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# Successful implementation of self-managing teams

Implementation  
of self-  
managing  
teams

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Following health-care organisations, many mental health-care organisations nowadays consider starting to work with self-managing teams as their organisation structure. Although the concept could be effective, the way of implementing self-managing teams in an organisation is crucial to achieve sustainable results. Therefore, this paper aims to examine how working with self-managing teams can be implemented successfully in the mental health-care sector where various factors for the successful implementation are distinguished.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This qualitative case study is executed by analysing 18 interviews within two self-managing teams in a mental health-care organisation located in the Netherlands. A coding process is executed in two steps. The first step is open coding, to make small summarising notes within each interview section. The second step is refocused coding, where the open codes were collected, categorised and summarised by searching for recurrence and significance. The coding process is made visible within a code tree. This code tree formed the basis for writing the findings.

**Findings** – Success factors for the implementation of a self-managing team that resulted from this research are a clear task portfolio division, good relationships within the team and a coaching trajectory with attention for a possible negative past.

**Originality/value** – By having used a specific change management model, the Change Competence Model, it can be concluded that a high change capacity will positively influence the success of a self-managing team in the context of a mental health-care organisation.

**Keywords** Leadership, Implementation, Self-managing team, Success factors, Change Competence Model, Change capacity

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Following health-care organisations, many mental health-care organisations nowadays consider implementing the structure of self-managing teams. Buurtzorg is a widely used example of a successful Dutch home care organisation that implemented self-managing principles in 2006. Buurtzorg served as an inspiration and consequently, many care organisations considered the structure of self-managing teams (Huijbregts, 2015). Working with self-managing teams is believed to make clients more satisfied, make professionals happier and lower the costs of the organisation.

The care sector is under high pressure because of the cost savings and the continuous structural changes made. Although there is less space for growth, the quality of care has to



be on a high level and most care organisations see the need to maintain and improve this quality. Throughout the years, care has become “too complex and expensive” (Nijhof, 2013, p. 6). There is a need to arrange care with less money, while still maintaining high quality. The following three groups have specific preferences: first, clients ask for more understandable procedures customised to their needs; second, professionals wish to primarily focus on giving care to the client; and third, the government puts pressure in providing affordable care. These three aims together legitimate the radical change to arrange care in a different, cheaper and more client-focused way (Nijhof, 2013).

Because the use of self-managing teams as an organisation structure has increased in the past years, researching the successful conditions of implementing such structures is relevant and will be highly valuable for organisations that consider implementing self-managing teams.

### *Self-managing teams*

The terminology of self-managing teams shows a great variety. Some researchers call it an “autonomous work group” or “shared leadership” and others call it a “self-directing team” or a “self-regulating work group” (Cummings, 1978; Goodman *et al.*, 1988; Pearson, 1992; Druskat and Wheeler, 2004; Ingvaldsen and Rolfsen, 2012; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Parker, Holesgrove, and Pathak, 2015). These terms seem to be largely similar (Goodman *et al.*, 1988, p. 296). In this research paper, the term *self-managing team* will be used to discuss the topic. An important definition of a self-managing team is made by Cummings (1978, p. 625) who defined a self-managing team as a work design that includes:

A relatively whole task; members who each possess a variety of skills relevant to the group task; workers’ discretion over such decisions as methods of work, task schedules, and assignment of members to different tasks; and compensation and feedback about performance for the group as a whole.

Thereafter, this definition is used by influential researchers to explain the concept of a self-managing team (Manz and Sims, 1987; Pearson, 1992; Cohen and Ledford, 1994).

The concept of self-managing teams originates from a study of the London Tavistock Institute in the context of coal mining (Trist and Bamforth, 1951). These researchers found that organisations consist of a technical system, with the equipment and technological processes, and a social system, where the psychological and social needs of the workers are central. This is called the sociotechnical theory, whereby the two systems are frequently in conflict. The aim is to achieve a joint harmonisation between both systems, to have a structure that is productive and humanly satisfying (Cummings, 1978; Pais, 2010). By focusing on employees’ involvement and participation in the organisation, the harmonisation between both systems is stimulated (Ingvaldsen and Rolfsen, 2012).

To make teamwork successful, members of the team need to be coordinated and the way that leadership, such as team leadership, is organised is important in this. Depending on how leadership is practised, the team’s opportunities will be different (Berlin, 2015). Working with self-managing teams as a shared leadership structure differs from a traditional management structure. The main difference becomes clear in the way leadership in terms of control is organised (Goodman *et al.*, 1988). In a traditional management structure, the manager performs tasks like planning, organising, directing, staffing and monitoring. The work group performs the core production activities in a traditional structure. However, in a self-managing team, the managing tasks and the core production activities are spread throughout the whole team. In other words, members of a self-managing team have leadership tasks as well as operational tasks and supervision of themselves and their colleagues (Goodman *et al.*, 1988). Furthermore, a higher degree of decision-making autonomy, more task variety and a

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changed role of supervision characterises a self-managing team (Pearson, 1992). The previous role of a manager is less relevant; this role is often eliminated or changed to a more supervising role including coaching tasks.

The evolution of the concept of self-managing teams is called a “management transformation, paradigm shift or corporate renaissance.” (Millikin *et al.*, 2010, p. 687). These expressions show how different work is organised within a self-managing team, compared to former more traditional management structures.

### *Effectiveness*

Researchers seem to express different views in whether self-managing teams are more effective than traditional teams, which makes the concept of self-managing teams ambiguous. On the organisational level, implementing self-managing teams can be interesting, as it decreases costs and makes the team more flexible, which is needed in today’s highly changing world (Manz and Sims, 1980; Power and Waddell, 2004). However, for higher management, it means a great shift from the hierarchical supervision to hands-off and collaborative worker management (Barker, 1993). On the team level, very few studies made the comparison between teams and self-managing teams, but the ones that did so argued that self-managing teams have factors that could be more effective than traditional work teams (Cohen and Ledford, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 1996; Pearson, 1992). For example, self-managing teams can lead to better performance and quality of working life. On the individual level, there are opportunities because the individual can learn from other members’ skills and leadership tasks can stimulate his effectiveness (Levi and Slem, 1995). However, this effectiveness is not cut in stone, as self-management seems to also have possible ineffective consequences such as leadership functions that are hard to manage by a team, weak members who can disrupt the effectiveness and conflicts that could negatively mediate the effect on performance (Power and Waddell, 2004).

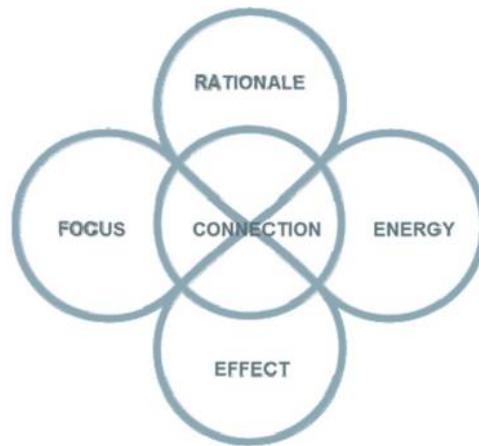
### *Implementation*

As with all management tools, if the tools are badly used, they will fail to give good results. It should therefore not be concluded that a system has failed, when the problem may be not in the system, but in the way it was implemented (Salem *et al.*, 1992). Although applying self-managing teams in an organisation could have effective outcomes, a successful implementation is therefore expected to be crucial to come to the desired results. In general, the implementation of a change initiative, similar to introducing self-managing teams, can be defined as the process in which the organisation translates its strategy into successful business results, while in the meantime maintains efficient and reliable operations (Yukl and Lepsinger, 2007). Often this is experienced as a difficult process. The studies by Yukl and Lepsinger (2007) depict that 49 per cent of 400 surveyed managers stated that their organisation was poor on execution and 64 per cent did not even believe the situation would improve.

Successfully changing a traditional management structure into a shared leadership structure with self-managing teams is “not a quick fix” (Attaran and Nguyen, 1999, p. 560). Therefore, research is needed to be carried out for the implementation process of a self-managing team from a change management perspective. This strongly links with the theory of the implementation gap (Aspesi and Vardhan, 1999), as often there is a gap between the initial plan and the execution of it. From a change management perspective, it is suggested that the implementation and the guidance of the change (in this case: self-managing teams) are essential factors to achieve sustainable results. This is also studied by Manz *et al.* (1990) as they advise to any organisation that considers to work with self-managing teams, to

spend time and effort in facilitating this important change. The implementation of a change initiative not only brings about how and whether the change will be understood and whether the employees will be capable of carrying out the change, but also what might be hindering them. The aim is to realise purposive change, where the link is made between plan and execution, or in other words “what it should be” and “how it could be accomplished” (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015).

Because models can be used to better understand research findings (Shafer *et al.*, 2005), the Change Competence Model (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015) is used as a framework to analyse the implementation process of self-managing teams in this research (Figure 1). It is crucial that all five factors are developed to the level required. In fact, to attain a



**Notes:** The Change Competence Model identifies five meta factors that hinder or facilitate change. These factors are rationale, effect, focus, energy and connection (Figure 1). Firstly, the rationale can be explained as the idea behind the overall reason for change. The effect refers to the proposed, projected or experienced concrete effect of the change on all stakeholders that are involved. Third, focus contains the change direction, which will be determined by the flexibility or changeability of the organisational elements and the organisational competences. Energy includes the inspiration, motivation and ability among the people, which can be influenced by, for example, leadership and the availability of knowledge and resources. Lastly, connection can be explained as the steering and harmony contributing to consistency and cohesion, connecting the other four constructs.

**Source:** Ten Have *et al.*, (2015)

**Figure 1.**  
The Change  
Competence Model

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successful change, an organisation should align or balance its ambition (change vision) with its possibilities (change capacity) to realise the organisational change (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). The *change vision* can be explained as the ambition from the organisational level translated to specific individuals and groups. A larger story (rationale) and a smaller story (effect) put together will form the change vision. This includes the ability of an organisation to continually identify opportunities and threats in its environment, and to successfully translate these into changes for the organisation. The *change capacity* can be explained as the capacity of an organisation to adapt to the changed and the changing circumstances. The change capacity consists of the direction of change (focus) and the ability to change (energy) (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). Focus and energy are the constituent elements of the change capacity, both elements individually and combined make it possible to realise the change.

This research paper about the implementation of self-managing teams extends the already existing research which mainly covers the effectiveness of the concept itself instead of how to develop towards an effective self-managing team. The actual change towards a self-managing team will thus be analysed to find valuable recommendations for the implementation of this concept for future organisations to achieve successful change results.

## Methods

For this research, a qualitative case study is executed using a constructivist grounded theory approach to collect and analyse data (Charmaz, 2008). This approach includes adaptable coding guidelines which means you “engage” with the data and there is room for flexibility in the coding process (Charmaz, 2008). The research question was as follows:

*RQ.* How can a self-managing team be implemented successfully in the mental health-care sector?

### *Context and participants*

The organisation of research is a mental health-care organisation with around 22 locations throughout the Netherlands. Health care is a specific sector, as their *raison d'être* is the care they give to ill clients. They do not sell a product, but a service with mostly an idealistic goal instead of a commercial goal. Next to that, emotional labour is an important part of giving care (James, 1992). Health-care employees work with weak and vulnerable persons. Besides this, mostly health-care organisations are organised following a top-down structure (Berlin, 2015), which means the change towards self-managing teams is more radical than in the context of a more flat structure.

The organisation has been working with self-managing teams since 2015. Now that two self-managing teams of the organisation are operational for over a year, the first results of this change can be identified. Both teams are working with people with psychiatric disorders, such as autism, borderline or schizophrenia, who live in assisted living facilities that are located in the same city. These similarities make it possible to compare both teams. The data sample consists of 18 semi-structured interviews with employees of both teams. In total, 7 employees of team X were interviewed and 11 employees of team Y. With these 18 interviews, the complete number of permanent employees were interviewed which improved the generalizability. The sample was divided into 2 men and 16 women; their ages range from 22 to 60 years old. They all operated in the function of residential supervisor.

*Data collection*

In-depth interviews were used as primary information and the method for observation (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Each interview took around 30 min and was recorded for transcription. One interview was around six pages of transcribed text, so all interviews together represented 108 pages of transcribed text.

Focusing on the understanding of the subjective experience of the participants, semi-structured interviews were a decent method because participants could be asked for the deeper meaning behind certain issues and follow-up questions could be raised (Bryman, 2012). Regarding the internal validity, there was no impression that participants gave socially desirable answers and the complete teams were interviewed so there was no selection of participants. Interview questions were built around the five elements of the Change Competence Model (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). Questions were mainly focused on the implementation process, although some additional questions about the effectiveness of the concept were asked. Together, this served as a structure for the interview questions and this means that each respondent was confronted with more or less the same topics. Consequently, the outcomes of the interviews could be compared with each other.

To support the collected interviews, a literature review was done throughout the whole research trajectory. Especially, scientific literature was used to prepare for the semi-structured interviews. Besides this, the literature review helped to compare the research findings with theoretical support in the discussion section.

*Data analysis*

All 18 interviews were transcribed in Dutch, to prevent for information losses. After this, a coding technique in two stages was used to analyse the transcripts, which formed the method of analysis (Charmaz, 2008; Kenny and Fourie, 2015). The first phase of this technique is initial or open coding; here codes are identified that define what is happening in a fragment of the transcribed interviews. This includes actions and potential theoretical cues to discover implicit processes. Staying close to the language of the participants is a part of this. The second phase is refocused coding, where recurring or significant codes are identified. These are summarised into theoretical categories to construct a theoretical framework, by writing and sorting memos during the interpreting process.

So, the interviews were first open-coded by making small summarising notes in Dutch for all answers of the respondents to stay close to the language and the initial message of the respondents. Then, the Dutch open codes were translated in more compact English codes, which reflected what the respondents discussed in each fragment of the interviews. Second, these open codes were collected, categorised and summarised by searching for recurrence and significance, as refocused coding. Although the coding process is executed with the studied quality standards in mind, it must be mentioned that the outcome is still an interpretation of the researchers. Interpreting can be seen as “the craft of giving your own meaning to your reassembled data and data arrays” (Yin, 2011, p. 207) and is an important characteristic of qualitative research. The outcomes of the coding process are placed in a code tree, which can be viewed on request to the researchers. This code tree formed the basis for writing the findings. Ultimately, with this case study, a new theory will be built around the topic of implementation of self-managing teams, which illustrates the combination of a case study with grounded theory.

**Results/findings**

The findings are categorised into four refocused codes: organisation, self-managing team, employees and implementation. (R = respondent).

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### *Organisation*

The religious identity of the organisation is an important characteristic, although this identity can nowadays be hard to maintain in an increasing secular world. Next to that, the organisation can be slow-going and not quite digitalised (R 13). According to the team members, the organisation can be characterised as a financially healthy organisation, but the past years have been tough for both teams. Almost all team members mentioned the hard period with prior interim-managers who guided the team. One member called it a “turbulent time” (R 14) and another member said: “We felt belittled in our power by wrong management” (R 15). Together with fired personnel and a financial crisis of the organisation, this formed the teams’ history. Some employees left team X, mainly because of the need for regular work or they looked for a new challenge.

Frequently, the team members considered the mission and vision of the organisation to be in-line with the change. The team members see resemblance in that the clients of the self-managing team members take care of, have to be more self-reliant too. However, one team member doubts if the team’s mission is in-line with the organisation’s mission as the board of directors still think from a top-down perspective (R 7), while the team wants to be independent.

Most team members see the communication of the board of directors about the change as insufficient: “Generally, I think it may be more” (R 1). Members of team Y cannot remember that the change was communicated at all from the top of the organisation, they just started to be a self-managing team. Although a few members notice that the board of directors is concerned with self-management of the teams, there is more need for vision and involvement of the teams. A few team members notice that the organisation supports the change by providing a coach, and they experience that the board of directors finds the change important. However, almost all members mentioned that the board hardly gives any insight into finances. The team members are convinced that some financial insight is needed to be a self-managing team: “Then you are really self-managing I think. [. . .] It is insightful if you see how the money comes and goes” (R 4). Another team member says: “Then you can make your own choices in this as team and it is not handed down from above [. . .] That suits being self-managing.” (R 10). Next to this, the management imposes its own annual plan to the team, while the team already made one themselves. “That does not suit a self-managing team, because we should figure out ourselves” (R 11).

Even though the current manager has a coaching role, he is responsible and needed. Most team members appreciate that he is still available: “I’m still very happy with him as regional manager where you can rely on” (R 4).

### *Self-managing team*

The portfolio division of labour is experienced as clear and the team members feel capable to perform the tasks. The portfolio division is mainly based on the preference of the team members: “There is a list of who has which portfolio” (R 3) and “we looked at who likes to do what, what are your talents” (R 12). Some members see danger in working on loose islands and some said particular tasks were like “a labyrinth” in the beginning (R 1). Especially team Y mentioned that the tasks of the senior team members are unclear for most members, as there is hardly any difference noticeable with a normal team member. Some members of team Y mentioned that the senior team members should be more decisive in difficult discussions.

Evaluation of the progress of the self-managing teams is mostly done within the team, via performance interviews and feedback with their team members. The senior members monitor the progress of the portfolios, based on the annual plan, and report this to the

regional manager. Particularly, members of team Y said they would like to have more reflection and peer-to-peer moments but time often lacks: "I miss a basis in this. For me a basis on part of reflection is team peer-to-peer learning. That is not or hardly not there." (R 9).

The team members showed ambiguous results about questions regarding time. Half of the members said they were busy, owing to the amount of task portfolios they have or the complex residents they take care of. A few members said that more employees are needed to manage the workload of the actual employees. Others mention they are not too busy and that time is not an issue: "I think it is quite luxury here" (R 4). On finances, the members think they are in "black numbers" (R 5) because there are coaches and meetings, they assume there is enough money.

Much information is given in the team's monthly meetings. In addition, after each shift, the employees discuss relevant information with the colleague who works the next shift. However, a member said that openness and giving feedback could be improved.

### *Employees*

Working in a self-managing team suit most of the needs the team members have. Mostly, they find it exciting and nice to have more influence, and they feel appreciated. Also, the team members like the freedom, though it can be busier for them. Several learning experiences were mentioned by the team members. They learned to be more independent, to set limits, ask for help and to be open. Because of this, they felt stronger and got more energy. Many team members mentioned the change stimulated enthusiasm and considered the change as a "good experience" (R 1) and "you notice that as a team we really go for it" (R 4). Also, a member said: "How I work now is the nicest for me" (R 14). One team member experiences the self-managing team as a closed team and now the seniors in team X have left, some members are curious about what will happen. Some members of team Y still feel the need for a manager, as sometimes choices are hard to make as team. Also, they experience an increased workload, and some members see that it is a pity that the amount of supporting tasks has increased at the expense of taking care of the clients, which is their core responsibility.

The success factors differ a bit per team. Team X mostly mentioned the good relationships within the team and that the team really goes for it. Also, they mentioned the match of people with tasks that suit their personal qualities (R 7). Team Y mainly mentioned the enthusiasm the team has, and the openness towards each other as success factors.

### *Implementation*

Many team members saw the urgency of the change after it was implemented, but at the start had a doubt if the change was necessary. Most members think of it as "a logical step" (R 2), reflecting today's society. Working in a self-managing team provides more job satisfaction, enhances decision-making and leads to greater responsibility as a group.

Most of the team members guessed the reason for the change towards self-managing teams was because of cost savings and to have "less layers in the organization" and also to give more tasks to the team. For almost all members the actual reason was unclear: "If I have it very clear I don't know, but for my sense it is mostly to have less managers and more [. . .] So actually cost savings, I think' (R 3). Also, the objective of the use of self-managing teams is unclear to most members. If the members guessed, they mainly mention as goals to "make the management smaller" (R 11) and to create ownership within the organisation (R 1).

Part of the coaching trajectory was to divide all the former management tasks into a portfolio division, based on preference of the team members. Also, there was attention for the

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past, by together looking back to the history of the team. Some experienced it as extra work because of the homework and assignments. The coaching trajectory was experienced as nice and good: “And then the coaching trajectory, that was also really good to do together” (R 10). The team members regarded it as needed after the tough period with interim management before the new structure was implemented. Initially there was a lot of resentment in the organisation owing to previous issues (R 2).

## Discussion

### *Organisation*

The starting point of the implementation process consisted of the history and specific characteristics of the organisation. The Change Competence Model (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015) refers to this as *Context*. The model describes (within the element context) that a negative change history results in a different starting point when implementing a change than a positive one. In the current study, the organisation suffered from a negative change history, as the authoritarian interim-management and the alarming financially situation made it a rough period for the organisation. According to the Change Competence Model, attention for the negative feelings of the team members and the rough period is needed in the implementation process, which is confirmed by this research. In this study, attention was paid to the difficult history during the coaching trajectory. This helped the employees overcome the negative starting point by expressing their feelings and thoughts. Talking about the past helped them with a new start together. Therefore, the coaching trajectory can be seen as a success factor.

With regard to organisational leadership, the board of directors support the change by arranging a coaching trajectory. Simultaneously, they did not fully act and conform the principles of the coaching trajectory themselves. Especially on finances and the year plan, the board struggles with handing over control to the team. It showed that it is hard to give leadership to the team and change or remove the deep-seated routines and the institutionalism that existed for years. This confirms what Barker (1993) called the great shift that higher management has to make from the hierarchical supervision to hands-off and collaborative worker management. Within the element *focus*, a relevant factor of failure is behavioural misalignment that became visible with the board of directors that initiated the change initiative and did not act completely according to this initiative (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). This research shows a tension between the team who wants to be self-managing as much as possible and the board of directors who struggle to hand over the control. What could be helpful is to act fully according to the change initiative and enhance the self-managing team’s effectiveness, and provide all the desired information (Muthusamy *et al.*, 2005). This combined with enhancing the team’s skills by enabling them to make decisions can let shared leadership to exist.

In this research, there is a regional manager, who has a coaching role towards the self-managing teams. His role is appreciated by the teams, which is to make difficult decisions or give valuable input in specific meetings. Pearson (1992) mentioned a changed role of supervision as a characteristic of a self-managing team, as members supervise themselves and their colleagues. The leadership role of the previous manager changes to a coaching role with a supportive task. In these two self-managing teams, this coaching role of the manager seems to be sufficient and helpful. For decisiveness and to fall back on, he is valuable for the team members, but most of the time he is not needed. Therefore, placing a manager more on distance but being available when needed, stimulates the success of a self-managing team.

*Self-managing team*

Most self-managing team members are satisfied with the task division by means of portfolios. Dividing all the management tasks as a self-managing team took place during the coaching trajectory. Hackman (1986) mentioned that in a self-managing team, all the work tasks are under the control of the team members. This is confirmed by the current research in which it is clear for the team members about who has to do what. Furthermore, it showed people also like the task they do, as the task division was based on preference. In light of the implementation process, the translation of the change initiative into effective tasks makes the required skill level concrete on an individual level (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). To strengthen execution, everyone in the organisation needs to have a “good idea of the decisions and actions for which he or she is responsible” (Neilson *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, the task portfolio division is regarded as a success factor for the implementation process.

In most cases, evaluations are executed within the self-managing team by performance interviews and giving feedback. This helped to exchange valuable information and develop the team. Evaluation and feedback refer to the *effect* of the change (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). In this, the desired and the undesired consequences of the change, and also feelings and perceptions can be discussed which seemed valuable for most team members. By reflecting on how the team is doing and being aware of the progress, action can be taken such as developing individuals, increasing the budget or prioritising activities, which strengthens the team’s change capacity (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, spending time to reflect on performance and giving feedback can improve the performance of a self-managing team, in the implementation process and when the team is already operational.

Resources, as part of the element *energy*, also have an impact on the change capacity of the organisation. Cohen *et al.* (1996) argue that employee involvement can be enhanced by giving power to employees to make decisions and to make the required information and resources available. For example, a non-functioning organisation lacks, among other things, the necessary resources (time, money and authorities) to play a meaningful role during the change (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). Implementing a self-managing team costs time and money and organisations who wish to develop towards, need to take care of sufficient resources to provide the change.

*Employees*

Both teams find the influence they have in a self-managing team exciting and they feel appreciated. They like the influence and freedom, though it can be busier than before. This is in-line with Hackman and Oldham (1976), who concluded that working in a self-managing team had a motivational influence on the team members. Working in a self-managing team satisfies the needs of the employees for responsible autonomy over a meaningful task. It confirms that members of a self-managing team showed higher levels of social needs satisfaction, for example (Cohen and Ledford, 1994). Therefore, the employees’ needs can be a valuable and appealing reason for the implementation of a self-managing structure in an organisation, as part of the *rationale* (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015).

Throughout time, the team members learned to be more independent, set limits, ask for help and be open. By doing so, they felt stronger and got more energy from their work. This is acknowledged by Levi and Slem (1995, p. 31), who stated that “an individual’s skills should improve by working on a team”. For example, the self-managing team members can learn from each other’s expertise. With regard to leadership, the individual employee’s responsibility is strengthened because each member now executes leadership tasks next to their normal work (Manz and Sims, 1980). On the other hand, Levi and Slem (1995) stated

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that some leadership functions, such as personnel issues and external relations, are hard to displace.

The learning experience of members in a self-managing team is stimulated and could therefore be another valuable and appealing reason for the implementation of this concept, as part of the *rationale* (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) previously mentioned improvement on social and interpersonal skills, as well as broadening the perspective of other disciplines. Based on the outcomes of the current study, it is important to keep in mind that employees could be enthusiastic, but also have their doubts when implementing a self-managing structure. Pearson (1992) acknowledged this in his study that most of the members appreciate the new work structure, although some members were sceptic. Discussing this scepticism can be helpful to overcome it. Support and continual development is needed and adequate communication is crucial (Wilson and Whittington, 2001).

Good relationships enhanced the motivation within the self-managing teams. Therefore, they were motivated and committed to each other and their work. Levi and Slem (1995) stated that selecting good employees is the most important human resources factor related to team work. In this research, providing a coaching trajectory helped in building relationships. Besides, the people (mostly) like each other, which might be fostered by their shared religious identity. Good relationships in a self-managing team are an important success factor, especially when there is intense collaboration as in a self-managing team.

### *Implementation*

As mentioned before, the reason for the change towards self-managing teams was unclear to almost all members. It was guessed to be because of cost savings, to reduce management layers in the organisation and to stimulate autonomy in the teams. The starting point of a change must be logical and appealing, and not only to the organisation but also for individual employees and specific groups it is important to see and “feel” the reason to change (Ten Have *et al.*, 2015). Otherwise, cynicism, lack of understanding, counter-productivity and self-interest can occur. In this case, lack of understanding and sometimes cynicism occurred, but to an extent that did not result to any negative behaviour. The members just accepted it and they liked their freedom. The goal of implementing self-managing teams is unclear to most of the members. In this case, the *rationale* of the change was less relevant because the employees were satisfied with the freedom they experienced. They simply perceived the change as an improvement, nonetheless the higher goal of the change.

During the coaching trajectory, tasks were divided into a portfolio division based on preference. This has a link with the element *focus*. In the coaching trajectory, there was specific attention for the past and together they looked back at the history. Ten Have *et al.* (2015) refer to this as a form of empathy of the organisation. They argue that empathy means that the higher management understands that change is difficult and appreciate the difficulties that employees may experience in letting go their old certainties and routines. This takes place by identifying and sharing individual problems in the process of the change. In-line with this, coaching facilitates willingness to speak up openly in the team and “to communicate with others in the organization about the changes”; this brought about a multifaceted team learning process that facilitated a successful implementation (Edmondson, 2003, p. 1446). In Edmondson’s study, teams lacking these practices did not succeed in their implementation efforts, which affirms our research findings on the relevance of coaching.

Implementation  
of self-  
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Interestingly, the coaching trajectory suits the principles of the change initiative, as division of tasks by the team is a form of self-management. This might have helped in building understanding and skills to become a self-managing team. [Wilson and Whittington \(2001\)](#) state that support and continual development are relevant in any change implementation, and that this also applies to self-managing teams. Therefore, the coaching trajectory is a success factor in the implementation process. This is linked to the *connection* element of the Change Competence Model. [Cohen et al. \(1996\)](#) also argued that to increase the employee involvement, training can be useful. So when considering the change towards self-managing teams, a coaching trajectory can be very helpful, especially when a negative change history forms the starting point.

### *Limitations*

Some limitations of this research should be mentioned. First, the interview data were collected in The Netherlands, which makes the outcomes generalizable for this specific country for self-managing teams with a strong shared identity. The team members of this research can be seen as a homogeneous group regarding their function and (religious) norms and values, which makes them strongly connected to each other. A heterogeneous team might have more discussions owing to their different viewpoints, whereby conflicts could arise more easily. Therefore, the research results might not be generalizable to more heterogeneous teams in (mental health-care) organisations. With regard to other countries, the results might only be generalizable if comparable policy and health-care systems exist in that country (public insurance-based health care). Lastly, applicability to other sectors than the (mental) health care is possible if the team members performs a practical job, are of a comparable group size and provide a service. Higher educated employees might be more sensitive for the reason of change and delivering a service asks for other task portfolios than making a product.

Next to this a limitation can be found in the data sample (the two self-managing teams) of the case study, which has been selected by the regional manager of the organisation. This could have the risk that he has chosen teams where the experiences are quite neutral or positive. As a consequence, the findings could be more focused on strengths than on weaknesses of the concept. This might give another direction to the research, although both sides can deliver important insights for the implementation of a self-managing team. The selection by the regional manager could also have the risk that the employees gave social desirable answers. Owing to the elaborate conversations and the openness of the interviewees, the researchers did not have this impression.

### **Conclusion**

With this research paper the academic literature on the implementation process of self-managing teams in the specific context of the mental health-care sector in the Netherlands is enhanced with a qualitative case study. Previous research has mainly focused about the effectiveness of self-managing teams, but limited research is conducted about the importance of the implementation. Furthermore, the Change Competence Model is elaborated by using it as a framework for implementing self-managing teams ([Ten Have et al., 2015](#)).

Self-managing teams as a concept could have effective outcomes, but the implementation process seems to be of crucial impact. Because the teams subject to this research successfully made the transition from a more traditional management structure towards a shared leadership structure with self-managing teams, several

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valuable insights occurred. The contribution of this research puts together three success factors which support a successful implementation of self-managing teams in the mental health-care sector.

First, when an organisation experiences a negative change history, the importance of the implementation process becomes visible. By having a successful coaching trajectory with attention for the past, the change history could turn positive and the coaching trajectory reinforces the transition to an effective self-managing team.

Making a clear task division based on preference is another success factor. A portfolio division of tasks, which can be made during a coaching trajectory, helps in being operational as a self-managing team. Dividing tasks together as a team already suits the implications of the change: being self-managing. In-line with this, it is important to make the self-managing team capable to perform the tasks and trust the team members in this. Keeping control on some important tasks on a management level has implications for shared leadership and can lead to doubts within the teams. However, if the employees' motivation and enthusiasm are high, the teams will positively continue as they did before.

Good relationships in a self-managing team is a third success factor. Owing to the intense collaboration in daily work-life, this is important in being self-managing. Motivation and enthusiasm because of good relationships positively affect the self-managing team's performance. A coaching trajectory can be supportive for relationship-building, but it is helpful if people simply like each other.

Regarding the Change Competence Model, it can be concluded that stimulating the *change capacity* of the self-managing team in particular is crucial to achieve sustainable results. For stimulating the change capacity that is needed, it is emphasised that a portfolio division of labour is made, good relationships within the team are stimulated and a coaching trajectory with attention for a possible negative past is provided. These three conditions together are crucial for being a successful self-managing team. Taking into account these success factors as an organisation, the transition to a successful implementation of a self-managing team can be made.

#### *Practical implications and future research*

Some practical implications follow this research. Self-managing teams with delegated responsibility and greater autonomy are important in terms of their possible effects on health-care quality and effectiveness. Quality and effectiveness could be influenced as the team's attention might be more on managing the team than on giving care to the clients sometimes. Next to this, a practical implication is related to new employees who join the self-managing team after the implementation process. These new team members might have impact on the good relationships within the team. Moreover, new employees miss a part of the team's history, the coaching trajectory and the process of task portfolio division. It is important to inform new employees and discuss these crucial factors with them.

Future studies should focus on the implementation of self-managing teams in other countries and in other contexts than the mental health-care sector of this research, to compare the findings and check if the lessons for successful implementation apply elsewhere. For example, there are important policy implications that can be explored in other health-care contexts. Policy implications differ by country, depending on whether they use insurance-based, private or public health systems. Because the coaching trajectory was an important success factor of the implementation of self-managing teams, more research about the successful design of a coaching trajectory would be valuable. Next to this, the

teams of this research can be called successful, but it could be also valuable to study a less successful implementation to see if the same success factors apply. Also, other characteristics could be tested, for example, these teams were practically educated but the results might be different for higher educated people that might be more interested in reasons behind a change. Additionally, quantitative research could focus on testing the found success factors with questionnaires for a higher number of self-managing teams, to see if more general claims can be made.

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