.

Team members had, on average, 8 years of teamwork experience in high-level autonomy team structures. They had been running the company as a self-governing team since January 2010, more than a year before the research was conducted. All members were also very familiar with other autonomous teamwork settings. Agile methods were very often used in software development, and 8 of 9 team members were actively working, in software development, from 5 to 15 years. The agile software development method is a method where all stakeholders are given complete control over the scope, budget and the schedule. Even the company's recruitment process filtered out individuals who were not interested in an agile way of working.

8 RESULTS

8.1 Team's interpersonal and work processes

8.1.1 Interpersonal processes in the team

Trust

The corporate culture of ABC Company supported building trustworthy relationships by emphasizing honesty, support and respect among individuals. When being interviewed, team members listed working with *»the smartest people in the industry«* and *»being able to depend on other's expertise«* as one of the workplace advantages.

"We got a genuine family feeling. You know you can trust everybody's competence, you can point at anybody and know that he is up for the job and will do it great!" (ABC team member)

When describing those statements, it has to be emphasized that there were two skill sets needed in this team to accomplish tasks; programming and management skills. Eight of nine team members lacked management experience, and some lacked management skills. When interviews with individuals in the team were conducted, it became evident that management skills were probably not taken into consideration when this answers were given since team members spent 66% - 80% of their time working as IT consultants and perceived those skills as most important and useful (ABC Company interviews 2011).

The culture was sustained by having a demanding recruitment process; a complete match with values was crucial. Extensive knowledge and skills were also essential, and individuals were usually interviewed, only if referred by people trusted by the organization. This helped the organization to sustain the unique culture, and employ only individuals with the best programming skills.

All team members have known each other for several years, which helped them to build cohesion and foundation for teamwork. Team members spent a lot of time socializing at work and in their free time. They also stated that *"working with people*

that really care” and *“family feeling”* as an important part of their work environment. This means that there was a visible support among team members.

“I get to work with people that care; about others, about software,...” (ABC team member)

“Everyone feels safe as a professional and reliable colleague, as well as a simple human being. Tolerance and humor are a necessity, and are very present in our organization.” (ABC team member)

Individuals also liked that there were no secrets and politics in the organization, and that everyone knew what to expect from others. This is important because trust is based on honesty and ability to fulfill others expectations to act consistently.

“Everybody knows what we do and where we are going. No secrets.” (ABC team member)

Asking for help was commonly accepted in the team.

“I can ask any stupid question I want and I do not get judged by anyone, and everyone is willing to share their knowledge very openly. Nobody is competing.” (ABC team member)

Team members were willing to take additional work in order to help individuals with their task.

It can be concluded that the trust level in the team was high. Team members were supportive, effective, respectful, honest, they acted consistently, were willing to reveal personal information by spending their free time together, they were willing to recognize each other’s skills, and they openly asked for help. The team fulfilled all indicators and proved the existence of trust.

Communication and conflict

The ABC team used several ways to communicate: they had regular weekly meetings where all team members were present and talked about strategy and operative things, Google docs was used for documents, the team also extensively communicated through emails, telephone conversations and internal micro-blogging (status.net). There were few occasions when someone did not answer his e-mail for

a day or two, but in general communication flow seemed to be efficient and clear. There were many examples when team members answered their e-mails or phone calls very late at night, during the weekends, or during holidays.

Communication was defined clearly under corporate values and in the guidelines of the team. The guidelines said: "Communicate!" They described that better communication leads to fewer conflicts. In case of conflict, confrontation had to be immediate, with a positive attitude and common sense. Every person needed to make sure that he understands expectations clearly in order to deliver exactly what was desired (ABC Company guidelines 2011). Values also emphasized the importance of open, straightforward and honest communication in order to build trustworthy long-term relationships within the company and with clients.

"I like it because everybody is sharing the information." (ABC team member)

At the meetings and on all other occasions, team members were encouraged to speak openly, straightforwardly and honestly. They were also encouraged to share their opinions; every individual got his turn to express himself. Although some people contributed more than others at the meetings, it was expected that everyone shared their point of view and got involved in the conversation. All participants were directly asked to speak. *"Being able to be involved in decision making"* and *"everyone listens to my opinions"* were also an important part of their work environment.

"Our big interest in what we do leads to many interesting and inspiring discussions every time we meet. Everybody has their say. No-one is more important than any other." (ABC team member)

If deviant behaviors occurred (not sending requested information on time, not fulfilling your assigned task as agreed, being late for the meeting, etc.) they were immediately confronted in a very open way. The team would express dissatisfaction with that person's behavior and ask the person to improve. Feedback was always immediate and public within the team, mostly done by one individual with the strongest management and leadership skills. All other team members could, and sometimes did, give their feedback as well.

However, there were some challenges with communication and conflict management. A very dominant person with extensive management experience and

strong leadership skills was guiding the team and taking the leadership role at all times. Team members openly admitted that they would face more challenges without that certain individual being present. If the team leader did not attend the meeting everyone would be asking: “*What would Tom do?*” when making decisions. They were convinced that the team would be absolutely lost without their leader.

The team leader was usually the only one who gave feedback, and he also did most of conflict confrontations. However, everyone got encouraged to speak openly numerous times. The situation seemed to be improving, said the team leader. Other team members were more and more willing to give critique, but still not as often as it would be desired. It mostly happened that team members waited for the response of their leader before they openly shared their point of view, just to see whether they will get his approval/disapproval on the issue. Although the leader continuously told his team that their duty was to disagree with any bad decisions, they mostly failed to do so.

Overall, the team had good communication, with some challenges already present. They had fairly open communication, team members were not good at conflict management, and some of them were avoiding confrontations/conflicts. However, it was not that much about current challenges, which were manageable, it was more about the threat of potential challenges, which could easily emerge from the present situation.

Commitment

All interviewed team members expressed satisfaction with being able to directly influence all decisions made in the organization. Decisions in the team were usually reached through consensus.

“I’m not just one of a crowd, people listen to my opinions.” (ABC team member)

Strong emotional commitment was present; there was emotional attachment to the company and the team, which increased the level of energy put into the work. The commitment of the ABC team was noticeably high, driven by autonomy over decision-making, by desired rewards (shares in the company), and by getting

recognition. The leader had an essential role in keeping the team committed and their communication as straightforward as possible.

“Everything is a team effort and we have no strangers.” (ABC team member)

“I like working for myself and people I care about, not for anonymous share holders or board of directors.” (ABC team member)

A very unique way of asking for commitment was present in the team. When decision was made and accepted by every single team member, the goal had to be followed without any excuse. There was an occasion when a single team member tried to justify his failure to deliver with an excuse that the goal was set too high. The reaction of the team was surprising. That team member was asked, if he was not present when everyone agreed on the goal. And even if he was not present, (which he was), it would be his obligation to come to the meeting and his duty to disagree with bad decisions. If not, he had to support accepted decisions the best way he could. If someone did not speak out when a decision was discussed, then it was his fault. After a decision was made, every individual had to stick to it and perform in an agreed manner. Explanation, why it is so important to follow goals and keep committed, was given to the team member who did not deliver as planned. The team explained to him that his ignorance could sink the morale and commitment of the entire team. It was emphasized that there should be no excuse, once you commit, you commit to both - people and the goal.

The overall commitment was highly team – oriented and task-oriented. Commitment to people can be explained also with a statement by an individual from the team explaining why everyone works so well together.

“... We are friends first...” (ABC team member)

There were strong silent norms present in the team. If someone got doubts about the goal, others would react strongly, immediately eliminate those doubts and make sure that everyone knew that once you agreed to something, you also committed. And when you committed, you had to perform without any excuses and any doubts. However, every team has to modify its goals from time to time. The ABC team did that every two months at their business plan meeting which usually took a whole day. It was normal to reset goals there, but not elsewhere.

As noticeable from the descriptions of events in the team, the team's commitment can be demonstrated through several things: regular Monday meetings lasted from 6pm until at least 10pm, and individuals worked at least 50-60 hours a week, and were also available on weekends for other meetings, which sometimes lasted an entire Saturday.

Employees of ABC Company had strong pride in their company and high workplace satisfaction. Pride originated from describing themselves as a »*best in what we do*« company, with the best people from the industry. Surprisingly, workplace satisfaction was connected more to enjoying working with very competent people (meaning IT competence) who cared about every individual in the team and shared the same passion for work, than other perks and benefits that the company offered (amazing headquarters with a game room, ABC Company beer brand available always after work, etc.).

“We are ABC! We have a lot of fun every time we meet, both in private and during work time.” (ABC team member)

“Everybody wants to be a part of an important and cool gang or team in life...” (ABC team member)

Furthermore, an interesting strong, silent positive norm was present. All team members were co-owners of the company and “shareholder way of working” was mentioned several times in the team. According to team members, if you were an owner, more was expected from you; more effort, more commitment, and better results. If any of the team members was not willing to put effort into the work, the team would kindly ask those individuals to rethink whether they want to be “shareholders” or “employees”.

The team had very strong commitment (task-related and people-related); team members put a lot of effort into their tasks, they felt proud, and everyone participated in the decision-making process.

Accountability

”If you promise, do it!” This was written in the team's guidelines. The ABC team had extremely well defined processes, goals and roles, and expectations were made very

clear. For example, when someone was offered a new position or asked to take more responsibility, these questions always followed:

*“Are you sure you want this/you are willing to do this/you know what this means?”
(ABC team member)*

They were usually repeated several times in order to make sure that a person really understood the importance of the task and to make him understand all expectations; all good and bad obligations, which were a part of the new task.

If a person did not complete the task, he would get confronted immediately. Social loafing was impossible because roles and processes were defined in a very clear way. The team made action plans (what, when, whom, resources allocation) for most actions, which helped to keep everyone involved accountable.

Weekly meetings took place on Mondays and lasted for about four hours. Meetings followed an agenda set and distributed a day before, and everyone was expected to come prepared to the meeting. During the meeting, reviews of past activities were made, planning took place, and minutes were taken. All actions agreed on at previous meetings were monitored and reviewed in order to keep track and alignment with goals. Besides meeting's minutes, two other lists were attached; an action point list (describing who, due date, action assigned) and a decision log (a complete list of accepted decisions). Having had a very organized roles allocation process made keeping track of assigned tasks very easy, and kept every individual accountable.

The ABC team had strong accountability: every team member was held accountable, every attempt to find excuses was stopped and results were demanded.

Results

The team defined themselves as craftsmen (ABC Company internal documents 2011, ABC Company website 2011), “exceeding client’s expectations by delivering state-of-the-art quality and professional service, working and learning with passion, and having great pride in our work and in our company’. Hiring the best and the brightest, and exceeding expectations of their clients were only two result-oriented goals of the ABC team.

Group potency was extremely high.

*“With high standards in knowledge and know-how in the field of agile systems development as a foundation, we put our clients and their businesses foremost.”
(ABC team member)*

“I am a part of something that is game changing. We challenge the status quo of the industry...” (ABC team member)

As described in the commitment section, this team really strived towards the same goal. The leader of the team served as a reminder, if any of the team members had an occasional motivational drop, he would get them back on track. A clear main goal was divided into smaller, carefully planned and measurable goals.

The team had an extreme focus on results and reviewed their performance on a regular basis.

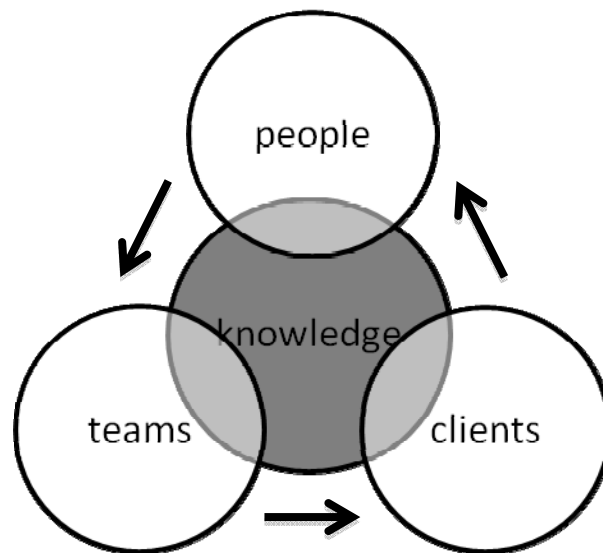
8.1.2 Work processes in the team

Goal setting and revision

The team’s highest goal was to follow the company’s vision and mission. Their vision was to create the most admired company in the region. They were planning to do that by fulfilling their mission to create value by sharing knowledge. A unique foundation to **set** and achieve their goals by sharing knowledge (Figure 8.1) was used in this process.

ABC Company was achieving growth through prioritizing its employees and people within the IT community, teams, and clients. For the company, these were three equally important groups of stakeholders involved in the value creation process. The meaning of value for each group might have varied, but all of them needed knowledge sharing to get it. Everything started with more knowledgeable people in the organization. When put into teams, those people made better teams and delivered better results to their clients. Happy clients invited them back to deal with new challenges. This way they gained even more knowledge and experience. The knowledge sharing process was actually a growing spiral that helped everyone involved gain value, and it helped the company get better, grow and gain admiration from all stakeholders (ABC Company internal documents 2011).

Figure 8.1: How ABC Company follows its goals and allocates resources



This foundation played a vital role when decisions were made or when resources were allocated. It was a guideline and a commonly accepted tool to keep the team on track.

Besides the main goal, there was a yearly goal setting process, which started with the selection of organizational goals in November, and it was usually finished at the beginning of the year for the following year. When organizational goals were set, every team member, who was responsible for one function (marketing, sales, etc.), had to set an area plan consisting of goals, strategy, and action plan. Function's goals named as operational goals were also personal goals of an individual responsible for that area. The team made sure that all goals from different functions were synchronized and were supporting each other. Goals were set according to team members' personal preference, but had to be challenging. All of them supported the main goal of the organization, and were accepted by everyone in the team.

The **revision of goals** took place every two months at a whole day meeting called "business plan review". This meeting was usually held on Saturdays. Goals were reviewed, situations and possible environmental changes were assessed, and goals were adapted, if necessary.

There were also weekly Monday meetings. Minutes were taken at every meeting, but for that specific meeting, two other lists were attached to the minutes as well; an

action point list (describing who, due date, action assigned) and a decision log (a list of accepted decisions). The agenda was set by the team leader, based on the needs of the company on a weekly basis. The main point of the weekly discussions was strategy review and review of past week activities (action point list). An interesting thing was that the team never got sidetracked at the meetings; it always kept straight to the agenda trying to be the most efficient.

Every team member got official feedback on his performance at least twice a year in a form of a coaching session. His performance was evaluated, based on the functional goals or operational goals that he set for himself. The team leader met with an individual in a private meeting called “individual discussion”. At the individual discussion, the team member got an assessment and feedback on the past performance, and improvements were suggested and agreed on. Also, the team leader asked every individual about his desires for the future; what he wishes to do or get better at. The long-term personal goals were discussed to verify if personal goals were aligned with organizational long-term goals. Lastly, expectations from each other out of the past experience were reviewed. This discussion was important to keep everyone at their best performance, motivated and aligned with organizational goals.

Revision of teamwork satisfaction and interpersonal relations was done at the “business plan review” meeting every two months. The team basically tried to solve any dissatisfaction, conflicts, and any hidden or unresolved issues connected with team work and interpersonal processes. For example, individuals could complain about getting too much workload, someone being “too harsh” when having a conflict, etc. It was all about aligning individual expectations and clearing up misunderstandings.

Results were celebrated. Team members listed “*having fun with colleagues at work and in free time*” as the most important reason why they liked working at ABC Company. They had several occasions where results were celebrated and recognition and appreciation was shown to every employee: opening of new headquarters, Christmas celebration (where everyone gets personal gift), etc. Very noticeable results were emphasized, and recognition was given immediately after the achievement.

The only challenge with goals occurred because of the highly interrelated functional goals. Unachieved goals in one function caused all other goals in other functions to collapse. It was extremely hard to follow up; many things got delayed or did not get executed at all. The team was working on this challenge to find a solution how to deal with urgent, unpredicted challenges, while having all other goals on track.

The goals of the ABC team were set, followed up and achieved in the most effective way most of the time. They were clear and measurable, but could have been more consequential.

Norms

The team's norms were drawn from the organizational culture (values) and from the team leader's guidelines. The team strived to have rotating leadership based on the organization's needs for certain strengths, although the leading role usually belonged to the same individual, who was the most experienced in management. He wrote his personal guidelines to make every team member aware and in agreement of his expectations (ABC Company guidelines 2011):

1. See before it happens – act while you've got time! (Be proactive in problem solving.)
2. Don't look, but see! (You have to realize and understand all relevant facts in order to make right decisions.)
3. Talk about the solution, not the problem!
4. If you promise, do it! (In order to retain trust.)
5. Care about your company! (Be there for your colleagues and have pride in the company.)
6. Communicate! (Better communication leads to fewer conflicts. Confrontation of conflicts has to be immediate, with a positive attitude and common sense. Make sure that you understand expectations clearly in order to deliver exactly what is desired.)

However, the team had no written norms. Surprisingly, it did not lack clear understanding of expectations since silent norms were extremely powerful, organizational culture was strong, and guidelines (expectations from the team leader)

were written clearly. Secondary norms were formed in a positive, productive way. There were two examples of secondary norms: “*shareholder not employee*” – taking more responsibility if you have shares in the company, “*once you agree you commit to goals*” – there should be no excuses for not delivering, etc. Those norms were formed through extreme discipline and consistent actions of the team leader. The team did have very clearly written rules about work processes; they are described under the common approach section.

The team leader explained how friendship in the team was a problem at the beginning of the team’s cooperation. According to him, people were coming to the meeting late, they were having excuses for not performing the tasks and were expecting to get deadline extensions and understanding for not performing, as you would get it from your friends. This was improved with time and with setting new behavioral rules.

However, too many confrontations had to be done on a regularly basis to correct deviant behaviors, which could have been prevented by having better, well-defined norms, such as “all e-mails have to be answered in 24 hours”, etc.

The team had rules, which guided most behaviors, but were not set in a form of norms. They were strong, appropriate, but they were not written down in one single document, and therefore the team left some crucial behaviors unaddressed. They also did not review those rules.

Common approach

ABC Company was divided into two parts – one was dealing with strategy, and one dealing with operative tasks. Processes were defined in a written form for every interaction within the company; from decision-making to very simple routinized tasks. Every function (marketing, sales, HR, finance, etc.) in the company had a »role definition«. This role definition described all tasks and responsibilities of a person managing the function, budget that could be used according to his own judgment, and the person’s replacement, if needed.

Roles in the team were assigned in three ways: according to functions individuals managed, or when someone in the team volunteered, or the role was assigned to someone who had the least work at that time. Team members tended to volunteer a

lot, and sometimes they even had to be reminded that there were other people who could take the task and had a lot less to do at that point.

The ABC team had an understanding of the importance of clear roles and processes. The team and the organization had all processes written down as flow charts; everything starting from processes on an organizational level, to the smallest and the simplest tasks, as how to post news to social media (ABC Company internal documents 2011).

The team had extremely well defined work processes. Starting from larger organizational matters to the smallest details about every single meeting. There were several meetings defined in their internal documents, each of them had a set of rules (norms) applied to them describing: when the meeting was held and how long it was expected to be, who had to attend (for those listed attendance was obligatory), who was a moderator, what were the meeting priorities, how participants had to follow the agenda and when the agenda needed to be set (how much in advance), what was the main purpose and goal of the meeting, how minutes were taken and where were they stored, what happened if the team ran out of time, or in case of emergency, etc. All decisions made and tasks assigned at the meetings were written in two separate documents and were followed up.

The team had a solid agreement on how all things get done; they had amazingly clear roles and other operational processes (decision-making, performance-management, meetings, etc.).

9 DISCUSSION

According to results, the examined team in ABC Company had the following characteristics regarding interpersonal processes:

1. Trust

The trust level in the team was high. Team members were supportive, effective, respectful, honest, they acted consistently, were willing to reveal personal information by spending their free time together, they were willing to recognize each other's skills, and they openly asked for help. The team fulfilled all indicators and proved the existence of trust.

2. Communication and conflict

Overall, the team had good communication, but there were some signs of potential risks. They had fairly open communication, team members were not good at conflict management, and some of them were avoiding confrontations/conflicts.

3. Commitment

The team had strong commitment; team members put a lot of effort into their tasks, they felt proud, and everyone participated in the decision-making process.

4. Accountability

The ABC team had strong accountability, everyone was held accountable, and every attempt to find excuses was stopped with demand for results.

5. Attention to results

The team had an extreme focus on results and reviewed their performance on a regular basis.

The ABC team had the following characteristics regarding team work processes:

1. Goals

The goals of the ABC team were set, followed up and achieved in the most effective way most of the time. They were clear and measurable, but could have been more consequential.

2. Norms

The team had rules, which were helpful in guiding most behaviors, but were not set in a form of norms. They were strong, appropriate, but they were not written down in one single document and therefore some behaviors were left unaddressed. There was no revision of norms in place.

3. Common approach

The team had a solid agreement on how all things get done, they had amazingly clear roles and other operational processes (decision-making, performance-management, meetings, etc.).

To sum up, the ABC Company team had almost no challenges among interpersonal processes, except with communication. Team work processes were established very well, except team norms, which were not formed entirely in a way that they should have been, and the team's operational goals were sometimes not consequential enough. These challenges are explained further in the following section.

9.1 Challenges among interpersonal and team work processes

9.1.1 Communication challenges

The team had a very dominant team member. When only one person gives feedback, like in the ABC team, it can happen that individuals start to seek to please him instead of focusing on doing the task required for the team effectiveness (Mohrman and Mohrman 1995, 70). Dominant members in the team can cause closed communication; less options get discussed and less information evaluated, therefore, the team will less likely make the best decision (Yeatts and Hyten 1998). Failure to disagree can result in many bad consequences, including low commitment (Mackenzie 1979; Lencioni 2003).

The team could have been setting up a stage for several possible forms of communicational failures: conformity, conflict avoidance, groupthink, Abilene paradox, etc.

1. Conformity: Conformity happens when people align their behavior with the team in order to be liked, accepted by the team, or because they do not want to be judged and evaluated (Collaros and Anderson 1996). It happens more often when people are uncertain about their expertise, when people admire the team (Thompson 2007), or when they like and respect the person who tries to influence them (Hogg 1987).

Most people seek approval, acceptance and respect. This need can be especially present in a team composed of friends, such as the examined team. There is a threat that the greater the friendship, pride, or team identity, the more likely the team will escalate commitment to unreasonable courses of action (Thompson 2007).

2. Conflict avoidance: If conflicts are not addressed, task conflicts turn into interpersonal conflicts and negatively affect the team's performance (Amason et al. 1995, 25). Another threat, caused by conflict avoidance, can be Abilene paradox. Abilene paradox happens when team members seek for consensus just to avoid conflict (Leith and Baumeister 1996). Team members take a certain point of view just because the team desires it, and they do not want to face conflicts. The outcomes of Abilene paradox are decisions and actions that make no sense and harm the performance of the team (Thompson 2007).

Abilene paradox and conflict avoidance usually happen when individuals in the team think that they cannot defend their viewpoint. There are several examples showing how this was the case in the examined team (Mulvey et al. 1996). The team had one member with expertise that others could not match (when members feel their expertise cannot match other's competence they self-limit), the same few people were better at giving arguments and they usually got the buy-in from others easier, a lack of confidence in one's ability to contribute was present, and pressure from others to conform the team's decision was present. After the leader gave his opinion, others sought for his approval and put pressure on criticized colleagues.

A strong organization culture contributed to uneven communication. Organization culture can encourage norm compliance to the point that different perspectives are

discouraged. Consequences of a strong organizational culture are too homogeneous teams; everyone is so similar that it is difficult to have different viewpoints, teams can fail to respond to new conditions, and there are implications for acceptance of new ideas and innovation (Raver 2009).

On the other hand, uneven communication, when only few people in the team do the majority of talking, happens in many teams. This does not represent a problem, if people who are most skilled and informed discuss the problem (Thompson 2007). This was the situation in the examined team now, but in the future team members should receive more education in management skills and diversify their team in order to gain benefits from various perspectives and make better decisions.

3. Negative feedback: The team leader usually noticed a hidden agenda, things said between the lines or shown through non-verbal communication (MacKenzie 1979), and addressed them immediately, which contributed to the openness of communication. However, being confronted too many times can decrease one's desire to take responsibility (Harrington-Mackin 1996), and minimizes communication even further (Collaros and Anderson 1996). Furthermore, the team members who are too conflicting can negatively affect team performance, cohesion, communication, and knowledge sharing in the team (Costa and McCrae 1992; Barrick et al. 1998, 377-391). A team can suffer from all listed, if only one team member is highly disagreeable (Barrick et al. 1998). The question is: where is the right limit between communicating openly and being too conflicting. The team leader thought that him being so confrontational did not affect the team in a negative way. He believed that he earned the team's trust and respect by being a role model, giving positive and negative feedback when appropriate, and by showing performance results. To back up his statement, there was a lot of storytelling in the organization fostering trust and respect into their leader. They described his commitment and performance results, such as *"he was always at the company working, whenever I came to the office, even on Sundays"*, which proved the presence of trust and respect, as mentioned by the team leader. After all, Charan and Useem (2002, 62) describe perfectly why management board needs to hear bad news before anything else. According to them, it should be like Robert Douval said in Godfather: "I have to go to the airport. The Godfather is a man who likes to hear bad news immediately." This means that knowing the ugly truth can prevent companies from going the way Enron did.

In the end, it has to be emphasized that communicational issues in the team were not critical since team members achieved all other Lencioni's (2003) interpersonal processes of the pyramid above communication; commitment, accountability and results. Those can be reached, only if every bottom characteristic is functional enough. However, the team should pay attention to identified issues before they escalate and present a threat.

4. Work-family conflicts: They were another challenge related to communication and conflict management. Individuals in the team were working at least 50-60 hours per week, very often also on weekends. It happened many times that their family life got prioritized because of their own desires to do so, or because of their spouse's pressure. That occasion created some dissatisfaction in the team. For Netemeyer and others (2004), work-family conflict is an inter-role conflict where job expectations interfere with family-related responsibilities. Individuals who cannot reach a work-family balance, which means that they are unable to perform in both roles as expected, will seek revenge from their organizations through employee deviance behaviors (Martinko et al. 2002). If too much stress and obligations are put on individuals, they tend to prioritize a family role, which results in anti-normative behaviors and potentially create a dysfunctional work place environment (Darrat et al. 2010). Organizations need to take this problem seriously since individuals with work-life conflicts suffer from psychological well being and have more frequent health problems, depressions and anxiety (Lapierre and Allen 2006), sleeping disorders (Williams et al. 2006), and lower overall life satisfaction (Hill 2005).

Researchers emphasize that individuals usually need to deal with spousal work-life conflict and their own at the same time. It has also been proved that new business ventures financial success is highly affected by spousal strain (Werbil and Danes 2010). Strain is any possible negative way that someone can react when exposed to stress (Raver 2009). Spouses who show more commitment and support to new business ventures in the beginning usually do not know how much changes they will have to make in their family lives, and after a short period of time they tend to have a very negative attitude towards it (Conner 1992).

To prevent and manage work-family conflict, it is important to have clear expectations of how commitment to work will reflect on family life, and to be resourceful; share

family roles or outsource help (Shelton 2006). It is also important to cope with conflicts as they occur by communicating with peers to make them understand the situation, and to detach from work and to have some flexible work time. Detachment from work results in better work engagement and in better job performance (Moreno-Jimenez et al. 2009).

9.1.2 Norms challenges

The team had extremely well defined work processes, covering everything from the shortest meeting up to organizational processes. Norms, although not called so in the team, were partially covered by having clear work processes, and partially by having leader's guidelines, and a strong organizational culture. Anyway, strong silent norms were formed. Luckily, those were not counter-productive because of the clearly communicated expectations, discipline and consistency demanded by the team leader.

The ABC team successfully changed their way of working as friends to working as colleagues. This was a good decision since Gibbs (1994, 3) confirms that teams of friends tend to perform badly because they do not feel comfortable to be tough enough with each other. As he describes it: "... it can be cozy, with no rigour or organization". Therefore, some new norms needed to be established. According to the team leader, he earned loyalty and trust by having competence, leading by example and showing results. This is how everyone in the team were willing to accept critique, hard discipline and, most importantly, new way of working. Paulhus (1998) discovered that friends tend to rate everyone's contribution high at first, but after several weeks of cooperation, ratings get more relevant to their actual performance.

Norms are a great way to prevent dealing with the same problem over and over again (Hackman 2002). Better team norms can prevent counter-productive silent norms being formed, minimize conflicts, and prevent deviant behaviors. This way, time and other resources are not wasted on solving problems after they occur. Good norms also increase the desire to take responsibility because there are fewer confrontations (Harrington-Mackin 1996). Less negative feedback can lift intrinsic

motivation, and improve self-efficacy (Deci 1972) and individual performance (Bouffard-Bouchard 1990).

Norms have to address punctuality, communication, participation, and conflict management (Hackman 2002, 105). Much of that was already addressed in several team's documents, but some things could have been defined a bit better, and could have been covered a bit more in order to be more efficient, and to enable regular reviews.

9.1.3 Goals challenges

Myers (1966) thinks that motivation relies on job success. Job performance is affected mostly by competence to perform the task, meaningful goals, and management systems. If all these are working well, the individual gets an opportunity to achieve his goal, and earn approval and reward. Interpersonal conflicts, failure, disapproval, punishment, feeling of guilt and frustration can very negatively affect one's motivation. A high competence level, goals that one can relate to, approval, reward, and self-actualization raise motivation. Myers (1966) also thinks that motivation is a cause and a consequence of job success. Something very similar is represented in the expectancy theory (Raver 2009). In the expectancy theory, there are three beliefs that drive motivation when combined together; expectancy (can someone perform at an expected level), instrumentality (will someone be rewarded for performance at an expected level), valence (does that someone value a potential reward). All three beliefs have to be in place; if one of them equals to zero, motivation equals to zero as well.

In the examined team, a lack of competence to perform some tasks led to motivational drops. Furthermore, individuals with poor performance tended to receive a lot of negative feedback, which hindered self-efficacy, motivation, and performance (Deci 1972) even more.

Goals in ABC Company and in the management team were set very clearly; from the organizational goals, down to functional goals, strategies and action plans. Goals were set by the individuals in the team so everyone could easily relate to them and find them personally relevant, which actually increased their commitment (Mayers 2000; Yeatts and Hyten 1998; Raver 2009). Goals were set as recommended by

researchers. They were clear, measurable, and challenging (Hackman 2002), and bigger goals were transformed into smaller ones (Katzenbach and Smith 1993).

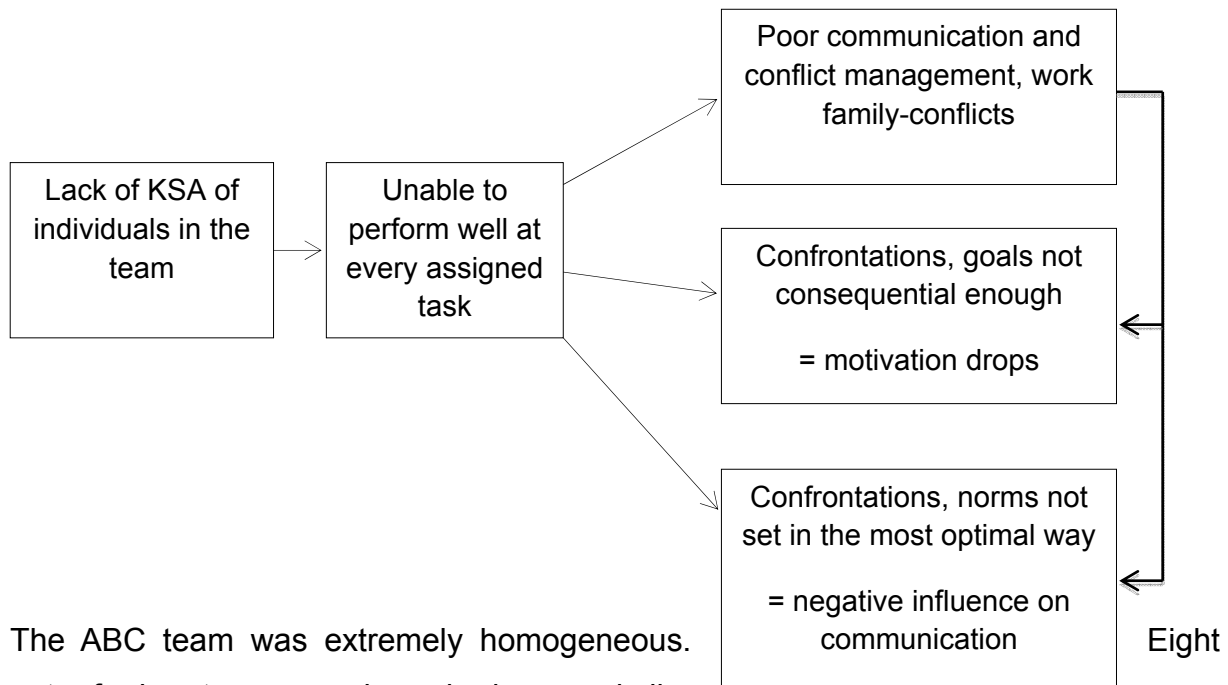
However, they were not consequential enough. Solving this issue would definitely increase motivation, orient attention better and engage team members better because goals would become more traceable (Hackman 2002).

Raver (2009) suggests that the goal-setting process is one of the easiest and the most effective ways to motivate individuals. Around 90% of studies with goal setting achieved positive results and, on average, performance improved by 16%. That is why she suggests that goals should be specific and difficult in order to get the best from people, individuals have to be committed to goals (either they have to be involved in goal-setting themselves or we have to get their buy-in), individuals have to have adequate ability to perform the task, and must receive feedback and recognition for achieving them. Spencer and Spencer (1993, 12-13) concluded that achievement motivation relies strongly on goal setting, and also on feedback in order to achieve continuous improvement. Improvement represents financial outcomes, productivity, quality and innovation.

9.1.4 Surprising findings

The ABC team had communicational and conflict management challenges due to inappropriate knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals in the team, which made team members inefficient at communication and conflict management. A lack of abilities to perform tasks resulted in many confrontations, and operational goals were sometimes not consequential enough (and team members did not have KSA to be able to improvise), which affected the motivation of individuals in the team. Some recurrent conflicts happened also owing to a lack of ability to perform and owing to norms, which could have been set in a better way. Surprisingly, challenges in three different areas of team work and interpersonal processes, had the same cause, which was inappropriate team design, where individuals lacked certain knowledge, skills or abilities to perform needed tasks (Figure 9.1).

Figure 9.1: KSA as a cause for all challenges



The ABC team was extremely homogeneous. out of nine team members had very similar backgrounds; knowledge and experience mostly in programming, and were working as IT consultants 40 hours a week. For another 10-20 hours per week, they represented the management board. They all had outstanding IT competence, but they also had a strong lack of management experience or skills. Basically, those team members had only one year of management experience and this role took 20% - 33% of their work time. Because of the organization's fast growth, team members had to take on different tasks that they were mostly not qualified for. Individuals sometimes struggled to perform owing to their lack of skills, knowledge, and abilities. Consequently, they were more or less dependent on one individual with solid management experience to guide and coach them. This proved to be an efficient cost-saving strategy for a new business venture, but also had several negative effects that might have caused trouble now or could represent a serious problem in the team's future.

Many teams strive for **homogeneity** not diversity because they search for predictability. Homogeneity can be a result of a strong organizational culture, which implies who gets hired (Raver 2009). There are several disadvantages of

homogeneous teams: small talent pool (access to more talented individuals happens when the sample you chose from is bigger), limited viewpoints (as described under communication challenges), less creative solutions and inefficient problem solving (Thompson 2007). The most effective teams are the ones that have a balanced range of different team members with complementing strengths (Gibbs 1994, 3).

It is a hard struggle, but organizations have to find a balance between employees who share organizational values in order to be successful, and diverse teams because they perform better than homogeneous teams (Raver 2009).

The effect of assigning the task to an **individual with a lack of knowledge, skills, or abilities (KSA)** can result in low self-esteem (Ferris et al. 2010), communicational issues (LePine and Van Dyne 1998), lower self-efficacy, and in motivational drop (Deci 1972).

When individuals feel that they cannot contribute as other team members, or that their contributions will not be noticed or significant, social loafing or free riding can occur (Thompson 2007; Latane 1997). However, owing to the team's extremely carefully planned and followed-up processes, clear role distribution, and belief that other team members will do their assigned task (Robbins 1995), this did not happen in the examined team.

There is no evidence that the self-esteem of an individual influences his or her performance (Baumeier et al. 2003), but Ferris and others (2010) believe that there is a strong, positive correlation between performance at work and self-esteem. This means that individuals who do not obtain knowledge, skills or abilities to successfully perform the task will have lower self-esteem. There were some attempts by individuals in the examined team to take on additional roles, roles that they were capable of handling, and to push aside their original roles, just to minimize their feeling of inability to handle the situation. That resulted in important tasks not being performed because an individual was focusing on less relevant activities he was more familiar with.

Individual's low self-esteem should not influence his or her performance (Baumeier et al. 2003), however it can influence team performance through communication. A sign of self-esteem, measured by LePine and Van Dyne in 1998, can be "voice

behavior". They were measuring willingness to speak within the team, especially when critique had to be given or opposing opinions needed to be presented. The more an individual is capable of practicing open communication, the higher his self-esteem level is. As described in the communication issues section, voicing is important for long-term success and to prevent groupthink, a destructive path that affects the judgment and creativity in the team. According to the "voice behavior", several individuals in the examined team had low self-esteem.

Receiving a lot of negative feedback can hinder intrinsic motivation and people's sense of competence (Deci 1972). When individuals have low self-efficacy, a personal assessment of how well one can perform (Bandura 1977), their performance gets affected in a negative way (Bouffard-Bouchard 1990).

This is how a loop happens. Low performance leads to low self-esteem (Ferris et al. 2010), which leads to receiving negative feedback, that affects the perception of self-efficacy (Bandura 1977), which again negatively influences performance (Bouffard-Bouchard 1990).

Spencer and Spencer (1993) emphasize that knowledge and skills are just the tip of the iceberg. In order to reach the highest performance level of an individual, we also need to take into consideration the following characteristics: self-concept, traits and motives. Motives drive behaviors towards certain goals, traits are physical characteristics and guide responses of individuals in certain situations, and self-concept is one's attitude, values and self-image. In practice, personal characteristics (motives, traits, self-concept and knowledge) create intent for action, which is visible as a behavior where a certain skill is represented. This is what creates an outcome known as job performance. Why is this important? This is important because in the examined team, self-concepts have been problematic. Self-concepts give a belief that someone can be successful in performing a certain task. Furthermore, values are an important part of self-concept. This is because people tend to behave in a way they value the most. If someone values being the best IT consultant, then it is more likely that his intent will be in this direction not in learning management skills.

9.2 Hypotheses

This research was conducted to address two hypotheses.

H1: The higher a team's experience with working in a high-level autonomy team structure, the fewer challenges regarding team processes (work and interpersonal) will occur.

H2: Teams that have more experience with working in a high-level autonomy team structure will more likely reach a high performance state.

As explained, high autonomy can be an advantage and a challenge at the same time. Teams without substantial experience with team structures that offer a lot of freedom usually face difficulties with team work processes (Ryner 1996; Yeatts and Hyten 1998; Hackman 2002; Pulko 2009) and team interpersonal processes (Amason et al. 1995, 25; Tekleab et al. 2009, 22). Teams can face challenges among team work processes and interpersonal processes when trying to perform (O'Grady 2008), which negatively influences their performance (Lencioni 2003; O'Grady 2008).

The ABC team had challenges with both communication (interpersonal process), and norms and goals (team work processes). It has to be emphasized that those challenges, especially among work processes (norms, goals), were minor. In the following section, the challenges of the experienced ABC team will get compared to the challenges of an inexperienced team to look for similarities and differences.

The inexperienced team used for comparison was a matter of examination in 2008 in Canada. It had five members, three females and two males. All team members had the same educational background; they were all students of the commerce program. Their age ranged from 20 to 23. They were from three different nationalities: two members were from North America and two from Europe. Their areas of interest during free time were much dispersed and did not overlap. The teams did not have to deal with the team design, which was the most optimally chosen by the professor. They were matched without their awareness, based on gender and nationalities to create a diverse team. They never worked together before; they actually did not even have any social contact before the research.

The team received in-class learning about team basics: trust, conflict, commitment, accountability and focus on results. They also received short guidelines about how norms, goals and mission should look like. When they were put together in a team, they did a fifteen-minute “get to know each other” exercise, which helped the team to get familiar with the team members’ backgrounds. They got accurate information and expectations from the professor. Their task was a real-life project for the leadership class, and they were graded as follows: the project was worth 35 % of the final mark; 30% was based on the team assessment of presentation and final report, and 5 % was based on individual performance assessed by the peer evaluation.

The only directive provided by the professor was to make a positive change in the local community and to present the project finished or not finished in the class at the end of the semester, which was in three months’ time. The team had all characteristics of a real self-directing team. Members had autonomy to decide what project they were going to do, how they were going to do it, and when. They had to set their own norms, goals and mission, and agreed on all team and interpersonal processes. They had the power of selecting their own ends and means.

The team had no experience with working in a self-directing structure. Individuals were used to being delegated about what to do and sometimes even how to do it.

There were some differences between the teams in their team design and organizational context. The 2008 team had no organizational context, it was a team of five students with flawless team design according to their background, nationality and gender, and the team had no previous experience with teamwork in high-level autonomy team structures. The ABC Company team was a management team of nine individuals with very similar backgrounds, but all team members had from 5-15 years of teamwork experience within high-level autonomy team structures. The team was very homogeneous according to their background, nationality and gender.

9.2.1 Hypothesis 1

The ABC team and 2008 team underwent 3 months of observation in a setting. The same dimensions were used to assess variables; therefore, the research findings are very comparable.

The ABC team had minor challenges with work and interpersonal processes compared to the 2008 team. During the existence of short-term project 2008 team, several issues occurred. The 2008 team had challenges with:

Trust: The team had no trust. Sucker aversion, when everyone pulls out in order not to be the only individual who is doing the work (Thompson 2007; Schnake 1991), emerged. Team members were not supportive, effective, respectful, or honest, they did not act consistently, they were not revealing personal information about themselves, they were not willing to recognize each other's strengths, and they did not ask for help.

Communication: The team did not understand what open communication was. It had artificial harmony, and conflicts were avoided.

Commitment: The team had no commitment because of a lack of goals (Hackman 2002). Low commitment can result in putting more energy into concerns than executing the work (Becker-Reems 1994, 69), therefore, the team members blamed each other for failure and did not look for solutions (Tjosvold 1986). The team put very little energy into work, the team members were not proud of their work or team, and they had challenges with participating in decision-making.

Accountability: The team had no accountability; excuses were present all the time, nobody got confronted for not delivering.

The team failed to see relevant information and to take actions. They were revisiting the same issue too many times because no efficient review system was in place. Commitment dropped, communication closed, avoidance of accountability emerged, and there was no trust left. A lack of trust gave the team members doubts that other team members will do their assigned tasks (Robbins 1995). This was also worsened by the lack of clear roles and goals (expectations) to keep individuals accountable (Hackman 2002).

The team spent more time looking for excuses than for solutions when results needed to be presented to the supervisor. This happened because there was no open communication, and the team had an inappropriate performance management system (Harrington-Mackin 1996).

Results: The team had no reviews and focus on results. The team dealt with the same recurrent problems connected to team work and team interpersonal processes without any improvements through 3 months of observations. There were no reviews, and no feedback was given in the team.

Goals: The team failed to set their common goal and consequently faced coordination problems because they lacked clear processes and roles. Unclear goals are a cause of work distribution confusion and inefficient workload distribution (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 247). Therefore, it is impossible to keep team members accountable (Lencioni 2003). Furthermore, failure to set a common long-term goal and smaller and measurable short-term goals resulted in poor interpersonal relations and in bad performance (Yeatts and Hyten 1998, 121).

Goals were set very late, they were not followed up, and most of them were not achieved. They were not clear, measurable, or consequential.

Norms: The team failed to set norms, and counter-productive silent norms emerged. Norms were not guiding necessary behaviors, and the team did not understand the purpose of norms, which were written down but were irrelevant, not followed up, respected, or reviewed.

Common approach: The team had unproductive meetings with poor attendance, low productivity, and sidetracked conversations. Overall, the team had undefined and unclear processes guided mostly by unproductive secondary norms.

O'Grady (2008) model was used to compare the differences in both team's performance (Figure 9.2). O'Grady model combines team interpersonal and work processes, aligns them and guides teams towards high performance with an 80% success rate.

To sum up, the 2008 low-experience team had difficulties with every single interpersonal process; trust, communication, commitment, accountability, and results. The team also faced several challenges among work processes; norms, goals, processes. Inexperienced teams generally face challenges with deciding on goals, norms, roles and other team work processes; they fail to set right timelines and allocate resources, and have an inefficient decision-making process and an

inefficient performance-management process (Ryner 1996; Yeatts and Hyten 1998; Hackman 2002).

Figure 9.2: Comparison of 2008 team and ABC team challenges

Steps in O'Grady model	Challenges ABC Company team	Challenges 2008 team
Step 1 TRUST and RESPECT		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No trust
Step 2 CONFLICT & COMMITMENT (Clear mission, goals and norms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicational issues Some norms missing Goals well defined, but operational goals could have been more consequential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear and inappropriate goals Norms not set right or respected Poor communication and conflict management No commitment
Step 3 ACCOUNTABILITY (Clear roles, processes and organization)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common approach not agreed on (unclear roles, processes) No accountability
Step 4 INATTENTION TO RESULTS (Auditing/debriefing)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inefficient auditing/debriefing
Step 5 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating excuses instead of looking for solutions

Task conflicts almost always turn also into interpersonal issues, as was the case in the examined 2008 team, and affect trust, communication, commitment, accountability and results of the team (Amason et al. 1995, 25; Tekleab et al. 2009,

22). According to O'Grady (2008), the 2008 team would have to go over all five steps of the model to improve their performance. In order to build trust as a first step in the model, team members have to be supportive and effective (O'Grady 2008). In the second step, team members need to set suitable and clear goals and norms, and conflict should not be a taboo in order to communicate openly (Lencioni 2002, 16). In the third step, the team needs to clearly define roles and processes in order to reach accountability. In the fourth step, the team has to regularly review their performance. Finally, the fifth step has to assure a good performance management system (feedback and coaching) and rewards to support desired behaviors in the team.

The findings were consistent with the idea that highly experienced team members possess better developed teamwork knowledge, and are more successful in teams than inexperienced or lower-experienced team members (Rentsch et al. 1994). The examined team in ABC Company, who had extensive teamwork experience with high-level autonomy structures, encountered only minor trouble with norms, goals and communication. All other work and interpersonal processes in the team were on the right track. The team would have to improve only in the second step of the O'Grady model; it would need to have more open communication, written norms that better address recurrent deviant behaviors, and their operative goals would have to be more consequential to make every individual see the light at the end of the tunnel and increase motivation.

All that stated shows that **H1: The higher a team's experience with working in a high-level autonomy team structure, the fewer challenges regarding team processes (work and interpersonal) will occur.** This also coincides with research findings by Watson and others (1993) that team processes improve with time, when team members learn how to proactively prevent small team work problems growing into bigger issues.

9.2.2 Hypothesis 2

The performance of the ABC team and the 2008 team was measured through several dimensions, which are commonly used to measure the overall performance of a team.

1. First dimension: Performance standards

How the team's outputs meet performance standards (O'Grady 2008). The ABC team outperformed any benchmark company. Compared to benchmark companies in the region, ABC Company reported the highest growth last year, and it was, without any doubt, one of the fastest growing companies in the IT industry in Sweden (ABC Company interview with team members 2011). Therefore, they were achieving their main goals. One of them was growth, which was visible on a monthly basis also from January until April 2011 through a number of newly-hired employees and turnover. They were also achieving their highest organizational goal — vision, which was, according to their internal documents (2011): "To become the most admired company in the region". Their good reputation among all stakeholders in the region was helping them to increase sales and to attract new employees, and consequently achieve growth.

The 2008 team performance was not compared to standards because an irrelevant assessment criterion was in the place.

2. Second dimension: Team satisfaction (O'Grady 2008) and cohesion.

It is important that team members enjoy working together, support and respect each other. This was fully visible in the ABC team; respect and support firmly formed trust among the team members.

In the 2008 team, there was no support or respect among individuals in the team; according to peer evaluations, the team members were not enjoying their collaboration as well.

3. Third dimension: Learning and improvement

A degree to which a team helps an individual member to grow personally (Hackman 1989,7), learn (Thompson 2007), and continuously improve performance (O'Grady 2008). The ABC team had individual coaching sessions in place, which helped individuals get better in desired areas, and they also had several learning opportunities (knowledge transfer within the team, within the company or by external coaches). The team's goals were getting more and more challenging, and the team continued to deliver.

The 2008 team did not grow, learn or improve team performance at the time of observation.

4. Fourth dimension: Integration

Integration; how well the team fits into the company's structure, how the team is integrated with other teams in the organization, and how the team's goals are consistent with the larger organizational goal (Thompson 2007, 41). The ABC Company team was fully and successfully integrated in the company's structure, and their goals were fully aligned with organizational goals. The 2008 team had no organizational context.

All previous findings emphasize the importance of training and teamwork experience in general. They say that teamwork experience improves performance (Rentsch et al. 1994) of both diverse and homogeneous teams (Watson et al. 1993). They explain how high-experience teams perform more effectively than less-experience teams, and how, under stress, the performance of low-experience teams decreases more than the performance of high-experience teams (Dyer 1984). It is proved that teams that get trained to develop skills related to setting work processes and managing interpersonal relations reach better performance than those that do not get trained in such skills (Prichard and Ashleigh 2007). Similar findings were revealed in this research. The research has proved that teamwork experience with autonomous teamwork are relevant for performance. The ABC team that had extensive experience with empowered teamwork reached high performance by achieving its goals in terms of sales and growth, it outperformed all benchmark companies in the geographical region, and it was one of the fastest growing IT companies in Sweden. Satisfaction and cohesion in the team was high. On the contrary, the 2008 team that had no teamwork experience in high-level autonomy team structures did not perform satisfactorily when it was put in an autonomous team structure, despite the fact that it had previous teamwork experience with controlled teamwork. **H2: Teams that have more experience with working in a high-level autonomy team structure will more likely reach a high performance state.** It is obviously not only about general teamwork experience, but also about experience with empowered teamwork.

9.3 Limitations of the study and further research possibilities

There are some limitations of this research. The research was based on internal self-perception, and it was not validated by any outside source. The teams that were compared were very different. The 2008 team, which consisted of students, had no organizational context, and was a short-term team. The ABC team consisted of employees, the owners of the organization, operating long-term in a real organizational environment. The teams differed from each other in many characteristics of team design: nationality, gender, age, backgrounds, size, diversity, etc. They even had a different level of autonomy. The low-experience team was a typical self-managing team, and the high-experience team was a typical self-governing team. Therefore, comparison could have been more relevant, if team design and organizational context were more similar, and the teams would really differ only according to their teamwork experience within high-level autonomy team structures. Both research studies lasted only three months, which is a short time for observation in a setting.

Unexpectedly, the examined team faced challenges with team design, which appeared as communicational issues, and issues with norms and goals. When teams have so much power over decision-making, it should also be studied how well they usually manage their design. Wrong team design can affect team work processes and interpersonal processes. More attention should be given to this issue in the future.

There is another opportunity for further research. In the research, the high-experience team faced challenges because of inappropriate skill sets of team members according to their tasks. The low—experience team faced challenges because of a lack of experience with a high-autonomy team structure. In any case, the high-experience team had far better performance than the low-experience team. Does that mean that teamwork experiences with autonomous teamwork are more valuable for team performance than actual technical or functional skills to execute the task? This is something that would be interesting to research in the future.

10 CONCLUSION

Empowerment has two sides of a coin. It can offer an opportunity for high performance, and it can push teams into devastation and failure when teams face challenges with their work or interpersonal processes.

So far, some researchers have concluded that teamwork experience improves the performance of teams, but not many of them have been exploring how experience with autonomous teamwork helps teams perform better. This research has showed that teams with more experience with empowered teamwork tend to have fewer challenges among interpersonal team processes (trust, communication and conflict, commitment, accountability, results) and team work processes (norms, goals, common approach). Consequently, they do reach a high-performance level easier and faster than teams without appropriate experience. Furthermore, the findings suggest that experience with autonomous teamwork is more relevant for a team's success than actual functional skills needed to perform the task.

From management perspective, this means several things. Investing into team training, when we want to empower an inexperienced team, is very beneficial, but it has to address specific knowledge needed for functioning in empowered team structures. General teamwork knowledge appropriate for controlled teams will not assure better performance of empowered teams. This type of training can help organizations not only save costs associated with resolving teamwork challenges, but also create value by pushing teams towards their best performance.

11 POVZETEK

VISOKO AVTONOMNI TIMI IN NJIHOVA USPEŠNOST

11. 1 Timi in opolnomočenje

Timi so kompleksni, dinamični sistemi, ki obstajajo znotraj organizacij, razvijajo pa se z interakcijami timskih članov (Kozlowski in Ilgen 2006, 78). Posamezniki znotraj tima so soodvisni in soodgovorni za delovne rezultate tima, ki vplivajo na uspešnost organizacije (Sundstrom et al. 1990, 120). Soodvisnost, to da člani tima cilja ne morejo doseči sami, je posledica tega, ker imajo posamezniki znotraj tima različne spretnosti, različne informacije in si delijo tudi vsa druga materialna sredstva, ki so potrebna, da tim doseže zastavljeni cilj (Thompson 2007). Soodvisnost pa ni edina pomembna karakteristika tima. Druga najpomembnejša karakteristika je predanost, saj naj bi bili najbolj uspešni timi tisti, kjer so člani tima predani skupnemu cilju (Katzenbach in Smith 1993, 45).

Avtorji time najpogosteje opisujejo z naslednjimi lastnostmi:

- Timi obstajajo, da bi dosegli skupen cilj (Alderfer in Smith 1982, 38; Thompson 2007, 5; Katzenbach in Smith 1993, 45).
- Člani tima so soodvisni (Alderfer in Smith 1982; Thompson 2007, 5).
- Timi so povezani in stabilni v določenem časovnem obdobju (Alderfer in Smith 1982, 38; Hackman 2002, 41).
- Timi imajo dovolj avtonomije, da lahko odločajo o svojih delovnih in ostalih notranjih procesih (Alderfer in Smith 1982, 38; Hackman 2002, 41).
- Timi delujejo znotraj socialnega konteksta (Alderfer in Smith 1982, 38).

Time zasnujemo tako, da najprej pogledamo nalogo, ki jo mora tim opraviti in nato določimo, kakšne posameznike bo tim potreboval (glede na njihove spretnosti,

sposobnosti, znanje ali celo osebnost), šele nato se odločimo koliko avtonomije bo ta tim potreboval (Eggensperger 2004; Thompson 2007). Opolnomočenje ali avtonomija pomeni, da tim dobi več priložnosti, da se odloča o svojih dejanjih (Stewart 2006). Timi dobijo avtonomijo tako, da članom tima damo več informacij in več moči pri odločanju (Spreitzer 1995) ter da timom damo strukturo, ki omogoča in podpira avtonomijo znotraj tima (Stewart 2006). Thompson (2007) definira štiri strukture timov, ki se razlikujejo glede na to, koliko avtonomije dovoljujejo članom tima: managersko-vodeni tim (ang. manager-led) ima avtonomijo le nad izvajanjem dane naloge, samovodeni tim (ang. self-directing) ima avtonomijo, da se odloča, kako bo dosegel dani cilj, samooblikovalni tim (ang. self-designing) ima avtonomijo, da se odloča o ciljih in načinu doseganja le-teh in samoupravljalni tim (ang. self-governing) ima avtonomijo, da se odloča o vsem, tudi o tem, kako deluje organizacija. Timi, ki imajo več avtonomije so ponavadi bolj uspešni pri svojem delovanju (Hackman 2002), nekateri avtorji pa zasluge za to pripisujejo povečani predanosti timskih članov.

11. 2 Izkušnje s timskim delom

Vsak posameznik ima popolnoma edinstvene predstave o tem, kako poteka timsko delo. Te predstave so zelo odvisne od preteklih izkušenj s timskim delom (Rentsch 1994) in vplivajo na splošno dožemanje in razumevanje timskega dela (Poole et al. 1990). Posamezniki, ki imajo več izkušenj in znanja o timskem delu, so ponavadi bolj uspešni pri delovanju v timih, kot posamezniki, ki tega znanja nimajo (Rentch 1994). Neizkušeni timi v tej nalogi so torej sestavljeni iz posameznikov, ki nimajo znanja in izkušenj z delovanjem v visoko avtonomnih timskih strukturah. Ni veliko avtorjev, ki bi pisali o tem, kako izkušnje z delom v visoko avtonomnih timih vplivajo na uspešnost timov, so pa le-te povezane z znanjem posameznih članov tima in s tem, koliko posamezne organizacije ponujajo usposabljanj na tem področju, hkrati pa tovrstno znanje tudi nagrajujejo (Hackman 2002). Za pridobivanje izkušenj so torej pomembni: usposabljanje (Wageman et al. 2005) še preden tim začne delovati, da vsi timski člani poenotijo svoje znanje in pričakovanja o timskem delu (Rentch 1994), dajanje povratnih informacij (Salas et al. 1999) in učenje (Thompson 2007), ki preprečuje, da bi tim ponavljal iste napake in izboljšuje njegovo uspešnost (Druskat in Kayes 2000).

Tim mora pokazati znanje in sposobnost, da lahko deluje kot samovodena enota (Ryner 1996), preden ga opolnomočimo. Ryner (1996) predlaga, da se timu določajo meje, ki dovoljujejo dovolj avtonomije, da tim ne izgubi predanosti, hkrati pa so dovolj ozke, da tim pridobi potrebno znanje preden ga popolnoma opolnomočimo. Te meje so lahko časovne omejitve, omejitve prostora ali drugih sredstev, predvsem pa je priporočeno, da se tim omejuje bolj pri identifikaciji cilja, kot pa pri odločitvah, kako bo ta cilj dosegel (Isaken in Laurer 2002).

11. 3 Procesi v timu

Procesi v timu zajemajo delovne procese (cilji, norme, dogovor o načinu dela) in medsebojne procese (zaupanje, komunikacija in reševanje konfliktov, predanost, odgovornost, rezultati).

Postavljanje skupnih ciljev: Dober skupni cilj mora biti povezan s cilji organizacije (Hirschhorn 1991), članom tima mora predstavljati izziv, mora biti jasen (Hackman 2002) in razdeljen v manjše cilje, ki si morajo logično slediti (Yeatts in Hyten 1998). Ti manjši cilji morajo biti merljivi, da lahko tim oceni svojo uspešnost in tudi pravočasno ukrepa, če ne zadosti pričakovanjem (Hirschhorn 1991). Cilj je lahko postavljen s strani tima (Thompson 2007) ali nadrejenih (Locke in Latham 1990), v vsakem primeru pa mora biti jasen, saj so nejasni cilji eden izmed največjih vzrokov za neuspešno delovanje timov (Bacon et al. 1999).

Dogovor o načinu dela: Tim se mora dogovoriti o načinu dela, ki jih bo pripeljal do cilja (Katzenbach in Smith 1993): o tem, kako bodo sprejemali odločitve, kako bodo potekali sestanki, kako se bodo delile vloge itn. S tem, ko postavijo jasna pravila, si timi olajšajo koordinacijo, porabijo manj sredstev, časa in energije. Še posebej si olajšajo delovanje, če so dosledni pri izvajanju dogovorjenega in opravljajo redne preglede in potrebne adaptacije procesov (Yeatts in Hyten 1998).

Postavljanje norm: Norme so skupek pravil, ki vodijo vsa dejanja in vedenja v timu (Hackman 1989; Hackman 2002). Morajo biti močne, jasne in predvsem morajo preprečevati dejanja, ki bi timu onemogočala, da bi se osredotočil zgolj na naloge, ker bi se preveč zapletal v medosebne konflikte (Hackman 2002).

Zaupanje: Zaupanje je pripravljenost, da se zanesemo na nekoga, ne da bi ga nadzorovali (Schoorman et al. 2007). Pridobimo ga lahko na več načinov: s spoštovanjem ostalih članov tima (O'Grady 2008), s konsistentnim vedenjem (Harrington-Mackin 1996), s priznavanjem spretnosti ostalih članov tima (Harrington-Mackin 1996), da smo učinkoviti in da podpiramo druge člane tima (O'Grady 2008), z medsebojno pomočjo (Harrington-Mackin 1996) itd.

Komunikacija in sprotno reševanje konfliktov: Konflikt je neskladje mnenj, lahko je pozitiven (konflikt o nalogi, ki daje kreativne in inovativne kompromise) ali pa negativen (neskladja med osebami, ki si dokazujejo le to, kdo bo prevladal) (Tjosvold 1998). Konflikti se morajo reševati sproti, komunikacija pa mora biti čim bolj odprta (Lencioni 2003).

Predanost: Predanost je energija, ki jo posameznik vложи v doseganje cilja (Yeatts in Hyten 1998). Pridobimo jo s povečanjem količine avtonomije (Pearce in Ravlin 1987).

Prevzemanje odgovornosti: Cilji morajo biti jasno postavljeni in vloge jasno razdeljene, člani tima se morajo držati izrečenih obljub in v delo vložiti dovolj energije, da zadovoljijo pričakovanja v timu (Katzenbach in Smith 1993).

Rezultati: Vsi člani tima si morajo prizadevati k skupnemu cilju (Lencioni 2003) ter redno preverjati, ali dosegajo zastavljene rezultate in pravilno ukrepati, če temu ni tako (Katzenbach in Smith 1993).

Procesi v timu lahko tečejo nemoteno, lahko pa timom povzročajo precej izzivov. Posebej neizkušeni timi imajo ponavadi težave s cilji, z normami, odločitvami o načinu dela (Ryner 1996; Yeatts in Hyten 1998; Hackman 2002; Pulko 2009), nato pa še z zaupanjem, s konflikti, predanostjo, prevzemanjem odgovornosti in z rezultati (Amason et al. 1995; Tekleab et al. 2009). Bolj izkušeni timi so ponavadi bolj uspešni (Rentch et al. 1994), saj z učenjem iz preteklih napak timi pridobijo potrebno znanje in preprečujejo, da bi se ponovno znašli pred istimi izzivi (Yeatts in Hyten 1998), procesi v timu pa se posledično izboljšajo (Watson et al. 1993). Zato je pričakovano, da H1: Več izkušenj kot ima tim z delom v visoko avtonomnih timskih strukturah, manj bo izkusil težav s procesi v timu (delovnimi in medosebnimi).

11. 4 Uspešnost

Uspešnost je opredeljena s štirimi dimenzijami: kako dobro tim zadosti standardom uspešnosti (Thompson 2007, O'Grady 2008), kako močna je povezanost med člani tima (Thompson 2007, O'Grady 2008), ali člani tima osebno rastejo in tim napreduje (Thompson 2007, O'Grady 2008) ter kako dobro je tim integriran v organizacijsko okolje (Thompson 2007). Procesi v timu vplivajo na uspešnost tima, več kot ima tim težav s procesi, slabša je njegova uspešnost, kar prikazujeta tudi modela avtorjev Lencioni (2003) in O'Grady (2008).

Na uspešnost vplivajo tudi izkušnje s timskim delom. Uspešnost timov se skozi čas izboljšuje (Watson et al. 1993), saj lahko člani tima zaradi pridobljenih izkušenj bolj proaktivno rešujejo potencialne težave (Druskat in Keyes 2000). Uspešnost izkušenih timov upade manj kot uspešnost manj izkušenih timov, kadar so le-ti izpostavljeni stresu (Dyer 1984). Uspešnost izkušenih timov se ponavadi izboljša zaradi boljšega poznavanja delovnih procesov (Prichard in Ashleigh 2007), hkrati pa je tim tudi bolj efektiven pri reševanju nalog (Reagans et al. 2005). Zato lahko sklepamo, da izkušnje s timskim delom izboljšujejo uspešnost tima (Rentsch et al. 1994). H2: Timi, ki imajo več izkušenj s timskim delom v visoko avtonomnih timskih strukturah, bodo bolj verjetno dosegli visoko uspešnost.

Raziskovalni model pravi, da izkušnje s timskim delom v visoko avtonomnih timih pozitivno vplivajo na procese v timu (delovne in medsebojne). Prav tako pa posledično pozitivno vplivajo tudi na uspešnost tima.

11. 5 Raziskava

Pri raziskavi so bile uporabljene kvalitativne tehnike: tri mesečno opazovanje tima in poglobljeni intervjuji, kjer sem merila pet dimenzij medsebojnih procesov, tri dimenzije delovnih procesov in štiri dimenzije uspešnosti tima, kot so opisani v teoretičnem delu povzetka. V raziskavi je bil udeležen tim devetih članov uprave iz srednje velikega švedskega svetovalnega IT podjetja ABC. ABC tim je imel

povprečno osem let izkušenj z delom v visoko avtonomnih timih. Pri svojem delovanju so uspešno izvajali večino procesov:

Postavljanje skupnih ciljev: Cilji so bili postavljeni, pregledani in doseženi na najbolj efektiven način, bili so jasni in merljivi. Lahko pa bi bili bolj posledični.

Dogovor o načinu dela: Tim je imel izjemno jasen dogovor o načinu dela.

Postavljanje norm: Tim je imel pravila, ki so bila v pomoč pri večini vedenj, vendar pa niso bila postavljena v obliki norm. Vseeno so bila močna, primerna, vendar pa bi lahko naslovlila več vedenj, prav tako jih člani tima niso redno posodabljali ali pregledovali.

Zaupanje: Člani tima so si zaupali: bili so si v podporo, bili so učinkoviti, spoštljivi, iskreni, konsistentni v svojih dejanjih, bili so pripravljeni deliti osebne informacije in priznavati sposobnosti ostalih članov tima ter si priskočiti na pomoč.

Komunikacija in sprotno reševanje konfliktov: Komunikacija in reševanje konfliktov sta bili rahel problem ABC tima. Na splošno je bila komunikacija dobra, vendar pa so se zaradi močnega timskega vodje pričeli pojavljati prvi simptomi konformnosti in izogibanja konfliktov, ki bi v prihodnosti lahko vodili v večje težave.

Predanost: Člani tima so bili izjemno predani, kar se je kazalo z ogromno količino energije, ki so jo vložili v delo.

Prevzemanje odgovornosti: Tim je imel izjemno jasne delovne procese, ki so zagotovili tudi prevzemanje odgovornosti.

Rezultati: Člani tima so bili osredotočeni na skupen cilj in redno so pregledovali napredek.

Če povzamem, manjše težave je ABC tim imel s komunikacijo in konflikti, z normami in s cilji. Kot rečeno, so te težave bile res v manjših razsežnostih. Presenetljiva pa je bila ugotovitev, da so bile vse povezane s sestavo tima, ki je vseboval posameznike, ki so imeli precej podobne in pomanjkljive spretnosti, znanje in sposobnosti glede na naloge, ki naj bi jih opravljali.

11. 6 Ugotovitve

ABC tim sem primerjala z neizkušenim samovodenim timom študentov, ki sem ga leta 2009 opazovala v Kanadi in na katerem sem uporabila isto raziskovalno metodo. Za primerjavo kateri izmed timov je imel več težav s procesi v timu, sem primerjala dimenzije in uporabila O'Grady model in ugotovila, da je neizkušeni 2008 tim imel težave s prav vsemi procesi (delovnimi in medosebnimi) in stopnjami O'Grady modela, izkušeni ABC tim pa le s komunikacijo ter s postavitvami norm in ciljev, kar je bilo na drugi stopnji modela. Ugotovitev je sovpadala z izsledki drugih avtorjev, ki so trdili, da imajo neizkušeni timi ponavadi težave s postavljanjem in koordinacijo delovnih procesov (Ryner 1996; Yeatts in Hyten 1998; Hackman 2002) in posledično tudi z vsemi medosebnimi procesi v timu (Amason et al. 1995, 25; Tekleab et al. 2009, 22). Prav tako je ugotovitev sovpadala z raziskavo Rentscha in drugih (1984), ki so ugotovili, da imajo člani tima, ki imajo več izkušenj s timskim delom, manj težav pri delovanju. H1: Več izkušenj kot ima tim z delom v visoko avtonomnih timskih strukturah, manj bo izkusil težav s procesi v timu (delovnimi in medosebnimi).

Primerjala sem uspešnosti obeh opazovanih timov in ugotovila, da je leta 2008 neizkušeni tim dosegel le eno izmed dimenzij (primerjava s standardi), pa še ta ni bila veljavna, ker je tim goljufal. Izkušeni ABC tim pa je dosegel vse štiri dimenzije in po uspešnosti spada celo v 2% najbolj rastočih švedskih IT podjetij. Na splošno se uspešnost timov izboljšuje skozi čas (Rentsch et al. 1994; Watson et al. 1993). Prav tako je dokazano, da so izkušeni timi bolj učinkoviti in se bolje odzivajo na stres, kot neizkušeni timi (Dyer 1984). Usposabljanje timov na področju postavljanja delovnih procesov in upravljanja medosebnih odnosov pa pripomore k boljšemu delovanju tima (Prichard in Ashleigh 2007). Raziskava kaže, da H2: Timi, ki imajo več izkušenj s timskim delom v visoko avtonomnih timskih strukturah, z večjo verjetnostjo dosegajo visoko uspešnost. Očitno je, da niso za uspešno delovanje avtonomnega tima potrebne zgolj izkušnje s timskim delom na splošno, pač pa tudi znanje in izkušnje na področju opolnomočenega timskega dela.

Vsekakor pa je potrebno imeti v mislih precej raziskovalnih omejitev, saj sta bila tima med seboj zelo različna (po nivoju opolnomočenja, po organizacijskem kontekstu, po diverziteti članov tima, po času delovanja itn).

Presenetljiva je ugotovitev, da je izkušeni ABC tim imel toliko težav predvsem zaradi sestave tima in bi bilo v prihodnosti dobro raziskati, kako dobro timi z veliko avtonomije ponavadi sestavijo svoje time. Druga priložnost za nadaljnje raziskovanje pa je, da je izkušen tim kljub pomanjkanju spretnosti, znanja in sposobnosti za opravljanje nalog bil vseeno bolj uspešen kot neizkušen tim, ki je imel vse potrebne spretnosti, znanje in sposobnosti za opravljanje nalog, ni pa imel znanja o delu v opolnomočenih timskih strukturah. Ali to pomeni, da so izkušnje z delom v visoko avtonomnih timskih strukturah bolj pomembne za uspešnost tima od dejanskih sposobnosti tima, da opravi dano delovno nalogo?

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