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**TEAMWORK IN 21ST CENTURY SOUTH AFRICAN
ORGANISATIONS: UNDERSTANDING THE
EXPECTATIONS ON MULTIPLE LEVELS**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Adri- Susan Grové, declare that the thesis *Teamwork in 21st century South African organisations: understanding the expectations on multiple levels*, which I hereby submit for the degree PhD Organizational Behaviour at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

I, Adri-Susan Grové, declare that this thesis has been language edited by Idette Noomé (MA English, University of Pretoria).

Adri-Susan Grové

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ABSTRACT

Teamwork in 21st century South African organisations: understanding the expectations on multiple levels

by

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More and more organisations are embracing a team approach in their quest to meet the demands of a turbulent marketplace. The dynamics of teams and teamwork are fascinating. Most managers in today's collaborative and consultative environments need to develop teams and team leadership to achieve good results through others. Strong teams assist managers and they make organisations stronger, but the converse is also true – weak teams severely weaken organisations.

Although there are many perspectives regarding teamwork, the general enthusiasm for teams and what they can accomplish remains strong. Work teams in South Africa are becoming a lucrative business. Already in the 1990s, no fewer than 82% of companies with more than 100 employees reported using team structures (Gordon, 2002). During the same period, as

many as 68% of the Fortune 1000 companies used self-managed teams (Lawler, Mohrman & Ledford, 1995).

There were two main reasons for undertaking this study: satisfying my own natural inquisitiveness regarding teams, and investigating teamwork and the expectations of employees of teamwork in 21st century South African organisations. I set out to explore, describe and understand the challenges teams have to face, as well as individuals' expectations of working in teams. A qualitative approach, with due reference to the multiple levels of organisational behaviour (individual, groups and organisational level), was applied in this quest to understand team expectations and challenges in context.

A total of 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and four focus group interviews were conducted amongst 38 voluntary participants. The transcripts were then thoroughly analysed and compared to identify shared themes and to explore differences and similarities in terms of team experiences and expectations.

Four themes and numerous sub-themes evolved from the research. **Theme 1** deals with the *individual level expectations of teamwork*, and represents the individuals' need to be part of the organisation and to enjoy this experience. **Theme 2** indicates the *specific team level expectations* of team work. Teams expressed a need for clear roles and to be rewarded if they reached those goals, as well as for team skills. **Theme 3** deals with the *expectations that leaders and organisations have* when they implement teamwork. It turns out that organisations often implement teams and expect them to solve business problems without offering the relevant support to those teams. **Theme 4** addresses the *greatest challenges teams face* in 21st century South African organisations. Virtual teaming and a loss of identity are identified as a few of these challenges. The themes as well as sub-themes are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Based on the study findings, several recommendations are made based on the shared experiences and unique feedback of these 38 individuals from all



organisational levels. I further identify various “team paradoxes”, as I call them, and indicate the relevance of these paradoxes in understanding teams. Some of the findings question existing premises regarding teamwork, establishing a foundation for possible future research. The truth is that there is still much to be done in terms of optimising team effectiveness and a better organisational understanding of the complexities of individuals working together in teams.



OPSOMMING

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Organisasies is toenemend ten gunste van spanwerk en die ontwikkeling van spanne in hulle strewe na effektiwiteit in ‘n vinnig veranderende markomgewing. Bestuurders sowel as leiers moet hulle spanne toerus ten einde resultate deur ander te bereik. Sterk spanne versterk bestuurders en maak uiteindelik die organisasie as geheel sterker. Die teendeel is egter ook waar – oneffektiewe spanne kan potensieel suksesvolle organisasies drasties verswak.

Alhoewel daar baie uiteenlopende sienings van spanne en spanwerk is, bly die algemene entoesiasme rakende dít wat effektiwe spanne kan vermag, baie sterk. Werkspanne in Suid-Afrika is besig om ‘n winsgewende besigheid te word. Reeds gedurende die negentiger jare het niks minder nie as 82% van maatskappye met meer as 100 werknemers aangedui dat hulle van spanstrukture gebruik maak (Gordon, 2002). Gedurende dieselfde tydperk het soveel as 68% van die Fortune 100 maatskappye van self-besturende spanne gebruik gemaak (Lawler, Mohrman & Ledford, 1995).

Die twee hoofbeweegredes vir hierdie studie was om my eie natuurlike drang te bevredig om spanne in die praktyk te probeer verstaan en om spanwerk, en wat werknemers verwag van spanwerk in 21^{ste} eeuse organisasies, na te vors. Die studie het gepoog om die uitdagings waarmee spanne

gekonfronteer word te ondersoek, te beskryf en in konteks te verstaan. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsaanslag was die beste manier om die navorsingsvrae te beantwoord – en wel vanuit die konteks van die veelvuldige vlakke van organisasiegedrag (die individu, groepe en organisatoriese vlak).

'n Totaal van 20 in-diepte, semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gedoen, asook vier fokusgroeponderhoude met 38 vrywillige deelnemers. Die transkripsies is toe deeglik ontleed en vergelyk ten einde gedeelde temas insake spanervaringe en verwagtings asook verskille en ooreenkomste uit te wys.

Vier temas asook verskeie sub-temas het uit die navorsing na vore gekom. **Tema 1** was die *verwagtings van spanwerk op individuele vlak*, en toon die individu se behoefte om deel te wees van die organisasie en om hierdie ervaring te geniet. **Tema 2** beskryf *spanverwagtings* in terme van spanwerk. Spanne verlang duidelike doelwitte asook om beloon te word as hulle hierdie doelwitte bereik. Spanvaardighede was ook belangrik. **Tema 3** verwys na die *verwagtings wat leiers en ondernemings* van spanwerk koester. Dit blyk dat organisasies soms spanwerk implementeer sonder om spanne van die nodige ondersteuning te voorsien. **Tema 4** verwys na die grootste *spanuitdagings* wat 21^{ste} eeuse Suid-Afrikaanse organisasies toenemend sal moet aandurf. Virtuele spanwerk asook die voortdurende verlies van identiteit is voorbeelde van sulke uitdagings. Die temas en sub-temas word in detail in Hoofstuk 4 bespreek.

Op grond van die bevindings word verskeie aanbevelings gemaak, grootliks gebaseer op die gedeelde ervarings en unieke terugvoer van hierdie 38 individue vanuit alle organisasievlakke. Verskeie “span-paradokse”, soos ek hulle noem, is ook aangetoon en die relevansie van hierdie paradokse vir 'n beter begrip van spanne is verduidelik. Die bevindings bevraagteken ook sommige veronderstellings rakende spanwerk, en vorm die basis vir moontlike toekomstige navorsing. Daar is nog baie te doen om spanwerk te optimaliseer en om 'n beter organisatoriese begrip teweeg te bring van die kompleksiteite van individue wat saamwerk in spanne.



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