

Preface by Jan Schouten

Teams and teamwork: a (mixed) blessing or sheer hell? Everyone can think of examples of both variants. Especially of the bad kind: a group that is incapable of learning from its mistakes ... a group that is replete with political games ... a group that destroys individual creativity by inspiring fear. But what about the good group, or more precisely, the 'so-called' good group? How often, in practice, does this kind of group turn out to be a cosy, fuzzy place where attention for the final goal is dangerously waning? An environment in which the members are constantly cajoling one another, thus neglecting to be critical?

We all know that we cannot handle matters on our own. As such we have no choice but to work with others. So we put together a team. A project team for example. But how can we elicit the unbridled energy contained in the group? And how can we target it at a goal? How do we promote survival in an environment, which is not always friendly? By closing ourselves off? And if we choose to open up to others, how do we avoid becoming a plaything?

And what if teams face threats as well as opportunities: are they merely external, or are we our own biggest enemy as a member of our team? However much we want it, regardless of how clear the goal is that the whole team has embraced, is it actually possible that we ourselves sometimes undermine our own brilliant starting position? Through an obscure distribution of power and power games? As a result of endless bickering about procedures?

Anke Baak has made a huge contribution to the further enrichment of this book, which was originally written by Wiebe Kamminga. As an organizational adviser she has applied herself among others to building better teams, in collaboration with her colleagues. She knows all about it. What you should do with a team, which keys to turn in order to get the most out of a team. General questions, which always require a practical answer in

every situation. That is the nice thing about this book, which was revised by Anke: it is well-founded and at the same time practical.

Jan Schouten
Beijing, October 2007

Preface by Anke Baak

For years, team leaders, team members and professionals within and outside Schouten en Nelissen have been using *Improving Teams* when working with teams. More recently, we felt that it was necessary to update this book. The developments surrounding organizations, which affect how teams function, never stop.

A quick overview:

- The dynamics within and surrounding organizations are continuously growing; changes are the rule rather than the exception.
- The questions in and around organizations, for which teams are used, are becoming ever more complex.
- Decision-making speed is increasing all the time, which results in higher (work) pressure among others. As a result people suffer from stress more often.
- Companies are paying more attention to their employees' health and wellbeing, as a result of the change in labour legislation among others.
- There is more attention for the issue of bullying and harassment at work.
- Employees are better trained, more emancipated and more independent.
- The rise of the Internet and e-communication has made it possible for employees to work together while being free of the constraints of time and place.
- As a result of globalization different national cultures are increasingly often represented within one and the same team. This means people are confronted increasingly with the challenge of how to deal with various cultural backgrounds.
- The boundaries between teams and organizations are fading. As a result, there is a rise in networking teams and alliances across the boundaries of organizations.

In this entirely new version of *Improving Teams* we have included a number of these developments and their impact on teams and how to work in and with a team. In addition, the original character of this book, a work book for team leaders, has been relinquished in favour of a broader scope. Professionals (advisers, trainers, team coaches) who focus on team improvement also tend to use this book. As such the book has now been rewritten to include the needs of this target group. The original work book has become more of a manual.

This book – in line with its content – came about as a result of team work. Contemporary team work, working towards one goal, virtual, free of the constraints of time and place. Jan Schouten and Wiebe Kamminga wrote the original version of *Improving Teams*.¹ Tjeu van Heck and Anke Baak started working on this book in teams, as professionals within the Schouten & Nelissen team group and later within the organizational development group. They have laid down their insights in a number of publications.² Based on the model that we used, and the accompanying methods developed by Thema, Vincent van Reusel published *Het teamspel* (The Team Game), together with Natasja Loomans.³ Annemarie Lasee worked on creating the *Teamkompas* (Team Compass) for Schouten & Nelissen, while Jennifer Campbell modified the team effectiveness test in the *Team Scan* for Schouten & Nelissen in collaboration with Vincent van Reusel.

Many other professionals within Schouten & Nelissen organizational development contributed to the ideas described here. I would like to thank Cees Oerlemans, an expert in the field of project teams and Bert van Dijk, our Leary expert, in particular, as well as Sander Trooster and Marjolijn Hazebroek for their comments. Thank you, Eva Jordans, for your input about multicultural teams. And last but not least: thank you to Ton, who stimulated me to start writing again.

Finally: to all those named here and all the others that I should have mentioned here, but whose names I have chosen to omit for purposes of legibility: thank you. We will continue our work together based on the perspective of turning collaboration into something that everyone can enjoy and in which all people can find satisfaction!

Anke Baak
Neerijnen, July 2007

Contents

	Introduction	11
1	What is a team?	17
2	Team effectiveness. How do you look at it?	31
3	The team's hard side	37
4	The inside of the team	58
5	Spotlight on the team leader	82
6	Different types of teams examined	90
7	When things really go wrong. Unhealthy teams	101
8	External interventions	106
9	Improving a team. The team compass	114

Enclosures

Enclosure 1	Team scan and explanation	121
Enclosure 2	Role analysis forms	129
Enclosure 3	Role negotiation form	135
Enclosure 4	Construction of a decision-making group discussion	136
Enclosure 5	Decision-making techniques	139
Enclosure 6	Meeting checklist	143
Enclosure 7	Checklist conflict diagnosis and choice of intervention	150
Enclosure 8	Team vitality checklist	153
Enclosure 9	Team compass	155
Enclosure 10	Overview of picture puzzles	165
	Literature	166
	Notes	170

Introduction

Most organizations are built on teams. Everywhere where goals need to be achieved, which involve several people making a joint effort, team work elements are required. A properly functioning team can make a contribution to solving more complex issues that cannot be tackled by an individual. At the same time, teams can be the place where people can develop themselves, draw inspiration from one another as well as support and where they can show their skills. Increasingly, people are becoming the vital element in the organization, and thus maintaining, using and developing human talent has become a key ingredient for success. We know that people need to feel that they can make a meaningful contribution to a bigger whole in order to be happy.⁴ And they can do this in teams. In addition, the complexity of issues and the dependence on others and on other organization is also on the increase. These are all sufficient reasons for applying team work.

But, as you will probably already know from experience, it is not evident to have a properly functioning team. Things can go wrong, due to a number of causes, especially when it comes to how a team works and collaborates. What's more, the introduction of team work in an existing organization is not always an easy process. Team work is not a panacea for every disease. In certain cases, team work is not even necessary. It can even hamper developments. Moreover teams do not only entail benefits for employees. They can also be places where people are aggravated by one another, where they might be harassed, which might eventually result in illness or departures.

This book wants to provide a number of insights, that will help you look at teams and which will help you set to work within your own team and organization or in the teams of others.

We will discuss a number of influencing factors and want to stimulate you to check if, and to what extent, these factors affect how the teams with which you are involved function. This will help you adjust and improve where necessary. We will also highlight the limitations and risks of team work and will discuss in which conditions team work is indicated or not.

A word of caution: what you will not find in this book is an overarching theory, which will help you tackle every situation in or around a team. What's more, you will probably not find ready-made answers to all your questions. Our aim, however, is to help you and your team(s) move forward, in the hopes that, in so doing, we will help you introduce more effectiveness and more fun in your organization!

The story of the jumping spider

So in this book you will not find a complete theory on team work or on how to increase the effectiveness of teams. We do not think that there will ever be a theory, which approaches everything from one angle. The organization and actions of people are often an unmanageable factor and will never be laid down in theory. We will illustrate why this is the case with a story. The story of the jumping spider.

The jumping spider's dream

Jumping spiders, when they dream, dream of a web. A web in which all the threads meet in one place. The spider itself is waiting in the middle until a prey arrives. He has a good overview of his web and can see any prey coming.

But, the jumping spider has one problem. He is unable to weave a web. Instead he goes hunting in the long grass, in order to attack his prey from a different angle at every turn.⁵ He always sees part of his prey. He needs to build an image, by looking from different points of view and amalgamate all these different points of view. And yet, he is able to act, if and when he is able to relinquish the notion that he has to have an overview of everything first.

In this book we are not attempting to order all the issues and questions in one comprehensive model or system. We think that this is not a correct representation of social reality (neither is that of the jumping spider for that matter). Team effectiveness is a complex issue, for which no uniform model exists, or so we think. Although at times, we also suffer from the same dreams as the jumping spider...

Anyone working on how to build better teams (and human behaviour) will also have to ask him or herself how to best approach this in his or her specific situation. The orientation offered in this book can be a tool to deal with issues in team functioning in a flexible manner. We will approach the various subjects from different angles. The question why teams work so well or not at all will not be answered in the general sense of the word. We will use different angles. You will be able to ask yourself based on theories and models: how does this apply to this specific team?

We will thus adhere to the jumping spider's strategy in this book and invite you to do the same. It will require you to be bold, but we think that you are anyway.



Puzzles

The question of 'how to build better teams' will be dealt with using picture puzzles. A picture puzzle is an ad hoc model to look at teams and the aspects that influence the effectiveness of teamwork. It does not matter whether you look at them as a team member, team manager or whether you are the manager who holds final responsibility. Or even if you are a trainer or adviser (if that is the case, simply substitute 'my team' with 'the team in question').

The picture puzzles can be considered as eyeglasses. Sometimes you will put on a pair of eyeglasses and get a clearer view of the situation. Wonderful. At times, you might put on a pair of glasses, and everything will be blurry, or maybe you will even see nothing. It

might be useful to check if someone else sees something when he looks at the same situation with these glasses. Then you will have learnt something new. Or maybe you will simply put the glasses aside. Apparently these glasses do not help you. On to the next ... We will describe 23 picture puzzles. The analysis of teams and team work through these puzzles will provide you with some points of reference to improve the team's functioning. You can use these as a starting point for the team compass, a method in order to arrive at a team improvement plan, which we will describe in chapter 9.

We invite you to establish the following for every picture puzzle when reading this book:

- 1 Do I understand it?
- 2 Is it applicable to this situation?
- 3 What do I see in this situation when I review it with these glasses?
- 4 Do I want to improve something? What do I want to improve? Does the team want to improve something?
- 5 What do I have to do to achieve this improvement? What does the team have to do?

In so doing, you must always distinguish two things:

1. Those things that happened, and which everybody was able to see and hear (the *objective* facts).
2. The *subjective* representation that you have of the facts. Of importance is the way you look at and assess these facts. In this matter you will be heavily influenced by your value patterns, your training and education, your personal experience, etc.

Nobody has a lease on the truth. Once you realise this and once you are capable of having discussions on the basis of a distinction between facts and opinions, you will have taken a big step towards building a better team.

Another remark: as a team member, team manager or team manager with final responsibility, you are not an unbiased outsider. You yourself are part of the situation. Chances are that you too have a part in potential issues within the team. This is human nature. It will help if you are capable and prepared to discuss your share, and where possible to change your behaviour. In some cases it is recommended that you call on a neutral outsider when trying to improve your team.

One last word of caution: there is extensive literature on teams. Many issues have been described quite well elsewhere. We will not include everything. In some cases we might choose to refer you to other books for purposes of legibility and a good overview.