

# ADRIAAN BEKMAN

	Projects	Owner	Time span
Our mission			
Our goals			
Our indicators			
Our activities			

## HORIZONTAL LEADERSHIP AND SELF-STEERING TEAMS



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*“Horizontal leadership and self-steering teams are a path to a healthy development of the company”.*

## **VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL**

Organizations are vertically structured. Hierarchy and functionality dominate. The power of the position and the creation of preconditions for employees are the most important management forces that are deployed for successful organizing. However, as soon as something does not function and has to be changed, these management forces prove to be insufficient to achieve the desired results in a good way. There is a need for leadership and it is not self-evident that managers are also leaders in practice. I reserve leadership for leading people and especially for leading yourself in processes of change and sense making. I call this horizontal leadership because leadership works in the community between people, even if they act on a different hierarchical level. The tendency to move towards more self-steering teams mirrors this leadership issue. It is not uncommon for what is asked above not to be done below and what is needed and desired below is not always heard above. How do we get the top, middle and bottom connected so that all can create something in common in addition to the great differences that exists.

## **TWO CHANNELS**

In my long-term international organizational development consultancy practice, I guide organizations of different natures in processing difficult issues and finding new ways based on the intelligence and creativity of all people in the organization involved in an issue. In this we create, in a sense, two channels along which two different kinds of processes run. On the one hand, we create a transparent, effective operational organization in which tasks are carried out in a disciplined manner on

the basis of goals and strategies and in which managers and professionals act together. On the other hand, we create a horizontal infrastructure in which decision makers and process owners, together with all the people involved, realize improvements, changes and innovations. Horizontal leadership of everyone and self-steering teams plays an important and often decisive role in this. I want to illustrate this on the basis of a practical example, representative of many more cases.

## **PRACTICAL EXAMPLE**

The management of a German Sparkasse with 1200 employees has been modernizing the operational organization for several years. New systems, new technology, new functions, new "products" are being designed and introduced. This creates increasing pressure for managers and professionals. The management would like its efforts to yield results under the motto: "we provide our customers with comprehensive care". After a few years, the three-man director team has to conclude that their expectations have only partly been fulfilled. Apparently, the managers and employees have difficulty translating the changes imposed from above into actual successful action.

In addition to the improvements in the preconditions, something else may also need to be done, is what the directors conclude. They decide to experiment with the idea of developing self-steering teams and supporting the managers in their horizontal leadership. To this end a process is being set up that I was asked to design and lead, together with one of the three directors.

Experiments have been being carried out in six sales offices and an internal department, as follows.

## **STEPS THAT HAVE BE TAKEN**

First of all, the manager of the department and of the team does a 360-degree analysis of his / her horizontal leadership qualities. Using a

questionnaire with 16 questions, they involve 4 employees, two colleagues, their boss and themselves in this research. Four core qualities are examined: steering the processes, coaching the learning, inspiring with a vision and intervening when something does not work. For each quality 4 questions have been formulated and the respondents can score from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'complete'. The questionnaires are distributed and completed. The manager processes the results himself and sees how differently employees, colleagues, boss and he / she have answered the questions. This leads to the distillation of the issues and these are discussed in a group discussion, together with all participants. It is not about "right or wrong" but it is about "more or less" and "continue doing this or otherwise".

The second step looks at the teams in the units. What are the teams, who is part of them and who leads the team? The idea is that everyone is part of a team and that teams are connected to a specific work process with its own characteristics.

When the teams have been established and it is clear who the team leader is, the team members receive two questionnaires: To what extent are we an autonomous team and to what extent are we a top team?

When it comes to an autonomous team, a self-steering team, the following qualities are important: The team has its own mission and goal, team members can take initiatives, we learn together and improve, we work with goals and indicators, we work together and with other teams, we know and use the systems, we have effective consultation with each other.

When it comes to a top team, the following qualities are important: the employees take responsibility, we are connected and respect each other as colleagues, the team is innovative and finds new working methods, the team achieves its goals, we give each other feedback and encourage each other in professional development, new colleagues are welcomed, included and integrated.

Each team member answers the questions with a score: 5 = 'fully', 1 = 'not at all'. In a team meeting, the scores are compared and issues are derived from them that the team wants to tackle independently.

These issues are translated into own projects and are documented with the aid of a steering instrument.

This steering instrument is placed on a whiteboard and hung in the team room. The instrument looks like this:

The steering tool for teams

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The teams start working on their projects after they have independently formulated and recorded the mission, goals, indicators to measure results and the main activities. Every project has an owner and the time frame for the project is recorded.

Progress is discussed in regular meetings. If there are preconditions that function as obstacles, the manager can be approached as a coach. This process was gone through in seven units with a total of 25 teams.

### SOME EXAMPLES

A team of experienced advisers for wealthy clients who do their work somewhat isolated from others contact a group of young client advisers in a nearby "Geschäftsstelle" (office). They agree that they will come

and help this team when necessary at busy customer moments and that, on the other hand, targeted customers will be referred to these specialized consultants. This appears to work well for everyone, customers are also positive and willing to do more business.

In a Geschäftsstelle (office), customers regularly wait in line. That annoys customers, but also employees. The employees in the front office discuss this with employees in the back office. Together they find a way to work together much more flexibly. Everyone is at the desk at busy times, while customer administration is dealt with at quiet times. The waiting time largely disappears and customers get their product faster.

A team wants to improve its results and decides to approach customers on a few special products. They are mostly customers with busy jobs and children. They make targeted agreements with these clients and discuss their pension provision and the future financing of children's studies. Customers respond positively and surprised. Many want to do business like that.

A team of internal IT and organization specialists are busy with the information systems. Users are dissatisfied and are exerting pressure. As a team they investigate what can be done differently and better. They come to the conclusion that the users should be involved much earlier in the process. They go out and visit users and investigate with them what the real issues are and how they can be improved. Many good ideas from the users are picked up and converted. Their work flows better and the satisfaction of their internal customers increase significantly.

## **THE WORKING OF THIS PROCESS**

It is surprising to see what happens when a team works on this. Something is changing on several fronts.

1. The team is confronted with its own strengths and weaknesses and can then do more or less work to improve and develop.

2. The team works in a more focused way, works better with others and asks the manager good questions.
3. The relationships in the team change because the behavior of team members changes, in many cases positively.
4. Complaining diminishes and motivation increases.
5. Results improve and the customer becomes more central.
6. There appears to be much more room for maneuver for teams than they initially thought.

The quality of the manager as a horizontal leader corresponds to the willingness and effectiveness of the team. Clear differences are developing in how the manager and the team are positioned in this.

## **FIVE LEVELS OF TEAM EXISTENCE**

A clear distinction crystallizes from where teams stand and how they work.

At level 0: the team consists of individuals who go their own way and are not really interested in how it affects others. "We are not a team" say the team members.

At level 1: The team members treat each other nicely and everyone does his own thing: "We respect each other".

At level 2: We bring each other into play, work together, celebrate the results and give each other feedback. "Together we strive for a good result as a team"

At level 3: We improve our work processes when they do not function properly and also do this together with other teams we deal with. "We learn together and keep improving".

At level 4: We are entrepreneurial and innovative. We are in dialogue with our client and clients are taking advantage of our proposals and created opportunities. "We work creatively and enterprisingly together".



Teams go through a development process and can take a step again and again and can arrive at a higher level. With every development step, the leadership quality of all those involved increases.

### **PARALLEL TO TEAM DEVELOPMENT, LEADERSHIP CHANGES.**

From initially strongly vertically and operationally embedded and sometimes clamped, the horizontal space and time is increasingly being sought and their own latitude is created. The manager can focus much more on horizontal cooperation with colleagues in order to tackle the improvement of the preconditions and any structural bottlenecks.

In this Sparkasse, after the meaningful experiments, this development is progressed step by step. Here the pull principle is used and not the push principle. It is up to the executives and the teams whether they want to engage in such a process. It is the people themselves who may or may not go along with each other in this development. Sometimes with trial and error steps are taken and people decide for themselves whether and how they want to continue.

In this way, in addition to an operative management culture, a leadership culture is built up and we learn together when operations and when development and change needs to take place.

### **IMO EXPERIENCE**

Sixty IMO colleagues in ten countries assist companies in such a development in different ways. For example, three Brazilian colleagues work in a service company with 1500 employees, who provide cleaning, canteen and transport at 800 customer organizations, on developing horizontal leadership and working with UGBs = self-steering teams. The team of 6 young ladies who send the invoices to the customers every month realized that sometimes more than 50% of the invoices sent

were incorrect, not understood by the customer. That takes a lot of extra effort. They intended to investigate why this is and what can be improved. In dialogue with colleagues it became clear that the registration of customer work is incorrect and the interaction of the customer teams and the administration team is incorrect. Step by step the ladies managed to get their process sorted out. At one point they presented the results to the entire company. In the past week, 1 of the 800 accounts for the customer was incorrect. With pride and self-awareness, this was a huge development step for the people and the company.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Horizontal leadership and self-steering teams do not come about automatically, it requires a specific process.

Horizontal leadership and self-steering teams go hand in hand.

The leadership and the team go through a development process: step by step.

Those with ultimate responsibility, managers and professionals / employees can be invited to engage in such a process. Vertical pressure doesn't work here, horizontal dialogue works.

Beacons for horizontal leadership and team development help to go through a conscious process together.

People and organizations benefit and the meaning of the work becomes very tangible.