National contribution to topic report on team work and High Performance Work Organisation

This is the Swedish national contribution to the topic report on team work for the European Working Conditions Observatory

Q.0 Firstly, the correspondents are asked to describe shortly the surveys

This is the Swedish national contribution to the topic report on teamwork. Teamwork is not a topic covered in national surveys and in has proven difficult to identify other recent surveys that cover teamwork. Many reports address teamwork as a topic, but mainly to study results or to look at it as a way of working.

Q.0.1 working conditions national representative surveys (quantitative methodology)

No national surveys cover the issue of teamwork.

Q.0.2 other establishment of company surveys (quantitative methodology - e.g. larger sample of employees; structured questionnaire used)

Abbreviation: Lean Production

A survey on Lean production conducted by the former the Swedish Metalworkers’ Union in 2002 (today called IF Metall). The focus sets out to investigate how common Lean production is among its members. The survey was sent to all ‘local union clubs’ in the manufacturing industry. The response frequency of the survey was around 70%, which corresponds to around 120 000 metalworkers. The study indicates that around 55% of all metalworkers work in work places that use lean production in one form or another. The study investigates different components of lean production, where team work is one of them.

Statistics Sweden carries out employee surveys, focusing on job satisfaction. However these are not public. The enterprises purchase these services from Statistics Sweden.

Q.0.3 qualitative studies (at different levels)

In the absence of national reports and statistical data This is the Bulgarian contribution to the topic report on Teamwork and its contribution to High Performance Workplace Organization, coordinated via questionnaire by the Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA, Czech Republic) for the European Working Conditions Observatory.

on teamwork at national level, the following pieces of research have been selected and will be referred to in the national contribution. It should be noted that this is a selection of studies and
many more exist, but many of them are from before 1998, hence they are not included in this contribution. This is not to say that reports are not written on teamwork, but few are suited for the purpose of this topic report, since they provided limited details into issues dealt with here.

**Abbreviation: Arbetsmarknadsstörget**

A case (DELT A, 2001) where three authorities, the Employment Service, the Social Services and the Social Insurance Agency, in Gothenburg have cooperated in ‘Cross organisational teamwork’ to help unemployed who have been in contact with several authorities and deal with complex problems. The purpose has been to help these unemployed people with jobs in an efficient way.

**Abbreviation: Work Climate**

This report by Sandberg, H.(2004) focuses on the connection between work climate and teamwork in the public sector. The report is based on interviews and focus group interviews which were conducted in 2001-2002 in the public health care sector.

**Abbreviation: Alternative assembly**

A book by Engström et al. (2004) about production technique developments focusing on alternative assembly techniques, that is techniques other than. The book is based on research in the automotive industry. Mainly it discusses experiences from organising work after the ‘Swedish model’ that grew in the 1970s, in comparison with assembly line methods and alternative methods such as organising work in work groups or with parallel product flows or dock assembly (the product is produced in a dock).

**Q.1 National correspondents are asked to give question wordings and figures which deal with the incidence of teamwork in their countries.**

*Example:*

- “Do you work in permanent work group or team that has common tasks and possibility to plan its work?”
- Does your job involve, or not...? “Doing all or part of your work in a team”
- Does your job involve, or not...? “Rotating tasks between yourself and colleagues”
- “At my work I have opportunity to be in touch with my colleagues by means of team work”

**Question wordings (Q.1a)**

No data from national representative surveys or quantitative case studies is available.

**Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.1.b)**
According to the **Lean Production survey**, 55% of workers in the former Swedish Metalworkers’ Union work in workplaces that have introduced lean production. 88% of the metal workers in those workplaces work in teams as part of the lean production concept.

In a study conducted by NUTEK during 1994-19995, over half of the Swedish workplaces reported that more than 60% of their employees work in teams (Nutek 1999).

**Content and main findings – company surveys, case studies or other qualitative research (Q.1.c)**

No question wordings in the reports that we have found and no specific results that are not presented under questions 2-7 below.

**Q.2 Do in the national representative surveys or other surveys exist questions dealing with form and organisation of the team?**

*Example:*

- *If you have opportunity to work in team, what is its usual form?*
  
  Flexible teams build up to solve particular project or problem.

  Teamwork in a simple form of job rotation without having opportunity to decide about methods of work or task.

Please include also data if available about incidence of different types of teamwork such as: **quality circles** (exmp. „Do in your company exist so called QUALITY CIRCLES, where the room to express your ideas to particular work issues is given to employees?*, virtual teams („Do you use computers or other electronic devices to organize group work or for consultation of your work tasks.“), **cross functional teams** („Do you cooperate with other departments within interdisciplinary work on particular projects or work tasks?“)

**Question wordings (Q.2.a)**

No data from national representative surveys or quantitative case studies is available.

**Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.2.b)**

No data available
Content and main findings – company surveys, case studies or other qualitative research (Q.2.c)

One trend among Swedish authorities is to create ‘Cross organisational teams’ such as in the case of Arbetsmarknadstorget. This trend is becoming more and more common in many municipalities and in the social welfare sector in order create more efficient solutions for instance to reduce crime, provide better healthcare and social services etc. In the case of Arbetsmarknadstorget did the authorities cooperate with the goal to find jobs for long term long term unemployed. Before cooperation started did the handling officers in the respective authorities have little insight and knowledge about the other authorities and they where not able to help the long term unemployed alone, as they did not have access to all information and tools needed. The results from the cooperation are positive. The handling officers experience that their competence has increased and they have been relieved of pressure previously experienced.

The work climate report concludes that the work climate in a team is better if made up of both men and women and if the team has a leader or someone who can take on the role as leader.

According the Alternative assembly book are there advantages with alternative assembly techniques such as higher product quality and shorter production times. They are also talking about better ergonomics. In the automobile manufacturing industry, the trend has been to work in assembly teams (for instance one team completes a car together at a fixed work station), though now some of the manufacturing plants are moving away from this way of working and going back to assembly line production. Partially this is believed to be due to increase in international ownership, especially in multinational corporations that are striving to standardise production techniques.

Q.3 Does teamwork increase autonomy of employees in decision making about their work? Which degrees of self-regulation can be distinguished?

Example:

- The teams are responsible for the preparing and supporting activities of their own work.
- The group can self set the targets for its work.
- The members of my team are responsible for determining the methods, procedures, and schedules with which the work gets done.
- Team is responsible for the results but the team is under the external control.
- Members of team do not have particular responsibility for results and group is managed from external sources as a unit.

Please give also figures showing association between teamwork and individual worker’s autonomy. In this respect crosstabs of autonomy (YES/NO) and teamwork (YES/NO) are required.
According to work climate report, autonomy has both positive and negative sides. The positive sides have at times also been the negative sides (depending on the team). Factors that have changed in a positive or negative way are: employees’ possibilities for personal development, to decide and to take action.

The Alternative assembly book concludes that organising work in self-managing groups gives the employees greater freedom and increased responsibility.

Q.4. To what extent are workers satisfied with team-based way of working? Can you also report on association between overall job satisfaction and teamwork presence? Does teamwork increase overall job satisfaction?

Example: - Are you generally satisfied with team-based way of working
- How satisfied are you with your job?

Question wordings (Q.4.a)

No data
Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.4.b)

No data

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.4.c)

No data, no information about this in the reports

Q.5 Does in your country exist any evidence about interconnection between teamwork presence and higher work intensity and probable work overload?

Please report on the results from any available sources (both of qualitative and quantitative nature).

Example of direct questions related to that issue:
- “Working in group is much more demanding than working individually”
- “Work pressure becomes evenly distributed in the group”
- “Nearly all the members of my team contribute equally to the work”
- “The number of people in my team is too small for the work to be accomplished.”

Question wordings (Q.5.a)

No data
Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.5.b)

No data

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.5.c)

Not much data found about this but in the case of ‘Arbetsmarknadstorget’, teamwork has resulted in a relief of pressure for the employees involved.

Q.6 What is the impact of teamwork on learning environment in organization?

In this question we are following the assumption that teamwork is creating environment for shared responsibility, knowledge and both continuous professional and personal development. We are interested in learning and professional growth opportunities of employees working in team in comparison to the other workers.

When answering this question you should also focus on the job enrichment and job enlargement phenomenon of working life.

Question wordings (Q.6.a)

No data

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.6.b)

No data

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.6.c)

For employees in the case Arbetsmarknadstorget teamwork has meant increased competence development for the employees as well as they have gained more knowledge about other authorities.
(Q.6.d)

It is assumed that teamwork contributes positively to job enrichment and job enlargement (for definition and concept see page n. 8). As these two job characteristics consists of different attributes of work and cannot be measured directly, they must be operationalised. Can you find in your national studies (both quantitative and qualitative) any reported association between teamwork, job enrichment and job enlargement?

No data found

Q.7 Team effectiveness subjectively perceived

It is probable that when answering this question you will be very limited and there will be no question wordings in representative surveys. For all that we can find at least some evidence how workers assess productivity of company or particular department after being involved in the teamwork (See an example).

Example:

- How well the following statements describe your group work? Productiveness of work improves in group work.

Question wordings (Q.7.a)

No data

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.7.b)

No data

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.7.c)

The teamwork in Arbetsmarknadstorget has lead to more effective ‘rehabilitation’ of the unemployed than what would have been possible if the authorities had not cooperated.

The work climate report finds that in the psychiatric sector is one of the prerequisites for effective teamwork the composition of the team/group. How the team is composed can both increase effectiveness and hinder. The team’s resources influence possibilities to work effectively as well. Another prerequisite is that the team members have social competence.
The Alternative assembly book talks about increased flexibility and flatter organisations. According to the authors, alternative assembly is easier to change the production volume when alternative assembly techniques are used, allowing for production flexibility. Some alternative assembly techniques have also proven to be more productive in comparison to traditional assembly line production. For instance, two Volvo car plants producing the same type of car have been compared, the plant that used an alternative assembly technique produced the car in 2-3 hours less than the plant that used an assembly line technique.

Q.8 Please reflect briefly on the existing governmental documents, policies, programs or social partners agreements discussing implementation of new work organization forms with emphasis on teamwork at national level.

No new or recent policy documents found, discussing new work organisations. Most initiatives dates back to the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s such as:

- Towards the end of the 1980s the government set up three official investigations with the purpose to investigate work environment, productivity development and training issues. All three investigations involved both employers and unions. The Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Science (IVA) launched another program in the early 1990s with the purpose to promote and study ‘a modern work organisation that led to increased productivity, better working conditions, usage of skills and sharpened competition.

- The Swedish Work Environment Fund set up another programme between 1990-1995- ‘the learning organisation’. It included development projects in 40 organisations both in the private and public sector.

- The Work Life Fund ran another programme for ‘Learning organisations’ covering 25 000 workplaces.

Even though Sweden is mentioned in many reports as being at the forefront when it comes to implementing teamwork in organisations very little has been written about it at a national level in the past eight years. An impression is that team work was a hot topic in the early and mid 1990s (not to mention the car industry in the 70s), which could explain why most reports and books dates back to that time period.

No simple explanations are found when trying to find out why there are very few new studies. However, one report talks about Swedish industry not believing in the ‘Swedish model’ (or sociotechnical theory) anymore (Engström et al. 2004) and gives examples of several Swedish car production plants going back to regular ‘assembly line production’ and lean production. Another report by Wallace (2003) confirms that workplaces that earlier were pointed out as good examples are now moving away from this way of working. Otter (2003) means that the increased competition and pressure results in businesses having little possibilities to focus on long-term development and learning.

Instead of teamwork, more attention is give to project based organisations. For instance have some researchers (Ekstedt et. al. 1999, Bergren and Lindkvist 2001, Midler and Lundin 1998, Blomquist 1999, Engwall 1998) noted that the need for flexible organisations has resulted in an increase in project-based organisations in Sweden. Projects are being used to solve one-off problems, but also to organise day-to-day operations. Organising work in projects is believed to increase creativity, enhance personal development and learning. Projects have been perceived as advantageous in many sectors in Sweden ranging from manufacturing to ICT.
Since this contribution to the topic report is rather limited statistically, a few examples of earlier findings from case studies on teamwork (before 1998) should be noted.

- **ABB** – reduced supply times, increased production flexibility (Peters, 1992)
- **Steel and petrochemical industry** – Technology has a role in reducing team autonomy (Bergman, 1995)
- **Volvo Uddevalla** – Enhanced autonomy and greater scope for double-loop learning. Shorter production times and increased product quality (Berggren, 1994).
- **National study conducted by NUTEK during 1994-1995** (published in 1996) based on questionnaires responded by 707 work places. The main focus of the study is flexible work organisations and teamwork is one indicator used to measure flexibility.

**References**


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