

HIGH ROAD TO WORK ORGANISATION CASE STUDY

Hollandse Betongroep



**J.M. van de Bovenkamp and R. Jongkind
TNO Work and Employment**

TNO

April 2000

Abstract

In the beginning of the nineties, a construction company made a start with self-managing construction groups. After the first experiences in the western region, the team concept has been used in other regions as well. Particularly attention is paid to the team concept used in the construction of a hospital (still under construction). Recently, these construction teams have become more and more self steering.

HI-RES Case Study: Dutch Construction Company

Sector

Nace code F.45

Key Words

Construction; Self-managing teams; Leadership; Organisational change

Table of Contents

Abstract

HI-RES Case Study: Dutch Construction Company

Sector

Key Words

1. Background Information	2
2. Drivers for Change	2
3. Characteristics and Process of Change	2
4. Obstacles to Change	3
5. Risk Analysis	3
6. Benefits of Change	4
Conclusions	4

1. Background Information

The construction company has over 90 years experience in the construction sector. The work area of the company is quite broad. Projects are done in utility construction, home construction and civil construction. The company is divided into four areas based on geographical regions and has been working for several years with the team concept.

2. Drivers for Change

Management realised that the traditional organisational structure combined with modern demands from the environment (like shorter delivery times, environmental, health & safety demands and quality demands) led to several problems:

- Communication problems: because under high time pressure various specialised functions had to be matched. This stress led to high repair costs, many short interruptions in the work, and necessary overtime.
- Due to the narrow tasks of the constructors, the construction sector got the image of a poor, unattractive employer, in a labour market in which well educated and motivated personnel is hard to get.

In June 1997, a start was made to work in self-managing teams during the construction of a hospital. Before the project started a kick-off meeting took place in which all the possibly involved construction employees were informed about the ins and outs of the self-managing team concept. Special task teams were created, constituting different employees with different roles (see further) that had to make their own task plans. Such a task plan relates to a whole piece of work at the construction yard that can be taken care of by a task team and for which it is responsible.

3. Characteristics and Process of Change

Before the project started, a kick-off meeting took place, in which all the stakeholders of the hospital construction were informed about the self managing team concept. The first step that was taken to start the team work was writing the so-called task plans. These task plans refer to complete pieces of work at the construction yard. Then teams were linked to these task plans. The teams were made responsible for the realisation of the task plans within a planned time frame. To be able to realise this, the teams got an own budget and got responsibility for safety, quality, logistics and materials. Teams are free to plan their own work. There is a weekly meeting and so-called star roles were introduced to improve the communication during the change process. Within teams the following roles are distinguished:

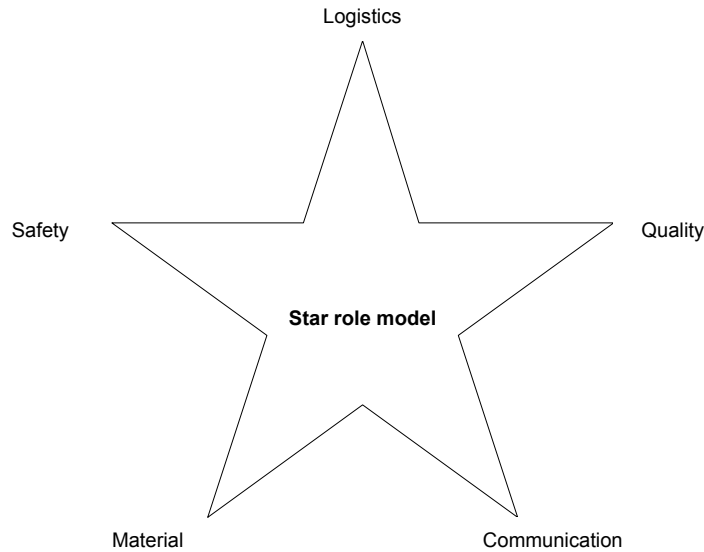


Figure 1: Star role model

The communication role takes care of the communication between the team and work preparation, sub contractors and construction management.

The change process (started in 1997 and still running now) consists of the following steps:

- The decision of the management to start working in semi-autonomous work groups.
- The design of task plans
- Design the construction organisation according to the task plans.
- Feedback through star role model and weekly meetings.
- Change of leadership style.

Essential characteristics of the new work organisation are the development of semi-autonomous work groups as well as balancing individual competence with organisational development. The changing role from boss to coach means a different role of middle and frontline managers. Another important aspect is the improved relation between the construction teams and the sub-contractors: partnerships are strengthened across organisational boundaries.

4. Obstacles to Change

At first the constructors were quite reluctant to the new way of working, which they expressed by being somewhat abide.

Finally the changed leadership style from problem solver and boss, to mediator and coach was quite a cultural and emotional shock. To overcome these problems a lot of effort was needed.

5. Risk Analysis

After the introduction of the star role model, it was not perfectly clear what the responsibilities were of the communicator. The communicator was seen as foreman and responsible person, which was not meant to be. It had to be made clearer that the team as a whole is responsible for its work.

6. Benefits of Change

As the change process is still running, not all effects of the change can be seen yet. Up to now costs of failure have been reduced drastically.

Quality of work has also improved. The star role model generated an improved motivation and work satisfaction of employees and improved knowledge of employees (more training).

Conclusions

In the construction sector traditional management is common. Nowadays competition is growing rapidly and traditional structures do not seem to be able to cope with the high demands. The construction company shows that a long trajectory of ongoing organisational change towards modern teamwork is beneficial to both competitiveness and quality of work.

Publication Details

Published by: St-Groep

Publication date: April 2000

Journal: Panta Rhei

URL: www.st-groep.nl

Revised: -

Notes: -

© TNO 2000. All rights reserved.

